

Parikrama: A spiritual walk to celebrate the Agricultural Harvest in Hindu Religious Cities

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Abstract- The Hindu mythology describes that the relevance of Parikrama of a sacred place, which is directly related to a mandatory ritual for prayer towards the almighty. In past few years, the increase in a number of pilgrims has been sensed by several of the researchers. Amongst several of the reasons, this paper seeks to find a relation between rise in the number of pilgrims and the effect of monsoon on the parikrama marg. It deals to find the actual causes which are affecting the rise in the population of pilgrims on parikrama marg. Paper is focusing on the cause which are affecting the sacred yatra as many of the parikrama marg are away from the river basins, where kunds, ponds, and lakes are the only source of water available to pilgrims and locals. The research tries to establish the fact that:

1. A good monsoon not only helps in vegetation that provides enough income to people as their income is generated through agricultural products which gives them a financial feasibility to perform the yatra.
2. The ponds and kunds act as a resting place for the pilgrims before proceeding their journey ahead. The ponds, and the kunds, which helps in the self-purification of the pilgrims to perform their rituals, are either encroached or demystified result a loss of interest among the pilgrims and locals.

The study areas used as a case study are the parikrama path of Varanasi and Ajodhya, both of the cities are situated on the bank of the river comprising a sacred parikrama path which passes through various vans, Upwans, grooves and kunds areas.

Keywords: Parikrama marg, kunds, tourist growth rate, pilgrims, Temple complex.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Parikrama refers to circumambulation of sacred places in Hindu, Jain or Buddhist context. *Parikrama* means "the path surrounding something" in Sanskrit, and is also known as ("to the right"), representing circumambulation. Both words are mostly used in the context of religious **deities in temples, sacred rivers, sacred hills** and a **close cluster of temples**, and "doing a *Parikrama*", as a symbol of prayer, is an integral part of Hindu worship.

Typically, *Parikrama* is done after the completion of traditional worship (Puja) and after paying homage to the deity.

In Rig Vedic verses Rig: 2.42.3 and 2.43.1 –" Pra", the Parikrama is done with facing the deity to the right side, in order to pay homage and devotion to the deity. Lakhs of pilgrims do the Parikrama of the sacred cities like Varanasi, Mathura, and Ajodhya, in order to show their devotion towards their beloved deity. During the Parikrama period, the pilgrims have to follow a path, which encircles the whole of the city premises, as to show the homage to the sacred city. The Parikrama Marg stretches from vans, jungles, urban areas, and open landscapes.

(There is another theory behind the sacred parikrama which was brought into light after doing some research on parikrama marg, according to some people parikrama marg was developed by the ancient governing system to protect the boundary of the Indian subcontinent from intrusions by neighbouring countries and states, and to provide the employment and basic amenities to the most remote areas of the country for the sustainment of a healthy life.)

Some of the well-known *Parikrama* in India are the ones around Narmada parikrama, Govardhan hill parikrama, Vrindavan parikrama, Vraj Mandal Parikrama, Ajodhya, Chitrakoot, Varanasi Panch Kosi and Char Dham Parikrama.

II. TYPOLOGY OF PARIKRAMA

1. Narmada parikrama

India is a land where even rivers are given a status of a mother, as it brings life and prosperity to the region, Narmada parikrama is the best example in which pilgrims and sadhus circumambulate the river to pay homage and show devotion towards river Narmada.

It starts from Arabian Sea at Bharuch in Gujarat along the bank of river to the source in Maikal mountains (Amarkantak hills) in Madhya Pradesh and back to Bharuch from the opposite bank of river which makes a circumambulation of about 2600 km (1,600 miles) to walk which is considered to be the highest religious efficacy.

During the parikrama devotees have to pass various religious places dating back to Mahabharata epic story.

