

PILGRIMAGE TO THE HIMALAYA: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND PRESENT SCENARIO

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Abstract

The Himalaya, known as an abode of Shiva and Shakti, the folk deities, has many world-famous highland and valley pilgrimages. This paper examines pilgrimage to the Himalaya, its historical perspectives, and present scenario. A detailed qualitative study was carried out on pilgrimages of the Himalaya – river valleys and highlands. Source areas and inflows of pilgrims, the impact of pilgrimage tourism on culture and livelihood, and changes in the nature of pilgrims were elaborated. Mass pilgrimage tourism has a significant impact on the culture and livelihood of rural people. The historical perspectives of pilgrimage tourism in the Uttarakhand Himalaya were rich during the past. The pilgrims were following certain rich norms while visiting the pilgrimages, leading to strengthening the culture, which has been slightly diluting since the latter half of the 20th Century. However, pilgrimage tourism's impact on rural livelihood as a major source of income is significant. The rural people are providing services to pilgrims on the roadside mainly during the *yatra* season and running their livelihood.

Keywords: Pilgrimage, Folk Deities, Culture, Trekking, Himalaya.

Introduction

The Himalaya houses holy destinations – rivers, confluences, lakes, caves, summits, glaciers, and pilgrimages. It is believed to be an abode of Lord Shiva, Shakti, and folk deities, and has been a centre to legends of countless cultures and religions, myths, and scriptures besides incomparable natural beauty. It is linked to self-realization embodied spiritual aspiration to substantial potential. The traditional scriptures on the deities and cultural mobility have established the pilgrimages in the Himalaya (Bharati, 1970; Bakker, 1990; Jha, 1991; Sax, 1991; Messerschmidt, 1992). Tourism in the form of pilgrimage to Hindu sanctuaries, located in High Mountain, has existed for a long time in the Himalaya, which plays a significant role in strengthening Hindu culture and society. The Aryan culture predominated by worshipping the holy rivers and nature deities integrated into Hinduism in due course of time. The Himalaya has spiritual importance, and it is a sacred place for Hindus (Grotzbach, 1994). Pilgrimage donates a journey to the holy places whereas pilgrims mean a person who performs journey (Singh, 2013; Singh, 2002; Laidlaw, 2008).

Shaivism and Vaishnavism are two cults, existed in the Himalaya. The followers of the Shaiv cult worship Lord Shiva and goddess Shakti and they are no-vegetarian. Meanwhile, the followers of the Vaishnav cult worship Lord Vishnu and they are pure vegetarians. Owing to the large number of followers of the Shaiv cult, the temples of Shiva and Shakti are outnumbered. On the other hand, the followers and temples of Vaishnav cults are few, although, Badrinath, the seat of Lord Vishnu is the major pilgrimage center and is one of the *char dhams* of India. Denotes four pilgrimages. India has char dhams – Puri, Rameshwaram, Dwarika, and Badrinath. Similarly, the Uttarakhand Himalaya has Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath known as char dhams. The Himalaya symbolizes Shiva and Shakti, and an abode of folk deities, and thus, the entire Himalaya has high spiritual significance. The Himalaya has irresistible majestic beauty, many faces, and moods, and attract pilgrims to devote time and worship. It obtains snow-capped ranges, misty sparkling valleys, tinkling streams, lakes, and beautiful forests, an inspirational and full of sanctity. It is home to those who are seeking spiritual salvation. The Hindu pilgrimage centers and ancient Buddhist

monasteries are situated in the Himalaya making it the secret cultural landscape. Further, the countless fascinating legends are making these pilgrimages a hallowed destination for pilgrims. Trekking along the course of the Ganga River from Haridwar to Gangotri and Badrinath is the spiritual destination of great power, ancient than India's scriptures. Himalaya is the home for many glacial-fed rivers, known for their purity and sanctity, and spectacular forest landscapes, all together attract pilgrims.

