

# Evaluation Of Cultural Places In Gorakhpur Division: A Framework And SWOT Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

*This Research paper systematically evaluates the cultural heritage of Gorakhpur Division by applying a structured, criteria-based assessment framework aligned with international benchmarks. Adopting the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), the study assesses cultural sites against seven crucial criteria: Heritage Significance, Physical Condition, Tourist Footfall, Amenities, Accessibility, Community Engagement, and Management and Governance. The framework prioritizes the intrinsic historical and cultural value while also considering practical aspects like preservation status and tourism infrastructure. Expert judgments inform the weighting of criteria, ensuring an objective and balanced evaluation.*

*Results reveal a clear stratification: iconic landmarks such as Gorakhnath Temple and Mahāparinirvāna Temple emerge as outstanding performers, reflecting exemplary preservation, strong visitor appeal, and effective local stewardship. Conversely, less-known sites struggle with limited infrastructure, lower community involvement, and fragmented management systems.*

*Complementing the quantitative results, a district-wise SWOT analysis sheds further light on internal capabilities and external factors influencing heritage conservation and tourism development. Notably, while the region benefits from rich intangible cultural traditions, robust community participation, and strategic location advantages, it faces significant hurdles like inadequate funding, insufficient promotion beyond flagship attractions, and rising threats from urban development pressures. The insights from this evaluation highlight the potential for integrated heritage tourism circuits, stronger community-based approaches, and strategic infrastructure upgrades. By addressing identified gaps and leveraging strengths—particularly through proactive management, inclusive community engagement, and sustainable tourism practices—Gorakhpur Division can enhance both the conservation of its cultural assets and their broader socio-economic impacts.*

**Keywords:** Heritage evaluation, Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), Heritage Significance, Cultural tourism, Community Engagement, Sustainable tourism, SWOT analysis.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

India, with its 5,000-year history and a multitude of heritage assets (including 40 UNESCO World heritage Sites), has embraced such global standards. Heritage conservation and sustainable tourism are national priorities – India's draft National Tourism Policy (2022) explicitly advocates for “sustainable, responsible and inclusive tourism”. In practice, this is reflected in initiatives like the Adopt a Heritage scheme that engages public-private partners to improve tourist infrastructure at monuments, and the HRIDAY program (2015) for integrating heritage conservation into urban development. At the international level, the UN Sustainable Development Goals include Target 11.4, which calls on all countries to “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage”. In this light, a rigorous framework to evaluate cultural heritage Sites is both timely and necessary, aligning local heritage management with global benchmarks for significance, preservation, community engagement, governance, accessibility, and tourism development.

Cultural heritage Sites are evaluated according to international best practices established by ICOMOS and UNESCO. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972) provides a global mandate to identify, protect, and preserve cultural heritage of outstanding value. ICOMOS charters further guide heritage tourism management. For example, the ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter (1999) emphasises sustainable tourism at heritage Sites – it calls for continuous monitoring of tourism impacts on heritage Sites and host communities. It also advocates providing appropriate visitor facilities without harming heritage values and involving local communities so that tourism benefits them and motivates them to care for their heritage. Similarly, UNESCO's Operational Guidelines for World Heritage (2021) require every heritage site to have a robust management system (e.g. management plan, legal protection, etc.) and stakeholder engagement to

safeguard the Places Outstanding Universal Value. These international principles underscore the need to evaluate cultural Places across multiple criteria in a comprehensive manner, ensuring that significance, preservation, community interests, and sustainability are all considered.

## 2. Evaluation Criteria and Significance

Drawing on the above conceptual priorities and standards, this study employs seven key criteria to evaluate cultural Places. These criteria capture both the intrinsic value of the heritage and the practical aspects of its use and management:

