

A Study of Evolution of Heritage Sites in Amritsar

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Abstract

Amritsar is known for its shrine landscape. With its rich heritage and cultural resources, Amritsar has enormous potential as a major tourism destination. The city of Amritsar sprang up around the Golden Temple, the Sikhs' most precious religious site. The Amritsar Walled City evolved organically in all directions, with expansion and development centred around the Golden Temple/Harimandir Sahib. Amritsar saw rapid growth during the Sikh misls period in the late 18th century, when the city was nearly rebuilt. The holy tank and parikarma were restored at Harimandir Sahib. Bungas, katras, bazaars, forts, gardens, tanks, and havellies appeared in vast numbers as part of the developing metropolis. The purpose of this study is to shed light on the evolution phases of the major heritage sites of Amritsar. The primary method of collecting data was adopted to gather the required information. The findings have suggested that although there are major developmental changes, these sites have managed to showcase an overall image of the traditional Amritsar. Urban redevelopments over a period of time have emphasized the city's deeper relationship with Sikhism. Heritage Street, which was recently opened, offers focus points in space that aesthetically highlight this link. Heritage Street promotes a broad interpretation of Sikhism that ignores historical and political communal divisions while ignoring acts of offense.

Key words: Amritsar, heritage, shrines, destination

Introduction

Punjab, as a tourist destination, is very popular among people all over the world as it is the home to one of the major international tourist destination i.e. Golden Temple. Geographically, it is situated on the bordering edge of Northern India which means it borders Pakistan, which was once considered as a part of Punjab itself. This is one of the main reasons that foreigners want to visit this place as that will help them to gain some kind of knowledge about the history of Punjab, its unique culture and its relations with other bordering countries, especially Pakistan. Ever since long ago, Punjab has been rich in culture and heritage. Every part of Punjab is unique in its own terms and culture. Because of different civilizations and ruling parties, Punjab is a complete blend of traditional and modern pace. Whether in terms of cuisine or entertainment or study, Punjab is able to cater to every need of every individual who is residing in the state over a particular period of time. The tourism

sector is one of the main factors which is helping the state to develop very rapidly and that too with new and latest technology and infrastructure. Punjab is always ready to welcome every type of tourist. No doubt, Punjab has developed over a period of time but still it has its own unique style to welcome every new tourist in its old traditional form. This is the reason that tourists get a homely feeling whenever they visit this state. People of Punjab are known for their hospitality and caring skills. No one can feel left out while wandering on the roads of Punjab. In earlier times, Punjab was confined more to religious tourism and most of the tourists came just to visit religious sites only but now the trend has changed and with the change in time, people have started traveling to Punjab for gaining knowledge about its heritage, language, culture and so on. Every possible effort has been made by the people and government of Punjab from long ago to please every tourist visiting this state and their efforts have been fruitful enough that now this state is famous all over the world in terms of tourism.



Literature review

Heritage tourism involves “activities and services which provide domestic and international visitors with the opportunity to experience, understand and enjoy the special values of natural, indigenous and historic heritage (The Australian Heritage Commission, 1999). Amritsar enjoys the legacy of being a Sikh hub since its origin as this city has witnessed various Sikh civilizations from time to time. Moreover the Jallianwala Bagh is known all over the globe for one of the biggest freedom struggles that turned out to be a tragedy popularly known as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Sikhs from all over the world are attracted towards such heritage sites of Amritsar and nobody wants to miss the chance of visiting these sites whenever they come to this holy city. There are countless heritage sites in Amritsar that always grab the attention of tourists such as The Golden temple, Jallianwala bagh, heritage street and so on. Walking down in the streets of Amritsar, one gets to see Katras, Akharas, Bungas, Havelis and Hattis- the vocabulary of traditional town planning and architecture. The walk takes you back in time as you witness traditional trades and crafts being practiced in the same place and in the same manner, as has been done for centuries. It is, however, the famous intricately carved wooden facades that will take your breath away. This walk is an opportunity to feel part of this beautiful, sacred, vibrating, Guru Di Nagari (HeritageWalk booklet, 3/24).

