NATURAL SCENERY AS A UNIQUE TOURISM PRODUCT IN KUMAON HIMALAYAS

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ABSTRACT

The natural scenery of the Himalayas is no more feared as unpredictable and alien, rather today it is much sought after as a 'tourism product' in the trend of recreation and tourism. Though natural scenery has always been regarded as the integral part of nature's entity, but now it has been recognised as a tourism product which is 'sold' to the tourists as a part of the package or exclusively. Natural scenery emerges as a unique product because even after 'used' or appreciated by the people it still remains there. It is a valuable asset to the region where it occurs. Unlike many other resources, there is no need of processing this 'product' where it is instantly utilized or consumed at the source by its resource users. Therefore, scenery is strictly a space-bound commodity which cannot be moved or flown out from its region to the consumers, least it can be reproduced in any virtual sense. So, the expenditure borne by the consumers to reach the scenic locations becomes the price of this 'product' payable to the region where it occurs. Moreover, other necessary things like shelter, food and recreation incur additional cost on the account of the consumer. People value in the natural landscape what they see, feel and reflect upon. Such appreciation is so rewarding that scenery becomes a valuable product in all the segments of travel and tourism. The value of resource in natural scenery is being redefined and recognized in the wake of industrialization of the tourism sector and its aggressive promotion strategy.

The concerns about the condition of Ganges were raised for a long time which has now gained impetus in past few years owing to awareness and support from keen environmentalists, activist, concerned social and religious leaders etc. Furthermore, different studies revealed the deteriorating health of the river which has conceived the necessity to initiate public mobilization to seek support for Save Ganga Movement – against the pollution of Ganges and its tributaries. In this juncture of critical movement to save the ganga and the people affected by the grievous pollution. The professional social worker aptly can play a major role in saving the ganga and the people affected; not only by being the partner of the movement like other stakeholders but by using the professional traits of different technique, principles, values, methods, skills and knowledge to mobilize the affected community and the people at large in the pledge for 'Ganga and our duty'; to make them all the crucial partners. The study emphasizes on the role of the Professional Social Worker as a Civil Society alliance in upscaling the sanitation efforts of the holy river Ganga in fulfilling the major objectives of the movement that are to create mass awareness for an eco-friendly non-violent culture of development for the protection of our life-sustaining natural systems in general and of the sacred Ganga and the Himalayas in particular and to put moral pressure on the government, to take time-bound decisive steps to completely and permanently save the Ganga symbolizing all rivers and water bodies, and the Giriraj Himalayas, symbolizing all mountains forests and wildlife.

Keywords: Natural scenery, Tourism product, Visual resource, Kumaon Himalaya, Soft tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Scenery has lately enrolled itself as a visual resource, 'which charms, thrills or inspires and is an asset to the land in which it is found. But it is a potential asset that becomes 'actual' only when valued by the aesthetic needs and aspirations of people'(Linton, D.L. 1968). People value in the landscape what they feel, see and reflect upon. The natural value of scenery is as such that it gives a feeling of recreating oneself and being born again. But in realistic terms the attraction of wilderness may not be so much for what it is, rather for what it is not- the absence of concrete, chaos, noise and dirt. As a matter of fact, the yearning to reach nature begins from the utter perplexity and complexity of urban life, and in such a situation one feels like taking a refuge in nature, however for sometime. So, either it is the positive feeling towards the natural landscape or a negative feeling towards the cityscapes that increasingly natural scenic destinations are sought by people.In fact, it is the overburden of work, air pollution, congestion and stress, along with the rush for ensuring better standards of life that the dwellers are repulsed from urban scenario, in search of some relief in natural settings of scenic beauty.

