

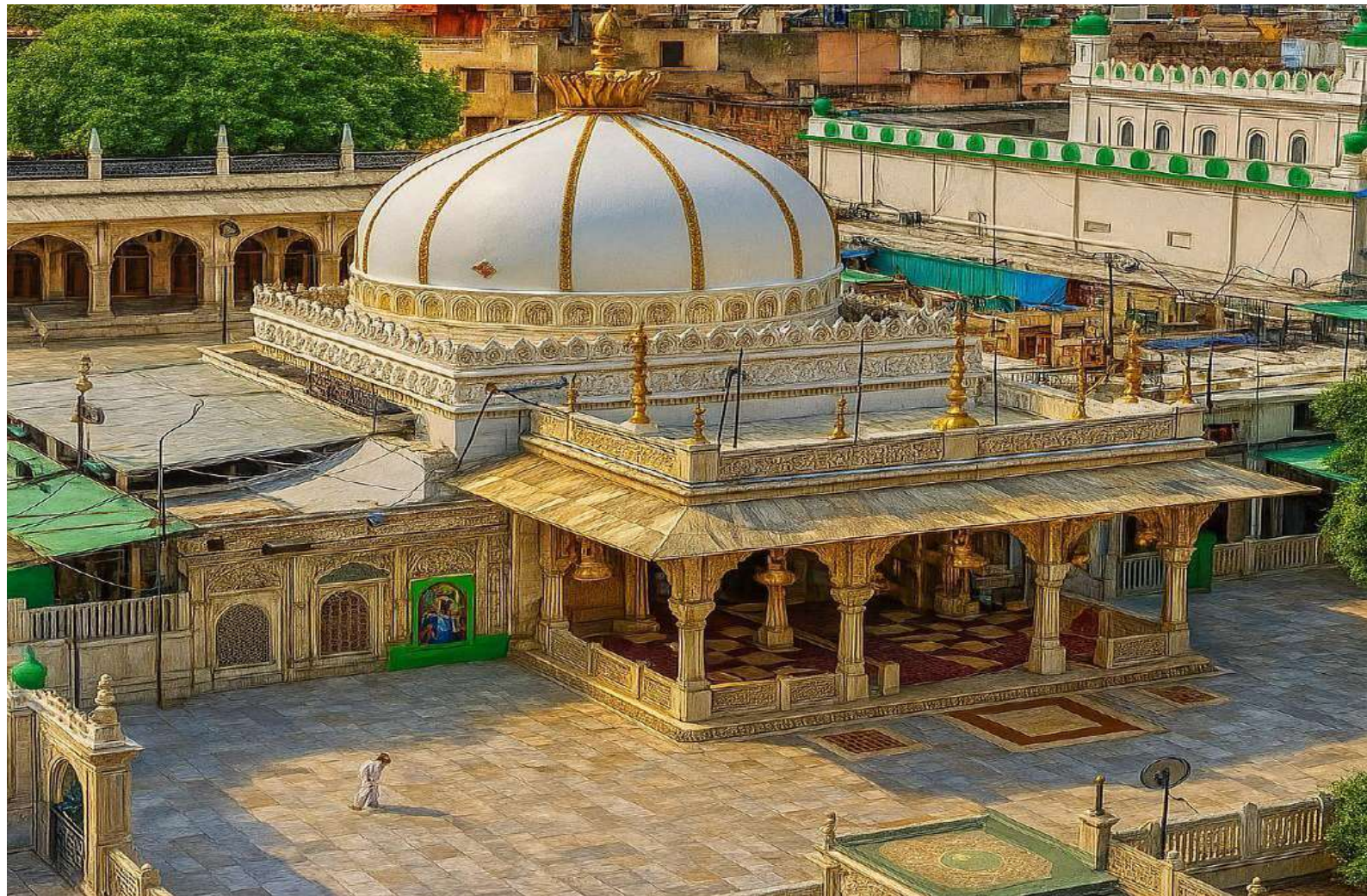


अल्पसंख्यक कार्य मंत्रालय
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STUDY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE DARGAH KHWAJA SAHEB, AJMER

