



**A Geographical Analysis of Major Tourist Centres
and Identification of Pilgrimage Tourist Circuits in
north Ahmednagar District.**

Dr. Sharad A. Borude¹ Sampat C. Dhokane² Dr. Shailesh M. Nikam³

¹Associate Professor, Department of Geography, Ahmednagar College,
Ahmednagar.

²Research Scholar, RAresearch center, Ahmednagar College, Ahmednagar.

³Professor, Department of Geography, Pemraj Sarda College, Ahmednagar.

Corresponding Author- Dr. Sharad A. Borude

Introduction

According to the report of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) June 1991, Tourism is the world's largest industry and major contributor to global development. India is on 54th rank in the Travel and Tourism Development Index (India Tourism Statistic 2022). Travel is the activity associated with arrival and departure at the time of Pleasure, Prosperity, Holidays and Leisure. (R.B.Chavda 2019). According to the definition given by the United Nations Organization (1937) "Tourism covers the social activities of people who go away from their permanent residence for 24 hours and more". Now in the present era lifestyle is changing rapidly, therefore the development of the tourism sector is very fast. Due to a fast lifestyle, people have little time for leisure and relaxation. Generally, people travel for several purposes or objectives. There are many types of tourism according to tourist purposes. i.e. Entertaining tourism, Environmental tourism, Health tourism, Adventure tourism, Religious tourism, Rural tourism, Historical tourism, Educational Tourism etc. (R.B.Chavda 2019). Tourism is now the largest industry in the world by virtually any economic measure including gross output, employment, capital investment and tax contribution. Tourism can create a significant importance in the income and living standards of the people of the region or locality. (Sujatha Annie Kurian 2012). Tourism is one of the industries with the strongest effect on the economy because it helps in the development of other sectors, it provides job opportunities in different tourism sectors like accommodation, hoteling, transportation, entertainment, and other. Ahmednagar district has a lot of potential in the tourism sector due to great diversity. Therefore, Ahmednagar has vast and huge potential of different historical, natural, religious and socio-cultural backgrounds. (Mr.Nikam S.M. 2016). The essential parameters for the success of the tourism industry is the development of the tourist circuits and destinations to attract domestic and international tourists. (Ar.Chetan Sachdeva 2020). This paper aims to study and highlight tourist centres in Ahmednagar district, classification of tourist centres and identification of possible pilgrimage tourist circuits in north Ahmednagar district.

Aim and Objectives of Research

The major objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To study the tourist centres of interest in Ahmednagar district.
- 2) To classify tourist centers in Ahmednagar district.
- 3) To highlight pilgrimage tourist centers and identify possible pilgrimage tourist circuits in north Ahmednagar district.

Database and Research Methodology

The study is based on the primary and secondary data collected from the visits to

tourist centres with the help of Photographs, interviews of tourists, pilgrims, households etc. Secondary data was collected from reference books, booklets, daily newspapers, periodicals, magazines, research reports, internet, various online sources, thesis, district census handbook 2011,2022, the reports from tourism departments, forest departments, Ahmednagar district Gazetteer etc.

Study Area

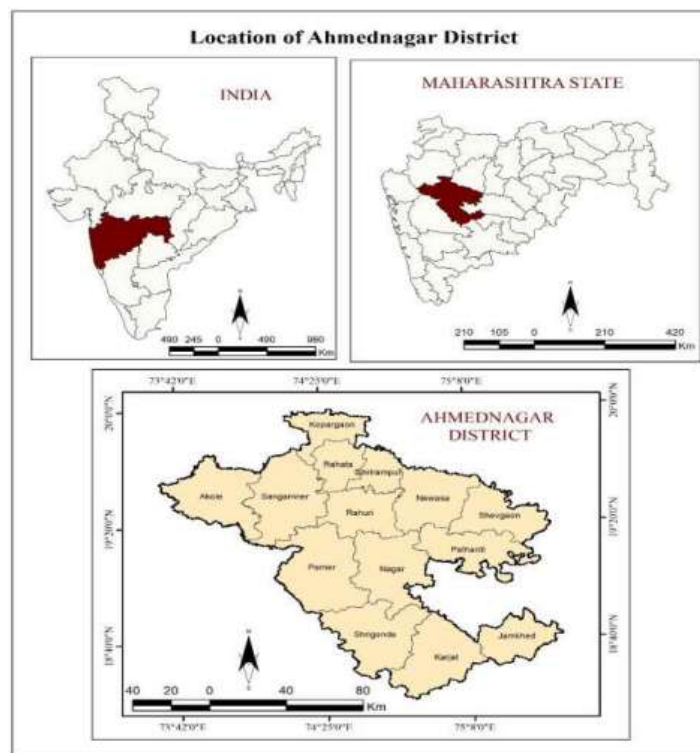
Ahmednagar district is located between 18°02' north to 19°09' north latitude and