Scenic beauty is not a simple phenomenon because it involves a human reaction towards beauty, quality and essence of nature. Conceptually, the matter relates to aesthetics, 'the response to what is seen through recognition of the abstract qualities in objects. They may be pleasant from the beauty in the object or unpleasant from the ugliness in an object'. (Laurie, I.C. 1970). Such pleasantness comes from the order in nature and the man's ability to create a visual order so as to stimulate and satisfy pleasurable feelings and emotions. It is much necessary for the scenery to be stimulating enough to evoke the positive feelings in the observer with

the help of its physical features such as mass, shape, variety, contrast, outline, texture, pattern, colour and rhythm. Thus, it is conceded that scenery in landscape produces the similar aesthetic response that of a work of art. It implies that the scenery should possess certain aesthetic attributes. Such aesthetic considerations can be assumed as:

The uniformity of landscape infuses harmony in the scenic compositions; the landscape compositions contain various designs in nature with lines, form and colour; the richness in quality and quantity further enhances the aesthetic value of the scenery; the spontaneity of the natural landscape is broken by the detractors like broken topography, bare slopes, mass wasting etc. and they bring negative effect to the landscape; incidence and quality of panoramic view lends extra value to the scenery by greater exposure of surrounding areas; dominance and quality of a particular feature specifies a particular scene overruling other visually less important features; sharp contrast of colours and forms may create a dramatic effect in the scenery and such contrasts may look visually attractive; outlines of water bodies define it visually which stimulates the aesthetic feelings in an individual; condition of any cultural and manmade feature adds character to the scenery; the environmental quality of water and air enhance the worth of a scenery.

The conceptual base of the work combines the visual elements of landscape and the aesthetic appeal in the respondents. As Fines statesthat the value of a scenery composition is certainly greater than the aggregate value of its component parts, therefore it is highly desirable to present the natural scenery in its totality, composed as a landscape(Fines 1968) In this 'Panel approach' photographs are used as the most convenient surrogates which can represent the visual content of a landscape. Though the use of photographs has

been criticised as a poor substitute of real world situations, but according to Lowenthal, 'many studies rely heavily on simulated environments or environmental surrogates, notably photographs, because they can be used with greater economy, speed and control than the real world situations' (Lowenthal 1972). Similarly, Shafer and Brush, opine that 'it seems possible to quantify scenic beauty in photographs' (Shafer and Brush, 1977). Thus. Photographs are confirmed as a good proxy for directly viewed scenes in assessing scenic beauty.

The preference ratings in this work are based on photos presented in a photoquestionnaire. Every effort was made to take photographs that best represent the various types of landscapes in the selected region of Kumaon Himalayas. This implies that all the areas are not photographed exhaustively, rather all the types of scenic compositions are captured. The photographs which are presented to the respondents for their preferential rankings contained various types of scenic compositions. Such compositions are termed as 'landscape types' as they imply natural scenery typically found in them. Each landscape has its own particular character and qualities, and viewer tend to evaluate landscapes according to their perceived merits' (Muir, R.1999).

The principal elements of scenery in the concerned region of the Kumaon Himalayas are mountains/valleys, water body, forest, constructed features and others like ethnic speciality, traditional housing, seasonal flowering etc. The landscape types associated with the principal elements are as follow:

1) Uniform Landscape: Vegetation

Vegetation in its natural occurrence manifests here as forests. Uniformity in their growth gives a distinct look. The visual charms of such vegetation growth is enhanced with its uniformity and unity. Therefore, they are represented by the uniform landscape type.

2) Panoramic Landscape: Mountain/Valleys

Panoramic type of landscape is composed of a wide angle view of surrounding from a higher point of elevation, in which horizon makes the outer limit of visual extent. The dominant line quality is of horizontality. Such panoramic view typically captures the mountain ranges and valleys in the selected hill region.

3) Focal Landscape: Water

In the highly mountainous terrain like Kumaon Himalayas, the water features are much limited in visual extent, and they can be best viewed by focussing upon them. Because of this focal nature of such water bodies such as, waterfall, lake, stream, river, natural spring etc., they are represented in focal landscapes.

4) Vivid Landscape: Inhabitants, Habitation, Seasonal flowerings

The vividness of this type of landscape may include a variety of scenic attributes. Mostly, they have a degree of changeability with time and season. That is reflected in change of colour and tone, and their visual expressions gets accentuated.

