


REGIONAL IDENTITY AND TOURISM POTENTIALS OF POTHOLE LANDFORMS

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Abstract:

Tourism is important economic activity which also related to natural landscapes and beauty and bounties of nature. In modern economics, tourism plays a vital role in accelerating the progress of the countries and communities. It is also induces employment generation and infrastructural development that facilitates the overall development of a region on the one hand. On the other, the excessive and misfit utilization of resources for tourism leads to disturbance to the natural and socio-cultural environment. All round development of tourism in present era has been found to induce large scale degradation of geographical environment at a faster pace. Although it is said that geo-tourism is an environment sensitive activity which touches conservation of natural environment, it has not been total reality. In fact, geo-tourism is also studied by the researchers with narrowed perspectives while just focusing upon different geographical aspects of tourism and their spatial interpretation. Hence, to plan and develop geo-tourism as an important activity needs awareness and detailed study at a grass root level. After field observations the researcher felt that there is a need to look into the issues for awareness level of geo-tourism aspects and also suggests effective strategies for the same to make ecotourism important and useful. The trend of tourism in India with special reference to Maharashtra gives some hints of the potentials and drawbacks of tourism. The present study investigates the geo-tourism potentials of Potholes at Takli Haji in Shirur (Pune district) or Nighoj in Parner (Ahmednagar District). Physical environment is explained by using secondary sources of information and personal visits for observation. The tourism potentials and problems are studied by conducting the survey using the schedules and questionnaires. Different methods are used for analysis of the data and it is interpreted with evidences. The opportunities, drawbacks and remedies are also suggested for the geo-tourism.

Key Concepts: *Geo-tourism, Tourism Potentials, Landforms, Regional Identity etc.*

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Introduction :

For recreation and entertainment many naturally formed landscapes like waterfalls, beaches, forest, water bodies, parks etc. are deeply exploited

presently as it become integral need of human life. The tourism industry has been emerged as one of the largest and fastest accelerated economic sector globally. Tourism Potential includes surrounding



physical, socio-cultural, political and economic resources of a region that would essentially form core of development of tourism activities for economic progress. Geo-tourism is an approach to learn about tourism elements of physical landforms, people's response to tourism activities and conservation of environment also respect to local culture as well as interest in eco-friendly tourism. Geo-tourism is purposeful travel to natural sites to understand, enjoy, learn and explore the 'natural along with cultural' sites and taking care not to damage the integrity of it, while conducting such type of economic opportunities that would rather work towards the conservation of natural landforms along with benefits to community.

Aim and objectives:

To understand the potentials of geo-tourism, related activities and problems, and remedies of potholes (Ranjankhalge) at Nighoj.

- To understand the trend of tourism and importance of tourism resources.
- To investigate the physiographical and socio-cultural geo-tourism potentials of pothole landforms.
- To understand the strengths, weakness and drawbacks of geo-tourism.

Methodology:

To understand the geo-tourism potentials of potholes at Nighoj and tourism activities, the secondary sources of information are used, such as Topographical maps, District Planning Series maps, books and magazines, different websites. To collect primary data, visit to area, photographs, observation, schedule and questionnaire etc. are used. 98 tourists were surveyed and 32 people interviewed to collect data. The data is analysed by using different techniques.

Tourism Assets:

The geographical diversity (topography, rivers,

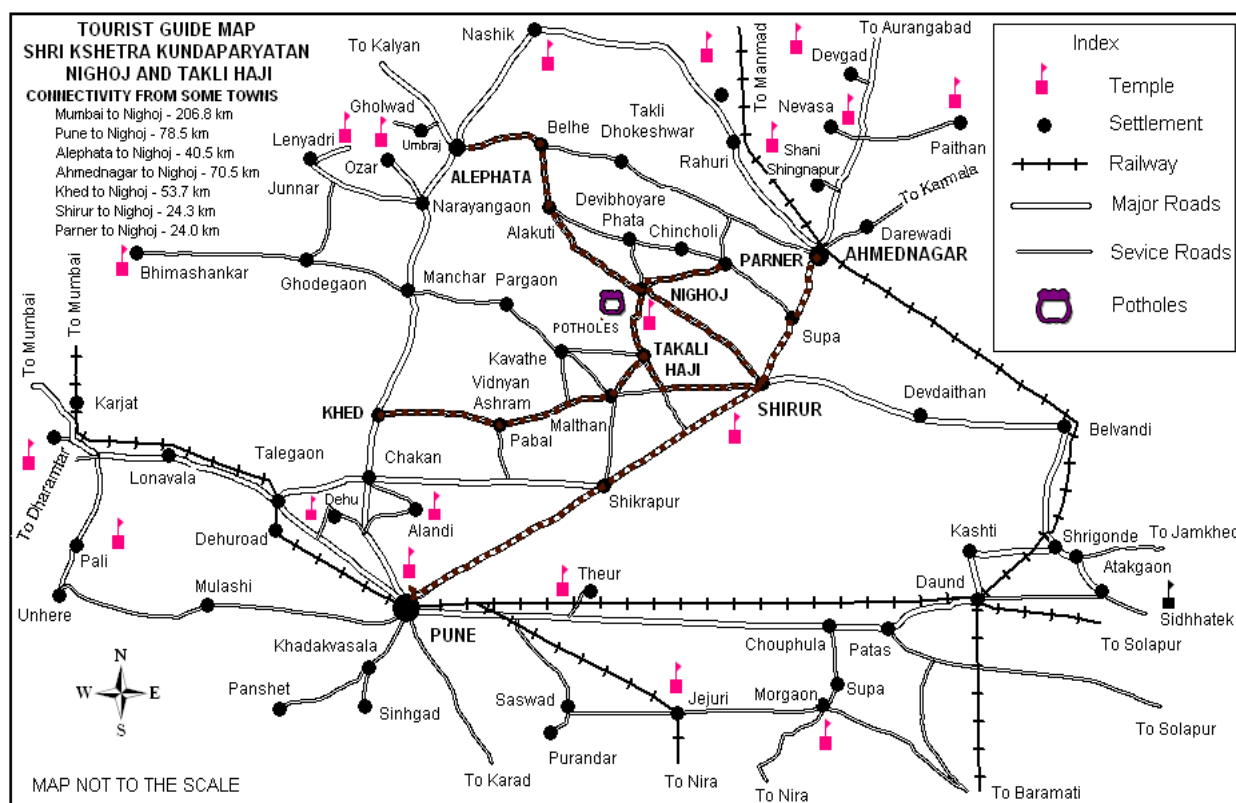
geology, climate, soil, lakes and dams, forest and wildlife etc.) in Pune district provides many opportunities for geo-tourism activities. There are many dams, lakes, forest areas, hills, river valleys, waterfalls etc. which could be developed as eco-tourism sites. In Tahsil Shirur the Ashtavinayak Ganapati at Ranjangaon, Sambhaji Maharaj Samadhi Sthal at Vadhu, Shri Kshetra Ramlinga at Shirur, Mastani Kabar and Vidnyan Ashram at Pabal, are important socio-cultural places that significantly attracts large number of tourists. But Ghod dam at Shirur, Morachi Chincholi and Ranjan Khalge (Potholes) at Takli Haji or Nighoj are important sites for Geo-tourism. According to Pune District Tourism Plan Ranjan Khalage (Potholes) at Takli Haji or Nighoj is included in Tourism Circuit of Pune. The two day visit plan can include Ranjan Khalge – Morachi Chincholi (halt) – Ranjangaon (Ashtavinayak) – Sambhaji Maharaj Samadhi (Vadhu) – Tulapur Triveni Sangam – Alandi – Pune, covering about 150 km distance. According to circuit development budget cost in the year 2015 was 1895.95 lakhs. Ranjan Khalge at Nighoj and Takli Haji is the unique geomorphological structures attract large number of geographers, geologists, geomorphologists, researchers, school and college students and local people to observe and study it. The socio-cultural footprint of Malganga Devi and celebrations is another major attraction for local and other visitors also.

