Submitted: 21 March 2012, Revised 13 Sept 2014. < 6850 words, 1 table, 7 figures >. Released: 1 March 2015.

[425.15]. Singh Rana P.B. and Haigh, Martin J. 2015. Hindu Pilgrimages: The Contemporary Scene; in, Brunn, Stanley D. (ed.) ***The Changing World Religion Map, CWRM: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics***. Springer Science + Business Media B.V., Dordrecht/ New York: pp.783-802. <Vol. II, Chapter IV.39>. ISBN Book: 978-94-017-9375-9. ISBN e-Book: 978-94-017-9376-6. DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9376-6_39.
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Vol. II, Chapter IV.39. Chapter No.: 39 0002197368.

Hindu Pilgrimage: The Contemporary Scene

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39.1. Introduction

Experiencing the power of place through acts of pilgrimage is a central feature of Hinduism (cf. Jacobsen, 2012). For Hindus, pilgrimage is a sacramental process that both symbolizes the participation of the pilgrim in the spiritual realm and actively establishes a two-way relationship between the pilgrim and the divine. Many pilgrimage places draw devotees through their reputation for granting some specific spiritual, social or material blessing, usually expressed in terms of purification and the healing of soul, mind and body (Stoddard, 1997). However, Hindu pilgrimage is also a social duty, a rite of passage, and a way of gaining favor, which "equally involves searching for spiritual experience in special places and learning that these material places lie outside the spiritual, mystical, true reality" (Sopher, 1987: 15). The liminal '*faithscape'* that is so created encompasses sacred places, sacred time, sacred meanings, and sacred rituals. The focal points for Hindu pilgrimage travel are called *tirthas*. The word "tirtha" means a 'ford' or river-crossing and, by extension, these are places that allow passage between the mundane and spiritual realms (Bhardwaj and Lochtefeld, 2004). Each Hindu pilgrimage is a '*tirthayatra'* (*tirtha* journey) and the geographical manifestation of each '*tirthayatra'* evokes a new kind of landscape that, for the devotee, overlays sacred and symbolic meaning upon a physical and material base. Hindu pilgrims often conceive their sacred journeys as an earthly adventure that combines spiritual seeking and physical tests (Sax, 1991). If touring is an outer journey in geographical space then pilgrimage is the geographical expression of an inner journey. If touring is something largely oriented to pleasure seeking (and/or the satisfaction of curiosity) then pilgrimage is something that combines spiritual and worldly aspirations in places where the immanent and the transcendent mesh. Today, most Hindu sacred places are dominated by hybrid spaces that blend the religious and the mundane in complex, often contradictory, forms. Each '*sacredscape*' of sacred spaces, religious ritual performances, and religious functionaries (cf. Vidyarthi, et al., 1979) is embedded within the socio-economic-environmental attributes of the mundane world and so creates the wholeness of a geographical '*faithscape*' (cf. Singh, 2013: 69).

Here, pilgrimage tourism is big business, part of a gigantic $18 billion, 300 million participant, '*religious tourism and hospitality market*' (Wright, 2007). In 2008, it generated around US$100 billion, which is expected to increase to US$275.5 billion by 2018 (Mishra et al., 2011). Overall, India claims more than 562 million domestic and 5 million annual 'foreign' tourist visitors, many of them from the diasporas (Kanjilal, 2005). Religious tourism provides half share of the total domestic tourists in India. The numbers of people involved are vast; the last Kumbha Mela festival held in 2001 (Fig. 39.1) brought 68 million visitors to Allahabad (Prayag) and the recent one held in 2013 estimated to around 75 million visitors. Tourism is India's largest service industry worth around 6% of GDP (almost 9% of total employment) and it is a major growth engine for the Indian economy (Mishra et al. 2011).
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Fig. 39.1. Allahabad, Kumbha Mela 2001: Pilgrims' camp, where lived over a million pilgrims for a month (photograph by Singh).

However, pilgrimages knit together the diverse Hindu population, at many different integrative levels, socially, culturally (Bhardwaj, 1973: 228). Collectively, they developing the complex web of pilgrimage routes and places that defines the sacred geography of India (cf. Eck, 2012). Although outward expressions of Hindu religious beliefs, driven by each pilgrims deeper quest for union of the human and divine, collectively, they reflect Hinduism's vitality, resilience, and syncretism.

Today, there is a rising tide of pilgrimage tourism in India, which may be related to an increased desire among Hindus to assert their identity. Partly, this is a reaction to the new militancy of Islam, perhaps partly to increasing prosperity, but also, partly, it is consequence of the sectarian politics of 'Hindutva', conservative Hindu nationalism, and the rivalry between secular parties, such as Congress, and 'identity' parties, such as, in North India, the (high caste dominated) Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and (lower caste dominated) Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), who promote a concept of Hindu cultural nationalism based on Hindu scriptures (Narayan, 2009), which led to the destruction of the Babri Mosque, Ayodhya, on December 6, 1992. Of course, expanding religions often place their shrines on above those of the religion they would supplant. Many British churches cover pagan Holy Wells, a mosque stands over Lord Krishna's birthplace in Mathura, while the Babri Mosque covered the birth place of Lord Rama. Such historical contestations are very easily exploited for political gain (Singh 2011b). Here, the result was another round of inter-communal disturbances throughout the country. However, a side effect has been that large numbers of Hindus have become more conscious of their religious heritage. The result has been increased participation in traditional rituals, celebrations, the construction of new temples and, of course, pilgrimage. Meanwhile, Hinduism, which is itself very diverse, remains broadly tolerant of diversity and there are examples of regional level Hindu pilgrimages, such as Sabarimalai in Kerala (South India), in which Christians and Muslims freely participate (Sekar, 1992).

