

CHAPTER-2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter looks into the previous literature related to pilgrimage tourism in India. It is arranged in five sections. In the first section, an attempt is made to understand the concept of pilgrimage tourism through the ages. In the second section, the pilgrimage tourism in India is tried to be explored. The third section includes a detailed review of the studies on service quality in pilgrimage sites. The fourth section presents the variables of service quality in pilgrimage sites. The fifth section presents the previous studies on the various problems in the pilgrimage sites. Based on the literature review, the problem statement, the research gap, and the importance of the study are identified in the sixth section.

2.1 The Evolution of Academic Inquiry into Pilgrimage Tourism

In the late 1970s, travellers visited sacred and powerful places to meditate and draw on their energy. In the 1980s, organised trips to these places became known as 'sacred journeys' or 'pilgrimages' (Rodrigues & McIntosh, 2014).

Pilgrimage is a form of religious travel that involves embarking on a journey for religious purposes and conducting specific religious practices (Turner, 1973). People who participate in these journeys are referred to as pilgrims. Within the field of tourism and travel, journeys undertaken for religious reasons are referred to as religious tourism, whereas trips specifically made for the purpose of pilgrimage are classified as pilgrimage tourism. Nevertheless, in the extant literature, religious and pilgrimage tourism are sometimes used synonymously, especially in contexts where the focus is on spiritual journeys regardless of the specific purpose. Indeed, each of these two concepts holds unique attributes. Pilgrimage visitors are required to perform specific rituals at the sacred sites they visit. Nevertheless, religious tourism does not necessitate the fulfilment of these rites, allowing for the inclusion of visitors who may just like to visit a site out of curiosity or admiration. One notable difference between religious and pilgrimage tourism is the provision of extra activities and amenities for religious travellers, including guided tours, recreational activities, and spa services. Conversely, pilgrimage tourism does not include services. During non-travel days, pilgrims are only able to dedicate their time to praying and worshipping in sacred locations. This characteristic gives a distinct meaning to pilgrimage tourism in contrast to religious tourism. Furthermore, pilgrimage locations are

characterised by the occurrence of extraordinary events, such as religious festivals or miraculous occurrences (Vukonic, 1996), while religious visitors typically visit shrines or temples. According to Shackley (2001), constructed structures are essential for religious tourism. However, in pilgrimage tourism, a location that is connected to a narrative, such as a historical event or religious story, holds more significance (Bideci & Albayrak, 2016). The various definitions of pilgrimage are given in the table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Definitions of pilgrimage

| | |
|--|--|
| Vukonić (1996) | “a physical journey in search of truth, in search of what is sacred or holy” |
| Barber (1991) | “a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding” |
| (Turner, 1973; Turner & Turner, 1995). | the journey of a religious devotee to a sacred religious site |
| (Morinis, 1983) | a journey to a site that embodies the highly valued, the deeply meaningful, or a source of core identity for the traveller |
| (Askew & Cohen, 2004) | a journey which represents the opposite of the pilgrim’s home environment. |

Source: Own Compilation

As one of the pioneering works on pilgrimage, Victor Turner's study on African communities in the 1970s highlighted that pilgrimage promotes social unity. He discovered that when participants are disconnected from their native social class structures, it leads to a willingness to rebuild the social order. Relationships are formed based on spontaneity and equality, and members experience a community with no status differences. Turner developed the term "communitas" to characterise this occurrence, in which relationships form spontaneously and one becomes a brother. His research can be applied to different societies. (Turner, 1973)

Pilgrimages hold significant religious, commercial, and scholarly importance, occupying the intersection of religion, travel, and tourism (Reader, 2013). The relationship between tourism and pilgrimage has long been a topic of debate among researchers, with many

acknowledging the unclear boundaries and overlapping characteristics between the two concepts.

Graburn (1983) noted that tourism and pilgrimage are similar as humans use them to add meaning and value to their mundane lives. But Adler (1989) placed tourism and pilgrimage on the opposite ends of his travel scale. Pearce & Stringer (1991) identified two types of travellers: travellers who are more pilgrims than tourists, and travellers who are more tourists than pilgrims. Eade's (1992) study of pilgrims and tourists at Lourdes and Rinschede's (1992) analysis of pilgrimage sites used for tourism all contribute to this discussion. Cohen (1992) adds that one key difference lies in the direction of travel: pilgrims' journey towards socio-cultural centres, while travellers move in the opposite direction. However, popular pilgrimage destinations often exhibit features of both pilgrimage and tourism.

