Emerging Consumer Segment: A Qualitative Assessment of Consumer Needs of Spiritual Migrants to Vrindavan

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ABSTRACT

Migratory movements’ impact demographic profiles in both origin and destination areas. As a component of demographic growth, migration plays a fundamental role in the rapid growth of underdeveloped area, as well as producing significant alterations in the population distribution. Migration studies, however, are complex and very few have focused on religious migration with almost none on spiritual migration which is usually seen and defined as religious migration only. All of the studies concerned with measuring the role of migration show that, to a great extent, it was the volume of movements from rural to urban areas which explains the intense rhythm of urban population increase in the second half of the twentieth century. However, considering its multiple facets, migration is not restricted to rural–urban or underdeveloped to developed area movements, since other types may emerge and grow in importance as a result of changes socio-cultural contexts. The present paper focuses on one such aspect – migration for spiritual pursuits and not for religious propagation and which is emerged in various geographic pockets of India having religious significance. This paper tries to understand the pattern of such migration and does a qualitative assessment of some basic needs and demands of the emerging new segment of customers in such areas. It concludes with discussions on critical issues requiring priority action to facilitate this migration type.

Key words: Spiritual migration, international migration, religious tourism, religiosity, new segment of customers, health services, transportation problem, Vaishnav brands
Introduction:

Majority of the studies on migration have highlighted better economics or employment opportunities as the most important pull factor at the destination motivating them to migrate. Census of India, 2001 show ‘work/employment’ (37.6%) and ‘education’ (6.2%) among males and ‘marriage’ (64.9%) among females as the main reasons for migration. Of the total 30.6 percent migrants in India (Census 2001), 1.6 percent was international migrants who mainly moved because of economic reasons. Education, migration after birth, migration for relocating the household are also reasons for migrating indicated by a small percent as per the census data. Beside these broad reasons, people migrate because of spiritual reasons. There are geographic pockets in India which attract large migrant population that provide the migrant population the opportunity for their spiritual pursuits. Areas, in and around, Varanasi-Sarnath, Haridwar-Rishikesh, Mathura-Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh and Jagannath Puri (Orissa), Udupi (Karnatak), etc. witness large number of spiritual migrants beside the religious tourism.

Literature review:

Internal migration is defined and is distinguished as to its cause and its consequences (M. J. Greenwood). Lot of people within Indian from different states migrate and settle down to above type of religious areas. Such migrants on the basis of their origin as classified into three categories – those from country of usual residence, long-term migrant and short-term migrant\(^1\). Although there are various bodies in India that collect data on both internal and international migration but there hardly exists a comprehensive collation of this data to provide insights on pattern of spiritual or religious migration. In India statistics relevant to migration is being collected for different purposes by different Government organisations, namely, Bureau of Immigration, Protector General of Emigrants (Ministry of Labour), Ministry Of External Affairs, Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner and National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). Statistics relating to the migration within country and foreigners staying in the country are collected through census and sample surveys. Above statistics are available for the users in different sequences by various categories in published form and on electronic media. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner and National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) are collecting information on migration for the statistical purpose but data on migration available with other organisations are by-product of their administrative functions like immigration control and emigration clearance for labour.

Migrations, both voluntary and involuntary, have marked every era of human history and migration continues to fashion the contemporary world. Studies over the past several decades have highlighted the extent to which migration is having a fundamental impact on societies, cultures and economies of both emitting and receiving countries. In the host countries of the developed world national politics and public debate are increasingly preoccupied with issues such as identity, minority rights, security, social integration, cultural diversity and religion in the public sphere, issues which are construed as being linked to immigration (D. S. Massey, 2004). What is more, research on migration has helped formulate some key concepts and theories in the fields of the social and human sciences. Among these we can list: globalization, trans-nationalism, post-modernity, post-coloniality, diasporas, hybridity, cosmopolitanism and autochthony (C.F. Longino Jr., 2007).

