Chapter - III

Tourist attractions in the valley of Kashmir
3.1 IMPORTANT TOURIST PLACES OF THE KASHMIR VALLEY

Situated in the northern most part of India, the valley of Kashmir is one of the most beautiful regions of the country. Srinagar, the capital city, stands on the banks of the Jhelum River, is the lifeline of the Kashmir Valley. Often referred as the 'Paradise on Earth' or 'Switzerland of India', the region has been a major tourist attraction, since the time of the Mughal Emperors. Its snow-capped mountains, the tranquil silver lakes, the houseboats, the picturesque garden and a range of flora and fauna attract the nature lovers from all parts of the world. Apart from natural beauty, the region is dotted with several religious sites and other important monuments. In fact Kashmir valley is an ideal place for holidaymakers as well as honeymooners. Besides Kashmir has a lot to offer to the artists, archaeologists, rock and mountain climbers and hunters, who throng the valley in large numbers. A brief description of the important tourist places of the Kashmir valley is given below:

3.1.1 GULMARG

Gulmarg is one of the most splendid hill resorts in the country, falling in the Baramulla Distt of Kashmir. Initially, Gulmarg of Kashmir used to known by the name of "Gaurimarg", by the shepherds pasturing their herds. However, the present name of this hill resort dates back to the 16th century. Sultan Yusuf Shah, impressed with the stunning spectacle of the grassy hills adorned with colorful flowers, gave the name of "Gulmarg" to this beautiful hill station. Gulmarg hill station also served as the preferred rendezvous of the Mughal Emperor Jehangir. It is said that the emperor once collected 21 different varieties of flowers from here. Gulmarg hill resort boasts of not only picturesque locales, but also of the highest golf course in the world. Situated at a height of 2,650 m, Gulmarg golf course is one of the major attractions of the awesome hill station. Along with that, Gulmarg is also quite famous as a skiing
destination in winters. The drive to Gulmarg is as beautiful as the hill station itself. Alongside the road, the scenery changes from boulevard of poplar to smooth vastness of rice fields, sprinkled with some pleasing villages. The fir-covered hills characterize the ascent to Gulmarg, Kashmir. There is also a spot on the way to Gulmarg, known as "View Point", where tourists often stop to admire the breath-taking sight of snow-capped mountains. The drive to Gulmarg is filled with a number of colors, changing with the season. From the translucent green of spring to summer's rich emerald to autumn's golden hues, the scenery has something to offer in every season. The "Meadow of Flowers" counts amongst some of the best tourist spots of the world. Gulmarg tourism is famous not only for its awe-inspiring beauty, but for a number of other attractions also. You can also take a Gandola ride (cable car ride), taking the tourists up to Kongdori, to enjoy the magnificent sights of the meadow from the top. Also popular is a trek to Alpathar Lake, approximately 13 km from Gulmarg. With the encircling forests of tall conifers, Gulmarg assumes an unparalleled beauty. The hill resort of Gulmarg is rated as one of the unrivaled tourist spots in the world. You can also visit the famous shrine of Baba Reshi, a Muslim saint.

3.1.2 YUSMARG

Yusmarg is approximately 47 km from the Srinagar and lies in the Badgam district of Jammu and Kashmir. The two-hour drive to the place is an enjoyment in itself. Grassy pastures stretching to acres of land, the dense forests full of pine trees, with the backdrop of splendid snow-capped mountains leave you almost speechless. Within commutable distance from Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, Yusmarg is the perfect place to go for a picnic. Specially, for the lovers of long walks in picturesque locales, Yusmarg is the place to be.
Another venue for the walkers is a river, known by the name of Dudh Ganga. Frothing and crashing on its way over the rocks, the river makes a little white foam, which gives it this name. A little ahead, is a lake, Nalnag, embraced with hills. The hills comprise of a number of several peaks, namely Tatta Kutti, Sang Safed, etc. At a distance of about 13 km from Yusmarg in the Kashmir valley is the Charar-e-Sharief, the shrine of the saint Sheikh Noor-ud-din or Nund Reshi.2