Smith's continuum of travel, introduced in 1992, positions pilgrims and tourists as distinct actors at opposite ends, with sacred and secular poles, respectively. Between these poles exists a spectrum of sacred-secular combinations, commonly referred to as 'religious tourism.' Jackowski and Smith (1992) equate 'knowledge-based tourism' with religious tourism, emphasising travellers' search for historical and cultural significance. Badone and Roseman (2004) challenge these rigid oppositions between pilgrimage and tourism, highlighting their similarities in their book *'Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism.'*

Despite the historical perception of tourism as a newer phenomenon, its roots trace back to pilgrimage. Scholars continue to investigate the convergence of pilgrimage and tourism, with some, like Digance (2003), emphasising the fundamental role of faith in traditional religious pilgrimage. However, distinguishing between the two remains a challenge, prompting questions about whether meaningful differences exist at all.

In recent years, scholars have re-examined the concept of pilgrimage, proposing that it can be considered a form of tourism (Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Ron, 2009). This perspective complicates the distinction between pilgrimage and tourism (Badone & Roseman, 2004), with blurred boundaries between the concepts and the stakeholders involved (Collins-Kreiner, 2010).

Many researchers now advocate for viewing pilgrimage and tourism as closely related concepts, emphasising their shared characteristics (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000; Digance, 2003; Shinde & Rizello, 2014).

The reasons why people go to pilgrimage sites can be very different (Timothy & Olsen, 2006); for example, some people go because of their spiritual or religious beliefs, while others go because they are curious, interested in culture, or looking for personal meaning (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). On the other hand, religious tourism includes a broad range of experiences, from engaging in religious ceremonies to exploring cultural heritage and historical events (Handriana et al., 2019). This ongoing debate reflects the changing nature of travel and the wide variety of changing motivations behind pilgrimage and tourism today.

Present day studies on pilgrimage tourism highlight the merging of tourism and pilgrimage, blurring the distinction between the two. Academics stress how important it is to think about all the different ways that pilgrimage affects people, groups, and destinations (Collins-Kreiner, 2016). This comprehensive approach emphasises the transforming power of pilgrimage experiences, both for the participants and the destinations they visit. Pilgrimage has evolved from an adventurous journey involving hardship (Blackwell, 2007) to a journey of strengthening ties with others, reinforcing beliefs, and strengthening relationships with the divine (Pavicic et al., 2007). This view aligns with Durkheim's (1912) belief that religious rituals are social celebrations that reinforce social solidarity. Others (Shinde, 2007; Wong, Ryan, et al., 2013) argue that pilgrims and tourists share similar behaviours, with more time spent on secular activities and souvenir-buying than attending services. This shift in understanding pilgrimage's nature is ongoing.

As pilgrimage tourism continues to evolve, scholars advocate for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from sociology, anthropology, religious studies, economics, and cultural studies (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). By embracing this multidimensional perspective, academia seeks to unravel the complexities of pilgrimage and its profound implications for society and the human experience.

2.2 Pilgrimage Tourism in India

India's relationship with pilgrimage is as ancient as its civilisation, deeply embedded within the country's spiritual ethos and religious practices.

The concept of '*teertha yatra*' (pilgrimage) is a cornerstone of Hindu tradition, signifying a journey towards spiritual purification and salvation (Bhardwaj, 1989; Morinis, 1983). The term '*teertha yatra*' is derived from the Sanskrit word '*teer*,' meaning sacred water or ford, '*artha*,' meaning to cross, and '*yatra*' implying journey. This practice is not merely about visiting religious sites; it symbolises a quest for the divine, believed to gain religious merit and spiritual liberation.

From the earliest Vedic texts, which explain the idea of *tirthas* and talk about the social and spiritual benefits of visiting holy rivers and their confluences, to the epic stories in the Mahabharata and the detailed descriptions in the Puranas, the scriptures have a lot to say about how important pilgrimage is (Kaur, 1979). The '*Aitareya Brahmana*' of the Rig Veda emphasises the significance of these sacred journeys, linking them to strengthening brotherhood and fostering social values (Kaur, 1979).

With the narratives like those of Alberuni (Sachau, 2017) reflecting the philosophical and religious landscape of India, including its pilgrimage customs, the mediaeval era witnessed a major change in the practice of pilgrimage. These narratives provided analytical as well as descriptive insights on the way pilgrimage fit into the socio-cultural matrix of mediaeval India. Abul Fazl's '*Ain-i-Akbari*' (Abul Fazl Allami, 2020) enhanced this story even further by offering a hierarchical schema of Hindu pilgrimage places and mostly referencing Hindu scriptures to direct both scholars and travellers alike (Pande & Shi, 2023).