1. **Heritage Significance** – the importance of the Places due to their historical, cultural, architectural, or religious value or uniqueness. This reflects the Places cultural significance in societal memory (analogous to UNESCO's Outstanding Universal Value). A Places significance may be indicated by official heritage listings (e.g. ASI or state protection) and scholarly recognition.
2. **Physical Condition** – the current state of preservation of the Places structures or artefacts. This considers integrity, maintenance, and any deterioration. Sound physical condition is critical for long-term conservation of heritage fabric, as conservation charters emphasise. It reflects the effectiveness of preservation efforts (e.g. regular restoration or protective measures).
3. **Tourist Footfall** – the annual number of visitors and the Places public profile or popularity. High visitation can indicate a Places tourism appeal but also implies more significant pressure and potential impact on the site. Visibility may be boosted by marketing or by UNESCO World Heritage status. This criterion helps gauge the tourism demand and exposure of the site.
4. **Tourism Amenities** – visitor infrastructure availability and quality such as information centers, washrooms, eateries, lodging, signage, and other facilities. Adequate amenities enhance the visitor experience and satisfaction. Providing such infrastructure is a key principle of sustainable heritage tourism, so long as it does not compromise the Places integrity. This criterion assesses how well the site caters to tourists' needs.
5. **Accessibility** – the ease of reaching the site, including transportation options (road/rail/air connectivity), last-mile access, signage, and provisions for differently abled visitors. Accessibility is an essential practical factor for the tourism use of a site. Improved connectivity (opening a new international airport at a Buddhist pilgrimage city) can significantly increase visitation. This criterion evaluates whether physical or logistical barriers impede visitor access.
6. **Community Engagement** – the degree of involvement of local communities in managing, interpreting, or benefiting from the site. Heritage tourism should benefit host communities and encourage their participation in heritage maintenance. This aligns with international calls for inclusive heritage governance and for local communities to have a stake in heritage conservation. Indicators include community-led initiatives, local employment at the site, and consultative management practices.
7. **Management and Governance** – the effectiveness of the Places administration, including clarity of ownership, existence of a management plan, staffing, funding, security, and stakeholder coordination. Good governance is vital for heritage sustainability. This criterion examines whether institutional frameworks are in place to protect the site (e.g. legal protection, monitoring systems) and whether management adheres to "good governance" principles of transparency, accountability, and community inclusion. Examples of positive indicators include model site management trusts or robust public-private partnerships.

Each of these criteria reflects a facet of heritage site value or use. Together, they provide a holistic evaluation framework. Heritage Significance is paramount, as it represents the Places inherent cultural value – the very reason it warrants preservation (comparable to UNESCO's concept of Outstanding Universal Value). Physical Condition indicates the state of conservation of the Places fabric, a fundamental factor for its longevity and authenticity. Tourist Footfall measures popularity and usage, highlighting a site's tourism pressure and economic potential. Tourism Amenities gauge the visitor infrastructure in place; appropriate facilities are needed for a quality tourist experience, a point stressed in both national schemes and international manuals. Accessibility covers how easily a site can be reached – a practical consideration that can limit or expand tourism (for instance, remote Places with poor access tend to receive fewer visitors). Community Engagement assesses local involvement, reflecting that host communities should benefit from and participate in heritage tourism. Finally,

Management/Governance evaluates the administrative capacity and policies in place, recognising that effective governance (clear ownership, adequate funding, management plans, etc.) is mandatory for sustainable heritage management. The Places viability and value delivery are compromised if these aspects are lacking. Evaluating Places against all seven criteria thus ensures a comprehensive assessment covering significance, preservation, use, and stewardship.

### 3.METHODOLOGY

An analytical hierarchy process (AHP) was employed to evaluate cultural places systematically against the above criteria. AHP is a multi-criteria decision-making tool developed by Thomas Saaty, widely used for prioritising factors in complex decisions (and increasingly applied in tourism and heritage studies). The AHP methodology in this study involved experts comparing the seven evaluation criteria pairwise to determine their relative importance weights. Using Saaty's 1–9 scale of relative importance,

**Table 1 - Saaty Scale**

| Saaty Scale | Meaning                 |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1           | Equally important       |
| 3           | Moderately important    |
| 5           | Strongly important      |
| 7           | Very strongly important |
| 9           | Extremely important     |
| 2,4,6,8     | Intermediate importance |

Heritage experts gave judgments such as “Heritage Significance is much more important than Tourism Amenities,” reflecting the primacy of cultural value over visitor convenience. All pairwise comparisons were arranged in a matrix, and the eigenvector method was used to derive a weight for each criterion.

