

**SERVICE QUALITY OF PILGRIMAGE SITES IN NORTH INDIA: A CASE  
STUDY OF *JYOTIRLINGAS***

A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements  
for award of the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **Chapter-8**

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter is devoted to present the summary of the research. It is classified into six sections. Section 8.1 provides objective-wise major findings of the study. Section 8.2 presents holistic suggestions for all objectives. Section 8.3 presents suggestions common to all pilgrimage sites. Section 8.4 presents the contribution of the study to the existing body of knowledge. Section 8.5 gives policy implications of the study, and section 8.6 specifies the scope of future research.

#### **8.1 Major findings of the study**

##### **8.1.1 Major findings from analysis of Objective 1**

###### **Site wise findings**

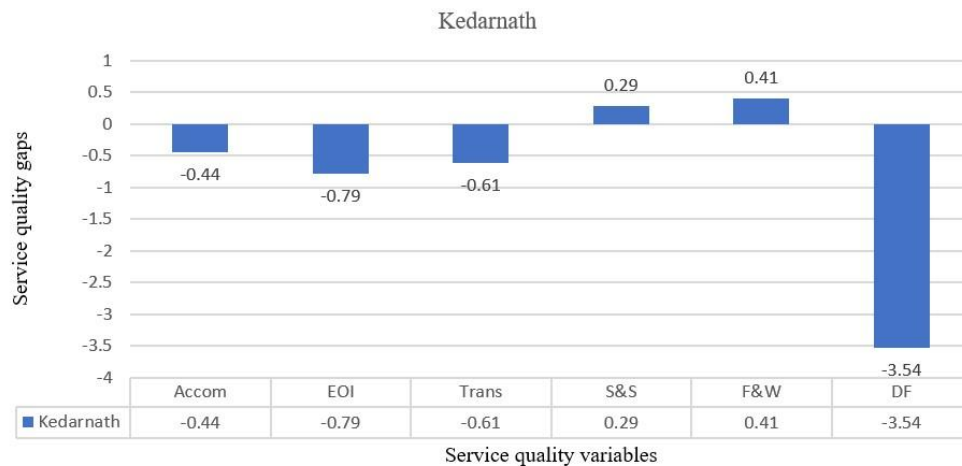
###### **i) Kedarnath**

The biggest item-wise negative gaps<sup>17</sup> in Kedarnath were ‘wheelchair facility for sick/old age citizens/PwD’ (-3.288), facility to keep footwear (-3.550) and availability of locker facility (-3.788). Other negative gaps included proper queue management at the temple (-0.369), clear direction regarding public facilities (-0.688), information about the protocols inside the destination (-0.837), easy communication with presence of guides (-1.663), proper management of street vendors (-0.644), temple management addresses pilgrim’s grievance quickly (-0.581), fair price of the accommodation available (-0.519), staff meets the needs, wants and complaints of tourists (-0.8), fare price to be charged for transportation (-0.675) and cordial attitude and behaviour of the transporters (-0.825).

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<sup>17</sup>In this study, the negative gap implies that tourist expectation is greater than tourist perception which means unacceptable service quality. Similarly, positive gap implies that tourist perception is greater than tourist expectation which means quality surprise in service quality.

**Figure 8.1: Service quality gaps in Kedarnath**



Source: Own compilation

These negative gaps indicate to the following issues:

1. Absence of wheelchair facility, footwear facility, and locker facility.
2. Absence of proper queue management at the temple.
3. Absence of guides
4. Absence of clear direction regarding public facilities
5. No information is provided about the protocols inside the destination
6. Improper management of vendors outside the temple.
7. Absence of grievance management cell in the temple.
8. Price of the accommodation and transportation available is not acceptable to the tourists.
9. Improper behaviour of the transporters and accommodation staff.

The largest positive gaps were ‘presence of security (police/forces) at the destination’ (0.675), ‘availability of accommodation near the destination’ (0.456), and ‘availability of clean drinking water at the destination’. (0.613). This was an indication that the presence of security personnel, easy availability of accommodation and clean drinking water was appreciated by the tourists.

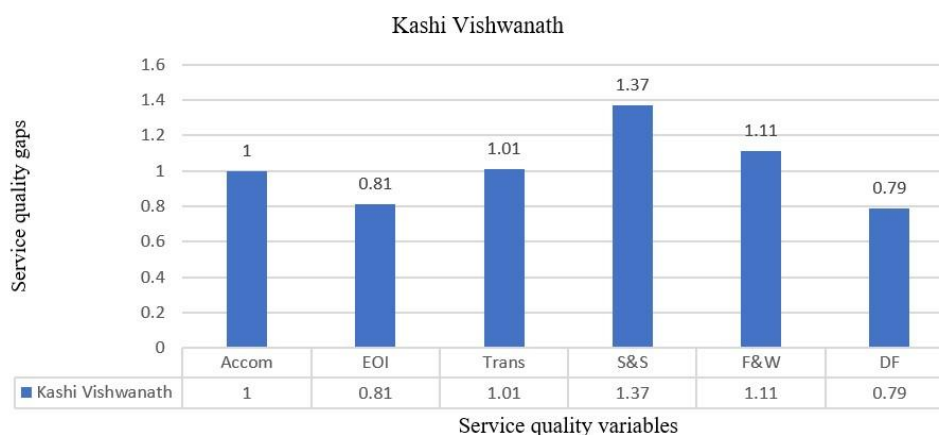
These positive gaps indicate to the following

1. Presence of security personnel in the temple
2. Easy availability of accommodation
3. Easy availability of clean drinking water.

To conclude, the gap analysis at Kedarnath shows a huge room for improvement in various aspects of service quality.

## ii) Kashi Vishwanath

**Figure 8.2: Service quality gaps in Kashi Vishwanath**



Source: Own compilation

The largest positive gaps were ‘presence of security (police/forces) at the destination’ (1.654), ‘availability of proper prevention measures for hazardous situation’ (1.365), ‘necessary first aid to be available at the destination’ (1.256), ‘availability of accommodation near the destination’ (1.301), ‘fair price of the accommodation available’ (1.179), ‘wheelchair facility for sick/old age citizens/PwD’ (0.923), ‘facility to keep footwear’ (0.782).

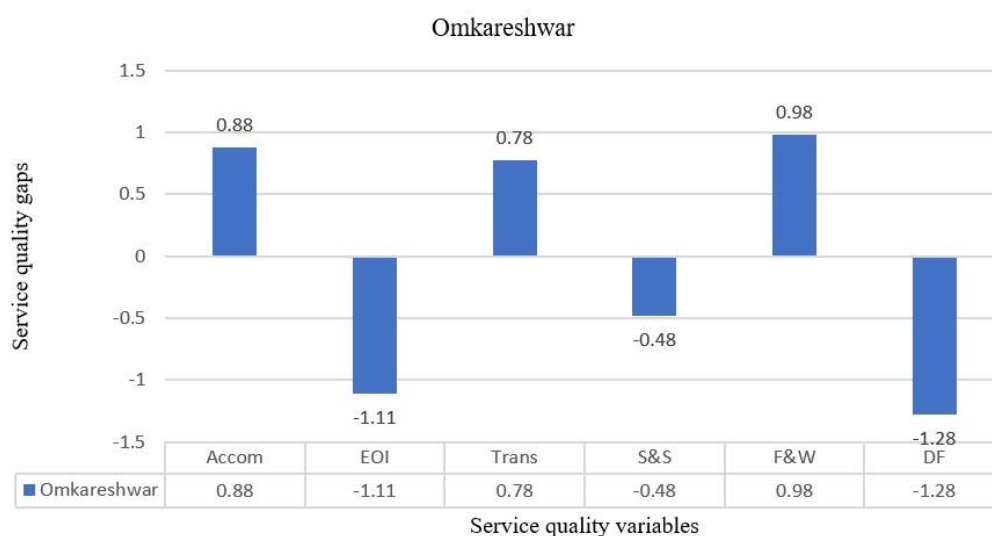
These positive gaps indicate to the following

1. Presence of security personnel in the temple
2. Easy Availability and affordability of accommodation
3. Wheelchair and footwear facility
4. Availability of proper prevention measures for hazardous situation
5. Availability of necessary first aid

There were no negative gaps highlighted in the item-wise analysis of Kashi Vishwanath temple which indicates tourist satisfaction for the service quality variables.

## iii) Omkareshwar

**Figure 8.3: Service quality gaps in Omkareshwar**



Source: Own compilation

The biggest item-wise negative gaps in Omkareshwar was ‘Availability of locker facility’ (-1.558), ‘Easy communication with presence of guides’ (-1.342), ‘Clear direction regarding public facilities’ (-1.258), ‘Proper management of street vendors’ (-1.258), ‘Temple management addresses pilgrim’s grievance quickly’ (-1.192), ‘Wheelchair facility for sick/old age citizens/PWD’ (-1.183), ‘Information about the protocols inside the destination’ (-1.117), ‘Facility to keep footwear’ (-1.108) and ‘Necessary first aid to be available at the destination’ (-0.967).

These negative gaps indicate to the following issues:

1. Absence of Wheelchair facility, and footwear facility
2. Absence of guides
3. Absence of Clear direction regarding public facilities
4. No Information is provided about the protocols inside the destination
5. Improper management of vendors outside the temple.
6. Absence of grievance management cell in the temple.
7. Absence of information/ unavailability of necessary first aid

The largest positive gaps were ‘Availability of accommodation near the destination’ (1.142), ‘Hygiene to be maintained in terms of food’ (1.133), and ‘Staff responds to tourists’ requests quickly’ (1.008), ‘Availability of clean drinking water at the destination’ (1), ‘Fair price of the accommodation available’ (0.958), Proper Walkable

Road (0.892), Fare price to be charged for transportation (0.875) and Availability of preferred Choices of food items (0.825).

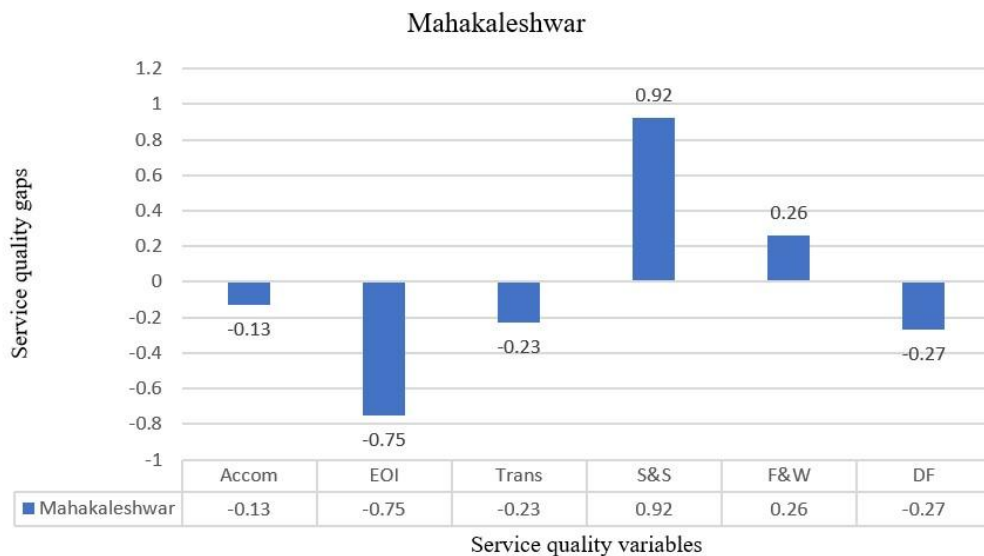
These positive gaps indicate to the following

1. Presence of security personnel in the temple
2. Easy Availability and fair price of accommodation
3. Easy Availability of clean drinking water.
4. Helpful staff at the accommodation
5. Fare price being charged for transportation
6. Availability of preferred Choices of food items

To conclude, the gap analysis at Omkareshwar shows a huge room for improvement in various aspects of service quality.

#### iv) Mahakaleshwar

**Figure 8.4: Service quality gaps in Mahakaleshwar**



Source: Own compilation

The biggest item-wise negative gaps in Mahakaleshwar was ‘Availability of locker facility’ (-1.938), ‘Easy communication with presence of guides’ (-1.1), ‘Clear direction regarding public facilities’ (-0.531), ‘Proper management of street vendors’ (-0.869), ‘Information about the protocols inside the destination’ (-0.85), Availability of clean toilet and washroom in the accommodation (-0.806), and Proper queue management at the temple (-0.788).

These negative gaps indicate to the following issues:

1. Absence of locker facility
2. Absence of guides
3. Absence of Clear direction regarding public facilities
4. No Information is provided about the protocols inside the destination
5. Improper management of vendors outside the temple.
6. Improper queue management

The largest positive gaps were ‘Availability of proper prevention measures for hazardous situation’ (1.069), ‘Presence of security (police/forces) at the destination’ (1.031), Expect to be safe while waiting in the queue at the pilgrimage destination (0.875) and Necessary first aid to be available at the destination (0.706).

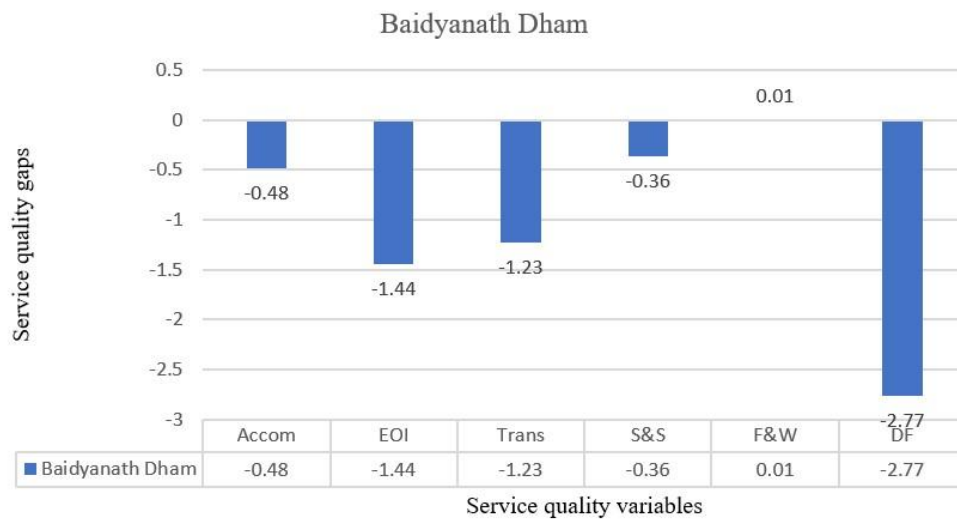
These positive gaps indicate to the following

1. Presence of security personnel in the temple
2. The tourists feel safe while waiting in the queue.
3. Necessary first aid to be available at the destination
4. Availability of proper prevention measures for hazardous situation.

To conclude, the gap analysis at Mahakaleshwar shows room for improvement in various aspects of service quality.

**v) Baidyanath Dham**

**Figure 8.5: Service quality gaps in Baidyanath Dham**



Source: Own compilation

The biggest item-wise negative gaps in Baidyanath Dham were ‘Facility to keep footwear’ (-2.904), ‘Availability of locker facility’ (-2.833), ‘Wheelchair facility for sick/old age citizens/PWD’ (-2.59), ‘Easy communication with presence of guides’ (-1.821), ‘Proper management of street vendors’ (-1.513), Cordial attitude and behaviour of the transporters (-1.494), and Information about the protocols inside the destination (-1.462).

These negative gaps indicate to the following issues:

1. Absence of locker, footwear and wheelchair facility
2. Absence of guides
3. No Information is provided about the protocols inside the destination
4. Improper management of vendors outside the temple.
5. Improper behaviour of the transporters operating outside the temple area.

The positive gaps were ‘Hygiene to be maintained in terms of food’ (0.135), and ‘Availability of preferred Choices of food items’ (0.013).