79°09' east to 75° 5' east longitude. The district has geographical area of 17,048.00 km². (District census Handbook 2011) Ahmednagar district is the largest district in Maharashtra, bounded by Pune district, Nasik district, Aurangabad district, Beed district, Osmanabad district, Solapur district and Thane district. General elevation is 752 meters above mean sea level. Ahmednagar district is situated partly in the upper Godavari basin and partly in Bhīma basin. The district has Sahyadri, Baleshwar, Harishchandra, Kalsubai Ranges and Adula hills. Average rainfall receives 575.8 m.m. The

mean daily Maximum temperature is 39°C and mean daily minimum temperature is 11.7°C.

Ahmednagar district has 14 talukas. These are Kopergaon, Akola, Sangamner, Shrirampur, Rahata, Rahuri, Newasa, Shevgaon, Pathardi, Ahmednagar, Parner, Shrigonda, Karjat, and Jamkhed. Ahmednagar city is the administrative headquarter of the district. There are 1584 Villages, 19 towns with total population 45, 43,159 and Density of population is 266 persons per sq. km. (District census Handbook 2011).

Map:1: Location of Ahmednagar District



1. Classification of Tourist centres in Ahmednagar District

India is one of the nations with a strong potential and fastest growing tourism destinations in the world, which contributes 6.8% GDP, 7.7% total employment generated and provides foreign exchange of US\$18.13 billion (IBEF 2016). Maharashtra attracts tourists from other Indian states and foreign countries. The area for study is Ahmednagar district with great potential for tourism. There is a lot of diversity in Ahmednagar district in the nature of tourist centres. The district has great and vast tourism potential of different

natural, historical, religious, and socio-cultural backgrounds (Mr.Nikam S.M. 2016). There are different types of tourist centres like Natural/geographical tourist centres, religious, historical, agro based, hill stations, caves, tombs, museums, monuments etc. For the convenience of this study researchers have classified tourist centres in five categories.

- 1) Religious tourism centers
- 2) Historical tourism centers
- 3) Natural Tourism centers
- 4) Cultural or Heritage tourism centers
- 5) Agro Tourism

Table: 1: Classification of Tourist Centers in Ahmednagar District

Types of Tourism	Tourist Attraction/ Destination	Taluka
Religious Tourist Centers	Shirdi	Rahata
	Shani Shinganapur	Newasa
	Siddhatek	Karjat
	Mohatadevi, Vruddheshwr , Madhi and Bhagawangad	Pathardi
	Deogad, Paiss Khamb (Newasa) , Siddheshwar Temple and Pravarasangam	Newasa
	Avhane	Shevgaon
	Jangali Maharaj Ashram and Janardan Seami Ashram (Maungiri Maharaj)	Kopargaon
	Agasti Rishi Ashram, Bhairav Gad	Akola
	Vishal Ganpati, Agadgaon, Dongargan, Avtar Meher Bab Samadhi, Meharabad, Arangaon and Gorakshnath Gad	Nagar
	Haregaon, Kamalpur (Domegram)	Shrirampur
	Shrigonda (Temple of Shaikh Mahamad maharaj)	Shrigonda
	Mahadev Temple and Mallikarjun Temple, karjat	Karjat