Discussion

Some well known names from the list of heritage sites of Amritsar are as follows that have a vast impact on depicting an image of Amritsar to the outer world.

Golden temple

Golden temple tops the list of heritage places of Amritsar and the reason behind this is that this site is considered as the holiest and of utmost religious importance for not only Sikhs but for all religions. Moreover, this place has gone through major changes from time to time from the 16th century. Its unique history can be traced back to 1809 because until then it suffered a major series of demolitions continuously and finally got reconstructed on the orders of one of the greatest rulers of all times in Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh with marble and copper. Then again in 1830, the gurdwara sahib was overlaid with the help of gold foil from which this site got its name – Golden temple. Majority of the people, especially sikhs, know this place by the name of Shri Harmandir Sahib or Shri Darbar Sahib.

Gurudwara Saragarhi

This place is wholly dedicated to the bravery of sikh soldiers and their fearless attitude. The soldiers, members of the Sikh regiment of British India, were sent to protect Fort Lockhart in Saragarhi, located in the North-West Frontier Province (now in Pakistan). While standing guard, they were unexpectedly ambushed by ten thousand Pathan tribesmen. The Sikh Army fought to the death, refusing to surrender. Although they were only twenty-one, the battle lasted over six hours and is considered by UNESCO as one of the eight most important demonstrations of collective bravery. To commemorate their bravery, three gurudwaras were erected — one at Saragarhi, the venue of the battle, the second at Ferozpur called the Saragarhi Memorial and the third here at Amritsar, called Gurudwara Saragarhi (HeritageWalk booklet, 8/24).

Jallianwala Bagh

This site can be visited while moving ahead towards Golden temple. Mostly people like to visit this place after they have done 'darshan' at Darbar Sahib. This place is a major heritage site of Amritsar as it clearly shows the whole picture of the massacre that had happened at that place before independence. Many innocent people had lost their lives during that tragic incident. One can have an insight about the pain and loss of Indians while roaming in different sections of this garden that still has the marks of bullets on the walls which were being targeted on people at that time and also a well in which many people had jumped in a way to save their lives but unfortunately they could not. People can get to know more about the significance of this site by watching a light and sound show that was tributed to people who were being killed during the Jallianwala bagh massacre.

Ram Bagh Garden

This site is easily accessible by almost every tourist as it is situated on the Queen's road. In earlier times, this place was said to be the residence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh during his stay in Amritsar as this garden has a palace in its middle portion. Even now people can clearly see the architecture and culture of those old times by visiting this place. Localites are usually attracted towards this site as it is a perfect destination for meditation

and walking. A statue of the great king saddled on the horseback has been erected at one end of the garden. One can also look for the fortified gate that was built to protect the palace from enemy assault; it now stands at another end of the garden (amritsaronline.in).

Darshani Deori

This site marks the spot from where Sri Guru Arjun and Sri Guru Hargobind would stand to view the Golden Temple. As there were no buildings around it at that time, there was a clear view of the shrine from this spot. Much later the beautiful painted and gilded ceiling was added (HeritageWalk booklet, 14/24).

Guru ke Mahal

Best known as the residence of Shri Guru Ram Das Ji, this heritage site was developed from time to time and was modified to turn it into a Gurdwara. This site is situated near Golden temple, on the main street of Guru Bazaar. People visiting this place can get a feel of residing into a years long old cottage but due to its development over time they can experience the luxuries of a Mahal at the same time inside this site.

Chitta Akhara

This site has been preserved in its past form till today. It is situated in the heart of Amritsar and is about two centuries old. Mahant Ganga Ram was the founder of this site and hence this place can also be known by the name Ganga Ram Akhara. The architecture of this site will take its visitors to the past, as back as two long centuries. One can see an ancient tomb and unique designed paintings inside Chitta Akhara.

Wagah Border

Wagah Border is situated on the boundary line of India and Pakistan and since the time of the independence of India, this place is able to attract millions of visitors every year because of the fact that they can witness the guards their changing their positions with their rivalry country and then making friendly gestures towards them and their natives. Apart from this, beating retreat ceremonies in the evening are not to be missed at this site as every individual who comes to visit Golden temple is eager to witness that ceremony as well. The main attraction of this ceremony is the closing of the international gates of both the countries and then lowering down their respective flags in order to showcase the respect towards each other. This practice of marching has been consistent since 1959.

