



**Potential of Religious Tourism in Hazara Division:
A Case of District Abbottabad and Mansehra**

Sadaf Butt,¹ Arsalan Ur Rehman²

Abstract:

Tourism in Hazara Division has an important place; it represents rich tourist's sites including historical places and civilizations. Traces of five religions not only add the potential of religious tourism in Hazara but also boost the economy of the region. The main objective of this research is to bring the historical locations, religious places and site points of Abbottabad and Mansehra Districts into the limelight so that this religious heritage could be preserved and promoted for future generations. This research is qualitative in nature based on both primary and secondary sources which include; District Profiles, Gazetteers, Official Report, e-books and Historical Documents found in archives, government offices and libraries. This research aims to highlight the religious sites of Abbottabad and Mansehra Districts that would contribute to enhance religious tourism not only in Hazara but in Pakistan, as the place which represents religious places from almost five religions to attract tourists from all religions.

Keywords: Pakistan, Abbottabad, Mansehra, Hazara Division, religious tourism, civilization.

INTRODUCTION

Religion and spirituality are the integral parts of mankind; being connected to religion has two major benefits; one is that relationship between man and God becomes deeper and stronger, and the other is that it provides persons the desire to live and also teaches them the ways of a good and healthy life. There are innumerable religions in the world and their followers are strongly attached to their respective religions. Contrary to the growing needs of the developed world, religion still has an important role in society. No matter how advance man and the world has become, religion cannot be ignored because the peace of mankind is directly linked to religion (Saqib, 2011).

¹ Lecturer, Department of Pakistan Studies, Abbottabad University of Science & Technology (AUST), Abbottabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Email: sadafbutt999@gmail.com

² Student of MSc. Strategic Business Management, University of Law Business School, Manchester Campus, Manchester, UK. Email: arsalan.rehman25@law.ac.uk

Some monuments have been built in every era to keep the religious traditions alive and this process continues even today. Those religious memorials not only remind us of the past, speak a lot about many historical facts. In today's world, religious tourism has become an undeniable fact. There is a need for the pioneers of religious tourism to extract those monuments from the hidden pages of history and bring them to the limelight so that the religious heritage could be strengthened (Rizwan & Butt, 2021).

Pakistan is included in the list of those fortunate countries whose soil is imprinted with ancient religions of the world, the colours of religious tourism are scattered in each and every corner. As far as Hinduism is concerned, from Hinglaj Mata's Mandir Lasbella to Shad BELO Mandir Sukkar, Hanuman Mandir Karachi, Shawala Tej Singh Sialkot and KatasRaj Mandir Chakwal, the imprints and colours of Hinduism are still visible on this land. As far as Buddhism is concerned, Taxila ruins, Bhamala Buddhist Complex, Takht Bai Ruins and Ashoka Rocks are the shadows of this ancient religion and still remind us of that era. Even today, Sikhism has not lost its importance in Pakistan, Panja Sahib Hasanabdal, Nankana Sahib and Kartarpur have attracted the attention of Sikhs from all over the globe. Churches established in Pakistan during Company and British Raj still provide religious facilities to the Christian population here, St. Patrick Karachi, St. Paul Rawalpindi, St. Mathew Nathiagali and St. Mary Multan are the ancient churches. Apart from this, the shrines of Sufis are also a colourful reflection of Islamic heritage and culture in Pakistan. Those Sufis spreaded the light of Islam in the Sub-Continent. Sultan Bahu, Bab Farid, Sachal Sarmast, Baba Bhullay Shah and Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai lit the candle of Islam through their poetry and writings, while their shrines are a rich reflection of Islamic architecture. Shah Jahan Masjid Thatta, Badshahi Masjid Lahore, Moti Masjid Lahore, Masjid Mahabat Khan and Illaysi Masjid Abbottabad are the reminiscents of the era. The colour of five religions in the Holy land of Pakistan not only makes it beautiful but also gives a boost to religious culture and tourism (Butt, Naazer & Rizwan, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Literature reveals that no academic work has ever been done on the religious places of Abbottabad and Mansehra Districts. These religious sites need attention, care and publicity so that religious tourism can flourish in its true sense. History of Hazara by Shair Bahadur Khan Panni (2006) covers the basics of Hazara History and comprehensively elaborates the main historical events of Hazara but this book is completely silent about the religious sites of Abbottabad and Mansehra Districts. Gazetteer by H. D. Watson (1908) is a sound profile of Hazara and provided in-depth overview of each and every aspect of this area but it does not provide enough information about religious sites of Abbottabad and Mansehra Districts. Each district of Hazara has its own profile that covers religious monuments also but these profiles do not shed light on the Holy Sites of the region. Usman et. al. (2018) found out tourism of Kaghan valley as it is one of the most beautiful places of Hazara but their contribution does not focus on the potential of religious tourism in Abbottabad and Mansehra Districts.