Ranjan Khalge (Potholes):

Potholes and Canyon are located at 18° 55' North latitude and 74° 15' East longitudes. It is 78 km away from Pune, 70 km from Ahmednagar, 40 km from Alephata, 25 km from Ranjangaon via Takli Haji and 3.5 km from Takli Haji (Shirur Taluka) of Pune district and Nighoj (Parner Taluka) of Ahmednagar district. Nearby International Airport is located in Mumbai. By railway one can reach to Pune or

Ahmednagar from all over India. The site is connected by roads from Mumbai, Pune,

Ahmednagar, Khed, Alephata, Parner and nearby villages.



Physiographical Environment:

The area forms a part of the Deccan trap region which is primarily a part of plateau. The rock of the study area is stratified trap of igneous rocks (effusive) generally basalt and associated Lavas and Tuff. As Pune district lies in Monsoon Climate region experiencing rainy, retreat of monsoon, winter and summer seasons, the average temperature experienced around 30⁰ c and 50-60cms of average rainfall. Soils found in the nearby areas are medium black, brown and fresh yellow to dark brown formed on the bank of the river. Vegetation mainly consists of Tropical Dry Deciduous and Tropical Thorn type but found to be degraded with extension of

agricultural activity. Babhul, Neem, Ber, Cactus, Chinch, Jambhul, Nirgudi, Tarwad, Mango, Sandalwood, etc are common species found in the area. The underground water level is depending on aquifers with secondary intergranular porosity and fractures. Wells, tube wells, lakes, and dams are the major sources of water.

The river Kukadi is flowing through the village. Near a temple, the river forms a deep **Canyon** which has resulted in many huge **Potholes** like structures carved in the bed rock because of the natural erosive action of the water and the abrasion by loose material moving with the water. These potholes are spread over three kilometres with an average depth of over 40 to 120 feet.



Canyon

It is said that these rocks were formed of alternative layers of hard and soft rocks where soft rocks get eroded faster compared to hard rocks forms depressions are formed. It is observed that the

different colours of rocks found in the area. In later stage the rolling of sand and pebbles in it, have caused further abrasion and erosion are responsible for formation of potholes.

Alternative layers of hard and soft rocks and erosion



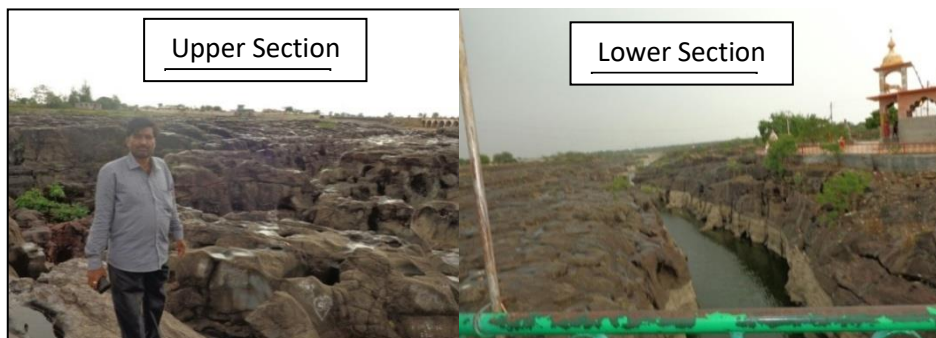
Depressions and stacks

It is also said that at one point, sudden geological disturbances occurred and a huge canyon was formed. The river flowed through this canyon with a great force formed huge holes in the rocks. Most of the part of river bed is having coarse boulders or

pebbles and absent fine sand which confirms the gradient of slope between 20 to 80 meters per kilometre (India Physical Map-NATMO). Compactness of rock, presence or absence of joints is found to bring decisive impact on the potholes

variations and formation irregularities. The nick points in the area are the prominent break in slope

and have contributed to high rate of weathering finally to induce the development of potholes.