The richness of the Himalaya can be viewed through the presence of numerous highland and river valley pilgrimages. Within the Garhwal Himalaya, one of the naturally and culturally integrated parts of the Himalaya, Panch Badri (five temples of Lord Vishnu), Panch Kedar (five temples of Lord Vishnu), and Panch Prayag (meeting places of rivers), are situated at different locations and altitudes (Figure 1). Two highland pilgrimages – Yamunotri and Gangotri are situated on the bank of the Yamuna and Bhagirathi rivers, respectively nearly to their source areas. All these are the highland and the river valley pilgrimages having importance in Hindus' religious wisdom. Besides these pilgrimages, thousands of Lord Shiva and Shakti temples lie in the entire region. The Garhwal Himalaya has 17 prayags and more than 100 places, where two rivers meet (Sati, 2015), having high spiritual significance. These are the places where the pilgrims take a holy dip during auspicious occasions. The Kumaon Himalaya has five famous pilgrimages – Jageshwar, Bageshwar, Purnagiri, Dunagiri, and Chhota Kailash. It also provides a famous trekking route to Kailash-Mansarovar *yatra* (Cultural procession). Besides, the highland and river valley pilgrimages, the Uttarakhand Himalaya have *Siddha Peethas*, *Shakti Peethas*, and *Jyotirlingas*. Jageshwar is one amongst the 12th *Jyotirlingas* in India, known for its 124 temples of Shiva and Shakti, built by Adi Shankaracharya. Joshimath, Surkanda, Kunjapuri, and Chandrabadni are the *Shaktipeethas*, and many *Siddha Peethas* are situated here. These pilgrimages and cultural locales have been the centers of spiritual attainment and *Moksha* (Salvation) for the centuries, visited by exodus pilgrims every year.

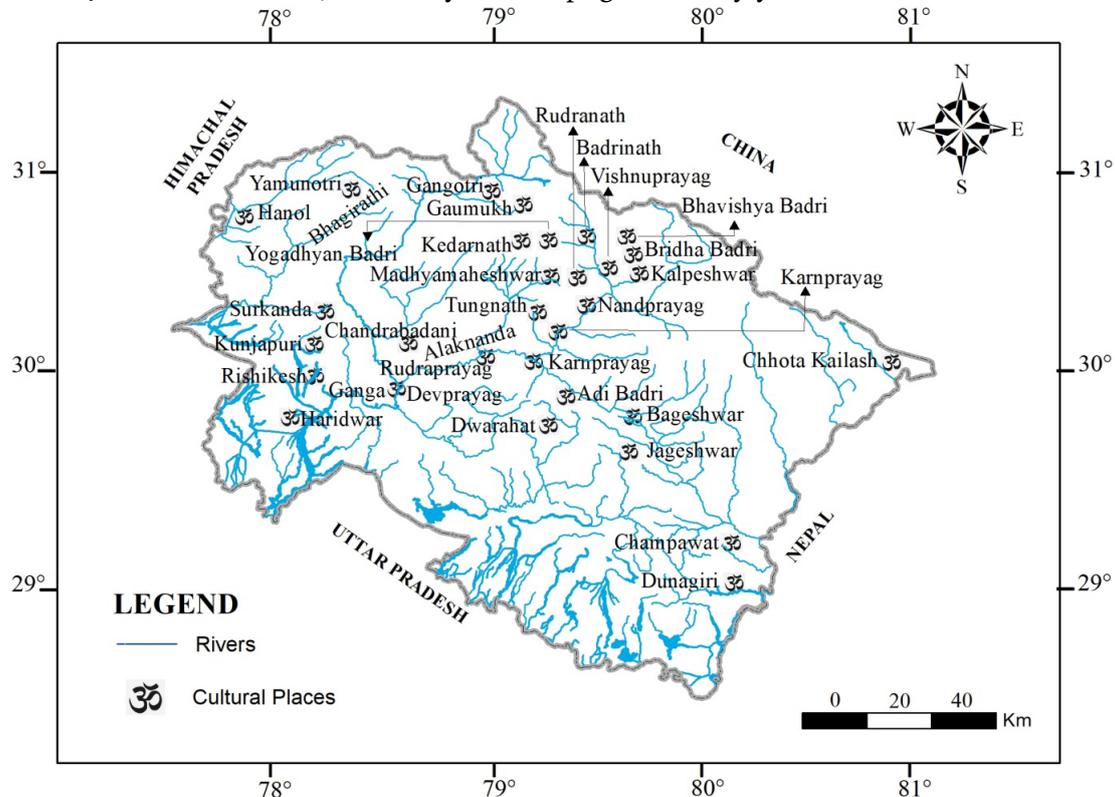


Figure 1: Major Pilgrimages – Highlands And River Valleys In The Uttarakhand Himalaya