Rizwan & Butt highlights the overview of Sikh Raj in Hazara (2020), but this paper does not present overview about the religious monuments of this valley. In other papers writers provide detail information about the life and services of James Abbott but this attempt is also silent on the information of the Colonial sites. Butt, Naazer, and Rizwan (2022) examined the scope of religious tourism in Haripur district of Hazara division. This study aims to explore the issues and problems of

the religious sites and also encourages the tourists to explore these places so that potential of religious tourism could grow in the area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature while descriptive and exploratory techniques have also been utilized to build the arguments. Primary sources such as District Profiles, Hazara Gazetteers, Personal and Political diaries of James Abbott and biographies have been used while research papers and articles published in various journals are also utilized as secondary sources. The current research work generally focuses on the scope and potential of religious tourism in Abbottabad and Mansehra Districts and highlights the religious sites in particular. This study could play a supreme role in promoting the religious tourism in both districts of Hazara Division.

POTENTIAL OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN ABBOTTABAD DISTRICT

Abbottabad, formally known as Orish, is still known to a large number of locals as Rushaa. The area actually had a lake in ancient times and due to the small hills spread around it, this lake was considered to be the best place for Hindu Yogis, and they used to come here for meditation. Buddhism was at its peak in the Haripur and Mansehra districts of Hazara division, but no traces of Buddhism can be seen as due to lake, there was no population. The water of the lake gradually depleted due to climate change and by about seventeenth century that lake had completely dried up and turned into a beautiful and famous Orish valley. However, Buddhism rapidly spreaded and left its marks and reminiscent in rest of the Hazara division, but the plains of Orish remained uninhabited until the end of eighteenth century. In the ninetieth century, Major James Abbott, was posted as an assistant to Henry Lawrence an advisor of Sikh Governor Chattar Singh Attariwala in Hazara. Abbott admired the natural beauty of Orish Valley and later moved his headquarter from Haripur to Orish. According to Major James Abbott, Orish Valley especially its beauty resembles his native England, the climate and prolonged snowfall did not allow Abbott to miss his homeland (Rizwan & Butt, 2018). On Abbott's recommendation, the British Government allowed the construction of a cantonment in the southern corner of Orish Valley, the progressive shape of that cantonment is PMA Kakul now. The area was settled under a military plan, which is why Abbottabad is still a garrison town and maintains its military status. On the occasion of James Abbott's posting in 1853, the second Deputy Commissioner H. B. Edwards named Orish Valley as *Abbottabad* in connection with Abbott's services for this land (Watson, 1908). This city is still named after Abbott since 1853; there are nineteenth century old Victorian churches here, reminiscent of the Company and the British Raj, have a strong and deep attraction for local and international tourists.

St. Lukes, Peter, Protestant & Other Churches

Abbottabad District owns three old Victorian Churches because during nineteenth and twentieth century's this area was a major centre of British residents. Victorian style churches captivate onlookers with their beautiful architecture, bells and long wooden doors. St. Lukes Church, almost 200 years old church opposite cantonment park Abbottabad, is a marvellous masterpiece of colonial times. Regular worship is held here every Sunday. St. Lukes was basically an Anglican Church dedicated to St. Luke and now it is under the trusteeship of Peshawar Diocese of the church of Pakistan. Built of strong heavy and fine stones surrounded with thick trees, this church amazes

visitors; and plays an important role in promoting religious tourism in the area (Government of Pakistan, 2015).

