ABSTRACT

Tourism is a phenomenon which was a strong motive behind the movement of people in ancient time and is still the strongest motive for causing the movement of millions of people across the regional, national and international boundaries. Travel which initially started with the intention to fulfil the religious/spiritual/pilgrimage needs of a person is again becoming the largest motivator to undertake travel. India recorded 4.43 million international tourist arrivals and over 400 million domestic tourists in 2006. In the same year, Indian tourism generated US$ 6 billion foreign exchange and contributed 5.83% to the GDP. Tourism to India means the third largest foreign exchange earner and one of the largest employment generating industry.

India is gifted by a miniature India in the form of State of Jammu and Kashmir. The State comprises three divisions namely, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Each division has its own unique climate, geographical setting, religious beliefs, food pattern, art, culture and traditions and is full of tourism assets which are also distinctive. Jammu division is a Hindu dominant area. It has innumerable temples spread throughout its length and breadth. Jammu is also called as “City of Temples”. Ladakh, also called as the “Land of Lamas”, is a mountainous country. It is dominated by Buddhist population. There are some old and important monasteries of Buddhists in this part of land, like, Hemis monastery, Shey monastery, etc. One more Division of the State is Kashmir, the “Paradise on Earth”.

Kashmir is known to be the most beautiful piece of land on the face of this earth, a miniature heaven designed by nature for the earthly people. Praised from time to time by historians, travellers, rulers, peers, saints, visitors and natural lovers because of its unique resource base and geographical position. “Paradise on Earth”, “Jannat-e-Benazir”, “Peer Veer”, “Switzerland of India”, are some of the many compliments which have been bestowed on Kashmir. Valley of Kashmir is full of tourism resources of different types, spread
throughout its different districts. Tourism attraction of different types, like, adventure treks, flora and fauna, wildlife, resorts, golf courses, winter sports, natural beauty, culture, architecture, Mughal gardens, springs, pilgrimage sites, etc, are found in abundance here. The Valley has world famous tourist spots of Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonmarg, Verinag, Dal Lake, etc. Besides the Valley has also strong base of pilgrimage tourism which has not been adequately and properly highlighted.

For centuries past, Kashmir has been considered as one of the holiest lands of India. It was a land of Parvati in ancient India and later became Rishi Bhumi, finally after conversion to Islam, became “Peer Veer” means ‘An abode of Saints’. Fine structures have been built at their burial sites and resting places of saints and peers and in some cases, memorial, as a mark of respect, exist. For example, in the era of Hindu rulers, like, Gopaditya, Jonaraja, etc, beautiful temples have been built. In the era of Buddhist rule, like, Ashoka, Kaniska, etc, various viharas, monasteries and stupas were built. In Mughal period, various mosques, shrines, etc, are the examples of their architectural excellence. These traditional mosques, shrines and Khanqahs are the richest representations of the cultural heritage of Kashmir. This built heritage has evolved over a period of centuries through cross-cultural exchanges between Kashmir, Iran and other Islamic cities of Central Asia. In Sikh era, fine Gurdwaras have been built at the places were the Sikh Gurus have performed some religious duties. The different religions in Kashmir, viz, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam have interacted harmoniously and Kashmir has absorbed the better aspect of each religion in itself.

Of all the prompting factors for travel and tourism, pilgrimage is the most motivating and compelling one for almost all religions. Pilgrimage tourism thus assumes importance unique in nature being strongly prompting and tempting for everyone. Pilgrimage is the journey which quenches the thirst of soul. It has been a visible sign of devotion in almost all the world religions since time immemorial. With the passage of time Pilgrimage and tourism began
to mix up with the sacred sites and secular seers; Pilgrimage thus turned into Pilgrimage Tourism.

In the present study entitled, "A Study of the Pilgrimage Tourism of Kashmir" an attempt has been made to make the garland of tourism attraction of Kashmir more colourful and attractive by exploiting the rich treasure of pilgrimage tourism of Kashmir. Addressing the problems which have kept this unique feature of Kashmir tourism in darkness and bringing to light the Prospects which Kashmir tourism can exploit is the main objective of this work.