Knick point

Slope

One can observe the small rock caves, stacks, deep holes, knick point, rapids, and water falls etc. are

other landforms indicate the differences in erosion rate



Cave

Stacks

The eroded loose material get transported to down slope at faster speed because of high gradient of slope does allow to lie in the area.

Socio-cultural and Economic Conditions:

The study site is a rural area that includes Nighoj village having population around 13600 and Takli Haji village having 5952 (Census of India-2011). The major population belongs to Hindu religion and very few are Muslims. The majority of population is engaged in agriculture. Bajara, wheat, jowar and pulses are important food grain crops grown in the village. As irrigation is available, many cash crops are grown like sugarcane, banana, grapes and vegetables. Health facilities and government and private educational institutes are the strengths for the

development of the area. Many temples are located in both the villages. The physiographical unique identity of potholes attracts large number of tourists. Majority of tourists visit to study the potholes and village fair (Yatra) in the month of Chaitra. Kundmauli Malganga is famous and most visited temples located both sides of river Kukadi. The old temple is situated in Nighoj village. Many mythical stories are attached to the existence of goddess in the village. The emergence of the Ghagar (Mudpot) in village well (Barav) steps is also a sect of celebration. Around 50,000 people visit here during 3 days of 'Chaitra Pournima Yatra'. Kalashtami Utsav is also popular for 'Ambil' and 'Bagad'. Kundyatra and Urus are other major celebrations enjoyed by the villagers.

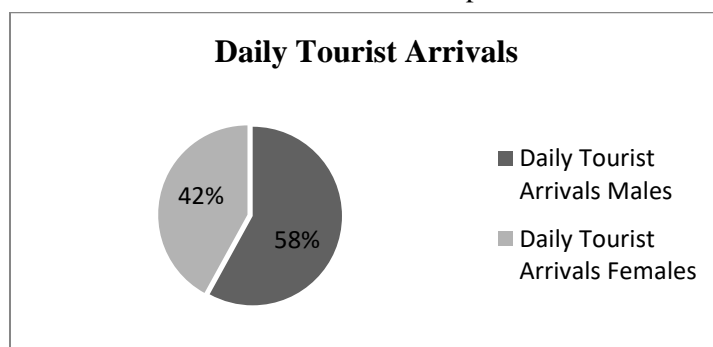
Tamasha, Kusti Akhada, Chhabina, Kathi and Ghagar Miravnuk, Bhajan, Kirtan and Devicha Jagar, Pooja and Arati are some of cultural activities conducted during these festivals. Offerings to the Gods and Goddesses are also the important part of culture. Race of bullocks (Bailgada Sharyat) is also a part of the festival but it has been banned by the High Court. Many types of food stalls (Shev-revadi, Bhel, Jalebi, etc.) cutleries, juice stalls and toys stalls are also available for shopping during festival time. Merrygo-round and Kulfi are the children's favourite. Annadan (Offering a food) , naivadya and offering of sweet dish (Pooran Poli) to the group of five or seven ladies (Suvasini) is also an integral part of the festival. The people who have migrated to other cities and villages

for employment also come on these occasions to village.

Every year many investigators come here to study the process, structure and formation of potholes. Around 200 to 800 local visitors visit the place daily. Many schools and colleges also visit the place.

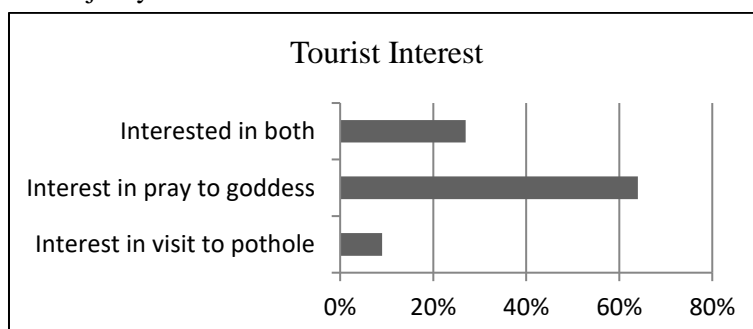
Condition of Tourist Arrivals, Accessibility, Infrastructure and Facilities, Sanitation and Cleanliness:

The tourist flow is low. 88% visitors were the local people and 22% were from other Talukas or Districts. Foreign tourists visit very rarely. Out of total daily visitors, 42% were females and 58% were males. As most of females are engaged in agricultural activities they do not travel for tourism in large number in comparison to males.



