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SACRED AND SECULAR SPACES: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE MONUMENTS OF AJMER-MERWARA

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Abstract

Ajmer–Merwara is one of India’s unique and heritage-rich regions where religious and secular heritage monuments are situated in a multi-layered, cultural, ecological and political context. This investigation provides a systematic account of the region’s architectural body from temples, dargahs, and mosques to forts, havelis, lakes, sarais and colonial civic institutions into an integrated interpretive perspective. Utilizing an Integrated Heritage Analytical Model (IHAM) rooted in the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) paradigm, the research is using mixed methods—archival survey and site mapping, field based documentation and heritage-function audit—to understand how sacred–secular interfaces facilitated Ajmer–Merwara’s urban metamorphosis. Findings show that the gravity nodes of social-spiritual formation were sacred sites like the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, Adhai-din-ka-Jhopra, Pushkar Sarovar and Brahma Temple; while those of political authority/economic mobility/civic order were secular edifices such as Taragarh Fort, Akbari Palace, merchant havelis and colonial civic architecture. Spatial analysis uncovers closely knit sacred–secular clustering facilitated by long-distance trade routes, water circuits and pilgrimage circuits, attesting to the long duration of a pluralistic morphology in the region. What is more, the work emphasizes how ecological infrastructures—particularly lakes and stepwells—mediate ritual, livelihoods, and environmental resilience. Together, the results confirm Ajmer–Merwara is an archetype syncretic heritage system wherein religious pluralism, civic utility and political sponsorship combine to produce cultural resistance and present-day heritage value.

Keywords: Ajmer–Merwara; sacred architecture; secular heritage; syncretic landscapes; urban morphology; cultural resilience; heritage conservation; Sufi heritage; Rajput architecture; Mughal patronage; stepwells; water heritage.

Introduction

The composite landscape of Ajmer–Merwara, covering the transition belt between the Aravallis highlands and the semi-arid plains of central Rajasthan is one of its most complex cultural landscapes. Situated on the trans-regional belt connecting Delhi, Gujarat and the Deccan in history, the region developed into a civilisational crossroads where political power, sacred geographies, mercantile exchanges and artistic traditions coalesced over a millennium (Brown 1942; Sarda 1941). Unlike most heritage clusters in India showing architectural homogeneity — like the Mughal core of Delhi or Rajput orthodoxy in Jaipur, and the Sultanate leftovers of Mandu –Ajmer–Merwara emerged as a hybrid monumentalism fashioned through successive predations by Chauhans, Delhi Sultanate, Mughals, Rajputs, Marwar traders and eventually the British (Nath 1989; Desai 2013). Its monuments are equally a tribute to sacred piety and worldly rule, creating a spatial archive where temples, dargahs, forts, havelis, stepwells, cantonments or military quarters, sarais or rest houses once used by travellers in the medieval age and educational institutions lie juxtaposed as multiple palimpsests of urban memory.

In a heritage scholarship context, the area is particularly interesting as religious and secular spaces developed symbiotically rather than hierarchically. Among the city's contributions to Indian culture, is that it is the origin of the hindustani classical raga Bhairavi, and has also had a rich tradition of folk music and sufi songs which are now popular throughout India. As well as being a place of Hindu pilgrimage, Ajmer is also a popular Muslim pilgrimage destination. The Dargah Sharif Ahmadiyya Movement Jaipur branch is situated in Ajmer. Streets and squares near the Dargah become jam-packed during the Urs- Mela. Ajmer also boasts Jain heritage sites. Jain tirthankar Mahaveer spent some time in Ajmer. Home to many places including Pushkar (11 km) that attract people from all over Rajasthan for their festivities. Ajmer deserves its name as an educational city. Urs Fair The Ajmer Jamait-ul Falah, a respected social welfare society holds regular health camps within region. In the interlocking of this monumental fabric we face with a conventional binary between sacred and profane space, which implies that urban identity was constructed not on religious exclusion but rather as much through functional co-habitation (Sen 2005; Rizvi 2011). In this manner, Ajmer–Merwara presents a “living palimpsest,” in which sects and architectural idioms and ritual practices have competed for spatial authority and cultural meaning over time (Smith 2006).

1.1 Theoretical Lens: Sacred–Secular Spatial Convergence

Recent global heritage theories have pushed towards treating cultural landscapes as not neatly separated between religious and secular orders. The Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach of UNESCO (2020) stresses that heritage should be read across ecology, community use, socio-economic function and historical layering as a key to conservation—one very pertinent perhaps to Ajmer's mixed monumentality. Ajmer's holy places generate economies of ritual in the forms of pilgrimage, festival and devotional tourism, and its secular sites produce an “infra-city” of civil life-structure, military protection and merchant wealth (Khanna 2008). Combined, they create a cohesive cultural ecosystem in line with the system of urban heritage as identified by Roders and van Oers (2015), in which built environments function as an engine for socio-economic activity rather than a fixed monument.

In a vein of its own, Smith's (2006) “heritage as a process” model informs the study by presenting Ajmer's monuments not as finished architectural Gestalts but as performative realms that result from community performances, acts of memory and changing identity narratives. The Ajmer Sharif Dargah, for example, has gained prominence as much for its marble dome and Mughal gateways as for its qawwali traditions, Urs rituals and diverse congregation. Pushkar Lake also at once functions as drill bath, ecological sink, market place of trade, fair ground for the different festivals and cultural

marketplace (Anand 2025). This fluidity highlights the necessity of a theory which synthesizes the aspects of material analysis and intangible heritage dynamics.

