

Research Article

Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India: A Demographic and Economic Analysis

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Abstract: The trend in Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) of a country can be considered as a proxy for the demand for tourism in that country. Viewing from this point, the analysis of the FTAs of a country assumes utmost significance in understanding the tourism sector of a country. The present paper intends to undertake a demographic and economic analysis of FTAs of India, an emerging economy in the Asian continent. The paper makes an attempt to understand the trend in FTAs, their age structure, gender, purpose of visit and Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) that are owed only to the FTAs. Drawing on data on tourism during the period 2011 to 2022, the study has found that the growth rate of FTAs in India hovered around 23.60 percent. Despite adverse consequences created by COVID-19, the Indian tourism sector has shown its resilience by registering a jump in growth rate in the post-COVID years. The study has revealed the domination of males and the middle-aged among the tourists visiting India. The study has shown that the Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from FTAs almost moved in tandem with the trend in the FTAs.

Keywords: Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs), Age, Gender, Purpose of Visit, Foreign Exchange Earning (FEE), Covid-19.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indeed, there is no dearth of literature showing that tourism has been playing an indispensable role in the development of all economies. On account of this reason, tourism has had an important place in the policy realms of all governments. It is obvious that the movement of people across countries and regions within the country cannot be considered as a part of tourism activities. A movement becomes a part of tourism when it gives some kind of pleasure to the person seeking a tourism experience and, thereby, contributes to the economy. It is true that over the years, both internal and external tourism have shown remarkable increases both in terms of revenue and in terms of employment generated. Particularly in the case of developing economies, studies have shown that tourism has played a dominant role in enhancing the livelihood opportunities and standard of living of people at large. India, an emerging developing economy, has not been an exception to this. It is known that many yardsticks have been used to gauge the progress of tourism in a country. One such important yardstick is to understand the trends in Foreign Tourist Arrivals. The present study is an attempt to understand the Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India in terms of gender, age and country of origin. In addition, the study also intends to delve into the purpose of tourist visits. Apart from this, the study also attempts to analyze the trends in Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from foreign tourist arrivals in India.

II. OBJECTIVES AND THE METHODOLOGY

This paper intends to focus on the trends in foreign tourist arrivals in India in recent times. Apart from looking at the trends, the study also aims at probing into purpose and source-wise changes in the FTA in recent times. The study also enquires into vital demographic characteristics of the tourists, mainly age and gender. The paper also analyses the foreign exchange earnings during the period under the study in order to have an understanding of how changes in foreign exchange earnings of India correlate with foreign tourist arrivals.

The study mainly relies on secondary data for analysis. Secondary data have been sourced from the official tourism website of the Government of India. The tourism department regularly publishes data on foreign tourist arrivals. Although both month-wise and year-wise data are available on the FTA in India, the present study mainly makes use of only the annual data, which is available in the India Tourism Report.

III. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The importance of tourism in economic development has long been recognized by economists all over the world. Studies have shown that the increasing policy emphasis on tourism owes much to its integrating effects on the economy. In other words, tourism is one of the sectors which enjoys both forward and backward linkages. Therefore, it can be said that a country which aspires to pursue an unbalanced growth strategy can easily find interest in investing enormous amounts of money for capital in



the tourism sector, which will ultimately lead to the generation of efficient linkage effect in the economy, thereby leading to economic growth contributed by all sectors of the economy. Studies have also remarked that tourism is reckoned as the largest industry on the planet because of the huge volume of investment that has been made in the tourism industry in different areas. Globally, it has been estimated that 8% of the global GDP comes from the tourism and travel industry, while 10% of global employment growth has also been attributed to the tourism and travel industry. With this, we now turn specifically to the case of providing a theoretical underpinning to the study of foreign tourist arrivals.

Economic and non-economic factors influence Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs). Economic factors generally encompass increases in income levels, changes in the employment market, expansion of business enterprises, scaling up of technology and business intentions, and improvements in connectivity and transportation facilities among countries. Non-economic factors, on the other hand, encompass mainly political and administrative decisions like the relaxation of visa requirements and passports, cultural exchanges among nations and releasing international uncertainty arising out of political turbulence. The recent upheaval in FTA in 2024, at 11% higher than in 2023, has primarily been attributed to non-economic factors, including air connectivity and Visa facilitation, as well as the relaxation of controls on tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is clear that, in a way, FTA may be taken as a proxy for tourism demand in a country. The number of people who visit a country in a given period of time can be considered a proxy for the demand for tourism that the country offers. The tourism industry has an enormous multiplier effect, which would ultimately help regional economies to grow at a faster rate. In addition to the multiplier effect, tourism has a desirable and long-lasting impact on the balance of payment position of a country and foreign exchange reserves of a country. It is evident that FTA has the potential to bring dynamism to human capital, especially through the addition of knowledge and skill, which will have reaching economic and social consequences on the economy in the near future.

