

Tourism Industry in Pushkar and Ajmer (A Geographical Analysis)

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ABSTRACT: Pushkar is a city, near Ajmer City and headquarters of Pushkar tehsil in the Ajmer district in the Indian state of Rajasthan. It is situated about 10 km (6.2 mi) northwest of Ajmer and about 150 kilometres (93 mi) southwest of Jaipur.^[1] It is a pilgrimage site for Hindus and Sikhs. Pushkar has many temples. Most of the temples and ghats in Pushkar are from the 18th century and later, because many temples were destroyed during Muslim conquests in the area.^{[1][2]} Subsequently, the destroyed temples were rebuilt. The most famous among Pushkar temples is the red spired Brahma Temple. It is considered a sacred city by the Hindus particularly in Shaktism,^{[1][3]} and meat and eggs consumption are forbidden in the city.^[4] Pushkar is located on the shore of Pushkar Lake, which has many ghats where pilgrims bathe.^[3] Pushkar is also significant for its Gurdwaras for Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. One of the bathing ghats is called Gobind ghat built by the Sikhs in the memory of Guru Gobind Singh.^[5] Ajmer is a city in Rajasthan, India. Ajmer is the headquarters of the Ajmer district. The city was established as "Ajayameru" by a Chahamana ruler, either Ajayaraja I or Ajayaraja II, and served as their capital until the 12th century CE.^{[3][4]}

Ajmer is surrounded by the Aravalli Mountains. Ajmer had been a municipality since 1869. Ajmer has been selected as one of the heritage cities for the HRIDAY^[5] and Smart City Mission schemes of the Government of India.^[6]

KEYWORDS: Pushkar, Ajmer, Tourism Industry, Pilgrimage, District, Aravalli, Rajasthan, Government, India

I.INTRODUCTION

In Ajmer, The main tourist places here are the Ajmer Sharif, Taragarh Fort, Soniji Ki Nasiyan, Nareli Jain Temple and many attracts tourists. The Pushkar Lake is located 11km away from Ajmer. Pushkar is famous for its annual fair (Pushkar Camel Fair)[1] featuring a trading fete of cattle, horses and camels.^[1] It is held over seven days in autumn marking Kartika Purnima according to the Hindu calendar (Kartik (month), October or November). It attracts nearly 200,000 people.^[3] In 1998, Pushkar hosted about 1 million domestic (95%) and international tourists over the year.^[6] Pushkar is in centre-east part of Rajasthan, on the western side of Aravalli mountains. [2,3]The nearest airport from Pushkar is Kishangarh Airport in Kishangarh, about 45 km (28 mi) northeast. Pushkar is about 10 km (6.2 mi) from Ajmer, connected via Pushkar road (Highway 58) which goes over the Aravalli Range mountains. Ajmer is also the nearest major railway station.^[8] Pushkar is believed to be the place where Brahma performed penance for a very long time and therefore is also one of the rare places which hosts a temple to the Hindu creator god. According to the Padma Purana, once Brahma decided to go to the earth and reaching the area of the present Pushkar, he entered that forest, full of many trees and creepers, adorned with many flowers, filled with the notes of many birds, crowded with groups of many beasts. Brahma was very pleased with the forests and trees and after remaining at Pushkar for a thousand years he threw a lotus on the ground which made the earth tremble to its core. The devas were also shaken and not knowing what had caused the upheaval, went to look for Brahma but could not find him. Vishnu told them the reason for the tremors and took them to Pushkar to meet Brahma. However they could not get a glimpse of him [1,2] and Vayu and Brihaspati suggested them to meditate according to Vedic rites to be able to see Brahma. After a long time the creator-god became visible to them and asked them why they were so distressed. The devas told him about the tumult caused by his dropping the lotus from his hand and asked the reason for it. Brahma informed them that a demon named Vajranabha who used to take away the life of children was waiting there to kill the gods but Brahma brought about his destruction by dropping the lotus. Since he had dropped the lotus there, therefore that place would be known as Pushkara, a great, sanctifying holy place, giving religious merit.^[9] Pushkar is near some of the oldest geological structures in India. Microliths near Khera and Kaderi suggest the region was settled in ancient times. The Aravalli hills near it have yielded Mohenjodaro-style artifacts, but the connection is unclear as these items may have been transported later.^[10] Sites near it have been sources of ancient Brahmi script inscriptions, considered pre-Ashokan near village Badli.^[11] Local excavations have been a source of red ware and painted gray ware confirming ancient settlement.^[10]

