



## DESTINATION IMAGE FOR PILGRIMAGE AND TOURISM: A STUDY IN MOUNT KAILASH REGION OF TIBET

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### Abstract

The study focuses on rituals performed during Kailash - Manasarover pilgrimage while investigating travel motivation aspects and the satisfaction level of visitors. Circumambulation of Mount Kailash and bathing in sacred Manasarover Lake of western Tibet are popular pilgrimage tourism rituals for which journeys are made annually despite of terrain hardship and adverse climatic condition. We have used ethnographic methods in collection of field data that include personal interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaire surveys and online surveys. One of the objectives of the study is to address the research gap on the role of destination image that motivates the devotees of different religious background to undertake such pilgrimage. We also pay attention on attributes that influence the selection of the individual pilgrimage routes initiated from Indian territory. The method adopted for analysis is qualitative involving software support for mapping. The discussion reveals the evolution of a distinctive cultural landscape that encourages pluralism with reference to a sustainable mechanism of coexistence for the pilgrimage tourism development.

### Key words

Circumambulation, sacred, ritual, pilgrim tourists, route, landscape, pluralism.

## INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage is a process of establishing a rapport with the sacred geography by sending the message of the landscape that has been imbedded in the myths, legends and tales. In shaping the pilgrimage experience, the myths have important part (Sopher, 1987). Regarding the pilgrimage destination, a sort of *imago mundi* is conceptualized where myth itself has its origin under cosmic horizons (Ilies, et al. 2017). Destination image for pilgrimage and tourism is much more important than the reality of the place itself (Matlovicova and Kolesarova, 2011). A pilgrimage site, in theory and practice is a distinctive cultural landscape (Shinde, 2011) that has been created, appropriated, organized and represented by human agency (Campo, 1998). Located in the Kangtose range, the watershed of Tibetan plateau, Mount Kailash (6638m) is one of such auspicious sites of shared faith of the Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Bons of Asia.

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It is firmly believed by the Hindus that a journey beneath the mountain peak leads to the sanctum sanctorum, which is structurally a cave, the abode of their God named Lord Shiva, while the Tibetans believe in the presence of a crystal temple of Gonpo Pung (the Black Lord) at the same place. Being irritated with the overflow of pilgrims, the Tibetan deity made His mind to abscond with the whole mountain into the serpent world beneath. It was ultimately prevented due to intervention of Lord Buddha who rushed to the site miraculously and cast snow on the peak in such way that no one can further climb on its holy summit. Tibetan Buddhists believe that the crystal temple is now concealed within the mountain, which they locally call Tise (meaning snow jewel/the great snow mountain).

Circumambulation is made by the pilgrims of different religious background following their prescribed paths. The mandala representation in sacred geometry of Indian origin is adopted in cognizing the Mount Kailash circumambulation route vide implementation of a squaring principal of the circle. Due to varying conception of different religious cultures on sacred geometry of the place, the Buddhists undertake circumambulation in clockwise direction, while the animistic Bons (now recognized as the 5<sup>th</sup> Tibetan sect by Tibetan government in exile along with the other four Buddhist sects of Tibet) follow the anti-clockwise direction while performing the same ritual in the region.

The claim of Jains and Hindus on Mount Kailash as their legendary Mount Meru is however recent, dating back to the period of contestation between Chinese and British empire on the political control of this region. In Mahabharata, the great Indian epic, Kailash was described as the abode of Kubera, a deity of wealth and treasure, while Kedarnath (in Uttarakhand of India) was recognized as the dwelling place of Lord Shiva. Pilgrimage to Kedarnath has a long history while Hindu pilgrimage to Kailash for Lord Shiva got momentum since 1930s under the British patronage. Swami Pranavanda, an ascetic and founder of *Bharat Shevasram Sangha*, a Hindu religious organization of great repute, organized 23 and 25 circumambulation events in Kailash and Manasarover respectively in the late 1930s and during the 1940s escorting about 5000 pilgrims (Mckay, 1998) Swami Pranavananda being a fellow of Royal Geographical Society of Britain identified the Gaya Chhu as the only outlet of Manasarover (Pranavananda, 1949), which has been cognized as Ganga river by the pious pilgrims relating with popular Hindu myth that Ganga descends on the earth from Lord Shiva.

