

Potential, Prospects and Challenges of Development of Tourism in Rajouri and Poonch

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Abstract

Tourism plays an important role in economies of almost every nation viz-a-viz GDP of the world. In the recent time few economies in the world which are regarded as purely tourism economies. Similarly, the economy of the State Jammu and Kashmir can also be termed as tourism economy i.e. tourism based economy. No doubt, there is a vital role of tourism in overall development of any nation or region. However, this economic development which can be called as green side of the tourism is also linked with some dark patches which exist in its shadow. Usually, we cheer the economic gains of the tourism and ignore its impact on the environment and the mankind which appears at its later stage. So it is better to plan tourism well in advance by keeping the plight of future generations in view. The present study shall investigate tourism potential, challenges and prospects in twin border Districts Rajouri and Poonch. Tourism in this area is in nascent stage therefore, measures need to be incorporated at this very stage, so that the flora, fauna and environment may not suffer in the long run.

Keywords: Tourism, Rajouri and Poonch, Environment, Economic development, Region.

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1. Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir is the Northern most States of the India. Geographically it is a unique State with three different regions within the State i.e. Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal husbandry, Forestry and Tourism are the main source of economy of the Jammu and Kashmir State. But, economy of twin border districts Rajouri and Poonch can be considered as backward economically. Still agriculture, farming and cattle rearing form the backbone of the economy of the Districts. There is very less scope for industrial development in this region because of the hilly terrain and remoteness of the area. Therefore, there is very less scope of development of agriculture in this region because of limited availability of arable land and small landholding. Secondly, the prospect for development of industries is also hampered due to hilly terrain, non availability of inputs for industry i.e. Men, Machine and Material. Confusion on the land transfer in the State as well as in this region therefore, the only prosperous area is the service sector.

Thirdly, the changing perception, modern lifestyle and new culture adoption bring a shift in people's life as a result people left cattle rearing, farming and other traditional activities. Therefore bulk of the section of the people are depending upon government jobs. But in recent years with the increase in the education among the masses creates completion in limited government jobs which result heavy unemployment in the region.

1.1 Objectives

Following are the objectives of the study:

- This study will investigate a relation between tourism and economic gain.
- Impact of tourism on the environment.
- Prospects and Challenges of development of tourism in the area of Rajouri and Poonch.
- The study will also highlight the mechanism for sustainable tourism development.

2. Methodology

Research methodology involves visit to various tourist places therefore, the field study; allows a critical understanding of the issues associated with the tourism, its impact on the environment and flora and fauna of the area. Insights are gained through various journals, articles, books and newspapers.

3. Discussion

3.1. Review of Literature

Man as a traveler is known since time immemorial. Initially their travel was for the quest of food followed by shelter. Generally with the passage of time their travel turned to several new dimensions-travel as an adventure, travel as a hobby, for relaxation, to enjoy the natural beauty, as a pilgrimage, to acquire knowledge on historical aspects and archaeological sites. Travel sometimes is associated with adventure and sometimes for religious purpose by visiting pilgrimages or by taking a holy dip. All these are to quench the thirst of mind. Thus, travel or tour has a very important position in human life and ultimately tourism that is a movement of people within their own country or across the nation border became one of the largest and gainful industries in the economic domain of human life (Dasgupta et al., 2007). Tourism is a human experience, a social experience, a geographical phenomenon, a resource value, and a business industry. It is a major social phenomenon of the modern society with enormous economic consequences. Its importance as an instrument for economic development and employment generation, particularly in remote and backward areas, has now been well recognized the world over. The industry today is globally recognized as a major economic contributor and employment generator. The investment flows into this field are constantly on the increase (WTO, 2011).

The debate on the importance of, and distinction between, tourism as a ritual and as a form of spirituality has not been conclusive (UNWTO, 2011). But, with an increasing differentiation of pilgrimage, religious tourism and usual tourism, and the difference between the wishes of people to search for a new meaning to their everyday life, all the shifts described show that the study of pilgrimage and religious tourism are being modified in the twenty-first century (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). The Indian department of tourism's definition is almost the same as proposed by the U.N. World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) which define tourists as people who 'travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited. But the Indian department of tourism's explicitly includes people traveling for the following reasons: leisure - recreation, holiday, health, study, religion, sport, business, family mission and meeting (GOI, 2008).

