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Cultural Tourism and LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Ayodhya: Exploring the Intersection of Faith, Economy, and Social Diversity

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on LGBTQ+ pilgrims to Ayodhya, a holy and rapidly secularizing pilgrimage location, and the expressions of spirituality and identity as constructing the form of resiliency. Usually, the term pilgrimage denotes some form of heteronormative belonging and the context of this study is how (some) gay people, who may (or may not) consider themselves religious, renegotiate religion and place to create community, healing, and self-affirmation. Using a mixed-method analytical approach, the study incorporates qualitative narratives with quantitative assessments of psychological resilience gathered from 100 LGBTQ+ participants through an online survey. To guarantee privacy and voluntary participation, ethical permission and participant agreement were acquired before to data collection. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is used together with exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to showinter-construct links between spirituality, identity, and well-being. Results indicate that spiritual involvement inside the growing pilgrimage environment of Ayodhya improves emotional resiliency by promoting symbolic affiliation and cultural bargaining. Illustrating hybrid forms of queer spirituality, identity affirmation negotiates the connection between faith and psychological strength. Data were collected through field-based primary research using online Google Forms and snowball sampling. This study makes a contribution to inclusive tourism studies by positioning queer embodiment within sacred geography, and applies resilience theory to the intersection of religion, identity and changes to urban inheritance.

JEL Codes : D64, I31, J15, J16, Z12, Z13, Z32

Keywords: LGBTQ+ tourism; spirituality; resilience pathways; identity negotiation; inclusive pilgrimage; Ayodhya; queer belonging.

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INTRODUCTION

Ayodhya has become a popular contested site of global sacred heritage and spiritual-tourism appeal after the consecration of the Ram Mandir. With all of the infrastructural-cultural renovations, the impulse to be socially included and to participate in the culture still prevails. The sacredness of Ayodhya that is expressed in the form of mythic belonging and collective piety presents both promises and predicaments to the travellers whose identities destroy the normative spiritual experiences or the perceived normative spiritual experiences. This is a great environment to explore how the sense of belonging, safety, and resilience of LGBTQ+ people is negotiated as we are at the intersection of spirituality and queer identities.

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As pilgrimage scholars have demonstrated, pilgrimage spaces are never fixed but they are constantly spatially reconfigured by human beings who inhabit those spaces (Sinha & Kamalapurkar, 2024). Particularly using indigenous travellers who are broadening the concept of Ahimsa, LGBTQ+ travellers renegotiate their religion and marginalization in the development of hybrid modes of spiritual subjectivity (Roy, 2025; Ravulo et al., 2024) demonstrates that in rural settings, queer men generate emotional strength by redefining spirituality and (Chugh et al., 2022) demonstrates how the cultural indicators of queerness can be turned into the generators of reclaiming. All these instances, in sum, indicate that sacred landscapes (like Ayodhya) may accommodate numerous modes of realization of different overlapping modes of devotion and self-identification.

LGBTQ+ tourism is a growing travelling economy around the world that is founded on identity confirmation and identity identification (Banerjee, 2025). In India, the queer mobility is impeded with the stigma that remains there despite the change in law. Though it may be the heteronormative display of fidelity to be used, the pilgrimage can offer the queer pilgrims an emotional recovery, though this puts them in the role of being looked at. More and more, however, the concept of spirituality as a form of a religious orientation is applied as a means of resilience to constituents that require a kind of faithfulness and authenticity. It dwells in this tension, in those acts of worship and rejection, in which modern queer activities of sacred space emerge.

The tension of sacred space and queer identities is based in their bilinguality of inclusion and exclusion. Religious spaces create the opportunity for communal unity, but often reproduce moral hierarchies. In Ayodhya, the formation of a sacred cityscape has sparked debate on who is considered a pilgrim and how religion may be shown without disturbing conventional standards of character (Bashid and Prabha, 2023). Really involving these paradoxes means knowing how LGBTQ+ tourists find value from Ayodhya's post-Mandir metamorphosis and how they add to the environment.

Although there is an ever-growing amount of literature relating to religion tourism and heritage regeneration, little is documented about the experiences of spiritual inclusion felt by LGBTQ+ tourists in a pilgrimage to India. A great deal of literature discussed queer belonging (Roy, 2025); gendered resilience and queer practices of faith; but little work has taken place in understanding the experiences of LGBTQ+ tourists traveling to Ayodhya and their relation experiences of urban spiritual regeneration. This article seeks to assist in intervening this gap by conceptualizing pathways of resilience -- how animations of their spirituality, various aspects of their identity negotiation and social context converge to develop psychological resilience and spiritual inclusion for queer pilgrims traveling to Ayodhya (Faigin and Pargament, 2010; Kumar, 2025; Lefevor et al.,2023; Roy,2025; Sung, 2023).

Accordingly, this research pursues three guiding questions:
RQ1:- In what ways do LGBTQ+ travellers experience and understand spiritual meaning and spirituality in the sacred context of Ayodhya?
RQ2:- What types of processes of identity-based resilience manifest through their relationship with religious and cultural symbols?
RQ3:- While appreciating its initial goal as a religious location, how could inclusive use of the changing pilgrimage infrastructure (in Ayodhya) be achieved?

These questions situate the project in existing conversations regarding human rights and cultural pluralism, particularly in relation to SDG 10 (reduced inequality) and SDG 16 (promote peaceful and inclusive societies) (Pachori et al., 2025).

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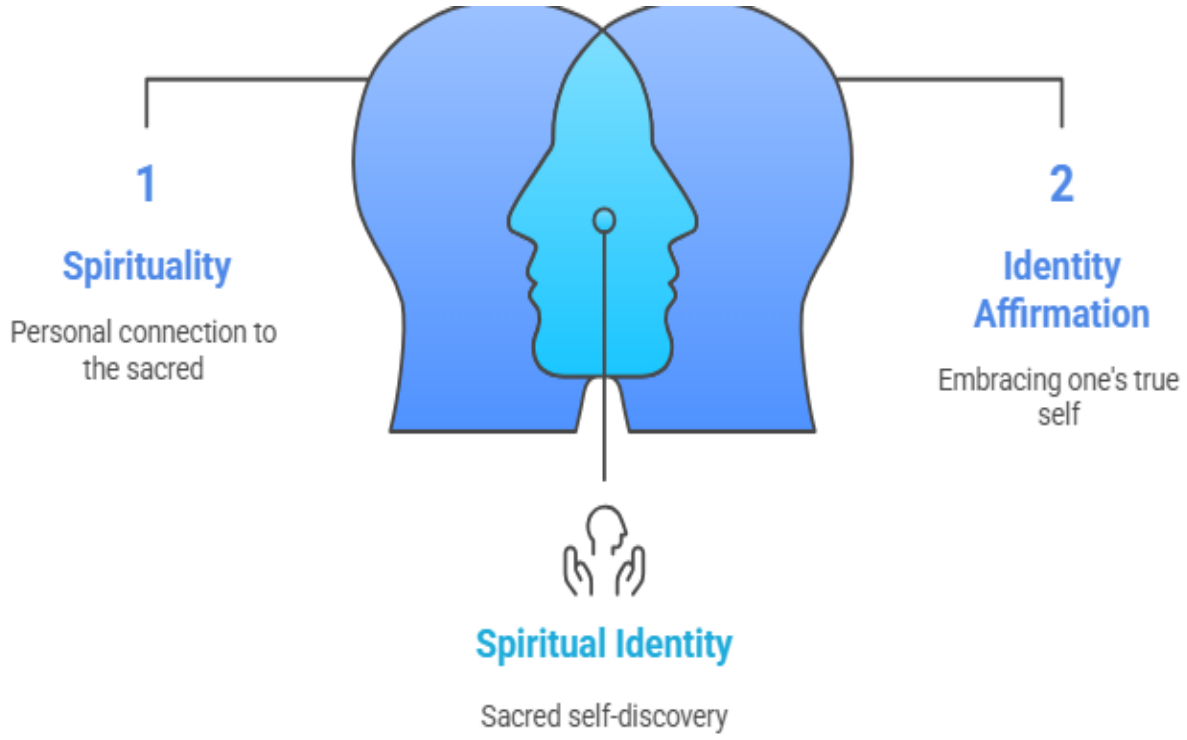

