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A study on Tourism Potential of District Baramulla, Kashmir Valley, J&K

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Abstract: ***Kashmir, land of natural resources, Mosques, Shrines, Temples, and Gurudawaras, is popularly known as paradise on earth. The Baramulla district of North Kashmir is one of the places in J&K, which has enormous tourism potential to attract local, national and international tourists throughout year. The Baramulla district provides all types of tourism products, which a tourist is looking for; the only condition is that we have to untap and bring those places on the tourism map. We know, Tourism is one of the important service sector industry and significant contributor to the economy of J&K. It consists of Heritage tourism, religious tourism, mountain tourism, adventure tourism, rafting and skiing. The development of this area and bringing new places in tourist map will increase tourist arrivals and increase business opportunities for the local population of area. This present study will explore the tourism potential of Baramulla district besides the economic benefits, employ ability and poverty eradication. The paper will also propose recommendations and suggestions for the improvement and utilization of these tourist destinations of District Baramulla, Kashmir.***

Keywords: Kashmir, Baramulla, Tourism, Untapping, Potential, Survey.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which is strategically situated, is where India's northernmost point is located. Jammu & Kashmir is located in northernmost India

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between latitudes 32°-15´ and 37°-05´ and longitudes 72°-35´ and 80°-20´. It is bordered by Pakistan in the west, China in the north and east. Its southern border is formed by Punjab and Himachal Pradesh states. Erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir occupied 222,236 square kilometres, or 6.93% of the territory of India [1].

Kashmir is renowned for its natural splendour, kind hospitality, and unity in variety. It has something to offer everyone. The Kashmir valley has countless aspects that are timeless in their appeal, including its rich beauty of its attractions, temperate climate, historic sites, majestic snow-capped mountains, lush grasslands and forests, serene backwaters and beaches, stunning rivers and lakes, and, above all, its well-meaning, endearing people. All of them contribute to the Kashmir Valley being a "land of paradise on earth."The tourism destinations in Kashmir Valley continue to be highly regarded on a global scale, and each year a large number of travellers from all over the world visit these locations [2], [3]. This sector provides a direct source of income for almost 70% of the state's residents. [4]

In the state's economy, tourism plays a significant role. There is a perceived need to expand tourism development in rural regions and to take advantage of J&K's rural attractiveness through nature-based programmes. Urban areas are primarily where industrialization and development occur. Stress in cities has increased interest in rural places. Rural tourism is a novel idea that encompasses all travel-related activities, wherein urban travellers can experience rural life and culture. Rural tourism refers to travellers' fascination with the exotic and native cultures. This tourism promotes rural life, culture, heritage and art, and rural residents benefit socially and economically from it. It also facilitates interactions between locals and visitors. It can also be referred to as ecotourism, nature tourism, agriculture tourism, and other terms. Rural tourism has particular features, such as being founded on the preservation of culture, occurring in a natural setting, being sparsely populated, and being experience-oriented. In this type of tourism, visitors stay in locals' houses to learn about their customs, traditions, way of life, eating habits, festivals, folk dances, music, and rituals, among other things. Additionally, it requires investigation, study, and the acquisition of regional goods. The villages of Jammu and Kashmir have their own distinct characteristics and magnificent natural beauty, which impresses both domestic and foreign tourists interested in rural tourism. For urban residents who reside in crowded, polluting cities, the attractive beauty of the villages may serve as major draws. [7]

Study Area

Jammu and Kashmir have 20 districts in total, with Baramulla being one of them. Baramulla district, which include 524 communities (census villages), is located at 34.1980 ° N longitude and 74.3636 ° E latitude covering an area of 4190 sq km. About 55 kilometres from Srinagar, the city is situated on both sides of the Jehlum River. [5]

Raja Bhimsina created the city of Baramulla, which gave rise to the district's name, in 2306 BC. Due to its location between Rawalpindi, now in Pakistan, and Muzaffarabad, now in POK, the city served as a gateway to the valley. This has led to a number of notable visits to Baramulla. The sixteen tehsils that make up the Baramulla district are Pattan, Uri, Kreeri, Boniyar, Tangmarg, Sopore, Watergam, Rafiabad, Rohama, Dangiwacha, Bomai,

