

Pilgrimage Tourism and Economic Impact: An Empirical Study on Medaram Samakka- Sarakka Jatara

B. Suresh Lal¹, Chilusani Raju² & Lunavath Valya³

¹Professor, Department of Economics, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana, India

²Associate Professor of Economics, Govt. Degree College, Wardhannapet, Warangal, TG- India

³Assistant Professor of Economics, Govt. Degree College, Thorrur, Mahabubabad District, TG-India

Abstract

To certain places, like the birth or death of the spiritual awakening founders. These places are very significant for believers. Medaram, a village in the Mulugu district of Telangana, India, is one such place. It hosts the well-known non-Vedic and non-Brahminical religious celebration, the Sammakka Sarakka Jatara. This biennial festival observed in Magha (February) masam on the full moon day, pays homage to the revered goddesses Sammakka and Saralamma. This festival is the largest tribal celebration in Asia and is celebrated by the Koya tribe living in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and the neighbouring states of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. The festival attracts an average of more than one crore people, making it a significant event for the local community and the region.

The study finds significant differences in monthly income and savings patterns across locations during the peak pilgrimage season and off-season. It shows that 98% of responses to pilgrimage destinations involve temporary hospitality businesses like tea shops, juice stands, and hotels, which are vital for meeting pilgrims' needs and supporting local economies. Other opportunities include selling ritual goods and using forest resources. 95% opinion that the Medaram pilgrimage boosts local income and job opportunities and diversifies occupations, improving financial stability for individuals and religious institutions. The Medaram pilgrimage significantly impacts government agencies like the Devasthanam Board, TSRTC, Railways, BSNL, and the Tourism Department. However, the study also highlights the urgent need for sustainable practices in pilgrimage tourism, as the Medaram pilgrimage significantly disrupts the natural balance of surrounding areas, causing deforestation and pollution, waste generation from animal and bird sacrifices, open defecation, and water and airborne diseases.

The correlation of chi-square test results shows a significant impact of pilgrimage increased levels of income, livelihood security for local people and adverse effects on ecological balance in the surrounding areas, including water and airborne diseases [Chi-square = 364.58 and sig = 0.000 and Chi-square= 356.37 and sig= 0.000], respectively.

Keywords: Rural tourism, livelihood, economic impact, tribes, Medaram and Telangana

1. INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage is a journey to holy places according to beliefs and faith. Many religions attach importance to certain places, like the birth or death of the founders of the spiritual awakening. These places have great significance for believers. Pilgrims can reflect on their goals and ideals while encouraging solidarity and belonging among like-minded travellers. Pilgrimage strengthens the local economy in addition to promoting spiritual development. For thousands of years, pilgrimage has been an effective means of fostering a sense of global community, self-examination, and personal development. In modern times, pilgrimage has become a source of mass tourism because as the development of transport and other facilities increased, the number of people visiting such places increased, too.

The birth of tourism can be traced back to the 17th century when young noblemen from Western and Northern European countries embarked on an educational trip around Europe to learn about history, art and cultural heritage. By the 18th century, this custom gained popularity among the wealthier classes and it spread to other parts of the world, such as America. Religious pilgrimages which originated in the Middle Ages were very popular too. The Industrial Revolution triggered a movement of people from rural areas to growing urban areas, which housed the industries. New social classes emerged. Developments in transport triggered the birth of leisure, entertainment and travel, Hose (2008).

Pilgrimage Tourism: Pilgrimage journeys are extraordinary, sacred journeys to spiritual enlightenment. They are a complete surrender to God. Factors such as faith, life values, principles, and religious interests motivate individuals to undertake pilgrimages, Bahri, (2017).

Economic Impact of Tourism—Tourism's impact on the economy extends beyond generating income and employment. It acts as a growth engine, stimulating investment in infrastructure, promoting sustainable development, and fostering cultural and natural heritage conservation. This multifaceted influence demonstrates how tourism is fundamental to global economic growth. In 2019, the travel and tourism industry accounted for 10.4% of global GDP – \$10 trillion. In 2022, the industry reached 7.6% of GDP. The tourism industry supported over 22 million jobs in 2022. When people think of tourism-related jobs, they usually think of travel agents, hotel staff, and workers at tourist attractions. However, millions of people worldwide work in tourism and other related industries.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tourism is an important industry that contributes to a country's economic growth and is closely linked to other sectors. Factors such as promoting tourism, medicine, industrial development, globalisation, and trade liberalisation have made the health industry competitive. Tourism is an activity with robust backward and forward linkages. Travellers spend money to enjoy a variety of goods, services, and experiences, Naik(2013a).

