

Potentialities of Pilgrimage Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir UT, India

Aamir Fayaz Wani

Ph.D Research Scholar, Centre for Rural Development, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar-608002, Cuddalore District, Tamil Nadu, India

[Email-aamirwanird@gmail.com](mailto:Aamirwanird@gmail.com)

Rifat Jan

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar-608002, Cuddalore District, Tamil Nadu, India

[Email-rifatwani1118@gmail.com](mailto:Rifatwani1118@gmail.com)

Pilgrimage meaning travel for religious or spiritual purposes it motivates tourists for the achievement of religious attitude and practices. Pilgrimage tourism is considered to be one of the fast growing forms of tourism. This form of tourism is important for promoting inter faith harmony, love, affection and respect for each other's religion, besides this promotes livelihoods which in turn increases living standard of people. Jammu and Kashmir is the paradise on earth because of the great scenic beauty and sacred pilgrimage destinations which are very popular in India and all over the world. The paper will explore the phenomenon of pilgrimage tourism in the context of Jammu and Kashmir and will also highlight the major pilgrimage centers that are located in this state. The aim of the study was to determine what pilgrimage tourism is and how it is different from other forms of tourism, major pilgrimage centers and the issues and challenges in pilgrimage tourism in Jammu and Kashmir. The infrastructural issues at pilgrimage destinations are also highlighted in this paper.

Key words: Pilgrimage tourism, pilgrimage centers.

Introduction

Pilgrimage tourism also termed as tourism of faith. This is a type of tourism which attracts devotees, pilgrims (tourists) all over the world. Pilgrimage tourism has added a new dimension to tourism industry. Since the inception of civilization, tourism industry has begun. The popularity of pilgrimage tourism is increasing day by day. The tourism of any form directly influences economy, fosters development process, and helps in maintaining peace among people. A pilgrimage is a journey for a search of great spiritual significance. Often it is a religious journey to a shrine or a sacred place of person's faith and belief. In its simple form, pilgrimage is a journey to a holy site for religious purpose. Jammu and Kashmir is gifted with many such holy destinations, and that is why Jammu and Kashmir is also called the land of pilgrimages. It is a land where diverse beliefs, traditions and customs prevail and still they live in harmony. The state is enriched with natural beauty, monuments and temples which are ancient and have its own distinct specialty that needs to be heard. Among these holy destinations Mata Vishnu Devi and Shri Amaranth cave, Dargha hazratbal, Sheikh noor din vali mausoleum possess unique distinction then others, as they attract huge devotees not only from the country but from rest of the world as well. The number of pilgrims visiting the state is increasing year by year and the current year of 2022 witnessed record breaking arrival of tourists in Jammu and Kashmir and more importantly in Kashmir, so far unto September 2022 one crore and sixty thousand tourists visited Kashmir valley alone which

brings enormous gains to the local residents, the state government and to the organizations which look after these sacred destinations. Pilgrimage tourism has now become a significant part of tourism industry in Jammu and Kashmir, contributing enormously to the state economy and providing employment to a large number of people which are associated with pilgrimage tourism industry directly or indirectly. And this segment of tourism in Jammu and Kashmir bring about tremendous change socio- economic development of union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Mata Vaishno Devi university, Islamic university of science and technology, cancer institute etc all these institutes of great importance come up because of this segment of tourism.

Objectives

The paper will find out the patterns of pilgrimage tourism in respect of Jammu and Kashmir. The aim of the study was to examine what pilgrimage tourism is actually and how it varies from other segments of tourism and to create awareness among people about major pilgrimage destinations of Jammu and Kashmir.

Methodology:

The study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. The primary data was collected by the researcher himself from the pilgrims across different pilgrimage sites through direct personal interview method. The secondary data was collected from various publications such as journals, Research articles, Internet and published and unpublished records of Ministry of Tourism Government of India and J&K tourism.

