

**POTENTIAL OF PARAMETER TRANSFERABILITY
WITHIN A RIVER BASIN TO PREDICT DAILY
STREAMFLOW IN UNGAUGED CATCHMENTS;
CASE STUDY FOR UPPER NILWALA RIVER BASIN**

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Water Resources Engineering and Management

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Sri Lanka

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Science in Water Resources Engineering and Management

Supervised by

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July 2020

DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work and this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a Degree or Diploma in any other University or Institute of higher learning and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgment is made in text.

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Date

The above candidate has carried out research for the Masters thesis under my supervision.

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Professor N.T.S.Wijesekera

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Date

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ABSTRACT

Potential of Parameter Transferability within a River Basin to Predict Daily Streamflow in Ungauged Catchments; Case Study for Upper Nilwala River Basin

Water scarcity is being exacerbated by population growth, urbanization, industries and climate change amplifies the prevailing circumstances. Scarcity of water creates the necessity for sustainable water resource planning and management using reliable information and representative models. Since most catchments are ungauged, estimation of streamflow is a challenge faced by hydrologic engineers. Parameter transferability is being investigated by the researchers as a tool to address the issue. In that case, a process-based hydrologic model with daily temporal resolution generates more hydrologically acceptable, accurate catchment response model parameters by which information is provided for hydrological process-based management decisions. Among the many approaches, it is essential to investigate the potential of parameter transferability between sub-watersheds of a river basin to deliver small watersheds wise management decisions. The objective of this study is to evaluate the potential of parameter transferability between main catchment and sub-catchment to estimate daily streamflow by developing a HEC-HMS model for Pitabaddara and Urawa watershed in the Nilwala river basin.

HEC- HMS model was developed for Pitabaddara and Urawa watersheds by using topographical data and daily hydrologic data for water years from 2009/2010 to 2017/2018. Optimal model parameter sets were identified by semi-automatic optimization using Root Mean of Square Error as the objective function. Results were evaluated by selecting model performance criteria as, MRAE, sorted and unsorted FDC, annual water balance, streamflow hydrographs for total and high, intermediate and low flow regimes. Further, identified optimal parameter sets were verified through fully automatic model optimization. Then the sets of optimal parameters were transferred using temporal, spatial and spatiotemporal transfer schemes and model performance was assessed. Further, the potential of predicted streamflow for water resource management at various time resolutions such as annual, seasonal, monthly and daily was investigated.

Both models for Pitabaddara and Urawa calibrated with 3.2 mm/day and 4.36 mm/day RMSE values. However, surprisingly validation result was better in Urawa than calibration with a 3.25 mm/day error value for RMSE. There is an acceptable agreement in simulated and observed flow hydrographs except for extreme hydrological conditions such as drought and flood. Also model was not able to capture low flows at an acceptable level compared to high and intermediate flows due to the fewer number of parameter of selected one-layer precipitation loss model. Transformation of sub-catchment model parameters to the main catchment exhibits high performance than transferring of main catchment model parameters to sub-catchment. The spatial parameter transfer approach is the best way to predict streamflow in both catchments with regards to streamflow magnitude and its sequences and highly performed flow regime is intermediate flow with 95% and 82% of accuracy respectively for Pitabaddara and Urawa catchments. The spatial transfer scheme was capable of capturing streamflow for 84% and 88% of average accuracy level in Maha & Yala season at Pitabaddara. For Urawa catchment, the temporal transfer could provide an average of 91% and 71% when in predicting streamflow volume for Yala and Maha season respectively for seasonal water resource management. Also, the credibility of parameter transfers schemes, spatial, temporal and spatiotemporal is subjective to the objective of the application and temporal resolutions.

