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People's perspectives on heritage conservation and tourism development: a case study of Varanasi

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Abstract

The conservation of heritage and heritage-based tourism are interrelated activities in which the development in one can lead to the growth of the other and vice versa. In recent years, people have become increasingly aware of the importance of heritage and the necessity of its conservation. People's knowledge and preservation of their roots and emotional attachments to traditions and places are beneficial for heritage conservation activities. Heritage places are also considered a growth point for the tourism industry that supports small- and medium-scale industries as well as numerous cottage industries. However, with the development of tourism and related industries in heritage areas, the local community may face difficulties in performing their day-to-day activities in the area. In many cases, local communities need to relocate and people must leave their residences due to the demand for tourism development. A case study of Varanasi City was conducted to obtain a detailed understanding of the impact of a recent tourism development programme (the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Project) and people's perception of it through a review of newspaper articles. It was found that people had mixed reactions regarding the development programme. The immediate residents of the area who were directly affected by the process in terms of emotional, economic and social loss were opposed to the project, while tourists and other residents of the city were pleased with the development activities. This paper attempts to identify the changes that occurred in the area due to the project and to capture people's perspectives regarding the corridor project of Varanasi.

Keywords Heritage, Tourism, Conservation, Community, Development

1 Introduction

The heritage of a country is a symbol of its national pride and produces cohesiveness and unity among the people. The importance of heritage and culture has increased significantly in recent years, particularly in the tourism sector. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 'Cultural heritage is, in its broadest sense, both a product

and a process, which provides societies with a wealth of resources that are inherited from the past, created in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations' (UNESCO 2014). Most importantly, it includes not only tangible but also natural and intangible heritage. As Our Creative Diversity notes, however, these resources are a 'fragile wealth'. As such, they require policies and development models that preserve and respect their diversity and uniqueness since they are 'nonrenewable' once lost. Modernisation and urbanisation spread rapidly worldwide during the past century, but people are now leaning towards their heritage to maintain the individuality and uniqueness of their communities and to present this uniqueness to the otherwise modern and developed world (Napavishta 2018). People have recognised the

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enormous potential of heritage and culture in the tourism industry and for economic and social development. Numerous industries consider heritage and culture to be a significant growth point for development and economic benefits (Xing et al. 2013). Although the growth of tourism may be considered beneficial for selected groups, in many cases, development and changes made with the goal of tourism development create significant negative effects on the host community, its culture and the heritage itself (Erbas 2018). The concept of heritage is based on its historical architecture and monuments, but it is also the heritage values and culture of the residents that have become part of their daily life. This combination of tangible and intangible heritage, called 'fields of heritage', is considered a capital stock worthy of conservation (Al-hagla 2010). In several cases, excessive tourist influx forces the local community to change its way of life and disrupts the day-to-day activities of the community. In other cases, a complete change of landscape due to tourism development creates environmental and cultural degradation. One of the problems of tourism development is that it fails to maintain a balance between the goal of achieving an increased number of tourists and its impact on the existing heritage and the community (Erbas 2018). In planning for heritage cities, urban development dynamics and tourism development are equally important factors. In areas with historical backgrounds, the conservation of the existing environment must be the primary concern (Erbas 2018).

1.1 Aim and objective

This paper conducts a study of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor project using an analysis of culture-led tourism and heritage conservation. The Kashi Vishwanath temple corridor project is considered a perfect case

study to analyse conflicts between the host community (local dwellers) of the city and the development programme aimed towards the betterment of the pilgrims and tourists who come to the heritage city. The main objective of the study is to assess the perspective of the local community on tourism-led development. A second objective is to understand the pros and cons of tourism-led developments in a heritage city.

While the case study in this paper is based on a recent occurrence, there has been little research on the effects of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Project. Although this development project affects only a small portion of the city, the area is heavily populated; therefore, the effects on the locals are significant. This situation must be addressed from the perspectives of the diverse groups who benefited or were harmed by the development initiative.