Literature Review:

Pilgrimage tourism as a growing segment of tourism, reviews the important studies conducted in India and abroad. Kriener and Kriet (2000) in their paper examined behavioral characteristics of christen pilgrims towards religious sites. They studied that there are considerable differences between “pilgrims” and “tourists” behavior towards any religious site despite of the fact that both had three common elements like discretionary income, leisure time and social sanctions. Bhardwaj (1973) According to Skandapurana (a religious treatise), truth, forgiveness, control of senses, kindness to all living beings and simplicity is tirtha. Thus, tirthayatra not only means physically visiting the holy places but implies mental and spiritual discipline as well. It has rightly said

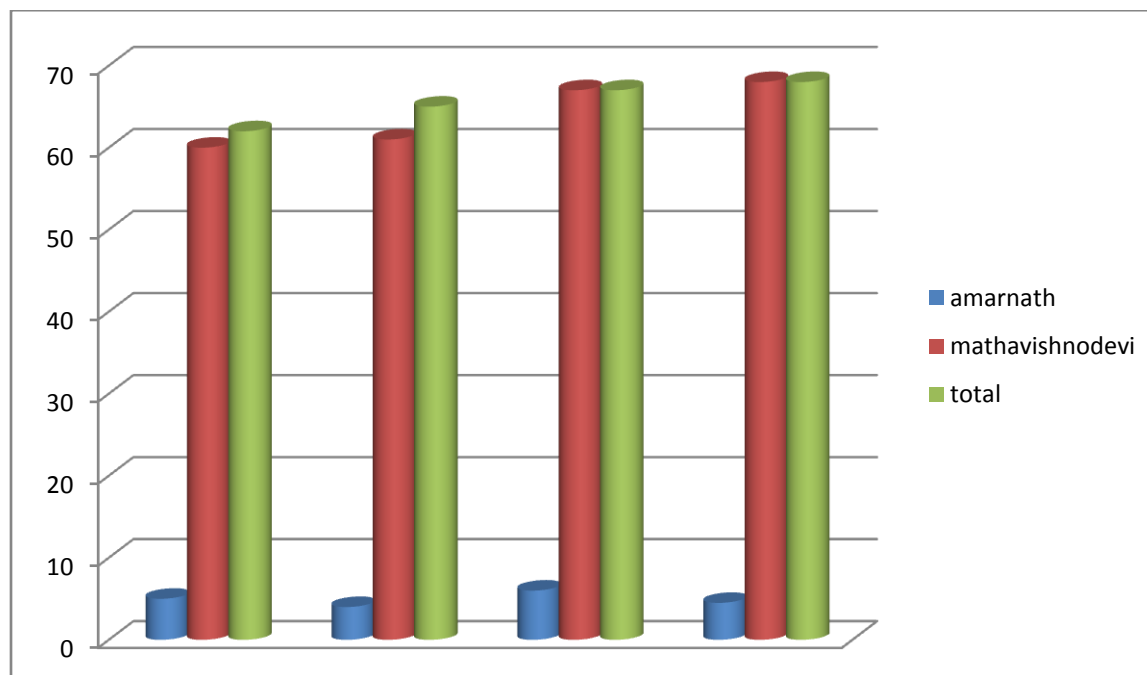
that following the Vedic period, the practice of religious tourism or pilgrimage seems to have gained increased popularity as evident from the great epic Mahabharata. Barber (1993) Pilgrimages have powerful political, economic, social, and cultural implications, and can even affect global trade and health. Pilgrimage inevitably necessitates spatial movements and for this reason stimulates geographer's interest with distances travelled and the phenomenon's effect on behavior. Pilgrimage is also an important subject due to its scope and special influence. It is also a primary economic activity for some countries and cities. A. Batra (2003) In his study highlighted different Buddhist pilgrimage sites like Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Rajgir, Nalanda and Kushinagar situated in India. The researcher viewed that India had tremendous potential to attract a large number of tourists from Far East and South-East Asia but due to lack of proper roads, basic amenities, infrastructure facilities and inadequate promotional efforts on the part of both the central and state government the growth rate of Buddhist tourism in India was very slow. Tomasi (2002) Local hospitality is one of the most important components of pilgrimage tourism and the hospitality industry thrives on service quality and facilities to ensure customer's satisfaction. Sushma Mawa (2004) carried out the study on Pilgrimage Tourism Marketing Strategy at Shri Mata Vaishnov Devi Shrine. The study proposed marketing strategy for various services drawn on the basis of an evaluation of these services the pilgrims availed during their visit to Shri Mata Vaishnov Devi Shrine. The major pilgrimage tourism services classified under various groups like hotel services, transportation services, retailing services had been studied in detail for the formulation of marketing strategy. Besides, the supervisory effectiveness of the Shrine board has also been studied to make the study meaningful for planned and effective marketing efforts by both commercial and non commercial providers of these services. The marketing effectiveness for each service has been measured separately and also by taking all the services together in terms of arithmetic mean. Sandeep Das (2011) In his article explains that tourism provides opportunities of job creation directly and indirectly. So this sector should be provided with incentives for sustainable and overall economic growth along with creation of jobs.

