



# A Geographical Perspective Of Religious Tourism And Cultural Landscape Change In Ayodhya

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**Abstract:** India is a place of many religions. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism are followed in majority. Indians celebrate numerous festivals such as Diwali, Holi, etc. throughout the year. With immense faith in their hearts people scale all geographical terrains to seek god's blessings reach the places of religious tourism, then be it the high mountains or valleys they reach the places with great faith in their heart only with a wish that they seek blessings of the god. People do not mind standing in long queues to just get a glimpse of the deity residing there. With changing times these religious places have become a site for tourism, rather than a mere pilgrimage. Worshipers want safe and comfortable journey. Religious tourism industry in India is yet to be explored to its full potential. With the increase of religious tourism, there is a massive change in the cultural landscape as well as the geographical and economic landscape of that area. Religious tourism would lead to revenue generation and rise in standard of living for the locals. Hence, the primary objective to present the paper is to study the Religious tourism and changes in cultural landscape changes.

**Index Terms – Tourism, Religious Tourism, Cultural Landscape, the Ram Mandir**

## INTRODUCTION

The idea that man trusts some supreme power from birth till death is found not only in any particular sect or sect but also in all religions. Man believes that there is some power which governs this creation. Our country India is one of those countries where people of many religions of the world reside. Not only this, everyone has complete freedom to live according to their religion, tradition and dress, which can be called secular tradition adopted by religious ideas or freedom of thought. That is why India is a great country. This faith has long been a unique medium to travel from one place to another or countries. Traveling to a religious place used to be called pilgrimage but now it is no longer just a journey but has become synonymous with tourism. The tradition of undertaking pilgrimages has been visible since ancient times, which we can call the oldest form of tourism. Tourism based on religion or spirituality holds a very important place in different parts of the world. Such as Jyotirlinga, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Gaya, Balaji, Sabarimala, Haridwar, Amarnath in India, Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia, etc., such religious places where lakhs of people from India and abroad travel for the events whose main objective is to It happens that by personally visiting one's divinity and one's holy places and attain spiritual peace.

Based upon the nature of the product, intensity and region of travel, Religious Tourism is divided into the following major categories:

- Pilgrimages
- Missionary travel
- Leisure vacations
- Faith-based cruising
- Crusades, conventions and rallies
- Retreats
- Monastery visits and guest-stays
- Faith-based camps
- Religious tourist attractions

While the main purpose of religious tourism is to worship, there are other reasons why travelers want to undertake this form of tourism. Some of them are highlighted below:

**Gratitude and Confession:** When people face a crisis in life, they tend to turn to the divine to get help. If they tide over their crises, they visit the shrine to thank the deity, god, or goddess for their divine intervention. Others may resort to religious tourism as a way to absolve themselves of their sins. They may believe that their problems are due to their sins and will visit a sacred site based on their belief to communicate with the divine and ask for forgiveness.

**Spiritual Salvation:** In many societies, going on a pilgrimage is seen as a mark of piety. This belief is especially true among Hindus, who visit religious sites to accumulate religious merits while Buddhist go to a sacred place as it is considered the first step in attaining enlightenment. Many seniors embark on religious tourism when they want to make peace with themselves before their leave behind their mortal remains.

**Celebrate Religious Events:** When people have the financial means, they visit a religious site to celebrate specific religious events. These events are mentioned in sacred tenets and during religious festivities, they are reenacted as a way to commemorate them.

**Communicate with Other Believers:** Religious visits also give people a chance to meet and socialize with fellow believers. It helps the person reaffirm their religious beliefs in a modern environment.

### Religious tourism in Ayodhya

Hindus place a great deal of cultural significance on Ayodhya, which also has a vibrant history. It is situated in India's Uttar Pradesh state. The religious and historical significance of Ayodhya drives the city's cultural pattern, which in turn influences many areas of customs and daily life. Ayodhya is comparatively well-known among individuals in India and those interested in Hindu culture and history worldwide because of its historical and religious significance. It is important to remember that a person's level of awareness may differ based on their cultural, religious, and interest in history and heritage backgrounds. In the heart of India, a monumental event took place on January 22, 2024. It marked a new chapter in the nation's rich heritage of faith and culture. The inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya was not merely an architectural feat but a beacon of devotion. This event also highlighted Uttar Pradesh's rise as a nucleus of religious tourism in India.

