Chapter 8

Summary of conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This thesis started with the statement which Stanley Plog made in 1972 about the need for management of tourism destinations. Even after 40 years the question is equally relevant, especially for the destinations that are still allowing the unplanned and under-managed tourism. Stakeholders of tourism industry in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in general and Kashmir region in particular have more reasons to worry as the product they are cashing on has highly fragile physical setting. This ecological fragility makes it more prone to changes with slight human intervention. Moreover, the region has been caught in the claws of violence, bloodshed and armed conflict for more than two long decades, which has worsened the situation. Besides, the region doesn’t have any proper tourism policy and the tourism is left largely unmanaged.

Along with the appreciation of natural and cultural attractions available, the study had made an attempt to highlight the economic significance of the landscape and examine the opinions and preferences of the visitors towards the landscape setting of the region. This was followed by the evaluation of the evolution and development of the recreation industry as well as the analysis of the past trends and current status of the tourism in the region. Butler’s Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model was used to accomplish this objective. Further, the types of tourists visiting the valley and the choices available to them have been thoroughly described, with an assessment of the carrying capacity of different resorts within the broader spectrum of ‘Kashmirscape’. SWOT analysis was carried out to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the region regarding the tourism development so that the opportunities and threats can be gauged. An important social aspect has also been dealt with—implication of host-guest interaction, the attitudes of different stakeholders and the perception of visitors about the tourism-environment relationship—with special emphasis on Kashmir region. Finally, to minimise the negative impacts and maximise the positive aspects of tourism—the very basic objective of tourism planning and management—an attempt
has been made to regionalise the whole region into a ‘Recreation Opportunity Spectrum’. The ‘ROS’ offers vast opportunities as possible for the established as well potential markets. The perception and opinion regarding traversed landscape elicited by consumers of the landscape resources, i.e. tourists, have also been evaluated under the ROS model.

The major aims and objectives, on which the study rests, were;

1. To appreciate and analyze the landscape resource endowment of Kashmir.
2. To trace the evolution, growth, pattern and trends of tourism vis-à-vis the conflict.
3. To examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to tourism industry of the region.
4. To investigate the attitudes and perceptions of hosts and tourists towards the tourism in Kashmir region.
5. To develop a suitable model for sustainable tourism.

8.2 Conclusions

Based on these objectives the following concluding remarks are derived from the analysis and interpretation of the literature available and data collected through field research. The conclusions are arranged chapter-wise and have been sequentially put forth.

The first aim of this thesis, to appreciate and analyze the landscape resource endowment of Kashmir region, was met in Chapter 3. Kashmir region is endowed with some of the finest landscapes that nature could bestow on a region with such dimensions; and many of its parts deserve to be recognized in line with (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) AONB to conserve them and enhance their quality. The region offers a vast spectrum of tourism products. Since Kashmir has plenty of natural resources in the form of its diverse landscape, the utility of such resource base is none but recreation. Natural resources are generally allocated to that economic activity
which provides maximum benefit to the majority of the people living in the vicinity. In the delicate environs of the Vale of Kashmir the natural endowments are best suited for the tourism as it is considered to be an inclusive economic activity which has relatively less impact on the surroundings. Although Kashmir valley is not fortunate enough to be endowed with the abundance of mineral resources or fossil fuels but its landscape has no comparison in the whole world. It is very rich in terms of other bounties of very high quality, rare to find in any other place on the planet earth. Kashmir region has a very plentiful and diverse landscape resource endowment. These include the rich bio-diversity, flora and fauna, avian multifariousness, long stretches of dense forests, some of the best agricultural lands, beautiful water bodies (both lakes and rivers), snow-capped mountains, numerous valleys, green and vast meadows, extensive glaciers, and above all the excellent recreational climate. Tourism in Kashmir is highly dependent on the environmental quality and any change in natural landscape will have a huge impact on the tourism industry and hence on the economy of the valley.

Nature has compensated the region of Kashmir for its mineral resources scarcity with abundance of renewable wealth, most important being the landscape scenic resources. Associated with high quality of landscape resources is the fragile environment with unique faunal and floral diversity. The industrial development is out of question as the mineral resources are absent and, more importantly, any such activity may disturb the harmony of nature to an unbearable extent. Hence, the only viable economic activity that can be carried out with minimal impact on the delicate ecosystems is tourism and that too in the most sustainable forms like eco-tourism. Landscape being the main natural resource endowment of Kashmir region its utilization for tourism industry is the obvious option.