MINISTRY OF MINORITY AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



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Executive Summary

The study on the Dargah Khwaja Saheb in Ajmer was undertaken by the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi, and sponsored by the Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA). This pioneering research provides an in-depth assessment of the Dargah Khwaja Saheb as one of South Asia's most significant Sufi shrines and a vital centre of Islamic spirituality, pilgrimage, and cultural heritage. It analyses the Dargah's historical evolution, spiritual legacy, administrative and legal frameworks, financial management, and pilgrim satisfaction. The study aims to offer evidence-based recommendations for improving governance, institutional efficiency, and service delivery while preserving the Dargah's spiritual and cultural integrity.

The study was designed with a broad set of interrelated objectives: (i) examine the current functioning of the Dargah Khwaja Saheb (DKS), Ajmer, with a focus on improving its administration, financial health, socio-economic role, and pilgrim satisfaction; (ii) assess the implementation of the DKS Act, 1955, identify existing gaps and challenges, and recommend measures for stronger enforcement; (iii) analyse the legal status of the Dargah's finances; (iv) examine both the religious and secular administration of the Dargah in light of the Act and relevant judicial pronouncements to ensure transparency and fairness; (v) evaluate the collection and utilisation of funds by different stakeholders; (vi) study the roles of the Sajjadanashin, Khadims, district administration, and pilgrims; (vii) conduct a comparative analysis of similar religious institutions in India and abroad to identify best practices for short-, medium-, and long-term adoption; (viii) compile the rights and duties of stakeholders and document existing administrative and interaction mechanisms; (ix) explore any additional aspects relevant to the study's scope; and (x) suggest practical measures for improving, streamlining, and enhancing the overall efficiency of the Dargah's operations.

The research design combines structured surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the Dargah's functioning. Quantitative data, derived primarily from pilgrim surveys, provide measurable indicators of satisfaction, service delivery, and institutional efficiency. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, offer deeper insights into governance, financial management, and stakeholder relations. The sampling framework ensures proportional representation of all relevant groups, with 264 respondents selected through a combination of

purposive, stratified, and random sampling techniques. Primary data were supplemented with secondary sources, including official reports, audit documents, judicial pronouncements, and archived literature. This triangulation strengthens the validity and reliability of the findings. Several research instruments were employed, including structured questionnaires tailored to stakeholder groups, semi-structured interview schedules for administrators, Sajjadanashin, and Khadims, and observation checklists used during major events, such as Mini Urs and peak crowd hours. The Output-Outcome Monitoring Framework (OOMF) was applied to assess transparency, accountability, and performance outcomes within administrative and financial domains.

A systemic review of the literature provides a comprehensive introduction to the study of Sufism and the Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer, situating the shrine within its historical, spiritual, and institutional contexts. It examines how Sufism, as the mystical dimension of Islam, evolved as a movement of spiritual introspection, love, and divine union, transcending rigid legalistic boundaries and fostering harmony among diverse communities. The discussion highlights Sufism's profound roots in Islamic theology, emphasising the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), remembrance of God (*dhikr*), and service to humanity (*Chapter 1*).

The study provides an analytical overview of the financial position of Dargah Khwaja Saheb (DKS) in Ajmer over the five-year period from 2020 to 2024, reflecting prudent financial management and effective retention of surpluses. Fixed and movable assets have expanded steadily, such as investment in infrastructure and long-term capacity building, while minimal dependence on external liabilities underscores the DKS' solvency and low financial risk. Nonetheless, recurring challenges in liquidity management and receivable turnover persist, as rising fixed deposits and investments coincided with declines in immediate cash balances in certain years. High volumes of receivables, including sundry debtors, rent, and license dues, suggest delays in revenue collection and potential operational cash flow constraints. Despite this financial strength, this study states that accumulated reserves have not been adequately translated into welfare expenditures or community-oriented initiatives, indicating limited reinvestment in healthcare, education, or social support services for pilgrims and the local community. Overall, the study underscores that while DKS demonstrates sound institutional control and long-term solvency, there is a pressing need for strategic reorientation to

complement financial consolidation with welfare-oriented spending and efficient utilisation of resources to advance inclusive community development (*Chapter 4*).

