

“TOURISM OF NINETIES: A CASE STUDY OF KASHMIR VALLEY”

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ABSTRACT

In 1989, a popular movement demanding independence from India and backed by various militant groups badly disrupted life in the Kashmir valley. Frequent curfews and strict security measures by the govt. authorities helped to ensure that hardly any tourists came to Srinagar and the famous houseboats on its lakes found deserted since 1990. The tourist inflow started dwindling and the tourism almost came to a grinding halt from 1989-90 onwards. Those who depended on this industry in one or the other way suddenly found themselves without an occupation and no means of livelihood.

KEYWORDS: Tourism, Turmoil, Domestic, Foreign and Infrastructure

INTRODUCTION

Travelling has been a characteristic feature of human society and lifestyle since antiquity. Every human settlement has a long tradition of visits by traders, missionaries, fortune seekers, pilgrims etc. Travel in early times is synonymous with the modern day tourism. Tourism has primarily been an outcome of civilizational and technological advancement, particularly in the fields of aviation and transport. Tourism as a regular and professionally meaningful phenomenon can be traced back to the transport revolution coinciding with the Second World War. In its early phase, tourism was more of a luxury available to the chosen few who could afford both the time and the money to travel.

Today, however the tourism is no longer the privilege of a few; it has become a mass industry.¹ Early tourism can be said to have taken two forms, travel for the purpose of business - be it for trading or for the business of the state, and travel for religious pursuit. Tourism in the contemporary world is usually defined as the movement of people away from their normal place of residence, for any given purpose as leisure, holidays, pilgrimage, education etc. This kind of activity generates income and employment in the areas visited by the tourists, thus making particular area as tourist industry.

The Tourism Department² of Government of India defines tourist as:

A foreign tourist is a person visiting India on a foreign passport, staying at least twenty-four hours in India and the purpose of whose journey can be classified under one of the following headings:

- Leisure (recreation, study, holidays, religion and sports)
- Business, mission, meeting and health

The definition of domestic tourist as given by the Department of Tourism,³ Government of India is: “A person who travels within the country other than his usual place of residence and stays at hotels or other accommodation establishments run on commercial basis for duration of not less than twenty-four hours for any of the following purposes”.

- Business
- Study
- Health
- Pleasure
- Pilgrimage

OBJECTIVES

- To examine the overall impact of turmoil on tourism of Kashmir.
- To ascertain the reasons responsible for decrease of tourists since 1990's.

Tourism in Kashmir Valley from (1990-99)

Kashmir since its hoary past continued to attract tourists of different hues and colors in view of its natural beauty, religious sites and historical monuments. These tourists can be broadly classified into following categories:

- Those who sought natural beauty and solace.
- Those who come in pursuit of truth and knowledge.
- Those who come in pursuit of trade and commerce.
- Those who come to enjoy the spectacle of various aspects of Kashmir culture and performing arts, like bandhpather, frove, rouf, damali, etc.
- Those who come for adventure tourism, seeking enjoyment of trekking, hiking, skiing etc.
- Lastly those who visit sacred centers and other heritage sites.

The tourist industry of Kashmir flourished in view of the writings in praise of the valley of Kashmir by travelers since time immemorial. Huientsang, the well known Chinese Pilgrim, who travelled through India and Central Asia for 16 years in the 7th century A.D, was captivated by the lovely Vale to spend two years there. There is also reference to Kashmir in the travels of Marcopolo; "The men are brown and clean, but the women taking them as brunettes, are very beautiful. The climate is finely tempered, but neither very hot nor very cold".

As per German Baron, Charles Hugel, "The most wonderful objects in the world" were the Taj Mahal and Kashmir. Similarly Thomas More in his "*Lalla Rookh*" in the middle of the 19th century provoked the curiosity of many travelers about Kashmir. The foreign authors have played a great role in highlighting the Kashmir as a tourist spot. In view of appreciable influence through their writings that a large numbers of tourists were attracted to the valley of Kashmir. No wonder that Kashmir is referred as the "Switzerland of India". The most attractive sites of Kashmir which have tremendous potential to attract tourists are as follows: (a) Mughal Gardens (b) Lakes such as Dal lake, Nigeen lake, Manasbal lake, Wular lake (c) Side valleys such as Lidder valley, Sindh valley, Gulmarg and Pahalgam. (d) Heritage sites of Kashmir such as Amarnath, Chattipadshahi, Hariparbat fort, Hazratbal shrine, Jamia Masjid, Martand temple, Makhdoom sahib, Shankaracharya temple, etc.