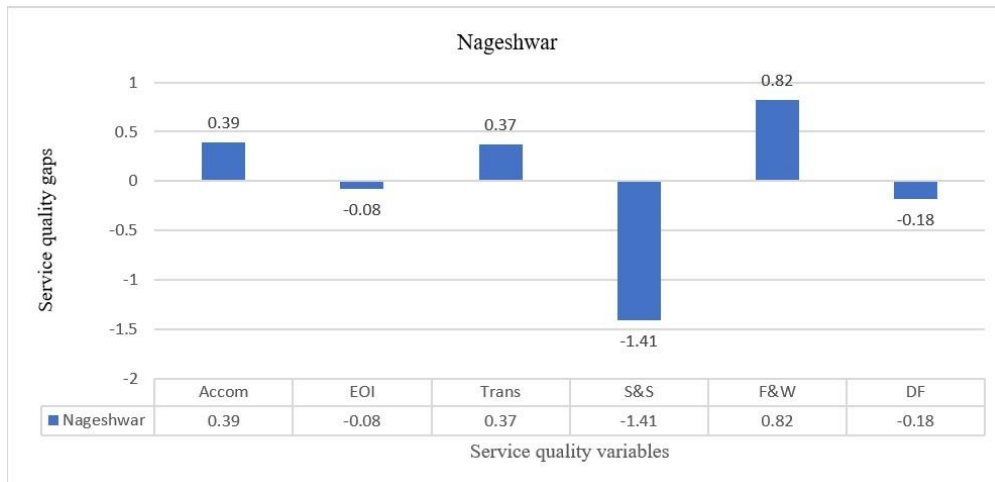
These positive gaps indicate to the following

1. Hygiene is maintained in terms of food.
2. There is availability of preferred Choices of food items near the pilgrimage site.

To conclude, the gap analysis at Baidyanath Dham shows room for a lot of improvement in various aspects of service quality.

**vi) Nageshwar**

**Figure 8.6: Service quality gaps in Nageshwar**



Source: Own compilation

The biggest item-wise negative gaps in Nageshwar was ‘Necessary first aid to be available at the destination’ (-1.628), Expect to be safe while waiting in the queue at the pilgrimage destination (-1.474), Availability of proper prevention measures for hazardous situation (-1.409), Presence of security (police/forces) at the destination (-1.153), Availability of locker facility (-0.613), Wheelchair facility for sick/old age citizens/PWD (-0.285), and Easy communication with presence of guides (-0.277).

These negative gaps indicate to the following issues:

1. Absence of Wheelchair facility, and locker facility
2. Absence of Necessary first aid
3. Improper queue management
4. Unavailability of proper prevention measures for hazardous situation
5. Absence of security (police/forces) at the destination
6. Absence of guides.

The largest positive gaps were ‘Hygiene to be maintained in terms of food’ (1.146), Availability of clean drinking water at the destination (0.752), Availability of preferred Choices of food items (0.584), Proper Walkable Road (0.416).

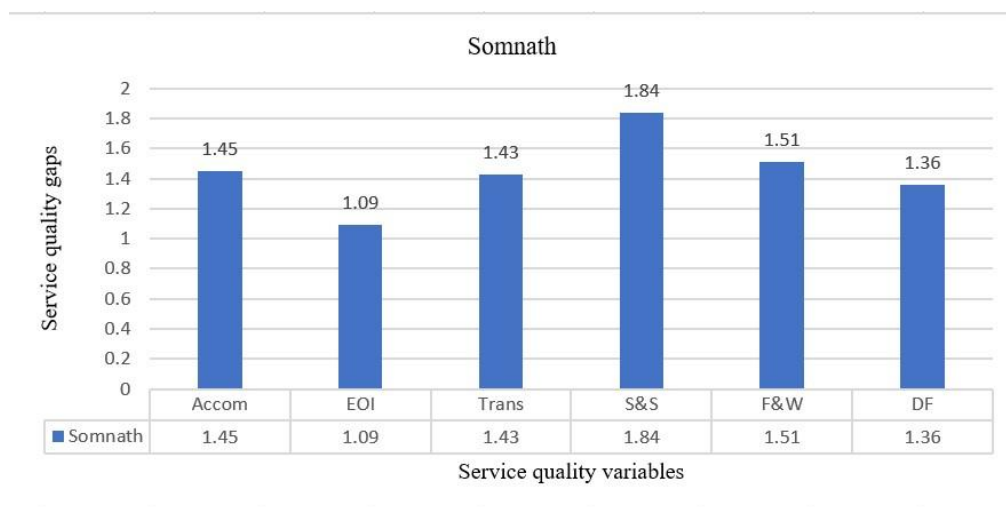
These positive gaps indicate to the following

1. Hygiene is maintained in terms of food.
2. Availability of clean packaged drinking water at the destination
3. Availability of preferred Choices of food items
4. Availability of Proper Walkable Road.

To conclude, the gap analysis at Nageshwar shows a huge room for improvement in various aspects of service quality.

#### vii) Somnath

**Figure 8.7: Service quality gaps in Somnath**



Source: Own compilation

The largest positive gaps in Somnath were Presence of security (police/forces) at the destination (2.108), Availability of proper prevention measures for hazardous situation (1.899), Necessary first aid to be available at the destination (1.665), Availability of accommodation near the destination (1.671), Fair price of the accommodation available (1.513), Facility to keep footwear (0.782), Expect to be safe while waiting in the queue at the pilgrimage destination (1.709).

These positive gaps indicate to the following

1. Presence of security personnel in the temple
2. Easy Availability and affordability of accommodation
3. Locker and footwear facility
4. Availability of proper prevention measures for hazardous situation
5. Availability of necessary first aid
6. Availability of reasonably priced accommodation

There were no negative gaps highlighted in the item-wise analysis of Somnath temple which indicates tourists' satisfaction for the service quality variables. The other *Jyotirlingas* should take this site as an example for improvement of service quality.

## Variable wise analysis

Figure 8.8: Site wise gap analysis



Source: Own compilation

### 1. Accommodation

Unacceptable quality: Kedarnath, Baidyanath Dham, and Mahakaleshwar all showed negative gaps in perception versus expectation, indicating undesirable quality. This is because of the following reasons:

Accommodations in Kedarnath exceed the number of tourists coming to the pilgrimage site. The existing accommodations are not fairly priced. There is a demand supply imbalance, due to which hotel owners charge more than three times the normal price. Only pre-booking through government enterprises like GMVN provides fair priced accommodation. GMVN dormitories are fairly priced for budget tourists, but the shared toilet near the helipad causes the toilets to be dirty and home to infections. The findings of the study are in line with the previous literature. Sati (2020) had concluded in her paper that accommodation facilities are not sufficient in Kedarnath region.

Some tourists responded that some accommodations near the Baidyanath Dham temple were dirty and unhygienic. People who travel on a very tight budget just for religious reasons frequently use Dharamshala, but these dharamshalas have a lot of problems. The common area stinks a lot, the toilets are dirty, and the entire premises of Dharmshalas are foul smelling.

As per the tourists, accommodations in Mahakaleshwar, both the hotels and dharmshalas, were fairly priced. The common public toilets in these Dharamshala were dirty. They are not cleaned for days. This is a common complaint of the tourists.

Quality Surprise: Kashi Vishwanath, Omkareshwar, Nageshwar, and Somnath all had positive gaps, indicating that the actual quality outperformed expectations.

The accommodations available near Kashi Vishwanath were both reasonably priced and adequate. Even female solo travellers felt welcomed and safe during their entire stay in accommodations near Kashi Vishwanath.

The accommodations near Omkareshwar are fairly priced. The provision of community based dharamshalas was a cause for concern for many tourists in the 21st century. Also, hotels in Omkareshwar do not give rooms to solo travellers due to an accident that took place in 2022. This causes distress to many solo tourists.

## **2. Desirable Facility**

Unacceptable Quality: Kedarnath, Omkareshwar, Mahakaleshwar, Baidyanath Dham, and Nageshwar have negative gaps, indicating substantial deficits in desirable facilities.

This is because of the following reasons:

In Kedarnath, there is an absence of a wheelchair facility, locker facility, or footwear facility near the pilgrimage site, causing distress to tourists. There is no ramp for the elderly and disabled as well.

In Omkareshwar, the steps leading to the temple are risky and steep. Accessibility is a problem at the pilgrimage site. There is an absence of a wheelchair facility, locker facility, or footwear facility. The shopkeepers selling the prasad and flowers tend to keep footwear in their shops.

In Mahakaleshwar, there is a wheelchair facility and ramp for the elderly and disabled. But the locker facility is still unavailable. Even foot wear is kept disorganized in the place allotted for it.

The Baidyanath Dham lacks wheelchair facilities, locker facilities, or footwear facilities. The shopkeepers selling sweets tend to keep footwear in their shops, but even they do not assure the safety of the footwear.

Quality Surprise: Kashi Vishwanath and Somnath reported positive gaps, indicating that facilities exceeded expectations.

There are wheelchair facilities, locker facilities, and footwear facilities at both pilgrimage sites. This raises the accessibility of these pilgrimage sites for the elderly and disabled. Our findings are in line with the findings of Gassiot Melian et al., (2016) who stated accessibility of pilgrimage sites is an important factor in predicting tourist satisfaction.

### **3. Ease of information and proper management**

Unacceptable Quality: Kedarnath, Omkareshwar, Mahakaleshwar, and Baidyanath Dham all had negative gaps, indicating inadequate management and a lack of knowledge. This is because of the following reasons:

- There is an absence of a help desk and guides across all these pilgrimage sites. Many tourists reported losing their way due to this lack of information.
- There is no proper office for temple management at the above-mentioned pilgrimage sites.
- The queue management is worse across the above-mentioned pilgrimage sites.
- The street vendors are haphazardly present across the vicinity of the pilgrimage sites, causing distress to the tourists.

Quality Surprise: Kashi Vishwanath and Somnath had positive gaps, indicating better-than-expected management.

- The grievance management at Kashi and Somnath was easy, efficient, and quick. The officials present at the site are easily approachable for grievance management.
- There is proper management of street vendors at these sites.

- Although guides were absent even at these two sites, the security personnel at all checkpoints ensured easy navigation.

Not Statistically Significant: Nageshwar's gap was not statistically significant.

- Although the gaps were not statistically significant, Nageshwar has no temple management committee to address tourist grievances. There are no guides or help desks at all.

#### **4. Food and Water**

Quality Surprise: All venues except Baidyanath Dham had positive gaps, with food and water services exceeding expectations.

There was an availability of fairly priced food items across all destinations. Nageshwar faces a problem of sour water, but that is an ongoing problem for tourists and locals alike.

Not Statistically Significant: Baidyanath Dham revealed no significant difference in perceptions and expectations.

- Although the gaps were not statistically significant, some tourists complained of unhygienic or oily food being sold outside the pilgrimage site.

#### **5. Safety and Security**

Unacceptable Quality: Omkareshwar, Baidyanath Dham, and Nageshwar have negative gaps, indicating serious safety and security concerns.

- Omkareshwar had poor security on the premises. Queues are easily broken, and there is always a chance of a stampede. There was a lack of necessary first aid on the temple premises.
- Although Baidyanath Dham had adequate security, the unmanaged crowd always had a risk of stampede. There are first aid medical help desks near the premises during *saawan* when *kanwariyas* arrive. But the same is absent in other months.
- Security personnel are absent from the Nageshwar premises. There was a lack of necessary first aid on the temple premises. Even medical shops are absent outside the temple.

Quality Surprise: Kashi Vishwanath, Mahakaleshwar, and Somnath showed positive gaps, indicating higher than predicted safety.

- There is efficient security in Kashi Vishwanath, Mahakaleshwar, and Somnath who are helpful and ensure a smooth tourist experience.
- The tourists feel safe during their visit across all three sites.
- Necessary first aid is also available on the temple premises across Kashi Vishwanath, Mahakaleshwar, and Somnath.

Not Statistically Significant: Kedarnath demonstrated a statistically negligible positive gap.

## **6. Transportation**

Unacceptable Quality: Kedarnath, Mahakaleshwar, and Baidyanath Dham all showed negative gaps, indicating transportation concerns.

In Kedarnath, there is a lack of public buses. Private buses charge unreasonably, causing problems for tourists.

In Mahakaleshwar and Baidyanath Dham, auto drivers operating outside the pilgrimage site charge relentlessly from tourists.

Quality Surprise: Kashi Vishwanath, Omkareshwar, Nageshwar, and Somnath showed positive gaps, indicating that transport services exceeded expectations.

Kashi Vishwanath and Somnath had reasonable, fairly priced autorickshaws operating outside the temple. However, some tourists in Kashi Vishwanath complained of cabs cheating them due to the language barrier.

Since Omkareshwar and Nageshwar are relatively isolated from the main town, tourists use buses to reach them. Buses are fairly priced and easily available.

The analysis revealed that unacceptable quality was most prevalent in Kedarnath and Baidyanath Dham, particularly in areas such as accommodation, desirable facilities, ease of information, and transport.

Quality surprise was most noticeable in Kashi Vishwanath, Somnath, and Nageshwar, where services frequently exceeded expectations, notably for food and water, and transportation. The gaps highlight key areas for improvement, particularly in accommodation and transportation for several pilgrimage sites, to better fit tourist expectations. The findings indicate a diverse assessment of service quality across the

seven pilgrimage locations, with some outperforming expectations and others requiring major improvements in many service parameters.

## 8.1.2 Major findings from analysis of Objective 2(a)

### 1. Kedarnath

**Figure 8.9: Supply side problems in Kedarnath**



Source: Own compilation

**Supply Problems:** High demand and the difficulty of refilling perishable supplies are the key causes of Kedarnath's significant supply issues during peak season. Shopkeepers face shortage difficulties, especially with prestige and luxury products, as well as specific items like almonds, cashews, and fruits. Transportation and traffic congestion hamper timely supply delivery, resulting in frequent delays. Although some merchants can function without any supply challenges due to their tiny operations, larger enterprises struggle to maintain adequate stock levels.

**Operational Problems:** Operational problems vary depending on the type of business, but they usually include inventory management and ensuring continuous operations during periods of high demand. Retail organisations face issues in maintaining stock levels, whereas hotels face challenges in managing high occupancy rates and providing a smooth check-in and check-out experience. Weather has a considerable impact on the quality of perishable products, making management especially difficult. Furthermore, single-person businesses bear the task of managing inventory and client flow

independently. Nonetheless, a few smaller businesses report minor operational challenges due to their size.

**Manpower Problems:** Businesses have significant problems maintaining talented employees and struggling to retain their manpower. Some personnel concerns can be resolved because many business owners rely on family members to assist or handle their company independently. Nonetheless, the scarcity of skilled personnel remains a major challenge, worsened by the need to hire from remote locations such as Rishikesh and Haridwar. Although some smaller businesses report no substantial manpower issues, seasonal staffing and high turnover rates complicate dependable business operations.

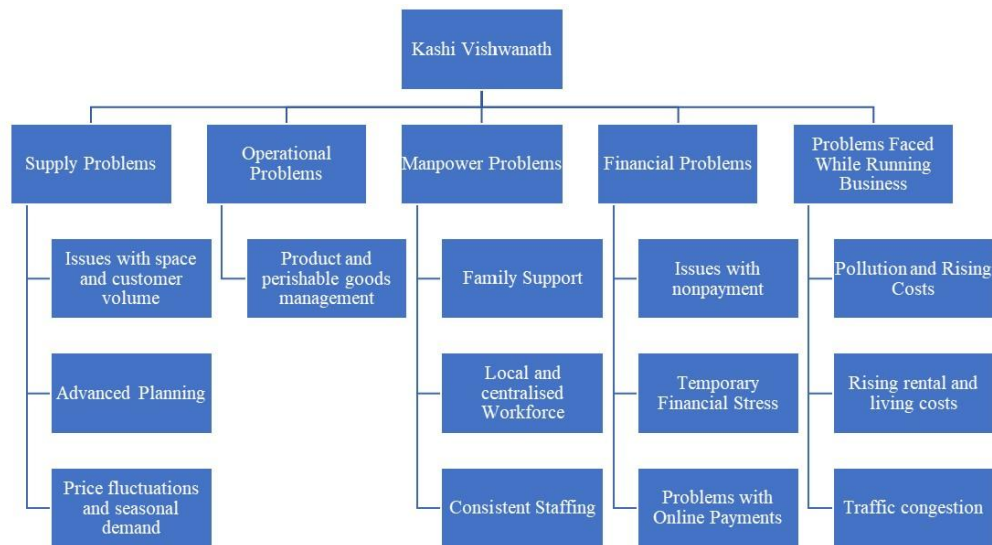
**Financial Problems:** Financial stability differs between businesses. Many businesses report no financial concerns, while others rely on loans and seasonal sales to stay open. Online payment issues and consumer nonpayment pose financial hazards. Price changes in food and ingredients make it challenging to maintain constant quality and pricing. Addressing these financial difficulties is essential to enhancing the overall economic health of Kedarnath's enterprises.

