Original Research Article

Analysis of environmental impact on emotional health of people visiting temples of Vrindavan, India: a qualitative survey

Purva Shoor*, Bhumika Bhatt

Department of Community Medicine, Kanti Devi Medical College, Akbarpur, Mathura-Delhi Highway, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India

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*Correspondence:
Dr. Purva Shoor,
E-mail: purva_s18@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Background: In this century, blind faith in unhealthy environments is dwindling and more focus on environmental impact on a truly spiritual and emotionally uplifting experience is regarded as most important to contemporary visitors to sacred places. The main objective is to describe the emotional state of people visiting temples of Vrindavan and to describe the viewpoints on environmental factors affecting their emotional health.

Methods: Type of study: a qualitative survey, study population: visitors to temples of Vrindavan. Method of sampling: purposive sampling, sample size: 67 people, study tool: pre-tested, semi-structured questionnaire for interview, data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and tabulated.

Results: 82.09% of people interviewed were of the age 18-50 years. Among the visitors all were Indians, and one NRI. Majority interviewed were males. 6 people visiting temple 1 reported feeling annoyed, disturbed and insecure during visit. There were relatively positive responses regarding environmental factors due to religious constraints. Many people reported good conduct of pujaris (temple priests) in all the three temples with quite a few bad comments like professional seekers and greedy. Long queues and no comfort was disliked for all the three temples, however some people expressed no problem with it.

Conclusions: Pilgrims do not critically analyze environmental aspects managed by authorities. They felt spiritual and emotionally aroused and preferred not to comment on not so comfortable experiences. We cannot neglect the rising exceptions to the usual herd of visitors who are on the rise.

Keywords: Vrindavan, Environmental impact, Emotional health, Survey

INTRODUCTION

Physical environment of pilgrimage and its impact on emotional health is a delicate issue due to cultural and religious constraints. Spirituality and emotions attached with it are rarely critically analyzed and mostly they are preconceived as religious practices and vows without instigating queries about appropriate and safe physical environment. Both the perceived frequency of use and efficacy of environmental strategies are positively related to perceived health. Moreover, the perceived efficacy of environmental strategies is positively related to life satisfaction in regulating sadness.¹

This study proposes to decipher various viewpoints related to the environment of a pilgrimage town in India and its emotional health consequences upon the visitors. We have questioned the impact the environment of temples might have on affect regulation.¹ With this situation analysis pertaining to the environment, we can change attitudes of the temple authorities, environmental analysts, and visitors’ perception regarding cleanliness,
security, access, linkage, and other factors to create a good quality emotionally healthy experience.

**Objectives**

- To describe the emotional state of people visiting temples of Vrindavan.
- To describe the viewpoints on environmental factors affecting their emotional health.

**METHODS**

**Type of study:** a qualitative survey.

**Method of sampling:** purposive sampling.

**Selection criteria**

All visitors were eligible, who were above 15 years of age, and who gave their consent to spare some time to conduct an in depth interview.

**Sample size**

There are around 5 lakh people visiting temples of Vrindavan, a temple town in India, every year. If we assume that influx of visitors is distributed equitably, we get around 1400 people who might in the least number, visited the temples on a single day. There are 13 hours of the day when the temples are open for visits, so by dividing 1400 with 13hrs, we get 107 people who visited any one of the temple in any particular hour. If 2% of these people were assumed to be retreating from visit at any hour of the day from any of the three temples, we got 21.4 people from each temple. This was calculated as 64.2 people or 64 people. When we actually interviewed, this being a survey, we were able to catch the attention of a few people extra in temple 1 and 3 whereas only 17 people in temple 2. Our final sample size was 67 people.

