Jotiba Temple, Kolhapur: As a Pilgrimage Center and its Impacts around its Vicinity

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Abstract: *Amongst the many pilgrimage sites in India, one such lesser-known pilgrimage place is of Jotiba temple situated in Wadi-Ratnagiri, Kolhapur. It is a religious and cultural landmark with significant regional impact. The temple has large number of pilgrims on daily basis about 5000-10000 in addition to the seasonal influx amounting to more than 5-8 lakhs during the Chaitra Yatra. This paper examines the challenges facing the temple complex, including infrastructural constraints, haphazard development around, chaos at the time of large number of tourist influx, environmental impacts, and social dynamics within the local community, specifically the Gurav Samaj. The study has been documented by visual observations and studied through the various surveys done on site through physical (tangible) and non-physical (non-tangible) factors. Thus, the paper highlights the various issues that the temple town faces and thereby the conclusion has been drawn after identifying the various factors that impact the temple and the immediate surroundings. Through a combination of architectural, non-architectural, and community-centered solutions, this study aims to propose sustainable interventions that can enhance the pilgrimage experience, preserve the cultural heritage and promote local livelihoods.*

Keywords: pilgrim town, Jotiba Temple, pilgrimage tourism, cultural heritage, community participation physical factors, non – physical factors

1. Introduction

Background
Kolhapur, located between 15°N and 17°N latitudes and 73°E and 74°E longitudes, spans 7692 sq. km and has a population of over 5 lakh (Census 2011). Kolhapur also known as "Dakshin Kashi", is popularly known for Mahalaxmi temple, Bhavani Mandap, Jotiba temple and other palaces and museums which add to the cultural value of the place. Of the various religious places, the Jotiba Temple, located near Wadi Ratnagiri region lies 19 km to the north of Kolhapur and at a height of 3124 feet above sea level and rises 310 mtrs from the Panchganga river plain (Dr. M. B. Potdar, 2011).

Aim:
The research aims to study the pilgrim area of Jotiba, Kolhapur and the various issues faced by the temple authorities, pilgrims and locals.

Objectives:
To study the pilgrimage center of Jotiba and the various issues and challenges faced by the pilgrims and the locals while visiting the same.

2. Research methodology

The research was conducted by mixed method by conducting interviews with all the stakeholders like the temple authorities, community leaders, local villagers, entrepreneurs who run shops around the temple premises, pilgrims etc. Primary data collection involved multiple site visits, on-ground documentation, and research using historical texts. Due to the limited availability of scholarly literature on the Jotiba Temple, interviews emerged as the most effective research method. Surveys were conducted to assess community needs, waste management issues, and employment challenges. Additionally, an online survey with more than hundred participants provided valuable insights from diverse perspectives. The secondary data was derived from the research papers on similar topics of temple precincts highlighting the issues and suggesting probable solutions for the same.
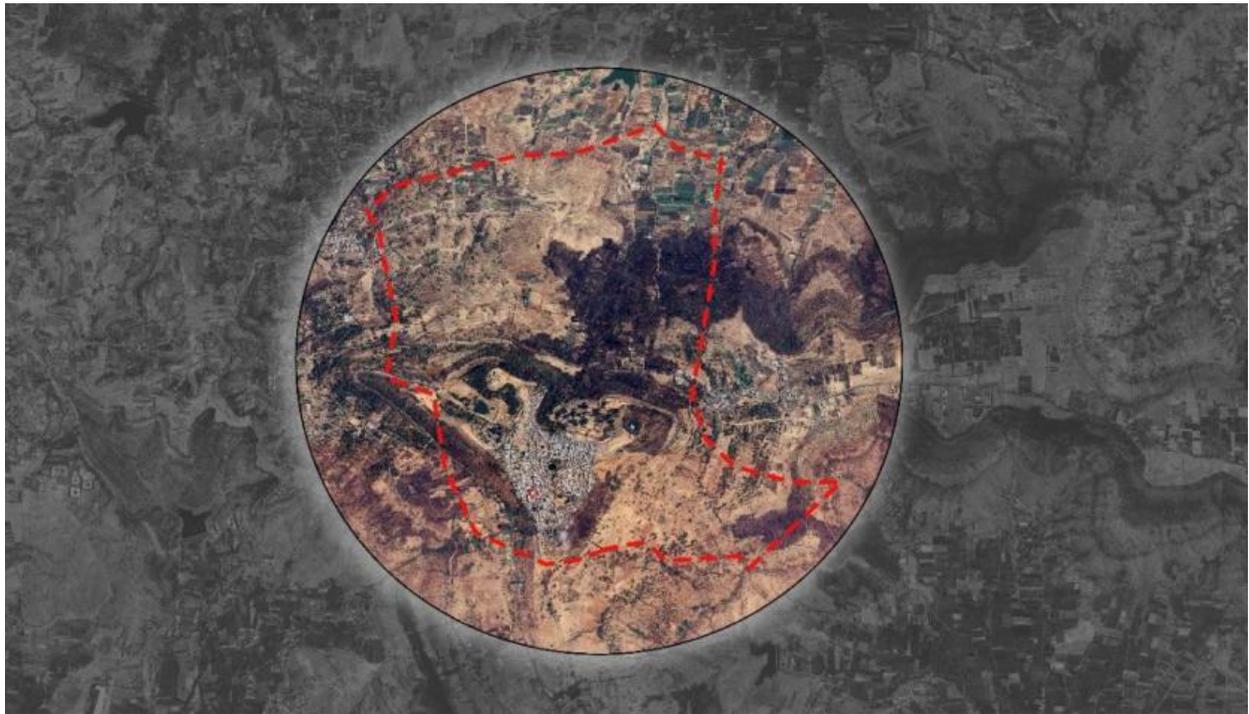
Figure 1: Wadi-Ratnagiri boundary
Source: Seza Samadhan