GobindGarh Fort

This fort was the center of military command of sikh power which controlled the Afghan dominated territory in the regime of Maharaja Ranjit Singh by a chain of such fort administration (Chakrabarty. P, Sep.2018, 8/11).

There are a number of other heritage sites in Amritsar that are evolving from the past and some of them are able to cater to every requirement of the people visiting these places. Although many amenities are being provided by the government to ensure the same, it is also observed that tourists have high expectations but some of them got poor experience of the availability of clean public toilets. Availability of money changer, open parking facility and affordable souvenirs and other items are the variables tourists had low expectation and low

experience so these variables are kept as low priority category and for the time being Government is drawing its attention towards more important areas to preserve these heritage sites (Chaudhary. M and Aggarwal. A).

Research Methodology

Area of study

Whenever there is something related to Punjab, Amritsar is the first and foremost thing which grabs the attention of every individual. This is because of the fact that this particular city is famous not only in whole India but also in different countries around the globe and that too among different religions. Amritsar is home to some very famous and breathtaking tourist destinations that attract millions of tourists every year. Amritsar is one of the fastest developing cities in Punjab and the reason behind this is the growing number of visitors to this particular place, both domestic and international visitors. The city of Amritsar was founded by the fourth Sikh Guru, Shri Guru Ram Das Ji and earlier it was known by the name Ramdasapur. Since then, many rulers have come and gone and left their impression on this beautiful city and its tourist sites. One of the main things which attracts tourists from all around the globe to visit Amritsar is its heritage and religious sites. A heritage site is one which has been preserved from the past and all possible efforts are made to keep its originality live. These sites are significant because of their historical relevance and culture that have the ability to depict the overall picture of that particular region. These sites are of utmost importance for the development of the tourism industry in Amritsar. These sites have something to offer to every individual, whether the person visiting these sites is a kid, youngster, adult or an elder. Lots of amenities are getting every year to these heritage sites such as for entertainment and study purposes so as to attract more tourists.

Objectives

This study aims to know:

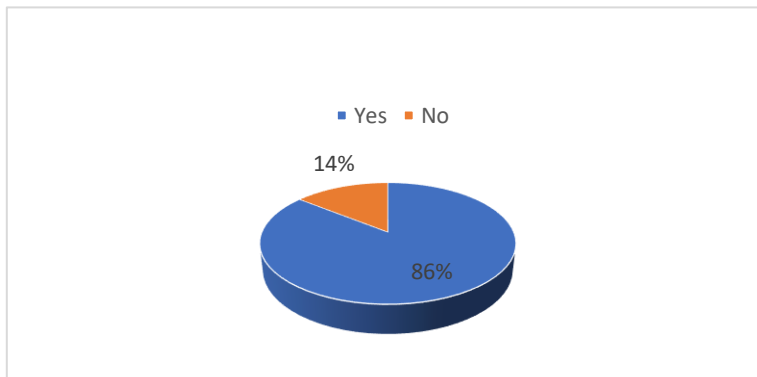
- the root essence of heritage sites in Amritsar and their importance.
- the development and evolution of these sites over time.
- the familiarity of these sites with tourists all around the globe.

The data for this study has been carried out with the help of the primary method of collecting data. A pilot study has been conducted with the help of 50 respondents who had visited Amritsar. The questionnaire was being sent to the ultimate respondents/tourists with the help of localities there. All of these respondents have shared their experience at Amritsar and thus helps in analyzing the objectives of this study in a better way.

