

The Alleviation of Poverty in Kashmir via the Development of Rural Tourism

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Abstract: *A relatively new development and offshoot of the tourism industry is rural tourism. All around the world, it has been seen as a useful concept for sustainable development. This kind of nature-based tourism showcases rural life, culture, art, and tradition in rural areas, helping the people who live there both economically and socially. This type of tourism offers opportunities for the rural population on the one hand, and has had a significant impact on the socio-cultural development and rural economics of the place in question on the other. In recent years, rural tourism has grown in popularity in developing nations and is often regarded as a crucial instrument for rural development, particularly in these nations. For a nation like India, where about 75% of the population lives in 7 million villages, the development and growth of rural tourism is undoubtedly beneficial. The economy of the state of Jammu and Kashmir is centred on agriculture, horticulture, tourism, handicrafts, handlooms, forests, sericulture, and hydroelectric projects. Approximately 70% of the state's population lives in rural areas. The Kashmir Valley, one of the three meso regions of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, offers a plethora of well-known tourist attractions, including stunning hill stations, landscapes, horticultural products, evergreen forests, wildlife, historical and architectural monuments, culture, art, crafts, fairs, festivals, and more. As such, it has enormous potential for the development of rural tourism. Rural tourism is still in its infancy, despite being the centre of diversity in natural resources, customs, and culture. In addition to attempting to explore various opportunities for the growth and development of rural tourism in Kashmir, which could play a significant role in the sustainable development of rural societies, the current study looks at and analyses the significant rural areas of Kashmir that have enough potential as tourist destinations. The outcomes of this study would benefit both policy makers and tourism sector stakeholders in designing an efficient road map for promoting rural tourism in Kashmir. The majority of the data used in this study came from secondary sources that were gathered from different organisations in an effort to produce useful findings.*

Keywords: Rural tourism, Development, Challenges, Opportunities and Kashmir

I. INTRODUCTION

Different meanings of "rural tourism" exist in different parts of the world. In European nations like the United Kingdom, Hungary, Finland, Greece, and other developed ones, it is a clearly defined concept of development. Unfortunately, developing countries like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and others have not yet given this idea any thought. A multifaceted activity, rural tourism occurs in an environment apart from densely populated areas. This industry is typified by small-scale tourism establishments situated in areas where forestry, agriculture, or natural areas predominate. Both "rural development" and "sustainable development" are thought to include rural tourism. This kind of nature-based tourism highlights rural life, culture, art, and tradition in rural areas, which benefits the community's social and economic well-being and fosters visitor-local interaction for a more engaging travel experience. On the one hand, this type of tourism has had a significant impact on the economic prosperity of the region and, on the other, helps the rural population by providing opportunities. Rural tourism offers a fresh perspective on life and brings people of all languages, religions, and cultural backgrounds closer together. In addition to giving individuals job opportunities, it also raises social, cultural, and educational standards.

The economy of the Kashmir Valley, one of the three meso-regions of Jammu and Kashmir State (together with Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh), is centred on agriculture, horticulture, tourism, handicrafts, handlooms, forests, sericulture, and hydropower projects. Approximately 70% of the valley's population lives in rural areas. Due to its many well-known tourist attractions, including stunning hill stations, landscapes, horticultural goods, evergreen forests, animals, historical and architectural landmarks, culture, art, crafts, fairs, festivals, and more, it offers enormous potential for the growth of rural tourism. Visitors like to explore new locations that are remote from the bustle of the city and near to nature. There is a great deal of potential for the development of rural spaces for the development of tourism in the Kashmir Valley because the nature of these regions is not as contaminated as it is in other Indian states.

Objectives

The major objectives of the present analysis are:

- To identify major rural tourist potential areas in Kashmir Valley.
- To analyze various prospects of rural tourism development in Kashmir.
- To suggest recommendations for promotion and development of rural tourism in Kashmir.

II. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The present analyses' methodological tenets are grounded in empirical observation carried out through fieldwork and the utilisation of secondary data sourced from both published and unpublished sources, including the Department of Tourism J&K, the Economic Survey J&K 2013-2014, the World Travel and Tourism Council, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, the Ministry of Tourism, the Government of India, and numerous research articles and papers.