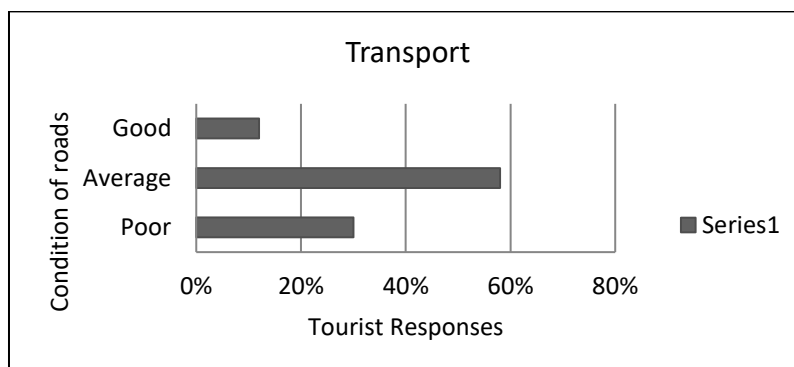
64% tourists were the devotees of Devata Malganga and were not much interested in observing the potholes. Hardly 9% visitors have shown enthusiasm to observe the potholes carefully and take photographs of the same. Majority of them were

teachers, students or educated visitors who were keen to know about potholes and canyon as landforms through actual observation. 27% tourists were given preference to both.



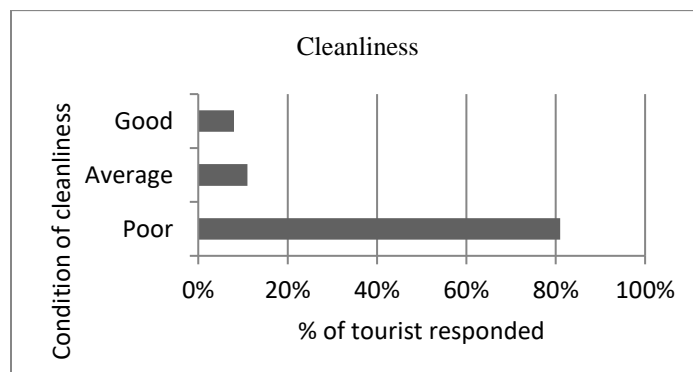
The condition of transport facilities are average as 58% tourists responded average, 12% good and 30%

poor. The connectivity was observed to the site through road network.



The State Transport buses are available to reach the tourist to village. Private mass transport in the form of auto service is also available although the frequency is low.

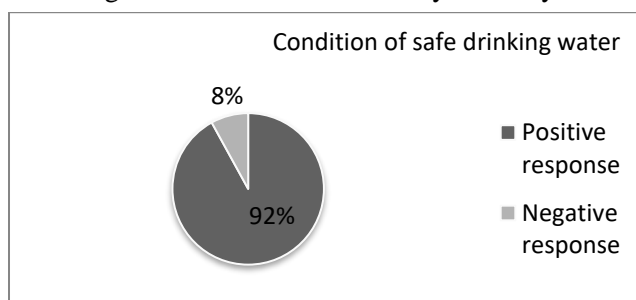
Cleanliness is poor, where 81% tourist responded poor, 11% responded average and 8% responded well.



Sewage and solid waste management is absent as 96% tourist queried about availability and maintenance of the system. Foul smell comes out of the river due to direct disposal in the river from the nearby areas. Flowers, plastic bottles, left food and other garbage are deposited in the potholes. Public toilet is available but in unclean condition. No appointed staffs are available to pick-up the garbage. Safety measures are also poor. No life guards or

policemen or security guards are available as 62% tourist responded unsafe and 38% responded safe or no need of safety measures as it is a rural area and most of people are devotees of goddess subsequently no need to worry about safety measures.

