

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN AURANGABAD REGION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY DURING THE PANDEMIC PERIOD

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Abstract

In the midst of the Corona virus pandemic, pilgrims cannot perform their pilgrimage. Places with multiple temples remain without pilgrims. Three different temples, such as the Grishneshwar Jyotirlinga Temple, Bhadra Maruti Mandir and Kachner Chintamani Parashwanath Jain Temple, have been studied empirically. Data on tourism and pilgrimages were also collected. During the first six months of the pandemic, religious tourism and temple pilgrimages fell by 85.95 percent. Temples in the Aurangabad area were closed for a few months around the time of the pandemic. The pandemic is affecting pilgrimage, so the number of pilgrims has decreased over the past ten years. There were other changes in the motives for expeditions to selected temples. Temple guardians and pilgrimage organizers ensure the safety of the pilgrims and the temple itself. The temples of Aurangabad have encouraged pilgrims through online prayer services, spiritual pilgrimages and virtual pilgrimages to strengthen their ties with temples, which shows how pilgrimages and religious tourism have developed.

Keywords: *Empirical Study, Pilgrimages, Religious, Tourism, COVID-19, Impact, Aurangabad*

Introduction

Tourism is essential to the economic growth of many countries and is one of the largest employers in the world (Chang et al., 2020). Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing service industries in the country, with major socio-economic, cultural, and environmental industries. India has a rich cultural heritage, ancient monuments, famous temples, architectural masterpieces, wildlife sanctuaries and scenic spots, and in the country attracts tourism both internationally and domestically. Maharashtra is above all a paradise for pilgrimages in the world. The world famous Hindu shrines attract millions of tourists at home and abroad. State pilgrimage tourism generates socio-economic benefits such as national integration, international understanding, direct and indirect job creation, currency exchange, local development, national unity and promotion of our culture on a national and international level (Kavitha et al., 2019) - one of the fastest growing Industries in the world in the tourism industry. For many countries, tourism is the main source of wealth; Tourism also contributes significantly to India's economic growth; has a unique ecological, economic and socio-cultural influence in this country (Prabhu et al., 2020) one of the earliest forms of tourism, a critical sector in the travel and tourism sector (Zamani et al., 2016). According to the literature, the religious journey originated in the evolution of religion (Ayorekire et al., 2020). One of the most effective forms of development on the planet is religious tourism. According to statistics from the World Tourism Organization, around 330 million people visit the world's most important pilgrimage centers on spiritual, religious and cognitive tours every year (Griffin et al., 2017), traditional and spiritual values (Ayorekire et al., 2020). The desire to absorb new ideas and create spiritual memories motivates tourists and religious endeavors (Griffin et al., 2007).

Review of Literature

The religious tourist industry is catastrophic in terms of COVID-19's economic, social, food, employment, and religious effects. Mass gatherings and pilgrimages were halted. Governments all throughout the world are concerned about religious tourism at this time (Raj et al., 2020). Religious tourism and pillars across the globe moved radically in reaction to the Coronavirus pandemic: hundreds of places were closed, and religious leaders warned their followers to avoid pilgrimages and spiritual travels that put their safety or the safety of others at risk (Faris et al., 2020). On August 7, 2020, India was the world's third-largest donor of COVID-19 cases. India confronts significant hurdles in minimizing COVID-19 evacuations induced by mice plants, as well as returning migrants from India and worldwide returnees

(www.mohfw.gov.in). The bulk of the world's population is infected with COVID-19 and is unable to leave their homes.