The Study Area

The three Meso areas of the state of J&K are Kashmir Valley, a distinct geographical entity that is commonly referred to as "Heaven on Earth"; they are divided from one another by the Himalayan mountain ranges. It is a transverse valley nestled in the North Western folds of the Himalayas, encircled on all sides by high mountain chains that are home to snow-capped peaks, picturesque valleys, thick forests, ice-cold rivers, lakes, springs, verdant meadows, and stunning health resorts. The Kashmir Valley borders Tibet to the east and Pakistan to the west. It is located at an elevation of around 1730 metres above sea level. Punjab is located to the south of Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh is to the southwest. With an extent of 15,853 km² (out of 1, 12,387 km²), the oval-shaped valley runs between 33°20' N and 34°40' N latitudes and 73°45' E to 75°35' E longitudes. This represents approximately 7.2 percent of the entire area of Jammu and Kashmir State. Kashmir Valley holds a unique place in India because of its geographical location, breathtaking scenery, and significant contributions to Indian arts and culture. The basin of the spindle-shaped valley is roughly 25 miles (40 km) wide and 85 miles (104 km) long. Kashmir has earned the nicknames "Switzerland of the Asia" and "Paradise on Earth" due to the way its natural boundaries are displayed, its physical location, its friendly seasonal division, the abundance of flora, and its luscious fruits and enticing vegetables.

Proposed Potential Sites for Rural Tourism Development in Kashmir

The Kashmir Valley, renowned for its rich cultural legacy, untamed natural beauty, and wild inhabitants, has enormous potential for rural tourism. Although farming and animal husbandry make up the majority of Kashmir's economy, the region is also well-known for its small-scale and cottage industries, which include handicrafts, carpet weaving, silks, copper and silverware, among other things. It has resources both natural and socio cultural that can be controlled and developed into tourism offerings. The wealth of Kashmir's natural, sociocultural, and historical resources suggests that the region has potential for the growth of rural tourism. The Jammu and Kashmir government has suggested a number of possible locations for the development of rural tourism in the Kashmir Valley, including:

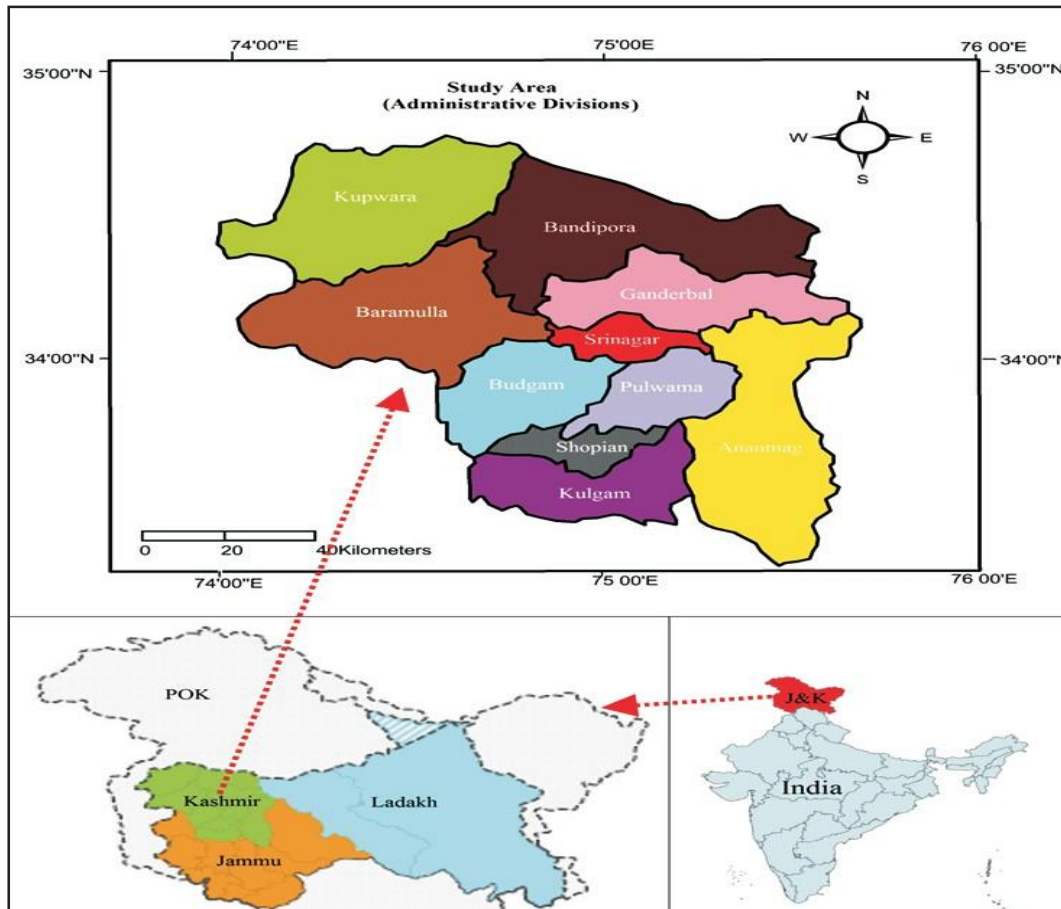


Fig. 1

Source: Census of India, 2011

Aru Village

The summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar, is roughly 107 kilometres away from Aru village. The best way to escape the stress, pollution, and dust of the city is to travel to Aru village. Its lush, evergreen pine forests, pleasant weather, and lovely, zigzag-flowing brook all contribute to its appealing appearance. Aru Village reaches the high Kashmiri meadows by following the shepherds' trail, which is located at an elevation of roughly 2408 metres. A little community of stone and wood buildings can be seen in a small valley on one side of Aru Meadow. The majority of the buildings have flat roofs and backs to the slope, typical of the distinctive Gujjar shepherd architecture. There is ample opportunity for cultural tourism in this village. This village is home to the indigenous people of Bakkarwal and Gujjar. A little brook and the well-known Lidder River run between this lovely meadow. Apart from the meadow's breathtaking beauty, trekking is another major draw for rural tourists in Aru. The Lidderwat Meadow and Kolahoi Glacier hikes are the most well-liked ones in this stunning location. In addition, one can take a stroll through the neighbouring forests and experience the sunlight peeping through the leaves. Aru has sufficient potential to grow its rural tourist industry.

Akingaam Village

The stunning village of Akingaam is 4 miles from the Achabal Garden, a well-known Mughal garden in the Anantnag area. The Bhand community, which consists of 820 traditional folk performers from Kashmir, lives in Akingaam and the adjacent environs. Although Muslims make up the bulk of the Bhand population in Kashmir, Pandit (Kashmiri Hindu) residents of the Akingaam village coexisted peacefully with one another. The Pandits of Akingaam are

supposed to have adopted BhandPather at the express request of the goddess Devi, who is said to have given one of their forefathers a violin (swarnai).

Harwan

In the Srinagar district, Harwan is located between Dachigam and Shalimar Garden. Some amazing remnants of old, elaborately designed tile pavements from the Buddhist era can be found on the hillside to the south of the settlement of Harwan. The tiles depict the clothing of the people who lived at that era, including loose trousers, tight turbans or Turkoman caps, big earrings that show the influence of Central Asia. Massive chinar trees and flower beds line the lovely garden in Harwan hamlet, giving it a lovely and appealing appearance. A lovely canal meanders through the middle of the garden in a zigzag pattern. The Harwan Garden has been purposefully kept free of artificial features such as artificial fountains, terraces, and other features that are common in other Kashmiri gardens. The main draw of the Harwan Garden is its abundance of splendour and beauty. The expansive grounds covered with lush green grass instantly draw guests to this location. Harwan is a great location for long walks in the middle of nature as well as picnics and excursions. It serves as a starting point for treks up Mahadev Mountain and a base for visits to the Dachigam Wild Life Sanctuary.

Kheer Bhawani

Dedicated to the Goddess Kheer Bhawani, Kheer Bhawani is a hallowed temple. The devotion of Kheer Bhawani is widespread among Kashmiri Hindus. Situated next to the well-known town of Tulmulla, the Kheer Bhawani temple is roughly 23 km east of Srinagar city. When the goddess, according to faith, changes the hue of the spring's waters, her devotees gather here on the eighth day of the May full moon. People flocked to this village to worship the goddess, and it is a very diverse cultural community. This hamlet is close to the Wangat River.

Watlab

Watlab village is situated in Jammu & Kashmir, India's Sopore Tehsil in the Baramulla district. It is located in Jammu and Kashmir, about 8 km from Sopore town and 60 km from Srinagar, on the Sopore-Bandipore route. In addition to its scenic surroundings, Watlab is well-known for its mosque perched on a hill. The shrine was constructed in honour of Baba Shukurddin, a Muslim mystic.