During the British colonial era, Indian pilgrimage places attracted more documentation and attention, usually from government officials and orientalist fascination. However, post-independence, pilgrimage saw a resurgence as an expression of national and cultural identity, reflecting a continuity yet transformation of traditional practices. In recent years, the magnitude and dynamics of pilgrimage in India have changed dramatically, owing to increased wealth, improved transportation, and growing interest from tourists from all over the world. Currently, religious tourism in India has a substantial economic component, with the faith-based tourism market predicted at US\$ 1,025.57 million in

2023 and growing at a CAGR of 16.2% from 2023 to 2033. (*India Faith Based Tourism Market*, 2023)

The government has recognised this potential and has implemented initiatives such as the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) in collaboration with various stakeholders to promote sustainable and holistic development at pilgrimage sites (Reddy, 2024). Table 2.2 shows the sanctioned amount for the development of *Jyotirlingas* under the PRASHAD scheme¹. Such efforts seek to strike a balance between the spiritual and heritage significance of the pilgrimage sites and their economic and development possibilities.

Table 2.2: Sanctioned amount for the development of *Jyotirlingas* under the PRASHAD scheme

| Project Name | Sanction Year | Approved Cost | Amount Release (in Crores) |
|---|---------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| Development of Dwarka | 2016-17 | 13.08 | 10.46 |
| Development of Pilgrimage Amenities at Somnath | 2016-17 | 45.36 | 45.36 |
| Development of Promenade at Somnath | 2018-19 | 47.12 | 47.12 |
| Development of Pilgrim Plaza with Queue management complex at Somnath Gujarat | 2021-22 | 49.97 | 0.00 |
| Development of Baba Baidya Nath Dham | 2018-19 | 36.79 | 34.95 |
| Development of Omkareshwar | 2017-18 | 43.93 | 43.93 |
| Development of Trimbakeshwar | 2017-18 | 52.92 | 29.84 |
| Integrated Development of Kedarnath | 2015-16 | 34.77 | 34.77 |

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

¹ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1989112>

The boom in pilgrimage tourism has had far-reaching consequences for local economies, infrastructure, and the socio-cultural fabric of the areas surrounding pilgrimage sites. While this has benefited local companies and infrastructural development, it has also prompted worries about environmental degradation, religious traditions becoming commercialized, and resource sustainability (Pande & Shi, 2023). Furthermore, the influx of pilgrims—estimated at 170 million per year visiting over 2,000 sites—has had a considerable impact on the dynamics of urban and rural areas, altering them to meet the requirements of religious tourists (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). This inflow tests the sites' ability to sustain their spiritual atmosphere and ecological equilibrium.

Myths and stories, as detailed in the *Puranas*, enhance the importance of pilgrimage in India by not only narrating the spiritual virtues of the places but also serving as cultural texts that guide the religious activities associated with them. The storylines included in these writings have spiritual, educational, and moral consequences, impacting the collective consciousness of Hindus.

In India, pilgrimages are a complex phenomenon that perfectly captures the balance between tradition and modernity. It requires a revaluation of the management and leadership of these sacred journeys as they continue to evolve guaranteeing that they remain authentic and feasible in relation to their spiritual foundations. In order to guarantee that this sacred practice keeps growing and contributes to the spiritual fabric of India, it will be essential to maintain an ideal balance between the preservation of traditional practices and the fulfilment of modern demands. While maintaining the fundamental nature of pilgrimage as a deeply spiritual experience, this balancing also needs to focus on the shifting societal norms.

2.3 Service Quality at Pilgrimage sites

Given the intangible and diverse nature of the services provided at pilgrimage sites, service quality is a significant research topic. Service quality, unlike tangible goods, is difficult to measure or evaluate. Measuring service quality shows the differences between consumer expectations and actual experiences, allowing changes that improve overall satisfaction. This is especially significant in the context of pilgrimage tourism, since the spiritual and physical well-being of the tourists are closely related to the services provided.

A number of studies have been conducted to measure the service quality at pilgrimage sites, with a focus on the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages. Jabnoun (2003), Haq and Jackson (2009), Eid (2012), Darfoon (2013), and Hassan et al. (2022) have all done extensive research on the Hajj. Eid (2012) assessed the quality of Hajj services and pilgrim satisfaction levels, emphasising the need to consider pilgrim perspectives rather than those of service providers or planners. This study emphasised the significance of Hajj facilities and services as well as their impact on the satisfaction of the pilgrims.

Krešić et al. (2012) investigated the quality of services in Medjugorje. Rivera et al. (2009) investigated this element at a religious site in Orlando. Hung et al. (2013) and Hung et al. (2015) examined service quality in Buddhist-themed hotels. Hsiao-Ming and Ching-Hui (2020) investigated it in relation to Taiwan's Djia Jenn Temple.

In India, research into service quality at pilgrimage sites is still in its nascent stages (Tripathi et al., 2010; Verma & Sarangi, 2019). Despite the country's rich cultural and religious heritage, there has been little academic research on the subject. Most of the existing studies on service quality have focused on other industries like dining, hospitality, airports, etc., with pilgrimage tourism receiving little attention. However, new studies (Verma & Sarangi, 2019; Debasish Batabyal et al., 2023) are beginning to close this gap.