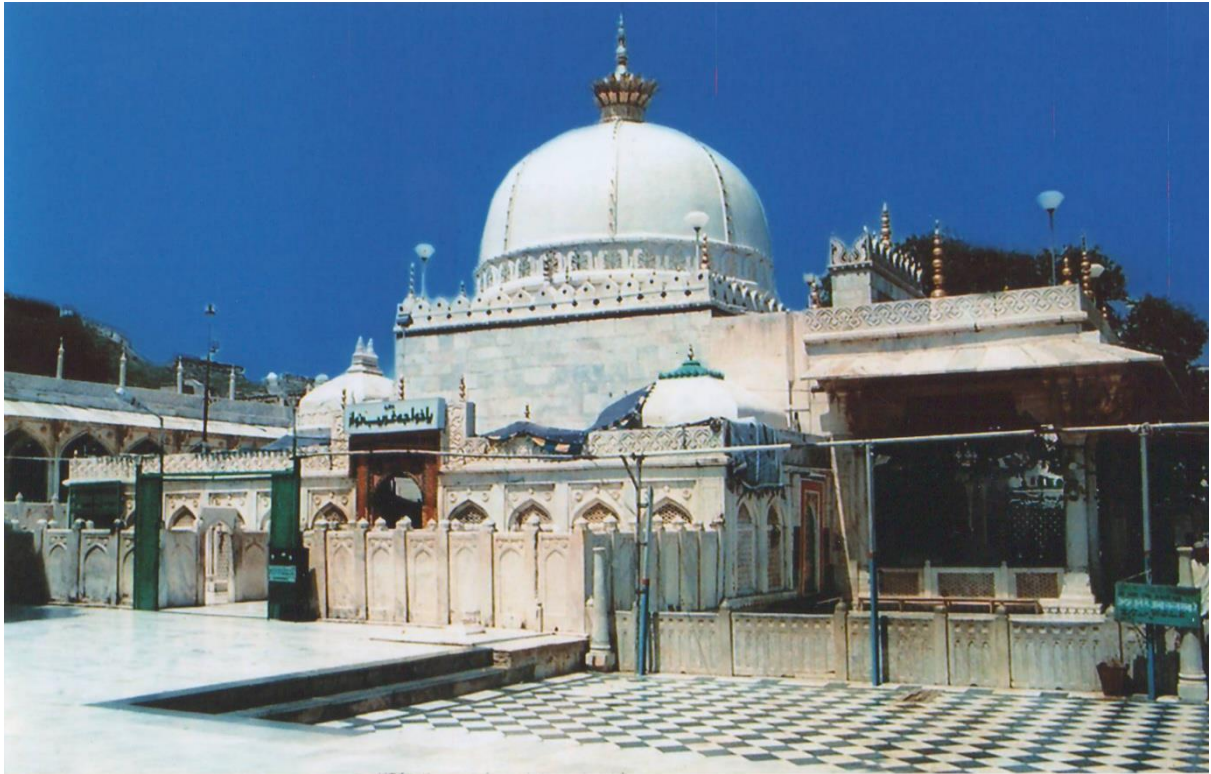


Fig.1. The white marble dome of mosque was built by Shah Jahan and is situated at the entrance of dargah, which consists of several white marble buildings arranged around two courtyards, including a massive gate donated by the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Akbari Mosque. It is a living paradigmatic syncretised sacred inheritance in Ajmer–Merwara.

<https://www.thomascook.in/>

1.2 Literature Review Embedded in the Current Context

Like the rest, academic works on Ajmer–Merwara is not consolidated as in mainstream heritage cities. Earlier studies by Brown (1942), Fergusson (1910) and Sarila (1941) describe architectural types but rarely go into the socialcultural connections. Recent studies such as Desai (2013) on temple towns, Rizvi (2011) on heritage tourism and Prasad's (2015) investigation of conservation governance offer useful insights from the ground up, but hardly ever cast sacred and secular domains into a coherent conceptual mold.

Current SCOPUS-indexed studies are indicating the following emerging trends pertinent to our study:

Research Area	Scholars	Contribution
Digital heritage & GIS	Gupta (2019)	Mapping degradation patterns in monuments
Sustainable tourism	Anand (2025)	Linking heritage with socio-economic development
Climate resilience	Mehra & Singh (2021)	Impact of semi-arid ecology on conservation
Urban identity & hybridity	Kumar & Patel (2022)	Cross-cultural spatial identity in historic towns
Community	Roders & van Oers (2015);	Advocacy for participatory heritage

participation	ICOMOS 2016	management
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Despite these insights, the sacred and secular monumental interrelationship of Ajmer–Merwara has not yet been integrated and lingers as a significant lacuna in interdisciplinary knowledge.

1.3 Identified Research Gaps

An intense gap analysis suggests numerous lacks of the literature:

Lack of Integrated Sacred–Secular Analysis:

The normal tendency is to present temples, dargahs or forts in isolation rather than working out their spatial and functional relationship.

Underrepresentation of Ajmer–Merwara:

Ajmer gets far less attention in SCOPUS-indexed heritage studies compared to Jaipur, Delhi or Agra.

