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‘Kashi Vishwanath Corridor’: A Tourism Magnet and An Architectural and Spiritual Representation of a Divine Attainment Journey

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Abstract: For centuries, Varanasi, or Banaras, has been home to the best of Indian tradition and culture, both tangible and intangible. The city of Varanasi and its heritage have always been an attraction for visitors and pilgrims for many hundred years. Because of the importance of its historical monuments and the tourism they generate, they necessitate a unique strategy for growth and planning. Heritage tourism, as a distinct group or category, does not exist, but as a strategy for long-term growth, it should always be given special consideration. Hindus revere the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi as a holy site. All twelve Jyotirlingas in India are considered sacred, but Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple in India is considered the most sacred one. On December 13, 2021, Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi officially inaugurated the ‘Kashi Vishwanath corridor’, which connects the ancient shrine to the ghats of the Ganga, making it a "world-class" pilgrimage site. The Kashi Vishwanath Dham Corridor, a heritage resource, is the focus of this paper, which examines the project’s architectural and spiritual significance and its representation of the divine attainment journey, as well as the current and future state of the corridor, to better understand pilgrimage tourism, heritage tourism, and new-age tourism.

Keywords— Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, Heritage, Tourism, Spirituality, Varanasi

In India, some well-known pilgrimage destinations attract thousands of people each year. Himalayan pilgrimages include visits to remote locations like Badrinath and Kedarnath in northern Uttar Pradesh, which were originally only accessible by foot. Pilgrims flock to the southern Indian rivers Kaveri, Krishna, and the Godavari for holy bath, and the coastline is home to several important temples, such as the Ramalingesvara Temple in Tamil Nadu's Rameswaram, where Lord Ram and his army crossed the sea to Lanka in search of his wife Sita. Thousands flock to Pandharpur in Maharashtra every year to pray to Lord Vitthala, an avatar of Lord Vishnu, who has been described by the great Marathi bhakti poets Namdev, Tukaram, and Eknath at least since the thirteenth century. Pilgrimage sites can be found on every river or picturesque hilltop in India. On the north bank of the Ganga, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, Varanasi (sometimes referred to as Banaras, Benares, or Kashi) is also one among the best holy and sacred places in India.

Kashi being one of the oldest cities in the world, currently known as Varanasi, is considered to be the Eternal City. Lord Shiva, or Vishwanath, is a permanent resident here. It is a holy site for Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains alike, making it a popular tourist destination as well. Kashi Khand's ancient scripture Skanda-Purana (Kashi Khand) states that: *“The Ganga, Shiva, and Kashi: where this trinity is watchful, no wonder here is found the grace that leads on to perfect bliss or salvation”*. Temples belonging to a variety of religious and spiritual traditions can be found across the city. There are 87 Ghats in the spiritual city, showing the presence of people from all occupations and all across the country, as well as their cultural and religious activities, temples, monasteries and so forth. P. V. Kane (Indologist and Sanskrit Scholar) stated this about Kashi: *“There is hardly any city in the world that can claim greater antiquity, greater continuity and greater popular veneration than Banaras. Banaras has been a holy city for at least thirty centuries. No cities in India arouses the religious emotions of Hindus as much as Kashi does.”* [1].

Kashi, more than any other Indian city, stirs the sacred feelings of Hindus. According to the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang, who visited the city in 635 CE, the city was a major religious centre. The city lies in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India, and it is a popular pilgrimage destination for Hindus from around the world. Hundreds of temples in Kashi represent God's home. There is no South Asian city more surrounded by the aura of being "the oldest continuously inhabited city" on earth, "ancient than history," and "quintessentially Indian" (more commonly "Hindu") than the city of Banaras or Kashi. Whether it is in ancient Sanskrit scriptures, contemporary tour guides, travel blogs, or coffee-table novels, the city is portrayed as both singular and universal, ageless and ancient, in a plethora of cultural productions.

In comparison to other Indian cities of comparable size, the religious significance of Kashi has been over-examined. This Hindu city of Kashi has been criticised for its research methods and assumptions on Banaras' "character," which have been accused of perpetuating an ahistorical and abstract dream through long-standing "discursive (and methodological) practices."