Pushkar is mentioned in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas, suggesting its significance in historical and religious tradition of Hinduism.^{[10][12]} The city is mentioned in many texts dated to the 1st millennium.^[8] These texts are not, however, historical. The earliest historical records relating to Pushkar and Ajmer are found in Islamic texts describing the raids and conquest of northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent.^[10]



The region finds mention in Mohammad Ghori's 1192 CE conquest related records, in the defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan. Thereafter, Pushkar and nearby Ajmer find mention in historical records related to Qutub-ud-din Aibak. It was regained by Hindus under the Chahamanas of Ranastambhapura in 1287, but regained by the Delhi Sultanate in 1301 and remained in Muslim control for many centuries.^[10] Akbar made the nearby Ajmer one of the provincial capitals, and it remained a part of the Mughal Empire until 1712 CE.^[10] The Muslim rule brought destruction as well as cultural influences. Aurangzeb's armies destroyed the Hindu temples along the lake.^[11] The cattle and camel trading tradition brought merchants from Afghanistan.^[13] With the collapse of Mughal Empire after Aurangzeb, Pushkar was regained by Hindus and became a part of Jodhpur State under the Rathores of Marwar who rebuilt the temples and ghats.^[5] Several important temples were rebuilt by the Rajputs, Marathas, Brahmans and wealthy Hindu merchants. The Brahma temple was rebuilt by Gokul Parak Oswal, the temple of Saraswati was rebuilt by the Purohit of Jodhpur, the temple of Badri Narayana was rebuilt by the Thakur of Kherwa, the temple of Varaha which had been destroyed by Jahangir was rebuilt by Maharaja Bakht Singh of Marwar and the Maratha Noble Goma Rao rebuilt the Shiva Atmateshwara Temple.^{[14][11]} In 1801, Pushkar came under British rule and remained a part of the British Raj until 1947.^[10]

In contemporary times, it has been the venue of the famed annual Pushkar Camel Fair.^[3] In 1901, the town was part of the Rajputana Agency had a population of 3,831.^[16]

According to 2011 India census,^[15] Pushkar had a population of 21,626. The town had 11,335 resident males and 10,291 females. Children in the 0-6 age group constituted 13.95% of the population. About 80% of the population including all age groups was literate (90% male literacy rate, 70% female). The town had over 4,250 houses, or about 5 residents on average per house.^[15]

Festivals and landmarks

Pushkar Fair

Pushkar fair continues for five days and these five days are a period of relaxation and merry-making for the villagers. This fair time is the busiest time for them, as this is one of the largest cattle fairs in the country. Animals, including over 50,000 camels,^[1] are brought from distant places around to be traded and sold. All the camels are washed and adorned, some are shorn to form artistic patterns. Some camels, horses, and cows are colorfully decorated.^[18]

In addition to the animal trading market, Pushkar in parallel holds a festival of folk music and dances, ferris wheels, magic shows, horse and camel races and various other traditional sports and team entertainment competitions. While the Pushkar fair is held around the Kartik Purnima that typically overlaps between late October and early November, other seasons feature other sports and festivals for pilgrims who visit the sacred lake.^{[19][20]}

Sikh Gurdwaras^[2,3]



