

Unveiling the Religious Tourism Potential in and around the Heritage City of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, Maharashtra, India.

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Abstract

The significance of religion in India's tourism industry is widely recognized. The nation is gearing up to promote faith tourism by developing more religious tourist circuits to attract foreign visitors. Religious tourism in India forms the foundation of societal values and the structure of religious culture. The potential of religious tourism in India has been a significant contributor to the country's development, particularly due to the presence of numerous religious sites across the nation.

Approximately 20 percent of the properties inscribed on the World Heritage List have some sort of religious or spiritual connection. Religious architecture holds a unique role in cultural heritage, as it is widely accessible and represents one of the most significant components of tangible cultural heritage. India is home to a vast array of religious and sacred sites that represent the country's rich cultural and spiritual diversity. Sacred sites, along with their surrounding functional environments, have a profound influence on the structure and composition of adjacent and associated urban cities. These sacred sites help shape the identity and image of public spaces. Their architectural value has a significant impact on the activation of tourism and business, enhancing the competitiveness of the city and can transform its significance on both national and international levels.

The aim of this research is to study the impact of historical sacred sites on the development of their surroundings and changes in the modern urban environment. The study deliberates a holistic development approach intertwining historic, cultural and natural values including the broader urban context and its geographical setting. The study undertakes a case of Heritage City of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, Maharashtra, India. The basic method of research is the study of sacred sites of different levels, in and around the city.

Keywords— Religious tourism, religious architecture, historical sacred sites.

I. Introduction

For centuries humans have felt the urge to travel. The history of human travel is an indication of human curiosity, persistence, and the desire to connect with the world. Pushing boundaries and fostering cultural exchanges across generations has fascinated humans since historic times. Traveling during those times was difficult because of the antiquated transport facilities and lack of safety and comfort on the route. Time and cost were the other major basic constraints. As our societies have evolved, so too have our reasons for travelling, transitioning from basic survival needs to more elaborate pursuits driven by the thirst for discovery, knowledge, and self-improvement. In recent times, several factors have contributed to an increase in human travel. Technological advancements, socio-economic changes, and evolving cultural preferences have contributed to the formation of varied and cheaper tourist plant facilities. This has made travel more desirable and feasible for all. Interconnected world and globalization have led to a significant increase in the volume and diversity of travel in recent times.

II. Religious Tourism And Urban Development A. Religious Tourism

There is a significant difference in pilgrimage and religious tourism. For Pilgrimage purpose and motivation of travel is religious. Participation in a religious ritual, praying or religious event can be the factors. Whereas for religious tourism the purpose and motivation of travel is knowledge search. Religious tourism can be defined as travel primarily motivated by the desire to experience religious practices, traditions, or the associated cultural elements, such as art, architecture, customs, and heritage. The factors of attraction are history and the importance of cultural heritage site along with religious beliefs. Places of worship stand as enduring landmarks, bearing witness to historic inter-territorial events over centuries and often serving as catalysts for subsequent occurrences.



Fig. 1. Difference in Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism.

B. Religious Tourism in India Religious tourism in India forms the foundation of societal values and the structure of religious culture. Its principles contribute to shaping policies, management, and developmental objectives. Pilgrimages, deeply rooted in India's historic culture, are a prominent and longstanding tradition. The potential of religious tourism in India has been a significant contributor to the country's development, particularly due to the presence of numerous religious sites across the nation. Religious Tourism has emerged as a dominant economic factor in India and in international horizon. There has been a surge in spiritual tourism in the near past. Modern religious tourism has become a key driver of the socio-economic development of a country. Religious tourism is deemed as an economic and social activity which benefits the local people & places as well as the country by generating employment and income, improvement in tourism and allied sector infrastructure etc. To achieve success in religious tourism, India needs to adopt a scientific approach for planning and management. With its incredible potential religious tourism in India is now attracting researchers and investors from different domains such as geography, history, sociology, economics, commerce, management, urban design, archeology, conservation and environmental sciences.

