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KASHMIR TOURISM – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



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ABSTRACT :

Kashmir has often been described as “Paradise on earth and Switzerland of the east”. It has unique geographical feature and its aesthetic beauty is well known in the world. Kashmir, nestled in north-western folds of the Himalayas has enormous potential for tourism. Its colorful history, multicolored landscape, diverse ethnic stock, lush green forests, variable wildlife, snow-covered peaks, giant glaciers, high altitude lakes, adventures treks, perennial streams, gushing springs, climate, invigorating, pollution free rural surrounding and strategic location provide everything that a tourist may look for to pass holidays. Thus, the valley attracts tourists from all over the world. The present paper throws light on the development of tourism and the places of tourist interest in Kashmir.

KEYWORD: Kashmir, tourism, development, paradise, potential, attract, tourists.

INTRODUCTION:

Kashmir is one of the popular tourist destinations in Asia. The tourism in Kashmir valley offers a wide array of places to see. The delighting backwaters, hill stations and landscape make Kashmir a beautiful tourist destination. Historical monuments, forts, places of religious importance, hill resorts, etc. add to the grandeur of the valley. Thus, they attract tourists from all over the world. Kashmir valley offers various categories of tourism. These include adventure tourism viz, water rafting, skiing and religious tourism. Tourism industry employs thousand of boatmen, porters, housemen and craftsmen. It provides live hood to more than two lakh people directly and thousands of indirectly. It also has vast potential to contribute to the state's economy¹.

Tourism has emerged as an important multidisciplinary subject, embracing various aspects of human activities, ecology, economy and society. It comprises complete system of nature which in includes the man and his activities, wildlife, mountains, valleys, rivers, water, forests, trees, social and cultural system, flora and fauna, weather, climate, sun and the sea. Tourism is an organized industry, its dimensions are wide, its location varies and its benefits spread over large segments of the population. The tourists both foreign and domestic all contribute to the development of economy of the area provide employment to the people and afford opportunities to them².

DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN KASHMIR

The international tourist traffic has increased incredible over the years, particularly after the world war second. India has contributed in lot to international tourism. After independence the country adopted a policy of development through planning, in 1952, when the first year plan was formulated. India has so many tourist attraction places like Delhi, Chennai, Shimla, Goa and Kashmir. Kashmir among them is one of the most beautiful tourist attraction places. Kashmir, the northern part of the state is known as the 'paradise on earth', and the 'Switzerland of the east'. It is bounded by two mountain ranges, with Its scenic splendor, meandering streams, serene lakes, gushing brooks, snow-clad mountains and green pastures have all along attracted tourists from all over the world.

ANCIENT PERIOD

From the ancient times, the state has long traditions of tourism. It was who king Ashoka who conquered Kashmir in about 250 B.C.E. His own conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism laid the Kashmir's gateway open for Chinese, and various other travelers who wanted to quench the thirst of Buddhist and Sanskrit knowledge. The first Chinese traveler to enter Kashmir was probably Chemong who entered the valley shortly after 404 C. E. Another Chinese traveler Fa-hein left for India along with 25 Buddhist monks in 420 C. E. Another great Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang's visited India in 631 C. E. was corroborated with this historical event. Other great Chinese scholars who visited Kashmir are Yuan Chwang and Ou-kong. This advent of foreign students and scholars influenced the art and culture of the Kashmiri's under the rule of king Lalitaditya. Kashmir became the synagogue of foreign scholars and erudite, and many cultural mission from other countries were received with respect³.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Tourism in the Kashmir traversed its course from the time of Mughal monarchy till its present day of turmoil. Mughal kings and princes laid the beautiful gardens, utilized springs, erected forests, enriched the land with a variety of vegetation and flowers, planted tempting fruit trees, revolutionized handicrafts and skills and left behind them, the dignity of Mughal architecture in their monuments. Kashmir is an attraction to be cherished, as a land to be explored, and a subject to be written about,

became famous in the world since Bernier, told the world Cachemire (Kashmir), the paradise of the Indies. François Bernier, the French Physician at the court of Aurangzeb, the first European to enter the valley of Kashmir in 1665 says. "it is not without reason that Mughals called it the Terrestrial Paradise of the India, that Akbar tried so hard to conquer and that his son Jahangir fell so much in love with it" 4