Tripathi et al. (2010) explored tourist requirements in the Sikh pilgrimage, Golden Temple. Kumar and Singh (2015) investigated the Naina Devi shrine, while Balaji and Venkatesan (2015) investigated the Navagraha temple in Tanjore. Verma and Sarangi (2019) developed a model to show the relationship between satisfaction, service quality, safety, and motivation at the holy Kumbh Mela. Following this, Vidhya and Selvam (2020) performed study in the Vellore district, while Piramanayagam et al. (2021) investigated tourist motivation in Bodhgaya. Most recently, Debasish Batabyal et al. (2023) created a service quality model for temples using online user-generated content from twelve *jyotirlingas*. These studies represent important advances in understanding and enhancing service quality at India's pilgrimage sites.

These studies validate the need for understanding the perceptions and expectations of the tourists in order to continuously improve service quality. It is primarily difficult to evaluate the quality of service in pilgrimage tourism because of the subjective character of the experience. However, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) conceptualised the

SERVQUAL model, which has been used to evaluate service quality in several industries. This model identifies five dimensions of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. However, the SERVQUAL model is not without its limitations, particularly in the context of tourism, where understanding the spiritual and religious experiences is very important.

Fick and Brent Ritchie (1991) noted that the SERVQUAL scale is extremely generalised and cannot be directly applied to the tourism sector. As far as pilgrimage tourism is concerned, the attributes discussed in the SERVQUAL model may not completely capture the essence of service quality components. As such, alternative models for evaluating service quality in tourism have been explored by the researchers; for example, Narayan et al. (2009) proposed a 10-dimensional scale to evaluate service quality in the Indian tourism industry. Gupta and Basak (2018) scaled down these dimensions to four important attributes for the Rath Yatra of Puri in Odissa. These four attributes were basic facilities, ancillary facilities, signage, and physiological needs. Additionally, many other models have been proposed and modified from the gap model and SERVQUAL, highlighting the necessity of personalised approaches to measure service quality. Bhat (2012) reframed the SERVQUAL model with a focus on tourism, while Pai et al. (2013) identified accommodation, infrastructure, transportation, and room rental infrastructure as essential elements for pilgrims.

Table 2.3: Service quality variables identified by Indian authors

| Authors' | Service Quality attributes identified |
|------------------------|---|
| (Narayan et al., 2009) | Core-tourism experience, Information, Hospitality, Fairness of price, Hygiene, Amenities, Value for money, Logistics, Food and security |
| (Bhat, 2012) | Assurance, Tangibility, Responsiveness and Reliability |
| (Pai et al., 2013) | Accommodation, Infrastructure, Transportation, and Room Rental Infrastructure |
| (Gupta & Basak, 2018) | Basic Facilities, Ancillary Facilities, Signage, And Physiological Needs |

Source: Own Compilation

The measurement of service quality depends on the expectations and perceptions of customers. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) emphasised the importance of

comparing customers' pre-delivery expectations with their actual evaluations of the services. This comparison helps in identifying the existing service quality gaps and paves a solid ground for improvement.

Research has shown that the quality of services provided has a direct impact on customer satisfaction. Weidenfeld (2006) highlighted the significance of tourist satisfaction, proposing that including religious elements in hospitality can significantly improve consumer perspective. Ryan et al. (2012) further explored how satisfaction derived from a visit is influenced by perception of place, expectation, motivation, and experiences.

To conclude, the satisfaction of tourists is dependent upon the quality of service provided at pilgrimage sites, which is a complex and elaborate field of study. As evidenced above, although there has been substantial global research, particularly on Hajj and Umrah, the Indian context is still in the early phases of exploration. The necessity for more personalised approaches that account for the distinguishing features of pilgrimage tourism is evident by the limitations of current models such as SERVQUAL. It is important to understand and adapt to the expectations and perceptions of tourists to improve the quality of services and guarantee a spiritually enriching experience.

2.4 Variables to measure Service quality

Studies on the service quality in religious or pilgrimage tourism context stressed upon different variables that are considered essential for the assessment of the standard of service quality. For instance, the presence of accommodation was one of the major components having a direct impact on tourist experiences (Baker & Crompton, 2000). To ensure tourist satisfaction, the availability of accommodation is essential near the pilgrimage sites (Ryan, 2012). Public shelters, or *dharamshalas* in the Indian context, play an important role for budget pilgrims (Lois-González & Santos, 2014). However, literature suggests that many pilgrimage sites, mostly in the Himalayan regions, had inadequate lodging options, causing problems during the peak pilgrim season (Sati, 2018).

