

IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT ON KASHMIR TOURISM AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE PEOPLE OF J&K

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ABSTRACT

Tourism plays a vital role in the economic development of a number of countries across the globe. Known for its extravagant and breathtaking beauty throughout the world, Kashmir has aptly been described as 'The Paradise on Earth'. Kashmir is second to no place in the world as far as its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage is concerned. Bubbling streams, lush green meadows and lily-laden lakes- the vale of Kashmir is any tourist's dream. Alongside, Kashmir is affluent in historical sites, unique handicraft and handmade items. However, the geo-political status of Kashmir has become one of its greatest handicaps. The continual political uncertainty in general and the two decade long armed conflict in particular has unexceptionally impacted every socio-economic activity in Kashmir. And tourism is a sector that has unquestionably been the worst casualty of this continued political instability and social turbulence. Not only tourism but the allied sectors especially the Kashmiri art and craft have equally been hit. The present paper attempts to empirically study the economic impact of armed conflict on Kashmir tourism and the resultant change in the socio-economic profile of the people of Kashmir. The paper also puts forth the suggestions and recommendations aimed at optimally exploiting the potential of Kashmir tourism in the fast improving socio-political scenario.

KEYWORDS: Armed Conflict, Geo-political, Socio-economic, Tourist

INTRODUCTION

Set like a gleaming diamond, Kashmir is a multi-faceted tourist destination. Changing its hues with every season – it is always extravagantly beautiful. Blessed with snow capped mountains, honey-dewed orchards, rippling lakes and splendid blue skies- The Mughals aptly called Kashmir 'The Paradise on Earth'.

Pre 1989, Kashmir was a Paradise in the true sense. The ongoing armed conflict that erupted in early 1990s has hit hard the tourism sector causing the loss of tourist appetite for this particular destination. By 1991 there was a virtual shut down of tourism sector, which impacted the economy of the entire state and percolated down to every household. Tourism, which was the

main stay in the economy of J&K, was deeply affected by various circumstances created out of the unsettled environment.

Kashmir became a risky place for tourists as Kashmir and unrest became synonymous. Tourism and its related sectors were battered causing not only the creation of a negative Kashmir image but also loss of livelihood to those dependent on it-directly or indirectly.

2. OBJECTIVES

The study was conducted with the following objectives in view:-

1. To evaluate the impact of turmoil and disturbance on tourism and related sectors in Kashmir.
2. To identify the major problems faced by tourism sector since the state became conflict ridden.
3. To propose feasible suggestions for revival and sustainable development of tourism in the state.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the present study mostly secondary data have been used. Secondary data have been collected from various interim and annual reports presented to The Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India. In addition to this, data have also been collected from various journals, articles, newspaper archives. The research is also based on the referred sources – published, unpublished and electronic.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. TOURISM, CONFLICT AND PEACE-THE LINKAGE

Tourism, conflict and peace exist in a reciprocal triangular relationship (as shown in the figure below) in which each component impacts the others.

A conceptual framework for the interrelationship of peace, conflict and tourism.

Figure 1: Tourism, conflict and peace-The Linkage



Tourism is conflict sensitive and positively responsive to peace. Conflict decelerates growth of the tourism sector if it leads to violence and threatens peace. Thus, peace, conflict and tourism are indisputably linked. Disturbance in any of the three elements, imbalances the other two.

Destinations are less appealing to tourists if they are insecure or likely to experience serious conflict (Alluri, 2009) - war, political unrest, terrorism, violations of human rights or heavy

crime – regardless of the abundance of scenic or cultural attractions (Sonmez, 1998). Therefore, tourism in general is highly vulnerable to turmoil and can thrive only under peaceful conditions (Mihalic, 1996; Neumayer, 2004; Pizam and Mansfeld, 2006; Tarlow, 2006).

4.2 IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT

Armed uprising in the state of J & K had a multi-dimensional impact on Kashmir tourism and its related sectors. Perusing the statistics, it can clearly be understood how hard the conflict affected tourism. Tourist arrival was remarkable 7.2 lakh in 1988 but saw a drastic dip in 1991 when it was a negligible 6287.

