

# Faith Economic Zones (FEZ)

## A Study based on Religious Tourism

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**Abstract:-** India since ancient times is termed to be a land of high tolerance & therefore welcomes new ideas with blissful vision. Many sectors are in the phase of boost due to the new market policies of the government. An open minded environment contributes to this scenario. One such sector which is still not explored to a great extent is Religious Tourism.

A simple concept like 'Special Religious Zones' & 'Faith Economic Zones' will give an impetus to this unexplored sector. India being an apode of culture faith & religion brings immense opportunities to initiate & grow by providing these services effectively.

### OBJECTIVE:

- I. To understand the implication of Religious Tourism on Economic Development
- II. To analyze the transition of religious places into 'faith economic zones'
- III. To identify measures for building sustainable faith economic zones
- IV. To identify & understand the drawbacks in this transition

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

*Empirical study based on primary & secondary data collection*

### INTRODUCTION:

Religious tourism in India has to distinct aspects which are:

- Where the tourist has a spiritual attachment with that destination
- Where the tourists originates from a different religion, region or a country

There is a huge potential for religious tourism in our country and this can be released only if problems associated with the carrying capacity on the region, air pollution, waste management, monetization of religion and lack of scrutiny of religious trusts are dealt with in earnest.

According to a FICCI – YES Bank report, it said that there is a critical need to develop integrated and sustainable infrastructure for the development of religious tourism and improving connectivity to such locations.

The government needs to take steps which will boost religious tourism in the country. There is also need for a governing body which will review the financial status and regulate these religious trusts.

There are many major and minor religious centers of various religions of the country and the world in India. There is need to create infrastructure in and around the religious centers. Places already having infrastructure should work on boosting the culture of that region by serving special packages for the tourists. According to Union Tourism and Culture Minister Mahesh Sharma (at the Parliamentary Consultative Committee meeting), the Swadesh Darshan, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) schemes and the working of Zonal Cultural Centres' roles are being discussed.

With 81% of the total population of the country being religious, there is a huge potential for the economy if the religious faith of people at various religious destinations are directly linked to confer the economy with a positive impact.

Based on the above points on religious tourism, its strengths, its weaknesses, government's role etc the researchers have come up with a unique concept of 'Faith Economic Zones'. Introducing Faith Economic Zones, a concept based on the lines of Special Economic Zones. Under SEZ, we develop a location around a specific industry. Similarly, under FEZ we'll develop a location around every religious tourist destination.

The main highlight of FEZ will be that the trade and business laws will differ from the rest of the country. This will help the local market to monetize itself to a great extent and also contribute to the economy. FEZ will not

only boost the local market but also other sectors in that region like infrastructure, folk tradition of that region.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW:

Tourism can be defined as the act of travel for the purpose of recreation. Religious tourism is a type of tourism where people travel to religious destinations for the purpose of pilgrimage, missionary or leisure purpose. India has been a destination of religious tourism for many major and minor religions from a long time. This sector is still not explored the way it should be to gain its optimum results. Religious tourism is the basis of culture in the country. Indian religious tourism potentialities have been one of the vital sources for country's growth particularly due to the presence of many religious tourist places in India.

Previous research work done by various individuals show that there is huge potential in these destinations but there are various loopholes due to which the potential has not been able to convert fully. Studying the work done by the researchers, there shows a research gap. The researchers of this paper tend to fill this gap by focusing this paper onto a specific topic namely Faith Economic Zones (FEZ). FEZ will be concerned with developing a town/city around a religious tourist destination. FEZ will be based on the principals of SEZ which will help in creating sustainable source of contribution to the economy.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THEORETICAL BASE FOR THE RESEARCH:

Faith Economic Zones are special trading and business areas created on the lines of Special Economic Zones in and around a specific religious tourism destination. This will help in developing the area which will in turn contribute to the economy more greatly. Faith Economic Zones will work on the similar pattern of the Special Economic Zones. It will have different rules & regulations for trading and doing business.

FEZ will help in developing tourist destinations which are famous amongst the religious group of people. This will lead to monetizing of resources & business in that area. If these areas are developed with a motive of boosting the economic activities, then this can prove to be the solution of many problems. These include problems like employment, business problems, finance problems etc. If Faith Economic Zones are developed in the country, this can create a major positive impact on the economy.

There has already been development of cities & town around major pilgrimage destinations in our country. For example, there has been huge transition in cities like Shirdi, Thiruvantapuram etc. This research study will be limited to the transition of Shirdi only.

Talking about Shirdi, the city has gone a dramatic change in the past 10 years. There has been development in the infrastructure in the city. The city in 2009 inaugurated its railway station which is well connected to all over the country. Increase in the business & market in the city due to increase in the number of visitors has resulted in creating employment options for the population of that area. The

culture of the city has also been promoted diversely. There are various services available which are introduced by both the government & private parties. Shirdi has reached that level of development where the government of other country wants to invest in the basic infrastructure for the city. In October, 2015, the Maharashtra state government received a bid from the Malaysian Government expressing an interest to invest Rs. 1500 crores for taking over the operations of the Shirdi airport.