1.2 The project details

The project of the Kashi Vishwanath temple corridor aimed to connect the Vishwanath Temple with the Ghats of Ganges. The pathway would connect the Manikarnika and Lalita ghat to the temple (Fig. 1), and the temple would be visible from the river front (Singh 2018). The temple, which is located 400 m from the ghats, was accessible to visitors only by narrow lanes (gali) through a crowded neighbourhood. The project mainly focused on building a wider and cleaner road and stairs with bright lights from the ghats to the temple. Because tourists and pilgrims come to Varanasi mainly to visit the older part of the city (i.e., the ghats of Ganges and the Vishwanath Temple), a connecting corridor would be of great use to them. By making the temple accessible to pilgrims and tourists through waterways, tourists could reach the temple ghat from the Khidkiya ghat and Raj ghat via a



Fig. 1 Kashi Vishwanath Corridor after Completion, 12 December 2021 (Source: NDTV.com)

boat ride. The project also aimed to build stairways and escalators to reach the temple (Pandey and Jain 2021). This major makeover of the Vishwanath temple was the first since 1780. The Maratha queen of Indore, Ahilyabai Holker, renovated the Vishwanath temple and its surroundings, but no major changes have occurred in this area since then.

The project was launched in 2018, and the work was initiated in March 2019. The project known as Kashi Vishwanath Mandir Vistarikaran-Sundarayakaran Yojana (Kashi Vishwanath Temple extension and beautification plan) was estimated at Rs. 400 crore. According to the plan for redevelopment, an area of 43,636 sq. m was cleared by demolishing all the construction between the river and the ancient shrine (Ghosh 2018). A development board was created to accomplish the plan. To create this huge space, 314 properties were bought and demolished by the board. A total of Rs. 390 crore was spent to acquire the properties that were selected for the project in the area. Of this Rs. 390 crore, a sum of Rs. 70 crore was allotted for the rehabilitation of the 1,400 people living in this area, who were mainly encroachers, vendors and shopkeepers (Tiwari 2021).

The narrow lanes and the surroundings that were demolished for the project were known as Lahoritola, Neelkanth and Brahamanal (Singh 2018). The neighbourhood of Lahoritola is one of the oldest parts of Varanasi City. The first settlers migrated to this place from Lahore during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Currently, the sixth generation of the original settlers are living in this area, but as the area was cleared for the project, they had no other option but to settle somewhere else (Ghosh 2018). The project has specific planning for people affected by it. According to the authorities, rehabilitation houses are to be built at Ramnagar on eight acres of government land. Shopkeepers affected by the process are to be allotted shops near the temple after the completion of the project (Singh 2018).

The project aims not only to create a wide corridor connecting the temple to the ghat but also to develop several buildings for various tourism purposes. The Kashi Vishwanath temple complex will have 23 new structures after the completion of the plan. Along with the construction of a new temple chowk, these structures will include a tourist information centre, salvation house, city gallery, guest house, multipurpose hall, locker room, bhog shala, tourist facilitation centre, Mumukshu Bhawan, vedic kendra, city museum, food court, viewing gallery, and restroom (Tiwari 2021). The Ganga View gallery will provide a clear panoramic view for tourists. According to officials, the Mandir Chawk will be a place for pilgrims to relax and meditate (Pandey and Jain 2021). After the completion of the corridor and other proposed buildings,

the temple complex will have 50,000 sq. ft. of space, which is approximately 200 times larger than the previous area of the temple complex. According to authorities, the space of the entire temple complex will be able to manage 50,000 to 75,000 pilgrims at a time, compared to a few hundred previously. The project has also considered the importance of green cover, and it was decided that 70% of the total 5.50 lakh sq. ft. will be green (Tiwari 2021). With the completion of the project, it is believed that there will be a boost in tourism, and the attraction of the heritage of the city will increase substantially.

2 Literature review

Since the 1980s, sustainable development has become an important concept worldwide. In the case of heritage tourism, Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) has become an important issue. STD includes developmental policies and the protection of the local environment. The common dilemma faced by all interested parties in tourism development is finding a sustainable tourism development plan that will conserve heritage while influencing the positive growth of tourism and tourism-related economic activities (Xing et al. 2013). When discussing sustainable tourism, the main focus is economic and environmental sustainability. The issue of social sustainability is overlooked, although it should be considered with equal importance. Exponential growth in a tourism location does not ensure the betterment of the local community, the prevention of community migration, or tangible benefits from tourism (Sirima and Backman 2013).

The tourism development process has both negative and positive impacts on heritage cities. While the negative impacts regarding the conservation of the area are concerning, the positive impacts of tourism cannot be ignored. The present-day commodification of heritage assets poses a serious question regarding the extent to which the development and modification of heritage areas is sustainable. Increased tourism activities and an influx of national and international tourists may expand the economy of the area and create job opportunities, but in the commodification of tourism, the heritage site may lose its aesthetic value and become artificial, and its originality may fade (Al-hagla 2010). In many cases, the benefits received by heritage locations through increased tourism activities may eventually be overshadowed by the negative long-term effects of the process (Benur and Bramwell 2015). To ensure that future generations inherit a resource base that is sufficient to fulfil their needs and wants, sustainability necessitates that such assets be prudently managed. The goal of this paper is to investigate how sustainability principles might be used most effectively in the context of heritage tourism with a focus on

the administration of historic homes and gardens (Fyall and Garrod 1998).

