

# A Comprehensive Synthesis: Ayodhya's Transformation from Ancient Tirtha to Modern Religious Tourism

**Dr. Amit Kumar<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Kumar Gaurav Mishra<sup>2</sup>,  
Dr. Shiv Kumar Yadav<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Manish Rai<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Lecturer, IHMCT Kovalam, Trivandrum, Kerala-695527

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Sherwood College of Professional Management, Lucknow, Uttar Pardesh-226016

<sup>3</sup>Lecturer, IHMCT Bhopal, Madhya Pardesh-462016

<sup>4</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Management and Hotel Management-Sant Baba Bhag Singh University, Jalandhar, Punjab-144030

## **Abstract:**

Ayodhya is a city in Uttar Pradesh, India, on the banks of the Sarayu River. It is one of the most complicated and ever-changing holy places in the world. In Hinduism, it has been a tirtha, or a place to cross over and be rescued, for thousands of years. Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Muslims have also found it to be very essential (Singh & Kumar, 2020; Kumar, 2022). This deep, complex sanctity is now coming together with strong forces of religious nationalism, economic ambition, and mass tourism. The consecration of the Ram Mandir (Rama Temple) in January 2024 sped up this process a lot. The academic literature on Ayodhya, particularly a series of critical studies conducted from 2019 to 2025, analyzes and clarifies this substantial transformation from multiple viewpoints: its sacred geography and cultural heritage, the intricacies of urban governance and planning, and the far-reaching socio-economic and market impacts following the temple's inauguration. This synthesis combines different points of view to give a whole picture of Ayodhya's past, present, and troubled future. It argues that the city is a major example of how faith, politics, heritage, and capitalism come together in the sacred domain around the world.

**Key Words:** Ayodhya, Ram Mandir, Religious Tourism.

## **Part I: The Sacred Foundation: Ayodhya as Multi-Religious Holy-Heritage City**

To comprehend Ayodhya's current significance, it is essential to recognize its historical and diverse character as a sacred landscape. Scholars such as Sarvesh Kumar and Rana P.B. Singh furnish the requisite intellectual and historical context. Kumar (2022) carefully explains that Ayodhya is not just a single Hindu site, but a "holy-heritage city" made up of "sacredsapes" and "faithsapes." A sacredscape, or tirtha, is more than a physical spot; it is a synthesis of geography, mythology, ritual, and collective memory where the spiritual and material worlds collide. History is not only documented here but is actively constitutive of its holy environment. Ayodhya's sacredscapes are performative environments that come alive through "a variety of festive and religious functions," from daily puja (worship) to major pilgrimage celebrations (Kumar, 2022). Crucially, Kumar's ethnological work indicates that this sacred terrain is deeply multi-cultural. The city's sacred geography includes sites venerating the Jain Tirthankaras, the Buddha, the Sikh Gurus, and Muslim pirs (saints), with its prominent identification as the birthplace of Lord Rama in the Hindu Vaishnavite faith. This generates a palimpsest of faiths where diverse religious communities have, for ages, written their own narratives and practices onto the urban landscape.

Singh and Kumar (2020) enhance this historical study, tracing Ayodhya's settlement continuity back to roughly 800 BCE. They define the city as a "riverfront sacredscape," where the Sarayu River is not a passive barrier but a crucial, purifying actor in the ceremonial life of the city. The constructed environment of this sacredscape is abundantly detailed: old temples, river ghats (bathing stairways), holy tanks, wells,

and ponds are not simply architectural features but reservoirs of "tangible and intangible heritage values" (Singh & Kumar, 2020). These ingredients form an integrated ritual environment. For instance, a pilgrim's journey might comprise a dawn dip in the Sarayu at a specific ghat, a clockwise circumambulation of a sacred forest, and offerings at a medieval temple, all following a specified spatial and symbolic order. This intricate sacred geography supported a continual flow of piety, with the authors noting that, even prior to the new temple's construction, roughly 1.9 million pilgrims visited annually for various festivals (Singh & Kumar, 2020).