A Sikh Gurdwara in Pushkar

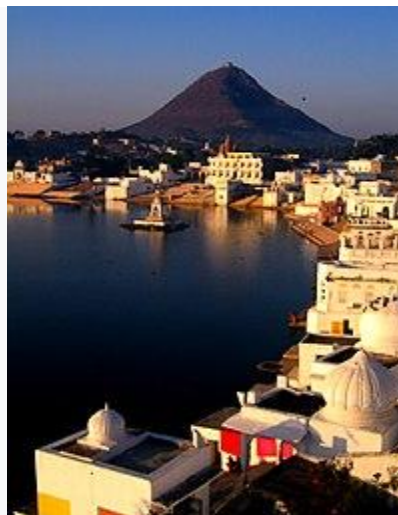
Pushkar is a sacred pilgrimage site for Sikhs as well, according to Gurmukh Singh, with Gurdwaras dedicated to Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. These have historic roots, with the Guru Nanak Gurdwara in the eastern part of the town called Guru Nanak Dharamsala, a name common for Sikh shrines before the 20th-century. The Sikh Dharamshala is a two-storeyed building consisting of a central room, surrounded by a verandah.^[5]

The second Sikh temple is dedicated to Guru Gobind Singh marking his visit after he left Anandpur Sahib. Pandit Parmanand took an oath on the holy cow on behalf of Hindu kings and Muslim priest, Qazi Syed Wali Hassan took an oath on the Quran which was handwritten by Aurangzeb. They promised that if Guru ji leaves Anandpur Sahib then he will not attack Guru ji and everyone can move out of Anandpur Sahib peacefully.^[5] The place he stayed in and the lakefront next to it is now called the Gobind Ghat. It has a memorial inscription and this shrine was built with the sponsorship of the Maratha Empire, after the widespread Hindu-Muslim wars in the final decades of Aurangzeb rule and the collapse of the Mughal Empire.^[5] The shrine has an old hand written copy of the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib and a hukumnama believed by Sikhs to have been written by Guru Gobind Singh. Both these have been preserved by a Pushkar Brahmin priest, a descendant of the priest whom the Guru met. The hukumnama is on a bhoj patra, a method of recording letters in the 18th century.^[5]

Pushkar Holi[3,4]

Holi takes place in March and it is one of the most important festivals in the Hindu calendar. It represents the triumph of good over evil and the coming of springtime. Holi celebrations happen all over India and involve huge jubilant street parties. During Holi, Bhang (ancient Indian cannabis edible) is served in Pushkar, which is known to have some of the best Bhang in India.^[21]

Other landmarks



Ghats at Pushkar lake

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The Brahma temple at Pushkar

- Brahma Temple (Jagatpita Brahma Mandir) – The most important temple in Pushkar is the temple of Brahma, one of the holy trinity of Hinduism. The temple enshrines a life-size idol of Brahma.

Fairs

- Nagaur Fair
- Tejaji Fair

Ajmer is the nearest tourist attraction that lies outside the city boundaries of Pushkar. Located 27 kilometres away from Ajmer, there is Kishangarh, famous for its miniature paintings, more popularly known as Bani Thani.

Pushkar Lake – The prime attraction of Pushkar is the Pushkar Lake which is considered sacred like the Mansarovar Lake in Tibet. Pushkar has become a place of Hindu pilgrimage because of this holy lake. Legend has it that this lake was consecrated to Brahma, the creator of the universe when a lotus dropped from his hand into the vale and a lake emerged in that place.

Old Pushkar – Old Pushkar lake is rebuilt and is located around 5 km from Pushkar Lake. According to the ancient texts, Old Pushkar has equal cultural and religious significance for the pilgrims.



Panoramic view of Pushkar lake

III.DISCUSSION

Ajmer, in Rajasthan, western India, is very popular as a gateway to Pushkar, and is connected by road with Jaipur and Delhi.

This city also has an important Islamic pilgrimage site, the shrine of the Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti.[3,4]



Interior of Ajmer Jain Temple

By plane

- Ajmer Airport - Kishangarh Airport, Ajmer (IATA: KQH, ICAO: VIKG) is a domestic airport in Kishangarh on National Highway 8, 27 km north-east of Ajmer. The airport is well connected by daily flights from Delhi, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Indore, Belgaum and Surat. As of March 2021, SpiceJet and Star Air serve this airport.[4,5]

By train

- From Delhi - the Delhi-Ahmedabad Mail is a decent overnight train (slow, but it gives you more time to sleep) while the Ajmer Shatabdi Express is the fastest way to get there. There are passenger trains (second unreserved only—definitely an "experience") in the morning and evening to Jaipur and train links down to Ahmedabad. The city is also connected to Udaipur, of which Intercity Express would be a better option.
- From Kolkata - The Sealdah station and the Kolkata(Chitpur) station are well connected to Ajmer Junction. Trains like Ananya express (Sealdah), Sealdah-Ajmer Daily Express and Kolkata(Chitpur)-Ajmer express are trains for Ajmer.
- 1 Ajmer Junction railway station.