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Dangerpora, Khoie (Panzipora), Wagoora, Kunzer, and Baramulla [14]. The region consists of 26 blocks: Uri, Rohama, Rafiabad, Zaingeer, Sopore, Boniyar, Baramulla, Tangmarg, Singhpora, Pattan, Wagoora, Kunzer, Paranpillian, Bijhama, Norkhah, Narwav, Nadihal, Kandi Rafiabad, Hardchanum, Tujjar Sharief, Sangrama, Sherabad Khore, Lalpora, Wailoo, Khaipora and Chandil Wanigam. The largest tehsil in the district of Baramulla is Pattan, which was later divided to create a separate Kreeri tehsil. [6]

As a result of the famed Muslim saint Syed Janbaz Wali's choice of Baramulla as the hub of his mission and subsequent burial there, the region of Baramulla rose to prominence among Muslims in the 15th century. He and his companions had travelled to the valley in 1421 AD. His shrine draws visitors from all across the Valley. The sixth Sikh Guru Shri Hargobind paid the city a visit in the year 1620 AD. As a result, Baramulla developed into a place where Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Sikhs could live in peace and contribute to the creation of a vibrant mixed culture [1]. As the "Gateway of Kashmir Valley" via the Rawalpindi-Murree-Muzaffarabad-Baramulla Road until October 27, 1947, it was the oldest and most significant town in the northern part of the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir. On October 26, 1947, the Maharaja formally acceded to the Union of India by signing the Instrument of Accession. (5)

Baramulla district has 1,008,039 residents according to the Census 2011. According to the 2011 census, 82% of the population speaks Kashmiri, but it is also spoken by people who speak Pahari (9.9%), Gujri (3.4%), and Punjabi [8] [9]. As most of these Hindi albeit Gujari speakers have been shown as concentrated in Baramulla, Kupwara, Punch, Rajouri and Doda districts, their Gujar identity becomes obvious. The number of Punjabi speakers in 1961, 1971 and 1981 Census Reports, actually reflects the number of Sikhs who have maintained their language and culture, and who are concentrated mainly in Srinagar, Badgam, Tral, Baramulla (all in Kashmir region), Udhampur and Jammu) [7].
This study paper focuses on Baramulla, Jammu & Kashmir's tourism and tourist destinations.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is mostly based on the information collected from secondary sources. The primary sources are collected from some of the people who visited these places and they share their experiences and knowledge regarding their visit to these places of attraction. The information for this research paper has also been collected from the government sources available online on their official websites. In addition to this, the data has been collected from journals, articles and newspapers.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tourist Places in and Around Baramulla

The gurudwaras, temples, monasteries, and shrines of Baramulla are well-known among travellers. Gulmarg is the main tourist destination of district Baramulla. Other tourist destinations include: the Tangram between Srinagar and Gulmarg; the freshwater lake Wular

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Lake, which is 37 kilometres (37 miles) from Srinagar; Manasbal Lake, which is 32 kilometres from Srinagar; Manimarg; Vijimarg; and Mahalishmarg.
Another popular tourist destination in the area is the town of Parihaspora. When Raja Shankervarman ruled Kashmir, this town served as the state's capital. The ParihasporaPattan and Pattan Bazaar are two popular tourist destinations in Parihaspora. Even the Vishnu shrines, the Raj Bhavan, and the Chaitya that were discovered there during an excavation in 1914 are open to visitors. If time allows, tourists are encouraged to visit Wular Lake, Manasbal Lake, and Alpather Lake. [5]

1. Gulmarg:

With ski slopes at 2,730 metres (8,957 feet), Gulmarg village (literally, 'field flower') is a hill station in the Baramulla area. The beginning of the skiing slope is accessible via a cable car. Gulmarg may be reached by travelling 50 kilometres (31 miles) east of Srinagar. It is 2730 metres above sea level. Originally known as Gaurimarg (the name of Lord Shiva's wife), the town was renamed Gulmarg, which means Valley of Flowers, in the 16th century. The magnificent grandeur of the Himalayan Mountains in the background has drawn millions of people to Gulmarg over the course of its history. The Gulmarg Gondola, the highest cable car in the world, is one of the primary sights to see in Gulmarg. Tourists ride the gondola in two stages, the first of which ascends to Kongdori Station at a height of 8530 feet and the second of which ascends to a height of 12293 feet. Tourists can enjoy horseback riding and can go up to Kongdori to view the frozen lake of "Al- Pathar," as well as to the magnificent "Strawberry Valley," "Leopards Valley," and other locations. Gulmarg in the winter is a breathtaking sight, completely covered in a white layer of snow that transforms it into a skier's heaven. The golf course in Gulmarg is famed for being the highest green golf course in the entire world. Jammu & Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation (JKTDC) has been entrusted with managing this golf club. In addition to the golf course, tourists can visit other well-known Gulmarg attractions including Khilanmarg, Acchabal, the Gondola Lift, Tangmarg, Verinag, and the Gulmarg Biosphere Reserve, to name a few [5]