Majority of the tourists visit Kashmir valley for its natural attractions, which is their main motivation for travel. From the number of options provided the mean likeness score of more than 7.50, out of 9 went to mountains with dense forest, meadows within the forests, high altitude mountain lakes and rivers with natural course. Out of the total of 500 tourists surveyed 46.6% considered the landscape of Kashmir as extremely beautiful, and an equal proportion considers it beautiful. Out of the primary
landscape components, vegetation got very high mean score of beauty (7.12 out of 9), followed by landform and water, with mean score of 6.66 and 6.21 respectively. Out of secondary landscape components forest got the first preference followed by meadows and agriculture. Amongst the secondary components of landforms mountains got the first preference followed by ‘hill and valley’ and plateau. Lakes got the first preference as secondary water component, followed by springs, rivers, glacial lakes and wetlands. Apparently, rural landscape got higher preference than the urban landscape. Considering heritage as a primary cultural component, historical heritage got the first preference, followed by religious and cultural heritage. Built form, which includes both rural and urban components, got the lowest score.

The second aim, which was to trace the evolution, growth, pattern and trends of tourism vis-à-vis the conflict, was achieved in chapter 4. Butler’s Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model was used to accomplish this objective. The region is found to be in the rejuvenation phase of its tourism cycle of Butler’s TALC model. Kashmir valley, due to the inaccessibility for larger part of its history and its relatively longer life span as a tourism destination has more or less ideally conformed to the Butler’s model. It has a fairly large and distinct exploration and involvement stages, followed by a perfect developmental stage that, however, continued for just a few years. Nevertheless, before the consolidation stage could show the future direction of destination evolution, the armed uprising put a big halt in the progress of the cycle. Out of the five possibilities of post-stagnation period there was only one option left for the valley and that was the total abandonment by all kinds of tourists. Government and local involvement in tourism was minimal as it was no more a viable option with uncertainties looming over the industry continuously. But when we look into the pilgrimage tourism to the Amarnath Cave, the increasing trend, even during the peak militancy periods, forces us to think whether we could have managed to attract other types of tourists to other spots in the valley? Yes, a proper management might have helped the tourism industry to be of some prominence in the valley during the period of unrest. However, the major impediment was the problem of security for the whole year and the whole region. Moreover, pilgrims have a kind of motivation which is
different from what other kinds of tourists have, as the latter want pure enjoyment, peace and entertainment which was impossible to provide in a war like situation.

Notwithstanding the problems the Kashmir valley has faced, the real challenge is yet to come. The advertisement of the valley as a hotspot of terrorism has acted as a blessing in disguise. The famous Bollywood line about Kashmir—*Jannat on Earth, but also the most dangerous place*—has acted as a two pronged sword. It popularised Kashmir as a dangerous place of war and terrorism, while simultaneously ‘*paradise on Earth*’ phrase has acted as an embossed painting on a plain velvet cloth. The period of halt for tourism was also ironically incubating it. After two decades, the tourist activities were restored with rather better and informed debates on eco-tourism and sustainable tourism; saving Kashmir in those 20 years when such concepts were neither popular nor were of much significance especially in the case of Kashmir. The rejuvenation is attracting a huge number of tourists which may continue for at least some years till the image of the valley gets normal. The domestic market is going to increase beyond the expectations and probably beyond the carrying capacity as they have been kept out of this ‘paradise’ for quite a long time now. With economic stability of the valley, the local tourism is also going to boom. The earlier excursionist trend is changing as more and more local excursionists are turning into the overnight staying tourists. Consequently, such activities would most probably pose a challenge to the government, the tourism authorities and the locals.

The violent phase in the history of Kashmir has to be considered as an opportunity and not as excuse in the future development of tourism. This phase should be taken positively from the perspective of tourism as otherwise phase might have exploited the tourism product beyond repair. The two decades of ‘hibernation’ for tourism has saved Kashmir Valley from the damage of mass tourism. Furthermore, new concepts of ecotourism and sustainability can be used to develop the tourism resources. Newer spots need to be developed to impose least possible threat to the ecologically fragile region.

To examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to tourism industry of the region was the third aim and which was met in Chapter 5. Tourism setting in the
region is strong and offers many opportunities for socio-economic development. All the weaknesses and threats are not inherent and definite; hence can be overcome with proper planning. Wide range of tourists is visiting the region but their movement is restricted within a few established resorts only.

The internecine situation in the Kashmir valley since 1989 has had many repercussions on the overall economic situation of the region. Tourism, being directly linked with the movement, transportation, peace and outside visitors, obviously gets most affected. Tourism had some impacts on the environment but still some of the money generated could be used to compensate for the loss. But when a sudden end to the tourism came with the emergence of armed conflict those who lost their jobs started misusing the resources leaving the fragile ecology under strain. Moreover, the excessive militarisation led to unrestrained resource utilization leading to the further stress on the ecology. Also, the lack of proper governance, due to the conflict, hampered the role of government bodies to check the misuse of natural wealth. An extensive survey was carried out to get an insight into the impacts of tourism activity on natural resources and the role of conflict in changing the resource utilization practices. Since people depending on tourism sector had shifted to the activities more detrimental to the environment the two decade long “holiday” period in the history of Kashmir tourism was not able to save the environment from degradation. Such has been the impact of conflict on the valley that it’s main and the only city Srinagar has been 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).

