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## **PRICE ANALYSIS OF ḤAJJ: COSTS, SUBSIDIES, INFLATION, AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES IN INDIA**

**Dr. Shujaat Ahmad Qureshi<sup>13</sup>**

### **Abstract:**

The cost of the Ḥajj pilgrimage from India has seen a substantial rise from 2002 to 2024, primarily driven by economic factors like inflation, the introduction of Value-Added Tax (VAT) in Saudi Arabia, currency exchange rates, and the changing value of gold. Inflation has been a major factor, with rising prices and improvement of services like accommodation, transportation, and other essential services in Saudi Arabia, compounded by inflationary trends in India. Additionally, the weakening of the Indian Rupee (INR) against the Saudi Riyal (SAR) has significantly increased the cost of services, as pilgrims need to spend more INR for the same services in Saudi Arabia. While nominal costs have surged, when adjusted against the price of gold, the real value of the Ḥajj has somewhat stabilized, reflecting a lower burden when measured in gold equivalents.

**Keywords:** *Ḥajj Price, Inflation in India, Exchange Rate, Gold Rate and Ḥajj Subsidy.*

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## Introduction

It is generally believed cost of Hajj pilgrimage from India has surged substantially over the past two decades, and it appears that this surge is placing a greater financial burden on the pilgrims who wish to undertake this sacred journey. This increase, however, is not arbitrary; it is driven by several interconnected factors that reflect larger economic trends and policy changes. Among other aspects of the spiritual journey, the amount spent on Hajj has received the least attention globally from scholars, primarily because the spiritual benefits of performing Hajj cannot be compared to its financial cost. Most scholars have focused on issues such as epidemics, effect on environment and deaths associated with the Hajj pilgrimage.(Abdullah Abonom et al., 2018)<sup>14</sup> Investigated and reported the environmental impacts of the Hajj, focusing on sustainability and the challenges of managing large-scale pilgrimages.By analysing the data from 2002 to 2024 from India (for reference we shall take datafrom Srinagar embarkation) we can understand whether this cost is really escalating. If yes why the cost of Hajj has increased and why this rise is, in fact, justified. The trend is same globally as factors effecting cost of services during Hajj are effected globally.

Let's explore the factors effecting cost on pilgrimage in detail since 2002, the year Srinagar embarkation point has been made operational.

### 1- Inflation, Increased Costs, and Improvement in services in Saudi Arabia

Inflation affects the cost of almost every service worldwide, and Hajj services are no exception. (Burnama. 2024) reported the rising costs of pilgrimage due to the introduction of VAT in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the financial burden on pilgrims. The inflation in India, with rates varying each year, peaking at 10.88% in 2009, and recently staying above 5% in 2022-2024. Inflation directly increases the cost of goods and services, leading to a rise in the overall expenses for Hajj. The impact of inflation is significant, as seen in the

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<sup>14</sup> Abonomi, Abdullah; De Lacy, Terry; and Pyke, Joanne (2022) "Environmental Impact of the Hajj," International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 12.

"Inflation adjusted Value of 86,000 INR," of 2002 increased to 2,30,417 in 2024. This adjustment reflects how more expensive things have become in general, showing that the actual purchasing power of money has decreased over time. (Aam Rusydiana et al. 2020)<sup>15</sup> Conducted a bibliographic study on the Hajj economy, specifically analysing the potential of a Hajj Investment Fund as a financial mechanism for supporting pilgrimage-related activities. The cost of living in Saudi Arabia has risen over the years, particularly in major cities like Makkah and Medina that host millions of pilgrims annually. Prices for accommodation, transportation, food, and healthcare have all increased, leading to higher Hajj rates.

Likewise, the quality of services provided to pilgrims has substantially improved in areas such as:

- **Accommodation:** With millions of pilgrims, demand for lodging is extremely high, driving up prices. Accommodation in Markazia area within 500 meters of Masjid un Nabvi in Madina Manawara of all Indian pilgrims from Hajj 2024, Provisions of Wifi, additional drinking water, lift system in all buildings, to meet safety and comfort standards, accommodation costs increase.
- **Transportation:** Costs for flights, local travel, and other transportation modes have risen, especially during the peak pilgrimage season. Providing of 24x7 bus service from Azizya to Masjid Haram in order to ensure all pilgrims shall reach Masjid ul Haram as per their own convenience added up to the cost
- **Maktab Fee and Visa Fee:** With shifting of facilities from type D to Type C, The Maktab fee, charged for the services provided to pilgrims during their stay in Saudi Arabia, and the visa fee have been increased many folds.
- **Other Services:** With high influx of pilgrims, the prices of food, water, and other essential commodities and services also increase during Hajj.