39.2. The Pilgrim's Progression

The motivations for pilgrimage are complex. Schmidt (2009) classifies them into several types: devotional, healing, obligatory or socially required, ritual cycle – whether related to the calendar of stages of human life or 'wandering' – freeform. Bhardwaj suggests that pilgrimages to the highest level shrines are made more for spiritual gains while pilgrimages to

lower level shrines tended to seek more material goals (Bhardwaj, 1973). Respecting this, the authors' propose a typology of five classes arrayed as a spectrum. At the one extreme are: (1) *Tourists* – those who are there to see the sights, take a picture, buy a souvenir, eat some food… but who have no major spiritual or emotional engagement with the sacred messages of the site. (2) *Pilgrims of Duty* – people who travel to the sacred not necessarily through belief but out of respect to their Social Dharma. It is something they must do and be seen to be doing by their community. Their pilgrimage is not especially spiritual, but it is expected of them, it is a display of social conformity. (3) *Pilgrims of Need* – Spiritual Supplicants – people who travel on a pilgrimage in order to gain some result in the material world. They are believers - but their mind is troubled by rough weather in the ocean of material life. In the Indian Himalaya, Uttarakhand's Chital temple, which is devoted to Shri Golu Dev, the Kumauni God of Justice, is covered in *manautis* – requests for success in legal disputes, examinations, interviews etc – all backed up with promises of gifts, usually a new temple bell, if the wish is granted (Agarwal, 1992; see Fig. 2). (4) *Pilgrims of Hope* – Spiritual Tourists are those who seek spiritual uplift from association with the Supreme, they have spiritual goals and seek things that are mainly outside the mundane world, but they are part-timers. They access the liminal mainly to leaven otherwise worldly lives. (5) *Pilgrims of Union* – true Spiritual Seekers for who all experience is a spiritual journey, who follow *moksha dharma*, a path that seeks escape from the material world and the Hindu cycle of rebirth.

Fig. 39.2. Golu Devata Temple, Chitai, Kumaun Himalaya - pilgrim 'thank you' gifts of temple bells (photograph by Haigh).

Most, Hindu pilgrimages are performed on auspicious occasions, sacred times that are often defined in terms of astronomical-astrological correspondences, which underpin their associated qualities of sacredness (*pavitrika*) and merit-giving capacity (*punya-phala*). These special occasions very often coincide with the timing of sacred festivals and share the belief that, at such times, the spiritual benefits of a particular *tirtha* are most powerful. This, of course, can lead to the development of mass pilgrimages like those of the Kumbha Mela and

Panchakroshi Yatra. Of course, the many and varied regional traditions of Hinduism, together with the rival claims of each *tirtha*, contain many such occasions and festivals. However, at pan-India level there appear about thirty-one key dates (cf. Table 1).

Table 39.1. Hindu Festive dates for Pilgrimages & the Roman Dates, CE 2014-2020

Se	**Festival**	**Hindu Date/ *Tithi***	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
1.	Makara Samkranti: always on the 14th January; the Sun leaves the house of Capricorn and enters Aquarius								
2.	Pausha Purnima	Pausha, L-15, F	16 Jan	5 Jan	24 Jan	12 Jan	2 Jan	21 Jan	10 Jan
3.	Magha Amavasya	Magha, D-15, N	30 Jan	20 Jan	8 Feb	27 Jan	17 Jan	4 Feb	24 Jan
4.	Vasant Panchami	Magha, L - 5	4 Feb	24 Jan	13 Feb	1 Feb	22 Jan	10 Feb	30 Jan
5.	Magha Purnima	Magha, L-15, F	14 Feb	3 Feb	22 Feb	10 Feb	31 Jan	19 Feb	9 Feb
6.	Maha Shivaratri	Phalguna, D - 14	1 Mar	17 Feb	8 Mar	25 Feb	14 Feb	4 Mar	22 Feb
7.	New *Samvata* starts, Vasant Navaratri -1	Chaitra, L-1 --- ***Samvata*** ---	31 Mar ***2071***	21 Mar ***2072***	8 Apr ***2073***	29 Mar ***2074***	18 Mar ***2075***	6 Apr ***2076***	25 Mar ***2077***
8.	Rama Naumi	Chaitra, L - 9	8 Apr	28 Mar	15 Apr	5 Apr	25 Mar	14 Apr	2 Apr
9.	Mahavira Jayanti	Chaitra, L-15, F	15 Apr	4 Apr	22 Apr	11 Apr	31 Mar	19 Apr	8 Apr
10.	Akshaya Tritiya	Vaishakha, L-3	2 May	21 Apr	9 May	29 Apr	18 Apr	7 May	26 Apr
11.	Buddha Purnima	Vaishakha, L-15, F	14 May	4 May	21 May	10 May	29 Apr	18 May	7 May
12.	Ganga Dashahara	Jyeshtha, L - 10	8 Jun	28 May	14 Jun	4 Jun	22 Jun	12 Jun	1 Jun
13.	Ratha Yatra	Ashadha, L - 3	29 Jun	18 Jul	6 Jul	25 Jun	14 Jul	4 Jul	23 Jun
14.	Guru Purnima	Ashadha, L-15, F	12 Jul	31 Jul	19 Jul	9 Jul	27 Jul	16 Jul	5 Jul
15.	Naga Panchami	Shravana, L - 5	1 Aug	19 Aug	7 Aug	27 Jul	2 Aug	5 Aug	25 Jul
16.	Ganesh Caturthi	Bhadrapada, D - 4	13 Aug	1 Sep	21 Aug	11 Aug	30 Aug	19 Aug	7 Aug
17.	Krishna Janmasthmi	Bhadrapada, D - 8	17 Aug	5 Sep	25 Aug	15 Aug	3 Sep	23 Aug	12 Aug
18.	Lolarka Shashthi	Bhadrapada, L - 6	31Aug	19 Sep	7 Sep	27 Aug	15 Sep	4 Sep	24 Aug
19.	Ananta Chaturdashi	Bhadrapada, L - 14	8 Sep	27 Sep	15 Sep	5 Sep	23 Sep	13 Sep	1 Sep
20.	Pitri Visarjana - 14	Ashvina, D - 14	23 Sep	11 Oct	30 Sep	19 Sep	8 Oct	28 Sep	17 Sep
21.	Navaratri, NR 1	Ashvina, L - 1	25 Sep	13 Oct	1 Oct	21 Sep	10 Oct	29 Sep	17 Oct
22.	Lakshmi Puja, NR 8	Ashvina, L - 8	2 Oct	21 Oct	9 Oct	28 Sep	17 Oct	6 Oct	24 Oct
23.	Dashahara, NR 10	Ashvina, L - 10	4 Oct	23 Oct	11 Oct	30 Sep	19 Oct	8 Oct	26 Oct
24.	Kojagiri / Purnima	Ashvina, L-15, F	8 Oct	27 Oct	16 Oct	5 Oct	24 Oct	13 Oct	31 Oct
25.	Dipavali / Divali	Karttika, D-15, N	23 Oct	11 Nov	30 Oct	19 Oct	7 Nov	27 Oct	14 Nov
26.	Surya Shashthi	Karttika, L - 6	29 Oct	17 Nov	6 Nov	26 Oct	13 Nov	2 Nov	20 Nov
27.	Prabodhini Ekadashi	Karttika, L - 11	3 Nov	22 Nov	11 Nov	31 Oct	19 Nov	8 Nov	25 Nov
28.	Karttika Purnima	Karttika, L-15, F	6 Nov	25 Nov	14 Nov	4 Nov	23 Nov	12 Nov	30 Nov
29.	Margasirsa Purnima	Margasirsa, L-15,F	6 Dec	25 Dec	13 Dec	3 Dec	22 Dec	12 Dec	30 Dec
30.	Lunar Eclipse	Full Moon (F)	-------	4 Apr	10 Feb	9 Jul	31 Jan, 27 Jul	16 Jul	-------
31.	Solar Eclipse	New Moon (N)	-------	------	------	------	------		