Another classic piece of British Raj is St. Peters, located at Gammi Adda, Karakoram Highway Abbottabad. It is a small but really old church, open for every visitor. Regular worship also held here, along with the church there is a school named St. Peters school for local Christian population. Another important church is Protestant Church located on main Karakoram Highway. It is quite different church with new modern style; its architecture does not match with other Victorian churches. White tall building is a place of worship for Protestants and opens since 1990. All these churches remind the Company and British Raj in Abbottabad and could play pivotal role in uplifting the religious tourism in the area.

Abbott Hill

Located 35 miles west of Abbottabad city is the beautiful valley of Sherwan, which is actually a collection of hundreds of small villages. The northern part of Sherwan is called Sherwan Kalah and northern is famous as Sherwan Kurd. Rare and high breed wolves, jackals, foxes and leopards are found in the densely forested Sherwan. This area is historically significant because the founder of Abbottabad Major James Abbott loved this place and built a wooden bungalow for himself on a hill. Abbott had built bungalow to escape from the scorching heat of Haripur plains so, whenever he felt dizzy he used to come to Sherwan and stayed in his bungalow, secret meetings on government affairs were also held in it. According to Sher Bahadur Khan Panni: traces and foundations of Abbott's bungalow can be seen till 1951, but no traces have been found since then (Bahadur, 2006). But the locals still remember the hill as Abbott hill where the bungalow was located. Abbott hill is a witness to the days and nights of the first English DC of Hazara and is one of the beautiful chapters of Company/British Raj. The Abbott's era fort at Sherwan also needs attention today as Abbott mentioned it in his diaries. Some of the rarest Victorian building of Abbott's time still exists in the city awaiting administrative care. One of them is old Tehsil Abbottabad which is located on Empire Road, tall wide wooden doors, tin roof and chimneys are the same even in 21st Century. Patwaris and Tehsildars still sit in this tehsil, though most of the locals are unaware of the building's historical significance but it is an important symbol of British Raj.

Old Christian Victorian Graveyard

Abbottabad has an old Christian Victorian Graveyard between FF and Baloch Centres, established in the times of Major James Abbott in 1853. Located on beautiful Hill Road, this cemetery still exists today in the same style in which it was built. Beautiful main wooden door and cemeteries of the British Raj surprises every visitor. However, in the last few years, the burial of local Christians has damaged this historical heritage, yet many graves are still in their original condition (Hunter, 1884). Most of the graves belong to Army Officers who were part of the Frontier Military Campaigns. Notable people who buried in this graveyard are Major Hugh Rees James, Major Leigh Richmond Battye, Colonel A W Crookshank, Rev. Henry Fisher Corbyn and Lady Jullia Helen Palmer (wife of General Sir Arthur Power Palmer). 70 to 80 graves of colonial time in this cemetery needs much attention, a Muslim traditional caretaker family is looking after this graveyard since 1902-3, prior to them, two soldiers of 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles took care of it around 1870s to 1902 (Tarin,

2010). In the times to come, this old and rare heritage can play an important role in promoting religious tourism in the region.

Town Hall/Abbott Museum

In the heart of the city of Abbottabad and in front of the famous historic Company Garden, a beautiful stone made building is still standing today with its splendor and is reminiscent of the British Raj. According to the Archaeological Department KP, there are 292 documented historical sites in Haripur and 304 in Abbottabad which if fully advertised, can play an important part in promoting cultural and religious tourism in the region. One of the most beautiful monuments in Abbottabad is the Town Hall, founded in 1850. It was originally set up for a meeting of British officials, this building still exists today with the same dignity and now in view of its historical significance, it has been turned into a museum and named after the first DC of Hazara, *The Abbott Museum*.