**Method of collection of data**

The interviewer visited 3 temples in Vrindavan and noted viewpoints using a pre-tested questionnaire and informed the subjects that the interviewer was not a representative of police, press or government and the information shall be kept confidential. The questionnaire was translated in Hindi for interviewing the visitors. The temples were selected out of the list in the official website of Mathura: mathura.nic.in. They were as follows:

- Shri Banke Bihari
- Iskcon Temple
- Prem Mandir

Two visits were organized for each temple. Data collection days had been divided into 3 visits in November 2017 followed by 3 visits in December 2017. Approximately 10-12 people retreating from darshan were interviewed at each visit. For each temple, time of data collection was selected as per convenience from 9-10 am or 4-5pm.

**Time period:** November 2017 to December 2017.

**Study tool**

A pre-tested, semi-structured questionnaire was used for the study which had been translated in Hindi.

**Method of analysis**

Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used for data entry and descriptive statistics.

**RESULTS**

In this study we interviewed 27 (40.30%) people visiting temple 1, 17 (25.37%) visiting temple 2 and 23 (34.33%) pilgrims visiting temple 3.

According to Table 1, maximum numbers of visitors interviewed in the temples were of the age 18-50 years. 10 people (14.92%) who were interviewed were of the age 50 years and above, and, 2 people (2.99%) were below 18 years of age while remaining 55 people (82.09%) were in the age group of 18-50 years.

41 people (61.19%) interviewed were males and 26 (38.81%) were females. All people interviewed were Indians from almost all states like Gujarat, Orissa, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Punjab, J and K and UP. One visitor to temple 2 was an NRI. 15 people belonged to local residents of Mathura of whom 7 were interviewed in Temple 3.

Table 1 suggests, out of 27 people visiting temple 1, 59.3% visited more than once per year, whereas 25.9% visited once per year. In contrast, 56% of temple 3 visitors were frequent for once in a year and 39.1% more than once in a year. Temple 2 showed similarity in number of visits per year to temple 3; 58% once in a year and 41.2% more than once in a year. There have been reported less frequent visits like once in five years in temple 1 and 3.

As shown in Table 1, the emotional health profile of visitors was found good subjectively as only 2 people (2.56%) reported not feeling good after their visit. None of the visitors mentioned any known stress or problems existing before their visit. Maximum visitors (65 in number, 83.33%) reported that they had no stress before the visits. Some people (11 in number, 14.10%) mentioned certain vows and traditions as a reason for visit.

According to Table 2, majority of emotional health responses stated by visitors during darshan, were as satisfied and spiritually aroused. 3 responses for darshan in temple 1, were as disturbed, one response as insecure.
and two responses as annoyed. One response for temple 3 was as annoyed. 2 responses were of no comments, and 1 response was peace for the emotional experience of visitors to temple 1. Similarly, peace and stress relief were other comments described by people visiting temple 3.

Table 1: Distribution depicting profile of visitors to temples.

| Characteristics          | Temple 1 (n=27) | Temple 2 (n=17) | Temple 3 (n=23) | Total (n=67) |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Age (years)              |                |                |                |              |
| 10-18                    | 0 (0)          | 2 (11.76)      | 0 (0)          | 2 (2.99)     |
| 18-50                    | 21 (77.78)     | 12 (70.59)     | 22 (95.65)     | 55 (82.09)   |
| 50 and above             | 6 (22.22)      | 3 (17.65)      | 1 (4.35)       | 10 (14.92)   |
| Sex                      |                |                |                |              |
| Male                     | 19 (70.37)     | 9 (52.94)      | 13 (56.52)     | 41 (61.19)   |
| Female                   | 8 (29.63)      | 8 (47.06)      | 10 (43.48)     | 26 (38.81)   |
| Nationality              |                |                |                |              |
| Indian                   | 23 (85.19)     | 12 (70.59)     | 16 (69.57)     | 51 (76.12)   |
| NRI                      | 0 (0)          | 1 (5.88)       | 0 (0)          | 1 (1.49)     |
| Local                    | 4 (14.81)      | 4 (23.53)      | 7 (30.43)      | 15 (22.39)   |
| No. of visits per year   |                |                |                |              |
| Once in every year       | 7 (25.9)       | 10 (58.8)      | 13 (56)        | 30 (44.78)   |
| Once in 5 years          | 4 (14.8)       | 0 (0)          | 1 (4.3)        | 5 (7.46)     |
| More than once per year  | 16 (59.3)      | 7 (41.2)       | 9 (39.1)       | 32 (47.76)   |
| Emotional health profile |                |                |                |              |
| n=32                     |                | n=20           | n=26           | n=78         |
| Not feeling good or stressed after visit | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 2 (7.69) | 2 (2.56) |
| Known stress before visit| 0 (0)          | 0 (0)          | 0 (0)          | 0 (0)        |
| No stress before visit   | 27 (84.38)     | 17 (85.00)     | 21 (80.77)     | 65 (83.33)   |
| Known vows or traditions as a reason for visit | 5 (15.62) | 3 (15.00) | 3 (11.54) | 11 (14.10) |

