

## **Anthropological Study of Tourism Attractions in Mahdishahr and Its Role in Sustainable Development (Compared to India)**

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### **Abstract**

Sustainable tourism is the concept of visiting somewhere as a tourist and trying to make a positive impact on the environment, society, culture and economy. Sustainable development refers to the use without exploitation of natural, cultural and all other tourist resources from the current generation, it means to preserve them for future use by future generations. Iran is famous in the world for kind hospitality, friendliness, and a beautiful Landscape and unique places like Mahdishahr. The people of Mahdishahr in Semnan province are so hospitable and warm-blooded and are so keen on making progress in different terms. There are some historical and beautiful places in this city. Therefore, the main purpose in this paper is to investigate the aspects of tourism in Mahdishahr by Sustainable and anthropological view and also to study and Introduction of Mahdishahr Tourist Attractions. The method in this paper is qualitative and also action research and tools of data collection is documentary (Library and Internet), in-depth interview and also participation. It is worth mentioning that in the theoretical framework the present research is based on law theory for its analysis of data. Findings show that Mahdishahr is a good potential for tourist attraction.

**Keywords:** Anthropology-Sustainable Development-Mehdi shahr-Tourist Attractions.

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### **Statement of problem**

According to UNESCO, Iran is among the top eight countries in the world in terms of historical and cultural monuments, and is among the top five countries in terms of ecotourism and climate diversity. Iran's four-season nature, existence of sea, desert, hot springs, diverse and exclusive wildlife, religious tourism attractions and a 7, 000-year-ancient civilization has given Iran the ability to rank among the world's top tourism destinations. But given such high capacities, even the minimum available facilities have not yet been benefited sufficiently for economic, social and sustainable development.

As we know, with the development of the tourism industry and with the creation of various infrastructures, such as roads and transport networks as well as the provision of facilities for tourists, the country's economic growth will increase and the quality of life of domestic people will further improve. On the other hand, the growth and prosperity of tourism, provides increased information and social awareness of inhabitants, preserving the country's environment and natural heritage, also brings foreign exchange and provides jobs creation. However, creating a job opportunity in the tourism industry requires less capital than other industries.

According to Mcool(2015)Local communities benefit from sustainable tourism through economic development, job creation, and infrastructure development. Tourism revenues bring economic growth and prosperity to attractive tourist destinations which can raise the standard of living in destination communities. Sustainable tourism operators commit themselves to creating jobs for local community members. Increase in tourism revenue to an area acts as a driver for the development of increased infrastructure. As tourist demands increase in a destination, a more robust infrastructure is needed to support the needs of both the tourism industry and the local community (McCool, 2015:15).

As we know, there are many unidentified touristic attractions in Iran, if necessarily noticed and considered, can alone contribute due boom to the tourism industry. One of them is *Mahdi Shahr* city in Semnan province, a city with several thousand years' history, very favorable climate, and with unique perspectives can be referred as a region that can be considered as the most important tourism attractions of Semnan province. Accordingly, the main issue of this study is what the tourism features of Mahdi Shahr are and what role this region plays in sustainable development.

### **Importance and significance of Study**

In addition to economic aspects, the tourism also has other dimensions, including the complex relationships which are the issues that exist before, during, and after travel; that one can refer to the psychological, environmental, political, and cultural effects, and to cultural relevance, before economic activity, and before it is an economic activity, it represents cultural communication. Today the terms *cultural tourism* and *heritage tourism* are used interchangeably (Kazemi, 2006: 153). The cultural significance of tourism is to the extent that the culture of the host community and tourists may interact with each other for a long time and lead to cross-cultural convergence over time (Homayoun, 2002).

The cultural and natural heritage present in remote areas with tourism approach and transforming them into tourist attractions also gives such an identity to local communities that they have a positive impact on the sustainability of their communities.

Tourism is considered a tool for generating international empathy and international understanding and identity as well as for achieving world peace. Politically, the role of tourism is also important in that human beings are benefited from the bitter and sweet experiences of governance throughout history and in different civilizations. And they look at other cultures at a wider angle and make the political relations of civilizations more balanced on the basis of economics and the understanding of nations (Kazemi, 2006; 7).

When tourists arrive in an area, they must pay certain costs, such as the cost of food and lodging, the hotel, the cost of entertainment, the cost of transportation, the cost of patrols, as well as the cost of buying souvenirs and native goods, and the cost of entering a museum or

sightseeing costs; these costs through the currency and foreign exchange that enter the host country, causing the host nation to prosper.

With the development of tourism activities, employment is being created and this is very beneficial for the people of *Mahdi Shahr*, which is facing a young and demanding population.