\(^1\) United Nations Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration (revision 1) adopted in 1997
No less than other domains of social interaction, religion has been affected by migration. Historically, “organized” religions spread through diverse migratory movements: proselytizing missions, mystical peregrinations, study journeys, pilgrimage, trade, but also conquest and exile. In today’s world of mass travel and cheap instantaneous communication, even religions which were historically circumscribed within narrow geographical perimeters are being practiced in countries very distant in space and culture from their original hearths. Shiite mosques in Australia, temples to Shiva and Krishna in Dubai, Vietnamese Buddhist temples in Canada, Evangelical churches in Morocco, Sikh gurudwaras in Brazil, Santeria churches in the USA, Mormon temples in Ghana, Naqshbandiya khanqas in England... all of the world’s religions now effectively share the same streets (T. J. Hatton, 2004). Until now, the study of migration and research on religious dynamics has developed separately. It is time therefore to ask how these phenomena are interconnected.

Need for the study:

Although migration is mainly due to economic reasons and most of the studies on migration have mainly focused on this aspect only, yet political and more importantly the social-cultural reasons also play a very important role. Among the socio-cultural reasons, marriage is the most important factor which has attracted several studies and in-depth analysis in past. However, there are hardly studies that delve deep into spiritual part of social-cultural migration. Spiritual pursuits are part of Self-Actualization needs (Maslow’s Need Hierarchy Model, 1943) leading to migration or immigration from one place to another. The present paper focuses on spiritual part of social-cultural migration through qualitative enquiry among spiritual migrants in Vrindavan. It assesses the emerging needs of spiritual migrants as a consumer of various services and products available in local markets and to what extent they are satisfied both with their availability and quality.

Study Objectives:

1) To analyses the pattern of migration in Mathura-Vrindavan
2) To make qualitative assessment of emerging needs of spiritual migrants as a consumer

Research Methods:

The first objective was analyzed by using the census data while the second objective used qualitative case-studies and in-depth discussions with the migrants and immigrants (sample=20) and with the religious groups such as ISKCON and other ashrams of Vrindavan (sample=5). A total sample of 25 was covered.

For analyzing the first objective data on migration published in the census reports titled ‘Migration Tables, D-Series’ was used. The series contains volumes relating to migration statistics tables for All India and different States/Union Territories. Data on migration characteristics like place of birth, place of last residence, reason for migration and duration of residence at the place of enumeration are available through these tables. Data on educational level, economic activity and age distribution of the migrants are also available in these tables. There are in all 17 Tables in this series. Latest publications on D-series are based on 2001 Population census and has been referred for the purpose of this paper.

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Study area:

Vrindavan was chosen as study area for this study because it is considered to be a holy place by all traditions of Hinduism and is a center of Krishna worship having several historical temples and structures attracting huge number of pilgrims, religious tourists and most importantly spiritual migrants. Vrindavan occupies a very significant position in Hindu mythology where lord Krishna spent a large part of this early life. It is located 2 kilometers from NH-2 and is a fast growing town of Mathura district in Uttar Pradesh having population of 56,618 (Census 2001), the total population of Mathura being 20,74,516. Due to huge set up of ISKCON and several big temple ashrams, it has been witnessing fast urbanization and attracting greater number of tourists/pilgrims as well as spiritual migrants/immigrants. Hence, it was apt to conduct the above study in Vrindavan-Mathura region.

Findings & Discussions:

Of the total 83,882 migrants in Mathura-Vrindavan (Census 2001), 99 percent had their last residence elsewhere in India, of which majority were from Uttar Pradesh itself (78%). The urban-rural proportion of migrants to Mathura-Vrindavan from within the state was almost the same (urban-47%; rural-53%). But, it was only rural folk that migrated from elsewhere within the Mathura district for the obvious reasons of finding better earning opportunities, beside the marriage. However, it is interesting to note that the migrants were predominantly from urban areas of other districts of Uttar Pradesh (64%). Beside marriage, the main reasons captured by the census for this migration was ‘relocation with household (22%)’ and the various other reasons appeared clubbed under response category - ‘other reasons (14%)’.

Migrants are predominantly urban and that too from developed states

22 percent migrants that were from outside the state, again the majority were from urban areas (62%). This indicates the dominance of urban population among migrants to Mathura-Vrindavan from outside states. Majority of the migrants (85%) from outside states were from developed states presented in Table-1. This population was mainly from urban areas of these states.
Table-1: Migrants to Mathura-Vrindavan from outside state

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>6660</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>2050</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>1733</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>784</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandigarh</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total developed states</strong></td>
<td><strong>15461</strong></td>
<td><strong>85%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other states</strong></td>
<td><strong>2756</strong></td>
<td><strong>15%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gross total of all states</strong></td>
<td><strong>18217</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 2001

Since the census data captures limited number of reasons for migration, there is a high possibility that the urban population migrating to Mathura-Vrindavan might have moved due to spiritual reasons – the reason that might not have got clubbed under the ‘others’ category and was lost from being identified, separately. A comprehensive study investigating into the various reasons for migrating into such spiritual geographic regions like Mathura-Vrindavan would be worthwhile undertaking.

