

**RELIGIOUS TOURISM AND VIKSIT BHARAT: A STUDY OF HUMAN
RESOURCE PRACTICES IN MAHARASHTRA**

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INTRODUCTION

Travelling for religious purposes is very common since ages. In fact, tourism started with people visiting various religious and sacred places. There are references that the saints of all religions have travelled to a number of places for their spiritual awakening and growth. Most of the people visit religious places in their old age. That is the time when they have lived their life and want to get away with all worldly attachments and be as close as possible to the God. The person who travels to such sacred places for paying homage or seeking blessings of the God is called as a Pilgrim and the journey undertaken by him is called as “Pilgrimage or Religious Tourism.” (Haq, 2011) (Gurung, 2016)

Most of the times cultural tourism and religious tourism is considered as same as the cultural tourist mostly visits to religious site to experience the culture. It is a travel with the primary objective of undertaking various religious activities. (Trauer, 2006)

There can be some points of differences between pilgrimage and religious tourism. The fundamental distinction is motivation for pilgrimage is quite different from the motivation for religious tourism. While the pilgrims travel to the religious destinations to have spiritual experience, the religious tourist may be just a customer who intends to enjoy the tour along with having blessings of the deity. A pilgrim may dress up in the traditional attire during the visit to the sacred site while a religious tourist may use modern clothing like jeans, shorts, and vests. Modern modes of transport, increased disposable income have increased the expectations of the religious tourists and has led to commercialisation of many of the religious tourist destinations. (Singh, 2011) (Blackwell, 2007)

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Choe, J. Y., & O'Regan, M. (2015) in their research article, “*Religious Tourism Experiences in South East Asia*” cover the entire religious tourism prevailing in South East Asia (SEA).

They also discuss the strategies required to overcome barriers for development of religious tourism. They have focussed their study on religious Buddhist tourism in Thailand.

2. Jesurajan, S. V. A., & Prabhu, S. V. (2012) in their article “*Dimensions of spiritual tourism in Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu in India—A critical analysis*” have discussed about determinants of spiritual tourism, satisfaction level of tourists and problems faced by them w.r.t. Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu. They have covered important spiritual tourist places in Tuticorin district such as Tiruchendur, Manapad, Nava Thirupathi and Tuticorin. After ranking the problems faced by tourists, they have also given suggestions to overcome the problems and also to promote spiritual tourism in the district.
3. Kiran Shinde (2010) in his research paper “*Entrepreneurship and Indigenous Entrepreneurs in Religious Tourism in India*” with the case study of Vrindavan, an emerging religious tourism destination in India explains how religious tourism can contribute in economic progress and how entrepreneurs innovate, develop new products and expand their business to suit the demands of the religious tourism. It demonstrates that religious entrepreneurs drive religious tourism. However, there is difference between entrepreneurship in western countries and other countries.
4. Olsen, D. H., Amos, Fyall, A., & Garrod, B. (2013) in their book “*Managing Religious Heritage Attractions*” have taken into consideration classification of sacred sites given by Shackley (2001). They have also taken note of various management issues at these sites as discussed by authors. The main focus of the paper is to find out management challenges at religious sacred sites in Jerusalem which are discussed w.r.t. four more popular sites in the country. They have provided suggestions for some of the problems like transportation.
5. Potdar, M., & Talekar, P. (2011) in their research article “*Religious Tourism in Kolhapur District: A Geographical Analysis*” assess religious tourist destinations in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra. Based on primary study of tourists visiting the religious destinations in Kolhapur they have given some suggestions for improvement of infrastructure and other facilities.
6. Razaq and Morpeth (2015) in their book “*Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Management: An International*

Perspective” have compiled and edited articles of several authors on religious tourism, pilgrimage, its management, sustainability in religious tourism and marketing of religious tourism. They have also included case studies related to religious tourism and its management. The book covers various aspects of religious tourism like globalisation of pilgrimage, motivation factors for religious tourism, sustainability in religious tourism and so on.