Types of Tourism	Tourist Attraction/ Destination	Taluka
Historical tourism centers	Ahmednagar Fort, Cavalry Tank Museum, Historical Museum, Chand Bibi Mahal, Alamgir Museum Farya Bagh and Manjarsumba gad	Nagar
	Patta Fort	Akole
	Bhalavani (Mahadaji Shinde wada), Palshi (gadhi)	Parner
	Raghobadada Wada	Kopargaon
	Kharda Fort and Chondhi	Jamkhed
Natural Tourism centers	Bhandardara Dam	Akole
	Mula Dam	Rahuri
	Randhafall, Ratangad, Harishchandragad, Kalsubai Peak, Ghatghar,	Akole

Samrad Valley, Tahakari	
Pemgiri	Sangamner
Nighoj Pot holes, Wadgav Darya (Lavansthambha), Takali Dhokeshwar Caves	Parner
Rehekuri – Black buck Sanctuary	Karjat

Types of Tourism	Tourist Attraction/ Destination	Taluka
Cultural or Heritage tourism centers	Sai Heritage Village, Shirdi Old Shirdi –Babas Geritage Village	Rahata
	Dhokeshwar Caves, Takali Dhokeshwar	Parner
Agro Tourism	Mahatma Phule, krishi Vidyapith, Rahuri	Rahuri
	Bhenda	Newasa
	Saiban and Hiware Bazar (Water shade Management and Adarsh Gav)	Nagar
	Ralegan Sidhhi (Water shade Management and Adarsh Gav)	Parner

2. Developed Religious Tourism Centers in North Ahmednagar District: -

There is a lot of diversity in north Ahmednagar district from a religious point of view. This district is known as a religious tourist district which is famous for some temples. These religious centers have huge potential for tourism development, but some of them are not well known for domestic as well as foreign tourists.

i) Shirdi:-

Shirdi, a town in Ahmednagar district is one of the famous religious sites for visitors from the 19th century. The location of Shirdi is 19°77' North Latitude and 74°48' East Longitude. The Average height from sea level is 480 meters. The average rainfall in Shirdi recorded is 50 cm. Maximum temperature is recorded 20° C. to 40° C. and minimum temperature recorded 8° C.

to 34° C. in the winter season. This center is in Rahata tehsil, famous for Shri Sai baba. Most of the tourists visit Shirdi in huge numbers. Sai Baba temple is one of the richest temples in India. Saibaba Devasthan trust (Saibaba sansthan) is one of the major trusts. Shirdi is 83 km. from

Ahmednagar and 15 km. from Kopargaon. Saibaba lived in shree kshetra Shirdi from 1838 to 1918. At the age of 16 to 17 years' baba arrived at Shirdi till his passing away. Shirdi village is developed because of Shri Sai Baba.

ii) Shani Shinganapur: -

Shani Shinganapur is one of the most famous places in Ahmednagar district. This village is located in Newasa tehsil. It is about 35 km. from Ahmednagar. It is situated only 6 km. far from Aurangabad – Pune state highway No. 60. The location of Shani Shinganapur is 19°24' North Latitude and 74°49' East longitude. This tourist center is 522 meters high from mean sea level. The Mula and Pravara Rivers are the main rivers in this area. The average rainfall in Shani Shinganapur recorded is 565 mm. Maximum temperature is recorded 40° C. and minimum temperature recorded 9° C. in winter season. Shri kshetra Shini Shinganapur is a very holy place. A unique aspect of this place is that there is no temple. There is only a simple platform on which stands the swaymbhu idol in black stone. Shinganapur is also famous for the fact that houses in this village are without doors,

only a barrier to enter a house which keeps out stray animals. People believe that nobody dares to take a risk to steal anything because they are punished by lord Shanidev.

iii) Shree Kshetra Deogad:

Devgad is famous for the holy temple of lord Dattatrya. It is a well-known and bountiful place which attracts pilgrims and tourists. This tourist center is 480 meters high from mean sea level. The average rainfall in Devgad recorded is 60 cm. Maximum temperature is recorded 40° C. and minimum temperature recorded 10° C. in winter season. Sant shri Kisangiri Baba is founder of shri kshetra Deogad. Kisangiri baba was born in the village Bodhegaon tehsil Newasa on 13th September 1907. Baba believed that "Service to Man Being is Service to God". On 6th March 1983 Baba left his disciple alone and passed away.

iv) Pais Khamb and Sant Dnyaneshwar Temple Newasa:-

Shree Kshetra Nevasa is a spiritual university of Maharashtra in Nevasa taluka of Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra which conveys the heritage of ancient Indian culture and religious culture. The location of Newasa is 19°32' North Latitude and 74°56' East longitude. This tourist center is 480 meters high from mean sea level. The average rainfall in Devgad recorded is 55 cm. Maximum temperature is recorded 42° C. and minimum temperature recorded 90° C. in winter season.