'Over tourism' is defined as 'destinations where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably'. The condition of 'over tourism' is the opposite of the expected condition of 'responsible tourism'. Responsible tourism is a tourism practice by which the tourism destination ascends to a better condition that benefits both the host and the tourists (Goodwin 2017). When tourism-related changes are introduced by persons external to the local community, the possibility of social conflict arises because of the fluctuating relationship between the stakeholder authorities and the host community (Yang et al. 2013).

Studies on the entangled relationships between stakeholders are just as important as studies of the growth of historic tourism, which have also been the subject of research. Conflicts of interest arise when the local community participates in the tourism development process without being guaranteed equitable involvement by the stakeholders. These complex scenarios must be studied to fully comprehend the implications of heritage site development initiatives (Li et al. 2020). The aim of using a cultural heritage space in a consumer-dominant space may lead to the complete commercialisation or 'touristification' of the area (Nasser 2003). This term is used to describe the particular forms and functions that take place due to the increased growth of tourism activity. The effect of 'touristification' is particularly prominent in the parts of historical cities that tourists use most (historic tourist cities) (Hernández et al. 2017). Developmental activities in heritage cities may lead to conflicts regarding land acquisition if the local community does not participate in planning (Porter and Salazar 2005). To prevent potential conflicts, it is imperative to focus on the interests, needs, and concerns of the local community at all phases of decision-making (Erbaş 2018). The host community of the location must be included in planning for tourism development; otherwise, it will lead to 'zoo syndrome', where the local community is negatively affected by the development plans (De Ascaniis et al. 2018). Bill Bramwell and Bernard Lane (1993) attempted to explain the connection between the interpretation and sustainable development of natural and heritage sites of the world. According to these authors, the host community's involvement in interpreting and promoting cultural heritage is beneficial for sustainable tourism development. The paper also suggests that 'historic and natural features [are] to be retained wherever possible, not

swept away by new developments'. Tourism in urban areas has started to create different types of problems in local communities (Hernández et al. 2017).

The influx of tourists has recently increased at a spectacular rate, particularly in urban tourist destinations. A study by María García-Hernández noted that historic urban landscapes are more affected by being tourism destinations (García-Hernández et al. 2017). Tourism development in these places is only sustainable when socioeconomic, physical and cultural characteristics are unharmed in the tourism process. The tourism development planning of a historic city must be based on the 'historic urban landscape approach'. To address community aspects, the development needs to be comprehensive and must address different perspectives with sincerity and humanity. In addition to the physical conservation and protection of the heritage, the social and economic aspects of the preservation and conservation area are equally important (Al-hagla 2010). An essential component of the growth of the tourism industry is the preservation of a heritage site's aesthetic value. A site's high aesthetic value may be a major factor in the growth of the tourism business, particularly in developing nations, and the tourism sector can convert this aesthetic value into economic benefit. In contrast, a site's deteriorating aesthetic value will worsen the quality of life for the people who live there. At the Rio meeting, more than 20 nations agreed that maintaining heritage sites' aesthetic value is crucial for sustainable development (Zhang et al. 2023). Because the locations were regarded as the core or centre of the cultural area, contemporary developments were prevented in several areas of the old heritage towns. For millennia, the unique social structures, customary pastimes, and street layouts of these areas remained unaltered. The heart of the cultural areas consists of a uniform collection of tangible and intangible assets. Several cities throughout North Africa and the Middle East have such examples. These ancient cities have not changed since the Arab civilisation's Middle Ages. These cultural centres, which include religious structures, paths, and gathering places, frequently serve as a main attraction for tourists, gathering places for pilgrims, and a source of revenue for nearby businesses (Bigio and Licciardi 2010).

At the UNESCO world heritage site Hampi in India, conflicts between the local community and the authorities pose challenges to the overall growth of the tourist site. A lack of communication between the government and locals, negligence in community involvement and participation and inequality in power distribution hinder the social sustainability of the heritage site (Nair et al. 2022). Similar features can be found in the older parts of Varanasi, where the ghat area, narrow alleys

and surroundings of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple have remained unchanged for centuries. Thus, sudden reconstruction in the long-unchanged part of the city will have a significant impact on the neighbourhood.