By bus

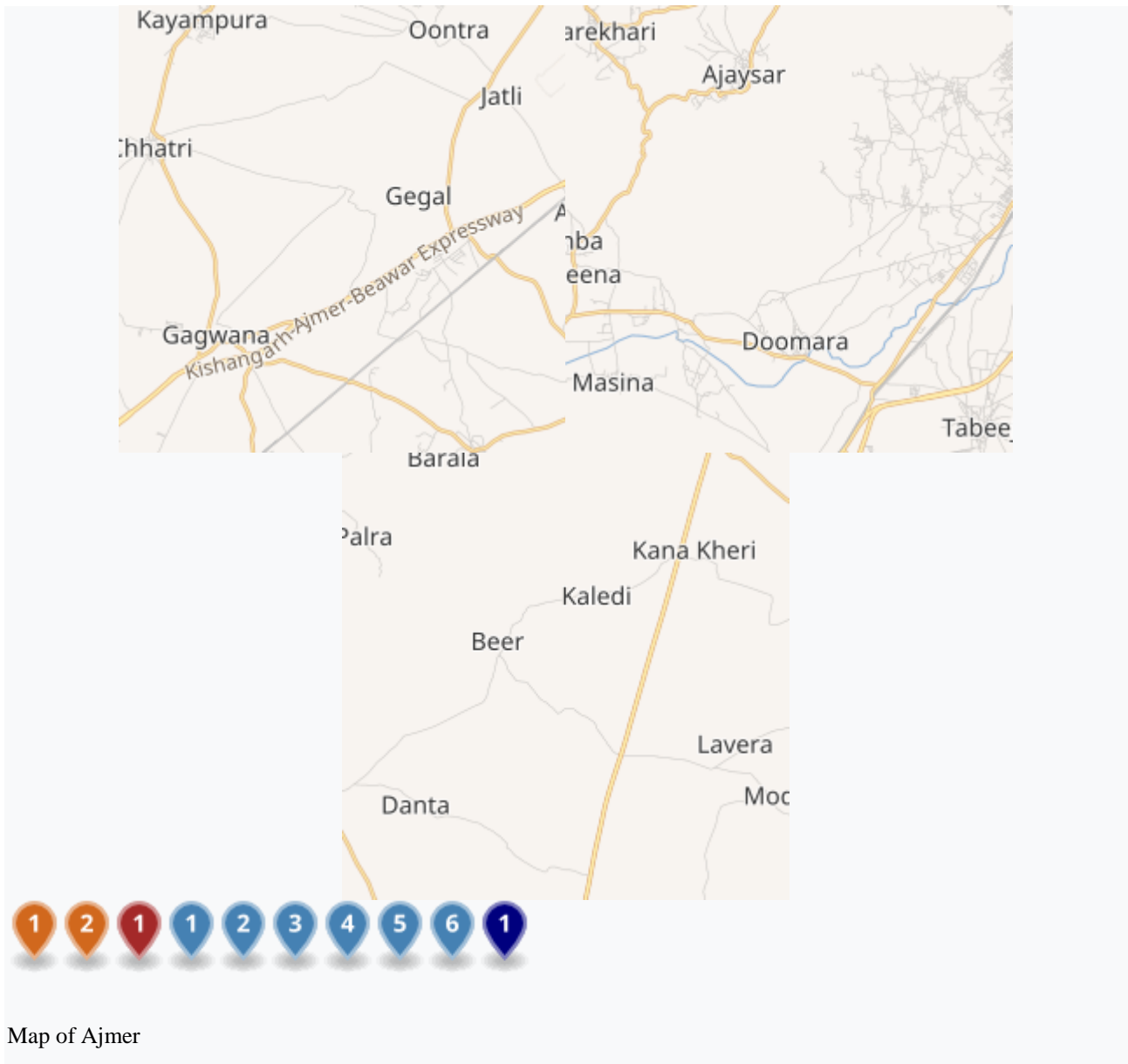
Jaipur is 1½–3 hours by road (depending on the type of bus you take)(the Jaipur-Ajmer expressway also known as national highway 8 is a 6 lane road and is fantastic to drive on). Jodhpur is 4–5 hours in the opposite direction.[5,6]