The ancient Indian city of Ayodhya has always held a special place in our hearts and minds. As old as *Kashi* (ancient Varanasi), Ayodhya dates as far as back as 600-300 BCE, which corresponds to the 'Second Urbanisation Period in India'—one of the most formative periods of Indian history, when settlements grew into cities, trade and commerce flourished, and religions and philosophies emerged. *Saketa*, as Ayodhya was then known, saw both prosperity and decline under successive rulers, rising to its greatest heights under the Gupta Empire. Notably, it is during the rule of the Guptas that Hinduism saw a great revival, and that *Saketa* began to be called 'Ayodhya'. It is also under the Guptas that Ayodhya was recognized as the capital of the *Ikshvaku* dynasty, the line of kings to whom King Dashratha and Lord Rama belonged. Lord Rama, a revered Hindu god is said to have been born in Ayodhya. Hindus place a great deal of significance on the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, which is devoted to Lord Rama. Visitors and pilgrims from all over the world flock to the city to seek blessings and immerse themselves in the spiritual environment. The city attracts pilgrims from all over India and across the world, seeing its largest influx during festivals and important religious events. As a city having historical and religious importance, Ayodhya offers great possibility as a tourist destination.

Many Hindu holidays are enthusiastically celebrate in Ayodhya. The most important holiday is Ram Navami, and Deepotsva which honours the birth of Lord Rama and is marked by opulent processions, singing, and plays. The festival of lights, Diwali, is also a big deal in Ayodhya.

There are many temples and shrines in Ayodhya that are devoted to various gods. The Hanuman Garhi, Kanak Bhavan, Nageshwar Nath Temple, and numerous other revered temples, in addition to the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple, draw worshippers year-round. In Ayodhya, there are numerous temples and shrines dedicated to various deities. Along with the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple, other temples such as the Hanuman Garhi, Kanak Bhavan, Nageshwar Nath Temple and many others are visited by pilgrims all year round. The city is renowned for the prasad (religious offering/food) that visitors to temples receive, which frequently consists of desserts like laddoos and kheer.

The intricate woodwork of Ayodhya, which includes exquisitely carved idols, furniture, and mementos honoring Lord Rama and the Ramayana, is well recognized. These handmade items are frequently bought by tourists as souvenirs. Throughout the year, Ayodhya experiences a sizable influx of pilgrims—both local and foreign. The cultural structure of the city revolves around accommodating their demands by providing lodging, local guides, and other amenities to guarantee a fruitful pilgrimage experience.

## Objectives

The primary objectives of the research paper are:

- To understand the concept of Religious Tourism in Ayodhya.
- To find out the cultural landscape changes in Ayodhya.

## Research Methodology

The present study based on the secondary data, collected from various sources like as government publications, published books, research publications, government websites etc.

## Cultural landscape

Cultural landscapes are a legacy for everyone. These special sites reveal aspects of our country's origins and development as well as our evolving relationships with nature over time. They provide scenic, economic, ecological, social, recreational, and educational opportunities helping communities to better understand themselves. Ayodhya, being one of the most sacred places known as the legendary capital of Rama; and nowadays one of the most important places of pilgrimage in India with special reference to its sacred cultural landscapes.

Ayodhya for a period of over two thousand years has borne witness to the presence of Jainism, Buddhism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Islam too, therefore Ayodhya consists of the sacred and religious places for Hindus together with Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and Muslims too. Ayodhya is also a sacred and important place for Koreans because it is the birthplace of the legendary foremother from whom the royal dynasty got succession.

## Cultural landscape change in Ayodhya

Nestled along the banks of the serene Sarayu River, Ayodhya, the sacred city, weaves a tapestry of mythology, cultural evolution, and religious significance that stretches across millennia. Today, Ayodhya stands not only as a pilgrimage site but also as a testament to the enduring spirit of faith. Pilgrims and tourists alike continue to come to the sacred city, exploring its rich tapestry that seamlessly intertwines myth and history, leaving an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of India.

The transformation of Ayodhya into a city with a thriving evening scene, has added a dynamic dimension to its cultural landscape. Lata Mangeshkar Chowk, Naya Ghat, Ram Path, Guptar Ghat and Surajkund have emerged as pulsating hubs that come alive with activity. These places have become more than just geographical locations; they are now vibrant social centres, attracting locals and tourists alike. No industry is more emblematic of the frenetic pace of activity there than hospitality. Here, for instance, Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL)—which owns popular brands like Taj Hotels and Vivanta—is coming up with two properties. OYO, the country's largest hotel chain operator, plans to add 50 hotels and homes, aggregating to some 1,000 rooms. "These new properties will be strategically located near Ayodhya's prominent landmarks, ensuring convenient access for visitors exploring the city's iconic attractions," says Anuj Tejpal, Chief Merchant Officer at OYO.

Apart from hotels, there are the massive infrastructure development projects announced by the central and state governments. Under the Ayodhya Master Plan 2031, projects worth ₹85,000 crore will be executed to upgrade the town's infrastructure. The government has already unveiled a new international airport and a revamped railway junction as well. During a recent visit to the town, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Infrastructure-related works will once again establish modern Ayodhya with pride on the map of the country."

