

Pilgrimage tourism in Uttarakhand Himalaya: Pilgrims' inflows and trends

Vishwambhar Prasad Sati

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Inflows,
Trends,
Pilgrimage tourism,
Highland pilgrimage,
Valley pilgrimage,
Uttarakhand Himalaya.

This article aims to describe pilgrimage tourism in the Uttarakhand Himalaya: pilgrims' inflows and trends. Pilgrimages – highlands and valleys are the main centers of spiritual tourism in the Uttarakhand Himalaya. Data on pilgrims' inflow in the major pilgrimage centers from 2000 to 2018 were gathered from the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, Dehradun. The pilgrims from Indian subcontinents and abroad have been visiting the pilgrimage centers for time immemorial. Inflows of pilgrims in the pilgrimage centers vary from the river valley pilgrimages to the highland pilgrimages. Haridwar, a valley pilgrimage, receives the highest inflow of pilgrims, which is more than 50% of the total pilgrims' inflows. Meanwhile, Yamunotri, a highland pilgrimage has the lowest inflow of pilgrims from within and outside countries. The main reason for the change in the number of pilgrims in these highland and valley pilgrimages was the availability of infrastructural facilities in the form of transportation and accommodation. In terms of the trends of pilgrims' inflows during the period, it is not uniform. The state of Uttarakhand is highly vulnerable to climate-induced calamities, which are highly catastrophic, and leads to land degradation and roadblocks. The pilgrimage season in the Himalaya falls during the monsoon season when heavy rainfall occurs. High rainfall variability has led to changing the number of pilgrims. This study reveals that pilgrimage tourism has immense potential for the economic development of the Uttarakhand Himalaya if suitable tourism infrastructural facilities are provided.

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1. Introduction

Tourism, a smokeless industry, is one of the most prominent economic activities, practiced worldwide. Many countries in the world have tourism as a major economic activity obtaining the largest share of gross domestic product (GDP). Tourism is practiced in various ways such as natural tourism, cultural tourism, historical tourism, and adventure tourism. Cultural tourism is also known as pilgrimage tourism. It offers high opportunities for generating income, employment, and foreign currency. It earns over 3.5 trillion worldwide and it has high social and ecological implications (Bar & Cohen-Hattab, 2003). In India, tourism and hospitality had risen by 5.1% in 2017 (Jafari & Scott, 2014; Reader, 2013).

Pilgrimage tourism has obtained an important place in varying categories of tourism in India (Page & Hall, 2014). It is an important segment of tourism (Ivakhiv, 2003), performed for peace and brotherhood. A journey to a temple and shrine, pilgrimage tourism denotes faith and beliefs (Gladstone, 2013). Pilgrimage tourism has spiritual importance also associated with religious tourism (Dhar, 2015). The concept of the pilgrimage tourism in academic studies seems new, however, it is one of the old forms of tourism practiced since time immemorial (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Timothy and Olsen (2006) stated that

pilgrimage tourism, the oldest form of tourism, has been practiced for centuries. Pilgrimage tourism can be defined as a visit of pilgrims to cultural places for spiritual attainment (Hernandez, 1996) and salvation (Kim & Kim, 2018; Liutikas, 2015). Pilgrims of all religions visit pilgrimages all over the world (Stoddard & Morinis, 1997) and exchange ideas on culture and spirituality with each other (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995). Pilgrimages are important cultural spaces where the pilgrims perform penance for peace of mind. Thus, pilgrimage tourism is also called spiritual and cultural tourism (Digance, 2003). Pilgrimage tourism integrates religions, cultures, and faith, and injects deep feelings among the pilgrims (Sharma & Gupta, 2006). Many scholars have studied the various aspects of pilgrimage tourism and generated knowledge (Hyde & Harman, 2011) and as a result, pilgrimage tourism has large literature to understand the sacred sites worldwide (Collins-Kreiner, 2016).

Besides the cultural and spiritual importance of pilgrimage tourism, it has a greater role in income generation and employment augmentation (Gokhale, 1986; Josan, 2009). It has also a significant role in enhancing the growth of industries, as demand and supply have increased multifold in the major pilgrimage centers (Elsner, 1992; Karar, 2010). Pilgrimage tourism thus has a high socio-economic significance (Reader, 2007). Most of the pilgrimages are

Research paper

Vishwambhar Prasad Sati: Senior Prof. Dr., Mizoram University, Department of Geography and Resource Management, India, Email address: sati.vp@gmail.com, Orcid id: 0000-0001-6423-3119 



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situated in spectacular geographical landscapes, therefore, the geographical importance of pilgrimages is significant. Pilgrimage tourism has converted into mass tourism in the recent past and the excessive use of natural resources through mass tourism has led to environmental degradation (Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Nolan & Nolan, 1989).