**Research purposes:**

1. to study and Introduction of the features of Semnan province, especially in the field of tourism.
2. to study and Introduction of Mahdishahr Tourist Attractions.
3. to study and Introduction of some of the customs of Mahdishahr people.

**Methodological considerations:**

The method in this paper is quantities and also action research and tools of data collection is documental (Library and Internet), in-depth interview and participate.

**Characteristics of People in Mahdishahr Selected for the Study, Number of Sample and Selection of Informants and Key Informants:** Key informant interviews are qualitative in-depth interviews with people who know what is going on in the community. The purpose of key informant interviews is to collect information from a wide range of Mahdishahr people—including community leaders, professionals, or residents (A total of 28 interviews) who have firsthand knowledge about the community. These community experts, with their particular knowledge and understanding, can provide insight on the nature of problems and give recommendations for solutions.

The key informants in the selected citizens were elders, officials of the village council, teachers, especially tourisms.

The local residents and informants in these selected citizens can be divided into three distinct groups:

The First Group: They were ordinary people of Mahdishahr whom the researchers had no difficulty to communicate with.

The Second Group: The people who were not that much willing to cooperate and to be interviewed, though less in number but generally opposed the presence of any stranger in their city.

The Third Group: The popular and influential people in the Mahdishahr that the majority of their citizens listen to and obey them and since the researcher has already made contact with these people in different ways and gained their trust, their relationship with the researchers were good and even in some cases, the researchers made use of these groups to interview people who were unwilling to cooperate conducting the research.

**Research questions**

1. What are the characteristics of Semnan province, especially in the field of tourism?
2. What are the attractions of Mahdishahr Tourism?
3. What are the some customs of the people of Mahdishahr?

**Theoretical framework:**

The "Law" theory of tourism development is used in this study.

**Law** (1993) lists four effective factors as under that contribute to tourism development as a service sector in cities:

1. Decline of manufacturing industries.
2. Need to create new economic activities and confronting unemployment.
3. Recognize the importance of tourism as a growing industry.
4. Role of tourism development in urban reconstruction and revival of urban areas.

Law believes that, in preplanned development and planning, tourism can create direct, indirect economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits and play a significant role in national development.

While trying to promote sustainable tourism in the cities, minimizes damage to the natural and human made environment, preserves the social and cultural heritage, maximizes the economic benefits of tourism development and improves the life quality of residents and the tourist experience (Law: 2002).

**Features of Semnan Province**

**Geography of Semnan Province:** Semnan Province is in the north of Iran, and its center is Semnan. The province of Semnan stretches along the Alborz mountain range and borders to Dasht-e Kavir desert in its southern parts. Neighbors in the north are Golestan and Mazandaran, in the west are Tehran and Qom, in the South is Isfahan

and in the East is Khorasan-e Razavi. The city of Semnan enjoys the traditional four seasons of spring, summer, winter, and autumn each year.

The rain season starts in December and lasts all the way into May, however, precipitation throughout the winter months generally falls in the form of light snow, and the rest of the precipitation throughout the rain season is generally very light to moderate.

Counties of the province include Semnan County, Aradan , Damghan , Shahrud , Mehdishahr , Meyami , Sorkheh & Garmsar County. In 2018, the province had a population of about 702360 (National Population and Housing Census: 2018).



**Photo No1: Arg Gate In Semnan**

**Climate:** Semnan has a hot desert climate, according to the Köppen climate classification. The city of Semnan enjoys the traditional four seasons of spring, summer, winter, and autumn each year.

The rain season starts in December and lasts all the way into May, however, precipitation throughout the winter months generally falls in the form of light snow, and the rest of the precipitation throughout the rain season is generally very light to moderate. During some winters, moisture-abundant blizzards make their way down from the Alborz mountains from the north of the city and dump several centimeters of snow in a single twenty-four-hour period. These blizzards force the closure of the airport, schools, small streets, and alleyways. As a result of the city's position in a semi-arid plain, many winter days are dominated by a cold and gusty wind that often produces a potent wind-chill factor which makes the city feel much colder than the

actual air temperature. According to Iranian Meteorology reports, Semnan experiences around 48 days in which the temperature falls below freezing each year.

**Demography and ethnic influences:** Majority of the city dwellers are Persians. Older Semnan was made up of four main districts: Shaji (Shahjoo), Naasaar, Latibaar and Espanjon (Esfanjan). These four districts still exist today, but the city has grown and become much larger including some new districts. To the west of the city is "Maleh" which used to be a separate settlement but was not a part of Semnan. In the local language the inhabitants are known as Malezh. "Maleh" consists of three parts: Koery (Kodivar), Koshmeni (Kushmaqaan) and Zaveni (Zavaqaan). "Maleh" is now part of Semnan.