By taxi

Various tour operators and travel agencies offer chauffeured car-taxi services; these are charged on a per km, per day basis. You can plan to take one to arrive into the city or take one for sightseeing in and around the city. If you want a decent car for the tour you can hire one from the stand in front of Zilla Parishad Bhawan (district's management headquarters); if you are good at bargaining, it's the best option.

There are also many car rental services which provide chauffeur-driven cars to Ajmer.





Map of Ajmer

Ajmer is a very limited market place, once you get your bearings. Dargah Bazaar is about 15 minutes walk from railway station, and Ana Sagar[6,7] ("lake" - which has marble pavilions in a garden and is a wonderful place to sit, especially on hot days) is about 30 minutes' walk. There are some wonderful back-alleys—just wander down small side streets from Dargah bazaar and you'll see some wonderful old architecture and murals before you stumble back across the main street.

Other than on foot, cycle rickshaws, autorickshaws (who are intent on taking you to Pushkar) and horse-drawn tongas are available for hire (the latter on selected routes only). There are also tempos and mini buses which run between bus stand and railway station and covering most over town - fare seems to be ₹10 in 2019.[8,9]

- 1 Akbari Fort and Museum. Emperor Akbar's royal residence, now serves as a museum, which houses an excellent collection of Mughal and Rajput armour, and some fine sculptures.
- 2 Ana Sagar Lake. The dam built by the grand father of Emperor Prithviraj Chouhan in Ajmer. Daulat Bag is an enormous park by the side of Ana Sagar and is a nice place to relax. there are marble monuments by the shore

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and plenty of ice cream and papad-wallahs selling snacks. There is apparently boat rental, though other than a bumper boats tank.

- Brahma Temple. Must go to Pushkar to visit this amazing Brahma Temple near Pushkar Lake, go shopping in the narrow but ethnic and colourful lanes of the marketplace, eat traditional foods as well as international delicacies in the numerous eateries. [9,10]



The holy Dargah Sharif of Ajmer

- 3 Ajmer Sharif Dargah, 111 Faiz Manzil, Nathwan Shah, Dargah Sharif, Khadim Mohalla, The Dargah is a major pilgrimage centre of Muslim religion and holds a special place in the life of the Sufi saint Khwaja Moin Uddin Chisty(RA). Entry is free, but you should pay the people watching your shoes a couple of bucks. Priests are available to act as guides and to perform ceremonies at the shrine. Men and women must cover their heads, and women must cover their shoulders. The beggars in the Dargah Bazaar can be quite persistent. It is suggested for women not to enter the shrine in western clothes.
- Happy Valley. Only if it is rainy season and you don't have old members in your group.
- 4 Nareli, Sri Dnyanoday Tirtha Area, Gyanoday Nagar. A Jain place on the outskirts (Kishangarh bypass). This is a good place to visit, has a very big temple and offer authentic Jain food (You have to check the meal hours in advance, they are strict in serving meals in those hours only).
- 5 Prithviraj Smarak. A park dedicated to Emperor Prithviraj Chouhan of the 11th century.
- Shah Jahan's Mosque. This mosque is the most beautiful of all the structures, in the Dargah precinct. It is made of white marble, delicately carved with trellis-work.
- 6 Ajmer Jain temple (Soni Ji Ki Nasiyaan), Dumada, Adarsh Nagar. This Jain temple built in the 19th century on the way to Ana Sagar is quite beautiful from the outside, it has a gold model of the city of Ayodhya, the birthplace of Hindu lord Ram, but usual temple protocols apply.
- Taragarh Hill. It has a shrine and it is the second highest peak in Rajasthan

