



# DRUG TOURISM IN INDIA: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

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**Abstract-**Drug Tourism is becoming a trend with India's inbound and domestic tourists. Its traveling to another country or place with sole purpose of using the drugs that are illegal or expensive or unavailable in one's hometown. Hashish of Malan at Himachal, Magic Mushrooms from Kodaikanal, Idukki Gold in Kerala, Bhang and Opium of Rajasthan, Psychedelic drugs in Goa are major drugs or destinations that attracts domestic as well as international tourists. This paper studies the drug tourism in Indian society and Tourist destinations. Also the substance abuse due to drug tourism and effects on local communities and cities. Methods like Participant Observation (Goa, Malana, Kodaikanal, Idukki), In Depth interviews with Tourists and local communities, Open ended Questionnaire and News reports, and articles resulted that Indian working youths and students had traveled once with sole purpose of using drugs. International tourists stayed more days on destinations promoting drugs and Rave parties. Educated unemployed youths (both gender), Stressed working class peoples, Artists, Backpackers are followed the trend. From school kid to senior citizens Drugs had become part of the travel plan . Drug abuses are reported in India that caused by international and domestic tourists. The impact of Drug tourism can be reduced by private, public and community participation activities.

**Keywords:** Drug Tourism, Healthcare, Social risk, Law, Drug Abuse.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of technology and globalization had made easy to travel from one corner of the world to another. Tourism is the one of booming service industry around the world. With the development of easy accessibility to destinations, tourism services had innovated further to different types of niche services. Drug Tourism as tourism industry niche includes traveling to a destination with the principle intention of consuming drugs that are generally unavailable in one's home location or nation because of the legal or socio-cultural factors. As each countries or states have its own laws and norms related to the Drug productions and consumption. Some nations/states have loose drugs laws while other nation/states gives more freedom in drug laws. This had created the trend of travel to other destinations to experience the drugs that are not available or prohibited or costly in their own nation/state/destination. According to the outcomes got in the study by Andrea Grobe and Julia Lier (2011) entitled. "Drug tourism: going on a trip holiday" demonstrated that there are travelers who travel in the midst of a furlough with the expectation to get and consume drugs, however that specific dangers included ought to be tended to in this tourism niche concept. Amsterdam, Peru, Bolivia, Prague, Bangkok, Malana/Goa, Colorado is the popular known destination for Drug tourism. Amsterdam is for easy availability of marijuana, Ayahuasca of Peru is a travelers favorite psychedelic drug that creates hallucinogenic effects. Cocaine of Bolivia or Colombia and Drug friendly clubs in Prague are the travelers list. Thailand, Laos, Burma are known as 'The Golden Triangle' with drug like Opium, heroin, Marijuana, Mushrooms and other new illegal drugs in its tourist destinations. The United Nations has noticed that Afghanistan and Myanmar alone produce world's 95% of Opium an known as 'Golden Crescent'. Mexico, Netherlands, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Bolivia, Czech Republic, India, Indonesia, Uruguay is the major nations famous for the drug tourism activities. There are variety of drugs deals in drug tourism as the tourist is more interested in experiencing new drugs in host destination that is not available in hometown. This had created the trend of making a destination know for some particular drugs. Like Ayahuasca for Peru, Malana for India, Mushrooms of Laos etc. In Cambodia (Siem Reap), 'Happy Herb Pizza, Happy Angkor Pizza, and Ecstatic Pizza.' are cuisines marketed with intention of drug tourists (The Phnom Penh Post, 2012). My 420 Tours is a Colorado-based the travel organization that offers cannabis related tour programs. 420 Friendly hotels where tourist can smoke cannabis inside hotel room, Joint rolling workshop on how to roll a joint(smoke), Cannabis massage, cannabis wellness tours(marijuana plantation visit), cannabis cooking class and luxury cannabis-friendly transport service are services offered by 'My 420 Tours'. Westerhausen (2002), in an ethnography of drifter-style tourism, examines the rise and fall of drug destinations in South East Asia, such as Goa in India and Koh Phangan in Thailand.