The temple attracts thousands of pilgrims annually, especially during the Chaitra Yatra festival, Shravan Shshti, Khete and during Navratri and thus holds immense cultural and spiritual significance. The pilgrim's number from 5 – 8 lakh from across Maharashtra and nearby neighbouring states of Karnataka, Goa, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The celebrations include throwing of gulal, smashing coconut and participating in processions with chanting of "*Jotiba chya navane changbhalaa*". The Hemadpanthi style temple is a group of three temples which includes the Kedareshwar Temple, Jotiba Shrine and the Ramling Shrine. The Yamai Mandir dedicated to Goddess Yamai, sister of Lord Jotiba, is also located on the same hill as the Jotiba Temple. Thus, the hill is an important religious place dedicated to Lord Jotiba, a powerful incarnation of Lord Shiva and draws lakhs of worshippers each year.

Figure 2 and 3: Jotiba temple, festivities at the time of Chaitra Festival and the Sasan Kathi.
Source: Seza Samadhan.

1) **Site Context: Wadi-Ratnagiri and Jotiba Temple**
- **Location**: Wadi-Ratnagiri village is surrounded by contours and the Yamai Temple forms part of the pilgrimage circuit of Kolhapur. The Jotiba temple forms the focus of the pilgrim circuit and then the devotees move towards the Yamai temple.
- **Accessibility**: The hill is accessed by some devotees who prefer a **pilgrimage trek** up the hill, especially during festivals. The path though steep is scenic and takes around

1–2 hours on foot. The local and private transport can go up the hill where parking is available.

- **Population and Cultural Importance**: The hilltop is a small village peopled mostly by *Gurav samaj* or priests of Jotiba along with other local communities. As per the Census 2011, the total Hindu population in Wadi Ratnagiri is 4,604 of which is 98.1% constitutes of the Gurav Samaj. The Gurav Samaj has been traditionally trusted with performing pujas, aartis, and other ceremonies. Wadi-Ratnagiri experiences a seasonal population surge due to pilgrim inflow. The temple serves as a central identity for the village, supporting local commerce and social structures.
- **Pilgrimage and Festivals**: The temple attracts pilgrims primarily during Jotiba Yatra, Navratri, Shravan Shshti, Khete, during Navratri and Maha Shivaratri. These festivals involve extensive rituals, including the unique Lavajama

cannon fire and palakhi (palanquin) processions, which contribute to the intangible cultural heritage of the site.