Data analysis and interpretation

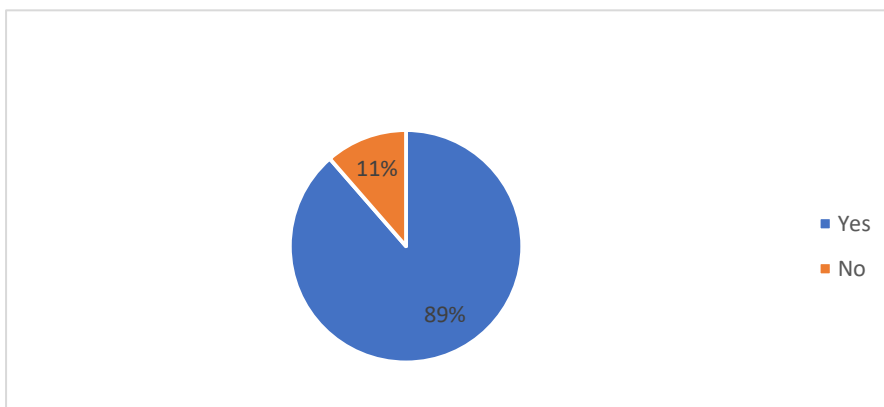
A couple of questions were asked in the questionnaire which helps in getting to know about the perspective of respondents who had visited Amritsar specially to visit its heritage sites and also of those who had not. It furthers assurance in adding some more facts about the development of these sites over a period of time. Around 51% of the total respondents were male and 49% of the total sample is represented by the female population.

1. Have you ever been to any specific heritage site of Amritsar?



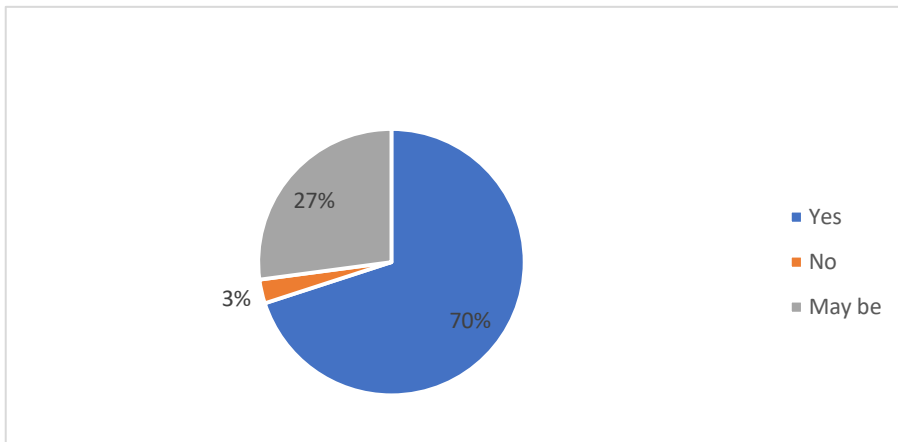
When asked this question, 86% of the total sample size had responded in yes that means they are well aware about all these sites and they had visited the majority of all heritage sites in Amritsar.

2. Were you attracted enough towards these sites to solely visit them?



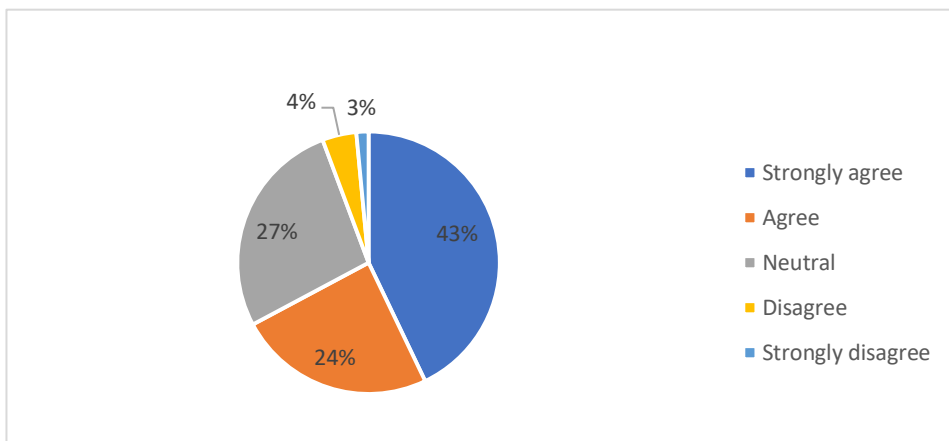
About 90% population (approx. figure) has responded as yes to this question that clearly depicts that the primary motive of the sample was traveling to Amritsar for just visiting its heritage sites only.