Krishna (1993) through light on historical prospective, that the first conscious and planned efforts to promote tourism in India were made in 1945 when a committee was set up by the Government under the chairmanship of Sir John Sergeant, the then, Educational Advisor to the Government of India. But it was only after the 1980's that tourism activity gained impetus full swing. The government of India took several significant steps, making tourism in the country effective in 1982. Later in 1988, the national committee on tourism formulated a comprehensive plan for achieving a sustainable growth in the tourism sector. In 1992, a national action plan was prepared followed by the national strategy for promotion of tourism in 1996. In 1997, a new tourism policy laid emphasis on the roles of central and state governments, public sector undertakings and the private sector in the development of tourism. The need for involvement of Panchayati Raj institutions, local bodies, non-governmental organizations and the local youth in the creation of tourism facilities also came into existence. Many small places economies highly depend on pilgrimage tourism as evidenced by the significant share of pilgrimage tourism in their total earnings. In year, 2009 pilgrimage tourism alone contributed 44.5 percent of the total export earnings of Indian tourism. Vijayanand (2012) describes that pilgrimage tourism is playing a major role in socioeconomic development. Among other observations, it has shown that, for many countries of the region, the economic significance of pilgrimage tourism is very large when measured against GDP and exports. For many countries in general and the least developed countries in particular, pilgrimage tourism is a sector in which they have comparative, if not competitive, advantages for which they can efficiently convert domestic resources into foreign exchange. If appropriately used, such foreign exchange can purchase the investment goods necessary to support more broadly based economic development policies. . The study has demonstrated that the social significance of pilgrimage tourism, measured in terms of employment (especially unskilled labor), is very large. It has also illustrated that appropriate pilgrimage tourism-related interventions can play a role in raising the standard of living and in reducing poverty in local communities. P.K. Bal (2008) portray various dimensions of tourism and Hospitality which includes various hotels, motels and restaurants throughout the world as well as in India. Various techniques of revenue management and emerging issues of IT are also the part of this book. Kanul (1984) book "The Dynamics of tourism-A trilogy", deal with the concept of tourism, its fundamental nature, its correlations, development and manifestations, and interaction and interplay of two basic factor-accommodation and transportation leading to the phenomenal growth of tourism world-wide.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir has been an important tourist destination, attracting both domestic and foreign tourists. The tourism sector with a revenue generation of more than Rs 3000 crores, provides employment to about 5 lakh people. The sector with its potential for employing people across the skill spectrum and positive externalities for other sectors like handicrafts, handlooms and transport occupies an important place in the development and employment strategy of the state. Tourism as an industry not only incentivizes the preservation of culture and heritage but is also in sync with the objective of conserving the fragile environment of the state. (Report of the Expert Group on Employment in Jammu & Kashmir, 2011)

As per, PHD Research Bureau (2011) which point out that State Jammu and Kashmir is an important tourist destination and has been an attractive destination for tourists, the world over. Vast numbers of tourists visit the beautiful Kashmir valley, Leh and Ladakh every year. 19 tourism development authorities have been established at places having tourism potential. There is vast scope for adventure tourism, pilgrim tourism, spiritual tourism, and health tourism leaving aside the traditional recreational tourism. During the last decade, the share of services sector has been stable in Jammu and Kashmir. The average contribution of the services sector in the GSDP of Jammu and Kashmir was around 45% during FY2001to FY2008. The service sector of Jammu & Kashmir is dominated by tourism and adventure sports. As per Annual Report of MSME-DI, Jammu & Kashmir (2011-12) which states that, Besides the scenic beauty, J&K is also known as a famous pilgrimage center i.e Shri Mata Vaishno Devi in Jammu province, Amarnath in Srinagar province and old Buddhist Monasteries/Gompas in Leh. It is worth mentioning that the State of J&K is one of the best tourist centers of India and is known as “Paradise on Earth”. C. G. Bruce (2005) in his book “The Peep at Kashmir” throws light on the historical importance of some temples of Kashmir. The temples during the reign of different rulers, particularly during the Afghan rule, which has been termed by him as the darkest period of ecological destruction in the Valley. The author has also focused on the snake worship period of Kashmir Hinduism. S. K. Sharma and S. R. Bakshi (1995) in their book “Kashmir Art, Architecture and Tourism” have given a brief introduction to the ancient monument of Kashmir But; their study had not included ancient temples of this region.

