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Knut Aukland

University College of Southeast Norway, knut.aukland@usn.no

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# At the Confluence of Leisure and Devotion: Hindu Pilgrimage and Domestic Tourism in India

**Knut Aukland**

University College of Southeast Norway  
[kau@usn.no](mailto:kau@usn.no)

In this article I draw on a wide range of studies including my own field research to provide a bird's-eye perspective of the various points of connection, confluence and overlap between Hindu pilgrimage and domestic tourism in contemporary India. This serves three aims. First, it presents an overview of the contemporary scene in India which lends itself to comparison. Second, it illustrates the ways in which a pilgrimage tradition can be explored via tourism, as opposed to something contrasted with tourism. Thus, I hope to demonstrate the many potential research avenues beyond asking who is a pilgrim and who is a tourist. Third, it seeks to locate lacunas for future research. I suggest four entry points into tourism that can each serve as departures for studying the contemporary nexus between a pilgrimage tradition and tourism: tourism as (1) a service industry, (2) a sector that motivates states and public bodies to act, (3) a travel culture and (4) a negotiated category, part of public discourses and imaginations. The article demonstrates the variety of ways in which Hindu pilgrimage becomes evermore entangled with domestic tourism, and the potential for new research angles this entanglement generates.

**Key Words:** Hinduism, Hindu pilgrimage, India, pilgrimage and tourism

## Introduction

In June 2014 I travelled with a group of Hindu pilgrims on a ten-day pilgrimage known as the *Char Dham Yatra* (*The Four Abode's Pilgrimage*).<sup>[1]</sup> This is a circuit, starting from Haridwar, which includes four major pilgrimage destinations (Yamnotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath) and has become immensely popular over the last four decades. The participants, including myself, had all booked a package tour that included transportation by bus and hotel lodging. The tour was planned and organised by the public tourism corporation in the region (GMVN) and we were given a guide with formal training, providing us with information and advice on everything from weather reports to ritual procedures in temples. On our first day we made a stop at the well-known tourist attraction Kempty Falls, and the last night was spent in a tourist resort featuring rafting and a scenic view of the river. At Kedarnath we went by helicopter to the temple site, one of the highlights for many of the participants. The literature consumed by my co-travellers included Sanskrit texts, tourist brochures, and pamphlets combining elements of both. Pictures were taken at all

the temples and riversides, but also *en route* as we stopped to appreciate majestic mountains and the impressive scenery. We ate most of our meals in restaurants, but only vegetarian food. Besides bringing back auspicious items from temples, rituals and rivers, pilgrims purchased various memorabilia and images at the bazaar. They also brought back memories and photos of the group that included a 30 year old, male, white, blond Norwegian scholar (myself) who participated in every part of the pilgrimage while asking questions that often tried to create conversations on matters related to religion and tourism.

These glimpses from a 2014 *Char Dham Yatra* reflect elements related to tourism in contemporary Hindu pilgrimage that coexist with the more typical components we tend to think of in relation to pilgrimage such as narratives, practices, experiences, beliefs and motivations related to deities. It has become increasingly clear that contemporary pilgrimage is intertwined and connected with tourism in various ways (Stausberg, 2011:53-71; Reader, 2014:101-10; 133-7). In the following, I aim to capture the many ways in which these come together or overlap. This article, I hope, can thus, potentially lend itself to comparative analysis or serve as a key to further studies and ways to think about the relationship between tourism and a pilgrimage tradition. The aim is to cover the many points of confluence between leisure

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and devotion in the contemporary situation rather than to account for historical developments that have led to the current embeddedness of Hindu pilgrimage as one section of domestic tourism, or to closely explore a specific case or place where such relations crystallise.

Speaking of the confluence of leisure and devotion, I refer not specifically to hedonistic forms of behaviour and religious motivations of individuals, but aim to incorporate a wider set of social relations. The focus in this article is leisure travel (Hall and Page, 1999:4) – i.e. travel undertaken during ones' free-time, holidays or after retirement. Such leisure travel has a variety of aims including subjectively relevant experiences and recreation. It may or may not include religion or religious motives. On the one hand leisure designates a temporal activity that stands in opposition to time spent at work or school. On the other hand it points to activities directed at enjoyment and other goods (both tangible and intangible) while travelling. In this context, leisure stands for cultural pursuits and specific motivations for travelling, but also points to a consumer service that both private and public organisations and institutions aim to facilitate, develop, and sell. Devotion, as I use it here, is not just thought of as something directed towards Gods but also something that includes commitment to a religious identity, group and tradition. One should not assume that Hindu pilgrimage and devotion in the past did not also coincide with pleasurable activities and freedom from work related activities. Yet, I would argue that such activities and freedoms acquire a distinct character given the rise of modern tourism, that involves the establishment of a tourism industry, ministries of tourism and the rationalisation of work and holiday as time- and space-bound activities (Hannam and Knox, 2011:47–8).

In line with current research trends (Stausberg, 2011: 14-5) I aim to shift the earlier focus on the relationship and difference between the pilgrim and the tourist, and instead direct attention towards actions, practices and material culture. This implies directing attention, not just to pilgrim behaviour, but also to the many stakeholders and mediators that operate and negotiate between pilgrims and visitors at pilgrimage sites and a destination, or various types of services available at these destinations, including religious services.

A fully developed understanding of pilgrimage in contemporary Hinduism will have to take tourism into account. In the available literature on pilgrimage, however, tourism tends to be a rather underdeveloped category. In a heuristic manoeuvre, I will therefore, in

the next section, suggest four entry points into tourism as a scholarly category. Each of the four points can serve as departures for a study of the contemporary nexus between (Hindu) pilgrimage and tourism. Each of them relates to various actors (e.g. travel agencies, guides and tourism departments) and patterns of behaviour (e.g. to take photographs or chose particular itineraries) that shape and interact with Hindu pilgrimage, and that will resurface in the text at various points. I then move on to present earlier studies that have dealt with Hindu pilgrimage and tourism.

In the second part of this article, I turn to the overlap and interplay between contemporary domestic tourism and Hindu pilgrimage. The study of the tourism-pilgrimage interplay is organised into three themes that also serve as subheadings indicated in the text:

- (1) The presence of various tourist *mediators*<sup>[2]</sup> such as travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, retailers, guides, books, pamphlets, films and websites;
- (2) *leisure* as pointing both to specific attitudes and expectations among visitors at pilgrimage sites and the various service providers that cater to these, and;
- (3) the *dichotomies* that tourism brings to discussions and attitudes concerning pilgrimage and tourism, leisure and devotion in both emic and etic contexts.

A recurrent topic that I will highlight is the importance of technology and the employment of new technology in relation to transportation, entertainment and media that is closely tied to tourism and the tourism-pilgrimage nexus in contemporary India. Each of the four entry points to tourism comes into play in relation to these three themes.