Key Words

parameter transferability, ungauged catchment, HEC HMS, Sri Lanka

TABLE OF CONTENT

DECLARATION	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENT	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xvi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xxiii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Hydrologic modelling for parameter transferability	1
1.2 Process-based hydrologic model.....	1
1.3 Temporal resolution in streamflow modelling.....	2
1.4 Streamflow Transferability for Hydrologic modelling	2
1.5 Hydrologic modelling in the Nilwala river basin	4
1.6 Problem statement.....	4
1.7 Objectives	5
1.7.1 Overall Objective	5
1.7.2 Specific Objectives	5
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	6
2.1 Hydrologic model	6
2.2 Type of hydrologic models	7
2.3 Parameter transferability	9
2.4 Model Selection	12
2.5 Data, data checking, and estimation of missing data	15
2.5.1 Data length and Quality	15

2.5.2	Fill missing data	16
2.5.3	Aerial averaging of rainfall	16
2.6	Streamflow threshold identification.....	17
2.7	Model warm-up.....	17
2.8	Model Optimization	18
2.8.1	Model calibration	18
2.8.2	Objective Function.....	19
2.8.3	Optimization algorithm.....	21
2.8.4	Model performance evaluation	21
2.8.5	Model verification.....	22
2.9	HEC-HMS model structure.....	23
2.9.1	Basin model	23
2.9.1.4	Transform Model.....	26
3	METHODOLOGY	28
4	DATA AND DATA CHECKING.....	31
4.1	Data collection	31
4.2	Compliance gauging configuration to standards.....	31
4.3	Selection of data period	32
4.4	Precipitation Areal Averaging	33
4.5	Annual Water Balance	36
4.5.1	Annual Water Balance at Pitabaddara	36
4.5.2	Annual Water Balance at Urawa.....	39
4.6	Consistency Check.....	41
4.7	Visual data checking	43
4.7.1	Visual data checking for Pitabaddara.....	44
4.7.2	Visual data checking for Urawa.....	47

4.8	Monthly and Annual Rainfall	50
5	MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND RESULTS.....	53
5.1	Catchment Selection	53
5.2	Model Selection	55
5.3	Development of Basin model.....	55
5.3.1	Canopy Model.....	55
5.3.2	Surface model	56
5.3.3	Precipitation loss model	57
5.3.4	Transform method.....	61
5.3.5	Baseflow model	62
5.4	Selection of Objective Function.....	63
5.5	Selection of Search Algorithms	63
5.6	Model performance evaluation	64
5.7	Identification of flow thresholds	64
5.8	Calibration results of HEC-HMS model.....	66
5.8.1	Calibration result of Pitabeddara watershed	66
5.8.2	Model calibration for Urawa watershed.....	74
5.9	Verification results of HEC-HMS model	83
5.9.1	Model verification for Pitabaddara Catchment.....	83
5.9.2	Model verification for Urawa Catchment	87
5.10	Optimized HEC-HMS model parameters	92
5.11	Model Parameter Transferability	92
5.11.1	Model parameter transfer schemes	93
5.11.2	Parameter transferability from sub-catchment to the main catchment	98
5.11.3	Parameter transferability from main catchment to sub-catchment	104

5.11.4	Transferability of model parameters in spatial and temporal and spatiotemporal.....	109
6	DISCUSSION.....	110
6.1	Hydro metrological data selection	110
6.1.1	Selection of gauging stations	110
6.1.2	Selection of data period	110
6.1.3	Data errors.....	111
6.2	Determination of flow regimes	111
6.3	Model selection.....	111
6.4	Hydrological process model selection	112
6.5	Model Optimization	114
6.6	Model Performance Evaluation Criteria	115
6.7	Model Calibration	116
6.7.1	Methodology for Model Calibration.....	116
6.7.2	Model Calibration for Pitabaddara watershed	117
6.7.3	Model calibration for Urawa watershed.....	118
6.7.4	The Validity of Calibration Result.....	120
6.8	Model Verification.....	121
6.8.1	Model verification for Pitabaddara watershed.....	122
6.8.2	Model validation for Urawa watershed.....	123
6.8.3	The validity of the verification result.....	125
6.9	Model Parameters transferability	126
6.9.1	Selection of model parameter transferability approach	126
6.9.2	Parameter transferability from sub-catchment to main catchment	126
6.9.3	Parameter transferability from main catchment to sub-catchment	128