With such pilgrimage, as cultural claim of India was increasingly established over the region, the Chinese government forbidden all pilgrimage to Kailash from India in the year 1962. After realization of the profits that could be obtained from pilgrimage tourism, Kailash – Manasarover is opened again from August 1981 for Indian pilgrims but in a limited scale with maximum focus on safeguarding the basic geopolitical interest of China who claims Tibet as their territory. Historically Tibet served as the buffer between India and China. Communist China occupied

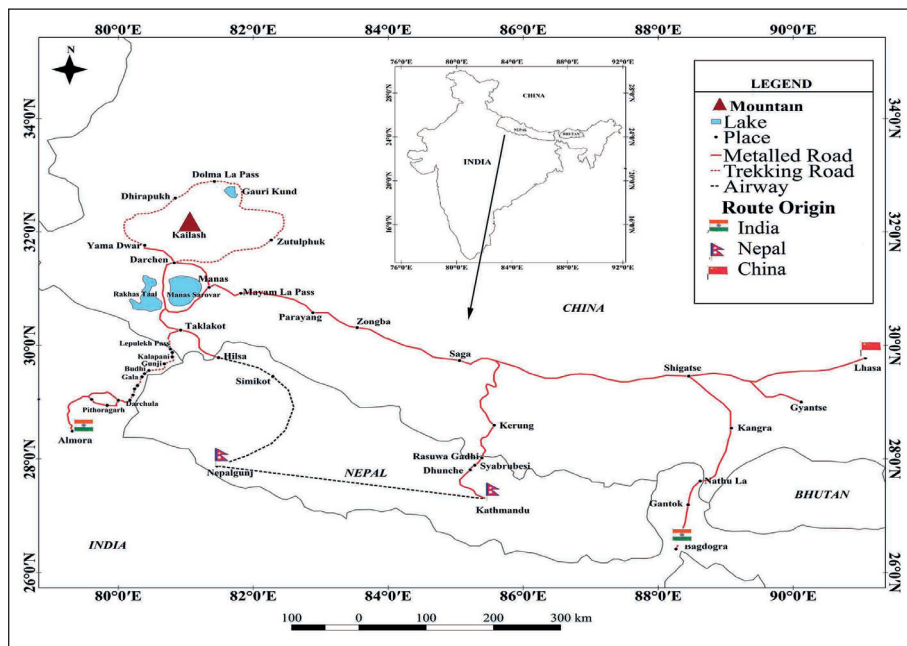


Tibet with Lhasa (the headquarter) and imposed the claim of Chinese nationality over the Tibetan population, while Tibetan government in exile is operating from Indian town Dharmasala since 1959 as the opposition of Chinese design.

From anthropological perspective, a sacred place may be conceived as an origin point for a prophet; as a place where indigenous gods or spirits reside or as a spot where notable event occurred (Bowen, 2002). Mount Kailash itself is the origin point of the Bon prophet, salvation place of Jain prophet, residence of Hindu God and site for notable events of Tibetan Buddhism. From spiritual point of view, all the geographical features including lakes, river caves and passes of this mountainous region are revered; thereby constitute the geographicity in exploring the pilgrimage place (Spengen, 1998). Linking of sanctity elements to geographical features make them extraordinary from ordinary, being designated as the power places (Eck, 2012). Each and every of such places have undergone the process of transformation from profane to sacred.

The approaches of Turner (1973) contributing to the idea of peripheral centres of pilgrimage is apparently the antithesis of the concentric approach propounded by Eliade (1969). Mount Kailash undoubtedly is a peripheral centre for Indian pilgrim tourists, who during the process of pilgrimage develop a group dynamics referred to as *communitas* (Turner and Turner, 1969) characterized by a type of unique bonding which is free from social hierarchies. As the pilgrims approach to the sacred centre from the mundane world, they experience a stage of liminality (Cohen, 1992). It is the authenticity issues relating to destination image that make impact on those visitors who are in real sense neither pure pilgrims nor conventional tourists from the standpoint of behavioural characteristics. While the characteristic of place itself inspire devotion, a number of place rituals flourish simultaneously (Mazumder and Mazumder, 2004). For the Indian pilgrim tourists, circumambulation is one of such rituals that symbolize their collective attachment to the place. During circumambulation, movement is mandatorily along a prescribed line that possesses religious meaning (Stoddard, 1987).

