

From Celluloid to Pilgrimage: Hindi Cinema and Religious Tourism

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Abstract

Hindi cinema has a long history of films based on religious and devotional themes, ranging from *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) to *Bhakta Prahlad* (1932), *Sant Tukaram* (1936), *Meera* (1945), *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975), *Bajrangbali* (1976), *Gopal Krishna* (1979), *Ganga Dham* (1980), *Meera Ke Girdhar* (1993), *OMG: Oh My God* (2012), *Kedarnath* (2018) and *Kalki 2898 AD* (2024). Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* marked the beginning of Indian cinema, which became an influential medium not only for entertainment but also for propagating Indian religious and cultural values. Phalke brought Indian religious traditions alive through cinema, creating a deep connection with Indian audiences. A huge number of Indians have visited pilgrimage sites at various times in their lives. In this context, religious tourism has been a significant cultural and economic activity in India for centuries, and became more popular through cinema. Religious films attractively present pilgrimage sites, motivating audiences to visit these sites. Hindi films were not only based on religious themes, but also depicted religious sites in non-religious cinema, such as in *Nastik* (1954), where the main character visits religious sites to achieve self-realization. Cinema provided a new dimension to religious tourism and has helped create a global identity for India's religious sites. It has helped in tempting pilgrims from India and abroad, which has also benefited the tourism industry.

Keywords: Religious Cinema, Devotional films, Religious Tourism, Pilgrimage sites, Economy

Since the beginning, films based on religious themes have been a staple of Hindi cinema. In 1913, the first Indian film, *Raja Harishchandra*, was based on a religious theme. Released in April 1913 at the Coronation Theatre in Bombay, this film is based on one of the most revered characters in India.¹ Gandhiji was also inspired by the play "Harishchandra", which he saw in his childhood days, and he was so impressed by it that he thought, 'Why shouldn't we all be truthful like Harishchandra?'² *Raja Harishchandra* was a king who sacrificed everything - his kingdom, his queen Taramati, and his son Rohitashva- on the altar of truth and justice.³ In the 1930s and 1940s, films such as *Bhakta Prahlad* (1932), *Sant Tukaram* (1936), *Sant Dnyaneshwar* (1940), *Bhakta Surdas* (1942), *Ram Rajya* (1943), and *Meera* (1945) featured religious saints.

Nasreen Munni Kabir writes that almost all filmmakers in India admit that religion has had a profound influence on their country's cinema. Although film is a Western invention, it was immediately adopted by Indian audiences. Indian audiences became deeply connected to these films when Indian filmmakers began to mould cinema to their narration style. This process began with Dadasaheb Phalke, the founder of Indian cinema, who directed, photographed, and wrote *Raja Harishchandra* in 1913.⁴ Phalke adopted religious and Devotional stories as the core theme of Indian cinema, providing audiences a powerful means to connect with their cultural and spiritual traditions through the cinematic medium.

In an article published in *Navayug* magazine in November 1917, Phalke explained the source of his inspiration. He wrote that when he saw the film 'The Life of Christ', he was deeply impressed by it. He says: 'When the life of Christ was passing before his eyes, the images of Sri Krishna, Sri Ramachandra, Gokul, and Ayodhya started emerging in his mind. He was caught in a strange attraction and immediately

bought another ticket and saw the film again. At that moment, this question arose in his mind - Will we, the citizens of India, ever be able to see a glimpse of Indian characters on the screen?⁵ This understanding of Phalke confirms that the initial aim of Indian cinema was not just entertainment but also to portray Indian religious and devotional traditions and cultural values. He ensured that cinema did not remain a mere alien concept to the Indian masses but became an integral part of their religious beliefs and historical heritage.