In the medieval period, the travel period was widened when diplomats from overseas kingdom started to pour into the state. Mughal emperors initially developed it as a "summer health resort." Akbar himself visited the valley in 1589, and it was on his directions that boats in the Dal lake were transformed into residential one. Mughal kings showed lot of interest towards the valley. After Akbar, Jahangir spent lot of time in the Kashmir, and says that "Agar Firdous bar rue Zamin ast, Hamin ast-o, Hamin ast-o-Hamin ast". (If, there is a paradise on earth, it is this, it is this, it is this, and verily it is this). He laid out numerous gardens and built up many health resorts. These places are still the assets of tourism production of the state⁵.

PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

During the British rule in India, the rulers of the state showed great hospitality to European visitors especially to the Britishers. Who paid frequent visit to the state as visitors, but the main purpose of these visits was to exert their influence on the people of the state. It was only after 1920 when motorcars became a popular mode of transport, the influx of tourists in Kashmir increased many folds. Now Maharaja, Raja, Nawabs, courtiers of numerous Indian state and rich people began to join the steam of tourists to Kashmir. In 1922 when Banihal cart road was thrown open to public use, many former paths in state were converted into roads for carrying traffic and other requirements. The state that had remained in isolation for centuries had now come into close in direct contact with the rest of the country. All possible efforts were made both by the state and the British Government to make Kashmir a lovely place in terms of the comforts and luxuries. As a result the number of tourists visiting the state was recorded 8404 in 1931⁶.

Tourism in the modern sense developed in the state after Second World War. When the American soldiers who had plenty of money and who were stationed in West Asia and South East Asia started visiting the state in large number. The Americans carried the news of the state's beauty to different parts of Asia, Europe and to the U.S.A. As a result a good number of tourists from different lands began to come to the state. That is why 28,937 tourists paved into the state in 1940. During the war Kashmir became famous as the "Switzerland of Asia". Hence, people of large number of nationalities made their way towards the state. The number of tourists went up from 29,326 in 1941 to 27,478 in 1943. Winter sports at Gulmarg grew in popularity also raising the number of tourists to 33,676 in 1944.

Britishers developed regions like Gulmarg, which had and still has a special charm for the foreigners. Pahalgam was also developed by the orders of Maharaja Hari Singh, the nephew of Maharaj Partap Singh who succeeded him. The increased influx of tourists had its own impact on the various aspects of life of the Kashmiris and every Kashmiri, connected with the tourist trade directly or indirectly began to become prosperous⁸.

POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Compared to any other industry, tourism trade has witnessed a phenomenal growth in the state since independence. The number of tourists visiting the valley has increased manifold. A turning point in the history of Kashmir tourism is marked by the construction of Srinagar-Jammu national Highway in 1948 (the old Banihal cart road), and the introduction of catering facilities in Dak Bungalows constructed

along the road at different points as resting place for pony rides, who used to carry 'Dak'(mail) for Kashmir. Both international and domestic tourism received a boost with the valley figuring on the air map of the country. Many things have changed since India got freedom in 1947, when total tourist flow to Kashmir was 14,568 and when it touched a margin of 6, 62,097 in, 1988. Kashmiri generally believed that their land is much explored seen and enjoyed by foreigners than Kashmiri themselves. If one goes through the written accounts of foreigners, it will become obvious that they really love the valley⁹. In the beginning of 2004, the Jammu and Kashmir has been selected for a special national tourism award for its outstanding performance in tourism promotion in 2003. This is the first time that the state has received the coveted prize.

PLACES OF TOURIST INTEREST IN KASHMIR

Valley of Kashmir known as paradise on the earth is nestled securely at an average height of about 600 feet above the sea level, in the mighty Himalayan ranges, with some covered lofty peaks. The oval shaped valley spreading approximately eighty-four miles in length and twenty to twenty five miles in breadth is filled with magnificent scenery at each and every inch.