In recent years, Banaras academics have focused on the concept of Banaras in particular [2]. Although these critical observations should be taken a step further, it is necessary to investigate the ways in which the concept of Banaras is still present in the cultural life of the city. The concept of "smart city-ness," influenced by a "world-class aesthetic" (Ghertner), has also taken root in Banaras

as a result of Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi designating Banaras as his constituency during the 2014 national election campaign [3]. These debates had already been sparked by the rapid growth of Indian metropolises before 2010 [4]. Despite the inadequate infrastructure, they are entangled in existing concepts of the 'timeless city'. Modernity's futuristic world-classness makes timeless concepts like immortality, antiquity, and spirituality all the more alluring.

Being a "heritage city," Banaras has been described as "the heart of Indian civilization" and "the heritage journey" by the government, and this is reflected on the Prime Minister's website, which describes the city as being on "a wonderful development journey," or Vikas yatra.

However, there is a complicated link between Banaras and its cultural history. Many researchers, philanthropists, and non-profit organisations have worked tirelessly to get the old city and riverfront of Banaras recognised as a World Heritage Site despite the city's recognition as a "city of music" in the Creative Cities Network [5]. Primarily, despite the city's claims to antiquity, most of Banaras' historic structures are from the 18th and 19th centuries, and there are a few so-called "protected monuments" despite the city's many places along the riverfront [6].

To round things off, Banaras continues to use orientalist conceptions about the city's uniqueness and timeless quality, which have been co-produced by a range of local actors over time to describe the city's singular character [7]. This romantic notion is also the driving force behind the ever-increasing number of Hindu and non-Hindu festivals, ceremonies, and rituals held primarily along the riverside. In the context of Banaras' performance tradition, these may be seen as either entirely new or textually sanctioned and resurrected [8].

An Indian city of one million people, Kashi has been described as "sitting outside of mortal time, and as a seemingly unique urban site with a particular ("Hindu") religious character" [9]. All Hindu deities are said to reside in Kashi, albeit Lord Shiva is the city's most prominent divinity. It is mentioned in the Kashi Khanda that the Lords of Kashi were ready to return when Divodasa (King of Kashi) exiled them all. Lord Shiva sent his Ganas and other gods with a mission of re-entering Kashi. Various Puranas use this story to emphasise the relevance of numerous deities in this location. Kashi also has a long history of embracing all of Hindu India's most important religious features into its fold (via punarsthapana). There are four Dharmas in Kashi, twelve Jyotirlingas, fifty-six Vinayakas, eight Bhairavas, nine Gauris, nine Durgas, and nine Grahas, ten avatars of Adityas, thirteen Narshimhas, sixteen Kevvas and sixty-four Yoginis. There is not a single site in Kashi that does not have a Linga, according to the Puranas. It is said that in this sacred city, every stone is an incarnation of Lord Shiva. However, the number of temples dedicated to Shiva and other gods has changed over time. According to Hieun Tsang, there were approximately one hundred well-known and revered temples in the area in the seventh century.

The Kashi Khanda (13th century) lists 511 Shivalingas, 7 of which are Svayambhu (self-manifested), 46 built by Gods, and 7 by Grahas (Planets). Over 1000 religious sites have been documented, including 333 mosques and 1454 temples in the city. Kashi is revered by Hindus as the abode of Lord Shiva, who considers it to be the country of salvation and wisdom. This Kashi is said to have been taken from Lord Shiva's trident and placed in the mortal world when he erected his idol there. When Lord Brahma's one day elapses, Kashi will not be destroyed, not even after the eventual destruction of the earth since Lord Shiva keeps this city on his trident, according to a belief.