Pilgrimage tourism seems to be a new concept but it is not a new phenomenon. Based on the literature review and interviews and observations conducted with various stakeholders in various areas, this study defines a pilgrimage tourist as someone who visits a place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of pilgrimage growth, without overt religious compulsion, which could be religious, non-religious, sacred or experiential in nature, but within the Divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling. A predominant theory of marketing argues that every market consists of groups or segments of customers with different needs and demands (Kamla-Raj 2010). It should be noted here that segments are unlikely to be mutually exclusive, and this would also apply to pilgrimage tourism.

Pilgrimage tourism in Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir is blessed with plenty of well known religious destinations. Pilgrimage to these destinations brings enormous benefits to local residents, the state government and to the organizations which look after these sacred destinations. Jammu and Kashmir has a lot of pilgrimage potentialities, some of the major pilgrimage destinations are: Mata Vaishnov Devi, Shri Amarnath cave, Hazratbal Shrine, Peer Khoh, Raghunath Temple, Kheer Bawani etc. These are some of the famous pilgrimage centers that are visited by devotees not only from the country, but from all over the world. The government of Jammu and Kashmir has taken various initiatives to promote the various places of worship. Various initiatives are made to develop the infrastructure in

order to accommodate the ever increasing number of pilgrims. Pilgrimage tourism positively effect on income, employment and standard of living of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Most of the pilgrimage sites are blessed with the scenic beauty surrounded by great Himalayas. This aspect also attracts large number of tourists every year. One of the greatest advantages of pilgrimage tourism is promotion of mutual respect, inter faith and brotherhood. The famous Mata Vaishnov Devi and ShriAmarnath Cave are located in this state, and the number of devotees visiting these sacred destinations was increasing till 2012, and after which the number starts decreasing but the year 2022 showed highest ever pilgrims to Amarnathji yatra.



Year	Amarnath	Mathavaishnoodevi	Total
2016	3.65	70.50	74.15
2017	3.14	75.17	78.31
2018	5.98	68.92	74.9
2019	4.74	83.32	88.09
2020*	Covid-19 Lock Down		
2021	5.58	88.49	94.07
2022	7.35	102.15	108.58

Pilgrimage Centers in Jammu and Kashmir.

Jammu and Kashmir has given birth to large number of sofi saints wales, rishis and monies. Jammu and Kashmir is a is considered sacred by the people of all religion. The state is bestowed with many such pilgrimage destinations which are situated amidst the picturesque beauty of Himalayas, visited by the people not only from the country but from all over the world. The state has previously three distinct parts namely Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, now only two jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh is now separate union territory after abrogation of article 370 .

Pilgrimage in Jammu

Jammu is also known as city of temples. Following are the major pilgrimage destinations in and around Jammu city

1. Mata Vaishnov Devi Shrine 50 km from Jammu. This small town (Katra) serves as the base camp for visiting the famous shrine of Mata Vaishnov Devi shrine in the Trikuta Hills. The shrine is approachable on foot along a 12 km foot-path. Every year, nearly 3 to 4 million pilgrims pay obeisance at MataVaishnov Devi shrine. The holy cave shrine of Mata Vaishnov Devi is one of the most popular and sacred Shrines of the country. It is an ancient shrine whose reference is found in the Vedas and other ancient scriptures. Previously the Shrine had only one natural entry cave, but now two more exit caves have been constructed. This shrine is 13 km away from Katra town.

2. Peer Khoh It is one of the famous pilgrimage destinations in Jammu. The cave of Peer Khoh is situated on the circular road and is famous for naturally made Shiva Lingam. Legends suggest that this cave has routes to other cave shrines in Jammu as well as of India.

3. Raghunath Temple and Ranbireshwar Temple It was Maharaja Gulab Sing who laid the foundation for the temple in 1853, but it was his son, Maharaja Ranbir Sing, who got its work completed in 1860. It is dedicated to Lord Rama. The inner walls of the shrine are covered with the gold sheets on three sides. Ranbireshwar temple: It was built by Maharaja Ranbir Singh in 1883, and is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The temple has a 7.5 ft high central Shiva Lingam, along with twelve 15 cm high Shiva Linghams of crystal.

4. Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji Gurudwara It is one of most scared Gurudawaras in Jammu. It had a 3 ft long marble statue of Guru Nanak devji, and is believed to have been build by Maharaja Partap Singh.