6.9.4	Parameter transferability approaches with temporal, spatial and spatio-temporal variations	129
6.9.5	The reliability of results in model parameter transferability.....	132
6.10	Model Performance for Water Resource Management.....	135
7	CONCLUSIONS	137
8	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	139
	REFERENCES	140
Appendix A	: Summary of literature review.....	153
Appendix B	: Visual data checking	155
Appendix C	: Model Calibration Results.....	172
Appendix D	: Model fully automatic calibration.....	176
Appendix E	: Model Verification Result.....	180
Appendix F	: Seasonal streamflow estimation - calibration and validation.....	183
Appendix G	: Model Parameter Transformation	188
Appendix H	: Parameter Transferability Schemes for Pitabaddara Catchment...	194
Appendix I	: Parameter Transferability Schemes for Urawa Catchment.....	207
Appendix J	: Simulated Streamflow from transferred parameters for Annual, Seasonal and Monthly Scale – Pitabaddara Catchment.....	221
Appendix K	: Simulated Streamflow from transferred parameters for Annual, Seasonal and Monthly Scale – Urawa Catchment	232

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3-1: Methodology flow chart	30
Figure 4-1 : Thiessen polygon map - Pitabaddara Catchment	34
Figure 4-2: Thiessen polygon map - Urawa Catchment.....	35
Figure 4-3: Annual water balance at Pitabaddara	37
Figure 4-4: Variation of Annual Evaporation and Runoff Coefficient in Pitabaddara Watershed.....	38
Figure 4-5: Variation of Annual Rainfall and Streamflow of Pitabaddara	38
Figure 4-6: Annual Water Balance at Urawa	40
Figure 4-7: Variation of Annual Evaporation and Runoff Coefficient in Urawa Watershed.....	40
Figure 4-8: Variation of Annual Rainfall and Streamflow in Urawa Watershed.....	41
Figure 4-9: Double Mass Curve for Rainfall Stations.....	42
Figure 4-10: Double mass curve for each rainfall (RF), streamflow (SF) and Evaporation stations.....	43
Figure 4-11: Visual data checking for Pitabaddara - Year 2011/12.....	45
Figure 4-12: Pitabaddara Streamflow vs Thiessen Rainfall Variation.....	47
Figure 4-13: Visual data checking for Urawa - Year 2011/12.....	48
Figure 4-14: Urawa Streamflow vs Thiessen Rainfall Variation	50
Figure 4-15: Comparison of monthly average rainfall.....	51
Figure 4-16:: Comparison of Monthly Thiessen Rainfall and Streamflow in Pitabaddara and Urawa Watersheds	52
Figure 5-1: Pitabeddara and Urawa catchments.....	54
Figure 5-2: Land use distribution of study area	58
Figure 5-3: Streamflow thresholds for Pitabaddara Catchment	65
Figure 5-4: Streamflow thresholds for Urawa Catchment	65
Figure 5-5: Unsorted flow duration curve for the calibration period of Pitabeddara Catchment.....	67
Figure 5-6: Flow Duration Curve for Calibration of Pitabaddara Watershed.....	68
Figure 5-7 Calibration Result for Pitabaddara Watershed - Semi Log plot	70

Figure 5-8: Annual Water Balance for Pitabaddara Watershed for Calibration Period	71
Figure 5-9: FDC for fully automatic optimization – Pitabaddara watershed	72
Figure 5-10: Fully Automatic model optimization - Hydrograph (Semi Plot)	74
Figure 5-11: Unsorted flow duration curve for the calibration period of Urawa Catchment	76
Figure 5-12: Flow Duration Curve for calibration of Urawa Watershed	77
Figure 5-13 Calibration Result for Urawa Watershed - Semi Log plot	78
Figure 5-14: Annual Water Balance for Urawa Watershed for Calibration Period	79
Figure 5-15: FDC for automatic optimization - Urawa watershed	81
Figure 5-16: Flow hydrograph for fully automatic optimization - Urawa watershed (Semi Log Plot)	82
Figure 5-17: Unsorted flow duration curve for the verification period of Pitabaddara Catchment	84
Figure 5-18: Flow Duration Curve for verification of Pitabaddara Watershed	85
Figure 5-19 Verification Result for Pitabaddara Watershed - Semi Log plot	86
Figure 5-20: Annual Water Balance for Pitabaddara Watershed for Verification Period	87
Figure 5-21: Unsorted flow duration curve for the verification period of Urawa Catchment	88
Figure 5-22: Flow Duration Curve for verification of Urawa Watershed	89
Figure 5-23: Verification Result for Urawa Watershed - Semi Log plot	90
Figure 5-24: Annual Water Balance for Urawa Watershed for Verification Period	91
Figure 5-25: Unsorted flow duration curve for optimized parameters for the study period - Pitabaddara Catchment	95
Figure 5-26: Unsorted flow duration curve for optimized parameters for the study period to Pitabaddara Catchment	96
Figure 5-27: Unsorted flow duration curve for optimized parameters for the study period - Urawa Catchment	97
Figure 5-28: Unsorted flow duration curve for optimized parameters for the study period to Urawa Catchment	98
Figure 5-29: Unsorted flow duration curve for parameter transformation to Pitabaddara Catchment	99