Table 2: Distribution depicting responses of visitors regarding their emotional experience inside the temples.

| Response                | No. in temple 1 | No. in temple 2 | No. in temple 3 | Total |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------|
| Disturbed               | 3 (3)           | 0 (0)           | 0 (0)           | 3     |
| Insecure                | 1 (1)           | 0 (0)           | 0 (0)           | 1     |
| Satisfied               | 20 (74.07)      | 17 (94.12)      | 10 (43.48)      | 47    |
| Spiritually aroused     | 20 (74.07)      | 13 (76.47)      | 13 (56.52)      | 46    |
| Annoyed                 | 2 (7.40)        | 0 (0)           | 1 (4.35)        | 3     |
| Any other               | 3 (1-peace, 2-no comments) | 0 (0) | 2 (1-peace, 1-stress relief) | 5 |
| Total                   | 49 (100)        | 30 (100)        | 26 (100)        | 105   |

Table 3: Distribution showing responses regarding mannerisms of local pujaris.

| Response               | Grade 1, 2, 3 | Grade 4, 5 | No comments |
|------------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Grade 1, 2, 3          | N (%)        | N (%)      | N (%)       |
| Temple 1 (n=27)        |              |            |             |
| Good conduct           | 7 (25.93)    | 18 (66.67) | 2 (7.40)    |
| Greedy                 | 13 (48.15)   | 8 (29.63)  | 6 (22.22)   |
| Not fair               | 10 (37.04)   | 9 (33.33)  | 8 (29.63)   |
| Sympathetic            | 4 (14.81)    | 14 (51.85) | 9 (33.33)   |
| Any other              | 0 (0)        | 1 (3.70)   | 26 (96.3)   |
| Temple 2 (n=17)        |              |            |             |
| Good conduct           | 0 (0)        | 15 (88.24) | 2 (11.76)   |
| Greedy                 | 14 (82.35)   | 2 (11.76)  | 1 (5.89)    |
| Not fair               | 10 (58.82)   | 6 (35.29)  | 1 (5.89)    |
| Sympathetic            | 0 (0)        | 16 (94.12) | 1 (5.88)    |
| Any other              | 0 (0)        | 0 (0)      | 17 (100)    |

Continued.
The mannerisms of local priests, called pujaris or pundits are described in Table 3. During the interview, we asked the visitors to grade each comment about the priests from 1 to 5. Grade 1 was least applicable and 5 the most applicable grade. In temple 1, out of 27 responses for good conduct, 6 (22.22%) marked grade 4 or grade 5. 25.93% responses showed that the conduct of priests was not as good. There were maximum low grades for greed, and only 8 comments (29.63%) showed that they were greedy (grade 4, 5). There were 6 (22.22%) no comments for greed. To know whether the priests were justly and fairly maintaining their activities in the temples, we asked the interviewees about fair conduct of darshan. There was approximately similar response on being fair or not by various interviewees, and there were 8 (29.63%) no comments. Many responses depicted that temple 1 priests