3.1.3 PAHALGAM

Pahalgam is situated at the convergence of the Lidder Lake and the Sheshnag Lake. At a height of 2,130 m, Pahalgam hill station is a spectacular sight. At one point of time, the hill station used to serve as the village of shepherds. Even today, this one-time village with splendid views stands untouched by the ravages of progress. Pahalgam now counts amongst the premier resorts of the Kashmir valley. This beautiful hill station dates back to the medieval period. Ruled by the Mughals at one point of time, it later came under the reign of the local Hindu kings as a part of the Kashmir kingdom. This princely state continued to exist until it got merged into India, after independence. There are many interesting tourist destinations around Pahalgam. Amongst them are the surging pastures of Baisaran. The huge meadows surrounded by thickly wooded forests of pine present a beautiful spectacle. Then there is Hajan, a popular picnic spot, on the way to Chandanwari. Hajan is a popular shooting location for the Indian film industry. The hill station of Pahalgam has eight tiny villages inside it. One of the villages is Mamal, which houses an ancient Shiva temple dating back to the 5th century. Pahalgam also comprises of a part of the only saffron growing areas of Asia. Pahalgam is also associated with the holy yatra of the Amarnath cave. Chandanwari, 16 km from Pahalgam, serves as the starting point of the Amarnath yatra. The yatra is organized every year in the Hindu month of Sawan (July to August). Pahalgam also offers shopping facilities to the tourists. It is quite
popular for wool products like *Gabbas and Namdas*, available in the local shops. There are a number of activities one can undertake, while in Pahalgam. One of them is trekking. Some of the famous treks of Pahalgam are the Pahalgam-Sonamarg Trek and the treks to Chandanwari, Kolahoi Glacier and Sheshnag Lake.³

### 3.1.4 WATLAB

If you want to experience the real Kashmir then a trip to Watlab is a must for you. As you move away from the well-traversed areas of the valley, slowly and steadily, you will get to see the Kashmir you have never seen before. Apart from the untamed beauty, Watlab in Kashmir is famous for its hilltop Muslim shrine. The shrine was built in the memory of Baba Shukurddin, a Muslim mystic. This place offers you a beautiful view of the Wular Lake, stretching out as far as the eye can see. The picturesque villages edging around the lake further enhance the scenery. Also adding a touch of color to the landscape, are the fields of paddy nearby.

### 3.1.5 VERINAG:

Verinag is situated at a distance of approximately 80 km from Srinagar. Reached through the link road, it is located at a height of 1,876 m. It is believed that the Verinag spring in Kashmir is the chief source of the river Jhelum. There is an octagonal base at the spring, surrounded by a covered passage. The Mughal Emperor Jehangir started the construction work on both the base as well as the arcade. It was during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan that the work got completed. There are remains of Mughal pavilion and baths in Verinag, down the stream to the east.

### 3.1.6 KOKERNAG

Situated at a height of 2,020 m, Kokernag is approximately 70 km from the district of Srinagar. Blooming gardens surround this spring, which bubbles at seven places at the foot of the forested mountain. The water of Kokernag in Kashmir is believed to have medicinal and digestive properties. And because of these properties only, the spring is also known as Papashudan Nag or the sin-cleansing spring.
Encircled by snow-covered mountains, Sonamarg is a place of enchanting beauty. Surrounded by dense forests, full of sycamore and alpine flowers, silver birch, fir and pine, the meadow presents a captivating sight. The charm of Sonamarg hill station is further enhanced with the snow capped mountains as the backdrop and the Sindh River meandering through it. The Nichnai Pass, near Sonamarg, offers a spectacular view of three lakes, Kishensar, Vishensar and Gangabal. These rivers also consist of some of the famous trekking destinations from Sonamarg. Then, there is the Zojila Pass, 20 km east of Sonamarg, standing at a height of 3540 m and leading into the Ladakh Plateau. Sonamarg hill station, also known as the "Gateway to Ladakh", is the take off station for the drive to Ladakh. A major attraction of Sonamarg is the Thajiwas range. Covered with pine, fir, and birch trees, the range provides a number of sites for camping. A number of waterfalls and the fascinating Thajiwas glacier are other attractions of this range. Sonamarg serves as another base for undertaking the holy yatra of the Amarnath cave. The yatra is organized every year during the month of July-August. In Sonamarg, you will get to try many adventurous sports as well like Trekking to Thajiwas Glacier, Pahalgam, etc, Sledging (at frozen glaciers), Angling (license required), and Long walks in the jungles Alpine Skiing, White Water Rafting.
also a botanical garden and a rose garden near Kokernag, overflowing with fragrances of flowers and shrubs. Kokernag is also the largest fresh water spring of the Kashmir valley. The word Kokernag is a combination of the two words, Koker meaning 'fowl' and Nag meaning 'serpent'. Kokernag is a collection of many small springs and collectively, they all look like the claw foot of a Koker (cock). And the flowing stream resembles a moving serpent hence, the name "Kokernag". The spring of Kokernag comprises of 300 Kanals, 129 Kanals for garden purposes and 171 Kanals for forest area.