Lockhart and Kipling Houses

Coming down from the Brigade Circular Hill road, view of old houses, built on pure nineteenth century Victorian style, mesmerized every spectator. Another reminiscent of British Raj, is a vital part of Abbottabad colonial heritage, which now demands care and attention because they have not been protected for a long time and these buildings are being damaged. This old and beautiful house was once belonged to late General Sir William Lockhart (1841-1900). General Lockhart served for many years in North West Frontier and got retire after becoming Commander-in Chief of the British Indian Army. He and his family really liked Abbottabad and its weather so they decided to build a house here and named it Lockhart house. They used to stay in their beautiful house every summer; Mr. Lockhart also built another cottage nearby his house for guests and his close friend John Lockwood Kipling manager of Mayo College of Arts (now NCA) who used to come and stay here during 1880-90, while his son Rudyard Kipling (a famous writer and poet) also stayed here for two summers (Butt, 2010). This cottage is commonly known as Kipling House by the locals. After independence in 1947, Lockhart family said good bye to Abbottabad and their house and cottage were deserted forever. Their house became the part of FG school; classes used to be held here but it is not operational since 1966, due to bad condition but these houses are still the part of FG school Abbottabad. Historic and beautiful Lockhart and Kipling houses have fear of demolition by the Cantt Board and Military Estate Office. It might be a better idea to preserve and restore it and make it a small museum, as these houses have great tourist potential, and can be saved and developed either as a museum or heritage place.

Ancient Hindu Mandirs

The Abbott city also has two of the oldest Hindu temples reminiscent, one is Hindu Shahi Raj, behind the Piffer Mosque in FF centre; while the other old Gurkha Shiv Temple is standing with its past glories and still visible in its original state. As there is no Hindu population here at all, so the temple is deserted, there is no worship in the temple and it is permanently closed since many decades. Another similar Shiv Temple is also located at Dodial road Nawasher, and hidden in a thicket of trees. This temple was made in Nagara style of architecture and has much influence of Kashmiri art (Watson, 1908). In ancient times there were five ponds nearby the temple for Hindu,

Muslim, Sikh visitors and two for Hindu and Muslim females. Now only two out of those five ponds are still visible.

Gurdwara Guru Singh Sabha (Gurdwara Gali)

Abbottabad city is representing 300 years old Sikh culture, the most important reminiscent are Arya Samaj Mandir and Shiri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara located in famous Gurdwara Gali Abbottabad. Though Gurdwara Gali is famous for its tasty Chat and Kulchy but this historic bazaar has a splendid past of 300 years. There was a time when that Gurdwara was full of Sikh visitors, who used to come here and worship on daily basis. But today it is full with toy and crockery shops and the real beauty of Gurdwara is being affected. Arya Samaj Mandir is also turned into a Government Primary School for boys, the mandir's doors, walls and balconies are same but these religious places are being insulted by establishing toy shops and primary school (Dawn, 2016). Religious tourism should be promoted by setting up museums in these religious places so, that the Sikh community from Pakistan and abroad can visit their religious sites.

Nara Mandir or Shiv Mandir Abbottabad

Nawasher is the oldest place of Abbottabad, it was the economic hub during the times of James Abbott. He writes in his political diaries that Nawasher has lush green meadows and plains and water is found abundant here. Nara Mandir which was commonly known as Shiv Mandir is located here and presents a thousand years old legacy of Hinduism. It is made in Nagara style of architecture which is greatly influenced by Kashmiri architecture. It has five pools or ponds for the ablution for male and female. Though they are in rough condition but ponds are still filled with water. This alone mandir is the token of Hindu community of Nawasher, who had migrated to India after partition. Well known Indian Congress leaders Jawahar Lal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi also visited Abbottabad and this mandir in 1937. The sapling planted by Jawahar Lal Nehru's has grown into a big tree which is currently standing in the lawn of District Education Office Female Abbottabad.

Shahzada Bukhara House and Masjid

Famous Shahzada Masjid Chowk has a splendid past because Shahzada Masjid and Bukhara House are the beautiful historical places to visit. This house was actually owned by Prince Bukhara Abdul Mulk and he also built a masjid in front of his house. Shahzada Bukhara belonged to the Bukhara region of Samarkand. As a crown prince of Bukhara, accompanied by Russia, he lost his land and moved to Kabul. After two years in exile he tried to recapture Bukhara but failed. The new ruler of Bukhara Yaqoob Khan imprisoned him for seven years and after release, he came to India via Kashmir. Prince Bukhara settled in the green valley of Abbottabad. British government granted him a vast land; he built a house of his own choice and a huge library because he was an eminent writer and a fine poet (Bahadur, 2006). The area around his house was called Mulk-Pura now commonly known as Malik-Pura. Shahzada Bukhara is buried in the courtyard of his masjid, his house and masjids are great places to visit and play crucial role in promoting tourism in Hazara.