The small piece of land is an exquisite fair land. There is scenery for the artists, mountains for the mountaineer, flower for the botanist, a vast field for geologist and magnificent ruins for the archaeologist. In simple terms, the valley has everything, which attracts everyone towards it. Kashmir valley is one of the loveliest spot of the world. Against the background of lush field, forest clad mountains, network of crystalline streams and babbling brooks, and the village picturesque shows every inch of Kashmir looks beautiful. There is scenic beauty, salubrious climate, sacred shrine which fascinates people of the whole world. Hospitality nature of the people has truly made it more fascinating, which cannot be explained in words, for that should be experienced, at least once in life time. Kashmir is a beautiful region blessed with such a good climate, grand mountains, fine rivers and lakes, so rich for agricultural purpose and garnished with such lovely wild flowers and fruits. Surely, the tales of fair Kashmir can be only fair tales of good kings and happy prosperous people¹⁰. Following were the important places of tourist attraction in Kashmir.

MUGHAL GARDENS

Down the Boulevard in the Srinagar are the royal pleasant gardens of Kashmir laid out by Mughals at the pinnacle of their glory, and they are Chashmashi, Nishat and Shalimar gardens. These gardens are ideal for day picnics and sightseeing. The beauty of these gardens is at their best during spring, but Mughal structure of these gardens lends them a unique sense of beauty even when the flowers are not blossoming.

Lakes

Dal Lake

The world famous lake, also know City Lake, is at a distance of 1km from the tourist Reception centre. The attractive lake lies to the west of the city of Srinagar at the foot of the shidhara (zabarwan) mountains. On its south stands the Shankaracharya hill (Takht-i-sulaiman), and on its west Hari parbat. The lake has an area of about 11sq.kms and is divided by cause ways into four parts, Gagribal, Lokut-Dal, Bod-Dal and Nagin. Two islands 'Rup-lank' and 'Sona-lank' are two islands of 'lokut-dal' and 'bod-dal' respectively. Four chinar trees stand on the 'Rup-lank' adding to the beauty of the lake and earning the name 'char chenari' to the island. Besides, the Dal lake is famous for its floating gardens, lotus and birds. The Boulevard, running alongside Dal Lake is quite attractive for the tourists. The Shikara Ghats provide

access to the houseboats, hotels, restaurant and shops along the way¹¹.

Nagin Lake

The jewel in the ring” the smallest but the most lovely part of Dal lake is Nagin lake. It is 8kms from tourist reception centre, separated by a causeway and only a short distance from Hazratbal, its deep blue water encircled by a ring of green trees add to its beauty. There is also a club to entertain tourists; Shikara ride in the good natured lake is a interesting and fascinating¹².

Mansabal Lake

The Manasbal Lake is 61 kms from Srinagar near the town of Safapora. It is the deepest lake in Kashmir. Manasbal lake is panoramic lake laden with lotus during summer and a bird watcher’s paradise. Manasbal is classified as “warm lake” and circulates once in a year for a short time.

Wular Lake

The great fresh water lake, the largest in India, is an important feature of the hydrographic, system of Kashmir. At an altitude of 1580 meters, this lake is at distance of about 60kms from the tourist reception centre Srinagar. Acting as a flood reservoir, its dimension vary at different times of the year. Normally it is 19kms by 10kms and is spread over an area of about 125sq.kms. Wular has a picturesque setting, abounds in fish and is surrounded by mountains²⁴.

Harwan Lake

Harwan lake is situated at a distance of 21kms from Srinagar. Harwan is 278 meters long, 137 meters wide and 18 meters deep. This lake is main source of water supply to Srinagar city. Scenic beauty of this lake attracts visitors in large number.

Hokarsar Lake

Hokarsar lake is located on the Baramulla road, at about 13kms from Srinagar. Hokarsar lake is surrounded by willow trees grown in abundance on its bank. The willow trees enrich the beauty in all seasons. Spreading about 5kms in length and 1.5kms in width this lake is worth visiting for its scenic beauty.