Spirituality has been a strong motivation for travel and is the case even now. People from developed and affluent countries are moving from their own countries to other destinations, seeking solitude, natural and holistic remedies, including health purposes, and eco-friendly experiences, Lal (2024). Narratives help in the construction of divinity, along with rituals and symbols. Religious narratives have an element of miracle that allows for constructing divinity. However, faith, subject to experience, has a semiotic-based epistemology, whereas narratives are based on semantics. Therefore, narratives alone cannot decipher the meaning of a great tradition. One has to look closely at the rituals and symbols as well. Nevertheless, narratives offer the entry point to a cultural space and understanding them is essential for a critical understanding of tribal culture and its networks, Pandey (2021). Tourism activities are considered to be one of the significant sources of economic growth. It generates employment and income in formal and informal sectors, Lal (2024). The study focussed on the pilgrim's experiences regarding their journey, motivation, experiences, risk factors, desire, quality, pilgrim satisfaction, etc. A survey was conducted on 580 pilgrims. According to the researchers, pilgrim management should be improved by reducing the risk elements, increasing motivation and desires, and improving the quality of pilgrimage services to enhance pilgrim experiences, Huang Che Wu (2019). Mussa (2021) points out the main positive impacts of pilgrimage tourism. It provides the locals with employment, income, and a way of life. On the other hand, man-made tourism creates problems like population density, mental stress due to overcrowding, epidemics, diseases, and the commercialisation of local culture. Pilgrimage tourism has raised the price of land and rent in Kashmir. It also affects the availability of goods and services during peak seasons. Tourism has acquired the status of a modern industry. It is an essential sector for both government and private industries as it is a good opportunity for development, Gill (2002). The tourism industry has acquired a crucial place in the global economy. He has provided suggestions for improving the quality of tourism products so that customer can change their perception towards this industry, Kamra (2004). Srivastava (2009) found that India is now seen as a perfect destination from the travelling point of view as it offers various travellers a mix of culture, history and state-of-the-art facilities.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study examines the economic impact of pilgrimage tourism in the Medaram area using a multifaceted methodology. The study uses a survey approach to gather information from locals in Tadvai, Oorattam, Kothur, and Narlapur villages, as well as local traders, street vendors, temporary workers, and service providers. The broad spectrum of participation offers a comprehensive picture of the effects on many local economic sectors. The mixed-methods framework integrates qualitative and quantitative data to provide extensive knowledge of the phenomenon. The study uses surveys, interviews, and documentary

analysis to collect data. Secondary sources, such as government documents, scholarly writing, and trade journals, are also consulted. The study offers insightful information about the economic impacts of pilgrimage tourism.

Significance of the study

The study lies in its potential to shed light on the economic benefits pilgrimage tourism brings to Telangana, mainly focusing on the famous Medaram Jatara. By analysing the various aspects of pilgrimage tourism at Medaram, such as visitor spending, job creation and infrastructure development, this study can provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders in the tourism industry. Ultimately, understanding the economic impacts of pilgrimage tourism at Medaram can help formulate strategies to maximise the benefits and minimise the challenges associated with this tourism.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the economic benefits of local people engaging in various economic activities during the Medaram Jatara and off-season.
2. To analyse utilising locally available economic resources during the Medaram Pilgrimage season.
3. To examine the impact of Medaram Jatara on the livelihood security of local people and
4. To investigate the effects of Medaram Jatara / Pilgrimage on the ecological balance of the surrounding areas.

Hypotheses (Null)

1. There is no significant difference in the economic benefits of people engaging in financial activities across various localities during the Medaram Jatara season and off-season.
2. Medaram Pilgrimage has no significant impact on people's livelihood security and
3. There is no significant adverse effect on ecological balance in the surrounding areas due to Medaram Pilgrimage.

Medaram Pilgrimage

Medaram is a village in Telangana, India's Mulugu district. This village hosts well-known non-Vedic and non-Brahminical religious celebrations. This festival pays homage to the revered goddesses Sammakka and Saralamma and is observed biennially in the month of *Magha* (February) on the full moon day. The largest tribal celebration in Asia, Sammakka Sarakka Jatara, is celebrated by the Koya tribe living in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and the neighbouring states Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. An average of more than one crore people attend. Because Jatara is a mythological story about two tribal women leaders who battled against the Kakatiya monarchs who attempted to take their land and woods, it is supported by several communities in Telangana society. The belief states that Sammakka's curse was the reason behind the Kakatiya's slow decline and eventual demise. Saramma and Sammakka demonstrated their support for their tribal forests and lands. Beyond its religious fervour, the jatara is a platform for fostering understanding and harmony between visitors and tribal communities, promoting the preservation of their unique traditions, culture, and heritage globally, The Hindu (2024).