IV. A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research studies on foreign tourist arrivals are rare in some sense, barring the reports prepared by governments at tourism ministry levels. For instance, the Ministry of Tourism in India publishes data on the trend of tourist arrivals. These reports have been made available on a monthly and annual basis, and many quantitative models have been created based on these reports to forecast foreign tourist arrivals in future (Makoni, Mazuruse, & Nyagadza, 2023).

The Indian tourism industry, underpinned by the nation's rich cultural and natural heritage, has emerged as a significant contributor to economic development and plays an imperative role in generating employment opportunities. Its diverse offerings, ranging from historical sites and religious pilgrimage centres to pristine beaches and snow-capped mountains, appeal to a wide range of domestic and international tourists (Modi & Shah, 2024). Tourism Industry holds immense potential for the Indian economy and retains enormous support towards the Gross Domestic Product. The tourism industry can be vigorous in generating more foreign exchange reserves and contributing to foreign exchange earnings if the Indian government focuses on improving the infrastructure and upgrading the products, tourism policies and hosting various international events (Vedapradha, Hariharan, & Niha, 2017; Arif, 2018). The expansion of the tourism sector can significantly boost up the long-term macroeconomic performance of developing countries and hence promoting tourism with strategic plan would contribute to the economic growth of India (Rout, Mishra, & Pradhan, 2016). Substantial progress has been made in India's tourism sector through the expansion of air travel capacity, enhancement of railway networks to major tourist hubs, improvement of road infrastructure, and diversification of accommodation options, including heritage properties and guest lodging. However, to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth and to position India as a leading contender in the global tourism landscape, a synergistic collaboration between Central and State governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations is imperative, given the sector's inherently multifaceted and service-driven nature (Nagaraju & Chandrashekara, 2014). The tourism sector in India faces numerous obstacles hindering its growth, including high financing costs, working capital constraints, branding and multiplicity of taxes charged. These immediate challenges, along with strategic issues such as global uncertainty, branding issues, human resources, financial viability concerns, customer service issues, operating cost creep, supply chain disruptions, safety, and security risks, need to be addressed in order to unlock the sector's potential and enhancing its support to Indian Economy (Hole, Khedkar, & Pawar, 2019).

However, the global outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 created an unprecedented global health emergency with a tremendous impact on societies and livelihoods. Travel and Tourism have been among the sectors most affected by this crisis, with complete curtailment of all domestic and international movements (Gautam, 2021; Ministry of Tourism, 2023-24). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on global tourism activities and particularly affected the economies of countries heavily reliant on the tourism sector; at the same time, in India, around 40-50 million jobs in the tourism sector were at risk due to the pandemic (Choudary & Saha, 2022; Fernández, Guaita, & Martín, 2022; PIB Bulletin, 2020). The appalling situation led to a significant drop in foreign tourist arrivals to India. Factors like fear and transportation issues contributed to this decline (Kumar & Anupama, 2022). However, the tourism sector of India has been on the path of resurgence and reflects positive post-pandemic resurgence with the arrival of 92 lakh foreign tourists in 2023, implying a year-on-year increase of 43.5%. The country's share of foreign exchange earnings in world tourism receipts increased from 1.38% in 2021 to 1.58% in 2022. Amidst this, the

industry represents a relatively low-hanging fruit for job creation in an increasingly challenging environment, marked by the rise of artificial intelligence, protectionist policies, rising transportation costs, and supply chain concerns. (Economic Survey , 2023-24; Business Standard;, 2024; The Hindu). The post-pandemic era has witnessed a paradigm shift in destination demand, characterized by a preference for shorter, safer, and more independent travel experiences. This necessitates a strategic reorientation for tourism organizations, prompting them to explore untapped segments such as niche tourism and fostering the scope of medical, wellness and spiritual tourism. By adapting to these evolving trends and investing in the development of underutilized regions, the tourism industry can stimulate demand and ensure sustainable growth (Pandey, Mahadevan, & Joshi, 2024).