**Other Problems:** Other challenges include constraints on infrastructure and the effect of weather on sales. Businesses lacking adequate infrastructure, such as extended roofs, suffer during bad weather. Competitiveness and the need to maintain consistent standards remain continuous challenges, as do specialised commercial challenges such as food safety and dealing with counterfeit items. Tourist conduct also causes issues, notably impolite behaviour during peak hours. However, some businesses report no serious concerns, demonstrating that their experiences vary.

**Problems Faced While Running Business in Kedarnath:** The influx of tourists has caused various challenges for businesses in Kedarnath. Traffic congestion has a substantial influence on everyday operations and access to key services. Locals are dissatisfied with Kedarnath's shift from a sacred location to a tourist magnet, which they regard as chaotic. Additional issues include impacts on local infrastructure, rising living costs, and shifts in weather patterns.

## **2. Kashi Vishwanath**

**Figure 8.10: Supply side problems in Kashi Vishwanath**



Source: Own compilation

**Supply Problems:** Limited space and high consumer traffic during peak seasons pose considerable obstacles for tiny establishments in Kashi Vishwanath. Some firms benefit from proactive planning since it allows them to place orders ahead of time and avoid stock shortages. Many respondents reported no supply concerns, indicating adequate infrastructure and supply chain. However, price fluctuations owing to seasonal demand, particularly for perishable items, present issues that must be addressed.

**Operational Problems:** The vast majority of respondents reported no operational concerns, indicating effortless business operations. However, some people struggle with managing perishable items and product availability, which can result in spoilage and financial losses.

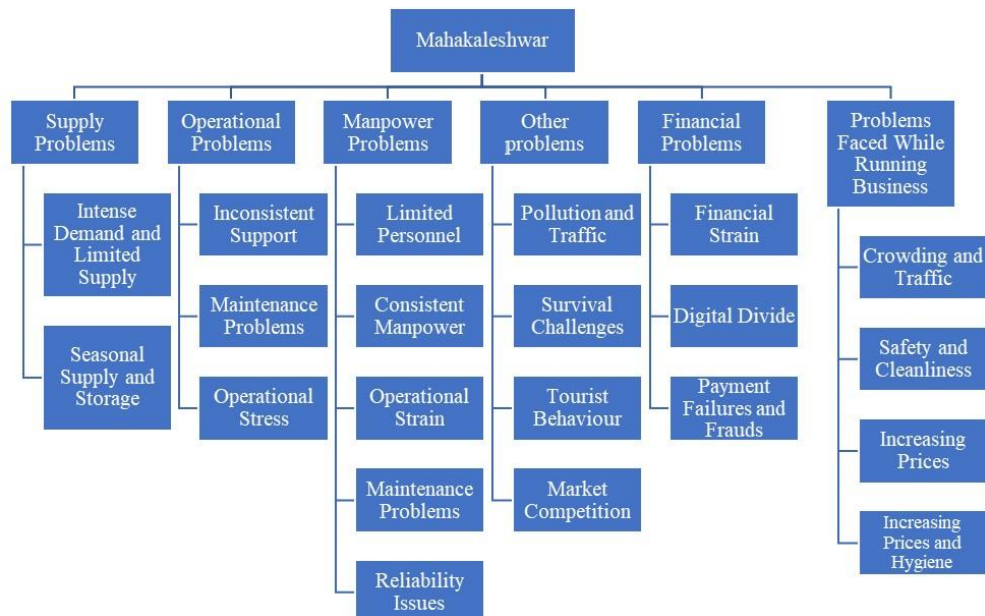
**Manpower Problems:** A lot of businesses benefit from family support and local workers, which makes staffing easier. Some businesses use centralised staffing strategies or have steady, long-term staff to preserve stability. A large percentage of respondents reported no manpower concerns, demonstrating the effectiveness of local employment processes.

**Financial Problems:** Nonpayment issues, particularly online payment failures, cause financial difficulties for some organisations. Seasonal financial stress, which necessitates borrowing during peak periods, is also cause for concern. Nonetheless, many businesses reported no financial issues, showing overall financial soundness.

**Problems Faced While Running Business in Kashi Vishwanath:** The residents and suppliers operating in Kashi Vishwanath had many complaints to make. They suffer pollution, a rise in living costs, and increasing rental charges as a result of tourism. Additional issues include overcrowding and a lack of cleanliness, which worsen the standard of living, and traffic congestion during peak tourist seasons makes these problems worse. Therefore, there is a need to address these problems for a balanced tourist and resident well-being.

### 3. Mahakaleshwar

**Figure 8.11:** Supply side problems in Mahakaleshwar



**Source:** Own compilation

**Supply Problems:** Due to the developed infrastructure and the location of the pilgrimage site in an urban dwelling, the business owners in Mahakaleshwar faced no major supply issues. However, during peak pilgrim season, the demand for Lotus, *Dhatura*, *Bel* leaves exceed the supply, which causes shortage. The seasonal weather changes also have an impact on availability of certain flowers that are offered to Lord Shiva. Most of the flower sellers are small vendors who have no access to cold storage. There is some transportation issues during peak season, like delays in delivery which raises the operational cost and causes restocking delays.

**Manpower Problems:** The respondents interviewed reported facing no major issues. Most of them had been running a family-based business for years and hence had family

support. However, there were concerns regarding the manpower shortages during peak pilgrim season. Some business owners had a budget crunch, due to which they were not in a position to hire more employees. Others also faced reliability concerns during tourist season.

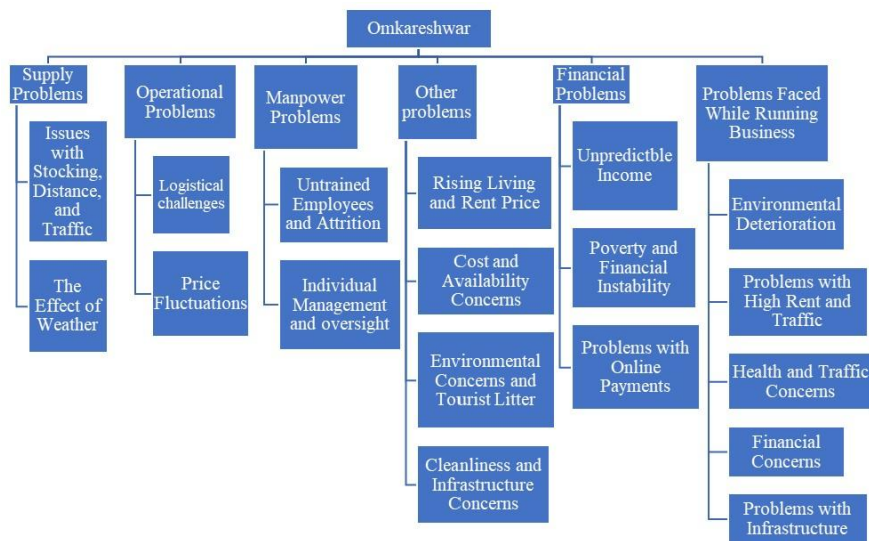
**Financial Problems:** The financial problems varied across businesses. While most suppliers claimed to have no financial issues, small vendors had a difficult time making a living. Online payment was the most prevalent issue faced by them, which led to failed payments and non-payments. There is a clear adaptation issue in businesses. The rising cost of rental space, products and even essentials were cause of income instability for some. Apart from the affluent suppliers, some small vendors were in need of financial assistance.

**Other Problems:** The respondents raised the issue of pollution and the rise in traffic. This was because of overcrowding and tourist influx. The regulatory measures against street sellers also caused them discomfort as they are not in shape to hire a ship and operate fully. The littering by tourists was disliked by the respondents. Also, the severe competition outside the pilgrimage site was fiery, and suppliers and vendors often feared their survival.

**Problems Faced While Running Business in Mahakaleshwar:** As the number of tourists grows, traffic congestion and overcrowding become a daily part of the resident's life. This overcrowding put strain on the city's infrastructure and other resources. The daily commute by residents and businesses becomes a challenge; navigating through the city becomes a challenge. Sociocultural impact like an increase in crimes like pickpocketing becomes prevalent. The rise in rental and living costs adds to the financial burden. Cleanliness issues have also been highlighted near the pilgrimage site, which needs supervision from the management.

#### 4. Omkareshwar

**Figure 8.12:** Supply side problems in Omkareshwar



**Source:** Own compilation

**Supply Problems:** The vendors operating in Omkareshwar are of different economic capabilities. Small vendors do not face any major issues because their suppliers are based nearby, and their size of operations is also small. Other owners cited problems like issues in stock management during peak pilgrimage season, the long commute to restock goods, and the traffic during pilgrimage season. Other supply issues are availability of flowers during a particular season.

**Operational Problems:** Most respondents faced no operational issues while conducting business in Omkareshwar. However, some practical issues like traffic congestion and difficulty in restocking due to the same were reported. The increased tourist's activity in Omkareshwar also led to some price changes that were not welcomed by small vendors who already found it hard to make a living.

**Financial Problems:** While many business owners were somewhat satisfied with the income they had, a small number of them were having a hard time managing finances. They were poor and had income instability. Some of them had no idea about QR codes and online payments. This unpredictability of income and rise in expenses caused them despair. These small business vendors, particularly older women running small stalls, are in urgent need of financial assistance.

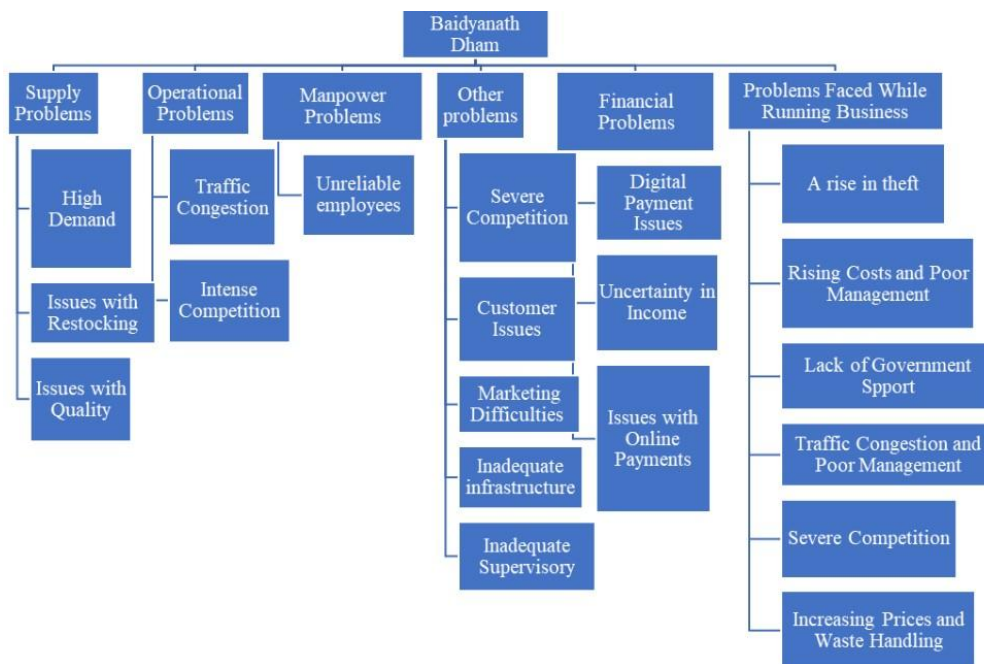
**Other Problems:** Apart from the various issues faced by business owners in Omkareshwar, the rise in living and rental costs is the most talked about. The tourists cause littering and pollution in the pilgrimage site that harms the sanctity of the place.

Additionally, the unclogged drains, inadequate infrastructure, congested Narmada Bridge, traffic congestion, and crowded, mismanaged vendors cause discomfort to the vendors. Addressing waste management is therefore both useful and essential for the upkeep and survival of the sacred pilgrimage site.

**Problems Faced While Running Business in Omkareshwar:** The residents of Omkareshwar who ran the business near the temple premises faced numerous problems due to overtourism. The environmental degradation is a major issue. Pollution has increased, and the waste management in Omkareshwar is poor. The rental costs are high, and traffic delays cause frustration to the residents. Sometimes traffic delays also worsen medical issues. The neglect by the government caused dissatisfaction to the residents who run the business in Omkareshwar. The infrastructure in Omkareshwar is in dire need of attention.

## 5. Baidyanath Dham

**Figure 8.13:** Supply side problems in Baidyanath Dham



**Source:** Own compilation

**Supply Problems:** There is a consistent efficient supply chain in the city of Deoghar. This is evident by the absence of major supply issues being reported by the respondents. They, however, reported general supply issues for highly demanded products during peak season, especially *Shravani Mela* during August. There are several restrictions to entry of large trucks and supply transports during the same time, which causes some supply

restocking delays. Some businesses had concerns regarding adulterated or fake products, and others were concerned about the increasing competition near the pilgrimage site.

**Operational Problems:** Respondents reported no major operational issues; they had satisfactory efficiency. The narrow lanes near the Baidyanath Dham are a constant cause of traffic congestion, which often interrupts business operations in the area. The severe competition was highlighted in terms of food safety standards. To tackle these problems, the traffic needs to be managed well, and guidelines relating to food safety standards need to be implemented and monitored.

**Manpower Problems:** The shops operating near Baidyanath Dham often hire daily wage labourers and staffs coming from the small villages of Jharkhand and Bihar. These labourers are often seasonal farmers seeking short term jobs. They quit and ran away after working for a few months. This causes problems for the employer. A lack of steady and unreliable workforce is a problem for these businesses. However, this is a case for small grocery shops and small *dhabas* where the owners do not pay much attention to where these staffs are coming from. However, a high-end hotel cited hiring his staff from a reputed hospitality college and developing a loyal, dedicated staff.

**Financial Problems:** Most businesses running near Baidyanath Dham had a steady economic condition. The poor literacy levels of some small vendors cause them adaptability issues to online payment methods. They are wither scared of online transactions or get deceived due to non-payments. They also face financial issues and are in need of financial assistance from the government. The fluctuations in daily income cause financial instability for such small vendors.