**Table - 2 AHP Pairwise Comparison Matrix**

| Criteria              | Heritage Significance | Physical Condition | Tourist Footfall | Amenities | Accessibility | Community Engagement | Management/Governance |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Heritage Significance | 1                     | 2                  | 3                | 3         | 4             | 5                    | 7                     |
| Physical Condition    | 1/2                   | 1                  | 2                | 2         | 3             | 4                    | 7                     |
| Tourist Footfall      | 1/3                   | 1/2                | 1                | 2         | 3             | 5                    | 6                     |
| Amenities             | 1/3                   | 1/2                | 1/2              | 1         | 2             | 3                    | 5                     |
| Accessibility         | 1/4                   | 1/3                | 1/3              | 1/2       | 1             | 2                    | 4                     |
| Community Engagement  | 1/5                   | 1/4                | 1/5              | 1/3       | 1/2           | 1                    | 3                     |
| Management/Governance | 1/7                   | 1/7                | 1/6              | 1/5       | 1/4           | 1/3                  | 1                     |

**Source:** Calculated by Researcher

**Criteria Weights:** The final normalised weights obtained for each criterion (summing to 1) are as follows:

**Table- 3 Criteria Weight**

|                       |        |
|-----------------------|--------|
| Heritage Significance | 0.3261 |
| Physical Condition    | 0.2170 |
| Tourist Footfall      | 0.1761 |
| Amenities             | 0.1216 |
| Community Engagement  | 0.0793 |
| Accessibility         | 0.0524 |
| Management/Governance | 0.0275 |

**Source:** Calculated by Researcher

The pairwise comparison matrix was checked for consistency to ensure logical judgments. The resulting consistency ratio (CR) was 0.0334, well below the accepted threshold of 0.10, indicating a high level of consistency in expert opinions. This adds reliability to the derived weights. The finalised criteria weights reveal which aspects are considered most critical. As expected, Heritage Significance received the highest weight (confirming that protecting cultural value is the top priority), followed by criteria related to preservation and community. In contrast, amenities and accessibility were weighted slightly lower. Such weighting is consistent with other heritage site evaluations that combine expert judgment with quantitative scoring.

With criteria weights in place, each site was evaluated on each criterion using a 5-point scoring scale (1 = very poor or low, up to 5 = excellent or very high). A scoring rubric was developed for uniformity – for example, under Physical Condition, “1” indicated a site in very poor, unsafe condition, while “5” indicated excellent preservation. Scores were assigned based on field observations, available data visitors, and stakeholder interviews. Multiple evaluators reviewed each site to minimise subjectivity and recorded consensus scores. Finally, a weighted sum was calculated for each site to produce an overall performance score out of 5, where the weight of each criterion (from the AHP) determined its contribution. This approach ensures that more essential criteria (like Significance or Condition) have a proportionately more significant impact on the final score. The evaluated Places were then ranked and grouped into performance categories (high, medium, low) for further analysis.

Qualitative insights complemented quantitative analysis. Specifically, a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) was conducted for heritage Sites in each study district. The SWOT framework allows contextualising the numerical scores by identifying internal strengths/weaknesses and external opportunities/threats influencing the Places. The combination of AHP-based scoring and SWOT provides a robust evaluation: the former offers an objective, criteria-weighted comparison of Places, and the latter provides strategic insight into management and development. All these methods align with charter recommendations for ongoing evaluation programs at heritage Sites and with adaptive management practices advocated in heritage management literature.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 5.4- Evaluation of Cultural Places Based on AHP Criteria and Weighted Scores in Gorakhpur Division**