The study has adequately highlighted various colours of the garland of pilgrimage tourism of Kashmir, like, various Hindu pilgrimage spots, like, Shankaracharya Temple, Sharika Devi Shrine, Kheer Bhawani Temple, Awantipore Temples, Khrew Temples, Vishnu Pad, Cave temple of Lord Shiva and Vivekananda Kendra Memorial. Sacred Springs, like, Nagbal, Vethavetur, Sut Haran, Pushkar Nag and Shiv Nag. Diverse Buddhist Pilgrimage spots like, Harwan, Parihaspora, Panderathan, Vihara of Saura, Raithan and Rajagir. Pilgrimage spots linked with Sikhism like, Patshahi Pehli and Chatti Padshahi. Varied Muslim shrines, like, Dastgir Sahib Shrine, Khanqah-e-Maula Shrine, Chrar-e-Sharief Shrine, Shah Zainudin Wali Shrine, Baba Reshi Shrine, Baba Shakoor-ud-din Shrine, Syed Hassan Mantaqi Shrine, Pinjoora Asar-e-Sharief Shrine, Hazratbal Shrine, Makhdoom Sahib Shrine and Imambara Badgam. These sites are presented in such a manner so as to give overall information about them; their geographical position, their common names, historical account, introduction to the deity, architectural account, fairs and festivals linked with the spot and its accessibility. In addition to these pilgrimage sites, there are lots of other temples, caves and springs, monasteries, viharas and stupas, revered gurdwaras and shrines which are of high religious order.

For the management of these sacred places, different religious organizations have been created through special Acts of the State government.
There are separate organizations for managing Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist pilgrimage sites. So far as the management of pilgrimage tourism of Kashmir is concerned, it is not governed directly by the Central or the State government. Neither Tourism Department nor Department of Archives, Archaeology and Museums is directly involved in the management and administration of these religious places and properties. Only some developmental activities are done by them at these places and that too in collaboration with these organizations. The State Government indirectly manages and maintains them through some semi-government or private organizations, especially assigned the job of management of pilgrimage sites. So, in order to evaluate the management of pilgrimage tourism of Kashmir, the main focus was put on the religious organizations of different religions working for the management and administration of their pilgrimage spots. Therefore, emphasis was given on their management structure and functioning at these spots.

While analysing the overall management of the varied pilgrimage tourism sites of the Valley of Kashmir, it was observed that although they have enough potential for acting as the support pillars of the economy and the administration is also aware of this fact but the lack of planning and cohesion between the religious boards and the government, lack of effective management and lack of monitoring by the State government is making heavy loss to these State resource in particular and to the National treasury as well.

For highlighting the hindrances and evaluating prospects, field surveys were conducted and a well designed questionnaire was administered on pilgrims at various sites to get the real information about the pilgrimage tourism of Kashmir. Indepth analysis of various pilgrimage spots around the Valley and various interviews with the tourism officials, religious board members, and service providers were conducted. Discussions were also done with the people and personnel who were present at the pilgrimage spots to get an overall view of the problems at such spots as well as to evaluate the future
prospects of this unique type of tourism. Survey Schedule was conducted at 14 pilgrimage spots of the Valley. At every spot 50 pilgrims were surveyed, and hence a total of 700 pilgrims were contacted for the survey. The spots were chosen keeping in mind the varied nature of pilgrimage potential. Some pilgrimage spots among them have religious importance dating back to ancient period, some to medieval and some modern pilgrimage sites. The questionnaire was designed keeping in view the potential of the pilgrimage spots and problems faced by tourists and pilgrims visiting Kashmir. The aim was to get maximum information through it and hence was elaborately prepared.

Some important and glaring facts have come to light as a result of questionnaire based survey conducted and discussions held with various persons and bodies related to pilgrimage tourism of Kashmir. These facts signify the importance and potential of pilgrimage tourism in the Valley. Important of them are mentioned below:-

- Kashmir pilgrimage tourism is not restricted to any particular religion. There are pilgrimage interests for almost every individual professing any faith, whether, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam or even being a secular. Hence, the varied nature of pilgrimage motivations increases the sphere of pilgrims visiting the Valley of Kashmir and gives one more reason to increase our statistical figures of tourist arrivals.

- Pilgrimage tourism of Kashmir draws people of different demographic profiles as has been proved by the survey.

- Income and employment effect of tourism on Jammu and Kashmir is more than one third of the total. Efficiently highlighting and focussing on pilgrimage tourism can open more avenues of employment in different service sectors, like, transportation, accommodation, food and catering, shopping facilities and other supporting services.