As a result of the Qajar dynasty's heavy influence on the city of Semnan, especially under Fath Ali Shah's reign, some families in Semnan can trace their lineage back to the Qajar dynasty. Furthermore, much of the city's most important monuments have been built under Turkic dynasties. For example, the Jame' Mosque of Semnan, constructed nearly 1,000 years ago, was built by the Seljuq dynasty.

**Economy:** The city of Semnan has traditionally been an important center of commerce along the historical Silk Road, and is still an important agricultural, industrial, and cultural center today.

**Industrial sector:** The production of textiles and carpets were the most important industries in the history of the city. But nowadays, in relation to its population, Semnan has very powerful industrial sectors, with special regards to its automobile industry (cars and bikes). Another major industry is the production of cement from the nearby cement plants. The mountains and foothills around Semnan also hold major deposits of minerals used in the production of plaster.

Other minerals that are mined around the city consist of gypsum, salts, zeolite, betonies, and Celestine. Some heavy industries of Semnan consist of the Iran Khodro Semnan Production Plant (producing 100,000 Samand cars per year), Oqab Afshan Production Plant (largest bus production plant in the region of Asia), the Semnan Sodium Carbonate Company (largest in the region of Asia), and the Semnan Rolling Mills Group (major producer of piping and profiles). One of the

largest industrial zones in the city is the Semnan Industrial Town, which features 2, 100 hectares of land and 900 industrial units.

**Agricultural sector:** Agricultural traditions still persist around and within the city of Semnan. The Golrudbar river, which starts in the Alborz Mountains in the north, runs through the western side of the city. With proper irrigation, the municipality has managed to convert the entire southwestern portion of the city into green and lush pomegranate gardens. Around the city, further irrigation of the Golrudbar River and the surrounding creeks and tributaries have provided the proper environment for the cultivation of herbs, eggplants, potatoes, walnuts, and cotton.

**Religion:** Religion the people of the city of Semnan are almost all entirely Shi'a Muslim. The Shi'a Islamic faith dominates the culture, norms, traditions, and beliefs of the city, and continues to dictate the style of life in city. As a result, the celebrations, rituals, and days of religious mourning play a major role in the life of a Semnani city dweller, and are for some families, more important than the national Iranian customs and holidays. The majority of the people of Semnan observe Shi'a Islam quite conservatively; hence, the martyrdom and birthdays of Shi'a Imams are very important days on the calendar.

**Famous Handicraft:** The production of textiles and carpets was the most important industries in the history of city and also Pottery and ceramics, Felting, Calico Printing ...

**Unique foods and dishes:** The people of Semnan have many foods and dishes that are specific to Semnan. Some of the common ingredients used in Semnani dishes consist of pomegranate extracts, fresh walnuts from Shahmirzad (şômîrzé), a variety of greens and herbs known in Persian as sabzijat, and more recently, potatoes. Semnani food tends to be slightly sour and spicy when compared to the general culinary preferences of Tehran. In fact, there is an old proverb among the local people that says, "Semnan has so many foods, that a wife from this city can cook a different dish for every night of the year."

Some of the famous dishes are: Chelo Gousht, Sabzi polo and Khoresht e Esfanaj va Gerdou (espenôj vu yüz). The Semnani people are also quite fond of a variety of breads such as shirmal, shortbread (kamôç), and Kolüçe pastries. In the Semnani language, bread that is



baked in an oven is referred to as "nün, " while bread made by other means is referred to as "sôdjí."

The following are the names of some foods in English and Semnani: chicken (gırká), pomegranate (nôr), grapes (engír), cucumber (djürüng), walnut (yüz), eggplant (vingun), and apricot (şillık).

**Site Attractions :** Abr forest in Shahrud, Turan National Park, Kavir National Park, the Grand Mosque in Semnan, Semnan Citadel gate, Pir Najm Al-din mausoleum in Semnan, Ahovan, Sukan forest, Saro castles, Shahrud falls, the tomb of Bayazid Bastami, ancient hill of Chakhmaq, Bastam tower, Olang forest, Mojen waterfall, Cheshmeh Ali Damghan, Tarikhaneh mosque in Damghan, Hesar hill in Damghan, salt Lake in Damghan, Bahram Palace in Garmsar, Rameh tourist resort, Garmsar salt cave, Mehdishahr hot spa, Parvar protected area, Kanglou Castle.

