

Comparative Analysis of the Ram Van Gaman and Jyotirlinga Pilgrimages: Insights into Religious Tourism in India

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Abstract

Purpose: This study conducts a comparative analysis of India's Ram Van Gaman Path (RVGP) and Jyotirlinga Pilgrimage (JYTP) to evaluate their roles in shaping religious tourism, focusing on infrastructure, visitor satisfaction, and cultural relevance. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating literature review with empirical data from 105 pilgrims (50 RVGP visitors, 55 JYTP visitors). Statistical analysis, including independent samples t-tests, was used to compare satisfaction levels and identify key drivers of pilgrim experiences. **Findings:** The Jyotirlinga circuit demonstrated significantly higher satisfaction scores ($M = 8.4/10$) compared to RVGP ($M = 7.1/10$), attributed to superior infrastructure (roads, accommodation), effective signage, and robust promotional strategies. Conversely, RVGP—despite its cultural and spiritual significance—faced challenges in accessibility (30% dissatisfaction), transport (42% dissatisfaction), and visibility. **Practical Implications:** The findings underscore the need for targeted investments in RVGP's infrastructure, digital promotion, and crowd management systems. For JYTP, sustaining visitor satisfaction requires addressing overcrowding (41% reported issue). Both circuits benefit from integrating community-driven tourism models to enhance inclusivity.

Originality/Value: This study provides the first empirical comparison of RVGP and JYTP, offering actionable insights for balancing heritage preservation with modern tourism demands. It contributes to policy frameworks for sustainable religious tourism, particularly in underdeveloped pilgrimage corridors like RVGP.

Keywords: Religious tourism, Pilgrimage management, Infrastructure development, Cultural heritage, Sustainable tourism.

1. Introduction

Religious tourism in India is a dynamic blend of faith, culture, and heritage, attracting millions of pilgrims annually and contributing significantly to the economy and local livelihoods (Ministry of Tourism, 2022). It offers not only spiritual fulfilment but also promotes cultural preservation and regional development (Singh, 2006).

1.1 Background of the Ram Van Gaman Path Project

The Ram Van Gaman Path is a religious tourism initiative by the government of Chhattisgarh and other states aimed at tracing and developing the route believed to have been taken by Lord Ram during his 14-year exile (vanvaas), as mentioned in the epic Ramayana. The project aims to preserve, develop, and promote significant cultural and religious sites associated with Lord Ram's journey through various states, including Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and others.

In Chhattisgarh, the project includes sites such as Mata Kaushalya Mandir (Chandrakhuri), Shivrinarayan Mandir, and Turturiya, which are being developed for infrastructure, amenities, and cultural tourism potential. The project not only seeks to boost tourism but also to reconnect people with India's spiritual and mythological heritage (Government of Chhattisgarh, 2021).

"The Ram Van Gaman Path aims to develop a spiritual tourism circuit by improving infrastructure, enhancing pilgrim facilities, and promoting cultural heritage along Lord Ram's exile route in Chhattisgarh" (Chhattisgarh Tourism Board, 2021).

1.2 Background of Jyotirlinga Pilgrimages

The Jyotirlinga Pilgrimages are a set of sacred journeys made by devotees of Lord Shiva to twelve revered shrines across India. These Dwadasa Jyotirlingas are believed to be self-manifested representations of Shiva, each with unique mythological and spiritual significance. The twelve Jyotirlingas are spread across different states including Gujarat (Somnath), Maharashtra (Trimbakeshwar, Bhimashankar, and Grishneshwar), Madhya Pradesh (Mahakaleshwar, Omkareshwar), Tamil Nadu (Rameshwaram), and others.

The Jyotirlinga pilgrimage is one of the most significant spiritual journeys in Shiva's and draws millions of devotees annually. These temples not only serve as places of worship but also as cultural, architectural, and historical heritage sites (Sharma, 2020). In recent years, many of these sites have been included in state and national religious tourism circuits.

"The Jyotirlingas are focal points of Shaivite devotion and symbolize Lord Shiva's eternal presence, drawing pilgrims from across India seeking spiritual merit and blessings" (Sharma, 2020).