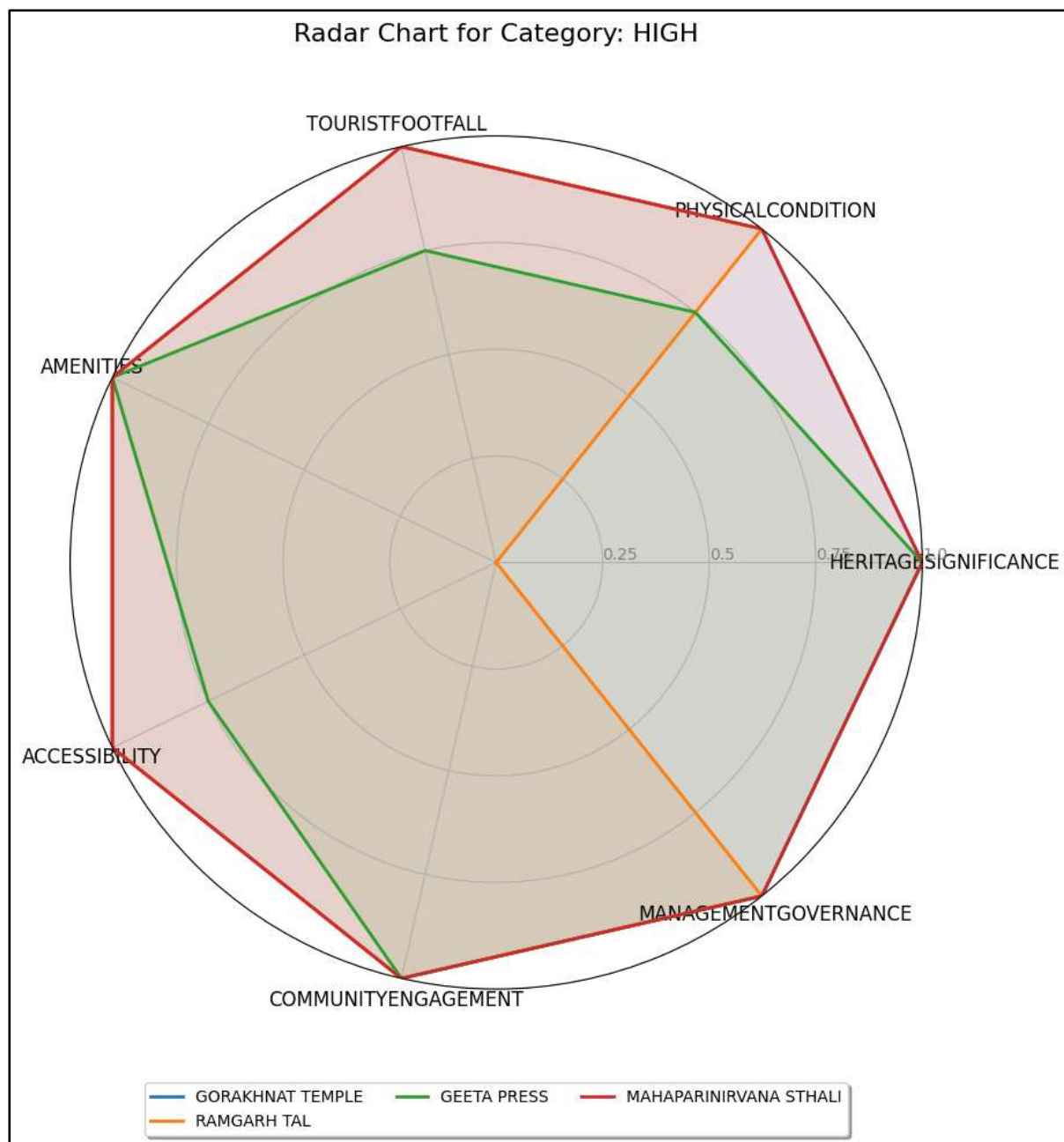
| Place                                 | HeritageSignificance | Physical condition | Tourist Footfall | Amenities | Accessibility | community engagement | Management Governance | WeightedScore |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Gorakhnath temple                     | 5                    | 5                  | 5                | 5         | 5             | 5                    | 5                     | 5             |
| Ramgarhtal                            | 2                    | 5                  | 5                | 5         | 5             | 5                    | 5                     | 4.0219        |
| Shaheed samarak chauri chaura         | 4                    | 3                  | 3                | 3         | 3             | 3                    | 3                     | 3.3265        |
| Shaheed Ashfaq Ullah Khan Prani Udyan | 2                    | 5                  | 4                | 5         | 4             | 4                    | 5                     | 3.7141        |
| Imambara                              | 2                    | 3                  | 3                | 3         | 5             | 5                    | 4                     | 2.965         |
| St. Joseph's cathedral                | 2                    | 4                  | 3                | 4         | 5             | 5                    | 4                     | 3.3036        |
| Tarkulha devi                         | 2                    | 3                  | 4                | 3         | 4             | 5                    | 2                     | 3.0068        |
| Buddhiamata mandir                    | 2                    | 3                  | 4                | 3         | 4             | 5                    | 2                     | 3.0068        |
| Munjeshwar nath mandir                | 2                    | 4                  | 4                | 4         | 3             | 5                    | 3                     | 3.2936        |
| Geeta press                           | 5                    | 4                  | 4                | 5         | 4             | 5                    | 5                     | 4.5281        |
| Mahaparinirvanasthali                 | 5                    | 5                  | 5                | 5         | 5             | 5                    | 5                     | 5             |
| Pava                                  | 3                    | 3                  | 3                | 2         | 3             | 3                    | 3                     | 2.8787        |
| Sun temple                            | 2                    | 3                  | 3                | 3         | 3             | 3                    | 3                     | 2.6741        |
| Kubersthan                            | 2                    | 4                  | 3                | 2         | 3             | 3                    | 3                     | 2.7695        |
| Lehda devi                            | 3                    | 4                  | 5                | 4         | 4             | 5                    | 4                     | 3.9027        |