5) Feature Landscape: Constructed structures

They are not natural features but appear to be a counterpart of natural scenery in their occurrence. Such features are easy to identify as forts, temples, caves or some special geological formation etc. They may be related to a particular period, style, pattern, and design.

In the evaluative procedure of this work, the preferential responses are taken from professional like landscape architects, artists, painters, photographers, sculptors, film makers, designers, environmentalists, geographers etc. who are trained to deal with art and aesthetics. Though these individuals may comprehend 'landscape' in different connotations but the fact remains that their professional training help them in evaluating landscapes in diverse manner. The cross-section of

respondents made it a participatory exercise through 'panel approach' by assigning values on qualitative basis. Because of their competence to deal with aesthetics they make explicit value judgements rather than simply assessing them in the terms of liking or disliking. This 'panel approach' leaves out the potential users or tourists at the task of inventorying the natural scenery as a tourism product.

The respondents were asked to rank five landscape types in the order of preference from I to 5 in ascending order. There were 108 respondents who judged the landscapes through surrogates of photographs, and also supplemented with a brief description of each. The total summation of the preferential values for all the landscapes are as follow (Table-1)

Table-1
Summation of Preferential Values for Landscape types

S.no.	Landscape type	Preferential values
1.	Uniform landscape	256
2.	Panoramic landscape	420
3.	Focal landscape	422
4.	Vivid landscape	252
5.	Feature landscape	276
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From the preferential values rendered by the respondents, the overall trend of Group preference emerges as (Table-2)

Table-2

The Group Preference

S.no.	Landscape Type	Preferential vales	Rank
1.	Focal landscape	422	I
2.	Panoramic landscape	420	II
3.	Feature landscape	276	III
4.	Uniform landscape	256	IV
5.	Vivid landscape	252	V

It is quite apparent from the above table that the Focal landscape type scores highest preference followed by Panoramic, Feature, Uniform and Vivid landscape types. A detailed analysis of the distribution of preferential values is done (Table-3)

Table-3

The Distribution of Preferential Values

	Landscape	Total					
Rank	type	Preference					
		Value					
			ı	11	Ш	IV	V
			Preference	Preference	Preference	Preference	Preference
1	Focal	422	38	45	12	9	4
	landscape						
Ш	Panoramic	420	53	24	13	9	9
	landscape						
Ш	Feature	276	11	17	26	26	27
	landscape						
IV	Uniform	256	4	12	32	28	20
	Landscape						
V	Vivid	252	11	10	19	24	32
	landscape						

The detailed analysis of the distribution of preferential values presents some important facts:

- 1. The Focal landscape has lesser I preferences with 38, in comparison to the panoramic landscape but maintains significantly high II preferences with 45, which contributed to its overall highest preference rank. Moreover, it has the lowest V preference with 4, in comparison to all other landscape types. Although, the Panoramic landscape seems to be highly preferred with 53 of I preferences attributed to this but, it has much less II preferences with 24, and a high V preference with 9, which has finally positioned it at second position in preference rank.
- 2. The status of the Feature landscape shows that it is not highly preferred by most of the observers but there is a remarkable uniformity in the III, IV and V preferences, with 26, 26 and 27 attributed to it respectively. Owing to this it secures the third position in preference.
- 3. In the case of Uniform landscape, majority of the judges/respondents have rated it neither high nor low. The III preference is highest with 32 in this case. It also shows that it accounts for the minimum I preference with 4 only, which has brought it down in the scale of preference.

4. The Vivid landscape has the least preferred status because of its highest number of V

preference with 32 and also a high IV preference with 24.

Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance W

$$W = \frac{\sum_{i=0}^{n} (\overline{R}i - \overline{R})^{2}}{N(N^{2}-1)/12}$$

k= number of set of rankings, e.g. the number of judges (108 professionals)

N= number of objects being ranked (5 landscape types)

Ri= average of the ranks assigned to the ith object

R= the average (grand mean) of the ranks assigned to objects

N $(N^2-1)/12$ = maximum possible sum of the standard deviations i.e. the numerator which would occur if there were perfect agreement among the k rankings.