- Promoting Pilgrimage tourism does not put any objection from the host side, as it is societal friendly type of tourism. Hosts will welcome those
people who come for religious purpose and will serve them in their localities, as it will open the doors of prosperity through employment generating avenues in the social friendly manner.

➢ Pilgrimage tourism will provide an avenue for showcasing the art and artistic wonders of Kashmir. Fairs and festivals attached with the pilgrimage spots will provide a platform for it.

➢ It will provide a medium for interaction and cultural exchange between those sacred pilgrims and the hospitable hosts. Pilgrimage tourism of Kashmir will inform the world about the unique Rishi and Sufi culture.

➢ Pilgrim is the least demanding tourist. He only needs the basic necessities. Entertainment and luxury facilities are not his need. This will also favour our state of things in Kashmir because we are already short of such things which are the primary requirements of tourists now-a-days.

➢ Kashmir is known to the very few people as the Buddhist land, although it has got enough potential for Buddhist pilgrimage tourism. Marketing the Buddhist pilgrimage sites will open the gates of foreign exchange for Kashmir.

➢ As the pilgrimage spots of different religions are located close to one another at many places and even at some places in the same compound, it provides an opportunity to pilgrims to visit each others religious places and break the barriers of religions. Hence, pilgrimage tourism provides an opportunity to spread brotherhood and religious Integration.

➢ Pilgrimage tourism also provides an opportunity to review the age old ties with the places linked with the same religious belief as of ours, e.g, linking the rituals of Kheer Bhawani Temple with Karla in South India, provides an opportunity to highlight and market this unique link and attract more and more domestic tourists from the States of Maharastra, Andra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerela, and Tamil Nadu.
Springs of Kashmir are also live examples of spirituality and religious nature of this revered land on earth. Their spa and medicinal nature can also act as natural therapies along with spiritual care for known and unknown diseases and disorders. This also increases the horizon of exploring pilgrimage tourism.

It is an open secret that the Valley is short of infrastructure. We need to build it so as to compete with other tourist destinations. As pilgrimage spots are spread throughout the Valley, hence pilgrimage tourism provides an opportunity for building the infrastructure to act as a tool for the development of this tourist's paradise.

Despite the above encouraging indicators and vast potential of pilgrimage tourism in Kashmir valley, its development is not surging ahead as much as it has the potential to grow. The study looked into the factors responsible for this paradoxical situation. The pilgrim's interviews and responses based on the questionnaire administered on them manifested the factors inhabiting the smooth and unhindered flow of pilgrims. These factors are contained in the problems the pilgrims experience en-route and during their visits to pilgrimage sites. Being enduring in nature for the naïve pilgrims, these problems and difficulties add a discouraging and repellent agent for the visitors. Their adverse impact arrests the growth of tourism. Important problems emerging from an analysis of the data collected through questionnaire are revealed below:

- Accessibility to any pilgrimage spot is a tough affair. Various spots around the Valley are connected through sub-standard transportation service which are cost wise higher and efficiency wise lower.

- Availing accommodation facility is a dream at most of the pilgrimage spots because the service is available at few spots only. Some spots have this service in limited availability and the pilgrims can avail the service only by greasing the palms of officials. The position of the
accommodation facility at such spots is pathetic and at other places it is non-existent.  

- Food outlets are totally missing at the pilgrimage spots, like, Vivekananda Kendra Memorial, etc. At places where they are available, the food stuff is of low standard or restricted to a few outlets providing limited choice of food. Hygiene, quality and choice are far away from these food outlets.  

- The system of providing information through the means of Information, like, sign board, play cards, posters, etc, are found at three pilgrimage spots only. Other information sources, like, the personnel placed on duty to provide information and guidance to visitors by the religious organisations at the spots also lack in having complete information. The indifferent attitude of Rishis and staff at the spots also hinders the free flow of information and hence a serious hindrance for the pilgrims.  

- The pilgrimage spots of Kashmir are devoid of public conveniences. Bathrooms, toilets, and water points available at some spots are not worth use.  

- Cheating by Rishis and employees of religious organizations of some innocent pilgrims has also came to fore at some pilgrimage spots of Kashmir, mostly Muslim pilgrimage spots.  

- No single pilgrimage spot has cared about making an arrangement of Feed back and Redressel system. Hence the pilgrims are left to grin and bear with their sufferings and suggestions on the mercy of God.  