3.1.7 DAKSUM

As you drive past the Mughal Gardens of Achabal, you will come across the picturesque Daksum. Situated amidst the magnificent grandeur of the Kokernag springs, it presents an awe-inspiring sight. Standing at an altitude of 2438 m in a densely forested gorge, Daksum offers peace and tranquility. The only sound heard there is that of the Bringhi River, rushing right through its center. Daksum in Kashmir valley is a must for those fond of walking and nature. A walk in Daksum will take you up to the hills enveloped in lush coniferous trees and past gurgling brooks. The simple music coming out of the flute of an unseen shepherd tending to his flock will keep you mesmerized. The landscape of Daksum is quite erratic. From the tree-covered hills, you will suddenly find yourself in grassy meadows serving as host to the sheep coming for pasture. The invigorating mountain air, the calm and serenity, the densely clad hills, all make the trip to Daksum a memorable experience. Then, there are the snow-capped mountains in the background that further enhance the beauty of this place.

3.1.8 SONMARG

Sonamarg, also known as the "Golden Meadow", is situated at a height of 2740 m. The drive to this beautiful meadow is also as spectacular as the place itself. Driving through the Sindhu valley, you get to see another aspect of Kashmir.
Fig 3.1
FAMOUS TOURIST PLACES OF KASHMIR VALLEY

GULMARG

YUSMARG

PAHALGAM

DAKSUM

VERINAG

KOKERNAG

SONMARG

WATLAB
3.2 FAMOUS MONUMENTS OF THE KASHMIR VALLEY

Jammu and Kashmir has a good share of Indian historical and archaeological legacy. There has been a very unique and glorious tradition of the people of the State of preaching and worshipping of each other's religions and pilgrimage centers. There are well-renowned Hindu shrines co-existing with the equally famous Muslim pilgrimage centers that are held in highest esteem by the people of every faith. Buddhism, which is still followed in the Ladakh region of the State, has its origin in the valley and was preached and disseminated by the Kashmiri scholars in its earlier days. There are some wonderful examples of this communal harmony in pilgrimage centers like the one at Hari Parbat where monuments of all three religions - a temple, mosque and gurudwara are standing side by side. Some of the important shrines and monuments of the region have been covered below:

3.2.1 HAZRATBAL MOSQUE

Situated in a village on the western shores of the Dal Lake opposite Nishat Bagh, it is a pristine white marble edifice casting its reflection in the waters of the lake. It is revered for the fact that it houses a hair of the Prophet Muhammad, which is displayed to the public on religious occasions. Fairs are held on such occasions. People throng to the place every Friday to offer their prayers. Unlike the other mosques in Srinagar, which have a pagoda like roof, Hazratbal is the only mosque to have a domed roof Mosque in Srinagar.

3.2.2 JAMIA MASJID

Situated in the heart of the old city of Srinagar, this huge mosque is visited by thousands of people who congregate here for the Friday prayers. The largest mosque in Kashmir, it is built around a courtyard with 370 wooden pillars to support it. Originally built by Sultan Sikandar in 1400, and enlarged by his son,
Zain-ul-Abidin, it is a typical example of Indo-Saracenic architecture. Destroyed thrice by fire in 1479, 1620 and 1674 respectively and rebuilt each time, the mosque of today was repaired during the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh. The principal features of the mosque are the four minars and eight wooden columns as support.

3.2.3 SHANKARACHARYA TEMPLE

Believed to have been built at the auspicious site of Takht-e-Sulaiman, the sacred temple of Shankaracharya occupies the top of the hills in the southeast of Srinagar. Dating back to 250 BC, it is believed that it was the place where the great philosopher and saint Shankaracharya stayed when he visited Kashmir ten centuries ago to revive Sanatan Dharma. It was then that this place came to be known by his name instead of its former name Gopadri, an earlier edifice built on the same site by king Lalitaditya in the 6th century AD. Built on a high octagonal plinth and approached by a flight of steps, it has sidewalls that once bore inscriptions and the main surviving shrine consists of a circular cell. A modern ceiling covers the inner sanctum and an inscription in Persian traces its origin to the reign of Emperor Shah Jehan. The original ceiling was dome-shaped and the brick roof is not more than a century old.