The study examines the legal status and regulatory framework governing rights, practices, and institutional authority at the Dargah Khwaja Saheb in Ajmer, drawing on the Dargah Khwaja Saheb Act, 1955, associated byelaws, and key judicial pronouncements to analyse the interplay between statutory regulation and the customary rights of hereditary functionaries, including the Sajjadanashin and Khadims. The study further traces the legal evolution of donation management, noting that Section 14 supersedes earlier court restrictions by authorising the Committee to receive offerings and manage donation boxes, while disputes over the Dewan Haveli, Khanqah, and Sola Khamba remain subject to judicial determination, reflecting ongoing tensions between waqf claims and administrative oversight. Ritual practices, including *ghusl* (ritual washing of the shrine), exemplify the division of roles between the Dewan, Khadims, and other hereditary participants, with courts upholding defined boundaries to preserve traditional hierarchies within the administrative framework. The study demonstrates that the legal position of Dargah Khwaja Saheb is shaped by a dual framework of statutory governance and judicially protected custom, wherein the Committee exercises extensive administrative and financial powers under the 1955 Act, while hereditary and spiritual rights rooted in centuries-old tradition are safeguarded, ensuring the continuity of religious authority alongside institutional accountability (*Chapter 5*).

The study presents a comprehensive analysis of pilgrim satisfaction at the Dargah Khwaja Saheb, Ajmer, based on survey responses from 201 pilgrims, examining socio-demographic characteristics, religious engagement, infrastructure, accessibility, sanitation, crowd management, service delivery, safety, and social welfare. The pilgrim population of the sample is predominantly male (80.10%) and Muslim (91.04%), with a majority aged 16–45 years. Devotees primarily come from Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, and their occupations are largely comprised of labourers, business owners, and homemakers. The study also highlights that while the Dargah excels in fulfilling spiritual and devotional needs, addressing infrastructural inadequacies and operational gaps through holistic, gender-sensitive, and technologically enabled measures is essential to enhance pilgrim satisfaction, strengthen institutional credibility, and harmonise the shrine's historic spiritual legacy with contemporary pilgrimage management demands (*Chapter 6*).

The field survey at the Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer provides insight into how the religious, administrative, and infrastructural aspects converge to shape the daily operations and pilgrimage experience at the shrine. Findings also reveal systemic shortcomings in the planning, maintenance, and regulation of infrastructure, resulting in overcrowding, poor hygiene, exclusion of vulnerable groups such as women, the elderly, and the differently abled, and overall discomfort for visitors (*Chapter 7*). Key findings of the field survey are as following:

- The central Dargah complex is structurally sound and historically preserved, whereas the peripheral lanes, especially those near Nizam Gate and Delhi Gate, are congested and poorly maintained.
- Inadequate electricity supply, inefficient drainage, and a lack of comprehensive urban planning impede smooth movement, particularly during high pilgrim inflows such as the Urs festival.
- Cleanliness within the central courtyard is generally well maintained, but waste accumulation near food stalls, narrow lanes, and open drains poses health risks.
- Garbage collection and public toilet maintenance are inconsistent during peak periods, reflecting a lack of coordination between municipal authorities and the local community.
- Basic pilgrim amenities, including drinking water, accommodation, rest areas, and medical support, are unevenly available.
- Organised information centres, signage, and emergency protocols are largely absent, and women pilgrims face difficulties accessing prayer space, resting spaces, and sanitation facilities, which indicates a lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure.
- Crowd management poses a significant challenge due to the high daily visitors and peak festival periods. Although temporary coordination exists among police, municipal staff, and the Dargah Committee, permanent systems such as barricaded routes, surveillance, and digital monitoring are lacking.
- Security measures fluctuate seasonally and are inconsistently applied, leading to gaps in ongoing risk management.
- Administrative tensions persist between the Khadims, the Dargah Committee, Sajjadanashin, and local authorities over control, resource allocation, and development projects, reflecting unclear roles and fragmented decision-making processes.