#### **Shrines, mosques and religious Centers**

\*Jame' Mosque of Semnan – built nearly 1, 000 years ago by the Seljuq Turks over what used to be an ancient Zoroastrian fire temple. This ancient mosque also includes the famous Seljuq minaret with archaic carvings and designs.

\*Imam Mosque (Soltani Mosque) – built under the Qajar dynasty, this mosque is a rare four-terrace mosque. The design of the Imam Mosque utilized the expertise of Iranian architecture of the time, providing all sectors of the complex with equal acoustic sound systems.

\*The Shrine of Sheikh Ala'ed-dowleh Semnani – This shrine was constructed by the Safavid dynasty in honor of Sheikh Ala'ed-dowleh Semnani, a major Sufi mystic and poet of Iran.

\*Threshold of the Alavids – A memorial shrine to the Alavid sayyids that administered the affairs of the city during the reign of the Alavid dynasty, centered in the ancient region of Tabaristan. The shrine also has religious value, being that the Alavids were the direct descendants of the second Shi'a Imam, Imam Hassan.

\*Imamzadeh Yahya Mosque – Aside from the mosque's aesthetic tile work and architectural design, this is a designated place of Ziyarah, or Islamic pilgrimage.

\*Imamzadeh Ali ibn Jafar Mosque – Another place of Ziyarah, or Islamic pilgrimage, with aesthetic tile work and architectural design.

The mosque is characterized by its green domes and a massive adobe dome that towers above the complex.

\*Imamzadeh Ali ibn Ashraf Mosque – A place of Ziyarah, or Islamic pilgrimage

\*Memorial of the Martyrs (Mezar Shohada) – this building was constructed as an interior cemetery for the soldiers of Semnan that were martyred in the brutal Iran–Iraq War of 1980–1988.

\*Hakim Elahi Mausoleum – Hakim Elahi was a prominent scholar of Islam and philosophy. ([www.semnan.ir](http://www.semnan.ir). Municipality)

**Famous Shopping Centers:** Semnan Grand Bazaar, Damghan Bazaar, Sheikh Ala Al-doleh Bazaar in Semnan, Shahrud old market, towers of ghoghnos.

**Museum :** Bath museum, Anthropology museum of Shahrud, Mehdishahr Nomads museum, the Museum of Stamps and Coins, Garmsar tribes museum, museum of east mysticism, Water Museum, Geology Mehdishahr museum.

#### **Features of Mahdishahr**

Mahdishahr formerly, Sang-e Sar Romanized as Sang-i-Sar is a city and capital of Mehdishahr County, Semnan Province. At the 2015 census, its population was 47, 475 (Iran Statistics Organization :2015). Mahdishahr is located on the southern slopes of the Alborz Mountains. Here, the chain of Alborz Mountains is very close to the desert of Dasht-e Kavir. Sangsar, specially the northern part of it, is completely mountainous with cold winters, heavy snowfalls but with mild summers.

The distance between Sangsar city and Semnan city is 15 kilometers. The altitude is about 1630 meters above sea level.

As for other towns of Iran, the name has thus been changed by the Islamic authorities into Mahdishahr as if to signal it's imposed pure Muslim identity. Mahdi is the Shia Muslim hidden Imam and Shahr means town in Persian, so Mahdishahr literally means town of Mahdi.

The most important network of roads consists of Semnan to Sangsar to Shahmirzad to Fooladmahale axis which connects these places with the city of Sari. This road connects the two provinces of Mazandaran and Semnan.



photoNo2: Snowy day in Mahdishahr(trekearth.com)

### **Some beliefs and customs of Sangesari people**

One of the oldest celebrations of the Sangesari, showing their pure Persian origin, is 'Aniran/Naroon' which means 'Everlasting light'. It happens in the middle of September and lasts for nearly one week. One of the traditions in this celebration is hanging pomegranates (anar) onto the horns of sheep and then encouraging the sheep to run around in the fields so that they can break open the pomegranates, which translates to a sign of fertility and prosperity for the next year. On the last night each family do a stock take of the animals they own and record the number.

The Sangesari tribe has their own calendar that is very similar to the calendar that was used in Ancient Iran during the Sassanid era. This calendar and the terminology used in it is also very similar to old Khorasan and Khwarezm languages that is indicative of the possible common ancestry of the Sangesari and Sogdian tribes.

**Sangsari language:** Sangsari language is a member of the northwestern branch of Iranian languages. It has a close resemblance to Semnanic language, Sorkheh, Shahmirzadi and Tasgarm, which is one of the important settlements of Semnan city and Mahdi Shahr city. The Sangsari language in contemporary history has been analyzed by many linguists and experts.