A Jyotirlinga signifies the formless supreme reality. This is where all things originate, and it is from here that Shiva emerges. As the form of creation, Shiva is known as "Saguna." The ultimate, undivided reality from which Shiva manifests himself in some form is the Jyotirlinga, according to Hinduism. Legend has it that Shiva manifested himself as a blazing column of light at one of India's twelve jyotirlingas, or holiest shrines. Jyotirlingas are named after Shiva's various manifestations. There are a total of twelve Shiva incarnations known as Jyotirlingas throughout India. They are listed as: Somnath Jyotirlinga in Gir, Gujarat, Mallikarjuna Jyotirlinga in Srisailem, Andhra Pradesh, Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, Omkareshwar Jyotirlinga in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh, Baidyanath Jyotirlinga in Deogarh, Jharkhand, Bhimashankar Jyotirlinga in Maharashtra, Ramanathaswamy Jyotirlinga in Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu, Nageshwar Jyotirlinga in Dwarka, Gujarat, Trimbakeshwar Jyotirlinga in Nasik, Maharashtra, Kedarnath Jyotirlinga in Rudrapur, Uttarakhand, Ghrishneshwar Jyotirlinga in Aurangabad, Maharashtra and Kashi Vishwanath Jyotirlinga in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. In all of these places, the primary image is that of a lingam, which represents Shiva's limitless stambha, or pillar.

One of the twelve Jyotirlingas, the most sacred Shiva temple of Kashi Vishwanath stands on the banks of the sacred Ganga River. There are several Hindu Gods with the title "Lord of the Universe," including Shri Vishwanath and Vishweshwara. The temple is known as Kashi Vishwanath Temple since Varanasi was known as Kashi in ancient times. The origin and significance of Vishweshwar Jyotirlinga has been detailed in the Shiv Mahapurana, according to which the Supreme God sought to convert himself into Ardhanarishvara form, a composite androgynous form of the male Lord Shiva and female Goddess Parvati. Akashvani was then made by the Supreme Lord how the universe could only be formed by persistence.

A beautiful 5 Kos city, complete with all necessary resources, was then built by Lord Shiva using his divine powers. People in Kashi believe that the Vishweshwar Linga, which is a Hindu deity, offers salvation and grants all of their requests. As stated in various Puranas, including Kashi Khanda of Skanda Purana, it is a well-known Hindu pilgrimage destination.

Visitors from throughout the world flock to this religious site. In reality, the city's amenities fall far short of expectations. There is no way to display both unhealthy practices and spirituality at once. Now tourists find it easier. The arterial route from the airport to the city has been redesigned, giving it a more up-to-date appearance. The city must be able to accommodate visitors from all occupations - those with huge pockets and those on a shoestring budget. As the number of tourists increases, this will lead to a rise in economic activities such as hotel, food, transportation, banking, mobile phone services, and river cruises. It is common for those who learn about Hinduism to visit the Manikarnika ghat where the deceased are offered their final farewells. People who are buried are believed to have broken the cycle of life and death.

The goal of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been to resuscitate the city of Varanasi so that it may attract more tourists. Sculpture, temples, and other spiritual aspects are the main attractions for international tourists in India. These places attract a large number of Indian religious tourists, who visit them for their spiritual value. Often, these pilgrims get exhausted from the hassle of navigating the narrow roads and byways to get to the shrines and jostling with others in the long queues for a glimpse of the deity only to be pushed aside in an instant.

Despite the several roadblocks in the path to the inner sanctum of the Vishweshwara temple, pilgrimage travel continued as usual. As a result of the compound's historic significance, the ever-increasing number of pilgrims attests to its uniqueness. The Kashi Vishwanath complex is one of the oldest of its kind, consisting of private residences, bunker shops, stray animals, and a mosque

constructed in the late 17th century. It has long been recognised for its encroached galis, which is regarded as a major factor in the increasing number of visitors to Banaras.

Therefore, the Indian Prime Minister launched a project called the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor in order to preserve India's heritage, culture, and commitment to its people. Mr. Narendra Modi's restoration of the Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi will be remembered as one of his great achievements. Indians entering the information age need to feel proud of their cultural heritage and traditions, and this new campaign aims to do just that. Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi has spiritual and religious importance that is unparalleled. Tourists and pilgrims from all over India and the world visit this revered shrine.

PM Narendra Modi outlined his vision of modern India and its ties to the country's rich cultural heritage while inaugurating the corridor on December 13, 2021. On his arrival in Varanasi to contest for Lok Sabha in Varanasi, he said that Mother Ganga had commanded him to do so. To make the city a tourist destination like other holy towns across the world, he had shared his vision with his people.