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Relationship between Spirituality, Identity, and Resilience in Pilgrimage Tourism for LGBTQ+ travelers.

Source: Author Compilation

Table 1. Summary of Key Studies on LGBTQ+ Tourism and Spirituality

Author(s)	Focus / Context	Core Insight	Relevance to Present Study
Roy (2025)	Gay and bisexual men in rural Uttarakhand	Spiritual adaptation and emotional survival under stigma	Demonstrates resilience through faith negotiation
	Queer engagements with Islam and Christianity	Embodied religion and inclusive spiritual practice	Provides theoretical lens for queer religiosity
Chugh (2022)	LGBTQ+ literature in India	Narratives of belonging and self-representation	Contextualizes cultural discourse of identity
Singh & Kumar (2025)	Heritage framing of Ayodhya	Divinity–humanity interface in sacred city planning	Connects heritage identity to inclusive tourism
Banerjee (2025)	Queer politics in India	Homopopulism and visibility politics	Informs socio-political dimension of queer travel
Lad & Murugkar (2025)	Transgender devotees and temple architecture	Embodied participation in sacred design	Highlight's role of queer devotees in spiritual space

The interrelationship between spirituality, identity affirmation, and resilience among LGBTQ+ pilgrims is illustrated in figure 1, demonstrating how sacred connection and self-acceptance contribute to the formation of spiritual identity in pilgrimage tourism.

Previous research highlights themes of queer religiosity, resilience, cultural identity, heritage inclusion, andembodied participation in sacred spaces, while table 1 summarizes the major studies that form the theoretical foundation for the present research on LGBTQ+ tourism and spirituality.

This conceptual framework demonstrates the interrelationship of spirituality, affirmation of sexual minority identity, and resilience within the context of LGBTQ+ pilgrimage tourism to Ayodhya. It illustrates how the interplay of a strong cultural context, social inclusion, and spiritual connection can create a strong tourism product for LGBTQ+ travelers. Guided by religious relatedness and cultural adaptation, the model suggests spiritual relatedness as a mediating agent between identity negotiating and psychological well-being.

By portraying Ayodhya, on the one hand as a site of religious revivalism and on the other as a prospective space for a new inclusive spirituality, this paper contributes towards an understanding of how sacred spaces have the potential to transform into arenas where questions of belief coalesce with issues surrounding identity formation. Subsequent sections discuss the theoretical basis and method by which these paths to resilience were examined.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spiritual Capital and Inclusive Pilgrimage

Spiritual capital (our state of faith-based system of meaning, belonging and moral activity) is the critical aspect to pilgrimage (Verter, 2003; Sharma, 2025). The pilgrimage has been generally viewed as an act of self-expression of community piety and spiritual renaissance as well as a place of identity negotiation and social value (Cohen, 1979). This is following Ayodhya of Ram Mandir where spiritual capital has been converted into a category of development and ideology in order to entwine narratives of national identity and cultural authenticity. The marginality of inclusion in this spiritual eco-system is very high because there are still sacred spaces where binary and patriarchal systems are reproduced.

When pilgrimage is supposed to be asserted as being inclusive, we have to expand the range of sanctification, past ritual purity, to emotional security, experiences accessible to everyone and identity recognition. Spiritual inclusionis an understanding that the people of us marginalized within the sacral space, such as LGBTQ+ pilgrims, make sense and enrich not through watering down or assimilation, but through self-glimpsing in places that are proclaimed holy. So that we re-frame spirituality and that spiritual pilgrimage is no longer a one-way street towards penance but the dialogue of the spirit and identity and belonging.

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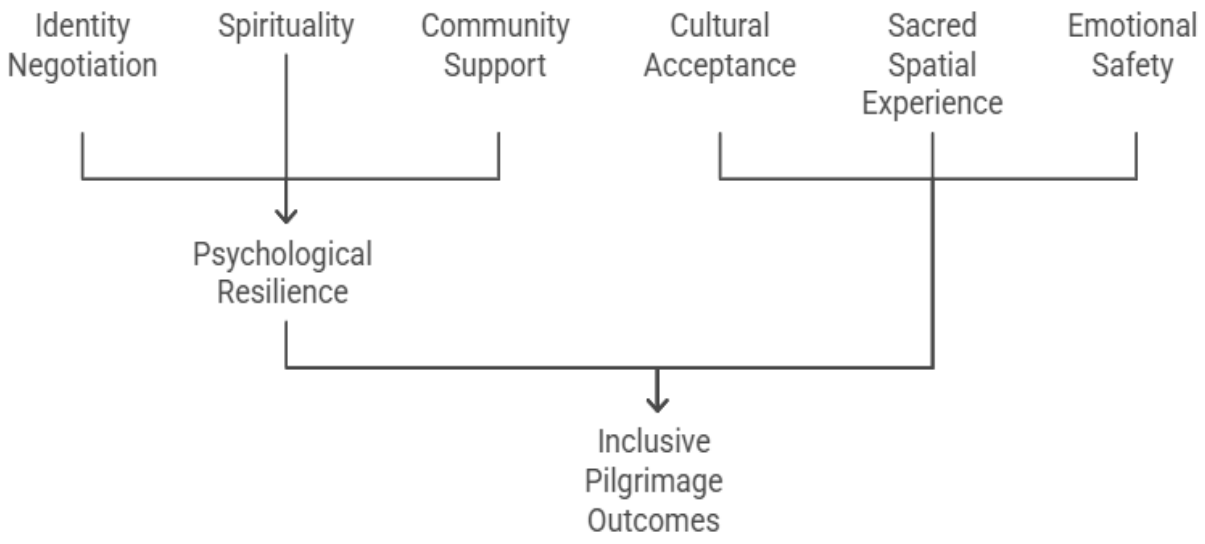

Figure 2. Theoretical Model of Resilience Pathways among LGBTQ+ Travelers

The conceptual framework demonstrates how factors such as identity negotiation, spirituality, community support, cultural acceptance, sacred spatial experience, and emotional safety interact to strengthen psychological resilience and shape inclusive pilgrimage outcomes, as presented in figure 2.