3. Are these sites open to everyone now after this pandemic period?



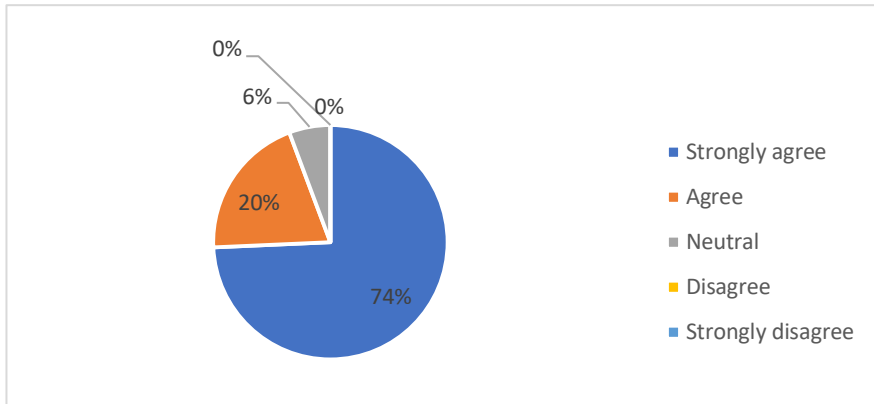
70% of the sample size agrees to the above statement and only 3% says that it is still not open for tourists to visit and 27% are not sure about the recent conditions of those sites after the pandemic as they might have traveled earlier before this pandemic period. So, this can be interpreted from here that the government is slowly opening all the tourist destinations so as to improve its infrastructure and develop them more rapidly with the help of the flow of income that gets generated because of the tourism industry.

4. Do you think the heritage sites are being preserved in their original form?



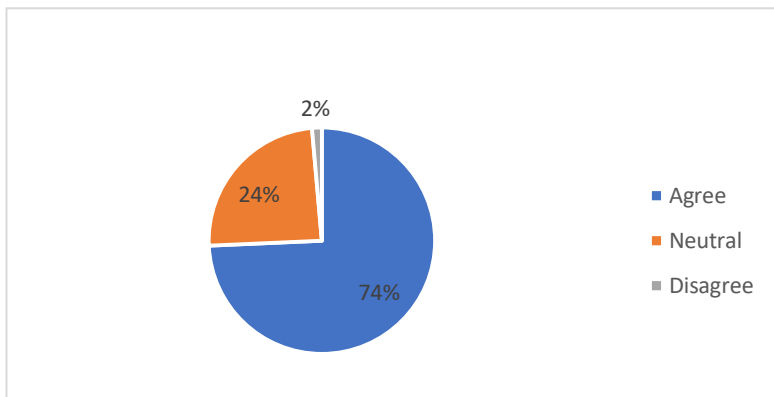
43% respondents are strongly in favor of the above statement and 24% of them also agrees with the statement and 27% are neither agree or disagree and only 7% of them are against this statement that means about 67% of the respondents feel that these sites have been preserved in their real and original form since their establishment.

5. Does these sites tell something about their importance or history?



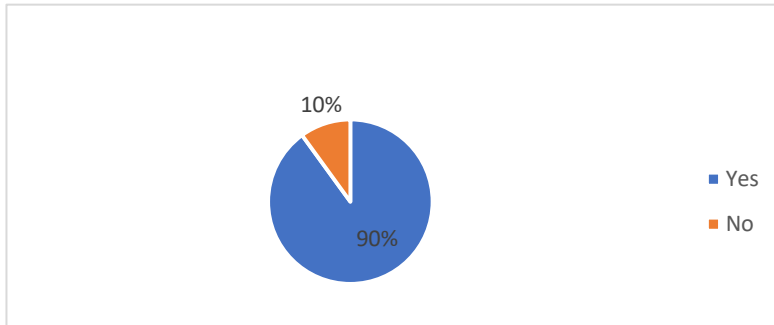
By having a look at this chart, it can be clearly interpreted that more than 94% of the sample (who are strongly and slightly agreeing) was able to get an insight about the history and the significance of these sites by having a visit at these destinations, this is because of the reason that these sites are built in a way that can showcase its importance in its most efficient form.