Safe drinking water is one of the important essentials for tourism. About drinking water 92% tourist responded the availability of safe drinking water easily and only 8% responded negatively.





Street lights are available but because of load shedding villagers do not get enough electricity. Public convenience

and maintenance of facilities are poor responded by 69% of tourists. Enough parking spaces are available. Tourist information Centre and guides are not available. Accommodation is poor and Bhakta Niwas is not yet much used by the people. Shops are available for marketing. The quality of goods and food items found inferior. No Star hotel or motel available for the tourist.

The satisfaction of tourist is average responded by 64% tourists. They are willing to have many other facilities such as children's park, museum, well equipped cinema theatre etc. The tourist does not get shelter facility for rest during summer. Very less trees are found nearby potholes. Unplanned concretization and constructions are damaged the beauty and original look of the site. The administration lacks in advertisement. Also scribing with paint on rocks of potholes does look horrible.

The suspensible metal bridge to cross the river is also one of attraction to the people. The bridge is used to cross the canyon by the deities. Social gatherings are attended by many villagers as a part of their responsibility and attachment to the native place.

By observation and interview with tourists it can be concluded that availability of safe drinking water, place for rest, parking space, and participation by villagers and shops for marketing are strength for tourism. Rest all other factors important for tourism development need to pay attention to improve or introduce the facilities to tourist like safety, health, sewage, solid waste management, transport, maintenance system, guides, other recreational facilities etc.

The Region is endowed with strategic location; peaceful and generic picturesque environment, forts, temples, lakes, mountains, rivers; historic

monuments, friendly and hospitable people. Natural resources has wide range of tourism potential. The natural resources include Sahyadri hills and valleys, forested areas, wild life sanctuary, lakes, flora and fauna. Socio-Cultural resources has strong cultural and historical background. The region is surrounded by the cultural capital of the state of Maharashtra. It characterizes Marathi culture, which focuses on education, arts and crafts, music and theatre. Regional culture reflects a blend of traditions fusions with western traditions also.

Suggestions:

It can be suggested to promote it as a world famous tourist destination, well connection to other nearby tourist spots like Devi Bhoyare, Sugar factory, Village market at Belhe, Wind Mill near to Garkhindi and Karst landforms at Vadgaon Darya as well as Ghod Dam, Parashar Agro-tourism centre at Rajuri, Vidnyan Kendra at Pabal, Manikdoh Dam, Plant Nurseries, GMRT etc. are essentially needed.

The appointed and trained tourist guides needed to be provided. Safety measures to be taken care by local police station and appointed life guards from village. Sanitation and solid waste management can be taken care with support of NGOs. To attract foreign tourist to stay in this area need improvement in transport facilities and world standard accommodation. Vigorous marketing, aggressive advertisement and promotion of recreation and entertainment should be done on a priority basis. Participatory approach from political leaders and community is must for development of tourism.

Strengths and Weaknesses studies about environment of potholes required to be done on urgent basis to promote geo-tourism approach. Sign and information boards along major roads in surrounding area are must to pay attention of common travellers from nearby route. Organized development of other nearby tourist destination as a circuit and transport service



supposed to be made available to common people at a reasonable rate.

Tree plantation drives, social forestry, community shelter are needed to be introduced. The programmes related to awareness and importance of biodiversity and habitat etc. needed to include in community education drives.

Detailed tourism master plan need to be prepared considering rocks, mineralogy, slope, minor landforms with proper implementation of geo-tourism guidelines by special drives with proper planning and effective execution. Shirur or even Parner taluka needs the further research for geo-tourism development. There is no doubt that Shirur must be developed as tourism taluka and potholes as a destination in terms of geo-tourism activity. It is a sole responsibility of local people and governance that the potholes site should be developed on the guidelines of eco-tourism as a **geo-park** to promote tourism without disturbing the natural beauty of it.

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