Razmara writes in the book of "*Geographical Culture of Iran*" about Sangsari language:

"The Sangsari language is mixed with Tati and Raji" (Razmara, 2009: 157).

**Sangsar food:** unique Local Sangsar Food has always been suitable place for Tourist visit.

The mountain villages around the city of Sangsar, in, are renowned throughout the region for the production of a particular dairy product called arsheh.

Its long processing technique is carried out in many steps. The sheep milk is processed into cheese right after milking. Rennet is added and the curd is gently shaken until it slowly solidifies. Half an hour later, the curd is rough-cut into large pieces using a spoon, and it is then transferred into a large piece of fabric where it is gathered and left to hang and dehydrate for few hours. The curd is then kneaded by hand and transferred into a large copper pot where it is cooked for about eight hours. During the cooking phase, turmeric is added and, toward the end, wheat flour too. Especially this latter phase is very delicate, for the product can easily burn. Once it has attained the right thickness, arsheh is left to rest in order to remove the remaining water. The final result is a thick powdery cream with a yellow-bronze color. Its consistency is fat though not unctuous, resembling that of cookie dough or raw shortbread. Arsheh is part of the traditional Iranian breakfast, and it is eaten with bread, alone or with honey.

**The Sangesari Tribe:** Usually from September to March they settle in this center before travelling their normal routes during the other part of the year. They are the most important tribe of the Alborz Mountain area and have the longest nomadic path duration of all nomadic tribes of the Iranian plateau that stretches up to 1, 500 km in length. Bernard Hockard, head Iranologist in Europe, believes that the Sangesari tribe's nomadic route is the longest in the world.

Majority of their traveling occurs during spring and summer and their tents are made specifically to withstand the hot sun. These tents are black because they are made from goat hair and surprisingly it is called "goot/ goat" in Farsi.

The women's clothing is also very special. It is one of the main duties of women to make clothes from wool and silk for domestic use. Variety of these clothes and fabric, compared to other nomadic tribes,

are by far more elaborate. Some of these fabrics and their uses are as follows:

- 'sargira': this is usually very fine woolen fabrics used by women to completely cover themselves, similar to the modern day chador.
- 'kajin shevi': this is the finest silk fabric made by the women to wear as a shirt.
- 'ferakh serval': these are multi layered skirts usually decorated with a large floral design.
- 'makene ': this is a needle point fabric unique to the Sangesari women to cover their hair.

Other woven products of the Sangesari tribes are changum (woven earrings for ladies) and also paellas (heavy duty, colorful floor coverings). Apart from all their unique fabrics, the Sangesari tribal members are also master weavers of carpets and kilims that show a possible heritage from the Tati tribe of Iran.

It seems these peoples are the oldest surviving Persian-speaking nomadic people of Iran with roots in the Parni/Aparni tribe of pre-historical times that lived south-east of the Caspian Sea. It is also believed that their original homeland may have been Southern Russia from where they immigrated with other tribes.

An interesting fact is that one of the sheep breeds in Iran is called Sangesari. The ratio of meat compared to the entire weight of the sheep is the highest in the entire world, making up 60% of the animal (tahere: 143, 1975). This lamb meat is regarded as the most delicious and tender in Iran. The Sangesari tribe uses the milk of sheep and goats to produce 32 different dairy products. Some of them like 'varhun' (a dense buttery fat) and 'arsheh' (a thick fried cheese similar to haloumi cheese) is unique to this tribe. They also make a local kind of chocolate called 'chicu' that makes wonderful gifts for guests visiting them. (Translated and edited by Shervin Ghorbany :1397).

#### **Historic Places and Sightseeing Attractions of Mahdi Shahr City**

**Darjazin;** Darjazin or Daragazin is one of the districts of MahdiShahr City. The city enjoys good development due to the water flow of the *Gol-e-Roodbar spring* and its several aqueducts, and has some qualitative and quantitative development areas. Some of its fruits are famous, such as apricots and pomegranates.

**Beautiful Mollahdeh village:** The village of Mollahdeh is located at 66 km north from the environs of Mahdi Shahr City. Its climate is temperate in spring and summer, while cold and snowy in winter. Its historical attractions include the house of Ibrahim Khan in the village.

**Mahdishahr mansion and hunting ground:** There are two large, ancient and beautiful mansions or buildings in the village of Mollahdeh, located parallel on the east and west sides of each other, about 40 meters apart and with separate ownership. The architecture of these buildings is very beautiful.