- Preservation effort, if any, put up by the management of the pilgrimage monuments is not in consonance with the architectural and historical importance of the pilgrimage spots.  

For developing any tourism spot, in tourism terminology, there is a requirement of four A’s, Accessibility, Accommodation, Attraction and
Amenities but the scenario of these essential A's, leaving aside one A, representing ‘Pilgrimage Attractions’, is very bad so far as developing pilgrimage tourism is concerned. Hence, for exploiting and reaping the rich dividends of this vast treasure, the scholar highlights some core areas that needs to be focused and also gives some suggestions for rectifying the loopholes in those areas linked with the pilgrimage tourism of the Valley which came to light during the survey, field visits, discussions and interview with the people and personnel at the different pilgrimage spots around the Valley.

There is a need of a role model to overcome the many bottlenecks which are currently seen in the preservation, protection, as well as accountability of the pilgrimage sites. The researcher recommends the creation of the Kashmir Pilgrimage Tourism Regulatory Board (KPTRB) on the pattern of functioning of major industrial undertakings in private sector.

There is an urgent need to build an alternative road to the existing Jammu-Srinagar National Highway. The closure of this only road due to land sliding and snow fall closes the only door to Kashmir for the tourists coming from other parts of the country. Alternative to this road is Mughal road which needs to be developed as it is accessible round the year.

There is a need of revival of transport services or providing an alternative to the existing transport service at some places. The researcher recommends using environment friendly Chariot or traditional Tonga service of Kashmir for the city pilgrimage centres and other pilgrimage spots within the city and at other pilgrimage spots around the Valley where the service will be feasible. At those spots in the Valley where the above mentioned service is not feasible, the researcher recommends the creation of a superior facility which should conform to international standards connecting the various pilgrimage/tourist centres in Kashmir division.

Inland Water Transport System (IWTS) could be made available along the 170-km stretch of the Jhelum from Khanabal (Anantnag district) in South
Kashmir to Khadanyar (Baramulla district) in North Kashmir. Hence, transporting tourists through water transport will be an environment friendly approach of Kashmir tourism which can prove to be its USP.

Some Pilgrimage spots can be made more accessible and pilgrim friendly by connecting them with aerial ropeways. These ropeways will be an added attraction for the pilgrims and tourists to visit these spots.

For solving the accommodation problem the researcher recommends that the Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir should get the house holders registered near pilgrimage/tourist spots who would be owners of one, two or even three bed rooms and convert them into ‘living modules’. Such kind of accommodation will not only satisfy the accommodation requirement of pilgrims and tourists but will also bridge the gap between guest and hosts and will be an easy source of employment for them.

Businesses that cater to the eating and drinking needs of visitors is to be promoted at the pilgrimage spots of Kashmir.

Public conveniences like water points, urinals, road side signage’s and resting chairs needs to be provided and maintained at the appropriate places.

Pilgrimage centres can prove to be ideal centres for selling the handicrafts and other unique items of Kashmir. Researcher suggests the setting up of Kashmiri Art and Handicraft Market (KAHM) at every pilgrimage spot so as to promote pilgrimage on one hand and market the unique master pieces of Kashmir art on the other.

Kashmir though having enough tourism attractions to satisfy the taste of any tourist but is lacking in its marketing and publicity initiatives. An aggressive campaign needs to be organised worldwide to market pilgrimage and other tourism attraction of the Valley.
A website on internet needs to be created which can make aware potential pilgrims about the pilgrimage interests of the Valley and provide them all sorts of information regarding visiting such places.

Springs of Kashmir besides having pilgrimage importance are also known for their medicinal and mineral properties. The special quality of water needs to be emphasized and all these activities require to be clubbed under a new nature-care facility for foreign and domestic tourists.

It is obvious that besides taking hundreds of measures there may still be some shortcomings in services or in the pilgrim’s satisfaction. So a Feedback and Redressel system should be there to handle pilgrim’s complaints or receive suggestions on the part of pilgrims.

Working on the suggestions given in the thesis will ease the passage of pilgrims and tourist to the pilgrimage spots of Kashmir. The satisfied pilgrim/tourist will carry a good impression of the destination and hence will do word of mouth publicity. As a result the Pilgrimage Tourism of Kashmir will move out of the Dark Age and will get adequately highlighted.