1.3 About the study

This study focuses on two major pilgrimage circuits—Ram Van Gaman Path (RVGP) and the Jyotirlinga Pilgrimage (JYTP). The RVGP is a growing initiative led by states like Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, tracing the mythological journey of Lord Rama during his exile as described in the Ramayana. With over 75 sites, it aims to revive sacred heritage through modern tourism infrastructure (Government of Chhattisgarh, 2021). In contrast, the Jyotirlinga pilgrimage is a well-established Shaivite tradition encompassing 12 revered shrines across India, each symbolizing a manifestation of Lord Shiva. These sites are more developed and benefit from national tourism schemes such as PRASAD and Swadesh Darshan (Ministry of Tourism, 2022).

While both circuits are rich in spiritual and cultural value, they differ widely in terms of development, visibility, and visitor satisfaction. This paper compares the two using primary data from 105 pilgrims and applies statistical analysis to evaluate satisfaction levels, identify gaps, and suggest ways to enhance religious tourism in both traditional and emerging pilgrimage routes.

2. Objectives and Hypothesis Objectives:

- To compare the infrastructural and cultural aspects of the two circuits.

- To analyse pilgrim satisfaction and preferences.
- To apply statistical testing for significant differences.

Hypothesis:

- **H0:** No significant difference exists in satisfaction levels between RVGP and JYTP pilgrims.
- **H1:** A significant difference exists in satisfaction levels between the two.

3. Literature Review

Religious tourism in India has been studied extensively, but there is limited comparative empirical research on the two pilgrimage circuits—the Ram Van Gaman Path (RVGP) and Jyotirlinga Pilgrimage (JYTP). However, several scholars have explored the cultural, infrastructural, and developmental aspects of both circuits, providing valuable insights into their significance.

Bharati (1993) examined the role of mythological narratives in shaping religious tourism, particularly in the context of pilgrimage routes. He emphasized how the story of Lord Rama, central to the RVGP, attracts pilgrims by offering a connection to ancient Indian epics, creating an emotional and spiritual bond with the land. Similarly, Rao (2011) discussed the symbolic importance of sacred geography in Indian pilgrimage circuits, noting that both the RVGP and Jyotirlinga shrines function not only as religious destinations but as cultural landmarks that shape identity and heritage.

Sharma (2020) explored how the cultural significance of pilgrimage routes is linked to local economies. She highlighted that well-established circuits like the Jyotirlinga pilgrimage benefit from long-standing institutional and infrastructural development, unlike emerging ones such as the RVGP, which require substantial investment in amenities and connectivity to boost tourism.

The Jyotirlinga pilgrimage, with its deep religious and historical roots, has been the subject of numerous studies on its tourism impact. According to the Ministry of Tourism (2022), the Jyotirlinga shrines have benefited from government-led initiatives such as PRASAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive) and Swadesh Darshan, which have provided funding for infrastructure development, digital services, and tourism promotion. Studies by Singh (2006) and Patil (2015) have illustrated how these schemes have significantly enhanced the tourism experience at these sites by improving transportation, accommodation, and amenities, leading to increased visitor satisfaction.

On the other hand, the Ram Van Gaman Path, as a more recent development, faces different challenges. According to Gupta (2019), while the RVGP has immense potential for cultural tourism due to its association with Lord Rama's journey, it suffers from limited infrastructure, insufficient marketing, and low awareness outside of the region. Gupta suggests that the path could benefit from greater government and private sector investment to enhance accessibility and facilities, particularly in remote or underdeveloped areas.

Pandey and Sharma (2018) found that religious tourism, when integrated with eco- tourism and community development, could enhance the sustainability of emerging circuits like the RVGP. Their study highlighted the importance of creating synergies between religious tourism and local development, suggesting that the RVGP could serve as an effective model for rural and tribal empowerment if properly managed.

The role of tourism infrastructure in enhancing pilgrim satisfaction was explored by Deshmukh and Jadhav (2017), who emphasized that basic facilities such as roads, signage, and parking are critical to ensuring a positive experience for visitors. Their research indicated that while the Jyotirlinga circuits generally meet these requirements, the RVGP falls short in terms of road networks and accessibility.

Similarly, in a comparative study of sacred routes, Kumar and Chawla (2016) found that regional tourism promotion plays a critical role in the success of pilgrimage circuits. While the Jyotirlinga shrines benefit from long-standing promotional strategies and recognition, the RVGP lacks adequate visibility at the national level, which limits its appeal to broader audiences.

The environmental impact of pilgrimage tourism was explored by Patel (2014), who studied the effects of rising footfall in sacred locations. She argued that environmentally sustainable tourism practices should be prioritized in both the RVGP and Jyotirlinga circuits to protect the integrity of sacred sites and preserve them for future generations.