Significant cultural landscape change in Ayodhya discussed under the following heads.

**The Ram Temple-:** The Ram temple was inaugurated on 22 January 2024. Since then it has emerged as the largest center of faith in India. Which has changed the cultural, geographical and economic landscape of Ayodhya. The Pran Pratishtha, or consecration ceremony, marked a significant milestone, bringing an end to a 500-year quest for a Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The Prime Minister marked this event as the end of a long wait. He highlighted that the construction of the temple dedicated to Lord Ram, symbolizing justice, was carried out in a fair and impartial manner. He expresses gratitude to the Indian judiciary for safeguarding the principles of justice. While the Ram Temple is now a reality, the paramount concern is to prevent the recurrence of religious disputes in India. It is imperative for everyone to adhere to the principles of Ram Rajya and uphold Dharma.

### Significance of construction of Ram Mandir

- **Moment of Triumph:** The construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya is a significant event that marks the end of a long-standing dispute and the beginning of a new chapter in India's history.
- **Religious Significance:** The temple is the sacred abode of one of the Hindu pantheon's most popular gods, Ram, who Hindus believe was born at the exact site in Ayodhya.
- **Symbol of Faith:** Ram Mandir is being built on the site that many Hindus believe to be the birthplace of Ram. Millions of Hindus worship Lord Ram with an intense belief that chanting his name in times of adversity will bring peace and prosperity, and most of those who practice Hinduism keep idols of Ram in their homes.
- **Temple Economy:** These initiatives are expected to turn Ayodhya into a major spiritual center in the country, which will spur business and economic activity in the wider region due to enhanced connectivity. Like as The Tirupati temple, a major pilgrimage site, draws millions of devotees annually, significantly boosting the local economy.
- **Nucleus Institution:** The temple could act as a nucleus around which charitable institutions such as schools and hospitals can grow.
- **Social Cohesion:** The Ram temple will go beyond the symbolism of a Hindu deity to signal a larger message of cohesion and cultural synthesis. It is social engineering through invoking divinity. It may prove as the binding thread of the nation
- **Cultural Diplomacy:** Ram's divinity not only holds sway as a prominent religious influence in India but also constitutes an integral part of the cultural heritage in nations such as Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Malaysia. This will additionally strengthen India's cultural diplomacy.

**Maharishi Valmiki International Airport-:** Ayodhya airport, now called the Maharishi Valmiki International Airport, has been inaugurated on December 30. Ayodhya airport's terminal building's facade reflects temple architecture. Ayodhya's state-of-the-art airport in its phase 1 has a terminal, covering 6500 square metres. The airport aims to cater to around 10 lakh passengers annually. Ayodhya International Airport is a significant aviation project in the history of Ayodhya. The airport aims to increase connectivity, promote tourism, and stimulate economic growth in the region. The airport will ensure seamless travel for devotees and tourists, pushing the city into the global limelight. The project would be UP's fifth airport located near National Highway 27 and Ayodhya dham railway station. The airport is expected to provide a convenient gateway for travellers visiting other parts of UP, such as Lucknow, Varanasi, and Allahabad (Prayagraj).

The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has decided to develop Ayodhya Airport in three phases. The first phase of the project will include the following

- Construction of a 6,000m<sup>2</sup> terminal building
- Widening and expansion of the runway to 2,200m length and 45m width, with 7.5m shoulders on either side,
- Construction of a 140m x 110m apron for ATR 721 Q400-type aircraft

**Ayodhya dham railway station-:** The Ayodhya railway junction was given a new name: Ayodhya Dham. The new Ayodhya Dham railway station building has been given a temple architecture facade as a tribute to Lord Ram, while the interior boasts "airport-like" amenities. The elongated Ayodhya Dham railway station building encompasses three floors. These are; ground, mezzanine, and first. They feature 'shikhar' structures on the corners facing the railway tracks and chhatri-style elements on its frontage. According to Indian Railways, the three-story



modern building of the Ayodhya Dham railway station has several modern features such as food plazas, waiting halls (both on ground and first floor), cloak rooms, child care rooms, shops for puja needs etc.

**Water Metro-:** Tourists heading to Ayodhya will also get a chance to explore water metro as state government will get two vessels for the purpose,

**Development of parikarma marg-:** Kosi Parikrama is a sacred pilgrimage that holds immense significance for devotees in Ayodhya, India. This spiritual journey involves circumambulating the Kosi River, a ritual believed to cleanse the soul and bring spiritual enlightenment. In this comprehensive guide, we will explore the dates, the sacred path (Marg), and the route to undertake this divine journey. The Ayodhya Master Plan 2031 will extend the boundaries of the holy city up to the boundaries of the 84 Kosi Parikrama Marg which passes through five districts -- Basti, Ayodhya, Ambedkar Nagar, Barabanki and Gonda.

