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Assessment of Pilgrims Tourism Potential in Karjat Tahsil, District Ahilyanagar: A Geographical Analysis

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Abstract

Pilgrimage tourism, also known as religious tourism, is one of the most significant forms of tourism globally, especially in India, where spirituality and culture are deeply intertwined. The purpose of this paper is to assess the potential of pilgrimage tourism in Karjat Tahsil, District Ahilyanagar, Maharashtra. This region, rich in cultural and religious heritage, is home to numerous temples and sacred sites. However, the potential for tourism in this area has not been thoroughly studied or developed to its full extent. This study aims to explore the current state of pilgrimage tourism in Karjat Tahsil, identify the key factors affecting its growth, and propose strategies for developing it further. There are two places in Karjat taluka which are declared as tourism spots out of which one is Vandev and second is Tukai dongar. These two places are environmentally located in such places where there is green forest and wonderful scenario place. More over there is origin of river Khanola near Rehkuri which can also be a potential place for tourism. In Karjat taluka there are many religious places which can a tourist places in future. The taluka is rich in pilgrim and environment heritage. The research methodology includes qualitative and quantitative methods such as surveys, interviews with local stakeholders, and field visits to significant pilgrimage sites.

Keywords: Pilgrim Tourism, Karjat Tahsil, Religious Heritage, Ahilyanagar, Tourism Development, Maharashtra

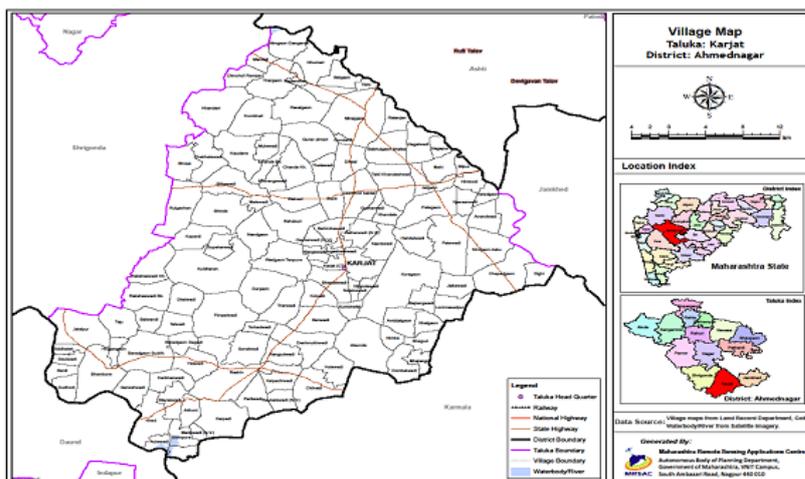
Introduction

Pilgrimage tourism is a rapidly growing sector, particularly in India, where religious practices, temples, and holy shrines play a central role in daily life. Maharashtra, with its spiritual landmarks and sacred sites, is one of the leading states for pilgrimage tourism in India. Karjat Tahsil, located in Ahilyanagar district, is an area that has significant untapped potential in this domain. Despite its religious significance, the region's tourism potential remains largely underdeveloped.

The primary aim of this research is to assess the pilgrim tourism potential of Karjat Tahsil, identify challenges, and propose recommendations for sustainable development to increase its attractiveness as a pilgrimage destination.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the religious and cultural significance of Karjat Tahsil in terms of pilgrimage tourism.
- To evaluate the existing infrastructure and facilities available to pilgrims.
- To assess the local community's attitudes toward pilgrimage tourism.
- To examine the economic impact of pilgrimage tourism in the region.
- To provide strategies for the development of pilgrimage tourism in the region



Research Methodology

The research methodology for this study follows a mixed-methods approach:

Primary Data Collection

- **Surveys:** Pilgrims visiting the major religious sites in Karjat Tahsil will be surveyed to understand their experiences and expectations from the region.
- **Interviews:** In-depth interviews with local temple authorities, tourism department officials, and hospitality providers will be conducted to gather insights into the current state of tourism.
- **Field Visits:** A field visit to key pilgrimage sites such as temples, ghats, and other sacred locations will be undertaken to assess the current infrastructure and facilities.

Secondary Data Collection

- **Literature Review:** Previous studies on pilgrimage tourism, reports from the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), and other government publications will be reviewed to gain an understanding of the regional tourism landscape.
- **Tourism Statistics:** Data on tourist arrivals, revenue generation, and infrastructure development will be analyzed.
- **Review of Literature**

Various studies on pilgrimage tourism have highlighted its potential as a sustainable form of tourism that boosts local economies and preserves cultural heritage. According to Singh and Singh (2017), pilgrimage tourism contributes significantly to rural development by providing employment opportunities and encouraging local entrepreneurship.