Having reviewed relevant existing studies in the field of tourism, it is apparent that the trend in tourist arrivals plays a significant role in determining the progress a country aspires to achieve in tourism. India, being a country with enormous tourism potential, has not been able to fully tap its potential. The analysis of trends in foreign tourist arrivals in terms of age and gender (demographic features), the purpose of visit and the trend in foreign exchange earnings (economic analysis) would be of immense help in understanding more about the tourism sector of India.

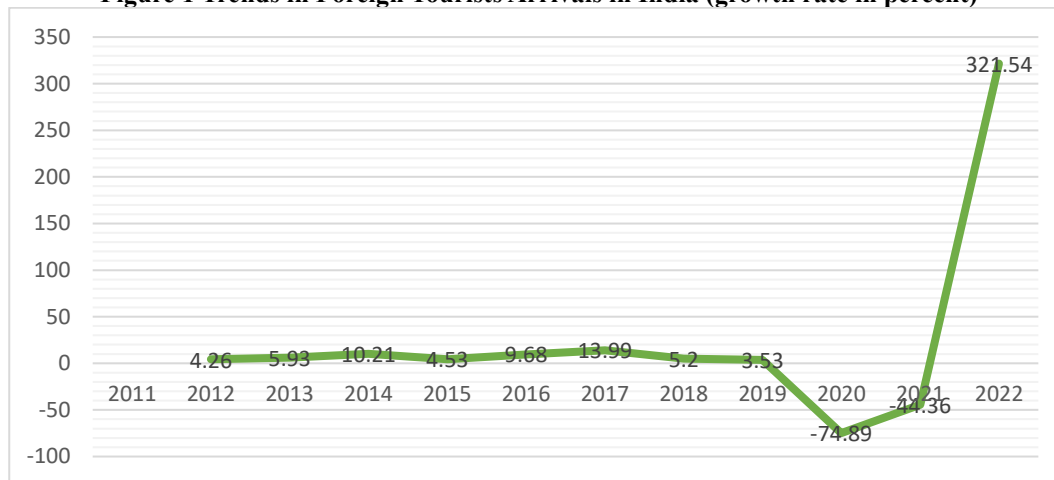
V. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

India, an emerging economy, appears to have been witnessing drastic variations in the trend of foreign tourist arrivals in recent times. It is interesting to note that till the outbreak of COVID-19, the growth rate in tourist arrivals had almost been of the same pattern, barring the upheaval witnessed in 2014 and 2017. Starting with 2012, when the growth rate in FTA was as low as 4.26 percent, the growth went up to 10.21 percent, although in 2015, it plummeted to a level of 4.53 percent (Table No.1). In 2017, it again shot up to 13.99 percent. It is unsurprising that the slowest growth rate in FTA was registered in 2019, when the whole world began experiencing the Covid-19 pandemic. The social distancing and the restrictions placed on the movement of people resulted in the slow rate of FTAs in India as elsewhere in the world. The tightening of restrictions owing to Covid-19 engulfing the entire globe into deep financial, social and health crises, the FTA growth in India entered into negative figures to the tune of 74.89 percent in 2020 and further to 44.36 percent in 2021. Nevertheless, it is amazing to note that the easing of restrictions following the signs of withdrawal of the Covid-19 virus from many parts of the world led to an unprecedented hike in the growth rate of FTAs to the tune of 321.54 percent (Figure 1) Having said this, it needs to reiterated that the absolute number of FTAs that India witnessed in 2019, just before the outbreak of Covid-19, has never returned back again despite all efforts at revamping the tourism sector. The number of FTAs in 2022 is 6437467, which is almost close to what India had as FTAs in 2014 (Table 1). It simply substantiates the point that although the comeback from the negative growth in 2021 is laudable, India has to walk a long way before it sets into the immediate pre-Covid times. The future success of tourism in India really depends on the efforts of all stakeholders pertaining to the tourism sector to bring the economy back to the pre-COVID-19 times.

