

## Identification of Tourist Potential Regions for Balanced Tourism Development in Pahalgam Tourist Destination of Kashmir Valley



### Geography

**KEYWORDS :** Tourist potential; Pahalgam; GIS

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### ABSTRACT

*Tourism has assumed an overwhelming importance as a component of mountain economies around the world. Pahalgam valley is the leading tourist destination of Kashmir as it receives about 70 percent of the total tourist flow to Kashmir. The tourist potential regions of Pahalgam have been identified on the basis of selected indicators and ranked on the basis of composite scores. Three broad tourist potential regions have been identified and demarcated using Geographical Information System (GIS). The study shows that there is large disparity in the provision of facilities and services within the different tourist potential regions. Tourist related activities are concentrated mainly in the Pahalgam bowl which poses a potential threat to the ecology of the site. The identification of tourist potential regions will not only help to explore the type of tourist attraction but also will guide to develop necessary tourist infrastructure on sustainable basis.*

### INTRODUCTION

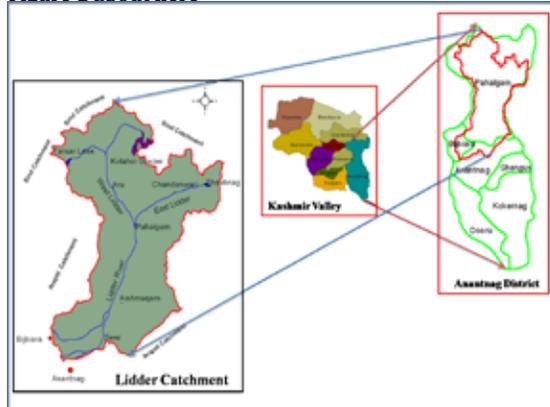
In the recent past, mountain regions have experienced "tourist revolution" causing substantial economic, social and environmental changes. The Kashmir Himalayas has earned world reputation as a famous tourist hill resort. The snow capped mountains, fast flowing trout streams and vast stretches of green forests and pastoral land represent Pahalgam, one of the most sought-after tourist destinations of Kashmir. The Pahalgam tourist resort has assumed additional importance as it stands en-route to Amarnath cave which receives huge number of pilgrims from every part of the country and even from abroad. The valley is longitudinal and narrow one with undulating slopes characterized by large meadows, lush green forests and sparkling water streams gushing out of glaciers and high altitude lakes which seem to be crowned in the sky.

The study area is experiencing an increasing anthropogenic interference as a result of mass tourist inflow which has changed the demographic and economic scenario of the destination. This situation has stressed the already weak economic base of the area which is characterized by heavy reliance on agricultural sector and other natural resources especially forests. The energy and food requirements of the native and floating tourist population are being met through local resource base which have mainly encroached the forest resource of the area. Besides this, the weak tourist infrastructure base, biased and unplanned economic activities of the local dwellers and non-existence of government tourism policy have resulted in a continuous and fast change in the LULC of the catchment from forest to non-forest uses (Imran et al 2011) and the consequent degradation of the various available resource potentialities of the catchment. Accelerated population growth accompanied with unregulated growth of tourist infrastructure on limited available land has lead to undesirable land use changes in Pahalgam Valley (Bhat et al 2007). The present study is therefore vital to develop a tourism development strategy which could aim at sustainable tourism development by specifying the type of tourist activity in a particular region and simultaneous infrastructural development in a sustainable manner.

### STUDY AREA

The Lidder catchment occupies the south-eastern part of Kashmir valley (fig. 1) and is situated between 33° 45' 01" N - 34° 15' 35" N and 75° 06' 00" E - 75° 32' 29" E. The Lidder valley forms part of the middle Himalayas and lies between the Pir Panjal range in the south and south-east, the north Kashmir range in the north-east and Zaskar range in the south-west. It has a catchment area of 1159.38 km<sup>2</sup>, which constitute about 10 per cent of the total catchment area of river Jhelum (Imran et al 2011).