India has been practicing different types of tourism – natural, cultural, historical, and adventure for centuries. It provides suitable destinations for tourists' interests. The geographical components of tourism such as mountains, river valleys, waterfalls, forest landscapes, coastal areas, and varied climates are abundant. Further, the cultural components – fairs, festivals, customs, and rituals provide suitable bases for cultural tourism. India has diversity in religion, culture, and traditions. One of the major components of cultural tourism, pilgrimage tourism dominates in the tourism practices in India. Owing to high cultural diversity, every religion has its pilgrimage centers, spanning all over India. The people of India are religious and cultural therefore the importance of pilgrimage tourism in India is high (MacCannell, 2013). Among the Hindus' pilgrimages, there are four famous pilgrimages, which are situated on the four corners of India. Badrinath in Uttarakhand, Dwarka in Gujarat, Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu, and Puri in Orissa are world-famous. Besides the Hindu pilgrimages, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, and Muslim pilgrimages are also located almost all over India. India is the main center for pilgrimage tourism, as about 170 million visit the pilgrimages, of which, 70-90% are domestic pilgrims (UNWTO, 2020; Shinde, 2012).

The largest tourist inflow in India was observed as pilgrimage tourism. Pilgrimage to the major shrines, located within India, is the way of life of Indians. Owing to the involvement of the pilgrims, local people, and service providers – providing transportation, accommodation, and food and beverages, pilgrimage tourism has large economic, social, cultural, and environmental implications. Tourism is one of the economic activities in India therefore tourism has favorable economic impact. The socio-cultural impact of tourism in India is significant both in terms of favorable and adverse. Most of the highland and coastal shrines are located in fragile landscapes, therefore, the environmental impact of the pilgrimage tourism in terms of land degradation, is enormous.

The Uttarakhand Himalaya is believed to be the abode of Lord Shiva, Goddess Shakti, and folk deities. Many pilgrimage centers are situated in the high mountains and the river valleys. Pilgrims and tourists from within and of outside visit these pilgrimages, mainly during the six months of summer (Sati, 2015). These pilgrimages are the centers of spirituality, where people of all religions and cultures visit and worship deities. Pilgrimage to the Himalaya is a very old practice, performed since time immemorial. The pilgrims have a strong bonding with these pilgrimages. They worship Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu, and Goddess Shakti for the attainment of Moksha

(salvation). It is believed that by visiting these centers for spiritual tourism, the pilgrims get rid of the birth and death cycle. Many highland pilgrimages are remotely located where the pilgrims have to trek over 15 km. Accommodation facilities are lagging. Therefore, the pilgrims' inflow is less in the highland pilgrimages than to the valley shrines. Similarly, the inflow of foreign pilgrims in the pilgrimage centers is less than the number of domestic pilgrims. The scope of this study is limited to the six pilgrimage centers – four highlands and two river valleys, situated in the Garhwal Himalaya. There are several institutes located in India, researching tourism studies. Further, academicians and scholars have conducted significant studies on tourism in India. However, a few studies on tourism were carried out in the Uttarakhand Himalaya, mainly on pilgrimage tourism and trends and inflows of pilgrims. This study is important because it examines pilgrimage tourism and its trends and inflows in the Uttarakhand Himalaya. It also analyzes domestic and foreign pilgrims' inflows and trends in the four highlands and two river valley pilgrimages from 2000 to 2018 (19 years) first time. The study will provide literature to the academicians and scholars for further research.

2. Study Area

The Uttarakhand Himalaya is one of the states of India, formed on 9th November 2000. It was known as Kedarkhand, Manaskhand, and Uttaranchal in the past. The state has 53,483 km² areas and it stretches between 28°53'24"– 31°27'50"N and 77°34'27"–81°02'22"E (Figure 1). It has two distinct geographical and administrative divisions as Garhwal and Kumaon regions. In terms of culture, it has three broad cultural realms – Kumaon, Garhwal, and Jaunsar. The Uttarakhand Himalaya comprises mainly two topographies – mountainous mainland, which has about 93% geographical area, and plain regions. Two districts of Udham Singh Nagar (USN) and Haridwar are fully plain areas and Dehradun and Nainital are partially mountainous. The other nine districts – Pithoragarh, Champawat, Chamoli, Uttarkashi, Tehri, Rudrapur, Pauri, Almora, and Bageshwar are mountainous. There are many pilgrimages located in the Uttarakhand Himalaya. The pilgrimages, which are located in the high Himalaya, are called the highland pilgrimages whereas the others are called the valley pilgrimages. The Garhwal region is known for four highland and two river valley pilgrimages. In the meantime, the Kumaon region has two highland pilgrimages – Purnagiri and Dunagiri, and two river valleys pilgrimages – Bageshwar and Jageshwar. The highland pilgrimages of the Garhwal region – Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri are situated above 3,000 m altitude in Bugyals. These Bugyals are situated near the Greater Himalaya, which remains closed during the winter

