

## CHAPTER-1

### INTRODUCTION

Religious travel, one of the most ancient movements in human history (Swatos & Tomasi, 2002), has now expanded to include various motivations and destinations. These journeys often begin with an aim to visit sites of events that have witnessed miraculous history (Higgins & Hamilton, 2016), attain salvation (*moksha*), enhance health, and pray (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). Pilgrimage is a category of religious travel that describes journeys undertaken for a specific religious purpose by pilgrims. Interestingly, these travels are not limited to the religious; even non-religious people take these journeys and visit sacred sites. Religiously inspired journeys are called religious tourism and pilgrimage tourism is considered its subset (Rinschede, 1992). The literature suggests that the focus of academicians and researchers moved to the study of pilgrimage tourism in the 1990s. (Rinschede, 1992; Smith, 1992). Currently, there is significant literature on the field of pilgrimage tourism (Kreiner et al., 2015).

Various traditions and disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, including anthropology and sociology (Badone & Roseman, 2004; Cohen, 1992 ; Morinis, 1983; Turner & Turner, 1995), geography (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Singh & Singh, 1987; Stoddard & Morinis, 1997), religious studies (Gesler, 1993; Reader, 2007), and tourism and hospitality studies (Murray & Graham, 1997; Shackley, 2001; Digance, 2003; González & Medina, 2003; Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006; Belhassen et al., 2008; Krešić et al., 2012; Lois-González & Santos, 2014), have explored pilgrimages. Research has probed into various issues, including the institutional and geopolitical implications of pilgrimages (Holloway & Valins, 2002), migration (Hannam et al., 2021), and the sociological characteristics of pilgrims, such as their motivations and experiences (Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006; Fleischer, 2000; Jackowski & Smith, 1992; Murray & Graham, 1997; Turner & Turner, 1995). Additionally, recent studies in consumer research and marketing contributed to understanding pilgrimages (Scott & Maclaran, 2012; Moufahim, 2013; Higgins & Hamilton, 2016).

The growing academic interest in pilgrimage traditions lines up with an increase in religious travel worldwide. In 2022 alone, India witnessed an astounding 1,433 million domestic tourists undertaking pilgrimages, while 6.64 million foreigners made their way to the country's sacred sites. Comparatively, the figures stood at 677 million domestic

tourists and 1.05 million foreign visitors in 2021, showcasing a substantial increase in both categories. (Kaur, 2023)

Traditionally, pilgrimage refers to a pilgrim's travel to a sacred site (Turner, 1973; Turner & Turner, 1995). Pilgrimage is an important aspect of many religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Globally known religious locations include Jerusalem for Christianity, Mecca for Islam, the Ganges for Hinduism, and Lumbini for Buddhism (Padin et al., 2016). These religious tourists, along with non-religious visitors interested in cultural exploration, make up a sizable market for religious tourism (Hung, 2015). Modern spiritual journeys, including pilgrimages, go beyond religious motivations to include health, wellness, and self-improvement (Kato & Prozano, 2017). The popularity and significance of pilgrimage tourism are frequently neglected, despite its broad reach. For example, each year, approximately three to five million Muslims make the Hajj, some five million pilgrims go to Lourdes in France, and approximately 28 million Hindu pilgrims visit the River Ganges in India (Singh, 2006).

Tourism, one of the world's most valuable industries, benefits greatly from the economic activity associated with religious sites. Over the last few decades, the tourism industry has grown and integrated into national economies, becoming one of the largest and highest-earning global sectors (Nouri Kouchi et al., 2018). Communities around tourist areas benefit from economic development, better employment prospects, improved communication services, and higher salaries (Stoykova, 2008). According to Shafieisabet & Haratifard (2020), tourism is made up of direct suppliers, support services, and development organisations, all of which play important roles in the business. Hence, to know the impact of any kind of tourism, studying all these stakeholders becomes necessary.