| Place               | HeritageSignificance | Physical condition | Tourist Footfall | Amenities | Accessibility | community engagement | Management Governance | WeightedScore |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Itahiya shivling    | 3                    | 4                  | 5                | 4         | 3             | 5                    | 3                     | 3.7959        |
| Sonadi devi         | 2                    | 3                  | 2                | 3         | 2             | 4                    | 2                     | 2.4436        |
| Sohagi barwa        | 3                    | 4                  | 3                | 3         | 3             | 3                    | 3                     | 3.2173        |
| Banarsiya kala      | 4                    | 1                  | 1                | 1         | 1             | 1                    | 1                     | 1.9787        |
| Ramgram             | 4                    | 1                  | 1                | 1         | 1             | 1                    | 1                     | 1.9787        |
| devaraha baba       | 3                    | 3                  | 4                | 2         | 3             | 3                    | 3                     | 3.0548        |
| Dugdeshw arnath     | 3                    | 4                  | 4                | 3         | 4             | 4                    | 4                     | 3.5526        |
| Sri tirupati balaji | 2                    | 4                  | 2                | 2         | 4             | 2                    | 2                     | 2.5928        |
| Hanuman mandir      | 2                    | 3                  | 2                | 2         | 4             | 3                    | 2                     | 2.4282        |

**Source:** Calculated by Researcher

Each cultural place in the study was evaluated using the above methodology. The final composite scores enabled Places to rank from highest performing to lowest. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Places of most tremendous heritage significance and good management ranked at the top. For example, Gorakhnath Temple (in Gorakhpur) and the Mahaparinirvana Stupa in Kushinagar emerged as top performers – each scored the maximum five on most criteria, reflecting their exceptional significance, well-maintained condition, strong community support, and robust visitor infrastructure. In contrast, some lesser-known rural Places with more localised significance (and weaker tourism infrastructure) scored lower overall.

For interpretive clarity, Places were categorised into three tiers based on their performance: High, Medium, and Low. High-performing Places (overall scores >4) excel across most criteria and can be considered models; medium performers (scores ~2.5–4) showed mixed results with room for improvement in specific areas; low performers (scores <2.5) are those facing serious challenges on multiple fronts (significance may be low or under-realized, condition poor, and management ineffective). Each group's categories were visualised using radar charts (spider graphs), illustrating the profile of strengths and weaknesses across the seven criteria. For instance, high-tier Places show a well-balanced, outward-stretching radar shape (indicating strength in significance, preservation, engagement, etc.). In contrast, low-tier Places have a more constricted shape (indicating deficits in several criteria).