Several regions of the world have conducted heritage reconstruction projects similar to the corridor project. The ancient town of Skopje in Macedonia, also known as the Old Bazaar, which consists of small stores, streets, independent businesses, and historic cultural establishments, has descended into social instability and dire economic conditions. To improve the condition of the area, a project was started in 2010. The project's primary goal was to implement better amenities and commercial development, which would in turn contribute to improved citizen livelihoods and improved tourism activity. According to the study, since the beginning of the project, the number of business establishments in the Old Bazaar has increased by 50% and its daily revenue has grown by 80%. Furthermore, the daily number of tourists increased by approximately 90% in the city. Jordan offers another illustration of this sort. The artistic mosaic creations have made Madaba, an ancient city with a rich heritage and culture, particularly well known. To address the city's physical deterioration, population growth and encroachment, and poor maintenance, the World Bank launched a redevelopment project in the city of Madaba. After the project was finished, the city saw a significant rise in tourists within a period of two to three years (Throsby 2015).

The physical and socioeconomic regeneration of urban areas is prominent after tourism development. The assimilation of the local community in the process, as a source of heritage value and the inheritors of the heritage space, can result in sustainable tourism development.

2.1 Methodology

Each historically significant building has value or cultural heritage significance, and different stakeholders have varied perspectives on what those values are. Currently, determining the historical relevance of a site depends not only on professionals but also on the public at large. The need for public participation in cultural conservation initiatives is widely acknowledged in the literature (Bakri et al. 2015). The information for this study was gathered from newspaper articles published between 2018 and 2022 during the demolition of houses and the construction of new structures according to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor Project plans. The newspapers used for this study were in English and were published in digital media. The source of the newspapers was reliable national news agencies. Thirteen such articles were used for this study, and nine of them are cited in this article.

In addition to news articles, Google Earth Pro software was used to evaluate change detection within the study area. Google Earth Pro software has very fine resolution and is regularly used in research papers on urban development. To show the urban sprawl and changes over time, Google Earth Time Series Images were used, and area delineation was performed using the polygon tool in ArcMap software (Boussema et al. 2020).

In this paper, the polygon creation method was used to demarcate the study area within which the demolition of old structures and development of new structures have occurred. A landscape change analysis was performed using Google Earth images from three different years. The Google Earth images of different stages of the project provide a visual understanding of the changes that occurred in only 5 years. This paper includes images of the area before the commencement of the project (2018), during the project (2019) and after the completion of the project (2022). Following flow chart explains the various materials and methodology used in the present study (Fig. 2).

2.2 The heritage of Varanasi

The city of Varanasi, popularly known as Varanasi or Kashi, is situated on the left bank of the mighty Ganges in the district of Uttar Pradesh. The city has been a centre of religious practices and devotion and a pilgrimage site. Varanasi or Kashi is one of the oldest living cities in the world. Varanasi recorded its first human settlement in approximately 1000 BCE (before the Christian Era), although the city mainly developed during the 18th century. Other ancient cities worldwide have hardly survived after imperial and colonial forays, whereas the city of Varanasi continued to thrive through the ages. The city has successfully retained its ancient charms and rich culture even in the era of modernisation. During the 8th century, Adi Shankara started the worship of Shiva in this place. Later, in 1780, the temple of Kashi Vishwanath was built by queen Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore. This is also known as the golden temple and is one of the most famous temples of Varanasi.

The main iconic attraction of Varanasi City is its riverbanks and ghats with stairways. The riverfront heritage area spreads approximately 200 m inwards from the river and 6.8 km along the Ganges River. This heritage part of the Ganges Riverbank has a crescent shape and is located between the confluence of Ashi Nala in the south and Varana River in the north. A total of 84 ghats are located within this inherited river front. The ghats are overlooked by enormous old buildings, shrines and temples built mainly under the patronage of kings and lords between the 18th and 20th centuries. The ghats of Varanasi hold a special significance as they connect heritage