Table 1. Trends in Foreign Tourists Arrivals in India

Year	FTAs	Growth Rate
2011	6309222	
2012	6577745	4.26
2013	6967601	5.93
2014	7679099	10.21
2015	8027133	4.53
2016	8804411	9.68
2017	10035803	13.99
2018	10557976	5.20
2019	10930355	3.53
2020	2744766	-74.89
2021	1527114	-44.36
2022	6437467	321.54

Source: Compiled by Author; Taken from Bureau of Immigration, India

Figure 1 Trends in Foreign Tourists Arrivals in India (growth rate in percent)

Source: Compiled by Author, Taken from Bureau of Immigration, India

A) Age-wise analysis of FTAs in India

It is undeniable that the age group that features FTAs across nations invariably tends to change following the destination of FTAs. Nevertheless, it has been found that younger adults and middle-aged form the FTAs of many countries, typically for reasons ranging from adventure to health and fitness (Richards, 2015). Needless to say, the high disposable income in this group has also been responsible for their dominance in FTAs. Studies have also pointed out that middle-aged individuals often travel in pursuit of new relaxation avenues and high-quality experiences (Cai & Li, 2012). Keeping this in mind, let us turn to the age-wise distribution of FTAs in India during the period 2011-2022 (Table 2). As is evident from the table, age groups have been classified into seven categories. It is obvious that the middle-aged, particularly in the age category of 35-44 years, dominates the FTAs in India with 21.4 percent in 2022 as compared to other categories.

The age category of 45-54 comes second with 20.4 percent. It is curious to note that these categories together constitute almost half of the FTAs in India in 2022. It appears that there is a relatively stark difference between the immediate preceding and succeeding age categories. For instance, the age category 25-34 has a share of 15.7 percent, while the 55-64 years has a share of 12.9 percent. The trend was almost the same in 2011 as well. This clearly shows that the middle-aged form the better part of the FTAs in India. That said, however, what is promising is the increasing percentage of the under-14 category in 2021 and 2022. In both years, the under-14 age category maintains a share of a little higher than 13 percent. In 2020, during the peak time of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Euro world, the percentage of 65 plus in the FTAs in India remarkably shot up to 10.7 percent. This is on account of an increase in the number of immigrants of aged people from the Euro world, believing it would be much safer in their home country during the time of a pandemic like COVID-19.

Table 2: FTAs in India according to age group, 2001, 2011-2022
(Percent by Age Group in years)

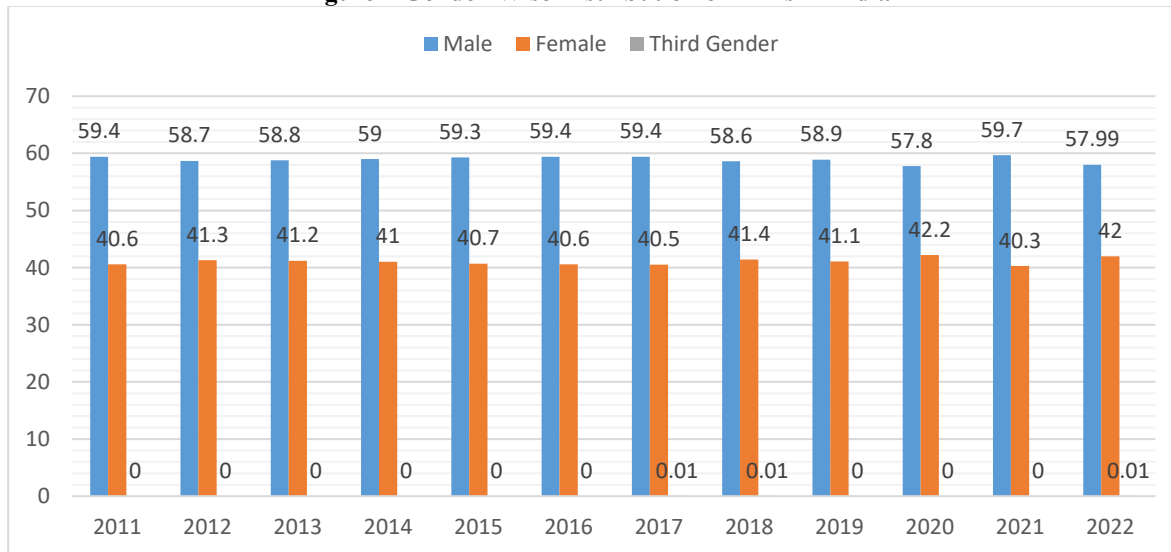
Year	0-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and above
2011	10.5	7.9	16.6	21.2	19.7	13.7	10.5
2012	11	8	16.5	21	19.8	13.9	9.9
2013	9.5	8.7	19.1	21	20	14	7.7
2014	9.2	8.5	18.9	21	20.1	14	8.3
2015	9.4	8.5	19.2	21.2	20	13.8	7.9
2016	9.5	8.5	19.2	21.1	19.9	13.8	8.1
2017	9.4	8.5	19.1	21.1	19.9	13.8	8.2
2018	9.3	8.4	18.6	21	19.8	14.2	8.7
2019	9.2	8.3	18.6	21.3	19.8	14.1	8.8
2020	7.7	7.7	18.4	20.2	19.7	15.6	10.7
2021	13.6	8.4	15.8	21	21.8	13	6.4
2022	13.6	8.3	15.7	21.3	20.4	12.9	7.8