However, Singh and Kumar (2020) voice a loud note of alarm over the preservation of this very history. They notice that "most of the religious heritage sites and monuments are dilapidating and are in abandoning condition." They ascribe this decline to a triple failure: a lack of "rational and viable conservation strategy," inefficient "administration management," and insufficient "people awareness and their involvement." This diagnosis goes directly to the basic governance difficulties that precede and are aggravated by the current tourism boom. The sacred foundation, therefore, is both Ayodhya's greatest asset—the source of its magnetic pull—and its most vulnerable part, threatened by neglect, commercial pressure, and the possible homogenization of its multi-religious identity in favor of a singular narrative.

## **Part II: The Governance Challenge: Planning, Policy, and Heritage-Inclusive Development**

The maintenance of a living, breathing sacred city like Ayodhya, especially one on the edge of spectacular growth, presents extraordinary challenges for urban governance. The work of Kumar and Singh (2019) gives a critical lens on this complicated administrative system. They frame the issue through the UNESCO-informed concept of "heritage-inclusive development" (HID), which seeks to integrate heritage assets—both tangible (monuments) and intangible (rituals, festivals)—into the broader processes of urban planning and economic development, rather than treating them as isolated relics to be fenced off.

Their research maps the "complex and often fragmented" institutional framework regulating Ayodhya (Kumar & Singh, 2019). Key participants include the Ayodhya Municipality, the Ayodhya Development Authority (tasked with executing a master plan), the Ayodhya Research Institute (focused on cultural research), and non-governmental entities like the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). Kumar and Singh (2019) explore how these bodies interact (or fail to engage) across the three essential dimensions of urban governance: political (decision-making and legitimacy), economic (resource distribution and development models), and institutional (rules, norms, and coordination). They find that while entities like the Ayodhya Research Institute and the tourism-focused "Tornos" project attempt to promote heritage, there is often a gap between cultural conservation goals and the priorities of infrastructure and development authorities.

The demand for effective HID has gotten considerably more important. The Ayodhya Development Authority's master plan, as indicated in linked documentation, projects a stunning expansion of the city's notified area from 69.76 square kilometers to 872.81 square kilometers by 2041. This plan involves additional ring highways, riverfront developments, satellite townships, and substantial modifications to water, sewer, and electrical facilities to meet an expected annual visitor flow that already nears 33 million. The primary governance challenge, therefore, is how to implement this necessary modernization without eliminating the very sacredscapes and intimate human-scale urban fabric that pilgrims come to experience. Will new, broad roadways boost access or sever traditional pilgrimage routes? Will high-capacity, uniform hotels supply required accommodation or produce a generic tourist strip that drowns out the charm of the old city? Kumar and Singh's (2019) study shows that without strong, coordinated HID policies that give heritage a central seat at the planning table, the development likely to be undertaken will be of a generic, profit-driven form that will radically damage Ayodhya's spiritual identity.

This governance difficulty extends into the actual control of the pilgrim experience itself. The research of Kala and Chaubey (2025) enters here, shifting the focus from macro-planning to micro-behavior. Their work on "modelling Indians' visit intentions to Ram Mandir" employs behavioral theory and quantitative methodologies (such structural equation modeling) to discover the major factors driving a pilgrim's desire to

attend. These variables presumably include religious devotion (bhakti), societal influence, perceived facilities, and the appeal of a historic national event. The "implications for temple committee and tourism policymakers" that Kala and Chaubey (2025) deduce are vital. Their data may assist estimate peak visitor numbers, assess tourist demographics and motivations, and build tailored services—from crowd management and queue systems to the provision of specific ritual amenities. This marks a drive towards evidence-based, strategic governance of the pilgrimage economy, seeking to balance the religious journey with the practicalities of managing millions of people.

### **Part III: The Temple as Catalyst: Socio-Economic Transformation and "Market Devotion"**

If the sacred foundation gives the pull and governance the structure, then the dedication of the Ram Mandir is the unprecedented catalyst that has sped all processes to a new velocity. The post-2024 literature is dominated by research measuring this catalytic influence. Ameet Sao's (2025) holistic research serves as a wide summary, proclaiming the temple's opening a "turning point in the city's history" and examining its rippling impacts across tourism, economic growth, infrastructure, cultural preservation, social dynamics, and community well-being.