7. Shinde (2018) in his research paper, *“Governance and Management of Religious Tourism in India”* tries to provide a better understanding of governance and management of religious tourism. The paper takes an overview of policy framework and governance mechanisms for religious tourism. It also discusses formal and informal aspects and models of religious tourism w.r.t. two religious sites i.e. Vrindavan and Shirdi.
8. Singh, R. P. (2013) in his research paper *“Green pilgrimage initiatives”* has stated the concerns about environmental issues at the sacred places due to increase in the number of pilgrims. He focusses on Green Pilgrimage Network (GPN) initiative of Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) along with its benefits and the GPN initiatives taken in India. He suggests certain points for the development of sustainable religious tourist places.
9. Vijayanand, S. (2012) in his research paper *“Pilgrimage tourism management issues and challenges with reference to Tamil Nadu”* has described a number of pilgrimage sites in Tamilnadu. He has discussed cultural and socio-economic importance of pilgrimage tourism and various issues at the pilgrimage sites. He has pointed out shortcomings in the basic infrastructure like non availability of clean drinking water, insufficient parking facilities and accommodation arrangements and so on. He has even suggested certain measures for infrastructure development and temple services.
10. Varma, A. (2019) in her research paper *“Hinduism and Environment”*, discuss continuously increasing environmental concerns as discussed by number of scholars. She has described philosophy of Hindu religion, food patterns followed, festivals celebrated and their relation with the environment. She argues that though all these practises are very much eco-friendly changes in life style and commercialisation have led to major shift in celebration of festivals defeating the very principle of these

celebrations and mainly deteriorating the environment.

Definitions of Religious Tourism

1. (Grondys, Ślusarczyk, & Kot, 2014) Religious tourism means “religious-cognitive departures, in which holy place does not constitute the purpose of visit or tourist travel in general, but it is on route or in the destination of the journey held in other purposes than religious.”
2. (Shinde K. A., 2011) “Contemporary patterns of travel to sacred sites and pilgrimage sites are increasingly being referred to as Religious Tourism.”

Religious Tourism in India and Maharashtra

The world's largest form of mass religious tourism takes place at the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra in China, Kumbh Mela at Haridwar, Allahabad (now Prayagraj), Ujjain and Nashik- Tryambakeshwar in India, annual Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the site of Christ's crucifixion in Jerusalem where Christian pilgrims regularly visit. These sites are not only visited by the pilgrims but also by non-religious tourists since they have cultural, historical and religious significance. (Singh R. P., 2011)

India being the land of Gods and Goddesses and follower of many religions, has many religious places. 12 Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva, Vaishno Devi Temple, Golden temple, Dargah of Ajmer Sharif, Velankanni Church, Hemkund Sahib, Amarnath cave, Rishikesh, Mathura, Vrindavan, Tirupati, Rameshwaram, Badrinath, Bodhgaya and many more. Lots of Indians and foreign tourists visit all these places every year.

In Maharashtra also, there are a number of religious places of different religions. The popular and most visited ones are Ashtavinayak, Shirdi Sai Baba, Haji Ali Dargah, Gurudwara at Nanded, Siddhivinayak, Mahalakshmi in Kolhapur, Shegaon, Vitthal Rukmini temple in Pandharpur and many more. Lakhs of tourists visit these places every year. (Gurung, 2016) (Patange, Srinithiviahshini, & Mahajan, 2013)

Concept of Viksit Bharat Mission

Viksit Bharat Mission is a government initiative launched by the Government of India with the aim of transforming India into a developed nation by 2047. The mission focuses on inclusive and sustainable development across sectors such as Infrastructure, Education, Healthcare, Digital economy, Clean energy, Agriculture, Employment and

many more. It involves active citizen participation, policy reforms, and strategic investments to improve the quality of life, boost economic growth, and ensure that development reaches every corner of the country. The Viksit Bharat mission also aims to make India self-reliant and globally competitive.

Importance of Religious Tourism in Viksit Bharat

The concept of Viksit Bharat (Developed India) 2047 places a high value on religious tourism as it focuses on sustainable tourism, social integration, economic growth, and cultural legacy into a single, potent industry. The importance of religious tourism can be in the following aspects:

1. **Economic Growth and Employment** – Religious tourism contributes significantly to local and national economies. According to the Ministry of Tourism, religious tourism contributes over 60% of domestic tourism in India. It generates employment across hospitality, transportation, guiding services, and local crafts. Programs like PM Gati Shakti PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive) are useful in the development of religious sites.
2. **Cultural Preservation and National Identity** - Religious tourism helps preserve India's ancient cultural heritage. Temples, mosques, churches, monasteries, and gurdwaras are centers of architecture, art, music, and traditions. Visit to such places makes the tourists aware about the rich culture and Indian civilizational values aligning with the Viksit Bharat goal of a culturally rooted modern nation.
3. **Social Harmony and Inclusivity** - Religious tourism encourages cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue. People from different regions and communities interact, promoting mutual respect and understanding. Pilgrimages like the Char Dham Yatra, Haj, Velankanni or Golden Temple visits reduce regional divides and develop national integration.
4. **Sustainable and Regional Development** - Many religious sites are in tier-2 and rural regions. Investment in tourism helps to improve rural infrastructure, boosts local economies, creates sustainable livelihoods and promotes eco-tourism and responsible travel. Under Swadesh Darshan Scheme, thematic circuits like the Buddhist

Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, and Spiritual Circuit are being developed to enhance infrastructure and accessibility.