Expectations on enjoying mystical or magical religious experiences have their origin in destination image, which constitutes the spatial dimension of pilgrimage. The trek route of pilgrims around Mount Kailash is worthy of attention for its length which is more than 50 km in a region of oxygen deficiency (Snelling, 1983). Circumambulation of Mount Kailash or bathing at Manasarover lake are among the spatial rituals that attract the visitors. All such issues relating to cultural image have been taken into consideration to address the research questions on motivations of pilgrim tourists. There is increasing stress on current geographical research on what the pilgrims say about their pilgrimage and analyze them through the lenses of tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). This paper is an attempt in this context on Indian pilgrims adopting Uttarakhand and Sikkim routes among the five routes (Fig-1) to approach Kailash– Manasarover.



**Figure1**

Access route to Mount Kailash and Manasarover Lake

Source: Prepared by the Authors, 2020

It is noteworthy to mention that reviews of related literatures reveal abundant sociological and anthropological interpretation on Kailash-Manasarover pilgrimage but geographical interpretation of destination image with a focus on pilgrimage routes that could facilitate in various decision making during preparation for a journey are a few. This paper aims to address the research gap on the spatial dimension of pilgrimage tourism with reference to the study area with a focus on its complex socio-spatial process comprised of expectations and experiences. As found worldwide, such processes are historically, culturally and socially dependent (Collins-Kreiner, 2009).

## OBJECTIVES

In the dichotomy between pilgrimage and tourism based on the sacrificial parameters, pilgrim tourists stand mid-way possessing half pilgrim and half tourist behavioural character (Rinschede, 1992). A pure pilgrim is ready to sacrifice all the earthly comforts and a tourist on contrary may not have any sacrificing commitment and they respectively constitute the two extreme ends of a continuum (Palmer, et al. 2012). As destination image is one of the determinants of visitors' behaviour, Kailash-Manasarover Yatra (pilgrimage journey) of today is nothing but the pilgrimage



tourism phenomena which may be defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions on a destination (Crompton, 1979). The study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- a. To analyse the destination image of Kailash-Manasarover that draws the pilgrim tourists of different religious faith.
- b. To evaluate the status of access routes to Kailash-Manasarover availed by the Indian pilgrim tourists.

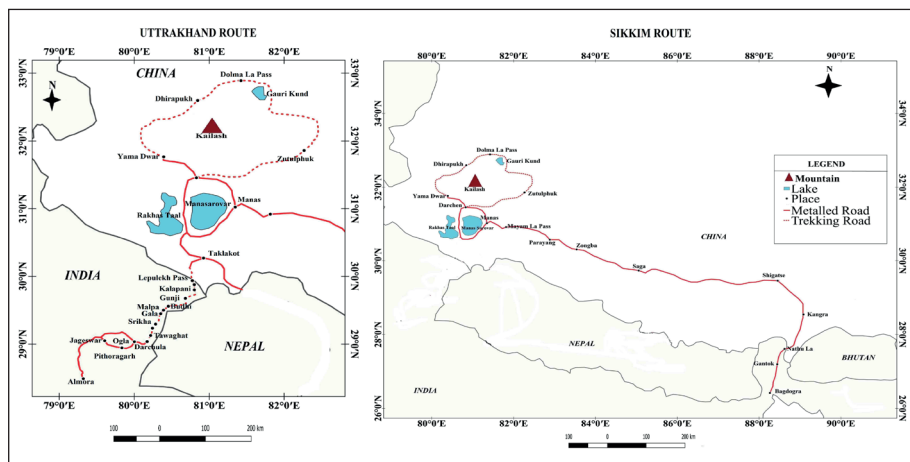
## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Most of the researches on Kailash Manasarover are either philosophical or merely the religious interpretation of history. A geographical study is therefore something which has different focus emphasizing on the intercourse between history and religious culture concerning specific space from the perspective of man-nature dynamism. Thus the anthropological aspects reflected in the study co-exist with an attempt to take adequate account of the regional geography of pilgrimage. Methodologically it recasts pilgrimage with the positivistic approach beyond the fold of historicism. For existential appreciation of the data in the context of religious experience, the travel blogs written by the pilgrim tourists who made Kailash Manasarover journey during the last five years have been consulted. Google search engine is applied to analyse the service quality available for pilgrims during the road journey from Indian territory. Face book and Twitter comments have been utilized to compare the attraction, accommodation and accessibility status of the Uttarakhand and the Sikkim route for Kailash-Manasarover apart from field interviewing conducted at Almora and Gangtok in Uttarakhand and Sikkim respectively. Questionnaires have been mailed further on request of 47 pilgrim tourists who trekked the route. For the subjective assessment of destination image, the focus group method (Dezsi, et al. 2014) has been used. Intentionally only the trekkers were incorporated in such survey with equal importance on Uttarakhand route and Sikkim route for the purpose of comparative analysis. Who opted for helicopter service are excluded considering them as pseudo pilgrims since sacrificial scale is the determinant of pilgrim character and pilgrim tourists are those who make a balance between sacrificial attitude and desire for consumption during travel.