Springs

Recognized as a great sanctity for its water cold in summer and warm in winter, springs are useful auxiliaries to the mountain steam for irrigation and in some places act source of drinking water to the people. Anantnag is well known place for countless springs. The Malaknag spring in this area is known for its sulphurous content and its water is widely used for garden cultivation.

Achabal

Gushing out of the Sasanwar hill, Achabal is the most beautiful among the all springs sight from olden days. Achabal is surrounded with running water and completely over shadowed by massive Chinar trees. Achabal is 58kms away from tourist reception centre Srinagar via Anantnag at an altitude of 1667 meters. Once the pleasure retreat of empress Nurjehan, it has a fine garden water cascades, fine camping ground and a trout hatchery¹⁴.

Verinag

The spring here is reported to be the chief source of the river Jhelum. Verinag is a spring of deep blue water which lies at the foot of the Pir Panjal mountains, densely covered with green pines. Verinag situated at an elevation of 1858 meters is about 80kms from Srinagar, near the Jawahar tunnel. The spring has an octagonal basin, with an arcade built by the Mughul emperor Jehangir in 1630 C. E. 15.

Kokernag

At an altitude of 2020 meters and at a distance of 70 kms from the Srinagar. Kokernag is famous for the curative properties of this spring. It also had a Botanical garden with a variety of roses. Kokernag has been mentioned in a book *Ain -Akabari*, when it has been mentioned that the water of Kokernag satisfies both hunger and thirst, and it is also a remedy for indigestion. The sweet breeze make the poplar and fir trees to sing melodious song for tourists¹⁶.

Margs

Margs is simply an open grass land, Such Margs prompting viewers to compare it with the "Alps of Switzerland." These Margs attracts lot of tourists towards Kashmir valley in large number due to its mesmerizing beauty, famous Margs of Kashmir valley are as follows:

Nagmarg

The prettiest of the Margs in Kashmir is "Nagmarg", located at head of Wular lake this picturesque grassy meadow land, with glassy water of lake, attracts tourist in large number. These grassy lands are the favorite grazing pastures for cattle, sheep and ponies.

Tangmarg

Tangmarg is located at the foot of the Pir Panjal range, Tangmarg is gifted with natural beauty which attracts tourists from all over the world. The tourist spots like Feropore Nallah and Ziyarat (shrine) of Baba Reshi, are in the vicinity¹⁷.

Sonamarg

Sonamarg in the Sindh valley along the Srinagar-Leh, Sonamarg is an excellent base for trekking. Sonamarg mean 'meadow of gold' which could derive from the spring flowers the strategic position it once enjoyed. Sonamarg is situated at the terminal moraines of Thajwas Glacier. It is at an altitude of 2,740m above the sea level, at a distance of 83kms from Srinagar. The small village of Baltal is the last settlement in Kashmir¹⁸. Sonamarg has a string of Shimmering waterfalls, and Thajwas Glacier. Gadsar and Satsar lakes are the periphery of Sonamarg. The other recreational activities here include horse riding, mountaineering and fishing.

Yusmarg

Yusmarg situated at an altitude of about 2,377m is about 40kms from the tourist reception centre Srinagar. It is small open vale in the pir panjal range. Gaint pines, firs and deodar cover the mountain slopes on either side of the valley. Pony riding is the other recreational activity of this silent 'marg', trips to the nearby Nil-Nag lake, can be made from here. Boarding and lodging facilities are available in the state tourism department¹⁹.

Gulmarg

Gulmarg, literally means “the meadow of flower”. It is considered as one of the unparalleled hill resorts in the world. Gulmarg is a wide, green, undulating valley, characterized by eskers and terminal moraines, and is surrounded by dense fir forests. Situated in the lap of Pir Panjal range it is a unique place intersected by the fresh water channels, dotted over with wood village. On a clear day Nanga Parbat is visible to the north and Harmukh and sunset peak are visible to the south-east. Indeed, the scenery of Gulmarg compares favorably with that of the loveliest region of the Switzerland. Moonlight Gulmarg is a glorious sight, the mist rising in the early hours of the morning giving the marg of a appearance of mystic, lake and filling the soul with poetical idea and inspirations²⁰.

