



## Teertha Yatra: A sacred journey for senior citizens sponsored by 'Madhya Pradesh Mukhyamantri Teertha Darshan Yojna' with special reference to Sidhi District

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### Abstract

In recent years, Teerth Yatra (sacred journey) has become very popular among devotees. Teerth Yatra to scared place constitutes an important component of religious tourism and has contributed effectively to the growth and development of the place. Every year around seven million pilgrims visit the different sacred places in India which is influencing the socio-economic environment of the region. This study is throwing light on the Socio-economic impact of the pilgrimage tourism. The study is based on the methodology adopted for estimation of social impact of teerth yatra. It also explain and supports the idea that the socio-economic impacts of religious tourism should not be neglected or underestimated, although religious institutions have traditionally attempted to downplay this in the past. Additionally, the religion and tourism have much in common. In the modern world it is hard to ignore the impression that in most places of pilgrimage the profane impacts of tourism are just as important if not more so than the religious. The Govt. of Madhya Pradesh has implemented *Mukhyamantri Teerth-Darshan Yojna* to help the poor to fulfill their long-cherished desire of pilgrimage, because elderly people have not taken to the place of pilgrimage due to lack of money and their old age their wish remains unfulfilled. So, those people fulfill the aspiration of wish through the Teerth Darshan Scheme. Keeping the view in mind the present paper is an attempt to review the theoretical support of Teerth Darshan scheme.

**Keywords:** Teerth Yatra, religion, tourism, pilgrimages, senior citizen

### 1. Introduction

The ancient ashram vyavastha prescribed that a man, on crossing 50, should think of renouncing familial liabilities and undertake a journey to the forests (Vanaprastha) in search of finding the Self (Jha 1985 and Singh 2015) <sup>[3, 11]</sup>. The puranas also say the punya (divine blessings) one gets by sending someone off on a pilgrimage is far greater than what can be earned by going oneself (Mishra 2000 and Acharya 2001) <sup>[5, 11]</sup>. The combination of above such wisdoms and the big picture reality is perhaps what has led to Madhya Pradesh's 'Mukhyamantri Teertha Darshan Yojna'. The government has decided to send elderly people on all expenses paid pilgrimages, the expenditure to be borne by the state exchequer. This scheme has been implemented on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2012, under the Religious Trust and Endowments Department. The department has assist senior citizens above 60 years of age to undertake pilgrimage to one of the prescribed pilgrimage centers once in their life time. The M. P. Govt. has sanctioned fund for this scheme and also signing a MoU with the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd. to regulate the scheme. The pilgrims will be sent under the package of IRCTC but the scheme has to be supervised by the Religious Trust and Endowments Department. The department has planed that at least one centre of pilgrimage of all the minority communities should be included. Thus, there is Ajmer for the Muslims, Amritsar for the Sikhs, Sammed Shikhar and Shravanabelagola for the Jain and the Basilica in Velankanni for the Christians (RTED 2013) <sup>[8]</sup>.

### 2. Objective of the Study

The core of this study is to find out which factors motivate senior citizen to travel to pilgrimage tourism attractions and, especially, to visit the holy places. The theoretical context will present the concept of senior citizen after completing the yatra but the functional part of this study to designing and implementing the scheme of Teerth Darshan Yojana. The following objectives considered for the study -

1. To fulfill pilgrims desire from poor/weaker senior citizens to undertake journey for financial disciplines to holy place.
2. To encourage senior citizens to maintain their independence and to participate through the active movement by social contacts and religious activities of a cultural and educational aimed at enhancing their quality of life.
3. To promote a more positive attitude towards ageing and people to enjoy a full and active life and advocate for them.

### 3. Method and Data Collection

The study is based on field work. Primary data collected from Religious Trust and Endowments Department of Sidhi and Bhopal. The feedback and opinions of devotees has also obtained who have attained the teerth darshan yatra. The study also tried its best to find out true with pilgrimage phenomenon and behavioral pattern of pilgrims. The secondary source of this study, to collect the data and facts from various news papers, articles, internet and advertisement material related to Teerth Darshan Yojana.