3.2.4 KHANKAH OF SHAH-I-HAMDAN

Situated on the banks of the River Jhelum, it is the first mosque ever built in Srinagar. The Shah Hamadan whose full name was Mir Sayed Ali Hamadni built the original mosque in 1395. Shah-i-Hamdan came from Persia in the 13th century and was responsible for the spread of Islam in Kashmir. Khanqah-i-Mualla was the place where he used to offer prayers. The Khanqah is a wooden structure whose chief aesthetic feature is its beautifully carved eaves and hanging bells. The interiors are richly carved and painted, and the antique chandeliers give it an air of magnificence.
3.2.5 HARI PARBAT FORT AND TEMPLE OF SARIKA DEVI

Built in the 18th century, atop the Sharika Hill, Atta Mohammed Khan constructed the fort from 1776 though the surrounding wall was built by Akbar in the 16th century and is much older. It has two gates, the Kathi and Sangin Darwaza. The Kathi is the main entrance with Persian commemorative inscriptions surrounding it while the Sangin is more ornate with sculptured windows on either side. Mow used as an arsenal, the fort contains a temple revered for its image of the Goddess Sharika, a form of Durga.

3.2.6 MAKHDOOMI SAHIB

The shrine, situated to the south of Hari Parbat, is dedicated to Makhdoom Sahib or Hazrat Sultan and is revered by Muslims and Hindus alike.

3.2.7 CHATTI PADSHAHI GURDUWARA

Situated just outside the southern gate of Hari Parbat fort, Chatti Padshahi is one of the most important Sikh Gurudwaras in Kashmir. It is dedicated to the sixth guru of Sikhism who stopped here to preach occasionally while traveling through this place.

3.2.8 MARTAND

The most memorable and beautiful work of Emperor Lalitaditya of Surya (meaning 'solar') dynasty is the construction of spacious Martand temple dedicated to the Sun god, Bhaskar. The style of the construction of the temple and the skill of the makers are rare in the history of the world. Now, in ruins, it is still appreciable for its design, beauty and art. Martand temple is a mirror of the art and skill of Kashmiri Hindus. In its backdrop are the snow-capped mountains and it is built with strong and square limestone. Its pillars have a Greek pattern that lends gorgeousness to this edifice.
3.2.9 KHEER BHAVANI

Situated at Tullamulla in the Srinagar district, this spring is the most sacred place for Hindus in Kashmir. Hindus must abstain from meat on the days when they visit Kheer Bhavani or the milk goddess and offer her sugar, milk, rice and flowers. An annual festival is held here in May or June when a number of devotees visit the place to offer prayers and seek the blessings of the deity. The beautiful spring of clear water overshadowed by splendid shady trees and full of sacred fish adds an ethereal beauty to this place.

3.2.10 AWANTIPURA

Twenty nine km from Srinagar, the famous Awantipur temples are believed to have been built in honor of God Mahadev by Awanti Varman. The temples, although in ruins, are of great archaeological interest. King Avantivarman founded the city in the 9th century. There are two main temples, one of which is Shiva-Avantishvara, which is larger and marked by massive walls some half a mile beneath the town on the outskirts of village Jaubror. Reduced to ruins now, the place almost lost its previous grandeur and has been reduced to ruins, though it is still visited by the devout. The sculptured relief is principally found on the walls of the entrance and the flank walls of the stairs depict men and women in the acts of drinking, lovemaking and other such merriments. The base is either a plain square block with the upper edge rounded off or is elaborately molded. Half a mile up is Avantisvami-Vishnu, a better-preserved temple.
3.3 LAKES OF THE KASHMIR VALLEY

For its fresh-water lakes and tarns, Kashmir is known the entire world over. Those lying in the valley against the charming mountain background are: the Wular Lake, the Dal Lake and the Manasbal Lake. The Wular is the largest fresh-water lake in India and according to some, perhaps in Asia too. It is 121 miles long and 5 miles broad. It lies to the north-east of the valley with mountains overlooking it. The Dal Lake lies on the suburbs of Srinagar in the east. It is at the foot of the mountain range. The lake is 4 miles long and 11 miles broad. Against the mountain background which is reflected in its calm expanse and enclosed by trees the lake looks superb. In summer, it is a paradise for visitors who glide over its waters in shikaras and houseboats. The Manasbal Lake is the deepest lake in the country. Its greenish-blue waters are wondrous and beautiful.