2. Wular Lake

Alpine lakes are everyone's favourite, and without a doubt, Kashmir has several alpine lakes that just cannot be compared - yet the story is a little different when it comes to

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Wular Lake. Located at the base of Haramuk Mountain, Wular Lake is the second-largest freshwater lake in Asia [5].It isone of the biggest wetlands in Asia. Its coordinates are 34°16′-34°20′N latitudes and 74°33′-74°44′E longitudes, and it is located at an elevation of 1,580 m. In addition to other lakes, it is one of the man-serving lakes [10]. It spans a total area of 200 square kilometres, almost 24 kilometres in length, and 10 kilometres in width. The lake is located in Sangrama, close to Baramula Road, between the cities of Sopur and Bandipore.River Jhelum serves as Wular Lake's primary water source. The "Zaina Lank," a tiny island in the middle of this lake, is another feature. King Zainul-Abi-Din created this island. Additionally, Satisar Lake, which was once present, is reported to have left behind Wular Lake. Additionally, the lake serves as a well-liked sunset location.[5]

3. Parihaspora

A historic town called Parihaspora is located 26 km from Srinagar, close to the Baramula district. Throughout the Shankervarman Regime, this town served as the Kashmiri capital. LalityadityaMuktapid, the king of Kashmir, discovered it in the eighth century AD. The ancient archaeological sites located at the ParihasporaPattan and the Pattan Bazaar are this location's most well-known feature. In addition to these artefacts, the town also has a few fragments of a Buddhist monastery and stupa. In an excavation conducted here in 1914, a few Vishnu temples, a Raj Bhawan, and a Chaitya were also discovered. The construction method used at this excavation site used big stones and was common in antiquity [5].


Parihaspora Temple


Martand Sun Temple


Sugandesa Temple

4. Ziyarat Baba Reshi:

The Ziarat of Baba Reshi, a well-known Baramulla shrine that is 13 kilometres from Gulmarg and located next to the Alpather Lake, belonged to the saint Baba Payam-Din. A well-known Muslim saint by the name of Baba Payam-Din served as a courtier to Zain-ul-Abidin, the ruler of Kashmir. Baba Payam-Din passed away in this shrine in 1480 after spending his days in prayer and meditation.

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The Baba Payam-Din burial, which is covered by a fabric embellished with exquisite craftsmanship, is the focal point of this shrine. The temple is well-known for bestowing the blessings upon its followers. After receiving their wishes, devotees return to the shrine to thank the great saint with an offering.[5]



5. Munddaji: Baramulla's Off-Beat Tourist Destination



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In the Rafiabad Hills of the Baramulla district, Mund-Daji is a charming village and off-the-beaten-path tourist destination situated in the shadow of mountains and surrounded by lush green meadows. It is said to be a combination of Gulmarg and Pahalgam as it not only has lush green meadows but beautiful water streams that add to charm of the place. Generally, it is visited by people of adjoining places like Baramulla, Handwara and Sopore areas. The surrounding places of the place include Kafar Nar, Kat Behak, Vithakri, Nurzun Top, Pur Daji Waterfall on Hamal Nallah, Satsaryan (a nallah having seven springs) and there are also some of the best trekking spots. It has enough green and wide pastures that attract tourist not only to spend their days but once a tourist goes there they don't want to come back. There are so many freshwater bodies at the place and there is also a green forest park, favourite place for students. Mund-Daji, if developed further will become a reason of economic upliftment for locals as it the potential to attract national and international tourists who are often in search of undiscovered and lesser known places. It is worthwhile to mention that Mund-Daji which has a has potential for summer tourism is one of the 75 new tourist destinations that have been identified by the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Department.