2. Govardhan hill parikrama

It is a narrow sandstone hill known as Giriraj near Mathura Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh, which is about 8 km (5) miles in length. Its significance with Lord Krishna gave it an important religious place where devotees used to encircle the hill and a festival is celebrated after Dipawali known as Ankut or Annakuta in which devotees use to offer food to the deity which is distributed as Prasad to thousands of devotees. The parikrama encircles to about 21 km (13) miles around the hill and believed to be the sacred ritual performed by believers as spiritual purification.

3. Vrindavan parikrama

It is a religious town in Uttar Pradesh having a spiritual walk around the town with no definite start and stop point. The devotee has to encircle the town perimeter covering a distance about 10 km (6.2) miles.

Parikrama is generally done on Ekadasi (eleventh lunar day of waxing and waning of the moon), during the parikrama pilgrims visit to various temples and Ghats to show their devotion and love.

4. Vraj Mandal Parikrama

It is also known as 84 Kosi parikramas which are performed during the month of October and November. It took devotees 1-2 months depending on the route and the speed to visit twelve forests known as vans twenty-four groves known as Upwans. The twelve forests are - Madhuvan, Talavan, Kumudvan, Bahulavan, Kamavan, Khadiravan, Vrindavan, Bhadravan, Bhandiravan, Belvan, Lahavan, and Mahavan. The twenty-four groves are- Gokul, Govardhan, Barsana, Nandagram, Sanket, Paramadra, Aring., Sessai, Mat, Uchagram, Kelvan, Sri Kund, Gandharvavan, Parsoli, Bilchhu, Bacchavan, Adibadri, Kavahla, Ajnokh, Pisaya, Kokilavan, Dadhigram, Kotvan and Raval. Pilgrims have to visit all these places to complete their yatra.

5. Ajodhya

Ajodhya being a temple city in Uttar Pradesh is a center of Hinduism. Pilgrims believe it as a sacred city which motivates people for a sacred walk, parikrama is happening since thousands of years. Various levels of devotion tend to develop various levels of parikrama as 5 Kosi, 14 Kosi, and 84 Kosi. 5 Kosi being the most popular among the pilgrims which encircle the entire city having a parikrama about 15 km performed over a period of two days.

Devotees first have to take a holy dip in Saryu river to start a holy walk, in the parikrama marg there are several kunds which act as padav sthals and the temple completely attached to it, where pilgrims have to take visit after taking bath in the kunds and to offer food and other offerings to deity, which was later distributed to all pilgrims as Prasad.

6. Chitrakoot

It is one of the oldest religious places in the history of Hindu religion dated back to the epic of Ramayana; its current location is on the border of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. It falls in the northern region of Vindhya Range of the mountain on the bank of Mandakani River. The parikrama of Kamadgiri parvat which is about 5 Km. Is believed to be spiritual and comprises of various temples and forests areas.

7. Varanasi Panch Kosi

It is one of the oldest living cities known to Hindu religion and has a significant importance in the Hindu religion. To show their devotion people perform a spiritual walk around the city known as Panch Kosi parikrama which comprises of five places naming, Kardmeshwar, Shivpur, Rameswar, Bhimchandi, and Kapildhara.

The parikrama starts from Manikarnika Ghats and ends at the same place covering a stretch of about 64 km approx. The devotees have to visit all the places and take bath in the kunds area before entering into the temple. Once all the five places have been visited yatra ends at the Manikarnika Ghat giving pilgrims a spiritual comfort in their life.