**4. Selection processes of Teerth Yatri**

A senior citizen desirous to avail benefit of Teerth-Darshan Yojna should fill up application in prescribed proforma in two copies and submit the same at nearest tahsil or sub-tahsil before the prescribed time-limit. Photo and address proof should be affixed to application. Ration card, driving license, electricity bill, voters’ identity card or any other evidence recognized by the State Government will be accepted as address proof. Under the scheme, an attendant can also accompany pilgrim above 65 years of age. If one of the spouses is selected, his or her life partner can also go on pilgrimage. The life partner can undertake pilgrimage even if he or she is less than 60 years of age. Application of life partner will have to be submitted simultaneously. Similarly, attendants’ application should also be submitted simultaneously (RTED 2013) [8]. If senior citizens submit application in group, then entire group will be regarded as one application and selected in lottery system. One group can consist of maximum 25 applicants including attendants. Selection of pilgrims will be made by collector. First, applications will be sorted place-wise. Selection will be made through lottery if applications outnumber quota. A waiting list of 10 percent quota will also be chalked out. If pilgrims desire to avail any other facility than prescribed by the government during journey, then they will have to make payment for the same. Carrying any inflammable or intoxicating material or jewellery will not be allowed. The State Government will not be responsible for any accident during the journey.

**5. Religious Places under the scheme**

At present, under this scheme the State Government has selected various holy places in India related to all religions. Mostly, Shri Badrinath, Shri Kedarnath, Shri Jagannath Puri, Shri Dwarika Ji, Haridwar, Amarnath, Vaishno Devi, Shridi, Tirupati, Ajmer Sharif, Kashi, Amritsar, Rameshwaram, Sammed Shikhar, Shravan Belgola and Velankani Church, Nagapattinam, Mathura-Vrindaban as pilgrimages under the scheme (RTED 2013) [8].

**6. Managing Committees for pilgrimage**

The department of Religious Trust and Endowments, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, has creating state and district managing committee for pilgrimage. The State-level Teerth-Darshan Managing Committee has been constituted to ensure effective arrangements for pilgrimage journey of senior citizens. Chairman of the State-level Managing Committee is the Religious Trusts and Endowment Minister. Its members include Minorities Welfare Minister, Tourism Minister and Principal Secretaries of Finance, Public Health & Family Welfare and Tourism. Principal Secretary Religious Trusts & Endowments is its Member-Secretary. Similarly, Managing Committees has also been constituted in districts. Chairman of the District-level Managing Committee will be minister in-charge of district. Collector will be its secretary while members will include superintendent of police, chief executive officer of Zila Panchayat, a deputy collector nominated by in-charge officer of Waiver Section of collectorate or collector, chief medical and health officer and District Protocol Officer. In the absence of in-charge minister, Collector will preside over meetings. Besides arranging pilgrimage journey of senior citizens, these committees will also redress pilgrims’ problems during the journey.

**7. Analysis of Data**

The table 1 shows the data of devotees who have traveled to different holy places under the mentioned of scheme of Teerth Darshan Yojana.

**Table 1:** Statistical Data of Pilgrims, Sidhi District

Year	Religious Place	No. of Pilgrims	Total
2013	Dwarika	310	920
	Vaishno Devi	320	
	Shridi	290	
2014	Rameshwaram	190	565
	Jagannath Puri	165	
	Mathura-vrindavan	210	
2015	Vaishno Devi	196	491
	Shridi	160	
	Tirupati Bala Ji	135	
2016	Swarika	210	540
	Vashno Devi	170	
	Haridwar	160	
2017	Ajmer Sharif	90	421
	Kashi	110	
	Rameshwaram	220	
Total			2937

Last five years from the starting of the scheme 2013 to 2017 the total 2937 teerth yatri has fulfilling their long-cherished desire to different holy places in India. During the year 2013 there are 920 senior citizens to take a journey from holy places of Dwarika, Vaishno Devi and Shridi. The 565 pilgrims had gone Rameshwarm, Jagannath Puri and Mathura-Vridawan in year 2014. During the year of 2015 the department has organize teerth darshan trips for Vaishno Devi, Shridi and Tirupati Balaji the total 491 devotees had participated such journey. In the year of 2016 the 540 senior citizens gone for teerth darshan journey to Dwarika, Vaishno Devi and Haridwar for fulfilling their spiritual need and during the year of 2017 department had operate journey for Ajmer Sarif, Kashi and Rameshwaram the 421 teerth yatri had gone there fulfill log cherishes desires. All above pilgrimage journeys have completed successfully and all arrangement free including train journey, meals, lodging and attendant to the pilgrims.

**8. Feedback and Opinion of Teerth Yatri**

Senior citizens of Sidhi district who completed their pilgrimage journey of different place under this scheme, Devotees said that the precedent of principle of respect to all religions set by the scheme, through this scheme will always be remembered in the history of the Teerth Yatra (holy place). After completing the teerth yatra, feedback and opinion of devotees have been express their feelings about the Teerth Darshan Scheme- Sri Mahendra Mishra from Rampur naikin block said that I feel better to Darshan of Bhagwan by the helps of Teerth Darshan Scheme. I have never thought of it. This scheme of journey just like Shravan Kumar. The 67 year old, Sri Chhotelal and his wife Sumitra Devi from Bahari said that the Teerth Darshan Yojana is a historic journey for pilgrim’s centers. Mrs. Dulari Bai, a 70 years old resident of Majhauli block said that the Mukhyamantri Teertha Darshan Yojna has fulfilled our long-cherished wish for pilgrimage. Smt. Sushila Devi Panika of Kusmi region Said that the Mukhyamantri Teertha Darshan Yojna has concern for all senior citizen of M. P., now this type of Journey is a

marvelous. Similarly, Pt. Ramsundar said that I fulfilled my long-cherished desire for undertake the journey of Vaishno Devi through this scheme.