5. Others There are many other famous and sacred destinations in Jammu, which are visited by devotees like Mahamaya temple, behind Bahu fort, covered by city forest, is among the ancient temples of Jammu. Peer Baba, it is a Dargah of a saint, Peer Budhan Ali Shah and is visited by the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs alike. Protestant church, on Wizard road is the oldest church in the Jammu city.

Pilgrimage in Kashmir

Raj Taringini the chronology of the Kashmir Kings written by Kaihana praises the beauty of Kashmir as follows: “KasmiraParvatiParoksh; Tat Swami chMaheswara”. Meaning Kashmir is as beautiful as Goddess

Parvati manifest; and its owner is Lord Shiva Himself”. And the Mughal Emperor exclaimed “Agar Firdous Bar-ru-e-ZaminAst; HaminAsto, HaminAsto, HaminAst”which means if there is paradise on this earth: This is it, this is it, and this is it

1. Shri Amarnath Cave It is situated around 145 km away from Srinagar and is dedicated to Lord Shiva. Every year government of Jammu and Kashmir organizes a yatra to Amarnath cave in the month of July and August.this place is reachable by two ways in Kashmir one from baltal side and another from pahalgam side ,but pahalgam route is considered traditional one. It is during july and august when the white Shiv-Lingham build of ice starts to take form. On the full moon day, it attains complete form and it is this day that is believed to be the day when Lord Shiva told the secret of creation of life and immortality to Goddess Parvati that was overheard by two doves. Reaching this sacred place is not an easy task and only people with good health can complete the challenge and reach the destination without any trouble. Government and SASB have fixed the yatra for 45 days for this year 2022. Three lakh pilgrims paid obeisance this year and about thirty five pilgrims died and more than one hundred pilgrims died this year.

2. Hazratbal Shrine The shrine was built in the 17th century by Muslim Auqaf Trust. The main reason was to preserve the relics of Prophet Mohammad (SAW) . The shrine is located on the banks of famous Dal Lake in Srinagar and is one of the most important pilgrim places for Muslims. This is the place where Prophet Mohammad (SAW) hair is kept inside a glass casket. The hair is kept for public display only on auspicious days. The shrine is also famous for fairs that are held in the premises which attract lot of **pilgrims to the shrine.**

3. Kheer Bavani and Shankar Acharya Temple KheerBavani is a Hindu shrine and is devoted to Goddess Ragnya Devi. It is situated at Tullamula in the Srinagar district and is surrounded by streams and chinar trees. Shankaracharya temple is also situated in the Srinagar district on the hill known as Takht-e-Suleiman. It is a house at a height of 1100 ft above surface level of the main city on the hill. 4. Charar-e-sharif and Jama Masjid: it is counted amongst the most sacrosanct Muslim Shrines in India. It is situated approximately 40 km from Srinagar. It is a wooden shrine and is approximately 600 years old. The Jama Masjid of Srinagar is situated at Nowhatta, in the middle of the old city. It is an important Mosque in Srinagar and was built by Sultan Sikandar in 1400 AD. And this Mosque was later extended by Zain-ul-Abidin who was the son of Sultan Sikandar.

Problems and Issues in Pilgrimage Tourism

Pilgrimage tourism based on religious faith raises controversies. These include conflicts between pilgrimage and secular ideas ,competition between faiths for a location and heritage, the building of shrine may have great spiritual value but a commercial value too. The huge rush to these sites often project vulnerability to theft and destruction to public and private property (Baltal crises, land transfer controversy at ShriAmarnath cave are the notable ones). UN organized rush to these sites without proper infrastructure often turns environmental hazardous. That led to prolonged adverse impact on health and livelihood of local people residing in and around those sites. One of the most important pilgrimage destination in Jammu and Kashmir is the famous Mata Vaishnov Devi, which outweighs the number of pilgrimage tourists visiting the state, but due to lack of infrastructure and limited number of hotels, the travelers prefer to cook their own food and travel by hired buses, which limit the benefits that could go to the local community. This also makes the schedule of devotees a bit hectic as well. Another issue which pilgrimage tourism in Jammu and Kashmir is facing is the limited number of days that the devotees can visit the Shri Amarnath cave (i-e, between 30-45 days in a year), and the death of devotees because of extreme environmental conditions. . Travel and Tourism depends on a wide range of infrastructure services like airports, roads, rail route, as well as basic infrastructural services required from