India has known for its own specialties throughout the world even before the colonial periods. Yoga, Ayurveda, Martial arts and other spiritual gurus and ideologies are followed by many westerners and others



from different corners of the world for hundreds of years before. The natural Drugs in India have used by traditional medical practitioners thousands of years ago for medical purpose. Later it becomes as a recreational drug. These Recreational drugs become part of Indian culture in different locations, religions and communities. Bhang is the best example consumed and practices by ancient Hindu religious followers. The colonial power had developed more popularity for recreational drugs in Goa. We can experience the emerging trend of India as a Drug Tourism destination. Himachal, Goa, Kodaikanal, Idukki are existing drug tourism destination in India. There are many domestic and international tourists who traveling in India only for experience the local drug products/activities. This paper explores to the Indian tourist destinations known for drug tourism, its socio-cultural impacts, recent trends and challenges in India with emergence of drug tourism. An ethnographic study on destinations and tourists in Malana, Goa, Kodaikanal and Idukki are forced to identify the real trends and challenges. Drug tourism is a happening niche market of tourism in India. EDM, Full moon parties and festivals are the major tourism activity that brought the support of drug tourism. Drug abuse have been reported many times in India in tourist destination and tourists. Because of consuming the drug both the tourist and local community had faced problems. There are many risks associated with the drug tourism. Uriely, Belhassen (2005) described risk derived by drug tourism to three segments as Legal risk, social risk, medical risk in the article 'Drug and Risk-taking Tourism'. The local government and community had developed different mechanisms to control illegal drug consumption in these regions but most of the time it had failed. Nation like India have to develop activities and programs from the people not from top authorities to control the drug abuse due to drug tourism . Bottom to up approach, Co-operative law implementation will be more effective way to prevent the society from problems of drug tourism.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic fieldwork methods are the main strategy of the study. In Depth interviews with tourists, drug peddlers, local travel agencies, and NGO volunteers, government authorities and local community contributed to the study. Participant observation in tourism destinations like Malana and Kasol(Himachal), Goa, Kodaikanal(Tamil Nadu), Idukki(Kerala) are conducted over 2 years during 2017-2018. Local Kodaikanal travel agents, volunteers from NGO Healing Himalayas in Himachal, and forest authorities in Idukki district of Kerala, International tourist in Goa, Drug peddlers in Kodaikanal and local villagers of Vattakanal (Kodaikanal) had interviewed. One week stay in Dragon guest house of Malana(2017), 25 days in Kasol and Manali(2017), a week of Goa, seven days in Kodaikanal and one week of Idukki are the source of observational data. During the participant observation events like EDM and music concerts, carnival and festivals are included. The secondary data of published articles, news reports, international reports also supported the study.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Drug tourism niche market is developed after the tourists find out the possibilities of consuming drugs in different location that are illegal or not available in hometown. Also the whole purpose of traveling become as just Recreational activity. In olden times people moved from one place to another for resources, religious purpose and spread kingdom, then to explore the unknown locations and cultures, later as a recreational activity through experiencing the nature, man-made and cultural attractions of a host destination. Mostly tourist travel for consume drugs to have relaxed time from a stressful life or experience extreme happiness of psychedelic drugs. The drug tourism destination known for drugs like Alcohol, Marijuana, Glass (Crystal methamphetamine), Ecstasy (MDMA), LSD, Hashish, Cocaine, Heroin, Magic Mushrooms, GHB, Ketamine, Xanax, Oxycodone, Rohypnol. Even in India above drugs are easily available and consumed in dark side of daylight. According to the dealers in Goa and Himachal, Ketamine and Calvin Kleins are the most popular drug for rave parties as club drug. International Tourist comes to Goa only with the intention of using these psychedelic drugs in the festival seasons and fly back after detoxification.

### 3.1 Goa

Goa has turned into a transit point of drugs in Indian continent. Many International and National drug dealers are arrested in Goa. The reports (Rediff 2008) mentions that as information from drug dealer the easiest way to smuggle drugs is by using the minors and females. There are many complaints from local people about drug mafias which is controlled mostly by the Russians in goa. Manas, a goan entrepreneur described that many domestic budget travelers' comes to Goa with camping equipments and destroy the public properties. He further explained that this trend not only contributes nothing to the local community economically but also conflicts the peaceful lifestyle of peoples. According to the Goa Police report in 2017 filed 162 cases of illegal drug business and arrested peddlers about 170 as the chief minister Monohar ordered to fight against the drug users in Goa. 26 were foreign nationals who arrested in 2017 and left Indians. Dr. Jawaharlal Henriques of St Anthony Hospital Goa reported they have many overdose cases registered including tourists with age of 20 to 27. As Times of India reported on October 2018, police filed 173 cases and arrested 182 persons also seized different drugs in goa by time period of first 8 months in



2018. Recently (November 2018) the Goa Tourism Minister Manohar Parrikar said there is a need of increase in the events like Electronic Dance Music(EDM) festivals as the government need revenue. This had become more complicated decision as the music events and rave parties are found to providing the platform for drug deals and consumption of drugs in Goa. Study found that most of tourist who visit Goa consumes different types of drugs. This made Goa as a Drug tour destination. from last decades only the domestic travelers increased trips to Goa only to consume drugs. Drug peddlers, Coffee or Massage shops, Chemists and star hotel room boys are the important source of illegal drugs to tourists. During the fieldwork i have experienced different times persons asking 'do you want pleasure or weed or more'. Tourists who visits Goa more than once in a year used to have a specific drug dealer or hotel to pre arrange the drugs and fun before travel itself. Most of the Respondents didn't visit Goa first time as a drug tourists, they visited as a part of college tour, gap year travel or business/academic events.