Figure 5-30: Flow Duration Curve for parameter transformation to Pitabaddara Watershed.....	100
Figure 5-31: Parameter transformation for Pitabaddara Watershed – Hydrograph (Semi log plot)	102
Figure 5-32: Annual Water Balance for Pitabaddara Watershed for Transferred model parameter.....	103
Figure 5-33: Unsorted flow duration curve for parameter transformation to Urawa Catchment.....	104
Figure 5-34: Sorted flow Duration Curve for parameter transformation to Urawa Watershed.....	105
Figure 5-35: Parameter transformation to Urawa Watershed – Hydrograph (Semi log plot)	108
Figure 5-36: Annual Water Balance for Urawa Watershed for Transferred model parameter.....	109
Figure 6-1: Schematic diagram for developed HEC-HMS model.....	113
Figure B- 1: Streamflow response at Pitabaddara for year 2008/2009	157
Figure B- 2: Streamflow response at Pitabaddara for year 2009/2010	158
Figure B- 3: Streamflow response at Pitabaddara for year 2010/2011	159
Figure B- 4: Streamflow response at Pitabaddara for year 2012/2013	160
Figure B- 5: Streamflow response at Pitabaddara for year 2013/2014	162
Figure B- 6: Streamflow response at Pitabaddara for year 2014/2015	163
Figure B- 7: Streamflow response at Pitabaddara for year 2015/2016	164
Figure B- 8: Streamflow response at Pitabaddara for year 2016/2017	165
Figure B- 9: Streamflow response at Pitabaddara for year 2017/2018	167
Figure B- 10: Streamflow response at Urawa for year 2008/2009.....	167
Figure B- 11: Streamflow response at Urawa for year 2009/2010.....	168
Figure B- 12: Streamflow response at Urawa for year 2010/2011.....	168
Figure B- 13: Streamflow response at Urawa for year 2012/2013.....	169
Figure B- 14: Streamflow response at Urawa for year 2013/2014.....	169
Figure B- 15: Streamflow response at Urawa for year 2014/2015.....	170
Figure B- 16: Streamflow response at Urawa for year 2015/2016.....	170

Figure B- 17: Streamflow response at Urawa for year 2016/2017.....	171
Figure B- 18: Streamflow response at Urawa for year 2016/2017.....	171
Figure C- 1: : Calibration Result of Pitabaddara Watershed - Normal Plot.....	174
Figure C- 2: Calibration Result of Urawa Watershed - Hydrograph (Normal Plot) ..	175
Figure D- 1: Fully Automatic Calibration result for Pitabaddara – Normal Plot.....	178
Figure D- 2: Fully Automatic Calibration result for Urawa Watershed – Normal Plot	179
Figure E- 1: Verification Result for Pitabeddera Watershed – Normal Plot.....	181
Figure E- 2: Verification Result for Urawa Watershed – Normal Plot	182
Figure F- 1: Seasonal water balance for calibration period - Pitabaddara watershed	184
Figure F- 2 : Seasonal water balance for calibration period - Urawa watershed	185
Figure F- 3: Seasonal water balance for verification period - Pitabaddara watershed	186
Figure F- 4: Seasonal water balance for verification period - Urawa watershed	187
Figure G- 1: Parameter transformation to Pitabaddara – Hydrograph (Normal Plot)	191
Figure G- 2:Parameter transformation to Urawa – Hydrograph (Normal Plot).....	193
Figure H- 1: Unsorted FDC - Temporal Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara catchment.....	195
Figure H- 2: Sorted FDC - Temporal Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara catchment.....	196
Figure H- 3:Flow Hydrograph Temporal parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	197
Figure H- 4: Annual Water Balance for Temporal parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	198
Figure H- 5: Unsorted FDC - Spatial Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara catchment.....	199
Figure H- 6: Sorted FDC - Spatial Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara catchment	200

