

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AT PILGRIMAGE SITES: EVALUATING PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES IN POST FORMATION OF TELANGANA

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### ABSTARCT

This study explores sustainable pilgrimage tourism practices in Telangana, focusing on Yadadri and Jogulamba Temple through primary data collection via a questionnaire. Using Neural Network and Exploratory Factor Analysis, the research identifies key sustainability factors, including environmental conservation, cultural heritage preservation, and socio-economic development. Findings emphasize the importance of waste management, green infrastructure, and responsible tourism awareness. The study highlights the role of CSR-driven initiatives, eco-friendly temple practices, and heritage conservation funding in promoting sustainability. Strengthening policy frameworks, community involvement, and storytelling-based tourism can further enhance sustainable pilgrimage tourism in Telangana. The study provides actionable insights to balance religious tourism growth and environmental responsibility.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Tourism, Pilgrimage Sites, Environmental Conservation, Cultural Heritage, Responsible Tourism, Neural Network Analysis

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a significant driver of economic growth, cultural exchange, and regional development. Among various tourism segments, pilgrimage tourism holds a unique position, attracting millions of devotees to sacred sites worldwide. In India, pilgrimage tourism plays a crucial role in preserving religious traditions while contributing to local economies. However, the increasing footfall at religious sites often leads to environmental degradation, resource depletion, and infrastructural strain, necessitating a shift towards sustainable tourism practices.

Telangana, formed in 2014, is home to several revered pilgrimage sites such as Yadagirigutta, Bhadrachalam, Basara, and Jogulamba Temple. Since its formation, the state has witnessed significant tourism development, yet concerns about sustainability, waste management, water conservation, and cultural preservation remain largely unaddressed. The post-formation period presents an opportunity to assess sustainable tourism initiatives, ensuring that religious sites remain environmentally and culturally viable for future generations.

Sustainable tourism at pilgrimage sites requires a balanced approach, integrating government policies, stakeholder participation, and community engagement. While some studies highlight the economic and religious significance of pilgrimage tourism, limited research focuses on the sustainability dimension, particularly in Telangana's post-formation context. The effectiveness of waste disposal systems, eco-friendly infrastructure, green transportation, and heritage conservation measures needs to be evaluated to ensure long-term sustainability.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of sustainable practices at pilgrimage sites in Telangana and propose strategies to enhance tourism sustainability. By examining current policies, stakeholder initiatives, and visitor awareness, the research will provide insights into best practices, challenges, and future directions. The findings will contribute to developing a sustainable tourism framework that balances religious tourism growth with environmental responsibility, cultural preservation, and community well-being.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURES

**Kahramon K. Khalilov (2023)** explores the concept of a "SMART" tourist area model to enhance pilgrimage site management. The study integrates sustainability, technology, and resilience to create a holistic approach for pilgrimage tourism. Using various elements such as smart technology, community engagement, and environmental preservation, the study presents a structured framework for improving tourism experiences. The findings highlight the significance of eco-friendly transport, waste management, and renewable energy in sustaining pilgrimage tourism. The study concludes that balancing sustainability, technology, and socio-economic benefits can help policymakers and stakeholders create a thriving and future-ready tourism sector.

**Moh. Musleh et al. (2023)** investigate the role of stakeholders, particularly the descendants of Kings, in managing the Asta Tinggi pilgrimage site. The study adopts a qualitative case study approach, utilizing in-depth interviews and observations to examine collaborative governance in pilgrimage tourism. The research findings indicate that traditional groups play a key role in

sustaining heritage tourism, while government and private sector participation remain limited. The study suggests that government intervention is necessary to expand collaboration networks and institutionalize site management. The conclusion emphasizes strengthening collaborative governance to ensure the long-term sustainability of pilgrimage heritage sites.

**Natalia Pankiv & Nataliya Pankiv (2022)** examine the current state and future prospects of religious tourism in Ukraine's Carpathian region. The study employs a regional analysis approach to assess the distribution and significance of sacred monuments across four key regions. The findings reveal that Lviv has the highest concentration of religious sites, while Chernivtsi has the least, with wooden churches playing a vital role in attracting religious tourists. Despite the region's rich religious heritage, many resources remain underutilized for tourism development. The study concludes that optimizing the use of sacred sites and promoting pilgrimage tours can significantly enhance religious tourism in the Carpathian region.