As there is no one standard method available for analysing image, individual methodical approaches and procedures (Matlovičová and Kormaníková, 2014) have been applied. The sacred journey of Hindu pilgrims initiates from two base stations in Indian territory: Almora of Uttarakhand and Nathu La of Sikkim. Since adverse climatic situation prevails at Nathu La, it was found convenient to take interview of the pilgrim tourists at Gangtok, the capital city of Sikkim, where they have been sheltered after completion of their return journey. The researchers have adopted software based qualitative multi attribute model (Taskova, et al. 2007) for



analyzing their feedbacks in the context of attraction, accommodation and accessibility status of these two routes. DEXi is a capable software for such qualitative multi-criteria decision modeling and support (Bohanec and Rajkovic, 1990) facilitated by expert system and machine learning (Rozmanet al, 2009) contributing to the development of attribute trees. An evaluation and analysis of options registered in Likert scale has been adopted contributing to the generation of graphical outputs for Utrakkhand route and Sikkim route that approaches to Mount Kailash from different directions.



**Figure 2**

Utrakkhand Route and Sikkim Route for Manasarover Pilgrimage

Source: Prepared by the Authors, 2020

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The spirit of a place lies in its landscape (Relph, 1976) from which its destination image could be categorized as permanent (Lane, 2001). Kailash is conceived as the dwelling place of Hindu God Shiva as described in Mahanivanatantra (a 13<sup>th</sup> century treatise). There are two glacial lakes among which Hindu pilgrims cognize Manasarover as sacred and Rakhasi (literally means demon's lake, also called Ravanasarover after the name of demon king Ravana) as profane. The name 'Manas' (meaning mind in Sanskrit language) has its origin in the myth that the lake (called sarover in Sanskrit) has been created from the mind of Lord Brahma, one of the supreme Hindu trinity. The lake is also considered as the abode of celestial spirits and the water of it is symbolic of nectar. For Hindu pilgrims, it is the paradise land of Lord Brahma and by circumambulation of the lake, they could earn the merit to get rid of all the evil deeds performed in a mundane life. According to Hindu philosophy, one action is instrumental in bringing reaction and if sin is committed, prosecution



is inevitably awaiting in due course. Circumambulation, according to Hindu belief is instrumental to destroy the sins, which motivates the Hindus for a pilgrimage overcoming all the hardships to a contested site, characterized by conflict over its access and usage (Digance, 2003).

The Kailash Manasarover is contested because of the claim of Jains, Buddhists and Bons apart from the Hindus. According to Jain scriptures, it is place of *Nirvana* (salvation) of the first preacher of Jainism named Adinath Rashbhanatha, popularly known as Rasbha. It is noteworthy to mention that among the 24 preachers of Jainism called *Tirthankara*, the first 22 were imaginative non-historical figures. Jains of India believe that Rasbha went to Tibetan Kailash with ten thousand monks, which seems to be practically impossible viewing the nature of physiography and climate of Tibetan Kailash. Similarly a Buddhist belief exists that Buddha flew magically to the mountain by air route in 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (when there was no aircraft) along with five hundred monks in search of an image of future Buddha from Magadha (ancient Bihar of India). The Mandala peak (called 'Mt. Buddha Throne') nearby is revered for the symbolic presence of the impression believed as the left foot print of the Master, engraved at the site where he magically landed from sky. After recovery of the aforesaid image, it was given in the custody of indigenous serpent king, who supposed to be resided inside the mountain. With such belief, the mountain is considered sacred by the Buddhists worldwide.

