



The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor and Urban Transformation: Assessing Cultural, Economic, and Identity Shifts in Varanasi

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ABSTRACT

The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, a large-scale urban redevelopment initiative in Varanasi, India, has assumed considerable strategic and socio-cultural significance due to its dual objectives of enhancing pilgrimage accessibility and safeguarding the region's historical and cultural heritage. The purpose of this research paper is to look at all the different ways the Kashi Vishwanath corridor is changing what happens with culture, the economy, and people socially in Varanasi. Using both ways of getting information – things you can count, and things people say such as questionnaires, chats with people who live and work in the area, and looking at numbers for visitors, the study creates a full view of how the corridor is affecting things. The results show that religious visitors have gone up a lot, and shops and companies owned by people in the area are doing better financially, although there are issues with too many tourists, the local systems not being able to cope, and people being moved from where they used to live, and their culture being lost. The piece of writing hopes to add to the wider discussion about getting the right level between making money and keeping old traditions, especially when an old city is being changed by becoming more modern.



Introduction

The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor a really large-scale city renewal scheme in Varanasi, India is now a central project to improve what people who come on pilgrimage experience, and to look after the area's extremely valuable heritage. The Kashi Vishwanath Temple to Lord Shiva is tremendously important religiously; it is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas. Full of history, the temple is not just the main place for religious observance, but also represents a vital part of the cultural identity of Varanasi, which is thought of as one of the world's oldest cities still lived in (Jha et al., 2025). In the past, the area around the Kashi Vishwanath Temple had been made up of thin streets, walkways packed with people, and lots of little shops serving those on pilgrimage and visitors. Though, the city area had difficulty dealing with the ever-increasing number of people, and this caused worry about getting around, safety, and the overall feel of the place (Mehrotra, 2025). This meant the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor had to be made; it was planned as a change to the area and its infrastructure, that would allow easy movement and a better for everyone, whilst not damaging the holy nature or the building style of the temple buildings.

This research paper is to look at the many effects of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor on Varanasi's cultural, financial and social side. Looking at what the corridor means for tourism, how it alters how local people relate to each other, and protecting the heritage that is at the core of Varanasi's identity, this work will give important understanding to the discussion of city planning in old cities. Close study will be on the ways the corridor's construction might rearrange the city's structure, impacting local trade, people's involvement in the community, and how cultural possessions are managed.

Literature Review

As cities globally deal with both becoming modern and keeping their heritage, Varanasi is a particularly interesting case. The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor is intended to serve the people who are there now, and also to value and keep the long-established customs that make up the city's cultural character. Research – Jha et al. (2025) for one shows how important it is to combine up-to-date town planning with looking after historic things, in order to encourage both the economy and cultural continuity. The Corridor is a key meeting-point of current city design and the ideas behind heritage conservation, and shows a determination to safeguard Varanasi's important cultural and historical nature. At the heart of this is the clever putting-together of new infrastructure with old traditions, which not only makes things work better, but also makes certain Varanasi's past identity isn't lost. Das et al. (2024) say the corridor was very carefully planned to give visitors a smooth time, at the same time stressing the age of the city's heritage places. The work includes, for example, putting right old temples and ghats – which are a core



part of the city's religious and cultural life. The thinking behind the Corridor's design is that it should be sensitive to Varanasi's history. Ghosh et al. (2025) explain how the project has begun a conversation between modern city looks and the real stories within the city. This conversation is seen in the use of materials and building styles from the past, which are like the old buildings that are the city's mark. In addition, modern comforts – like better roads and public areas – have been added without hiding how spiritually and culturally important the places being improved are. This careful planning shows a wider understanding that we have to find a balance between the need to develop and the need to preserve heritage.

But the making of the Corridor also brings difficulties and strains, as Singh and Rana (2025) point out. The rise in tourism the Corridor causes makes chances for the economy, but also creates problems for the local community's cultural practices and social life. Though more visitors can give new life to local cultural forms – like old skills and performing arts – there is also the danger of things being turned into things to be sold. The chance that these cultural practices will be watered down brings up serious questions about what is real and keeping local character in a more and more business-led world.

Methodology

The study will employ both qualitative and quantitative methods – surveys, talks with people locally involved, and a look at tourist numbers – to create a full sense of what the corridor is doing to the area. With this, we'll be able to see how this big project is altering what goes on in the locality, and in particular, how it is changing tourism. Because Varanasi's character is so connected to its religious past and the tourists who come to see it, what happens with the Kashi Vishwanath corridor isn't only about buildings being bettered; it really affects the life of the people, and the history they live in. Thus, the piece intends to add to the wider debate on keeping a good balance between growing the economy and protecting what has come before, most notably in an old city dealing with being made modern. By placing the Kashi Vishwanath corridor in the ideas of those who've studied this sort of thing before, the research points to the demand for complete city plans which understand and prize cultural identity, and so let better, more knowing city planning happen in comparable historical places.

Data Analysis and Findings

Tourism and Economic Impact

The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor's construction has really changed tourism in Varanasi –especially religious tourism – and this has a great deal to do with the local economy and how people in the



community get along. Detailed statistical work shows that, since the Corridor was finished at the end of 2021, far more people have been going to Kashi Vishwanath Temple; it's thought that both domestic and foreign tourist numbers are up by around 30% when you look at figures before the Corridor was built (Khan, 2025; Soni & Chaturvedi, 2024). This increase is very clear at the busiest times for religious festivals, when over 80,000 people often visit each day (Soni & Chaturvedi, 2024).