6. Uri

Located 1,363 metres above sea level, Uri is a town on the Jhelum River in the Baramulla district. Uri is 46 kilometres (29 miles) from Baramulla and 106 kilometres (66 miles) from Srinagar via road. The valley of Uri is quite lovely. There are many tourist attractions, but two noteworthy ones are the 9th-century Lord Shiva temple Buniar (located on the Jhelum Valley Road two miles above Rampur) and the Dhatha Mandir or Bandi Temple (located on the Jhelum Valley cart road halfway between Rampur and Uri, about two miles below Mohora). There is also a lovely Eco Park.The village of Khadniyar, Baramulla, is reached by a dilapidated wooden bridge, and it is situated on an island in the Jhelum River in the midst of Baramulla-Uri highway [11]

Wildlife

Kazinag National Park

Kazinag National Park is located on the north bank of the Jhelum, close to the Line of Control in the Baramulla district, some 70 kilometres from Srinagar. It is situated at 34°10'0"N latitude and 74°2'0"E longitude with an altitude range of 1,800–4,700 m asl.

Vegetation: In the middle-lower elevations, Pine (Pinus wallichiana), Deodar (Cedrus deodara), and Fir (Abies pindrow) dominate the temperate coniferous, alpine, and subalpine type (24) of vegetation. At higher elevations, mixed forests and birch (Betula utilis) predominate in the subalpine forest, whereas juniper (Juniperus squamata) and alpine meadows predominate in the alpine vegetation. Horse Chestnut (Aesculus indica) woods and Viburnum grandiflorum bushes dominate the riverine woodlands, while lower elevations have separate meadows with rolling terrain. Wintertime lows of -10°C and summertime highs of 30°C.

Fauna: Within the boundaries of Kazinag National Park, there are about 20 different kinds of mammals, some of which are uncommon, endangered, or threatened. Markhor (Capra falconeri), Himalayan black bear (Ursus thibetanus), Himalayan brown bear

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(Ursus artos), common leopard (Panthera pardus), Yellow-Throated Martin (Martes flavigula), Himaliyan Marmot (Marmota caudate), Small Kashmir Flying Squirrel (Eoglaucomysfimbriatus), and others are among the important animal species seen. [12]

Tourism and Regional Development
The growth of remote and underdeveloped places is accelerated by tourism. The majority of picturesque and lovely tourist destinations are discovered to be situated in underdeveloped regions, where they positively influence the growth of local industries. The same is true of Gulmarg, which is a remote location yet has significantly aided in the growth of both the surrounding area and the region in which it is located.[13]

Tourism Potential of Baramulla
As discussed above, the places to be explored and untapped for tourism and those which are explored need infrastructure development. The following are the areas of tourism, which need to be explored to drain out the benefits of employment and other benefits associated with it.

Wildlife
The places mentioned above have the potential of having a wildlife sanctuary, if not all at least one destination should be developed as a wildlife sanctuary. Wildlife sanctuary is a place where wild animals and their habitat are protected.

Pilgrimage
The shrines, temples or any other religious place in the district will be put on the religious tourist map by providing basic facilities and development of infrastructure. For a traveller on pilgrimage tourism, he finds peace of mind and solace by visiting these places of religious importance. Developing pilgrimage tourism also create environment of peace among different communities.

Nature / Eco-Tourism
Those areas which are unexplored have the capacity for eco-tourism. More trees should be planted to make those spots ready for eco-tourism

Water Sport Tourism
Water tourism has some element of adventure associated with. Baramulla district has huge potential for water tourism like rafting, fishing etc. There is enormous potential for water sport tourism such as boating, swimming, cannoning, scuba diving, boat racing, and jumping, etc. so the district Baramulla is endowed by the nature with all such facilities. The only requisite is to explore it and put it on the tourism map.

Mountain Tourism
In the past and earlier times people visited mountains for some purpose like in the search of natural resources and gazing their livestock. This practice is still in vague in many parts of the world. In the present modern times, it has become a trend to visit mountain areas and camp there. The thinkers of tourism believe that mountaineering is a part of adventure

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tourism. It has the potential to attract large number of tourists who do mountaineering for climbing, hiking and skiing. The administration and the concerned departments of district Baramulla in particular and tourism departments in general should take advantage and make the mountains of district Baramulla attractive and useful for mountaineering.