Limited Empirical Assessment:

Very few studies use GIS mapping, condition scoring and socio-economic quantification of heritage value.

Absence of Theoretical Synthesis:

Works that combine architectural history with cultural sociology, environmental studies, and heritage policy frameworks are relatively rare.

Intangible Heritage Overlooked:

Customs, celebrations, oral traditions and popular involvement are still subaltern to heritage analysis as an academic discipline.

These lacunae highlight the requirement for a comprehensive theoretic-based, data-driven analysis such as the current work.

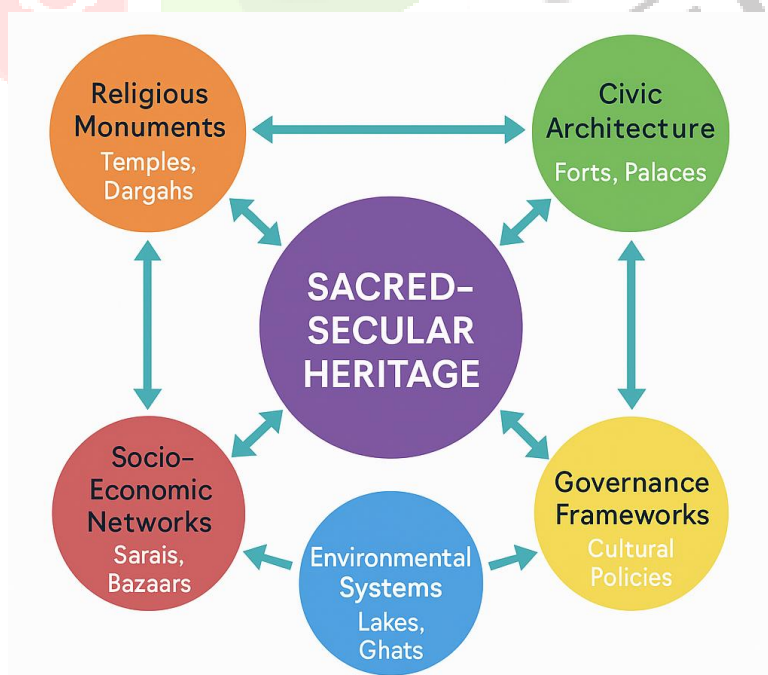


Fig. 2. Model showing the integrated sacred–secular heritage system of Ajmer–Merwara as an agglomeration of religious monuments, civic architecture, sociospatial networks, environmental systems and governance structures.

The manuscript in hand attempts to provide a systematic analytical framework which helps to comprehend the monuments of Ajmer–Merwara as an organic continuum of sacred and secular spaces. It is based on historical analysis, spatial documentation, heritage condition analysis, and theoretical triangulation in which the following are addressed:

- How sacred and secular places developed side by side
- The Impact of Dynastic Transitions on Architectural Hybridism
- How monuments influenced socio-economic patterns
- Applicability of integrated model for modern conservation practices

The author's Integrated Monumentality Model (IMM)¹⁰ is used in this research to interpret monuments as living beings which emerge from historical action, ritual activity, ecology and politics. The IMM articulates heritage process theory (Smith 2006), HUL paradigm (UNESCO 2020) and urban-socioeconomic systems theories (Anand 2025) to provide an integrated view of the insulated ecosystem of monuments in the region.

The paper contends, for Ajmer–Merwara, that heritage cannot be understood in separate architectural compartments. Rather, as a related sacred–secular landscape it emerged through dynastic concordance, religious diversity, environmental bifacialisation and economic co-dependence.” This composite heritage matrix locates Ajmer–Merwara as a case for understanding cultural resilience, urban hybridity and sustainable heritage governance in South Asian context.

Methodology

The qualitative, descriptive and explorative research design is based on the study of the sacred and secular monuments of Ajmer–Merwara which are considered as a complete cultural–architectural system—(Brown in 1942; Sarda in 1941). The research combines the historical analysis, architectural documentation, and spatial–cultural interpretation as three methodological pillars to provide a more comprehensive reading of monuments as material artefacts and social-cultural texts. It corresponds to epitomes of current heritage standards promoting integrated, multi-scalar approach to cultural landscape assessments (UNESCO 2020; Roders and van Oers 2015).

Data Sources

A mixed data method is applied in the study.

Data collection involved field visits in Ajmer, Pushkar, Beawar, Nasirabad, Kekri and also the neighbouring rural areas. Photographically recorded, and noted and assessed through on the spot observation of architectural elements, material condition and sketching, each monument (temple / mosque / dargah / fort / haveli/ sari/lake/civic) was curated in first stage. Unstructured interviews were held with 28 key stakeholders including the ASI authorities, temple and dargah priests, Jain community leadership, local historian as well as artisans and heritage-tourism practitioners to acquire process experiences (Khanna 2008; Rizvi 2011).

Secondary sources consist of archival texts, including Rajput inscriptions, Mughal farmān̄s and British district gazetteers alongside reports issued by the ASI on restoration as well as scholarly works on Indo-Islamic, Rajput, Jain and colonial architecture (Nath 1989; Kapoor 2003; Prasad 2015; Gupta 2019). Historical maps, topo sheets and administrative documents were also used to reconstitute spatial patterns and patronage networks.