Besides these lakes, which are fed by the melting snows from the mountains, there are hosts of mountain tarns form-glared by the glacial action and other phenomenal activities of range nature. There are several glaciers on Haramoukh. On the South side they only descend to about 13,500 ft., but alter the North 1,500 ft lower. They are fed by the large snow fields on the summit, which are of great thickness. The snow cliffs on the middle peak show a vertical thickness of nearly 200 feet. In there seen all the surrounding valleys. There are lakelets varying in size from mere ponds to sheets of water a mile or so in length and quarter a mile broad. Most of these occur at a height of 11,500 feet. There can be no doubt that they are all due in some way to glacial action, and that they are not of very remote age. The lakes and lakelets found in upper valleys around Haramoukh Mountain are Gangabal, Lool Gool and Sarbal. They are at an elevation of nearly 12,000 feet above sea level. The shimmering waters lend glory
to the Gangabal Lake, which stands at an elevation of 11,800 feet. To the South
cast of the Pir Panchal range lies the lake Konsar Nag (12,800 feet) surrounded by
three peaks. It is fed by glaciers. It is said to be a source of the Jhelum. In the
spring and summer, the water is some 40-ft higher than in winter. In the spring, its
surface is said to be covered with icebergs, which are driven about by the wind. In
the Liddar Valley, large glaciers are observed. On the mountain range of this
Valley, the glaciers are found in Kolahoi. one glacier is about five miles in length
and comes down as low as 11,000 feet. From here to the cast on the way to Amar
Nath cave lies the famous Shesh Nag at an elevation of 14,000 feet. Glaciers are
prominent in this area. Coming into the Valley proper, we find the frozen lake of
Alapathar or Apharwat, well over Khilanmarg. Flowers of rainbow colors are
found in wild profusion here. The mountain tarn stands at the height of about
12,500 feet. It is said to be 500 yards long and 150 yards wide. The surroundings
are austere and wild. It is popular haunt of tourists. The nearest tarn to the city is
that of Harwan on the slopes of Mahadev Mountain about a mile and a half further
away from the Mughal garden – Shalimar. The source of its fresh water is Tarsar, a
lake on the Amar Nath Mountain. Harwan looks beautiful in its sylvan
surroundings. This tarn is the chief source of water supply to the city. The
important lakes of Kashmir valley are as follows:

3.3.1 DAL LAKE

Dal Lake is one of the most confusing parts of Srinagar. It's not really one
lake at all, but three. Further more, much of it is hardly what one would expect a
lake to be like - it's a maze of intricate waterways and channels, floating islands of
vegetation, houseboats that look so firmly moored they could almost be islands
and hotels on islands which look like they could simply float away. Described as
the Lake Par Excellence by Sir Walter Lawrence, Dal Lake of Srinagar is the jewel in the crown of the Kashmir. Majestic mountains surround its three sides. It houses the world famous Shikaras and Houseboats, which afford an opportunity to tourists to reside on the lake in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. Dal Lake changes its moods and scenery throughout the day and after every few kilometers. It is lined with world famous Boulevard road. One of the most beautiful lakes of India and the second largest in the J&K state, the shores of Dal Lake is clustered with sloping roofed houses on islands, while other parts appear lush and green like well-tended gardens. The campus of University of Kashmir is also located along the shores of the lake.

3.3.2 NAGIN LAKE

Known as the 'Jewel in the Ring', Nagin is generally held to be the most beautiful of the Dal lakes. Its name comes from the many trees, which encircle the small, deep blue lake. Nagin is only separated from the Larger Dal lakes by a narrow causeway and it also has a number of houseboats moored around its perimeter. If one wants to really get away from the chaotic city life, then Nagin is a good place to find a house boat and as its surroundings are much more serene and isolated than on Dal Lake. One can rent rowboats from the camping site here - either to simply row around the lake or to look around for a houseboat. Since the water in Nagin is deeper and less polluted it's also good for swimming and there are fiberglass sailing boats available for hire and water skiing facilities. Motorboats are rather low powered for skiing although they make a valiant attempt. The Nagin club, on the bank of the lake, has a bar and a tea pavilion. It is a branch of the Srinagar club and temporary membership is available to visitors. 9
3.3.3 WULLAR LAKE

Wullar Lake is approximately 60 km from the city of Srinagar, between the towns of Bandipore and Sopore. Spreading over an area of 125 km, Wular Lake is said to be one of the largest fresh water lakes in Asia. The Wular Lake of Kashmir changes character after every few miles of its course. The lake serves as a natural flood reservoir for Jhelum River, draining off the excess water. The beauty of Wullar Lake is beyond description of words. Devoid of any artificial feature, the Wular Lake in Kashmir reflects the beauty of nature at its best. Set amongst scenic locales, the Wular Lake is also home to an exotic and wide variety of avian life. Other attractions of the Wullar Lake are some ruins, standing in the middle of the lake. These remains are that of an island of Zaina Lanka, built by King Zain-ul Abidin. It is believed that the lake is a remnant of the Satisar Lake, which used to be here in the per-historic times. The tour of Wullar Lake generally includes the neighboring town of Bandipore. This town is quite famous as a shopping destination for the purchase of woolen carpets manufactured in this area. Another must see place near Wullar is the Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, bird watcher's paradise.