Settling down is a gradual process

Spiritual pursuit as a key motivator for migration was corroborated from the qualitative discussions with the migrants of Vrindavan in the present paper. It showed that people from developed states especially from neighbouring areas like Delhi, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan where Krishna worship was predominant among families have relocated for spiritual pursuits. They, reportedly, had their original homes in these states where they had their family & relatives whom they keep visiting as and when required. Even their family members keep visiting them often during holidays. Three couples interviewed said that their process of migration was a gradual one; they first use to visit Vrindavan very often to participate in various spiritual celebrations but stayed only for 2-3 days, then slowly purchased their flats and stayed for longer duration and finally permanently shifted as they became comfortable with the daily routine of the place. “We use to visit Vrindavan from Delhi on every weekend to spend Saturday and Sunday here. It’s just three and half hours run by car” said one couple interviewed. The entire process of relocation, reportedly, took around 3-4 years.
Migrants specifically distinguished spirituality from religiosity

It emerged from the discussion that migrants perceived spirituality as different from religiousness. Spirituality for them, for which they migrated to Vrindavan, was their individual choice, a way of life more to satisfy their psychological need of personal attainment for the concept of soul, salvation or bhakti. One respondent said: “my life objective is different. I am not here to propagate any religious mission or agenda. I am here simply to discover my original relationship with Krishna and in pursuing so I feel spiritual happiness”. Although majority of them were associated with some religious groups called sampradayas or ashrams like Nityanand, Ramanand, Adwait, Vallabh Sampradaya or organizations like ISKCON yet they were not necessarily required to change their religion. In words of a respondent: “The various sampradayas in Vrindavan offer different spiritual philosophy to choose from as per one’s inclination and intellect. I am associated with ISKCON and still I am Christian”. Hence, the purpose was not propagating any religion or meeting some religion’s goals as those of Catholics and early missionaries who migrated India primarily as agents of their religion. It was found that in contrast to fanatic religious migrants, the spiritual migrants have mostly adopted the local culture, behaviors, social norms and local values of Vrindavan. “I wear Indian cotton saree, put sindoor daily, wear bangles because this is the get-up of a Brijwasi Indian lady; celebrate Diwali and Holi, which is mentioned in Hindu scriptures and is liked by God” said one Russian devotee associated with and shifted to ISKCON, Vrindavan.

Migrants comprises of both young and old couples

Contrary to the conventional thought that these religious places provide abode to old age after retirement, Mathura-Vrindavan has been recently attracting young couples of 7-10 years of their marriage. One such couple married for 8 years and shifted a year back from Delhi with their two kids said: “I dislike the fast life of metro and big cities although I have spent all my life in Delhi. For peace and spiritual happiness one needs a natural peaceful and spiritual environment. For this we preferred Vrindavan because it offered all yet it is so close to Delhi”. Another young couple, married for 6 years, shifted with one kid and parents just 8 months back said: “I like Indian villages which show real India where God reside. The lifestyle in Vrindavan is appropriate blend of modern and traditional culture. We live comfortable life in modern flats but relish the traditional life style”.

Increase in demand for modern dwelling units

Due to increase in migration from rich urban areas, Vrindavan is developing fast as there are more than 20 apartments currently under construction each having on an average 300 flats with modern construction and amenities in the line of those in neighbouring big cities like Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida, Faridabad, etc. These flats serve three purposes – (a) providing permanent residence to relocated families, (b) provide second home to frequent visitors who prefer purchasing small studio or one room flats, (c) provide very good investment

3 Sampradaya is a Sanskrit word refers to religious group, connoting Hindu, descending from a celebrated spiritual master that follow or propound a unique philosophy for spiritual pursuits.