Efficient transportation systems to and from the pilgrimage sites are a necessity to improve the overall tourist experience (Hyde & Harman, 2011). Mobility is hence an essential factor in service quality assessment. Eid (2012) highlights the need for quality roads, transportation systems, and means of communication in satisfying tourist

expectations, so mobility becomes an essential aspect of assessment of service quality. Hence, mobility becomes an essential aspect of the assessment of service quality. In places like the Himalayas, where narrow, badly maintained roads cause severe discomfort and delays for tourists, transportation issues are particularly significant (Sati, 2018). Moreover, tourist satisfaction depends on total transportation accessibility, including public transit and easy movement of people (Gassiot Melian et al., 2016).

Safety and security are also major concerns for pilgrims and tourists. Rinschede (1992) stated the importance of proper safety precautions to protect the tourists. Safety in this context includes feeling safe while waiting in line, moving through the accumulated crowd in pilgrimage sites, and also while accessing the public transportation system (Filingeri et al., 2018). Improving tourist expectations and perceptions depends on safe and secure surroundings. Therefore, it is an essential aspect affecting service quality.

The availability of food and water also impacts tourist satisfaction at a pilgrimage site. In her study, Saayman et al. (2016) observed that as meals are a part of tourist expenditure, tourist experiences are greatly affected by the quality of food and water. The necessity of adhering to religious dietary regulations, such as Kashruth, and acknowledging that food must be prepared in specific ways to accommodate tourists' preferences has been highlighted (Weidenfeld, 2006) in the literature. Along with this, the difficulties encountered by the tourists in numerous pilgrimage sites in the Himalayas because of the adequacy of food and water facilities are also highlighted (Sati, 2018).

The temple service, which includes customs, rites, ceremonies, and temple management, is also vital to the pilgrimage experience. To increase religious accomplishment, the service providers need to address these spiritual requirements (Eid, 2012). An effective temple service includes not just the quality of rites but also the management of facilities, including seating, cleanliness, and accessibility. This includes the provision of *prasad*, *pooja* items, wheelchair accessibility for the elderly and disabled, as well as involvement in *aarti* ceremonies (Buzinde et al., 2014). The act of seeing and being seen by the deity, referred to as *darshan*, remains an important inspiration for devotees and must be effectively managed to meet their expectations (Eck, 1998; Kaur, 1984).

Another minor yet important aspect of service at pilgrimage sites is the availability of clear information. The tourist can have an insightful experience if he understands the

history and importance of the pilgrimage site he visits. Aukland (2015) highlighted the importance of guided tours in the context of Rishikesh. According to Eid (2012), a lack of information about facilities and services also ruins the tourist experience. Major pilgrimage sites lack adequate tourist information centres and qualified guides, causing tourist dissatisfaction (Sati, 2018).

By concentrating on the above variables, the pilgrimage site managers can bridge the gap between the expectations and perceptions of the tourist, resulting in superior service quality and tourist happiness. The table 2.4 clearly shows the variables used to measure service quality.

Table 2.4: Variables to measure Service quality

| Dimensions | Authors |
|-------------------------|--|
| Accommodation | Kumar & Singh, 2015; Darfoon, 2013; Sadibekova, et al., 2021 |
| Ease of Information | Hsiao-Ming, et al., 2020; Verma & Sarangi, 2019; Balaji & Venkatesan, 2015; Tripathi, et al., 2010 |
| Transportation | Patwal & Agarwl, 2013; Pai et al., 2013 |
| Safety and Security | Balaji & Venkatesan, 2015; Shah, 2013; Kumar & Singh, 2015; Verma & Sarangi, 2019). |
| Hygienic Food and Water | Tripathi et al., 2010; Vijayanand, 2012; Patwal & Agarwal, 2013) |

Source: Own Compilation through Literature Review

2.5 Problems at Pilgrimage sites

In the contemporary world, travel to pilgrimage sites has become more frequent as a result of enhanced transportation options and increased accessibility (Bhardwaj, 1983; Gladstone, 2013; Singh, 2004). As a result, the traditional form of pilgrimage in India has been replaced by a more modern version (Shinde, 2007). This contemporary form of pilgrimage exhibits tourism-like characteristics, such as changing visit patterns, limited engagement in customs and rituals, setting up of commercial organisations like package tours, creating specific marketing strategies, and the rise in consumerist behaviour among tourists (Gladstone, 2013; Singh, 2004).

Local populations gain considerable economic advantages from pilgrimage tourism, which promotes regional development by generating income opportunities. Nevertheless, the influx of pilgrims and tourists presents a variety of challenges that impact the sacred sites and the local communities. Some of the challenges include overpopulation, environmental degradation, commercialisation, economic inequalities, loss of spiritual atmosphere, infrastructure problems, and managing tourism carrying capacity.