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<sup>15</sup> Rusydiana, Aam; Antonio, Muhammad Syafii; Assalafiyah, Aisyah; and Yusup, Akhmad (2021) Hajj Investment Fund: A Bibliographic Study of The Hajj Economy," International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 12.

As the cost of goods and services rises in Saudi Arabia, the expenses associated with organizing the Ḥajj automatically increases. This inflationary pressure justifies the hike in Ḥajj rates, as these rates must cover the rising costs to maintain acceptable standards of safety, comfort, and quality for millions of pilgrims. (Amin Nouri Kouchi et al., 2018)<sup>16</sup> have reported the positive relationship between the growth in the number of Ḥajj pilgrims and economic growth in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the economic benefits of pilgrimage activities.

## 2 Phasing Out of Government Subsidies:

Government of India used to provide subsidies to reduce the cost of Ḥajj pilgrimage, making it affordable for pilgrims. However, in 2012, the Supreme Court of India ordered that Ḥajj subsidy must end by 2022<sup>17</sup>. The Supreme Court ruled that subsidy is not only unconstitutional but also inconsistent with the teachings of the Qur'ān. The Court cited Qur'ān verse 97 in Surah 3, Al-e-Imran ordains as under: "In it are manifest signs (for example), the Maqam (place) of Ibrahim (Abraham); whosoever enters it, he attains security. And Ḥajj (pilgrimage to Makkah) to the House (Ka'bah) is a duty that mankind owes to Allah, those who can afford the expenses (for one's conveyance, provision and residence); and whoever disbelieves [i.e. denies Ḥajj (pilgrimage to Makkah), then he is a disbeliever of Allah], then Allah stands not in need of any of the Alamin<sup>18</sup>. In compliance to apex court directions, this subsidy was gradually reduced, and it was completely phased out by 2018.

- **2002:** The subsidy per pilgrim was Rs.24,609.
- **2009:** The subsidy peaked at Rs.57,430, significantly reducing the out-of-pocket expenses for pilgrims.
- **2017:** By this year, the subsidy had decreased to Rs.16,022.
- **2018:** Onwards: The subsidy was completely phased out, leaving pilgrims to bear the full cost of the Ḥajj pilgrimage.

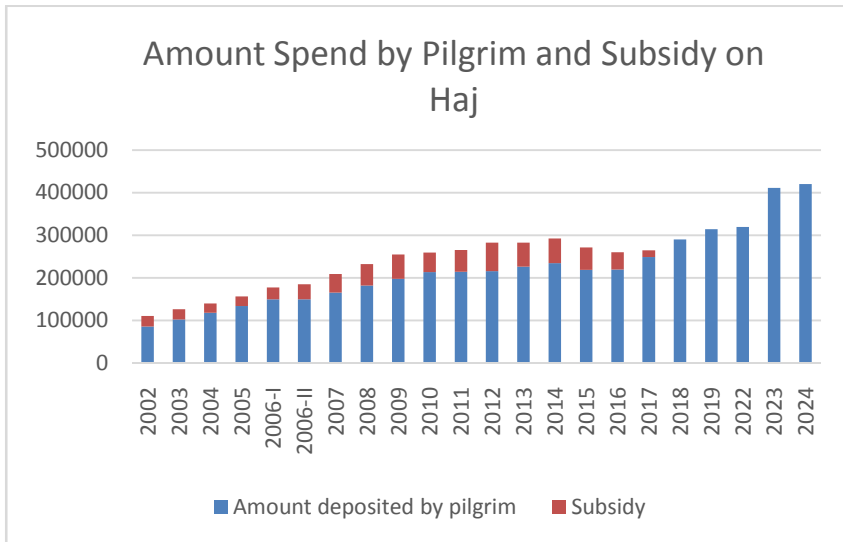
Without the government subsidy, pilgrims are now responsible for covering the entire cost of the pilgrimage. This policy shift aligns with the government's broader approach to reducing financial support

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<sup>16</sup> Amin Nouri Kouchi , Mansour Zarra Nezhad , Pouyan Kiani (2018) A study of the relationship between the growth in the number of Ḥajj pilgrims and economic growth in Saudi Arabia Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management Volume 36, September 2018, Pages 103-107.