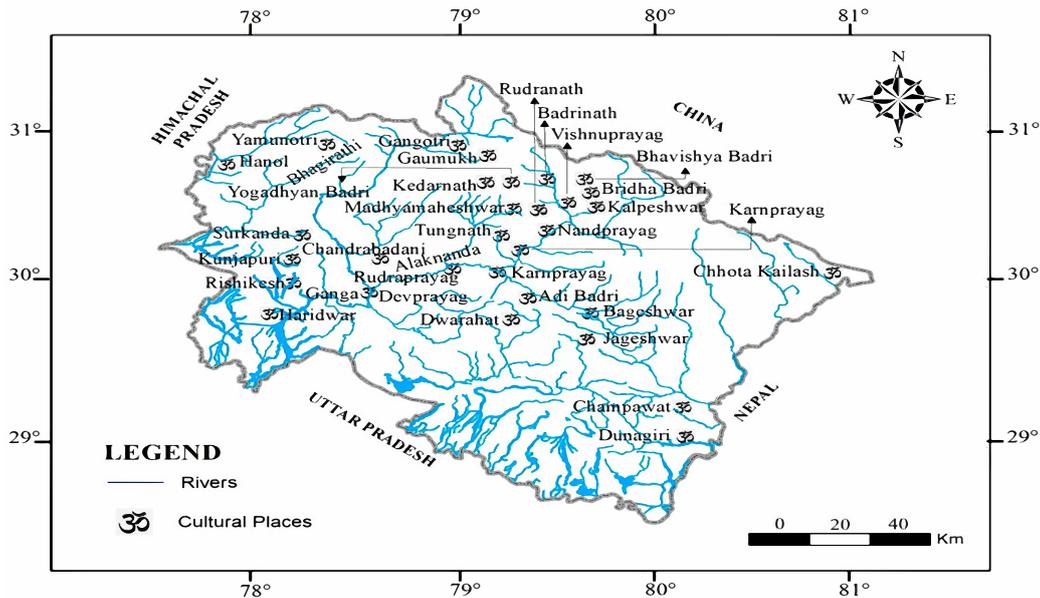


Figure 1: Major pilgrimage centers in Uttarakhand Himalaya; Sati (2020) modified.

Source: By author

season. The river valley pilgrimages of the Garhwal Himalaya – Rishikesh and Haridwar remain open throughout the year.

3. Methodology

This study has mainly a qualitative approach whereas the quantitative method was also used to analyze data pertinent to pilgrims’ inflows and trends. Data were collected through Geographical Positioning System (GPS), field observation, and the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB). Data on the inflow of pilgrims in the high Himalayan regions and valleys pilgrimages were gathered from UTDB from 2000 to 2018. Data were available till 2018. Further due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the data were scanty for the rest of the years mainly up to the end of 2021. Data were categorized into domestic and foreign pilgrims and their inflow in each pilgrimage – valleys, and highlands. They were analyzed and presented through linear graphs to show trends. Statistical tools such as mean, maximum, and minimum values, and std. deviation of pilgrims, who visited each pilgrimage, was used to analyze inflow.

A total of six pilgrimages were studied – four highland and two valley pilgrimages. Their location, altitude, and coordinates – latitudes and longitudes are given in Table 1. Haridwar (288 m) and Rishikesh (339 m) are the valley pilgrimages (Figure 2), whereas, Gangotri (3063 m), Badrinath (3108 m), Yamunotri (3229 m), and Kedarnath (3551 m) are the highland pilgrimages (Figure 3). Two valley pilgrimages - Haridwar and Rishikesh are situated on the bank of the Ganga River in the Haridwar district. They are world-famous. All pilgrimages are situated on the bank of the Bhagirathi, Yamuna, Mandakini, and Alaknanda rivers. These pilgrimages are the abode of Lord Shiva, Goddess, Shakti, and Lord Vishnu. On the bank of the Alaknanda River, the famous pilgrimage is Badrinath, which is the seat of Lord Vishnu. The two mountain peaks – Nar and Narayan surround the pilgrimage. Yamunotri pilgrimage is known as the home of Goddess Yamuna, situated in the Uttarkashi district. On the bank of the Mandakini River above 3,000 m altitude, the world-famous Kedarnath temple is situated. Gangotri is a highland pilgrimage, the seat of Mother Ganga, situated on the right bank of the River Bhagirathi.