The pilgrimage to the Himalaya began between the 4th and the 2nd century BC, as mentioned in the epos Mahabharata. The route was started from Haridwar to the source of the Yamuna, Ganga, Mandakini, and Alaknanda rivers from west to east. The highland pilgrimages, located above 3,000 m, are remained open for six months of the summer and monsoon seasons, mainly from April-May to October-November. The dates of opening and closing of these highland pilgrimages are decided by the descendent of the king of Tehri in Narendra Nagar. The *Kul Purohits* (Spiritual teachers) decide the date according to the Hindu calendar. In the meantime, the river valley pilgrimages remain open throughout the year. This paper discusses pilgrimage to the Himalaya and describes the historical perspectives and present scenario of the pilgrimage tourism in the Uttarakhand Himalaya. Source areas of pilgrims and pilgrims' inflows are also described.

This study covers the pilgrimage centres and pilgrims' inflows in the Uttarakhand Himalaya, an integral part of the Himalaya. It is the land of rivers, having rich biodiversity, and an abode of Shiva and Shakti. Uttarakhand was the part of Uttar Pradesh state before 2000 and now it is an independent state of the Republic of India. It is a mountainous state, about 16% geographical area of which is snow-capped. The mountain peaks, river valleys, alpine grasslands, and different forest landscapes support pilgrimage tourism and make this land unique. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach. Field visits of the pilgrimages – river valleys and highlands were made. The pilgrimages mainly Panch Badri, Panch Kedar, and Panch Prayag were described with their historical perspectives and pilgrims' inflows were illustrated.

Historical Perspectives

The Himalaya has been remaining a center for peace, penance, and salvation and for spiritual attainment from time immemorial. In the Rishi tradition of India, our Rishis performed penance in the Himalaya and composed many treatises. The pilgrimage centres of the Uttarakhand Himalaya are referred to in the Hindu scriptures of Ramayana and Mahabharata. It is believed that Lord Rama and his younger brother Lakshmana visited Rishikesh after killing the devil king Ravana. Two hanging bridges on the Ganga – Ram *Jhula* and Lakshman *Jhula* are named after them at Rishikesh. It is also believed that Lord Lakshmana performed penance at Lakshman *Siddha Peeth* situated in the Raja Ji National Park near Dehradun city after killing Ravana. The Pandavas after killing their 100 Kaurava brothers in the famous battle of Mahabharata stayed in Uttarakhand while on the way to Swarga (heaven). The temple of Kedarnath was believed to be built by Bhima, one of the Pandava brothers. Pandukeshwar, a small settlement located before Badrinath, is named after the Pandavas. The great saint Ved Vyasa, who scribed the Bhagawat Geeta, visited the highland pilgrimages after the war of Mahabharata. Vedas were believed to be written in the Himalaya by Rishi Ved Vyasa.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century AD, Adi Guru Shankaracharya of Kaldi (Kerala), the founder of the ancient Swami order, visited Uttarakhand after establishing three *dhams* in different parts of India – Rameshwaram in the south, Puri in the east, and Dwarika in the west. In the Hindu scriptures, these pilgrimages already existed in the given places since the period of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Adi Shankracharya re-established and renovated them. He travelled the entire Uttarakhand Himalaya and re-established many temples of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. The temples of Panch Badri, Panch Kedar, Bageshwar, and Jageshwar are among them. He travelled up to Bageshwar, where he built the temple of Lord Shiva on the banks of the Gomati and Saryu rivers. On the bank of the Jataganga in Jageshwar, he built a group of 124 temples of Shiva and Shakti. He is believed to be a forerunner of starting trekking in Uttarakhand. The famous Vishnu temple at Badrinath, one of the *char dhams* of India, was

re-established by him. It is believed that Adi Shankaracharya died at Bhairav Jaap near Kedarnath at the age of 28 years in 820 AD (Nand and Kumar 1989).