Table 1: Year Wise Number of Tourists Who Visited Kashmir from 1987.

Year wise number of tourists who visited the valley From 1987				
S.No.	Year	Home	Foreign	Total
1	1987	664081	57537	721654
2	1988	662097	59938	722035
3	1989	490212	67762	557977
4	1990	6095	4627	10722
5	1991	1400	4887	6287
6	1992	1175	9149	10324
7	1993	-	8026	8026
8	1994	500	9314	9814
9	1995	322	8198	8520
10	1996	375	9592	9967
11	1997	7027	9111	16131
12	1998	99636	10247	109883
13	1999	200162	17130	217292
14	2000	104337	7575	111912
15	2001	66732	5859	72591
16	2002	24670	2686	27356
17	2003	182205	8959	191164
18	2004	358095	18234	376729
19	2005	585702	19680	603582
20	2006	412879	20009	432888
21	2007	417260	24576	441836
22	2008	-	-	22000
23	2009	-	-	20809
24	2010	-	-	24376

Although the influx of tourists has registered an improvement after nineties, however, it is worth noting that the figures have come nowhere close to tourist arrival in pre-militancy period.

Tourist spots were totally or partially encroached by army camps and pickets. Many historical sites were occupied by Indian forces including the world famous Mughal Inns. Frisking kept the local excursionists away from visiting various tourist destinations especially far-flung ones. Collateral damage affected numerous cultural and spiritual buildings. Around 180 historical structures were gutted during militancy in the state. Such places obviously remained off bounds of tourists. In various militancy related incidents tourists were also targeted.

In 1987, the last big season before the violence started, tourism accounted for approximately 10 per cent of the state's income. During the next 23 years of unrest, tourism contributed virtually

nothing to the state's economy. Pre-militancy, international tourists constituted a significant portion of those visiting Kashmir. They spent on high-end handicraft products besides investing in adventure spots like trekking, skiing and rafting. However, Foreign Tourist Arrival (FTA) received a major blow after Al-Farhan, a militant organisation, kidnapped a group of western tourists in the early nineties, who were trekking in Pahalgam. Unfortunately, they were never found. As a result of this specific incident negative travel advisories to visit Kashmir were issued by various foreign countries. This adversely affected the tourist revenue generated by foreign visitors. Militants also saw Indian tourists as soft targets.

Table 2: A list of incidents which led to tourist decline in the valley.

Tourist Destination	Nature of Incident
Pahalgam	Four tourists, including a child, were killed and 18 injured on June 12, 2004 in the resort town of Pahalgam. The tourists were having lunch when militants tossed a grenade inside the restaurant.
Mughal Gardens	On 25 May 2006, militants hurled a grenade at a tourist bus killing four persons and injuring seven others. The tourists were headed for the Mughal gardens and as their bus halted at a speed breaker near Zakura, a grenade was thrown at it. Two women and a child died on the spot. Another person died in hospital
Dalgate	On 31 May 2006, militants hurled grenades at two tourist buses from West Bengal, injuring 22 people. The buses were attacked at Dalgate
Hazratbal	Four tourists were killed and six others, all of them from Gujarat, were injured in an explosion on their vehicle near Hazratbal on 1st June, 2006
Old City Srinagar	On July 11, 2006 a campaign of grenade attacks in Srinagar claimed the lives of six tourists and wounded forty. The targets included a tourist bus and the Tourist Reception Centre. A similar attack on May 31 against a tourist bus wounded 21.
Shalimar	An explosion took place on July 29, 2007 in a tourist bus at Shalimar Gardens. Six tourists were killed and 21 wounded in that explosion.
Gulmarg	In the summer of 2008, a grenade attack in Gulmarg killed one tourist and injured five.
Bijbehara	On July 28, 2012 two women tourists from Maharashtra were killed and six others were injured when militants hurled a grenade into a Tempo Traveller taxi in Bijbehara town in Anantnag district
Srinagar	A Spanish tourist was injured on 16 th February, 2013 as valley witnessed several protests to oppose hanging of Afzal Guru.
Anantnag	A grenade attack in Anantnag killed a pilgrim and a taxi driver, and caused injuries to three persons.
Lolab Valley	The area was a rebel stronghold for almost a decade, but it is now controlled by the Indian army who close the gate after dusk to stop any civilian movement into or out of the valley
Seshnag	Terrorists attacked the Nunwan camp en route to Amarnath Shrine opening fire on the pilgrims. Among the dead were also seven pilgrims and five workers. Another grenade attack on the community kitchen for pilgrims left 15 injured.