### 3.2 Malana

Malana is a village 21 km far from Kasol, Himachal. One have to take a private transportation or bus from Bhunter and then have to trek uphill(8,700 feet) to reach Malana village. High on one side of a wild and remote glen that adjoins the waterway Parvati in the Kullu valley of Himachal Pradesh. Malana village is known for its finest Hashish tourist called as 'Malana Cream'. Villagers in Malana had followed barter system in old days. Later during and after colonial rules in India, Foreigners explored these villages and introduced villagers how to make Hashish from Weed grown in Parvati valley. Then after the villagers started to entirely depend on the production of Hashish as economic source. Actually, in 1995, Malana Cream was declared one of the best hashish smokes at Cannabis Cup, Amsterdam. Later many international tourists from Israel, United States came and settled in Malana and adjacent locations to experience the Malana Cream. An old villager mentioned in late 70s a foreign tourist instructed villagers to remove an inebriating tar(Hash) from the cannabis. Then the villagers started commercial cultivation of cannabis. September and October is peak season of drug tourist to Himachal as it is the harvesting time. According to the Himachal police report international drug peddlers also arrested with Indians. Most of the international peddlers are origin of Nigeria. Once (2010-12) the local government had supported Malana village to cultivate cash crops like pea and liliun ( medicinal herb) instead of Cannabis, with a promise of fixed price for the production. But local government failed to give promised price, only offered 30% of fixed price and villagers felt like cheated. Then the whole production they threw to Parvati and went back to cannabis cultivation. 'Only reason why they have tourism is cause of hashish and if they stop producing it even the tourism will be affected badly' VIPIN BANSAL running cafe in parvati for three years. The local drug peddlers use the Dussehra festival for easy smuggling of drugs from Malana to tourists around as the city have huge rush of festival and policies will be busy on maintaining the crowd and VIP safety. A drug peddler described he used to use camps of deities(temple/ashram) as a safe option for trade of narcotics. Now the government is planning to use hydel power projects in Malana area Sutlej Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited(SJVNL) and National Hydro Power Corporation(NHPC) to set up rehabilitation centers for drug addicts. It has affected the local community and tourists. Many scams are happening in drug trade in Himachal tourists. Baiju, a tourist from Kerala had experienced fake drug scam in Manali. As the drug peddler provide fake drugs(Hashish) to outstation tourists instead of original drug with a high price and it may affect economically and physically to the consumer. There are many reports of tourists have vanished or been killed, with the local drug gangs. During my first day trek to the Malana village, two of the local young was smoking hashish and they invited me to take one trip, as i resisted they had tried to ask for money as i am outsider. Now the villagers had banned outsiders to stay in the village to protect them from exploitation. Most of the villagers are friendly and both women, children, and old people are masters in hashish production. The communities young people are becoming addict to the drug is main challenge. And so on Malana become a pure Drug tourism destination. Also the whole adjacent locations like Kasol, Kullu, Manali, Shimla, Etc had promoted the other drugs too. Psychedelic drugs are most popular among the international and national tourists to enjoy the music parties. Kasol has hosted many secret psycho rave parties and it becomes Himachal as drug tourism market.

### 3.3 Kodaikanal

Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu is the south Indian famous drug tourism destination. Known for its psychedelic mushroom 'Magic Mushroom'. Many international tourists are staying in Kodaikanal only to consume Magic Mushroom. It has used by tribal people in Vattakanal area of Kodaikanal for medical purpose and now used as a recreational drug. Kodai mushroom can trade as dried, mixed in smoothies, special shakes, fried in omelets, chocolate bars, also consumed directly by inserting in a banana. Magic mushroom gives high as LSD. "Magic mushroom contains psilocin which is banned in India, but we cannot arrest people who possess the mushroom because it has not been declared illegal," narcotic official said as Reported by The Times of India (2015, October 20). However, deal and transport is illicit It has a compound segment called psilocin which is prohibited in India. The local villagers of Vattakanal explained these magic mushrooms are even delivered to any location in India using the professional courier services by the middle mens or also deliver directly to the star hotel rooms. Drug dealers describes about the