Problems Faced by Tourists

The congestion of pilgrimage sites is a significant challenge. Congestion and an overall reduction of experience for everyone involved are the consequences of exceeding the capacity of these areas to accommodate visitors. Congestion does not only cause a problem to locals but is a major challenge for tourists visiting with religious motives. Nolan & Nolan (1992) emphasise that this issue is particularly prevalent during religious festivals and peak seasons. The spiritual experience of pilgrims can be reduced, and travel can be challenging due to the presence of a large number of people. Citing an example from India, the commercialisation of sacred rituals such as *puja* in Pushkar has attracted a significant number of tourists, which has further strained physical spaces and disrupted traditional practices (Joseph & Kavoori, 2001). The management of these sites is further complicated by the addition of recreational tourists, which contributes to the congestion. In the interest of tourism development, the physical limitations of these sacred spaces are frequently disregarded, resulting in scenarios in which the sheer volume of visitors can overwhelm the infrastructure. The problem of congestion in and around religious sites during religious events, cultural ceremonies, and other sacred events is an ongoing problem (Woodward, 2004). These sites often face wear and tear, litter, and vandalism, and their sanctity is further compromised by the leisure tourists (Olsen, 2003). Such tourists frequently disrupt prayers (Pfaffenberger, 1983), cause overcrowding (Fish & Fish, 1993), cause disorder (Cohen, 1998), and generate noise (Kasim, 2011). This causes problems for pilgrims and tourists who arrive to seek peace and spiritual calmness. Additionally, the spiritual significance of these sites may be diminished by their commoditisation and commercialisation (Wall & Mathieson, 2006; Egresi & Kara, 2016). The underdevelopment of transportation, accommodation, and other infrastructural facilities on tourist and pilgrim circuits results in another major problems for the tourists. For instance, the Gangotri Circuit in the Himalayas is particularly susceptible to disasters because of its inadequate infrastructure and fragile landscape (Sati, 2018).

Problems Faced by Suppliers and Local Residents

The total burden of the increased environmental degradation, including traffic congestion, water supply challenges, and inadequate sewerage systems, is frequently faced by residents (Alipour et al., 2017). According to Shinde (2012), the strain on local resources is evident from the fact that the residents are compelled to spend a lot of time storing water due to the limited municipal water supplies. Traffic congestion, inadequate water supply, sewerage systems, and solid refuse management are the most obvious environmental consequences in pilgrimage towns (Shinde, 2007). The infrastructure has not kept pace with the growing demand for environmental services. The difference presents significant challenges for the local governments and residents who are forced to manage the elevated levels of garbage and pollution that are the consequence of the increased number of visitors.

The locals accuse tourists of desecrating sacred places like Pushkar (Joseph & Kavoori, 2001). The crowd sizes exceed space, dominating the natural environment and making inhabitants feel like they are performing for the visitors rather than worshipping (Nolan & Nolan, 1992). The growing visitor numbers regularly exceed local populations in Tirumala, straining services and causing waste and pollution (Shinde, 2007). Short-term, high-volume tourist influxes can stress water supply and drainage systems, resulting in huge waste generation (Shinde, 2007). Another issue is the competition for transportation facilities and parking around shrines and cathedrals (Digance, 2003). Additionally, some tourists also end up offending local feelings with inappropriate attire (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2009). This presents a greater challenge for local devotees in terms of religious observance and practices (Shackley, 2001).

Overcrowding, traffic congestion, insufficient facilities, and infrastructure limitations have plagued historic towns due to rapid tourism growth (Orbasli, 2002). Tourism can harm the standard of living through pollution, higher costs, and cultural and social disruptions (Brunt & Courtney, 1999). Ownership patterns and traditional economies are also changing (Woodward, 2004).

Research indicates that tourism development is also linked to increased crime rates (Doan, 2006). Service gaps, infrastructural issues, inadvertent damage, noise pollution, vandalism, and negative tourist experiences are widespread (Woodward, 2004).

The environmental fragility of landscapes is made worse by the presence of tourist centres and pilgrimages. Environmental and ecological issues are the result of the insufficient carrying capacity of these destinations (Sati, 2018). During peak periods, local municipalities are compelled to apply pesticides and insecticides to prevent epidemics of diseases due to the frequent occurrence of sewage overflows and foul smells (Shinde, 2007). The fragile Himalayan landscape has been adversely affected by modern tourism, which has resulted in overcrowding, traffic congestion, and environmental pollution (Singh, 2006). Commercial activities, such as mining, forestry, poaching, felling, and the trade in medicinal plants, add to the environmental pressure. The influx of tourists poses a threat to the environmental sustainability of these regions, and if not managed effectively, it can result in long-term degradation.

Problems Faced by the Management Committees

The management committees in these pilgrimage sites also face problems. Modern consumption patterns are challenging traditional perceptions of religious sites (Huang & Pearce, 2019). First of all, the development of effective religious tourism strategies is frequently delayed by the absence of sufficient information regarding the volume of tourist visits (Kartal et al., 2015). Most of these sites have no data about the number of tourists visiting the place. Secondly, the sustainability of these pilgrimage destinations is at risk due to the risks posed by peak season crowds, which may result in infrastructure breakdowns and health and environmental issues (Shinde, 2018).

