

Tosamaidan In Kashmir: Ecological And Economic Significance

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Abstract

The Tosamaidan is very famous for its scenic beauty as it has been bestowed with beautiful and fascinating water bodies, snow clad mountains, lush green forests and verdant meadows, green valleys, pleasant and invigorating climate. Blessed with rich natural resources, the Tosamaidanis considered one of the most beautiful places in the Kashmir valley compared to other places. Its vast area, mesmerising water bodies, rich flora and fauna, beautiful glaciers, lakes, captivating topography, invigorating climate is unique in all respects. It is bounded by dense green forests particularly fir, pine, and deodar trees having great ecological and economic value. Its snow-capped mountains, fresh water rivers, and scattered sheep in beautiful green pastures are presenting a mesmerising and fascinating look to the nature lovers. However, there are few challenges to Tosamaidan, particularly infrastructure development on lines of eco-tourism. Facilities like roads, electricity, and water are yet to be developed there. Soaring global warming, climate change, environmental pollution, plying of vehicles on green meadows, and massive deforestation are other challenges to the developing Tosamaidan. There is an urgent need to prevent disturbance of the eco fragile Tosamaidan. For the last many years, its glaciers are melting at a high pace owing to global warming and anthropogenic activities. Frequent avalanches in Tosamaidan are clear indicators of manmade change. Between 1960 to 2014, Tosamiadan suffered a great loss due to artillery shelling. Declaring Tosamaidan as an ecotourism place in the valley can have many benefits as it will provide employment to lakhs of people, increase revenue to Jammu and Kashmir , maintain ecological balance in nature and increase tourist flow to the valley that promote further boost to the state economy. Development of Tosamaidan in a sustainable way will make it one of the best places in the Kashmir valley in all respects. The Tosamaidan stood as a heaven for pastoral and agricultural communities including Gujjars, Bakerwals, Chopans, Paharis and Kashmiris. They draw their meagre subsistence and livelihood from the natural resources present in Tosamaidan. They have not only been using it as a temporary residential place for centuries but for grazing sheep, goats and

cattle. Children of such communities particularly chopans and Bakerwals (pastoral communities) read and learn in government mobile schools at Tosamaidan during summer season. Such communities had suffered a lot earlier amid artillery firing. However, efforts are needed to ensure their well-being, preserve their cultural heritage, and support their livelihoods in view of industrialization, urbanization and modernization. They are already at the bottom of the economic ladder in a society and special schemes need to be launched on a war footing basis by the government for development of Tosamaidan along with the welfare of these pastoral communities.

Key Words: Mesmerising, invigorating, verdant, eco fragile, anthropogenic, pastoral and urbanization.

Introduction

Tosamaidan is the biggest meadow in Kashmir located at a distance of 60 km away from Srinagar and nestled in the Pir Panjal Mountains of district Budgam between two beautiful meadows of Gulmarg and Dodhpathri from its north and south sides. Tosamaidan is about 5 Km in length and more than 2.5 Km in breadth situated at the elevation of around 10000 feet above sea level. One notable structure in Tosamaidan is the “Seven Story Building” an architectural marvel that stands as a testament to the region's unique history. Some theories’ suggest that it acted as a rest house during British rule and others suggest that it had strategic military importance. Tosamaidan is a place of pleasure and solace to visitors. Every site at tosamaidan is fascinating such as Chinamarg, Dumdum, Danvaas, Kokerseene, PandanValley, KadlehBal, Gateh Marg, Haffaz, Mani Naar, ProunShahar, Guzzer, GaddahTaar, ShinnehKhazanah, Shupnaag, KashpPathri, BallehMasheed etc.. It offers panoramic views of the surrounding peaks creating a serene and captivating ambience. It is blessed with innumerable beauties of nature that make it an unmatched and unparalleled tourist destination in Budgam district of the Jammu and Kashmir.

Tosamaidan Retrieval and Development

Tosamaidan has had a great historical, economic, ecological and cultural importance for centuries. In 1964, the state government of Jammu and Kashmir leased about 11600 hectares of its land to the Indian Army for use as training purposes. During the said period, the Tosamaidan was not developed. However, its lease ended in 2014 and the whole Tosamaidan area was returned to the locals by the state government. Between 1960 to 2014, hundreds of forest smugglers and poachers easily managed to Tosamidan meadow where they caused great damage to its forests, wild animals and disturbed ecological balance in nature. For centuries, the Chopan and Bakerwal communities in the Kashmir valley, particularly from Budgam district, regularly take their sheep, goats and cattle to the Tosamaidan for grazing in the summer season. They are very dependent on rearing sheep, goats

and cattle in Tosamaidan. However, they are hardly getting basic facilities of life owing to meagre income from pastoralism. However, destruction caused to the Tosamaidan and its ecosystems by forest smugglers and poachers affected pastoral communities immensely as their livelihood and traditional practices suffered significantly. However, various movements were launched by environmentalists, civil society members, and RTI activists for its protection and conservation. The Tosamaidan Bachao Front was one of the important NGO that launched peaceful protests for development of Tosamaidan in all respects keeping in view its ecological, economic and cultural attributes. The Tosamaidan Bachao Movement was successful in 2014 when the Jammu and Kashmir government declared it an artillery firing free zone and handed it to the locals for the welfare of the environment and the society. Since 2014, the government of Jammu and Kashmir has been investing money for its development. Keeping in view its mesmerising beauty and invigorating climate, there is a need for development of Tosamaidan on modern and ecotourism lines as it will not only catch the attention of citizens of the country but foreigners as well.