In 1290 Saint dictated Dnyaneshwari at the age of 15 in the year 1290 Shake 1212 in this holy land and written by shri Sachchitanand Baba. Saint *Dnyaneshwar* leaned against the pillar while composing his great work Dnyaneshwari. This pillar is called a Paiss Khamb. This Paiss Khamb is buried in the ground under a flat roof, which is about 33 x 36 feet, it stands about 4.5 feet out of the ground. Saint Dnyaneshwar give "pasaydan" for the wellbeing of all the human beings of this world at this place.

V) Belhekarwadi – Renukamata Darbar :-

Shri Kshetra Belhekarwadi is well known for the glass temple of Mata Renuka. The location of Renuka Darbar is 19°23' North Latitude and 74°50' East longitude. This tourist center is 478 meters high from mean sea level. The average rainfall in Devgad recorded is 50 cm.

Maximum temperature is recorded 38° C. and minimum temperature recorded 10° C. in winter season. This religious tourist center is situated 4 km. from Sonai and 60 km from Shirdi. It is situated only 12 km. far from Aurangabad – Pune state highway No. 60. Swami Shri Krishnaji Joshi was a natural devotee of Renukamata, Mahuragad living in Belhekarwadi with his wife Seema. Seamiji and Seemaji always visited village Mahurgad and prayed Renukamata by heart. One day as usual they are at Mahurgad. At that time Rnukamata blessed them and told them, ' You need not come here: I am; I am coming with you to your village.' From that day Swami decided to stay in the farm. He came back to his farm at village Belhekarwadi and stayed in the farm and started praying to Renukamata. He constructed a Yadnya Mandap in 1954. He started a construction of temple of Renukamata in 1971 and completed in 1991. Internal side of the temple is decorated by pieces of glass. Mosaic glass is very attractive. There is an idol of Renukamata.

There are Lord Krishna temple, Shri Dattatrya temple, Sraswati temple, Lord Vittha temple, Saptayogini and Swami Mharaj temple. These temples are in the area of the main temple. (Mr. Ghule S.R. 2013). These are the famous and developed tourist centers but the rest of the tourist centers are underdeveloped. Some religious tourist centers have a lot of potential. The potential for development amomong the following tourist centers is as follows, Kshri kshetr Taharabad, Shriram Mandir And Dudheshwar Mandit Shrirampur, Janardan Swami Maharaj (Maungiri Maharaj) Kopargaon, Kamalpur (Domegram), Agasti Rishi Ashram, Akole, Pravara sangam, puntamba, Domegaram ect. These religious tourist centers are not so popular.

3. Circuit Tourism:

Circuit tourism is a form of tourism in which a tourist starts from a tourist destination and visits at least three spots which are not too distant from each other. The circuit should have a distinct entry and exit point. Circuit tourism is normally conducted when the destinations require equal tourist recognition. Circuit tourism provides equal development to all the destinations in its circuit. It also provides equal importance to all destinations. (Antony Simon 2021) It's an important factor for the

development of multiple tourist destinations simultaneously. Circuit tourism also helps to provide more recognition to the less-visited tourist destination. With the help of a circuit. Tourism tourist spots could be easily recognized with fewer investments. Circuit tourism is normally cantered to a specific destination or monument or place and built around it. The most commonly found form of this tourism is for holy pilgrimages. Cities with historical or cultural or business importance (Antony Simon 2021). "A Tourist Circuit is defined as a route on which at least three major tourist destinations are located such that none of these are in the same town, village or city at the same time they are not separated by a long distance It should have well defined entry and exit points A tourist who