The Koyas: This tribe is called Koitur in their dialect. The people of this tribe can be found in Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, Khammam, East Godavari and West Godavari Districts. Koyas and Gonds racially, linguistically and culturally belong to the same stock. Also, the social organisation of Koyas and Gonds is identical, Lal(2023).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Faith-Based Market in India

The Global Indian faith-based tourism market size is estimated to be valued at USD 1180.4 million in 2024 and is expected to reach USD 4158 in 2030. The significant factors driving rising spirituality, religious sentiment and the rise of faith-centric experiences are reasons for the growth of the Indian market, Coherent(2024). 10% of India's GDP and create 60 million jobs by 2030.



Figure 1 presents the number of foreign tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings in India. India earned an average of 7.69 billion US dollars annually from 2000 to 2010. Figure 2 also presents the number of foreign tourist arrivals and foreign exchange Earnings in India. According to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, India earned an average of 19.63 billion USD annually from 2011 to 2022. Hence, the Indian tourism industry is trying hard to provide peace and spirituality in travel and tourism in India. It also points out that “Atithi Devo Bhav” is a slogan of Indian tourism.

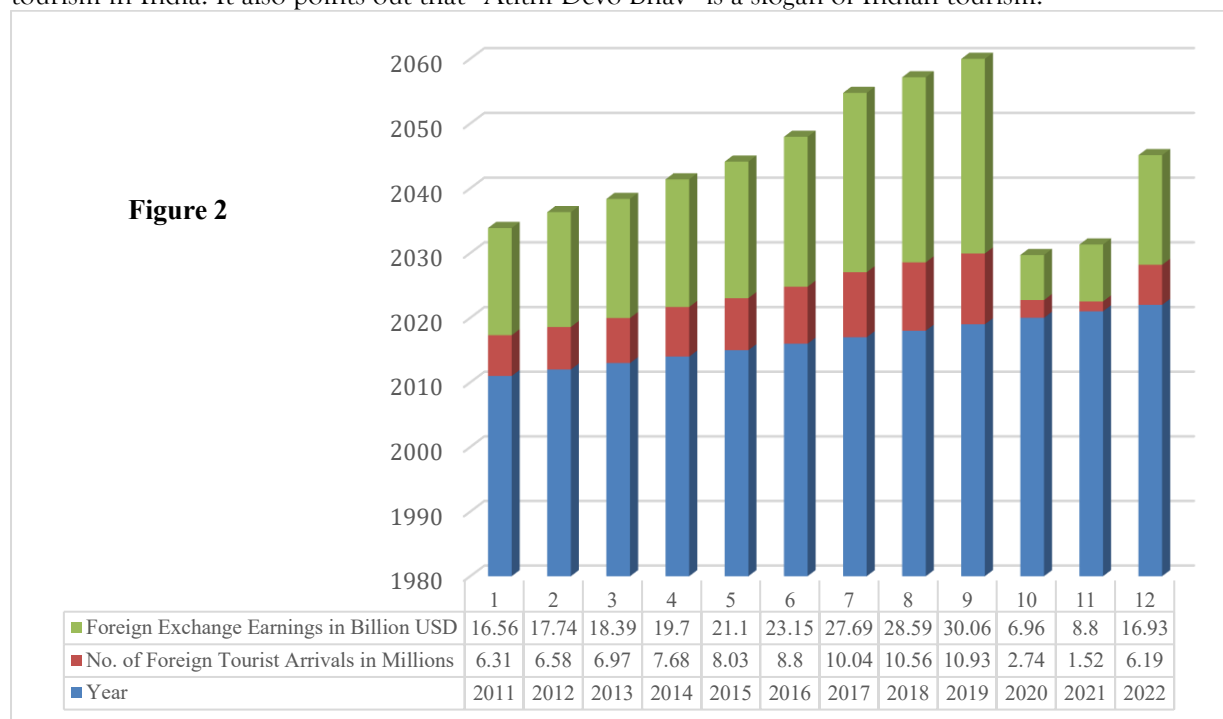


Figure 3

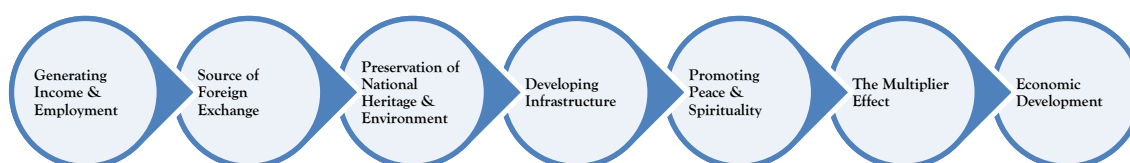