Figure H- 7:Flow Hydrograph Spatial parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment	202
Figure H- 8: Annual Water Balance for Spatial parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	202
Figure H- 9: Unsorted FDC – Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara catchment.....	203
Figure H- 10: Sorted FDC – Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara catchment.....	204
Figure H- 11: Flow Hydrograph Spatiotemporal parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	205
Figure H- 12: Annual Water Balance for Spatiotemporal parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	206
Figure I- 1: Unsorted FDC - Temporal Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara catchment.....	208
Figure I- 2: Sorted FDC - Temporal Parameter Transferability for Urawa catchment	209
Figure I- 3: Flow Hydrograph Temporal parameter transferability - Urawa Catchment	210
Figure I- 4: Annual Water Balance for Temporal parameter transferability – Urawa Catchment.....	211
Figure I- 5: Unsorted FDC - Spatial Parameter Transferability for Urawa catchment	212
Figure I- 6: Sorted FDC - Spatial Parameter Transferability for Urawa catchment ..	213
Figure I- 7:Flow Hydrograph Spatial parameter transferability - Urawa Catchment	215
Figure I- 8: Annual Water Balance for Spatial parameter transferability – Urawa Catchment.....	216
Figure I- 9: Unsorted FDC – Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability for Urawa catchment.....	217
Figure I- 10: Sorted FDC – Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability for Urawa catchment.....	217

Figure I- 11: Flow Hydrograph Spatiotemporal parameter transferability – Urawa Catchment.....	219
Figure I- 12: Annual Water Balance for Spatiotemporal parameter transferability – Urawa Catchment	220
Figure J- 1: Annual FDC for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	222
Figure J- 2: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	223
Figure J- 3 : Average monthly streamflow prediction for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	224
Figure J- 4: Annual sorted FDC for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	226
Figure J- 5: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	227
Figure J- 6: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	228
Figure J- 7: Annual sorted FDC for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	229
Figure J- 8: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	230
Figure J- 9: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	231
Figure K- 1: Annual FDC for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment	233
Figure K- 2: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment	234
Figure K- 3: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment.....	235
Figure K- 4: Annual sorted FDC for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment.....	237

Figure K- 5: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment	238
Figure K- 6: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment	239
Figure K- 7: Annual sorted FDC for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment.....	240
Figure K- 8: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment.....	241
Figure K- 9: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment.....	242

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1: Classification of hydrologic model.....	7
Table 2-2: Classification of extrapolation of hydrological model parameter	10
Table 2-3: Model Selection	13
Table 2-4: Judgements for model selection.....	14
Table 2-5: Applications of Thiessen Polygon method in HEC-HMS	16
Table 2-6: Selection of canopy model.....	23
Table 2-7: Selection of precipitation loss model.....	25
Table 2-8: Selection of Transform model	26
Table 2-9: Selection of Baseflow model	27
Table 4-1: Data resolution and sources	31
Table 4-2: Distribution of rainfall and streamflow gauging stations	32
Table 4-3: Percentage of missing data of rainfall and streamflow data	32
Table 4-4: Thiessen weight for Pitabaddara watershed.....	33
Table 4-5: Thiessen weight for Urawa watershed.....	33
Table 4-6: Annual water balance at Pitabaddara.....	36
Table 4-7: Annual Water Balance at Urawa	39
Table 4-8: Comparison of monthly average rainfall	51
Table 5-1: Surface Depression Storage	56
Table 5-2: Weighted curve number calculation for Pitabaddara Watershed.....	59
Table 5-3: Weighted curve number calculation for Urawa Watershed.....	59
Table 5-4: SCS soil groups and infiltration loss rates	60
Table 5-5: Summary of the parameters of the deficit constant rate loss model	60
Table 5-6: Lag time calculation.....	62
Table 5-7: Initial value for Baseflow Model parameter	63
Table 5-8: Optimized parameter for Pitabeddara Catchment.....	66
Table 5-9: Numerical measures for Calibration of Pitabaddara watershed.....	67
Table 5-10: Numerical measures of sorted flow duration curve for the calibration period of Pitabaddara watershed.....	68
Table 5-11: Annual Water Balance for Calibration of Pitabaddara Watershed	70