While I primarily draw on a wide range of earlier studies, I will also lean on primary sources and observations from my own research on contemporary Hindu pilgrimage. There is an element of regional bias that readers should be aware of, since much of the earlier studies and my own work focus on sites within the northern half of India where Indo-European languages dominate.<sup>[3]</sup>

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2. I have taken a clue from Stausberg 2011, ch. 8 here, who also looks at 'mediations' in the form of various forms of media (images and texts), guides and souvenirs.
  3. It has been suggested pilgrimage in Southern India is more tied up to temples than in Northern India where geographical areas and units play a more prominent role (Jacobsen 2009, 394–395; 2012, 92). See also Fuller 2004, 147ff. on religious festivals in the north and south.

## Tourism

Like many other multifaceted categories assumed to have a global presence (such as religion or culture), tourism is difficult to pin down in a neat definition (Hall, 2003:7-8). The issue of defining and conceptualising tourism is best addressed within the expanding discipline of tourism studies and is itself a topic of separate investigation (Stausberg, 2011:8-9). Here I shall limit the conceptualisation to indicate four entry points into tourism. First, we can think of tourism as activities concerned with providing and marketing services and facilities for leisure travel (Pond, 1993:35). Though both private and public organisations are involved in such activities in India, it is predominantly private sector companies that deliver and market services in connection with transportation, accommodation, food and entertainment. Key actors here are tourist facilitators including travel agencies, accommodation and food providers, retailers, entertainment suppliers and guides.

Second, overlapping with these activities but moving on to the level of public bodies, tourism is a sector in relation to which the state and its various public institutions act, create policies, usher marketing initiatives and contract various development projects. An important definition of tourism used by many nation-states, including India, is that provided by The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). According to the UNWTO, tourism:

*comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited* (quoted in Stausberg, 2011:6).

As a very broad definition of tourism it accommodates a wide variety of purposes for travel, be they religious, economic, pleasure-seeking or educational (hence it goes beyond what I have defined as leisure travel here). The tourism ministry in New Delhi, and the various state departments and public tourist corporations are the main actors that I will discuss in relation to this aspect of tourism.

Third, we may focus on the ideas and actions of those who travel, that is, a certain travel culture that tourism helps create. This approach to tourism as something tourists *do* has dominated earlier scholarship on pilgrimage and tourism. As a cultural activity, tourism has become an ingrained part of modern lifestyles (Stausberg, 2011:27). Tourism then stands for certain

cultural pursuits, aspirations and expectations, but also practices and habits. An example of this is the 'tourist gaze' with the use of camera technology as an important element (Urry and Larsen, 2011). Important inclinations I return to below, relate to such visual practices, but also the choice of itineraries (which has obvious connections to organisations in the private and public sectors) and changes in the market of rituals and patterned practices available at pilgrimage sites.

The fourth way in which tourism is relevant to our exploration is the manner in which we talk and think about tourism in general, but also stereotypical notions of the tourist and those things that are negatively labelled touristic or labelled as touristification (Stausberg, 2011:54). In both popular and scholarly discourse we find that tourism and pilgrimage are seen in opposition to one another. Hence, the idea of 'tourism' also works in certain ways in popular perceptions and everyday conversations. While some scholars of religion might assume that a stark division between something like a tourist (secular) and a pilgrim (religious) may be specific to some cultures, say those marked by a strong presence of Christianity (see Olsen, 2010:849), I will argue that we also find such distinctions made in relation to Hindu pilgrimage in India today, though expressed under different cultural constraints. I return to this issue in the section on *dichotomies* below.

In what follows I will give examples of how these four ways of locating tourism interact and are intertwined with Hindu pilgrimage by means of various actors, nonreligious tourist practices, and behaviours, among visitors at pilgrimage sites. While I have so far referred to the inclusive phrase 'visitors at pilgrimage sites', the rest of the article will focus on a particular kind of visitor, namely Hindu visitors. Thus I will use the terms 'Hindu pilgrim' and 'pilgrim' for anyone who, while identifying him / herself as a Hindu, travels to a place of pilgrimage and takes part in the worship of deities.

## Earlier Studies of Tourism and Hindu Pilgrimage

The study of religion has in general, paid little attention to the interplay between religion and tourism (Stausberg, 2011:x; 13ff.). In tourism studies it appears that domestic tourism in the global south has been largely overlooked (Gladstone, 2005:14). It was striking that in a 1998 review essay of some then recent books on Hindu pilgrimage, the author pointed out certain avenues that had not been addressed



sufficiently, but did not mention the tourism-pilgrimage nexus as one of these (Llewellyn, 1998). One might blame the dichotomous schema between the tourist and the pilgrim for this, despite the oft-repeated Turnerian mantra that ‘a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist’ (Turner and Turner, 1978:20). In the meantime, things appear to be changing (see in particular Gladstone, 2005, Ch. 4; Jacobsen, 2009:407-8; Lochtefeld, 2012; Singh, 2009).

An important exception to this lacuna is Ann Gold’s rich ethnography *Fruitful Journeys* (1988) wherein we are invited to join a group of rural and small-town Rajasthanis on a thirty-day pilgrimage to Puri and back by bus. Other important studies have come from the work of Kiran Shinde, a geographer, who has published a series of articles (2007; 2007b; 2008; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013), which unlike Gold’s work, situates his research in dialogue with both the study of religion and tourism (see also Shinde’s article in this volume). In his monograph on Haridwar, James Lochtefeld (2010:210-216) makes a range of interesting observations on how state-initiated tourism development has helped usher a series of changes in both the physical environment and attitudes of pilgrims with the influx of luxury hotels, holiday services and entertaining attractions. Last but not least there is one remarkable study from 1981 on *The Bakreshwar Temple* in West Bengal by anthropologist Buddhadeb Chaudhuri that deserves attention because it provides a very good snapshot of many of the changes and developments that we see in place today.

Bakreshwar is one of the many pilgrimage places connected to stories of Śiva and his wife Sātī whose body parts landed at various sites in India that afterwards became pilgrimage destinations. Situated 225 kilometres Northeast of Kolkata, it is also famous for its hot springs believed to have curative powers - a familiar feature of many pilgrimage sites. Based on fieldwork conducted in the 1970s, Chaudhuri observed a series of changes similar to the ones I am concerned with here. He first noted the importance of new technology in relation to transportation that increased the numbers of visitors substantially (1981:16), but also the role played by new media:

*The different modern media of communication like press and publication, radio, posts and telegraphs, transport system and tourism have greatly helped in the spread of the cult of Siva* (Chaudhuri, 1981:50).

Distribution of pamphlets, promotional literature and printing of adverts in the papers by Brahmans and the

state tourist department was also noted (Chaudhuri, 1981:49-51). Newspapers and local radio also covered the story of a laboratory that tested the chemical properties of the water in the hot springs (Chaudhuri, 1981:50-1), providing a good example of what I have described elsewhere as scientization (Aukland, 2016a). Political leaders and groups would also appear at Bakreshwar to rally support with the media reporting the events (Chaudhuri, 1981:51, 62).