Figure 3 reveals how the tourism industry impacts the Indian economy; it provides a theoretical

framework for how the industry caters to tourists' needs, promotes peace and spirituality, and promotes economic development.

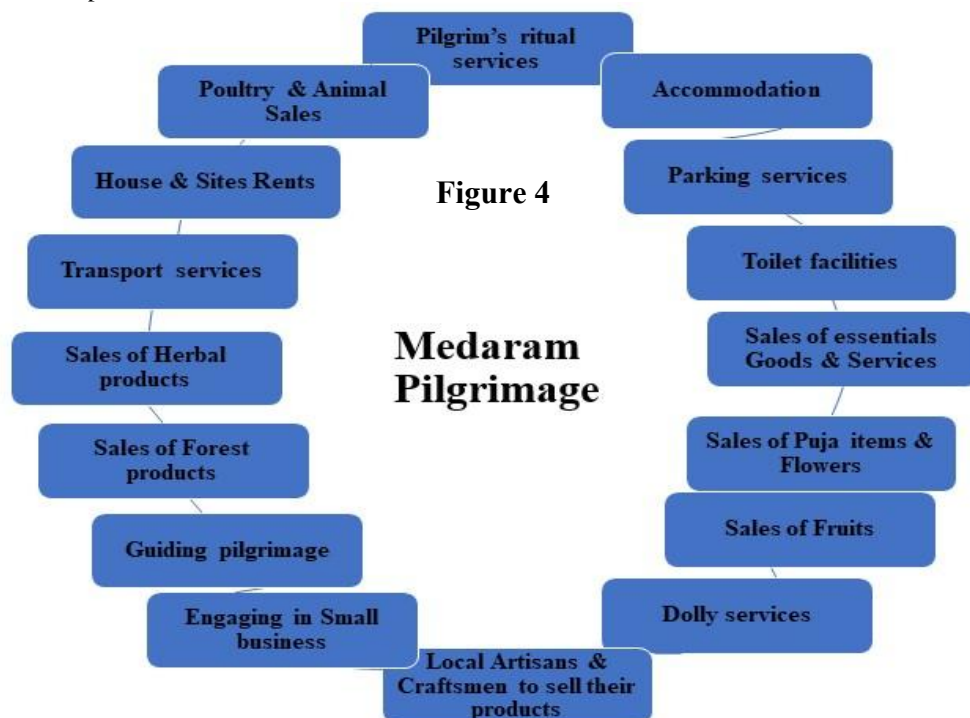


Figure 4 shows the economic activities associated with the Medaram Pilgrimage. It provides services from pilgrim's rituals, accommodation, parking, toilet, sales of essentials, puja and flowers, sales of fruits, dollies, sales of forest produce, herbal products, house and site for rent, poultry and animals, and sales of tribal artisans' products.

Table 1. Earning Particulars of Temporary Hospitality Businesses by Local People in Medaram Jatara

Sl No	Business Activity	Monthly Income (in INR)
1	Tea Shop	20000 - 25000
2	Juice Stand	30000 - 40000
3	Cool Drinks	25000 - 35000
4	Hotels	120000 - 200000
5	Wines	300000 - 450000
6	Ritual Goods	200000 - 500000
7	Dolls	200000 - 400000
8	Forest Resources	125000 - 175000
9	Jaggery (Bangaram)	300000 - 500000
10	Live Birds	350000 - 475000
11	Goats & Sheep	500000 - 700000

Source: Field study

Table 1 shows that many local and tribal people do temporary business activities for their livelihood. Most of these business activities are run by men and women twenty-four hours a day because floating devotees buy around the clock. Selling tea earns an average monthly income of between 20 and 25 thousand rupees, juice sales of 30 to 40 thousand rupees, and hotel business of 1.20 to 2 lakh rupees. From wine sales to goats and sheep sales, they earn rupees 3 to 7 lakhs monthly.