Religious tourism has been an important cultural and economic activity in India for centuries. India, with its ancient heritage and diverse traditions, is renowned for its pilgrimage sites. Kiran A. Shinde writes that Pilgrimage and pilgrimage sites have existed in India since ancient times, and the total number of these holy places is said to be more than 2000.⁶ According to a domestic tourism survey conducted by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, in 2002, over ten crore people visit religious events, temples, and pilgrimage sites every year.⁷ Another domestic tourism survey conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research in 2003 also revealed that forty of the fifty most visited destinations in the country are of religious importance, while eight of the top ten are pilgrimage sites. The estimated number of devotees to these was extremely high: 2.3 crores to Tirupati, 1.82 crores to Puri, 1.7 crores to Vaishno Devi, 1.1 crores to Haridwar, and 0.83 crores to Mathura-Vrindavan.⁸

The data released by the Ministry of Tourism in 2023 states that the number of domestic tourists visiting pilgrimage sites in 2022 was 143.3 crores, and the number of foreign tourists visiting India was 66.4 Lakh. In 2021, the number of domestic tourists was 67.7 crores, and the number of foreign tourists was 0.105 crores. The income figures related to religious tourism are also noteworthy. In 2018, tourism generated an income of ₹ 1,94,881 crore, which increased to ₹ 2,11,661 crore in 2019. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this income fell to ₹ 50,136 crore, increasing to ₹ 65,070 crore in 2021 and reaching ₹ 1,34,543 crore in 2022. Although the Ministry of Tourism does not maintain direct records of income from religious places, details of foreign exchange earnings are available.⁹

Over time, various media have been used to convey Indian values and traditions to the masses. Also, efforts were made to preserve Indian history and culture through varied media. In this context, Dr. Girija Shankar Prasad Mishra writes that attempts were made to conserve the details of ancient public heroes and their deeds in history and the Puranas. Similar details were also present in narratives. On special festivals, professional singers, called 'Sut', used to sing these and recite them to the people.¹⁰ Conventional forms of expression, such as literature, music, drama, and painting, played a significant role in this context. With the advent of cinema, it played this role in an even more effective manner. This medium not only became a means of entertainment but also proved to be a powerful tool to influence social and cultural consciousness. Hindi religious cinema, in particular, has deepened this influence in recent decades.

Nitin Mittal and Anjaneya Swamy write that a picture speaks a thousand words, but a video speaks a million words.¹¹ This statement is relevant to reflect the influence of Hindi cinema. Today, Hindi cinema is not just a film industry but also a global cultural force, reaching nearly a billion devoted fans worldwide.¹²

In an interview with Dr. Manoj Sharma, renowned filmmaker Shyam Benegal argued:

*Religious and devotional themes in Indian cinema and television have had a profound cultural impact. TV series like Ramayana and Mahabharata were not just religious broadcasts, but they became an integral part of India's shared cultural heritage. These series, despite being based on religious themes, were widely accepted by people of all religions and became a medium for a shared cultural identity rising above specific religious identities. These narratives served as a unifying force, bringing diverse communities under a common cultural umbrella. Even though these religious themes derive from the roots of Hinduism, the Indian public viewed them as part of a broader national identity, thereby promoting unity rather than division.*¹³

Pilgrimage sites were portrayed in detail and impressively through religious films, which increased the audience's devotion and interest in visiting religious places. When a viewer sees the ghats of Banaras, the temples of Ayodhya, the streets of Vrindavan, and the Amarnath Yatra in a religious film, one can understand the religious significance of these places and get inspired to visit them themselves. Hindi cinema, especially through religious and devotional films, presents these places in a lively and emotional form, making these pilgrimages not just a spiritual ritual but also a cultural, psychic, and emotional experience.

The importance of religious places and pilgrimage has been deeply depicted not only through religious films but also in non-religious films. In these films, various aspects of religion, faith, and philosophy were highlighted through the filming of religious places. An example of this can be seen in a movie called *Nastik* (1954), where the main character, Anil, suffers a deep mental trauma and injustice, the cause of which he believes to be a priest. As a result of this experience, he adopts the path of atheism and starts denying the existence of God. When the priest realizes that Anil is planning to take revenge on him, he sets out with his daughter on a pilgrimage to major pilgrimage sites like Dwarka, Rameswaram, Banaras, Haridwar, and Puri. Anil follows the priest to these places and sees the gods and goddesses, but he does not worship them.¹⁴ This paradox—seeing but not worshipping—becomes a philosophical experience in itself, where the hero moves towards self-introspection through a confrontation with God. This film presents religious places not only as centers of faith but also as symbols of personal struggle and self-realization.