Illyasi Masjid

In the hamlet of Nawasher, a beautiful Illyasi Masjid is a famous tourist destination; Nawasher, Dhamtor and Salhad are the oldest areas of Abbottabad, which James Abbott also mentioned in his

personal diaries (1846-47). Built between 1926-27, this masjid is a combination of Islamic, Sikh and British architecture. This masjid is built on a stream of water whose water comes from inside the hill and flows all the year. This cold water has a lot of healing in it. Patients with skin and respiratory diseases drink water and take bath here. Made of white marble, this masjid is a special attraction for tourist and covers the area of five canals. This masjid also has a religious seminary, where children come to study the Holy Quran. Walls of masjid are engraved with Quranic verses and devotional Persian Couplets. Indeed, this masjid is like a white pearl in the Abbottabad Valley (Government of Pakistan, 2015). Outside the masjid there are *pakora* shops and tourists mostly come here in summer, visit the beautiful Illyasi Masjid and happily eat pakoras. There is no doubt that historical artefacts are scattered all over this beautiful city, which can promote religious tourism in the region and can add to the prosperity of Abbottabad.

POTENTIAL OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN MANSEHRA DISTRICT

The most capable generals of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army had a considerable influence on the areas of Hazara; they not only gave their heart to the beauty of the area but also took appropriate steps for the fertility and betterment of the people of the Hazara land. One of the prominent generals was Sardar Mang Singh who not only gave his name to the beautiful area of Mansehra but also played an important role in the prosperity of the area. The Mansehra Valley was an integral part of Gandhara Civilisation. Signs of this great civilisation can be seen in the corners of this valley, which may promote the religious tourism in the times to come. The traces of Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism reminds the glorious past, in which there is a lesson of defeat and victory.

Ashoka Rocks

The beautiful valley of Mansehra was a part of the Gandhara Civilisation as well as part of the great empire of Chandar Gupt Morya. His grandson Ashoka visited many areas after his conversion to Buddhism, including Islam; he always engraved his edicts on stones and spread them in his kingdom. These edicts were the essence of the teachings of Buddhism, which were adopted by Ashok after his conversion to Buddhism. Ashoka wanted every inhabitant of his kingdom to follow the teachings of Buddhism and for this purpose he had the edicts engraved on stones and spreaded in his kingdom (Cunningham, 1887). Almost 14 edicts inscribed on heavy rocks of Ashoka times are present in Ashoka Park Mansehra. It is difficult to read these edicts written in Karosthi Script. But now it is the legacy of the region, which Ashoka really liked. This thousands of years old heritage is being protected by the Department of Archaeology and has been added to UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2004. It is an important historical site for Buddhists from all over the world. Due to climate change, thousands of years old historical heritage is dilapidated. For this reason, the Archaeological Department has installed canopies to protect them.

Shawala Chitti Ghatti Mansehra

The beautiful valley of Mansehra bears witness to the Hindu Shahi rule and there was also a Shawala here to perform the religious rites of the local Hindu population which is still known as Shawala Chitti Ghatti. This Shawala is one of the few Shawalas of Pakistan where religious rituals are still performed regularly. Here the 3000 old Lingham highlights the importance of this historical place, as all the Hindu festivals like, Shivratri, Janam Ashtami, Ganish Jyanati and Durga Puja are celebrated here. Here, according to all beliefs of the Hindu religion, the idols are neatly and

beautifully decorated. Located in a beautiful Chitti Ghatti village, this shawala has two floors. The first floor is almost closed while the second floor has all the idols and the ancient Lingham of Lord Shiva. Raja Diwan Kirparam of Jammu built a beautiful temple around the three thousand years old Lingham in 1830 (Rizwan & Butt, 2021). Although the old building is demolished, it was a masterpiece of Hindu architecture. Present building seems like a mosque and does not look like a temple at all. The current construction took place in 1980 and two police constables are deployed at all times to deal with any untoward situation. Security arrangements are tightened on the occasion of festivals. Hindu pilgrims from all over country come here to celebrate religious festival. Due to lack of proper hotels and inns around Shawala, Hindu pilgrims from far off places face many difficulties. Religious tourism in the area can be promoted by taking proper living and eating measures around this historical heritage.