Source: Compiled by Author, Taken from Bureau of Immigration, India

Gender-Wise Analysis of FTAs in India

Gender has played a significant role in shaping the trend in FTAs, not only in India but also in many other countries. Two things stand out as far as the gender dimension of FTA is concerned. One is that still male dominate the scenes of FTAs in many countries, including India. The other thing is that the gender gap in FTAs has been consistently narrowing, and in Europe and North America, women constitute almost 50 percent of foreign tourists. However, in the case of foreign travel made for business and adventure purposes it has been found that males outnumber females (Seow, Choong, & Moorthy, 2017). In the case of India, it is interesting to note that males outnumber females among the FTAs, and this gap has persisted over the years, particularly during the period under study, which spans from 2011 to 2022 (Figure 2). It is astonishing that, on average, compared to women, more than 18 percent of men form the FTAs in India. There could be several reasons for this. Some studies argue that, since India has become an emerging market in recent times, business travel has been on the rise. As most business executives are men; it is quite natural that FTAs in India often include males rather than females.

Figure 2 Gender-Wise Distribution of FTAs in India

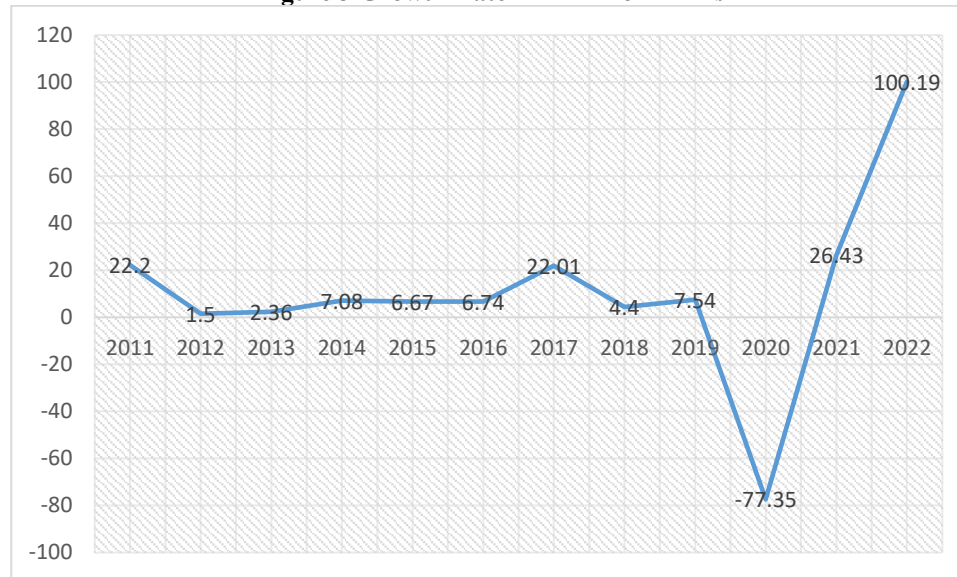


Source: Compiled by Author, Taken from Bureau of Immigration, India

B) Analysis of Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from FTAs in India