Price Analysis of Hajj/ Dr. Shujaat Ahmad

and encouraging pilgrims to bear their own expenses. As a result, the increase in Hajj rates post-2018 is justified by the fact that pilgrims are now responsible for covering the full expenses that were previously subsidized.



### 3- Increased Cost of Services and introduction of Saudi Arabia.

**Rise in Service Charges:** The introduction of Value-Added Tax (VAT) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) after 2020, aimed at reducing the country's dependence on oil revenues and diversifying its economy.(Farida Susanty and Anton Hermansyah 2018)<sup>19</sup> have found th Polus, Reni; Shaheer, Ismail; and Nayak, Naresh P. (2024) "Pilgrimage in the COVID-19 Era: Uncovering Supply Side Challenges and Opportunities in Media Representations," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 5at Saudi Arabia's implementation of Value Added Tax (VAT) has increased the costs of

<sup>17</sup> Special Leave Petition (CIVIL) NO.28609 OF 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Qur'ān, 3:97.

<sup>19</sup> Farida Susanty and Anton Hermansyah (2018) S. Arabia's VAT to make Hajj, umrah costlier. The Jakarta Post 2018.



Hajj and Umrah for Indonesian pilgrims. The expenditure in Saudi Arabia for Hajj services, including accommodation, transportation, and food, has increased sharply. This is evident in the "Hajj Rate in SAR" column, where costs have nearly tripled from 6,677 SAR in 2002 to 18,759 SAR in 2024. The Saudi government has been investing heavily in infrastructure improvements to accommodate the large number of pilgrims, and these costs have been passed on to pilgrims through higher service fees.

**Infrastructure and Logistics Investments:** The Saudi government has implemented various projects to expand and improve the facilities in Makkah and Madinah to handle millions of pilgrims. These projects, including expansions of the Haram area, transport services, and accommodation improvements, have required massive investments. Consequently, introduction of value added tax in Kingdom, for services provided to pilgrims have risen to recover these costs.

#### **4- Strengthening of SAR and INR-SAR Exchange Rate**

With strengthening of SAR against US dollar, the INR-SAR exchange rate has weakened significantly over the past two decades, which has amplified the cost of Hajj for Indian pilgrims. In 2002, the exchange rate stood at Rs.12.88 per SAR, but by 2024, it had climbed to Rs.22.39 per SAR. This currency depreciation means that the same services in Saudi Arabia now require more Indian Rupees, making the pilgrimage more expensive for Indian citizens.

(Rajkovic Milos et al., 2019)<sup>20</sup> have reported that domestic currency depreciation/devaluation makes export activity cheaper and thereby increases it, whereas, at the same time, it makes import activity more expensive and thereby decreases it, altogether leading to a reduction in the trade imbalance. The impact of this currency depreciation is evident when we look at the Hajj rate in SAR, which is the effective amount of money required in Saudi currency:

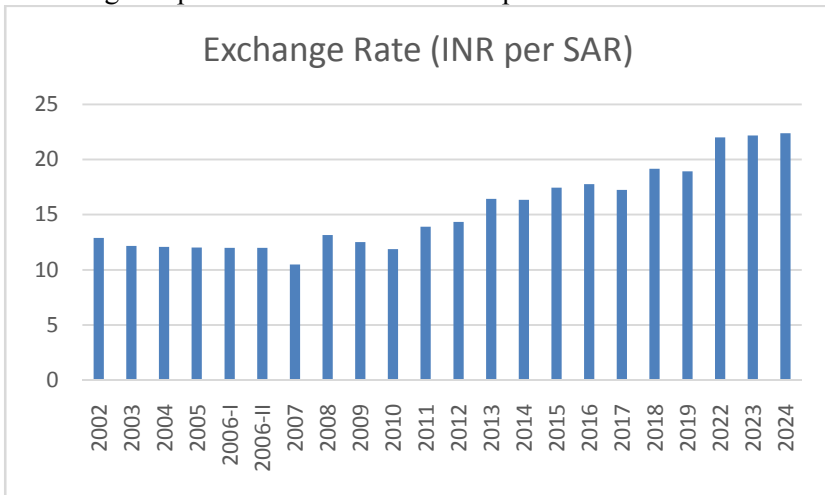
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<sup>20</sup> Rajkovic, M., Bjelic, P., Jacimovic, D., & Verbic, M. (2020). The impact of the exchange rate on the foreign trade imbalance during the economic crisis in the new EU member states and the Western Balkan countries. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 33(1), 182–203.