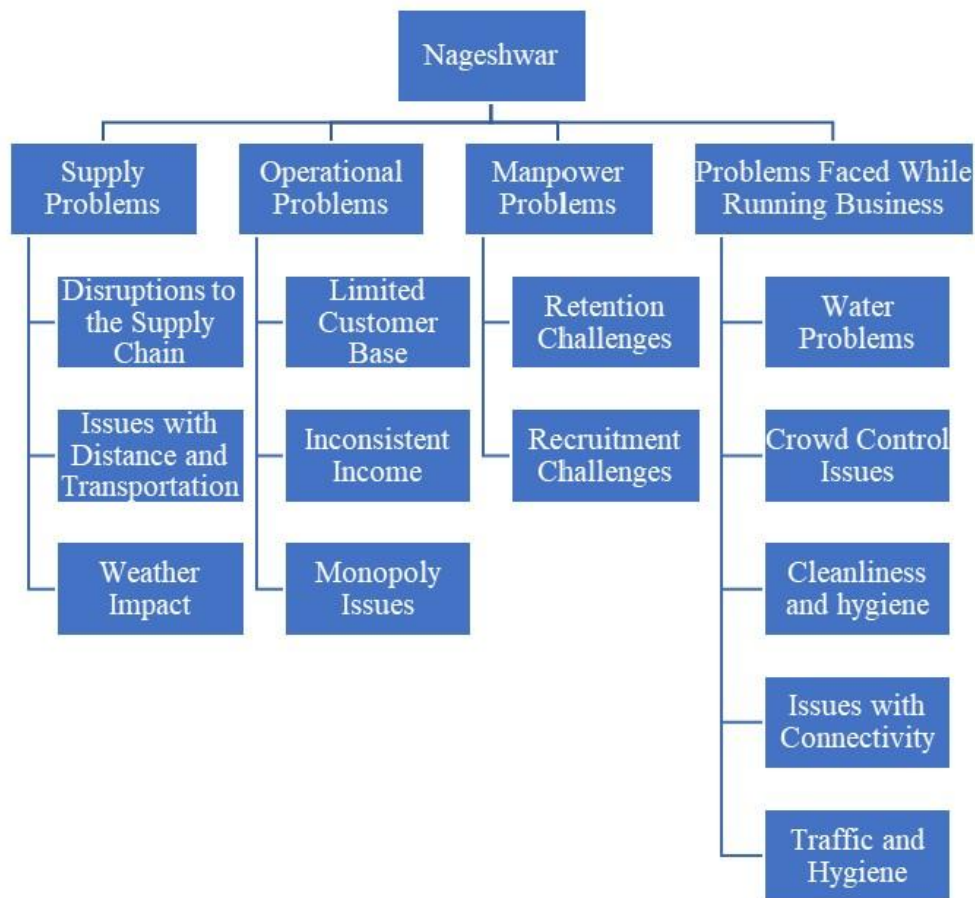
**Other Problems:** Business owners were generally content with their operations. However, the rising competition in the market was a cause of concern. As Baidyanath Dham is developing more, new businesses are coming up, which causes worry to existing businesses. The broken roads in the already narrow lanes near the pilgrimage site worsen the infrastructural issues. The shopkeepers operating complain of poor management, overcrowding, and the absence of government support. The management needs to pay attention to the issues not only during Shravani mela but all through the year.

**Problems Faced While Running Business in Baidyanath Dham:** The influx of tourists causes a number of problems for businesses and residents of Baidyanath Dham. The safety concern is the most highlighted. Instances of an increase in theft denote a security

concern that needs to be resolved. The businesses complain of the rise in the price of rental space. Unfortunately, this rise has not been on par with the rise in income. The shops and spaces near the pilgrimage site have become expensive to rent, and the competition among the shops has worsened in the last few years. However, these are general business concerns by the business owners.

## 6. Nageshwar

**Figure 8.14:** Supply side problems in Nageshwar



**Source:** Own compilation

**Supply Problems:** The supply problems in Nageshwar varied across business types. However, water is a yearlong problem for residents and business owners of Nageshwar. Some supply chain hiccups are caused when wholesalers are not able to restock on time considering the isolation of the city from other major cities. This remote isolation from major cities like Surat, Ahmedabad, and Somnath causes delays in restocking during peak season. Most of these businesses run because of the crowd visiting Dwarkadhish temple.

**Operational Problems** The shopkeepers operate with a really small customer base, which leads to a fluctuation in income. The business constantly struggles to make a consistent and stable income due to the seasonal nature of pilgrimage tourism in Dwarkadhish and Nageshwar. Some small vendors spoke of monopolies by large and older established stores that hurt these small vendors. However, despite these issues, they are contended with running business in Dwarka.

### **Manpower Problems**

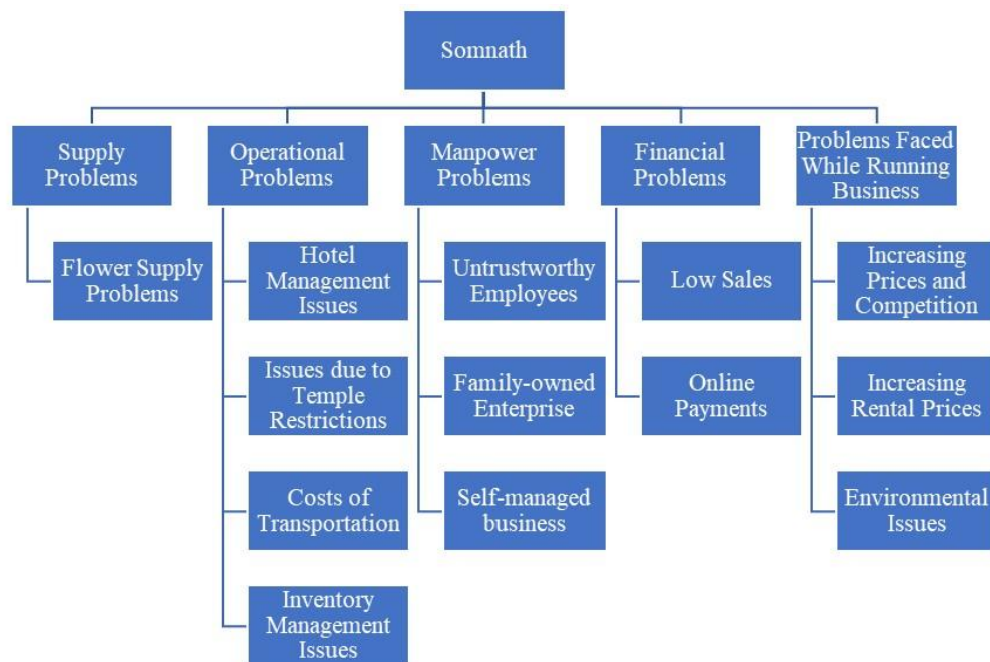
The respondents reported no major manpower difficulties and showed an overall satisfaction with the staff available. Some retention challenges exist during off season because these staff relocate to major cities for better opportunities. Finding and hiring reliable staff becomes a challenge when pilgrim season starts. Even during special festivals and busy seasons, hiring and retaining staff is a challenge for businesses like small restaurants. They need staff for petty jobs like cleaning tables, washing utensils, etc., which sometimes becomes an issue.

### **Problems Faced While Running Business in Nageshwar**

The most prevalent and ongoing problem while running a business near Nageshwar is the water crisis. Tourists complain of sour water available for drinking as well as for daily use. Even small tea vendors have to buy packaged water to make tea. There is a degree of cleanliness concerns developing in the small city of Dwarka with the growing tourism for Dwarkadhish. The tourists are careless and throw garbage here and there. This disregard for cleanliness in a pilgrimage site is alarming. The connectivity and transportation given the isolated location of the city worsen the issue. However, in spite of the issues, the resilience of the business owners is highlighted by the fact that they report no major concern and regard this as a general part of running a business.

## **7. Somnath**

**Figure 8.15:** Supply side problems in Somnath



**Source:** Own compilation

**Supply Problems:** The urban infrastructure and well-developed transportation network of the Somnath area cause no major supply issues for the business owners. The issues of availability of flowers due to the adverse climate of Gujarat are a concern for daily wage earners. The businesses working on a small scale also had concerns regarding expensive transportation and stocking delays.

**Operational Problems:** The businesses running in Somnath applauded the cooperative business environment in the city. The well-planned infrastructure of Somnath contributes to operational efficiency for the shop owners. Although some business-related issues exist, such as hotel management and inventory management concerns, but these issues highlight the need for improved planning during pilgrim season.

**Manpower Problems:** Most of the businesses interviewed in Somnath are family businesses. They have dependable manpower and had no manpower problems. However, the challenge highlighted by lodge owners was the manpower poaching by competing lodges. This always leads to an ongoing recruitment challenge. The business therefore relied on their family members. The sole proprietors, however, raised concerns regarding their huge workload during tourist season.

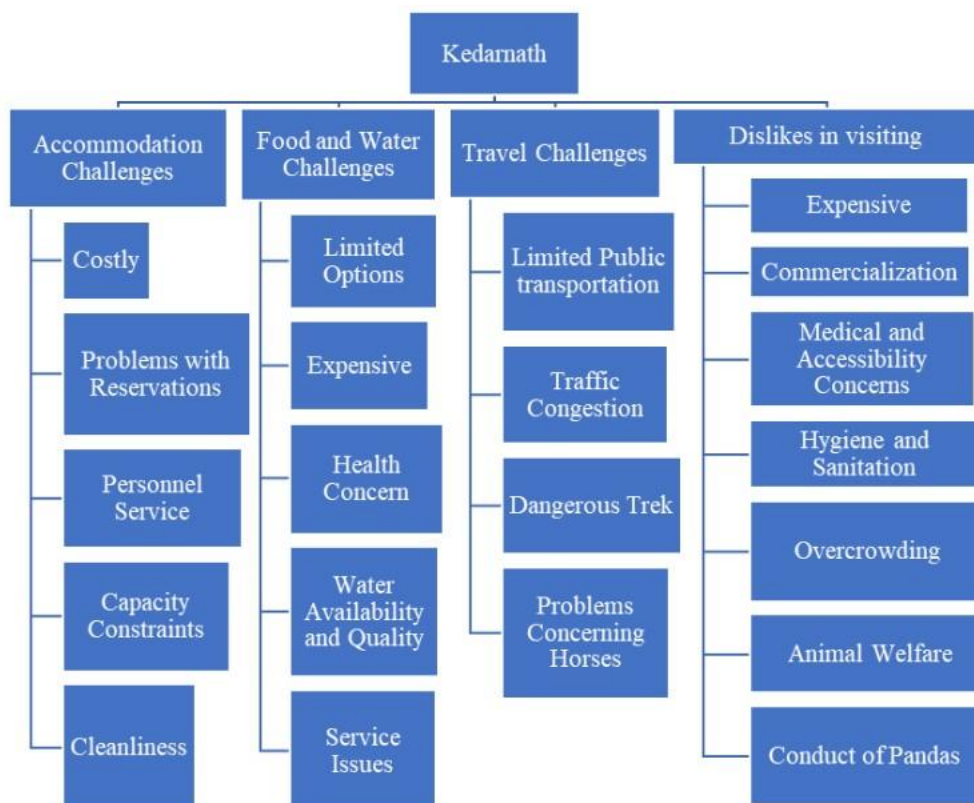
**Financial Problems:** The supportive government policies and strong financial infrastructure led to no major financial difficulties by the respondents. One of the respondents (a flower seller) had a financial issue because of unstable revenue. Apart from that, the general business environment in Somnath is positive and favourable.

**Problems Faced While Running Business in Somnath:** Plastic pollution is the most highlighted problem in Somnath. The residents and businesses get annoyed by the tourists' disregard for the environment. A general increase in expenses for both housing and business units was also stressed upon. However, the businesses showed no other major concern.

### 8.1.3 Major findings from analysis of Objective 2 (b)

#### 1. Kedarnath

**Figure 8.16:** Demand side problems in Kedarnath



**Source:** Own compilation

#### Accommodation Challenges

The tourist responses regarding accommodation issues highlighted many issues. The unreasonable prices for lodging were a problem. It all added to extra financial strain for

the tourists. The demand supply mechanism caused the accommodation prices to be varied. However, the tourists who prebooked through GMVN had fewer complaints to make. The service quality at accommodation facilities varied too. The dormitory toilets were dirty and added to hygiene problems for some respondents. Some respondents found the private accommodation staff to be rude, whereas the GMVN staff were regarded as friendly and helpful. The overcrowding at Kedarnath is the root cause of these problems. There are fewer accommodations than the number of tourists arriving in Kedarnath. These findings indicate a need for price regulation, improving sanitation in public washrooms, staff training, and a need to set up additional accommodation facilities for the increasing number of tourists.

### **Food and water challenges**

Food and water are a cause of concern for tourists visiting Kedarnath. The special diet needs of the varied population are not addressed by the existing food options at the pilgrimage site. the food options like dal (pulses), roti (chapati), Maggie noodles, and *aloo* paratha (stuffed potato bread). The issue is worsening at night. This situation necessitates the improvement in food variety, increased affordability, and providing some healthy alternatives to these food items.

### **Travel challenges**

The tourists face many travel issues while coming to Kedarnath. The limited number of government buses is a problem that is worsened by the unfair prices charged by the private buses and cabs. The trek from Gaurikund to Kedarnath is broken at places and has been referred to as broken, slippery, and hazardous. The bad weather makes the problem worse. The use of horses for transportation causes problems for both the users and the trekkers. Due to the unregulated business of horses, they are overworked and tumble down the path sometimes. Accidents are frequent, and these horses cause obstruction for even people who walk.

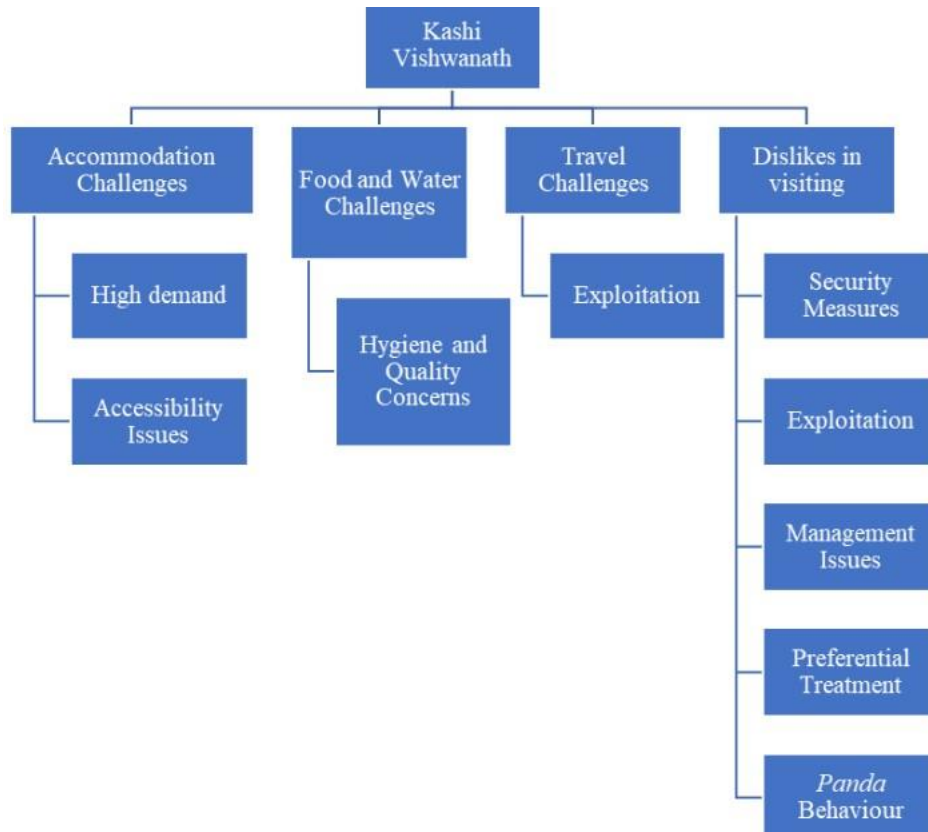
### **Dislikes in visiting Kedarnath**

Tourists visiting Kedarnath faced a lot of challenges, like unfair prices of food and lodging that put a strain on their finances. The emergency medical facilities and absence of ramps and wheelchairs have been regarded as severe accessibility concerns. The public bathrooms and mobile toilets are dirty, causing hygienic issues. The above problems are

worsened by the high number of tourists visiting the place. People trek without gear and are susceptible to accidents. The panda behaviour, which includes asking for unnecessary Dakshina and queue breaking, harms the sanctity of the pilgrimage site.

## 2. Kashi Vishwanath

**Figure 8.17:** Demand side problems in Kashi Vishwanath



**Source:** Own compilation

### Accommodation Challenges

The primary challenges in Kashi Vishwanath are limited supply and high demand. Tourists face problems with unreliable online booking systems, which often result in hidden fees and wrong representations of lodgings being booked. Accessibility concerns caused by small roads hamper transportation and access, especially for people with mobility issues. However, hotels near the temple and the river are in high demand due to their convenience, which enhances the pilgrimage experience. Pre-booking can help alleviate some of these issues, resulting in a more seamless encounter. Despite these concerns, many respondents reported lodgings to be typically available, comfortable, and inexpensive, albeit frequently necessitating much study and advance planning.