A large road has been created connecting the major Hindu temple to the Ganges River as part of an ambitious effort to make the site a "world-class" pilgrimage destination. The Gyanvapi mosque, located in the centre of the 'beautification' district, is a historical focus of Hindu nationalist movements to 'liberate' traditional Hindu places of worship from Muslim presence. The origins of the Corridor as a "legacy project" are traced using ethnographic data obtained over several years of research and an in-depth examination of local Hindi media.

A new heritage system is built through it to confirm and provide evidence for contemporary Hindu nationalist forecasts of India as a Hindu country. There are also 1,200 seats available in the Rudraksh Convention Centre, which is shaped like a Shiva lingam and has a gallery, conference rooms, and pre-function areas that may be used for a variety of events. A cruise on the Ganges is also planned for tourists. More than 40 "lost" temples, including the Gangeshwar Mahadev, the Jauvinayak, and Shri Kumbha Mahadev, were discovered during the removal of constructions that were impeding the intended path for the corridor.

Varanasi was named as PM Modi's seat in 2014 because of its prominence as a "Hindu city," and it has made significant progress since then. Mr. Modi laid the foundation stone for the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, a 50,000-square-meter tract surrounding the Kashi Vishwanath Temple (KVT), Banaras' primary Hindu temple and a major pan-India pilgrimage site. Completely Hindu neighborhood with tiny galis (lanes), cramped stores, and little way-side shrines have been replaced with a spectacular access road that will eventually connect to the KVT and riverfront. Exhibition halls, Vedic centers, museums, and stages for performances have been built in the new complex, which is a part of the city's development under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Herzfeld described the Corridor as a type of urban redevelopment that combines the 'neoliberal economic policy needs with the conservation regime that pays attention to historic monuments but ignores inhabited places' [10]. According to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Lord Vishwanath will finally be able to breathe freely in the newly liberated space that the Corridor has created: a previously congested neighborhood has been transformed into an open space in which the deity can once again enjoy the peace and serenity he so craves.

"This praise of the new spatial setting immediately reminds us of global instances of 'spatial cleansing' – a term that describes the process through which historic neighbourhoods and populated urban areas are turned into empty and imposing spaces of 'monumental vacuity' that become symbols of progress, cleanliness and civilisation" [11]. Nearly 40 temples with rare historical artifacts known as "mulyavan etihask purataviya" were found during the demolitions of encroachments for building the Corridor.

It is easy for those who have studied Indian urban history to recognise the story of liberators versus encroachment, and the Prime Minister's patronising attitude toward the residents. When it comes to trespassing on public land, the term "encroachment" is synonymous with illegal construction [12]. There have been more recent instances of this word being used to disparage cultural preservation, such as in India and other countries [13], [14]. De Cesari and Herzfeld argue that heritage-led regeneration often justifies the displacement of local people by reinstalling colonial tropes of 'uncaring natives' or by portraying residents as "unsuitable" to be guardians of their own legacy [15].

The literature described above has attempted to mislead official narratives by portraying people as encroachers while depicting government officials and urban authorities as liberators of heritage. The inclination is to reproduce "unnecessary reductionist dichotomies between bad heritage (by the state and capital) and good heritage (by civic committees, protest movements and evicted residents)" [16]. In addition, the majority of scholarly investigations continue to begin with the ability of states and conservation organisations to define heritage. There seems to be an overwhelming focus on (first) the state or large heritage institutions' viewpoints and activities, and subsequently the responses or engagement of other groups, according to an introduction to a new collection on heritage movements in Asia [17]. To put it another way, the use of historic idioms is seen as a kind of resistance to government heritage policy.

PM Modi maintained a close eye on the corridor's progress and made certain that nothing hampered the \$339 million makeovers. With people living nearby, it was difficult to get permission for a land acquisition because it impeded an important temple artery. People worked together and the administration showed patience [18], [19], [20].