III.RESULTS

Pushkar Lake or Pushkar Sarovar is located in the town of Pushkar near Ajmer city in Ajmer district of the Rajasthan state of western India. Pushkar Lake is a sacred lake of the Hindus. The Hindu scriptures describe it as "Tirtha-Guru" [Thirtha Raj]– the perceptor of pilgrimage sites related to a water-body and relate it to the mythology of the creator-god Brahma, whose most prominent temple stands in Pushkar. The Pushkar Lake finds mention on coins as early as the 4th century BC.[10,11]

Pushkar Lake is surrounded by 52 bathing ghats (a series of steps leading to the lake), where pilgrims throng in large numbers to take a sacred bath, especially around Kartik Poornima (October–November) when the Pushkar Fair is held. A dip in the sacred lake is believed to cleanse sins and cure skin diseases. Over 500 Hindu temples are situated around the lake precincts.[12,13]

Tourism and deforestation in the surroundings have taken a heavy toll on the lake, adversely affecting its water quality, reducing the water levels and destroying the fish population. As part of conservation measures, the government is undertaking de-silting, de-weeding, water treatment, and afforestation as well as mass awareness programme.

Pushkar Lake around which the Pushkar town has developed is in the Ajmer district in the state of Rajasthan, India amidst the Aravalli range of hills. The mountain range known as Nag Parbat ("snake mountain") separates the lake from the city of Ajmer. The valley is formed between the two parallel ranges of the Aravalli hills (in elevation range of 650–856 metres (2,133–2,808 ft) running south-west to north-east. Situated at 14 kilometres (8.7 mi) northwest from Ajmer, the artificial Pushkar Lake created by building a dam is surrounded by deserts and hills on all three sides.^{[1][2]} The lake is categorized as a "Sacred Lake" under the list of "Classification of Lakes in India".^{[2][3]}

The soil and topography in the catchment are predominantly sandy with very low water retention capacity.^[2] The land use pattern in the Pushkar valley that drains into the lake comprises 30% of the area under shifting sand dunes, 30% under hills (degraded and barren) and streams and 40% of the area is agricultural.^[4]



Pushkar Lake in Rajasthan

The region experiences semi-arid climatic conditions with dry and hot summers and cool winters. The summer months of May and June are the hottest, with a maximum temperature of around 45 °C (113 °F). [14,15] During the winter months, the maximum mean temperature is in the range of 25–10 °C (77–50 °F).^[2] Rain mainly occurs during a short spell of two months during July and August. The recorded average rainfall is in the range of 400–600 millimetres (16–24 in). Rainfall is also recorded some times during winter months of January and February.^[2]

From April to September, strong winds blowing in the southwest to northeast direction add to the formation of sand dunes.^[2]

The Pushkar Lake drains a catchment of the Aravalli hills covering an area of 22 square kilometres (8.5 sq mi). The lake has a water surface area of 22 hectares (54 acres). It is a perennial lake sourced by the monsoon rainfall over the catchment. The depth of water in the lake varies from season to season from 8–10 metres (26–33 ft). The total storage capacity of the lake is 0.79 million cubic metres (1.03 million cu yd). As the lake periphery is encircled by 52 ghats of various sizes, the surface water flow from the catchment into the lake is channeled through a series of arches under a footbridge, 110 metres (360 ft) long at the southern end. The footbridge facilitates the parikrama (circumambulation) that is performed by pilgrims around the lake covering all the 52 ghats (covers an area of 2 hectares (4.9 acres)).^[5] Pushkar Lake, when full, is rich in fish and other aquatic life. The depth of the lake has substantially shrunk – to less than 1.5 metres (4.9 ft) from a maximum of 9 metres (30 ft) – resulting in the death of large fish weighing 5–20 kilograms (11–44 lb), caused due to the viscous water and the lack of oxygen for the fish to survive. Since the region where the lake and its valley is situated is arid, the flora and fauna recorded relate to desert plants, including cactus and thorny bushes, as well as desert animals like camels and cattle.^{[6][7]} Man-eating crocodiles used to be a menace in the Pushkar Lake, resulting in the deaths of people. Pilgrims were aware of this fact, yet many considered it lucky to be eaten by crocodiles.^[8] The crocodiles were caught with nets by the British and shifted to a nearby reservoir.^[9] Pushkar Lake's history dates back to the 4th century BC. Numismatics, in the form of punched Greek and Kushan coins date the