It is worthwhile to mention that the primary doorway to the state of J&K i.e. the Srinagar International Airport has witnessed at least three major terrorist attacks. The impact of such violent incidents certainly deterred people across India and abroad from coming to Kashmir valley. Locals have observed that such incidents cause a huge decline in the number of tourists because they either pack their bags and leave or cut short their visit or even worse, bad mouth about the situation in the valley to keep the potential visitors away. Tourists are not only afraid of being caught up in violence related incidents but also fear being used as hostages or killed after kidnapping.

Such had been the impact of conflict in the valley that its main city Srinagar was once declared as the most threatened site in India by the World Monuments Fund (WMF), placing it on the 2008 List of Most Endangered Sites (Winter & Punjabi, 2010).

4.3 IMPACT OF UNREST ON EMPLOYMENT PROFILE IN TOURISM SECTOR

According to estimates the state of J&K lost around 27 million tourists from 1989-2002 leading to a whopping tourism revenue loss of Rs. 190.8 billion which in turn caused unimaginable losses to those who drew employment from it. A study conducted by Jawaharlal Nehru University reveals that 66% of Houseboat owners changed their occupation during turmoil. The following table manifests the impact of unrest in Kashmir on the employment profile of people associated with tourism sector.

Table 3: Relationship between unrest and employment in tourism sector.

Relationship between Unrest - Tourism and Employment (In Percentage)			
Impact of Unrest on tourism	Houseboat owners	Hotel owners	Shikara owners
Change in occupation during Unrest	66	54	45
Average level of occupancy by tourists before Unrest	78	70	80
Average level of occupancy by tourists during Unrest	7	8	10

With businesses reaching to lowest ebb in early 1990s', many hotels, restaurant and guest house owners declared to close down, resulting in the loss of employment for those associated. In Srinagar city, 3,500 hotels with 25,000 rooms had zero occupancy by the peak of the 2010 unrest, resulting in enormous economic losses to the hoteliers. After the 2010 unrest, 300 tourism businesses had to go insolvent and many other stakeholders found themselves at the receiving end and were forced to look for alternative sources of income. Despite improvement in the scenario, the employability in this sector is still considered volatile as any militant incident will mean cold business for tourism industry.

4.3.1 EFFECT ON HANDICRAFT AND CARPET INDUSTRY

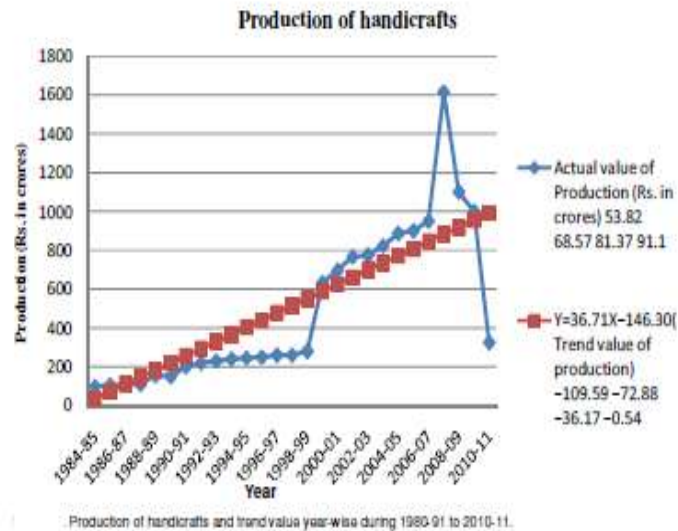
The handicraft industry occupies an important position in the economy of J & K and provides employment to more than 3 lakh people. It is heavily dependent on tourism for its survival because this sector is linked to the tourist arrival. Tourists often purchase the world famous Kashmiri carpets, shawls and crewel embroidery. Besides, paper machie items, wooden art-ware and Kashmiri rugs have also been fancied by tourists who love to take them home as souvenirs. However, post 1989, the performance of this sector also deteriorated. The following table shows the value of production has declined from Rs.154 crores in 1988-98 to Rs.150 crores in 1989-90.