For the Bonpos, the mountain is sacred since it accommodates 360 deities of them connected with 360 days of lunar cycle in a palace protected by a red bird, a turquoise, a tortoise and a Chinese tiger in all four directions. Further in Bonpo view, the universe is covered by atmosphere like a tent and Mount Tise is supporting this tent lying at the middle (Loseries-Leick, 1998). It is noteworthy to mention that in Indian tradition, there is similar concept of such mountain called Mount Meru from where four major rivers namely Indus (northward), Karnali (southward), Brahmaputra (east) and Sutlej (west) descends (Ali, 1966). Tibetan traditions describe the association of supernatural elements like Naga, Garuda, Raksha and Yakhas as integral part of Mount Meru (Beer, 2003), which is conceived as the axis mundi. The term axis mundi is defined as a cosmic axis through which prayer of devotees from earth directly ascends to the heaven and blessing from heaven descends to the devotees (Eliade, 1969). For all the traditions, Mount Kailash is thus serving as a pole connecting between supernatural and natural world. It has been accessed from different base stations situated in India, Nepal and China. The following routes are noteworthy:

- i. Road from Lhasa, the ancient capital of Tibet now under the control of China.
- ii. From Gangtok (capital city of Indian state Sikkim for which the route is popularly called Sikkim route) through Nathula pass.
- iii. From Kathmandu (Nepal) via Kerung.





- IV. From Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal via Nepalganj (at the India-Nepal border) in order to cater Indian pilgrims mostly.
- V. From Almora (in Uttarakhand state of India), called Uttarkhand route.

Sikkim routes is among the first three routes which follow the motorable China National Highway 219, that penetrates through a number of high altitude passes. The route from Nepalganj (Nepal) and Almora (Uttarakhand) are historical pilgrimage routes which reaches the destination via Taklakot (the name given to Burang town, the administrative centre of Burang Country of Tibet). It is a popular place for acclimatization for them who reach the place by air route. They used to stay at least for a day and there develops even star hotels to cater them. All categories of hotels are available because the trekkers of Uttarakhand routes also reach this town and take rest after seven days of their journey (Table 1). To reduce the hardship of these pilgrims, the attempt of India government to construct a motorable road becomes a matter of recent border dispute between Nepal and India. The road building is

**Table 1** Uttarakhand Route: A bird's eye view.

Day	Segment	Distance and Time	Attraction	Remarks
1	Almora (1610m) to Darchula (930m) via Pithoragarh	210 km. 7 hours by Car	Pithoragrah Fort, Mountain and Lake view, Narayan Ashram and Temple	Transportation for trekking initiated from Darchula
2	Darchula (930m) to Gala (1230m)	19 km. 5 hours by trek	Waterfall and mountain View	Easy trek
3	Gala (1230m) to Budhi (2740m)	18 km. 6 hour trek	Waterfalls and mountain View	Moderate trek; Landslide prone area.
4	Budhi (2740m) to Gunji (4940m)	17 km. 7 hours trek	Temple, waterfall, snow clad mountain View	Moderate to difficult trek.
5	Gunji (4940m) to Kalapani (4823m)	19 km. 6 hours trek	Source point of Kali River, temple, historical villages and medicinal plant	Moderate to easy trek through a landslide prone area.
6	Kalapani (4823m) to Nabhidang (5035m)	5 km. 4 hours trek	Om Mountain, Waterfall, sunrise view of snow clad mountain	Difficult trek due to high altitude. The newly built road by BRO (Border Road Organization) of India approaching to Lepulekh pass on which border dispute between Nepal and India arises.
7	Nabhidang (5035m) to Taklakot (3975m) via Lepulekh Pass	10 km. trek and 120 km by bus.	Snow covered Lepulekh Pass.	Difficult trek of 2 km.

Source: *Prepared by the Authors*





started from the tri-junction of Indo-Nepal-China border by the effort of Indian army. The road from Navidang to Kalapani is already in operation. With the extension of this road up to Gala in future is planned to facilitate a comfortable journey as the alternative of a very difficult trek.

Pilgrimage tourism service quality of this route has been compared with the Sikkim route from Nathula with application of DEXi software. The relative importance of attributes has been expressed by weightages, which are estimated from the rules maintained by DEXi using a linear regression method (Bohanec et al. 2013). The perception evaluation results on journeys in two routes namely Almora to Taklakot and Nathula pass to Manasarover have been shown in Fig-3 as determined by DEXi from the input data and application of its inherent decision rules.