Chaitra Yatra - Every year on the full moon of Chaitra (April Month).

It is the biggest and grand festival that takes place at Jotiba Mountain, attracting lakhs devotees from across Maharashtra. The event features vibrant rituals like gulal throwing, coconut and coin offerings, and a majestic palanquin procession with Sasan sticks, horses, camels, and musical instruments and several ceremonies. The 'procession' of *Sasan Kathi* is the main attraction of Chaitra Festival. In the evening, Shree Jotiba visits Goddess Yamai's temple for her symbolic wedding, followed by fireworks and celebrations that continue for a month.

Figure 4: Festivities at the time of Chaitra Festival and the Sasan Kathi.
Source: Official website of Jyotiba Mandir Managed by Devasthan Management Committee (Gov. of Maharashtra)

Shravan Shashti - Shravan Shuddha Shashthi i.e the sixth day of the bright fortnight (Shukla Paksha) of the Hindu month of Shravan. This is the second big festival on this pilgrimage; where a special pooja of lemon, bel and flower is made overnight to Goddess Charpat Amba on Shravan Shudha Shashthi.

Khete – Pilgrims visit five Sundays during the Hindu month of Magh (Feb-March). The pilgrims who visit the five Sundays are called Jotiba khete. The feature of this Khete is that only devotees of Kolhapur Walk to visit the temple.

Navratri – Various festivities and Poojas are organized on the first day, seventh day is known as Jotiba's Jagar when nearly 2 lakh devotees come, ninth and on the day of Vijaya Dashmi

(Dasara) and there is a celebration of the Simollanghan and the temple is kept open for darshan at the night.

2) Environmental and Climatic Conditions
- **Climate**: With moderate rainfall and seasonal temperature variations, Kolhapur's climate impacts visitor comfort and the sustainability of temple infrastructure. Proposals for shading and water conservation are essential for addressing climate resilience.
- **Ecosystem Impact**: The 'gulaal' or the 'holy pink powder' is presented to Lord Jyotiba by His worshippers, and they celebrate His divinity by throwing it all around his enclave smearing on the steps, floors, the walls and even the temple towers. The entire temple complex mesmerizes pink hues.

Figure 5: View of the Jotiba temple area during the Chaitra Yatra.
Source: Seza Samadhan.

Post-festival cleanup often involves washing gulal, flower remains etc. into nearby water bodies or drains. Yamai, Kapurbao, Chavantali and Gaimukh form the major water resources and have large number of dependents on them for domestic purposes. The ritual activities at Jotiba Temple significantly pollute the nearby still water bodies, with effects lasting over two months until the monsoon washes away contaminants. Local communities face water quality issues during this period, highlighting the need for stronger and more targeted lake management measures beyond existing practices. (S.B. Jadhav, 2009). Thus, effective waste management practices are needed to maintain the ecological integrity of the area.

3) **Community Dynamics and Socioeconomic Context**
- **Gurav Samaj**: Traditionally responsible for temple rituals, this community relies on the temple economy but faces socioeconomic challenges. Expanding their role in temple waste management and other eco-friendly initiatives can enhance their livelihoods.
- **Local Occupations**: Besides religious duties, community members engage in small-scale businesses that support pilgrimage tourism. The local vendors sell religious items and souvenirs. There isn't a dedicated space for these shops, leading to a cluttered environment and missed opportunities for local artisans.

Figure 6: View of the shop line, Jotiba temple area.
Source: Seza Samadhan.

Improved infrastructure can facilitate better economic opportunities for locals through employment in tourist services, crafts, and cultural preservation roles.

3. Current Infrastructure and Limitations

- **Physical Infrastructure**: Facilities such as parking, restrooms, bhakti niwas, and ritual halls are often

insufficient. A seasonal influx of visitors overwhelms these resources, leading to overcrowding and discomfort. The current toilet facilities, including those managed by MTDC, are inadequate, leading to long wait times and poor hygiene conditions, particularly during peak times.