Pilgrimage tourism in India has been the subject of extensive research by various researchers. One of the foundational works on pilgrimage tourism in the Indian Himalayas was done by Kaur in 1979 as a part of her Ph.D. research. The discussion on mass tourism in pilgrimage sites (Kaur, 1984) and the need to move towards sustainable tourism began in India in the nineties (Gupta, 1999).

While Jutla (2002) focused on Sikh pilgrimage, Joseph and Kavoori (2001) conducted a thorough examination of the commercialisation of Pushkar. Sati (2018) and Chaturvedi

(2002) expressed concerns about the carrying capacity of the Himalayan ecosystem, which is vulnerable. Singh (2004, 2006) shared his insights on the changing definition of pilgrimage in India and the negative effects of tourism in the Himalayas. Mustonen (2006) investigated volunteer tourism in postmodern India. Shinde (2007) investigated the environmental effects of visitors in Tirumala-Tirupati and the function of charitable trusts (Shinde, 2011), entrepreneurship (Shinde, 2010a), and event management (Shinde, 2010b) in Vrindavan. The motivations for visiting sacred sites in India were the subject of Chand's (2010) research. Maoz and Bekerman (2010) contributed to the discussion between tourism and pilgrimage in the Indian context. The Kumbh Mela was the subject of Buzinde et al.'s (2014) article. In Vrindavan, Tuljapur, Shegaon, and Ajmer Sharif, Shinde (2015) studied religious tolerance. Aukland (2015) studied the importance of guided trips in pilgrimage sites in the context of modern India. According to Verma and Sarangi (2019), perceived motivation, service quality, and safety levels have a significant impact on pilgrim satisfaction at the Kumbh Mela, which in turn results in positive intentions to recommend the event to others or attend the event again. Patwardhan et al. (2020) have studied the loyalty of visitors in pilgrimage contexts.

Other studies conducted in India include the development of a Pilgrimage City Sustainability Index (PCSI) (V.S. & Firoz C., 2022), the adoption of virtual reality technology (Raj et al., 2023), and interactive qualitative analysis to represent the pilgrim-tourist experience at Hindu religious sites (Jyotsna & Prakash Sai, 2022).

Weidenfeld (2006) acknowledged the importance of tourist satisfaction in religious tourism and the hospitality industry. As per Vukonic (2002), there exists a 'convenient symbiosis' between religion, tourism, and economy. This relationship makes ensuring tourist satisfaction and providing superior services at pilgrimage sites even more important. This is because religious tourism benefits both local communities and the broader tourism industry (Eid, 2012; Muriuki et al., 2016; Gassiot Melian et al., 2016). Though these sites are important for the economy, empirical evaluations of service quality are not common, especially in India (Gassiot Melian et al., 2016).

In spite of India's rich cultural and religious heritage, very little investigation has been done on the service quality of pilgrimage sites. The economic benefits of these sacred sites are highlighted in literature, but service quality has not been explored (Bhattarai et al., 2005). Exploring and assessing the service quality at pilgrimage sites is essential to

promoting significant religious travel in the country (Debasish Batabyal et al., 2023). India is a country with the majority Hindu population, and its description as a 'religious outlier' and 'Hindu bloc' by the World Economic Forum inspires the importance of studying these Hindu pilgrimage sites (Census of India, 2011; Jacobs, 2019).

The *Jyotirlingas*, or 'twelve significant Hindu pilgrimage sites' (Debasish Batabyal et al., 2023), provide a suitable choice for measuring service quality due to their cultural and religious significance (Nair, 2010). The *Jyotirlingas* have been extensively studied in the last few years. The effects of tourism on the local community (Zhuang et al., 2019) and on the suppliers (P.J. et al., 2020) have been studied in the context of Varanasi. Lovelesh et al. (2024) studied overtourism in Varanasi, attributing it to the popularity of Kashi Vishwanath temple. Additionally, researchers have also studied the cultural relevance of Varanasi as a holy city (Gesler & Pierce, 2000).