8. Char Dham Parikrama

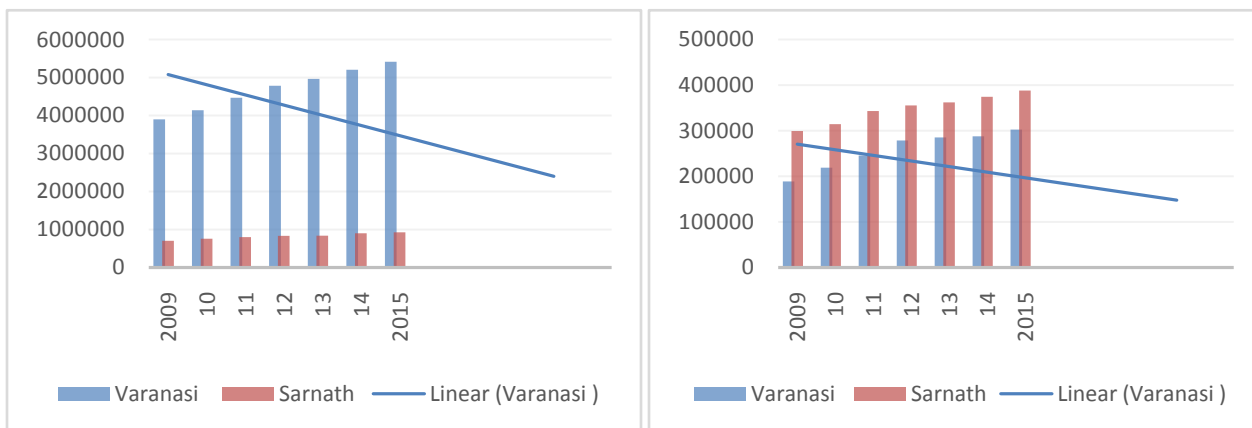
India's most popular pilgrimage circuit comprises of Puri in Orissa, Rameshwaram in Tamilnadu, Dwarka in Gujarat, and Badrinath in Uttarakhand. These important pilgrimages were grouped together in a religious circuit where pilgrims take a spiritual walk encircling the whole country which shows their devotion towards their motherland.

III. TRAFFIC DATA ANALYSIS (TOURISTS & PILGRIMS)

Tourist and pilgrims Traffic data observation:

It has been observed that most of the parikrama performs during the months of September to April, during this period Indian subcontinent faces a good monsoon and a pleasant weather to perform parikrama around various places of the country. A need of water and shelter can easily be provided by Mother Nature after a good monsoon season. It has been observed by the tourism department that after a good monsoon there is a rise in the numbers of the pilgrims because of the availability of natural resources in abundance. According to the tourism data, there is a constant growth of about 6% after a good monsoon but the graph decreases as the annual rainfall decreases.

In order to investigate the matter further, I have conducted a survey on two of the parikrama marg, Ajodhya, and Varanasi, and taking data from the tourism department it is been concluded that there is a rise in pilgrims which is about 6% on average, when there is a good monsoon season the growth rate has increased to 16% in 2009-10 but during the periods of bad monsoon the rise in no. of pilgrims has dropped too dramatically to .8 % in 2013-14 where the max and min. average temp remains almost stationary during this period.



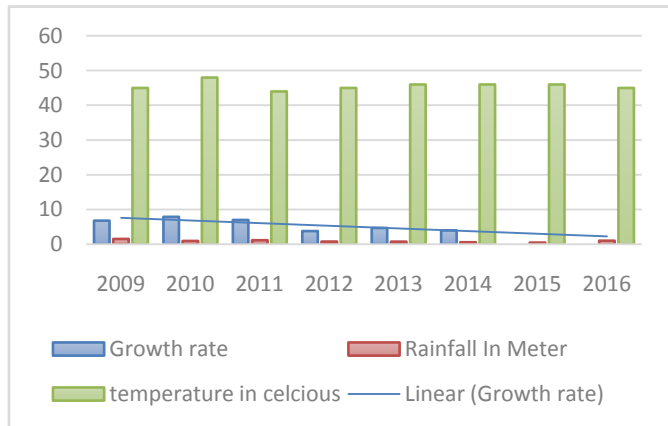
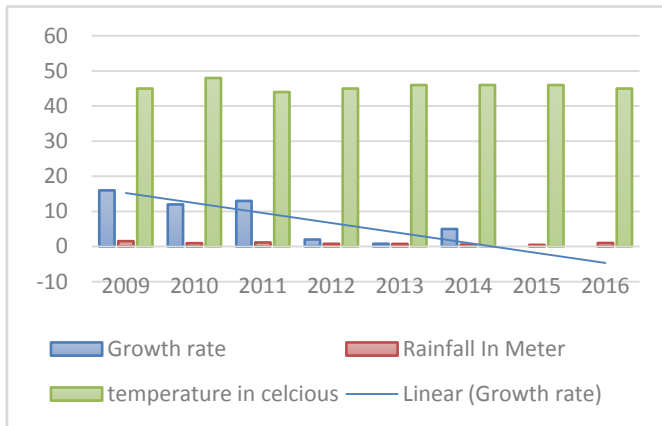
Tourist Data of Domestic Tourist from 2009-15 (Varanasi)