P.N.K Bamzai, (1994) has written a good account other religion on of Kashmir in his book “Cultural and Political History of Kashmir”. This book throws light on all aspects of ancient culture and political hierarchy of the State.

Abdul Bari Naik (2008), the thesis presents a detail account of the history of tourism in Kashmir Valley i.e. tourism in Ancient, Medieval, British and Post British Period. Further study also focused on leisure, adventure; health and heritage tourism of the area by exploring few potential tourist sites. Saraf Siuraj (1958) throws light on historical aspects of Hindu Shrines of Jammu in his book; it also takes account of the historical importance of Sadh Mahadev, Karachi, Bilawar, Purandal, Kalash Yatra, Vashno Devi and Bahufort in Jammu. In the light of above mentioned facts tourism is recommended as a lead sector for development of State Jammu and Kashmir as well as district Rajouri and Poonch, this review further indicates that there has not much study undertaken in the areas of Rajouri and Poonch. So this study i.e Potential, Prospects and Challenges of development of tourism in Rajouri and Poonch is purposely undertaken to fill the research gap.

Seeking an alternative for economic development and contribution in employment generation, tourism can be regarded as a viable source of economic development in the region. As stated that Jammu and Kashmir is divided into three regions.

3.2. Similarly, tourism in the State is also categorized into three i.e. Leisure, Pilgrimage and Adventure:

- Kashmir is famous for scenic beauty which suits leisure activities and its snow covered mountains are renowned for winter sports in the world.
- Ladakh the Cold Desert which emerged a unique destination in the recent past and positioned prominent place among foreign national’s minds. As Ladakh is famous for adventure travel so it attracts thousands of adventure travelers across the world. It also attracts Buddhist tourists from Japan, China and parts of Europe because of presence of Buddhist monarchies in the region.
- Jammu the city of temples, remains famous for Pilgrimage tourism in the country. Although, most of incoming tourism in this region is domestic but they are very large in number. Only Mata Vashno Devi Shrine, attracts millions of pilgrims in this region, it is the second most Shrine in the Country after the Tirupati shrine of south India, which attracts millions of pilgrims in a year.

Like other Himalayan destination Rajouri and Poonch is a part of this region also have some unique and potential tourism product in all forms like pilgrimage, leisure and adventure travel. Unfortunately this region couldn't bring in the tourism map of the Himalayan destination. But in the recent years with the changing political scenario of the region, a rise in the education and recommendation of the working group on Kashmir highlighted the tourism potential of the region. Moreover, revival of historical Mughal road also brings areas into lime light from tourism development prospective.

3.3. This region has the unique distinction from the rest of the three region of the state these are:

- Moderate Climate
- Short distance from winter and Summer Capital of the State (i.e. from Srinagar and Jammu).
- Round the year tourism activities.
- Almost availability of all categories of tourism.

The moderate climate of the region suits tourists in winter, there is not much chill as in Kashmir and Ladakh and during summer there is a very pleasant climate which is not there at the peripheries of Jammu. In short this region possesses the character of Kashmir, Ladakh and Jammu in all respects. Tourist, who usually comes to Ladakh, Kashmir and Jammu, can be easily motivated for this region.

Now, the leisure and adventurous tourists from Kashmir can easily reach to Rajouri and Poonch via Mughal road, which is a 3-4 hour memorable journey and amazing experience through the lap of the nature. Religious devotees who come for Darshan of Mata Vashno Devi can be easily switched to Rajouri and Poonch through promotion and development of tourism infrastructure. This region has a very pleasant and moderate climate so, tourism activities can encourage round the year.