Movies have been an integral part of Indian families since Independence, when they gradually came to be accepted as a moral medium of entertainment for the entire family.¹⁵ Actors/actresses in Hindi films have enjoyed extraordinary popularity, far wider than any other field, such as sports, business, or politics. It is this popularity that has inspired people to visit religious pilgrimage sites through their characters. Hindi religious cinema has not only contributed to the spread of religious and spiritual viewpoints among the masses but has also given a new dimension to religious tourism. When a religious film is shot against the backdrop of a place, that place gains popularity, and the local economy also gets a boost. In the present times, when the Indian diaspora is settled in different corners of the world, Hindi cinema is not just a means of entertainment for the masses but has become a cultural religion that transcends the boundaries of caste, religion, or race. The people of the diaspora also visit the pilgrimage sites when they are shown on celluloid. In other words, devotees from not only the country but also abroad start visiting pilgrimage sites promoted through films.

Religious films increase the Popularity of Pilgrimage Sites

Hindi cinema has provided a powerful medium for expressing religion, faith, and devotion. These films not only present religious themes but also elevate the significance of the sites with which narratives are associated. Many religious films have centred their narratives around particular pilgrimage sites, thereby increasing people's curiosity and faith in these sites. We will examine some of them in the discussion.

Santoshi Maa: 'Jai Santoshi Maa', released in 1975, brought the worship of Santoshi Mata to every household. After the success of this film, there was an extraordinary increase in the number of devotees visiting the Santoshi Mata temple.¹⁶ The film provides a model for the key elements of the Santoshi Maa cult, namely, making votive offerings, observing fasts for a period, and establishing the goddess in the home. As the cult spread, new temples dedicated to Santoshi Ma were built, and in addition, abandoned temples of goddesses such as Shitala Mata were re-consecrated in the name of Santoshi Ma, not only in metropolitan cities but also at pilgrimage cities like Banaras.¹⁷ It was only after this film that the practice of fasting for Santoshi Maa started. In those days, especially women went in large numbers to watch this film. 'Audiences were showering coins, flower petals, and rice at the screen in appreciation of the film.'

They entered the cinema barefoot and set up a small temple outside the cinema. In Bandra, where mythological films aren't shown, it ran for fifty weeks. It was a miracle. - Anita Guha (actress who played goddess Santoshi Ma).¹⁸ Many of its songs, which became hits, are still sung in homes and temples for the *aarti* of Santoshi Maa. The budget of this film was reportedly twenty to twenty-five lakhs, and it earned around five crores, which was a huge amount in those days. *Jai Santoshi Maa* was the second biggest hit after *Sholay* in 1975. After that, *Deewar* was at number three.¹⁹

Kedarnath: Similarly, the film *Kedarnath* (2018) served to popularise the glory of the Kedarnath temple in Uttarakhand to the new generation. The film was set against the backdrop of the natural disaster that struck Uttarakhand in 2013, highlighting the sensitivity and spiritual significance of the pilgrimage site. As a result, there was a significant increase in the number of devotees visiting Kedarnath. In this article, we will analyse how religious Hindi cinema popularized religious sites and played a vital role in establishing visits to these places as a religious tradition.

According to government officials, over 7.30 lakh devotees visited Kedarnath in 2018 (6,94,934 as per the official website of sacredyatra.com)²⁰, which was the highest number of pilgrims visiting the temple in nearly four decades. Before this year, the highest number of pilgrims visiting the temple was in 2012, when 5.83 lakh (6,94,934 as per the official website of sacredyatra.com)²¹ people visited Kedarnath.²² Kedarnath has seen a steady increase in the number of pilgrims over the past decades, except for a few years after the 2013 flash floods. However, the deadly COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in 2020 once again led to a sharp decline in the numbers. For instance, in 2014, the number of pilgrims visiting the temple dropped to just 40,832.²³ The number of tourists visiting Kedarnath in the last two decades is illustrated in the chart at the end.²⁴ The film *Kedarnath* (2018) played a major role in increasing the number of pilgrims, as can be seen from the fact that before the film's release on 07-12-2018, the number of pilgrims in the year 2018 was 6,94,934, which increased to 10,00,821 in the next year 2019, which shows an increase of 44%.