Tourist Data of Foreign Tourist from 2009-15(Varanasi)

Year	Zone	Domestic	Growth	Foreign	Growth	Total	Growth Rate in
2009	Varanasi	3898557	0.00	188853	0.00	4087410	0.00
	Sarnath	704142	0.00	299305	0.00	1003477	0.00
	Total	4602729	0.00	488158	0.00	5090887	0.00
2010	Varanasi	4139785	6.19	219088	16.00	4358873	6.64
	Sarnath	758814	7.76	314510	5.08	1073324	6.96
	Total	4898599	6.42	533598	9.30	5432197	6.70
2011	Varanasi	4466972	7.90	245660	12.13	4712632	8.12
	Sarnath	800093	5.44	343122	9.09	1143215	6.51
	Total	5267065	7.52	588782	10.34	5855847	7.80
2012	Varanasi	4783012	7.07	278573	13.40	5061585	7.40
	Sarnath	833500	4.17	355294	3.54	1188794	3.98
	Total	5616512	6.63	633867	7.65	6250379	6.73
2013	Varanasi	4966161	3.83	285252	2.40	5251413	1.77
	Sarnath	838566	0.61	362113	1.92	1200679	1.00
	Total	5804727	3.35	647365	2.13	6452092	3.22
2014	Varanasi	5202236	4.75	287761	0.87	5489997	4.54
	Sarnath	899457	7.26	374268	3.36	1273725	6.08
	Total	6097693	5.04	662029	2.27	6763722	4.82
2015	Varanasi	5413927	4.07	302370	5.08	5716297	4.12

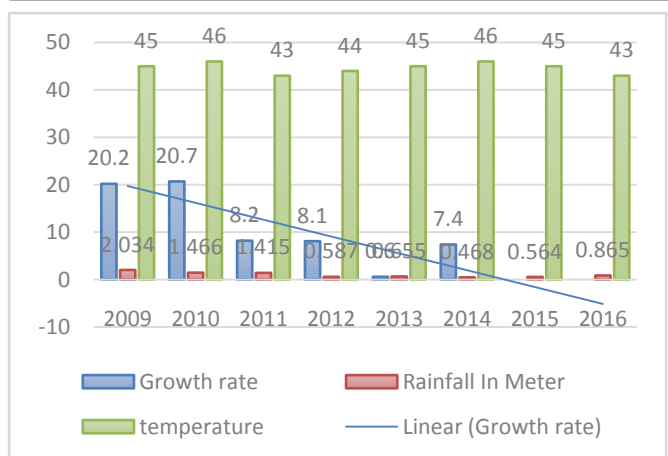
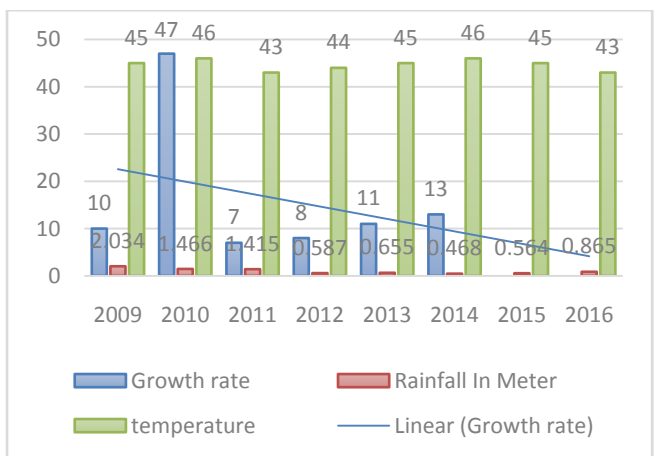
Year	Zone	Domestic	Growth	Foreign	Growth	Total	Growth Rate in
	Sarnath	924552	2.79	388102	3.70	1312654	3.06
	Total	6338479	3.95	690472	4.30	7028951	3.92