C. Religious Tourism and Urban Identity

India is home to many significant historic cities. Most of these cities possess components of religious significance which are recognized as sacred sites by different communities. Sacred sites, along with their surrounding functional environments, have a profound influence on the structure and composition of adjacent and associated urban cities. The term "Sacred site" embraces areas of special spiritual significance to peoples and communities; and the term "Sacred natural site" corresponds to the areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities," According to ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property), living religious heritage has characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of heritage. These sacred sites help shape the identity and image of public spaces. They contribute to creating attractive, multifunctional

spaces that are open to a variety of activities. Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar formerly known as Aurangabad, is one such tourist city with a rich historical background whose religious tourism potential is yet to be fully realized.

III. Study Area: Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar –Aurangabad

Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (CSN) – formerly known as Aurangabad as a tourist destination, has already gained fame on national and international maps. Sites such as Bibi-Ka-Makbara, Ellora Caves (World Heritage site) and Daultabad fort are well-known and major tourist attractions. Along with these, the city has many religious sites which are national and regional level centers of pilgrimage. The study scope is confined to religious tourism in different temples in and around the city. These sacred sites exhibit rich cultural and built heritage. The structures -Temples on the sites are architectural marvels of the time. These structures with their associated compatible environment have a significant impact on the composition of urban surroundings and the city. They are responsible for creating the image and identity of public spaces. Which in return influences the activation of tourist and business districts and regions and increases the attractiveness of the city as a tourist destination. The basic method of research is the study of sacred sites of different levels, in and around the city and its religious tourism potential.

For the purpose of study, the selected sites are:

A. Grishneshwar Temple CSN (Aurangabad), Maharashtra.

B. Khandoba Temple Satara Parisar, CSN (Aurangabad), Maharashtra.

C. Siddheswar Mahadev Temple, Kaygaon Toka, CSN(Aurangabad).Maharashtra.

A. Grishneshwar Temple CSN (Aurangabad), Maharashtra.

Prospects: Grishneshwar Jyotirlinga is a Hindu temple, dedicated to Shiva. The temple is a national protected site, situated in Verul village, 30 kilometers north-west of the city Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. Being one of the 12 Jyotirlinga temples, Grishneshwar attracts devotees from all over India, especially during the Maha Shivaratri, Shravan month, Shani Amavasya when special prayers & rituals are performed. The annual average footfall is recorded to be between 25000 to 30000 pilgrims.



Fig. 2. Grishneshwar Temple Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar -Aurangabad Maharashtra. (Photograph By Rashmi.parab - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21747604> Map: https://bhuvan-app1.nrsc.gov.in/culture_monuments/)

Historical Background: The temple structure was destroyed by the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. It was rebuilt in the 16th century by Malojiraje Bhosale, the father of Shahaji Raje Bhosale, and later renovated by Rani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore in 1730.

Geographical Setting: The mandir is a national protected site, one and a half kilometers away from the Ellora Caves- a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site - one of the largest rock-cut Hindu temple cave complexes in the world, with artwork dating from the period 600–1000 AD. Making it quite assessable for tourists along with devotees. Do not use abbreviations in the title or heads unless they are unavoidable.

Architecture: Constructed in “Hemadpanthi” architectural style with basalt rocks, it features elaborate carvings and sculptures of gods and goddesses. Temple has five-tiered peak adorned with elaborate carvings and topped with a kalash (pot-like finial). The temple features a spacious mandapa supported by intricately carved 24 pillars. The garbhagriha houses the Shiva Linga. The temple has a large courtyard surrounded by stone walls, offering a serene atmosphere for devotees.

Challenges: The major issues observed in Grishneshwar temple surroundings is the rapid and unplanned urbanization, which adversely affects the physical appearance of the site and diminishes its significance as a place of worship, disrupting the temple's serene and spiritual ambiance.

- **Conservation and Restoration:** Regular conservation to preserve carvings and stone structures.
- **Encroachment and Urbanization:** Rapid urban development disrupts spiritual ambiance and diminishes cultural significance.
- **Tourism Pressure:** High footfall during religious festivals strains facilities.
- **Water and Weathering Damage:** Exposure to natural elements threatens stone structure.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:** Inadequate parking, sanitation, and crowd management facilities cause difficulties.
- **Awareness and Promotion:** Temple's less national and international recognition affects cultural tourism.