Addressing these concerns will necessitate enhancing booking reliability, transit accessibility, and the availability of low-cost lodgings near major attractions.

### **Food and water challenges**

According to respondents who tried everything from street food to dosa for breakfast, visitors to Kashi (Varanasi) praised the city for its variety and number of culinary options, which appeal to a wide range of tastes and preferences. The accessibility and availability of food and drink were also praised, with many stating that they had no trouble getting food around the city, even if proper meals were not always available just outside the temple. Furthermore, respondents consistently reported food and water to be reasonably priced, making the city accessible to a wide spectrum of people. However, issues persist, particularly in terms of the hygiene and quality of street food, as well as the difficulty of finding nutritious and balanced meals near temples. Addressing these concerns is critical for improving the entire dining experience and preserving Varanasi's reputation as a welcome pilgrimage destination.

### **Travel challenges**

Tourists visiting Kashi Vishwanath had a balance of travel challenges and wonderful experiences. The primary issue was exploitation and overpricing by local transport operators, including deceitful ways to fool tourists and overcharging by autorickshaw and Uber drivers, mainly in the narrow lanes around the temple, which worsens the difficulty and cost of reaching the pilgrimage site. Regardless of these issues, the tourists unanimously applauded the experience they had. The trains, the battery-operated rickshaws, and the rental bikes were applauded for being so convenient. The city's connectivity is also praised wholeheartedly.

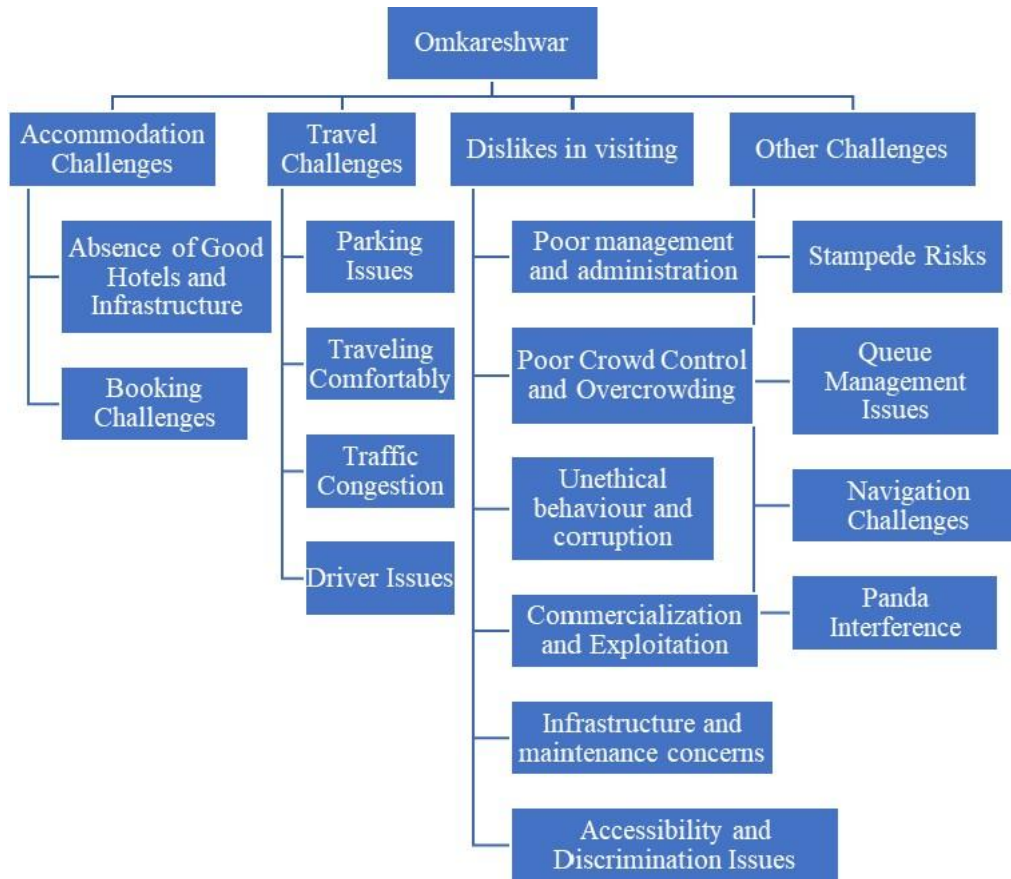
### **Dislikes in visiting Kashi Vishwanath**

Tourists faced a number of challenges that had an impact on their entire experience. Some had an issue with frisking by the security; others complained about the *panda's* behaviour. Exploitative practises by vendors were questioned. The incidents of regular theft and pickpocketing around the temple invoke a sense of fear in tourists. The solo or first-time travellers face issues due to lack of assistance, and the improper queue management overwhelms the tourist. The system of biased treatment based on economic situation

fosters inequity and makes the tourist feel bad. This business-like behaviour exhibited by the pandas undermines the social ethic to be followed in the temple premises.

### 3. Omkareshwar

**Figure 8.18:** Demand side problems in Omkareshwar



**Source:** Own compilation

#### **Accommodation Challenges**

The respondents were disappointed with the type of lodging available, denoting the absence of good hotels in the pilgrimage site. Some booking issues are prevalent, along with the problem of not giving room to a single occupant. Community based lodgings are both lauded for their services and questioned for their existence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These infrastructural issues need to be resolved to provide a better environment for tourists.

#### **Food and Water Challenges**

The tourists did not face problems with food and water availability in Omkareshwar. All the respondents unanimously stated the availability of necessary food items. There was variety in the meal being served, and the quality was satisfactory. The variety of food was

appropriate for both North Indian taste and Gujarati tourists. The reasonable price was another positive aspect of the food available at the site. The affordability made the religious experience comfortable and satisfactory.

### **Travel Challenges**

Parking was a challenge faced by many tourists. Poorly managed parking spaces cause problems for tourists coming by their own vehicle. Tourists who used the buses were quite satisfied with the experience. The Chartered buses were both a pleasant experience and cost effective. The prominent issue was traffic congestion during peak pilgrimage season, which caused delays. Problems with navigation were also observed, and a need for a sign board was necessitated.

### **Other Challenges**

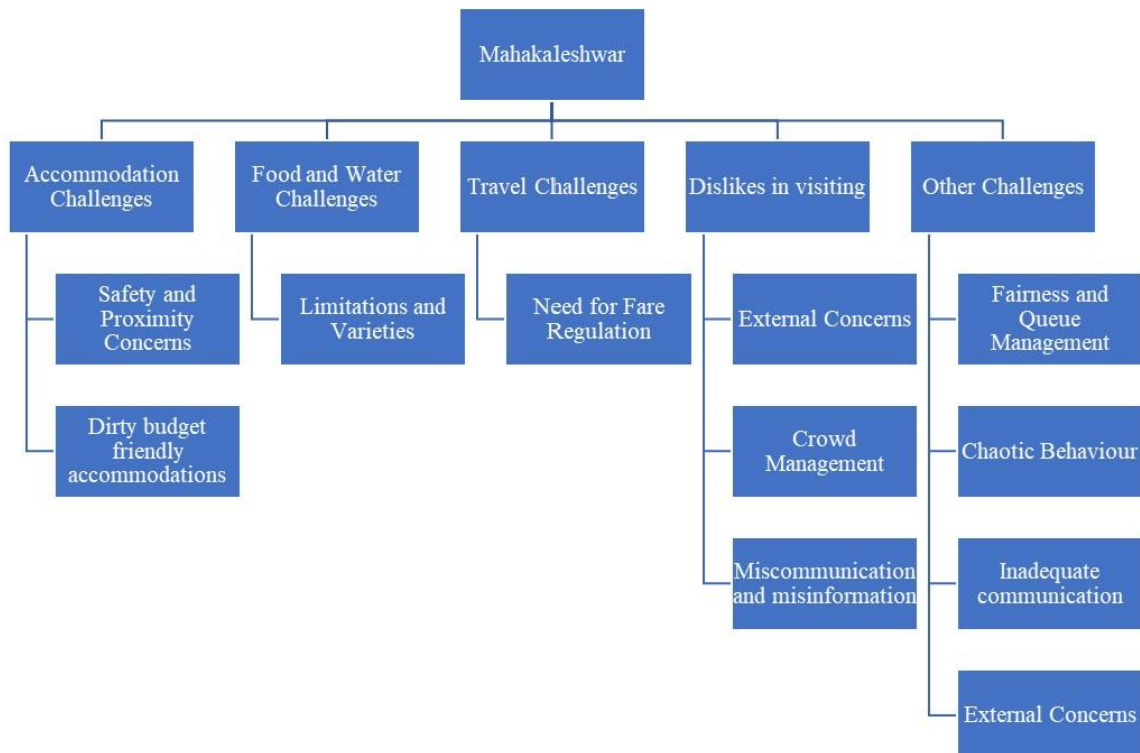
The pandas were a cause of concern for tourists. Their rude, disrespectful behaviour and the tendency to take *dakshina* in lieu of fast darshan caused chaos in the temple. The language barrier was a problem for some tourists who lost their way across the pilgrimage site. The crowd and queue management were severely criticised for mismanagement. The risk of stampede was highlighted by several tourists, and a need for better management is a necessity.

### **Dislikes in visiting Omkareshwar**

Several issues were highlighted by tourists in their visit to Omkareshwar. Some stressed the poor management, which led to chaos on the premises; others criticised the unethical practises by the pandas. The place requires maintenance, and the surroundings are dirty. The temple was inaccessible for the elderly and disabled, which further made the experience poor. The inquiry about caste was disliked by tourists who chose not to disclose their caste.

## **4. Mahakaleshwar**

**Figure 8.19:** Demand side problems in Mahakaleshwar



**Source:** Own compilation

### **Accommodation Challenges**

The tourists expressed concerns regarding the safety of accommodations available near the pilgrimage site. The online description of accommodation was so deceptive that tourists failed to realise it while prebooking. This caused disappointment and dissatisfaction among the tourists. The last-minute booking caused another set of problems for the tourist. They could not find affordable and acceptable lodging, and there were also incidences of overcharging. The Dharamshalas were regarded as budget friendly alternatives by the tourists, but the hygiene concerns and general public toilets caused discomfort to the tourists.

### **Food and Water Challenges**

The food available in areas near the Mahakaleshwar was praised by most of the tourists visiting, who claimed it to be acceptable, available, affordable, and varied. The easy availability of food was the general perception. However, certain tourists also noted the absence of certain delicacies and cuisines, i.e., South Indian food, giving room for improvement for the food vendors operating near the pilgrimage site.

### **Travel Challenges**

The tourists reportedly had a favourable experience in Mahakaleshwar. The smooth connectivity was commended by most of the tourists. The efficiency of public buses was notable in the responses. The Chartered buses were noteworthy praised by tourists as being affordable, efficient, and for running on accurate time. There were concerns regarding the unfair and unregulated prices charged by autorickshaws operating near the pilgrimage site. The autorickshaw owners charge unreasonable fees from tourists.

### **Other Challenges**

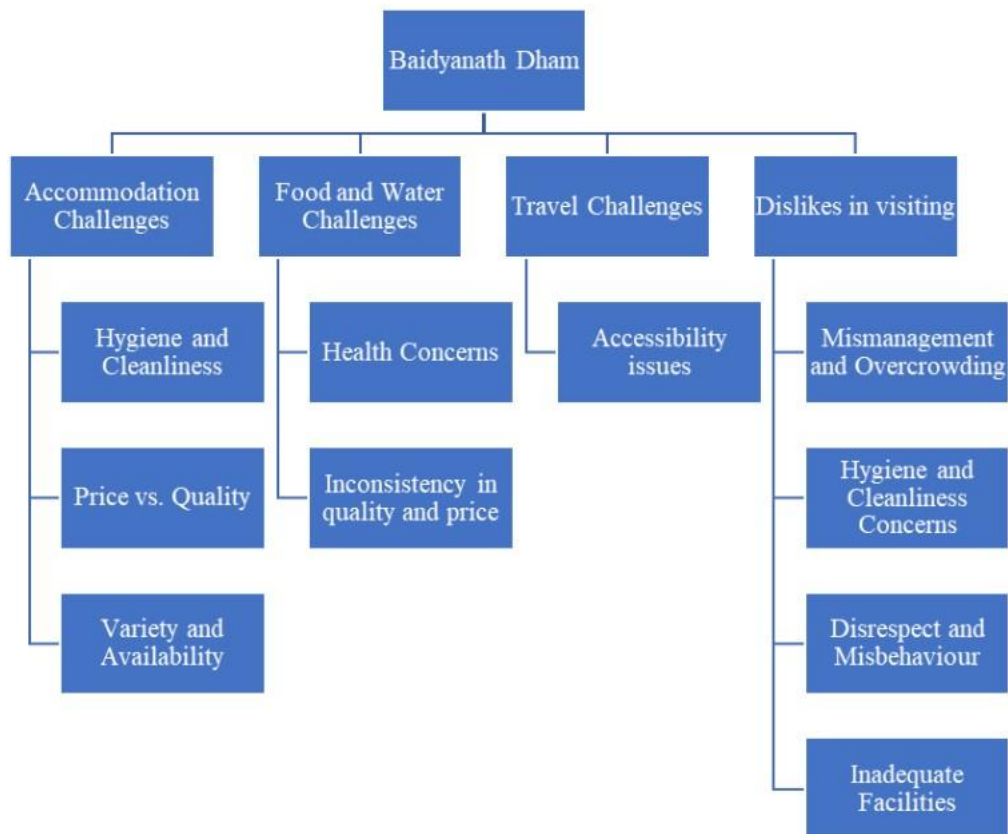
The VIP entry system and improper crowd management were causes of dissatisfaction for many tourists. Even the tourists were annoyed by the indecent behaviour of other tourists in front of the shrine. Clicking photographs while others are praying and trying to see the Lingam was a constant source of annoyance for devotees. Some tourists also complained of being inadequately uninformed. Absence of help desk and guidance caused them to miss Bhasma Aarti, which caused dismay to some tourists. The exploitative behaviour of shopkeepers running shops outside the temple misleads the tourists. Although the temple management was praised for the effective management, cleanliness, and upkeep, there were concerns regarding the VIP treatment and unequal treatment.

### **Dislikes in visiting Mahakaleshwar**

There were several causes of dissatisfaction and dislikes in Mahakaleshwar that had an impact on the overall pilgrimage experience. Some tourists raised concerns regarding the actions of sellers operating outside the temple, which they regarded as deceptive. The overcrowding, rude behaviour of priests, and the indecent conduct of other tourists were also significant sources of annoyance for some tourists. The crowd control was inefficient at times, as the tourists were being impatient in front of the shrine. This impatience disrupted the peace some devotees sought in the shrine area. Miscommunication and misinformation were strongly addressed by some tourists who had a language barrier.

## **5. Baidyanath Dham**

**Figure 8.20:** Demand side problems in Baidyanath Dham



**Source:** Own compilation

### **Accommodation Challenges**

There are major concerns relating to cleanliness and hygiene in the available accommodations near Baidyanath Dham. The tourists criticised the dirty dharamshalas and their toilets. The rooms were just manageable. This indicates the severe absence of basic hygiene in the lodging available near the temple. There is a clear difference between the price of accommodation and its cleanliness. Even when tourists chose a premium accommodation for their stay, they were disappointed by the personnel's careless attitude and disregard for basic cleanliness. While there is availability of different types of accommodation alternatives in the city, the quality of services varies. There are also repeat tourists who stay in the same accommodation over and over because it has met their expectations.

### **Food and Water Challenges**

Baidyanath Dham was praised for its easy availability and affordability of different types of food in the areas outside the temple. The tourists were able to easily locate the food

joints and eateries. They also commended the various types of food available to cater to the different requirements of different tourist segments. However, health concerns were raised by a few tourists with health issues like hypertension and diabetes who could not find any alternative and had to carry home-cooked, packed food for their visit. The tourists also complained about the prices of food being higher than the kind of food available. This leaves enough space for improvement.