Note: (Recorded Figures for the year 2009 to 2015), Source: U.P TOURISM



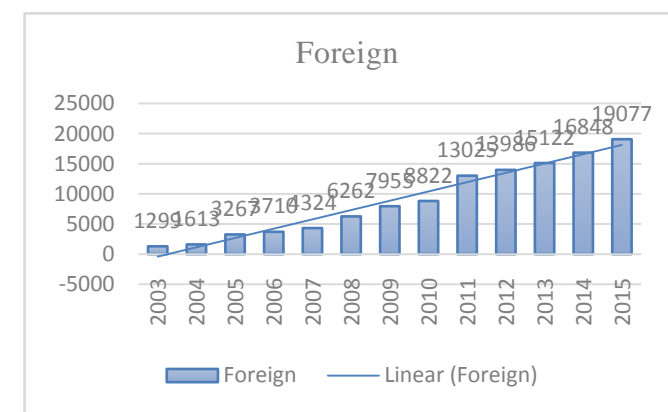
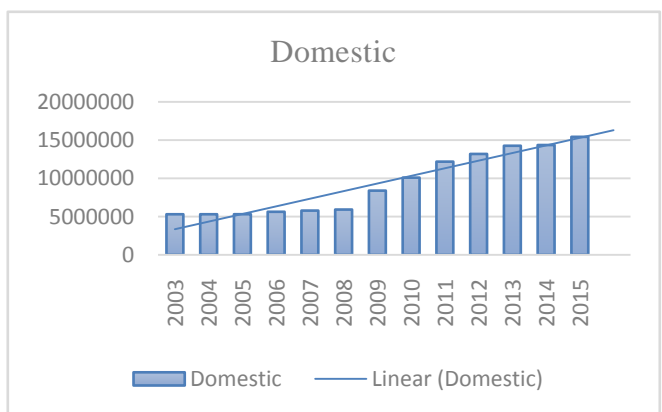
Graph showing growth rate for Foreign tourist from 2009 -16 (Varanasi)

Graph showing growth rate for Domestic tourist from 2009-16 (Varanasi)



Graph showing growth rate for Foreign tourist from 2009-16 (Ajodhya)