Needless to say, changes in foreign tourist arrivals have been reckoned as an important factor contributing to the foreign exchange earnings of many countries (Balaguer & Cantavella-Jordá, 2002). Going through the trend of foreign exchange earnings attributed to FTAs in India from 2011 to 2022, it is pretty clear that there has been an increase in foreign exchange earnings in India during this period (Figure No.3). To begin with, in 2011 India acquired 17707 million US dollar as foreign exchange earnings from the FTAs in India, and by 2017, it tremendously went up to 27365 million US dollar, registering a growth rate of 22.01 over the previous year 2016 (Table No.3). Nevertheless, it is disheartening to note that in 2018, the growth rate plummeted to a level as low as 4.4 percent. Thus, it is evident that there have been visible and sharp oscillations in the growth rate of foreign exchange earning that comes out of FTAs in India. For instance, after registering a record growth rate of 22 percent in 2011, in the next year itself, it actually went down to 1.5 percent, the lowest positive growth rate during the period under this study, and till 2016, the growth rate in foreign exchange earning owing to FTAs remained less than 10 percent. Again, although the growth rate peaked at 22 percent in 2017, the very next year witnessed a down to the extent of 4.4 percent. Like in the case of many economies, it is pertinent to mention that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on foreign exchange earnings from FTAs in India. It is evident that in 2020, the growth rate hovered in the negative zone of -77 percent on account of stringent measures taken by countries across the world with the intention of fighting the Covid-19 virus collaboratively. Restrictions had been placed on the movement of people across the border, leading to a drastic slowdown in FTAs in India. However, thanks to the gradual easing of COVID-19-induced controls on social distancing and travel, foreign exchange earnings started registering positive growth in 2021 and 2022. It is amazing to note that in 2022, the growth rate actually exceeded 100 percent over the previous years (Figure 3).

If we consider the value of FEE from FTAs in India in absolute terms, it is worth noting that in 2019, India received Rs. 216467 in rupee terms and 30721 in dollar terms (Table 3). But this actually declined to 50136 and 6958 in the year 2020, respectively, having been hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Further, it is quite interesting to observe that between 2013 and 2019, the FEE from FTAs in rupee terms ranged between Rs.107563 in 2013 and Rs.216467 in 2019.

Figure 3 Growth Rate in FEE from FTAs

Source: Compiled by Author, Taken from Bureau of Immigration, India

Table 3: Foreign Exchange Earnings from FTAs in India During 2011-2022

Year	FEE in ₹ terms		FEE in \$ terms	
	₹ Crore	% Change over the previous year	US \$ Million	% Change over the Previous Year
2011	83037	25.49	17707	22.2
2012	95060	15.14	17972	1.5
2013	107563	12.51	18396	2.36
2014	120366	11.9	19699	7.08
2015	134843	12.03	21012	6.67
2016	150750	11.8	22428	6.74
2017	178189	18.2	27365	22.01
2018	195312	9.61	28565	4.4
2019	216467	10.83	30721	7.54
2020#2	50136	-76.84	6958	-77.35
2021#2	65070	29.79	8797	26.43
2022#2	139935	115.05	17611	100.19

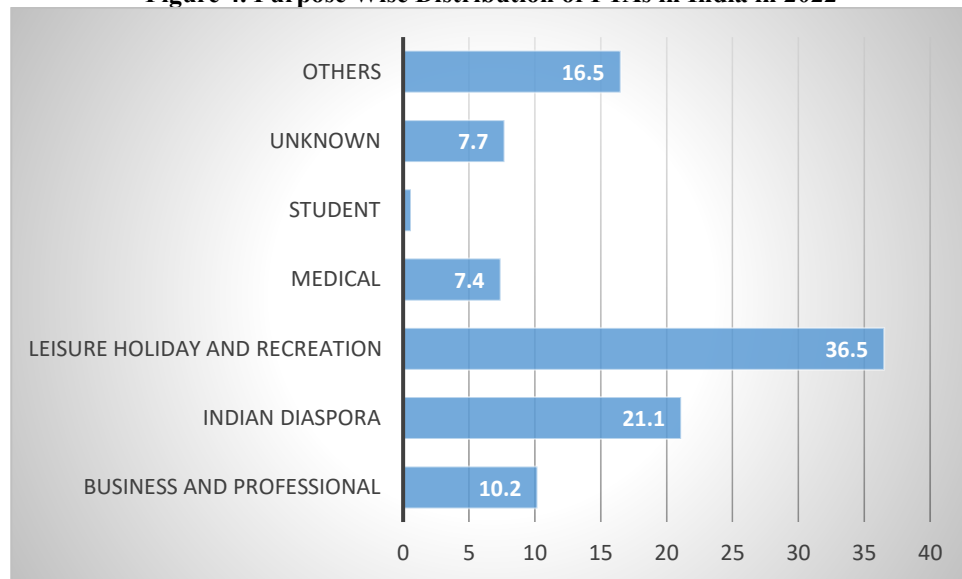
#- Revised Estimates

Source: Compiled by Author, Taken from Bureau of Immigration, India

C) Trends in Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India: Purpose-Wise Analysis