Amidst expansive apple orchards, there's also a Forest Rest House available for guests. One of the biggest freshwater lakes in Asia, Wular Lake, is seen from this location in a panoramic view. The lovely villages that border the lake add even more beauty to the landscape. In addition, the surrounding paddy fields give the scenery a splash of colour.

Kokernag

Kokernag, a small town renowned for its scenic beauty, is situated in the Anantnag region of Jammu and Kashmir, roughly 53 kilometres from Srinagar, the state capital during the summer. Koker, which means "fowl," and Nag, which means "serpent," are the sources of the name Kokernag. It is located 2000 metres above sea level. At the base of a heavily forested slope lies a creek that splits into multiple channels. This is named for the fact that it resembles a hen or other fowl's claw-foot. This area is well-known for its trout streams, gardens, and largest freshwater springs. Kokernag is surrounded by the villages of Wangam, Hangalkund, Sagam, Zalergam, and Dacksum, among others. The Kokernag spring bursts at seven locations at the base of the mountain covered in forests. The spring's water is well known for having therapeutic and digestive qualities.

Mawar Village

Mawar is a charming village that is close to the well-known tourist destination Bangus Valley. It is situated approximately 12 km from Tehsil Handwara in the district of Kupwara. Situated on the banks of the Mawar stream, this quaint village is encircled by snow-capped mountains, verdant forests, and streams that fall down the sides of the mountains. A great place to start a trip to Bangus Valley is Mawar Village. Many down-country tourists from various parts of Northern India come to Mawar for the day during the summer months. Due to its picturesque surroundings,

cultural legacy, and expansive meadows brimming with lovely flowers and verdant grass, this location presents a wealth of opportunities for rural tourism.

Rafiabad

Rafiabad area is located about 15 Kilometres from district Baramulla and 60 Kilometres from J&K's Summer Capital is Srinagar. It is home to some of the greatest communities, renowned for both their cultural legacy and their breathtaking natural surroundings. Munddajii, Bosiya, Kiterdajii, Hamam, Markote, Wolanwar and Doniwari, Braman, Khamoh, Ladu, and Ladoora are the most significant villages. These villages have more breathtaking scenery and a more perfect landscape than Gulmarg and Pahalgam. The picturesque streams that meander through the popular tourist destination of Rafiabad are the Hummal and the Gasji, which rise from Kajinag Mountain. Rarely are foreigners spotted at this popular tourist destination to witness the soaring affluence. Even so, domestic travelers—particularly young people and school-age children—are flocking to Rafiabad to take in the breathtaking scenery. It has enormous potential to draw tourists if it is properly developed and run. Rafiabad's promotion as a rural tourism destination has the potential to create jobs for thousands of unemployed youth and contribute to the overall growth of tourism.

Tangmarg

One of the greatest tourist destinations with a lot of potential to draw visitors is Tangmarg. This wonderful vacation spot is situated roughly 13 km away from the well-known Gulmarg resort and 20 km from Jammu & Kashmir's Baramulla District. Nestled at the base of the PirPanjal Range, Tangmarg is home to several stunning tourist destinations, including Drang village, a popular destination for visitors to Gulmarg. About 3 kilometres separate Drang and Tangmarg. Travellers can trek or ride a pony from Tangmarg to this stunning location. This magnificent location is well-known for its lovely, roaring stream. Drang village, well-known for its rock climbing and trout fishing, is among Tangmarg's greatest places for picnics. Travellers are drawn to this magnificent resort because of its abundance of natural beauty. In addition, Tangmarg is well-known for having some of the greatest hot springs and streams, including Ferozpora Nallah, Koutar Nag, Waters Meet, Ningle Nallah, and Banibal Nag. These springs bubble up at the base of Kashmir's stunning mountains. They stay frozen until the middle of June, at which point dissolving ice strips start to float over the lake. These lakes are well-known for their therapeutic properties, and bathing in their water is said to treat a variety of skin conditions. The popular tourist destination Tangmarg is well known for its handicrafts throughout Kashmir.