Table 1: Geographical Information of Major Pilgrimages

Place Name	Location (District)	A river that flows in the pilgrimage	Altitude (m)	Coordinates		Infrastructural facilities	
				Latitude	Longitude	Transportation	Accommodation
Haridwar	Haridwar	Ganga	288	29°57'26"	78°10'22"	Road, rail, and air	Star hotels, models, dhabas
Rishikesh	Dehradun	Ganga	339	30°5'15"	78°17'33"	Road, rail, and air	Star hotels, models, dhabas
Gangotri	Uttarkashi	Bhagirathi	3063	30°59'39"	78°56'28"	Road	Few Dhabas
Badrinath	Chamoli	Alaknanda (Vishnu Ganga)	3108	30°44'41"	79°29'27"	Road	Hotels and dhabas
Yamunotri	Uttarkashi	Yamuna	3229	30°59'56"	78°27'45"	16 km trekking	Few dhabas
Kedarnath	Rudraprayag	Mandakini	3551	30°44'06"	79°04'00"	16 km trekking and chopper	Few dhabas

Source: By author



Figure 2: River valley pilgrimages, situated along the Ganga River (a) Pilgrims taking part in Ganga Aarti at Triveni, Rishikesh (b) Pilgrims participating in aarti at Har-Ki- Pauri, Haridwar



Figure 3: (a) Pilgrims are in queue for worshipping Lord Vishnu at Badrinath, (b) pilgrims are standing in front of the Kedarnath temple (this picture is taken before 2013), and the Gangotri temple remains snow-clad during four months of winter, and (d) the pilgrims trekking 16 km to Yamunotri temple

4. Results

Pilgrims' Inflows and Trends

In this section, the flows and trends of pilgrims are described. At individual pilgrimage centers, the flow of domestic and foreign pilgrims was also illustrated. The data reveal that the flow of domestic pilgrims is high in the highland and valley pilgrimages whereas it is very less in

terms of foreign pilgrims. For analyzing the flow of pilgrims in the pilgrimage centers, statistical tools – minimum, maximum, sum, mean value, and standard deviation, and a linear regression method were used.

The Inflows and Trends of Domestic Pilgrims in the High Himalayan and the Ganga valley pilgrimages

Domestic pilgrims' inflow was analyzed (Figure 4). It shows that the trend of the flow of domestic pilgrims has

been increasing. In 2000, about seven million domestic pilgrims visited these pilgrimages –highlands and river valleys. It has increased to more than 25 million in 2018. In the meantime, the trend shows variability in pilgrims’ inflow. Several times, domestic pilgrims’ inflow decreased from the previous year. For instance, in 2009, the domestic pilgrims’ inflow was 22 million, which decreased to less than 19 million in 2011 and further decreased to 15 million in 2013. The reason was noticed as the occurrences of atmospheric hazards, particularly in June 2013.

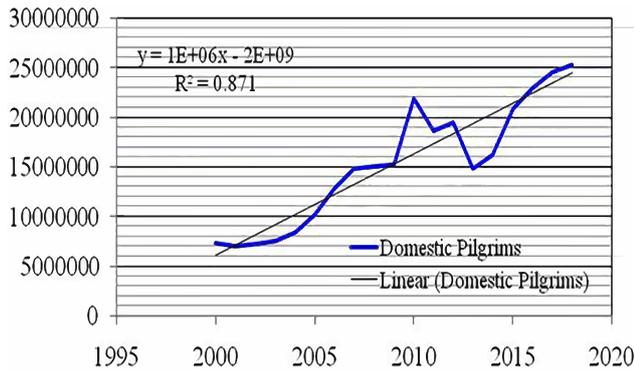


Figure 4: The flow of domestic pilgrims in the high Himalayan and Ganga valley pilgrimages

Source: By author

The inflow of foreign pilgrims was analyzed (Figure 5) It was noticed that the foreign pilgrims’ inflow was comparatively very less, however, the trend has been increasing. In 2000, the inflow was about 15,000 pilgrims, which increased to 35,000 pilgrims in 2018. In between, the highest inflow was observed in 2010, which was 37,000 pilgrims. There has been a decrease in foreign pilgrims’ inflow in several years such as 2002, 2006, 2011, and 2014.