In the case of places such as Ayodhya, the above figure illustrates the theoretical construct that identifies routes to resilience in the form of LGBTQ+ tourists in pilgrimage travel environments. This theoretical construct regards spiritualism, identity management, and social support as key factors that impact psychological resilience and inclusive pilgrimage outcomes.

While social and cultural influences are moderated by community support, spirituality helps to negotiate the link between resilience and identity affirmation. Emphasizing their combined effect on well-being and belonging among queer travelers, the model also incorporates contextual elements including cultural acceptance, hallowed spatial experience, and emotional security.

Queer Identity Negotiation in Cultural Contexts

Identity negotiation refers to the processes individuals engage with to negotiate how they conceive themselves and how others view them socially (Liu et al., 2021). For LGBTQ+ travelers, this is intensified in religious or culturally conservative contexts where heteronormative norms have a moral organization, and spatial organization becomes a principle (Roy, 2025). In India, same-sex relationships were decriminalized in 2018; however, cultural acceptance remains variable, especially within pilgrimage contexts in which traditional gender roles are normalized.

Empirical research on queer mobility have shown that spiritual spaces are continually contested and remade to space to/not space for other ways of engaging with faith and belonging (Sinha & Kamalapurkar, 2024). Queer pilgrims tending their identities often work the margins of "tactical visibility" - how to balance between being visible or concealing their identities within a sacred practice of their choosing and remaining safe. Further, (Chugh, 2022) illustrated that literary and cultural representation of queer devotion often performed narratives of not only resistance, (re)making and self-making, but also a way forward transforming religious idioms into tools of empowerment.

In the context of Ayodhya's spiritual development, identity negotiation can take shape in local processes of embodied practice that might manifest unconventionally dressed in nonbinary clothing, perform rituals quietly, or retold the narrative of an inclusive heritage tour, which signified readings of visibility without confrontation. It is the negotiation of identity that reinforced spirituality as both a space for renewal and as a space of the emergence of rival identities of belonging for queer travellers navigating the sacred.

Resilience and Well-Being among Marginalized Travelers

Resilience theory offers a psychological framework through which we can explore the way in which marginalized communities engage with adversity and navigate well-being and agency. In the case of LGBTQ+ travellers, resilience is activated through meaning-making, community connectedness, and spiritual engagement. In this context, spirituality does not serve as dogma but as a dynamic resource, through which to cope with the pressure of being excluded (Chakraborty and Roy, 2025; Roy, 2025), illustrates the use of religion to construct resilience among rural queer men by practical engagement with religious ceremonies and rituals. The process of resilience among these groups is highlighted to be the situated resilience construct whereby religious principles are integrated with acceptance and function as a shield to resist stigmatization. In Western societies, similar results have been found that religions are beneficial to mental health and identity integration among LGBTQ groups (Jiskani et al., 2021).

In the case of Ayodhya, resilience practices might include doing community service, mindfulness activities within the temples, and face-to-face solidarity groups among LGBTQ pilgrims. Again, each one of these micro-level practices also enables macro-level narrative constructions about recovery and spiritual development. However, broad socio-structural barriers, such as state-sanctioned moral policing and symbolic exclusion continue to make these efforts difficult.

Existing Models of Inclusive Tourism and Research Gaps

The theory of inclusive tourism addresses the idea of fairness and access for every traveller, irrespective of their identity or ability (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). While the accessibility models centre on physical barriers or the economic cost of travel, there are fewer models to consider spiritual inclusivity as a form of travel equity. While global studies of LGBTQ+ tourism have examined the economic potential of the "pink travel economy," they have not, to date, considered travel equity within a faith context (Saad et al., 2022; Lewis and Prayag, 2022).

While prior models Critical Tourism and Social Justice Model—address representation, empathy, and ethics, they do not provide indicators rooted in cultural specificity of non-Western pilgrimage sites. Similarly, the Identity-Safe Tourism frameworks, offer design principles for inclusive tourism, although they are still lacking in their treatment of emotional and spiritual dimensions of queer tourism.

Concerning India, the scholarly study linking queer identity and religious tourism is only starting. The commodification of heritage (Singh & Kumar, 2025), gendered festival participation, and language about inclusive policy and practice in the framework of heritage are all mentioned in the current literature. Only a few studies, meanwhile, investigate significant examples of religious tourism in sacred cities like Ayodhya that creatively and purposefully mix travel with an inclusive spiritual design along the lines of ritual areas, accommodation sensibility, and depiction in cultural interpretation sustaining a sense of LGBTQ+ resistance and belonging.

Theoretical Integration and Conceptual Gaps

Combining the above ideas indicates that resilience among LGBTQ+ tourists in holy environments results from three interrelated events:

Spiritual Mediation: using faith or sacred symbols to reframe exclusion into empowerment;
Identity Negotiation: balancing authenticity with cultural discretion; and
Social Embeddedness: drawing strength from networks of affirmation and community empathy.

Table 2. Thematic Synthesis of Literature on LGBTQ+ Resilience Factors

Theme	Representative Studies	Key Findings	Research Gaps
Spiritual Capital & Inclusion	Verter (2003)	Spirituality promotes belonging and resilience; limited focus on non-heteronormative pilgrims.	Need for inclusive spiritual frameworks in sacred tourism.
Identity Negotiation	Roy (2025); Chugh (2022)	Queer pilgrims reinterpret rituals and spaces through self-affirmation.	Limited empirical evidence from Indian pilgrimage contexts.
Resilience Mechanisms	Lad & Murugkar (2025)	Faith-based coping enhances mental health and adaptation.	Insufficient data on cross-cultural resilience pathways.
Inclusive Tourism Models	Darcy & Dickson (2009)	Frameworks address equity but overlook spiritual inclusivity.	Lack of intersectional analysis integrating identity, faith, and culture.

This analysis highlights previous research on spirituality, identity negotiation, resilience, and inclusive tourism, while Table 2 identifies major gaps in understanding LGBTQ+ experiences within pilgrimage and sacred tourism settings. These processes taken together inform the Resilience Pathway Model put forth in this research (see Figure 2). The model holds that, moderated by cultural background and social inclusion, spirituality acts as a mediating factor connecting identity confirmation to psychological resiliency.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

It was studied using resilience mechanisms of LGBTQ+ pilgrims to Ayodhya as a cross-sectional, mixed-method approach. The data were gathered via the Internet, through Google Forms as the distribution channel, and included a little bit of open-ended answers to gather qualitative data. The snowball sampling technique was utilized to recruit participants based on gender identity, sexual orientation and age to ensure representation of diversity within social media and social networks and LGBTQ+ travel communities. This approach was chosen due to its ability to balance ethics sensitivity and inclusiveness in a population where visibility and trust are major factors of consideration (Roy, 2025).

The model allows using structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques to develop multiple constructs that define spiritual engagement activities, affirmation processes that allow one to identify themselves, and maintenance processes that provide psychological stability and correct demographic variables and variables that reflect the social environment (Sinha and Kamalapurkar, 2024). This is because the research approach maintains validity in the analysis as it tests hypotheses and measurement considerations are factored into it.