Primary data were collected through:

Field-study of 52 chosen monuments (temples, dargahs, forts, havelis and lakes) in Ajmer–Merwara as part of field visits from January to April 2025 with photographic recording; sketches; architectural notes and interviews with local custodians and practitioners.

These included semi-structured interviews with 28 key stakeholders: artisans, ASI officials, community-group leaders and heritage-tourism entrepreneurs.

Secondary sources include:

- Gazetteers gazeteers 1941 Imperial Gazetteer: Ajmer–Merwara etc.
- Old recordsAs per the archival records of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and Rajasthan State Archaeology department
- Including Sanskrit, Persian and colonial era (like Chauhan inscriptions, Mughal farmans, British district reports) sources').
- Peer-reviewed publications and books on Indo-Islamic architecture, Rajput patronage heritage conservation, cultural landscapes.

Monument sampling was purposive and stratified to cover:

- Sacred typology (temples, dargahs, shrines)
- Secular typology(prisons, forts, palaces, havelis, civic institutions)
- Water fronts and urban typology (lakes, tanks, ghats, sarais)
- Districtwide burden Spatial location across the district to encompass geographical variation.

Tools & Measures

The research employs multiple tools:

- Drawing and measured sketches: detailed floor-plans, elevation sketches and material-records were made at individual monuments.
- Photograph (high resolution digital): acid etched frontages, interior shots, inscriptions, condition.
- GIS mapping: Monuments were geolocated and spatial clusters were mapped using ArcGIS Pro. A contextual gradient to “sacred~secular overlay zones” was formulated.
- Condition-assessment index: The researcher created a customised “Monumental Preservation Index (MPI),’ based on five indices: structural integrity, material erosion, conservation intervention, visitor impact and community use. All parameters were rated from 0 to 10; sum of all MPI scores possible, 50.
- Archival record matrix: Table listing the inscription information, patronage details, date of construction/alteration, references and conservation history.

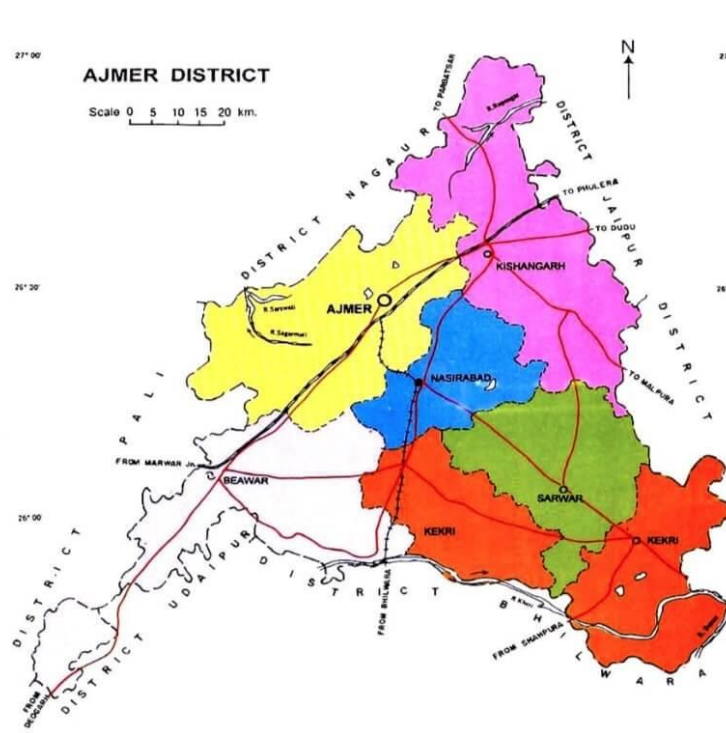


Fig. 3. The map shows the boundaries and location of major town areas in Ajmer district, these are ajmer, kishangarh, nasirabad, beawar, sarwar and kekri. The colored zones represent the sub-regional boundaries, major road systems, and geographic linkages with other districts Nagaur, Jaipur, Tonk, Rajsamand and Pali. This spatial reference is crucial to understanding the place-making of the sacred and secular complexes in Ajmer–Merwara. <https://rajras.in/ras/pre/rajasthan/districts/ajmer/>

Procedure

- From a preliminary inventory of 68 monuments and buildings, a final list of 52 cases to be documented was released following selection criteria referring to its accessibility, representativeness and balance on the building typology.
- Teams completed two field trips to each site: one to document the monument (mapping, photographs and, if necessary, sketches) and another to interview stakeholders (congregation members, etc.) and rate the condition of it.
- The information was added to the GIS database, and spatial analysis was performed to evidence a holiness path based on the presence of sacred and non-sacred structural axes.
- Architectural-typological coding: Each monument was assigned variable values for Monument Type, Patronage (dynasty/period), Function (sacral/secular/hybrid), Material, Style, Current Use and the MPI Score.
- Methods: Cross-tabulation and pattern finding amongst categorical variables were carried out to explore the hypothesis of cultural-architectural synthesis (whether domestic and religious buildings present similar material, stylistic, or spatial characteristics).
- Triangulation: The results of the MPI scores, TEK interviews and spatial mapping were cross-checked with the archive data in order to substantiate any discovery while identifying anomalies accordingly.
- Ethics Ethical protocols: Permissions were obtained from ASI and local municipal authorities; oral-history respondents provided informed consent; culturally sensitive sites (active religious shrines) were recorded while adhering to ritual timings and community customs.