- Operational challenges include suboptimal infrastructure, congested access routes, inconsistent sanitation, lack of long-term urban planning, commercialisation of surrounding areas, and limited adoption of digital and technological solutions for management.
- Despite these challenges, the shrine’s spiritual sanctity is preserved through pilgrim devotion and the participation of Khadims, and its core structures and central courtyard remain well-maintained.
- Modernised, integrated management approaches are necessary, including infrastructure upgrades, improved sanitation, and gender-sensitive facilities. Additionally, digital governance for crowd and emergency management is crucial, as is strengthened coordination among custodians, the Dargah Committee, and civic authorities. Long-term urban planning is also crucial for striking a balance between religious sanctity and functional efficiency, safety, and accessibility.

The comparative analysis of the Dargah Khwaja Saheb, Ajmer, and other major religious shrines, such as Shirdi, Mashhad, and Baghdad, highlights several best practices that can guide Ajmer’s development through short-, medium-, and long-term phases as following (*Chapter 8*):

Short-Term Recommendations

➤ **Adopt Digital Management of Donations and Expenditures (Inspired by Shirdi)**

- ❖ Introduce digital systems for receiving, recording, and auditing donations.
- ❖ Ensure transparency and accountability in financial management.
- ❖ Reduce disputes and enhance trust among stakeholders.

➤ **Enhance Pilgrim Services (Drawing from Mashhad)**

- ❖ Improve sanitation and waste management across the shrine complex.
- ❖ Strengthen crowd management with designated routes and trained volunteers.
- ❖ Establish information kiosks and emergency assistance points.

➤ **Introduce Basic Service Improvements**

- ❖ Install clear signage and direction boards for pilgrims.

- ❖ Provide online booking options for accommodation and services.
 - ❖ Organize structured queues for ziyarah to maintain order and safety.
- **Strengthen the Community Kitchen (Langar) System (Modeled on Baghdad and Shirdi)**
- ❖ Expand and formalize langar operations under a regulated management system.
 - ❖ Ensure food hygiene, quality, and regular inspection.
 - ❖ Promote inclusivity by serving all pilgrims regardless of background.

Medium-Term Recommendations

➤ **Build Institutional Capacity (Inspired by Mashhad’s Astan Quds Razavi and Shirdi Sai Trust)**

- ❖ Establish hospitals, dispensaries, and welfare centres for pilgrims and locals.
- ❖ Launch scholarship programs for underprivileged students.
- ❖ Create cultural centres promoting Sufi music, heritage, and interfaith dialogue.
- ❖ Strengthen administrative structures through training and legal reforms.

➤ **Promote Transparency and Stakeholder Participation**

- ❖ Implement audit mechanisms for financial and administrative processes.
- ❖ Involve hereditary custodians, local authorities, and community representatives in governance.
- ❖ Ensure gender inclusion and accountability in staffing and decision-making.

Long-Term Recommendations

➤ **Transform Ajmer into a Global Spiritual and Cultural Hub (Modelled on Mashhad)**

- ❖ Redevelop surrounding areas with planned infrastructure and pilgrim towns.
- ❖ Develop international outreach programs targeting the South Asian diaspora.
- ❖ Encourage cultural tourism and global interfaith dialogue initiatives.

➤ **Integrate Learning and Heritage Institutions**

- ❖ Establish universities, museums, and research centres within the Dargah complex.
- ❖ Promote Sufi studies, Arabic-Persian scholarship, and cultural preservation.

➤ **Strengthen Global Cultural Presence**

- ❖ Position Ajmer as a centre of cultural diplomacy and Sufi networks.
- ❖ Pursue UNESCO World Heritage Site recognition for the Dargah complex.

➤ **Link Religious Tourism with Local Economic Development (Following Shirdi's Model)**

- ❖ Support local handicrafts, cultural fairs, and heritage festivals.
- ❖ Encourage academic tourism and cultural exchange programs.
- ❖ Ensure that shrine revenues contribute to community welfare and sustainable rural development.