Gulmarg, a green valley is fringed by gigantic fir and pine forests, with crisp mountain air and snow capped peaks. The heart of Gulmarg is its Golf course. During winters Gulmarg is covered with thick sheets of snow, and becomes a vast stadium for winter sports.

Pahalgam

Renowned for its natural beauty, ideally situated at the confluence of the Lidder and Shehnag stream. Pahalgam is set amidst fir and pine covered mountains. Originally a Shepherd's village, it has become a world's famous resort. “Shepherd's village”, Pahalgam is visited by tourists and locals in huge number, for gradual lowering of temperature and river Lidder, which is flowing at an approachable distance. Pahalgam is situated at the bank of Lidder river, considered as one of the most beautiful tourist sites in the world. It is about 95kms from Srinagar, and at 2,130m above the sea level. There are many short walks from Pahalgam and it is an ideal base for long treks to Kolahoi Glacier or Amarnath cave.

India has rich heritage, with its wondrous form of art, architecture and archaeology. Cultural tourism relates to the “doing of man”, that render the landscape attractive. These cultural expressions constitute, potential recreation resources like people, life styles, manners belief and faith. The various cultural places of Kashmir are as follows:

Takht- I- Sulaiman.

A hill called Takht-i-Sulaiman, is exactly a thousand feet above the valley plain. It is the most conspicuous object in the locales of Srinagar; the hill is surrounded by an ancient Hindu temple Shankaracharya. The temple is of the typical Hindu plan of a square, with redressed corners, and is built like all the ancient Kashmir temples, of massive blocks of stones. A handsome flight of steps is made of limestone, leads from the ground to the door of the temple. Pilgrims from all over India visit the old temple of Shankaracharya²².

Hari Parbat Fort

Hari parbat fort is located like a crown at the peak of Hari Parbat hill. This fort, though lost its earlier glory, still stands impressive in attracting visitors towards in ancient buildings. The fort was constructed in 18th century by Atta Mohammad khan, an Afghan Governor. The wall around the hill was built by Mughal emperor Akbar in 1592-98 A.D. In the night time, it looks wonderful because of its illumination or lighting.

The Pari Mahal

Mainly used as a school of astrology, was built by Prince Dara Shikoh for his tutor Mullah Shah. Though ruined with the passage of time, it was renovated and reconstructed by the state government,

and a beautiful garden was also laid around it.

Harwan

Harwan is at a distance of 15kms from Srinagar. This huge garden has a beautiful canal running in the middle surrounded by flower beds and tall Chinar trees. In order to maintain the natural beauty of the garden, artificial fountains are not developed. It looks like a vast green carpet spread on the floor.

Kashmir valley is known for its cultural uniqueness right from the olden days. Numerous pilgrimage centres are located all over the valley. Some of the important places that attract tourist are as follows:

Hazratbal

Hazratbal, also believed to be the “Kaaba of poor people” is situated majestically on the site of one of the early Mughal garden known as Sadia-abad, built in Shanjahan’s reign. Harzatbal is on one of the western shore of the beautiful Dal lake, opposite Nishat Bagh, commanding a grand view of the lake and the mountains unfolding as a back drop behind it. The special sanctity of Hazratbal is due to the presence of the Holy Relic of the Prophet Mohammad(P.B.U.H) which was brought to Kashmir in 1111A.H and exhibited in Srinagar by Khawaja Nur-ud-din Ishbar.

Shankaracharya

Shankaracharya is located at south-east of Srinagar, built on a high octagonal plinth with side walls and steps. The main shrine is circular in shape. The antiquity of Shankarcharay is dedicated to lord Shiva dates back to 200 B. C. E. this temple attracts tourist from all over the country²³.

Shri Amarnath Cave

Holiest of all Hindu shrines, Amaranth cave is located at a distance of 141kms from Srinagar, and is about 45kms from Pahalgam. Trekking, ponies, horses and helicopter service are the option to reach this pilgrimage centre. Amaranth yatra is generally undertaken in July-August every year. Thousands of devotees visit this pilgrimage every year. The pilgrimages call on Shiva to appear and if the god is propitious pigeons flutter out from cave. The shrine of Amaranth is believed to be the abode of lord Shiva.