5. **Global Soft Power** – India's spiritual legacy is a global attraction. Sites like Bodh Gaya, Rishikesh, and Varanasi attract millions of international tourists annually. Yoga, Ayurveda, and Indian spirituality are seen as soft power tools to enhance India's global influence.
6. **Digital and Smart Tourism** - Government initiatives like e-Darshan, virtual tours, and mobile apps are modernizing pilgrimage experiences. Integration of AI, AR/VR in temples like Somnath and Kashi improves user experience and efficiency. (Ministry of Tourism, 2024)

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the concept of religious tourism and the scenario in Maharashtra
- To study the importance of religious tourism in the mission of Viksit Bharat (Developed India)

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

From the data collected, analysis about the HR practices followed is made.

- To analyse the existing HR practises followed in religious tourism in Maharashtra
- To assess how religious tourism can contribute to the goals of the Viksit Bharat Mission 2047, with a focus on sustainable development, employment generation, and inclusive growth.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research is Exploratory and has been conducted based on Primary and Secondary sources of data. The data has been obtained from books, articles, reports and websites. For the collection of primary data, a structured questionnaire was designed to study HR practices followed in various religious places in Maharashtra. Data has been collected from 60 religious trusts. Convenience sampling method has been used for collection of data. Data was collected through Personal interviews with trustees, office bearers, priests (pujaris) at the religious destinations who are involved in the management of the trust. Collected data has been analyzed with SPSS software.

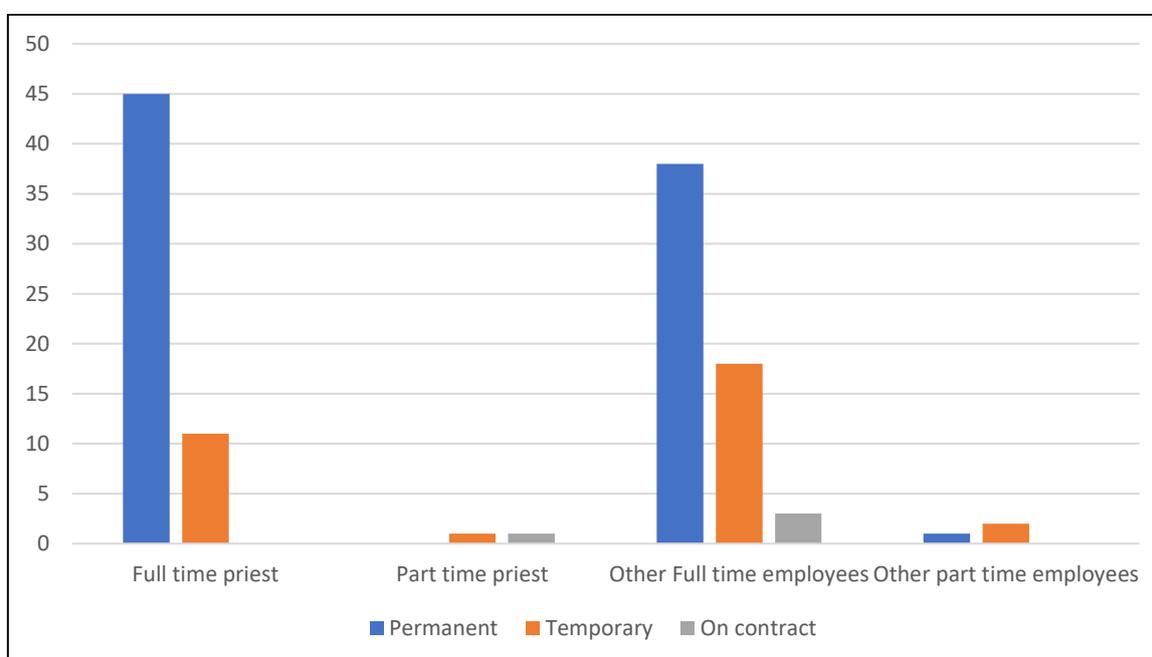
(a) People working with Religious Trusts