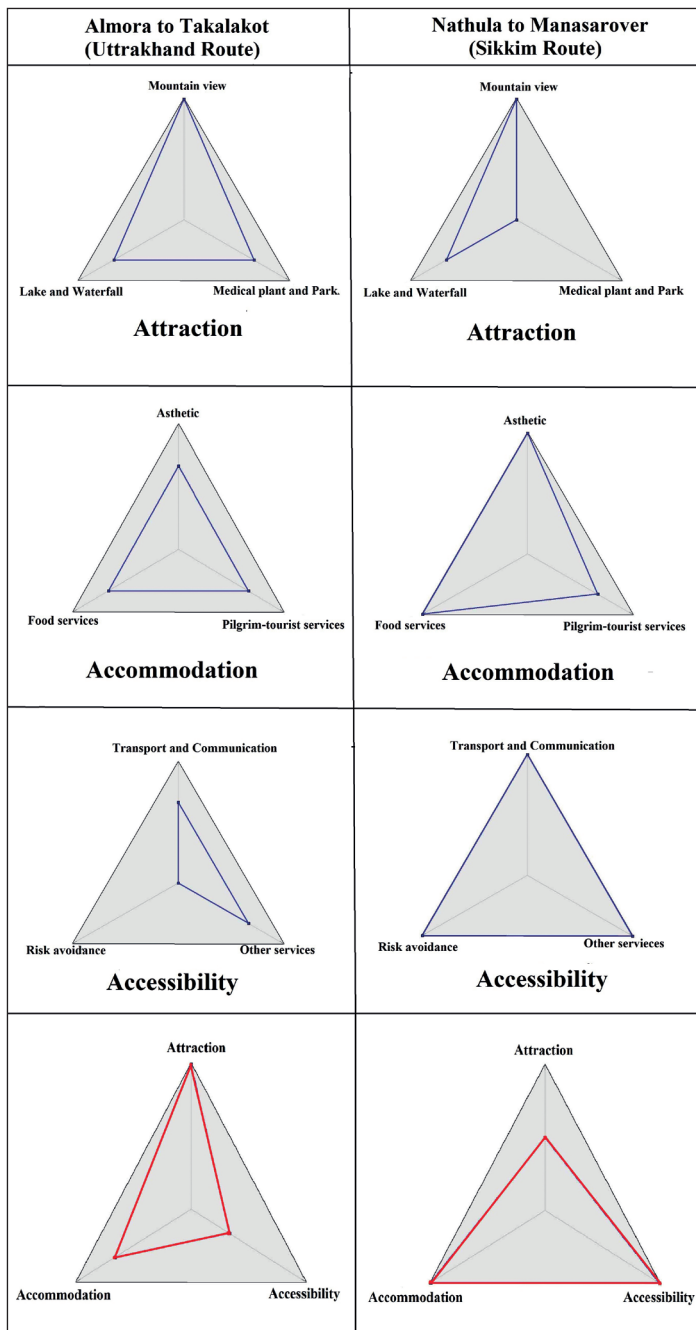
Evaluation results		
Attribute	Almora to Taklakot	Nathula pass to Manas Sarovar
<b>Pilgrimage-Tourism Service Quality</b>	Satisfied	Satisfied
<b>Attraction</b>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	Good
<b>Physical</b>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	Satisfied
Mountain View	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>
Lake and Waterfall	Satisfied	Satisfied
Medical Plants and Parks	Satisfied	<b>Unsatisfied</b>
<b>Cultural</b>	Satisfied	Satisfied
Religious Background	Good	Good
Cultural Programme	Good	Sometimes
<b>Accomodation</b>	Good	<i>Very Good</i>
Asthetic	Good	<i>Satisfied</i>
Food Service	Healthy	<i>Very Healthy</i>
Pilgrim-Tourist Service	Satisfied	Satisfied
<b>Accessibility</b>	Need Improve	<i>Satisfied</i>
Transport and Communication	Good	<i>Satisfied</i>
Risk Avoidance	<b>High</b>	<b>Abscent</b>
Other Service	Satisfied	<i>Very Satisfied</i>

**Figure 3**

Evaluation results of Pilgrimage Tourism service quality using 5.04 software

Source: Prepared by the Authors, 2020.