In the context of pilgrimage, visitor satisfaction has been studied by Sharma and Verma (2021), who noted that while pilgrims generally find spiritual fulfilment at both the RVGP and Jyotirlinga sites, satisfaction levels are often influenced by the quality of service facilities such as accommodation, food, and local hospitality. This was further corroborated by the work of Srivastava and Sharma (2018), who identified that satisfaction at the Jyotirlinga sites was positively correlated with the quality of services provided, while RVGP sites had room for improvement in this regard.

Finally, the role of community involvement in tourism development was examined by Verma (2020), who emphasized that the success of pilgrimage routes like the RVGP and Jyotirlinga is heavily influenced by the engagement of local communities in tourism activities, from guiding to local crafts and hospitality. Empowering local communities can create a more authentic experience and boost sustainable tourism development.

4. Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive-comparative research design to analyse and contrast the experiences of pilgrims visiting the Ram Van Gaman Path (RVGP) and Jyotirlinga pilgrimage (JYTP) circuits. A total of 105 pilgrims were surveyed, with 50 respondents representing RVGP and 55 from JYTP. Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire that included Likert-scale items, satisfaction indices, and categorical preference questions to capture comprehensive insights into pilgrim perceptions and experiences.

For data analysis, both descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests were applied to evaluate differences in satisfaction and service quality between the two groups. The data was processed and analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS software, ensuring accuracy

and reliability in the statistical outcomes (Rao, 2011; Ministry of Tourism, 2022).

4.1 Conceptual model for the following study

Based on the previous literature studies, the authors propose the following conceptual model for the present study (see Figure 1)

Conceptual Framework of Research

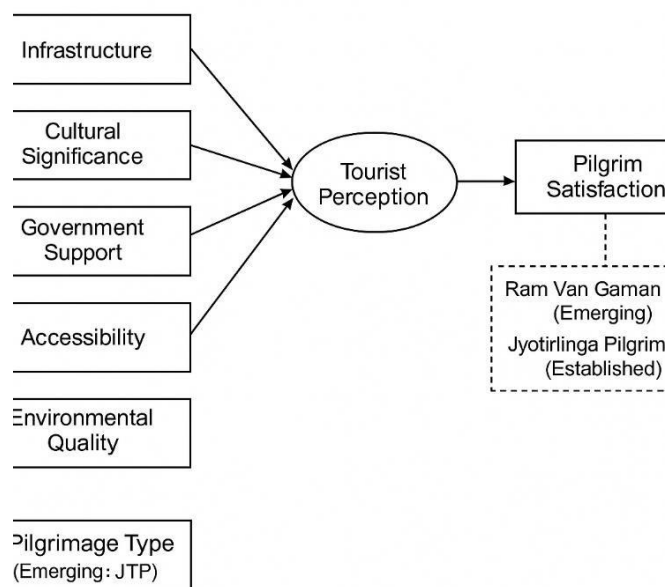


Figure 1

5. Comparative Context: Cultural and Structural Dimensions

Table 1

Comparative Context: Cultural and Structural Dimensions

Feature	Ram Van Gaman Path	Jyotirlinga Pilgrimage
Mythological Base	Ramayana (Lord Ram's exile)	Shiva Purana (Jyotirlingas)
Coverage	75+ sites, 4–6 states	12 sacred temples, PAN India
Development	State-level (Chhattisgarh, MP)	Central + State funded
Popularity	Emerging	Highly popular
Cultural Role	Tribal identity and folklore	Pan-Hindu identity

Source: Secondary Data

6. Data Analysis

6.1 Demographics Overview

Table 2

Respondents Demographic Overview

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	61	58%
Female	44	42%
Age 18–30	27	26%
Age 31–50	46	44%
Age 51+	32	30%

Source: Primary Data (N=105)