The socio-economic repercussions are multi-faceted and significant. On the positive side, the tourism boom has prompted a surge in jobs. Jobs are being generated not only in direct hospitality (hotels, restaurants, tour guides, shuttle services) but also in construction, retail (selling religious artifacts, souvenirs, and ritual supplies), transportation (from taxi unions to luxury bus operators), and the informal sector (street vendors, flower sellers, porters). Local and regional economies are receiving a major inflow of money. Property values in Ayodhya and along major access roads have risen. A new ecosystem of spiritual tourism enterprise is growing, ranging from premium pilgrimage travel packages to digital darshan (viewing) apps and branded ritual kits. The flood of wealth is also fueling the rapid infrastructure development outlined in the master plan, offering enhanced civic facilities for inhabitants in the long run.

However, Sao's (2025) "holistic analysis" definitely also reveals serious hurdles and disruptions. The most urgent is the strain on existing infrastructure, leading to traffic jams, water shortages, and waste management crises during peak events. Inflation in the price of essential products and housing may surpass wage gains for many long-term inhabitants, resulting to displacement and gentrification. The concentration on catering to a primarily Hindu pilgrim clientele could unwittingly diminish the sites, festivals, and economics associated with Ayodhya's other religion communities, potentially affecting the city's social fabric. The transition risks turning a vibrant, multi-layered holy community into a more homogenous religious tourism offering.

Perhaps the most dramatic and unexpected dimension of the temple's impact is described by Goel et al. (2025) in their study "Market devotion." Applying the financial "event study method," they investigate variations in the Indian stock market around the date of the temple's consecration. Their finding that this religious occasion had a statistically significant impact on market performance is noteworthy. It reveals how a religious ritual translated into investor mood, affecting sectors including hospitality, construction, transportation, and consumer goods. This "market devotion" represents the full capitalization of faith, where religious symbolism is linked with national economic narratives. It reveals that the Ram Mandir is not only a local or religious phenomena but a national economic event, drawing investment, affecting market patterns, and presenting development as a type of nationalistic duty. The sacred, in this environment, becomes a tremendous engine of speculative and material capital.

### **Part IV: Pilgrim Perception and the Contested Future**

Amidst these macro-scale changes in administration, economy, and urban form, the primary unit of analysis remains the individual pilgrim. The forthcoming work by Sinha and Kamalapurkar (2024) on "Memory, sacred landscapes and religious tourism: pilgrim perceptions in Ayodhya" promises a critical micro-level perspective. Their research presumably analyzes how pilgrims from varied regional, class, and generational backgrounds truly view the renovated Ayodhya. Do people regard the new, enormous temple complex as a real fulfillment of ancient longing, or as a modern spectacle? How do they travel between the calm, older

sacredsapes described by Kumar (2022) and the crowded, newly-built pilgrimage infrastructure? What memories do people take away, and how do those memories interact with the media-saturated, politically-charged national narrative surrounding the temple? Understanding these perceptions is crucial to judging if Ayodhya's development is sustaining its spiritual essence or commodifying it.

### Overview

Looking forward, the literature collectively suggests to many key, contentious pathways for Ayodhya's future. The first is the contradiction between homogenization and pluralism. Will Ayodhya be developed largely as a symbol of a certain Hindu nationalist ideology, or can its planning actively protect and promote its multi-religious heritage as an intrinsic part of its identity? The second is the clash between commercial mass tourist and sustainable spiritual tourism. Can a strategy be devised that manages the vast crowds while retaining opportunities for calm reflection, ritual closeness, and the ecological health of the Sarayu River? The third revolves around equitable development. Who profits from the tourism economy? Can policies ensure that long-standing inhabitants, small companies, and marginalized populations are not overshadowed by huge corporate interests and political elites?

The comparative assessment demonstrates that Ayodhya is not only another pilgrimage destination but an extraordinary and amplified synthesis of worldwide patterns, defined by the quick conversion of spiritual capital into national economic and political capital on a gigantic scale.

The underlying economic model for religious sites globally is the localized "pilgrimage economy," where spiritual devotion is immediately transformed into commercial transactions. As evidenced in Belucio's (2018) study of Marian sanctuaries and Zinko et al.'s (2019) research on West Ukrainian shrines, this paradigm develops a community-centric environment sustained by spending on lodging, food, souvenirs, and ritual offerings. Ayodhya demonstrates this same basic trend, with Sao's (2025) holistic research describing a post-temple growth in local employment, hotel, and retail. However, Ayodhya's economic influence explosively exceeds this localized model. It is portrayed by Sharma (2024) as a dual "pillar" of India's national GDP revolution with artificial intelligence, anchoring the temple in a narrative of macro-economic prosperity. This is empirically corroborated by the surprising result of Goel et al. (2025), whose event research discovered "market devotion"—a statistically significant movement in the Indian stock market caused by the temple's dedication. This phenomena symbolizes the peak of financialization, as faith-based feeling directly influences national capital markets, a scale of integration lacking from studies of other regional shrines. Consequently, Ayodhya operates on a dual economic plane: it serves as a major local pilgrimage economy while also operating as a powerful symbolic asset within the national political economy, a duality that characterizes its distinctive character.

