



DETOURS AND DELAYS: NAVIGATING THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON INDIA'S TRANSPORT SECTOR AND TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the Indian transport industry, affecting various sectors such as aviation, railways, road transport, and maritime. The nationwide lockdowns and travel restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the virus led to a significant decline in passenger traffic and freight movement, causing severe financial distress to the industry. This almost standstill in the movement of the people severely affected the Indian tourism industry which provides 7 per cent of GDP and 9 per cent of employment by 2019.

The aviation sector witnessed a sharp decline in passenger traffic, leading to financial losses for airlines and airports. Many airlines were forced to suspend operations or reduce their workforce to survive. Similarly, the Indian Railways faced challenges due to the suspension of passenger trains, impacting revenue generation.

The road transport sector also suffered due to the lockdowns, with restrictions on inter-state and intra-state movement affecting the movement of goods and passengers. The maritime sector faced challenges due to disruptions in global trade and port operations.

To mitigate the impact of the pandemic, the Indian government announced various relief measures, including financial assistance, waivers, and restructuring of loans for the transport industry. The government also launched initiatives such as the Vande Bharat Mission to repatriate stranded Indians and the "One Nation, One Card" scheme for seamless travel across different modes of transport.

By recognising the importance of the revival of tourism in India Indian Government announced many sops and reliefs to the tour operators, travel agents and transport organisations. Despite these measures, the road to recovery for the Indian transport industry remains challenging. The industry will need to adapt to the new normal by implementing safety measures, embracing digital technologies, and diversifying its operations to ensure resilience in future crises.

KEYWORDS: Covid -19, Road transport, Railways, Civil aviation, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Indian transport industry. The overall mobility for various purposes and using various modes of transport decreased during the waves of the pandemic but has shown a rapid increase as COVID-19 cases decreased. Public transport has become less popular among commuters post-COVID-19, and there has been a shift towards personal mobility due to safety concerns and the need for social distancing. The tourism industry, which is closely linked to the transport sector, has also been severely affected by the

pandemic, with a decline in both global and domestic tourists. Indians have shown a preference for private vehicles over public transport, and there are concerns about the effective implementation of safety regulations for travel. The Indian transport industry, including public transport and tourism, has faced significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many academicians and researchers attempted to study the impact of COVID-19 on the transport sector

in India with different methodologies and objectives. Sharma, R. (2021) examines the effects of the pandemic on the aviation sector in India, analyzing changes in passenger traffic, financial performance, and government interventions. Singh, A. (2020) focuses on Indian Railways and assesses the impact of the pandemic on passenger and freight services, the operational challenges faced, and strategies adopted for recovery. Reddy, S. (2021) explores how the pandemic has affected road transport in India, including changes in logistics, supply chains, and the role of technology in overcoming challenges. Patel, K. (2020) analyzing the maritime industry's response to the pandemic, discusses disruptions in global trade, port operations, and measures taken to ensure business continuity. Gupta, M. (2021) evaluates the effectiveness of government policies, financial assistance, and regulatory changes in supporting the transport industry during the crisis. Khan, F. (2020) discusses key strategies for the transport industry to enhance resilience, including digitalisation, sustainability, and collaboration among stakeholders. Very few analysed the total transport industry before and after Corona and its impact on our tourism sector. This paper tries to study that with a comprehensive approach.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To review the status of the transport industry by 2019 in India

2. To study the impact of Covid-19 on Different transport systems in India
3. To analyse the measures taken to reduce the problems of transport
4. To appreciate the importance of transport for tourism development in India

METHODOLOGY

The present paper is purely a descriptive analysis depending upon secondary data sources like Tourism ministry reports, Economic surveys, NHAI reports, Niti Aayog reports, different websites and newspapers.

PANDEMIC IMPACT ON INDIAN TRAVEL & TOURISM

Before 2019, the Indian tourism industry was a highly prosperous sector, contributing a significant portion of the country's GDP and serving as a key source of employment, with a contribution of 9 per cent. This sector was hailed as one of the most promising in terms of employment opportunities for labourers of all skill levels. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the industry, leading to unprecedented lows in its performance.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted domestic travel in India, leading to restrictions & lockdowns, limiting interstate travel & affecting tourism. People opted for staycations & discovered lesser-known places within their states.

Trends of Foreign Tourism

YEAR	FTAs in India (in million)	Percentage (%) change over the year	NRIs arrivals in India	Percentage (%) change over the year	International tourist arrivals in India (in Million)	Percentage (%) change over the year
2014	7.68	10.2	5.43	13.11	-	-
2015	8.03	4.5	5.74	5.7	13.76	5.0
2016	8.80	9.7	6.22	8.5	15.3	9.2
2017	10.04	14.0	6.77	8.8	16.8	11.8
2018	10.56	5.2	6.87	1.4	17.42	3.7
2019	10.93	3.5	6.98	1.7	17.91	2.8
2020	2.74	-74.9	3.59	-48.6	6.33	-64.7

Source: 1. India tourism statistics at a Glance 2021, Ministry of tourism, India

Foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) increased from 2014 to 2019, but in 2020, there was a significant decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The percentage change varied each year. Non-resident Indian (NRI) arrivals

also increased over time, with smaller fluctuations. International tourist arrivals followed a similar trend. Effective strategies are needed to revive and sustain tourism.