Test Result:

W = 0.263

Significant at P<0.1 level

As the value-judgements are subjective therefore it is essential to present a summation of individual responses and check the degree of concordance among them. It is necessary to understand such consensus as a product of group dynamics verified by some statistical method to not only to validate the results but also to strengthen the assumed expertise of the group concerned. In such consensus approach the subjectivity is accepted as a modus operandi, but adopts the objectivity to control it. For testing this statistically, the Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance W is used upon the preferential study. This technique is an important nonparametric statistical measure, particularly useful in case of inter-judge reliability (Siegal, S.1988).

In the present work, the significance of concordance W is P<.01, which means that the 108 observers/judges are applying essentially the same standard in ranking the types of landscapes. However, a high significant value of W does not mean that the observed ranking is correct. In fact, they may all be incorrect with respect to some

external criterion. It can be concluded with considerable confidence that the agreement among the 108 judges/respondents is higher than it would be by chance had their rankings been random or independent. There seems to be good consensus among members about the evaluation of various landscapes.

Consensus appraisals, as one adopted in this study, are the product of group dynamics where subjectivity is accepted as the modus operandi. In order to control the subjectivity there may be other options, i) Clark (1970) proposed that 'two teams of professionals should work independently. Both teams would include geographers, geologists, planners, architects, engineers, artists etc., and would evaluate the same landscapes, the ranking of the two teams to be averaged. ii) or to make the assessment more viable, it might be possible to interpose a third "wild" team, consisting of shopkeepers, scientists, factory workers etc.' iii) There is a common feeling that the professional consensus may well diverge from that of the public.

But, this should be empirically verified by taking into account the general consensus, essentially within the framework of the same norms. The standard variance between the two can be used to indicate the relation between the agreement of the two.

The objectivity in the study of scenic resources need to be expanded with the use of better techniques of data collection, analysis and application. The imageries may provide information about the physical elements of the landscape, but nevertheless, they have to be necessarily viewed and assessed from the ground level in order to evaluate the scenic potentiality. The users preferences and natives opinions can be considered while deciding the priorities of developing these potential scenic resources. It is desirable to take the combination of various types of research techniques like observational, descriptive, evaluative, perceptional and analytical, to obtain the best results.

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Preference appeared to be strongly affected by the natural contents of the scenery, in particular the landscape with water element and wide panorama are high in preference, whereas scenery showing human-induced factors are not so high in preference whether they are constructional/institutional features, traditional housings or ethnic speciality. The implication of overall preference are, as follow-

FOCAL LANDSCAPE

The focal landscape type emerges as the most preferred one, and the preference appears to be strongly affected by the water element in it. The natural water features like waterfall, lake, river etc. hold maximum visual appeal to become the focal point of a landscape. Perception of water agrees with the mood of life, from a dynamic mountainous stream to placid lake. Water bodies have an edge effect which significantly enhances the visual appeal by defining the forms of such features. The visual quality reflects in the colour and transparency of

water body, which is found to be very high in these landscapes.

Panoramic landscape

The panoramic landscape follows closely after the Focal landscape in the preferential order. This landscape characterises snowbound peaks and open valleys. There is a natural succession of peaks as 'prospects' and valleys as 'refuge' complement each other in producing the landscape which is preferred by many (Appleton J. 1975). Mostly respondents prefer a panoramic landscape because it poses no restriction in the visual field. In other words, it gives greater freedom sense of openness and freedom which upholds the prime quality of nature. The Himalayan peaks featured in the panoramic view typically show the grandeur of the Himalayas.

Feature landscape

The feature landscape characterise those features which are not natural in their formation, but in their style and form maintain a natural composure. They blend well with the natural setting, wherein they are found. Their preference is attributed to the distinction in their visual character. In a visual experience such a feature can be easily isolated and experienced within it too. People who prefer to retreat in nature also want something more tangible and concrete to stir their aspirations, which may be linked to their cultural alliances or religious sentiments.