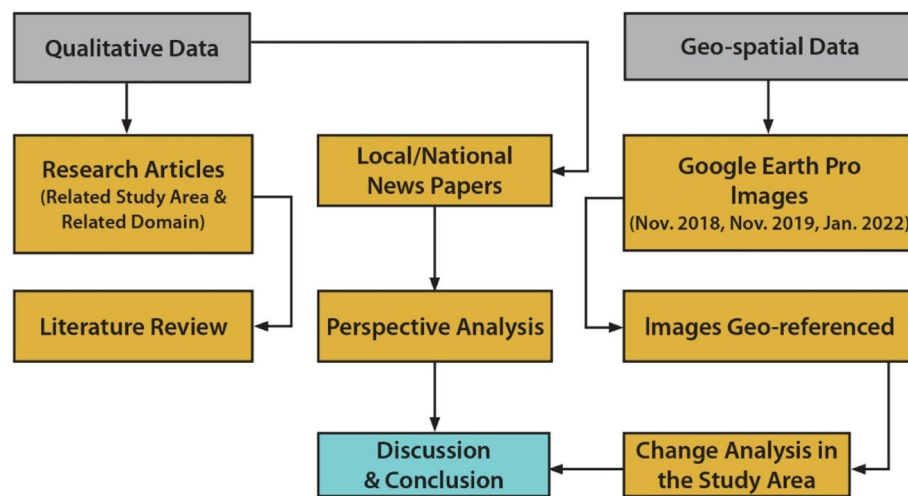


Fig. 2 Research Methodology Flow Chart (Source: the author)

with everyday life. Centuries-old ghats and neighbouring monuments are part of the everyday life of local residents as well as tourists and pilgrims. The river front also serves as an intangible part of cultural heritage as it is a necessary part of every ritual and festival of the city. All rituals start at the ghats with a sacred bath in the Ganges River. Although the city of Varanasi is not yet inscribed as a world heritage site, '*The Riverfront and Old City Heritage Zone of Varanasi*' is being presented to UNESCO as a potential world heritage site (Singh and Rana 2015). Another creative proposal has recently been revealed for the renovation and rebuilding of the Kashi ghats, known as the River Front Development Project. The riverfronts and ghat areas are projected to undergo significant modification as a result of this project. On the other side of the river from the ghats, the project includes a four-lane elevated road that will be eight kilometres long. According to the project, three additional bridges will be constructed. It is anticipated that after this project is finished, tourism will flourish (Seth 2022).

2.3 The landscape change

As discussed earlier, an area of 43,636 sq. m. was selected, and the existing properties were demolished. The clearance of the area was planned to make space for building up the new structures decided according to the project. This particular area has experienced a significant change in landscape within a couple of years. From being a congested agglomeration of houses, shops and unplanned built-ups to narrow lanes filled with tourists, pilgrims and locals, it turned into a clean modern wide-spaced corridor. Modern construction also contains new buildings to facilitate tourists.

Google Earth images were taken in different years to compare the landscape changes that took place in the area of the project. Three images were selected: November 2018 (Fig. 3), November 2019 (Fig. 4), and January 2022 (Fig. 5).

The first figure (Fig. 3) was selected from the time when the area was unchanged, and all the existing built-ups were intact. It is clear from the image that the Kashi Vishwanath Temple was surrounded by closely spaced compact settlements, and the only way to access the temple was through narrow alleys. Varanasi is particularly famous for these old narrow alleys, through which one could reach the ghats of Ganges and the Vishwanath Temple. Some of these alleyways were also market areas with numerous shops. The range of goods sold in those areas ranges from religious goods and decorative items to food stalls. This area, known as Lahori Tola, is a residential area with numerous shops and businesses.

The figure (Fig. 4) was selected from 2019, when the whole area under project was cleared by demolishing the properties. The barren land in the image clearly shows the parts where complete demolition has been done. The space between the Vishwanath Temple and the Ghat of Ganges appeared to be unhindered and waiting to be transformed into a tourism-based landscape.

In the third and final figure of 2022 (Fig. 5), the new constructions are visible, which were built according to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple extension and beautification plan. The whole area has changed from a compact residential space to a space for tourists and pilgrims within a couple of years. The existing properties were mostly private properties, temples, and shops.