**Miloš Jesenský et al. (2024)** explore the historical significance and contemporary relevance of pilgrimage tourism, with a focus on Slovakia's potential. The study utilizes case studies of pilgrimage sites in Levoča and Šaštín, analyzing visitor trends before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings indicate a growing interest in pilgrimage tourism, with a resurgence in site visits post-pandemic and increasing recognition of its economic and cultural value. The study highlights the necessity of government support and collaborative efforts to sustain and develop pilgrimage tourism. It concludes that strengthening partnerships and promoting under-visited sites will ensure the long-term sustainability of this historic tourism sector.

**Makhbuba Aliyeva (2024)** explores the role of tourism as a key driver of economic growth in Ellikkala district, Karakalpakstan. The study is based on an assessment of historical and cultural tourism potential, particularly focusing on 21 ancient castles that could be included in international tourism routes. Findings indicate that despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the region attracted over 40,000 domestic tourists, showcasing its resilience and potential for further development. The study highlights the importance of historical preservation and infrastructure improvements in boosting pilgrimage tourism. It concludes that integrating these historical sites into global tourism circuits can enhance the district's economic and cultural significance.

**Vijayanand S (2013)** investigates the motivations, challenges, and infrastructure issues in pilgrimage tourism, particularly in Nagapattinam district, India. The study employs both primary

and secondary data collection, analyzing responses from pilgrimage tourists using statistical methods such as ANOVA, chi-square tests, and Friedman mean rank tests. The findings reveal that poor infrastructure and lack of promotional strategies are major challenges, while pilgrimage tourists play a crucial role in sustaining religious tourism. The study emphasizes the need for improved facilities and strategic marketing to enhance the economic viability of pilgrimage destinations. It concludes that targeted infrastructure development and better promotional efforts can significantly boost pilgrimage tourism in the region.

**Yaroslav Marynyak et al. (2023)** analyze the strategic development of pilgrimage tourism in the Ternopil region, emphasizing the role of territorial communities in attracting tourists as economic resources. The study is based on a geospatial analysis of pilgrimage routes across three districts—Northern, Central, and Southern—detailing key pilgrimage sites and their significance. Findings indicate that while the region has a rich concentration of sacred sites, there is a delay in state and church institutions adapting to regional economic growth changes. The study concludes that a strategic approach integrating tourism infrastructure and economic planning is necessary to maximize the potential of pilgrimage tourism in Ternopil.

**Bohdan Luhovyi et al. (2024)** examine the tourism development potential in the Ternopil district, which was restructured following Ukraine's administrative reform in 2020. The study employs a resource-based analysis of historical, cultural, and religious tourism, identifying castles and sacred sites as key attractions. Findings highlight the district's untapped tourism potential, with numerous undiscovered sites complementing well-known attractions, and emphasize the role of the Maria Spiritual Center in Zarvanytsia. The study concludes that integrating castle tourism, religious tourism, and green tourism into comprehensive tourism products can enhance the region's market presence and socio-economic development.

## **RESEARCH GAP**

Despite the growing global emphasis on sustainable tourism, research on its implementation at pilgrimage sites in Telangana remains limited, particularly in the post-formation period of the state. While existing studies focus on religious tourism's economic and cultural significance, there is a lack of comprehensive evaluation of sustainability practices, environmental management, and governance strategies adopted after Telangana's formation in 2014. Additionally, most research has overlooked the impact of increased tourist footfall on local communities, infrastructure, and ecological balance at pilgrimage destinations. The gap persists in understanding how state policies, stakeholder collaboration, and community involvement

contribute to sustainable tourism development in these sacred sites. This study aims to bridge this gap by assessing current sustainability initiatives, identifying challenges, and proposing effective strategies to balance heritage conservation, environmental protection, and tourism growth at pilgrimage destinations in Telangana.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How are sustainable tourism practices being implemented at pilgrimage sites in Telangana, and what are their impacts on the environment, local communities, and tourism experience?
2. What sustainable strategies can be proposed to enhance tourism sustainability at pilgrimage sites in Telangana while balancing heritage conservation, environmental protection, and economic development?

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To analyze the implementation of sustainable practices at pilgrimage sites in Telangana.
2. To propose sustainable strategies for enhancing tourism sustainability in Telangana.