Further, these holy sites, which are turned into tourist attractions, are threatened by cultural commodification. To attract tourists, some priests in Pushkar have shortened the puja duration (Joseph & Kavoori, 2001). This change impacts ritual credibility and cultural significance. Such a transition from a sacred ceremony to a commercial venture weaves tourists negatively into the city's sacred fabric.

Engaged and collaborative stakeholders, such as businesses, local communities, pilgrims, visitors, and the environment, are essential for the development of religious tourism (Lin, 2021). It is essential to understand the significance of these stakeholders and their contributions in order to foster engagement and manage relationships (Lin, 2021). Nevertheless, there is a lack of research on the salience of stakeholders in religious tourism (Lin, 2021). The contemporary management of religious sites should prioritise

the reinforcement of their religious identity and the enhancement of the experiences of believers (Olsen, 2012).

Although pilgrimage tourism supports local economies, it also generates economic disparities within the community. Inflationary prices for products and services render them less affordable for locals, despite the fact that increased tourism revenue results in improved living conditions for some (Vukonic, 1996). This inflation has the potential to worsen the economic disparity between those who derive benefits from tourism and those who do not. Tour operators, hoteliers, and other business owners are typically the ones who benefit economically, while the majority of profits go to a small number of owners. This unequal distribution has the potential to result in social tensions and discontent among residents who perceive themselves as being excluded from the benefits of tourism.

Neglecting the wider effects of tourism development, such as its influence on community well-being and cultural integrity, can result from the emphasis on economic gains (Alipour et al., 2017).

Infrastructure and service deficiencies pose substantial challenges for pilgrimage destinations. Many historic cities and pilgrimage sites lack the infrastructure to accommodate high tourist traffic, resulting in insufficient parking, insufficient public amenities, and deteriorating infrastructure (Orbasli, 2000). The disparity between service demand and available infrastructure in pilgrimage sites worsens problems such as pollution, waste management, and depletion of resources.

It can be concluded that pilgrimage sites have challenges that show the importance of a balanced approach to tourism management. While pilgrimage tourism has obvious economic benefits, addressing environmental, cultural, and infrastructure concerns is essential for its survival. Effective planning and management, keeping in mind the concept of 'tourism carrying capacity' (TCC), can help reduce these difficulties while maintaining the sanctity of these pilgrimage sites. By addressing this myriad of issues, pilgrimage sites can continue to serve as essential cultural hubs while also contributing to local economic growth. Addressing these difficulties demands an inclusive approach that takes into account the requirements of the pilgrims, tourists, and local population along with the insights of management involved. Policies and practices that encourage sustainable tourism development, safeguard cultural assets, and improve infrastructure and services are critical. By encouraging stakeholder participation and executing effective

management measures, pilgrimage sites can strike a balance between economic development and cultural conservation.

2.6 Problem Statement

There is a major difference in the number of domestic tourists visiting North Indian states compared to South Indian states, despite the significant contribution of pilgrimage tourism to employment creation, societal development, poverty alleviation, and cultural promotion in India (table 2.5). The difference highlights the gaps in the current body of literature, particularly in the context of service quality at north Indian pilgrimage sites. The specific service quality at these sites has not been fully studied, despite the extensive research conducted on the economic and cultural impacts of pilgrimage tourism. Furthermore, previous research has focused mainly on the issues encountered by the tourists, disregarding the challenges experienced by supply-side businesses and temple management. It is important to note that the *Jyotirlingas*, which are significant religious destinations in North India, have not been examined in this way. The objective of this study is to address these gaps by conducting an assessment of the quality of service at North Indian pilgrimage sites. This assessment will offer a comprehensive view of the challenges encountered by both the tourists and the suppliers.

Research Gap

The following were the gaps identified:

1. The number of domestic tourists visiting North Indian States is less than the number of tourists visiting South India. There is an absence of significant literature to study the reason for the imbalance in tourist visits in the two parts of the country. The data presented in Table 2.5 shows that the states in the Southern Region of India perform better in tourism than the North Indian States. Hence, the study will focus on north Indian pilgrimage sites.
2. Pilgrimage tourism has led to job creation, development of society, and poverty alleviation. Pilgrimage tourism fosters worldwide understanding while also promoting local crafts and cultural activities. Religion has historically provided a significant boost to the tourism sector by attracting massive crowds to pilgrimage sites. As a result, pilgrimage tourism is chosen in this research.
3. Existing studies address the problems of tourists and other involved stakeholders in temples of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh,

Uttarakhand, Kashmir, *Shaktipeeth* of Jammu, and the Char Dham *yatras*, but the other *dyotirlingas*, which attract a huge population of tourists coming over to visit, have never been studied before in this context. Hence, the *dyotirlingas* have been chosen as the study area.