This immense economic and religious concentration precipitates the core and most crucial dilemma facing such sites: the contradiction between expansion and sustainable carrying capacity. This is a universal concern, from the basic infrastructural "opportunities and challenges" noted in Das's (2023) study of temple tourism in Kamrup, Assam, to the precise environmental and social calculations of Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC) applied to the cultural site of Tongkonan Lempe in Toraja Yabarmase et al. (2023). For Ayodhya, this is the paramount governance crisis. Pre-2024 scholarship by Kumar & Singh (2019) and Singh & Kumar (2020) explicitly warned of divided governance and decaying heritage, advocating for "Heritage-Inclusive Development" (HID). Post-2024, the city's master plan to increase its territory more than tenfold to 873 sq km is a direct, gigantic response to expected visitor numbers topping 30 million annually. This magnitude of planned transformation demands for the adoption of stringent sustainability frameworks, such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria utilized by Yadav (2024) to assess Varanasi. The important question for Ayodhya is whether such measured, sustainable planning principles can be implemented effectively against the great impetus of political intent and quick expansion, or if they will be overridden in the race to construct. The case of Varanasi, a comparable ancient Indian holy city, reveals that managing population, pollution, and infrastructure is a continual, long-term struggle, giving a dismal lesson for Ayodhya's future.

Finally, contrasting models of geographical organization and identity further highlights Ayodhya's specific journey. Many successful pilgrimage landscapes, like the networked circuits of Marian sanctuaries Belucio, 2018 or West Ukrainian shrines Zinko et al., 2019, operate as regional networks, distributing economic benefits and visitation pressure across multiple sites. In stark contrast, Ayodhya is being created as a monumental, unique destination, centralizing worldwide attention and footfall. This centralization intensifies the risk of homogenizing its historically pluralistic sacred identity, which historians like Kumar (2022) have exhaustively documented as incorporating Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh, and Muslim sacredscapes. The development model centered on the Ram Mandir threatens to assimilate this multi-faith palimpsest under a singular patriotic narrative, a tension less obvious in the culturally integrated tourism of places like Tongkonan Lempe Yabarmase et al., 2023.

## Conclusion

The intellectual excursion through Ayodhya's recent studies finds a city at a critical crossroads. Its ancient identity as a multi-religious tirtha, painstakingly chronicled by historians of sacred geography, is now the foundation upon which a hyper-modern project of religious nationalism and economic transformation is being created. The governance studies highlight the tremendous difficulties of managing this transformation through heritage-inclusive development in a fragmented institutional system. The post-2024 effect evaluations highlight the extraordinary scale of the change: a socio-economic revolution for the region and even a "devotional" ripple through the national stock market. The ultimate outcome hinges on whether planners, policymakers, and the public can prioritize a vision of Ayodhya that respects its layered past, manages its chaotic present with wisdom and equity, and fosters a future where its sacredness is not just a resource to be extracted, but a living, inclusive, and sustainable reality. As such, Ayodhya serves as a critical, real-world laboratory for understanding the promises and hazards of sacred place in the 21st century.

