

## SAMBHAR LAKE: AN EMERGING TOURIST HUB

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### ABSTRACT

*Sambhar Lake, small however a vital town on the landscape of Rajasthan, is located about eighty kilometers from the capital city of Jaipur. It is encircled by the biggest inland salt water lake of Asia, that produces almost 196,000 tonnes of clear salt each year that is around 9% of India's salt production. The lake receives water from six rivers, Medha, Samod, Mantha, Khari, Roopangarh and Khandela with the geographic area of 5700 sq. kilometres. It is elliptically formed with length of roughly 35.5 kms and a breadth variable between 3 kms to 11 kms in season. The circumference of the lake is 96 kms and is embraced by Aravali Hills on all sides.*

**KEYWORDS:** Sambhar Lake, Six Rivers, Geographic Area, Aravali Hills.

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### Introduction



**Heaps of Salt**

Besides its economic importance, the lake may be a breathtaking site for the tourists. Salt lake is exclusive in its views of salt mountain- like heaps lying around and a railway narrow gauge mini train that meanders through the salt pans to carry crude salt to mill in wooden wagons may be a spectacular sight. This scene figures in the opening scenes of the Amir Khan starrer movie PK.



**Wooden Wagons for Carrying Salt**

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There is a wide area where one can drive on landscape. Nearly 22-25 kilometres before Shakambhari Mata temple is a marvellous expanse of flat land used for drive. It is a spectacular experience for all those people searching for unconventional adventures. A rocky trail that soars besides this temple heads up to the top of a knoll (10 minutes of rocky climb, steep within the last lap) from here the view is superb. Lake-bed expanding uninterrupted for miles in every direction and a tiny line of Aravali hills marks the horizon in the distance all around. The appropriate time to go to this place is from November to February. The weather is serene and delightful.



**Wide Expanse around Maa Shakambhari Temple**

The biggest drawback is a lack of hospitality infrastructure for tourists. Some safe and smart overnight lodging options ought to be explored and initiated in collaboration with non-public sector, government and native bodies to boost new avenues of business enterprise in this space. A couple of fast food joints, cafes or eateries and decent restrooms would be a welcome move.

Though Sambhar Lake is famous more for salt production from natural salt lake but this town also possess a rich past. There is a lot for the mythological, historical, religious, cultural and heritage buffs.

This city derives its name from MaaShakambari Devi, goddess of the Chauhan clan, the capital seat of the historical King PrithvirajChauhan. In line with a local tradition, Shakambhari Devi is an incarnation of Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva, converted this dense forest into a plain bowl of silver in reciprocation for the services done to her. After the request of the inhabitants who feared the greed and strife that such a possession were to excite, she remodelled it into a salt lake. Salt- which was equivalent to silver in its white form and value. Shakambhari temple is located 28 kms from the city. Each year on 'RadhaAshtami' there is a " mela" that attracts thousands of individuals from neighbouring villages. This mela can also be promoted for cultural tourism.



Sambhar Lake is a famous pilgrimage with Devyani Sarovar, a mini temple complex, which is also known as Mini Pushkar. Devyani was the daughter of 'daitya' guru Shukracharya and was married to Yayati. Devyani is referred to as 'TheerthonkiNani' (grandmother of all pilgrimages), according to the popular belief all those folks visiting Devyani reap the benefits of visiting all the 'teerths' or pilgrimages of India. The temple has some ancient sculptures too. The sculpture of ashwatthama bears some inscriptions which are yet not deciphered. It can be a source of attraction for the persons having interests in history and archaeology.

The little white colored seat of Naraina sect, Dadu Dayal Maharaj is also amid this wet-land area. Dadu Dayal was a saint from Gujarat. Dadu means the 'brother' and Dayal means 'the compassionate one'. He was purportedly found by an affluent businessman floating on the stream of Sabarmati. He later moved to Naraina, a city close to Sambhar, where he gathered a section of followers around himself forming a sect that came to be known as the 'Dadupanth'. This sect has been continuing in Rajasthan to the present day and has been an early source of manuscripts containing songs by the Dadu and other North Indian saints. Dadu's teachings are recorded in two books- Anabhaivani and Kayabeli. Dadu breathed his last in 1603 AD at Naraina and this place became 'Dadu Dwara' where relics (Dadu's hair, his *tumba*, his *chola* and *khadau*) of Dadu are preserved. This place has become a pilgrimage for all the Dadupanthis who come to pay their homage to him.

Dadu Vaniteple is a marvel of fine arts, which has twelvedoored embellished palaces of the Acharya, the palanquin of baiji, chowk for horses, Khejaraji Dham, entombments and canopies. Guru Gobind Singh visited Dadu Dham when traveling through Rajasthan in 1706-07. Sambhar is endowed with communal harmony. It is a harmonious mix of Hinduism and Islam. The celebrated dargah of Khwaja Hussamuddin Chisty or popularly referred to as 'Sambhar Sharif' is situated in Sambhar. He was the grandchild of Sultan-ul-Hind-Khwaja Garib Nawaz of Ajmer. He has been given the title of 'Jigar Shobhta'. Several Muslims come for 'ziarat' (pilgrimage) to this place each year.