Lunar month: D, Dark Fortnight (waning), L, Light Fortnight (waxing); F, Full Moon; N, New Moon.
(Source: Singh, 2009a, pp. 390-391; *prepared by &* © Rana P. B. Singh).

In fact, most Hindu Pilgrims aspire toward transcendence of the mundane and often express their experiences in purely spiritual terms, perhaps as a dialogue with their Deity or

greater Self. Such deep pilgrimages, whether motivated from a sense of duty, hope or devotion, are rites of passage involving a cycle *(mandala)* of three stages: *initiation* (from awareness to start), *liminality* (the journey and its experiences), and *reaggregation* (the homecoming) as well as the upward path of liberation *(moksha)* [Fig. 3]. This is a sacramental process that involves the pilgrim in the liminal dimensions of each *faithscape.* It seeks to develop a two-way relationship between the pilgrim and the divine, howsoever conceived, and it offers two means of departure, one back to the mundane world and one to the spiritual realms (Singh, 2011a). Singh's model of Hindu perspectives on pilgrimage charts (a minimum of) four layers, interconnecting through sacred space and sacred time, that link the individual believer to the Ultimate [Fig. 4]. These two process systems bind sacred space, time, territory and religious functionaries together into a sacrosanct spatial organization (Caplan, 1997).

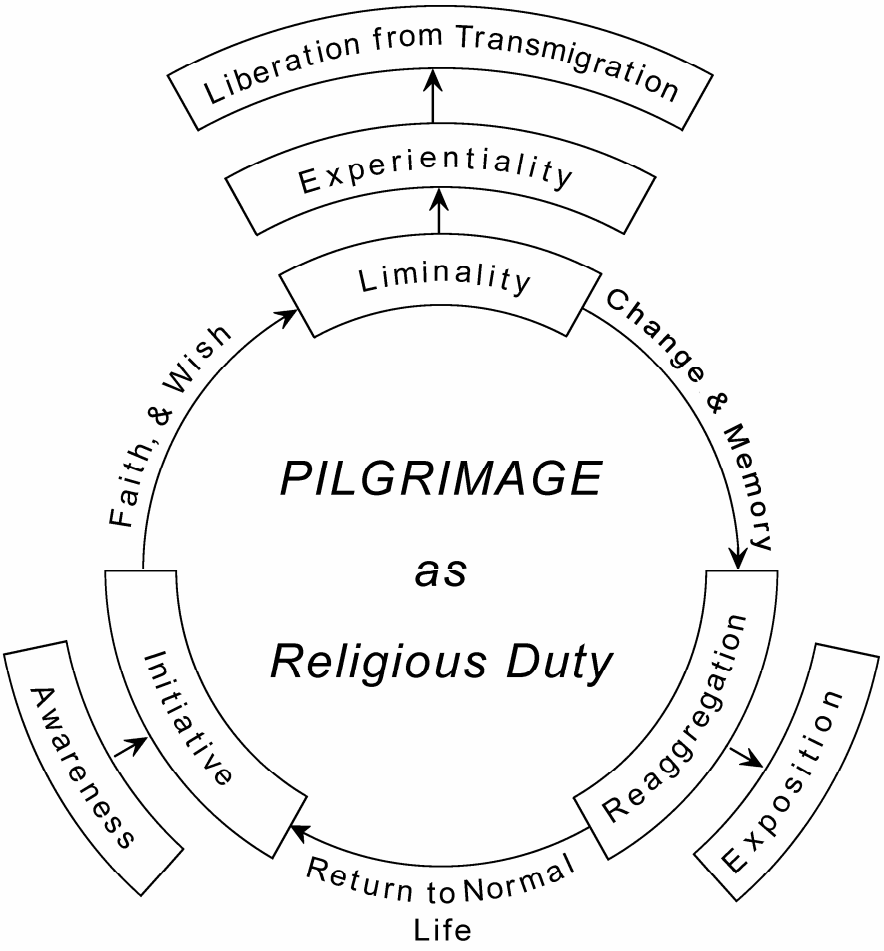

Fig. 39.3. Pilgrimage as religious duty: 'Pilgrimage Mandala' (after Singh, 2011a, p. 17).

39.3. Making Sense of Pilgrimage Places

The most ancient parts of the Vedas, the *Rig Veda*, (ca. 13th Century BCE), attach four chief connotations to the notion of *tirtha.* It is: (1) a place where one can receive power (*Rig Veda*, 1.169. 6; 1.173.11); (2) a place of purification where people can dip in sacred waters (*Rig Veda* 8.47.11; 1.46.8); (3) a sacred site where God is immanent (*Rg Veda*, 10.31.3); (4) the location of some divine pass-time or activity (*Satapatha Brahmana*, 18.9). A huge, if not quite as ancient, literature describes the many and varied blessings awarded by taking a Holy dip at different pilgrimage *tirtha*. These include the *Puranic Tirtha Mahatmya* texts dating from the first millennium or so CE, which dominate the *Skanda* and *Padma Purana*s. In addition to spiritual gains, Hindu pilgrimages have always concerned gaining social status and the relief of worldly cares (Haigh, 2011). In these texts, very many of the blessings described concern the

relief of sins or the fulfillment of wishes for health, wealth, success and so forth (cf. Jacobsen, 2012). Hence, the *Brahma Purana* (70.16-19) classifies *tirthas* into another four categories: (1) sites related to gaining blessings from specific deities; (2). sites associated with the propitiation of mythological demons who performed malevolent works and sacrifices there; (3) sites associated with the lives of important spiritual leaders; and (4) human-perceived sites, which are not believed to be "chosen" but merely discovered and revered by humans.