The livelihood of pilgrimage priests was undergoing changes in two important respects. As non-*dharamśālā* accommodation<sup>[4]</sup> started being built, some Brahmans joined in and started running guest houses as a side venture (Chaudhuri, 1981:30, 70ff.). In relation to ritual services, traditional patterns for keeping longstanding relations with pilgrims (the *jajmānī* system, see Lochtefeld, 2011) were starting to fade out and various rituals were increasingly conducted in abbreviated forms (Chaudhuri, 1981:vi-I, 40-2, 51, 60-1, 88; cf. Singh, 2009:97). Finally, there was presumably a change in the visitor profile as some pilgrims reported that they came not for rituals or religion, but for pleasure on an itinerary that also included non-religious destinations (Chaudhuri, 1981:54-7). Highly educated urban dwellers made up a substantial number pointing to the connection between the growth of a substantial Indian middle class and the growth of mass-tourism and package tours. Film rolls were in demand at the local bazaar indicating that cameras and photography had made their way into the pilgrimage arena (Chaudhuri, 1981:71).

Today we find Bakreshwar promoted on the web as part of a tripartite ‘popular religious-cultural tourist circuit’ promoted by the tourism department of West Bengal.<sup>[5]</sup> This indicates the importance of contemporary information technology (web pages and social media) and the increased involvement of tourism departments and agencies. All these issues are connected to economic, societal and cultural changes in India in general, changes that have repercussions for modes of travel, leisure, consumption and entertainment that have become part of the *tīrthyātra* tradition.

4. A *dharamśālā* refers to traditional pilgrimage lodgings that today are tax exempted and that at least traditionally was different to guesthouses and hotels that are run on purely commercial grounds.

5. <http://westbengaltourism.gov.in/web/guest/district-birbhum>. Accessed April 18, 2014.

## Mediators

The obvious tourist mediators are the many travel agencies that organise trips and package tours to pilgrimage destinations. The more upscale agencies and bureaus market their services online, on television and in newspapers, while the more humble ticket issuer / booking office styling themselves as 'Tour and Travels' can be found in temporary wooden shacks with their services displayed on a board with hand writing. While the former are often found in the bigger cities and might be part of international corporations, the latter are found in abundance at pilgrimage destinations and train stations that connect to other nearby destinations. Yet, there are considerable overlaps in terms of the destinations they promote.

Travel literature and promotional materials are good places to investigate tourist and pilgrim imaginaries (Stausberg, 2011:194-5, 199ff.). If we look at the 2013 travel magazine *Bharat Deko (See India)* of the long established travel company Cox and Kings, we first notice the map of India on which some images are placed to indicate main attractions at various sites. In relation to pilgrimage sites we find that Chennai is marked with a temple; a pillar from a temple in Khajuraho (famous for erotic sculptures) is displayed in central India, and finally; there is an image of temples along the Ganges at Varanasi. The tourist imaginary of domestic, upscale tourism in India is clearly marked with religion. On a separate section under the heading 'Pilgrim: Experience the Power of Truth' the travel agency informs that:

*Our pilgrim tours cross the length and breadth of India – Vaiṣṇo devi, Haridwar, Rishikesh and Char Dham in the North, Navgraha temples, Rameshwaram, Tirupati and Puttaparthi in the South, the temples of Puri in the East, Dilwara temples or the temples in Palitana and the renowned resting seat of Shri Sai Baba in Shirdi in the West. Divinity is calling you.*

There are many package tours that feature pilgrimage sites and temples as an element in the program, and two of them - the *Char Dham Yatra* and *Temple Tour of Gujarat* - have pilgrimage destinations as their main focus. While the temple tour does not follow any established route, it indicates how travel technology and the logic of tourist itineraries enable pilgrims, not just the more affluent ones, to visit more places in a shorter time. On the website of the Indian Association of Tour Operators we find the Char Dham Yatra on the very top next to tours to Delhi and Rajasthan.<sup>[6]</sup>

Thomas Cook also offers this same tour, as well as a wide variety of temple tours and other places in the southern parts of India under the category 'Pilgrimage Holiday'.<sup>[7]</sup> It remains to be seen in future studies what role religion and religiosity plays for the well-off people who travel on such package tours. Reader (2014:188) argues that commercially organised, comfortable travelling helps downplay the religious aspects; I see no reason why comfort and leisure could not be combined with religiosity as such. As we will see below, religious organisations in India and beyond (cf. Stausberg, 2011:113-24), create leisure parks as an arena for propagating religious messages. Moreover, the idea of 'proper pilgrimage' as something that ideally involves hardship is one that might not correspond to the participants' own understanding and developments within a pilgrimage tradition.

My own study of the role of travel agencies in developing Hindu pilgrimage points to the ways in which the industry ties together India's pilgrimage geography with a broader tourist geography, and further define the framework and tempo for how pilgrimage places are consumed (Aukland, 2018). I find that the travel market favours areas where pilgrimage and additional tourist attractions and services cluster together, and that the agencies' busy itineraries and scheduling favours short acts of devotion rather than traditional pilgrimage rituals (Aukland, 2018:314-8).

Another key mediator between pilgrims and the places they go are guides (Stausberg, 2011:195ff.). Guides may or may not have undergone official training, and represent a different role to the traditional religious experts in that their credentials are secular. Boatmen in Varanasi function as guides to both foreign tourists and Hindu pilgrims (Doron, 2005). While the extent of guides operative in pilgrimage sites remains to be studied, my own fieldwork in Haridwar and Rishikesh - two seminal pilgrimage destinations on the banks of the Ganga that also function as the starting point for the Char Dham Yatra (Lochtefeld, 2010) - suggest that they can play a defining role in the experience many pilgrims have of a place. While some guides work for specific travel agencies that organise day trips from Haridwar to Rishikesh, others might be stationed at places where buses of pilgrims are likely to park. Equipped with licenses but no official training, these

6. <http://www.iato.in/Inquiry.aspx>. Accessed June 19, 2014.

7. <http://www.thomascook.in/tportal/india-holidays/Pilgrimage-holiday-packages?ST=Pilgrimage>. Accessed June 19, 2014.

guides take their groups through a set route of various temples and sites, giving instructions to complete short acts of worship and framing each place with religious narratives. Unlike pilgrimage priests that take fees and donations for their services to pilgrims, the guides use their guided tour to inspire pilgrims to purchase religious objects from which the guides get a commission. Analysing this process, I have argued that these guides are retailing religion as they combine and coordinate commercial and religious interests in their tours, promoting the sale of religious objects (Aukland, 2015).

Turning to Vrindavan, the pilgrimage town connected to Krishna and his youthful sports, we also find that traditional pilgrimage priests (*paṇḍās*) do more or less the same job: taking pilgrims on guided tours (Hawley and Shrivatsa, 1992:28ff.; Aukland, 2016b). This points to an important fact, namely that contemporary pilgrims often plan to spend comparatively little time at one specific destination before they move on to the next stop in their frequently dense itineraries (Doron, 2005:162; Shinde, 2007a). The guided tour, therefore, appears to be a suitable activity that allows pilgrims to see the highlights of a place before moving on. Many *paṇḍās* in Vrindavan have adapted well to this, some by cooperating with travel agencies others by setting up their own travel agencies that offer both tourist and priestly services (Aukland, 2016b). Indeed, there are other signs that some pilgrimage priests are trying to adapt to the new tourism setting by developing their own hotels and thereby expand or adjust their services (Chaudhuri, 1981:30, 70ff.; Gladstone, 2005:189-90; Lochtefeld, 2010:135ff., 36; Shinde, 2010:530ff.). Accordingly, scholars have pointed out that the modern setting for pilgrimage has weakened the traditional *jajmānī* system where pilgrimage priests would have the right to serve certain groups of pilgrims, and pilgrims would seek out their rightful priest and support him. In recent times, changing travel patterns and attitudes of visitors have made the exchange of money more defining for the relationship between pilgrim and priest (Chaudhuri, 1982:42; van der Veer, 1989:xv; Lochtefeld, 2010:125ff.; Whitmore, 2010:67-8; Shinde, 2011:348; Aukland, 2016b). While the *paṇḍās* of Pushkar have adapted to changes in visitor profile and behaviour, they are also a good example of how resistance and on-going contestations are part of the contemporary situation (Joseph and Kavoori, 2001; Joseph, 2007; Stausberg, 2011:68-70).