Gurdwara Guru Singh Sabha (Municipal Library)

The municipal library on Kashmir road in the middle of Mansehra is actually an important historical site of Sikh Raj, which was actually Gurdwara Guru Singh Sabha. It still exists today in its original beauty, and reminds of fine masterpiece of Sikh architecture. This three storey Gurdwara amazes visitors with its beauty and charm. It was built in 1905, Sikh Saint Sardar Gopal Singh Saithi of Hazro laid the foundation stone of Gurdwara. After the creation of Pakistan, a large number of Sikhs migrated to India, due to which this Gurdwara has become empty. Since then there is no less population in Mansehra so this Gurdwara has become completely deserted. After the independence a school was set up in this Gurdwara, later it was given to Police Department but it became a seat of learning since 2000, now it is called Municipal Library where hundreds of people come every day to quench their thirst for knowledge. This library of ten thousand books and countless newspapers is now flourishing, book lovers daily come here (Junaid, 2011). The current local government has announced the reopening of this historic Gurdwara, after making some necessary renovation work. It will soon be open for worship. Sikh pilgrims will also be able to worship here and religious tourism in the area will be promoted. Under the supervision of Provincial Government, this Gurdwara is being handed over to Evacuee Trust Property Board. This Gurdwara will be the first Gurdwara not only in Hazara but also in Northern Areas where after a long time the worship facility will be available to the Sikh Pilgrims.

Shrine of Syed Ahmad Shaheed

The great personality in the history of Hazara who turned the local Muslim population against the Sikh and tried to save them from their atrocities and also stood firm like a rock against the atrocities of Sikh Raj, was Syed Ahmad Shaheed. He said that Jihad becomes obligatory in a Muslim State which is occupied by non-Muslim. He achieved his first victory by conquering Peshawar in 1831, also vowed to bring the local Pashtun tribes together to end the Sikh Raj in Hazara but he was defeated by an army in Balakot and his close companion Syed Ismail was also martyred. The betrayal of his close associates Sardar Yar Muhammad and Sultan Muhammad Khan did not allow him to succeed in his pious mission. Syed Ahmad's personality and martyrdom is an important historical chapter of Hazara. His shrine is in Balakot (Mahmood, Nasiruddin, & Rizwan, 2014). Visitors from local and other places come to his grave and recite Fatiha. His shrine is an important historical heritage of Hazara land.

Mansehra Shiv Temple

One of the oldest Hindu temples operational in Pakistan is the Mansehra Shiv Temple. The temple dates back between 2000 and 3000 years. At Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, 15 kilometers from Mansehra, the temple is situated near Chitti Gatti. People from Pakistan and beyond attend the temple's yearly Shivarathri event (Ahmad, 2020). The ancient Shiva Lingam inside the temple is exceedingly old and is at least 2000 years old, according to archaeological studies, and there were Hindu temples on the spot where the present temple stands. The Raja of Jammu repaired the temple in the 1830s out of devotion. The temple was violently taken over and unjustly occupied over the years 1947–1948. They also shut down the adjoining temple. The temple was shuttered and desolated from 1948 till 2008. Hindus were unable to approach the temple until 1998. Hindus regained the temple in 1998. Following that, Pakistani Hindus partly repaired the temple (UNESCO, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Hazara, a land of precious landscapes, towering peaks, fertile plains and beautiful lakes, is popular throughout Pakistan for its beauty and colourful culture. Its beautiful places and ancient historical heritage plays a positive role in highlighting cultural, regional and religious tourism not only in Pakistan but all over the world. The purpose of the present study is to draw the attention of Muslims and minorities in all over Pakistan to all these historical and religious assets. All these places have a history of their own but due to lack of proper marketing many places are hidden from the eyes of tourists. All the places discussed in this paper are of great interest to archaeological departments, history and people of different faiths and religions. Each place has a unique era and past, which needs to be seen and felt and knowledge lovers also need to know about them. The study, conducted with the help of various references, seeks to highlight religious and historical sites throughout Hazara, which must be brought into the limelight of 21st century, so that religious tourism can be promoted in Hazara in future. The promotion of religious tourism will increase the income and prosperity of the Hazara Division and it will further highlight the historical and religious significance of the area. Religious tourism will foster brotherhood in the region, which will further strengthen love and unity among the population.

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