Another fascinating factor is the Nalasar archaeological excavation site. The valuable artifacts discovered here in the excavation have been preserved at Albert Hall Museum in Jaipur. The excavation of this site provides us an insight to the building of homes, water wells, grain storage and numerous coins of various dynasties., terra cotta and shell objects,(4,5). A lot continues to be buried below the sand. Sambhar has an abundant biodiversity that marks it appropriate for ecotourism. It is world famous for migratory birds that abound here, though it is not a sanctuary, however undoubtedly, it is an enormous wide landscaped Important birding area (IBA). The greater and lesser Flamingoes, the bar-headed goose, Pochards, Shelducks, stilts etc flock here between November and January, their winter sojourn after Rann of Kutch. It is a photographer's delight for shooting of these rare migratory birds and also the breathtaking natural beauty of the salt pans and the mountains. The Nalasar is the freshwater lake that has avian treasure with parakeets, curlews, weaver birds to name a few.

The year 2019 can be said as the black year in the history of Sambhar Lake as around 25000 migratory birds like northern shovelers, ruddy shelducks, plovers and avocets died due to Botulism, a serious and fatal illness of nerves(6). Government is taking ample measures to avoid the reoccurrence of such horrifying calamity. This incident had imparted a ban on salt business and employment strongly affecting the economy of this place. The probability of ecotourism seems bleak this year due to Covid 19.



**Flamingoes**

Sambhar salt Museum has a collection of more than 80 types of salts available for different purposes. The model outside displays collection and process of salt making in its indigenous way. Sambhar needs to be brought on touristy circuit by offering mesmerizing day trips. The large expanse of land can be used for camping and organising various activities like bike racing, car racing and paragliding, camel and cart racing. Hot air balloon project can be ventured into. Of late, Bollywood has found interest in Sambhar. Its Havelis and narrow lanes were featured in the film Delhi 6. Recently VikasBahl's 'Super 30' starring HrithikRoshan was also shot here. Sambhar had also been a locale for the films Jodha Akbar, Veer, Drona, Highway, PK to name a few.

Despite its immense potential as an exotic tourist destination, Sambhar Lake still remains untapped. A good infrastructure of hotels and resorts including amenities and facilities for comfortable stay of tourists needs utmost priority. Various kinds of tour packages need to be chalked out according to the needs of tourists, those interested in bird watching, adventure sports or sightseeing. Camping facilities for star gazers can also be catered to. A two day trip can be arranged for the tourists which can include a visit to Albert Hall Museum, DevyaniSarovar, MaaShakambhari Devi temple, Hazrat Husamudeen Chisti Dargah, DaduDayalji and SharmisthajiSarovar. A visit can also be planned with Sambhar Salts Ltd. to the salt pans and salt processing units. A delightful trip to salt fields in small trolley cars is a unique and mesmerizing experience to be cherished forever.

Evening can be made interesting by taking tourists to the local city in decorated autos/Bullock carts/camel carts. They can be shown the making of a local sweet delicacy 'Pheeni' and lac bangle making. At resort tourists can be introduced to the traditional colourful Rajasthani culture. Tourist can be entertained by the lively folk dance and puppet shows. The traditional Rajasthani cuisine of dal, bati, choorma, bajra/makkikiroti, bajrakikhichdi etc. can be served for dinner. There are a few havelis that can be converted into hotels where tourist can stay in peace and solace far from the madding crowd of the cities. A few such havelis were used for the shooting of AbhishekBachchan starrer film Delhi 6.

All tourist places have some special delicacies particular to that place. In Sambhar pheeni is that speciality. Sambhar and pheeni has become synonyms to each other besides salt. It is the cottage industry of Sambhar. Pheeni is supplied not only to the districts of Rajasthan but all over India, even to the remote state of Assam. Pheeni making is an intricate process and requires a lot of skill. It is an art which has been handed down to the decendents from generations to generations. The climate and quality of water somehow renders an exotic texture to pheeni which makes it very scrumptious and special. The production of pheeni is approximately 15 to 20 tonnes per day during winter and pure desi ghee pheenis are prepared only during winter season. Pheeni industry can be boosted with the enhancement of tourism.

Cultural tourism can also be revived and promoted at the time of numerous melas such as Shakambhari Mata Mela, NandKeshwarMahadevMela, Tejaji Ka Mela, Devyani Ka Mela and DayalMaharaj ka mela. This place can be developed as a location for rural tourism. A place away from hustle and bustle of the big cities. The serenity, vastness, calmness of this place can attract many tourists here. Development of Sambhar as a tourist hub will not only generate employment but boost its iconic structure. Tourism will also boost the business of AnajMandi and local vegetable market.

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