lake back to this time. The inscriptions found at Sanchi attest to the lake's existence to the 2nd Century BC. This suggests that Pushkar was a pilgrimage centre even if it did not lie on the trade route.^[10]

In the fifth century AD, Chinese traveller Fa Xian made reference to the number of visitors to Pushkar Lake.^{[11][16]}

A story tells of a ninth-century Gurjara king, Nahar Rao Parihar of Mandore, chasing a white boar to the lakeshore on a hunting expedition. [17,18] In order to quench his thirst, he dipped his hand into the lake and was astonished to see that the Leukoderma marks on his hand had disappeared. Impressed with the sacred curative nature of the lake, he got the lake restored to its glory. After discovering the curative characteristics of the lake water, people have since visited the lake to take a holy dip and cure themselves of skin problems.^{[12][13]}

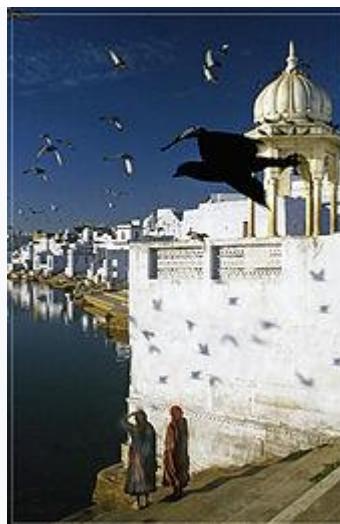
The creation of Pushkar Lake, as an artificial lake, is also credited to the 12th century when a dam was built across the headwaters of the Luni River. The 10th Sikh guru, Guru Govind Singh (1666–1708), is said to have recited the Sikh sacred text Guru Granth Sahib on the banks of the lake.^[14]

During the Mughal rule, there was a short break in the lake's importance due to the levy of a pilgrim tax and a ban on religious processions. In 1615–16, the Mughal emperor Jahangir (1569–1627) built his hunting lodge (seen now in total ruins) on the shores of the Pushkar Lake to celebrate his victory over the local Rajput Rana (king). He came to this lodge 16 times for hunting during his stay in Ajmer, about 23 kilometres (14 mi) from Pushkar.[18,19] This act violated the local tradition of not killing any animals in the precincts of the sacred lake. He also committed an idolatrous act by breaking the image of Varaha – the boar Avatar of the god Vishnu, as it resembled a pig and symbolically hurt Islamic sensitivity. Thereafter, Jahangir's grandson emperor Aurangzeb (1618–1707) destroyed and desecrated several temples, which were later rebuilt.^{[11][15]} However, during the rule of Jahangir's father, Emperor Akbar (1542–1605), there was a revival of not only the lake but also the Ajmer's Dargah dedicated to sufi saint Moinuddin Chishti, of whom Akbar was a devout follower.^[10]

The Rajput rulers of Amber, Bundi, Bikaner and Jaisalmer made great efforts to restore the importance of the lake and its surrounding temples. Credits given for modern additions to the building of ghats and the renovation/construction of temples go to Maharaja Man Singh I of Amber for the Raj Ghat and Man temple; Maha Rana Pratap for the Varaha temple; Daulat Rao Scindia for Kot Tirth Ghat, the Marathas-Anaji Scindia to the Koteswar Mahadev temple and Govind Rao, the Maratha governor of Ajmer for Shiva Ghat; to the British rule for combining the religious pilgrimage with a cattle fair to generate taxes for improving the lake and its surroundings; and gifting of the Jaipur Ghat and the Main Palace on the ghat in 1956 by the Maharaja of Jaipur.^[16]

IV.CONCLUSIONS

There are various legends from Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Puranic scriptures which mention the Pushkar Lake and the town of Pushkar surrounding it.