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for people working with Religious Trusts

Job status	Permanent		Temporary		On contract	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Full time priest	45	80.4%	11	19.7%	0	0.0%
Part time priest	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	1	50.0%
Other Full-time employees	38	64.4%	18	30.5%	3	5.1%
Other part time employees	1	33.3%	2	66.7%	0	0.0%

Source: Primary data

Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics for people working with Religious Trusts



Source: Primary data

Interpretation:

From the Table 1 and Figure 1 it can be observed that

- (i) Out of 60 religious trusts, 45 trusts i.e. 80.4% trusts have full time and permanent priests and only 11 i.e. 19.7% trusts have full time priests but their services are temporary. Hardly

any trust has part time priests in service.

- (ii) Apart from the priests employees are needed to handle administrative tasks, maintain cleanliness, security etc. 38 trusts have employed full time staff on permanent basis while 18 trusts have employed full time staff on temporary

basis. Just like priests there are hardly any part time employees engaged by trusts.

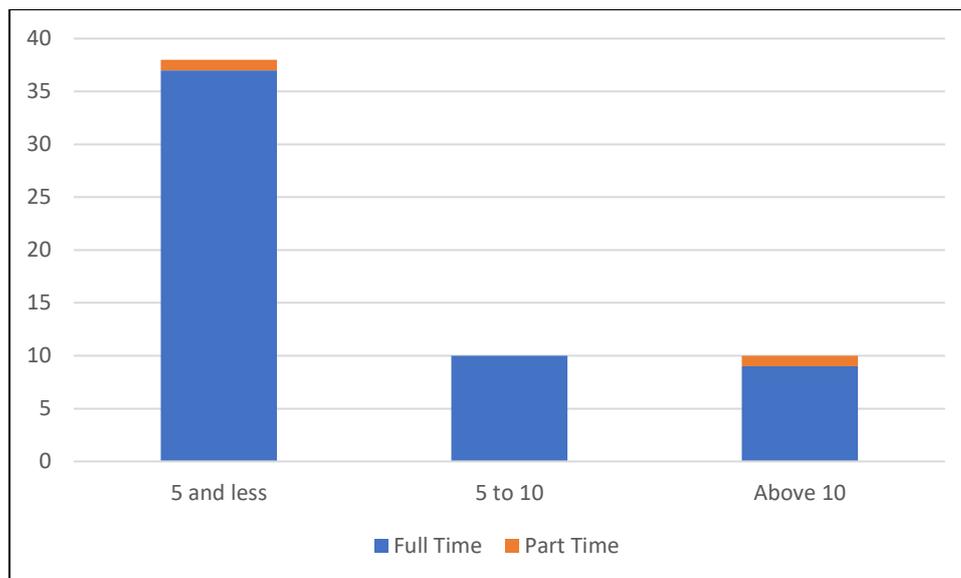
(b) Number of Priests working with Religious Trusts

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Number of Priests working with Religious Trusts

Number of Priests	Full Time		Part Time	
	Count	%	Count	%
5 and less	37	66.1%	1	50%
5 to 10	10	17.9%	0	0%
Above 10	9	16.1%	1	50%

Source: Primary data

Figure 2: Descriptive Statistics for Number of Priests working with Religious Trusts



Source: Primary data

Interpretation:

From the Table 2 and Figure 2 it can be observed that 37 trusts have employed less than 5 priests, 10 trusts have employed 5 to 10 priests while 9 trusts

have employed more than 10 priests to provide religious services. As mentioned in the previous table and chart there are hardly any part time priests.