- **2002:** The Hajj rate was approximately 6,677 SAR, which translated to about Rs.86,000 due to a favorable exchange rate of Rs.12.88 per SAR.
- **2024:** The Hajj rate has risen to 18,759 SAR, which costs a staggering Rs.4,20,030 given the weakened exchange rate of Rs.22.39 per SAR.

This currency depreciation is beyond the control of individuals or the Hajj committees and reflects larger economic forces. The Indian Rupee's weakening against the Saudi Riyal justifies the increase in Hajj rates, as the costs in Saudi Arabia must be met with higher amounts of Indian currency. This currency fluctuation alone adds a substantial financial burden on pilgrims.

If we consider the "Hajj Rate in SAR" column, the costs in SAR have risen due to inflation in Saudi Arabia as well. In 2002, the cost was around 6677 SAR, but by 2024, it has escalated to 18,759 SAR. Coupled with the INR depreciation, this increase translates into a much larger expense in terms of Indian Rupees.



## 5- Gold as Indicator of inflation.

Gold as a Benchmark for Hajj Costs: Gold prices can be used as an indicator of real economic value over time. In 2002, gold was priced at 4,990 INR per 10 grams, while in 2024, it has reached 71,510 INR per 10 grams. Despite inflation and currency depreciation, the cost of Hajj in terms of grams of gold has actually declined in recent years,

indicating that the real asset cost has stabilized. (Brian M. Lucey et al., 2016)<sup>21</sup> have however reported the existence of a shift in cointegration between gold and official inflation in the United States since the mid 1990s, we also examined at gold and money supply to understand the true relationship between the price of gold and the amount of cash in circulation. But positive correlation between the two is evident from the market.

Cost in Grams of Gold Trend: The "Cost of Hajj in grams of Gold" has reduced from 172.34 grams in 2002 to 58.74 grams in 2024. This suggests that while the nominal amount in INR has increased, the purchasing power of INR in terms of a stable asset like gold has somewhat preserved the actual economic burden. However, since most individuals pay in INR and not in gold, the nominal increase still reflects a higher financial outlay.

Gold prices serve as an economic indicator that influences multiple aspects of the global economy, including pilgrimage costs. From 2002 to 2024, the price of gold per 10 grams in India rose from Rs.4,990 to Rs.71,510—a fourteenfold increase. This drastic increase reflects global inflationary trends, economic uncertainties, and shifts in demand and supply for precious metals.

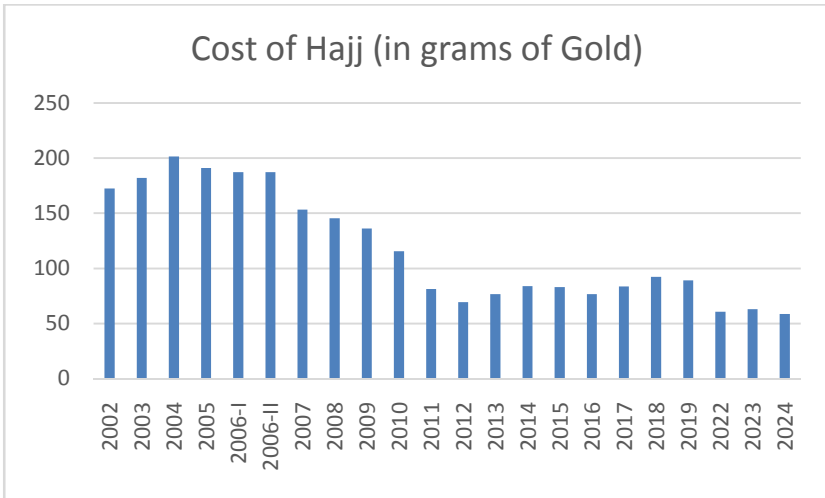
In terms of the "Cost of Hajj (in grams of Gold)," we see a significant decrease in the gold equivalent:

- **2002:** The Hajj pilgrimage cost Rs.86,000, which equaled approximately 172 grams of gold at the rate of Rs.4,990 per 10 grams.
- **2024:** The cost of Rs.4,20,030 translates to only about 58.74 grams of gold, as gold prices have soared to Rs.71,510 per 10 grams.

