

## **Tourism Potential in Akole Tehsil of Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra State, India**

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### **Abstract**

As tourists always get attracted towards the mountain destinations, tourism as a socio-cultural and economic phenomenon can be develop a lot in the mountainous region, if planned properly. In this context, the Akole tehsil of Ahmednagar district has a great potential for tourism development. The western mountainous region of the tehsil offers many tourism products of nature with a wide ecological range and biodiversity. In addition, the socio-cultural dimension of tribes of this region is one of the major tourist attractions. With the help of primary and secondary data the paper focuses on tourism potential of the study area.

**KEYWORDS:** Tourism, Potential, Akole, Kalsubai, Bhandardara

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### **Introduction**

Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal/professional purposes (UNWTO, 2008). Lickorish and Jenkins (1997) stated that, tourism is a gathering of activities and services which brings a travel experience encompassing transportation, accommodation, eateries, shops, entertainment and hospitality services provided for persons or their groups away from home. It is an activity which cuts across congenial sectors in the economy and requires inputs of an economic, social, cultural and environmental nature. Leisure or recreation is the main purpose of tourism (Davidson, 1993). Being located in the Western Ghats region, the Akole tehsil of Ahmednagar district is characterized by vivid topographical features and scenic beauty; it offers various tourism opportunities to the visitors. The segment of north-south stretching Western Ghats, called Sahyadri in the state, has its highest peak, Kalsubai, in the tehsil. High rainfall, thick forest area with great biodiversity, pleasant climate and water reservoirs has developed various tourist locations in the tehsil. Thus, each of the tourist places in the study area has its own peculiarity. Here, tourists can choose destination according to their purpose of tourism. This fact is motivated to undertake the present study which attempts to know the tourism potential in Akole tehsil of Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra.

### **Objectives**

The present study is aimed at geographical analysis of tourism potential of Akole tehsil. This has been achieved with the help of following objectives

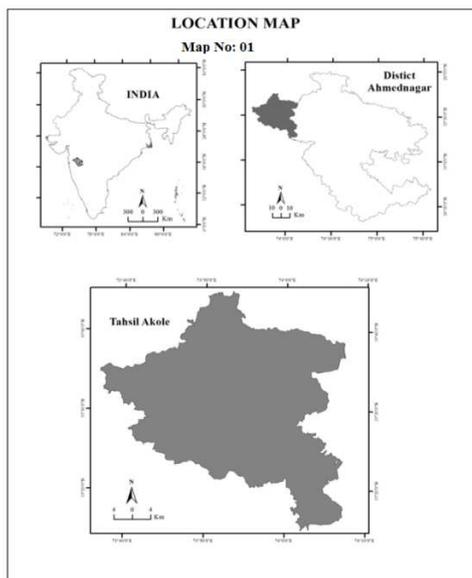
1. To identify the tourist locations in the study area
2. To understand the tourism potential of tourist centers
3. To identify the challenges for tourism development.
4. To give suggestions for the tourism development in the study area.

### Data Source and Methodology

Present study utilizes both, primary and secondary data. Personal discussions with the natives, tourists and officers, questionnaire schedule, field survey and interview techniques were the primary sources of information. The secondary data was obtained from the socio-economic review and district statistical abstract of Ahmednagar district. The obtained information was analysed and presented.

### Study Area

Akole Tehsilis located (Fig.1)at the western margin of Ahmednagar district. Geographically the tehsil is extended between  $19^{\circ}15'12''$  N and  $19^{\circ}45'06''$  North latitudes and  $73^{\circ}37'00''$  E and  $74^{\circ}07'21''$  East longitudes. In the west, there lies the district of Thane, in the north there is Nashik district while the Pune district lies in the south of it.



**Fig. 1 Location Map of Akole Tehsil**

Out of 1,505.08 km<sup>2</sup> area of the tehsil, in all 65.59 percent area is covered by agriculture and 27.7 % area is under forest while the remaining area is used for other purposes. The north south trending Western Ghats ranges lies in the western part of the district. Thus, the western part of the study area has become more rugged. The geomorphic characteristics in the western part of the tehsil are very complex. Volcanic eruption is the main cause of rock formation in this area. Thus, the main type of rock found in the region is basalt. The area is also characterized by limestone, red bole, sand stones, shales, clay and a thin layer of black soils at some places. In the western part the westward slope of the area is steep while in the east, the eastward slope is gentle. Mula and Pravara are the main rivers of the study area. Climate of the tehsil is hot and dry except during the period of south west monsoon. The tehsil is identified as a tribal tehsil of the district. During 2011 the population of the tehsil was 2,91,950 (GoM, 2014).

### Potential Tourist Places

#### Amruteshwar Temple

Amruteshwar, an ancient temple of lord Shiva is a major religious attraction of the tehsil. It is located in the base village of Ratangad fort, Ratanwadi. The temple is one of the oldest structures made up of black stone. It has a sanctum where sculptures of god and goddesses are carved out of the stone. Near temple there is a constructed water tank.

There are two *sabhamandaps* in the temple. The sanctum (*garbhagriha*) is located between these *sabhamandaps*. The temple of Amruteshwar is not affected by attacks of foreigners and natural hazards. Tourists can reach Amruteshwar by road via Bhandardara.