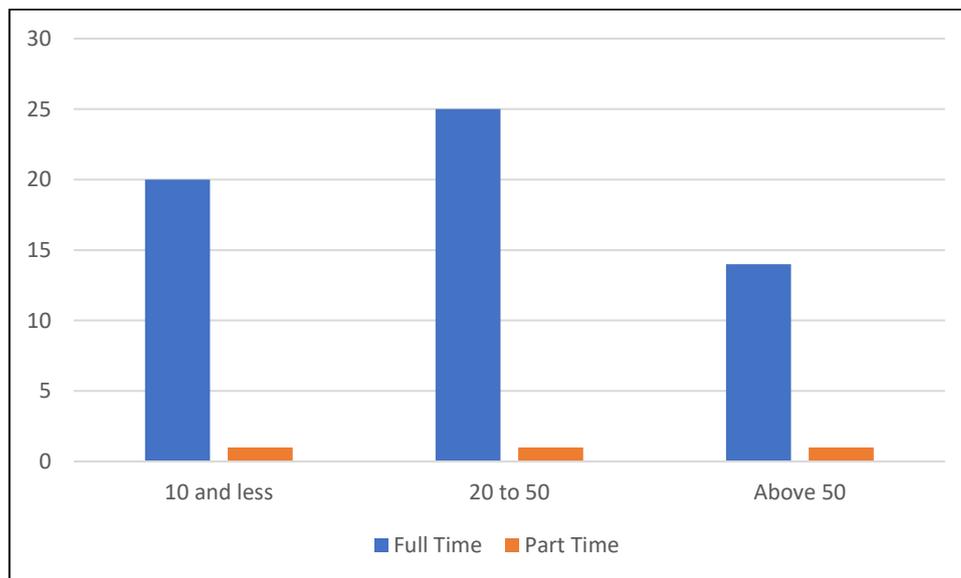
(c) Number of Other Employees working with Religious Trusts

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Number of Other Employees working with Religious Trusts

Number of Other Employees	Full Time		Part Time	
	Count	%	Count	%
10 and less	20	33.9%	1	33.3%
20 to 50	25	42.4%	1	33.3%
Above 50	14	23.7%	1	33.3%

Source: Primary data

Figure 3: Descriptive Statistics for Number of Other Employees working with Religious Trusts



Source: Primary data

Interpretation:

From the Table 3 and Figure 3 it can be observed that 25 trusts, which is 42.4%, have 20 to 50 full time

employees, 20 trusts which is 33.9% have less than 10 full time employees and only 14 trusts i.e. 23.7% have more than 50 employees.

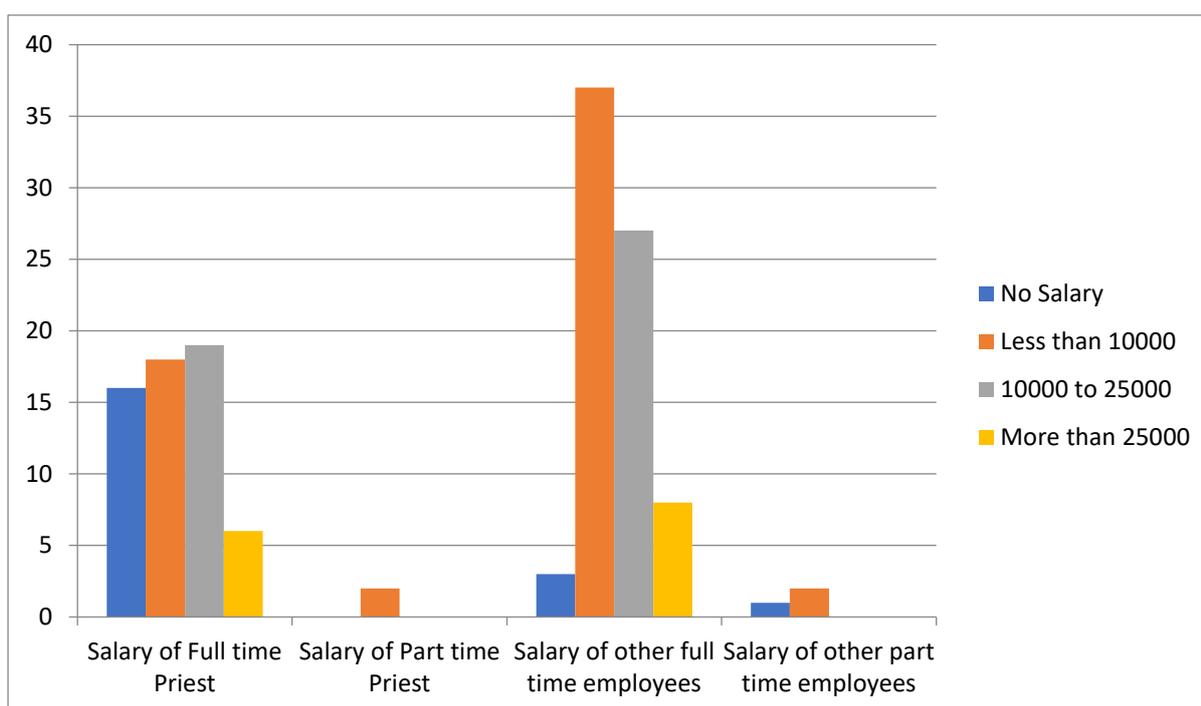
(d) Salary distribution of employees working with religious trusts