Figure 2: sadhus are on the *char dham yatra* near rishikesh. photo by author.

The pilgrims including saints and sages (sadhus) have undertaken the journey through the Himalaya in the past. They performed the journey to the pilgrimages, situated in the high Himalaya by trekking for several days or months (Figure 2). Pilgrims believed that the longest distance and days they travel to visit the pilgrimages bring them to attain salvation or enlightenment. The highland pilgrimages in the Himalaya are situated above 3,000 m. Haridwar, a valley pilgrimage, is the gateway to *char dhams* of Uttarakhand – Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath. Before the Chinese aggression of 1962, these pilgrimages were trekked kilometers by pilgrims, after which, a road was constructed to Badrinath and Gangotri and now these two pilgrimages are accessible by road. However, a trek of about 16 km goes to Kedarnath, Yamunotri, and Gaumukh pilgrimages. Another divine route goes to Kailash-Mansarovar, which takes about a month trekking. A journey to Kailash-Mansarovar is performed during the summer via the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand.

Pilgrimage to the Himalaya: *Char Dham Yatra*

Pilgrimage to the Himalaya begins from Haridwar, also known as Hardwar. The term ‘Hari’ means Lord Vishnu and ‘Dwar’ means Gateway thus, Haridwar denotes ‘Gateway to Badrinath’ (Lord Vishnu). Similarly, ‘Har’ means Lord Shiva, therefore, Hardwar also denotes ‘Gateway to Kedarnath’ (Lord Shiva). The importance of Haridwar is described in the Hindus scriptures. The Ganga flows through Har Ki Pauri where pilgrims take a holy dip on the Ganga to liberate themselves from the cycle of birth and death. The *Char dham yatra* goes to Rishikesh, 24 km from Haridwar, along the Ganga River, is known as ‘Saffron Belt’. Rishikesh is known as the ‘Yoga Capital of the World’. The ghats of Rishikesh are famous for morning and evening aarti. Rishikesh is the centre of ashrams where spiritual teachers pronounce Vedic teaching to their disciples. The banks of the Ganga are the places for walking, puja, and meditation. Devprayag is situated on the banks of the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda rivers about 69 km from Rishikesh. These rivers make a beautiful and pious confluence at Devprayag, after which, the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda rivers are called the Ganga (Figure 3). A road bifurcates from Devprayag goes to Badrinath pilgrimage along the course of the Alaknanda River. Rudraprayag (Mandakini

joins Alaknanda), Karnprayag (Pindar joins Alaknanda), Nandprayag (Nandakini meets Alaknanda), and Vishnuprayag (Dhaulti Ganga meets Alaknanda) are the famous valley pilgrimages, situated on the way to Badrinath pilgrimage. Another road bifurcates from Rudraprayag, a valley pilgrimage, and goes to Gaurikund, a base camp of the Kedarnath pilgrimage along the Mandakini River. From Devprayag, another road goes to Gangotri pilgrimage along the Bhagirathi River. Yamunotri is one of the highland pilgrimages, situated on the bank of the Yamuna River, close to Gangotri. *The Char Dham Yatra* can be performed from the east to west i.e., Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri.



Figure 3: Devprayag, where the Alaknanda River joins the Bhagirathi River and after confluence, these rivers are called ‘the Ganga’.