#### **Wilson Dam and Umbrella Fall**

Built in 1910, on river Pravara, the Wilson Dam is one of the brilliant outcomes of excellence in engineering. The main purpose behind construction of this dam was to avail water for irrigation in the downstream area. However, today the dam site has become one of the major tourist attractions in the tehsil. The garden developed at the base of this dam is full of thick vegetation. Boating and fishing facilities at this site attracts the tourists.

Umbrella waterfall is one of the amazingly beautiful attractions at Bhandardara dam site. This water fall do not appears during whole of the year. It appears in rainy season and whenever the dam releases water. Tourists can spend time near this waterfall.

#### **Kalsubai Peak**

The Kalsubai Mountain Peak (1,646 mt. above MSL), a major attraction for trekking and popular amongst the devotees of Kalsubai, is the highest peak in the state. It is also known as Everest of Maharashtra. As this mountain peak is surrounded by a thick forest, wild life enthusiasts are also interested in this tourist attraction. During historical period, this peak has served as a watch tower for the rulers of this region. Celebration of the nine night festival called *Navaratri* is one of the major attractions of this place. Devotees from the nearby area visit this place during *Navaratri* and celebrate the festival.

#### **Randha Fall**

Randha fall is one of the magnificent tourist attractions of the study area. It cascade from a height of 170 ft. and makes a beautiful scene during rainy season.

#### **Agasti Rishi Ashram**

Agasti Rishi Ashram, one of the popular holy places in the tehsil is located on the left bank of river Pravara near Akole, the tehsil headquarter. It is believed that, Sage Agastya offered an arrow to lord Shri Ram at this place during his visit to the Ashram. There is a Ram Kund lying near this place. The Ashram is about 40 km from Bhandardara and is connected by road. The temple at this place is spacious and clean.

#### **Harichhandra Gad**

This is one of the historical tourist destinations and a most challenging trekking location in the study area. An escarpment, called Konkan Kada is the main attraction of this place. It offers a scenic view of Konkan region of Maharashtra. During rainy season, one can enjoy the experience of walking through cloudshere.

#### **Ghatghar**

Ghatghar, a tiny village located near Western Ghats escarpment, called Konkan Kada, is one of the major places of tourists' interests. This is a tribal village where tourists can observe the tribal culture and have a look at Plains of Konkan lying at the foot of the escarpment. At Ghatghar, tourists can enjoy the scenic beauty of greenery around and can enjoy sunset. During rainy and winter seasons, the area around Ghatghar is covered with clouds. Thus, here tourists can have an experience of walking through clouds.

#### **Ratangad Fort**

Surrounded by beautiful natural scenery, the fort of Ratangad is about 400 years old. It was captured by the Maratha king Shri. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj where he used to rest and spend his leisure time. Several trekking sites are located near this fort from where tourists may observe the magnificent view of valleys lying in the Western Ghats. Tow

caves located on top of the fort provide places for accommodation. The fort of Ratangad is about 22 km from Bhandardara and is connected by road passing through lush green forest and tribal villages.

### **Sandhan Valley**

Sandhan Valley, called as Valley of Shadow or Valley of Suspense is one of the special geomorphic attractions found near village Samrad. Trekking at this valley gives a combined experience of adventure activities like rock climbing, descending and sliding.

### **Bhandardara Hill Station**

Bhandardara hill station is situated at 19° 5' north latitudes and 73° 45' east longitudes. It is characterized by scenic beauty and lush green mountain region. This place is 185 km from Mumbai, 65 km from Nashik, 190 km from Pune and 126 km from Shirdi. This hill station is accessible by road. The nearest railway station to Bhandardara is Igatpuri. It is located on Mumbai-Delhi central railway route and Mumbai-Agra national highway.

### **Major Challenges**

As most of the study area is covered by the ranges of Sahyadri, the transportation network in this area is not much developed. The hilly area limits the expansion of settlements thus; the accommodation facilities in the area are rarely developed. There is a shortage of electricity supply. Frequent power cuts disturb the daily routine of life. Though this is the high rainfall receiving area, during summer it suffers from the scarcity of water. There is a poor sanitation arrangement in the hilly area. Environmental pollution, strong competition due to different options for tourists, untrained manpower, acute problem of land use, stress on infrastructure, transport and services are some of the challenges.

### **Suggestions**

A masterful blend of community, industry and stakeholders should take initiatives to plan the tourist destination, while, the execution of these plans and policies can be done with the help of central and state government. Developing appropriate infrastructure, support system and efficient transportation network, accommodation facilities, new tourist attractions, providing excellent visitor's information services, celebrating festivals and events and encouragement for ecotourism, adventure tourism, sports tourism, wild life tourism is needed.

### **Conclusion**

The Mountainous area of the tehsil will offer a favorable condition for outdoor recreation and tourism, if explored systematically. It has also been observed that the nearness of mountainous area to the metropolitan cities like Mumbai can attract a large number of tourists which helps in economic development of the natives. The variety of options at this destination is one of the major pull factors help in strengthening the tourism activity. The culture of tribals in the study area is one of the special tourist attractions. However, in present scenario, only few destinations are developed in the Akole tehsil. Now the time has come to recognize those centers. Tourism can play an important role in the socio-economic development of the study area. A sustainable developmental plan of remote destinations can be of some help in the tourism development of the area. All the possible types of tourism are needed to be promoted.

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