### **HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant implementation of sustainable practices at pilgrimage sites in Telangana state.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant implementation of sustainable practices at pilgrimage sites in Telangana state.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study provides a comprehensive examination of pilgrimage tourism in Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri and Jogulamba-Gadwal, Telangana, with a focus on its development following the state's formation. It assesses the impact of government policies, infrastructure advancements, and sustainability initiatives on the growth of religious tourism. A key aspect of the research is analyzing the effectiveness of sustainable practices at pilgrimage sites and their contribution to heritage conservation. Additionally, the study aims to formulate strategies for fostering sustainable and inclusive tourism, ensuring economic growth while safeguarding cultural and environmental heritage. The insights gained from this research will be valuable for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities in strengthening Telangana's prominence as a significant pilgrimage tourism destination.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design –

The study follows an exploratory research approach to assess the implementation of sustainable practices at pilgrimage sites in Telangana and propose strategies for enhancing tourism sustainability. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires from devotees, local stakeholders, and tourism officials to understand their perspectives on sustainable tourism. The analysis focuses on evaluating current sustainability measures and identifying effective strategies to promote long-term tourism development in South Zone of Telangana's pilgrimage destinations.

**Source of data** - The study collected primary data using a structured questionnaire designed in alignment with three key research objectives.

### Sampling Units:

The study focuses on two temples in the South zone of Telangana, selected based on their high pilgrimage footfall. These temples hold significant religious, cultural, and historical value, attracting a large number of devotees annually. Their selection allows for an in-depth analysis of their impact on religious tourism, local businesses, and the overall pilgrimage experience.

Zone	Temples
South Zone	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Shri Laxminarasimha Devasthanam (Yadadri),</li> <li>2. Jogulamba Temple (Alampur)</li> </ol>

**Sample Size** - The study collected primary data from 110 devotees visiting two high-footfall pilgrimage temples in the South zone of Telangana.

### Statistical Tools -

**Neural Network** – This study employed the Neural Network model to evaluate sustainable tourism practices in Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri and Jogulamba-Gadwal, Telangana. The model identified key patterns in tourism growth and environmental sustainability, aiding in the prediction of effective strategies. By leveraging this approach, the study formulated data-driven recommendations for long-term improvements in pilgrimage tourism.

**Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)** – EFA was utilized to assess factors influencing pilgrimage tourism in Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri and Jogulamba-Gadwal. This technique identified high and low-loading factors, emphasizing critical aspects impacting tourism development. The findings helped in prioritizing strategic measures to enhance pilgrimage experiences and support sustainable tourism initiatives in Telangana.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

**Objective – 1 :** To analyze the implementation of sustainable practices at pilgrimage sites in Telangana South Zone , Selected Districts Yadadri - Buvanagiri and Jogulamba- Alampur in Post Formation of Telangana