In most nations, business operations have been halted to prevent and minimize contamination, as well as an unprecedented suspension of air transport services. By April 2020, 96% of global locations have enforced travel restrictions owing to the Coronavirus. COVID-19 is more contagious than any other virus (Bai et al., 2020; Rothe et al., 2020). Tourism is currently possibly the greatest sector of the global economy, accounting for over 9% of global GDP and creating roughly 200 million employment. Only 2.4 million people visit India each year, out of a population of 600 million. Each year, 10 million Indian visitors visit the United States, accounting for only 4% of all foreign travel. Pilgrimage as tourism is particularly popular in India when it comes to religious tourism. Pilgrims usually attend or participate in cultural events such as fine art, dance festivals, and regional festivals. Every pilgrimage site in the world is closed owing to the active COVID-19, and the risk of tourism is considerable, and the economic situation is dire (Vidhya et al., 2021). During the first week of the epidemic, leaders of major faiths and congregations urged their adherents to keep a safe distance from society, support those in need, avoid residences, and engage in prayers and rituals.

Several religious and cultural activities have been cancelled at the shrines. Following the war, nothing else has had an influence on tourism, including religious tourism and pilgrimages, save the COVID-19 epidemic. This report summarizes the findings of a seven-month study on the impact of the SARS-Cov-2 epidemic on tourism and religious pilgrimages in Aurangabad's Hindu wilderness areas (January to July 2020).

The first signs of reactivation of pilgrims in the centers analyzed were observed in mid-January and are similar to the "opening" reports for Grishneshwar Temple, Kachner Parashwanath Jain Temple and Bhadra Maruti Mandir. The information is brief. A significant research issue is the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the pilgrimage areas and the management of thousands of holy sites worldwide. The unfortunate rapid progress of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2020 is another important reason. The number of diagnosed Coronavirus cases in the global total number of cases has unfortunately been recorded in individual countries around the world since the beginning of December 2020. Today it exceeds 560,000 as of October 31, 2020. Today's results show that many studies have taken into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pilgrimages and pilgrimages religious tourism in 2020 and 2021.

Methodology

The empiric analysis encompasses the significant temples of the Aurangabad Region: Grishneshwar Temple, Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple and Bhadra Maruti Temple. They are most prominent and well-known pilgrimage sites in the Maharashtra. Every year, around one million people visit the above five temples before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the first six months of the SARS-Cov-2 coronavirus pandemic (which the authors paid most attention to), detailed data on pilgrims was taken from the shrine pilgrim office in each temple. The statistical material collected is structured and systematic. The results of the study present the method of comparison, description and method of analysis. For the description of quantitative data, cartographic presentation methods and graphic presentation methods used in this research framework, interviews were conducted with temple guards and workers and pilgrims. Grishneshwar Temple and Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple interview pilgrims. In the field of research, to be precise at Grishneshwar Temple, Bhadra Maruti Temple and at Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple. An explanatory model is presented for pilgrimage and religious tourism in Aurangabad region during the COVID-19 pandemic.

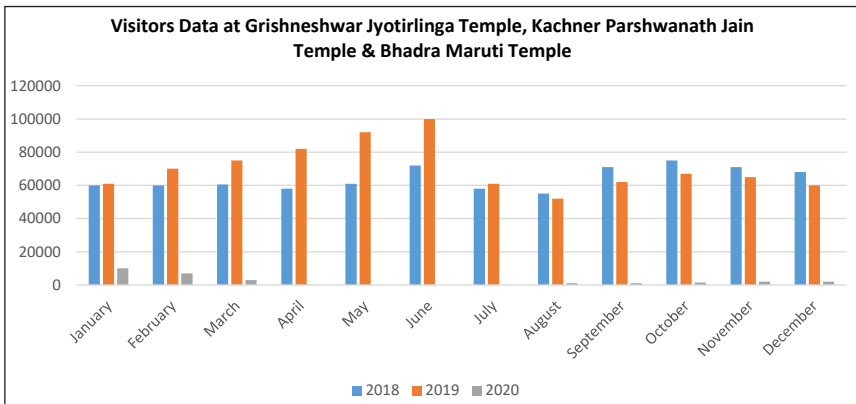
Empirical Study Results

Pilgrimages Visits the Grishneshwar Temple during the First Six Months of the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic

Grishneshwar Jyotirlinga Temple, every so often known as the Ghrneshwar or Ghushmeshwar Temple, is one of the shrines devoted to Lord Shiva this is referenced within side the Shiva Purana. The phrase Ghrishneshwara means “lord of compassion”. The temple is an essential pilgrimage site in the Shaiva culture of Hinduism, which considers it as the last or 12th Jyotirlinga (linga of light). This pilgrimage site is placed in Ellora (also referred to as Verul), much less than a kilometre from Ellora Caves – a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is set 30 kilometres (19 miles) north-west of the town of Aurangabad. The temple has changed the face of small village (Verul) and also because it is in the close vicinity of Ellora Caves the number of visitors to this temple is huge.

More than 50 lakh pilgrims visit Grishneshwar temple every year (before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic) (56 lakh in 2018 and 60 lakh in 2019). From April to June 2020, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Grishneshwar Temple was almost completely empty. The figure shows how many pilgrims visited Grishneshwar temple, Kachner Parshwanath

Jain temple, Bhadra Maruti temple from January to December 2018, 2019 and 2020. Fig. 1 shows that the number of pilgrims who visited three different temples in 2019 was the higher country bigger than in 2018. The first six months of the pandemic period were zero due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Pilgrims is zero. However, he points out that even during the strictest of restrictions, temples are not closed. Although pilgrimage phenomena prevail, the number of participants has been much lower. In March, April and May 2020, people of all ages stop their pilgrimage. Detailed statistics, especially regarding the Grishneshwar temple expedition, have not been kept due to restrictions imposed. Grishneshwar Temple recorded 60 lakh pilgrimages in 2019. Grishneshwar Temple recorded around 50,000 expeditions during the COVID 2020 pilgrimage season. Most of these pilgrimages were of limited size, with no more than 100 pilgrims authorized by temple officials (later to 200). The pilgrimage is held with a relay system or in groups with representatives of the priests or guide. The number of pilgrims accepted is very limited. In addition, he noted that significantly more pilgrims are participating in spiritual pilgrimages (compared to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic) and that some of them are entering the Grishneshwar temple to complete their pilgrimage. Some pilgrimages are subject to restrictions; only pilgrims between the ages of 18 and 60 can depart. The main purpose of the Hajj organizers is to maintain security; then, apply some rules: keep your distance, wear a mask, take your temperature and use disinfectant.



Source: Own study based on data made available by temple office.

Fig. 1: The Number of Pilgrim’s Visits Recorded at Grishneshwar Temple, Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple, and Bhadra Maruti Temple from January to December 2018, 2019 and 2020

The figure illustrates the age-sensitive percentage of pilgrim visits recorded at the golden Grishneshwar temple from July, August and September between 2018 and 2020. The Fig. 2 has shown two more pilgrims over the age of 50 visited Grishneshwar temple and visited Grishesnhwar Temple, pilgrims between 25-50. Pilgrims under the age of 25 ranked in the third category. In 2021, all the temples shut down for six months due to the outbreak of the second wave of COVID-19.



Source: Own study based on data made available by temple office.

Fig. 2: The Age-Wise Percentage Of Pilgrim's Visits was Recorded at Grishneshwar Temple in July, August, and September from 2018 to 2020

During the First Six Months of the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic, Pilgrimages Visited the Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple

Shri 1008 Chintamani Parshwanath Digambar Jain Atishay Kshetra, Kachner, Maharashtra is a rich heritage with a legendary temple. Kachner is a small village, at a distance of 37 km from famous city Aurangabad (Maharashtra). Chintamani Parshwanath Bhagwan's idol is installed here in a temple. The basement structure was discovered from an underground basement about 250 years ago. This idol of Chintamani Parshwanath is very attractive, miraculous, fulfilling the desires of pilgrims and making them free from problems. After worships and prayers here desires are fulfilled problems & disturbances get disappeared. Because of the removal of worries of peoples here, this idol was named Chintamani Parsvanath (Chinta-Worries). Based on research carried out in the Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple, it concluded that pilgrimages to Temple decreased by more than 85% during the first six months of the pandemic. However, it emphasized that even under the most severe restrictions imposed by the Indian government, the temple remained open. It recalled that the Maharashtra Government declared the state of epidemic risk on 7 March 2020, according to the Minister of Health's Regulation. The Maharashtra government imposed strict restrictions on the movement of people on 20 March 2020 due to the Coronavirus. It is including prohibitions on the activity of more than two people except for occupational duties or meeting vital daily life-related needs; there were also restrictions on movement via public transport and on foot, and participation in religious celebrations was limited to five people. These restrictions extended to the sanctuary and pilgrimages to the Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple. Following 20 March 2020, the final weeks saw the most severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the guidelines of the temple officials, only a few people participated in the annual festival of Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple Until the pandemic broke over, more than 12 lakhs visit Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple Temple from various states. In the Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple, the largest pilgrimages were unable to do. Pilgrimages to the temple of Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple revived after 15 June 2020. The pilgrimages were, however, definitely individualized in the June and the holiday months. Fig. 3 depicts the percentage of pilgrims over the age of 50 who visit Kachner Parshwanath Jain Temple in July, August, and September from 2018 to 2020.

Pilgrimages Visits the Bhadra Maruti Temple during the First Six Months of the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic

Bhadra Maruti Temple, Khultabad is a Hindu temple devoted to the Hindu god Hanuman in Khuldabad, Maharashtra, near Aurangabad. The temple is

four kilometres away from the Ellora Caves. The deity of Hanuman in this temple is shown in a reclining or resting pose. It is one of just three instances where Hanuman is seen sleeping. The second notable location is a temple on the banks of the Ganga in Allahabad and Uttar Pradesh, and the third is in Jam Sawali, Madhya Pradesh.

The Bhadra Maruti Temple is one of the tourist attractions near Aurangabad, and thousands of people go there on auspicious occasions such as Hanuman Jayanti and Ram Navami. On Saturdays during the Hindu calendar month of “Shraavana,” people from Aurangabad and surrounding areas walk to the temple to do puja.

According to legend, the Khuldabad was known as Bhadravati in ancient times, and the ruler was a magnificent king named Bhadrasesa, who was an enthusiastic follower of Rama and liked to sing songs in His favour. Hanumanji dropped in the area one day, listening to religious hymns performed in favour of Rama. He was fascinated and, unconsciously, assumed a reclining posture known as ‘Bhava-samadhi’ (Bhava samadhi is a yogic posture). When King Bhadrasesa concluded his song, he was astounded to see Hanuman in Samadhi before him. He asked Hanuman to stay there indefinitely and bless his and Lord Rama’s worshippers.

The most important number of visitors and pilgrimage at the Bhadra Maruti temple in 2018 was roughly 2 lakhs, including people from neighboring states. During the previous three years (2018-2020), the temple received over two lakh visitors per year, with roughly 50 000 of them being state from five different states. Several religious activities have been planned for the town’s jubilee and individual sacred. In January and February 2020, the Bhadra Maruti Temple had the highest visitors in the recent decade. According to a Maharashtra State Ministry of Health ruling, the temple was shuttered on March 14, 2020. Due of the COVID-19 outbreak, the authorities cancelled a variety of religious events. The temple reopened on July 21, 2020. The number of temple visits counted from 1 July 2020 is notably lower when compared to similar months in 2018 and 2019 (Fig. 1). It is because of the COVID-19 epidemic, which has resulted in visit restrictions. The temple admitted just 100 pilgrims per day from 1 April to 30 July 2020, and 250 from 1 August 2020 (Only one-on-one visits are permitted.)