The Kedarnath *Jyotirlinga* has also been the subject of significant research after the 2013 floods caused large-scale losses and destruction. Kaushik and Chakrabarti (2018) studied the perceived travel risks in Uttarakhand. The service quality of security personnel in Uttarakhand was assessed by Tyagi et al. (2016). The facilities provided in Kedarnath were the primary focus of Sati (2020). Singh et al. (2023) analysed the destination attractiveness of Kedarnath, whereas Singh et al. (2023) initiated the discussion on the implementation of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals SDGs in Kedarnath.

It is observed that not all the *Jyotirlingas* have received similar attention from the researchers and policymakers. Patil & Patil (2023) investigated the challenges that were encountered in Omkareshwar. Nath (2017) investigated the influences of the religious factors on the development of Baidyanath *Dham*. This indicates that the academia is increasingly emphasising the services and amenities offered at these *Jyotirlingas*. In spite of this curiosity, no empirical investigation has addressed service quality. Debasish Batabyal et al. (2023) created a Temple Service Quality (TSQ) model for all *Jyotirlingas*, but it lacked empirical evidence and was based on secondary data analysis.

Previous studies on service quality in pilgrimage tourism outside India include Krešić et al. (2012) in Medjugorje and Rivera et al. (2009) in Orlando. Hung et al. (2013, 2015) conducted investigations on Buddhist-themed hotels, while Hsiao-Ming and Ching-Hui (2020) studied Taiwan's Dzia Jenn temple. Jabnoun (2003), Haq and Jackson (2009), Eid (2012), Darfoon (2013), and Hassan et al. (2022) have all assessed the level of service

provided during the Hajj pilgrimage. However, extensive study on service quality at Indian pilgrimage destinations is still rare. Notable studies on tourist expectations and perception in India include those by Tripathi et al. (2010), Kumar and Singh (2015), Balaji and Venkatesan (2015), Verma and Sarangi (2019), Vidhya and Selvam (2020), and Piramanayagam et al. (2021).

The assessment of service quality at pilgrimage sites is difficult due to the subjective nature of the tourist experiences. The SERVQUAL model, which was conceptualised and validated by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), is the most commonly used model for measuring service quality, but it fails to capture the unique aspects of the tourism industry (Fick and Ritchie, 1991). However, some researchers in India have tried to adapt and refine the SERVQUAL scale for pilgrimage settings (Narayan et al., 2009; Bhat, 2012; Pai et al., 2013; Gupta and Basak, 2018).

Balancing tourist expectations and perceptions is important for increasing service quality and providing a meaningful pilgrimage experience. This can further lead to increased tourist satisfaction and increased support for the local economy, all of which coincide with the government's goals of promoting pilgrimage and religious tourism. This study seeks to fill gaps in the literature and correct methodological problems in previous studies by conducting a complete assessment of service quality at Hindu pilgrimage sites, particularly the *Jyotirlingas*.

This introductory chapter is designed to give an overview of pilgrimage tourism in India and service quality research in pilgrimage tourism. The basic idea is to introduce pilgrimage tourism. This is followed by a discussion on the importance of measuring service quality, where the primary driving factors behind taking up this research are presented.

### **1.1 Outline of the thesis**

The present study is organised into eight chapters.

Chapter 1 is introductory, about pilgrimage tourism in India as a whole and *Jyotirlinga* in particular, and why the present research is essential.

Chapter 2 discusses the review of the literature and research gap.

Chapter 3 explains the study area.

Chapter 4: The objectives, methodology, and conceptual framework used in the study.

Chapter 5 describes the demographic profile of the respondents.

Chapter 6 presents the data analysis of the first research objective.

Chapter 7 presents the data analysis of the second and third research objective.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter, which presents the summary of findings, policy implications, and scope for further research.

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