Militants affected the environment in their own way and army had its full authority to exploit the fragile land resources without any restrictions. Militants wanted tourism to dwindle in order to send the message that all was not normal in Kashmir. They targeted the infrastructure and entertainment venues and also targeted the tourists. Forest was the obvious hideout for these warlords and hence these resources were utilized, apart from other uses, for buying the weaponry. Army and other paramilitary forces have their own story to tell. Heavy deployments of army in the forested lands, extension of roads for the military movement, and clearing the forests for the base
camps are some of the ways it participated in destroying the natural resources. Encounters between the militants and armed forces led to the rapid forest fires and hunting the wild animals for food and then for quick money also led to the rapid extinction of hundreds of species of birds and animals.

There are a very few tourist resorts which attract both foreign as well as domestic visitors. Even the local excursionists prefer these established resorts. Hence almost all infrastructural facilities are located within or in the vicinity of such establishments. Moreover, the consecutive visitors also choose destinations which not only provide infrastructural facilities but also attract new visitors in the same area instead of exploring new ones. The new and potential spots or regions deprived of visitors, investors, development and also recognition.

The strengths and opportunities of tourism in Kashmir are much more than its weaknesses and threats. The greatest strength of the region lies in its vast base of natural and heritage landscape along with most of its spatial extent still hidden from the tourist market. The biggest opportunity is that the potential visitors have been kept away from this destination that might be very enthusiastic to visit the region, and this opportunity can be grabbed to make them feel that there is more in store and hence they should come back. The biggest weakness of all is the lack of tourism policy, while the greatest threat is that of political instability.

The region attracts very few allocentric or ventures (only 3.2%) and a large proportion of psychocentric or dependables (39.8%), the reason being the concern for safety and security which the region is considered lacking. However, different resorts attract different types of tourists.

Based on the current infrastructure and management capabilities the carrying capacity of tourist resorts during the peak season of summer is lesser than the expected tourist flow. But having overcome these shortcomings and with the development of new resorts, along with using the ephemeral quality of the region, the tourist carrying capacity is going to increase manifolds. Further, if social carrying capacity is taken into consideration, then the region is far below its capacity.
The fourth aim was to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of hosts and tourists towards the tourism in Kashmir region, for which the impacts of tourism on the natural settings of the region were gauged and the perceptions and attitudes of resident communities and visitors were brought out in chapter 6. Tourism has cast its negative impacts on the physical environment of the Kashmir region since its inception as an economic sector to exploit the natural landscape commercially. From the literature available it is observed that forests, water, air and soil, all such aspects of environment got affected. Till 1990’s tourism in the region was increasing at a good rate and thus associated with it was higher pace of environmental degradation. Tourists stopped visiting this destination with the onset of the armed violence, but the environment continued to suffer, sometimes at the hands of the locals, sometimes at the hands of the corrupt officials and most of the times because of the lack of tourism. It seems ironical but it is the truth. Since 2005 the arrivals have been steadier and surely in this rejuvenation stage the environment is more prone to the negative face of this otherwise eco-friendly industry. The main reason is the superimposition of the tourism rejuvenation on the dilapidated infrastructure that has been the collateral damage of the armed violence. The current extent of the impacts are easily observable through the unmindful distribution of the litter, degrading water and air quality in and around the tourist resorts, increasing builtup area and expanding vehicular traffic. This is the story of all the established resorts and unfortunately, the newer upcoming spots are following the footsteps of the established destinations. Conflict has led to unimaginable damage to the tourism industry, environment, and landscape quality and above all it has tarnished the image of the valley.

Views of tourists about the Kashmir region are positive and encouraging for natural beauty, climate, cultural attractions, accommodation and hospitality but the cleanliness, infrastructure and management are considered to lag behind. Since tourists visit the valley for its natural landscape most of their time is spent in contact with the nature outdoors. They are satisfied with the climate, landscape, hospitality and local heritage and culture but the management of tourism, cleanliness, price/quality ratio and other services were not found up to the mark. However, overall the satisfaction with the Kashmir region is encouraging.
Residents of tourist areas, especially those of the established and developed ones, are highly dependent on the tourism for their economic stability. However, these hosts are not unaware of the negative repercussions of this sector of economy. They are witness to the changes in the landuse and landcover in their vicinity, and know very well that tourism increases the value of their property and provides them employment opportunities. Most of the residents favour the development of tourism in parallel to the environmental conservation. Their attitude towards the visiting guests is positive and they are in favour of the tourism development options.