In 1983, the UP Department of Religious Affairs formed the Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust (KVTT), a government agency in charge of the temple's management. Since then, rumors of a government plot to expand the temple (called *vistarikaran*) have circulated. During the period of 2007 to 2010, the KVTT bought two minor temples in the vicinity of the KVT and engaged in a contested renovation of the area.

Throughout the past decade, the management of KVTT has been viewed as contemptuous of the temple's history and ritual customs. There was a 2016 movement to have the KVT designated a 'national heritage site' as a means of saving it from the institution's current management. Shatarudra Prakash, a senior politician of the Samajwadi Party (which at the time was in power in Uttar Pradesh) was the driving force behind this effort. According to Prakash's reasoning, if the KVT was declared a national heritage, the KVTT, which Prakash said was mismanaging and illegally encroaching on the temple, would be abolished and the temple would be placed under the "professional protection" of the Archaeological Survey of India.

Fig. 1. The area on the inauguration day, 8 March 2019 [21]



As previously indicated, the KVT's domain growth had been little before the BJP assumed power in Uttar Pradesh in March 2017. Expansion ambitions were initially conceived within Mr. Modi's outstanding constituency development plan and as a focus for the new UP Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, but they then took a unique, ambitious road. Residents in the region around the KVT began to see conflicting reports about the size of the territory that would be acquired and even the name of the project kept changing. All of this added to the confusion that had been caused by longtime rumors of a temple expansion in the neighborhood.

Resolving land disputes quickly was not possible due to the protracted nature of the country's land dispute resolution process. When a few previously acquired residences and shops were demolished without warning in December 2017, the neighborhood erupted in outrage.

As previously stated, residents and businesses viewed the Corridor at this phase as a development project that would harm the city's soul above everything else. By the beginning of 2018, protests had grown more violent, with some demonstrators threatening to set themselves on fire. A "Save Heritage Struggle Committee or DBSS" was then established. DBSS's goal was to "protect Banaras' legacy." Vikas, or growth, should not be used as a reason for destroying the city's history, as was discussed in the DBSS meetings. But they also had the KVT as well as the small shrines and dwellings of the ancestors to draw on as a source of legacy. This material fabric established distinct modes of living and socialising and fostered emotional ties with the people who lived there [22].

Making the Corridor a heritage project was made possible by Vishal Singh's appointment as the KVTT's CEO and the principal officer in charge of its implementation. Singh immediately met with the DBSS's top brass, who were extremely supportive of him. Encroachment on the lanes were planned to be eliminated, but no houses or temples would be razed, the mayor assured the residents in an informal meeting.

Singh had concern for the historic landmarks, including multiple temples mentioned in the Kashi Khanda, an important Sanskrit work that is frequently used by modern ritual specialists. It was brought up by a few shopkeeper interlocutors that they would like to clear and reestablish the few square inches of public space outside their stores that were occupied by their items [23].

Officials began inspecting properties and compiling a list of structures to be purchased while a preliminary drone assessment of the area was conducted. Concern for the city's future and the outraged pleas of residents and shopkeepers to preserve its legacy escalated. Students and local politicians from opposing parties attended DBSS meetings in an attempt to spread the word about the protest via social media.

To begin with, officials tried to co-opt heritage ideas. For example, Singh suggested that the first drone survey would help the area be added to the UNESCO World Heritage List, a statement that came out of nowhere and has yet to be backed up by other evidence of government interest in submitting the area to UNESCO.

To appease protestors, Singh revealed that a survey had been conducted in an attempt to locate the temples that had previously been mentioned in the Kashi Khanda. However, he reaffirmed that the neighborhood and the KVT would stay the same as they are today. It was quickly adopted by demonstrators, who said they would go all the way to UNESCO to safeguard the city's cultural legacy [24].

As purchase and demolition intensified, many residents resisted the urge to sell their homes and lived in a half-destroyed neighborhood for months. Anti-Hindu rioters claimed that the state and federal administrations, which they claimed were ruled by Hindus, were destroying not only the homes and businesses of the Hindu community but also the Hindu deities and temples inside it [25].