Fig-4 represents the result graphically in which 100% satisfaction constitutes the end points, i.e. represented as "very satisfied". It is observed that visitors are "very satisfied" for Almora to Taklakot trek route whereas the attraction status of motorable road from Nathula pass to Manasarover is comparatively less as expressed with the term "satisfied". In order to improve the attraction status, revitalization of ethnographic museums of monasteries on the way is possible. Indoor microclimate monitoring for long term protection of exhibits (Radvan, et al. 2017) following the Romanian model applied for historic wooden church (Onet, et al. 2020) could be adopted as a sustainable strategy in this context. Conserving and preserving cultural heritage is an interdisciplinary field, the success of which



**Figure 4**

Comparative route status predicted by DEXi 5.04 software  
Source: Prepared by the Authors, 2020



depends on the level of collaboration between restorers, archaeologists, art historians, museum curators and professional conservators (Indrie, et al. 2019).

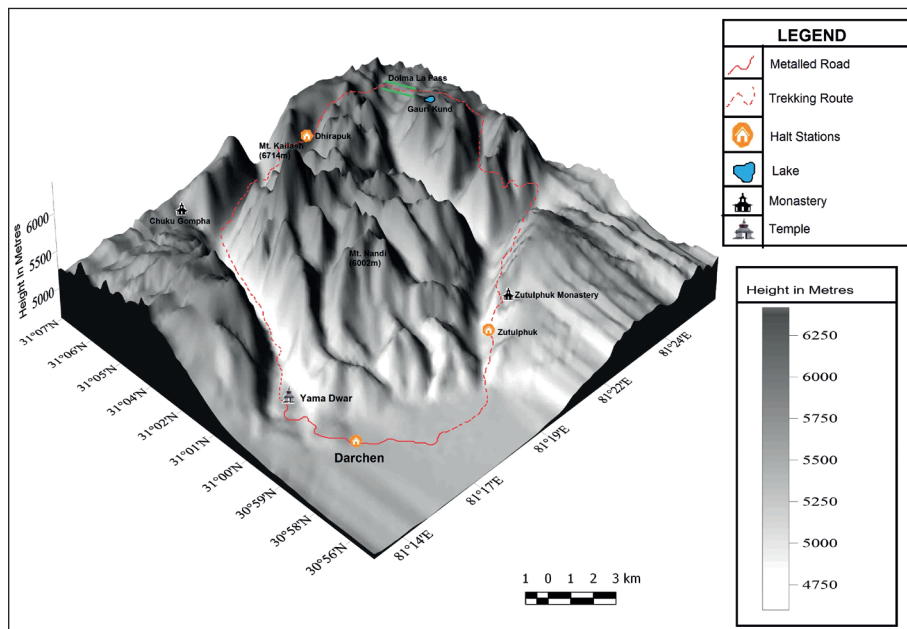
Accommodation facilities of pilgrim tourists available on the Almora to Taklakot road are responded as “good” whereas from Nathula pass to Manasarover journey, it obtains a better feedback (i.e. “very good”) in hierarchical arrangement. The analysis reveals that the status of accessibility must be improved for the route from Almora to Taklakot. Tourists are pleased on the accessibility status from Nathula pass to Manasarover because they enjoy the advantage of Chinese National Highway. As and when the motorable road in Uttrakhand route will start serving the pilgrim tourists, the pilgrimage tourism business of China flourished due to advantage provided by China National Highway 219 will be decayed and it may be one of the reasons for which China is opposing the India’s road construction project.

On the way to Kailash via Nathu La pass, Shigatse (3858m) is famous for viewing snow peaks including Mount Everest. The historical Sakya Monastery is the additional cultural attraction of this place for the visitors. Saga (3700m) is the next halt in this route which is a 495 km drive by car. Saga (3700m) to Manasarover (4800m) is about 8 hours of drive (distance: 480 km.) via Zhongba (4742m) which is a halt point for the availability of various categories of hotels. From Zhongba, Manasarover is reached through Parayang and Mayum La Pass (5200m), which separates the headwaters of Brahmaputra and Indus in Tibet. After completion of rituals at Manasarover, pilgrim tourists are taken to Darchen via Rakhastal for circumambulation called Kailash *Parikrama* (Table-2 and Fig-5).