This setting is shaped by tourism in various ways, including pilgrimage behaviours and interests that are increasingly geared towards activities other than

traditional rituals, and mediators such as travel agencies and guides that in many ways have taken over the job of agents (*gumāstā*) working for *paṇḍās*. The job of such agents was to pick up potential clients from train stations and other places where pilgrims would arrive (Parry, 1994:104). Today *paṇḍās* can be found near helipads waiting for the next batch of pilgrims to arrive by air. As groups arrive on package tours with guides, *paṇḍās* will often approach the guide to get information on the whereabouts of the pilgrims' natal homes and try to secure customers. Participating in a one-day bus journey to Taj Mahal and Vrindavan from New Delhi, I was not prepared for the sudden appearance of a *paṇḍā* in the bus as we were approaching Vrindavan. Without introduction he started telling us stories about the place, took us on a guided tour upon arrival, and clearly had a fixed connection with the bus conductor. In Vrindavan, a number of pilgrims can hire a taxi or go by bus on a sightseeing tour and pilgrimage of the surrounding villages and places connected of the stories of Krishna in ways that are markedly different to the more traditional pilgrimage to these places by foot (Shinde, 2007a; 2008).

Another seminal player and mediator are public bodies ranging from the tourism ministry in Delhi to the public corporations run by the state governments.<sup>[8]</sup> Created in 1958, the Ministry of Tourism has tended to focus on international tourists, while the regional tourism departments that were created in the 1980s in the various states have been more focused on domestic tourism (Singh, 2002:143; Hannam and Diekmann, 2011:17).<sup>[9]</sup> Today, the Ministry of Tourism allocates funding to these state departments, and while they are free to apply and use them according to their own initiatives, the ministry encourages the development of circuits (see the article by David Geary in this volume). In relation to the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2012-2017) for economic growth they have identified the following three Hindu pilgrimage circuits:

8. See Singh 2009, 96 and Bandyopadhyay et.al. 2008 for critical evaluation of the way in which the Indian government encourages consumerism and tries to create an idea of India's heritage that privileges Hinduism, highlights colonial resistance and frames Mughal history as Muslim atrocities.
9. These institutions provide statistics of domestic tourism whose reliability probably varies. All India statistics from 2009-10 and 2012 were retrieved from <http://tourism.gov.in/TourismDivision/AboutDivision.aspx?Name=Market%20Research%20and%20Statistics> and <http://tourism.gov.in/TourismDivision/AboutContent.aspx?Name=Market%20Research%20and%20Statistics&CID=45>. Accessed June 19, 2014.



- 1) Haridwar, Kedarnath and Badrinath,
- 2) Vrindavan and surrounding villages and
- 3) Tirupathi, Chennai and Mahabalipuram.

The popular Vaiṣṇo Devī shrine in Jammu and Kashmir (that I will return to) is also mentioned in relation to specific religious sites shared by all religions that allegedly promote national integration.<sup>[10]</sup> The central government in Delhi has displayed a growing interest in domestic tourism and tourism in general since the late 1990s (Hannam and Diekmann, 2011:6, 17-8, 103), while the national railway corporation has developed special train concessions and packages in relation to pilgrimage destinations.<sup>[11]</sup> Taken together with the development of infrastructure and transportation, state involvement has been seminal to the development of what one might call mass pilgrimage.

An important implication of the development of circuits and package tours mentioned above is that new places and destinations become connected, not so much as a result of religious narratives and ritual connections (Feldhaus, 2002; Eck, 2012) but as a result of new transportation technology, the travel industry and the logic of tourism development and itineraries. Hence, Vrindavan and the city of Mathura (believed to be Krishna's birthplace) have seen increasing numbers of visitors that are traveling on the popular 'Golden Triangle' route (Delhi–Taj Mahal–Jaipur) because they happen to be located on the way. The combination of the four destinations in the mentioned Char Dham Yatra is partly a result of improved infrastructure and successful marketing of public and private tourism corporations as they turn a religious concept (*cār dhām*) into a circuit and package tour (Aukland, 2017).

A more critical evaluation of the involvement of public and private enterprises in pilgrimage comes from Meera Nanda. In the *The God Market* (2009:202), she argues that Hinduism has increasingly come to dominate the public sphere as a result of neo-liberal economic policies that work to the advantage of Hindu gods and Hindu nationalism. An important element in this process is what she calls the 'state-temple-corporate complex' in which 'pilgrimage tourism' (a preferred term by tourism authorities in relation to their support of pilgrimage travel and sites) is an important element:

*The seemingly innocent and perfectly secular agenda of promoting tourism has become a channel for pumping taxpayers' money into promoting temples, ashrams, and pilgrimage spots* (Nanda, 2009:109).

The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act ensures that the management of temple endowments and religious service is placed under a board made up of career bureaucrats (Nanda, 2009:111). The 'state-temple-corporate complex' is seen when states offer cheap land to religious groups and infrastructure projects for the creation of temples and pilgrimage destinations that industrialists and business houses build under the guidelines and symbolic guidance of religious leaders. In the process, temples are turned into profit-making centres for state economy and private business, and public sector funding and infrastructural work is directed to improve temples and pilgrimages (Nanda, 2009:113ff.). Others have similarly pointed out connections between pilgrimage and Hindu nationalism with its associated violence (Jaffrelot, 2009; Lochtefeld, 2010:216ff.; Singh, 2011).