Because of the greater numbers of tourists, local businesses – mainly those selling things used in worship, food, and tours – have done very well, with the Varanasi Development Authority finding that small and medium-sized businesses had, on average, 25% more income in the year after the Corridor opened (Khan, 2025). Also, more jobs – over 10,000 directly or indirectly – have been created in the now-booming tourist industry (Mitras, 2025).

Infrastructure and Community Dynamics

The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor – a key project to make the Kashi Vishwanath Temple and the area around it easier to get to – has had a big effect on the local community in Varanasi. The most obvious good thing is that infrastructure is much better: roads are better, there's better lighting, waste is better managed, and public facilities are improved. This better infrastructure has made life better for a lot of local people, making it easier for them to get around (Dubey, 2025). Better access to health care, education and other things people need is a direct result of the improvements to infrastructure. Residents said they were more pleased with their daily lives, showing how helpful the modernisation started by the Corridor has been.

However, these improvements aren't without problems. The Corridor's development has brought about a big change in the local people and in the local economy and society. Specifically, the arrival of tourists and businesses hoping to profit from the higher numbers of people passing by has caused house prices and the cost of living to go up, which can hurt people who have lived in the area for a long time, often making them lose their cultural identity (Chaturvedi, 2025). As gentrification happens, long-term residents may find themselves left out in their own areas, leading to disagreements about who people are and what they believe in the community.

The appearance of new, commercial areas near the temple has caused arguments between different parts of the community, especially between those who want to protect the culture and those who want modernisation and economic growth. This tension shows itself in arguments about how Varanasi's cultural heritage should be kept and shown alongside the changing needs of tourists. Traditional practices



and ceremonies which used to be common are in danger of being weakened as the community tries to deal with the pressure to serve a large and growing number of people who are attracted by the Corridor.

Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities and Cultural Authenticity

The opening of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor has started a fresh approach for Varanasi, most notably in how the city's people live and work. Religious tourism has a real chance to help the area's economy; more people coming to visit should mean more need for things made locally, the services people offer, and places to stay – and that could mean new jobs and businesses. But counting on tourism to be the main thing supporting the economy could leave local people open to the problems that come with the way tourism goes up and down, and changes in how many people travel (Mitra, 2025).

These difficulties come about because of relying on a trade that is often affected by things outside itself – like what is happening in the world economy, political trouble, or even events in nature. As Varanasi goes toward this kind of economy, depending on tourism-related work runs the risk of hiding other ways to grow the economy that would be good in the long run. Also, as tourism gets bigger, there's a troubling move toward turning local culture into something to be sold, which can lessen what is real and damage the structure of the community. Increasingly, genuine culture is in danger as changes are made to please tourists, instead of using and valuing the ways and habits of local people. It's been shown that an economy based on tourism can cause culture to be lost, with real experiences being replaced by things made clean and safe to please visitors (Mitra, 2025). The more local people get into tourism, the more trouble can come up between keeping old ways and changing to fit what a growing number of tourists want.

Problems of Overtourism and Sustainability

However, the increasing number of visitors makes people worry about overtourism, which creates big problems for the long-term health of both the historic place and the people around it. Though the money benefits are certainly welcome, they've also put more stress on local services and buildings – traffic jams, issues with garbage, and shortages of things people in the area need are all becoming more and more noticeable (Mitra, 2025). People living in Varanasi have said they're concerned that their everyday lives are being upset by the sheer number of tourists, and that in some cases this has led to the lessening of the local culture that draws visitors there in the first place. Given these problems, the need for tourism that can last has become the main thing for people who make policy and those involved who care about getting the economic benefits to match keeping Varanasi's cultural and historical value. Plans to control



how tourists get to delicate areas, push for visits when it isn't the busiest time, and get the community to take part in making decisions about tourism are all important to lessen the bad effects of more and more people on foot (Mitrás, 2025).

Conclusion

The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor has really changed Varanasi, with effects across the city's culture, economy and the lives of people there. Aiming to make the Kashi Vishwanath Temple easier to get to and more enjoyable to visit, the corridor is – in many ways – a smaller example of the bigger problems of keeping what is old, and letting a place grow to be modern. In terms of culture, the corridor has strengthened Varanasi's place as a key place for religious journeys, and helped old Hindu traditions come back. Economically, the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor has helped the area's businesses, and made more jobs. And socially, building the corridor has changed how the community works, making some groups closer, and others more at odds.

Looking at what is needed for development that can last, we really have to think about what we've learned from this big change in Varanasi's story. The future of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor needs to be built on strong, flexible city planning – that is, making sure we keep the things that are old, while the city grows. As studies of how cities grow out of control show (Sridhar et al., 2025; Jabeen, 2025), it is vital to foresee and reduce the things that happen, which we didn't mean to happen, through development. So, future study ought to be based on ways for people in the area to take part in planning, so that growth meets what the people want and need. Also, what is suggested to governments should be a careful system that puts protecting cultural heritage and city growth plans together. By giving priority to rules that respect the long, rich history of Varanasi, while also adapting to what a modern city requires, those involved can create a lasting example that can be used by other historical places going through similar changes. In the end, the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor is a special example of how cultural protection, economic growth and people getting on together meet, when cities change very quickly. Working together – by all those involved – will be the most important thing in dealing with the problems and chances ahead.



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