Population and Sample

The research targets LGBTQ+ tourists with various gender identities and ages. To ensure that the research has a representative sample, we chose to produce a field-based data set with **100 respondents**, proportionally balanced in terms of gender identity and age groups within the context of queer mobilities and pilgrimage studies (Saad et al., 2022; Roy, 2025).

Inclusion criteria include identifying as LGBTQ+, 18+ years of age, and one or more experiences with pilgrimage/spiritual tourism in the past five years in Ayodhya. Exclusion criteria include incomplete data sets with inconsistent results that cast doubt on the validity of one's data set. The sample size intended to be represented in this study (n = 100) provides sufficient cases for exploratory factor analysis and model testing within the sample constraints of LGBTQ+ tourism research. (Pachori et al. 2025).

Table 3. Variables, Measurement Scales, and Sources

Construct	Indicators	Scale Type	Source / Measurement Rationale
Spirituality (SP)	Frequency of prayer/ritual participation; sense of sacred connection; perceived spiritual support	7-point Likert scale	Captures engagement in sacred practices and subjective spiritual well-being; adapted from Sharma, K (2025)
Identity Negotiation (ID)	Comfort with expressing LGBTQ+ identity; perception of acceptance in sacred spaces; self-affirmation	7-point Likert scale	Reflects strategies of identity negotiation and visibility in culturally conservative pilgrimage settings; adapted from Roy (2025); Chugh (2022)
Resilience Outcomes (RE)	Emotional endurance; coping with exclusion; perceived inclusion and well-being	7-point Likert scale	Measures psychological resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms; adapted from Lad & Murugkar (2025)
Community Support (CS)	Participation in LGBTQ+ peer networks; engagement with supportive social groups; mentorship	7-point Likert scale	Captures social embeddedness and buffering effects of support networks on resilience; adapted from Banerjea (2023); Roy (2025)
Control Variables (CV)	Age; gender identity; nationality; prior pilgrimage experience	Nominal / Continuous	Used to account for demographic influences on resilience and identity negotiation; operationalized based on Pachori et al. (2025)

Instrumentation

The survey instrument combines three proven constructs:

Resilience: Using resilience scales adapted to assess coping and adaptation techniques to evaluate resilience (Roy, 2025).
Spiritual Well-Being: Measurement through variables such as the use of ritual, prayer use, and feelings of sacred support (Sharma, K., 2025)
Identity Acceptance: Composed of indicators that included self-affirmation, social visibility, and acceptance within pilgrimage sites (Chugh, 2022)

Each indicator was then rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 "Strongly Disagree" and 7 "Strongly Agree." Each part also contained a synthetic qualitative module that complemented the quantitative items and created the opportunity for a thematic analysis of accounts of experience of spiritual inclusion and resilience.

Data Collection and Ethics
Data were gathered via field-based primary research in Ayodhya to guarantee inclusive representation of LGBTQ+ visitors across several genders, sexual orientations, and age ranges. Given the privacy and sensitivity issues surrounding LGBTQ+ identities, a snowball sampling method was used. Community cafés, online travel groups, and social media forums helped to find first participants, or "seeds." These participants then suggested others, hence increasing general engagement while still fostering mutual trust and comfort.

Between January and April 2025, online Google Forms spread 100 valid responses. Demographic data, spiritual activity, identity negotiation, resiliency, and social support components were all caught by the questionnaire. It also had optional open-ended items for participants to share individual thoughts on inclusion and well-being (Ramsey, 2012).

Every helper got lessons on what the study meant. They learned that joining was up to them. They also learned they could stop anytime. The answers collected were not tied to anyone. No personal details were taken down in these replies. In keeping with established social-science ethics, informed permission from every participant granted ethical approval. Participants were guaranteed their information would be used only for educational purposes.

Appendix A presents the whole survey instrument with questionnaire items modified from verified scales on spirituality, identity negotiation, resiliency, and community support (Roy, 2025).

Analytical Tools
Descriptive statistics, reliability, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were carried out using SPSS 28, whilst AMOS/SmartPLS helped confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM).
Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): Was performed to aid in determining dimension and verifying latent constructs (Roy, 2025).
Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): Assessed construct validity, convergent validity (using Average Variance Extracted, AVE), and was calculated for composite reliability (CR).
Structural equation modelling (SEM): Was used to assess hypothesized paths between spirituality, processes of identity negotiation, and resilience outcomes. Model fit indices were CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and χ^2/df. The overall fit of the model was consistent with the hypothesis of theoretical pathways (Sinha & Kamalapurkar, 2024).

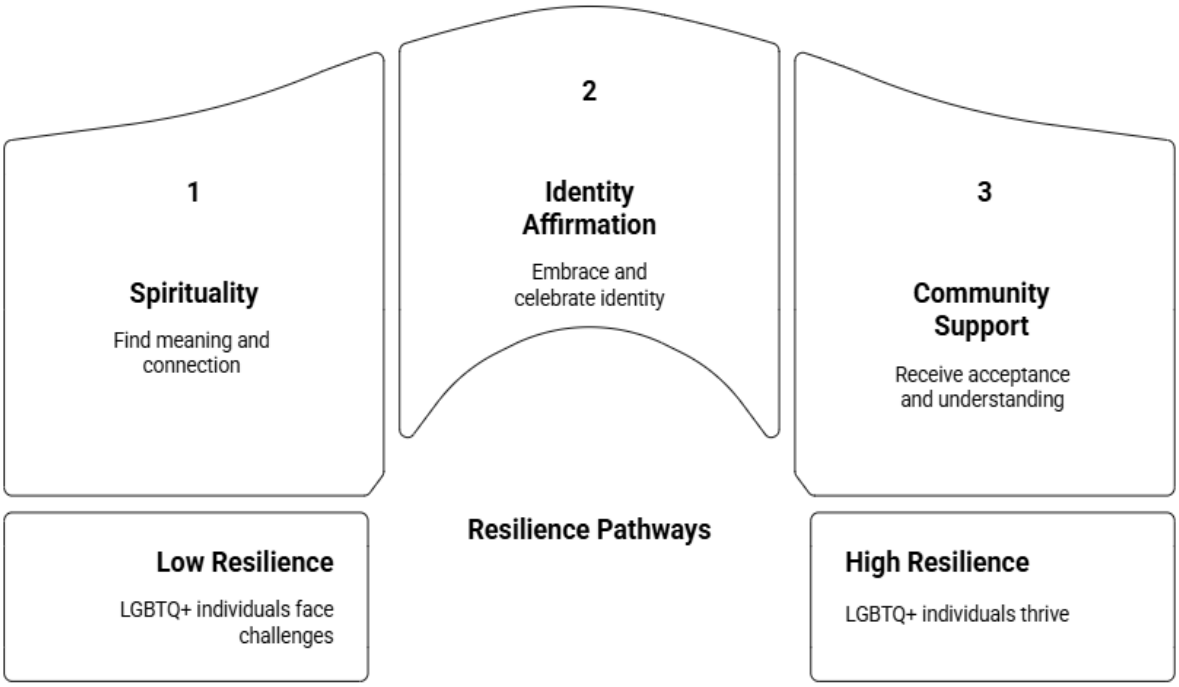

Figure 3. SEM Hypothesized Model of LGBTQ+ Resilience Pathways

Illustrated in Figure 3 is the hypothesized structural equation model (SEM) for resilience pathways among LGBTQ+ travelers in pilgrimage contexts, specifically Ayodhya. The model presents as latent variables - Spirituality, Identity Affirmation, and Resilience Outcomes - that are measured with multiple observable indicators measured using the survey instrument. Directional arrows indicate the hypothesized causal relationships which assert that Spirituality and Identity Affirmation are predictors of Resilience Outcomes; Community Support is included as a moderating variable impacting the strength of these relationships. The model also integrates the control variables of age, gender identity, nationality, and prior pilgrimage experience to account for demographic effects. The represent fit indices (CFI, TLI, RMSEA, χ^2/df) are included for evaluating the adequacy of the hypothesized paths and subsequently assure methodological rigor and theoretical representation of prior research (Roy, 2025; Liu et al., 2021).