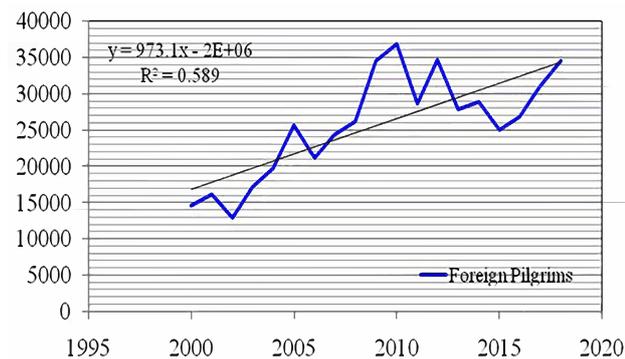


Figure 5: Foreign pilgrims’ inflow in the pilgrimage centers both the highlands and the river valleys

Source: By author

The Inflows and Trends of Domestic Pilgrims in the high Himalayan Pilgrimages

The flows and trends of domestic pilgrims in the high Himalayan pilgrimages have been analyzed (Figure 6). It shows that in the Badrinath pilgrimage, domestic pilgrims visited the highest number. The second place was obtained

by Kedarnath. In Yamunotri and Gangotri, the lowest number of pilgrims visited. The trends of domestic pilgrims visiting the highland pilgrimages are not uniform. In 2014, the highland pilgrimages were visited by the lowest number of tourists. During the period, lots of fluctuations in pilgrims’ inflow were observed.

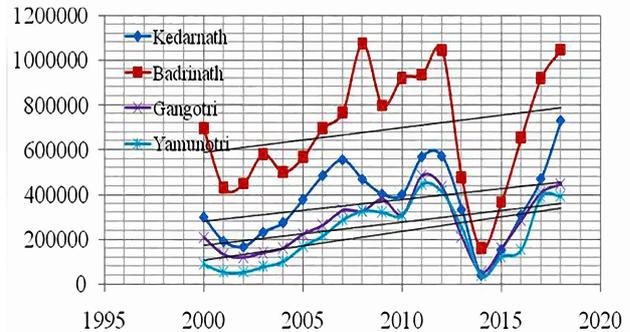


Figure 6: The inflows and trends of domestic pilgrims in the high Himalayan pilgrimages

Source: By author

Statistics tools were employed to illustrate domestic pilgrim’s inflow in the highland pilgrimages, for which a total of 19 years of pilgrims’ inflow data from 2000 to 2018 were examined. The data show that in Badrinath, the flow of pilgrims was the highest with 688,669 mean values, followed by Kedarnath with a mean value of 370,423 (Table 2). The mean value of the number of pilgrims who visited Gangotri was 125,845, and in Yamunotri, the number of pilgrims visited was the lowest with 137,599 mean values.

Table 2: Inflow of domestic pilgrims in the high Himalayan pilgrimages (n=19 years)

Highland Pilgrimage	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Kedarnath	40,718	730,387	7,038,046	370,423	174,270
Badrinath	159,405	1,075,372	13,084,720	688,669	259,242
Gangotri	51,555	484,826	5,070,810	266,884	125,845
Yamunotri	38,208	448,751	4,225,356	222,387	137,599

Source: UTDB (2018)

Inflows and Trends of Domestic Pilgrims in the Ganga Valley Pilgrimage centers

Haridwar and Rishikesh are the two cities, situated on the bank of the Ganga within a 24 km distance. These are renowned pilgrimages. Haridwar was visited by the exodus of domestic pilgrims between 2000 and 2018 and the trend has been increasing (Figure 7). The data shows that from 2011-2014, the pilgrims’ inflow decreased in Haridwar. This is the time when a meteorological disaster affected Uttarakhand which had a direct impact on pilgrims’ inflow. The inflow was the highest in 2010 (19 million) and 2018 (21.5 million). In comparison to Haridwar, pilgrims who

visited Rishikesh were quite fewer and the trend was the same during the study period.

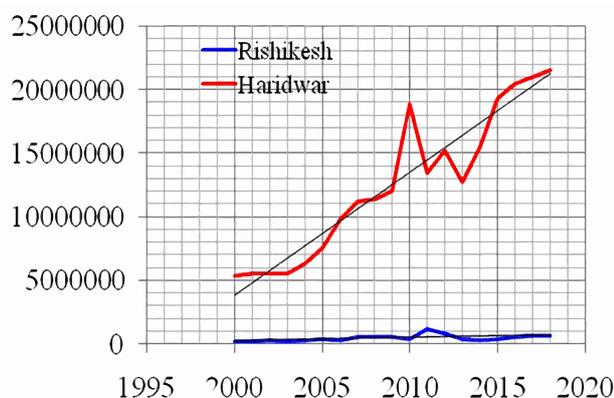


Figure 7: Domestic pilgrims' inflow and trends in the valley pilgrimage centers

Source: By author

Data were analyzed to find out the inflows of domestic tourists in the Ganga valley pilgrimages and the statistical tools – minimum, maximum, and mean values were applied. The data showed that the mean value of inflows of domestic pilgrims in Rishikesh was 480,038 pilgrims during 2000-2018. Meanwhile, it was 12.53 million mean values in Haridwar (Table 3). Similarly, the minimum and maximum values change in both pilgrimages.