Tourism and Regional Development

Tourism as a service sector industry can act as a catalyst in the development of that region and society. Development in tourism will lead in the progress of rural/ backward regions (smith 1984). Most of the tourist sports with scenic and beautiful locations are located in the far-flung and backward areas. These backward destinations contribute significantly in the economic progress and social upliftment of that particular area. Tourists visiting or willing to visit to these unexplored destinations can give flip to the economic conditions of the people and the economy by promoting local art, craft, and other industries.

Tourism and Economy

The main advantage and benefit, the tourism activities bring is the generation of money and the creation of jobs especially for the local residents. This is the reason tourism is becoming one of the largest service sector industry. Tourism involves different sectors such as tour operators, travel agencies, tour guides, transportation, hotels, restaurants, cafes, etc. The economic impacts of tourism are, therefore, important considerations in economic development of local, regional, national and international level. Tourists contribute to destinations jobs, taxes, revenue etc. Tourism industry put positive impact on employability and has the potential of creating more jobs. It offers jobs to different segments of people both directly or indirectly.

Environmental Challenges

For any of the spot or destination the first and foremost priority should be the environment. The following points need to be taken care of while promoting any tourist destination.

1. There is a need for policy makers, administrators, & governments to implement the practical steps in order to achieve the balance between tourism and environment.
2. There is a need for sustainable growth in different forms of tourism like eco-tourism, adventure, cultural, mountain, etc. through adherence to international standards/ principles.
3. The top priority should be given to the surrounding environments, flora and fauna while developing infrastructure.
4. There is a need to erect signboards and educate tourists about do's and don'ts of the particular place or destination.
5. There is need to control transport related impacts on the environment of the destination.

Role of Social Media in Promoting Destinations

The world we live is tech savvy. A large number of world populations is using different social media sites. Tourism players and government agencies can social media for the marketing and promotion of destinations and sites. The main benefit of using social media is that we can interact with large population and aware them about the destination. It is a tool,

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which provides information and knowledge about tourism products and tourism places. The use of social media allows tourists to share their opinions, experiences and problems.

Suggestions/Recommendations

The need of the hour is to work for sustainable tourism planning and development. From the above study, the following suggestions will help in developing and exploring the destination:

1. The destinations should be developed within the environmental limits. Due regard should be given to the natural habitat.
2. Proper infrastructure and basic facilities should be provided at the destinations. No destination should be promoted till the basic infrastructure should be erected so that the tourists can not feel any inconvenience.
3. Cafes with book shops should be opened at each destination and books about art, culture and history should be making available there for tourists- local, national as well as international, so that they can read or buy the books & get the knowledge about art culture and history of the area they visited. It also promoted the reading habits among the tourists.
4. Due consideration should be given in engaging local youth in the employment generating out of tourism activities which helps in making them economically strong and eructating the problem of unemployment.
5. While planning for destinations, local populace should be engaged in knowing their view and taking their suggestions about the destinations.
6. All the concerned agencies, tourist's locals should respect the destinations environment.
7. Continuous research should be done to assess the impact on the environment and try to solve the problems if any a raised out of tourism activities.
8. Separate department of police should be carved out to help and educate the people visiting the areas.
9. Small dispensaries with medical staff should be constructed for the health and medical emergency of the visiting tourists.
10. A limit should be implemented that a tourist can visit only once or twice in a year in order to safeguard the environment.
11. There is a need to identify new tourist attractions that will help in enhancing tourism potential of district Baramulla.
12. Tourism should be shifted from being a seasonal commotion to an all year round activity.
13. The tourism department should make record of all the tourists coming to tourist places in Baramulla district and make data available on their official website that will help policy makers and researchers in getting the data when they need it for different purposes.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is such an activity which is dependent on environment. There should be proper link between tourism and environment if planned properly and with the consultation and corporation with other departments. Tourism is one of the prime service sector industries and efforts need to be undertaken for maintaining, sustaining and retaining it. Tourism opens new vistas of investment and revenue generation, which leads to employment and economic

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development. The hidden treasure of Baramulla needs to be taken out and put on tourism map by building infrastructure, hotels and all the other basic facilities. Steps should also be taken to restore the past glory of ancient monuments, religious sites and natural destinations. Tourism is an area which needs a constant and in depth research so that genuine problems could be addressed and immediate innovative solution could be given.

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