Having discussed the Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from Foreign Tourists Arrivals (FTAs) in India in recent times, we now turn towards the purpose-wise analysis of the foreign tourist arrivals in India in the year 2022. According to the literature on FTA, it is evident that foreign tourists typically visit countries for various reasons. The prominent reasons among these are business and professional, the Indian diaspora, leisure activities such as holidays and recreation, medical tourism, student studies, and unknown purposes. Among these purposes, the most prominent reason for visiting India in 2022 is leisure, followed by holidays and recreation, and then the Indian diaspora. It is obvious that 36.5 percent of FTAs in 2022 are to enjoy holiday and recreation facilities in India. Only 21.1 per cent of frequent Indian visitors are part of the Indian diaspora (Figure 4). Interestingly, it could be observed that only 7.4 percent consider India as a destination for medical tourism, while 10.2 percent of foreign tourists still visit India for professional business purposes.

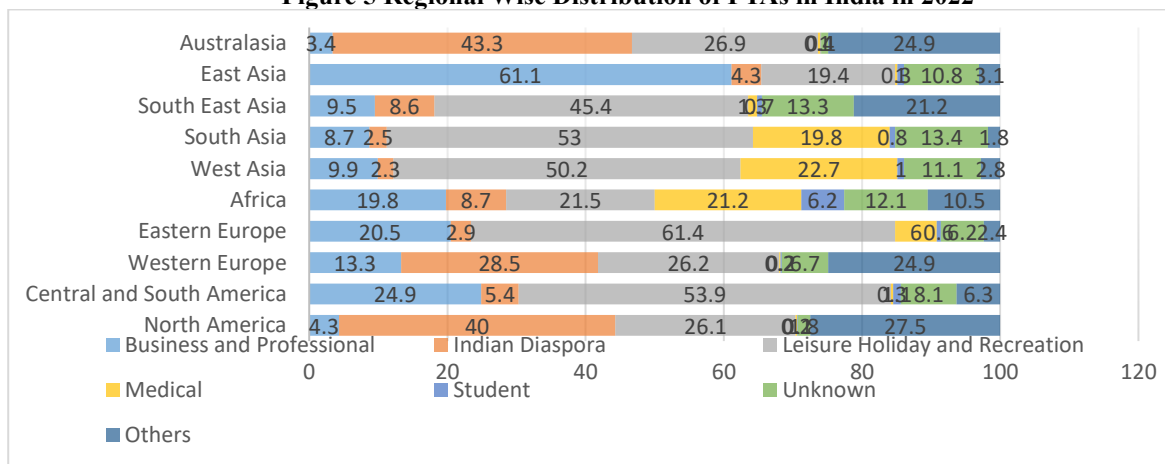
Figure 4. Purpose Wise Distribution of FTAs in India in 2022



