

Exploring the Socio-Economic Coordinates of Tourism: A Case of Kashmir

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Abstract

The state of Jammu & Kashmir being the abode of Himalayas represents an epitome of natural beauty and, hence, has emerged as one of the top most tourist resorts of the world. The variegation in states tourism sector in the form of nature tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, pilgrimage tourism, leisure tourism etc. has attracted tourist of every nature irrespective of space as a result of which, this sector has been the mainstay of state's economy. Pertinently, all throughout the turbulence when the valley was reeling under the cycle of violence and when life virtually went into sabbatical, this sector especially through the pilgrimage tourism remained the only viable option with the people to relieve themselves from the imposed agonies. Further, in the absence of a well established private sector and given the fact that this sector has been the main agency of employment generation, a complex sociology of tourism has shaped up in the state involving administration, hoteliers, houseboat owners, taxi wallah, tonga wallah, pony wallah etc. and the tourist. Unfortunately, the unscientific management and irrational interaction of the public with such tourist places has jeopardized their very delicacy which has, in turn, immensely harmed the states otherwise rich diversity of flora and fauna. All this has generated a need towards a proper organizational structure in order to sustainably harness the tourist potential in the state. However, in the absence of inadequate infrastructure and specific and sound interventional measures at place, the state couldn't secure properly at many counts be that guest-host relationship, conforming to the environmental norms or drawing the expected dividend. This paper, therefore, endeavors to explore the sociology of tourism in Kashmir with a due focus on socio-economic dimensions of tourism besides highlighting the need towards the eco-tourism in the state so that the tourist potential can be optimally realized that too, on the sustainable basis.

Keywords: Conflict, Kashmir, Peace, Tonga Wallah, Tourist

Introduction

Tourism has served as a means of exploration, trade, pilgrimage, personal enrichment, and encounters between people from different tribes, nations and cultures since prehistoric times. It has also served as a vehicle for territorial expansion, espionage, terrorism, colonialism, slavery, wars, desecration of cultures and exploitation of resources (Morrison, 2006). Traveling brings people into contact with each other and as tourism has an educational element, it can foster understanding between people that can provide cultural exchange between hosts and guests. This enhances the chances for people to develop mutual sympathy and understanding and to reduce their prejudices (IIPT, 2000). Even, the international community has widely accepted that the success of the tourism industry is directly linked to its ability to offer tourists a safe and pleasant visit. It does not make sense to spend millions on marketing campaigns if the potential tourists are afraid to visit the country or region selected. Thus, it can be inferred that countries facing security problems affecting tourists should make a serious effort to resolve the main obstacles and problems (Inter American Travel Congress, 1997). In recent years, researchers have become interested in understanding the relationship between tourism and terrorism and its impact on tourist destinations. In fact, the researches about the relationship between tourism, terrorism and criminal acts affecting tourist's safety perceptions have pointed out that "safety and security of tourists" is a prerequisite for a prosperous tourist destination. Sonmez (1998) in her research on "Terrorism and Tourism" has pointed out that the introduction of risk into touristic decisions has the potential to disrupt routine decision-making. In contrast, tourism as a mechanism can contribute positively towards overall peace building process. It is said that tourism has the potential to promote social development through employment creation, income redistribution and poverty alleviation (IIPT, 2000).

Tourism can transcend governmental boundaries by bringing people closer together through the understanding of different cultures, heritages and beliefs. Infact, it is potentially one of the most important vehicles for promoting peace among the people of the world (Minho Cho, 2006).

Tourism has been regarded as “a harbinger of peace” for destinations as it promotes a direct contact between visitor and host, which is irreplaceable, augmenting the fact that “how anyone can be inferred from the above discussed literature that tourism being the most sensitive industry is badly affected by terrorism, as it has enormous impact on the travel pattern and builds negative image of the destination. But tourism as a counter mechanism for terrorism, it has an inherent capacity to contribute to the national integration, strengthen guest-host relationship, develop respect for others thereby building overall peace in the region. ne can feel enmity for someone he has known or received personally, or has received him” (WTO, 2000).