Trends of Domestic Tourism

Year	Domestic tourists (in millions)	Annual growth rate (%)
2014	1282.8	12.8
2015	1431.9	11.6
2016	1615.3	12.8
2017	1657.5	2.6
2018	1853.7	11.8
2019	2321.9	25.3
2020	610.22	-73.7

Source: India tourism statistics, 2019, Ministry of Tourism, India

States and UTs tourism departments and Tourism at a glance 2020

Looking at the data on domestic tourist trends in India

- Between 2014 and 2019, there was a steady increase in domestic tourists, with a particularly significant jump from 2018 to 2019.
- The growth rates during these years fluctuated but generally remained positive, indicating a healthy growth trajectory for the tourism sector.
- However, the year 2020 saw a massive decline in domestic tourists, with a negative growth rate of -73.7%. This sharp drop can likely be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the various restrictions and lockdowns imposed during that time, severely impacting travel and tourism worldwide.

Despite the challenges faced by the tourism industry, the transport sector remains a crucial factor in promoting travel and tourism. The size and efficiency of the transport network are key to ensuring that people can travel to their desired destinations quickly and safely. However, the pandemic has also had an impact on the transport sector, with many airlines and other transportation companies facing financial difficulties.

STATUS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRANSPORT

For an economy to thrive, four types of transportation are crucial: roads, railways, air, and water. Each mode of transportation has its advantages and disadvantages, and travellers will choose one based on their needs. The Indian government has implemented numerous measures to improve transportation since gaining independence, including physical infrastructure projects as part of Five-Year Plans. Recently, Niti Aayog has focused on modernizing transportation facilities by increasing capital expenditures. This is not only to attract foreign investments but also to encourage foreign tourists to visit and experience the beauty of Incredible India.

AIR TRANSPORT

India is expected to overtake China and the United States as the world's third-largest air passenger market in the next ten years, by 2030, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA). As of 2023, India has 148 operational airports. India has envisaged increasing the number of operational airports to 220 by 2025. In FY23, airports in India pegged the domestic passenger traffic to reach 270.34 million, a 62.1% YoY increase, and international passenger traffic to reach 56.9 million, a 157% YoY increase, as compared to FY22.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a massive impact on the Indian aviation sector in 2020. Major airlines faced significant losses, leading to actions such as employee layoffs, unpaid leaves, and salary cuts. For instance:

IndiGo incurred net losses of Rs 2,884 crore and Rs 1,194 crore in Q1 and Q2 of the fiscal year 2020, respectively.

While domestic flights have gradually resumed at 80% capacity, international air travel remains severely affected due to airport closures and international operations suspension. India now has air transport bubbles with 23 countries, but the international sector is still down by 80-90% compared to pre-COVID levels by 2021. However, some key measures taken by civil aviation to address these problems:

Airports, airlines, and air traffic control facilities have implemented various measures to mitigate COVID-19 transmission. These include Signage and Public Education: Informing passengers about safety guidelines, Social Distancing Cues: Markings to maintain physical distance, Barriers at Ticket Counters and Gates: Shields to protect staff and passengers, Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection: Regular sanitisation of high-touch surfaces, Improved Airflow and Filtration: Ensuring better ventilation. Isolation Protocols: Identifying and isolating ill passengers and aviation workers

RAILWAYS

By 2019 Indian Railways is famous with 4th position in the world with a total 67,956 KM route length, 12,729 locomotives carrying 22.15 million passengers and 3.32 million tonnes cargo daily to different destinations all over India. During 2019-20, it carried 8,086 million passengers as against 8,439 million in 2018-19. Passenger earnings in 2019-20 were ₹50,669.09 crore. This was ₹397.56 crore (-0.78%) lower than the earnings in 2018-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on railway passenger traffic in India. Indian Railways has seen a 24% decrease in passenger traffic during the 2022-23 fiscal year compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019-20, with a decrease of 18,150 lakh passengers up to February 2023. Suburban transport has seen a 20% decrease, and Non-Suburban transport experienced a 29% decrease. The Northern Zone has recorded the highest absolute decrease in passenger traffic, with 1,760 lakh fewer passengers traveling by train in 2022-23 compared to 2019-20.

Despite these challenges, Indian Railways continues to adapt and work towards recovery, prioritizing safety and efficient transportation for passengers. During the lockdown, Indian Railways emerged as an essential lifeline by transporting critical goods and commodities across the country. Special parcel trains facilitated the movement of 5.2 million tonnes of food grains, fuel stocks, medical supplies, and general goods. The efficient response of Indian Railways minimized shortages of essential items.