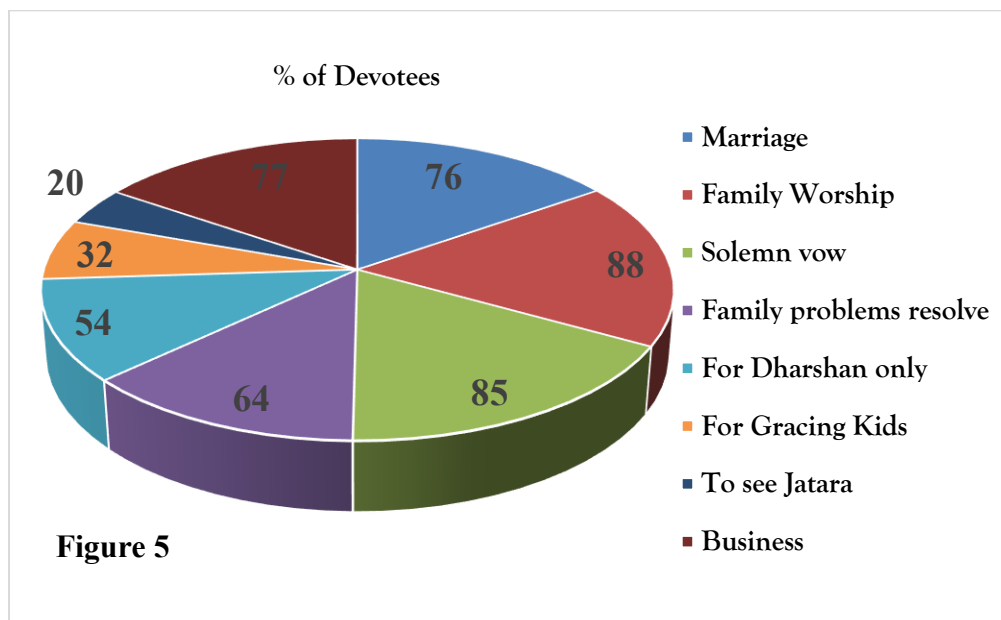


Figure 5 shows that 88% of devotees visit Medaram jathara for worship, followed by 85% of devotees' solemn vow, 77% of devotees for business, 76% of devotees for dharshan, 64% of devotees to resolve family problems, 54% of devotees for blessing from Goddess to get marriage immediately, 32% of devotees for gracing to kids, who are long waiting for having kids and 20% of devotees to see jathara.

Table 2. Resource Perspective from Sample Respondents

Perception	Statistics	F-value	Sig
Medaram Pilgrimage brings community infrastructural facilities such as toilets, Washrooms, drinking water, and drainage	Mean-3.12 S.D- 1.01	36.712	0.000
Medaram Pilgrimage promotes economic infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, petty shops, community hall and guest house	Mean-3.31 S.D- 0.91	32.014	0.000
Medaram Pilgrimage promotes social infrastructure such as hospitals, banks, post offices, insurance agencies, network towers	Mean-2.11 S.D- 1.12	33.160	0.000
Medaram Pilgrimage provides incentives for the creation of tourism infrastructure.	Mean-2.32 S.D- 0.42	22.12	0.000
Medaram is a forest-based temple; it helps to protect forest areas surrounding the temple	Mean-2.13 S.D- 0.41	2.678	0.000
Environmental influence of Medaram Pilgrimage on local communities	Mean-2.17 S.D- 0.51	32.12	0.000

Source: Field study

Table 3. Environmental Degradation Perspective of Sample Respondents

Perception	Statistics	F-value	Sig
Medaram Pilgrimage produces sanitary-related Issues, open defecation, & water pollution	Mean-3.17 S.D-0.32	12.236	0.000
Medaram pilgrimage produces plastic waste, kitchen waste, bottles, debris & litter	Mean-3.01 S.D-0.39	67.127	0.000
Medarm pilgrimage destroys the natural beauty of the environment and deforestation	Mean-2.29 S.D-0.51	17.678	0.000
Medaram pilgrimage affects residents by spoiling the quality of the environment	Mean-3.32 S.D-0.41	22.610	0.000

Medaram pilgrimage leads to over-exploitation of natural resources	Mean-2.13 S.D-0.51	13.867	0.000
Medaram pilgrimage creates wild animal hunting	Mean-3.19 S.D-0.65	6.312	0.000
Medaram Pilgrimage produces sanitary-related Issues, open defecation, & water pollution	Mean-3.17 S.D-0.32	12.236	0.000

Source: Field study

RESULTS OF HYPOTHESES

The correlation of chi-square test results shows a significant impact of pilgrimage on increased income levels and livelihood security for local people and adverse effects on ecological balance in the surrounding areas, including water and airborne diseases [Chi-square = 364.58 and sig = 0.000 and Chi-square = 356.37 and sig= 0.000], respectively.