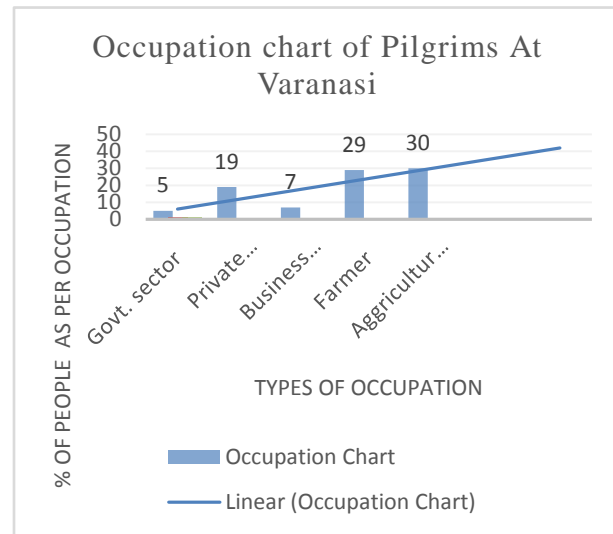
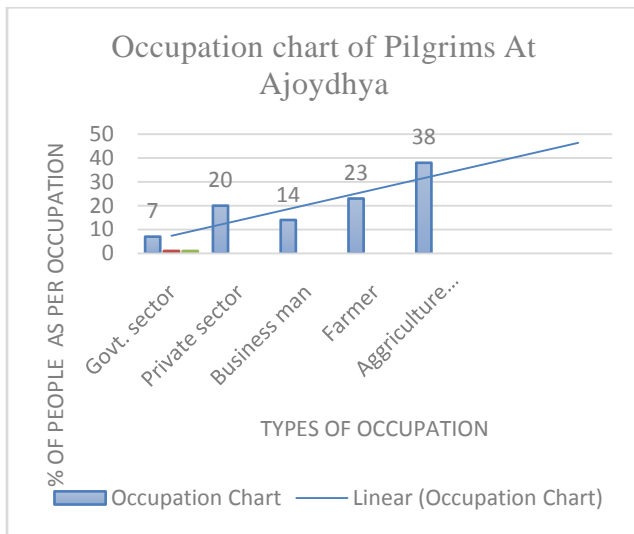
Graph showing growth rate for Domestic tourist from 2009-16 (Ajodhya)



Tourist Data of Domestic Tourist from 2009-15(Ajodhya)

Tourist Data of Foreign Tourist from 2009-15 (Ajodhya)

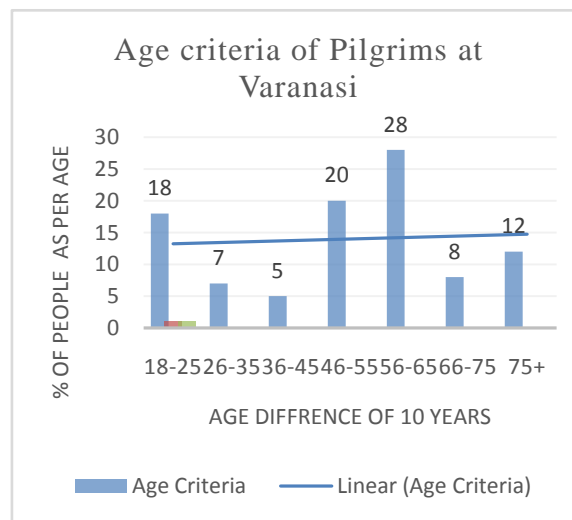
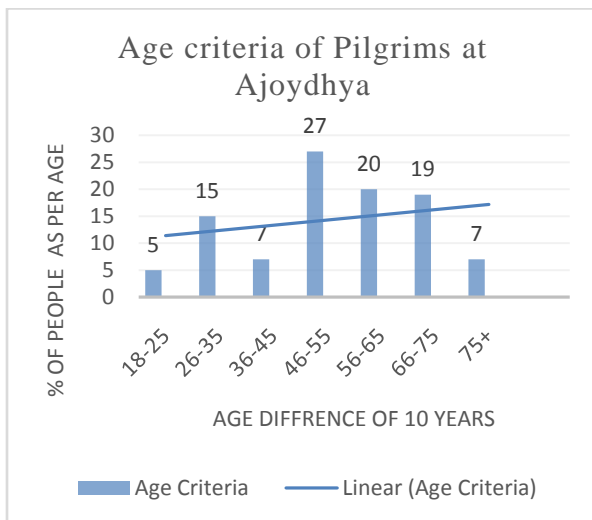
On further analysis, it has been observed that most of the people who perform parikrama belongs to the lower income group and majority of them are related to the occupation of agriculture or products related to agriculture.