Though it might appear that the "gold equivalent" has decreased, this metric actually demonstrates how much more cash is required to match the Hajj cost in the current economy. The rise in gold prices directly correlates with broader inflationary pressures and a corresponding increase in the costs of goods and services. As gold prices reflect inflation and increased costs of living, the rising cost of Hajj is a justified response to ensure that the expenses align with the real-world economic conditions faced by pilgrims.

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<sup>21</sup> Brian M. Lucey, Susan Sunila Sharma, Samuel A. Vigne (2017) Gold and inflation(s) – A time-varying relationship Volume 67, December 2017, Pages 88-101.



## 6- Global Economic Conditions and Travel Costs

**Higher Airfare and Fuel Costs:** The global rise in fuel prices and airline operating costs have contributed to more expensive airfare for international travel. Although airfare specifics are not provided in the data, it is known that global aviation costs have risen over the years due to fuel prices, regulatory costs, and inflation. This affects the overall Hajj package cost, as travel forms a significant portion of the expense.

**Pandemic-Induced Expenses:** Post-COVID-19 adjustments have added new health and safety regulations, which may increase the cost of travel and accommodation due to reduced capacities and additional health checks. These pandemic-related costs became relevant in the years following 2020, when Hajj resumed with extra health and logistical precautions.

## 7- Impact of COVID-19 and Post-Pandemic Adjustments

Reni Polus et al. (2024)<sup>22</sup> reported effects of COVID-19 on pilgrimage expenditure, identifying supply-side challenges and

<sup>22</sup> Polus, Reni; Shaheer, Ismail; and Nayak, Naresh P. (2024) "Pilgrimage in the COVID-19 Era: Uncovering Supply Side Challenges and Opportunities

opportunities, as well as media representations of the pilgrimage during the pandemic era. The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on global travel and large gatherings, including the Hajj pilgrimage. In 2020 and 2021, the pilgrimage was either canceled or conducted with strict limitations, leading to a temporary halt in services. When Hajj resumed in 2022, new health and safety protocols were implemented to ensure the well-being of pilgrims, adding additional costs. (Faisal Abdulrhman Osra et al., 2021)<sup>10</sup> emphasized on adoption of strategies to balance economic sustainability and environment of the Hajj system,.

Post-pandemic safety adjustments included:

- **Health and Sanitation Protocols:** More frequent sanitization, health checks, and safety measures were required.
- **Medical Testing and Screening:** COVID-19 testing and other health checks became mandatory, adding to the cost structure.
- **Crowd Control and Distancing Measures:** Managing social distancing among millions of pilgrims required enhanced infrastructure and personnel.

These additional safety and health measures have led to a sharp increase in Hajj costs. For example:

- **2022:** The cost of Hajj reached Rs.3,19,700.
- **2023:** and **2024:** The cost further rose to Rs.4,11,364 and Rs.4,20,030, respectively.

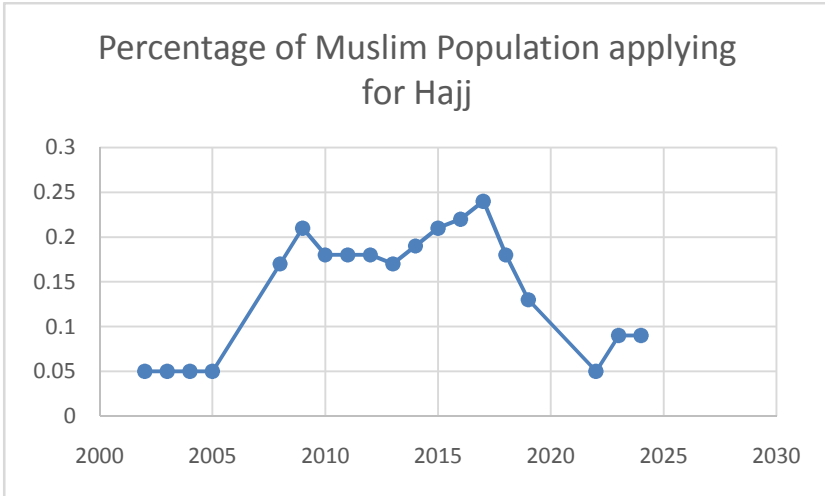
The increase in costs post-COVID-19 is justified by the additional expenses required to maintain a safe environment for pilgrims. Health protocols, crowd management, and enhanced sanitation add value to the pilgrimage experience by prioritizing safety, albeit at a higher cost.