Ayodhya and Chitrakoot: Several films and television serials based on *Ramayana*, especially Ramanand Sagar's TV series *Ramayana*, brought immense popularity to holy places like Ayodhya and Chitrakoot, not only nationally but also internationally. This international popularity is evident from an example mentioned by Vijay Mishra. He writes that when the construction of Fiji's largest theatre, 'Lilac', was completed in 1932, the Marathi film *Ayodhyacha Raja* (1932), directed by V. Shantaram, was screened in that theatre to a packed audience.²⁵ This film was followed by several movies based on Rama, such as *Rambaan* (*Rama's Arrow*, 1948), *Ram Rajya* (1943), and *Sampoorna Ramayan* (1961), which were extremely popular among Fiji Indians.²⁶ *Adipurush*, released in 2023, has helped in increasing their popularity among Indians.

Prem Sagar's²⁷ perspective on the role of Hindi cinema and television is particularly noteworthy.

*Ramanand Sagar's television serial Ramayana has a significant role in shaping Indian society and influencing the minds of people across India. The show was not just a religious story but an emotional and moral experience that transcended the boundaries of caste and religion, promoting unity and shared values. I recollect an incident in a hut in Rajasthan, in a remote village, where hundreds of people were watching the series Ramayana, which reflected its popularity. This scene proved how cinema and television mediums can connect people spiritually. Actors/actresses like Arun Govil (Lord Ram) and Deepika Chikhalia (Sita) became symbols of people's faith, and characters like Ram, Sita, Bharat, and Ravana provided moral messages to the people. In a way, these actors/ actresses were not just mere actors, but became a guide to morality and religion for the audience.*²⁸

Thus, the TV series *Ramayana* increased religious sentiments and people's attraction for the holy places associated with it, such as Ayodhya, Chitrakoot, and Rameswaram. Visits to these places have now become an emotional pilgrimage, not just a religious ritual. Hindi cinema and television programmes have not

only shown religious places on screen, but have also started a new era of pilgrimage by connecting them with the faith of the people. This is the power of cinema, which connects the audience with sacred geography and inspires religious tourism on a large scale.

The construction of the Ram Temple has made Ayodhya a major centre of religious tourism, with an unprecedented increase in the number of devotees. In a recent update, the Ram temple in Ayodhya has surpassed the Taj Mahal to become the top tourist attraction in Uttar Pradesh. The Ram Mandir is set to become the most visited site in the state in 2024, primarily due to the increasing number of religious travellers.²⁹

Union Minister of Tourism Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat stated in a written reply that, according to the data received from the Government of Uttar Pradesh, there has been a significant increase in religious and spiritual tourism in Ayodhya after the construction of the Ram Mandir. According to available tourism data, while a total of 60,22,618 tourists visited the district in 2020, their numbers increased to a staggering 16,44,19,522 in 2024.³⁰ According to the report, Ayodhya received 3,153 international and 13.55 crores domestic tourists between January and September 2024. This figure reflects an astonishing rise of almost 70% in religious tourism, primarily attributed to the grand Prana Pratishtha ceremony held at the Ram Mandir.³¹

Mathura and Vrindavan: Mathura and Vrindavan, celebrated as the places of Lord Krishna's Leela, have been religious, cultural, and spiritual centres for centuries. Hindi films and serials have portrayed the unique identity of these places at the national and international level. Many films and serials based on the childhood pastimes of Lord Krishna and the devotional traditions such as '*Hare Rama Hare Krishna*' (1971, directed and written by Dev Anand), '*Shri Krishna Leela*' (1971, directed by Homi Wadia), '*Meera*' (1979, directed by Gulzar), '*Shri Krishna*' (1993-1997, *Doordarshan*, directed by Ramanand Sagar), '*Jai Shri Krishna*' (2008–2009), have deeply established the cultural image of Vrindavan and Mathura in the minds of the people.