Achievements

The study highlights several key achievements of the Dargah Khwaja Saheb, Ajmer. It confirms Ajmer's position as a pivotal Sufi centre celebrated for its spiritual inclusivity and deep-rooted Chishti heritage, attracting devotees from diverse backgrounds. Financially, the Dargah has demonstrated robust asset growth and fiscal resilience, maintained solvency while expanded its infrastructure base. Legally, the statutory framework and judicial interventions have preserved hereditary custodianship and safeguarded ritual practices, ensuring continuity of traditional roles within a structured administrative system. Above all, the enduring spiritual connection of pilgrims, reflected in their consistent willingness to revisit the shrine despite infrastructural and administrative challenges, underscores the Dargah's profound spiritual influence and its continued relevance as a living symbol of faith and inclusivity.

Constraints and Bottleneck

The study identifies several key bottlenecks and challenges that affect the effective functioning of the Dargah Khwaja Saheb in Ajmer. Administrative fragmentation remains a significant concern, with ongoing tensions between the Dargah Committee, Khadims, and the Sajjadanashin hindering cohesive decision-making. Human resource development is weak,

marked by gender imbalance, inadequate staffing, and a lack of professional training among Dargah's employees. Infrastructure-related issues persist, including deteriorating facilities, poor sanitation, ineffective crowd management, and limited emergency preparedness. Despite significant financial inflows, there has been minimal reinvestment in visible welfare initiatives or improved pilgrim services. Additionally, recurring disputes over property rights, management of offerings, and control of administrative authority continue to undermine institutional harmony and operational efficiency.

Recommendations for Governance of Dargah Ajmer Sharif Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA)

Policy and Legal Oversight

- ❖ Review and, if necessary, amend the Dargah Khwaja Saheb Act, 1955, to reflect present-day challenges such as crowd management, safety, transparency, and inclusion.
- ❖ Issue statutory guidelines to institutionalise representation of Khadims (Haft-Baridar), Sajjadanashin, and civil society members in the Dargah Committee to ensure participatory governance.
- ❖ There should be a permanent mediation platform between Khadims, the Committee, and the Sajjadanashin for dispute resolution and coordination during the Urs and major events.
- ❖ Consider creation of a Judicial/Quasi-Judicial Committee framework within the Act to arbitrate disputes between Dargah Committee, Sajjadanashin, and Khadims, reducing dependence on litigation.

Transparency and Accountability

- ❖ Mandate annual financial, structural, and safety audits of the Dargah Committee (Tosha Khana, Deg, Langar, shops, hujras).
- ❖ Establish a central digital portal for pilgrim feedback, grievance redressal, and transparency of offerings/utilisation of shrine revenues.

Pilgrim Facilities and Infrastructure Support

- ❖ Provide special central grants under schemes for heritage/religious tourism to modernise langar, deg, washrooms, and crowd management systems without compromising sanctity.

- ❖ Facilitate coordination with the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Culture for museum, library, and archive development, highlighting Ajmer Sharif as a site of composite cultural heritage.
- ❖ Promote gender-sensitive infrastructure, ensuring MoMA guidelines include separate and secure facilities for women pilgrims.

Capacity Building and Welfare

- ❖ Launch capacity-building programs for Dargah Committee staff, Khadims, and volunteers in areas of heritage management, fire safety, hospitality, and pilgrim services.
- ❖ Create a special scholarship scheme for Khadim children in theology, law, heritage management, and foreign languages, linked to MoMA's existing educational support programs.
- ❖ Extend MoMA's welfare schemes (health insurance, skill development) to Khadims and other Dargah's employees.
- ❖ Institutionalize a Dargah Coordination Mechanism (MoMA + District Admin + Dargah Committee + Sajjadanashin + Khadims + Line Departments) that meets annually before Urs.
- ❖ Ensure inter-ministerial convergence (Tourism, Culture, Home Affairs, Power, Urban Development) so that Ajmer Sharif receives holistic infrastructural support.