3.4. Dividing categorically tourist destination of the region, one can analyze that the region has potential for:

- Adventure travel.
- Pilgrimage tourism.
- Heritage tourism.
- Leisure and Ecotourism.

4. Prospects

Tourists always seek something new, thrill, adventure and excitement, they try to experience new things and wants their tour more memorable. In other words tourist wants maximum thrill in minimum time. They are fed up by routinely visiting famous sights so, this is an opportunity to J&KTDC that while considering tourists brain mapping they can include Rajouri and Poonch in Brand Kashmir. For how long we will continue to sell Gulmargh, Pahalgam and Ladakh there is needed to develop and promote some alternate, so that burden may shift to other places.

4.1. Prospects of tourism in Rajouri and Poonch include:

- Cross border tourism.
- Spa tourism-Tata Pani/Hot Spring bath, Remedy for Joint & skin diseases.
- MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Events/Exhibitions).
- Rural tourism.

5. Challenges

Whenever we discuss tourism we usually discuss its economic benefits, which is so called, the green side of the tourism and we pay no attention to its dark side. In greed of getting much economic benefit from tourism or tourist activities we usually not consider its harmful impact, which are there in the shadow of tourism (dark side). These harmful effects may include impact on the environment, wildlife, culture and human values. These impacts are related to flora and fauna of the area, among them fragile natural setup is the first victim next the environment which may include glacier, water bodies and birds and wild animal then the culture of the society and hence ultimately human race (i.e. future generation). This is the description of primary, secondary and tertiary victims of tourism.

In case of District Rajouri and Poonch, there exists very few but very delicate species of flora and fauna. Tourism in this region is in nascent stage; therefore, Policymaker; expert and other stakeholder should intervene and design tourist circuit in such a manner that it may not harm nature at all. Usually, whenever tourism bad impact appears in any region in that very movement we tries to put check on them, which is not possible at that very stage. So, it is better to plan sustainable tourism model at a premature stage by keeping all complication in our mind well in advance. As we have the bad examples from Dallake, Wolerlake, Himichal Pardesh-Nanital, Utranchal and recent example is periphery of Shri Amar Nath Shrine at Pahalgam, from Kashmir itself. Again these statistics specify that better to plan than promote and then develop tourism.

6. Policy recommendations for the development of tourism in Rajouri and Poonch:

- ✓ Rajouri and Poonch need to be incorporated in brand Kashmir for tourism.
- ✓ There is scope of development of Pilgrimage, Heritage and Adventure tourism in the region.
- ✓ There are many prospects for development of ecotourism.
- ✓ This area should be granted the status of hill development council on the pattern of Ladakh Hill Development Council.
- ✓ There is a need to consider Rajouri and Poonch tourism potential by concerned J&KTDC and GOI then accordingly by assessing the areas potential further developmental plan, promotional and marketing activities can be undertaken.
- ✓ Need to sensitize community and concerned district tourism development authorities, (TDA).
- ✓ There is much scope for the development of cross border tourism in these twin border districts, this opportunity can be grabbed easily.
- ✓ There is a need to develop tourism infrastructure.
- ✓ Sensitization program for community participation in tourism activities.
- ✓ Training and development program for creation of local skills inventory.

7. Conclusion

Tourism professional including scientist, environmental experts and every other keen stakeholder in all over the world are not happy, with the past and present practices (unsustainable) of tourism. Most of the parts of the world including India and state Jammu and Kashmir are lacking in implementing sustainable tourism development practices. Considering coming generation in view a strategic approach can develop, so that the economic benefits of tourism as well as preservation of resources go hand in hand. As tourism potential is there in twin border Districts Rajouri and Poonch, but it is not yet explored. If it is explored under a grand master plan (under sustainable practice(s)) by involving few expert groups, this region can become a role model for rest of the world, both in term of sustainable tourism development and resulting economic gain. By keeping potential prospects and properly addressing challenges while developing tourism.

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