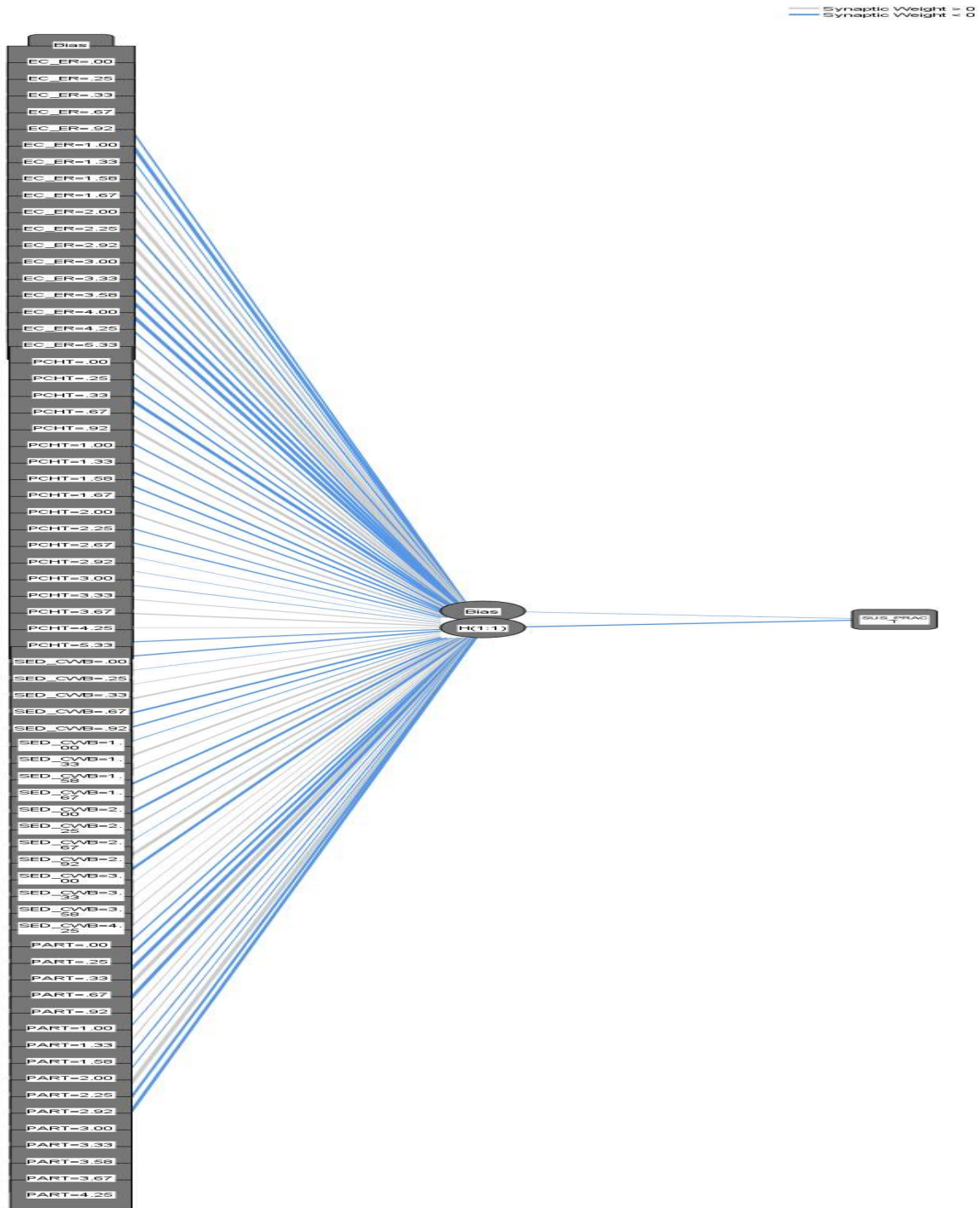
**Table – 1**  
**Case Processing Summary of Sustainable Practices at Pilgrimage Sites in South Zone Of Telangana**

		N	Percent
Sample	Training	72	70.6%
	Testing	30	29.4%
Valid		102	100.0%
Excluded		8	
Total		110	

Source: Primary Data

The table presents the case processing summary for analyzing sustainable practices at pilgrimage sites in the South Zone of Telangana, specifically in Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri and Jogulamba-Alampur districts. The results identified that, Out of 110 total responses, 102 were considered valid, with 72 (70.6%) used for training and 30 (29.4%) for testing in the analysis. The exclusion of 8 responses ensures data accuracy, allowing for a more precise evaluation of sustainable practices in these key pilgrimage districts.

**Figure – 1**  
**Neural Networking of Sustainable Practices at Pilgrimage Sites in South Zone Of Telangana**



Hidden layer activation function: Hyperbolic tangent  
Output layer activation function: Identity



**Table – 2**  
**Independent Variable Importance of Sustainable Practices at Pilgrimage Sites in South Zone of Telangana**

	Importance	Normalized Importance
Ecological Conservation and Environmental Responsibility	.262	100.0%
Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Traditions	.250	95.6%
Socio-Economic Development and Community Well-being	.244	93.4%
Pilgrim Awareness and Responsible Tourism	.244	93.2%

Source: Primary Data

The analysis of sustainable practices at pilgrimage sites in the South Zone of Telangana provides insights into the key factors influencing sustainable tourism. The table presents the independent variable importance of sustainable practices, emphasizing four crucial aspects that contribute to the long-term sustainability of religious tourism in the selected districts of Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri and Jogulamba-Alampur in Telangana State.

The table results signifies that, the Ecological Conservation and Environmental Responsibility ranks as the most critical factor with a Normalized importance value of 100.0%, highlighting its role in maintaining environmental sustainability. Thus, it underscores the necessity of eco-friendly initiatives such as waste management, water conservation, and renewable energy adoption to minimize the environmental impact of pilgrimage activities. It suggests that, implementing green infrastructure and sustainable waste disposal methods will significantly contribute to preserving the natural surroundings of these sacred sites.