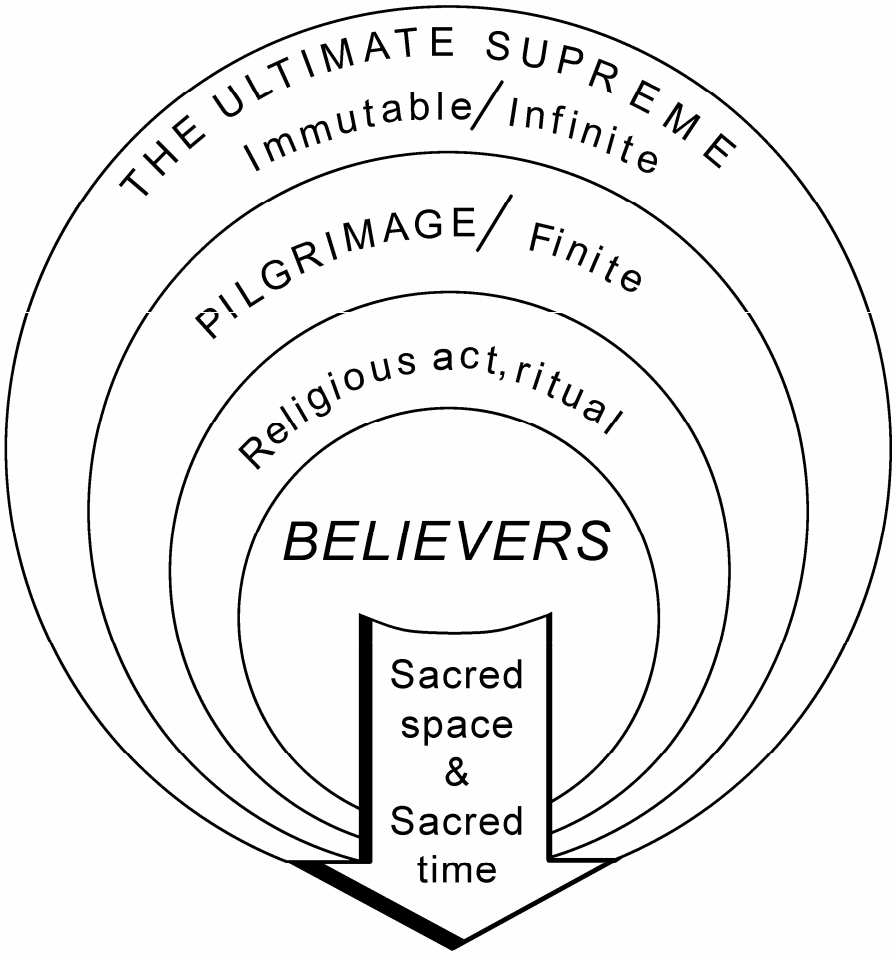

Fig. 39.4. Hindu outlook of Pilgrimage (after Singh, 2011a, p. 18).

A huge literature has developed to catalogue these sacred sites and several geographers have sought to order this complexity by classification, seeking norms, generalizations, and rankings (see Singh, 2011a). Today, the most popular pan-Hindu pilgrimage destinations are Kashi (Varanasi), Allahabad (Prayag), and Gaya (Vidyarthi, 1978), which together are eulogized as the three ladders to the heaven, while for overseas visitors especially, the 'Braj Mandala', an area around the temple towns of Mathura and Vrindavan (Uttar Pradesh), is also important. Among pan-Indian pilgrimage places, there are the seven sacred cities include Mathura, Dvarka, Ayodhya, Haridvar, Varanasi, Ujjain and Kanchipuram and, similarly, scattered across India, are 12 important Jyotir Linga *tirthas* of Lord Shiva, 4 abodes of Lord Vishnu (the Preserver God), 1 major temple devoted to Lord Brahma (The Creator God) at Pushkar, and 51 special sites sacred to the Goddess (Motivation and Power) [cf. Fig. 5]. According to the *Kalyana Tirthank* list, 35 per cent of all sacred places are associated to the Lord Shiva, followed by Lord Vishnu (16 per cent), and the Goddess (12 per cent). In addition, there are layer upon layer of more local and regional shrines, for example in Kumaun, the western part of India's Uttarakhand State, pilgrims from many states flock to the Shaivite

temple complex at Jageshwar (Agrawal, 2010), while in the local area around Kumaun's capital, Almora, the temple named for the Kumauni mountain Goddesses, Nanda Devi and Su Devi, takes local pride of place during festivals. Feldhaus (2003) has explored the intricacies of such interconnected regional identities and 'sacredness' in western India. Of course, in recent years, this pattern has become still more complicated with the rise of the new pilgrimage shrines of World Hinduism, such as the BAPS Svaminarayan Akshardham in Delhi, ISKCON's Mayapurdham in rural Bengal, and Aurobindo's Auroville complex in Puduchery, which attract people from all over the world (see: Brooks, 1989). In truth, the number of Hindu *tirthas* in India is so vast and the practice of pilgrimage so ubiquitous that some argue that India itself might be better conceived as sacred space organized into pilgrimage centers and hinterlands, many of which are better defined as cultural and mental than physical spaces (Bhardwaj, 1973).

Fig. 39.5. Important Hindu Places of Pilgrimages (after Singh, 1997, p. 194).

Elsewhere, in the '*new Indias*' of more recently established Hindu communities, immature but ontologically similar patterns can be seen to be developing in places as diverse as Bali, Mauritius, the West Indies, Europe and the Americas (Prorok, 2003). For example, the most sacred Hindu place in Mauritius is Ganga Talao (Grand Bassin), a crater-lake temple complex high in the island's mountainous heart, which, since 1897, has been seen as having a spiritual connection to the Ganga River. Today, during the festival of Maha Shivaratri, as many as 40,000 pilgrims leave their homes to walk many miles into the mountains to collect its Ganga water as an offering to Lord Shiva (Eisenlohr, 2006; Seewoochum, 1995).