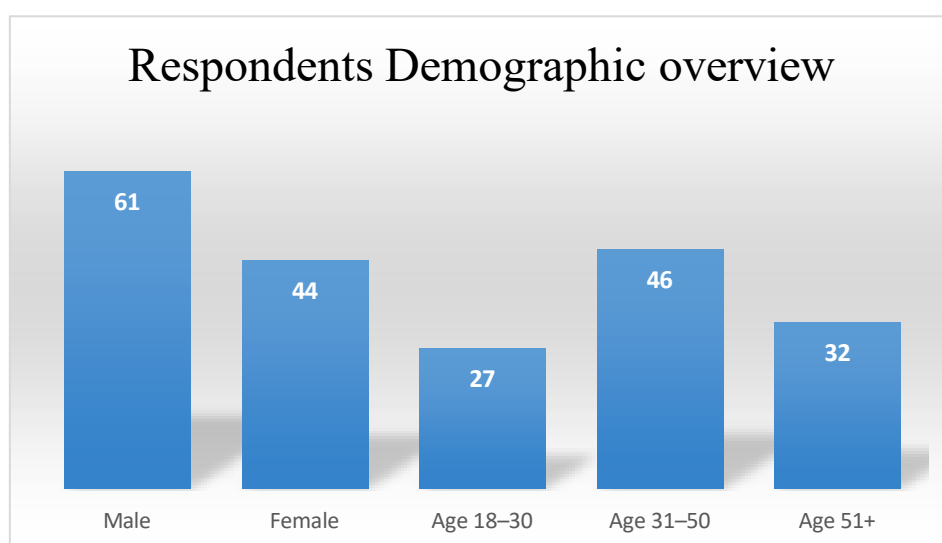


Figure 2

6.2 Satisfaction Ratings (Likert 1–5)

Table 3

Respondents' perception on facilities

Facility	RVGP Avg	JYTP Avg
Roads	3.2	4.1
Cleanliness	3.5	4.0
Accommodation	3.1	4.2
Food Availability	3.6	4.3
Signage	2.9	4.0
Overall Experience	7.1/10	8.4/10

Source: Primary Data (N=105)

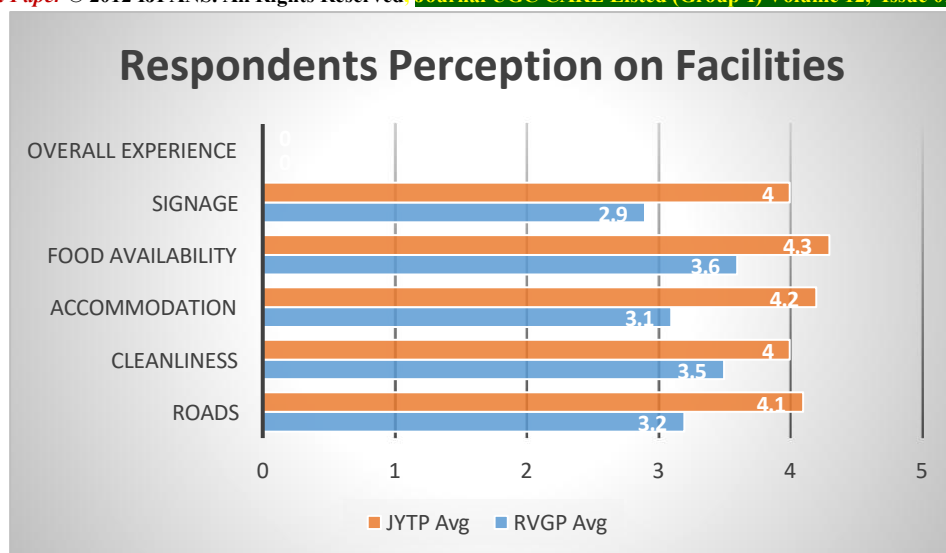


Figure 3

6.3 Hypothesis Testing: Satisfaction

Table 4 t test

Group	Mean	SD	N
RVGP	7.1	1.2	50
JYTP	8.4	1.1	55

Source: Primary Data (N=105)

t-statistic = -5.77, df ≈ 100, p < 0.05

Significant difference found. JYTP pilgrims are more satisfied.