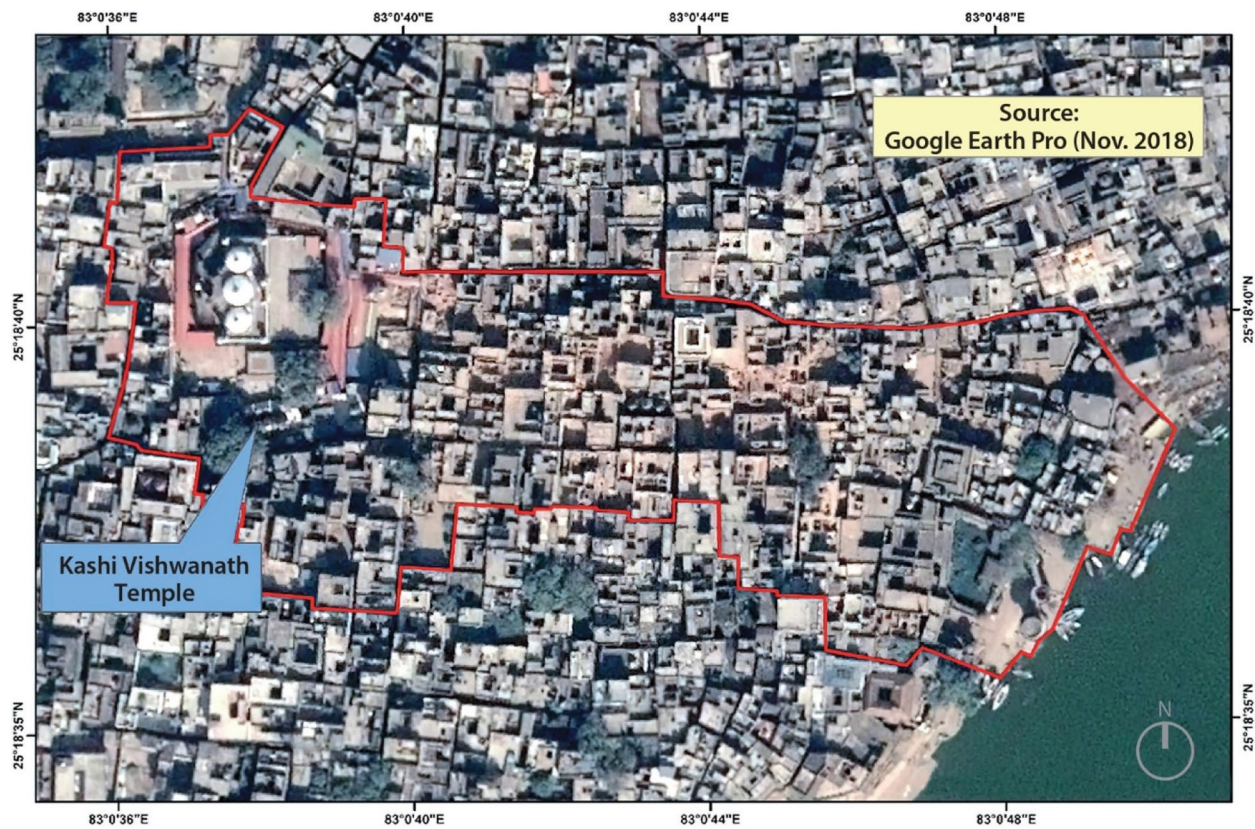


Fig. 3 The original settlement pattern around the temple, November 2018 (Source: Google Earth)

Although the private properties were demolished, the temples remained unharmed.

2.4 People's perspectives

2.4.1 Perspective of the residents

The opinion of the public regarding the project is divided. Despite the restoration of religious glory and decongestion of the surroundings of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, the situation of the locals who have lost their homes is painful and devastating. The locals of the area have discussed their loss and destruction with news reporters (Press Trust of India- PTI 2021). The people who were living in the area have clearly expressed their anguish about losing their homes and businesses. People have voiced their disagreement regarding the amount of compensation paid to them and have stated that the close proximity of their homes to the temple was an additional advantage that they lost due to this project. The locals stated that this tourism project has significantly affected them, not only economically but also emotionally (Ghosh 2018). Many people who had homes in the area selected for the corridor project recalled memories of their homes and the old neighbourhood. While many of the residents of Varanasi were enthusiastic about the ambitious project

of redevelopment, many others grieved the loss of their family homes, where their families had lived for more than a hundred years. Many stated that extended families living in these old houses were broken up after the property was demolished. Family members became segregated and began living separately in different places in Varanasi (PTI 2021).

2.4.2 Perspective of shop owners

All the businesses operating in the area have been closed (Ghosh 2018). Many people who had shops in the area face the loss of their businesses due to complete demolition and relocation as shifting shops does not shift customers to new locations (PTI 2021). Several residents of the area had shops on the ground floor of the houses, and they lost their shops along with their residential properties during the demolition.

2.4.3 Perspective of the authorities

In an interview with the chief executive officer (CEO) of Shri Kashi Viswanath Temple Trust, Vishal Singh, who was in charge of implementing the project on the ground, the perspective of the stockholders was showcased more clearly. When he was asked about the disruption caused



Fig. 4 **a** The project area (cyan colour boundary) after demolishing the settlements, November 2019 (Source: Google Earth). **b** Demolition work in full swing for the Kashi Vishwanath Temple Project, 20 January 2019 (Source: the Hindu). **c** Properties being demolished for the project, 8 March 2019 (Source: the wire). **d** Temples amidst destruction, 13 May 2021 (Source: the Print)



Fig. 5 The project area (orange colour boundary) after the construction of new structures, January 2022 (Source: Google Earth)

by the corridor project and how the people's displeasure was handled, he replied that the clearance of the temple area was envisaged for 10–15 years, but the plan was implemented very recently. The problems faced by pilgrims were the key consideration in planning. Providing 'Suraksha aur Suvidha' (security and facilities) to pilgrims is the main focus of the corridor project. When asked about the residents of the area who had to leave due to the project and how they were compensated, he said, 'We have paid every family, every household living here, including tenants. We have paid every single person who has been shifted out of this place' (Basu 2019).

