PhD Thesis Abstract

GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF TOURISM
IN KASHMIR REGION

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**Introduction**

The tourism industry is self-destructive as the seeds of the destination’s almost-inevitable decline are already sown in the midst of its success. A destination area may attract more number of tourists with time but ultimately it starts declining because of the degradation of the scenic resources, and reaches to the level where it is unsustainable for the whole community to benefit from the tourism activities. Simultaneously it becomes unattractive for the visitors too. A tourist resort passes through a cycle with distinct and successive stages of exploration, involvement, development, maturity and finally to decline. The types of tourists visiting the area also change with time. Host-visitor conflicts escalate. At this point even the attitude of the visitors towards the destination conservation, if any, diminishes. The visitor pressure on the environment is multiplied with time and gradually the landscape resources are degraded and the negative impacts on the environment reach to the point when visitors find the destination unattractive and finally abandon it.

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.

**Research questions**

Several questions concern me about the current tourism developments in different resorts individually and Kashmir region as a whole as one tourism destination. These are guiding questions and their treatment is implicit in the contents of chapters of the thesis. Since the tourism industry has been brought to a standstill due the political and social unrest that started in 1989, it is imperative to examine the current level of tourist flow to the region and the possible future trends. How has the unrest affected the tourism development in the region and at what stage of tourism development does the valley stand? How is the environment responding to the current developments and what recreation opportunities are available for the tourists? What types of tourists are coming to visit the valley and what are their attitudes towards the tourism development and the environmental conservation in the region? How
does the local community perceive the tourism development and how do they interact with the visitors? And finally, how can the tourism industry be developed so that it is sustainable?

Objectives

Based on the questions raised the study tries to focuses on building an appropriate model for sustainable tourism development in Kashmir region. Keeping this in mind the following objectives have been set forth:

1. To appreciate and analyse the landscape resource endowment of Kashmir.
2. To trace the evolution, growth, pattern and trends of tourism vis-à-vis conflict.
3. To examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to tourism.
4. To investigate the attitudes and perceptions of residents and visitors towards tourism-environment relationship.
5. To develop a suitable model for sustainable tourism.

Conceptual framework

These above raised questions and the subsequently set objectives are explored through five major concepts and themes. The first theme is the Landscape Resources. Landscape components, both physical and cultural, have been taken into account. Primary and secondary landscape components of the Kashmir region have been described and perceptions of the landscape users analysed. Further, the traversed landscape has also been dealt with to get answers to some of the questions related to the landscape of the Kashmir region.

The second concept used is the concept Destination Life Cycle. Using Butler’s Tourism Area Life Cycle model evolution of the tourism and development through time is addressed. The concept is applied to the Kashmir region as a whole as one single destination as well as to the different resorts lying scattered throughout the length and breadth of the region. The impact of armed conflict on the cycle is analysed.

The third theme embraces three components: tourist types, evaluating the types of tourists that visit the destination; carrying capacity, which involves the evaluation of the current tourism resources and their utilization; and SWOT Analysis, dealing with the strengths and opportunities, and weaknesses and threats to the tourism industry of Kashmir region.
The fourth theme has two components: tourist attitudes, towards the tourism-environment relationship and host perceptions, towards tourism development and visitors.

The fifth theme pertains to the sustainability of tourism in the region. It is significant as the region is set in such environmental and ecological settings that if the development is not environmentally sensitive it can lead to the degradation and eventually the abandonment of the destination by the visitors.

**Organisation of the thesis**

The study is organised into eight chapters, keeping in mind the questions raised and the objectives set forth. Chapter one introduces the topic and the logic behind choosing this area for research. Apart from presenting the aims and objectives of the study it explains the data sources and the techniques to analyse the data. Relevance of the study in the academic field as well as for practical purposes has been explicitly demonstrated. Moreover, overview of methodology is also given. Chapter two tries to present the physical and social character of the study area. Through this chapter historical background, geographical landscape and political/administrative delineation has been attempted to bring out. Moreover, it peeps into the literature at disposal, and tries to link the current work with the already available research in different parts of the world having similar conditions as that of Kashmir. Chapter three traces the recreation landscape of the destination. Physical, scenic, archaeological, historical and other tourism resources have been explained in detail. Moreover an assessment of the physical and cultural landscape along with the traversed landscape has been done. Chapter four analyses the evolution and trends of tourism development in the Kashmir region using Butler’s hypothetical Tourism Area Life Cycle model. Based on this model the current status of the tourism development in Kashmir region has been analysed and impact of the armed conflict on the tourism life cycle has been emphasised. Chapter five helps in understanding the types of tourists to the region and their demands, using Plog’s classification of travellers. Availability of tourist circuits and nodes have been systematically described. After analysing the carrying capacity of different resorts and the valley as a whole tourist movement within the valley has been assessed and its likely implications discussed. Finally a SWOT analysis is carried to bring out the strengths and associated opportunities of tourism development, along with bringing out the weaknesses and the possible threats regarding the same. Chapter six uses different statistical techniques to understand the relation between the tourism development and the perception of the local residents. The attitude of the visitors towards the
tourism development and their sensitivity towards the environmental conservation is also assessed. In Chapter seven the emphasis has been given on developing a suitable model for sustainable tourism. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) has been used to meet this aim. Therefore, the area has also been delineated into the regions with different Recreation Opportunities, to provide choice for all potential tourists visiting the destination. The summary of conclusions of the study is provided in Chapter eight.

**Major findings and concluding observations**

Based on these objectives the following concluding remarks are derived from the analysis and interpretation of the literature available and the analysis of the data collected through field research.

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. In the delicate environs of the 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. 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 region.

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 region for its natural attractions, which is their main motivation for travel. Dense forests, clear waters of lakes and streams, meadows and other natural features are like the most by the visitors. However their experience along the traversed landscape is not satisfactory.

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 region, 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.

Notwithstanding the problems the Kashmir valley has faced, the real challenge is yet to come. The rejuvenation is attracting a huge number of tourists. 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 region, 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 an 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 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. 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.

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. The new and potential spots or regions are 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 venturers and a large proportion of psychocentric or dependables, 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 built up 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 region 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.
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.

Based on the analysis and the finding of this research, the following conclusions have been drawn.

1. Kashmir is endowed with some of the finest landscapes that nature could bestow on a region; and many of its parts deserve to be recognized in line with AONB to conserve them and enhance their quality.

2. Tourism is in the rejuvenation phase of its cycle with steep rise in arrivals with each passing year.

3. Tourism setting in the region is strong and offers many opportunities for socio-economic development. Weaknesses and threats are not inherent and hence can be overcome with proper planning.

4. 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 their expectations.

5. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum is an indispensable tool for tourism policy in the region, as it provides a range of opportunities to all potential visitors and the benefits of tourism can reach to the far and inaccessible areas without compromising their fragility of ecosystems.