Badrinath is considered one of the important *dhams*, named after the famous temple of Badrinath, an abode of Lord Vishnu. About 3,100 m altitude, close to the Tibet border, Badrinath is situated on the right bank of the Alaknanda River, which is also called the Vishnu Ganga. Badrinath is one of the five Badris. The others are Bridha Badri, Bhavishya Badri, Yogdhyana Badri, and Adi-Badri. All these are the abodes of Lord Vishnu. The Kedarnath pilgrimage is situated on the bank of Mandakini where four other rivulets join the Bhagirathi including the Saraswati. Kedarnath is a sheet of Lord Shiva, one of the Panch Kedar. The other Kedars are Madhyamaheshwar, Tungnath, Rudranath, and Kalpeshwar. All five temples of Lord Shiva are situated above 3,000 m, which remained close during the winter season because of heavy snow. The idols of Lord Shiva are brought to the valley pilgrimages, the winter sheets. Seventeen famous prayags¹ are situated in the Garhwal Himalaya although there are above 100 prayags in the entire Uttarakhand. The Panch Badris, Panch Kedar, and Panch Prayags are the famous pilgrimages – highland and valley for the Hindus. Two female folk deities – Yamuna and Ganga have summer dwellings in the highland pilgrimages – Yamunotri and Gangotri, respectively. Yamunotri, located on the left bank of the Yamuna River, is believed to be the daughter of Yama, the god of death. Taking a ship of water (aachman) of the Yamuna River is believed to be getting rid of all sufferings. The idol of goddess Yamuna is brought to Kharsali village, a winter dwelling and valley pilgrimage. Gangotri pilgrimage is located on the right bank of the Ganga River. The Ganga is the pious river of India. In the Hindu scripture, it is

mentioned that taking a holy dip in the Ganga River liberates from the cycle of birth and death. The idol of goddess Ganga is brought to Mukhimath (Mukhawa), winter abode, for six months when the Gangotri pilgrimage remained snow-capped (Figure 4). The Kumaon Himalaya has Jageshwar, Bageshwar, Purnagiri, and Dunagiri pilgrimages, the abodes of Shiva and Shakti. The *Char Dhams*, valley pilgrimages, and other numerous cultural locales have been the centres of spiritual attainment for centuries. The Himalaya is itself an embodiment of Lord Shiva. The rivers, forests, and mountains are named after the fold deities and pilgrims worship all forms of nature.

The cultural processions to the Himalaya are ancient. Besides the *char dham yatra*, cultural procession of *Dev* and *Devi* are performed at the local level. The idols of folk deities are carried by local pilgrims from village to village for a month or more. Nanda Devi is a female adorable deity. The idol of Nanda Devi is carried to Homkund every year in the month of August. The Nanda Devi Raj Jat is the longest spiritual procession of 22 days, is one of the poignant examples of pilgrimage tourism. This procession is performed every 12 years where thousands of pilgrims trek to the high Himalaya along with the idol of Nanda Devi and a Khadu (goat).



Figure 4: Yamunotri, a summer abode of goddess Ganga, remains snow-clad during winter. Photo by Author.

Source Area and Pilgrims' Inflows

The pilgrims visiting pilgrimages in the Himalaya are mainly the Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists. The Teerthankars of Jains is believed to be the incarnations of Hindu deities. Many Teerthankars performed penance in the Himalaya. Lord Buddha, a son of the Hindu king Suddhodhana, established Buddhism, which spread throughout south, southeast, and northeast Asia. Adi Shankaracharya mentioned Lord Buddha as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The Sikh religion originated in the 15th century AD in India by Guru Nanak Dev. They have two highland pilgrimages in Uttarakhand – Govind Ghat and Hemkund Sahib. All these religions are integrated into Hinduism. Hindus within the Indian subcontinent are outnumbered. They are mainly domestic pilgrims. Nepali pilgrims also visit the pilgrimages of the Uttarakhand Himalaya. A number of Jain pilgrims visit the pilgrimages of the Himalaya. Among the foreign

pilgrims, Buddhists are outnumbered. They belong to Sri Lanka, Southeast, and Northeast Asia. A number of Tibetan pilgrims also visit the pilgrimages of the Uttarakhand Himalaya.

In the last 18 years (2000-2018), about 300 million domestic pilgrims and 0.48 million foreign pilgrims visited the pilgrimages of Uttarakhand (UTDB, 2018). Haridwar received about 240 million domestic pilgrims and 0.32 million foreign pilgrims. It was followed by Rishikesh. In the highland pilgrimages, the highest domestic pilgrims visited Badrinath (13 million), followed by Kedarnath (7 million). Domestic tourists trek 16 km to reach Kedarnath therefore their number is just half than Badrinath (Figure 5). Gangotri has received 5 million and Yamunotri has received 4 million domestic pilgrims (Sati, 2021). The highest number of foreign pilgrims visited Kedarnath (23094 persons) because Kedarnath is accessible by air, as chopper services are available during the *yatra* season. It is followed by Gangotri (6429 persons), Badrinath (3805 persons), and Yamunotri (3752 persons). Badrinath and Kedarnath are the two famous highland pilgrimages. Visiting them in a lifetime is the dream of pilgrims. Badrinath is visited by the highest number of pilgrims because it is accessible by road whereas, a 16 km trekking needs to reach Kedarnath, therefore, the pilgrim number is comparatively less. Pilgrims also visit Gangotri and Yamunotri whereas the inflow is comparatively less. The Gangotri temple is located roadside whereas the Yamunotri temple is a 16 km trekking. Foreign pilgrims' inflow is nominal. Foreigners visit India for natural tourism, and they visit the places, which are accessible.