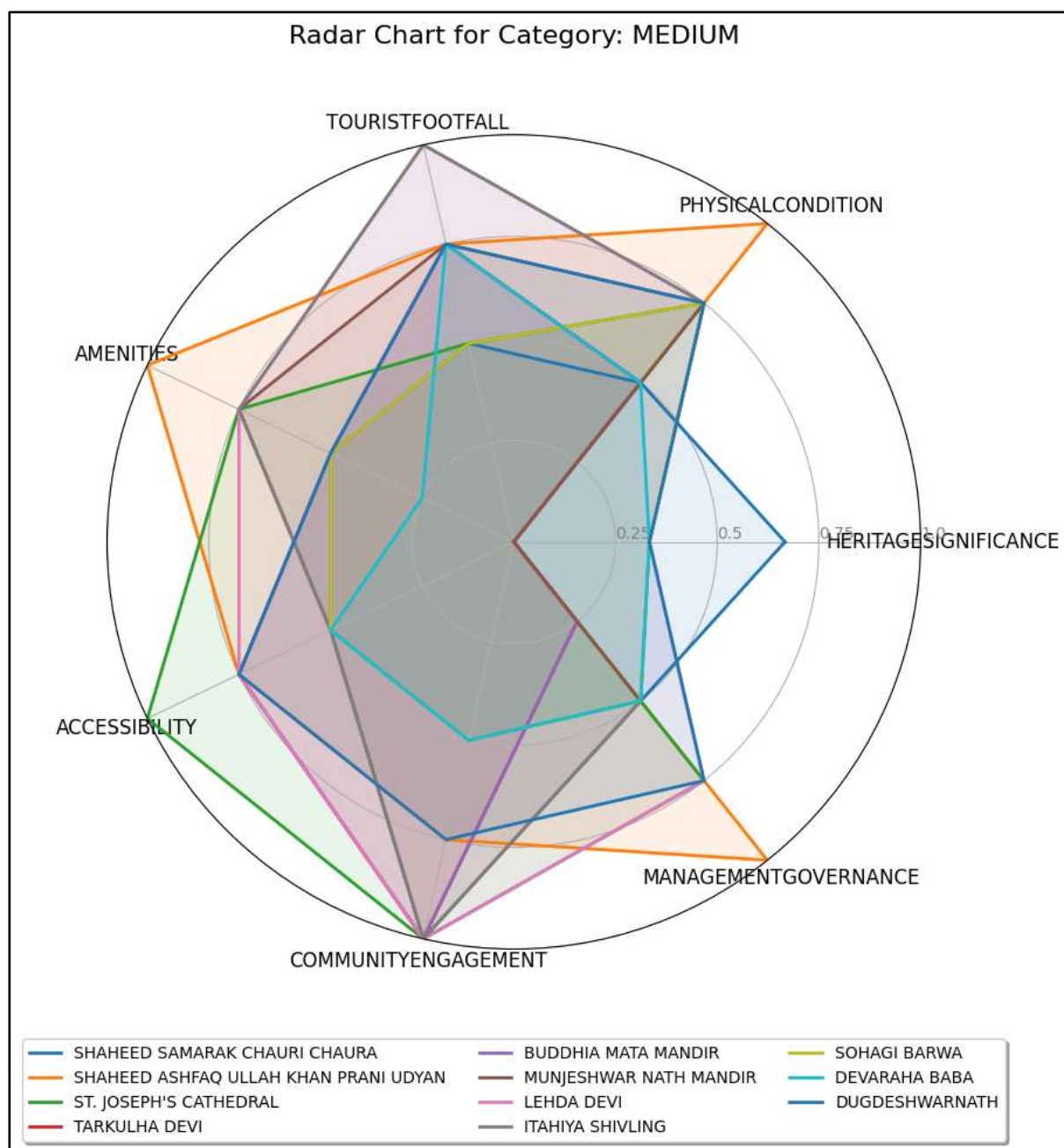


**Figure 1 Radar chart for the High category Places.**

It demonstrates their strong scores on all criteria (nearly reaching the edge on every axis), underscoring why they lead in the ranking. The highest-scoring cultural Places are Gorakhnath Temple, Geeta Press, Mahaparinirvana Sthali, and Ramgarh Tal. Notable observations are:

- The Places uniformly score high across most evaluation criteria, reflecting robust management, significant heritage value, excellent physical conditions, and strong tourist appeal. Tourist Footfall and Heritage Significance stands out, indicating their regional and possibly international significance. Minor variations in Accessibility suggest slight room for infrastructural enhancements, especially concerning ease of transportation and visitor convenience.

Given their high status, these Places are benchmark examples for developing lower-ranking Places. They can further benefit from sustained conservation and promotional activities, ensuring their ongoing attractiveness and cultural significant.



**Figure 2: Radar chart for medium category**

It include Shaheed Smarak Chauri Chaura, Shaheed Ashfaq Ullah Khan Prani Udyan, St. Joseph's Cathedral, Tarkulha Devi, Buddhia Mata Mandir, Munjeshwar Nath Mandir, Lehda Devi, Itahiya Shivling, Sohagi Barwa, Devaraha Baba, and Dugdeshwarnath. Key insights are:

- This group displays moderate variability. Several Places score relatively well in Physical Condition and Accessibility, suggesting a reasonable infrastructure level and ease of visitor access. Amenities, Community Engagement, and Management/Governance have mixed scores, indicating inconsistent local involvement and administrative oversight. Tourist footfall for these Places is moderate, pointing to their existing popularity, which can be further leveraged through targeted marketing and heritage valorisation initiatives.

These medium-tier Places could benefit from a focused strategic development plan that enhances community participation, governance effectiveness, and visitor amenities to elevate them to the higher category.