Adverse Impact on the Economy: Alcohol is not an ordinary commodity but a toxic substance in terms of its direct and indirect effects on a wide range of body organs and systems. It is one of the most harmful health risks. Develop an evidence base to project the magnitude of the problem on the population's health in conjunction with other risk factors and issues, such as liver diseases, road traffic injuries and violence, Naik (2013).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Religious tourism: India has many different religions, and spiritual travel is one of the most well-liked forms of tourism there. Some of the country's most well-known holy locations are Amritsar, Varanasi, Haridwar, and Rishikesh. From the tribal pilgrimage point of view, Medaram is a very popular tribal pilgrimage in India with vast potential. Its contribution to GDP is also significant, which can lead to the development of a nation. Though tourism is a service industry, its growth and promotion are interdependent both directly and indirectly on many other sectors of the economy like Infrastructure, Transport Sector, Tele Communications, Hotels and Restaurants, Travel Agents and Tour Operators, Hotel Management and Food Craft Institutions, Handicrafts and Traditional Gifts items manufactures, Shopping Arcades and Exhibitions. It also significantly disrupts the natural balance of surrounding areas, causing pollution, waste generation and contamination of holy Jampanna vagu.

Green marketing should not neglect the economic aspect. Marketers need to understand its implications. If you think customers are not concerned about environmental issues or will not pay a premium for more eco-responsible products, think again, Lal (2015).

Declaration of competing interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the paper.

REFERENCES

- [1.] Pandey, J. (2021). Medaram Jatra: A Review of the Narratives. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 9(6).
- [2.] Naik, N.T.K. & Lal, B.S. (2013). Economic Analysis of Indian Medical Tourism (International Healthcare Destination). *International Journal of Business Management Economics and Information Technology*, 5(2). Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276868151>
- [3.] Lal, B.S. (2024). Sustainable Tourism and Economic Growth in India — An Analysis. *Journal of World Economy*, 3(1). doi:10.56397/JWE.2024.03.05
- [4.] Hose, T.A. (2008). Towards a History of Geotourism: definitions, antecedents and the future. *Geological Society*, London.
- [5.] Nithya & Behri, R. (2017). Pilgrimage Tourism in Punjab. *International Journal of Science Technology and Management*, 6(1).
- [6.] The Hindu. (2024). Medaram Jatara: A sacred gathering of devotion and tradition. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/incoming/medaram-jatara-a-sacred-gathering-of-devotion-and-tradition/article67860563.ece>
- [7.] Wu, H.C. (2019). The impact of the development of religious tourism on host community - A case study of Mount Everest in China. In *Managing religious tourism*.

- [8.] Mohammad, M. (2021). A study of consumer behaviour for religious and Pilgrimage Tourism with special reference to Amarnath Cave in Kashmir Challenges and its Social Economic impact of Kashmir. *Doctoral dissertation*, Department of Rural Management, BSB Ambedkar University.
- [9.] Gill, P.S. (2002). *Tourism and Hotel Management*. Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- [10.] Kamra, K.K. & Chand, M. (2004). *Basics of Tourism Theory Operations and Practice*. Kanishka Publishers Distributors, New Delhi.
- [11.] Srivastava, M. (2009). Assessing International Heritage Tourist Satisfaction in India. *Indian Journal of Marketing*, 39(4).
- [12.] Lal, B.S. (2015). Green Marketing: Opportunities And Issues. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education (IJMRME)*, 1(1). Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/B-Suresh-Lal/publication/311562617>
- [13.] Naik, N.T.K. & Lal, B.S. (2013). Impact of Alcohol Consumption on Health and Economy (A Focus on Mc Dowellization of World). *IOSR Journal of Nursing and Health Science (IOSR-JNHS)*, 1(5). Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/B-Suresh-Lal/publication/340091042>
- [14.] Lal, B.S. & Valya, L. (2023). Multidimensional Poverty Among Tribes: An Investigation in Telangana State. *The Indian Economic Journal*, 2(Special Issue). Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377067000>
- [15.] Coherent Market Insights. (2024). *Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.coherentmarketinsights.com>