Tourism and Economy

Tourism is a growing and complex phenomenon which is becoming one of the world's largest economic activities. It involves an amalgam of industries such as tour operators, travel agencies and tour guides, transportation, accommodation, recreation and entertainment and food and beverage services. The complexity and structure of the tourism industry are directly influenced by the consumptions of the visitors who buy both tourism and non-tourism goods and services. The activities of tourists thus have effects on different industries including goods and products that initially may not seem to relevant to tourism. Tourism also involves economic costs: the direct costs incurred by tourism businesses; government costs for tourism infrastructure; and related costs, (such as inflated prices), borne by individuals in the community. Community decisions over tourism often involve debates between industry supporters touting tourism's economic impacts, and opponents emphasizing tourism's costs. Sound decisions should be based on a balanced assessment of benefits and costs, and on an understanding of who will gain as a result of tourism and who will pay for it. Tourism's economic impacts are, therefore, an important consideration in economic development, in state, regional and community planning, and in marketing and management decisions. Communities need to understand the relative importance of tourism to their region, including tourism's contribution to economic activity in the area. Tourism has a variety of economic impacts. Tourists contribute to a destination's sales, profits, jobs, tax revenues, and income. Primary tourism sectors, such as lodging, dining, transportation, amusements, and retail trade, are affected directly: most other sectors are impacted by secondary effects. An economic impact analysis of tourism activity usually focuses on regional tourism-related changes in sales, income, and employment.

A standard economic impact analysis traces the path that money takes once it leaves a tourist's pocket: this is also referred to as the flows of money from tourism spending. The first flow, (direct effect), is to the businesses and government agencies to which the tourists pay money directly. The money then flows through the economy as (i) payments from these direct recipients to their suppliers, (ii) salaries and wages for households who provide labor for tourism or supporting industries, and (iii) various government taxes and charges payable by tourists, businesses and households. Continuing the fluid analogy, a leakage occurs when money escapes the economy of a region because a local consumer, (household, business or government), has purchased a product from an outside supplier.

Research Methodology

The Problem Statement

Tourism has continued driving itself on to the radar of developing countries policy makers. The growth of tourism has been sustained at 7-12% per year in most developing countries in the last five years (ODI, 2007). At the local and international level, it is being seen as an impetus to sustained growth and development, and no longer as a generator of foreign exchange. It is often included in more than 80% of low income countries poverty reduction strategies (ODI, IBID). However, practical action to harness tourism for sustained growth and development is being hindered by the elusive nature of the evidence on pro-poor impact, and the policy void on tourism that exists in many donor and financing organisations. Tourism plays an important role in the state's economic development. This industry has strategic advantage and forms the backbone of the state economy. Kashmir is one of the important tourist destinations of India and has unique place in the economic development of state economy. Tourism industry in Kashmir had a major setback as the valley has been badly affected by the turmoil especially during the last two decades.

Despite of gaining popularity as a major tourist destination, the last two decades have hindered the smooth growth of tourism industry because of political instability, which has discouraged travellers for visiting India's most beautiful tourist destination (Chauhan & Khanna, 2005).

The pilot study was conducted in sample study organisation's, to examine (i) the appropriateness of the questions to their context(ii) to ascertain about the adequacy of item in covering the various issues involved and (iii) to ensure that the questions was easily comprehensible, properly worded, unambiguous and answerable within a reasonable time period.

Sample Selection Procedure

A "Random sampling method" has been used for selecting the respondents from the universe. The universe of the study covers the tourism organisation's and the owners and the employees of the business connected with tourism in Kashmir.

Objectives of the Studies

The present study has before it the following objectives:

1. To examine the existing status of tourism industry;
2. To identify and analyze the working of state Departments as facilitator in the economic development of state;
3. To analyze the impact of tourism industry on the economy of Kashmir;
4. To study feasible ways and means for the flourishing of tourism industry in Kashmir for economical benefits of the state.