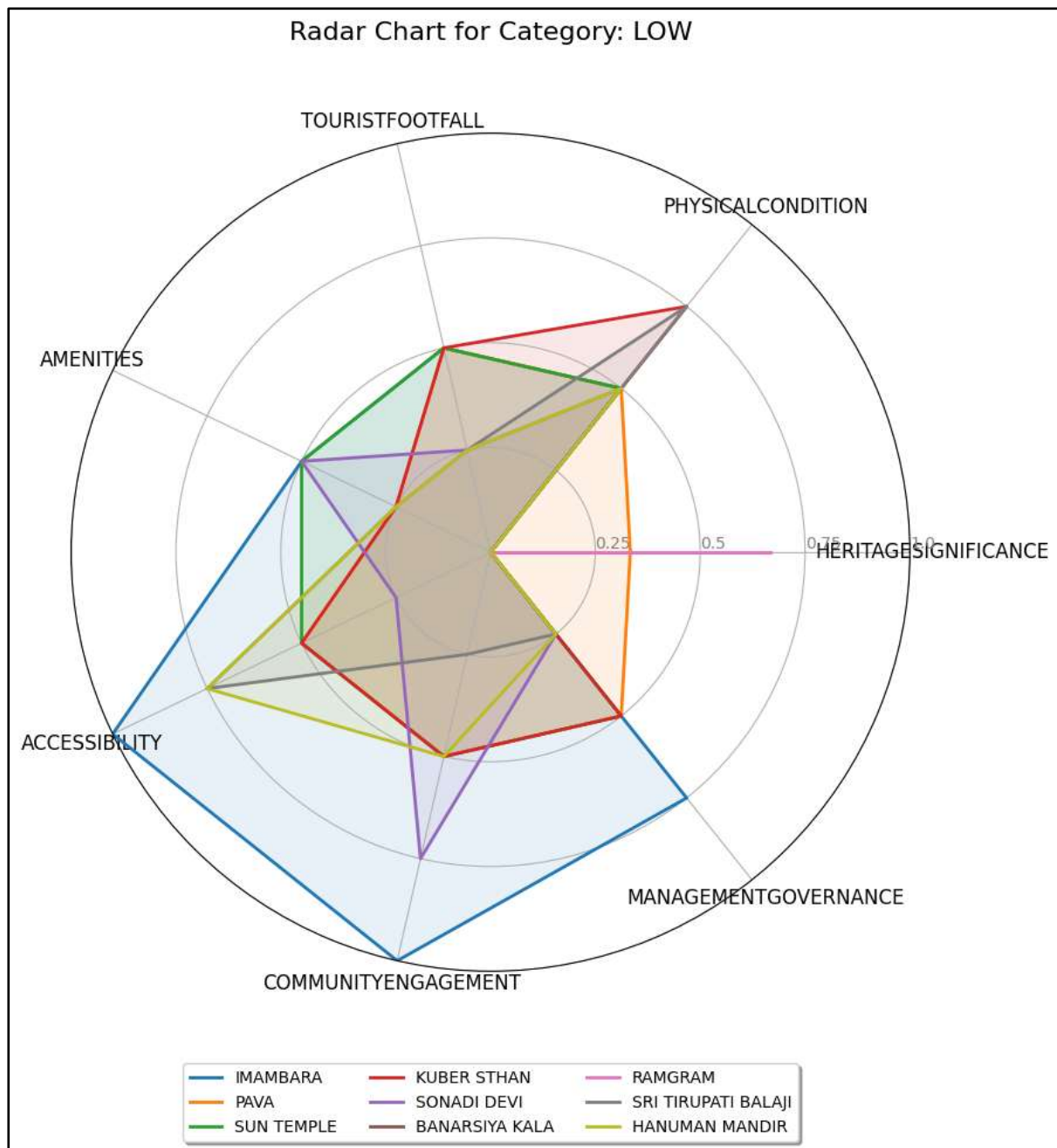


Figure 3: Radar Chart for Low category

These Places include Imambara, Pava, Sun Temple, Kuber Sthan, Sonadi Devi, Banarsiya Kala, Ramgram, Sri Tirupati Balaji, and Hanuman Mandir:

- Most Places scored notably low in Amenities, Tourist Footfall, and Accessibility, indicating limited infrastructural development and tourist appeal. Heritage Significance and Management/Governance scores vary among these Places but are generally modest, highlighting potential opportunities for heritage-based intervention and improved governance frameworks. Community Engagement is minimal across Places, suggesting the need for local community integration into tourism and heritage management practices.

This indicates an immediate need for targeted improvements, infrastructure enhancements, and increased promotional activities to elevate the visibility and utility of these Places.