mafia of Mannavanur, a town in Tamil Nadu that holds the trade of Magic Mushrooms in India. Gokul Vannan of Deccan Chronicle (2016, November 14) reported death of two Kerala young college students overdose of magic mushroom and alcohol. The other challenge is that the police can detect tourist who consumed magic mushroom as like detecting alcohol and marijuana users. College students are traveling to Kodaikanal from Bangalore, Cochin, and other nearby places only to experience the Magic of Kodaikanal mushrooms. Vattakanal local community are facing troubles from the tourists as the tourists camp near to village, pollute the environment with plastic products, bribe local young community peoples to find out magic mushroom, also brings other drugs to the village youngsters. Purpose of visiting Kodaikanal have been influenced with the sole trend of consuming magic mushrooms.

### 3.4 Idukki

Idukki, Kerala is known for the cannabis verity 'Idukki Gold' also described by local people as Neelachadayan or Neelam. Rajakkad (Idukki) is the source of major cultivation of Idukki Gold. there are many scams happening around the Drug of Idukki. There are officials mentioned the verity of Idukki Gold is no more available, all the Idukki gold available in drug market are imported local marijuanas from Andhra or Odisha and re branded as 'Idukki Gold'. This will help the drug dealers to charge a premium price. Most of the border marijuana cultivation in Odisha are being grown by the help of Maoists. Recently the ISRO has agreed to help the Kerala police to provide satellite imagery of forests to inspect cultivations of marijuana. Idukki police had tried to minimize the drug trade by patrolling in different tourists areas. Forest authorities destroyed much illegal cultivation of Ganja in Rajakkad area. Still the popularity of Idukki Gold had made the travelers from western countries and other states travel to Idukki to experience the worlds best cannabis verity. Idukki Gold is a premium item in Amsterdam, Netherlands that have been exported from illegal cultivation of Idukki.

### 3.5 Recent Trends

Major trends of Drug tourism in India are wide variety of international and domestic drugs are available. The recent drug dealers using Dark Web (anonymous internet) and Bitcoins for trade of narcotics. Technologies of drug production are available on the Dark web even the manufacturing machines. This had promoted production drugs inside a residential area. Minors and Females are widely used in India to smuggle drugs as there are legal loopholes for them. College students are the major share of drug tourists found in India, then working class youngsters. All classes (economic) people are traveling to different locations in India only to experience the drugs, as there are different costs of drug experiences. The trend of EDM and Rave parties are the platform of extensive drug usage in tourist destinations. As the Music events are generating good tax revenue to the local government, state also promoting the events. Chemists, Drug peddlers, Cafe shops, Star hotel room boys, Stationary shops, Travel agents, Tourist guides and different Event organizers are the basic stakeholders in drug tourism. The study found that there is culture of settling the drug tourism destinations by tourists for longer period as they get addicted to the drug. Easily availability and freely consumption of the drug is the attraction of drug tourists to a destination. Then the cost of drugs available in the destination. Fake policing and fake drug are the other trend. Most of the drug tourists used to suggest friends or colleagues for experience the drug or drug tourism destination. Drug tourism had created many challenges to the local community, government, and others. Challenges faced to tourists like Terrible drug trips, Accidents and deaths, Overdoses impacts, Police bribes, Arrests, Commitment to criminal activities in the host nation chance of getting to scams, chances of spreading HIV Aids viruses, and other health effects. The government face problems to control the destinations and local administration. And mostly local community people face problems of bad behavior from tourists, drug gang wars, negative cultural influence in local young people as they learned from tourists, chances of local students becoming part of drug deals for money and exploiting local girls for sex tourism purpose by the result of drug tourism. There are some limitations to Indian laws like few cities allow legal sale of Bhang-marijuana for religious reasons. the substances Psilocybin and Psilocin are illicit and referenced in Schedule 1 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, there is no notice of 'magic mushrooms' in the law.

## CONCLUSION

The study found that there is immediate need for government, private and community participation to reduce the drug abuse in Tourist destinations that are labeled as 'Drug Tourism' destinations. Drug tourism in India had developed to a foundation stage, also many international and domestic tourists are traveling to different places only to consume the drugs. These travels are affecting local community administration and health of citizens in India, especially the young citizens. For a better future India we have to develop programs and activities that can reduce the drug abuse caused by drug tourism. The local government, NGOs, and community can join together to clear the drug abuse from the society. Bottom to Up approach will be more effective in this case. Himachal, Goa, Kodaikanal, Idukki are the popular drug tourism destination as of now. But states like Punjab, Odisha,



Mumbai are known for the availability of every drugs. There is further research scope for studying every state in India to understand the level of travel habits of people and destination only for experiencing drugs.

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