Swami Avimuktesvaranand, an eminent ascetic, launched a new campaign in April 2018 to protect these deities and temples from the threat of destruction. Local communities and temples were visited by a swami who mingled with them. Other portions of the city saw demonstrations against Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mr. Adityanath Yogi. The DBSS organised a meeting with the swami and Shatarudra Prakash to bring together different protest groups and define common concerns. As a result, Swami Avimukteshvaranand strongly opposed any notion of 'heritage' as a label for temples and deities, since this term connotes something that is neither alive nor dead. This is not surprising, given the post-colonial state's attitude toward the separation between "dead monuments" and "living religious practices," which is often referred to as the "post-colonial divide" [26]. That was the issue that led to the breakup of the initial collaboration.

Ironically, while the opposition organisers were debating whether or not it was appropriate to include heritage in the Corridor branding, the state of UP began to use the term more frequently in its marketing efforts. The Board aims 'to establish the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Special Area Development Board to create the special area under its authority for developing and maintaining cultural, spiritual, mythological, and architectural aesthetics in such area to promote tourism following the rich cultural heritage of the region," said the 'Shri Kashi Vishwanath Special Area Development Board Act', which was signed into law on September 18, 2018.



Fig. 2 Work in progress and new sign board for the 'heritage zone', February 2019 [27]

Co-opting heritage was first a haphazard process. At some point in late 2018 or early 2019, the Corridor was renamed 'Vishwanath Heritage Zone,' which was announced with signage erected throughout the demolition site. Others appeared near to previously buried temples and at areas labeled as "iconic" or "rediscovered."

The Corridor's civilising and conservationist objective of liberating ancient monuments from encroachment was explicitly mentioned on various signboards, which swiftly became coated in dust and rubble. One such signboard read: "As a result of demolition of Resident/Commercial structures on property No. CK 10/27, this temple is now visible and open for your visit and Darshan." The story of liberators vs encroachers was vividly emphasised on all of these signs [28].

Both local newspaper language and terminology changed at the same time. Many reports focused on the 'rediscovered' temples, illustrating their architectural features and trying to date them while also reporting official plans for their conservation and management, despite the fact that the project was intended to boost pilgrimage experiences and promote the city as a top destination. The KVTT also created and distributed a brochure listing the "rediscovered" temples. A common complaint from locals was that many of the temples' dates and names in the pamphlet were incorrect or made up. Modi's inaugural speech gave final approval to the Corridor's heritage status as a result of the project's now public visibility. There began to be a steady stream of press coverage on historical activities relating to the Corridor and the restoration of "the old splendor of Banaras."

As a response to the stigma of being referred to as encroaches, some locals produced different theories for the 'rediscovered' temples' prior isolation. "If it were not for us, Banaras would be renowned as the city of mosques and not the temples!" This narrative quickly spread among those who had been forced to flee, and the intrusion was reappropriated as a heroic act, in keeping with Hindu nationalist stereotypes of Muslims as temple desecrators" [29].

Costing \$6 billion, the Vishwanath Mandir corridor project began on 11.6 acres of land, which is approximately 47,000 m². Ghats named Manikamika (the western end), Jalasen (the middle one), and Lalita (the eastern one) encircle and protect Vishwanath Dham's main temple. The executive committee purchased and demolished 250 private properties, many of which had been occupied by individuals or families, as a result of this corridor pathway cleaning, revealing 42 temples that had previously been obscured by encroachment and illegal construction around the main temple dating back centuries. The new design of this corridor intends to give pilgrims in the future a sense of grandeur and exclusivity that defines the entire area. The construction of the Vishwanath temple was completed in four stages.

The planned amenities are sure to increase the number of tourists, and considerable security measures are now necessary to keep them safe. The Integrated Command Control Center will include a distinct facility dedicated to the quad-level security service. The use of the Telemeter, which sounds an alarm in case of an emergency, will be followed by Hydraulic-based Bollard System, which plays an important part in the protection of such public locations. Objects and people entering the temple are scanned using an Access Control System on the third level, while an Air Surveillance System on the fourth level monitors for any anomalies within 200 meters of the Vishwanath Dham Corridor. In the event of an emergency, an ambulance will be able to enter the temple grounds through a new, bigger emergency gate.