One of the pilgrimage destinations Nanda mentions is Vaiṣṇo Devī in Jammu and Kashmir, whose growth over the last few decades is closely tied to a political intervention.<sup>[12]</sup> It was Jagmohan Malhotra, the then Governor of Jammu, who helped create the current management board in 1986, later backed by *The Jammu and Kashmir Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act* of 1988. This led to dramatic changes as the hereditary priest families that ran the temple were removed over night, and a shrine board took over with a career bureaucrat as a CEO. The board reports significant increase of pilgrims from about 1,400,000 in 1986 to 10,400,000 in 2012.<sup>[13]</sup> The site has changed dramatically, partly as a result of the new management with its deployment of various bureaucratic and governmental technologies of the disciplinary society described in the works of Michel Foucault that includes systems of spatial and behavioural rules (Hannam and Knox, 2010:21ff.). My own observations at the Vaiṣṇo Devī shrine indicate that such technologies and systems not only define secular affairs, but also extend into the realm of worship, thereby thoroughly shaping the experience of visiting and worshipping at the place. Inside the cave entrance (of which there are now three), signs instruct pilgrims

10. Interview with secretary of the minister of tourism (New Delhi, 02.04.2014).
11. <http://www.railtourismindia.com/>. Accessed June 20, 2014. See Kerr 2005 for more on the impact of the Indian railways of Hindu pilgrimage.
12. Official website is <https://www.maavaishnodevi.org>. Accessed June 20, 2014.
13. [https://www.maavasihnodevi.org/yatra\\_statistics.aspx](https://www.maavasihnodevi.org/yatra_statistics.aspx). Accessed June 20, 2014. For more on Vaiṣṇo Devī see Rohe 2001, Foster and Stoddard 2010 and Chauhan 2011.



to 'Please only chant religious slogans (*jaykār*) in your heart' and 'Please do not tie sacred red thread (*mouli*) on the railings' (referring to a popular practice). Popular practices tied to the worship of virgin girls (*kanya pūjā*) have been curbed, the numbers of deity images have been reduced in the shrine, and ritual offerings are controlled by the shrine board to minimise ritual waste in order to create a respectable code of religious etiquette. Comparing Tuljapur with Shirdi - the former a regional, the latter a pan-Indian pilgrimage destination in Maharashtra - Shinde (2011) has demonstrated the importance and crucial difference between a more traditional set of mediators in the shape of hereditary pilgrimage priests and their agents, and the modern temple trust and network of hotels, shopkeepers and their agents.

A final and crucial mediator is that of modern media, stretching from the spread of mass printing in nineteenth century India, to television and digital media (Stausberg, 2011:199ff.; Reddy, 2012). Many puranic texts in Sanskrit describing pilgrimage places and their virtues have these days been converted into short versions in modern languages in the form of cheap booklets available in the bazaars (Pinkney, 2013). Moreover, tourism authorities publish official guidebooks for pilgrimages such as the Char Dham Yatra which I have analysed elsewhere (Aukland, 2017). Travel books, tourism brochures and web pages are increasingly read by pilgrims. A famous destination such as Vaiṣṇo Devī has even been given a separate issue in the well known comic series *Amar Chitra Katha*. The tourism departments promote their star destinations with brochures and DVDs that together with coffee table books tend to frame these sites and sights in a language and aesthetic that is far removed from the pre-modern tourism and more devotional contexts. Recent studies have looked at these types of popular media representations in Kedarnath (Whitmore, 2010:Ch. 4 & 5) and Tuljapur (Shinde, 2013). In more recent times, websites for destinations like Vaiṣṇo Devī are surely growing in importance for many visitors - one can find pilgrims sharing their experiences through blogs and online tourist forums. Finally, travel shows on television, films and novels that portray pilgrimages are also part of shaping views and ideas about pilgrimage places.

## Leisure

In a small study on arrivals in the Char Dham related destinations Haridwar, Badrinath and Kedarnath, conducted in the late 1980s, it was discovered that a noticeable minority (around 10%) of Indians reported

that they came for recreation / pleasure and not religious / pilgrimage or academic / educational purposes (Singh, 1989:234, 244). Many reported that they wanted more restaurants and food variety at these places (Singh, 1989:238). I have already mentioned how increasing numbers of hotels are springing up, supplementing and perhaps to some extent transplanting the more traditional *dharamśālās*. Shinde (2008:253) has observed how pilgrims in Vrindavan got into conflicts with the organisers of their trip since they were unhappy with the facilities and level of comfort. As a participant in the Char Dham Yatra in 2014, I registered that we only stayed in hotels owned by the state tourist corporation with rooms that all had TV sets, A/C or fans, with the exception of our Badrinath lodging that did not have television. Almost all our meals were taken in restaurants owned by this corporation, with menus that had some variation, though all of it vegetarian. Private travel agencies further offer package tours in various price ranges that include lodgings ranging from the simplest type to luxurious star hotels.

The growing expectations in relation to lodging comforts and food indicate the importance of enjoyment-seeking activities for many pilgrims. There are many signs of the growing interest in entertainment and recreational activities at pilgrimage sites. In Haridwar and Rishikesh, pilgrims are observed rafting (Rao and Suresh, 2001:215), and one can find billboards in both places for water parks - *The Fun Valley Park* and *Crystal World* - that both clearly cater to people that are on their way to, or from, Haridwar. It should be kept in mind that pilgrimage travel and destinations in the past, and in particular festivals (*melas*), have had entertainment as an element that attracted and amused people. Observing the Kumbh Mela over a hundred years ago, Edwin Thomas Atkinson noted that:

*Religion, however, is not the sole incentive that draws these crowds together. Trade and amusement are as much thought of* (Atkinson, 1981:559).

And yet, the entertainment technologies employed at such places today are becoming similar to those found at tourist sites all over the world.

An interesting development is the way in which modern entertainment technology and religion are combined. The most famous expression of this today is surely the Akshardham temple complex in Delhi that attracts both international and domestic visitors, including pilgrims in buses passing through Delhi on

an itinerary focused on pilgrimage destinations. It was created by Swaminarayan Hindus, followers of a new Hindu movement that has its roots in the early nineteenth century (Williams, 2011). Characterised as a 'show temple' (Reddy and Zavos, 2010) and 'Hindu wonderland' (Singh, 2010) that cultivates a 'Disney-divinity' (Srivastava, 2009), anthropologist Christiane Brosius argues that it aspires:

*to be a tourist site, a pilgrimage site, a site for spiritual enlightenment and national awakening, for entertainment and consumption, adventure and education about cultural heritage (2010:174).*

Besides the main temple dedicated to Swaminarayan, the founder of this movement, the temple complex further features: an Imax cinema showing a film that follows the founder on his pilgrimage as a young boy; a series of dioramas with robotronics presenting highlights from the whole life of the founder; a boat ride presenting Indian civilisation as a Vedic and Hindu glorious past complete with science and democracy; a park with statues of national heroes; a musical fountain and food vendors selling anything from Indian food and tea, to vegetarian pizzas and burgers with Coca Cola. The growing significance of leisure, whether defined as a cultural impulse to seek out certain activities and states of mind, or as a way of structuring and thinking about time, is clearly linked to the rise of the Indian middle class that seems to be particularly drawn to places such as Akshardham (Gladstone, 2005:Ch. 5 & 6; Srivastava, 2009; Brosius, 2010).