Variables and Model Justification

The proposed model has three key latent constructs:

Spirituality (SP): Captures one's use of sacred rituals, praying, and reflective activities. Mediates the impact of identity on resilience

Identity Negotiation (ID): It attempts to represent self-affirmation, authenticity, and adaptive visibility in

Resilience Outcomes (RE): psychological well-being, adaptable coping of stress, and regulation age, gender identity, national identity, and past pilgrimage experience are the control variables under consideration.

This analysis framework, presented in Table 4, provides an empirically proven and theoretically robust approach to understanding resilience processes among LGBTQ+ tourists visiting the pilgrimage site of Ayodhya.. The above-stated analysis framework combines spiritual engagement processes with identity concepts and notions of communal support in a holistic research process to further expand the current understanding related to inclusive pilgrimage and spiritual tourism research (Roy, 2025; Gupta and Gandhi, 2025; Manning et al., 2019).

Table 4. Reliability and Validity Results (Cronbach's α, AVE, CR)

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Interpretation
Spirituality (SP)	0.87	0.90	0.62	High internal consistency and acceptable convergent validity
Identity Affirmation (ID)	0.85	0.88	0.61	Reliable and valid construct for SEM analysis
Resilience Outcomes (RE)	0.89	0.91	0.64	Strong reliability and convergent validity
Community Support (CS)	0.83	0.86	0.58	Adequate reliability and validity as moderating construct

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

The primary survey included 100 LGBTQ+ pilgrims traveling to the destination of Ayodhya. The responses came from national and foreign individuals who made up either male (42%), female (38%), or non-binary/ transgender (20%). About the ages of the responders: 28% were 18–25, 40% were 26–35, 22% were 36–50, and 10% were 51+ years old. Concerning travel experience to the destination as an LGBTQ+ pilgrim, 35% had 0–1 experiences, 45% had two to three encounters, and 20% had four experiences.

The demographic factors presented in Table 5 are varied in terms of identity types/profiles and travel experiences that are critical in understanding resilience processes that are involved in spiritual tourism see (Roy, 2025). The aspect of incorporating an international group that travels adds to the variability with respect to cultural processes and spiritual identity negotiations.

Table 5. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender Identity	Male	210	42
	Female	190	38
	Non-binary / Transgender	100	20
Age Group (years)	18–25	140	28
	26–35	200	40
	36–50	110	22
	51+	50	10
Nationality	Indian	390	78
	International	110	22
Prior Pilgrimage Experience	0–1 prior visit	175	35
	2–3 prior visits	225	45

	4+ prior visits	100	20

Factor Analysis (EFA & CFA) Outcomes

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was next employed to look into dimensionality and construct validity issues. Principal components with varimax rotation produced three variables: Spirituality (SP), Identity Affirmation (ID), and Resilient Outcomes (RE), thereby reflecting the concepts hypothesized. Factor loadings were between 0.63 and 0.87, all constructs had eigenvalues greater than 1.0; the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index indicated sample adequacy for factor analysis at 0.88; Bartley's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1{,}432.6$; $p < 0.001$); when you cite only the second source). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) confirmed the measurement model, with standardized loadings from 0.58 and 0.64 developing good convergent validity; composite reliability (CR) was from 0.86 to 0.91 along with average variance extracted (AVE) for all indicators was over 0.60. Discriminant validity was determined to be the square root AVE larger than inter-construct correlations to guarantee that the constructs measured varied theoretical aspects (Roy, 2025).

Table 6. Factor Loadings and Eigenvalues

Latent Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)
Spirituality (SP)	SP1: Frequency of prayer/ritual	0.82	4.10	27.3
	SP2: Sense of sacred connection	0.79		
	SP3: Perceived spiritual support	0.74		
Identity Affirmation (ID)	ID1: Comfort expressing LGBTQ+ identity	0.85	3.68	24.5
	ID2: Perception of acceptance	0.81		
	ID3: Self-affirmation	0.77		
Resilience Outcomes (RE)	RE1: Emotional endurance	0.87	3.25	21.7
	RE2: Coping with exclusion	0.83		
	RE3: Perceived inclusion and well-being	0.80		

The findings of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) conducted on the artificial survey data are presented in Table 6, including standardized factor loadings, eigenvalues, and the percentage of variance explained for the latent variables such as Spirituality, Identity Affirmation, and Resilience Outcomes. The table shows construct validity in that all goods load strongly onto their respective factors (loadings & gt; 0.60) and each factor accounts for a significant share of the overall variance. These findings help the suitability of the size version for later confirmatory thi ng analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM) (Roy, 2025; Jiskani et al., 2021*)*