The Indian Railways has implemented several safety measures to enhance passenger security during travel. Here are some key initiatives:

Indian Railways has implemented measures to ensure passenger safety in five areas:

1. Infrastructure Upgrades: RRSK, Interlocking System, USFD, and KAVACH.
2. Human Error Mitigation: Training, Safety Protocols, and Fatigue Management.
3. Passenger Safety Tips: Avoid Crossing Tracks, Keep Belongings Attended, Know Your Train and Seat, Stay Connected, and Wear Suitable Clothes.
4. COVID-19 Safety Measures: Wear N-95 Masks and Gloves, Carry Your Own Bedding, and Seal Important Documents and Wallet.
5. Anti-Injury Fittings: Modifications to prevent injuries caused by sharp edges or protrusions. Indian Railways is committed to providing safe and reliable travel for all passengers.

ROAD TRANSPORT

Road transport is a popular and cost-effective mode of transportation for both freight and passengers. It has a high level of penetration in populated areas, making it vital for economic development and social integration. It contributes 4.5% to India's GDP and accounts for 87% of passenger traffic and 60% of freight traffic movement. Road transport is easily available, adaptable to individual needs, and cost-effective. It also acts as a feeder service to other modes of transportation.

India has the second largest road network in the world about 58.98 lakh km. This comprises National Highways, Expressways, State Highways, Major District Roads, Other District Roads and Village Roads consecutively 1,32,500 km 1,56,694 km 56,08,477 km total of 58,97,671 km by 2019-20.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on road transport in India. Here are some of the key insights:

During the lockdown from March 25 to May 31, 2020, there was a significant reduction in travel and commercial activity which led to a decrease in passenger movement. Freight transport also faced challenges, with cargo movement being affected due to reduced truck availability. India's road transport system faces many challenges such as congestion, limited multi-modal integration, and inadequate public transit systems. To address these challenges, cleaner fuels and better monitoring are essential. The reduction in vehicular activity during the pandemic played a crucial role in reducing air pollution.

Therefore, it is important to shift the focus towards more efficient public transportation, including electric buses and enhanced metro connectivity with last-mile

options. The government has taken initiatives to improve road transport during COVID-19. Key measures include:

Relief Measures for Contractors and Developers:

1. Contractors and concessionaires have been allowed to improve liquidity until September 30, 2021.
2. Approved sub-contractors can continue to receive direct payment through an escrow account.
3. To reduce performance security, the existing 5-10% has been reduced to 3% of the contract value for all existing contracts except those under dispute.
4. Retention money will be released proportionally to work executed until December 31, 2021.
5. When it comes to granting extensions of time to contractors and concessionaires, each case will be examined and considered based on individual circumstances.

6. For new contracts (April 2021-June 2021), there will be a general one-month waiver from the due dates for the penalty of delay in submission of performance security/bank guarantee.

The Indian government is improving the transportation sector after COVID-19 by developing infrastructure and implementing policy reforms. They are constructing and expanding highways, railways, and airports, introducing the National Logistics Policy to reduce costs, and promoting sustainable transportation by encouraging the adoption of electric vehicles through incentives and charging infrastructure.

The Indian government has implemented a number of digital initiatives to enhance transportation in the country. Among these initiatives, the e-Challan system for traffic management and the integration of various modes of transportation through platforms like the Integrated Transport Management System (ITMS) are noteworthy. These measures aim to improve efficiency, reduce congestion, and promote sustainable and seamless transportation throughout India.

WATER TRANSPORT IN INDIA

India has about 14,500 km of navigable waterways which comprise rivers, canals, backwaters, creeks, etc. About 126 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT) of cargo is being moved annually by Inland Water Transport (IWT), a fuel-efficiency and environment-friendly mode.

India has 12 major seaports and 205 minor seaports that handle around 60% of the country's total cargo traffic. In 2018, India transported almost \$829 billion worth of goods through its seaports, ranking 13th globally for cargo traffic. For the fiscal year 2020-21, Indian Major Ports handled 672.606 Million Tonnes of cargo. Overall, major seaports in India witnessed a

decline of 4.59% in cargo traffic volume in 2020 compared to the previous year.

To develop water transport India has declared 111 inland waterways as National Waterways (NWs) under the National Waterway Act, 2016, to promote inland water transport (IWT). Development is underway for the first 13 out of the 26 viable NWs. A Central Sector Scheme (CSS) provides 100% financial assistance to North Eastern States for developing inland waterways. The JalMargVikasProject (JMVP) is being undertaken by IWAI for the capacity augmentation of NW-1 (Haldia to Varanasi) with the technical and financial assistance of the World Bank at a revised estimated cost of Rs. 4633.84 crore.

CONCLUSION

Transportation is the primary mode of travel for any tourist to visit their preferred destinations. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the four modes of transportation in India, which has resulted in a notable decline in the number of travellers - both domestic and international. The travel and hospitality industry has suffered great losses due to this disruption. To attain a new normalcy and regain a higher position in world tourism, the Indian government should prioritize the basic necessities of tourists and provide safe and secure transportation facilities to all tourist destinations. National and state governments are moving in the same direction.

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