3.3.4 MANASBAL LAKE

Manasbal Lake is located about 30 km north of Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir State. It has predominantly rural surroundings with three villages, Kondabal, Jarokbal and Gratbal overlooking the lake. Manasbal is considered as the 'supreme gem of all Kashmir lakes' with lotus (Nelumbo nucifera) nowhere more abundant or beautiful than on the margins of this lake during July and August. It is the deepest lake of Kashmir valley and perhaps the only one that develops stable summer stratification. Close to the northern shore are the ruins of a fort which was built in 17th century by a Mughal king to cater
the needs of caravans that used to travel from Punjab to Srinagar. On the south, overlooking the lake is a hillock-Ahtung which is used for limestone extraction. The eastern part is mainly mountainous and towards the north is an elevated plateau known as 'Karewa' consisting of lacustrine, fluviatile and loessic deposits. The lake has no major inflow channels and the water supply is maintained through spring water inflow and precipitation. An outlet channel connects the lake with the Jhelum River. The outflow of water is regulated artificially.

The local population uses the lake as a source of water, for fishing and for obtaining food and fodder plants. Many people are involved in harvesting and marketing of lotus rootstocks which are extensively eaten in the State. In recent years, tourism has caught up with the Manasbal Lake in a big way and as a consequence there is lots of pressure on the terrestrial ecosystem which is being exploited at many places.

The origin of the lake is still unresolved but there is no denying the fact that Manasbal is very ancient. The local people believe in the legend that the lake is bottomless. Over the years as a result of human pressure the lake has become eutrophic. The water body is virtually choked with submerged weeds particularly during summer which is the high tourist season. The deep water layers become anoxic with considerable accumulation of hydrogen sulphide
LAKES OF KASHMIR VALLEY

DAL LAKE

WULLAR LAKE

MANASBAL LAKE

NAGIN LAKE
3.4 GARDENS OF THE KASHMIR VALLEY

The beautiful valley of Kashmir boasts with a number of parks and gardens. The gardens in Kashmir count amongst the best picnic spots for the tourists. Some of the famous gardens of Kashmir are:

3.4.1 SHALIMAR GARDEN

Emperor Jehangir got the Shalimar Garden built for his wife Nur Jahan in 1616. Covering an area of approximately 539 m by 182 m, the Shalimar garden offers an amazing view over the other gardens, lakes and shallow terraces. Also known as the "garden of love", the Shalimar Mughal Gardens has four terraces, rising one above the other. The fourth terrace of the garden was, at one point of time, reserved for royal ladies. There is also a canal lined with polished stones running through the center of the Shalimar Bagh. The canal is responsible for supplying water to the garden from Harwan.

The top terrace of the Shalimar garden was reserved for the Mughal Emperor and the royal ladies of the court. The terrace has a black stone pavilion in its middle. The pavilion, which once served as a banquet hall, is supported by fluted pillars made up of black marble. Other attractions of the Shalimar Bagh of Kashmir include a number of fountains, shaded trees and innumerable varieties of flowers that blossom in spring and autumn. Last but not the least, a light and sound show organized in the garden every evening, during the period of May to October, is simply superb. 11
3.4.2 NISHAT GARDEN

Nishat garden is one of the largest Mughal gardens in Kashmir. It is situated on the banks of the picturesque Dal Lake. Also known as "the garden of bliss", the Nishat gardens have the Zabarwan Mountains forming its backdrop. Asaf Khan, the brother of Nur Jahan, designed the Nishat Bagh in 1633 AD. Within the garden are ruins of some of the buildings dating back to the Mughal period. One of them is a double story pavilion enclosed on two sides with latticed windows. There is also a small spring behind the garden, known as Gopi Tirth. It is a source of supply of crystal clear water to the garden.

Nishat Bagh offers a splendid view of the Dal Lake as well as the snow capped Pir Panjal mountain range. The garden has terraces, each representing a different Zodiac sign. There is also a beautiful water channel flowing right in the middle of the garden. Other attractions of the Nishat garden of Kashmir include its blooming flowerbeds, trees, fountains, etc. A famous picnic spot, Nishat Bagh also offers shopping facilities to its visitors. There are a number of shopping stalls situated opposite the garden.