### **Travel Challenges**

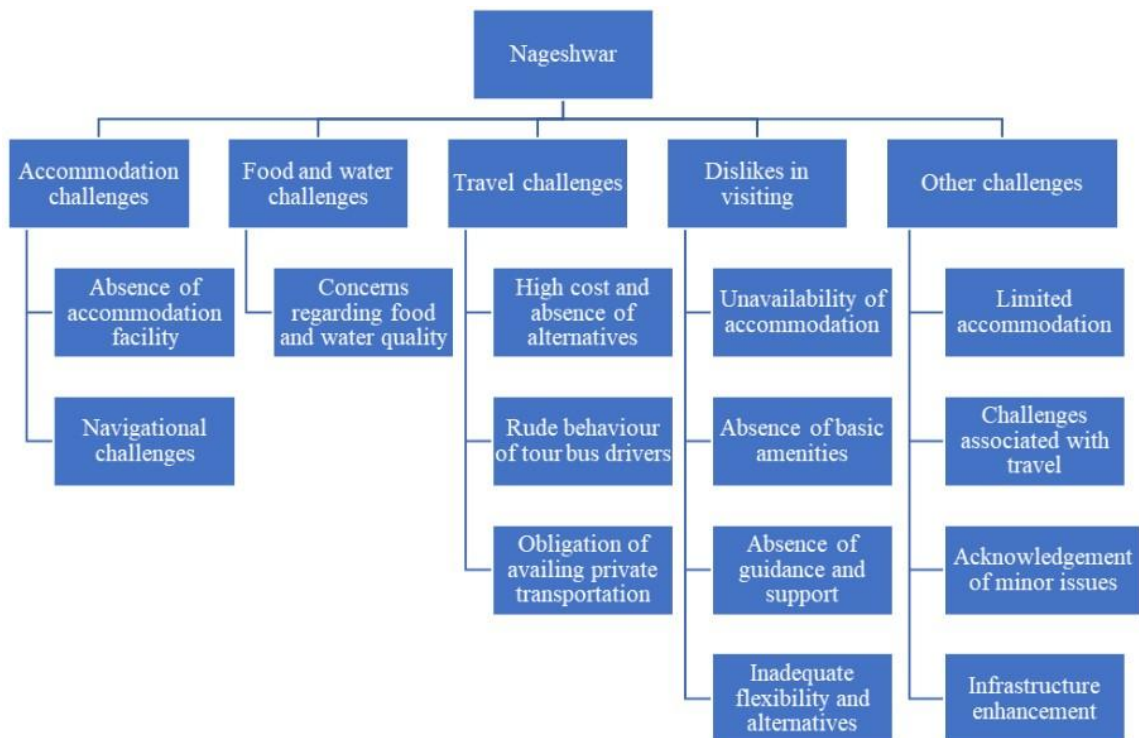
Travelling to Baidyanath Dham is a pleasurable experience for tourists. The city is well connected to all big cities. The temple is accessible with the availability of autorickshaws at all places. The travel was convenient and affordable for tourists. Private cabs with better facilities were also easily available around the pilgrimage site. The discomfort that the tourists complained about was due to the sands and pebbles on the path outside the temple. A need for a damp carpet outside the temple in hot summer days was raised by tourists.

### **Dislikes in visiting Baidyanath Dham**

There were several areas of tourist disappointment. Some tourists find it hard to offer their prayers in peace because of inadequate crowd management. Additionally, overcrowding is a major issue in Baidyanath Dham. There is always a risk of stampede, especially endangering the elderly and disabled. The temple premises and the accommodation in proximity to the temple are subject to many complaints about cleanliness and hygiene. This unsanitary condition gets worse due to the improper waste management. Accessibility concerns also exist, such as a lack of wheelchair facilities for the elderly and disabled. There were instances of pickpocketing, which ruins the entire experience of visiting a pilgrimage site. The disrespectful behaviour of pandas and the constant pushing by them make the tourist question the conduct of these pandas. The younger tourists behave inappropriately due to a lack of information about the significance of the place and a total disregard for etiquette to be followed.

## **6. Nageshwar**

**Figure 8.21:** Demand side problems in Nageshwar



**Source:** Own compilation

### **Accommodation Challenges**

The absence of accommodation near the temple is a major challenge for the tourists visiting the place. Due to this absence of accommodation, tourists visiting have no alternative but to stay in Dwarka, which is almost sixteen kilometres away from Nageshwar temple. The quality of services provided in these lodgings is criticised by the tourists, who point to the dirty linens. These criticisms indicate a room for improvement. There is a need for help or assistance desks at major entry points, especially the railway station. The railway station is really isolated, and the tourists often have no idea about the absence of accommodation near the temple. The first-time tourists often face issues in navigating the town. Setting up accommodation options near the temple would help mitigate these issues faced by tourists who specifically arrive to visit Nageshwar temple.

### **Food and Water Challenges**

The tourists had a positive experience while visiting Nageshwar. The availability, affordability, and taste were generally well appreciated by them. The local cuisine options were satisfactory to the tourists. There was, however, an ongoing concern about the

availability of sour water. The tourists had to buy packaged water every day. Even the water available for toothbrush in hotels was sour. But the tourists were sympathetic towards the locals, who had an ongoing water crisis.

### **Travel Challenges**

The limited alternatives of travel to navigate through Dwarka was a cause of problems for the tourists. There are fewer public transportation options, and the private alternatives are costly. The absence of a reliable public transportation system compels tourists to choose pricier private cab alternatives. The private tour buses operating in Nageshwar have a tight schedule that goes through all major tourist sites like *Bhewt Dwarka*, *Rukmini Mandir*, and Nageshwar Temple. They do not let tourists stay in Nageshwar for more than ten minutes. This is a disappointment for other tourists who arrive for worship, especially in Nageshwar. The isolation of the pilgrimage site is a major issue. In spite of these challenges, the tourists who arrive, especially for some ritual in Nageshwar, have no other alternative than to hire a private cab. The necessity for affordable alternatives is highlighted by the responses.

### **Other Challenges**

The analysis of other problems faced by tourists in Nageshwar points to the inadequate tourist infrastructure at Nageshwar. The city of Dwarka has two prominent pilgrimage sites, i.e., Dwarkadhish and Nageshwar *Jyotirlinga*. However, there's a huge difference in the facilities available for the pilgrims visiting both of these pilgrimage sites. The tourists visiting Nageshwar have to be dependable on accommodations near Dwarkadhish temple. There is an absence of accommodation, medical assistance, proper personalised travel arrangements, and food joints near the Nageshwar temple. The conduct of the tout bus driver is questionable. They often threaten to leave the tourists' stranded in case of any delay. The tourists take in the minor inconvenience as a part of travel to pilgrimage, but their problems highlight the need for improved infrastructure near the pilgrimage site.

### **Dislikes in visiting Nageshwar**

The tourists dislike the absence of basic services, the absence of shops, and the lack of accommodation in close proximity of the temple. The absence of a help desk causes confusion, and tourists are completely clueless at the railway station. The isolation of the temple, on the one hand, is a blessing to the tourists because they can pray in peace, but

on the other hand, it causes logistical issues for the tourists. The tourists are further disappointed by the lack of basic facilities near the temple. Medicines are not available near the temple. There are no healthier eating options. The first-time tourists face significant issues regarding information about accommodation and travel to the Nageshwar temple. The stringent schedule of private buses adds to their problems. All these issues emphasise the necessity of more reliable travel arrangements for tourists visiting Nageshwar temple.

## **7. Somnath**

### **Accommodation Challenges**

The tourists applauded the affordability and cleanliness of the available accommodation. They were also pleased with the closeness of the available accommodation to the temple. This convenience adds to the tourists' pleasant experience in visiting Somnath. They are able to attend the aarti in the morning and the light show in the evening. The efficient management and the consistent service quality at these accommodations lead to revisits. Some tourists had a lack of knowledge about the availability of accommodation near the temple itself, which suggests a need for help/information desks on railway stations and major entry points.

### **Travel Challenges**

Most of the tourists had no major concerns about travelling to Somnath. There is accessibility and convenient travel alternatives, such as connecting trains, buses, and flights. Even the local rickshaws are very well managed. The drivers are hospitable and help tourists navigate easily through the town's tourist spots. The autorickshaws have their own business cards with all the tourist spots listed in them. They are also affordable for rental tour service. The assistance received by the tourists was well appreciated by all tourists. It led to an enjoyable, satisfactory experience.

### **Food and water challenges**

The food available in Somnath was appreciated by the tourists. The availability, accessibility, affordability, and taste all appealed to the tourists visiting the place. The taste of the local Gujarati cuisine added to the variety and pleasure. The food is reasonably priced and appreciated for its variety. The local taste had an overall positive impact on

the tourists' satisfaction. It is made clear by the praises for specific breakfast items, such as *jalebi* and *fafda*.

### **Dislikes in visiting Somnath**

It is noteworthy that tourists did not express any major complaints about their experience in Somnath. The quality of facilities and services caused a high level of satisfaction among numerous tourists, who have expressed surprise and delight. The absence of negative feedback indicates that management has effectively established a positive visitor experience, as no substantial issues have been raised by tourists.

#### **8.1.4 Major findings from analysis of Objective 3**

The analysis of the third objective revealed that most of the *Jyotirlingas* were under the purview of the government, and these officials were trying to manage the *Jyotirlingas* very well. There is however a difference in the management of all. A degree of homogeneity should exist in the management of these sacred sites.

1. Kedarnath was run and overseen by BKTC, which faced no major issues in running and maintaining the pilgrimage site.
2. Shri Kashi Vishwanath was run by the Uttar Pradesh Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act, 1983. The recent enactment of the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Special Area Development Board Varanasi Act, 2018 and the development of the Kashi Vishwanath corridor have raised security and management concerns for the temple management. As the officials responded, the revenue has multiplied in the last few years, but there are new issues coming up on a daily basis due to this larger premise, and they strive to find new ways to tackle these issues.
3. The Omkareshwar temple is run under the Madhya Pradesh Public Trusts Act of 1951. The finances are under the supervision of the government, who help and coordinate in the best way possible. The official interviewed applauded the efforts by the state government in temple management. But they also added that the panda behaviour that the tourists complain about is ignited by the tourists themselves. There are regulations regarding the conduct of priests and pandas in the law, but the tourists themselves offer money in the name of fast darshan. They added that the tourists also need to be careful and patient enough to stay in line and offer their prayers patiently.

4. The Madhya Pradesh Shri Mahakaleshwar Mandir *Adhiniyam*, 1982, governs the Mahakaleshwar temple. The temple is well managed, and its efficient management is applauded by the tourists. The finances are kept in the purview of *the Mandir Kosh* Fund, which is overseen by the Committee.
5. The Baidyanath Dham temple is managed under the Baba Baidyanath Dham-Basukinath Shrine Area Development Authority Act, 2015. The temple has a long history of struggles, and as responded by the official interviewed, the internal conflict between the government appointed DC, Sub Divisional Officer, and the Jharkhand State Hindu Religious Trust Board is ongoing. In spite of the efficient efforts put on by the officials in charge, the trust board intervenes and accuses regrading mismanagement.
6. The Somnath temple is run by the Shree Somnath Trust, which efficiently manages the temple. Although the official of the temple management could not be interviewed, the efficient crowd management, the cleanliness, and the security were evidently applauded by the tourists visiting the temple premise.
7. No secondary data about Nageshwar temple could be found. The priests could not share any details about the temple management. They claimed to manage the temple themselves. This is alarming because a *Jyotirlinga* is functioning in the way a regular temple does.

## 8.2 Holistic Suggestions for all objectives

### 8.2.1 Suggestions for Improvement in Kedarnath

**Table 8.1: Suggestions for improvement in Kedarnath and Kashi Vishwanath**

<b>Kedarnath</b>	<b>Kashi Vishwanath</b>
✓ Centralized portal for pre-booking	✓ Regulate and standardize transportation services
✓ Ensure pre-booking for crowd management	✓ Improve accessibility and connectivity near the pilgrimage site
✓ Enhance supply chain efficiency	✓ Enhance Security Measures
✓ Training program on inventory management	✓ Improve Hygiene and Quality Standards for Food
✓ Financial Assistance	✓ Increase access to nutritious and balanced meals

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Price regulations</li> <li>✓ Accessibility Enhancements</li> <li>✓ Help Desk for Safety and Gear Recommendations</li> <li>✓ Emergency Medical Facilities</li> <li>✓ Improve sanitation and hygiene</li> <li>✓ Increase variety of food and ensure nutrition</li> <li>✓ Limit commercialisation and maintain sanctity</li> <li>✓ Additional Facilities and Services</li> <li>✓ Increasing Public buses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Maintain affordability of food and lodging</li> <li>✓ Centralised system for efficient online booking</li> <li>✓ Guides and help desk</li> <li>✓ Reduce exploitation by local vendors</li> <li>✓ Address preferential treatment and economic bias in the temple premises</li> <li>✓ Improved Conduct of Pandas and Temple Staff Behaviour</li> <li>✓ Locker and wheelchair facility</li> <li>✓ Enhance accessibility</li> <li>✓ Improve Supply Chain Efficiency</li> </ul>
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### **Centralised portal for pre-booking**

Prebooking for all accommodations needs to be encouraged. All private and public accommodations should be listed on the website with their prices. This will ensure a price ceiling. Also, tourists without accommodations should not be allowed to trek to Kedarnath for their safety during harsh weather.

### **Ensure pre-booking for crowd management.**

To pay attention to the carrying capacity of the fragile mountains, a pass system needs to be implemented to control the number of tourists each day, limiting overcrowding and decreasing resource demand. This is a very important step to limit the number of tourists visiting the pilgrimage site. Our suggestions are in line with the previously conducted study where Singh, Jha, et al. (2023) suggested limiting the number of pilgrims visiting Kedarnath in a single day.

### **Enhance supply chain efficiency**

The logistics and supply chain management need to be enhanced in Kedarnath to enable quick replenishing of goods, especially perishable items, and lessen the supply problems. Common storage facilities can be built in the market area to assist retailers in storing

excess product, particularly during busy seasons. These facilities can be used on a rental basis by all retailers. Further, a precise time for delivery trucks to operate needs to be set to ensure that products are transported efficiently even during peak seasons.

### **Training program on inventory management**

The management can train business owners on inventory management and operational effectiveness. This can help them tackle huge demand while still offering good services.

### **Financial Assistance**

Some suppliers borrow money from money lenders. Hence, tracing such merchants who try hard to make their living and helping them through financial aid programmes like low interest loans will help them run businesses without the money lenders help.

### **Price regulations**

A price range should be fixed for accommodation, food, and other services available at the pilgrimage site, considering the high demand as well as the welfare of the tourists visiting. Such prices should be regulated and monitored by the pilgrimage site management. This supervision should include both public and private parties operating in the pilgrimage site. A genuine price range ensures justice and affordability for all tourists.

### **Regulation of Panda Behaviour**

Strict guidelines should be made to guarantee that pandas follow professional standards and do not request extra fees for rituals, hence safeguarding the site's honour and equality. There is strict panda regulation in Mahakaleshwar and Somnath. These two *Jyotirlingas* can be a great example for the improvement in Kedarnath.

### **Accessibility Enhancements**

The provision of wheelchair-friendly ramps is essential in such a revered pilgrimage site. The *pooja* experience needs to be accessible for all. Since the development work is already in process in Kedarnath Valley, some consideration should be given to such accessibility enhancements.

### **Help Desk for Safety and Gear Recommendations**

Considering the difficulty of the trek, a checklist and instructions should be provided to the tourists on important trek equipment to ensure they are properly prepared for their journey. Important gear like shoes, jackets, and walking sticks should be checked before the tourist starts their trek in Sonprayag. No tourist should be allowed to trek without proper gear. Experienced guides and assistance desks need to be set up to provide pilgrims with information and support, boosting their awareness of the site's history and significance.

### **Emergency Medical Facilities**

Accidents have become really common owing to the horses and broken trek. Hence, it is very important to establish well-equipped medical facilities with personnel on standby to manage health emergencies. This medical facility should also be known to the tourists.