Dargah Committee

Institutional and Governance Reforms

- ❖ Strengthen transparency through annual audits of *Tosha Khana*, langar/deg finances, and property rents, ensuring accountability.
- ❖ Revise shop/property rents to align with market rates, introducing a fair, transparent lease policy.
- ❖ Strengthen revenue systems by regulating commercial activities, rent collection, and fair property use.
- ❖ Professionalise staffing through merit-based recruitment (SSC or equivalent) with transferable appointments, ending hereditary monopolies.
- ❖ Introduce a digital grievance redressal and feedback system for pilgrims and staff.

- ❖ Undertake a structural audit of all constructions, vacating unauthorised or non-heritage buildings and preserving significant structures.
- ❖ Develop a master plan for the expansion of the complex (e.g., Gates 3-6, Jhalra) to address rising pilgrim inflows.
- ❖ Ensure institutionalised representation of Haft-Baridar/ Khadim and Sajjadanashin in important decision-making regarding the functioning of Dargah Khwaja Saheb, Ajmer.
- ❖ Make Kayad Vishram Sthali a permanent facility with lockers, enclosed washrooms, and basic amenities for the pilgrims.

Pilgrim Facilities & Services

- ❖ Improve infrastructure for inclusivity: ramps, shaded seating, anti-skid flooring, widened staircases, gender-sensitive prayer/wudu areas.
- ❖ Segregate entry/exit routes; widen Shahjahani Gate and redesign unsafe gates (6–8).
- ❖ Renovate langar and deg facilities with modern hygiene standards, introducing LPG and pre-packed food/token distribution while retaining tradition.
- ❖ Establish digital queue management systems for better crowd flow.
- ❖ Prohibit commercial activities inside shrine precincts; relocate vending to designated external zones.

Khadims

- ❖ Draft and enforce a code of conduct for behaviour within premises, ensuring sanctity of practices.
- ❖ Establish a cultural archive (oral histories, ritual practices, manuscripts) to safeguard intangible heritage.

District Administration and Line Departments

- ❖ Lead a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism (before Urs and other high-footfall events) involving police, municipal, fire, electricity, and health departments.
- ❖ Oversee encroachment removal around the Dargah to maintain sanctity, ease access, and prevent safety hazards.
- ❖ Institutionalise joint safety audits (fire, electricity, crowd flow, drainage) before major events.
- ❖ Monitor hotels/guest houses for fire and building safety compliance.

- ❖ Deploy digital surveillance, drones, and queue management systems.
- ❖ Restrict high-risk rituals (flag hoisting, roof access) to authorised personnel only.
- ❖ Expand dustbin networks; integrate flower waste into formal disposal.
- ❖ Conduct intensive cleanliness drives with penalties for non-compliance.
- ❖ Improve drainage and sanitation before Urs; construct permanent, gender-sensitive washrooms.
- ❖ Mandate ELCB installation for commercial units; enclose transformers with barriers.
- ❖ Raise wire heights; expand underground cabling; implement structured RoW plan.
- ❖ Conduct routine safety audits with fire and municipal departments.
- ❖ Create designated bus/vehicle parking outside the core area.
- ❖ Prohibit private vehicles in high-density zones during Urs.
- ❖ Introduce special mobility lanes/services for elderly/differently-abled pilgrims.
- ❖ Maintain emergency lanes for ambulances/fire response.
- ❖ Install 100 – 150 fire hydrants in critical areas.
- ❖ Enforce fire exits and evacuation signage in commercial establishments.
- ❖ Conduct vendor training and awareness campaigns.
- ❖ Clear encroachments blocking emergency corridors.

This report provides a comprehensive understanding of the administrative, social, and spiritual dimensions of the Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, highlighting both its enduring sanctity and the structural challenges that affect its functioning. By examining issues of governance, pilgrim experience, and institutional accountability, the study contributes valuable insights into how traditional religious institutions can adapt to contemporary needs without compromising their spiritual essence. The study offers practical recommendations for improving transparency, efficiency, and inclusiveness. In the long run, this research can serve as a foundational reference for policymakers, religious administrators, and scholars interested in the intersection of faith, governance, and community welfare, helping ensure that the Dargah continues to thrive as a centre of devotion, service, and social harmony.