4. An extensive literature review establishes that tourist expectations and perceptions have been fairly researched in India and worldwide. Yet, in spite of the revenue generated from temples and the volume of tourists it attracts, no serious effort has been made to find the service quality of pilgrimage sites. Hence, the study focuses on bridging the gap in literature and finding the service quality of pilgrimage sites.

5. Previous studies have presented a one-sided view in their study based on the tourist expectations and experiences. The problems encountered by the tourists have been thoroughly acknowledged. But the issues of the supply side in the pilgrimage sites have not been taken into consideration. Apart from the tourist side of the problems, this study also focuses on the problems of the supply side.

The following points summarise the research gaps that have been identified in the field of service quality:

1. The service quality at pilgrimage sites has not been studied before. Pilgrimage is an important revenue earning source for the economy. Hence, the study focuses on the service quality at the pilgrimage sites.
2. There has been a scattered study of temples in different parts of the country. Research has not focused on a specific part before. By reviewing the service quality of north Indian pilgrimage sites, the study might reveal the reasons for lesser tourist visits in the north Indian destinations compared to the southern part of the country.
3. A dual view of the problems at pilgrimage sites (both demand and supply side) has not been taken into consideration before.
4. The issues relating to temple management (financial issues, operational issues, etc.) have not been studied before.
5. The *dyotirlingas* have not been studied in spite of being an important religious tourist destination in India.

Table 2.5: Share of top 10 states/UTs of India in number of domestic tourist visits between 2015-2020

| | Domestic Tourist Visits | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Percentage Share (%) | | | | |
| | 2015 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| Tamil Nadu | 23.29 | 21.31 | 20.8 | 21.31 | 23.0 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 14.31 | 13.21 | 15.4 | 23.08 | 14.1 |
| Karnataka | 8.37 | 8.04 | 11.6 | 9.82 | 12.7 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 8.49 | 9.49 | 10.5 | 10.21 | 11.6 |
| Telangana | - | 5.90 | 5.0 | 3.58 | 6.6 |
| Maharashtra | 7.22 | 7.21 | 6.4 | 6.43 | 6.4 |
| West Bengal | 4.90 | 4.61 | 4.6 | 3.98 | 4.7 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 5.45 | 9.33 | 4.5 | 3.82 | 3.9 |
| Gujarat | 2.53 | 2.4 | 2.9 | 2.54 | 3.2 |
| Punjab | 1.80 | 2 | 2.4 | 2.04 | 2.7 |
| Others | 23.64 | 16.5 | 15.9 | 17.01 | 11.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Market Research and Statistics, Ministry of Tourism, India

Importance of the study

The significance of this research is therefore threefold. First, it offers a thorough assessment of tourist expectations and perceptions regarding service quality variables at specific pilgrimage sites in North India, providing valuable insights for both academic and practical use in tourism studies. Secondly, it conducts a critical evaluation of the challenges that surround these pilgrimage sites, addressing both the supply and demand sides of the tourism sector. This dual analysis contributes to a more thorough understanding of the difficulties faced by stakeholders in the tourism industry. Third, it contributes to the broader body of knowledge in tourism management and policy-making by identifying the important issues in the management of these pilgrimage sites.

Scope of the study

The scope of this study includes an analysis of service quality at seven Jyotirlingas in North India—Kedarnath, Kashi Vishwanath, Omkareshwar, Mahakaleshwar, Baidyanath

Dham, Nageshwar, and Somnath. These sites were selected due to their immense religious significance and their role as major pilgrimage destinations in India. The study aims to assess the quality of services provided at these pilgrimage sites from both the demand and supply perspectives.

The research primarily focuses on assessing tourist expectations and perceptions of service quality at these pilgrimage sites. It explores key service components such as accommodation, food and water, transportation, safety and security, ease of access to information, and temple services. Additionally, it seeks to understand the challenges faced by various stakeholders, including tourists, temple authorities, local vendors, and transportation providers.

A mixed-method approach is adopted, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. Surveys were conducted among tourists visiting these Jyotirlingas to gather insights into their experiences, while interviews with temple management and local stakeholders provide a holistic view of operational challenges and service gaps.

The study also investigates the differences between tourist expectations and actual perceptions, aiming to identify areas requiring enhancement. Further, it examines management and financial issues affecting temple management and the tourism ecosystem. Through this, the research contributes to policymaking and strategic planning for sustainable religious tourism in India.

By addressing these aspects, the study seeks to bridge the existing research gaps and provide empirical insights into service quality at pilgrimage sites, ultimately enhancing the overall experience for pilgrims.

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