While the quantitative scores tell “what” the performance level is, the SWOT analyses help explain “why” each place or district performs that way. The following sections discuss the findings through district-wise SWOT

discussions. These analyses integrate the evaluation results with contextual factors—such as recent initiatives, funding, community attitudes, and broader tourism trends—to provide a nuanced understanding of each area. This approach aligns with UNESCO and national policy guidance that heritage site management should be evidence-based and context-specific. Below, we detail the SWOT analysis for each district in the study (Gorakhpur, Kushinagar, Deoria, and Maharajganj in Uttar Pradesh), which together form the Gorakhpur Division, and then synthesise cross-cutting insights and recommendations.

## SWOT ANALYSIS

### Strengths

- **Diverse and Significant Heritage:** The division boasts world-renowned sites (e.g., Gorakhnath Temple in Gorakhpur, Mahaparinirvana Temple in Kushinagar) alongside vibrant local temples (Deoria's Lehra Devi, Maharajganj's Lehda Devi), and newly discovered archaeological sites.
- **Community Engagement:** Strong local involvement in the upkeep of major religious sites, festivals, and rituals, particularly in Gorakhpur and Deoria.
- **Government and International Support:** Key sites benefit from structured management—either by temple trusts, development boards, or with international Buddhist organization participation (notably in Kushinagar).
- **Connectivity:** Gorakhpur's role as a transport hub, Kushinagar's international airport, and the proximity of all districts to each other and Nepal enhance regional accessibility.
- **Intangible Heritage:** Rich traditions, oral histories, and living religious practices remain embedded in community life, ensuring cultural continuity.

### Weaknesses

- **Limited Visibility Beyond Flagship Sites:** Most tourism and investment are concentrated in a handful of famous locations; many other heritage sites are under-promoted, poorly interpreted, or unknown to outsiders.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Inadequate visitor facilities, signage, and amenities at lesser-known or rural sites; weak road and transport connectivity in parts of Deoria and Maharajganj.
- **Management and Conservation Shortfalls:** Absence of unified, site-specific management plans; limited involvement of heritage professionals outside flagship sites; fragmented or informal governance in many areas.
- **Economic and Capacity Constraints:** Lack of funding, professional staff, and conservation expertise, especially in Deoria and Maharajganj, slows heritage development and threatens long-term preservation.
- **Overdependence on Religious Tourism:** Heavy reliance on pilgrimage traffic (especially in Kushinagar and Deoria) limits diversification and resilience of the local tourism economy.

### Opportunities

- **Integrated Heritage Tourism Circuits:** Thematic circuits linking major and lesser-known sites across the four districts (e.g., Buddhist Circuit, Spiritual Circuit) can be promoted to extend visitor stay and spread benefits.
- **Government Schemes & International Collaboration:** Leveraging central/state tourism programs (PRASAD, Adopt a Heritage), cross-border collaborations with Nepal, and UNESCO/ICOMOS guidelines can enhance funding, visibility, and management.
- **Community-Based Tourism and Digital Outreach:** Training locals as guides, creating heritage walks, developing digital content (websites, apps, videos), and capacity-building initiatives can increase community benefit and visitor engagement.
- **Sustainable Development Synergies:** Aligning heritage preservation with urban/rural development, eco-tourism (in Maharajganj), and handicraft promotion offers scope for inclusive socio-economic growth.
- **Infrastructure Upgrades:** Improving roads, signage, basic amenities, and internal transit (especially around new airport and rural sites) will make the division more tourist-friendly.

### Threats

- **Urbanization and Environmental Hazards:** Rapid development, encroachment, flooding, and climate impacts threaten unprotected sites, especially in urban Gorakhpur and the Terai belt.

- **Overtourism and Commercialization:** Excessive crowding at popular sites (e.g., Gorakhnath Temple, Kushinagar) without proper visitor management risks environmental degradation and loss of spiritual ambience.
- **Neglect of Lesser-known Sites:** If all focus remains on headline attractions, smaller sites may deteriorate or lose cultural relevance, and intangible heritage may decline with youth migration and modernization.
- **Security and Geopolitical Risks:** Heritage theft, vandalism (especially in remote areas), and any disruption in international Buddhist tourism (e.g., due to political or health crises) could impact the region's appeal and economy.
- **Institutional Weakness:** Delayed or uncoordinated responses to conservation needs, lack of sustained funding, and insufficient cross-district collaboration may hamper heritage safeguarding efforts.

Gorakhpur Division is rich in both tangible and intangible heritage, offering world-class and community-rooted attractions. The region's future as a holistic cultural tourism destination depends on closing gaps in infrastructure, management, and marketing, while harnessing its connectivity and community strengths. Coordinated efforts, innovative tourism models, and sustainable policies will help protect this heritage and share its benefits more widely.

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