Developing Faith Economic Zones is easy, what's difficult is creating sustainable FEZ. While developing plans of FEZ, the concerned authority should keep in mind the sustainability aspect of the plan. It should take in concern the waste management system, security and safety of the area, creating sustainable source of income for the population.

There are various drawbacks related to the development of FEZ.



Few of them are mentioned below:

- Poor implementation of policies
- Lack of single window clearance
- Security
- Private Public Partnerships
- Creating Circuits

#### HYPOTHESES:

This research paper is focused on testing the hypothesis:

“Faith economic zones help contribute economic development of the nation.”

#### LIMITATION AND SCOPE OF RESEARCH:

- This research is restricted to Pune city
- Known and popular travel and tourism agencies are interviewed. Others are ignored
- Willingness of college youth to visit FEZ is focused. Elderly people are excluded from study.
- Restricted to the students of Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce. Other colleges are ignored.
- Only city based students are considered rural students are ignored from this study.
- Since a few personal observations have become a part of this research, the research findings may be bias.

**METHODOLOGY:**

The data for this study were collected from local travel agencies which are engaged in tourism activities and provide religious tourism packages. This research is mainly based on secondary data such as books, internet, news etc. The primary data will be collected through questionnaire and personal interviews. Secondary data has been collected through library resources. The data has been analyzed by using simple statistical tools such as percentages, ratios etc. The duly analyzed data has been presented by use of charts, diagrams and tables. Personal observations of the researchers will also form a part of this research.

**DATA INTERPRETATION:**

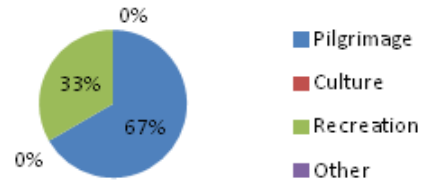
For finding out the above mentioned objectives, the following questions were asked. The responses are also mentioned below.

Tourism & Religion when mingled can create miracles. Do you feel this statement is correct?

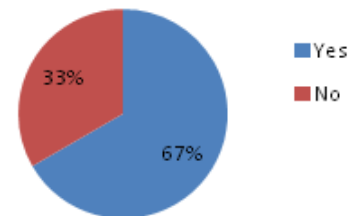
1. Do you think religious tourism has market in India?
2. What are the main reasons for tourists to visit religious places?
  - Pilgrimage
  - Culture
  - Recreation
  - Other
3. What is the normal days package tourist chooses?
4. Apart from accommodation, food & travel which other facilities can be included to enhance the experience in this sector of tourism?
5. Do you feel Faith Economic Zones on the lines of Special Economic Zones can be made successful?
6. If yes, then which services can be streamlined for the same?
  - Accommodation
  - Local cuisine
  - Special transport services
  - Recreational services
7. Which local industries will get a boost through this?
  - Handicrafts
  - Folk tradition
  - Infrastructure
8. If you compare Faith Economic Zones with Viability and Feasibility, which one will you choose?
  - Viability
  - Feasibility
9. Suggestions

**ANALYSIS OF DATA:**

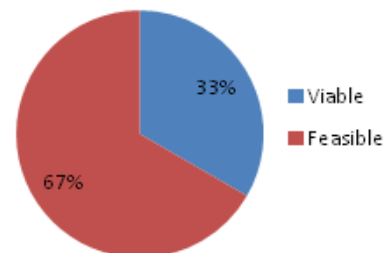
**Main reasons for tourists to visit religious places**



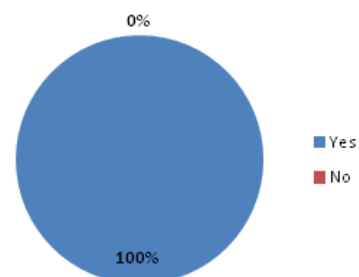
**Religious Tourism has a market**



**FEZ, Viable or Feasible?**



**Can FEZ be successful?**



**OBSERVATIONS:**

The researchers observe that there has been a strong change in the mindset of the people. The daily work schedules of individuals are getting hectic every passing day. This has resulted in changing the sole reason for religious tourism. Now people also prefer going to such destinations for recreation & relaxation purpose. Whereas, some people still strongly believe that people visiting religious tourist destination is solely for religious purpose. While conducting a survey of the local travel agencies, a point which was focused by most of these agencies was that people usually don't prefer to go to such places in packages provided by them. They like to create a plan of their own & plan it accordingly.

**SUGGESTIONS:**

The researchers would like to suggest the following points based on their study:

- i. The initial development of FEZ should be based on the lines of SEZ.
- ii. FEZ needs to be a combination of both feasibility & viability.
- iii. Creation of FEZ should help the population by giving access to infrastructure & resources for their business at a cheaper cost.

- iv. The concerned authority should pay attention on services like hygiene, sanitation, safety, security, healthcare etc.

**CONCLUSION:**

The researchers of this paper have come to a conclusion that Faith Economic Zones or FEZ has a huge potential in our vast country. If plans are developed on the lines of successful SEZ models, and these are followed properly then FEZ can be one of the crucial source of the developing economy.

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