"Figure 1 about here"



**Fig. 1: Location map of Pahalgam valley**

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Survey of India topographic maps of the year 1961 on 1:50,000 scale, substantiated by satellite data of the year 2010 (IRS P6, LISS III, 23 meter resolution) were used for the delineation of tourist potential regions. A number of indicators were evaluated and ranked on the basis of composite scores. The presence or absence of any indicator at a particular site was assigned a value of 4 and 0 respectively. Besides using secondary data obtained from various sources especially from Pahalgam Development Authority, a primary survey was also conducted to evaluate the various indicators used in the present study.

#### 1. Index of natural beauty

- i. presence of forests
- ii. presence of springs
- iii. presence of pastures and meadows
- iv. presence of glaciers
- v. presence of high altitude lakes
- vi. presence of flowing water

#### 2. Index of adventures and sports

- i. Ice skiing
- ii. Water skiing
- iii. Heli skiing
- iv. River rafting
- v. Mountaineering and trekking
- vi. Hiking and rock climbing
- vii. Boating and swimming

#### 3. Index of games and infrastructure

- i. Presence of shooting and fishing beats

- ii. Presence of accommodation
- iii. Presence of hotels and shops
- iv. Transport and communication
- v. Other civic infrastructure

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three broad tourist potential regions with different characteristics have been identified in Pahalgam valley.

### i). Pahalgam and Surroundings

This region comprises of Pahalgam and Baisaran with both natural and artificial tourist attraction (fig. 2). The essential tourist infrastructure is present only here. This region is used as a base camp for trekking and onward journey to Amarnath cave. Pahalgam is guarded by fir covered mountains, flower strewn pastures, beautiful parks (Poshwan Park, Lidder View Park, Amusement park) and white transparent water of Lidder river. The surroundings are ideal and allow for relaxation and leisure in the true spirit of a traditional hill station holiday. The important tourist destinations in this region are Pahalgam club, Mamal (named after a Shiva temple, which is considered to be one of the oldest existing temples in Kashmir), Shikargah and Baisaran.

“Figure 2 about here”



Fig. 2: Tourist Potential Regions of Pahalgam

### ii). Middle Meadowland Region

This region comprises of Aru, Chandanwari and Sheshnag. The region is endowed with green carpet like meadows and pastures, forests, springs and lakes. However this region lacks the

tourism infrastructure and is also characterized by inadequate accessibility. The important tourist destinations of this region are Betab Valley (named after a bollywood movie 'BETAB' which was shot extensively in this area), Aru (a rolling meadow of velvety green turf, fringed with fir and pines), Chandanwari (Chandan-pleasure giving coolness, Wari- farm) and Sheshnag lake (derived its name from seven peaks that look like the head of Sheshnag, the sacred snake in the Hindu mythology).

### iii). Outer Adventure Region

The main tourist attractions of this region are glaciers, high altitude lakes, meadows, network of trekking routes and Amarnath cave. This region comprises of Tulain lake, Panchtarni, Mahagunas pass, Kolahoi glacier, Lidderwat and Amarnath cave. Tourist infrastructure is least developed in this region and needs special attention to attract tourists. The region experiences highest tourist flow in terms of pilgrims to Amarnath cave in summer season and is devoid of any tourist activity in winter because of heavy snowfall, unstable slopes and inaccessibility.

## CONCLUSIONS

The mountain environments are often recommended for promotion of tourism as these are gifted with spectacular ecosystem and have exceptionally attractive recreation resources of nature and culture. But at the same time these are special areas of extraordinary susceptibility. Tourism has a profound impact on the environment of Pahalgam. The growth and expansion of tourist related infrastructure at the expense of forest cover is affecting the carrying capacity of the region and also exhibiting environmental transformation in the form of deteriorating environment, depletion of natural resources and conditions of poverty. There is large disparity in the provision of facilities and services within different tourist potential regions. Therefore the resource potentialities need to be evaluated objectively to identify the potential sectors of development and their carrying capacity which would help in the integrated development of the destination and its stakeholders in an eco-friendly and sustainable manner.

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