The data resulted that, Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Traditions follows closely with a normalized importance of 95.6%, emphasizing the significance of safeguarding traditional practices, rituals, and architectural heritage. It found that, Conservation efforts such as restoration of ancient temple structures, regulated tourism activities, and promotion of traditional art forms play a crucial role in maintaining the authenticity of pilgrimage sites. The analysis highlights that, Strengthening these initiatives will ensure that cultural and religious traditions are passed down to future generations while attracting heritage-conscious visitors.

The Importance table depicts that, Socio-Economic Development and Community Well-being holds an importance of 93.4%, indicating the strong relationship between pilgrimage tourism and

local economic development. The study reveals that, Pilgrimage sites significantly contribute to employment generation, small-scale business growth, and infrastructure development. By integrating sustainable tourism policies, these regions can ensure economic benefits while maintaining the religious and cultural integrity of the sites. Thus, Encouraging local entrepreneurship and involving communities in tourism-related activities can further enhance economic stability and sustainability.

The Table data reveals that, Pilgrim Awareness and Responsible Tourism, with a normalized importance of 93.2%, underscores the necessity of educating visitors about sustainable practices and responsible behavior at pilgrimage sites. It highlights that, Awareness programs, digital guidance systems, and community-driven initiatives can foster a sense of responsibility among devotees to maintain cleanliness and respect the sacredness of the sites. It suggest that, Encouraging responsible tourism behavior will enhance the overall visitor experience while preserving the sanctity of these pilgrimage destinations.

Therefore, the study findings indicate that ecological conservation is the most influential factor in ensuring sustainable pilgrimage tourism, whereas, implementing these sustainable practices can lead to significant benefits, including environmental protection, cultural preservation, economic upliftment, and improved pilgrim experiences. The study concludes that, by adopting a holistic approach to sustainability, Telangana can position itself as a leading example of sustainable religious tourism, ensuring long-term growth while maintaining the spiritual and ecological integrity of its sacred sites

### **Objective – 2: To Propose Strategies for Enhancing Tourism Sustainability in Telangana.**

The study examines the sustainable strategies for enhancing the tourism in Telangana state. The study collected the primary data and applied the EFA statistical method.

**Table – 3 KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.823
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	151.929
	Df	55
	Sig.	.011

Source: Primary Data

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.823 indicates a high level of sampling adequacy, confirming that the dataset is suitable for factor analysis in identifying sustainable strategies for tourism in Telangana. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, with a Chi-Square value of 151.929 and a significance level of 0.011, suggests that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, validating the appropriateness of the factor analysis. The results support the reliability of the data in determining key sustainable tourism strategies for effective policy implementation.

**Table – 4**  
**Component Matrix of sustainable strategies for enhancing tourism sustainability in Telangana.**

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Green practices in temples	.611			
Laws to protect temple funds	.608			
Hygienic Prasadam & less waste		.523		
Energy-efficient temple designs		.498		
Professional yet traditional management		.485		
Promoting festivals & storytelling			.556	
Eco-friendly ritual offerings			.542	
CSR for eco-friendly tourism				.706
AI-based crowd control				.222
Reviving temple arts & music				-.176
Temple funds for heritage				.645
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
a. 4 components extracted.				

Source: Primary Data

The Table Shows the Component Matrix analysis of sustainable strategies for enhancing tourism sustainability in Telangana. The study highlights the key factors contributing to pilgrimage tourism in selected districts of Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri and Jogulamba-Alampur in South Zone of Telangana State. The Table resulted that, the highest positive loading factor is CSR for eco-

friendly tourism (.706), indicating that corporate social responsibility initiatives play a crucial role in promoting sustainability and Temple funds for heritage conservation (.645) also show significant importance, suggesting that allocating temple revenue for heritage preservation strengthens long-term sustainability. The study analysed that Promoting festivals & storytelling (.556) and eco-friendly ritual offerings (.542) also contribute positively, reinforcing cultural engagement and environmental responsibility.

Additionally, hygienic Prasadam distribution with minimal waste (.523) and energy-efficient temple designs (.498) reflect the importance of maintaining cleanliness and adopting sustainable architectural practices. The result highlighted that, Professional yet traditional management (.485) emphasizes the need for balancing modern governance with religious integrity to enhance pilgrimage tourism. Whereas, AI-based crowd control system (.222), although positively loaded, has a lower impact, implying that while technological interventions are useful, they may not be a primary determinant of sustainable tourism.