4 ISKCON is International Society of Krishna Consciousness. It is a registered society having branches all over the world. It propagates spiritual attainment through individual and congregational chanting of sixteen syllable Harey Krishna mantra.
opportunity with high returns. An old retired couple that relocated from Patna 3 years back said: “For me this one BHK flat is sufficient but I have invested in 3 big flats under construction. I just give the down payment on which I get a margin of at least 1-2 lakhs when I sell in a year’s time”. One of the migrant from Ludhiana who started real-state agency 10 years back said: “Prices of land has trebled in last 3 years and three room flat of 1300 square feet is around 30 lakhs which is as expensive as in any big city...around 60 percent flats are purchased by people from neighbouring big cities who get roughly a profit of 1-3 lakhs in a single flat in a year’s time. It provides a good alternative income even to those who have shifted here recently. The localities prefer investing in land than flats as purchasing of land is easier for them but a hassle for outsiders”.

Emerging new segment of consumer

The greater influx of metro urban population in Mathura-Vrindavan has lead to increase in demand for various products and services. Although such migrant accept the local traditions and culture they remain brand and quality conscious. Thus, they form a new segment of customer who is urban, educated, belonging to mid-to-high income groups, is in the process of self-actualization, has unique taste for food, very defined likes and dislikes and is associated or inspired by some Vaishnav cult or sect. One respondent said: “We don’t expect all the brands to be available in a small town like this, but we cannot compromise on quality as we are ready to pay the prices”. On being asked whether they locally get their required brands or products, there was a mixed response. The responses were: “Generally all the brands of consumer goods are available here but the shops or outlets are not within easy reach”, “Myself or any of my family member carry with themselves any specific brand from Delhi whenever they visit us”, “We have tied up with a shop in Loi Bazar in Vrindavan who can deliver all household items at home, we pay a few rupees extra for home delivery, it’s very convenient”. Thus, the products and brands were available but not within easy reach.

Preference for ayurvedic or herbal toiletries, cosmetics and brands

On being specifically probed for brand availability, majority said that they prefer ayurvedic or herbal products which are always available. One respondent said: “ISKCON and many other ashrams prepare soaps, shampoos, toothpastes, creams, oils, ointments, jams, sauces, etc. from natural products, we purchase them because they are pure and good for health. These are quality tested and properly packed”. There appeared a high demand for natural, herbal and ayurvedic fast moving consumer goods (FMCG). ‘Himalaya’, ‘Jhandu’, Ayur, Vicco, herbal range of Unilever emerged as most preferred brands. Among the brands from ashrams, the most commonly mentioned were – Baba Ramdeo’s products, Gomata and Gokul brands from ISKCON, products from Sant Asharam Bapu, etc. One ISKCON manager interviewed said: “Some international devotees that have settled in Vrindavan have opened shops from where they sell various brands which they outsource from abroad. They prefer natural, herbal based items. Seeing their demand, we have started manufacturing various cow based products which are sold out quickly; we are unable to meet the demand”. One respondent said: “We have come here to lead a life near to nature and hence prefer most natural products. I prefer those national or international brands which are herbal in nature but are not easily available. I am fine with local ayurvedic brands and products, too, as they are more easily available”. There lies a gap between what is demanded and what is available – a potential consumer market for various FMCG companies to tap by bringing out new line of herbal products with specific

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media strategy and advertisement to target the emerging consumer in such religious geographic pockets in India.

**Defined taste, likes/dislikes for food items, snacks, beverages and brands**

The new segment of customer in such places is, reportedly, very specific about the type of food consumed. Being associated or influenced by Vaishnav philosophy, which strictly prohibits use of onion, garlic beside the non-vegetarian food, this consumer buys those snacks which are strictly devoid of these ingredients. One respondent said: “We prefer Halidram, Satmolha or Bikanerwala brands for purchasing salted range of snacks and to ensure this everyone in family checks the ingredient description on any packed food before purchasing”. ISKCON has its dedicated bakery and confectionary outlets that guarantee sale of authentic Vaishnav snacks. ISKCON manger said: “people purchase from us pastries, pizzas, burgers, biscuits, sweets, toffees, chocolates, etc because we prepare them under strict conditions of hygiene and Vaishnav norms. Hence all these items are considered by our customers as spiritual diet, also because they have been first offered to God, the Prasads”. The unique selling proposition (USP) of various recent modern restaurants are – (a) food items cooked following vaishnav norms, (b) everything is a Prasad, (c) freshly cooked and (as stale is considered non-spiritual). Similarly, the most common beverages sold are lassi, jal-jira, thandai, milk-shakes, juices, butter-milk, various types of sherbets. Among the packed drinks and beverages, the preference is for Amul for flavoured milk, curd and butter milk, Tropicana for juices, Mango Fruity. However, there did appear need for specialized and complete range for beverages and drinks catering to such segment of consumers. Pure ghee, especially cow-ghee followed by ground-nut, mustard and olive oil was, reportedly most often used for cooking.