**Parvar:** Parvar model tourism area is located 46 kilometers north of Mahdishahr, known as Parvar Protected Area.

**Rudbarak :**Rudbarak area is located north of Mahdishahr city and has vegetation coverage and trees covered forest. Rudbarak forest is located on the road from Mahdishahr to Shahmirzad to Foolad Mahla, 84 km northeast of Semnan.

**Darband:** Darband is a small verdurous area located between the median line of Mahdishahr and Shahmirzad highway. The most important tourist attraction of it includes the pleasant climate, pristine nature and cave of Darband.

**Chashm Tourism Area:** Chashm Tourism Village is located in Mahdishahr city and enjoys cold and breezy climate because of its mountainous location.

**Tribal Museum of Sangsar:** The museum has exhibited tools, life means and crafts of Sangsari women, working tools and ornaments of Sangsari women.

**Ancient Site of Kharand :** This ancient site or compound is known for its proximity to the village of Kharand. This area was the home to various tribes in the late second millennium and early millennium BC.

**Emam Zade Ghasem (Qasem):** The monument is located north of Mahdishahr in the Ziarat (pilgrimage) area of Mahdishahr and apparently belongs to the son of Imam VII (as).

**Hosseiniyeh Al-Mahdi of Mahdishahr:** The Hosseiniyeh building was designed to be viewable from almost all parts of the city and offers a dreamy view at night.

**Hotel Sangsar:** Sangsar Hotel is one of the buildings with modern architecture of Mahdishahr city. This luxurious building is built on the

hills leading to the northwest mountains of Mahdishahr and gives a very suitable view of the city.

**Shahmirzad's Lion castle (Shir Ghale):** The monument is located three kilometers northwest of Shahmirzad in Sheikh Cheshmeh Sar valley on a high mountain known as Sheikh Cheshme Sar Castle.

**Kafer Castle:** To the south of the historic town of Mahdishahr on the summit of the mountain are seen very ancient castle works built of stone, plaster and mortar (Sarooj). This castle, which belonged to pre-Islamic Iranians, is called the infidel or the fortress of the pagans.

**Foolad Neighborhood:** Foolad Neighborhood has a beautiful landscape, gardens, and safari fields.

**Shahmirzad:** Shahmirzad is a good weather city in Mahdishahr, 22 km away from Semnan. Shahmirzad is a very important city in terms of history, agriculture and tourism. The weather in Shahmirzad is moderate in summer and cold in winter and in comparison with the cities around it, it has cooler and fresher weather. According to Food and Agriculture Organization, the biggest walnut garden is in this city. The people of Shahmirzad have a lot in common with people of Mazandaran and they have so many collaborative cultural bonds. This city was known as an international tourist area in 1386.

#### **Sustainable development**

Sustainable development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. The desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources are used to continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system. Sustainable development can be defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations.

While the modern concept of sustainable development is derived mostly from the 1987 Brundtland Report, it is also rooted in earlier ideas about sustainable forest management and twentieth century environmental concerns. As the concept developed, it has shifted to focus more on economic development, social development and environmental protection for future generations. It has been suggested that "the term 'sustainability' should be viewed as humanity's target

goal of human-ecosystem equilibrium (homeostasis), while 'sustainable development' refers to the holistic approach and temporal processes that lead us to the end point of sustainability" (shaker:2015).

#### **Sustainable tourism:**

Sustainable tourism is the concept of visiting somewhere as a tourist and trying to make a positive impact on the environment, society, and economy. (Lisse :2015). Tourism can involve primary transportation to the general location, local transportation, accommodations, entertainment, recreation, nourishment and shopping. It can be related to travel for leisure, business and what is called VFR (visiting friends and relatives). (Dubois: 2010). There is now broad consensus that tourism development should be sustainable; however, the question of how to achieve this remains an object of debate. (Peeters and others: 2004).

Without travel there is no tourism, so the concept of sustainable tourism is tightly linked to a concept of sustainable mobility. (Hoyer: 2000). Two relevant considerations are tourism's reliance on fossil fuels and tourism's effect on climate change. 72 percent of tourism's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions come from transportation, 24 percent from accommodations, and 4 percent from local activities. Aviation accounts for 55% of that transportation CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (or 40% of tourism's total). However, when considering the impact of all greenhouse gas emissions from tourism and that aviation emissions are made at high altitude where their effect on climate is amplified, aviation alone accounts for 75% of tourism's climate impact. (Gossling and peeter: 2005).

"Sustainable transportation is now established as the critical issue confronting a global tourism industry that is palpably unsustainable, and aviation lies at the heart of this issue " (Cohen and others:2014).