A recent entertaining religious attraction in Vrindavan is the Maa Vaishno Devi Ashram.<sup>[14]</sup> Consisting of a near 43 meter tall statue of the goddess seated on a lion, this attraction invites devotees of the mentioned Vaiṣṇo Devī to enter into a replica of her cave that is filled with ankle-high water, before one comes out at the feet of this impressive and innovative image. On a road often referred to as the Bharat Mandir road in-between Haridwar and Rishikesh, one can find a number of similar entertaining temples that display stories of gods and gurus in dioramas that gives them a theme park feeling. Here we can find yet another reconstruction of Vaiṣṇo Devī's cave that visitors must crawl into before coming into a replica of her manifestation, another testament to her popularity these days. The two goddesses, Caṇḍī and Mansā Devī found on the hilltops on each side of the Ganges overlooking Haridwar also combine entertainment, leisure and

**Figure 1 : The tourist and the religious gaze: visitors at the ISKCON temple in Vrindavan combine *darśan* with photography.**



Photo taken by author.

religion as they are equipped with ropeways, playgrounds and food vendors (see Lochtefeld, 2010:210-16). A great example of how the idea of a tourist site and temple can merge is found in the Jaigurudev temple in Vrindavan that is modelled on the Taj Mahal, located nearby.<sup>[15]</sup>

An important practice found at such entertaining religious attractions, but also pilgrimage destinations in general, is photography (see Figure 1). Photographers ready to take your picture and print it within few minutes are available at many places, but people are increasingly bringing their own cameras, and most mobile phones are now equipped with a camera. People can be found lining up in front of the Ganges or posing while taking a bath, in front of seminal temples, standing next to a *sādhū* (wandering ascetic) or just after having completed *pūjā* (worship) with a priest. I once observed a pilgrim holding a video camera whilst walking through a temple and bowing down before various images of gods, temporarily putting down the camera. These practices forces us to reflect on the relationship between photographic practices and the tourist gaze on the one hand (Edensor, 1998; Urry and Larsen, 2011), and the auspicious beholding or ritualised seeing known as *darśan* on the other (Eck, 1998; Zara, 2015). I am not convinced that the two are as opposed as some have suggested (Aukland, 2018, 309) - one related to seeing sites the other beholding religious images or places (Eck, 2012:443). In popular

14. <http://www.maavaishno.org>. Accessed June 21, 2014.

15. For further examples of modern temples combining elements from religion and tourism see Brosius 2010, 213ff.

parlance, *darśan* is also used for seeing religious experts, politicians and friends - travel agencies advertising for bus tours of Delhi can be seen sporting signs saying 'Delhi Darshan' - even though such a tour would hardly include any temple visits compared to the 'Braj Darshan' tours going to Vrindavan and surrounding villages. Ann Gold reported that Rajasthani pilgrims used the term in relation to seeing the Laxman Jhula (a bridge) site in Rishikesh and the ocean at Puri (Gold, 2002:211, 281). As I have argued, the increased involvement of travel agencies and itinerised visits to pilgrimage sites could be read as a reformatting of the more traditional notion of Hindu pilgrimage (*tīrthyātra*) into 'darshan tours' (Aukland, 2018:313-4).

These overlapping concerns - seeing secular and religious sites while travelling - are reflected in itineraries of those that travel. The itinerary of the rural Rajasthanis Ann Gold travelled with was clearly shaped by pilgrimage destinations, but it also included a visit to the Taj Mahal and Red Fort in Agra, and Buddhist temples in Bodhgaya (Gold, 2002:227-8, 280). I have already mentioned package tours, and many of them can be seen to combine devotion with leisure. The Char Dham Yatra, as we have seen, is often combined with a visit to the popular Kempty Falls and sometimes the famous Valley of Flowers. Indeed, part of the allure of destinations such as Haridwar, Rishikesh and the Char Dham Yatra in the hot summer months is that these are also near the many hill stations that draw considerable amounts of domestic tourists. I have interacted with several families travelling together in groups of three generations, a trend also noticed by others (Chaudhuri, 1981; Singh, 2002:155). Such family trips are often done in relation to school vacations, reminding us that pilgrimage travel today is connected to leisure, conceptualised as time and activities distinct from work and school, a separation that crystallised in late eighteenth century Britain (Hannam and Knox, 2011:48). In learning that the itinerary of many such families includes a combination of pilgrimage and tourist destinations, I have asked travellers whether they were on a pilgrimage (*tīrthyātra*) or just travelling (*ghūmnā*). This often caused smiles and laughter, and more than once have I heard the expression 'multi-purpose trip' being used. Many also argued that while elderly people are more geared towards devotion, the young are looking for secular entertainment.

Spending money and purchasing souvenirs are integral parts of pilgrimage travel for many (Stausberg, 2011:205). Ann Gold (2002:288ff.) reported that

giving away, using up and spending money was emphasised by Rajasthani pilgrims as virtuous and effective in accumulating merit. In my field notes from the Char Dham Yatra, I classified goods that my co-travellers brought home into three categories. The first comprised such substances that had been in direct contact with gods or had inherent qualities tied to religious narratives in them, such as *prasād*<sup>[16]</sup> and water from rivers. Secondly, there were objects that are more representational in nature, such as images of gods and temples in various mediums such as figures, key-chains, pictures, postcards, CDs and DVDs. The difference between these two are not clear-cut in many cases, and an item such as prayer beads (*mālā*) could be placed in either one. Both types are sold in bazaar stalls as well as in temples. In the third category are items that do not have obvious links to religious narratives to begin with such as jewellery and toys. Yet, their character might nevertheless be infused with the power of the place in which they were bought. In other words, they might very well be given to their beneficiaries with the information that they have not just been bought anywhere, and might thus gain special significance related to religious narratives. As this improvised typology shows, ideal-typical distinctions between a relic (pilgrimage) and a souvenir (tourism) should be used with care (Stausberg, 2011:209). It would be interesting for future studies to look into differences and similarities between various types of goods in relation to criteria such as use and consumption (including sharing and distribution upon return), production and popularisation (Stausberg, 2011:213), advertisement and framing, consumer profile and cost. The same is true for the role of various types of souvenirs after return in relation to issues such as memory activation and the bestowing of social capital on those displaying them (Stausberg, 2011:206, 210).

A further issue that needs more research relates to aesthetic appreciation of nature and its role for Hindus completing pilgrimages (Shinde, 2012) such as Char Dham Yatra and the Amarnath Yatra in Jammu and Kashmir that both feature impressive mountains and natural environments as a backdrop to their religious attractions (Aukland, 2017). The above-mentioned coffee table books and tourist brochures often frame pilgrimages in a language and on terms similar to those found in relation to nature based tourism. Trekking is popular among a certain segment of tourists, but it is also an integral part of many pilgrimages. Questions regarding ecology and sustainability are growing

16. See Pinkney 2013 for a study of *prasād* and Char Dham.



concerns for observers, tourist departments and other organisations, and are also entering the pilgrimage scene (Alley, 2002; Haberman, 2006; Shinde, 2007b; Singh, 2009:99-101). In response to this, Puri, Rishikesh, Ujjain and Varanasi have all become part of the Green Pilgrimage Network organised by Alliance of Religions and Conservation.<sup>[17]</sup>

Finally, another wider area of research interest is how heritage tourism and cultural tourism intersect and play a role for some pilgrims. Are there pilgrims, for instance among diaspora Hindus, that would frame their visit to pilgrimage sites as a way to connect with their heritage, more than to ask superhuman agents for support in their everyday life or simply perform what is socially expected of one? Ian Reader (2014:190-2) argues that the involvement of tourist boards supports a development where pilgrimages turn into cultural heritage tours, increasingly downplaying the importance of faith, miracles and religiosity. This contradicts my own study of Char Dham guidebooks, where heritage as a concept is not used as an interpretive lens, and religious concerns remain central to the overall framing of pilgrimages and temples (Aukland, 2017).