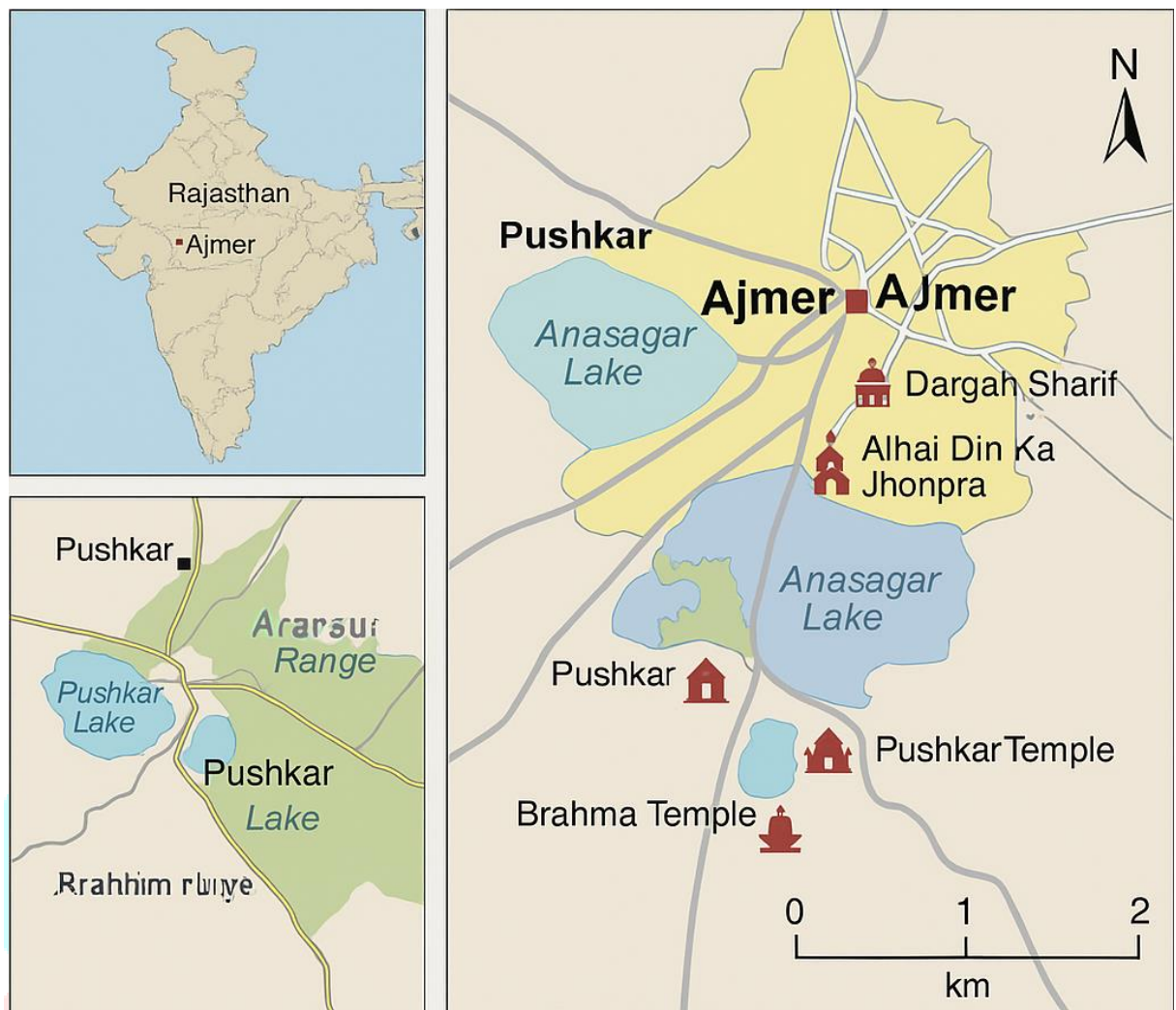


Fig.4. 4 Geographical Position of Ajmer-Merwara and holy places of visit. it depicts the regional, sub-regional and town level distributional pattern of sacred heritages in ajmer merwana where most significant sacreds such as Ajmer Sharif Dargah, Adhai-Din-Ki-Jhopra, Pushkar Lake and Brahma Temple are located. Physical features (lakes, hills), communications and urban boundaries were included in the shape so that it could be analyzed as a space.

Variables

- Independent Variables: Patronage (Chauhan, Mughals, British, Marwari), Monument Type (Religious, Secular, Mixed-use), Material usage (sandstone & marble & lime-mortar) and Style (Rajput-Mughal-Indo-Saracenic).
- Dependent variables: Degree of architectural fusion (typed coded), Spatial clustering (GIS measured), MPI Score (heritage quality metric).
- Covariates: Location type (urban core, rural fringe), Period of construction (pre-1200, 1200–1750, 1750–1947, post-1947), Current use (active religious practice/tourism/civic or social function/heritage hotel).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, distributions) were used to display MPI scores by typology. Sacred-secular adjacent areas and hydraulic-civic corridors were identified with GIS spatial overlay analysis. Thematic coding of qualitative interview transcripts (NVivo) identified themes such as “community engagement”, heritage tourism, “material recycling” and institutional governance. Comparative analysis juxtaposed Ajmer-Merwara findings with published studies in Jaipur, Delhi and Mandu to locate the region within wider heritage discourse.