Table 4: Year Wise Production of Handicrafts and Its Trend Value.

Year	Actual value of Production (Rs. in crores)	$Y=36.71X-146.30$ (Trend value of production)
1980-81	53.82	-109.59
1981-82	68.57	-72.88
1982-83	81.37	-36.17
1983-84	91.10	-0.54
1984-85	97.85	36.84
1985-86	105.00	73.96
1986-87	108.40	110.67
1987-88	109.29	147.38
1988-89	154.00	184.09
1989-90	150.00	220.80
1990-91	200.00	257.51
1991-92	220.00	294.22
1992-93	230.00	330.52
1993-94	240.00	367.64
1994-95	245.00	404.35
1995-96	250.00	441.06
1996-97	260.00	477.77
1997-98	260.00	514.48
1998-99	280.00	551.19
1999-00	633.03	587.90
2000-01	696.33	624.61
2001-02	765.94	661.32
2002-03	775.00	698.03
2003-04	821.53	734.74
2004-05	887.00	771.45
2005-06	900.00	808.16
2006-07	950.00	844.87
2007-08	1614.59	881.58
2008-09	1100.00	918.29
2009-10	1000.00	955.00
2010-11	325.00	991.71

Perusing the table figures, it can be observed that there has been an acute downward trend in the production of handicrafts since militancy gained momentum. As it is evident from the figure that the actual value of production during the period of 1989-90 to 1998-99 was lower than the value of linear trend line, signifying that the production of handicraft sector has not flourished during this period. Afterwards, that the production of handicrafts shows an increasing trend up to the period of 2008. However, after the turmoil resurfaced during 2008 to 2010, the production of handicrafts has decreased drastically i.e. from Rs. 1614.59 crores to Rs. 325 crores only.

Figure 2: The Production of Handicrafts and trend values.



Coupled with allied sectors, the losses estimated by the tourism industry for 2010 were a whopping ten billion rupees. It is losses like this that have brought the Jammu and Kashmir State's annual deficit to 220 billion rupees (\$4.8 billion) (Hussain, 2010).

5. NEED TO REVIEW TOURISM

Tourism is perhaps the only sector which starts paying off immediately as it has no gestation period. The other developmental activities like roads, railways, construction, mega projects etc. take time to complete, function and pay-off. Sometimes these projects are delayed due to displacement, land acquisition, environmental problem etc. But in case of tourism no such delays take place and people are benefited immediately. For instance, as soon as a tourist steps out of his/her house, the benefits start flowing in terms of his spending on taxi, hotel, shopping, travel agent etc. till he/she reaches back.

Commenting on the estimated growth figures on tourism arrived at in a study conducted by ASSOCHAM (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India) and Yes Bank, the survey recommends that Jammu and Kashmir State should gear up itself by putting in place all tourism related activities well in time so that tourists can enjoy their tour to state. The study has made a specific mention of J&K because as Indian tourist and travel industry grows, tourism sector and its allied sectors in Jammu and Kashmir will also grow since Jammu and Kashmir is

one of the major tourist centres of India.

The Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India has also launched a special program called “HUNAR SE ROZGAR” which offers short but quality training course covering food and beverages services, food production, housekeeping utility, bakery etc. for creation of employable skill among youth who are in the age group of 18 to 28 years. Recently a program has been launched for imparting skills in driving and stone masonry also.

The central Govt. has already formed various working groups to generate employment, confidence building measures etc. Hence, both state and central governments are conscious of the prospects of tourism sector in J&K and are therefore working tirelessly to capitalize on this potential sector.

6. SUGGESTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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 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.

7. CONCLUSION

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.

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