In addition, several documentary films based on Vrindavan and Mathura—such as *Vrindavan – Land of Krishna* (ISKCON Cinema); *Mathura – The City of Lord Krishna* (Discovery Channel); *Shri Banke Bihari Temple*; *Shri Radhavallabh Lal Ji Temple*; and *Incarnation of Unborn* (Director: Atharva Singh, The Vagabond Films); - have brought real images of these sites to a wider audience. Shooting at holy sites such as Banke Bihari Temple, Prem Mandir, ISKCON Temple, Yamuna Ghat, Nandgaon, and Govardhan Parvat in these films further strengthened their visual identity. As a result, the influx of devotees has increased significantly, and religious tourism has taken a new direction and momentum.

The Braj Mandal region includes Vrindavan, Barsana, Govardhan, and Mathura. It has become a major shooting destination for Hindi cinema. Another reason for this is the film shooting incentive schemes announced by the government of Uttar Pradesh. The Government of Uttar Pradesh has not only provided subsidies and facilities to filmmakers but has also emphasized the development of local infrastructure.³² These incentives have given a new dimension to the local economy, local people have got employment, and tourism has also increased rapidly.

Mathura-Vrindavan is becoming a major centre of religious tourism. According to a resident of Mathura, the maximum capacity of these towns is around 20,000. While on normal days more than one lakh devotees visit here, two to two and a half lakhs on weekends, and five to six lakh devotees on festivals like Janmashami.³³ According to the Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department, approximately six crore tourists visited Mathura-Vrindavan in the year 2022–23, which is the second-highest figure in North India after Banaras. While reviewing the arrangements in Mathura recently, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said, "Earlier, Goa used to attract the most tourists in the country, but last year (2022) 80 lakh tourists came there, while 7 crore devotees reached Kashi and 6 crore devotees reached the Braj region." This is a clear

indication of the inclination towards religious tourism.³⁴ There are more than 20 major temples in Mathura-Vrindavan, which attract tourists and devotees from all over the country and abroad.

Shirdi and Shirdi Ke Sai Baba: Released only two years after the success of *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975), *Shirdi Ke Sai Baba* (1977) tried to capitalise on the growing enthusiasm for religious films. The film was designed to appeal to two kinds of audiences. The main focus was the Hindi-speaking masses, as reflected in the titles in Devanagari script and the absence of English in the dialogues. The movie primarily targeted the general public, but its story and presentation were also related to the educated urban class. This is evident from the backdrop of a class of upper-middle urban family in which a doctor questions the utility and relevance of saints in the scientific age.³⁵

Initially, the film did not prove to be a blockbuster, but it still managed to attract enough audience attention, albeit mostly through TV rather than the cinema. More importantly, the film contributed to the growing cult of Shirdi Sai Baba. At the time of the film's release, Sai Baba's fame was largely confined to Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, but this film helped him gain wider national recognition.³⁶ *Shirdi Ke Sai Baba* was not a commercial success and failed to appear in the list of the top ten highest-grossing Hindi films of 1977. In terms of box office earnings, the film was the 31st most watched Hindi film of that year, officially declaring it a flop, as was the case with most religious films in the 1970s.³⁷ The film may not have been a huge box office success, but it became an important catalyst in giving Shirdi a national identity. A village which had just two hundred houses at the beginning of the century gradually became one of the major pilgrimage places in India, something that was hard to imagine. According to an estimate, by 2010, the number of devotees visiting Shirdi had exceeded 60 lakhs.³⁸

Over time, the film gradually reached a wider audience, especially when it began to be broadcast on television. Although *Doordarshan*, the Indian government-run television network, started its operations in 1959, it had limited access to the average Indian household until the mid-1980s. Television's reach grew rapidly in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, when the number of transmitters across the country increased from just 26 in 1982 to 523 by 1991.³⁹ It was also during this period that *Doordarshan* began broadcasting a Hindi film every week. In 1988, the first national telecast of Sai Baba of Shirdi took place, bringing the film to a new level of popularity.⁴⁰ The local community following the film's broadcast honoured one of the film's lead actors, who had contributed to popularizing Shirdi and Sai Baba. The main road near the temple was named after him. Movies based on regional deities have also gained popularity across India. Shrines depicted in these films have seen a significant increase in visitor numbers, particularly when the films are commercially successful.⁴¹