Table 5-12: Optimized Parameter from Automatic Calibration - Pitabaddara Watershed	71
Table 5-13: Numerical measures for the goodness of fit – Fully Automatic Optimization- Pitabaddara Watershed.....	72
Table 5-14: Optimized parameter for Urawa watershed	74
Table 5-15: Numerical measures for Calibration of Urawa watershed.....	75
Table 5-16: Numerical measures of flow duration curve for the calibration period of Urawa watershed	76
Table 5-17: Annual Water Balance for Calibration of Urawa Watershed	79
Table 5-18: Optimized parameters for Automatic Optimization for Urawa Watershed	80
Table 5-19: Numerical measures for the goodness of fit – Fully Automatic Optimization- Urawa Watershed.....	80
Table 5-20: Numerical measures for verification of Pitabaddara watershed	83
Table 5-21: Numerical measures of flow duration curve for the verification period of Pitabaddara watershed	84
Table 5-22: Annual Water Balance for Verification of Pitabaddara Watershed.....	86
Table 5-23: Numerical measures for Verification of Urawa watershed	88
Table 5-24: Numerical measures of flow duration curve for the verification period of Urawa watershed	89
Table 5-25: Annual Water Balance for Verification of Urawa Watershed	91
Table 5-26: Optimized HEC-HMS model parameter for Pitabaddara and Urawa watershed.....	92
Table 5-27: Parameter transferability approaches with temporal and spatial variation	93
Table 5-28: Numerical measures for optimized parameters for the study period - Pitabaddara watershed (unsorted FDC).....	95
Table 5-29: Numerical measures for optimized parameters for study period - Pitabaddara watershed (sorted FDC).....	96
Table 5-30: Numerical measures for optimized parameters for the study period - Urawa watershed (unsorted FDC).....	97
Table 5-31: Numerical measures for optimized parameters for study period – Urawa watershed (sorted FDC).....	98

Table 5-32: Numerical measures for parameter transformation to Pitabaddara watershed – unsorted FDC	99
Table 5-33: Numerical measures of flow duration curve for parameter transformation to Pitabaddara watershed – Sorted FDC.....	100
Table 5-34: Annual Water Balance for parameter transformation to Pitabaddara Watershed.....	103
Table 5-35: Numerical measures for parameter transformation to Urawa watershed – unsorted FDC	104
Table 5-36: Numerical measures of sorted FDC for parameter transformation to Urawa watershed.....	105
Table 5-37: Annual Water Balance for parameter transformation to Urawa Watershed	108
Table 6-1: Comparison of Annual RMSE and MRAE value for Pitabaddara watershed	118
Table 6-2: Comparison of Annual RMSE and MRAE value for Urawa watershed ..	119
Table 6-3: Comparison of Validation and calibration goodness of fit measures of unsorted FDC – Pitabaddara watershed	122
Table 6-4: Annual MRAE and RMSE value for the validation period – Pitabaddara watershed.....	123
Table 6-5: Comparison of Validation and calibration goodness of fit measures of unsorted FDC – Urawa watershed.....	124
Table 6-6: Annual MRAE and RMSE value for the validation period – Urawa watershed	124
Table 6-7: Comparison of annual MRAE and RMSE value of Pitabaddara catchment with transferred model parameter.....	127
Table 6-8: Comparison of annual MRAE and RMSE value of Pitabaddara catchment with transferred model parameter.....	128
Table 6-9: Model performance for parameter transferability schemes for Pitabaddara watershed – Unsorted FDC	130
Table 6-10: Model performance for parameter transferability schemes for Pitabaddara watershed – Sorted FDC.....	130