Local inhabitants have a positive attitude towards tourism development while as the visitors are highly satisfied with the natural landscape of the region but their perception regarding the overall tourism experience is below expectation. Local involvement is indispensable for the survival of this industry as these stakeholders would preserve the environment only if it has some economic benefit. Since ecological function is not readily recognizable to those who are not educated to look for it so educating the locals as well as the visitors is necessary to develop conservation interest in them.

The final aim, which was to build a suitable model for sustainability of tourism in the region, was realised in chapter 7. It was established that the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is an indispensable tool for tourism policy in the region. Kashmir region has all the recreation opportunities present which need to be preserved. The development of resorts is being done in such a way that each looks like a replica of another, which is definitely going to affect the satisfaction of the visitors. Since Kashmir doesn’t have a tourism policy ROS is ideal to be incorporated whenever a policy is formulated. To sustain the tourism in this ecologically fragile region it is necessary to develop this sector of economy with proper planning and management. Providing the visitors all the opportunities of recreation is one indispensable part of tourism planning. Ecotourism is one form of tourism that is most suitable for the sensitive environment of the region.

However, the attention needs to be paid towards the traversed landscape as well. The approach of tourism development should be to develop the whole region as a system.
Island of tourist resorts within the ocean of such a beautiful landscape is not a good idea.

Investment needs to be done in ‘traversed landscapes’ along with the destination development. Such investments should either increase the aesthetic beauty or avoid the damage. Laws and regulations need to be formulated to convince the people, especially those lying along the tourist routes to enhance the beauty of their surroundings.

Environmentally viable forms of tourism, like eco-tourism, nature based tourism and sustainable tourism etc. are needed in the rejuvenation phase of the valley’s tourism development. Such forms of tourism are considered environmentally viable after studying the relation between tourism and natural resources management.

Environmentally viable forms of tourism are needed in the rejuvenation phase of the valley’s tourism development. Further, local involvement is indispensable for the survival of this industry as these stakeholders would preserve the environment only if it has some economic benefit.

Areas of high natural beauty need to be designated in line with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty of United Kingdom, to preserve their scenic quality.

8.3 Limitations of the study and future directions

Although this work tried to investigate many such aspects of tourism, within the region of Kashmir, which have not been given the attention with required academic fervour, still it has not been possible to address all the issues that deserve the academic interest. Secondary data source is weak because of the chaotic situation in the region for last few decades. Due to this handicap many important aspects of tourism could not be addressed. Even the primary data collection was hampered by the violent phase during the survey. The results might have got impacted by the social unrest while the primary data was being collected.

This research is just a step forward in appreciating the importance of academic research for tourism development in such tourism-dependent regions as Kashmir. In-
depth studies need to be carried out by the researchers of different disciplines, especially the spatial sciences, to explore the social, economic and environmental impacts of tourism at various levels viz. individual level, resort level and regional level. Local involvement and their attitude towards the tourism development policies need to be explored further. The perceptions of all the stakeholders, including labourers, small vendors, ponywallas, hotel and restaurant owners and so on should form the base of some researches. Cost-benefit analysis need to be applied in Kashmir conditions, exploring costs in terms of social and environmental and benefits in terms of employment opportunities provided to locals and the quality of their life. Finally, a concrete model, involving all the resorts, stakeholders and residents in a coordinated manner, needs to be brought out to make tourism most suitable and sustainable industry in the region.

The study has examined many the stages on which damage to tourism industry should have been stopped, as at every stage of development, socio-economic changes and political instability we have received sufficient warnings where it was possible for the govt and the civil society to take note and rectify the mistakes committed and prevent further damage and loss to the Kashmirscape. Since we cannot change the past now, but the future surely lies in our hands. Fate of Kashmir’s scenic resources depends on our present policies and management. As the rejuvenation and the revival of the tourism industry has already set in proper care is needed to nurture the beauty of the paradise to make it sustainable. The immediate need is to reconstruct the damaged infrastructure and repair the degraded environment on which the tourism industry thrives. Tourism is important not only for providing the direct employment to the people but also for its induced and indirect benefits to other industries like carpet, handicrafts etc. So the utmost need is to exploit the tourism resources in more rational and judicious way with minimal impacts on the landscape resources. Once again Plog’s statement needs to be reminded that the reason for stakeholders of tourism to worry is that the attractiveness of their resources may be spinning away as they themselves watch it but ignore the warning. This should not happen with this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.