6. Do these sites showcase the real picture of overall Amritsar?



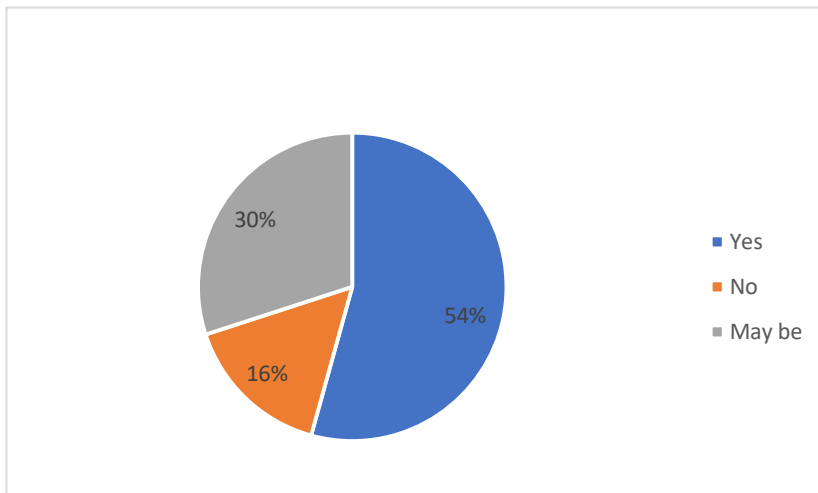
Majority of the sample size i.e. 74% of the total respondents are agreeing which means that these sites have got the privilege of showcasing the overall ethics and values of the holy city Amritsar.

7. Were you able to get an insight about the culture of Amritsar by visiting such sites?



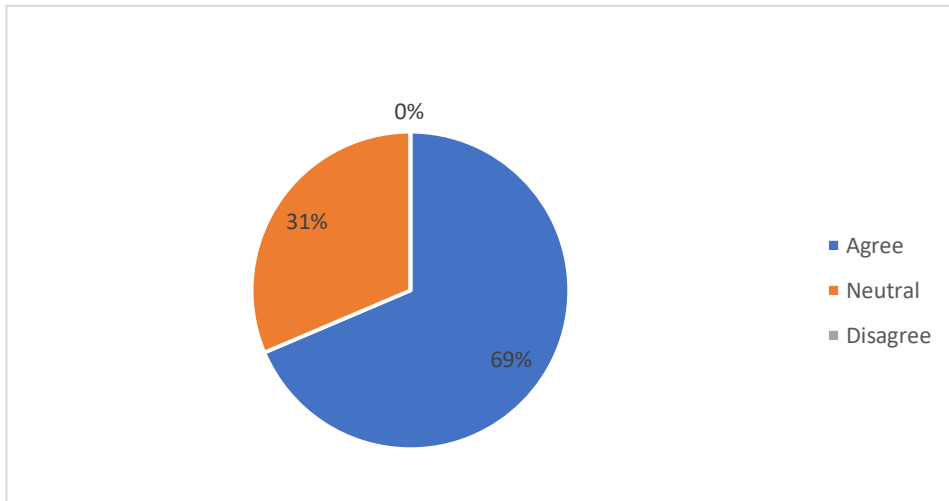
Clear majority of the sample size (90%) shows that they were able to know about the culture and heritage of Amritsar by just visiting these places. From this, it can also be said that these sites are the face of Amritsar that have the capability of presenting the whole Amritsar to the outside world. The main reason behind this is the preservation of these sites in their raw form which takes an individual back in the centuries ago when these sites were built.