According to the authorities, the main reason behind the planning of the expansion of the temple complex was to provide facilities to tourists and pilgrims. On special occasions, the temple expects 4–5 lakh visitors in a day, and pilgrims must wait in a long queue, sometimes for more than a day. The aim of developing an extended temple complex was to provide basic amenities such as toilets, drinking water, first aid and medical care to visitors in need (Basu 2019). The authorities of the project applied a positive perspective to the situation and confirmed that every problem associated with the evacuation of the area was treated with a humanitarian approach (Basu 2019). According to the authorities, rehabilitation and compensation were not only for real owners of the area; other permanent settlers, such as tenants and people living illegally, were also included in the planning (Tiwari 2021).

Many people stated their opinions in support of the development project. Many supported the decision to remove the temple area encroachment. In some people's opinions, most of the rightful owners of the neighbourhood in question did not live there. The people who were displaced due to the project were mostly tenants or had unauthorised occupancy (Ghosh 2018). According to the authorities, the process of purchasing property from the owners was the most difficult task. The real owners of the area were descendants of the kings or wealthy people of the past. Most of the properties were given to the shebait or caretakers, who looked after the property and temples. The shebait of the properties started to expand the buildings using every kind of construction, some of which were illegal and unsafe. Shebait began renting the rooms to tenants. Finally, when the properties were bought and vacated, the authorities had to compensate the real owners of the property, the shebait who looked after the property, the tenants and some illegal encroachers (Basu 2019).

Despite all the disputes regarding the acquisition of the properties, there is no pending case in the court (Tiwari 2021). The CEO of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust has confirmed that Rs. 262 crore was paid to the owners of the property, and another Rs. 16.54 crore was paid to the tenants, including illegal encroachers (Basu 2019).

2.4.4 Perspective of the Tourists

The experiences of the tourists and pilgrims who visited Vishwanath Temple in its previous condition were not very positive. Slow-moving traffic around the temple and a long queue to enter the temple were regular affairs. Due to overcrowding, people could obtain only a glimpse of the deity before being forced to move ahead even after waiting in the queue for hours or days. It is expected that after the completion of the project, this situation will improve (Pandey and Jain 2021). Tourists visiting Kashi again after several years are surprised by the changed landscape of the temple. A visitor from Kolkata who was visiting Kashi after seven years was astonished by the wide space at the entrance of the temple instead of narrow and cramped lanes. The visitor shared his experience from his last visit when he had a 'tough time' reaching the temple through a narrow, crowded lane (Pandey 2019). The tour companies shared great joy in the news reports about the completion of the corridor project as they predicted an enormous increase in tourism business in Kashi. According to the president of a tour company, they had already witnessed a 10% increase in travellers interested in travelling Kashi. According to another president of a renowned tour company, along with the increased interest in visiting the Kashi temple, tourists show interest in visiting Sarnath Temple and river cruises (Bhuniya 2022). It can be inferred that with the rejuvenation of the Vishwanath temple, other surrounding attractions of Kashi will also benefit from the tourism business.

2.4.5 Other perspectives

According to historians, some parts of the neighbouring area of the temple that were demolished for the new construction were as old as the temple itself (Ghosh 2018). Families have stated that they had their own temples at their family homes that were also old and had beautiful carvings, but those too were demolished along with the remaining property. Structures that were demolished for the project, such as old family temples, houses and dharamshalas, were 250–300 years old. The locals stated that these structures were equally important parts of the heritage of the old city, but they are now lost due to the tourism development project. A police officer who chose to remain anonymous shared his grief regarding the destruction of heritage buildings for the project. According to this officer, some of the iconic buildings of the area were destroyed in the process. Although he admitted that the new structure looked beautiful, the loss of old stone carvings and structures was absolutely tragic. He stated that development at the cost of heritage is never acceptable (PTI 2021). Demolition for the Kashi Vishwanath corridor has disrupted the balanced harmony that existed

between the Vishwanath Temple and the Gayan Vapi Mosque: 'Such exposure, and particularly the haunting sight of the object remains – detritus, scraps of the city's fabric and broken deities – led to protest and debates...' The residents of the area have also stated their powerlessness in fighting the government project and saving the neighbourhood from destruction (Lazzaretti 2021).