Figure 5: Pilgrims trekking to Kedarnath pilgrimage along the course of the Mandakini River in Rudraprayag district. Photo by Author.

The Present Scenario

During the past, the pilgrims while pilgrimage to the Himalaya, prepared food items and managed accommodation. They maintained the hierarchy of the social systems, followed a different path of worshipping folk deities. This was the reason that the local people, who were serving the pilgrims during the pilgrimage season, did not have sufficient income from the

pilgrims. Many of the highland pilgrimages were not connected by any means of transportation, therefore, trekking was only the option to reach these pilgrimages. The food items were mainly nonperishable made by ghee including *pua*, *puri*, and *sattu*. Further, a large group of pilgrims was poor with a limited capacity of expenditure. The *Char Dham yatra* was performed by trekking before the Chinese aggression of 1962. The pilgrims undertook *yatra* from Haridwar for several days often months. It was difficult to trek all the highland pilgrimages thus, the pilgrims visited one or two pilgrimages one time.

The advent of modern pilgrimage tourism in the Uttarakhand Himalaya led to a significant change in the culture and society. The people of mountainous mainland of the Himalaya are innocent. They adapt the cultural imprints of pilgrims easily and smoothly. The author has observed that the food habit of the folks, which are providing services to the pilgrims along the road sides, has changed. With the increase in income from pilgrims, they have adapted the modern culture. A road was constructed from Rishikesh to Badrinath after 1962, which led to a large increase in pilgrims' inflow. Slowly, the pilgrims' use modern means of transportation like taxis, AC buses, and their vehicles. Many of them have become open-minded, started eating and drinking in hotels and restaurants. The pilgrims who are using modern means of transportation and accommodation have changed the cultural landscapes and the major idea of the pilgrimage tourism in the Himalaya. Thus, enormous changes social practices have also been noticed in the pilgrimage sites. The pilgrims are losing the deep sense of pilgrimages mainly the new generation not following the norms of pilgrimage tourism. The author observed that mass tourism, in the form of river rafting, trekking, and mountaineering, has replaced pilgrimage tourism largely. In the pilgrimage centres, the VIP culture has been developed. The common pilgrims make a long queue for Darshan (worshiping inside the temple known as *garvagriha*) of deities whereas, there is a provision of Darshan without making queue if someone pays an extra fee or he or she is VIP. Those visiting Kedarnath pilgrimage by chopper are enjoying the extra facilities of Darshan. In Rishikesh and Haridwar, where a large number of foreign tourists visit, the scenario is different. The young tourists in the name of yoga are consuming drugs and involved in sexuality. It has been observed that the young and educated local tour guides after spending several days with the young female tourists/pilgrims from abroad come close to each other and in many cases, they become life partners. Many of them are settled in India and many in other countries. This has diluted the real sense of pilgrimage.

Environmental risks due to mass pilgrims and geo-environmental hazards in many highland pilgrimages are noticed high, mainly during the past decades. The high landscape fragility also accentuates the environmental risks. The Kedarnath tragedy of 2013 is a unique example of geo-environmental hazards, which has led to the killing of more than 10,000 people and damaging huge property (Sati, 2013). The pilgrimage site, the entire Kedarnath town was fully damaged. Lacking proper institutional facilities – registration of pilgrims visiting pilgrimage centers, weather prediction, and properly following the warnings are the other issues related to the highland pilgrimages.