## REFERENCES:

1. Goel, R., Bhattacharjee, A., Sidana, N., Singh, T., & Kaur, M. (2025). Market devotion: understanding the Ram Mandir event influence on the Indian stock market using event study method. *Journal of Applied Economics*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15140326.2025.2472584>
2. Kala, D., & Chaubey, D. S. (2025). Modelling Indians' visit intentions to Ram Mandir: implications for temple committee and tourism policymakers. *International Journal of Tourism Policy*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTP.2025.144174>
3. Kumar, S. (2022). Sacredscapes vis-à-vis Faithscapes: Cultural landscapes of Ayodhya, a holy-heritage city of India. In R. P. B. Singh (Ed.), *Placemaking and cultural landscapes* (pp. 59–75). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-6415-1\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-6415-1_5)
4. Kumar, S., & Singh, R. P. B. (2019). Ayodhya: A study of urban governance and heritage-inclusive development. In *The urban book series* (pp. 357–370). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94932-1\\_22](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94932-1_22)
5. Sao, A. (2025). Socio-economic implications of religious tourism in Ayodhya: A holistic analysis, post-Pran Pratishtha of Lord Rama. *Journal of Informatics Education and Research*, \*5\*(1). <https://doi.org/10.52783/JIER.V5I1.2036>
6. Singh, R. P. B., & Kumar, S. (2020). Holy-heritage city development and planning in India: A study of Ayodhya. In Springer eBooks (pp. 541–558). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31776-8\\_33](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31776-8_33)
7. Sinha, A., & Kamalapurkar, S. (2024). Memory, sacred landscapes and religious tourism: Pilgrim perceptions in Ayodhya, India. In Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803928746.00008>
8. Das, J. (2023). Opportunities and challenges for temple tourism in the Kamrup district of Assam, India. *Shodhkosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, \*4\*(2). <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.6444>
9. Goel, R., Bhattacharjee, A., Sidana, N., Singh, T., & Kaur, M. (2025). Market devotion: understanding the Ram Mandir event influence on the Indian stock market using event study

- method. *Journal of Applied Economics*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15140326.2025.2472584>
10. Kala, D., & Chaubey, D. S. (2025). Modelling Indians' visit intentions to Ram Mandir: implications for temple committee and tourism policymakers. *International Journal of Tourism Policy*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTP.2025.144174>
  11. Kumar, S. (2022). Sacredscapes vis-à-vis Faithscapes: Cultural landscapes of Ayodhya, a holy-heritage city of India. In R. P. B. Singh (Ed.), *Placemaking and cultural landscapes* (pp. 59–75). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-6415-1\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-6415-1_5)
  12. Kumar, S., & Singh, R. P. B. (2019). Ayodhya: A study of urban governance and heritage-inclusive development. In *The urban book series* (pp. 357–370). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94932-1\\_22](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94932-1_22)
  13. Sao, A. (2025). Socio-economic implications of religious tourism in Ayodhya: A holistic analysis, post-Pran Pratishtha of Lord Rama. *Journal of Informatics Education and Research*, \*5\*(1). <https://doi.org/10.52783/JIER.V5I2.2036>
  14. Sharma, S. (2024). Ayodhya's Ram Mandir and AI: Pillars of India's GDP revolution. *Vidhyayana*, \*10\*(3). <https://doi.org/10.58213/vidhyayana.v10i3.2066>
  15. Singh, R. P. B., & Kumar, S. (2020). Holy-heritage city development and planning in India: A study of Ayodhya. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 541–558). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31776-8\\_33](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31776-8_33)
  16. Sinha, A., & Kamalapurkar, S. (2024). Memory, sacred landscapes and religious tourism: Pilgrim perceptions in Ayodhya, India. In *Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803928746.00008>
  17. Yadav, C. (2024). Assessing the sustainability of pilgrimage destinations using GSTC criteria: A case study of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. In A. Kumar (Ed.), *Tourism and cultural heritage* (Vol. 3, pp. 118–134). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.58532/v3bhma26p2ch4>
  18. Belucio, M. (2018). Economy and religious tourism: The phenomenon of pilgrimages to Marian sanctuaries. *Horizonte - Revista de Estudos de Teologia e Ciências da Religião*, \*16\*(51), 1439. <https://doi.org/10.5752/p.2175-5841.2018v16n51p1439>
  19. Yabarmase, A., Wicaksono, A., Dinanti, D., & Munenge, S. (2023). Tourism carrying capacity (TCC) of Tongkonan Lempe tourism attraction, North Toraja Regency. *Regional and Rural Studies*, \*1\*(2), 71–79. <https://doi.org/10.21776/rrs.v1i2.13>
  20. Zinko, Y., Malska, M., & Hrynchyshyn, T. (2019). Religious-pilgrim tourism in the west of Ukraine: Main centres and shrines. *Visnyk of the Lviv University Series Geography*, \*53\*, 144–166. <https://doi.org/10.30970/vgg.2019.53.10671>