Tourism in Kashmir

Jammu & Kashmir with its vast potential and growing economy has immense potential for the sustenance of tourism industry. Tourism has no doubt remained an instrument of economic growth in the state of Jammu & Kashmir and has contributed a lot in developing the economy, particularly in Kashmir valley. Tourism is an important industry of Kashmir. This sector has given jobs to a large number of people of Kashmir and generated economic activities especially in the tertiary sectors. Its impact in Kashmir is visible in service industry sectors, such as transport, hospitality, horticulture, handicrafts and small scale industry.

Tourism and Kashmir protect both as they are not mutually exclusive. Both have an indissoluble relationship that has an age. Travellers came here for centuries for the holy silence, heavenly tranquillity, fragrance of its flowers and to experience the most hospitable and helpful attitudes of the Kashmir's. Kashmir, it has been often said for centuries, is an indefinable beauty. Noted travellers and historians felt it is Nature's blessing to the universe but failed to describe it appropriately as for them words proved inadequate to define beauties of this precious land, its mountains and valleys. Yet, for ages human endeavour has invested efforts to interact with Kashmir's beauty, explore it and describe and highlight it to the outside world. Almost all explorers with their rich experience and knowledge could not mention any place or spot in the world that was comparable with this beautiful land. Undoubtedly, Kashmir is the world's most fascinating experience offering variety in climate and landscape. The valley is surrounded by high peaks, diverse terrains and lush green forests all around standing as a chain with no parallel in the world and these lap glaciers, pastures and high altitude lakes offering amazing trekking opportunities and far behind these formations the ice clad summits provide a splendid view. Each spot in the valley plains or up on the highlands excels the other and every small elevation unfolds a new natural set-up bringing altogether new phase of climate and atmosphere. The Valley is quite different in each season. It is like a garden in summer and golden in autumn. Winter makes Kashmir yet another world. It is a great experience to travel to Kashmir in spring when snow over the slopes of Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Sonamarg still appears fresh while flowers appear in abundance in the Valley plains. Certainly, it is an all season affair in Kashmir. Tourism plays an important role in the state and is indeed one of the major contributors to the state economy. There are several tourist spots with breathtaking scenic beauty located throughout the length and breadth of the state that attracts thousands of domestic and foreign tourists. The picturesque beauty, large natural lakes, the snow clad mountains surrounded by thickly populated pine forests with rivers flowing through have made Kashmir as a prime tourist attraction.

The Valley attracted 7 lakh tourists in 1988/89, averaging a growth rate of 10+%. This healthy progress was jolted by the insurgency in the 90s and tourism went on a decline. There were early signs of recovery in 2003 when tourist arrivals touched 1.9 lakhs.

The recovery accelerated in the following two years with tourist arrivals of 3.8 lakhs in 2004 and 6.1 lakhs in 2005. Sporadic incidents of violence through 2006 have dampened the growth in 2006 with arrivals of 3.8 lakhs up to August 2006. Security is after all a pre-requisite for tourism to flourish. 5.3 If there were no insurgency, tourism would have maintained its growth track and it is estimated that annual tourist arrivals today would have been in the range of 15-18 lakhs. Tourism's share of the state's GSDP, which was 10% in 1988/89, would have gone up to 15%-20% if not higher. 5.4 Pilgrim tourism to the Jammu region of the state has remained largely unaffected by the insurgency. The Mata Vaishno devi temple which is a year round attraction and the Amarnath Yatra for which Jammu is a base have maintained healthy flow of tourists into Jammu. The number of pilgrims was 61 lakhs in 2004, 62 lakhs in 2005 and 47 lakhs in 2006 (up to August 2006). 5.5 Ladakh too has had a steady growth in arrivals (both domestic and overseas). In 2005, the arrivals were 38,448 and in the first eight months of 2006 the figure was 40,450. The position of incoming tourists to Kashmir under the Five Year Plans is shown in table 1.3

