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Under his supervision, three Ph.D. degrees have been awarded, and eight Ph.D. scholars are currently pursuing research. Prof. Singh has attended and presented papers in over 40 national and international seminars and conferences, received awards such as Best Speaker and Best Paper, and is regularly invited as a resource person and keynote speaker at various academic and professional forums.



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Challenges and Opportunities

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Edited by

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Tourism as Soft Power: A Political-Economic Theory of Cultural Capital and Regional Development in India

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of a volatile global order, this study reconfigures the discourse on Indian tourism, positioning it not merely as a tertiary service sector but as a dual-engine of soft power projection and regional structural transformation. Deploying a novel political-economic framework that synthesizes Joseph Nye's soft power paradigm with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, the research identifies a specific "conversion mechanism" wherein intangible heritage assets, spanning UNESCO enclaves and syncretic festivals, are transmuted into tangible diplomatic influence and decentralized economic equity. Empirical analysis of the sector's post-pandemic "V-shaped" recovery supports a linear projection model suggesting that Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) could potentially double by 2029, validating the sector's capacity to function as a hard-economic pillar of statecraft. By examining policy interventions like the Swadesh Darshan scheme, the paper demonstrates how tourism acts as an interstitial development force, generating employment in peripheral regions while embedding Indian cultural narratives within bilateral ties. However, the study cautions against the risks of "cultural commodification," proposing a "cultural equity index" and participatory governance models to ensure that economic ascendancy does

not erode the authenticity of the very assets it leverages. Ultimately, this framework establishes tourism as the vanguard of India's trajectory toward Viksit Bharat, harmonizing civilizational resonance with inclusive 21st-century economic growth.

Keywords: *Soft Power, Cultural Capital, Tourism Economy, Regional Development, Equitable Growth, India*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in India transcends its traditional classification as a tertiary economic activity, functioning instead as a dynamic repository of the nation's pluralistic ethos, spiritual heritage, and civilizational depth. This paper interrogates the sector through a novel political-economic framework that synthesizes Joseph Nye's (2004) concept of "soft power", influence derived from attraction rather than coercion, with Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory of "cultural capital," which posits that heritage and traditions possess inherent symbolic and economic value. Situated within the volatile landscape of contemporary international relations, tourism emerges as a critical instrument for projecting India's narrative to a global audience, leveraging assets such as 42 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and a five-millennia-old legacy to shape international preferences and discourse. Consequently, the study posits that tourism is not merely a leisure industry but a strategic geopolitical tool capable of positioning India as a "culturally resonant" power while simultaneously driving decentralized regional development.

Beyond its diplomatic utility, the tourism sector serves as a vital pillar of India's domestic economy, contributing approximately 6.8% to the national GDP and sustaining over 39 million jobs, thereby acting as a primary engine for employment generation. This research bridges a significant gap in the existing literature by examining how the strategic deployment of tourism infrastructure satisfies the dual objectives of enhancing international standing and fostering domestic economic growth. The central argument posits that tourism functions as a transformative mechanism that converts accumulated cultural capital, knowledge, skills, and historical advantages, into tangible economic capital and political influence. By elucidating this conversion process, the paper