B. Khandoba Temple Satara Parisar, CSN (Aurangabad), Maharashtra. Prospects: Shri Khandoba Temple, a significant pilgrimage site in Satara village, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, Maharashtra, is renowned for its historical significance, spiritual legacy, and distinctive temple architecture, drawing thousands of devotees, particularly during Champa Shashti.

Historical Background: Shri Khandoba Devasthanam, a 12th-13th century temple in Deccan, is a significant center of Khandoba worship. It gained prominence during the Maratha period, with renovations led by Ahilyabai Holkar in the 18th century. The site holds historical importance due to Bajirao Peshwa's meeting with the Nizam, highlighting its role in regional politics. The temple is a major pilgrimage site, particularly during Champa Shashti, attracting 5-6 lakh devotees annually.

Geographical Setting: Shri Khandoba temple, located in Satara village, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, is a strategic temple situated on an elevated platform, 2 kms from Satara hill range. The Kham River and surrounding landscape influence the region's settlement patterns and pilgrimage traditions. The temple offers scenic views and serves as a landmark for devotees and tourists, contributing to the spiritual and cultural landscape.



Fig. 3. Khandoba Temple Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar -Aurangabad Maharashtra. (Photograph Credit: Swapnil Joshi Co-convenor of INTACH CSN. Map: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Shri+Khandoba+Temple/>)

Architecture: Featuring Nagarkhanas (entrance pavilions), Mandapas (pillared halls), Garbhagrihas (sanctuaries), and Shikharas (spires), the temple is built according to traditional Maratha architecture. Constructed from red sandstone, the original shikhara was later rebuilt using bricks during renovations under Ahilyabai Holkar. The temple walls feature multi-cusped arches, floral motifs, geometric patterns, and intricate carvings from the Holkar period.

Challenges: It is facing a growing threat from urbanization, which is threatening its historical essence and sacred atmosphere, as encroachment and modern developments alter its traditional landscape, diminishing its cultural and spiritual significance.

- **Structural Deterioration:** Conservation efforts needed to prevent material degradation.
- **Encroachment and Urbanization:** Expanding settlements and modern infrastructure encroach on heritage space.
- **Pilgrimage Management:** Crowd control and infrastructure maintenance challenges.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Though it has regional importance, the Temple is less known nationally.
- **Environmental Factors:** Proximity to Kham River increases moisture-related erosion risks.

C. Siddheshwar Mahadev Temple, Kaygaon Toka,

CSN(Aurangabad). MaharashtraProspects: Siddheshwar Temple, a significant cultural and religious site in Kaygaon Toka, Maharashtra, is a prominent pilgrimage destination dedicated to Lord Shiva, renowned for its historic significance, spiritual significance, and remarkable stone architecture.

Historical Background: As per local narratives, the place is mentioned in Purana (Ramayana). The present Siddheshwar Mahadev Temple was built in 1767 (Samvat 1833) at a cost of Rs. 93,000 by a Brahmin named Vishnu Mahadev Gajre, according to an inscription on the south gate. Temples built from black basalt are decorated with intricate carvings depicting stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Geographical Setting: Siddheshwar Temple, located at the Pravara and Godavari rivers' confluence in Kaygaon Toka, is a significant religious site with a spiritual atmosphere and a serene environment due to its lush greenery and ghats, making it a popular destination for devotees and tourists.

Architecture: The temple complex follows the Nagara style of architecture, characterized by intricately carved stone structures and a shikhara (spire) with a beehive-like design. The temple complex comprises three main temples: Siddheshwar Mahadev Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, Vishnu Temple, and Devi Temple, dedicated to Goddess Parvati. The temples feature high-relief sculptures and spacious ghats for religious rituals and ceremonies.

Challenges: Rapid urban expansion and environmental factors are posing a significant threat to Siddheshwar Temple, with encroachments disrupting its serene ambiance, affecting its physical preservation and spiritual experience for devotees.



Fig. 4. Siddheshwar Temple Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar -Aurangabad Maharashtra. (Map: https://bhuvan-app1.nrsc.gov.in/culture_monuments/ Photograph: Author)

- **Conservation and Restoration:** The temple's centuries-old carvings and inscriptions require preservation efforts.
- **Encroachment and Urbanization:** Urban development threatens the temple's heritage and landscape.
- **Water Damage:** The temple's proximity to the river exposes it to moisture and erosion.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Despite historical significance, the temple is less known.
- **Tourism Management:** Need for improved infrastructure for pilgrims and tourists.