Price Analysis of Hajj Pilgrimage: Expenditure, Subsidies, inflation and Gold Adjustments Over Time"										
Year	Average Expenditure per pilgrim	Amount deposited by pilgrim <sup>11</sup>	Subsidy <sup>17,18,19,20,21,22</sup>	Amount returned to Hajji as 2100 SRs	Inflation Rate in India <sup>23</sup>	Inflation adjusted Value RS.86000	Exchange Rate (INR per SAR) <sup>24</sup>	Hajj Rate in SAR	Gold rate/ 10 gram <sup>25</sup>	Cost of Hajj (in grams of Gold)
2002	83561	86000	24609	27048	4.3	86,000	12.88	6677.02	4990	172.34
2003	100891	101943	24505	25557	3.81	1,03,922	12.17	8376.58	5600	182.04
2004	114737	117886	22240	25389	3.77	1,07,423	12.09	9750.70	5850	201.51
2005	130827	133829	22240	25242	4.25	1,11,371	12.02	11133.86	7000	191.18
2006-I	152614	149772	28000	25158	5.8	1,16,758	11.98	12501.84	8000	187.22
2006-II	152614	149772	35539	25158	5.8	1,16,758	11.98	12501.84	8000	187.22
2007	187047	165715	43,340	22008	6.37	1,22,674	10.48	15812.50	10800	153.44
2008	227590	181658	50,947	27594	8.35	1,30,429	13.14	13824.81	12500	145.33
2009	228739	197601	57,430	26292	10.88	1,40,534	12.52	15782.83	14500	136.28
2010	234621	213544	46025	24948	11.99	1,51,670	11.88	17975.08	18500	115.43
2011	236173	214565	50840	29232	8.91	1,59,945	13.92	15414.15	26400	81.27
2012	252448	215658	66925	30135	9.48	1,68,749	14.35	15028.43	31050	69.46
2013	248070	226532	56041	34503	10.02	1,78,055	16.43	13787.71	29600	76.53
2014	258149	234756	57749	34356	6.67	1,84,250	16.36	14349.39	28006	83.82
2015	235096	218650	53070	36624	4.91	1,88,810	17.44	12537.27	26300	83.14
2016	222901	219700	40539	37338	4.95	1,93,407	17.78	12356.58	28623	76.76
2017	228276	248500	16022	36246	3.33	1,96,500	17.26	14397.45	29667	83.76
2018	250193	290450 <sup>12</sup>	0	40257	3.94	2,00,159	19.17	15151.28	31438	92.39
2019	274268	314000 <sup>13</sup>	0	39732	3.73	2,03,622	18.92	16596.19	35220	89.15
2020	No Hajj	No Hajj	No Hajj	No Hajj	6.62	2,09,771	19.88	No Hajj	48651	No Hajj
2021	No Hajj	No Hajj	No Hajj	No Hajj	5.13	2,14,534	19.97	No Hajj	48720	No Hajj
2022	273458	319700 <sup>14</sup>	0	46242	6.7	2,20,757	22.02	14518.62	52670	60.70
2023	411364	411364 <sup>15</sup>	0	0	5.4	2,25,773	22.19	18538.26	65330	62.97
2024	420030	420030 <sup>16</sup>	0	0	5	2,30,417	22.39	18759.71	71510	58.74

Each of these factors justifies the rise in Hajj costs over time, as they reflect real-world economic conditions, policy decisions, and the need for safety in a post-pandemic world. While this increase presents financial challenges for pilgrims, it is a necessary adjustment to align the cost of Hajj with global and regional economic realities.

### 8- Social Factors Influencing Hajj Decline in India particularly in J&K

From 2002 to 2017, (Table: 2.0) the number of applications increased significantly, peaking at 448,268 in 2017 (0.24% of the population), indicating growing interest in Hajj participation. This trend reversed after 2017, with applications sharply declining to 97,133 in 2022 due to pandemic restrictions. By 2024, applications rebounded slightly to 174,000 (0.09% of the population), reflecting a gradual recovery. The sharp increase between 2013 and 2018 is attributed to the change in the Hajj policy during this period, where preference was given to pilgrims who had applied four times but were not selected through the draw of lots (qurrah).