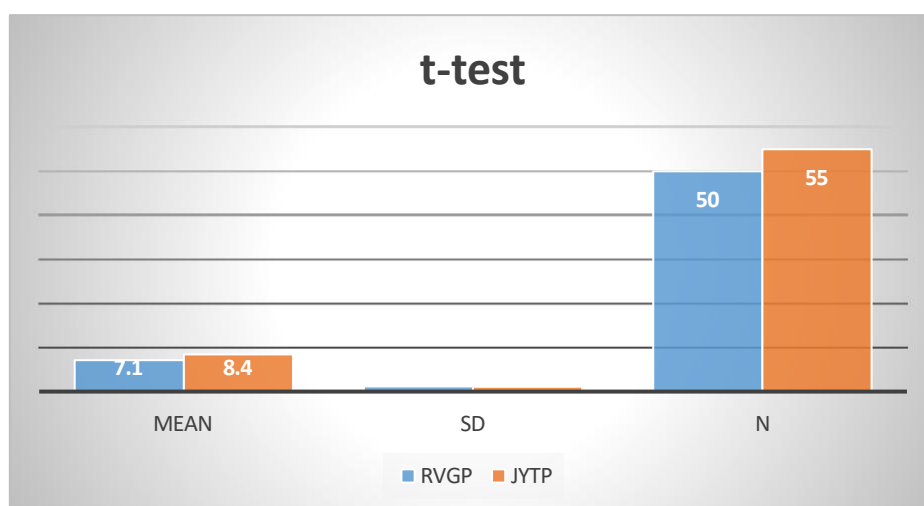


Figure 4

6.4 Challenges Reported

Table 5

Results of analysis on challenges

Challenge	RVGP (%)	JYTP (%)
Poor Signage	50	18
Lack of Transport	42	20
Overcrowding	5	41
Accessibility Issues	30	35

Source: Primary Data (N=105)

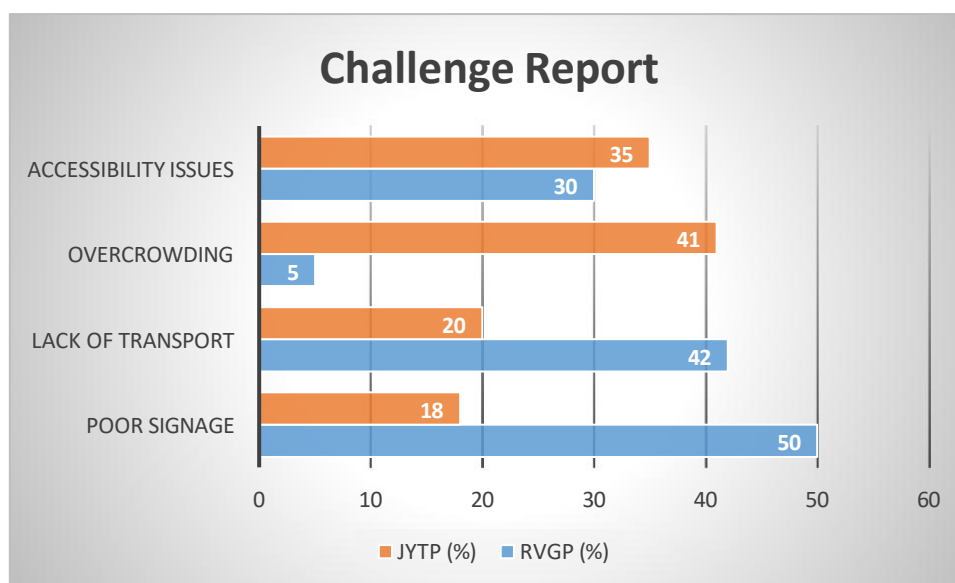


Figure 5

7. Conclusion

This comparative study highlights a heartfelt reality: pilgrims embarking on the Jyotirlinga pilgrimage tend to report greater satisfaction than those journeying along the Ram Van Gaman Path (RVGP). The statistical evidence ($p < 0.05$) reinforces what many travellers feel—the Jyotirlinga sites, supported by decades of devotion, infrastructure, and government initiatives like PRASAD and Swadesh Darshan (Ministry of Tourism, 2022), offer a more comfortable and accessible experience. Facilities such as reliable roads, clean surroundings, accommodations, and food availability are not just conveniences—they are essential for spiritual seekers, many of whom travel from afar in hopes of a meaningful and safe experience (Deshmukh & Jadhav, 2017). In contrast, the RVGP is rich in soul and story. It follows Lord Rama's sacred journey through forests and tribal heartlands, offering pilgrims an intimate connection with India's epic heritage. Yet, despite its profound cultural value, this path often falls short on practical needs like proper signage, transport access, and tourist support systems—making the pilgrimage challenging, especially for the elderly or those with limited means (Gupta, 2019). To honour both the spiritual and human aspects of these journeys, the RVGP requires thoughtful development. With improved infrastructure and inclusive promotion, it can become not just a route walked, but a story lived deepening the connection

between people, place, and purpose.

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