3 Implication: rediscovering the ancient temples

Conservation of the ancient temples can be considered one of the positive aspects of the corridor project (Singh 2018). While clearing the settlements for the projected corridor, more than 40 ancient temples were rediscovered. These temples were surrounded by dense settlements; in some cases, they were completely engulfed and new settlements were built around them, covering the ancient temples. The Archaeological Survey of India has confirmed that none of the temples that were found during the destruction of personal and commercial properties along the project site were older than the 17th century (PTI 2021). According to the architect of the project, the goal was to increase facilities for tourists by connecting the temple with the ghat of Ganges without changing the existing formation of the temple. The architect also stated that the aim was not to tamper with the original structure of the temple and to maintain it as it was. According to Atul Tripathi of Banaras Hindu University, 'The corridor will give glimpses of the sculptural art and architectural history of temples over 300 years because the 41 temples, which were found among the buildings purchased and demolished, have been preserved' (Indo-Asian News Service—(IANS), 2023).

Rediscovering the ancient temples on which illegal construction was performed has become one of the important reasons for many people to support the project (Ghosh 2018). During the demolition of houses in the area, numerous old temples were found inside the properties. Religious sentiment was given priority in this case, and the temples were not demolished. The plan of the project was revised due to the discovery of the old temples. The location of the guest house and the Vedic centre were changed to accommodate these temples within the temple complex. All the temples were incorporated into the plan and restored to their former glory (Tiwari 2021).

4 Discussion and conclusion

A limitation of this study is that a field survey would have enhanced the quality of the work. Unfortunately, when the project was in progress, there were several restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the chance of possible health risks from a field survey were also considered. There is future potential to continue this work by interviewing the affected residents and obtaining a

broader perspective of how their lives changed after the completion of the project.

The case study of Varanasi City with regard to the newly developed Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Project provides a clear view of the existing conflicts between heritage conservation planning and the affected community. The opinions of the people are clearly divided based on their gains or losses from the development project. Temple-centric tourism development, increased facilities and amenities for tourists and pilgrims have pleased a great number of devotees. Larger space around the temple, less congestion, and the elimination of long queues to visit the deity have created a positive effect, especially for pilgrims and tourists as well as many other residents of Varanasi. For visitors, this development project will help to provide a better experience while visiting the holy temple, but outsiders will not realise the actual effect resulting from the redevelopment of the area. The complete demolition of private properties and the loss of businesses and means of income will no doubt cause socioeconomic damage to the people of the area. Although the people received compensation for their loss, several reports have confirmed the locals' disappointment as the sum was not sufficient to compensate what they lost. In addition to the socioeconomic damage, the loss of heritage that took place in the process is undeniable. The area was one of the oldest parts of Varanasi and was part and parcel of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. The locals, along with many others around the country, have revealed their anguish about losing heritage in the name of tourism development. Some damages are measurable in terms of economic value, whereas some damages are completely unfathomable. The emotional and sentimental loss suffered by the residents due to their attachment to this area cannot be compensated.

Varanasi, now known as Kashi, is a city of incredible heritage value and is one of the oldest living cities in the world. The importance of heritage in Kashi cannot be confined to heritage structures; it spreads to the people, culture, and values of the place. The area that was demolished was considered a residential area, and the properties were not declared heritage buildings or may not have contained significant heritage monuments or architecture, but the heritage value of the space was undeniable. Areas with various historical, architectural, local, artistic and aesthetic characteristics incorporated into natural urban landscapes, when taken collectively, are more valuable than their individual values. The clustering of various aspects of tangible and intangible heritage value existing in the area that was lost in the process of tourism development is the only drawback for the otherwise ambitious project.

Abbreviations

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
STD	Sustainable Tourism Development
BCE	Before the Christian Era
PTI	Press Trust of India
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
IANS	Indo-Asian News Service

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Authors' contributions

First author's contribution: writing Abstract, Literature review, Discussion and conclusion. Second Author's contribution: Modification/Rewrite Abstract and literature review. News agencies' reporting photos of study area. Study area Google Earth Pro work, Study area delineation and calculation in ArcMap software. Common work: Throughout the communication with the editor of the *Journal Built Heritage*. Both authors did revision of manuscript with discussion and common understanding in every suggestion that were received from the reviewers. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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