**Redevelopment of ghats-:** The Ayodhya Development Authority (ADA) is planning a makeover for Guptar Ghat, situated on the banks of Saryu which is revered among Hindus as the place where Lord Ram took 'jal Samadhi'. The Ayodhya Development Authority plans to develop the 10-acre wide riverfront and set up food kiosks, interpretation centre, open-air theatre, Divyangjan Park, therapy garden, terrace garden, children's park, meditation centre, surveillance and public announcement system, decorative lighting and gazebos among others, at the ghat.

**Beautification of ancient ponds and religious places-:** With the Shree Ram Janmabhoomi Temple, the Ayodhya city of Uttar Pradesh is firmly on the path to becoming "India's biggest religious tourism hub". But the government seems to have a much bigger plan for Ayodhya - dubbed as "The Land of Sree Ram" by it. The Union and the Uttar Pradesh governments plan to put the city "on the map of world tourism in the years to come". Launching beautification projects to enhance the city's appearance, targeting old Ashrams, ancient ponds, and temples. The goal is to make Ayodhya "the most beautiful city in the world by 2024".

**Construction of Ram path and Sugriva path-:** The Ram Path, which links Sadatganj to Naya Ghat, is now 13 km long and four-laned. It was developed at a cost of Rs 845 crore. Shops and properties on either side had to be shrunk or make away entirely for widening the road. The shop shutters have Hindu symbols, such as shankh, trishul, gada and swastika, and the houses have been painted in shades of peach with white temple-shaped motifs. The road is expected to handle the maximum traffic as it also connects the Lucknow-Gorakhpur national highway

**Convenient and easy-:** the Uttar Pradesh government has decided to build a 'Sugriva Path' to connect the two highly-revered pilgrimage spots in Ayodhya. 'Sugriva Path' is the name coined for the new pathway connecting the revered Hanuman Garhi Temple with the sacred Ram Mandir in the temple town of Ayodhya. The proposed Sugriva Path, spanning a length of 290 metres, will facilitate seamless entry for devotees into both the temples

**Use of clean energy source-:** Ayodhya is being developed into a solar city to reduce its dependence on electricity. Ayodhya is poised to become the first solar city of India." For the first time, a solar power-enabled e-boat was launched at the saryu ghat in a bid to make Ayodhya a "model solar city".

**Uniform colour code to be set for all building in ayodhya-:** The widened Ram Path with uniform facades of buildings on both sides, ornamental lamp posts bearing a design representing the traditional 'Ramanadi tilak' and the 40 Surya Stambhs installed along Dharm Path and the Lata Mangeshkar Chowk are new tourist attractions in the city. The Ayodhya Development Authority rolled out uniform colour code for various buildings and establishments in town, as it will give them distinct identity according to the authority. The scheme of colours to be used for buildings of different nature is being finalised. There will be a dedicated colour each, for commercial, residential, religious and historical buildings whereas, the colour of various temples leading to the Mandir will be saffron.

**Hotel industry-;** With several small hotels, resorts, and homestays investing in the region, Ayodhya is emerging as a new hotspot in the hotel industry. Industry giants have rushed to take advantage of the opportunity and expand their portfolio in the country by opening hotels in the temple town. According to Divisional Commissioner of Ayodhya Gaurav Dayal, around 50 renowned hotels have invested in Ayodhya

for large-scale projects, and the construction of their buildings is underway. These hotels include Taj, Marriott, Ginger, ITC, Oberoi, Trident, and Radisson, and they will soon be completed and operational. The addition of luxury hotels is not only a testament to the increasing allure of Ayodhya as a tourist destination but also an opportunity for these esteemed hotel chains to contribute to the city's economic and infrastructural growth.

## Conclusion

Ayodhya Dham represents an aesthetic and unique type of cultural landscape and heritagescapes that include historical monuments, artefacts, Ghâms, water pools, traditional performances, mythology and faiths, custom, folklore, festivities, pilgrimages, and other tangible and intangible cultural heritages. These are attractions for pilgrims and tourists but lacking adequate or appropriate presentation and communication in respect to their significance of heritage values to both visitors and members of the local host community. Lack of awareness can hinder and prevent the development of public, political and governmental support and funding to protect and conserve the heritage places. Government should plan sustainable strategy and guiding visions for conservation and protection of heritage monuments and sites for future generation while taking care of people's involvement and provision for required infrastructure.

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