

A Study on Impact of Pilgrimage Tourism with Special Reference to Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract: *Travel and Tourism is the fastest growing industry in India in today's global economy. The rapid growth of the industry is not only creating jobs to millions but also contributing at a large scale towards the total economy of the world. Tourism in J&K is one of the most important sectors of the economy. Being the largest service industry, tourism is a significant contributor to the state Gross Domestic Product (GDP). J&K is known for its scenic beauty all over the world. The state of J&K has immense potential for tourism from both domestic as well as international tourists. In J&K, there are a number of tourist places but pilgrimage tourism has its own importance. Pilgrimage as a form of journey provides an opportunity for the people to visit sacred places. The land of J&K is blessed with the holy stay of many great saints and religious souls. Therefore it attracts large number of pilgrims from various parts of India. Pilgrimage Tourism thus provides an extra boost to the state's economy. The present study is an attempt to study the potential and impact of Pilgrimage Tourism on the overall development of the state and moreover aims at the challenges which the tourism industry is facing in J&K.*

KEY WORDS: *Pilgrimage Tourism, Jammu and Kashmir, Impact*

INTRODUCTION:

Travel and Tourism is the fastest growing industry in India in today's global economy. The rapid growth of the industry is not only creating jobs to millions but also contributing at a large scale towards the total economy of the world. Tourism consists of the activities undertaken during travel from home or workplace for the pleasure and enjoyment of certain destinations, and the facilities that cater to the needs of the tourist. Tourism today is the most vibrant tertiary activity and a multi-billion dollar industry in India. Tourism is the right vehicle for a developing country like India which is on the path of modern economic growth through structural transformation of the economy. The role of tourism is essential in the economic development of a country.

Jammu and Kashmir is one of the popular tourist destinations in Asia. The tourism in Jammu and Kashmir offers a wide array of places to see. Jammu and Kashmir is known for its attractive scenery all over the world. Tourism forms an integral part of the state's economy. Jammu and Kashmir especially Kashmir

Valley offers various categories of tourism. These include adventure tourism, medical tourism, water rafting, skiing, religious (pilgrimage) tourism, etc. The state of Jammu and Kashmir has three distinct regions, viz, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh which has immense potential for tourism from both domestic as well as international tourists. Tourism has now become a significant industry in J&K, contributing enormously to the state's economy and providing employment to a large number of people.

OBJECTIVES:

The present study has following specific research objectives:

1. To assess the impact of pilgrimage tourism in Jammu and Kashmir
2. To find out the major challenges of Tourism Industry in Jammu and Kashmir
3. To provide some feasible suggestions that may prove valuable for the future development of tourism in J&K.

METHODOLOGY:

The study is mainly based upon the collection of secondary data. The secondary data was collected from various sources of publications such as Magazines, journals, Research articles, Internet and published and unpublished records of Ministry of Tourism Government of India, official websites of ministry of tourism, selected State and J&K tourism.

PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

A pilgrimage is a voyage or search of ethical or pious significance. Typically, it is a journey to a memorial or other location of importance to a person's belief's and conviction, although sometimes it can be a symbolic journey into someone's own beliefs. In J&K, there are a number of tourist places but pilgrimage tourism has its own importance. Jammu & Kashmir has various pilgrim destinations for Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. Pilgrimage as a form of journey provides an opportunity for the people to visit sacred places. The land of J&K is blessed with the holy stay of many great saints and religious souls. Therefore it attracts large number of pilgrims from various parts of India. Pilgrimage Tourism thus provides an extra boost to the state's economy. The State J&K has three distinct regions: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. All the three regions have great potential for tourism from both domestic as well as international tourists. Jammu & Kashmir has various mosques and temples which are just marvel creations. The state stands as an essence of sacred acceptance. Kashmir's natural beauty has made it one of the popular tourist destinations in South Asia. Jammu known as City of Temples, Hindu Shrines, gardens and forts. Jammu's historic monument is a unique feature

of Islamic and Hindu architecture. Ladakh is a major hub for adventure tourism. This part of Greater Himalaya is called “Moon on Earth” because of naked peaks and deep gorges. It is a “land of high passes”. Some of the famous sacred places and famous tourist spot in J&K are:

- 1) **Hari Parbat Pilgrim:** locally known as Koh-e- Maran is situated at the periphery of Srinagar City of Jammu and Kashmir and is ancient and one of the holiest places of Kashmir. Visiting the Hari Parbat Pilgrim Center where a temple, a gurudwara and a mosque stand side by side gives a feeling of pure brother hood in between of major religions of Jammu and Kashmir.
- 2) **Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine:** also known as Mata Rani is a manifestation of the Hindu Mother Goddess Mahalakshmi. It is located at the Trikuta Mountains within the Indian State of J&K. This site is the most valued and sanctified of Hindu pilgrimage sites where thousands of devotees pay homage every year. This Shrine in Jammu region also attracts tens of thousands of Hindu devotees every year. Hindus believe that one cannot possibly have Darshan of Mata, unless she herself calls the devotees. “Chalo bulawa aaya hai, Mata ne bulaya hai..... Meaning is “Let us go to Vaishno Devi as Mata has beckoned us to come for Darshan and Blessings.
- 3) **Amarnath Temple:** is a Hindu Shrine located in Jammu and Kashmir and is situated at an altitude of 3.88m and 141 km from Srinagar, the capital of J&K and reached through Pahalgam Town. It forms an important part of Hinduism and is considered to be one of the holiest shrines in Hinduism. The cave is surrounded by snowy mountains. The cave itself is covered with snow most of the years except for a short period of time in summer when it is open for pilgrims.
- 4) **Hazratbal Shrine:** is a Muslim Shrine in Hazratbal Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir India. It contains a relic, the (Moi-e-Muqqadas), believed by many Muslims of Kashmir to be a hair of the Islamic Prophet Mohammad (saw) and the truthful come to pay homage. The name of the Shrine comes from the Urdu word “Hazrat” meaning “respected” and the Kashmiri word “bal” meaning “place”. Thus it means the place which is given high regards and is respected among the people.
- 5) **The Shahdara Sharief:** located in Rajouri District of the State Jammu and Kashmir is like an emblem of communal harmony and is close to a beautiful hill standing on top Thana Mandi. This is a half an hour drive from Rajouri. . Baba Ghulam Shah, who was born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, made Shahdara

His house and Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus visit this shrine for offering prayers and seeking the blessings of Pir (Saint). People of all religions visit this Shrine and they believe Shahdara Sharief equally sacred. “Sada Bahar” a famous tree near the Shrine, bears fruits all round the year.
- 6) **Temple of Maha Kali** (better known as Bahu or Bawey Wali Mata): located in the Bahu Fort, is considered second only to Mata Vaishno Devi in terms of mystical power. The temple was built shortly after the coronation of Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1822. Other temples in the city include the Gauri Kund Temple, Shudh Mahadev Temple, Shiva Temple, Peer Khoh Cave Temple, Ranbireswar Temple, and the Parmandal Temple Complex.
- 7) **Zaskar Valley:** is one of the most isolated places to visit in Ladakh where about 14,000 people comprising of mainly Buddhists live. It is the most famous valley in Ladakh.
- 8) **Nubra Valley:** also called the “Valley of Flowers”, is about 150 Kms away from Leh, the Capital Town of Ladakh. People from all the States and Countries come to visit this beautiful and attractive valley.
- 9) **Pangong Lake:** the beautiful water reservoir is about 134 Kms long and 60% of the lake falls under China. The scenic beauty and serene environment appears to be so unreal to the tourists.

IMPACT OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR:

Tourism is one of the most vital source of income for any economy at both private as well as public sector .Tourism sector provides an instrumental way of generating revenue to the government in every country. The tourism sector helps in a way to share the culture, heritage, religion, enriching the knowledge about the traditional values of the country. As a result of privatization policy in tourism sector, many allied sectors has been developed such as, transportation, hotel, availability of travel agents, tourist guides etc., that results in creating more employment opportunities to the surrounding people and develop their standard of living. Despite these improvements tourism sectors need more improvements in its services and create more awareness with new ideas and operations in order to attract tourists and satisfy the society.

Tourism has a prominent role in developing the economy of State J&K, especially Kashmir and Ladakh regions. Being a labor intensive industry, it has resulted in the creation of large number of jobs and generated economic activities in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the state, which owes large dependence on this industry. The employment opportunities provided by this industry are comparatively higher than other industries. Kashmir has been a center of attention for different people for different reasons all over the world. There are various places of tourist attraction in the state visited by the tourists. Due to its heavenly beauty, Kashmir is famous all over the world. However, most of the places with ample tourism potential are untapped. Domestic pilgrimage tourism plays a vital role in creating the national integration and universal brotherhood. Every individual is benefited either directly or indirectly. The potential for domestic pilgrimage is gradually increasing with time, particularly in last few years. Most of the countries are focusing to develop pilgrimage tourism by provision of various amenities and facilities. It helps in bringing nations closer and transcending all the barriers. Moreover it also helps in protecting environment, old monuments of cultural and historical importance.