#### **The relationship between tourism development and sustainable development**

Sustainable development refers to the use without exploitation of natural, cultural and all other tourist resources from the current generation, it means to preserve them for future use by future generations. Since the development of tourism in a certain area largely dependent on natural and anthropogenic attractiveness which are located in the surrounding, the practicing of sustainable development



gets more and more important. In case these resources to be destroyed or degraded, the attractiveness of the destination is reduced as well, but also leads into question for development of tourism in this region, because potential tourists are interested in visiting attractive and clean destinations which offer services with high quality. However, the environment that has no attributes of a quality environment is not only unattractive to tourists, but in that environment do not feel comfortable and domestic population. Planning of sustainable tourism development actually concerns planning of preserve the environment, and it encompasses a variety of research and analysis before making a decision on any determination of the direction of development. All these activities are done in order not to allow intensive exploitation of resources in some specific areas, without care about the preservation of resources.

#### **The amazing secret of India's success in the tourism industry**

Due to the cultural similarities between Iran and India, in this section we will focus on tourism features and attractions in India so that we can use the experience of this country in Iran, especially in MahdiShahr area, which has been very successful in this industry.

India is one of the most populous Asian countries, lying between the golden seas of the Indian Ocean and the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas. India is a country known as the 72 Nations because of the different ethnicities and religions living together.

Its capital is New Delhi, India to the northwest is neighbor with Pakistan; to the north with China, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet; and to the northeast with Burma and Bangladesh. India also has a blue border from the West with the Oman Sea and the Persian Gulf, from the East with the Bay of Bengal and from the South with the Indian Ocean. India is the second most populous country after China. Bombay Port (Mumbai) is India's most populous city. India has more than thirty-five major cities with a population of over one million. Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Agra, Mysore, Jaipur, Goa, Pune, Bhopal, Trivandrum, Surat and Kanpur are major cities of this vast country.

India has a very rich history and culture dating back to five years BC. India is home to many diverse races, languages, rituals, and cultures. There are hundreds of languages and thousands of dialects and accents

in India. In addition to the two languages of Hindi and English that have been declared official in the country's constitution, the other twenty-two languages have official language status in one or more states.

India enjoys a very diverse wildlife, a 1412 square km protected area in Gujarat, and is the only remaining shelter of about 300 Asian lions. India is home to many great mammals such as Asian elephants, unicorns and tigers. More than 2000 bird species and three crocodiles' species live in the country.

India's natural resources include coal (ranked fourth in the world in terms of reserves), iron, manganese, mica, bauxite, titanium, chromite, natural gas, diamonds, crude oil, limestone, thorium. India's oil reserves on the Mumbai coast in Maharashtra, Gujarat and in the east of Assam address more than 25% of domestic needs.

India's climate is very diverse, ranging from the ever-snowy Himalayan Mountains to the tropical region in the middle and south and the arid desert to the west.

The four Indian seasons include: cold and dry from December to February, warm and dry from March to May, the rainy season from June to September and temperate in October and November. On average, about 1000 to 1500 mm of rain per year covers almost all of India, that amounts to 2500 mm off the coast and northeast of India. The average annual rainfall in West Bengal amounts more than 11000 mm / year.

India is one of the countries that have attracted many foreign tourists as its economy has improved in recent years. However, this country has always been one of the tourist destinations of the world because of its monumental buildings and beautiful temples. The rapid development of tourism in India, which began in early 2000, has now swept across the Indian subcontinent.

In the five-year period between 2002 and 2007, the number of foreign visitors and tourists to India increased by 80%. The massive propaganda program for the development of the tourism industry under the slogan "Incredible India" was the pioneer of this tourist revolution and has over the last few years has transformed the international image of India from a poverty-stricken and war-torn

country to a destination full of vibrant and lively culture and traditions along with tourist infrastructure to spend the dream vacation.

The slogan 'Wonderful India', which attracts tourists from all over the world, encompasses 'amazing results' for Indian tourism activists themselves. India's tourism wheel, which is operated by nonstop flights from Europe and North America, is still developing new markets, and programs such as the development of low-cost domestic air transport, have enabled Indians to travel further and accelerate the growth of tourism in the country.

In addition, India is a land of contradictions. From pristine beaches to fertile mountains and valleys and rain forests and deserts, it is suitable for almost any type of tourism, including ecotourism and nature tourism, adventure, beach and culture. The development of the tourism industry is planned and implemented by central and regional government agencies. India's tourist attractions include Port of Goa, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Kohana Fortress, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka and others.

In essence, the tourism industry has many benefits for both the destination country and the travelers themselves. According to statistics from the International Tourism Organization, it is estimated that travel and tourism now accounts for more than 7% of India's total employment of one billion and 300 million people. Apart from the economic impact, a healthy tourism industry can have significant and widespread implications on the state of infrastructure such as transport and the environment of a country.