Uniform landscape

In such landscapes the uniformity is marked by the continuity of vegetation. Vegetation plays a significant role in establishing the mood of a landscape. Its distribution and types are governed by a different set of natural factors but, unanimously evoke an aesthetic appeal. 'People prefer forests because they feel they can take a retreat in its natural environment and find a shelter among the trees and in the shadows of their foliage' (Peron, E., A.T., et al. 1998). However, it is foundthat the Uniform landscape type constituting forest and wilderness does not scale high in order of

preference, probably due to limitations of visual penetration and less infrastructural facilities associated with it.

Vivid landscape

In the overall preferences, the rating of vivid landscape stands close to Uniform landscape type. Here, vividness relatesto the variables like inhabitants/ethnic group/, habitation/traditional housing, other cultural occurrences like cultural fairs and seasonal blossoms or falls etc. Since this landscape type is not preferred much, it shows that respondents are more inclined for natural features. Moreover, it is evident that the traditional housing, natives have somehow lost their typicality and original style gradually. Vividness implies more variety and diversity in its visual character, and with low preference attributed to such landscapes means that observers prefer any landscape type with a distinct character of its own than the mixed and varied visual character.

The potential scenic resources are identified in the Kumaon region through a methodology that combined field observation/data collection of visual attributes, evaluation through a Panel approach and analysis of scenic variables. The potential scenic resources are identified within the twenty-one selected scenic areas in the concerned regions though without determining any spatial extents of such areas. The analysis of potentiality of scenic resources is concluded as:

1. In all the selected areas of potential scenic resources, the Pithoragarh district has the

largest number of potential scenic areas. In fact, the first three areas of potential scenic worth namely, Munsyari, Narayan Ashram and Lohaghat, come from this district only.

- 2. The most potential scenic areas in the respective districts are, Munsyari area (10.6) in Pithoragarh district, Lohaghat area (9.2) in Champawat district, Kasardevi area (8.5) in Almora district and Sat tal area (9.0) in Nainital district. There is no such potential scenic area is found in Bageshwar district. Udham Singh Nagar district is not taken into consideration for this study.
- There are two such potentially scenic areas where a short trek is required from the road head. They are Pinath (near source of Kosi) about 5 km from MES Kausani and Dhaulachhina about 2 km from metalled road.
- 4. The final assessment of the selected areas is in terms of scenic potential therefore, some of the areas like Ramgarh and Mukteshwar which are widely visited by tourists in the recent years, are not positioned high in the order of potentiality.

The analysis of potential scenic resources in terms of resource value has resulted into an inventory of scenic resources in the Kumaon region. The final status of potentiality of scenic resources under all the delineated areas is given in table below in descending order (Table 12)

Table 12

THE STATUS OF POTENTIAL SCEINC RESOURCE AREAS IN KUMAON

Name of the Area	District	Potential Scenic Value
1.Munsyari area	Pithoragarh	10.6
2. Narayan Ashram area	Pithoragarh	10.0
3. Lohaghat area	Champawat	9.2
4.Kasardevi area	Almora	9.0
5.Chandag area	Pithoragarh	9.0
6.Sat tal area	Nainital	9.0
7.Didihat area	Pithoragarh	8.2
8. Kilberry area	Nainital	8.0
9. Mukteshwar area	Almora	7.7
10.Pinath (Kausani) area	Almora	7.5
11.Berinag area	Pithoragarh	7.5
12.Gangolihat area	Pithoragarh	7.5
13.Champawat area	Champawat	7.2
14. Askote area	Pithoragarh	7.2
15. Ramgarh area	Almora	7.0
16. Manila area	Nainital	7.0
17. Devidhura area	Champawat	6.7
18. Maheshkhan area	Nainital	6.5
19. Dhauladevi area	Pithoragarh	6.5
20. Dhaulchhina area	Pithoragarh	6.2
21.Dwarahat area	Almora	6.2

Some of the most significant conclusions drawn from the study can be summarised as:

 The visual attribute of a panorama, either Himalayan panorama or valley panorama, has contributed most significantly to the scenic worth of the Kumaon region. Because such panorama with high scenic values are associated, by and large, with all the selected areas except a few areas like forest interiors of Maheshkhan, Sat tal and Kilberry.