In the meantime, the development of infrastructural facilities and increase in the income level of pilgrims, the radical changes in terms of the pilgrims' behaviour, and their impact on the culture and livelihood of the local people were observed significantly. Adopting new practices in terms of transportation and accommodation has increased a considerable income and economic scenario of the local people and the State as well. The river valleys from Rishikesh to *char dhams* in different directions are connected by roads. The rural people have constructed economic avenues such as hotels, models, *dhawas*, and tea stalls along the roadside, augmenting employment. Many resorts have also been constructed on the way, providing food and beverages to the pilgrims.

Discussion

The Himalaya has extraordinary sights and vibrations. The temples of the Himalaya emanate spiritual powers through conscious practices, meditation, and chanting. Pilgrimage to holy places bless the pilgrims with divine knowledge and feelings, and also enlightened with a rich history. Pilgrimages are believed to be the centre of love nature, high mountains, and places of spiritual power. The landscape all through the river valleys and highlands is spectacular, attracts the pilgrims. The sages and saints have been performing meditation in the Himalaya for time immemorial. The rivers are believed to be pious and many of them are named after folk deities. The Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers are three female deities, worshiped by pilgrims. The mountain peaks are also known as the centers for meditation. The two mountains – Nar and Narayan situated on the two sides – east and west of Badrinath highland pilgrimages are believed to be the holy mountains. Similarly, there are many other mountains where the pilgrims perform meditation. Many forests of the Himalaya are named after the folk deities, e. g. Nanda Van and Badri Van.

Not much attention was given to pilgrimage tourism by policymakers and development researchers (Cohen, 1992; Rinschede, 1992). The Himalaya has many highland and river valley pilgrimages of world-famous. These pilgrimages make unique spiritual landscapes and provide peace of mind. However, many highland pilgrimages are inaccessible where trekking of above 15 km has to be performed still today. Some of them are Yamunotri, Gaumukh, Kedarnath, Madhyamaheshwar, Tungnath, Rudranath, Purnagiri, and Kailash-Mansarovar. Many other local pilgrimages are also accessible by trekking. The roads' quality is not good in the many areas, which are leading to the highland pilgrimages. Accommodation facilities are poor, therefore, many pilgrims avoid visiting the pilgrimages. A study conducted by the author shows that every day 5,000 pilgrims visit Gangotri highland pilgrimage during the *yatra* season meanwhile, a large number of pilgrims return on the same day because of lagging accommodation facilities (Sati, 2018). The impact of natural hazards is enormous on pilgrims. The *yatra* season falls during the monsoon period when the entire Uttarakhand Himalaya receives heavy downpours. The pilgrimage centres, situated along the river valleys and highlands are ecologically fragile. Landslides and mass movements along the roadsides are common during the pilgrimage season. Thus, the pilgrims face lots of problems during the pilgrimage to the Himalaya.

Conclusions

The Himalaya has been a center for the attainment of spirituality and salvation. The sages and saints across India visit and meditate in these pilgrimage centres. Pilgrimage tourism has a significant impact on the income and economy of the rural people, who are involved in providing services to pilgrims. Along with mass pilgrims visiting the highland pilgrimages, the number of *dhawas*, hotels, motels, and restaurants is increasing. Although, natural and adventurer tourism is also practiced in Uttarakhand, yet the pilgrims are outnumbered. In the meantime, carrying capacity such as transportation and accommodation in the pilgrimage centres is not sufficient.

The remote pilgrimage centers, which are ecologically fragile and where the construction of the road is not possible, ropeways facilities can be provided. Homestay facilities can be provided along the trekking routes, which are leading to the highland pilgrimages. In the pilgrimage centres, folklore – songs and dances can be performed. This will make pilgrims understand the folk culture. The local food and beverages can be served to the pilgrims in the pilgrimage centres. A separate nodal agency for pilgrimage tourism can be set up which will look into all

affairs of pilgrims in all the pilgrimage centres. Tour guides can be trained for imparting knowledge about the folk culture to pilgrims. Institutional facilities such as registration of pilgrims at the entry point i.e., Haridwar or Rishikesh can be ensured. Similarly, weather prediction can be followed strictly so that any future catastrophe in the pilgrimage centres can be minimized.

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