Figure 7: Public toilet facilities.
Source: Seza Samadhan

As per the newspaper article, during the religious festivities parking facilities had been planned at 33 locations on the foothills from where free buses ply the pilgrims to the bus stand located over the hill (Times of India, 2023). Parking facility is also made available to accommodate as much as 8,000 two-wheelers and 4,000 four-wheelers.

- **Environmental Services**: Limited sewage, water, and solid waste management systems hinder sustainable operations. Seasonal waste from offerings and ritual items further strains available resources, emphasizing the need for comprehensive waste management plans.
- **Pilgrim and Community Interaction**: The existing setup does not facilitate smooth visitor flow or local interactions, often leading to conflicts and resource mismanagement during peak pilgrimage seasons.

4. Analysis of Cultural Practices

1) **Rituals and Traditions**: Ceremonies like the "Sasan stick" and Chaitra Yatra embody the cultural depth of the Jotiba Temple. The intangible heritage associated with these practices underscores the temple's religious value and necessitates its preservation.
2) **Behavioral Patterns**: The number of pilgrims visiting Jotiba has seen a rise over the years, and the pilgrim behaviour also varies by season, with higher engagement and longer stays during major festivals. Understanding these patterns can help design visitor-friendly facilities and improve the management of crowd density.
3) **Economic and Cultural Value**: As a vital economic asset for Kolhapur, the temple supports various cultural practices that contribute to the local identity. Enhancing the temple complex's functionality while preserving its sanctity can elevate both economic and cultural values.

The various issues that the town faces can be broadly divided into two groups:
1) Physical / tangible factors:
- The regions affected infrastructure – Insufficient parking space, improper sanitation facility, services required for its proper functioning when there is a large influx of people.
- Tourist infrastructure – Number of shops, stay facilities or lodging facilities for the pilgrims within the vicinity of the temple premise.
- Transitional spaces before and after the temple visit and the area around it- Congregational facilities, open/un-built areas and built areas and the processional routes.
- The connectivity between the temple, the region around and the city of Kolhapur and the pilgrims.

2) Non-Physical / intangible factors:
- Spiritual significance and devotion – The deep-rooted faith of the devotees in the deity as an incarnation of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.
- Tradition and rituals- The procession of the Sasan Kathi during the Chaitra Festival, offerings to the deity in terms of Gulal; Simollanghan at the time of Navratri in lotus petals form the intangible factors.
- Chanting hymns like Chang Bhal during the procession which has also been passed from generation to generation.
- Due to its importance as a pilgrimage center, it has led to generic level of economic and social development and thereby increase in the living standards of the locals.

5. Observations and Issues Identified

- **Inadequate infrastructure Amenities**: Insufficient parking, sanitation, and lodging facilities for peak visitor seasons create a strain on existing resources thereby impacting visitor satisfaction.
- **Waste Management Challenges**: The increasing floating population of visitors impacts the environment by problems

like solid waste disposal and water pollution. Temple offerings, including flowers, coconuts, and gulal, accumulate rapidly, especially during festivals, requiring dedicated recycling and disposal mechanisms.

- **Lack of Community Engagement**: Although central to temple operations, the Gurav Samaj has limited involvement in broader site management or economic planning.
- **Environmental Concerns**: Air and noise pollution from increased visitor traffic and ceremonial practices like Lavajama cannon fire impact the surrounding ecosystem.

6. Conclusion

The study has thoroughly explored the existing insufficient facilities at Jotiba such as visitor management, inadequate infrastructure, and environmental concerns, necessitating an integrated approach that balances community needs with the growing influx of devotees. A sustainable, holistic approach to the Jotiba Temple revitalization can address interconnected challenges, preserve the cultural heritage while promoting community involvement. Through thoughtful architectural interventions, regional planning, and community-driven economic initiatives, the Jotiba Temple can continue to serve as both a spiritual haven and a vital economic and cultural hub for Kolhapur.

7. Future scope

The further scope of study can explore the different interventions which can not only enhance the spiritual experience for visitors but also create economic opportunities for the locals and thereby support their livelihood and reinforce the temple's role as a vital community asset.

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