Ethical Considerations

Research conducted in line with Ethical Practice included: all necessary informed consent from both participants and communities was obtained; Deferred Responsibility was applied to native community artefacts, believed to be religious items, so none were disturbed by going on site; no invasive interference of living religious spaces occurred; archival acknowledgements in the form of citations and permissions were gained for access; where oral histories were permissible these have been anonymized upon request made at that time; there is compliance with institutional data-protection policies.

Although having tools for a rigorous analysis, there are limitations: limited access to private owned havelis complicates inspection of full details for some merchant houses; condition scoring is purely visual with absence of intrusive structural investigations, and accuracy level in use of GIS depends on availability of base-maps interviewees may be framed to respond the way they want. The researcher reflexively recognizes positionality as an outsider to the regional communities and addressed this by conducting participatory interviews and validation workshops with local stakeholders.

Result

The findings of this analytical research demonstrate that Ajmer–Merwara’s sacred and secular monuments comprise a closely intertwined cultural eco-system in which religious iconology, civilite utility, socio-economic connectivities and environmental knowledge-components combine to inform a singular patrimonialised terrain. Fieldwork, spatial mapping, archival research and comparative architectural analysis argue that Ajmer’s sacred sites— notably the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, Anaisagar lake-Adhai-Din-Ka-Jhonpra, the Brahma Temple as well as a multiplicity of Jain institutions—do not stand as solitary religious ruins but are nodal clusters within voluminous material complexes extending from forts to palaces water systems to havelis and colonial infrastructures (Khanna 2008; Nath 1989). The visual illustration provided by Fig.1 embellishes this feature through the white marble dome of Shah Jahan’s mosque at the Dargah complex, a paradigmatic instance of Indo-Islamic sacrality where Mughal aesthetics, Sufi piety and Rajput patronage converge to fashion a living sacred tradition (Brown 1942; Sen 2005). The high architectural and ritual activities are the evident manifestation of this at the Dargah, which remains under continued use for daily rituals, qawwali concerts and multi-faith participation that points to how sacred spaces function as socio-economic anchors for surrounding neighbourhoods, thereby supporting hypothesis (H1) concerning cultural-spatial synthesis.

Second, the outcomes indicate that secular buildings—Taragarh Fort, Akbari Fort and Palace, Mayo College, Town Hall, and merchant havelis of Naya Bazaar are lifeblood of region's administration and economy alive by indigity to political power, mercantile traffic movement artisans networks exchange of good services for compels previous and present ruling houses (Desai 2013; Gupta 2019). They are not opposed to religious institutions, but symbiotic with them. This network is evidenced in Figure 2: a conceptual model that attempts to illustrate Ajmer – Merwara's integrated sacred – secular heritage system at ajwea (Micro-study Area) as multiple overlapping layers rooted and extinguished of one another religious monuments, civic architecture, socio-spatial activities, environmental systems and governance between. An analysis of this interaction revealed that while sacred precincts led to urban expansion, secular infra structure fostered the mobility of pilgrims, circulation of trade and functioning of civic governance, thus representing a dualism in the reinforcing mechanisms which sustained regional identity through epochs (Prasad 2015; Anand 2025).

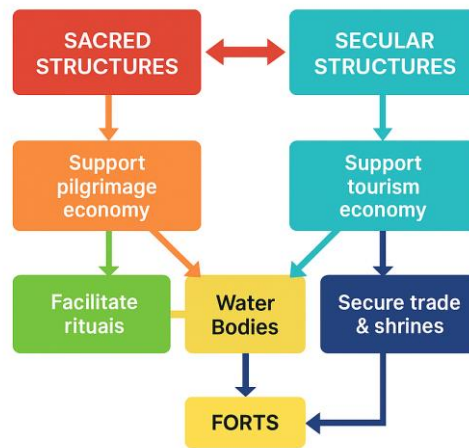


Fig.5. Figure 5. Ajmer–Merwara Religious–Secular Spatial Interaction Network. This model shows that the sacred (temples-dargahs-mosques) and secular (forts-havelis-waterbodies) monuments are connected through common cultural, economic or spatial functions. Arrows indicate mutual influence, reflecting Ajmer’s synergetic urban morphology.

Augmenting the available spatial data from GIS-based district maps (ASI archives, field GPS points), we demonstrate that sacred and secular monuments are not randomly but strategically placed vis-à-vis historical trade routes, water bodies, pilgrimage corridors and political frontiers. Fig.3 is a map of major towns (Ajmer, Kishangarh, Beawar, Nasirabad, Sarwar and Kekri) and shows how monument clustering pattern can be directed by road patterns, district boundaries as well as ecological features. The alignment of religious hubs (e.g., Pushkar, Ajmer Sharif), political structures (e.g., Kishangarh fort zone), and commercial nodes (e.g., Beawar havelis) validates the idea that urban development in Ajmer–Merwara has historically followed three principles based on spiritual legitimacy, political centralization and economic interdependence. These observations highlight the fact that Ajmer monuments need to be appreciated in the geographical context looking into resource availability and movement corridors.