According to the visitor records on the website of Shri Saibaba Sansthan Trust (SSST), on average, around 25,000 devotees visit Shirdi village every day to see Shri Sai Baba. During the festival, more than one lakh devotees visit the temple every day.⁴² According to officials of the Sri Saibaba Sansthan Trust, Shirdi, more than one lakh devotees have visited the Sai Baba temple every day since December 23, 2022. According to them, about 1.5 lakh devotees visited the temple every day on December 25 and 26, 2022.⁴³

Banaras: Banaras, also known as Kashi and Banaras, has been a vibrant centre of Indian culture, religious traditions, and spiritual consciousness. The religious grandeur of this city, the eternity of the holy ghats, the divinity of Ganga Aarti, and the concept of salvation have attracted not only pilgrims but also filmmakers. The portrayal of this spiritual city through cinema has become a cultural journey for the audience, thereby augmenting the depiction of the city on celluloid and leading to a significant increase in religious tourism.

In recent years, increasing interest among the youth in religious places and a rise in Banaras's popularity have been witnessed. According to film director Neeraj Pathak:

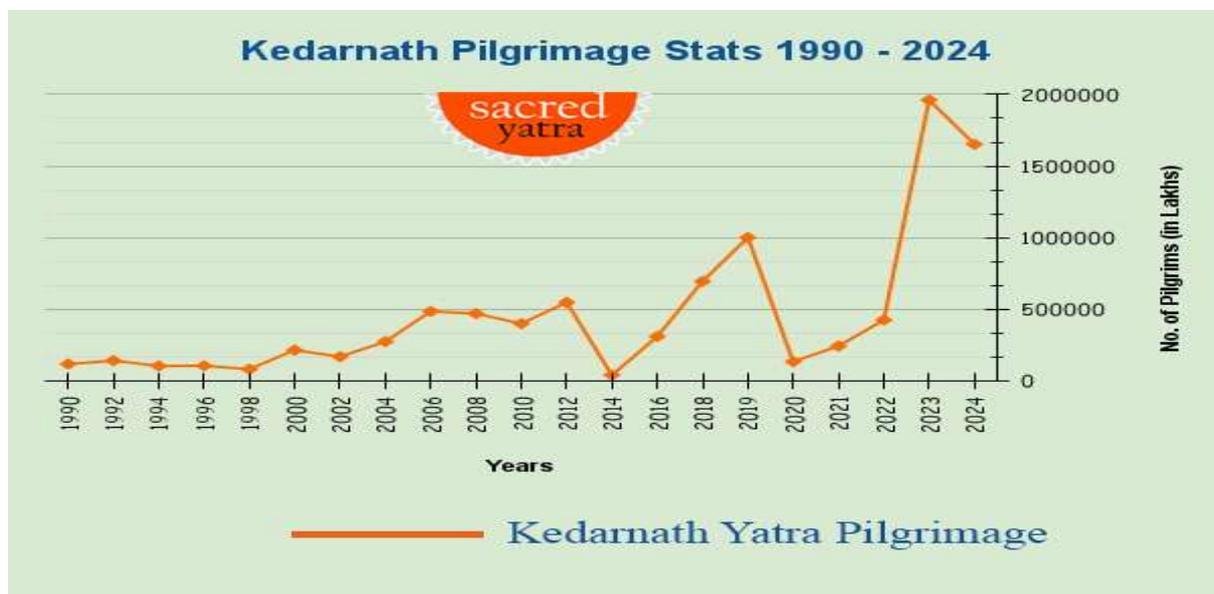
We have become very aware in this regard over the last few years. We are conscious of this. I was listening to an interview on Aaj Tak, which stated that on that day, 7 crore people had come to Kashi Vishwanath. It has now become a more preferred place than Goa. Now think, Goa was a place where people used to go to visit earlier, but now people are visiting Kashi, so something has changed. I realize there has been an awareness among the youth about religion. I would say that there is a huge contribution from some of our leaders in this regard. Our Prime Minister has visited Kedarnath and other religious places and said that if we improve the infrastructure and transport of religious places, the economy would grow. Tourism will increase. Everyone wants to see the 12 Jyotirlingas, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Kashi, etc. If those places are improved and made better, more people will go there. This will boost the economy. That is the reason for more tourism, and its effect is now clearly visible. To substantiate my argument, I would say that in today's era, the most expensive film being made is Ramayana, and it has a lot to do with the opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.⁴⁴