For every nation, the cultural heritage is regarded as priceless and irreplaceable. Even the tiniest loss due to disappearance or degradation constitutes a depletion of humankind's collective cultural legacy. It is estimated that the current darshan (meeting the deity) arrangement in the Kashi Vishwanath Temple is outturned by 3000 pilgrims every day, and the number exceeds 100,000 on certain auspicious occasions. The corridor's launch has strived to eliminate the lumpy encroachment difficulties, making darshan both beneficial and comfortable at the same time.

The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, a 320-kilometer-long and 20-kilometer-wide paved promenade, now connects Varanasi's famed temple and the Ganga River. Planning and implementation of the project were delegated to the Kashi Vishwanath Special Area Development Board (KVSADB). Right from evicting residents to compensating them, the corridor was taken on a war-footing by the same architect (Ar. Bimal Patel) who is in charge of New Delhi's Central Vista reconstruction project.

The temple complex, which was formerly encircled by buildings on three sides, has now been decongested by the addition of a passageway. Temple Chowk, the Varanasi City Gallery, the Museum, the Devotee Facilitation Center (DFC), the Godowlia Gate (Bhogshala), Priest and Sevdar housing, a multipurpose auditorium, a hall, and other facilities are all part of the project, according to architect Bimal Patel, quoted in a press release from the Uttar Pradesh government. "We worked towards realising the prime

minister's goal of reorganizing the temple premises to restore its magnificence," Patel said, adding, "We retained almost 70 percent of the 5.50 lakh sq ft area for green cover" [30]. For those who do not know, 296 buildings had to be torn down to make space for the corridor. The purchase of structures cost Rs 300 crore.

Despite the two waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire process was finished in record time with maximum transparency because of the organised and focused efforts of both the Centre and the state government [31]. The hidden temples that were uncovered after the demolitions are now being maintained and made available to the public. For her role in the rebirth of the Kashi Vishwanath temple, Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar has been commemorated with a statue at the Kashi Vishwanath Dham Corridor. There are statues of Adi Shankaracharya, Bharat Mata, and Lord Kartikeya throughout the temple grounds. Restorations to the idols of Goddess Parvati, Goddess Annapurna, Lord Ganesh, and Hanuman in the temple premises have also been restored.

One 50-foot-long corridor connecting Ganga's Manikarnika and Lalit Ghat to the Kashi Vishwanath Jyotirlinga Temple have been built as part of the project. The corridor contains waiting rooms for pilgrims to rest. This museum and auditorium highlight Varanasi's rich cultural heritage. Worshippers can locate Yagyashalas specifically designed for religious rituals such as havan. A separate section of the hotel is reserved for priests, volunteers, and religious pilgrims. Tourists can learn about the city and its various points of interest by stopping by an information booth located along the route. Besides, a Banarasi and Awadhi food street for travelers to sample the delicacies of the region in addition, and an auditorium for temple functions, gatherings, and other events have been built. Tourists can get a clear glimpse of the Ganges River from the gallery. Religious tourism is sure to benefit from this.

As a result of the construction of this corridor, the region's economy is expected to grow because of the large number of pilgrims who will pass through the area. It is hoped that the construction of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor will promote religious tourism and boost the local economy. "The number of tourists to Kashi Vishwanath grew by 2.5 times during the development period of the project," said Deepak Agrawal, Divisional Commissioner, Varanasi [32].

The temple grounds are visited by almost 7 million pilgrims and visitors each year, and more than 10,000 local devotees conduct daily prayers at the famed Mandir, for those who are unaware. In the month of Shrawan, 2.5-3 lakh devotees visit the temple, but on Maha Shivratri, the number rises to 4 lakh visitors each day.

The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor project has received both positive and negative feedback from the public. India's religious consciousness is seen as being resurrected by this initiative. Several Indian saints and other religious leaders have praised this decision. Some ghats have been connected to the famous Kashi Vishwanath temple thanks to the development of this corridor. In their eyes, it is an "unprecedented scale" effort that has relieved congestion at the shrine. By bringing in more tourists and elevating India as a top pilgrimage destination, the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor is expected to go down in history as the best rejuvenation project of all time.

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