**Inadequate availability of health facilities and transportation**

The discussions revealed that migrants felt urgent need for basic healthcare facilities and services for which they have to rush to nearby developed cities like Agra, Mathura, Faridabad or Gurgaon. An industrialist of 56 years relocated from Ahmadabad for spiritual pursuits said: “Health is a major concern here. There are only two public hospitals with very limited facilities and doctors, on which one can’t, reportedly, depend. The private health facilities and nursing homes are around six in numbers but they also lack facilities to handle emergency cases”. One lady of 50 years relocated from Lucknow 1 year back said: “I met a road accident while visiting a temple here on rikshaw 5 months back. The rikshaw puller ran away. Someone got another rikshaw and took me to the nearby private hospital. It was only 8:30pm and there was no doctor as they visited on call. I was asked to wait till next morning. The pain was intolerable. One of my God-brother urged for getting the doctor on paying extra fees. Doctor came at 10pm and told I had broken my shoulder bone which was dislocated, too. Prompt and adequate health services are a big problem for a place like this having a significantly large population”. Another problem that surfaced from discussions pertained to pharmacy and chemist stores which are fewer. In the words of a respondent: “you will not find some important medicines in the drug stores here. The chemist open late and close early. I get most of my medicines either from Delhi through my son who visits me on alternate Sundays”. The localities say that they either get the medicines from Mathura city or order the chemist one day in advance who gets them from Mathura or Agra.
The transportation problem was quoted in almost all the discussions held. Some of the problems mentioned were – (a) for local commute there are either pedal rickshaw or shared auto and six-seater vehicles, (b) the passengers are crammed twice the capacity of these shared vehicle which is very risky, (c) if one tries for hiring these auto without sharing, prices demanded are irrational and very expensive, (d) auto and pedal rikshaw are driven very rashly and boys of 14-18 years also drives the auto, (e) roads are very bad to provide a safe and comfortable commute, (f) there is no fixed tariff for hiring taxi services for long distance travels, lot of time is spend in negotiating for prices for any travel requiring a taxi, (g) very unprofessional attitude of the travel agencies and drives. A foreign respondent said: “there is always a long argument each time with the taxi agents, first of all they will never come in time, then they will always expect big tips and more money, they think they can fool foreigner by making excuses and telling some stories”.

Conclusions and way forward:

For a country like India which attracts large number of tourists visiting its religious places and those seeking spiritual experiences or pursuits, there lies need to study the various aspects related to spiritual migration and that how it is different from religious migration of the nature of early Catholics or missionaries. There is a limited data studying the pattern of such migration and hardly any comprehensive study that analyses the aspects of such migrant population in spiritual pockets of India. The census surveys are broad and only indicative in this regard.

There is a new emerging segment of customer in spiritual pockets like that of Mathura-Vrindavan that needs to be thoroughly studied so that they can be targeted with appropriate product mix and brand offerings. This segment of consumer needs to be targeted through niche marketing strategies.

Specialized market exists in such areas and hence there lies immense potential for FMCG companies. This market can easily be tapped by having appropriate and customized product range of FMCG, food and beverage items. The branding for cosmetics and toiletries can focus on natural and herbal ingredients while for food and beverages the focus could be Vaishnav diet, life style and preferences.

There is urgent need for fully equipped health facilities providing basic and specialized health care services to cater to the health needs of the migrant population of Vrindavan which comprise of both young and old age groups.

As a long-term strategy transportation system needs to be in place and the roads to improve which would raise the quality perception of tourists and pilgrims further attracting them in larger numbers. This also solves the basic infrastructure needs of the urban migrants.

Being small towns such spiritual geographies often lack proper administrative support from local authorities and there is a lack of attention towards various essential services coming only from Government officials. The enforcing and implementing law and fair practices is, reportedly, essential so that the relocated population from outside states or countries does not get cheated. It is a well know fact that such places are high revenue generating areas and investing on infrastructure or giving specialized attention from government machinery is
beneficial for overall regional development and achieving greater happiness for this specific group of spiritual migrants.

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