Turmoil and disturbance in Kashmir laid a terrible impact on the tourist places of the valley. All the hotspots of Tourism in valley like Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg, Dal Lake and Mughal gardens, which used to witness thousands of tourists, all of a sudden turned into not less than any ghost places. The previous two years, before the turmoil started in 1989 had respectively recorded an overwhelming number of 721,650 and 722,031 tourists.⁴ This number came down to 557,980 in 1989; and in the year 1990, it substantially came down to a dismal figure of 10,720 and that it continued to remain below 10,000 till the year 1996.⁵ The reasons for the disturbance was the 1987 elections, which the Muslim United Front (MUF), a conclave of major opposition parties in the state claimed, were rigged.

A consequence of this was that all the workers of the opposition parties, particularly Muslim United Front went underground and later on came on the surface and asserted their presence through armed struggle. In view of the armed struggle about one lac people have lost their lives causing colossal damage to economy particularly tourism and created an atmosphere of political instability and uncertainty. With the passage of time disturbance increased, which created havoc particularly to the tourism industry as not only the domestic tourist flow decreased substantially but also the foreign tourist flow. Thus received in 1993 the domestic tourism almost was non-existent and those connected with this industry were in one or the other form became the worst hit as most of them lost employment. The following table has been prepared to show the abysmal decrease in the tourist traffic.

Table 1: Tourists Coming to Kashmir Valley (1990-94)

| Year | Domestic Tourists | | Foreign Tourists | | Total No. of Tourists | | %Age of Domestic Tourists | %Age of Foreign Tourists |
|------|-------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| | No. of Arrivals | %Age Change Over Previous Year | No. of Arrivals | %Age Change Over Previous Year | No. of Arrivals | %Age Change Over Previous Year | | |
| 1990 | 6095 | -98.76 | 4627 | -93.17 | 10722 | -98.08 | 56.85 | 43.15 |
| 1991 | 1400 | -77.03 | 4887 | 5.62 | 6287 | -41.36 | 22.27 | 77.73 |
| 1992 | 1175 | -83.93 | 9149 | 87.71 | 10324 | 64.21 | 11.38 | 88.62 |
| 1993 | 0 | -100.00 | 8026 | -10.27 | 8026 | -22.36 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| 1994 | 500 | ---- | 9314 | 16.05 | 9814 | 22.28 | 5.09 | 94.98 |

Source: Data provided by Directorate of Tourism, Govt. of J&K

As has been seen from the table 1, the tourism industry received a serious setback with the outbreak of armed struggle by the separatists. The militancy and the concomitant cross-firing, crack-down, hartals and curfews, arrests and interrogations by security forces, abduction by militants, collapse of tourist infrastructure and the hazards, stopped and almost throttled the chances for the tourists from visiting this place. The negative impact on it was that the domestic as well as foreign tourists changed their destination to other places in India such as Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh etc.

Table 2: Tourists Coming to Kashmir Valley (1995-99)

| Year | Domestic Tourists | | Foreign Tourists | | Total No. of Tourists | | %Age of Domestic Tourists | %Age of Foreign Tourists |
|------|-------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| | No. of Arrivals | %Age Change Over Previous Year | No. of Arrivals | %Age Change Over Previous Year | No. of Arrivals | %Age Change Over Previous Year | | |
| 1995 | 322 | -35.16 | 8198 | 16.05 | 8520 | -13.19 | 3.78 | 96.22 |
| 1996 | 375 | 16.46 | 9592 | 17.00 | 9967 | 16.98 | 3.76 | 96.24 |
| 1997 | 7027 | 1773.86 | 9111 | -5.01 | 16138 | 61.91 | 43.54 | 56.46 |
| 1998 | 99636 | 1317.90 | 10247 | 12.47 | 109883 | 580.90 | 90.67 | 9.33 |
| 1999 | 200162 | 100.89 | 17130 | 67.17 | 217292 | 97.12 | 92.12 | 7.88 |

Source: Data provided by Directorate of Tourism, Govt. of J&K

The number of tourists who visited the Kashmir valley from 1995-99 can be shown in the table 2. As is evident from the table 2 that during the years 1995, 1996 and 1997 the tourist flow to Kashmir remained very low,

especially domestic tourist flow. Suddenly the domestic tourist flow reached to 99636 in 1998 as compared to 322 in 1995 and the number went up to 200162 in the next year. The total tourist flow increased from 8.52 thousand in 1995 to 2.17 lac in 1999. The reason for the increase in the number of tourists after 1998 was that the socio-political conditions were better now as compared to the past years. It was during this period that in the year (1996-97) elected government was established in the state after a gap of six years. And it is after the formation of a popular government that the situation began to improve considerably and tourism related activities started to pick-up speed again. The new government started the process of re-building and restoring infrastructure systems, on a massive scale, that had been severely damaged during the years (1989-97), because of armed struggle.

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5. Ibid. p. 31.

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