Singh explored the cultural geography of Varanasi's *Panchakroshiyatra* of *Ashvina Malamasa* (18 September-16 October 2001; cf. Fig. 6). Surveying a sample of 432 from its 52,310 pilgrims, Singh (2009a) found that most travelled as small, typically family, groups (3-6 persons) (*sim*, Gujarat: Sopher, 1968, and the UK: Chauhan et al., 2012). In Varanasi, most participants (66%) were female and most came from the local area. However, there were also cohorts from Bengal and from the international diaspora (Singh, 2009). Over half of the pilgrim-tourists were middle-aged, 40 to 60 years and 20% came from the lower classes, including peasantry and menial servants. Their educational status was also low with 57% of the local pilgrims claiming to have an education between primary school and graduation (Grades 5–10), compared to 70% of the pilgrim-tourists from further afield. People of Brahmin caste predominated because undertaking such rituals helps reinforce their professional image and religious status. Together, the Brahmin and Merchant castes shared a little over half of the total (Singh, 2009). Similar results are found in a survey of 500 pilgrims to the Shaivite Jageshwar shrines of Kumaun (Agrawal, 2010), which was also dominated by Brahmin participation and by married people, who have more responsibilities. Agrawal (2010) also found that rural respondents and those from lower income groups were more inclined toward God than more wealthy urban people.

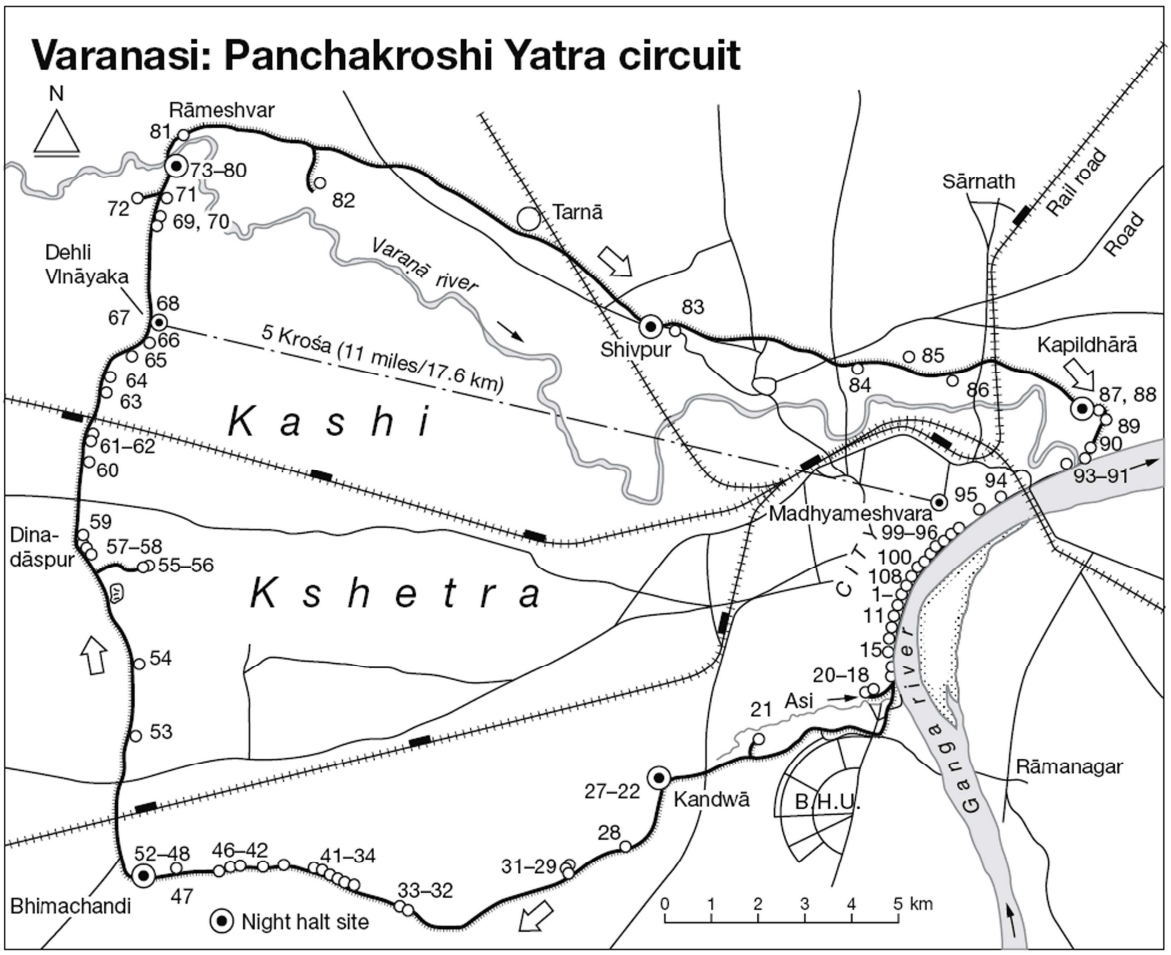

Fig. 39.6. Varanasi: Panchakroshi Yatra Circuit (after Singh, 2009a, p. 271).

Bhardwaj (1973), again following Stoddard (1966), found a weak correlation between a catchment-area-based hierarchy of pilgrimage sites and the caste of the pilgrim visitors, which suggests that visitors to pan-Hindu or supra-regional shrines are more often from higher castes than those visiting regional or local shrines (Bhardwaj, 1973). Undoubtedly, part of the reason for this high caste prevalence is socio-economic but part is the greater familiarity of higher castes with the Sanskrit texts. Bhardwaj (1973) also mentions a counter trend caused by the '*Sanskritization'* of the lower castes. Since India's independence in 1947, an aspect of upward mobility among the lower castes has been their adoption of symbols and religious activities formerly associated with higher castes. The Sanskrit law books and *Purana*s commend pilgrimage as meritorious for poor people, members of the low castes, and women. However, even today, very low caste Hindus rarely make pilgrimages (Morinis, 1984).