**Table 2:** Circumambulation Route availed by the pilgrim tourists.

Day	From	To	Distance	Activities of Pilgrims
1	Darchen (4700m)	Dhirapuk (4850m)	Darchen to Yama Dwar- 8 km by car. Yama Dwar to Dirapuk -12 km by trek	The main attraction of this trek segment are: a. A shrine named Yama Dwar. b. Chuku Gompha. c. Charan Sparsh Site.
2	Dhirapuk (4850m)	Zutulpuk (4790m)	22 km. (9 hours trek).	The main attractions are Gaurikund (waterbody) and Dolma pass (5630m), a sacred place of Buddhist pilgrims. Northern and eastern portion of the Mount Kailash are viewed from here.
3	Zutulpuk (4790m)	Darchen (4700m)	8 km. (2 hours trek)	The main attraction is Zutulpuk Monastery. Eastern and Southern portion of Mount Kailash are viewed from here.

Source: Prepared by the Authors, 2020



**Figure 5** Mount Kailash Parikrama trek route

Source: Prepared by the Authors, 2020

## CONCLUSIONS

A collective spiritual carnival is noticed in Kailash circumambulation on account of its varying destination image among the pilgrims of diversified ethnicities. It is noteworthy to mention that the region itself is the habitat of the ethnic group who is influenced by Chinese food, art and printing but inspired from various literary and cultural elements from India since time immemorial (Jackson and Cabezon, 1996). Tibetan script was developed from Indian *Devnagari* (ancient Indian script) by the efforts of the Tibetan students who were sent to the ancient Indian Buddhist Universities for learning and translating the treatises. Kalachakra Tantra is another example of cultural tie that has been developed in Tibet assimilating the Indian ideas of Tantric Buddhism with pagan culture of the Tibetan Bonpos known for the black magic, sorcery and witchcraft. The Bons believe that Tonpo Shenrab, the founder of their shamanistic religion (worshipped in Tibetan monasteries as equivalent to Sakyamuni of Buddhism) descended from heaven via Yangdrung Gutse, i.e. the Mount Kailash. They believe that Tanpo Shenrab used to roam the territory known as Shangshung (Gibbons and Pritchard-Jones, 2006), riding on the legendary Khyung bird (identical with the great Garuda bird of Indian belief), whose silver castle is situated less than 100 km south west of Kailash. As he mediated below the Mount Kailash, according to their belief, the mountain was under their religious



possession. Such metaphors on spiritual landscape shape the cultural image of the place encouraging pluralism and coexistence.

Milarepa, a Buddhist monk compelled the Bonpos to make a retreat to the Mountain Bon Re near Lake Manasarover. This is the evidence that co-existence was once challenged by conflict as a social process. According to a popular legend, a competition between Milarepa (1052-1135 A.D.) and Noro Bonchug, a Bon Shaman was held to reach the summit of Kailash. Though the Shaman was a reputed black magician, Milarepa reached the summit before him miraculously riding on the first rays of the sun and touched the summit. The eight step marks on the southern slope of mountain is believed to be gorged out as the surprised Shaman discovering his competitor at the top dropped his drum, which trembled down the mountain registering eight bounces (Gibbons and Pritchard-Jones, 2006). For these distinctive eight steps, the Jains refer this mountain as Astapada (*Asta* means eight and *Pada* refers to step marks). Thus the mountain geomorphology found explanation in folklore, which is another innovative aspect in shaping the destination image.

Spiritual magnetism in the destination image of Mount Kailash for the pilgrim tourists however lies in its association with Shiva and Buddha, the two dominant and spiritual symbols of the Himalayan region (Pandit, 2017). Mount Kailash as a unique geomorphosite has strengthened the Hindu claim of its association with Lord Shiva, who is conceived as the cosmic male. Hindu spiritual belief stresses on the union between cosmic male and cosmic female and Manasarover is perceived as the all-powerful female entity. The geomorphology of Mount Kailash resembles the *Lingam*, the male genital organ (worshipped as the symbol of Lord Shiva), while the glacial lake Manasarover symbolizes *Yoni*, the female organ. The cult fertility concept thus contributes in cognition of destination image by providing a spiritual explanation of regional geomorphologies. The folklores associated with the specific geomorphosites sustain the pluralism representing the destination environment as the melting pot of different Asian religious cultures. Motivated by their own spiritual narratives hidden in destination image, devotees from diverse background consider Kailash morphologically as the pivot of earth, a journey to which leads a pious soul to achieve the goal of salvation.

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