The works of Sharma (2015) also emphasize the importance of infrastructure in pilgrimage tourism. The study underlines that inadequate facilities, such as poor road access, lack of basic amenities, and insufficient accommodation, are some of the main barriers to the growth of pilgrimage tourism.

In the context of Maharashtra, several studies have explored the tourism potential of regions like Shirdi, Pandharpur, and Nashik. However, Karjat Tahsil has not been extensively covered in academic research, making this study particularly valuable.

Pilgrimage Sites in Karjat Tahsil

Karjat Tahsil, situated in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, is home to several important religious sites. These include temples, historical monuments, and places of natural beauty that hold religious significance. Some of the most prominent pilgrimage sites in the area include:

Shegud Shree Khandoba Temple, Karjat: A significant site for devotees of Lord Khandoba, the temple is visited by thousands of pilgrims annually.

Godad Maharaj temple: Located near Karjat, these places are part of the small Pandhari circuit, attracting religious tourists.

Rashin Jagdamba temple: Jagadamba Mata temple is a Hemadpanthi temple it was renovated by Akkoba Shete from 1704 to 1710 and he built a massive wall for this temple. The temple has a magnificent entrance with light of the lampstand the outer walls of the embankment around it are very attractive. The statue of a goddess lion in front of the assembly. The idol of Jagadamba Mata is very expressive to the extent that one cannot ignore it. Certainly, everyone is very pleased after offering prayers to the idol. The magnificent divine festival of Navratri and Vijaydashmi takes place here & also, on Kojagiri, Bhaland.

Siddhatek Ganesh Mandir located at the southern part of Karjat tahsil one of the Asthavinayak temple. These sites are not only sacred but also offer natural beauty, providing a dual appeal for pilgrims and tourists alike.

Current Infrastructure and Challenges

The infrastructure supporting pilgrimage tourism in Karjat Tahsil is still in its nascent stages. Some key points to consider:

- **Transport:** The road connectivity is limited, with major pilgrimage sites being somewhat inaccessible by public transport.
- **Accommodation:** There is a lack of quality hotels, guesthouses, and dormitory facilities catering to a large number of pilgrims.
- **Sanitation:** Basic amenities like clean toilets, drinking water, and waste management systems are insufficient.
- **Signage and Information:** The lack of clear signage and tourist information in the area makes navigation difficult for visitors.

Despite these challenges, Karjat Tahsil has immense potential for growth in the pilgrimage tourism sector.

Economic Impact of Pilgrimage Tourism

Pilgrimage tourism can have a profound impact on the local economy. Some of the potential economic benefits include:

- **Job Creation:** Increased tourist traffic will create jobs in the hospitality industry, including hotels, restaurants, and transportation services.
- **Boost to Local Crafts:** Local artisans and craft sellers could benefit from a rise in pilgrimage tourism, with opportunities to sell religious artifacts and souvenirs.
- **Revenue Generation:** Increased footfall will result in higher revenue from entry fees, donations at temples, and sales from local vendors.

Strategies for Development

To fully harness the potential of pilgrimage tourism, Karjat Tahsil needs to adopt a comprehensive development plan:

Infrastructure Development

- Improve road networks connecting major pilgrimage sites to the main towns and cities.
- Develop affordable and quality accommodation options ranging from guesthouses to mid-range hotels.
- Upgrade sanitation facilities and improve waste management practices around pilgrimage sites.

Community Involvement

- Engage local communities in tourism development initiatives, including training for hospitality services and guiding.
- Promote local culture, arts, and crafts to ensure that pilgrims have an immersive experience.

Marketing and Promotion

- Enhance the visibility of Karjat's pilgrimage sites through digital marketing, including a dedicated website and social media campaigns.
- Collaborate with the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) to include Karjat in the state's promotional campaigns.

Sustainability Measures

- Establish eco-friendly practices at pilgrimage sites to preserve their religious and environmental significance.
- Promote responsible tourism to ensure that the influx of tourists does not harm the local community or the environment.

Conclusion

Karjat Tahsil, with its rich spiritual heritage and natural beauty, has immense potential to emerge as a significant hub for pilgrimage tourism. However, the current infrastructure and facilities are inadequate to cater to the needs of pilgrims. Through strategic development in infrastructure, community participation, and marketing, Karjat can establish itself as a top pilgrimage destination in Maharashtra. This would not only boost the local economy but also contribute to preserving the cultural and religious heritage of the region.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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