The emotional qualities, experiential learning and religious understandings of pilgrims in Rajasthan have been explored by Gold (1988, p. xiii) who inquired: "what people did and what they said about what they did, and what they said about what they did, to each other and to me". Although it tackles a very atypical 'international' pilgrimage, Bhakti Caitanya Swami (2007) has recorded an evocative 8-9 hour video documentary that shares the route, practices, ethos and experience of a month-long *Braj Mandala Parikrama* made by devotees from the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). However, much more research could be done to explore the different levels of emotional experience gained by pilgrims of different types, who so clearly see their surroundings with very different eyes. For example, on a mundane level, Radhakund, 'the most Sacred Place in the Universe' (Bhakti Caitanya Swami, 2010), is a small ordinary tank filled with water of questionable biological quality, albeit one surrounded by a bustle of small temples and religious shrines. However, for a devotee, it is sublime, a place filled with pure and holy water that is the liquid essence of the Goddess Radha, and whose waters preserve the seeds of eternal devotion for Lord Krishna. In transcendental vision, its surroundings of unpainted bricks and stone fade to lush forest and in its place appear four bridges across which heavenly maidens (*Gopis*) walk toward a be-jeweled central pavilion, where Radha relaxes among her girlfriends. Such visions contrast sharply with more mundane experience, such as that charted by the travelogue of Dev Prasad, IT engineer from Bangalore, who describes a thoroughly modern pilgrim's progress through the lands of Krishna (Prasad, 2010).

Together, the landscape with its sacred symbolic geography creates a '*faithscape*'. To cross such a sacred landscape is to seek to be transformed and realize a new spiritual identity. The act of pilgrimage is itself a ritual and a crossing of a threshold to a new way of being (Singh, 2011a). After a positive pilgrimage experience, the transformed pilgrim returns to their everyday life and shares their experiences with others, who themselves become inspired to be pilgrims themselves. This forms a cycle known as the '*pilgrimage mandala*' [Fig. 3].

39.4. Making Sense of Pilgrimage routes: the Pilgrimage Mandala

Topographically, holy *tirthas* may be classified into three groups: (i) *Water-sites*, associated mostly with a sacred bath on an auspicious occasion, (ii) *Shrines*, related to a particular deity or sect and mostly visited by pilgrims that belong to, or are attached to, that particular deity or sect, and (iii) *Kshetra* (sacred grounds), areas usually shaped by the form of cosmic *mandala*, the travelling of which brings special merit. Typical cases include Varanasi (Singh, 2009a and b), Ayodhya (Bakker, 1986), Mathura's Braj Mandala (Entwhistle, 1987) but arguably not the Kathmandu Valley (Stoddard, 2009).

For the pilgrim, Braj Mandala, the holy land of Lord Krishna, is a place where pilgrims hope to experience the interpenetration of the spiritual world and material worlds (Entwhistle, 1987). No single mundane place is the goal. Instead, pilgrimage trails manifest as a nested series of circular '*Parikrama*' (meaning 'path surrounding') or '*pradakshina*' (meaning 'path to the right') *mandalas*. These Parikrama trails lead through a shifting array of places that have

spiritual associations, in this case, with the romantic play, *lilas*, of the divine couple, Radha-Krishna, and their associates. The hope of the Parikrama participant is to transcend the material world to the spiritual place where the sacred transcendental pastimes of the divine couple continue eternally. Their ambition is to achieve an insight that no longer is trapped by the mundane, often squalid, realities of Mathura, Vrindavan and its surrounding villages, but one that shares the higher plane in an idyllic forest paradise, 'Goloka Vrindavan', where these activities continue, and their goal is to become a personal participant.

Singh tracks 56 pilgrimage routes through that most sacred Hindu city, Varanasi (Kashi), and describes their associated numerical/cosmic associations, varieties of divinities, and rituals (Singh, 2009a and b). Here, the *Panchakroshi Yatra* pilgrimage trail describes a cosmic circuit centered on the temple of Madhyameshvara and with the shrine of Dehli Vinayaka (Ganesha) at its radius [Fig. 6]. There are 108 *tirthas*, shrines and sacred places, along its 88.5 km route including 56 devoted to Shiva (*linga*). These archetypically indicate the division of time into the 12 stations of the zodiac and space into the 9 planets of Hindu mythology, the eight cardinal directions and the centre. Singh (2011a) tracks the origins of this pilgrimage to the mid-sixteenth century and descriptions in Puranic mythology. Significantly, this journey tales place in a month outside of normal time, the intercalary month of leap year, known as *Malamasa*. Similar cosmic interpretations of such holy journeys are reported from West Bengal (Morinis, 1984) and many other places.

The Kumbha Mela, the world's largest pilgrimage gathering, owes its origin/location and timing to two traditions. The first establishes its timeframe through astrological calculations while the second emerges from the *Puranas*. This tells of a battle between gods and demons during which four drops of sacred nectar (*amrita*) fell at each of the *mela* sites (Feldhaus, 2003). The Kumbha Mela is held four times every twelve years and its location rotates between Allahabad at the confluence of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Sarasvati [cf. Fig. 1], Nasik on the Godavari River, Ujjain on the Shipra River, and Haridvar on the Ganga River [Singh, 1987, pp. 316-318; cf. Fig. 7]. Taking a holy dip in these rivers at the Kumbha Mela is considered to bring great merit and to cleanse both body and spirit.

The Kumbha Mela has great antiquity, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, Hsuan-tsang, described a Magha Mela at Allahabad in 643 CE, but the modern festival was shaped by the ninth century philosopher Shankaracharya (Dubey, 2001). Shankaracharya, leader of the non-dualist Advaitist School of Vedanta, called Hindu ascetics, monks and sages to meet at these places to exchange of philosophical views and build mutual understanding, while the laity followed, in increasing numbers, to benefit from association with these assembled sages.

Gaya is eulogized as the most sacred place for ancestral rituals that aim to help ancestral spirits (who, through *karma* or premature death, are trapped in limbo) become free and reach the realm of the ancestor spirits. This site, which attracts over a million pilgrims each year, is mentioned in the ancient *Rig Veda* (1.22.17), while the rites in the Vishnupad Temple are described in texts dating from the 5th century CE and claim continuity of tradition since the 8th CE. Presently, 84, from an original 324 sites, related to ancestral rites are identifiable in nine sacred clusters, but modern pilgrims rarely visit more than 45, while more than three quarters perform their ancestral rites at the Phalgu River, the Vishnupad Temple and its associated sacred centers (Vidyarthi, 1978). The cosmogony of Gaya's faithscape contains three territorial layers: Gaya *Mandala*, Gaya *Kshetra* (literally 'field'), and Gaya *Puri* (township), through which shrines and rituals chart a complex of interweaving themes concerning birth, fertility, life and death (Singh, 2009b). Lord Vishnu's footprints, enshrined in the Vishnupad temple, serve as the *axis mundi* for the Gaya *mandala* whose cardinal and solstitial points are marked by hills, including Pretashila ('the hill of the ghosts').