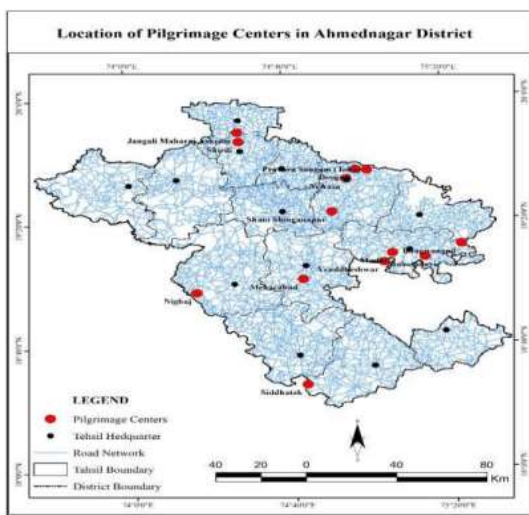
enters at the entry point should get motivated to visit all the places identified on the circuit" (Chowdhury, A.L. (2011).

Circuit tourism is typified by the short length of stay at each destination on the circuit, pre-planned itinerary and regional and local clustering of attractions (Chowdhury, 2011). Circuit tourism depends, for its existence, on the identification, development, and promotion of tourist circuits. Circuits can be developed either within a country (intra-border) or between two or more countries (cross-border). Circuit tourism needs careful planning in the smallest detail. It will also require development of a proper support system at various locations along the circuit route; and provides an opportunity to involve local people in the tourism development process.

4. Pilgrimage Tourism:

The term "Pilgrimage" has its origin in the Latin word 'Peregrines' which means a 'stranger' or 'wanderer'. It is also defined as a Spiritual odyssey. Its chief purpose is to gather religious merits (Punya) and absolve own sins (Pap) as well as to involve the blessings of the particular deity

Map: 2: Pilgrimage Centers in Ahmednagar District



enshrined in the religious place. (Sinha Amita, 1994).

Pilgrimage a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purpose and internal understanding is one of the religious and cultural phenomena most common to human society throughout the world.

Pilgrimage refers to a journey that is motivated by religion or spirituality and plays a significant role in almost all world religions. The nature of religious tourism could be defined according to the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1985) as the movement of persons due to essentially cultural motivations as study travels to festivals and another artistic events, visits to places and monuments, travels to explore the nature, the art, the folklore and the pilgrimages'.

5. Identification of Pilgrimage Tourist Circuits in North Ahmednagar district.

The creation of the route tourism process identified by Lourens (2007) involves the selection of routes based on the target market and its criteria, the audit of tourism goods in the specified region, the scrutiny of tourism properties and the identification of specific sales characteristics. In the next step, the product mix is established by designation marketing organization (DMO), a simple strategy to guide work plans and finally, route branding. (Ar. Chetan Sachdeva (2020).

Interstate Circuits can be developed based on various themes of effective transportation connectivity. When a circuit is around pilgrimage tourist centers the circuit is considered as a Pilgrimage tourist circuit. The destination in such a circuit will be of Pilgrimage or religious importance. The circuit is to be taken up and will be identified on the basis of popularity of destination and distance in between them. While selecting the circuit, the potential of the places should be considered. Till date circuit tourism in India is conducted between different cities of different states or different districts (Antony Simon 2021).

Map:3 Pilgrim Circuit in N. Ahmednagar District.



North Ahmednagar district is well known for popular religious tourist centers. As circuit tourism is not initiated till date, the tourists visiting the Ahmednagar district normally miss a few destinations, lot of guests coming who are most likely to take a tour to get the feel and culture of the city. So circuit tourism is the best way of getting them as close as to the Indian culture, history and beauty. It's an important factor for the development of multiple tourist destinations simultaneously. Circuit tourism also helps to provide more recognition to the less-visited tourist destinations. With the help of circuits, tourist spots could be easily recognized with fewer investments. Amongst the tourism circuits development in north Ahmednagar district have great potential. It consists of pilgrimage tourist centers like Shirdi, Shani Shingapur, Newasa, and Deogad.

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