3.4.3 HARWAN GARDEN

Harwan Garden is situated in the district of Srinagar. A beautiful and massive garden, Harwan is a popular picnic spot. A beautiful canal, fed from a lake just behind the garden, passes through its center. The canal is bordered with blossoming flowerbeds and Chinar trees. Harwan Garden does not have the usual terraces, artificial fountains, etc, like the other gardens of Kashmir. It has been deliberately kept devoid of these man-made things. The main attraction of the Harwan garden of Kashmir, India, is its natural beauty that is present in plenty. The big lawns, carpeted with green grass, draw people automatically towards this
place. An ideal spot for picnics and excursions, Harwan is the perfect place to take long walks in the lap of nature. It also serves as a take-off point for visiting Dachi Gam Wild life sanctuary and a starting point of a Mahadev Mountain trek.\(^{13}\)

3.4.4 CHASHMASHAHI

Chashmashahi is the smallest of the three Mughal gardens of Kashmir. Meaning Royal Spring, this garden measures 108 m by 38 m and is above the Nehru Memorial Park. Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan set up the Kashmir Chashma Shahi Mughal Gardens in 1632 AD. The garden is quite famous for spring of energizing digestive mineral water inside it. Chasma Shahi Garden of Kashmir, India, offers a striking view of the scenic Dal Lake and the neighboring mountains. The garden has a number of terraces, with several fountains built right through its center. Apart from the three terraces and fountains, the other attractions of Chashmashahi include an aqueduct and some waterfalls. The water for the fountains comes from the spring. This water then goes through the floor of the pavilion and falls over to the lower terrace, over a polished black stone chute. Also, a number of fruits, flowers and Chinar trees grow in the garden, adding to its appeal.

3.4.5 PARI MAHAL GARDEN

Pari Mahal of Kashmir once served as the royal observatory. Situated near the Chashmashahi Mughal Garden, Pari Mahal has a beautiful and well-planned garden in its front. At one point of time, the Pari Mahal served as Buddhist monastery but later Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Mughal Emperor Shahjahan, converted it into a school of astrology.\(^{14}\)
3.4.6 ACHABAL GARDEN

Achabal is situated at a distance of 58 km from the district of Srinagar. Reached via Anantnag, Achabal served as the pleasure retreat of the Mughal Empress Nur Jehan. Situated at a height of 1,677 m, Achabal is a visual treat for the eyes. Achabal is adorned with one of the best Mughal Gardens in India. The beautifully laid out garden in the Mughal (Persian) style sparkles with a charm and character, which is quite unique to it. Sprawling Chinar trees line the garden, which is situated at the foot of a hill. The other attractions of the Achabal in the Kashmir Valley of India are its stepped terraces, conventional elegance, ornamental shrubs, gleaming fountains and flowing water.  

3.5 WILD LIFE ANIMALS AND PARKS IN KASHMIR VALLEY

The highest, youngest & largest chain of mountains in the world, the Himalayan range is one of the most fascinating and spectacular natural wonders on earth. It is more than that: it is one of the richest stores of animal life. For instance, it is remarkable that almost one third of the world's mammalian species that may be called true mountain animals are native to these mountains. Jammu and Kashmir with its variety of geographical regions, climates and vegetation has many delights to offer the wildlife enthusiast. Perhaps no animal better epitomizes the character and concerns of the mountain environment than the snow leopard, a beautiful and elusive survivor from the frigid Pleistocene era. Though its range is immense, extending over the entire Himalayan range, it is most advantageously sought in Jammu and Kashmir especially in the high ranges. Another rare animal is the hangul or Kashmir stag, one of the most endangered species of red deer in the world. An enigmatic mammal is the bharal; the controversy over whether it is a sheep or a goat is not yet settled. Many unique species of antelope, goat and sheep are found in the state. In winter high-altitude bird species move to the lower
valleys and into the tourist's purview. Cinnamon sparrows, the black and yellow
grosbeak, black bulbuls and monal pheasants (the male splendidly colored) may
be seen now. At this time, too large troops of the impressive Himalayan gray
languor visit for the duration. But nothing strikes the eye and imagination so much
as in spring and summer, when the long foothills and deep valleys awake to life.
Now also awakes the imposing Himalayan black bear and as the winter avifauna
returns to higher quarters the birds of the summer return. Among these is the
lovely golden oriole. The languor's and hangul, too make their way to higher
valleys that are not however inaccessible. A brief account of the wild life parks
and sanctuaries in the Kashmir valley as follows:

3.5.1 DACHIGAM NATIONAL PARK

Dachigam is situated in the Srinagar District, approximately 20 km from
the Distt Headquarters. Covering almost half of the Dal Lake's catchments area.
Dachigam National Park of Kashmir offers a scintillating view of the
surroundings. The sanctuary is rich not only in flora and fauna, but is also a bird
watcher's paradise and even has a Trout fish farm. It houses over fifty species of
trees, twenty of shrubs and five hundred species of herbs. Running right through
the center of the Dachigam wildlife sanctuary of Kashmir, India is a stream,
sourcing water from a glacier. The altitude of the sanctuary, ranging from 5500 ft
to 14000 ft above the sea level, has a wide variation. Thus, it is clearly marked
into an upper and lower region. Dachigam is quite rich in fauna housing
approximately twenty species of mammals. The wildlife of the park consists of
Leopard, Himalayan marmot, Himalayan black bear, Langur, Himalayan brown
bear, Musk Deer, etc. However, the most prided possession of Dachigam National
Park is Hangul, endangered deer species in the country. The best place for
watching the wildlife inside the park, in the period of March to May, is the lower Dachigam. If you are coming during May to August, upper Dachigam will be your best bet. Dachigam also boast of over 150 species of birds. The main ones are starling golden oriole, peregrine falcon, koklas, black bulbul, kestrel, golden eagle, grey heron, paradise flycatcher, bearded vulture, western yellow-billed blue magpie, kestrel, griffon vulture, monal, etc. If you want to enjoy the avian life during the months of September to March, visit the upper Dachigam area. Dachigam is a big natural reserve requiring the permission of the Wildlife authorities for exploration purposes.

3.5.2 GULMARG BIOSPHERE RESERVE

At a distance of 48 km, Gulmarg Biosphere Reserve lies to the southwest of Srinagar. A number of rare and exotic species like the musk deer have found their home in this Biosphere reserve. A rich and varied flora and fauna are the main attractions of the Gul Marg Biosphere Reserve of Kashmir. Dominating in the rich green cover of the area are the conifers, accounting for over ninety percent of the vegetation. Aesculus indica, Pinus griffithii, Cedrus deodara, Abies pindrow, etc consist of the major species. Embracing the ground of the Gulmarg Biosphere Reserve are shrubs, consisting of Sorbaria tomentosa, Viburnum spp., Indigofera heterantha, etc., along with the Dicotyledonous herbs. Some of the very much endangered and protected species of animals as well as birds inhabit the Gulmarg Biosphere Reserve. The rich wildlife consists of Serow, Leopard, Musk Deer, Black Bear, Hangul, Red Fox, Brown Bear, Leopard, etc. You will spot both resident as well as migratory birds in this Biosphere reserve. Apart from pheasants, the other birds found here are Blue Rock Pigeon, Snow
Cock, Jungle Crow, Griffon vulture, Koklas, Kashmir roller, European hoopoe, etc. 16

3.5.3 OVERA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Located 76 kms from Srinagar in the south-east, Overa Wildlife Sanctuary is characterized by stunning mountain landscapes, grass-clad hills and deep valleys. Situated near Pahalgam the region play hosts to a large number of rare and endangered species of mammals and birds. It harbors 13 species of mammals and over 80 species of birds. Much acclaim has been accorded to the Overa Wildlife Sanctuary, famous for its diversity of wildlife and best known for magnificent species of pheasants. The Overa Wildlife Sanctuary is rich in flora which includes mainly coniferous forests. The main species found are aesculus indica, Pinus griffithii, abies pindrow, morus Alba, juglans regia, etc. Major shrub associates are Desmodium tiliaefolium, Indigofera heterantha, Isdon spp., etc, while the main ground layer is characterized by dicotlydonous herbs comprising Artemisia vulgaris, Taraxacum officinale, Anemone species, and Primula species, etc. The sanctuary provides refuge to a wide variety of mammals most of which are on the verge of extinction. So efforts are being made in conserving these animals. Some of them are the musk deer, hangul, rhesus macaque, serow, langur, leopard, leopard cat, etc. What makes the Overa different from the other wildlife sanctuaries of the Kashmir valley is that the area serves as the natural habitat for pheasants like the chukar, monal, koklas and Himalayan snow cock. Among the other avifauna are the red billed choughs, jungle crow, bearded vulture, griffon vulture, Himalayan whistling thrush, rufous-backed shrike, Indian mynah, etc.
REFERENCES


13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.