Early morning view of the ghats at the Pushkar Lake.[20]

According to the Hindu scripture Padma Purana, Brahma saw the demon Vajranabha (Vajranash in another version) trying to kill his children and harassing people. He immediately slew the demon with his weapon, the lotus-flower. In this process, the lotus petals fell on the ground at three places, where springs emerged creating three lakes: the Pushkar Lake or Jyeshtha Pushkar (greatest or first Pushkar), the Madya Pushkar (middle Pushkar) Lake, and Kanishta Pushkar (lowest or youngest Pushkar) lake. When Brahma came down to the earth, he named the place where the flower ("pushpa") fell from Brahma's hand ("kar") as "Pushkar".^{[10][17]} It is also said that the sacred Sarasvati River emerged at Pushkar as five streams.^{[1][12]} The three lakes were assigned their presiding deities as the Hindu Trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, respectively. When Brahma came down to the earth, he named the place where the lotus fell as 'Pushkar'. Brahma then decided to perform a yagna at the place,^[21] at the main Pushkar Lake. However, his wife Savitri (called Sarasvati in some versions)^[22] could not be present at the designated time to perform the essential part of the yagna. Brahma, therefore, married a Gujjar, a dominant agricultural race named Gayatri and completed the yagna with his new consort sitting beside him. However, when Savitri finally arrived at the venue, she found Gayatri sitting next to Brahma in her rightful place. Agitated, she cursed Brahma that he would be worshipped only in Pushkar. As a result of this, yagna performed in the presence of all the gods, it is said that a dip in the lake created at this place is credited with holiness, assuring salvation from all sins. It is now one of the five holiest centres of pilgrimage for Hindus.^{[10][18][19][20][21]}

Ramayana and Mahabharata refer to Pushkar Lake as Adi Tirtha, or the "original sacred water-body". The famous Sanskrit poet and play-writer Kalidasa also referred to this lake in his poem Abhijnānaśākuntalam.^[19] The Ramayana mentions that Vishwamitra performed penance at Pushkar Lake for a thousand years. In spite of Brahma appearing before him and granting him the higher status of a rishi instead of a royal-sage (rajarishi), Vishwamitra continued his penance, but, the celestial nymph apsara, Menaka came to the lake to take a bath. Vishwamitra was enamoured by her beauty and they decided to live together in pursuit of pleasure for ten years. Then, Vishwamitra realized that his main activity of penance was disturbed. He, therefore, took leave of Menaka and went away to the north to continue his meditation.^[22] Vishwamitra was also described as building the Brahma temple at Pushkar after Brahma's yagna.^[23] Mahabharata mentions that Pushkar is a holy place of the god Vishnu, considered as the Adi Tirtha where millions of tirthas united during sunrise and sunset, and visiting the lake and taking a holy bath in the lake would wash off all sins.¹



Morning view of one of the ghats on the lake

According to Hindu theology, there are five sacred lakes collectively called Panch-Sarovar ('Sarovar' means "lake"). Namely, Mansarovar, Bindu Sarovar, Narayan Sarovar, Pampa Sarovar and Pushkar Sarovar; hence, Pushkar is considered one of the most sacred places in India. It is also the belief of devotees that a dip in the waters of the lake on Kartik Poornima would equal the benefits that would accrue by performing yagnas (fire-sacrifices) for several centuries.^[21] Pushkar is often called "Tirtha-Raj" – the king of pilgrimage sites related to water-bodies.^{[1][2]} The scriptures also mention that doing parikrama (circumambulation) of the three lakes (the main Pushkar, Madya Pushkar where there is a Hanuman temple and an old Banyan tree, and Kanishta Pushkar where a Krishna temple exists), which cover a distance of 16 kilometres (9.9 mi), during the Kartik Poornima day would be highly auspicious.^[17] International Business Times has identified Pushkar as one of the ten most religious places in the world and one of the five sacred pilgrimage places for the Hindus, in India.^{[20][23]}

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