Sri Rafique Khan from Sidhi said that Madhya Pradesh is the first state of the country where so much care is being accorded to senior citizens. Sri Mod. Mirza from Shihawl block said that his long-cherished desire has been fulfilled; this scheme is very valuable to all elderly people of Sidhi as well as State. Sri Shahid Mansoori from Sidhi said that the Teerth-Darshan Yojna is lauded and glorify for us and he

also said that the Mukhyamantri Teertha Darshan Yojna has popular for every section of society. Finally, all devotees such as senior citizen for concerning of this scheme have chalked out wonderful and marvelous scheme. People have deserving for this scheme and also they are remembering till them last breath.

For obtaining qualitative data about their opinion, the 10 percent of the total devotees gone for pilgrimage site, year wise has also been taken through questionnaire given to them and data so obtained has been shown the table 2.

**Table 2:** Qualitative Data of Pilgrims, Sidhi District

Year	Religious Place	No. of Pilgrims	Total	Feedback obtained from devotees (10 % of total devotees about their opinion)		
				Good	Average	Normal
2013	Dwarika	310	920	55	25	12
	Vaishno Devi	320				
	Shridi	290				
2014	Rameshwaram	190	565	30	18	8.5
	Jagannath Puri	165				
	Mathura-vrindavan	210				
2015	Vaishno Devi	196	491	23	15	11.1
	Shridi	160				
	Tirupati Bala Ji	135				
2016	Swarika	210	540	32	14	8
	Vashno Devi	170				
	Haridwar	160				
2017	Ajmer Sharif	90	421	20	13	9.1
	Kashi	110				
	Rameshwaram	220				
Total			2937	160	85	48.7

**9. Conclusion and Suggestions**

Thus, a cross section of society has lauded *Mukhyamantri Teerth-Darshan Yojna* describing it as a novel precedent of respect to all religions. Besides, the scheme has also fulfilled senior citizens’ long cherished desire for going on pilgrimage. Now, every senior citizen of the district will be able to undertake journey to the place of pilgrimage under the scheme. So, the Scheme is very popular. There are 2937 people of senior citizen from different places of the Sidhi district visited religious places. Moreover, all devotees have agreed to promote social harmony from this type of yatra. Every senior citizen fulfills their log cherished desire (Pine and Gilmore’s 1999) [6].

Therefore, the Teerth Yatra can be associated with the spiritual welfare with different economical, environmental and psychological dimensions (Vijayanand 2013) [12]. Its impacts rest on host society whose ways of life are affected and on the devotee who take it as a very important part of their life (Bahardwaj 1973) [2]. Teerth Yatra (pilgrimage tourism) is enormously popular with holy places. Obviously, Teerth Yatra itself as a peaceful phenomenon can be well linked in no time, once it has firmly started to attain moksa towards the final goal, spiritual bliss of devotee (Shinde 2007a) [9]. So that the pilgrims centers have been attracting and accommodating devotees (pilgrimage tourists) from different parts of the world from many years and furthermore this trend is increasing. It can be straightforwardly confirmed that the pilgrimage tourism industry has become a job generator; both service oriented and product oriented. Increased income by job generation help raise standard of living (Price & Harrison 1996) [7]. In addition, the diversification of various new economic activities can lessen the big social problem of unemployment (Shinde 2012b) [10]. People of the area

welcome Teerth Yatri (pilgrims) as they have realized its importance, particularly from the economical aspect. Teerth (Pilgrimage) Tourism has facilitated the development of the sense of place among the Yatri. They are conscious about the pilgrimage that has been preserved from many years. The locales have slowly but surely come to be aware of the secret which is of interest for the people around the world. Consequently, more care and protection is required to the pilgrims collectively by the organizer Agency. Such a joint effort not only improves the attraction of the Yatra but also unites people together. The impact of pilgrimage on local communities can be both positive and negative, whether it comes to economic, social or environmental effects. It depends to which extent Teerth (pilgrimage) tourism is developed in a particular region (Karar 2010) [4]. Every region has its bearing capacity, that is to say the limit of the incoming influence that does not harm the host community. If we overcome that limit negative impacts of Teerth Yatra will follow.

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