The study found that the negative loading of "Reviving temple arts & music" indicates that this strategy may not have a significant role on integrating traditional arts into modern pilgrimage experiences. This suggests that temple arts and music, while culturally valuable, may not be a primary strategy in enhancing tourism sustainability. The results suggest that financial sustainability, eco-friendly initiatives, and cultural engagement are the most influential factors in promoting sustainable pilgrimage tourism. Thus, Investments in CSR-driven eco-tourism, structured heritage conservation, and green practices can significantly enhance the sustainability of pilgrimage destinations. The study concludes that sustainable tourism at pilgrimage sites requires a multifaceted approach, balancing financial sustainability, environmental responsibility, and cultural preservation. Therefore, Strategies such as dedicated heritage funds, eco-conscious rituals, and CSR-driven tourism models emerge as strong enablers of sustainability.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

1. Ecological Conservation and Environmental Responsibility emerged as the most crucial sustainable practice, with a normalized importance of 100% (0.262). This highlights the significance of waste management, water conservation, and green infrastructure at pilgrimage sites. The findings indicate a strong need for enhanced environmental policies to mitigate ecological degradation.

2. Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Traditions was ranked second with a normalized importance of 95.6% (0.250). This underscores the necessity of safeguarding historical structures, rituals, and local traditions while accommodating modern tourism needs. Strengthening heritage conservation efforts can ensure long-term cultural sustainability at pilgrimage sites.
3. Socio-Economic Development and Community Well-being secured a normalized importance of 93.4% (0.244), emphasizing the role of pilgrimage tourism in job creation, local business growth, and infrastructure development. The study suggests that sustainable tourism strategies should integrate community participation and equitable economic benefits.
4. Pilgrim Awareness and Responsible Tourism was equally significant with 93.2% (0.244) normalized importance, indicating a need for educational programs and awareness campaigns. Promoting responsible pilgrim behavior can reduce environmental impact, overcrowding, and resource strain, leading to a more sustainable tourism ecosystem.
5. Green Practices in Temples emerged as the most impactful strategy with a high importance value of 0.611. This indicates that adopting solar energy, water conservation, and waste management systems in temples can significantly contribute to environmental sustainability. Encouraging eco-friendly infrastructure and energy-efficient measures can reduce the carbon footprint of pilgrimage sites.
6. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for Eco-friendly Tourism received the highest importance in its category with 0.706, highlighting the critical role of businesses in funding and implementing sustainable tourism initiatives. Encouraging CSR-driven projects such as green transportation, waste management, and afforestation programs can enhance the sustainability of pilgrimage tourism.
7. Temple Funds for Heritage Conservation was identified as a key strategy with an importance value of 0.645, emphasizing the need for effective utilization of temple revenues. Allocating a portion of these funds for restoration, maintenance, and cultural preservation can ensure that historical and religious sites remain intact for future generations.
8. Promoting Festivals and Storytelling ranked significantly with 0.556, underscoring the role of cultural narratives in sustainable tourism. Integrating traditional storytelling,

digital heritage tours, and festival-based tourism can enhance visitor engagement while preserving intangible cultural heritage at pilgrimage sites.

## CONCLUSION

The present study has been emphasized to know the sustainable pilgrim tourism practices in Telangana state. The study collected the primary data through questionnaire. The study considered three pilgrim tourism places i.e., Yadadri, Jogulamba Temple. The study applied neural network and exploratory factor analysis statistical methods. The study highlights the significance of sustainable tourism practices at pilgrimage sites in Telangana, emphasizing the need for environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and socio-economic development. Effective waste management, water conservation, and green infrastructure are crucial to minimizing ecological degradation. Safeguarding historical structures, rituals, and traditions ensures long-term cultural sustainability while integrating community participation enhances local economic benefits.

Promoting pilgrim awareness and responsible tourism can reduce environmental strain and improve visitor experiences. The adoption of green practices in temples, such as solar energy and eco-friendly waste management, plays a pivotal role in sustainability. Encouraging CSR-driven eco-tourism initiatives can further support green infrastructure and conservation efforts. Proper utilization of temple funds for heritage conservation is essential to maintaining sacred sites.

Additionally, fostering cultural storytelling and festival-based tourism can enhance engagement while preserving intangible heritage. Implementing strong policies, collaborative governance, and community-driven strategies will ensure a balanced approach to sustainable pilgrimage tourism. This study provides insights into practical strategies that can create a harmonious blend of religious tourism and environmental responsibility in Telangana.

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