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Salary distribution

	No Salary	Less than 10000	10000 to 25000	More than 25000
Salary of Full time Priest	16	18	19	6
Salary of Part time Priest	0	2	0	0
Salary of other full time employees	3	37	27	8
Salary of other part time employees	1	2	0	0

Source: Primary data

Figure 4: Descriptive Statistics for Salary distribution



Source: Primary data

Interpretation:

From the Table 4 and Figure 4 it can be observed that

(i) Salaries of priests vary in different trusts though they are full time employed. 16 trusts do not offer any salary to their priests. These priests get their income from money directly given by devotees for performing some pooja.

(ii) 18 trusts provide salary of less than Rs.10000, 19 trusts pay salary in the range of Rs.10000 to Rs.25000 and only 6 trusts pay salary more than Rs.25000 to their priests.

(iii) Similarly, salaries of other full time employees are different in different trusts. In 3 trusts the full time employees do not get any salary, in 37 trusts they get salary in the range of

Rs.10000 to Rs.25000 while only in 8 trusts they get salary of more than Rs.25000

Key HR Challenges in Religious

Tourism in Maharashtra

- 1) **Seasonality and increase in demand** — Religious festivals, pilgrim seasons create huge increase in the tourists that may create issues of crowd management and temporary staffing.
- 2) **Volunteer vs paid staff balance** — Many trusts rely on volunteers during peak times who may not be able to handle the crowd as well as other operational issues.
- 3) **Skill gaps** — The staff appointed by the trust may lack hospitality skills, language skills, hygiene, safety and so on.
- 4) **Retention & motivation** — Due to low pay, high workload during peaks, low benefits it is difficult to retain the employees.
- 5) **Cultural sensitivity** — Staff need to understand religious norms, pilgrims' expectations.
- 6) **Infrastructure & facilities** — HR cannot deliver well if physical infrastructure like accommodation, toilets, water, hygiene is poor.

HR and Sustainability in Religious

Tourism

- 1) Waste management (solid & liquid) during large pilgrimages; requires trained manpower and systems.
- 2) HR staff need training in standards of hygiene, crowd flow, safety protocols.
- 3) Local workforce can be used to ensure community inclusion and economic benefits.
- 4) It is important that staff, guides at the religious places respect religious/traditional customs to ensure cultural preservation.
- 5) HR must schedule, monitor, and enforce practices like minimizing plastic waste, use of sustainable energy sources like solar and managing water usage. (SALVE & BALKRISHNA, 2025)

Relation with Viksit Bharat Mission

- 1) Expanding tourism destinations including spiritual tourism is part of boosting the sector for both domestic and inbound tourists. HR scaling is needed.
- 2) PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana will help formalize jobs, incentivize hiring which may help in getting more stable employment in religious tourism.
- 3) Infrastructure development under various schemes means better facilities

- 4) Sustainable development is a pillar so HR practices must incorporate environmental sustainability and social responsibility.
- 5) Skill development / capacity building is emphasized across government

policy and is the focus of Viksit Bharat. Religious tourism sites would benefit by having trained hospitality guides, service staff etc.

CONCLUSION

Religious tourism in India, and specifically in Maharashtra, plays a vital role in the socio-economic and cultural landscape of the country. It has not only contributed to preserving India's cultural heritage but also become a major driver of domestic tourism. In the context of the Viksit Bharat Mission, which envisions India as a developed, inclusive, and self-reliant nation by 2047, religious tourism emerges as a powerful instrument to achieve multiple national goals — including economic development, cultural preservation, social harmony, and sustainability. The data collected from religious trusts in Maharashtra highlights a diverse workforce engaged in maintaining these sacred spaces, though challenges remain in areas like HR practices, employee compensation, training, and retention.

To truly harness the potential of religious tourism, there is a need for structured and strategic human resource management. Government schemes such as PRASHAD, Swadesh Darshan, and PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana provide critical support in terms of infrastructure and employment generation, but their success depends on effective on-ground implementation and workforce development. Training staff in hospitality, hygiene, safety, and cultural sensitivity will enhance the pilgrim experience and ensure the sustainable growth of these destinations. Moreover, religious tourism can foster rural development and community participation, thereby aligning perfectly with the inclusive development model promoted by Viksit Bharat. By integrating modern practices with traditional values, India can position religious tourism as not just a spiritual journey, but a cornerstone of national progress and identity.

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