Source: Compiled by Author, Taken from Bureau of Immigration, India

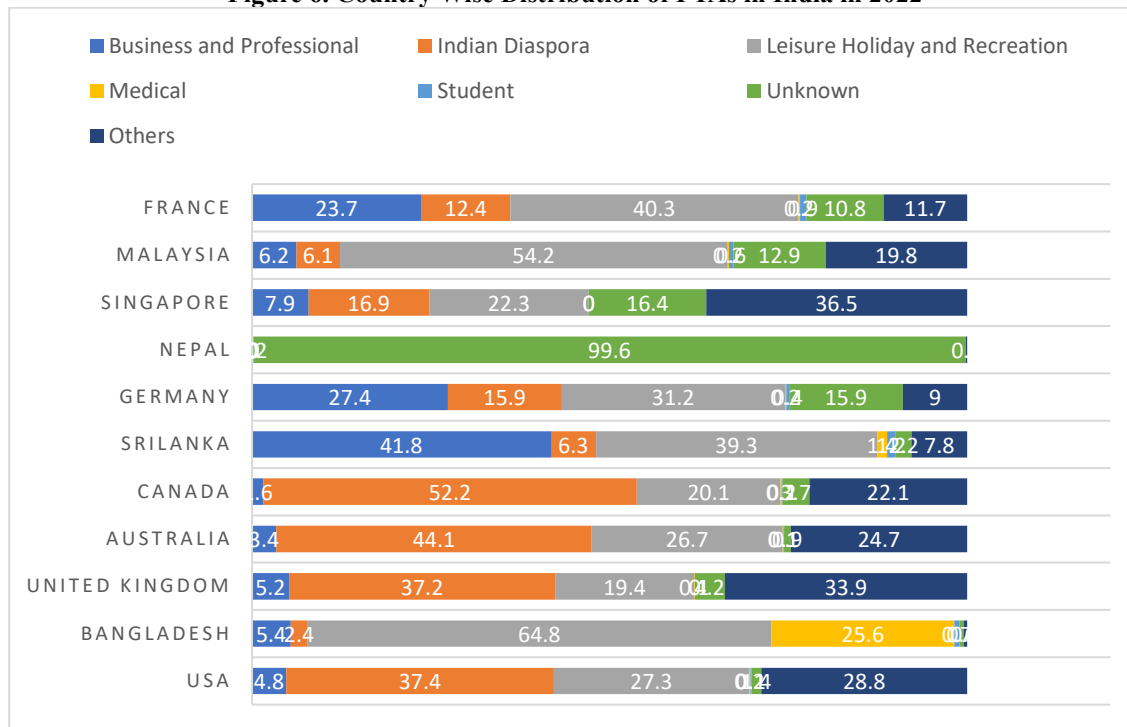
Now, we turn towards the region-wise analysis of the purpose of FTAs in India in 2022. It is obvious that from Australasia, the majority of foreign tourists visited India in 2022 just because of them being a part of the Indian diaspora (Figure 5). But from regions like South East Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Eastern Europe and Central and South America, most of the people visited India in 2022 to enjoy the holidays and recreation facilities available in India. It is worth noting that a significant proportion of people also visited India from regions such as Africa, West Asia, and South Asia for medical purposes.

Figure 5 Regional Wise Distribution of FTAs in India in 2022



Source: Compiled by Author, Taken from Bureau of Immigration, India

Having discussed the region-wise analysis of the purpose of FTAs in India in 2022, let us now examine the country-wise analysis of the purpose of FTAs in India. To simplify the explanation, we will consider only those nations with more than ten million tourists visiting India. It is evident from the figure that most Canadians visit India because of them being a part of the Indian diaspora (Figure 6). Around a little higher than 52% of Canadians come to India as they happen to be part of the Indian diaspora, whereas it is clear that a little more than 20% of Canadians also come to India for leisure and recreation purposes. It is evident that 37.4% of tourists from the United States visit India for the purpose of being part of the Indian diaspora, but it is interesting to note that 27.3% of FTAs from America visit India to enjoy their holidays and immerse themselves in the recreational avenues available in India.

Figure 6. Country Wise Distribution of FTAs in India in 2022

Source: Compiled by Author; Taken from Bureau of Immigration, India

VI. CONCLUSION

The analysis of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) of a country helps to understand the nature of tourists who visit a country, the purpose for which they visit, and the foreign exchange earnings they generate for the host country. In this study, an attempt has been undertaken to gauge the demographic and economic analysis of foreign tourist arrivals in India during the period 2011-2022. Drawing on data on tourism, the study has found that from 2011 to 2019, the growth rate of FTAs in India hovered around 7.1 percent, but during the whole period that is from 2011 to 2022, it moved around 23.60 percent. Despite the fact that COVID-19 has had an unfavourable impact on the trend of FTAs in India, the trend in FTAs since 2021 clearly shows the resilience of the Indian tourism sector. Demographic analysis reveals that middle-aged individuals constitute the majority of FTAs in India, and there has been a male-dominated trend in FTAs, which remains largely unchanged during the period from 2011 - 2022. Unsurprisingly, the study has shown that Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from FTAs almost moved in tandem with the trend in the FTAs. Most foreign tourists visit India for leisure and recreational activities.

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