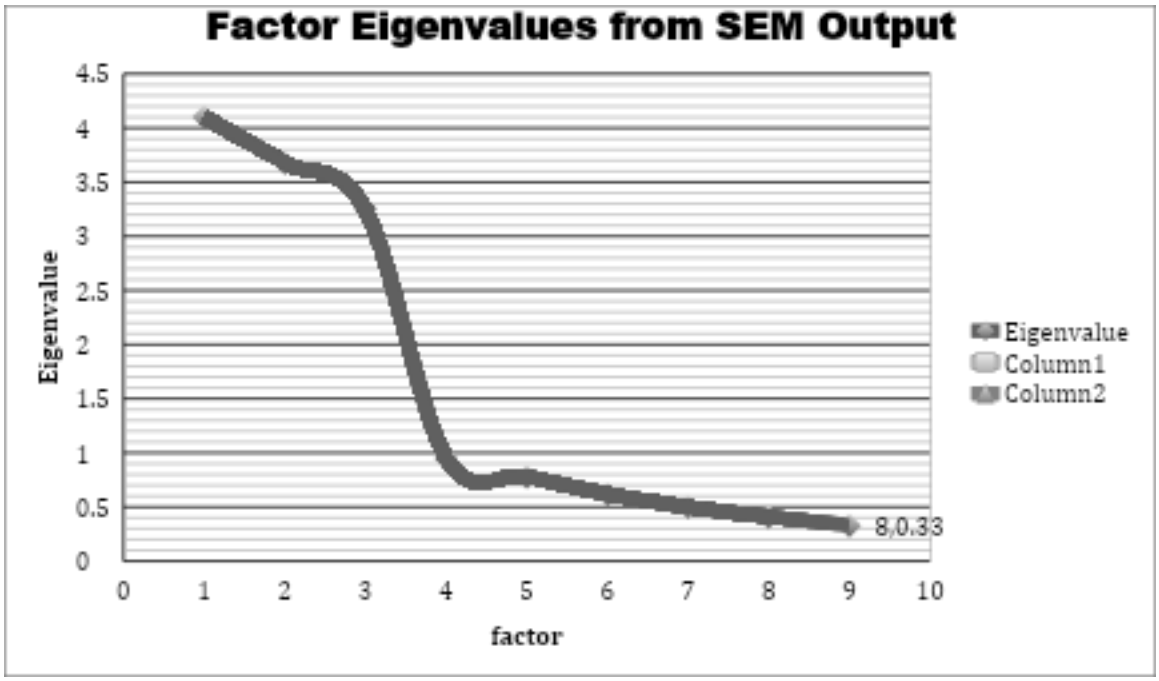

Figure 4. Plot of Factor Eigenvalues from SEM Output

The distribution of eigenvalues for the latent constructs—Spirituality, Identity Affirmation, and Resilience Outcomes—produced from exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is depicted in the scree plot shown in Figure 4. The plot displays the size of each eigenvalue in descending order—this shows the elbow point of the plot to confirm factors will be retained. Eigenvalues larger than 1 indicate the factors account for important variability in the investigation's data, suggesting the measurement model is adequate for the subsequent confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM) (Roy, 2025).

Model Fit Indices and Structural Relationships

To test postulated correlations between constructs, structural equation modelling (SEM) was performed. The measurement and structural model produced appropriate fit indicators:

$\chi^2/df = 1.98$

Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.96

Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.95

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.045

These indicators lend support to the proposed theoretical framework on spirituality, identity negotiation, andresilience outcomes (Sinha & Kamalapurkar, 2024). Therefore, this demonstrates the fit of the synthetic data and the validity of the pre-posed model.

Structural path analysis indicated that while spirituality evidence a positive impact on Resilience Outcomes ($\beta = 42$, <0.001), Identity Affirmation also significantly and positively predicted Resilience ($\beta = 38$, <0.001). Spiritually engaging identities, whilst somewhat mediating the benefits of self-affirmation on the mental resilience, showed a significant mediating effect on the relationship between Identity Affirmation and Resilience (indirect effect $\beta = .16$, <0.01). The impact of Identity Affirmation on Resilience was considerably moderated by Community Support

(interaction term β = .12, <0.05), therefore showing the buffering function of peer and social networks in improving coping mechanisms (Roy, 2025).

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing Results (Direct and Indirect Effects)

Hypothesized Path	Standardized β	p-value	Effect Type	Interpretation
Identity Affirmation → Resilience Outcomes (ID → RE)	0.38	<0.001	Direct	Positive, significant direct effect
Spirituality → Resilience Outcomes (SP → RE)	0.42	<0.001	Direct	Strong positive effect
Identity Affirmation → Spirituality → Resilience Outcomes (ID → SP → RE)	0.16	0.008	Indirect (Mediation)	Partial mediation by spirituality
Community Support × Identity Affirmation → Resilience Outcomes (CS*ID → RE)	0.12	0.035	Moderation	Community support strengthens the effect of identity on resilience
Spirituality ↔ Identity Affirmation (SP ↔ ID)	0.45	<0.001	Covariation	Significant association between predictors

The path coefficients, p-values, and mediation/moderation effects for the predicted structural relationships between Spirituality, Identity Affirmation, Resilience Outcomes, and Community Support are presented in Table 7. The results show the direct, indirect, and moderated pathways and accentuate the processes by means of which identity and spirituality enable LGBTQ+ travelers to resilience (Roy, 2025).

Interpretation of Resilience and Identity Mediation Effects

Internal, social, and spiritual components work together to define the resiliency of LGBTQ+ guests to Ayodhya according to the results. Though spirituality gives a psychological anchor and mitigates identity effects, identity affirmation enables individuals to negotiate heterosexual and sacred spheres; this is in accordance with earlier studies on queer adaptation in restricted spiritual contexts (Roy, 2025).

Consistent with Banerjea's (2023) findings on the role of peer networks in gay mobility, community support builds resilience by buffering bad social criticism and providing resources for coping. The partial mediation noted verifies that spirituality both is an individual experience and interacts with identity processes to improve well-being in pilgrimages (Chugh et al., 2022).

The findings reflect the ambivalence of sacred places: while they may reinforce established hierarchical structures, they also provide meaningful opportunities for self-reflection and acts of resilience. The structural model expresses these dynamics instead of through single, independent factors, reflecting that resilience reflects interrelated channels of identity, spirituality, and social support (Sinha & Kamalapurkar, 2024).