| Response                | Grade 1, 2, 3 | Grade 4, 5 | No comments |
|-------------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
|                         | N (%)        | N (%)      | N (%)       |
| **Temple 3** (n=23)     |              |            |             |
| Good conduct            | 1 (4.34)     | 16 (69.57) | 6 (26.09)   |
| Greedy                  | 10 (43.48)   | 2 (8.7)    | 11 (47.82)  |
| Not fair                | 8 (34.78)    | 4 (17.4)   | 11 (47.82)  |
| Sympathetic             | 5 (21.74)    | 7 (30.43)  | 11 (47.83)  |
| Any other               | 0            | 1 (not efficient; 4.35) | 22 (95.65) |

(n=total number of responses).

Table 4: Distribution describing comfort, security and image of temples.

| Environmental factors                                      | Yes (%) | No (%) | Don’t know/no comments (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|----------------------------|
| **Temple 1** (n=27)                                        |         |        |                            |
| First impression good                                      | 26 (96.3) | 1 (3.7) | 0                          |
| Female pilgrims are more                                   | 10 (37.04) | 11 (40.74) | 6 (22.22)                 |
| Enough space to offer prayers                              | 10 (37.04) | 17 (62.96) | 0                          |
| Cleanliness                                                | 20 (74.07) | 7 (25.93) | 0                          |
| Provision of dustbins                                      | 16 (59.26) | 10 (37.04) | 1 (3.7)                   |
| Security                                                   | 22 (81.48) | 5 (18.52) | 0                          |
| Deployment of guards                                       | 24 (88.89) | 3 (11.11) | 0                          |
| Allowed to take pictures                                  | 7 (25.93) | 20 (74.07) | 0                          |
| Don’t pay attention to factors because of spiritual consideration | 13 (48.15) | 14 (51.85) | 0                          |
| **Temple 2** (n=17)                                        |         |        |                            |
| First impression good                                      | 16 (94.12) | 0       | 1 (5.88)                  |
| Female pilgrims are more                                   | 12 (70.59) | 3 (17.65) | 2 (11.76)                 |
| Enough space to offer prayers                              | 9 (52.94) | 7 (41.18) | 1 (5.88)                  |
| Cleanliness                                                | 15 (88.24) | 2 (11.76) | 0                          |
| Provision of dustbins                                      | 13 (76.47) | 4 (23.53) | 0                          |
| Security                                                   | 16 (94.12) | 0       | 1 (5.88)                  |
| Deployment of guards                                       | 14 (82.35) | 3 (17.65) | 2 (11.76)                 |
| Allowed to take pictures                                  | 2 (11.76) | 13 (76.47) | 2 (11.76)                 |
| Don’t pay attention to factors because of spiritual consideration | 8 (47.06) | 8 (47.06) | 1 (5.88)                  |
| **Temple 3** (n=23)                                        |         |        |                            |
| First impression good                                      | 21 (91.30) | 2 (8.70) | 0                          |
| Female pilgrims are more                                   | 12 (52.17) | 6 (26.09) | 5 (21.74)                 |
| Enough space to offer prayers                              | 19 (82.61) | 4 (17.39) | 0                          |
| Cleanliness                                                | 23 (100)  | 0       | 0                          |
| Provision of dustbins                                      | 21 (91.30) | 2 (8.70) | 0                          |
| Security                                                   | 19 (82.61) | 4 (17.39) | 0                          |
| Deployment of guards                                       | 21 (91.30) | 2 (8.70) | 0                          |
| Allowed to take pictures                                  | 15 (65.22) | 8 (34.78) | 0                          |
| Don’t pay attention to factors because of spiritual consideration | 12 (52.17) | 11 (47.83) | 0                          |
were sympathetic, and there was one other response telling that they were mere professional seekers.