In such panoramas the water features like lake, waterfall or river carry higher scenic values. Wherever a panorama of Himalayan snowclad peaks or valley is combined with any visual attribute of water feature, the scenic potentiality emerges significantly high e.g., Munsyari-Madkote area (scenic value 10.6) with the Himalayan view of Panchchuli peaks and scenic river course of Goriganga through Madkote, Lohaghat area (scenic value 9.2) with the Himalayan panorama from Mayawati ridge and the Lohawati river through Lohaghat valley.

- 2. The scenic resources like old temples and local shrines are mostly found to be located on top of the mountains, by this virtue such locales very often possess the scenic worth of a panoramic view as well, e.g. Pinath, Serakote, Chandag. In Kumaon the temples and shrines are also found combined with the scenic resources of high quality deodars. Such conifer groves are attributed to beauty, sanctity and myth-mix. The well-known temples set amidst such conifers are Mahakali temple (Gangolihat area), Dhauladevi temple (Dhauladevi area), Devidhura shrine (Devidhura area), Chandag temple (Pithoragarh area).
- 3. There is also a remarkable coincidence found between the scenic areas and the locations of the institutional features like 'ashrams', 'dak bungalows' of colonial time etc. It implies that they were located after carrying a search through the scenic character of the landscape

- with a keen aesthetic sense. In present context, these built-up features in turn, contribute to the aesthetic value of such areas where they are located.
- 4. More visual attributes do not necessarily mean higher scenic potential is any area, because it is the qualitative status of natural scenery not their quantitative occurrence. The perception study shows that the landscape with diversified character of scenery is less preferred than the landscape with a distinct character of its own, e.g. the vivid landscape is preferred least.
- 5. In Kumaon region, the Pithoragarh district contributed the largest potential of scenic resources. The first two areas (Munsyari and Narayan Ashram) of potential scenic resources come from this district only, followed by Nainital and Almora districts respectively. This also implies that the Pithoragarh district is least explored in regard to its visual resources owing to its farthest distance. The Munsyari area is found to have the most potential scenic resources in the Kumaon region. It has to be understood in terms of highest potentiality in visual worth, which has not been actualised so far.
- 6. None of the selected areas under study is located in the snow fields of the Kumaon Himalayas due to serious constraints of accessibility as well as the strategic restrictions in this border area. However, in the Munsyari area the scenic resources are identified very close to the inner line. Similarly, another spectacular area of potential scenic resources is Narayan Ashram which lies on erstwhile route to Kailash-Mansarover pilgrimage, in Dharchula tehsil.
- 7. While scenic beauty is an important resource in its own right, it also derives importance as it contributes to recreational pursuits. The identified potential scenic resources in different areas offer some typical locations

for the recreation of the nature lovers, such as:

- (a) The wilderness areas of Kilberry, Maheshkhan, Chaukori and Sat Tal may be developed as potential campsites.
- (b) Chandag (Pithoragarh Area), Mayawati (Lohaghat Area), Kasardevi (Almora area), Dhauladevi and Pinath (Kausani area) may come up as beautiful ecotourism destinations.
- (c) Khalia Kalamuni, Madkote (Munsyari area) and Mt. Abott (Lohaghat area) may emerge as potential summer retreats.
- (d) PatalBhubneshwar (Gangolihat area), Dunagiri (Dwarahat area) and Devidhura have immense potentiality to be developed as scenic sites of religious sanctity in nature's lap.
- (e) The potential scenic resources in other areas like Mukteshwar, Ramgarh, Manila, Berinag, Champawat, Didihat, and Askote can be, by and large, developed as recreational areas.
- (f) Munsyari area can also be developed as winter sports centre for the Kumaon region.

The identification of the natural scenery is the major task of the resource analysts and managers in tourism system. Such tasks have to be accomplished in order to actualize its worth as a tourism product. In an attempt to orient the development towards the social desirability, employment and services, the vast potential of the visual resources as an exclusive tourism product, need to be realized in this mountainous region. Considering the vulnerable and valuable nature of this product, the development

plans and policies are to be recommended under 'soft tourism'.

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