### **Improve sanitation and hygiene**

The mobile toilets need to be cleaned at regular intervals, and a special emphasis on satisfying women's menstrual hygiene requirements needs to be given. The GMVN staff should maintain sanitation facilities on a regular basis to ensure cleanliness and hygiene, especially in the shared toilets near the helipad.

### **Increase variety of food and ensure nutrition.**

Nutrition was a common complaint in Kedarnath, especially for diet following people with diabetes or sugar. Therefore, the management needs to ensure the setup of some restaurants or eateries that offer a wider range of nutritious and diet-specific food alternatives to accommodate a variety of dietary demands and tastes.

### **Limit commercialisation and maintain sanctity.**

Strict laws need to be enforced to reduce commercialisation that takes away from the site's spiritual sanctity. Activities that preserve the dignity of the pilgrimage experience need to be encouraged. Mobile phones should not be allowed, and a dress code should be implemented in the shrine area.

### **Additional Facilities and Services**

The management should provide locker facilities comparable to those found in Somnath to alleviate the load of carrying possessions and increase convenience. Also, help desks

should be set up in Sonprayag and Kedarnath to assist tourists, particularly those who speak a different language.

### **Increasing public buses**

Considering the heavy demand for a dependable public transport system, some additional public buses should be introduced for the pilgrimage season.

## **8.2.2 Suggestions for Improvement in Kashi Vishwanath**

### **Regulate and standardise transportation services.**

A fixed fare system for autorickshaws, tuk-tuks, and other local transport needs to be implemented to prevent overcharging. A transparent and clearly displayed pricing for all transportation options, including Uber and rental services, should be ensured. The use of official transport services and registered drivers to reduce exploitation needs to be promoted.

### **Improve accessibility and connectivity near the pilgrimage site.**

Shuttle services from key locations to the temple area, especially from bus and train stations, to alleviate dependency on local rickshaws needs to be introduced. The number of battery-operated rickshaws that can navigate narrow lanes efficiently and affordably should also be increased.

### **Enhance Security Measures**

Efficient monitoring systems and hotlines for tourists to report overcharging and other exploitative practices need to be introduced. Additional security personnel in areas prone to theft and pickpocketing to enhance safety needs to be deployed. The security staff should be trained to be respectful and considerate, ensuring that their actions do not disrupt the spiritual experience.

### **Improve Hygiene and Quality Standards for Food**

A mandatory hygiene training and certification should be implemented for street food vendors to ensure they follow proper sanitation practices. The regular safety inspections of food stalls and food vendors are a necessity for maintaining high standards of cleanliness and food quality.

### **Increase access to nutritious and balanced meals.**

The establishment of more restaurants and food stalls that offer nutritious and balanced meals, particularly near the pilgrimage sites, needs to be encouraged. The food outlets need to provide clear nutritional information to help visitors make informed choices.

### **Maintain affordability of food and lodging.**

Affordable meal plans or coupons for pilgrims need to be introduced, which can be redeemed at participating food outlets. The development of comfortable and affordable lodging options to cater to pilgrims with different budget constraints needs to be supported.

### **Centralised system for efficient online booking**

A centralised portal for all available private and public accommodation should be made. This portal can be redirected to the online booking platforms of hotels, lodges, and dorms to ensure that they are providing clear, accurate information about accommodations, including pricing, amenities, and location. Reliable customer reviews and ratings should be provided on the centralised portal to help pilgrims make informed decisions and increase trust in online booking services. It should be ensured that all accommodations, regardless of price, meet basic standards of comfort and cleanliness to enhance overall satisfaction. The accommodations that are conveniently located near the temple and river should be marked clearly to attract pilgrims. This centralised portal can offer packages that include lodging, guided tours, and transportation to key sites to enhance the convenience for pilgrims. The pilgrims who book their accommodations well in advance should be provided some discounts as well.

### **Guides and help desk**

Help desks need to be set up at key locations to assist pilgrims with booking, directions, and other enquiries, ensuring language support for non-native speakers. Trained guides need to be provided to help both first time tourists and solo travellers navigate the city and understand the significance of the pilgrimage site, enhancing their overall experience. A help desk needs to be established in the temple to assist visitors and overcome language barriers, especially for those from the southern or north eastern part of India.

### **Reduce exploitation by local vendors**

A price range for goods sold by local vendors, particularly around the temple area, needs to be fixed. The vendors operating outside the pilgrimage site should be licensed and adhere to regulations that prevent exploitation and ensure fair practices.

#### **Address preferential treatment and economic bias in the temple premises.**

The policies ensuring equal treatment for all devotees need to be enforced regardless of financial contributions. The process for rituals and services should be made transparent, ensuring that financial contributions do not determine the quality of the spiritual experience.

#### **Improved Conduct of Pandas and Temple Staff Behaviour**

A strict code of conduct for pandas and temple staff should be enforced and implemented, emphasising respect and fairness. Training programs for pandas and staff should be provided to enhance their professionalism and improve their interactions with pilgrims.

#### **Locker and wheelchair facility**

A locker facility inside the temple, similar to Somnath, should be set up to avoid tourists being forced to buy goods to access locker facilities.

#### **Enhance accessibility**

A wheelchair facility and ramp should be constructed, similar to Mahakaleshwar, to increase the accessibility of the pilgrimage site for the elderly and disabled.

#### **Improve Supply Chain Efficiency**

Improve transportation infrastructure in the narrow lanes near Kashi Vishwanath to reduce traffic congestion. Designate specific times for delivery trucks to operate, ensuring that products can be transported efficiently even during peak seasons. Better logistics and supply chain management will ensure timely restocking of goods, particularly perishable items.

### **8.2.3 Suggestions for Improvement in Omkareshwar**

**Table 8.2: Suggestions for improvement in Omkareshwar**

<b>Omkareshwar</b>
✓ Government attention
✓ Setting up a tourist Grievance cell

- ✓ Model code of conduct
- ✓ Need for a separate queue for vulnerable groups
- ✓ Proper crowd management
- ✓ Improve Parking Management
- ✓ Infrastructure improvement

### **Government attention**

As the temple runs under the state government, they need to ensure proper maintenance of the temple. There is a sense of neglect in and around the temple as far as cleanliness and maintenance are concerned. Following the lines of best practises in place, the Omkareshwar temple should also be managed in similar lines as the Mahakaleshwar. Immediate actions by the state management are required to improve the upkeep of the temple.

### **Setting up a tourist grievance cell**

A dedicated tourist grievance cell needs to be set up to transparently manage the tourist issued due to mismanagement, misconduct, or if they face any corruption. This cell should be transparent and easily accessible by all. It is necessary that the staff are trained enough to provide quick assistance.

### **Model code of conduct**

Stricter laws need to be implemented for the conduct of pandas and priests. They should be trained about the ethics to be followed at the pilgrimage site. Laws regarding verbal and monetary penalties need to be enforced in case of complaint. It is necessary to understand that the pilgrimage site is a sacred place whose sanctity needs to be respected.

### **Need for a separate queue for vulnerable groups**

The queue in Omkareshwar is so strenuous that it is very difficult for the elderly, disabled, and mothers with infants to stand on for hours. A separate queue for the vulnerable group will ensure they have a comfortable experience. It would be helpful if such separate queues are clearly marked and there are volunteers present to help these vulnerable groups.

### **Proper crowd management**

The risk of stampede in Omkareshwar premises can only be mitigated by the proper crowd and queue management by the temple management. Timed entry tickets can be implemented in line with the one done in Tirupati. The access points need to be controlled, and the overcrowding on steps needs to be monitored and supervised. Digital displays can be used to provide real time updates on the increasing crowd in the shrine area.

### **Improve Parking Management**

A parking facility with organised parking facilities should be designated to prevent unauthorised parking. Proper signs should also be set up. Battery operated rickshaws from the parking to the accommodation and temple areas can also be started. Monitoring parking management would help prevent chaos when buses and private cabs park in their designated areas.

### **Infrastructure improvement**

The conditions of roads, the parking area, and the cleanliness of the bridge should be paid attention to. Navigation multilingual sign boards should also be put in places so that tourists do not lose their way. Street signs can also be put up at turns and alleys leading to the temple. The tourists should also be provided with adequate seating areas. The restrooms should be cleaned and checked, drinking water stations should be put up, and child feeding facilities should also be provided. The type of accommodations available were a cause of concern for the tourists. Therefore, attention should also be paid to setting up economical hotels equipped with basic facilities.

#### **8.2.4 Suggestions for Improvement in Mahakaleshwar**

**Table 8.3: Suggestions for improvement in Mahakaleshwar and Baidyanath Dham**

<b>Mahakaleshwar</b>	<b>Baidyanath Dham</b>
✓ Proper Crowd Management	✓ Administration and Quality Inspection
✓ Ensuring Equal treatment	✓ Improve Additional Facilities
✓ Improved safety and security	✓ Proper crowd management
✓ Regulations against mobile Phones	✓ Proper waste management
✓ Increased cleanliness and hygiene	✓ Establish Information Centres
✓ Additional facilities	✓ Offer Nutritious Food Options

✓ Set up a Help desk	
✓ Fare regulation	

### **Proper Crowd Management**

Some security personnel can be deployed to manage the crowd. Alternatively, a digital queue management supervisor can also be done, especially during peak tourist times. Using sign boards and announcements regarding proper tourist behaviour should be done. Some structural guidelines regarding tourists' behaviour and against queue jumping need to be enforced in the temple premises. This helps in maintaining a spiritual temperance in the place.

### **Ensuring equal treatment**

All tourists, regardless of their entry or dakshina, should be treated equally. The priests and pandas should be trained about equal treatment and ethical practises for all devotees. Their behaviour should be monitored to prevent preferential treatment. The process and charges/dakshina for the pooja should be standardised and made transparent. A complaint or feedback mechanism should also be set up to report this kind of discriminatory practise.

### **Improved safety and security**

The temple management needs to collaborate with law enforcement in the area to ensure the lodges, Dharamshala, and hotels near the pilgrimage site are safe. Night patrolling similar to the one being done in the lanes and ghats of Kashi Vishwanath needs to be implemented in the lanes near Mahakaleshwar. This is to ensure the safety of solo and female travellers.

### **Regulations against mobile phones**

Although some temporary measures are taken to prevent devotees from taking mobile in the shrine area, a permanent alternative like the one followed in Somnath should be chosen. Visitors should be checked thoroughly because they tend to sneak in somehow. Even the VIPs should not be allowed to take pictures inside the shrine area to foster equality.

### **Increased cleanliness and hygiene**

The accommodation outside the pilgrimage site should be closely supervised and monitored. Regular inspection should be a part of this drill to maintain cleanliness in all accommodations near the pilgrimage site, including government and non-government-owned properties. Cleanliness and hygiene maintenance of all accommodations increase tourist satisfaction.

#### **Additional facilities**

A locker facility should also be provided to the tourists to keep their purses and other belongings to ensure they can pray in peace without worrying about things being misplaced or stolen.

#### **Set up a help desk.**

The pilgrimage site management should set up an information desk at significant entry points like railway stations, bus stands, and airports. The information desk can provide a brochure about important rituals and their timings. i.e., it can also describe the timing of the light show and opening of the Mahakal Lok. Similar information can be displayed on online platforms to make the tourists aware of the different rituals at the pilgrimage site.

#### **Fare regulation**

Although the travel issues are lesser in Mahakaleshwar than any other pilgrimage site, the unreasonable auto fare is a cause for concern. A price range should be implemented for auto drivers even in case of high demand during peak tourist season.

### **8.2.5 Suggestions for Improvement in Baidyanath Dham**

#### **Administration and Quality Inspection**

Although there is proper availability of food near the pilgrimage site, their quality was questioned. A food inspection at regular intervals would help in ensuring that hygiene standards are being adhered to, especially near the pilgrimage site. Similar quality certification for dharmshalas and hotels operating near the pilgrimage site should be done. The destination image does not only imply the temple premises; the facilities available nearby should also be developed.

#### **Improve Additional Facilities**

Wheelchair ramps for the elderly and disabled need to be installed in the temple premises to make it accessible for all. This improved inclusivity will enhance the temple experience for all. Similarly, locker facilities and an organised footwear facility will help prevent theft and loss of purses, footwear, and other personal items. Currently, the shops selling *pedas* and *prasad* let the devotees keep their footwear in their shops, but even then, there is no safety, and the footwear gets lost sometimes due to crowds.

### **Proper crowd management**

The queue management is worse at Baidyanath Dham. The devotees are pushed and handled like herds and cattle. A structured queue with separate entry points for VIPs and vulnerable groups (elderly, disabled, and mothers of infants) needs to be implemented. Volunteers should patiently handle and give directions to tourists in this queue to avoid the risk of stampede. Timed entry slots can also be provided to VIPs or daily regular visitors.

### **Proper waste management**

Steps should be taken to protect the sanctity of the temple. Proper waste management techniques should be used to discard packets of incense, cotton wicks (*battis*), and *prasad* plates. A verbal reprimand or monetary penalty should be imposed on tourists discarding their waste products in the temple premises. The implementation of strict steps can only change the sad plight of pollution and garbage dumping in the temple premises. Regular cleaning and maintenance of the temple premises must be done and strictly monitored.

### **Establish information centres.**

An information centre of a help desk needs to be set up either at major entry points (railway stations, bus stands, etc.) or outside the temple gate to inform visitors about the various events and customs at the temple and their timings. It can act as a catalyst to assist tourists and disseminate important information.

### **Offer Nutritious Food Options**

Encourage vendors to provide a wider range of health-conscious food options and clearly label food items with nutritional information to help visitors make informed choices.

## **8.2.6 Suggestions for Improvement in Nageshwar**

### **Immediate government intervention**

It is surprising that the Nageshwar temple is in a complete state of neglect in spite of being a *Jyotirlinga*. Hence, immediate government support and intervention are required to improve the infrastructure of the temple and nearby areas.

### **Develop Nearby Lodging Options**

More accommodations in close proximity to the temple need to be developed to reduce the need for tourists to stay in Dwarka. This could include building government guest houses, Dharamshala, or budget hotels near the temple complex. Private investment in lodging facilities needs to be encouraged near the temple by offering incentives or subsidies.

### **Improve Quality and Hygiene**

Regular inspections and sanitation standards need to be implemented for all accommodation providers to ensure clean and hygienic environments. Training programs for hotel and guesthouse staff need to be implemented to maintain high standards of cleanliness and service quality.

### **Enhanced Booking and Navigation Assistance**

A centralised booking platform with accurate descriptions and reviews of accommodations to help tourists find and book suitable lodging easily needs to be developed. A clear signage and offer maps or digital navigation needs to be developed as aids to help tourists locate accommodations and other essential facilities.

### **Food and Water Enhancements**

Water purification systems need to be invested to ensure the availability of clean and safe drinking water for tourists. Install water purification stations at key points around the temple complex. The temple management needs to test and monitor the water quality to maintain high standards and address any issues promptly.

### **Expand Food Options**

In order to accommodate a broad range of preferences, it is necessary to motivate local food vendors to provide a more extensive selection of cuisines, which should include health-conscious and dietary-specific options. It is imperative to conduct routine health and safety inspections of food purveyors to guarantee the quality and hygiene of the food they serve.

## **Increase public transport alternatives**

The tourists visiting Nageshwar are completely dependent on private cabs to perform their pooja. This alternative not always fits their budget. Therefore, the availability of public transport exclusively for Nageshwar tourists needs to be improved. This will help reduce reliance on expensive alternatives.

## **Emergency and Health Services**

Access to emergency services and healthcare facilities needs to be improved to ensure the safety and well-being of tourists and residents. There are no medical shops outside the pilgrimage site, which adds to the worries of the tourists.