CHALLENGES OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

LACK OF PROPER INFRASTRUCTURE

Some common problems related with basic tourism infrastructure facilities like accommodation, food, drinking water, parking, sanitation, shopping shelter have been faced by the respondents at selected sites. Infrastructure needs for the travel and tourism industry vary from corporal infrastructure such as ports of entry to modes of transport to urban infrastructure such as access roads, electricity, water supply, sewerage and telecommunication. The sectors connected to the travel and tourism industry include airlines, surface transport, accommodation (hotels), and infrastructure and facilitation systems, among others. It is the amalgamation of tourism and good infrastructure that underpins the economic, environmental and social benefits. If travel and tourism is not managed well, it can have a detrimental effect- it can damage fragile environments and destroy local cultures.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY

As tourism increases, environmental and socio-economic impacts can also be expected to increase. Environmental pollution poses a serious threat to life on earth not only in industrial areas but also in areas where there is a great concentration of tourists. The areas with tourists' concentration are dumping ground for municipal and industrial waste. Thus unclean environment due to piled garbage and lots of pollution takes place.

DISPUTE IN KASHMIR

There are many challenges in the State J&K. The first problem is violence and turmoil in the State. Due to dispute and conflict over Kashmir region, the outsider's find it endanger to move inside State. Kashmir region is closed one due to animosity between India and Pakistan over this region. Violence and turmoil adversely affected our industries. Tourism as the one of the main industries in the Kashmir Valley has suffered tremendously due to violent activities.

COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE PROBLEM

In J&K people are facing the problem of communication and in tourism industry, there are especially the local people working which face large problems while interacting with tourists which in result tourists are not fully convinced by them to use any service. Also the people of J&K are having the different culture as compared to the rest of the world as it is the valley full of villages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study has highlighted some important conclusions which can be of great value for improving the pilgrimage tourism at the selected sites in J&K. To make the State of Jammu and Kashmir the number one tourist destination leading to sustainable socio-economic development of the region by capitalizing on the abundant available natural and human resources following step should be taken:

1. The first and the foremost thing in this regard would be to have a well documented tourism policy because J&K does not have a tourism policy which should give equal rights to all the stake holders involved in tourism related activities like local people, private sector and NGOs.
2. The working of the management of the selected pilgrimage sites must be more transparent.
3. As tourism is mainly a private sector driven industry, it is important for J&K govt. to act as a facilitator and not a regulator with respect to tourism.
4. There are number of unexplored tourist destinations in J&K because of which it is also known as, "Paradise Unexplored". Such new unexploited attractive destinations need to be explored more and more.
5. At the selected pilgrimage sites, the tourists face many problems due to overcrowding. The demand for the basic tourism infrastructure facilities is much more than their availability. So to increase the growth of tourism at these places optimal infrastructure should be provided and the facilities related with food, accommodation, parking, drinking water, sanitation, shelter etc must be provided.
6. Most of the tourist destinations with lot of tourist potential are occupied by Indian armed forces thus incurring a heavy loss on govt. exchequer and environment. State should make sure that such tourist spots are not misused at any cost by anyone.
7. More promotional efforts must be undertaken by the State and the Central government to increase the domestic and foreign tourism.

Travel and tourism industry meets the inspirations of millions of people who want to travel and joy to share experiences, to confrontation different cultures. It has grown in answer to upcoming demand and travel and tourism has been at the forefront for new creation. The prospects of tourism and its contribution in J&K state made it mandatory for government department to work in collaboration with religious and industry. Two broadly categorized tourist destinations within state are Jammu and Kashmir. Apparently, these two have been differently positioned and hence marketed in different ways. Jammu with its busy city life attracts a large number of tourists who may consider visiting Jammu "The City of Temples".

Kashmir as a "Heaven on Earth" attracts a large number of tourists to visit. Tour operators have exploited this twin positioning well with travel magazines featuring these two in a travel circuit.

CONCLUSION:

It is evident from the above summary that tourism has been an important source of economic development for J&K economy from over several decades and will continue to be a significant contributor in future also because of the changes taking place on both demand and supply sides. Supply side changes are due the growth of new areas like Adventure tourism, Science tourism, Spiritual tourism and Medical tourism. Moreover the factors which increase its scope from demand side include, change in the standard of living, rise in disposable income, late marriages, long leisure time and better education. The economy of State J&K has greatly boosted by tourism sector, despite may regional and political issues, but a lot needs to be done to update, sustain, develop and modernize it. Tourism opens new doors for utilization of resources, both revenue and investment generation, motivating to the creation of employment as well as socio economic development of the tourist place by the development

of transport, inter connectivity, up gradation of hotels, well conditioned roads, various recreational utilities, adventure sports etc. There is need to construct alternative roads one to another places to ensure better interconnect. The grander of old monuments should be restored as this State is important for Muslims, Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims. Special care should be taken of these places to boost inflow of pilgrims.

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