Table 3: Inflows of domestic pilgrims in the Ganga valley pilgrimages (n=19 years)

Valley Pilgrimages	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Rishikesh	220,097	1,181,535	9,120,726	480,038	240,164
Haridwar	5,316,980	21,555,000	238,187,071	12,536,161	5,742,652

Source: UTDB (2018)

Inflows and Trends of Foreign Pilgrims in the High Himalayan Pilgrimages

In the Kedarnath pilgrimage, the inflow of foreign pilgrims was the highest (Figure 8) whereas its trend was irregular during the period. In the other three pilgrimages, the trend was almost the same at all times. Kedarnath pilgrimage had the highest inflows in 2005, which were 4,800 pilgrims. In 2001 and 2004, the inflow was 2,100 and 2,400, respectively. From 2006 onwards, the foreign pilgrims' inflow decreased to a minimum in 2013 and 2014 because of a devastating natural calamity, which caused to death of more than 10,000 pilgrims. The trend shows pilgrims' inflow is increasing since 2017.

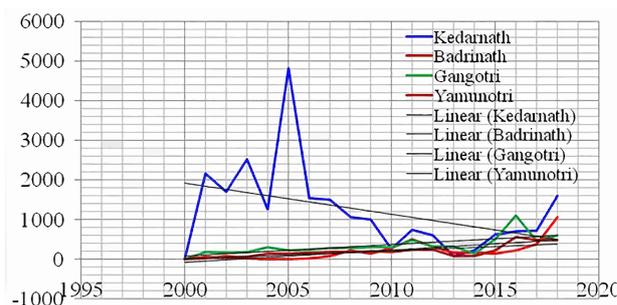


Figure 8: Inflows and trends of foreign pilgrims in the high Himalayan pilgrimage centers

Source: By author

Descriptive statistics of inflows of foreign pilgrims in the high Himalayan pilgrimage centers were employed (Table 4). In Kedarnath, the mean value of inflows of pilgrims was the highest (1,215 pilgrims), which was seconded by Gangotri (338 pilgrims), Badrinath (200 pilgrims), and Yamunotri (197 pilgrims). Similarly, the maximum value changes from 4,811 the highest in Kedarnath to 566 the lowest in Yamunotri. The inflow of foreign pilgrims in the high Himalayan pilgrimage centers was comparatively less than the inflow of domestic pilgrims.

Table 4: Inflows of foreign pilgrims' in the high Himalayan pilgrimage centers (n=19 years)

Pilgrimages	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Kedarnath	4811	23094	1215	1112
Badrinath	1064	3805	200	251
Gangotri	1109	6429	338	234
Yamunotri	566	3752	197	155

Source: UTDB (2018)

Inflows and Trends of Foreign Pilgrims in the Ganga Valley Pilgrimage Centers

Haridwar is the major center for pilgrimage tourism where foreign pilgrims' inflow was high (Figure 9). However, the foreign pilgrims' inflow showed a mixed trend. From 2000 to 2010, the foreign pilgrims' inflow in Haridwar increased significantly whereas, after 2010, a large decrease was noticed in the inflow of foreign pilgrims. The inflow was the minimum in 2015. The overall trend has been noticed to increase. Rishikesh received very less foreign pilgrims inflow and the trend has been noticed to decrease.

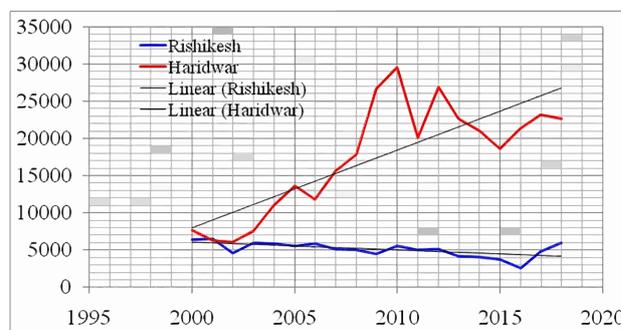


Figure 9: Foreign pilgrims' inflow and trends in Rishikesh and Haridwar pilgrimages

Source: By author

An analysis of the inflow of foreign pilgrims in Rishikesh and Haridwar pilgrimage centers was carried out using descriptive statistics. The data depicts that the mean value of the inflow of foreign pilgrims in Rishikesh was 5,092, whereas, it was 17,359 in Haridwar, three times higher than in Rishikesh (Table 5). A total of 329,834 pilgrims visited Haridwar during 2000-2018 (19 years) whereas in Rishikesh the total number of pilgrims visited was only 96,752.