### **8.2.7 Suggestions for Improvement in Somnath**

**Table 8.4: Suggestions for improvement in Nageshwar and Somnath**

<b>Nageshwar</b>	<b>Somnath</b>
✓ Immediate Government intervention	✓ Streamline Hotel Management
✓ Develop Nearby Lodging Options	✓ Accessibility and Facility Enhancements
✓ Improve Quality and Hygiene	✓ Regular Quality Checks and Training
✓ Enhanced Booking and Navigation Assistance	✓ Travel Assistance Desks
✓ Food and Water Enhancements	✓ Implement Successful Management Models
✓ Expand Food Options	
✓ Increase Public transport alternatives	
✓ Emergency and Health Services	

## **Streamline Hotel Management**

To effectively manage room turnover, implement a standardised check-in and check-out system. Additional temporary staff during peak seasons needs to be hired to handle early morning arrivals and ensure rooms are cleaned and ready on time.

## **Accessibility and Facility Enhancements**

Ramps and other facilities like wheelchairs need to be installed for devotees in wheelchairs to ensure accessibility.

### **Regular quality checks and training**

In order to maintain the highest standards of hygiene and service quality, it is essential that accommodation providers undergo routine inspections and participate in training programs.

### **Travel Assistance Desks**

Travel assistance desks should be set up at key entry points, such as railway stations and airports, to guide and support tourists.

### **Implement successful management models.**

The successful management practices of Somnath need to be implemented in other *Jyotirlingas*.

## **8.3 Suggestions common to all pilgrimage sites**

### **1. Setting Up Pilgrimage Site Management Committee**

There is a need to set up a transparent pilgrimage site management committee that acts as a parent statutory body for all different committees running the pilgrimage site. For example, representatives of the state and central government, members of the temple management, all food vendors, suppliers, travel agents, members of the prasad committee, and owners of both private and public lodges operating near the pilgrimage site should be a part of the committee. This committee should implement strict rules regarding cleanliness, price regulation, safety, and the conduct of businesses in the pilgrimage site. Inspections and audits can be conducted at regular intervals to guarantee that established standards are followed. The pilgrimage site management committee will foster coordination between all stakeholders involved in the pilgrimage site to streamline operations and ensure smooth maintenance. A transparent feedback mechanism should be devised by this committee to address any tourist grievance relating to any stakeholder at the pilgrimage site.

### **2. Centralized Booking System**

A centralised online registration platform that accommodates all types of accommodations, such as hotels, guesthouses, and *dharamshalas*, in close proximity to the temple needs to be set up by the Pilgrimage Site Management Committee. The pre-existing websites of Somnath, Mahakaleshwar, have this option, but not all lodging

available near the pilgrimage site is mentioned. A centralised booking system will ensure that each lodging option is under the scrutiny of the Pilgrimage Site Management Committee. This will ensure the tourists that these options are safe and accessible. Therefore, each accommodation listed will be accurately described, photographed, and reviewed by tourists on this platform. The prices and services offered should be accurately listed. To prevent overcharging and offer a fair price range, a dynamic pricing strategy, especially during peak season, should be maintained. We can take the example of *Yosr*, which is a common booking system for registering Hajj pilgrims, for managing their accommodation and transportation, including finalising the payments (Brdesee et al., 2013).

### **3. Token system for counting and limiting tourists**

There is a need to get an accurate headcount of the tourists visiting these pilgrimage sites. An accurate count helps in making informed decisions by the management. A token system should be strictly maintained for all pilgrims and tourists. Setting up one dedicated checkpoint to issue these tokens will ensure the smooth counting of devotees visiting per day. Pilgrims who travel to The Camino de Santiago are issued a certificate to prove their pilgrimage (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016). This kind of pilgrimage certificate with a unique ID can be issued to the pilgrims visiting the 12 *Jyotirlingas* as well.

In the case of *Jyotirlingas* situated on land, like Kashi Vishwanath, Mahakaleshwar, Nageshwar, Baidyanath Dham, Omkareshwar, and Somnath, where residents and locals visit and pray on a regular basis, tokens should be given to both residents and tourists from the time the temple opens to the gate being closed. But for *Jyotirlingas* on Mountains, i.e., Kedarnath, limiting the number of tourists is essential to ensure its survival. Landslides are becoming too common in the mountainous areas of Uttarakhand. The mountains will not be able to take in the load for long. First of all, Kedarnath has become a tourist hub, and infants and really old people travel to the place, risking their lives. Secondly, the carrying capacity of the place is exceeded in the six months of the pilgrim season. There is a need to limit the number of tourists arriving in Kedarnath.

### **3. Price Regulation for Food**

The prices of food available in and outside the pilgrimage site need to be regulated. Tourists being overcharged for food because of increasing demand has an impact on their experience. A standardised price list should be made by all these food vendors operating

in the pilgrimage site area. The prices need to be reviewed and modified to ensure that they comply with the market conditions and food standards. Even in mountainous regions where transporting food is another hassle, there should be a price range that should be followed by vendors operating there.

#### **4. Panda Behaviour Management**

A training programme needs to be created for priests and pandas that highlights the significance of treating all devotees equally, regardless of their wealth or status. A standard code of conduct should be set up for temple employees to ensure that all visitors are treated with the utmost respect, fairness, and professionalism. A strict monitoring system that assesses the behaviour of priests and pandas with a verbal reprimand or monetary penalty for those who engage in unfair practices, ask for donations in lieu of special pooja, or engage in queue breaking should be implemented.

#### **5. Ensure Impartial Treatment of All Tourists**

The temple management needs to ensure that all visitors receive equal treatment, regardless of the *dakshina* (donation) they offer or the entry option (VIP or normal) they choose, by regulating the procedure for selecting rituals and services. Transparency needs to be ensured to prevent special treatment by providing clear information about the charges/*dakshina* for rituals and services. A formal complaint mechanism also needs to be implemented that allows devotees to report any instances of discrimination or unjust treatment and guarantees that complaints are resolved in a timely and effective manner.

#### **6. Increase Public Transportation**

The accessibility of pilgrimage sites needs to be increased by increasing the number and availability of buses running to and from the pilgrimage site. The private buses and cabs operating near far off pilgrimage sites can be regulated. Similarly, the pricing for local autorickshaws operating near pilgrimage sites located in cities needs to be regulated as well. Travel assistance desks at important entry points like airports, bus stands, and railway stations can help connect tourists to these regulated private cars and buses as well. This can ensure a smooth transition to their accommodations and the pilgrimage site.

#### **7. Establish a Tourist Office**

Establish a tourist office in close proximity to all these important pilgrimage sites to offer tourists assistance, guidance, and information. Maps, pamphlets, and assistance with bookings and local information should be provided by this office.

## **8. Ensure accessibility to all pilgrims**

The findings have raised a serious concern about the accessibility of six out of seven pilgrimage sites. Unavailability of wheelchair facilities, toilets for PwD, and ramp facilities are causes of tourist dissatisfaction. This suggestion is also in line with the findings of Gassiot Melian et al. (2016), who stressed recognising the rights of PwD as an essential aim for modern society. Tourism accessibility benefits not only PwD but also families, pregnant women, and others with temporary mobility challenges, ensuring no one is left behind.

### **8.4 Contribution to the existing body of the knowledge**

This study significantly improves the existing research by identifying six critical variables for assessing the quality of service at pilgrimage sites: transportation, accommodation, safety and security, desirable facilities, and hygienic food and water. Furthermore, it resulted in the preliminary validation of a specialised scale that is intended to assess the quality of service in the context of pilgrimage tourism. This research provided a balanced perspective on the complexities faced in religious tourism by addressing both the demand and supply-side issues through a comprehensive approach.

The importance of this investigation is multidimensional. Initially, it offers an in-depth assessment of the expectations and perceptions of tourists regarding the quality of service at specific pilgrimage sites in North India. This provides valuable insights that are useful to both academic inquiry and practical tourism management. By finding the problems faced at these pilgrimage sites by both the demand and supply sides, this research helps in developing a holistic understanding of real issues in the pilgrimage site that need attention.

Finally, this study contributes to the broad discipline of tourism management and policymaking by identifying the underlying issues at these pilgrimage sites. Thereafter, practical suggestions are provided to improve the quality of basic services and increase tourist satisfaction.

By assessing the identified areas that need improvement and using the identified variables to assess service quality, the pilgrimage site managers can systematically assess and improve the operations at these revered sites. Also, by adapting the tourists feedback regarding services, a continuous assessment of services can be undertaken. These feedbacks can help in taking informed actions and implementing targeted solutions.

To conclude, this study not only adds to the existing academic literature on pilgrimage site management but also provides practical insights to improve the service quality at these pilgrimage sites and ensure their ongoing survival. This study provides practical tools and recommendations that may significantly enhance the effectiveness of pilgrimage site management by establishing a robust framework for assessing service quality and addressing stakeholder challenges.

### **8.5 Policy implications of the study**

The results of this study have considerable policy implications for the improvement of the sustainability and management of pilgrimage sites in North India. By addressing the key variables identified—ease of information and proper management, transportation, accommodation, safety and security, desirable facilities, and hygienic food and water—policymakers can improve the overall experience for tourists and guarantee the long-term viability of these significant cultural and religious destinations.

#### **i) Implementation of a Centralized Booking System**

Create a centralized online registration portal that encompasses all types of accommodations (dharamshalas, guesthouses, and hotels) in close proximity to the pilgrimage sites. Accurate descriptions, photographs, reviews, and ratings should be included on this platform. A centralized booking system would promote transparency and enable tourists to make informed decisions, thereby preventing overcharging and assuring fair pricing. Additionally, it enhances the overall experience of travellers by ensuring that they have access to appropriate accommodations.

#### **ii) Establishment of a Pilgrimage Site Management Committee**

Establish a Pilgrimage Site Management Committee management committee that includes representatives from temple management, local food purveyors, and both private and public lodging providers. A consistent and high-quality experience for visitors can be guaranteed by the enforcement of stringent regulations regarding sanitation, safety, and

pricing by such a committee. Regular inspections and audits, along with the setting up of a feedback mechanism system, will help in the effective redressal of visitors' grievances.

### **iii) Regulation of Food and Lodging Prices**

Enforcing measures to regulate the prices of food and accommodation in close proximity to the pilgrimage site will assure affordability to pilgrims of all economic status and also help in preventing exploitation prevalent in tourist sites. Such standardised and fair pricing range should be set up with the concurrence of the site managers as well as hotel owners. If the hotel owners believe they offer affluent services and their prices need to be more, they need to justify this increase. But they need to ensure that this standardised price range will not be doubled or tripled even during peak pilgrim times.

### **iv) Addressing safety concerns**

The safety concerns are manifold. It includes both, feeling safe outside the pilgrimage site at odd hours, and getting access to emergency medical treatment in need in case of mishap. There are security personnel who patrol the ghats and lanes outside the Kashi Vishwanath temple at late night. Implementing a similar strategy in all *Jyotirlingas* will make the tourist feel safer. The tourists should also be informed of emergency medical services upon arrival so that they are not confused and worried about their safety.

### **v) Paying attention to carrying capacity and limiting tourists**

The increase in tourists, especially in fragile mountains is a cry of nature to stop overcrowding. Enforcing strict laws that take the tourism carrying capacity into consideration is necessary. This will ensure substantiality and survival of these places. Enforcing stringent laws to control crowd in such pilgrimage sites will help in preserving these sites for generations to come. This involves implementing limits on the tourist number per day, controlled access points, and timed entry slots during peak seasons. These steps will help preserve the ecological and cultural integrity of pilgrimage sites by restricting the huge tourist influx and mitigating the environmental impact.

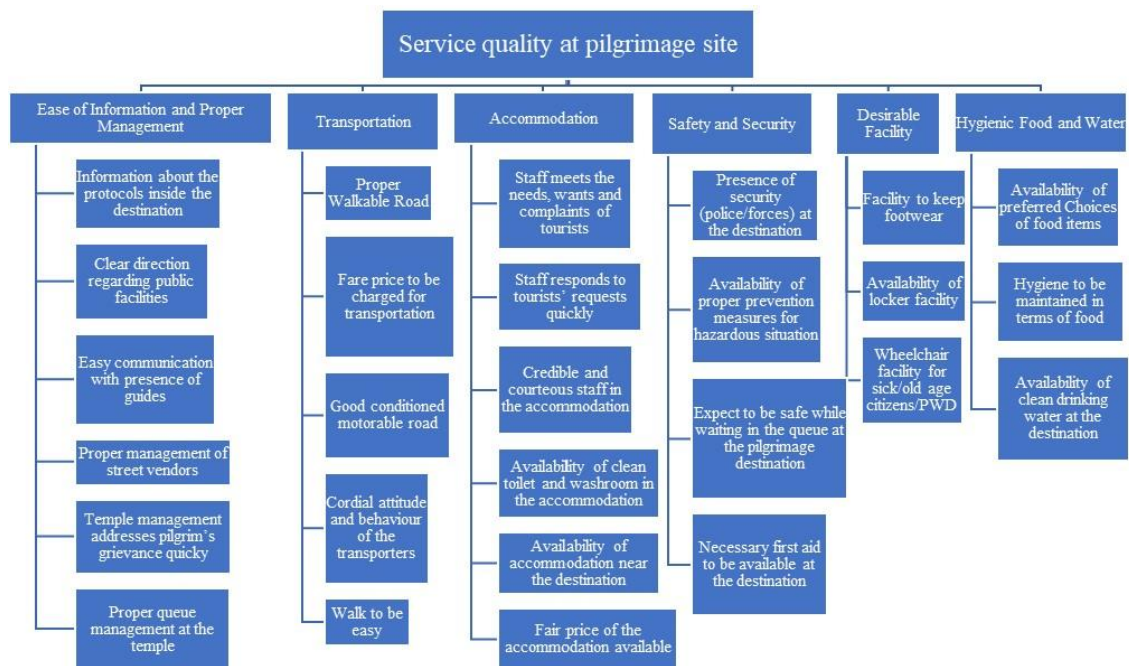
### **vi) Addressing Accessibility concerns**

Accessibility is one concern that needs to be addressed by the pilgrimage site managers. Construction of ramps, handrails, and providing the basic facilities like wheelchair help can make the site inclusive for all.

## 8.6 Proposed Service quality model

This study proposed a service quality model (Fig. 8.22) to measure the service quality at pilgrimage sites. Currently, this model is derived from exploratory factor analysis only. This proposed model can be further tested for its reliability and validity by future researchers using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. Also, this model can be used on other pilgrimage sites to check for its generalisability.

**Figure 8.22:** Proposed model to measure service quality at pilgrimage sites



**Source:** Own Compilation

## 8.7 Limitations of the Study

The study is based on a relatively less respondents than the total number visiting these pilgrimage sites, making it difficult to generalize findings to all tourists visiting the selected pilgrimage sites.

Some temple management authorities, Mahakaleshwar and Somnath, refused to cooperate, while Nageshwar lacked an official management body, limiting insights into their governance structures.

Data collection was conducted between September 2022 and March 2023, limiting observations to that period only. Seasonal variations in tourism patterns (e.g., peak pilgrimage seasons vs. off-seasons) were not fully accounted for.

Some temples operate under formal government acts, while others rely on local committees or trusts, leading to inconsistencies in management data availability and transparency.

The study focused on service quality but did not assess the economic, environmental, or cultural impact of pilgrimage tourism on local communities.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into service quality at North Indian pilgrimage sites.

### **8.8 Scope for future research**

This study completely focused on the service quality of pilgrimage sites, including the quality of accommodation and food available, yet a detailed study of the accommodations available near the pilgrimage sites needs to be done to get an accurate picture of which accommodations or food joints are causing dissatisfaction among the tourists.

This study covered Jyotirlingas in North India; future research should examine service quality in South Indian pilgrimage sites for a comprehensive comparison.

The study introduced a service quality model based on Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Future studies can test its reliability and validity using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to refine its applicability.

Conducting long-term studies on individual Jyotirlingas can help track whether service quality improves over time with policy changes.

Future research should explore how government policies on accommodation pricing, transport regulations, and carrying capacity limits influence the pilgrimage experience

Future studies can focus on infrastructure improvements like ramps, handrails, and wheelchair accessibility to ensure inclusivity at pilgrimage sites.

Seasonal variations in tourist satisfaction and service expectations should be examined to develop adaptive service strategies for peak and off-peak seasons

Similar research should be conducted in complete Jyotirlinga circuit, Char Dham circuit, and Vaishno devi pilgrimage site.