Table No:- 1.3 FIRST FIVE YEAR PLAN (1951-56)				
Years	Home Tourists	Foreign Tourists	Total	Growth in %
1951	9333	1246		10579
1952	11630	1470	13100	23.83
1953	19319	2062	21381	63.21
1954	32885	1760	34645	62.20
1955	48195	2830	51025	47.28
SECOND FIVE YEAR PLAN (1956-61)				
1956	57,341	7,012	64,353	26.12
1957	37,172	5,846	43,018	33.15
1958	54,017	6,540	60,557	40.17
1959	60,354	10,866	71,220	17.60
1960	63,373	11,187	74,560	4.89
THIRD FIVE YEAR PLAN (1961-66)				
1961	79,137	13,214	92,455	24.00
1962	80,334	12,661	93,015	60.00
1963	72,137	11,552	83,687	10.03
1964	48,538	8,182	56,720	32.22
1965	37,521	8,020	45,541	19.17
FOURTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (1969-74)				
1969	93,552	13,003	1,06,959	23.98
1970	1,05,420	15,737	1,21,153	13.27
1971	79,612	15,240	94,852	21.71
1972	1,08,445	17,841	1,25,486	31.24
1973	1,75,829	20,017	1,95,846	56.07
FIFTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (1974-79)				
1974	1,48,320	19,299	1,67,619	-14.41
1975	1,62,576	22,214	1,84,790	10.24
1976	2,86,412	38,078	3,24,490	75.60
1977	3,87,817	54,223	4,42,000	36.22
1978	4,43,342	59,323	5,82,665	13.71
SIXTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (1980-85)				
1980	5,48,491	46,026	5,94,517	7.36
1981	5,98,555	43,745	6,42,300	8.04
1982	5,60,987	42,851	6,03,834	- 5.98
1983	3,98,428	41,101	4,39,529	- 27.20
1984	19,26,84	36,458	22,91,42	-47.86

SEVENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (1985-90)				
1985	4,65,599	38,015	5,03,614	119.78
1986	5,36,398	53,573	5,89,716	17.1
1987	6,64,681	57,573	7,21,654	22.37
1988	6,62,097	59,938	7,22,035	0.05
1989	4,90,215	67,762	5,57,977	- 22.72
EIGHTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (1992-97)				
1992	1175	9149	10324	64.21
1993	-	8026	8026	-22.25
1994	500	9314	9814	22.30
1995	322	8198	8520	-13.18
1996	375	9592	9967	16.98
NINTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (1997-2002)				
1997	7027	9111	16138	61.91
1998	99636	10247	109883	580.89
1999	200162	17130	217292	97.74
2000	104337	7575	111912	-48.49
2001	66732	5859	72591	-35.13
TENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (2002-2007)				
2002	24670	2686	27356	-62.31
2003	182205	8959	191164	598.80
2004	358095	18634	376729	97.07
2005	585702	19680	605382	60.69
2006	412879	20009	432888	-28.49
ELEVENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (2007-2011)				
2007	417264	24576	441840	2.06
2008	551041	21588	572629	29.60
2009	577345	23905	601250	4.99
2010	710504	25984	736488	22.49

Source: - Directorate of Tourism, Planning and Statistical section, J&K Government, Srinagar.

The tourism sector generates revenue for government and public sector undertakings which has shown significant increase over the years. The revenue generated is expected to increase manifold provided the situation remains normal and the tourist influx increases in a desired manner. The state has sufficient potential to exploit more and more revenue generation. Revenue earnings made under the public sector during last five years are summarized as under:-

Table No:1.6 Revenue Earned

Name of the Department/ organization	Revenue earned during last five years (Rs. In lakhs)					
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Directorate tourism Kashmir/ Jammu (DGT)	11.46	14.83	35.25	62.06	54.00	56.65
SKICC	46.00	49.34	52.00	64.00	71.20	65.00
Gulmarg Dev. Authority.	19.70	21.86	32.46	48.50	51.17	34.35
Pahalgam Dev. Authority.	5.12	9.16	9.95	19.00	12.73	6.68
Sonmarg Dev. Authority.	0.00	13.78	36.35	32.50	45.00	39.00
Patnitop Dev. Authority.	11.00	10.15	15.62	79.00	20.00	19.54
Royal Spring Golf Course	57.26	35.09	34.73	50.06	45.66	44.25
Cable Car Corporation	289.00	754.41	676.00	798.81	839.14	1116.00
J&K TDC	1642.41	1796.44	1765.39	1763.00	1963.00	1894.00
Total	2081.95	2705.06	2657.75	2926.93	3101.90	3275.47