Jami Masjid

The impressive wooden mosque is notable for the 300 pillars supporting the roof, each made pillar of single deodar tree trunk. The present mosque, with its green and peaceful inner courtyard was built similar to the original design, after a fire in 1674 destroyed the original one. As per verse a door of the Jama masjid the mosque was originally built by Sultan Sikandar in 1801A.H (1398.A.D) and completed in 1804A.H (1401A.D) ²⁴.

Pather (Stone) Masjid

Almost directly opposite to the Shah-i-Hamadan mosque, on the other bank of Jhelum, the stone or Pather Masjid is fine stone mosque, built by Nur Jahan in 1623A.D. It is also known as “Nau shahi masjid” (new royal masjid)²⁵.

Khair Bhawani

The Kashmiri pandits are chiefly followers of Shiva, the lord of the mountains and the god of the

hill people. The temple of Ragnia Devi, Khir Bhawani at Tulamulla is the most important sacred place of Kashmiri pandits. The water of the spring of Khirbhawani at the mouth of the Sind valley is believed that it changes colour. A festival is held annually at the temple²⁶.

Trekking

Trekking is one of the highlight of tourism in Kashmir valley. Some of popular and famous routes for trekking in Kashmir valley are Amarnath yatra, Gulmarg, Sonamarg, Kolahi Glacier, Wangat, Gangabal, Kausarnag, Daksum and Panikhar.

Skiing

Snow Skiing in Kashmir is like a dream come true to only adventure sports enthusiast. The snow capped mountains in Kashmir offers great opportunities for snow skiing. The best place for skiing in Kashmir is Gulmarg. It is the cheapest resort in the world to ski. Gulmarg was also host to the winter game in year 1998.

Golf

Golf tourism is one of the main attractions of the Kashmir valley in summer. The peak season for golf in Kashmir is from April to November. One advantage that the game of golf in Kashmir has over other golf courses, that the weather here is quite refreshing, and the shade of the bordering. Gulmarg and Pahalgam are the two venues for golfing in Kashmir valley²⁷.

CONCLUSION

A jewel of a destination, Kashmir is one of the most amazing holiday destinations in India. The vast and beautiful valleys Kashmir, its rich and colourful attraction deserve a substantially greater tourist inflow. Kashmir has more attractions than other regions in variety of tourist centers. The important tourist resorts include Srinagar, Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg, Yusmarg, Kokernag etc. The historical gardens such as Shalimar, Nishat, Chasmashahi, Naseembagh, Nehru park, Achabal gardens etc. The historical shrines mosques and temples include, Shankarachary temple, Harzabatal shrine, Martand, Jamia masjid Amaranth etc. The sport tourism include, skiing, mountaineering, water Skiing, Fishing, Golf, Horse-pony riding etc are the places of tourist attractions of Kashmir valley.

Tourism at present is the largest industry in the world. Tourism frames massive and continuous flow of people to more and more all around the globe. In recent years tourism has undergone several major shifts. Now tourism is an organized industry in which it entered in the multinationals, by means of transport which carry people in bulk to far-off places has increased rapidly and the increase in the size of range of jet aircraft has led to the creation of a long haul package holiday market. The objectives of tourists also vary in space and time. This emerging pattern of tourism is transforming the socio-economic pattern and cultural value of the people all over the world. Tourism plays the crucial role for national economies throughout the world. The tourists are attracted to the destinations not only because of the natural resource or natural beauty of the place, but because of the returns they get on the expenditure they do in the tourist place. Tourism is an organized industry, its dimensions are wide, its location varies and its benefits spread over large segments of the population. The tourists both foreign and domestic all contribute to the development of Kashmir economy and provide employment to the people and afford opportunities to them.

Among the states of the country Kashmir enjoys wide variety of tourism products and places of attraction not only for the domestic tourists but also for the international visitors. The state

government has taken all these steps to improve the tourism industry by improving the facilities for the tourists and visitors in the recent past, several infrastructures such as railway line connecting the Kashmir valley from the rest of India.

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