There were more positive responses about mannerisms of priests in temple 2 and 3, which can be attributed to better temple management and ambience of these temples. There was one other comment in temple 3 describing the priests as not efficient. There were 51 no comments in temple 1, 22 in temple 2 and 61 in temple 3. This finding may suggest that people are either religiously constrained as not to provide a negative comment or are satisfied, but more so because they do not bother so much and take for granted the mannerisms of priests inside the temples as natural.

| Environmental factors                        | Temple 1 (n=27) | Temple 2 (n=17) | Temple 3 (n=23) |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Facilities for specially abled               | 6 (1-yes but not properly applied); 8 (29.63) | 9 (52.94) | 9 (39.13) |
| Equity                                       | 15 (55.56) | 8 (47.06) | 14 (60.87) |
| Easy commutation                             | 23 (85.19) | 16 (94.12) | 21 (91.30) |
| Good boarding facilities                     | 22 (81.48) | 12 (1-yes with prior booking); 12 (52.17) | 3 (17.65) |

Table 5 describes access and linkage with positive viewpoints regarding visit to all three temples. Facilities for specially abled in temple 1 was perceived by 22.22% visitors and no comments was the response by 48.15%. In temple 2, 52.94% perceived provision for visitors with disability and 35.30% no comments for the same. In temple 3, 39.13% responded for availability of such facilities like wheel chairs and 43.48% had no comments.

Equity of access to darshan in temples by people of all socio-economic classes and their boarding and commuting facilities were found to be fairly good. There were fair responses to equity. For boarding and commuting, visitors had responded positively with good comments irrespective of temples where we interviewed them.

As shown in Table 6, there were certain viewpoints shared regarding various environmental factors. Temple 3 was the first to be located when one enters the temple town from the highway NH-2 and had a very spacious, newly constructed infrastructure. It is a newly planned temple, hence people visiting were found to be happier about rightly managed transportation. Whereas, temple 1 and 2 were primitive and embraces huge emotional attachment among the visitors, there were uncomfortable parking and access facilities with heavy load of visitors in congested streets which might have elicited negative remarks as described in Table 6.

Regarding access and linkage, people gave good comments except in temple 1 where there was less space, many visitors and no place to sit for some time and pray. Also for temple 1 there were mixed viewpoints on cleanliness, drinking water supply, and bribery. There were 13 comments portraying dissatisfaction due to long queues and overall comfort. There were good comments for temple 2 and 3. When the visitors were asked about their overall spiritual experience, they all felt good except that there was one comment by a teenager visiting temple 3 that he did not have spiritual satisfaction and he belonged to local area.
### Table 6: Viewpoints and suggested environmental changes by temple visitors.