In what way is it different for Hindus to visit archaeological temple complexes such as that of Khajuraho which is a well established tourism attraction listed on UNESCO's World Heritage List (Ichaporia, 1983; Stausberg, 2011:81-2), and a temple whose allure is tied more specifically to religious narratives and rituals? The Archaeological Survey of India is present at many historical sites putting restrictions on the use of temples, and is part of framing a temple visit by putting up signs that give information concerning the history of the place with slogans such as 'Sustain your heritage, and feel glorious.' In these cases, one would assume, the issues of management and framing become important factors in shaping visitor experiences. Rana P.B Singh (2011:295-6) reports that Muslim factions in Varanasi appear to be sceptical of the ways in which heritage politics will effect them if the city is enlisted on UNESCO's heritage list and points to the way in which the Archaeological Survey of India describes their living mosques as monuments of the past. This indicates that more critical studies along the lines of Meera Nanda's work (2009) which looks at connections between heritage tourism and identity politics would be of great value.

## Dichotomies

Researching pilgrimage and tourism inevitably seems to bring us into a set of dichotomies between such referents as tourist and pilgrim, devotion and leisure, religious and secular, souvenir and relic, tradition and modernity. It is not difficult to find examples where scholars structure their observations and conclusions along such dichotomies (see Stausberg, 2011:19-20). In relation to Hindu pilgrimage in India, scholarly contributions have contrasted the 'essence' of pilgrimage (Bleie, 2003:180, 183) to 'mere 'sightseeing tour[s]'' (Shinde, 2007:194), while other scholars argue that pilgrimage sites have been turned into 'tourist spectacles' (Singh and Haigh, 2015). These interpretations operate on the often taken for granted dichotomy between pilgrimage and tourism. From the perspective of the study of religion there is clearly something at stake in working out conceptualisations and definitions of pilgrimage and a pilgrim since these terms point to important religious phenomena that, among other things, seem to be shared by the so-called world religions. And yet, little is won by simply distinguishing between pilgrim and non-pilgrim travellers based on some rather superficial observations of behaviour. Because texts of the past do not give us a picture of how pilgrimage actually worked as a social phenomenon, anthropological studies of pilgrims today cannot uncritically be contrasted to or compared with pilgrims of the past. An alternative, to operate with a concept of the 'authentic / real / traditional pilgrim' of a more or less imagined past, is to turn to emic conceptions and distinctions. In other words, to investigate to what extent these dichotomies are part of an internal debate within contemporary Hindu pilgrimage. Yet, another approach would be to consider the whole spectrum of *pilgrimage-related travel*, that is 'travel that incorporates trip to pilgrimage sites as a component of a larger journey that may or may not be framed as a pilgrimage' (Aukland, 2018:211). In this approach, the whole spectrum of travellers, from the overtly pious to the traveller that claims no religious purpose, are analysed together on the account that they are in fact visiting and engaging sites of pilgrimage.

Hindu pilgrimage, as represented in the traditional Hindu texts, does not emphasise the journey but rather the destinations, and things that can be done and achieved there. The traditional puranic literature on Hindu pilgrimage focuses on the destination. However, there is a certain tension in the tradition between the easy attainable rewards promised in the texts and emphasising that virtues and asceticism ought to be

17. <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=521>. Accessed June 22, 2014.



practiced: we do indeed find a few text passages that mention the merits of travel by foot (Jacobsen, 2012:146, 149). Ethnographic studies have revealed that it appears to be a widely accepted belief that doing a pilgrimage or part of a pilgrimage by foot, and enduring hardship in general will give more religious benefit than going by an animal or motorised vehicle (Gold, 2002:280; Singh, 2002:152; Fuller, 2004:216; Singh, 2004:52; Nordin, 2011; Jacobsen, 2012:108, 147-8). At Vaiṣṇo Devī - where all pilgrims must either walk by foot or be carried by men or horses to reach the cave 13 kilometres up the hill - many pilgrims sing or are at least aware of a popular devotional song (*Calo bulāvā āyā hai*) about the goddess calling for her devotees. In its lyrics it is said that one should not look at the blisters on ones foot, and that one will be rewarded in a measure equal to the pain one endures.

<sup>[18]</sup> As I was observing a pilgrim moving forward by prostrating at each body length around the Govardhan hill near Vrindavan, another pilgrim saw me looking and commented in English that ‘. . . he must be wanting something special . . .’

Particularly interesting in this context are observations that traditional forms of religion are seen in a new light as a result of changes related to tourism in terms of transportation, package tours and commercialisation of religious performances. Jacobsen argues that because:

*modern transportation has made access to the pilgrimage places easy, the importance of parikramas [here meaning circumambulation of an area or mountain by foot] has probably increased. Some parikramas might conceivably be the result of the lack of emphasis on the journey to the place (2012:147).*

Shinde observes that, in Vrindavan, some religious experts argue that commodification of religious performances

*and the proliferation of yatras outside the traditional pilgrimage season devalues the spiritual meaning of the experience and the importance of the rituals for visitors, and negatively affects the sanctity of the place (2010:533).*

In these cases, instead of conceptualising the more hedonistically inclined tourist against the more devotionally minded pilgrim as unchanging categories outside specific contexts, we should see them as emerging categories in specific discourses at particular times. It might very well be that the contemporary idea

and vision of the pristine / devotional / ascetic / real / etc. pilgrim / pilgrimage has taken its present shape in recent times as a response to the growth of tourism and related technology.

While I have found that many pilgrims and service providers do not make any automatic or clear-cut distinction between a *tīrthyātrī* / pilgrim and a *panyātak* / tourist, such distinctions can nevertheless emerge after direct questions and some reflection, but also in certain circumstances (Aukland, 2016b:33). Shinde (2007:190-1) quotes locals in Vrindavan making such distinctions, one saying that ‘*Tirthyatri* used to come with *bhav* (devotion), but many *yatris* now come for tourism and entertainment.’ Pilgrimage priests in Pushkar similarly contrasted devotion in pilgrims with tourists (Joseph and Kavoori, 2001:1003; Gladstone, 2005:190-2). In relation to Char Dham Yatra I have often heard it claimed that there has been a kind of degeneration in the quality of the pilgrims or participants in the pilgrimage. Today one can find families with children and young couples complete the route (the underlying assumption being that these groups’ primary focus will be on nonreligious affairs), but earlier only the elderly would go, and before them, pilgrims would go by foot (in contrast to the contemporary bus pilgrims). A more clear cut negative evaluation of these developments was found in the aftermath of the 2013 flood catastrophe in Uttarakhand state where Char Dham Yatra takes place. Thousands of people died, many of them pilgrims, and the most iconic images from the catastrophe were of the Śiva statue standing on a pedestal in the Ganges in Rishikesh, and the Śiva temple in Kedarnath. While the statue eventually got covered in water and was washed away, the dramatic destructions in Kedarnath valley seemed to leave only the temple standing.