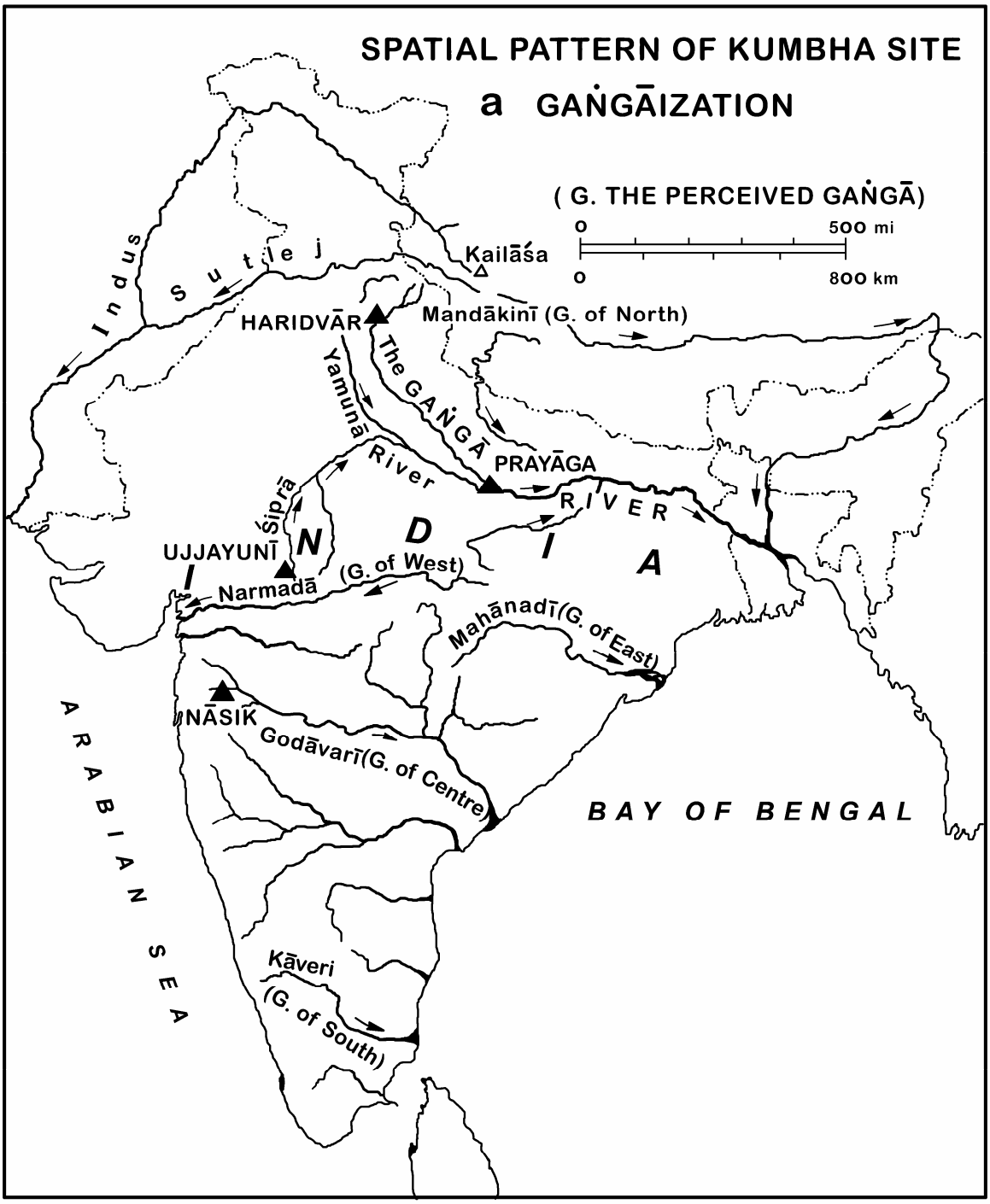

Fig. 39.7. India: Spatial patterns of Kumbha sites and Gangaization (after Singh, 1987, p. 317).

39.5. Hindu Pilgrimage: Hermeneutics

Victor Turner's pioneering studies focused on the pilgrimage journey, and the emergence of the status-less social union of pilgrims he called '*communitas*' (Turner, 1973), while Emile Durkheim's school saw pilgrimage as reaffirming social structure. In Hinduism, the truth is one, other or both together. The Hindu concept for right action is *"Dharma"*, *dharma* is the foundation of Hindu behavioral ethics but there two major types of *dharma* – *social dharma*, the dharma of duties and the rites prescribed by community and culture – and *Moksha dharma*, which concerns appropriate action for the those seeking to detach themselves from the Hindu cycle of rebirth. In Hinduism, the path taken by those seeking liberation, *moksha*, is commonly socially antinomian and, by tradition, involves formal detachment from

social responsibilities (cf. Singh and Aktor, 2015). In Vaishnavism, the avatar Lord Rama and his associates provide the model of *social dharma*. He was the ideal King, Sita was the ideal wife, and Hanuman was the model servant and devotee and so forth. By contrast, another *avatar*, the wild ascetic, Dattatreya, set aside all social conventions of dress, behavior, even social interaction itself, along with all other distractions that stood in the path of the search for spiritual liberation. The coexistence of these two aspects is one reason why those who study pilgrimage in materialistic terms are seriously constrained.

Pilgrimage is a rite of passage that operates in a *liminal*, i.e. transitional, space between the material world and a transcendental reality. Turner & Turner assert that pilgrimage is "exteriorised mysticism while mysticism is an interior pilgrimage" (Turner & Turner, 1978, pp. 33-34). In Hinduism, the role of much religious discipline, including pilgrimage, is the removal of the veil of illusion that divides the material world from the spiritual reality that provides its context. Among Hinduism's many descriptors for the material world is the term *maya,* which also includes the root *ma*, the name for the Goddess as Mother, the *mater (Latin:* Mother*)* in materiality, and, hence, embedded within the material. This is why pilgrimage research that attempts to study the visible without knowing of what lies beneath it are doomed to failure (cf. Llewellyn, 2001). Pilgrimage is an aspect of the pilgrim's consciousness, which may be constructed at different levels. Bhardwaj (1973) classifies Hindu pilgrimage sites by suggesting that travelers to the highest level shrines tend to seek spiritual merit, while those to lower level shrines have more mundane purpose. In Rajasthan, Gold also found that pilgrimages to local shrines, *jatra* (a Rajasthani version of the Sanskrit *yatra*), were for material purpose while, *yatra,* pilgrimage to distant shrines, sought spiritual 'merit' (Gold, 1988; also cf. Morinis, 1984; Llewellyn, 2001).