| Thematic viewpoints                   | Temple 1 (n=27)                                      | Temple 2 (n=17)                                      | Temple 3 (n=23)                                      |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Transportation facilities            | 1-Alikraman nahi (no encroachment of space)          | 6-good                                              | 1-cannot advice                                      |
|                                      | 3-All good                                           | 8-no comments                                       | 1-do something about it                               |
|                                      | 1-good                                               | 1-one way line for vans                              | 19-no comments                                       |
|                                      | 1-heavy traffic                                      | 1-need parking system                                | 1-need of proper parking                               |
|                                      | 17-no comments                                       | 1-were charged more fare                             | 1-rightly managed                                     |
|                                      | 1-needs improvement                                  |                                                    |                                                     |
|                                      | 2-Pedestrians suffer                                 |                                                    |                                                     |
|                                      | 1-loot                                               |                                                    |                                                     |
|                                      |                                                     |                                                    |                                                     |
| Access and linkage                   | 4-All good                                           | 6-good                                              | 23-no comments                                       |
|                                      | 21-no comments                                       | 1-should be more pedestrian                         |                                                     |
|                                      | 1-cannot sit, timings limited                        | 10-no comments                                      |                                                     |
| Cleanliness                          | 3-bad                                                | 12-good                                             | 3-very good                                          |
|                                      | 16-good                                              | 1-no comment                                        | 20-good                                              |
|                                      | 2-fair                                               | 4-not good                                          |                                                     |
|                                      | 4-no comments                                        |                                                    |                                                     |
|                                      | 2-not good                                           |                                                    |                                                     |
| Drinking water facility              | 2-bad                                                | 10-good                                             | 1-available                                          |
|                                      | 5-don’t know                                         | 1-no comments                                       | 3-very good                                          |
|                                      | 13-good                                              | 6-not good                                          | 19-good                                              |
|                                      | 5-not good                                           |                                                    |                                                     |
| Bribery                              | 6-bad, present                                       | 1-bad                                               | 2-bad, present                                       |
|                                      | 7-no comments                                        | 1-not fair                                          | 3-no comments                                        |
|                                      | 13-not present, spiritual constraint                 | 11-no comments                                      | 14-not present                                       |
|                                      | 1-no problem with it                                 | 2-good not present                                  | 3-no problem                                         |
|                                      |                                                     | 2-no problem with it                                 | 1-stop wrong ways of income generation by stakeholders and pujaris |
| Management of long queues and comfort| 13-bad, no proper queue system, crowding             | 6-bad                                               | 3-bad, crowded, present                               |
|                                      | 5-no problem, comfortable, godliness                 | 2-no problem with it                                 | 7-no problem with it                                  |
|                                      | 4-no comments                                        | 3-no comments                                       | 2-no comments                                        |
|                                      | 4-no queues                                          | 1-difficult                                         | 11-not present                                       |
|                                      | 1-sometimes present                                  | 5-not present                                       |                                                     |
| Spiritual satisfaction               | 1-excellent                                          | 11-good                                             | 1-not satisfied                                      |
|                                      | 22-good                                              | 1-no comment                                        | 5-very good                                          |
|                                      | 1-very good                                          | 5-very good                                          | 16-good                                              |
|                                      | 3-no comments                                        |                                                    | 1-yes spiritual experience                           |

**DISCUSSION**

Du Plessis et al found that the more frequent the visits, the more the environmental impacts of tourism were perceived.³ In contrast to this study, in our survey, the viewpoints noted had no dependence upon frequency of visits. The negative responses perceived were only due to mismanagement hurdles like long lines, no space to pray and all visitors had spiritual and religious constraints why most did not pay attention to surrounding environment.

According to Barkauskas et al many scientists proposed that rural tourism created economic and non-economic (socio-cultural and ecological or environmental)
benefits. Similarly, in our study the local inhabitants gained income through shops, eateries and priests employed in temples, revenue was gained by managing darshan and the mannerisms of pujaris was found to affect the visitors who had mixed emotions about them. Quite a few judged them to be greedy, unfair while some admitted that the pujaris were sympathetic and had good conduct.

According to a study conducted by Priyanka et al. the pilgrimage affected the environment with problems such as accumulation of huge amount of non-biodegradable waste (plastic and glass cups, polythene etc.), water pollution (due to inadequate sewerage facilities), deforestation due to harvesting of firewood, and destruction of flora and fauna were reported. Another problem was related to overcrowding, congestion and stampedes which usually got a lot of media attention. Mathura has become a municipality recently and there were no comments regarding environmental sanitation, people’s viewpoints were not directed towards garbage accumulation, open drains, spitting, trash or unhygienic toilet facilities.

CONCLUSION

Pilgrimage is holy and people visit the temples to fulfill their vows and traditions without critically analyzing the surrounding environment. The visitors felt spiritual and emotionally aroused and preferred not to comment on not so comfortable aspects of the environment, they were momentarily agitated but acclimatized themselves to age old norms and conditions. But we cannot neglect the other few who did not make controversial comments and some spoke to bring about a better environment. Such will be the majority of the whole in coming years.

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