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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-55875

Title: Cultural Synthesis in Stone: Architecture and Heritage of Ajmer–Merwara

Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision.....

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity	✓			
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

Reviewer's Comment

This manuscript offers a comprehensive and interdisciplinary examination of the architectural and cultural heritage of the Ajmer–Merwara region, approaching sacred and secular monuments as part of an interconnected cultural landscape. By integrating architectural history, spatial analysis, heritage theory, and socio-cultural interpretation, the study advances the argument that the region's resilience and historical continuity lie in the functional interdependence of religious institutions, civic infrastructure, ecological systems, and governance structures. The topic is highly relevant to heritage studies, cultural geography, and conservation planning, particularly within the Global South, and the manuscript makes a valuable contribution by moving beyond monument-centric narratives toward a landscape-based understanding of heritage.

Scholarly Contribution and Conceptual Framing

A key strength of the manuscript lies in its conceptual framing of heritage as a “sacred–secular continuum.” The articulation of hypotheses H1–H5 provides a clear analytical scaffold, allowing the author to examine cultural synthesis through spatial clustering, ecological anchoring, ritual–economic linkages, and governance patterns. The engagement with the UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) framework is appropriate and well justified, and the manuscript successfully adapts this global framework to a regional Indian context. The discussion of syncretism across Chauhan, Sultanate, Mughal,

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Maratha, and colonial phases is nuanced and avoids simplistic binaries, demonstrating historical sensitivity and interpretive maturity.

Methodology and Empirical Foundation

The mixed-method research design is robust and ambitious. The combination of GIS-based spatial mapping, monument categorisation, field surveys, interviews, and functional heritage indices provides a strong empirical foundation for the study's claims. The visual materials, tables, and spatial representations enhance transparency and allow readers to follow the analytical logic. However, the manuscript devotes considerable space to methodological description, sometimes at the expense of analytical synthesis. Selective condensation—particularly of repetitive tables or technical explanations—would improve readability while preserving methodological rigor.

Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

The analysis convincingly demonstrates how sacred sites, trade routes, water bodies, and administrative centres evolved as mutually reinforcing elements within the Ajmer–Merwara landscape. The identification of pilgrimage–market linkages and the ecological role of lakes, stepwells, and forested zones adds depth to the interpretation of heritage as a lived and functional system. The finding that a significant proportion of secular and civic monuments are in poor or ruined condition, compared to the relative vitality of religious sites, is particularly important and raises critical questions for heritage policy and conservation priorities. Some analytical points, however, are reiterated across sections; tighter synthesis would strengthen argumentative flow.

Writing, Structure, and Presentation

The manuscript reflects deep domain knowledge and extensive research, but its length and density occasionally obscure its central arguments. Long sentences, repetition, and minor grammatical inconsistencies affect clarity. Editorial refinement, paragraph tightening, and improved signposting of key arguments would substantially enhance readability and scholarly polish.

Final Recommendation

Overall, this is a substantial, original, and theoretically informed contribution to architectural heritage and cultural landscape studies. Its integrated approach to sacred and secular heritage offers a valuable model for conservation discourse in South Asia and comparable regions. With minor revisions focusing on

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condensation, analytical tightening, and language refinement, the manuscript will be well suited for publication.

Decision: Accepted with minor revisions.