The changing financial landscape and social priorities in India reflect how society now often allocates savings toward significant events and investments beyond Hajj. For generations, Muslims in India and particularly in reference to Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) have viewed this journey as the pinnacle of spiritual fulfillment, saving carefully

over years to afford the once-in-a-lifetime experience. However, recent statistics reveal a marked decline in the number of Hajj aspirants from J&K, dropping from approximately 36,000 in 2016 to just 4,313 for Hajj 2025. This trend raises important questions: has the financial crunch and inflation in recent years driven people to postpone their Hajj plans, or is this shift indicative of changing financial priorities? Globally (Sally Nabil., 2023)<sup>23</sup> has reported that price increases are making pilgrimage increasingly unaffordable for Egyptians, reflecting the economic challenges faced by pilgrims. In Jammu and Kashmir with over 200 Umrah group organizers actively operating in the region, Umrah has seemingly become more accessible and popular, but it does not replace the obligation of Hajj. Here, we explore the reasons behind this change and why Hajj remains a primary spiritual duty that should be prioritized above other worldly pursuits. With rising costs of living and economic uncertainty, many families are opting for simpler, more accessible alternatives like Umrah, or choosing to spend on other pursuits that bring social and economic benefits. Let's examine these alternatives in the context of J&K's unique socio-economic environment.

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<sup>23</sup> Historical Gold rate trend in India. <https://www.bankbazaar.com/gold-rate/gold-rate-trend-in-india.html>



**Percentage of population applying for Hajj and Number proceeding**

Year	Muslim Population in India(Lakh)*	Number of applications received for Hajj <sup>28,29</sup>	Percentage of Population applying for Hajj	Number of Pilgrims who performed Hajj through Hajj committee	Number of Hajj application from J&K Pilgrims	Number of Pilgrims who proceeded on Hajj
2002	1414	73954	0.05	70276	-	2718
2003	1448	72634	0.05	69795	-	6383
2004	1484	75100	0.05	71711	-	7701
2005	1520	81155	0.05	80772	-	8932
2006-I	1540	-	-	99660	-	-
2006-II	1570	-	-	108816	12251	10616
2007	1595	-	-	110415	13021	8102
2008	1634	270962	0.17	121787	16295	7936
2009	1674	357338	0.21	120127	21260	7644
2010	1701	300680	0.18	126018	22808	6890
2011	1720 <sup>27</sup>	302616	0.18	124901	24739	8415
2012	1752	307309	0.18	125064	21837	8751
2013	1790	297466	0.17	121338	21735	8683
2014	1820	338326	0.19	99914	27140	6730
2015	1850	383724	0.21	99868	29803	6643
2016	1870	416755	0.22	99902	32293	6463
2017	1901	448268	0.24	124852	35217	8103

2018	1920	355000	0.18	128690	32330	10196
2019	1940	247000	0.13	139987	21566	11651
2022	1970	97133	0.05	56634	8765	6078
2023	2010	184565	0.09	139429	14217	10067
2024	2040	174000	0.09	139964	8135	7008
2025		151000			4313	
*Projected as per growth rate and population percentage						

## 1- Rise in the number of Umrah trips

Although both Hajj and Umrah involve traveling to Makkah and performing religious rituals, there are fundamental differences between the two. Hajj is a mandatory pilgrimage for every Muslim who is financially and physically capable, whereas Umrah is a recommended but optional act of worship. Performing Umrah does not absolve a Muslim of the duty to perform Hajj, as Hajj includes the performing vital rituals in Mashear region (Mina, Muzadalfa and Arafat), an integral ritual that not part of Umrah. Therefore, while Umrah brings spiritual rewards, it cannot substitute for the Hajj obligation.(General Authority for Statistics, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2023) Highlighted an 8.7% increase in the influx of Umrah pilgrims during 2023, showcasing the growing demand despite rising costs.

In J&K, the rise in the number of Umrah trips, especially shorter, less expensive ones, has coincided with a declining interest in Hajj. This shift could be linked to financial factors and evolving priorities, with families focusing more on other expenses such as weddings, education, homes, and vehicles.