hotels, restaurants, shops and recreation facilities (telecommunications and utilities). It is the combination of tourism and infrastructure that reaps the economic, social and environmental benefits. Unfortunately the infrastructure development seems to be a big challenge for the sustainability of pilgrimage tourism in Jammu and Kashmir. Problems faced by pilgrimage tourists in Jammu and Kashmir. Nowadays, tourism and especially pilgrimage tourism are fast growing areas. It is a well known fact that prosperity of tourism will positively contribute towards its development and the problems associated with it will hamper the development process. There are many problems which are faced by the pilgrimage tourists, that starts right from their departure from the railway stations itself. Pilgrims had to wait for busses for a long time, which are usually over crowded. The private owners of the transport charge fare according to their will. When the pilgrims get a bus they had to face the problem of heavy traffic, language communication barriers, toilet facilities and mostly the problem of security. After reaching the destinations, the profit motivated shop owners do not attach much importance to hospitality and cleanliness. The price list does not prevail in these markets, so that they can charge the price of their will. Some shop owners even sell the products above to their MRP (Maximum Retail Price). Drinking water is an important problem faced by the pilgrims. Most of the pilgrimage destinations do not have access to portable water, and if some of the destinations have, but not at all safe for health. The parking facilities for vehicles are in a haphazard manner, which is not matching the increasing number of vehicles. The accommodation facilities available to pilgrims are insufficient when compared to the number of pilgrims visiting these sacred places. The heavy rush fills these sacred destinations with noise, dust and dirt. The authority does not pay any attention to clean the waste and ultimate burden falls on the shoulders of the local community. People visiting Kashmir valley face the communication problem, as communication facilities are not available at all. Existing network of roads to these pilgrimage centers are inadequate to meet the increasing needs of pilgrims. Some of the other problems that pilgrimage tourists face are Security concerns, Poor maintenance of sacred destinations, Untrained guides, Issue of theft and harassment, Lack of tourist facilitation centers.

Suggestions

On the basis of above findings the following suggestions will help in promoting and increasing pilgrimage tourism in Jammu and Kashmir.

1. The pilgrimage tourist destinations are exploited by private transport operators, and in Kashmir waqaf board that is the regulating body of muslim pilgrimage location should frame guidelines for hassle free visit of pilgrims to muslim sacred places with respect exploitation of pilgrims by local mullas and care takers and this is one of the most important problem pilgrims face. In order to check the exploitation strict rules should be made, like those who violate these rules should be fined heavily.
2. The quality of hospitality is poor. Government should arrange programmes to educate the locals and business units about hospitality, and the benefits that they will reap from it in the long run.
3. To encourage the pilgrims to stay for longer, government should come forward and develop the infrastructure and adequate measures should be taken to conserve the nature from pollution and other man made hazards of these sacred destinations on urgent basis. Improving the condition of roads, regular state transport busses, helicopter services and budget hotel would be useful interventions. Privatization of tourism can fill the gap of infrastructure development.
4. Local people should be made tourist friendly and tourist supportive system should be evolved. Government and the authorities of these sacred places should check seriously the misuse and exploitation by the local people.

5. As for as the deaths of pilgrims are concerned, government has restricted the age of pilgrims and only those who are medically fit can visit this sacred place, one more thing can be done is that medical facilities can be provided to the pilgrims near the cave as well.

Conclusion

Jammu and Kashmir, especially its pilgrimage destinations are unique and priceless treasure from the tourism point of view. Tourism is the back bone of Jammu and Kashmir's economy and the share of pilgrimage tourism is nearly half to the total share of tourism to state gross domestic product. The study has revealed various problems that confront the sustained development of pilgrimage tourism in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Although the pilgrims visiting these pilgrimage destinations are quite satisfied with the attitude of local people, but are dissatisfied with the infrastructure and the attitude of government towards its infrastructural development. If the problems are addressed properly and enough publicity is given to the pilgrimage destinations of Jammu and Kashmir, only then It will be harnessed to its optimum level. It is useful to take into account these suggestions, pilgrimage destinations can be made as heavenly places for pilgrims visiting these places. However government cannot do it alone, the local community should also join hands with the government and work for the pilgrimage tourism development in the state.the infrastructure of these scared places if developed on modern lines and as per the needs of pilgrims these destinations will surely help in boosting economy and livelihoods. More propagation about these destinations need to done both at national level and international level so that people from different countries come to know about these destinations.

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