The key features of the three selected temples sites are enlisted here. The selection is based on the associated values (Tangible and Intangible) of the temples.

Selected Site - CSN (Aurangabad) Maharashtra	Grishneshwar Temple, Verul.	Khandoba Temple, Satara Parisar.	Siddheshwar Mahadev Temple Kaygaon Toka.
Photograph			
Historical Aspect	Mentioned in Shiva Purana. Destroyed in the 13 th cent. Restored in the 17 th Cent.	12th-13th century temple Restored in the 18th Cent.	The place is mentioned in puranas, present temple was built in 1767 (Samvat 1833)
Architectural Feature	Hemadpanthi architectural style in basalt rocks.	Traditional Maratha architecture. Built in red sandstone and restored in brick construction.	Nagara style architecture. Built in black basalt rock, feature high-relief sculptures and spacious ghats.




Geographical setting	 1.5 kms from the Ellora Caves- a UNESCO World Heritage Site.	 2 kms from Satara hill range in a dense urban congestion.	 Situated on a confluence of Pravara & Godavari rivers', Kaygaon Toka.
Religious Tourism Potential	National Importance- one of 12 Jyotirlingas. Annual avg footfall 25000- 30000 pilgrims.	Regional Importance- 5-6 lac devotees annually (Champa Shasti)	Regionally known for Sangam Rituals. Exact Footfall data not available.

Table 1. Details of the selected sacred sites

IV. Holistic Development Approach

The above discussed three sacred places in and around CSN,(Aurangabad) have a distinct character in terms of its geographical settings, religious importance, cultural identity and Architecture brilliance. Efforts have been in line for monumental conservation. The study deliberates a holistic development approach intertwining historic, cultural and natural values including the broader urban context and its geographical setting along with the socio-economic activities thus enhancing the livability of urban areas- Historic Urban Landscape approach(HUL).

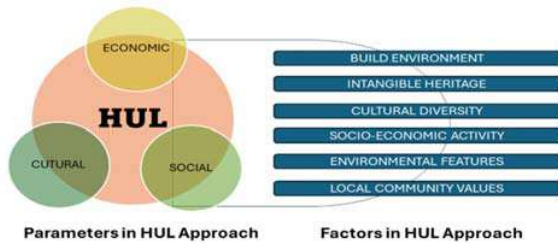


Fig. 5. Key Features of HUL Approach (Source: <https://niuua.in/intranet/sites/default/files/2446.pdf> Recreated: Author)

The HUL approach was introduced by UNESCO in 2011. It is an innovative perspective for understanding urban heritage integrating, heritage conservation and sustainable urban development. It identifies historic cities as evolving living entities, encompassing the entire urban fabric along with its cultural and natural values, rather than just focusing on individual monuments. It offers a framework for maintaining the integrity of these urban environments.

The Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach and religious tourism are interconnected in many ways, as both focus on preserving cultural heritage while promoting sustainable development. The challenges faced and its HUL based Solutions for the sacred sites discussed can be summarized as follows.

The HUL approach offers a comprehensive method for maintaining historic urban religious sites while promoting sustainable religious tourism. The integration of heritage conservation with urban planning and community engagement ensures the preservation of sacred landscapes for both worshippers and visitors.

V. Conclusion

It is imperative to maintain the religious aspect of the town amidst modern urban pressures owing to its historical and cultural significance, as well as role of these religious spaces in social cohesion and economic development. By applying the HUL principles, this research aims to propose sustainable strategies to preserve Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Aurangabad)’s unique urban heritage while ensuring its continued relevance and vitality in an increasingly globalized world.

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Challenges	HUL-Based Solutions
Over-tourism and congestion.	Visitor management strategies, capacity limits.
Commercialization of religious sites.	Strict heritage regulations, local business involvement.
Infrastructure pressure.	Sustainable urban planning.
Loss of local identity.	Community-led conservation projects.

Table 2. Challenges and Solutions for selected sacred sites in view of Religious Tourism and Urban Development Prospects.

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