

International Conference on Solid Waste Management, 5IconSWM 2015

## Tourism induced Challenges in Municipal Solid Waste Management in Hill Towns: Case of Pahalgam

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### Abstract

Municipal Solid Waste Management (MSWM) is one of the crucial urban basic services which influence the public health and environment of a town. While hill towns in India are already facing tremendous pressure due to lack of infrastructure, unfavourable climatic condition, difficult terrain, and public apathy towards waste management, Tourism induced challenges further aggravate the issue. Although in case of hill towns, tourism has a profound impact on the economy of the town, it comes with new challenges in terms of waste generation resulting into negative impacts on the sensitive hill environment. It is in this context, an effort has been made in this paper to examine the current issues and challenges in MSWM practice in Pahalgam, a small hill town located in the state of J&K, commonly known as “Mini Switzerland”, with special reference to impact of tourism on overall MSWM of the town. The methodology adopted includes review of case of SWM in other hill towns in India, and the legal and policy aspects at the national level. Primary survey of households and hotels was conducted by using stratified random sampling technique. Data was collected through structured questionnaire containing key information related to the issues and challenges in MSWM with special focus on tourism. Interview of city officials was conducted to capture institutional perspective.

The study revealed that, in Pahalgam, tourism sector is the major generator of solid waste, Religious-touristic activities during the peak season. The study also finds crucial issues related to lack of capacity of the local body and the issues related to lack availability of plain land, improper location of waste collection infrastructure due to undulated terrain and inadequate collection capacity. The study also finds very strong correlation between unscientific disposal of MSW and degrading surface water quality and increasing occurrence of water borne diseases in the downstream during the peak tourist season.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of 5IconSWM 2015

*Keywords: Hill Towns in India, Tourism, Solid Waste Management, Urban Environment;*

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## 1. Introduction

Municipal Solid Waste Management (MSWM) is one of the crucial urban basic services which influence the public health and environment of a town. As per Municipal Solid Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules of 2000 and the notified draft solid waste management rules of 2015 (including construction and demolition waste), urban local bodies are the responsible authorities for the management and handling of municipal solid waste. However the services offered by most of the urban local bodies in the country are far below the satisfactory level.

While hill towns in India are already facing tremendous pressure due to lack of infrastructure, unfavourable climatic condition, difficult terrain, budget deficit, and public apathy towards waste management, Tourism induced challenges further aggravate the issue (Bashir, 2015). Although in case of hill towns, tourism has a profound impact on the economy of the town; it comes with new challenges in terms of waste generation resulting into negative impacts on the sensitive hill environment. Primary objective of the paper is therefore to examine the current issues and challenges in MSWM practice in Pahalgam, with special reference to the pressure created due to tourism in the town.

## 2. Study Area and the Context

Pahalgam is located in the south Kashmir's Anantnag district at an average altitude of 2019 meters above sea level. It has a population of 9,264 persons spread over municipal area of 5 Sq. Km. The town has a municipal committee. Pahalgam is a world famous hill station and is known as mini Switzerland of India. The town enjoys a sub Mediterranean type of climate with harsh winters and moderate summers. The Lidder is the main natural drainage flowing through the town with perennial flow and rich aquatic species. The land use within the Municipal limits is dominated by the residential use followed by the tourist accommodation facilities like hotels and guest houses.



Map 1. Location of Pahalgam

Tourism is the main function of the town and receives more than 70per cent of the total tourist flow in the valley. Pahalgam also serves as a base camp for Yatra which is a Hindu religious occasion performed every year in the month of July and August. It is evident from different available literature that, the substantial tourist flow including Amarnath yatris, generates lot of solid waste at the base camp site which not only destroys the scenic beauty of the town but also eventually dumped in the River Lidder which is used as source of drinking water in the downstream areas (Bashir, 2015). While the entire country is discussing about National Urban Sanitation Policy

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