Only in August 2020, around 2500 pilgrims visited the shrine (The figure was over 4000 in January 2019). The pilgrimage to the Bhadra Maruti Temple increased significantly in September and October (4000 pilgrims in September and 5000 pilgrims in August), but it was typically lower than the

previous year. In October 2020, 5000 persons (about 20% of the number of visitors in September 2019) visited the Bhadra Maruti temple. The age-based percentage of pilgrim visits to the Bhadra Maruti temple from July, August, and September 2018 to 2020 is shown in Fig. 3.



Source: Own study based on data made available by temple office.

Fig. 3: The Age-Wise Percentage of Pilgrim’s Visits Recorded at Kachner Parshwanth Jain Temple and Bhadra Maruti Temple in July, August and September from 2018 to 2020

Discussions

The influence of the pandemic COVID-19 on religion and religious tourism, as well as wanderings to chosen temples in the district of Aurangabad,

Maharashtra, India, is discussed in this article. This was the first research of its kind in the COVID-19 era, focusing solely on pilgrimage sites in the Aurangabad district. During the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the data are potentially enormous and valuable for future research. Taking the release date into consideration, the first wave of SARS-Cov-2 coronavirus developments happened between March and September 2020. As a result, one may argue that it is revolutionary study in the pilgrimage region of the Aurangabad District. The findings of this study served as templates for the proliferation of temples and pilgrimages in COVID-19 locations. When specific circumstances are met, such as security assurance, support and collaboration, expanded human capital and innovation, and commercial activities, development is conceivable. Without the aid of temples, regional and national authorities, and the participation of temple guards and travel companies organising tourists-in-community pilgrimages, the shrines would struggle to thrive. Sharing experiences and collaborating with temples in towns and cities benefits Templar guards and hosts much. The United Nations World Tourism Organization emphasises the value of human capital in the development of global tourism. Increased human resources will also be required for the growth of temples and tourism in pilgrimage centres. As a result, a greater emphasis should be placed on pilgrimages and tourism professionals who are highly driven and eager to enhance their talents and demonstrate commercial attitudes. In order to attain their goals, temple authorities and pilgrimage centre employees must exhibit their skill, dependability, and boldness in decision-making in an age of perpetual change. Innovations and extensions, research for new ideas, solutions, and initiatives, and their execution, observation and drawing of important results, or preventative actions during the next 19 years are crucial to the shrines' evolution.

Conclusion and Future Scope of Research

According to research, the actions of pilgrimage centres have serious or even disastrous consequences for the worldwide pandemic, limited mobility, and the isolation of hundreds of millions of people, as exemplified by the case of Aurangabad. The traditional pilgrimage movement has undergone considerable transformations. The number of pilgrims to the three selected temples was probably decreased by 85-95 percent in the six months following the COVID-19 epidemic in the district of Aurangabad: Grishneshwar Jyotirlinga Temple, Kachner Parshwanth Jain Temple, and Bhadra Maruti Temple. Because to the amount of visitors and pilgrims' wise age structures and motives for pilgrimages into temples, there have been substantial modifications in the pilgrimage area of three chosen temples. Many temples were closed down during the first six months of the epidemic (between mid-

January and June). We haven't seen anything on this scale in contemporary times owing to any other pandemic. It is an incomprehensible occurrence, and no other phenomena compares. Pilgrimages and religious tourism were especially beneficial during the first wave of the pandemic COVID-19. Individual travels and pilgrimages to local, regional, and national pilgrimage centres are becoming increasingly popular. People gathered together to demonstrate sympathy with sick people, support their favourite shrines, and arrange pilgrimages in the years after the conclusion of COVID-19.

The journals of virtual adventures during the epidemic are also an intriguing study topic. Sharing expertise in arranging and serving temple pilgrimages led to tighter collaboration among temple guards. Pilgrimages to pilgrimage sites have a substantial economic impact on the development of SARS-Cov-2 Coronavirus. It is critical to keep in mind. Local pilgrimage centres should be included in future study on the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic.

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