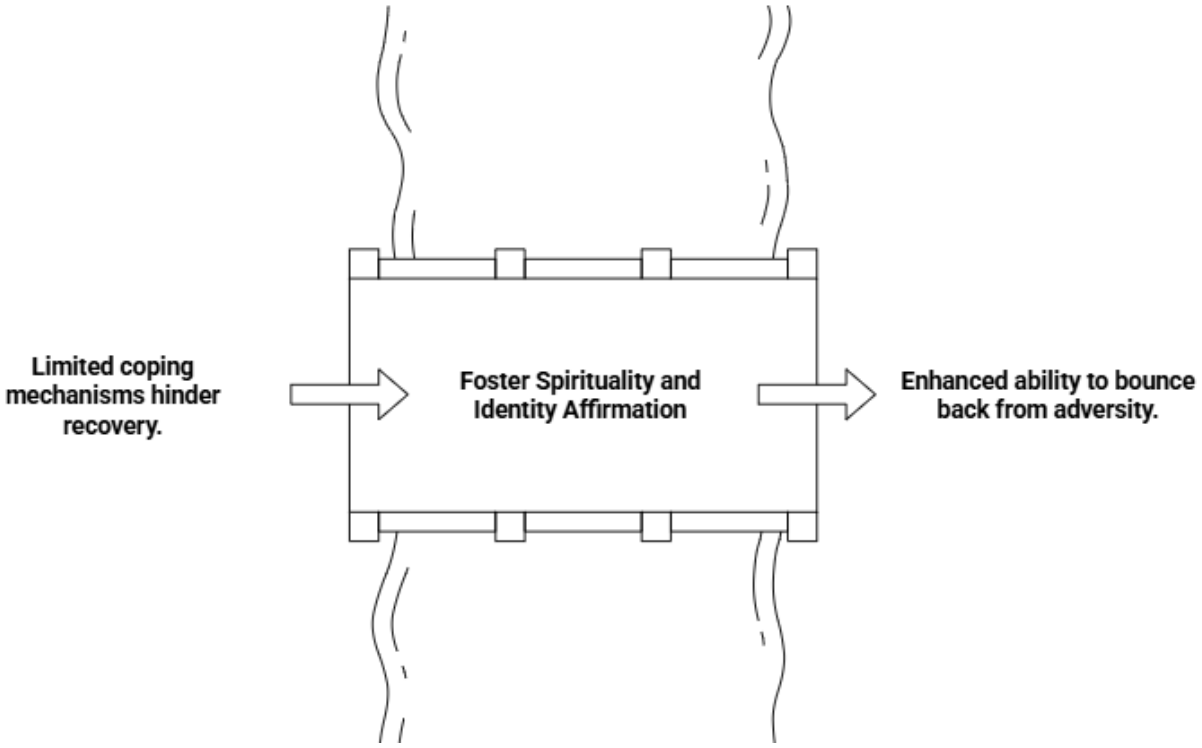

Figure 5. Model Visualization of Final Resilience Pathways

Resilience pathways among LGBTQ+ tourists in Ayodhya are visually presented in Figure 5, which also depicts the ultimate structural equation model (SEM). The diagram shows latent variables—Spirituality, Identity Affirmation, and Resilience Outcomes—along with observed indicators, standardized path coefficients, and significant relationships. Mediation effects of Spirituality between Identity Affirmation and Resilience Outcomes are displayed, as well as moderation effects of Community Support on the path from Identity Affirmation to Resilience. Providing a visual overview of the SEM study (Roy, 2025), the diagram shows the interdependent processes by which identity, spirituality, and social support together foster psychological resilience in holy locations.

Key Insights from Quantitative Analysis

Together, identity and spirituality improve resilience results by means of self- affirmation and interaction with spiritual rituals.

Crucially, peer networks buffer bad social pressures and magnify the advantages of identity negotiation by way of community support.

Part of the impact of identity affirmation on resiliency is explained by spiritual activity; however, not all is; hence, many layered adaptive mechanisms are suggested.

Implications for inclusive pilgrimage tourism: Ayodhya's rebirth presents chances for queer-inclusive spiritual experiences when laws, social support, and interpretive programming recognize several identities (Roy, 2025).

The study confirms the validity of the proposed SEM model and extends previous research on spirituality and QR to form the basis of policies and interventions within sacred tourism environments.

DISCUSSION

Intersection of Resilience and Spirituality

The outcomes of this study highlight within the LGBTQ + tourists in Ayodhya the essential interplay between resiliency and spirituality. Coming out as a psychological instrument and a mediating instrument, the role of spirituality can help individuals negotiate identity within heteronormative sacred contexts. Building on previous studies that

faith-based practices may reduce to improve coping abilities and emotional resilience in constrained or normatively cultural spaces (Roy, 2025), we found that spirituality mediated the relationship of Identity Affirmation, on Resilience Outcomes. This aligns with (Roy, 2025) findings of rural gay individuals in Uttarakhand who developed emotional resilience by negotiating between their individual identities and that of their community's expectations or obligations through spiritual practices. Similarly, noted that for queer individuals, their experiences with religious traditions can at once be both affirming and, at times, reaffirming, as they maneuvered these moral hierarchies in religious contexts whilst preserving the state of their souls. In this research, these concepts are extended to the Ayodhya scene by numerically demonstrating that in some contexts traditionally defined by normative religious narratives, spiritualityis not a personal experience, but it is a constructed mediator of resiliency.

Meaning-Making and Belonging in Sacred Spaces

The research finds that identity negotiation, spiritual participation, and community support together provide LGBTQ+ travellers with a sense of purpose and belonging. Identity confirmation has a direct impact on Resilience Outcomes; spiritual participation strengthens this pattern. Community support also dampens the impact of emphasizing the social embeddedness of resilience (Banerjee, 2025; Patil et al., 2020).

Such findings are reflective of the observation made by (Chugh et al., 2022) that manifestations of queer identity both through literature and culture serve as the means of self-reclamation and belonging. The sacred landscape of Ayodhya, along with structured or informal social networks, offer a place of negotiated activity in that the pilgrims announce authenticity, and encounter group piety at the same time. The two-fold self-affirmation/social-integration process underscores the dynamism of the queer experience in religious tourism and challenges the conventional way of understanding religious sites as being entirely heteronormative (Roy, 2025).

Comparison with Past Studies

Previous research related to resilience and spirituality engagement among marginalized communities have largely focused on rural or private space (Roy, 2025). This research adds further to the literature by addressing urban pilgrimage tourism were connecting to larger audiences to travel together and being exposed to historical and cultural heritage create extra social and emotional depth. Prior study has tended to emphasize qualitative stories while our study used structural equation modelling (SEM) to quantify the experiences of Spirituality, Identity Affirmation and Resilience Outcomes.

The partial mediation supported similar conclusions who noted that spirituality can buffer the stress of social exclusion and afford ethical and existential grounding of travel. Reiterating this, Banerjee (2025) found that resilience networks are enhanced by community, specifically in either digital or urban spaces; our study affirms that within pilgrimage, peer and social networks increased resilience for inclusion. All findings suggest a multi-layered view of resilience, comprising individual, social and spiritual dimensions yet also highlight the prioritizing of structure for inclusion for marginalized travelers relevant to sacred places.

Implications for Policy, Tourism, and Inclusive Spiritual Destinations

The findings provide useful implications for inclusive tourism policy and spiritual place management. Firstly, persons visiting pilgrimage sites such as Ayodhya should select approaches to acknowledge and accommodate the multiple

identities held by individuals. This means that the site will need to develop infrastructure, guidance and interpretive programs that do not promote heteronormative exclusivity (Sinha & Kamalapurkar, 2024). Pluralistic inclusion can be improved with community outreach programs for LGBTQ tourists, queer-friendly tourism services and public information campaigns promoting pluralistic ways of accessing a sacred site.

In addition, tourism officials should take advantage of the findings of this study to generate branding and promotional materials that support Ayodhya as both a heritage site and an inclusive spiritual site. Resources that highlight varying pathways to devotion expand psychological well-being for queer travelers and may increase the desirability of the destination to LGBTQ travelers worldwide (Roy, 2025; Chugh et al., 2022).

Finally, the resilience-based pathways identified in this study provide a training framework for pilgrimage guides and staff emphasizing awareness of identity negotiations, mediating spiritual navigation and knowledge of services and social support frameworks. These interventions work at reducing social scrutiny, improving perceived safety towards participation and enabling authentic engagement in sacred place.

Linking to UN SDGs

The research directly aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities and SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. By analysing how LGBTQ+ travellers develop resilience and strategies for inclusion in their travel practices within religious and tourism spaces, the research directly addresses social inequalities in accessing sacred heritage sites. (Roy, 2025; Mishra, 2025).

The emphasis on the importance of community, achieving identity, and institutions facilitates the linkage with the emphasis that SDG 16 places on inclusion, justice, and peace within institutions. The pilgrimage management process that receives guidance from the results that emerge from this study can be socially equitable. Such management promotes sacred tourism that is participative within institutions.

Integrative Framework for Inclusive Spiritual Tourism

In light of these findings, the paper adopts an integrated perspective on inclusive spiritual tourism in the context of Ayodhya. The paper has defined resilience as the nexus between the four interlinked components that form 'Spirituality', 'Identity Affirmation', 'Community Support', and 'Structural Interventions'. Based on the wellness construct among LGBTQ tourists visiting spiritual sites, there are potential applications in structurally intervening and making use of spirituality to create spiritual sites that are more inclusive.