Drangyari Tourist Village

The village of Drangyari is situated on the Kupwara-Karnah route, against the majestic Shamsabari hills, in the district of Kupwara, Jammu & Kashmir. Known for its evergreen forests, roaring streams, verdant meadows, and ancient sites, this village is a well-known tourist destination in Kashmir. Through nature walks, bird watching, and other associated ecotourism activities, Drangyari has a great deal of potential to draw tourists from overseas. Numerous birds can be seen in the area, such as black partridge, pheasants, tragophan, monal pheasants, and wild poultry. In addition to visitors, this location is frequented by a sizable number of local excursionists from the Kashmir Valley. Numerous historical sites can be found in the Drangyari vicinity, such as Melyal, the Raja Ram Mountains, Farkan, Ram Kund, Seeta Kund, Hanuman Kund, and Lakshman Kund. Hindus and Kashmiri Pandits revere the springs in the Melyal Harrie region. In Tikker Kupwara, there is also the well-known shrine Kheer Bhawani. Thousands of worshippers flocked to the temple for its yearly celebration.

Prospects of Rural Tourism Development in Kashmir

Globally, the trends towards industry and development are oriented towards cities. In addition, the counterurbanization syndrome has been brought on by the stresses of more urbanised lifestyles. Interest in rural areas is rising as a result of this. Conversely, the increasing tendency of urbanisation leads to a decrease in employment prospects and a drop in income levels, which causes communities to become abandoned. One possible answer to this issue is rural tourism. Through the use of natural, sociocultural, and financial resources, it has been viewed as a tool or mechanism with the ability to regulate socioeconomic developments. It has the potential to improve rural areas' growth from an ecological

and financial standpoint, as well as a way to raise the standard of living for those who live there. Because of this, rural tourism has been connected to the decrease of poverty in a variety of ways. For example, it has the ability to thrive in rural areas by utilising the natural and sociocultural resources that are already there, which opens up a lot of job opportunities for the local population. With its stunning villages, rivers, mountains, and cultural landscapes, along with its traditional hospitality and abundance of peace, Kashmir Valley has the potential to provide enjoyable experiences for travellers looking for quiet, peaceful places to unwind. The following are a few significant advantages of growing rural tourism in Kashmir:

The development of rural tourism in Kashmir would leave a positive impact on the economic development and environment, through increasing employment opportunities mostly in rural areas, increasing business activities, improving sales of goods and services, restoration and maintenance of cultural and historical heritage.

Rural tourism as supplemental income can play an important role in increasing the wellbeing of the rural people of Kashmir; reduce out migration and to the development of the rural area.

Rural tourism development in Kashmir would contribute and help in the diversification of the Kashmir tourist supply and in the formation of a more complex and colourful image.

The development of rural tourism in Kashmir would help to increase the viability of underdeveloped regions, to enhance the economic growth in the rural areas and to improve the living standards and quality of life of local population.

Rural tourism emerges to be an important means to revitalise the waning of rural areas and to ensure their sustainable future by even job creation or job retention, increased job diversity, broadened cultural provision, farm support, service retention, landscape and nature preservation or the maintenance of rural arts and crafts as tourist attractions.

A specific advantage of rural tourism development in Kashmir Valley would be the increasing number of opportunities for social interaction for rural inhabitants who often live relatively isolated lives in agricultural communities.

Development of rural tourism in Kashmir would also help in protecting the sustainability and the quality of environment.

III. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It is clear from the study of rural tourism growth in Kashmir Valley above that this sector has the potential to be one of the most powerful instruments for regional development. The Kashmir Valley is regarded as a nature lover's delight. Due to its many well-known tourist attractions, including its landscape, stunning hill stations, evergreen forests, horticultural goods, historical and architectural landmarks, art, crafts, culture, fairs, festivals, wildlife, etc., it has enormous potential for the growth of rural tourism. Despite being the centre of diversity in culture, tradition, and natural resources, Kashmir's rural tourism industry has not yet reached its full potential due to a number of interconnected causes, including political unrest in the area and a lack of understanding about the region's rural tourist attractions. The development of a set of goals that would both attract tourists and aid in the preservation of Kashmir's current environment is crucial for maximising the region's potential for rural tourism. The creation of a successful rural culture and historical tourist product for consumer consumption requires that the local population be led, educated, and organised to have a thorough awareness of the tactics involved in the cultural attraction mix. Furthermore, the local communities must acquire the specific skills required to recognise business possibilities and initiatives and to support them. Enhancing rural infrastructure and raising awareness of Kashmir's rural areas' great natural and cultural tourism potential are also crucial. In order to reduce negative effects and increase good ones while maintaining the fundamental idea of rural tourism, it is imperative that new strategies be developed and put into place. It follows that the Kashmir Valley's rural tourism would prosper if all of these steps were implemented.

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