39.6. Tourist Resource Management

Hindu pilgrimage places often have an ambivalent approach to the modern pilgrim tourist. Most welcome the revenue pilgrims bring but many are reluctant to become reduced to a 'sight-seen' rather than a religious experience and, ancient sites like the Jagannath Temple, Puri, Orissa, or Padmanabhaswamy Temple, Tiruvananthapuram, Kerala, energetically exclude perceived outsiders (cf. Prasad, 2010). New pilgrimage places tend to be more inclusive, for example, Bhagwan Swaminarayan Sanstha's Akshardham, a vast and magnificent new temple complex in New Delhi, aims to provide a showcase for both Hindu and Indian tradition as well as to raise awareness of the Swaminarayan sect and provide a focus of pride for its devotees (Singh, 2011c). Akshardham is a part of a new breed of Hindu pilgrimage site, often emerging in places where such developments were long suppressed by foreign rulers, and represent a modern re-visioning of the great ancient temple complexes built through the royal patronage of ancient Hindu kings (Jaffrelot, 2010).

However, elsewhere, the spiritual environments of some ancient holy places are being degraded into tourist spectacles. For example, two of most popular pilgrimage destinations are Vaishno Devi (Kashmir, in the north) and Tirumala-Tirupati (in the south). Here, the estimated annual income of the temple trust at each place exceeds Rs 5 billion (ca US$ 100 million) per annum. Unfortunately, little of this vast income is reinvested in maintaining the serene and sacrosanct environments of these holy places.

Despite its complexity, variety and potential, to date, relatively few geographers have explored the complex relationships between Hindu religion, culture, spirituality, and tourism, especially heritage and religious tourism. Nevertheless, pilgrimage, pilgrimage sites and their related festivities, in combination, are driving motivations for domestic and international tourist travel and the source of much interest in both heritage and its conservation. Of course, the new attention to the conservation of sacred sites also bears witness to the resurgence, redefinition and modernization of a previously repressed Hindu culture. Equally, it is affected by the commercial responses to modern sensibilities and by contemporary cultural developments, for example, much of the recent increase of religiously motivated travel to sacred sites is blended with a modern, middle-class, urbane, New Age spirituality, and brings

travelers who have non-traditional demands upon the infrastructures of heritage sites (cf. Timothy and Olsen, 2006). The process is magnified by the increasing impact of the Westernized Indian diaspora at Hindu sites along with their reverence for heritage and expectations for hotels, transport, etc. Currently, around three-fourths of the expenditure of the modern pilgrimage tourism traveler goes to supporting infrastructure, while local stakeholders receive only marginal benefit. Recent studies of Vrindavan and Tirumala-Tirupati suggest an immediate need, not only to develop comprehensive environmental management policies for such pilgrimage places, which should draw the religious institution 'enterprises' into some kind of regulatory framework for environmental improvement, but also include for strategies to build stakeholder participation and meet the needs of this community (Shinde, 2009).

39.7. Postscript

As globalization accelerates, the expansion of pilgrimage tourism has encouraged 'heritage-making' ('*heritagization*' or '*patrimonialization*' in French) within an international framework. Four of the chief pilgrimage cities of India are now part of a Green Pilgrim Cities Initiative (GPCI), namely Dwarka, Somnath, Ambaji (in Gujarat), and Amritsar (in Punjab); while Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) is in the process of nomination (Finley, 2011). The GPCI is affiliated with interfaith Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), which has worked for the environmental conservation of sacred sites and pilgrimage routes for over twenty years. Adoption of the GPCI framework has encouraged these Indian cities to awaken, activate and start educating their communities for the conservation of their sacred places and the need for eco-friendly pilgrimage. However, the national government of India has still to institute its 'heritage act' and, because India was founded as a secular-based system, it finds it hard to legislate on matters in the religious domain. A strategy for managing the development of the economic enterprises associated with pilgrimage-tourism may be another matter.

Meanwhile, in India, while pilgrimage-tourism remains centered on devotion-based informal activities in pilgrimage centers, the two aspects within religious travel remain. Religious-tourism (*dharma-kritya*) and spiritual-tourism (*moksha-dayi*), while intertwined, have different infrastructural needs, require different services, and have different driving forces, organizers, managers and modes. In practical terms, understanding these differences is a necessary prerequisite for the effective development of strategies for sustainable development within the overall framework of India's national development and within this religious institutions and charitable trusts have a vital role to play (Shinde, 2011).

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Abstract
A *Tirtha yatra*, Hindu pilgrimage, is a liminal process that establishes participation in the spiritual realm. It is also undertaken as a social duty, a right of passage, and mode of supplication. It engages with sacred landscapes that are partly defined by the material world but rather more strongly by sacred symbols, cosmographic and astrological alignments, traditions, festivals, and the belief that these places are spiritual crossing-places into the transcendent realms of the divine. There are very many *tirthas*. In fact, India's geography may be conceived as a '*faithscape*', a nested series of pilgrimage places and their hinterlands. Topographically, holy *tirthas* may be classified into three groups: (i) Water-sites usually associated with sacred immersion on auspicious occasions, (ii) Shrines dedicated to particular deities, which are visited by pilgrims of particular sects or with particular needs, and (iii) Kshetra, sacred lands, usually defined by a cosmic mandala, travelling along which brings special merit. This chapter explores the Hindu pilgrimage experience and, briefly, some key pilgrimage destinations including the Khumba Mela, the world's largest religious gathering, Varanasi's Panchakroshi Yatra and the Vraj Parikrama. It also looks at the growth of new pilgrimage sites both in India and amongst the diaspora. Today, pilgrimage and religious tourism are expanding rapidly, in parallel with the growth of India's middle class, creating new landscapes that blend the sacred and profane. Some three-fourths of travellers' expenditures go into supporting tourist infrastructure and several ancient holy places are degrading into resorts, where spirituality is blended with leisure activities. Recognizing the growing complexity of Hindu pilgrimage motivations, this chapter proposes a five layer typology that recognizes: tourists, pilgrims of duty, pilgrims of need, pilgrims of hope and pilgrims of union.

Keywords. Hindu Pilgrimage, *Tirtha yatra*, '*faithscapes*', Pilgrimage mandala, Religious tourism, pilgrim typology.

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