Photographs of Illegal Loggers/Poachers captured by Authors in Tosamaidan (2022)

Ecological and Economic Significance

Tosamaidan is a rich treasure of velvet like green meadows, lush green forests, snow clad mountains, alpine green pastures, perennial and crystal clear rivers, shimmering lakes, hissing springs, giant glaciers, rich wildlife, mountainous gorges, carpet green turfs, cool breeze, and invigorating and salubrious climate that refresh hearts and minds of visitors. The beauty and charming nature of Tosamaidan is such that whosoever visits Tosamaidan feels not less than heaven

and it deserves the very beautiful accolades like being called the "Paradise on earth", "The Switzerland of Asia" etc. It is rich in flora and fauna that adds to its scenery in addition to maintaining ecological balance in nature. It holds great importance as it has a rich source of medicinal as well as ornamental plants that provide livelihood to thousands of people associated directly or indirectly. Tosamaidan provides food, medicines, timber, and firewood to various communities. The pastoral and agricultural communities including Gujjars, Bakerwals, Chopans, Paharis and Kashmiris draw their meagre subsistence and livelihood from the natural resources present in Tosamaidan. These communities graze their sheep, goats, cattle of their own, and villagers in pastures of Tosamaidan. Getting milk, wool, and meat and selling to others for a meagre amount for purchasing basic essentials for sustenance.

For centuries, Tosamaidan is a cherished route historically linking Kashmir valley to the Poonch. It has been benefiting people across regions. Tosamaidan has a great potential for adventure activities like trekking, mountaineering, zip-line, Zorb ball, alpine skiing, ski touring, ski mountaineering, ski-paragliding, paragliding, mountain running, mountain biking, ATV'S etc. due to its conducive climate and topography. It has a large area and its green pastures are limitless where shepherds of many villages of district Budgam take their sheep for grazing during summer season. The green pastures of Tosamaidan flanked with white sheep of shepherds also present a very beautiful look that are heart, mind and eye catching to viewers. Tosamaidan and its adjoining areas are sources of many perennial water bodies like NalahSukh-Nagh, DoodhgangaNalah, Suresh Kulh and GoogaldaraNalah which provide water to district Budgam, Pattan, Tanghmargh and also to some parts of Srinagar city, where it is used for irrigation, construction and drinking purposes. These water bodies with its blue-green roaring cold water flowing through Tosamaidan and adjoining areas are ideal for trout and carp fishing and rafting. The Sukhnag River that has a source in Tasmanian has been irrigating lakhs of agricultural and horticultural lands in Budgam, Baramulla and Srinagar. Thousands of unemployed youth that have taken benefits of agricultural and horticultural schemes of the government are dependent on the water source of the sukhnag. Tosamaidan is rich in flora and fauna making it an ideal destination for nature enthusiasts and bird watchers. Its pastures bloom with a variety of wild flowers (Medicinal) during spring and summer months painting the landscape with vibrant colours. The fragrance of beautiful wild flowers on the vast land of Tosamaidan refreshes whole pastures, meadows and the environment of the Tosamaidan. The inflow of visitors to Tosamaidan is a source of income to many people surrounding the Tosamaidan. Tosamaidan craves for the attention of the concerned authorities. Having the highest number of trekking routes, green pastures, meadows and

vast area of land as compared to other tourist destinations in J & K, Tosamaidan receives very low visitors in both seasons due to various reasons.

Conclusion

Tosamaidan has a rich tapestry of mesmerising landscapes, historical intrigue, cultural heritage, and adventure opportunities invites travellers to uncover the mysteries of Kashmir's hinterlands. The Jammu and Kashmir government has already brought it on the tourist map a few years ago but lack of macadamised roads, markets, lack of transport facility, lack of hotels, restaurants, guesthouses, electricity, drinking water and other facilities are lacking there. Tosamaidan if to be developed fully by the government of Jammu and Kashmir as other tourist places and all facilities be kept in place for visitors keeping in view the fragile environment and ecotourism destination, honestly speaking, it will become one of the best and first class ecotourism destination all over the world. Development activities like markets, hotels, restaurants, guesthouses, and other facilities in Tosamaidan should be developed in such a way that will not deteriorate the natural environment and fragile ecology of the Tosamaidan. Eco-friendly markets and infrastructures in Tosamaidan will retain the virginity and sustainable nature of the Tosamaidan. Plastic items, polythene bags and other non-biodegradable items should be banned and local organic foods in biodegradable items should be encouraged and promoted in Tosamaidan for making it the most beautiful eco-tourism destination in India. Declaring Tosamaidan as an ecotourism place and development of all kinds of infrastructure and basic facilities including electricity, water supply and mobile communication system for the convenience of the visitors by the government will promote and boost tourism sector in the Jammu and Kashmir and contribute very well to the state economy. It will open floodgates of employment opportunities for unemployed educated youth of the valley and reduce rising unemployment in the valley. The foreign and domestic tourist inflow to Kashmir will increase, Hoteliers, guides, pony walls, transporters, shopkeepers, vendors etc. will get better profits. Due to its fascinating and suitable backgrounds and scenery of the Tosamaidan, the Bollywood filmmakers will use it most commonly and forget to visit foreign countries like Switzerland. The need of the hour is development and promotion of Tosamaidan on a war footing basis as its mesmerising landscapes together with pastoral communities had suffered immensely. The government of Jammu and Kashmir needs to launch special schemes for the development of Tosamaidan and pastoral communities. Development of all kinds of facilities by the government at Tosamaidan should not be at the cost of the environment and pastoral communities but on ecotourism lines benefiting all stakeholders.

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