Table 5: Inflows of foreign pilgrims in the Ganga valley pilgrimage centers (n=19 years)

Pilgrimages	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Rishikesh	2,574	6,536	96,752	5,092	1,004
Haridwar	6,029	29,555	329,834	17,359	7,391

Source: UTDB (2018)

5. Discussion

In this article, a detail of pilgrims' inflows and trends in all the pilgrimages – highland and river valleys were described. Further, the inflows and trends of domestic and foreign pilgrims in both pilgrimages were illustrated. First, the author described domestic and foreign pilgrims' inflow and trends in all pilgrimage centers. It was followed by a description of inflows and trends of domestic and foreign pilgrims in the high Himalayan and the Ganga River valley pilgrimages separately. It was noticed that the inflows of domestic pilgrims in the high Himalayan and the Ganga River valleys pilgrimage centers were quite higher than the inflows of foreign pilgrims in the same places. The inflows of both domestic and foreign pilgrims varied from one season to another, depending on the natural conditions in the pilgrimage centers. Physical remoteness of some of the highland pilgrimage centers, where the pilgrims trek for kilometers, is one of the major causes of low pilgrims inflows. The other causes, which are affecting pilgrims' inflows in the pilgrimage centers, are transportation, accommodation, and institutional facilities. Haridwar and Rishikesh pilgrimage centers have adequate infrastructural facilities in the forms of transportation – airways, railways, and roadways – and accommodation facilities, therefore, pilgrims' inflow in the two pilgrimage centers was quite high, which was more than 50% of the total pilgrims visit in the entire Uttarakhand. Badrinath and Gangotri pilgrimages are well connected by road, therefore, pilgrims' inflow was substantial. To visit the Kedarnath pilgrimage, about 16 km of trekking is required. Although, helicopter services are available yet, only economically sound pilgrims avail of air services. Meanwhile, an exodus number of pilgrims belong to low-income groups and thus, they trek to the Kedarnath pilgrimage. Many of them avoid trekking 16 km because of their poor health condition. Therefore, the pilgrims' inflow in the Kedarnath temple was comparatively less. On the other hand, in the Kedarnath pilgrimage, the inflow of foreign pilgrims was higher. The foreign pilgrims are economically sound therefore they prefer to use helicopter services. They also visit Kedarnath to enjoy the natural beauty. The Yamunotri

pilgrimage is also remotely located, where about 16 km of trekking is required therefore, the inflow of pilgrims both domestic and foreign pilgrims was less. In the highland pilgrimages, accommodation facilities are not adequate. This is also a reason for fewer pilgrims' inflow. The other important factor restricting the inflow of pilgrims in the high Himalayan pilgrimage centers is accommodation facilities. Yamunotri and Gangotri have very few accommodation facilities (Sati, 2018). A large group of pilgrims visit these pilgrimages and returned on the same day owing to a lack of accommodation facilities.

The trends of pilgrims' inflow in the pilgrimage centers were not uniformed and varied from year to year. The major drivers of changing trends of pilgrims' inflow in the pilgrimage centers were changing climatic conditions and frequent occurrences of natural disasters. This part of the Himalaya is prone to natural hazards such as terrestrial and atmospheric. Due to climate change, geo-hydrological hazards are quite active. This leads to a decrease in the number of pilgrims mainly in the high Himalayan pilgrimage centers. This study depicts that the trends of the inflow of pilgrims in the high Himalayan pilgrimage centers are more variable than in the valley pilgrimages. The reason was noticed that the river valley pilgrimages are less vulnerable to climate-induced disaster in comparison to the highland pilgrimage centers. Monsoon season is more devastating in the Uttarakhand Himalaya, which leads to occurrences of landslides-triggered roadblocks and therefore, it affects pilgrims' inflow. Data show that the pilgrims' inflows and trends – foreign and domestic – in the highland pilgrimages have declined sharply after 2010. From 2013 to 2015, pilgrims' inflow in all the places was very less. The 2013 catastrophe, which is called the 'Himalayan Tsunami', has caused huge landscape degradation. The intensity of the disaster was so huge, which has caused the killing of more than 10,000 people (Sati, 2013). Therefore, pilgrims' inflow decreased largely. After 2015, the trends of pilgrims' inflow increased. The trend of pilgrims number from within and outside India in the Ganga valley and high Himalayan pilgrimage centers was noticed increasing. In the high Himalayan pilgrimage centers, the trend of domestic pilgrims' inflow was increasing with high variability. In the Haridwar pilgrimage center, the domestic pilgrims' inflow trend was significantly increasing whereas, in Rishikesh, it was almost stagnant. The Kedarnath pilgrimage center received declining trends of foreign pilgrims' inflows whereas other highland pilgrimage centers had a slow increase in the number of foreign pilgrims. In Haridwar, the trend in the number of foreign pilgrims was increasing whereas it was decreasing in Rishikesh.