A popular devotional song with a music video showing explicit footage from the tragedy was played constantly in the bazaars of Haridwar after the disaster. A repeated line in the song raised the question of why the Ganges displayed this rage. Behind the question was a theory, proposed by several people, that pointed to a criticism of tourist behaviour. It was argued that the flood was a form of divine punishment because the Char Dham has been made into ‘a picnic spot’ where people consume non-vegetarian food and alcohol, and instead of being crowded with pious old people or devotees, the site features more and more families and young couples travelling on romantic errands. Jagadguru Kripalu, the guru behind the popular theme park temple Prem Mandir in Vrindavan, offered the following interpretation:

18. Thanks to professor Abha Chauhan for making me aware of this particular song.

*This display of the wrath of Bolenath [Shiva] was not without reason. In this Kaliyuga [current age of decay], all our sacred places of pilgrimage have become mere picnic spots with mushrooming growth of hotels and restaurants serving tamasik food, with no sense of sanctity and purity. Western music has taken the place of Bhagavannam sankirtan [devotional song].*<sup>[19]</sup>

I have found that many pilgrims and observers are under the impression that devotion is on the decline, and that it is mainly elderly people who travel with the right mind-set. Many researchers seem to be under the same impression (e.g. Shinde, 2007a; Singh, 2009:96-7), and the question of reduced devotion in relation to changing times and conditions is a legitimate one. Yet, simply making such assumptions or habitually casting travellers as either tourists or pilgrims seems less helpful and interesting at this point. In the study of religion and tourism, more relevant questions would be: what role does religion play in this case, for that traveller or at these places? Questions of travel motivation but also attraction, imaginaries, politics, practice and beliefs are all of value in understanding contemporary Hinduism and Hindus. This would imply moving beyond simply asking why people travel and the assumption that religious and non-religious motivations must be mutually exclusive. As I have attempted to suggest here, contemporary Hindu pilgrimage takes place at the confluence of leisure and devotion, and either one does not exclude the other.

### Suggestions for Future Studies

Above I suggested four entry points to tourism that each provide a lens into the study of contemporary Hindu pilgrimage: tourism as:

- (1) a service industry,
- (2) a sector that motivates states and public bodies to act,
- (3) a travel culture and
- (4) a negotiated category, part of public discourses and imaginations.

We have yet to understand the various roles played by private companies in framing, organising and shaping pilgrimages; the central and state governments, and various other public bodies such as the Archaeological Survey of India in developing, promoting, regulation, framing and managing Hindu pilgrimage; how non-religious tourist and pilgrimage practices and attitudes

overlap, interact, complement and conflict; the ways in which different people in different contexts conceptualise tourism and the tourist in relation to pilgrimage and the pilgrim. The current relationship between cultural, heritage and nature based tourism, and to what extent one can find new types of attitudes and patterns of behaviour's among Hindu travellers that relate to these forms of tourism also remain to be investigated. For example, what is the relationship today between Hindu pilgrimage and cultural practices such as mountain trekking, aesthetic appreciations of nature and yoga festivals? The latter also begs the question of whether and in what way Indian 'new age' practices might be tapping into the pilgrimage tradition (Frøystad, 2011).<sup>[20]</sup> In fact, a New Age framing of Char Dham Yatra is mentioned in a master plan of the regional tourism department from 2008, anticipating that it could attract the 'high-end domestic / NRI' (Non Resident Indian) market if it 'begins to combine new-age pilgrim spirituality and tourism . . .' (67).<sup>[21]</sup>

The opposite direction, and perhaps a more familiar approach to the student of pilgrimage and religion, would be to start with a pilgrimage phenomenon and see to what extent various elements of tourism interact with or shape it. Similarities between traditional and contemporary promotional pilgrimage literature have already been pointed out, and it would be interesting to know more about the relationship between them, the processes that go into transforming traditional puranic lore into mass produced brochures and DVDs (see Whitmore, 2010:Ch. 4), and the ways in which they are consumed and used by pilgrims and promoters alike. Another issue of 'tradition and modernity' relates to the *jajmānī* system. If it is true that this system is under a great deal of pressure, why does it continue to persist,<sup>[22]</sup> where and what forces are changing it and what are the various strategies employed by pilgrimage priests as a response to the current changes?

While perhaps a term not habitually used by scholars of religion, I have suggested that *technology* is key to the many changes in contemporary pilgrimage not at

19. 'The Rage of Lord Shankar' in *Divine Love*, Issue 1, July 2013.

20. In the above-mentioned study from Kumbh Mela at Allahabad, the authors actually argue that Western foreigners and domestic Hindu tourists come for similar purposes, engage in similar activities and describe similar types experiences (Buzinde et. al. 2014).

21. 'Uttarakhand Tourism Development Master Plan 2007–2022', <http://uttarakhandtourism.gov.in/uttdb/sites/default/files/volume-1-executive-summary.pdf>, accessed 23 July 2015.

22. See Shinde 2011 on Tuljapur in Maharashtra where such relations seem to be thriving, hampering the local hotel industry.

least in relation to transportation, and may serve as a productive entry into the topic. Motorised vehicles have vastly increased the number of pilgrims. The use of ropeways and helicopters is becoming evermore established at pilgrimage sites in the hills. Management of pilgrimage sites and temples is also increasingly defined by bureaucratic and surveillance technologies such as biometric tracing systems and surveillance cameras whose implications are yet to be inquired into. Printing technology and growing literacy has vastly changed the distribution and consumption of religious literature, with audio and video recordings becoming a standard supplement. Cameras and mobile phones enable pilgrims to share their pilgrimage experience in new ways; the Internet also serves as an important medium where information about pilgrimage sites is distributed and services advertised, but also an arena where pilgrims share their experiences via blogs, posting of images and communication on websites such as TripAdvisor (see Sanyal, 2007 and Aukland, 2016b for examples from Ajmer and Vrindavan).

One question I have only hinted at here relates to different types of attitudes and patterns of behaviour in relation to social and cultural backgrounds. This has been the topic of many earlier studies, and the relationship between tourism and the Indian middle classes and other sections of Indian society needs further attention. While I have pointed out the many advances in technology that shape contemporary pilgrimage travel and related religious practices, there are more complex questions regarding less visible areas such as changes in attitudes and patterns of behaviour in relation to pilgrimage, religion and travel. In what ways have these changed over the last three generations? Age is often raised as a key factor in emic debates that argue for a correlation between old age and stronger religious commitments and faith. Further, in what way does membership of specific Hindu groups, traditions, new religious movements and New Age milieus shape pilgrimage travel? Also lacking are studies from South India and destinations in the south. Is there any difference between the pilgrimage-tourism nexus in the north and the south, and what role do geographical and linguistic determinates play in this field?

In relation to the tourism-pilgrimage relationship, I have argued that there is a need to move beyond simple classifications based on assumed or enquired motivations for travel. In differentiating between the tourist and the pilgrim, one needs to be weary of potential biases in etic debates and simultaneously

sensitive to emic distinctions that may or may not emerge in different circles at different times. I have also suggested that studies should consider related issues such as itineraries, activities, service providers and mediators. We should still continue to develop conceptualisations and definitions of terms such as 'pilgrimage' and 'pilgrim', and yet, in these endeavours, there is no compelling reason why we should limit ourselves by using motivations as a key criterion, perhaps especially not in a religion that tends to stress practices rather than beliefs.

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