8. According to you, the culture of Amritsar has changed now from the time these sites were built?



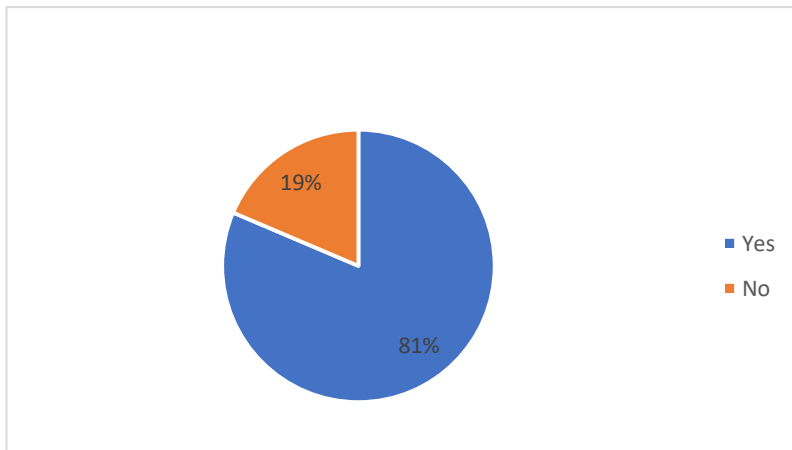
When asked this question, the respondents have answered in a diverse way. Although the majority is in favor of this statement, this fact also cannot be ignored. 30% of the sample size does not have much idea about the recent culture and 16% are countering this statement because according to them the culture is the same even now. So overall chart shows that even though the culture has been kept alive in its original form but that is only just with the help of these sites only, otherwise with the change in time, the cultural values of Amritsar are also changing

9. Are these sites getting developed with the change in time?



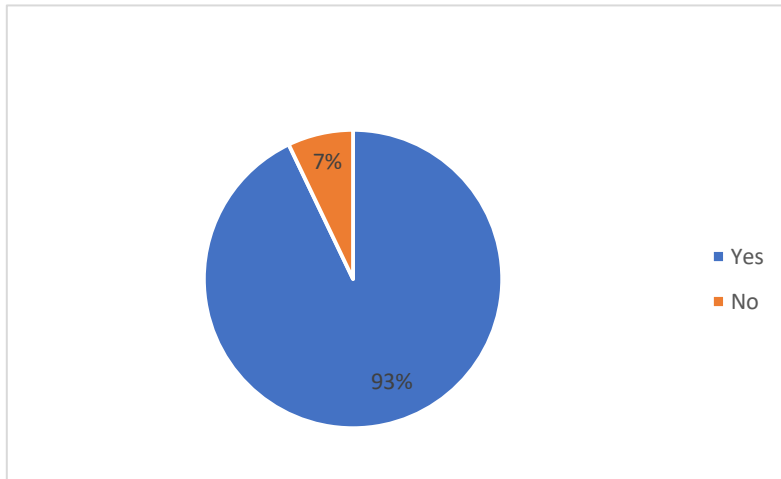
Three options were given to the respondents for the above question but not even a single respondent is against this statement. 69% say that the development of these sites is going on, be it in terms of infrastructure or amenities, these sites have evolved with the changing phase of time. Only 31% says that the sites are neither getting developed nor are their infrastructure constant.

10. Were you able to get help from a localite or a guide to reach your destination?



This question was asked so as to get an insight about the way Amritsar welcomes its tourists which again is a part of its culture and heritage. Majority has responded in yes that means they have asked for some kind of help from any local individual or guide in Amritsar and they were even able to get that help from that person. This shows that the people of Amritsar are so much stick to their cultural and heritage values that they are always ready to help others and this whole thing is also shown in the heritage sites of Amritsar as well through light and sound shows like in Jallianwala bagh.

11. Were you able to visit some more nearby destinations?



Clear majority is in favor of the above statement and this means that these heritage sites are built in such a way that provides complete knowledge about themselves and some more nearby destinations as well that can be visited by tourists on their journey to Amritsar. People then visit all or at least few of them in a single tour to Amritsar. More such efforts are being made by the government on a regular basis to make tourists more aware about its unique cultural and heritage sites.