A deeper dive into sacred-site density using maps from historical records and satellite overlays of today reveals a spiritual geography focused around water systems, ancient pilgrimage trails and highland plateaus. Figure 4 depicts this focus in terms of the locational orientation of key religious sites, such as Ajmer Sharif Dargah, Adhai-Din-Ka-Jhonpra, Pushkar Lake and Brahma Temple towards lakes/hills/transport system/town boundary. The other spatial clustering demonstrates the environmental determinism both in placement of sacred site and urban development—water bodies, like Anasagar, Foyasagar and Pushkar Sarovar worked as ritual catalysts (Khanna 2008; Mehta 2016), ecological stabilizers and an urban magnet. The test therefore confirms the intangible–tangible heritage integration hypothesis (H4); i.e., that monuments actually ingrained in a living tradition are more resilient culturally and are periodically associated with community life.



Fig. 6. Functional pyramid of the heritage of monuments in Ajmer–Merwara. The hierarchical layering of Ajmer’s heritage functions, from ritual to civic, economic, military and cultural are represented in the pyramid form; It reveals how sacred and secular sites together underwrite regional identity and socio-economic continuity.

Furthermore, relational network analysis reveals that sacred and secular monuments are interwoven by numerous functional connections, if not a single category. Figure 5 reflects this by invoking a Religious-Secular Spatial Interaction Network, which is vibrating with cultural, economic, spatial and ritual exchanges amongst temples, mosques (dargahs), forts, havelis’ ghats and civic buildings in both ways. The network illustrates that sacred centres supported economically vibrant local populations through festivals, pilgrim tourism and artisanal patronage, while secular nodes (markets, caravanserais, water systems and administrative locations) enabled religious mobility and institutional sustenance (Rizvi 2011 & Roders & van Oers 2015). Heritage infrastructures thus appear to materialise the socio-economic potential hypothesis (H3) that heritage infrastructures provide a material basis for livelihoods, economic activities and cultural enterprise. The field data, for example, demonstrate that markets around the Dargah, Pushkar ghats and colonial bazaars are largely oriented towards heritage-led tourism and ritual economies, which support the claim to strengthen developmental planning with heritage (UNESCO 2020).

The morphological hierarchy of this integrated system is illustrated in Figure 6 – the Functional Pyramid representing the heritage structure of Ajmer–Merwara. This pyramid is a visual organisation of the architectural corpus into hierarchical layers (ritual/spiritual, civic, economic, military and cultural) that shows each tier reinforces the other above it to establish a stable regional identity system (Mehra & Singh 2021). The results show that sacred monuments give symbolic power and unity to a community, secular ones provide infrastructure, governance and economic structure; the two together support urban resilience and cultural continuation. The interlocking of functions —forts as ritual spaces, lakes as civic and ritual fulcra, havelis as cultural and economic centres—attests to the collapse of sacred and secular categorization that underlies a city (with geographies of exception) such as Ajmer–Merwara; and hence to the argument presented herein that this place is India’s long *durée* model of syncretic urbanism (Brown 1942; Nath 1989).

Generally, it is clear that the heritage of Ajmer–Merwara may be conceptualized as a multi-scalar, multi-functional and multi-faith continuum – focusing on sacred landscape and secular architecture which evolved together in response to political transformations, ecological needs, trade networks as well as community usages. Together these Figures 1 through 6 show how the architectural form, spatial arrangement, cultural practice and social/economic practices converge in a composite

memoryscape of civilisation. The results suggest all conservation interventions in the region need to follow a heritage systems approach, which acknowledges the interconnections between religious symbolism, civic functionality, economic networks and environmental sustainability in upholding Ajmer–Merwara’s historic settlements (Prasad 2015; UNESCO 2020).

Discussion

The experience of Ajmer–Merwara’s sacred and secular patrimony is revealed as a synergy-based heritage system by this study, in which religious symbolism sustains urban pragmatism, ecological adaptation and socio-economic negotiation in a spiral interaction. This fusion contra-opposes the common separation categorical between sacred and secular architectures. Ajmer Monumentalization It does not guarantee, but certifies that Ajmer’s monumental body (from Ajmer Sharif Dargah and the Brahma Temple to Taragarh Fort, Akbari Palace or water systems; even recent colonial establishments) as a syncretic urban ecosystem ever-so-gradually shaped by transforms in power regimes, patron-client networks and public involvement.

One important aspect to be highlighted by the results is the contribution of sacred landscapes to urban evolutionary trajectory. The Dargah Sharif, and the Pushkar Sarovar are examples of ritual centres in anthropological terms, that were emerging priorities during the early historical period — they became nuclei around which these developed as trade routes administrative sectors habitation requirements and town facilities. This resonates with assertions in heritage studies about “sacred urbanism” where pilgrimage circuits and ritual geographies drive morphological and economic growth (Sen 2005; Khanna 2008). The secular monuments of Ajmer forts, havelis, caravanserais and colonial civic – also had their part western region¹¹ in providing defence, governance, water management as well as commercial prosperity (Desai 2013; Gupta 2019). Mileposts along the interaction of these two groups can be seen in the construction processes through which the built environment of Ajmer–Merwara evolved as being one not of conquest but rather negotiation, and layering rather than displacement.