Table 6-11: Model performance for parameter transferability schemes for Urawa watershed – Unsorted FDC	131
Table 6-12: Model performance for parameter transferability schemes for Urawa watershed – Sorted FDC.....	132
Table 6-13: Summary of estimated seasonal streamflow for parameter transfer schemes	136
Table 6-14: Summary of estimated monthly streamflow for parameter transfer schemes	136
Table F- 1:Seasonal water balance for calibration period - Pitabaddara watershed ..	184
Table F- 2:Seasonal water balance for calibration period - Urawa watershed.....	185
Table F- 3 : Seasonal water balance for verification period – Pitabaddara watershed	186
Table F- 4: Seasonal water balance for verification period – Urawa watershed.....	187
Table H- 1: Numerical measures of unsorted FDC - Temporal Parameter Transferability for Urawa Catchment	195
Table H- 2 : Numerical measures of sorted FDC - Temporal Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara Catchment	195
Table H- 3: Annual RMSE and MRAE value for Temporal parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	196
Table H- 4: Annual Water Balance for Temporal parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	197
Table H- 5: Numerical measures of unsorted FDC - Spatial Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara Catchment	198
Table H- 6: Numerical measures of sorted FDC - Spatial Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara Catchment.....	199
Table H- 7: Annual RMSE and MRAE value for Spatial parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	200
Table H- 8: Annual Water Balance for Spatial parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	202

Table H- 9: Numerical measures of unsorted FDC - Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara Catchment	203
Table H- 10: Numerical measures of sorted FDC - Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability for Pitabaddara Catchment	203
Table H- 11: Annual RMSE and MRAE value for Spatiotemporal parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment	204
Table H- 12: Annual Water Balance for Spatiotemporal parameter transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	205
Table I- 1: Numerical measures of unsorted FDC - Temporal Parameter Transferability for Urawa Catchment	208
Table I- 2: Numerical measures of sorted FDC - Temporal Parameter Transferability for Urawa Catchment	208
Table I- 3: Annual RMSE and MRAE value for Temporal parameter transferability – Urawa Catchment	209
Table I- 4: Annual Water Balance for Temporal parameter transferability – Urawa Catchment.....	210
Table I- 5: Numerical measures of unsorted FDC - Spatial Parameter Transferability for Urawa Catchment	211
Table I- 6: Numerical measures of sorted FDC - Spatial Parameter Transferability for Urawa Catchment	212
Table I- 7: Annual RMSE and MRAE value for Spatial parameter transferability - Urawa Catchment	213
Table I- 8: Annual Water Balance for Spatial parameter transferability - Urawa Catchment.....	215
Table I- 9: Numerical measures of unsorted FDC - Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability for Urawa Catchment.....	216
Table I- 10: Numerical measures of sorted FDC - Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability for Urawa Catchment.....	217
Table I- 11: Annual RMSE and MRAE value for Spatiotemporal parameter transferability - Urawa Catchment	218

Table I- 12: Annual Water Balance for Spatiotemporal parameter transferability - Urawa Catchment.....	219
Table J- 1: Numerical measures for Annual sorted FDC for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	222
Table J- 2: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	223
Table J- 3: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	224
Table J- 4: Numerical measures for Annual sorted FDC for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	225
Table J- 5: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	226
Table J- 6: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	227
Table J- 7: Numerical measures for Annual sorted FDC for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	228
Table J- 8: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment	230
Table J- 9: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Pitabaddara Catchment.....	231
Table K- 1: Numerical measures for Annual sorted FDC for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment.....	233
Table K- 2: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment	234
Table K- 3: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Temporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment.....	235
Table K- 4: Numerical measures for Annual sorted FDC for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment.....	236

Table K- 5: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment	237
Table K- 6: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Spatial Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment	238
Table K- 7: Numerical measures for Annual sorted FDC for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment	239
Table K- 8: Seasonal streamflow prediction for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment	241
Table K- 9: Average monthly streamflow prediction for Spatiotemporal Parameter Transferability - Urawa Catchment	242

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
AWB	Annual Water Balance
AWBE	Annual Water Balance Error
CN	Curve Number
FDC	Flow Duration Curve
IDW	Inverse Distance Weighted
MRAE	Mean Ratio of Absolute Error
MSL	Mean Sea Level
RF	Rainfall Only
RMSE	Root Mean of Square Error
SCS	Soil Conservation Service
SF	Streamflow
WB	Water Balance
WMO	World Meteorological Organization