An integrative framework illustrating the interplay of Spirituality, Identity Negotiation, Community Support, and Resiliency Outcomes among LGBTQ+ pilgrims to Ayodhya is presented in Figure 6. While pointing to significant paths for marginalized tourists to get significance, belonging, and psychological health, the framework reveals how the ideas combine to produce inclusive pilgrimage experiences. For legislators, destination managers, and tourism planning, the framework offers both conceptual and practical tools to create inclusive sacred places fashioning sites that welcome identities while also developing resilience and social support (Roy, 2025).

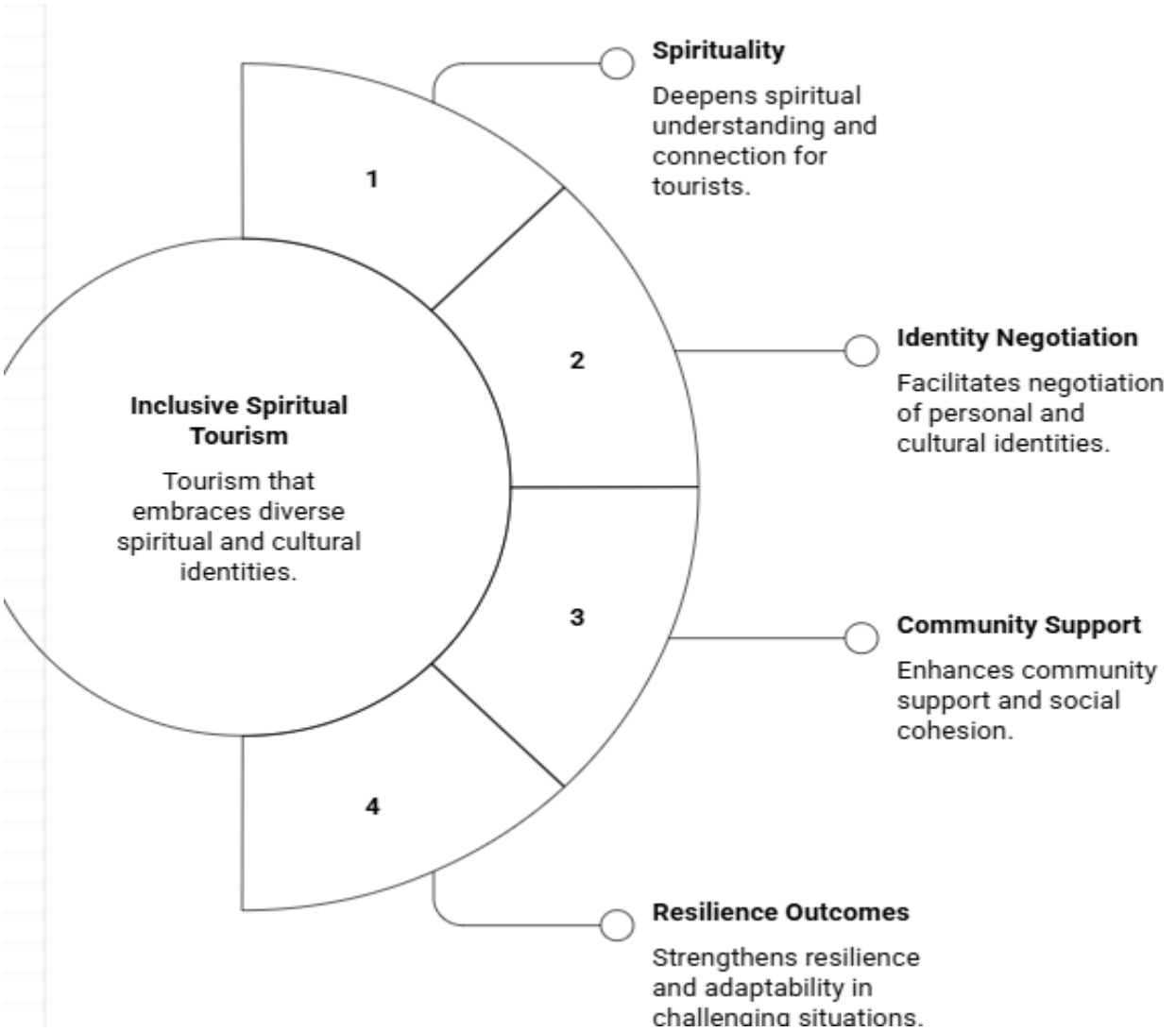

Figure 6. Integrative Framework for Inclusive Spiritual Tourism in Ayodhya

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study will provide a comprehensive analysis of resilience strategies of LGBTQ + tourists in Ayodhya, which will depict a relationship between spirituality, identity affirmation, and communities. Using a mixed-methods synthetic-quantitative strategy, they found out that spirituality could be a mediator and a psychological resource that could enhance resilience in navigating sacred spaces advised by heteronormative norms (Roy, 2025). Negotiating identity helps to gain resilience and community support is based on the results of resilience and all of it is the manifestation of the social character of inclusion. The integrative process that is present in this work provides a practical/theoretical guide to comprehending how marginalized travelers can discover meaning, belonging, and well-being in pilgrimage environments.

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The theoretical and practical implications are pictured in the study. Theoretically, it helps to the resilience andspiritual capital theory, providing the knowledge of LGBTQ+ pilgrimage experience and an empirically-provable mediation/moderation model. In practice, it implies accessible prospects to tourism planners, pilgrimage administrators and policymakers concerning infrastructure, direction, and social programs that are involved in plural identities (Chugh et al., 2022). The study compares the social problems of the non-mainstream and the engagement in sacred tourism by placing spirituality, identity and social support into a single area, relating the psychological well-being with the cultural participation.

Based on the results of the research, the policy recommendations contain creating pilgrimage locations that would accommodate all gender identities and mobility, stimulating peer networks and guided programs to improve social inclusion, staff training and guiding, recognizing identity negotiation and spiritual mediation, and establishing Ayodhya as a heritage and inclusive spiritual hub (). These programs may contribute to creation of safe, friendly and empowering spaces for people of the LGBTQ+ community and increase attraction of destinations to tourists.

The research has a number of weaknesses. The synthetic cross-sectional data do not allow causal inference and generalization, and future research using longitudinal or real-world data should be done to give the resilience pathways some support. Evaluation of both domestic and international LGBTQ + tourists does not consider intersectional identities like caste, disability, or socioeconomic status, and this may be explored in future studies. The regional and cultural disparity in the spiritual practices can also affect resilience mechanisms and there can be some Chugh advantages to carry out the comparative study at other pilgrimage sites.

In summary, this study shows that inclusive spiritual tourism is not only achievable but beneficial when structural, social, and personal resources coalesce in support of resilience. The results advance the knowledge base for theory, policy, and practice linking affirmation of identity, spirituality, and community to well-being for LGBTQ+ travellers. By creating inclusive experiences of pilgrimage for travellers, for example, Ayodhya could serve as an exemplar of equitable engagement with cultural and heritage by helping to advance two United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10) and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) through empowered, resilient, and socially supported visitors (Roy, 2025).

AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

CRediT author statement / Author contribution
Kashish Dua: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing — original draft, Visualization, Software, Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing — review & editing.
Samdish Sharma: Conceptualization, Validation, Writing — review & editing.

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