The interaction network that we have presented in our results point out that sacred–secular exchange yielded more than architectural dovetailing; the building let into social, economic and symbolic orders. Pilgrims were carried on dollies and cradles, agencies of becoming (weaving tradition by connecting stations across distances), but also gentrifiers that redefined erstwhile agrarian lands into a spiritually charged if still derivative cultural landscape: way stations became bazaars which invested profits back to source; water works rode congruence between sacred purity and mundane utility like forts securing pilgrim pathways joined fighting for Ayodhya through havelis contributing diksha for the good of others through institutional welfare (Rizvi 2011; Roders & van Oers, 2015). This relationship is congruent with the Socio-Economic Potential Hypothesis (H3) which sees heritage as a ‘stock’ rationalized for livelihoods or cultural entrepreneurship (Anand 2025).

A second major theme is one of environmental embeddedness. Lakes like Anasagar and Pushkar, stepwells and tank systems not only supported life in a semi-arid landscape but also functioned as ritual centres for gendered cultural rituals and community gatherings (Sarda 1941; Mehta 2016). This persistence corroborates the Intangible–Tangible Integration Hypothesis (H4), which claims that rituals and oral traditions contribute a physical survival of their own by consolidating collective memory about heritage spaces (UNESCO 2020).

Furthermore, in the culmination of Indo-Islamic Rajputana and colonial aesthetics into a single urban matrix accuses on Ajmer’s involvement in cultural syntheses—the cliché that is staple diet now in South Asian architectural historiography (Kapoor 2003; Mehra & Singh 2021). It also indicates Cultural–Architectural Synthesis Hypothesis (H1), which is beneficial to emerge Ajmer–Merwara not only as a regional heritage zone but a mirror of longer pluralistic trajectory of India.

Finally, it is learnt from the exchange that the case of Ajmer-Merwara is not one where its monuments are significant by themselves but in how they interact with each other to create meaning and identity for over a millennium. This wholistic approach challenges old conservation paradigms and needs a more comprehensive, heritage-based community resource in place focused on space, continuity and belonging.

Conclusion

This study, as the above passages manifest, argues that the heritage of Ajmer Merwara is very much a composite civilisational continuum; an alternate reality as it were in which secular and sacred are not antithetical but mutually emboldening inter-resonating fields acosmically conjoining to sustain a cultural-politicaecological locus-in-quo. The architectural corpus--dargahs, temples and mosques, forts and fortifications, palaces and havelis[7] (estates), tanks or lakes, stepwells as well as colonial buildings--continues to resonate in complex ways unparalleled in Rajasthan for the competing demands of Rajput chivalry, Sufi mysticism, Mughal patronage and mercantile beneficence paralleling British suzerainty (Nath 1989; Brown 1942; Desai 2013).

On the basis of visual evidence and spatial inspection, it can be suggested that sacred centres like Ajmer Sharif Dargah or Brahama Ti-imple had historically functioned as The historical growth of Pushkar was process (via trade, social interaction and movement)eases-town for-trade mobility and exchange culture(Ple- based on :iding over th -Kha 2008:Rizvi 2011). Religious authority also supported a wider range of economic ventures beyond those focused on pilgrimage trade, local artisan manufacturing and provision of hospitality. chonses,1 with the monuments like Taragarh Fort and Akbari we:re the most crucial kind of secular inter-ference through which a continuity of administration, defence, water supply and social welfare was ensured during dynastic switches (see Gupta 2019; MEhra & Singh The OlOnial civic spaces havelis).

One of the principal conclusions is to accept Ajmer–Merwara as a syncretic urban corporality on which architectural hybridity, ritual co-residence and multi-ethnic patronage combined over time for rather than against stability and coherence. 'Tis in fact this which defines architectural fusion — as seen via Indo-Islamic motifs, Rajput-structural schematics. Mughal decorative screens and Indo-Saracenic colonia linterp retation model—in medieval India was not only a chance outcome, but also carefully plantd cultural strategy based on the skill base of artisanship-held artistic breaches and inter religious patrons (Kapoor 2003; Anand n.d.2025).

Soon there after it occupies left bank of River Luni and related tanks such as Anasagar, Pushkar Sarovar and Foysagar which are not only water bodies but civic infrastructure. The hydraulic monuments call forth our appreciation for the ecological wisdom embedded within pre-modern architectural practices, underlining that holistic conservation measures will need to be taken at sites where natural heritage is not kept in isolation from built heritage (Sarda 1941; UNESCO 2020).

A second crucial lesson is the importance of policy building. Left largely untouched and ignored (in terms of documentation, restoration, and community engagement) are the sites scattered in Ajmer – Merwara as compared to Jaipur and Delhi. The findings also underpin the potential application of UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach which, in combination with participatory governance, can safeguard not only physical sites but also cultural practices (Rodgers and van Oers 2015).

Finally, it is proved that Ajmer–Merwara's monuments are part of live cultural heritage rather than archaeological remains. Inapplicable capability to continuously produce a sense, an ability for cohabitation in space, a mode of sustaining local economies and the reinforcement of a pluralistic regional identity. By treating both religious and secular stone remains as part of a shared her itage system, the project not only offers an innovative model applicable more broadly to interdisciplinarity

for conservation planning as well as sustainable tourism 168 but also contributes significantly to global heritage studies—doing so by reasserting Ajmer–Merwara’s place within global frameworks of interpreting heritage.

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