Source: (survey conducted by the researcher)

In many ancient civilization around the world, it has been seen that people used to offer food and ornaments to their beloved deity, as to please him and getting blessed in return with good monsoon rains in their region. A concept of Bali (sacrifice) can also be seen around the world, but a sudden change in the education system and awareness in the society leads to discouraging of this ancient system. In India most of these places where parikrama is done where people tend to promote the ancient system an offering of food items which was later distributed as Prasad, which people took with them as the present from the god's hand.

On further analysis of the survey, it has been found that most of the people are between at the age of 50 -75 years and having the primary occupation as agriculture. A good monsoon not only provides them enough food for a healthy living but also helps them to generate enough income to perform a yatra so sacred to them. With a poor monsoon, people don't have enough money to cater their basic needs.



Source: (survey conducted by the researcher)

A good monsoon also provides enough water to the nearby lakes, ponds, kunds which cater the need of the pilgrims and the people living on the parikrama marg. From ancient times these water bodies act a drinkable source of water for the people associated with it. But because of the urbanization, these water bodies lost its character and the quality of water is deteriorated enough even not to be consumed by animals. These kunds and water bodies are equally sacred and important as the temple area on the parikrama because they share the common history and making them as an entire temple complex. The discarding of the kunds and water bodies would have only discouraged pilgrims to take a holy bath and to offer water to the deity, from that same kund.

Kunds acts as a natural resource of water, away from river and streams. It provides a basic needs for the sustainment of life in a particular region. It can be also said that because of the water bodies the settlement in that particular region persists. Talking about the kunds and water bodies which often lie on the parikrama marg has played a significant role in the parikrama as well as for the people living nearby it. This has been observed that parikrama marg persist from thousands of years because of the kunds and water bodies are associated with the parikrama region, providing pilgrims with a place to stay. Without the kunds and ponds parikrama in that region can never be persisted.

With the increase in the no of pilgrims and people living near the water bodies, there is a constant pressure on kunds to provide adequate water supply to the locals and the pilgrims, they also act as a natural recharging medium of the underground aquifer. Due to extensive use of the water from the kunds the quality and quantity of water has been reduced tremendously. To make the condition worse, people living on the verge of the kunds and ponds use its water for daily needs.

Most of the kunds on parikrama marg are away from the persisted civilization, having no means and measures of wastewater drainage. All the wastewater were directed towards the kunds because of the natural depression on the site conditions, taking all the impurities with it making water unfit for consumption even for animals. As a result, most of the family living around kunds have their own bore well systems for daily needs, with a result, each family is having two set of bore well, one for outdoor needs and one for indoor needs. The extensive use of water results in the depletion of water table in that particular region making it difficult for ponds and kunds to recharge the underground aquifer. The levels of water in the kunds has been decreased tremendously exposing the impurities settled at the bottom, Conditions like these reduces the interest of the pilgrims to perform their rituals in the kunds and also been abandoned/ encroached by the locals.

The natural landscape and the character of that place have been lost because being rejected by the peoples and pilgrims leading a place reserved for antisocial elements.

IV. CONCLUSION

The paper seeks to conclude that monsoon not only helps pilgrims to provoke for the parikrama while increasing their annual income to support for the expense of the yatra, but also provide the natural resources like food, water and shelter spaces which helps in completing the parikrama. Kunds which are the only source of water in the remote areas also provide a breathing space to the pilgrims. During the rapid urbanization all the kunds and water bodies are either encroached or neglected by urban commuters, resulting in a loss of character of that particular region. People who are living on the parikrama marg or close to the temple area have flourished because of the pilgrim's influx which was related to their lively hood. They have also promoted migration of their relatives from various places to settle in that particular region making a permanent settlement around those water bodies and temple complex. By conserving the kunds and water bodies associated with the temple complex the parikrama marg can be conserved.

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