The unique and wide range of natural and cultural attractions in India provides the potential for tourism development (Mair & Whitford, 2013). However, it lacks in sustainable tourism development particularly, in sustainable development of pilgrimage tourism. A plan for the sustainable development of tourism requires managing

environmental issues (Smith, 2015). Further, the cultural and historical places need to be conserved because of their uniqueness. In a nutshell, both environment and culture need to be preserved simultaneously. Ghimire (2013) observed that less attention towards the environmental issues in the major pilgrimage centers has enhanced water and air pollution in India. Pilgrimage tourism in India needs immediate attention to check ecological degradation, sewage and sanitation problems and provide accommodation tariffs, catering, and water supply (Du Cros and McKercher (2014). To attain sustainable tourism development, appropriate policies and strategies need to be framed and implemented (Rao & Suresh, 2013).

6. Conclusions

Pilgrimage to the Himalaya has been practiced since time immemorial. Here, pilgrimages are the most sacred places. Pilgrims from within and outside India visit the pilgrimage centers every year for peace of mind and to attend spirituality. Other forms of tourism are also popular in the Himalayan region. These are natural tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. In the meantime, pilgrimage tourism is the most popular form of tourism. This study revealed that the inflow of pilgrims is the highest in this part of India. However, the inflow of pilgrims varies from one pilgrimage to another, mainly due to variations in various facilities including institutional facilities. The potential for tourism development is high in the Uttarakhand Himalaya, mainly for the development of pilgrimage tourism. However, it is lagging behind infrastructural facilities. It is suggested that the accommodation facilities in the pilgrimage centers can be increased and sufficiently provided to pilgrims. The pilgrimage centers, which are remotely located and which are not connected by roads, ropeways can be constructed. This will provide transportation facilities to pilgrims and will restore fragile landscapes. The helicopter services can be provided at subsidy rates for the highland pilgrimages. The state government can support homestay facilities by providing local food and beverages, and ICT. In the pilgrimage centers, the folk culture can be performed to educate pilgrims about the culture and customs of the Uttarakhand Himalaya.

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INFO PAGE

Pilgrimage tourism in Uttarakhand Himalaya: Pilgrims’ inflows and trends

Abstract

This article aims to describe pilgrimage tourism in the Uttarakhand Himalaya: pilgrims’ inflows and trends. Pilgrimages – highlands and valleys are the main centers of spiritual tourism in the Uttarakhand Himalaya. Data on pilgrims’ inflow in the major pilgrimage centers from 2000 to 2018 were gathered from the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, Dehradun. The pilgrims from Indian subcontinents and abroad have been visiting the pilgrimage centers for time immemorial. Inflows of pilgrims in the pilgrimage centers vary from the river valley pilgrimages to the highland pilgrimages. Haridwar, a valley pilgrimage, receives the highest inflow of pilgrims, which is more than 50% of the total pilgrims’ inflows. Meanwhile, Yamunotri, a highland pilgrimage has the lowest inflow of pilgrims from within and outside countries. The main reason for the change in the number of pilgrims in these highland and valley pilgrimages was the availability of infrastructural facilities in the form of transportation and accommodation. In terms of the trends of pilgrims’ inflows during the period, it is not uniform. The state of Uttarakhand is highly vulnerable to climate-induced calamities, which are highly catastrophic, and leads to land degradation and roadblocks. The pilgrimage season in the Himalaya falls during the monsoon season when heavy rainfall occurs. High rainfall variability has led to changing the number of pilgrims. This study reveals that pilgrimage tourism has immense potential for the economic development of the Uttarakhand Himalaya if suitable tourism infrastructural facilities are provided.

Keywords: *Inflows, Trends, Pilgrimage tourism, Highland pilgrimage, Valley pilgrimage, Uttarakhand Himalaya.*

Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
Vishwambhar Prasad Sati:	<i>Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization</i>	100%

Author statement: *Author(s) declare(s) that All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. **Declaration of Conflicting Interests:** The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article*

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