Another benefit of tourism development is in the form of incentives to invest in infrastructure development such as hotel construction, airport quality improvement and underground transportation. (Currently one of the largest and most beautiful airports in the world is in Indian Bombay) the sharp increase in the number of tourists visiting Delhi in 2010, for example, prompted the central Indian government to set a deadline for the local government to open new Delhi subway lines. The Delhi local government succeeded in welcoming thousands of tourists with its advanced transport system.

Conde nast traveler, that is one of the most successful tourism publications in the world, has placed India's tourist attractions among the four popular destinations in the world. On the other hand, the

famous "lonely planet" series, which publishes tourist guidebooks for different countries of the world, has included India in a list of five international tourist destinations in a survey of 167 countries.

The British Association of Travel Agencies has also named India as one of the best 50 destinations in the world for tourism. It has also won a number of international awards, including awards in the leading destination in Asia, a leading country in term of implementation of tourism projects and the best organizer of tourism conventions and conferences.



**Photo No 3: Taj Mahal**

The tourism industry in India serves as the main engine of economic growth and comprehensive efforts are being made to achieve sustainable development in this sector. Tourism industry practitioners and trustees in India are launching new initiatives to increase their share of tourism globally and invite tourists to have new experiences such as spiritual growth, cultural enrichment, physical empowerment and mental rejuvenation. To this end, they have developed and implemented projects such as launching tourist trains, cruising ships and creating sports fields; that we can also use these experiences in terms of cultural similarities and having the appropriate infrastructure to succeed in this context.

The government of India to encourage more investors supports 100 percent of their investment. This has led Thomas Cook, one of the world's largest tourism companies, to invest heavily in tourism and tourist exchange in this country. Since hotel projects in the country have been profitable and economical for early return investment, chain

hotels such as Sheraton, Hilton, Radisson, Marriott, Acor, Holiday Inn, Canterbury, Novotel, Shangrilla and Hyatt have launched branches there.

On the other hand, to further introduce it, it has encouraged domestic investors to build Tajmahal and Abroy hotels in other countries. In terms of accommodation infrastructure, India has 100, 000 rooms in the category of star hotels. And that is why they are exploiting all their abilities in medical, maritime, cultural and ecotourism tourism, so that today Indian medical tourism has found its place in the global markets; and it has been able to attract tourists to its country in the areas of heart surgery, kidney and liver transplants, plastic surgeries, knee replacements, dental care at a lower cost than anywhere else in the world. To do this, it has stepped forward to issuing a one-year medical visa (which can be extended up to three years).

The increase in the number of foreign tourists and the consequent increase in India's income can be attributed in part to the popularity of electronic visas in India, which is now being given to nationals of 150 countries and as a result, more foreign tourists are taking advantage of these facilities, they can come to India and boost India's billion-dollar tourism industry.

### **Conclusion**

Today, achieving sustainable economic growth is one of the key indicators of progress for developing countries, while tourism as a source of income and job creation at the national level can be an approach to economic development in the national territory and overshadow all economic sectors.

At the same time on ecological, economic, cultural and social dimensions, utilizing a holistic approach to tourism development, bottom-up planning, pollution control, attention to increasing awareness of local communities and paying attention to justice.

In general, sustainable tourism, relying on the concept of sustainable development, wants the tourism industry to have the least impact on host societies and the environment, with concurrent economic profitability.

In the meantime, due to the variety of potentials in Mahdishahr; if planned and developed in advance, sustainable tourism in addition to reducing unemployment and alleviating social and cultural problems

can create direct and indirect economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits and make a significant contribution to the national development.

Striving for sustainable tourism development in Mahdi shahr, minimizes damage to the natural and man-made environment, preserves social and cultural heritage, maximizes the economic benefits of tourism development, and improves the life quality of residents and the tourists experience.

### **Suggestions**

- Native people of Mehdi Shahr should be involved and participated in tourism planning and heritage conservation and should be invited for this task.
- The people of Mehdi Shahr should enjoy and benefit from tourism and the presence of tourists.
- The tourism promotion program in Mehdi Shahr should support, preserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage.
- Mehdi Shahr tourism should be planned according to the culture and customs of the people of this area.
- Tourism planning should be done in such a way those tourists feel valued, enjoyed and satisfied with their journey.
- It is suggested that tourism organizations and centers, especially in the MahdiShahr region, make use of India's very useful experiences in the field of tourism in terms of cultural similarities, to model the country in this regard, and to use the traditions and customs as a source of income and attract tourists.

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