## 2- Lavish Weddings: Shifting Focus from Spiritual Obligations

Weddings in J&K are traditionally grand affairs, and families often spare no expense in celebrating the occasion. While marriage is a highly regarded institution in Islam, the costs associated with

Kashmiri weddings—lavish feasts, elaborate decorations, and custom-made attire—often strain financial resources. An average Kashmiri wedding can cost anywhere from Rs.10 to Rs.30 lakh, funds that could be invested toward Ḥajj instead.

This cultural trend toward lavish weddings reflects a shift in priorities where families may find it more meaningful or socially rewarding to host an impressive wedding than to invest in Ḥajj. However, simplicity in weddings, as recommended in Islam, can free up resources for spiritual obligations. By making Ḥajj a family priority, believers can model a life grounded in faith, placing eternal spiritual benefits above fleeting worldly status.

### **3- Education: Rising Costs and a Focus on Future Security**

In J&K, where many parents aspire for their children to pursue professional careers in fields like medicine and engineering, the cost of education in professional courses is often substantial. Admission to a private medical college can run into lakhs of rupees, with expenses that many families save up for years to meet. While Islam encourages the pursuit of knowledge, balancing this with the obligation of Ḥajj is crucial.

For example, instead of allocating the entirety of savings toward costly degrees, families could consider an approach that includes Ḥajj as a financial goal. Such a choice provides an opportunity to prioritize both worldly and spiritual investments; ensuring children grow up valuing the importance of faith alongside career aspirations.

### **4- Housing: Balancing, Comfort and Modesty**

The drive to construct spacious homes is strong in J&K, with many people desiring a home that reflects their social status. However, constructing a large house can often lead to high debt or significant savings depletion. For instance, many families save for years to afford a two-story home in Srinagar or other cities, which can cost upwards of Rs.50 lakh

Redirecting some of these funds toward Ḥajj reflects a commitment to spiritual priorities, and a simpler home can still fulfill a family's needs. By investing in Ḥajj, families gain a lasting spiritual

legacy and demonstrate that a life of contentment and humility aligns closely with Islamic values.

## **5- Choosing Luxury over Practicality**

In J&K, vehicle ownership is a practical necessity given the region's terrain and weather. At least 10,000 new private vehicles are added on the road every passing year. However, some families frequently upgrade vehicles, opting for high-end or luxury brands. While reliable transportation is essential, continuously changing vehicles can detract from saving for Hajj.

Opting for a practical, fuel-efficient vehicle over a luxury model can help families allocate more toward their spiritual journey. This shift reflects a prioritization of religious duty over material convenience, ensuring that resources are directed to meet obligations rather than status symbols.

## **6- Tradition of Postponing Hajj until Old Age:**

For many Muslims, particularly in Asian countries like India, including J&K, the tradition of postponing Hajj until old age is common. However, delaying Hajj can be risky, as the obligation remains regardless of future health or financial conditions. If the financial and physical means are present, Hajj should be performed without unnecessary delay

## **Conclusion**

The cost of the Hajj pilgrimage has seen an upward trajectory. This rise is influenced by a combination of economic, policy, and global factors. Inflation, both in India and Saudi Arabia, plays a central role in driving up costs, compounded by the introduction of VAT in Saudi Arabia and the rising costs of goods and services. The phasing out of government subsidies has further shifted the financial responsibility onto pilgrims, aligning with the principles of self-sufficiency. Improvements in accommodations, transportation, and services have elevated the quality of the pilgrimage experience but have also contributed to the financial burden. Additionally, the depreciation of the Indian Rupee against the Saudi Riyal has amplified the expenses, as currency fluctuations directly impact the purchasing power of Indian pilgrims in Saudi Arabia. Global economic factors, such as rising fuel costs and post-COVID-19 adjustments, have also added to the costs. Health and safety protocols,

crowd management, and infrastructure investments to ensure safety and comfort have become necessary but expensive additions.

Despite these increases, the cost of Ḥajj, when measured against stable assets like gold, has seen some stabilization, indicating that real economic value is somewhat preserved. However, for most pilgrims paying in INR, the nominal increase represents a substantial financial challenge.

The increase in number of application between 2013 to 2018 is mainly attributed to policy change. The declining number of Ḥajj applications since 2018, reflects mainly because of changing social priorities and driven less by economic realities. While alternatives like Umrah have gained popularity, the spiritual and obligatory nature of Ḥajj remains unparalleled. Balancing accessibility, economic conditions, and religious obligations will be critical in ensuring the continuation of this essential religious journey.

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