Conclusion

Whether you wish to learn about Amritsar's fascinating history or simply enjoy the present, a trip to the city will provide you with a memorable experience. Amritsar, like other historic cities and communities in India, is a complex and well-developed cultural resource entity. It has a wide range of morphological traits, as it is a product of various geographical contexts, historical periods, qualities, and roles. It has been dubbed 'the abode of all virtues' because of its wealth of spiritual and national legacy (sifti da ghar). Every faithful Sikh longs for a journey to Amritsar and a holy bath at the Golden Temple while praying (Amritsar ke darsan isnan). A trip to Amritsar is said to cleanse the soul of all sins. The most significant advantage, though, is its people, who are pleasant, god-fearing, hospitable, hardworking and full of life and eager to learn more. They enjoy fine food, good clothing, and all of life's exterior symbols. All these things collectively represent the entire heritage and culture of Amritsar and its accompanied significance. The present study throws a ray of light on the evolution of heritage sites in Amritsar from time to time and it can be clearly concluded from the data analysis and interpretation that although these sites are getting developed in a positive way from time to time but still these sites have managed to be in their original form till now to express the incredible culture and heritage of Amritsar. Many heritage sites are getting evolved in a way that it can itself speak the history of Amritsar. Tourists are able to know a lot about Amritsar, its people, culture, heritage, cuisine, ethics and much more just by having a visit at these beautifully designed sites. There are a slew of development plans in the works or in the pipeline, all of which must be scrutinized in light of their potential impact on priceless heritage. Given the current political, economic, and developmental situation, Amritsar will see a new resurgent era of great growth and development, with a large influx of investment and people. Within the walled city, which holds the majority of the precious history, the pressure would be even greater. The destiny of the city and its position in the state and nation as the

home of all virtues will be determined by how these developmental pressures are rationalized and canalized in order to promote the orderly growth and development of the city and its history. Moreover, the government is focusing on the subject matter that made an intrinsic element of the city planning and development process in order to ensure successful conservation and preservation of constructed heritage. This would necessitate changing the state's town planning legislation to make heritage preservation one of the primary goals of the city planning and development process. This is done just to ensure the preservation of the heritage sites so as to make tourists a bit responsible towards the decorum of these sites, because if these sites lost their originality then no such site will be capable enough to depict the true picture of Amritsar and its past to such tourists. Hence, the government is now keen to initiate and take every possible action that can help in the evolution and development of these sites by keeping in mind the conservation of their originality as well. In this way, even more tourists will get attracted to visit these destinations of Amritsar so that they can have a memorable lifetime experience of watching these sites in their raw form.

Scope and Limitations

This study solely revolves around the main topic i.e. heritage sites in Amritsar and their evolution or development over time. This makes it an advantage in itself as this topic can be made vast or short as per the convenience of the researcher. Moreover, the present study includes the data that is being collected from a short sample i.e. 80 respondents. If this number increases then the conclusion can also be made in some more context as well, the reason being that more questions can be asked then to respondents in the questionnaire. Also, as now, things are getting back to normal after this long pandemic period, there is a huge scope of doing a study in a similar field in the future. That will increase the number of tourists as well at these heritage sites which in further can provide a diverse range of responses from different parts of the world. The topic can include some other dimensions as well like the local cuisine and ethical values of Amritsar along with the current topic under study. That will give more insights about the people and culture of Amritsar. Local people can play a vital role in providing the required information for this topic. They can also help in collecting more responses and that too from the ultimate targeted respondents. This will further add one more advantage to the researcher of saving time. As localities are well aware of the fact that the site is attracting more tourists and in which season of the year. With the help of this information, a researcher can easily get connected with his respondents on such sites.

The study also suffers from few limitations as well. The first and foremost being the limited number of tourists who were willing to fill the questionnaire. The reason behind this is that during this covid time nobody wants to get in touch with someone to whom they don't know as everybody is being precautionary during this phase. Secondly, some of the heritage sites are still not fully open to welcome outsiders as tourists. Government is still thinking upon this issue and it is taking some time to take this decision of reopening these sites. Because of this only a limited number are getting tempted to visit these places and this in turn makes it difficult for a researcher to collect more responses. In this scenario, the sample size is kept limited only. This in some cases can lead to biases of the data as well that is being collected from the sample and if that happens then the reliability of the research can be questioned. So, to avoid this the best thing that can be done is to wait for some time before taking any such kind of topic in near future. This will help in eliminating most of the limitations of this study in a very easy and smooth manner.

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