Several films have presented various aspects of Banaras with sensitivity and beauty. For example, *Banaras: A Mystic Love Story* (2006) used the mystical backdrop of the ghats to depict questions of spiritual love and reincarnation. *Mukti Bhawan* (2016) deeply depicted the ultimate desire for salvation and presented death as a search for peace. According to an article published in the *Times of India*, a travel guide stated that after the release of the film 'Mukti Bhawan', he started receiving calls from several travel agencies. These calls were about tourists wanting to include the shooting locations of films in their itinerary. Moreover, the curiosity to see children collecting coins in the Ganga, vividly portrayed in films *Mukti Bhawan* and *Masaan*, was witnessed among tourists.⁴⁵

Masaan (2015) depicted the social reality of the ghats and portrayed love, sin, and reincarnation in a humanistic way. *Mohalla Assi* (2018) exposed the ironies of religious hypocrisy and the commercialization of tourism, while *Ghatak* (1996) used Banaras as a backdrop to tell the story of the struggle for social justice. The depiction of the streets and festivals of Banaras in the film *Raanjhanaa* (2013) appeals to young audiences, encouraging them to experience the vibrant atmosphere of this city. According to data, Banaras received 8,54,73,633 visitors in the year 2023, which puts it far ahead of other destinations in the country.⁴⁶ The locations that have repeatedly appeared on cinema screens have become travel destinations for viewers, reflecting a significant increase in domestic religious tourism.

Documentaries like *Kashi: The Eternal City* and *Children of the Pyre* (2008) exposed the deep reality of Banaras, the cremation tradition, and social aspects on the world stage. These films inspired the audience to introspect and allowed them to see the religious image of Banaras from a new perspective.

All these cinematic works of art together have established Banaras as not just a pilgrimage site, but a cultural and philosophical experience. Films have added a new dimension to the image of Banaras, not only nationally but also internationally; consequently, the city remains a living symbol of devotion, sensitivity, and creativity.



Hindi cinema has not only strengthened the roots of faith and belief in Indian society, but it has also played a significant role in the expansion of religious tourism in the country. These films have portrayed ancient temples, pilgrimage sites, and spiritual places for the audience in a dramatic and emotional form, thereby making them lively. Due to this, these places are not limited to devotees only, but have also become a centre of attraction for common tourists. The cultural consciousness of the country has also increased through religious films. The scenes, music, dialogues, and plots used in these films inspire the audience to visit those places, which they had earlier read or heard only in the Katha or Puranas. Thus, Hindi religious cinema not only inculcates devotion and reverence but also promotes the culture of travel and pilgrimage.

The local economy has also benefited greatly due to the increase in religious tourism. Due to the increasing crowd at the pilgrimage sites, new employment and income opportunities have been created in businesses related to hotels, local transport, catering, and handicrafts. This makes it clear that the impact of religious cinema is not limited to the cultural or religious sphere, but its economic aspect is equally important. Given this impact, the government and various tourism departments have also given priority to the conservation and development of religious places. Many plans have come up to develop pilgrimage places like Ayodhya, Kashi, and Mathura as tourist hubs, in which the portrayals in Hindi films have been a source of stimulus.

However, some challenges are also associated with this trend of promoting religious tourism. Excessive commercialization of pilgrimage sites can affect their spiritual dignity. Also, environmental problems like pollution and garbage are arising due to the increasing influx of the crowd. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain a balance between religious tourism and spirituality, so that the original spirit and cultural dignity of these places can be protected. Thus, it is clear that Hindi religious cinema has not only kept faith and devotion alive in the Indian society, but has also succeeded in bringing positive changes in the cultural and economic sectors through religious tourism. Possibly, even in the times to come, cinema will continue to strengthen the triangle of faith, culture, and tourism.

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