It is clear from the Table 1.6 that the Department of Tourism is lacking behind other tourism organizations in Revenue earning during last five years.

7. Conclusion Suggestions for Sustainable Tourism Development

The above analysis reveals that the Tourism sector in J&K suffered a sudden downfall due to the massive political disturbance which struck the state in late 1980s". Prosperity was hit on all indices and development took a back seat. This led to a creation of a deep economic downturn which will take enormous time to reverse.

The need of the hour is to work towards planning sustainable tourism which will be the first step towards improving the dilapidated scenario. Although the economic revival of tourism is an uphill task and is riddled with multiple challenges ranging from renewing the industry to tapping the new potentials. However, the opportunities are enormous as the state is not only endowed with scenic beauty but rich flora and fauna as well. All it requires is intelligent planning and an iron will.

There is a strong tie between the state's prosperity and tourist influx. Tourist footfall is clearly related to violence associated with militancy in the region. Therefore any suggestions and recommendations in the area should include consideration of the following issues:

1. Development of a strong network among government and various agencies, tourism industry, interest groups, host communities, indigenous communities, etc which would work towards re-marketing Kashmir tourism on modern basis.
2. Tourism-related infrastructure – transportation, telecommunications, restaurants, shopping, support services, travel services, recreation and entertainment, health and emergency services etc. should be coupled with fool proof safety and security systems.
3. Tourism awareness in the host community and interest groups. Website and other related media should be used to allay any fear among the prospect visitors. Queries like Is Kashmir safe? What about attacks on tourists? What if I get in the midst of an attack? etc. should be addressed to properly. Prospective visitors and tourists should be given proper assurance and knowledge they require.
4. A „tourist code of conduct“ for this region should be evolved, which could be applicable to both the tourist industry and consumers alike. All should strictly adhere to the provisions of code e.g. Do not go trekking near the Line of Control (the sensitive de-facto border that separates the two parts of J&K), and try to avoid flashpoint towns like Tral, Sopore etc.
5. Identifying new tourist spots will go a long way in enhancing tourism potential of the valley.
6. Need to fight the negative violence prone image of the state by creating massive awareness about the recent tourist influx. A website should be developed wherein people who visited the valley can share their joyous experiences with those who would like to come. In addition to this print and electronic media should be involved. The popular social networking site like Facebook can also be used for this purpose.
7. Cross border travel and certain tourist based cultural events should be arranged. Educative Kashmir based seminars wherein the negative image of the valley can be curbed before the outside world should be organized. Jammu and Kashmir government celebrated 2010 as "Visit Kashmir Year" which can be seen as a big effort by the state to boost Tourism. On similar lines Central Government has boosted its effort to promote tourism in Kashmir by opening 104 peaks in Jammu and Kashmir. This move will promote Adventure Tourism in the state.
8. Tourism should be promoted as an ambassador and vehicle of understanding peace and harmony. People should not only look at it as a medium of entertainment but also as a force which brings „hosts“ and „guests“ together wherein they learn understanding and appreciation of each other.
9. The central and state governments should jointly undertake steps to improve the security situation and instil confidence in tourists who have been the target of terrorist attacks. The government should provide an insurance cover for both domestic and international travellers to the region. The J&K govt is reportedly considering a proposal in this regard.
10. Tourism should be shifted from being a seasonal commotion to an all year round activity. Kashmir has four distinct seasons, each with its own peculiar character and distinctive charm. Proper tourism marketing of each season can increase the tourist activity manifold.

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