

RURAL SPACE AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN KASHMIR VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the exploration of the tourist potentials in rural spaces in Kashmir Valley. Tourism as an industry has been flourishing and growing since time immemorial, but it has been in the last few decades that specific attention has started to be given to this smokeless industry. Tourism has emerged as an important as well as organized industry which scattered its benefits over large segments of the population. Kashmir Valley, known universally as the Paradise on Earth, is one of such regions of India which offers variety of experiences to the tourist. Thus there is every need to focus our attention to achieve the required prosperity, well-being and high quality of life for the people of the region, from the income generated in this sector (Tourism). Tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for Rural Development. The development of a strong platform around the concept of Rural Tourism is definitely useful for a country like India, where almost 74% of the population resides in its villages.

The main focus of the work is to find out the importance of rural tourism in sustainable development of the region. Besides find out the important villages having enough tourist potentiality in the Lidder & Sind Catchment area. In this context some suggestions will be given so as to enhance rural tourism development in Kashmir Valley. Finally, brief conclusion will be given for development of rural tourism and betterment of the society and well-being in the Valley.

Keywords: rural tourism destinations, sustainable development, rural space, culture, rural-folks,

INTRODUCTION

Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside. It is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like; it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is predominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions.

In Kashmir Valley there is potentiality to develop the rural tourism industry. Tourists want to see new places which are close to nature and away from hustle and bustle of city. In Kashmir Valley the nature of rural areas is not polluted at par with other states in India, so that is why there are enough potential for development of rural spaces for development of tourism in the region.

Tourism industry is also called the “Smokeless Industry” because without using any chimney, having more advantages than disadvantages. The sustainable tourism development could be achieved only due to development of rural spaces for tourism. Tourism comprises of biggest component of the tertiary sector. In fact one in every 16 workers in worldwide owes his or her job in tourism. Tourism will become the world’s number one export industry by the turn of century (Mohanty, 1992).¹ So the rural space development could not only provide us the clean environment but also the revenue in the form of tourism. Thousands of the rural people get attached with this industry and get jobs in this sector.

Rural tourism is often considered to be intrinsically sustainable, for it attracts small number of visitors, there is no need for extensive infrastructural development, tourists are usually genuinely interested in the local culture and traditions. One of the main attractions of rural holidays is the personal interaction with local residents, so hosts and guests are able to share ideas and knowledge, and consequently tourism can fulfill its role as the "industry of peace", as a tool of mutual understanding.

Nevertheless, if rural tourism development is analysed on a deeper level, certain doubts arise concerning intrinsic sustainability. The most significant issue to be investigated is the economic profitability of rural tourist services, since the demand is often seasonal, the occupancy rates are low and the investment required for creating or improving facilities for tourists is often high. In most rural tourist destinations it is quite unlikely that tourism can be viable as a sole source of income. Rural tourism can usually be only one of the income-generating alternatives in a region, so its role in sustainable development is highly influenced by the performances of other economic sectors (especially agriculture).

OBJECTIVES

The present study has certain specific research objectives. They are as follows:

1. Enhance sustainability in rural tourism development enhance cultural, natural & social environment.
2. To identify important tourist potential villages in Lidder & Sind catchment area.
3. Find out the advantages and disadvantages of rural tourism development in Kashmir Valley.
4. Provision of a unique multi-dimensional “Valley Experience”.

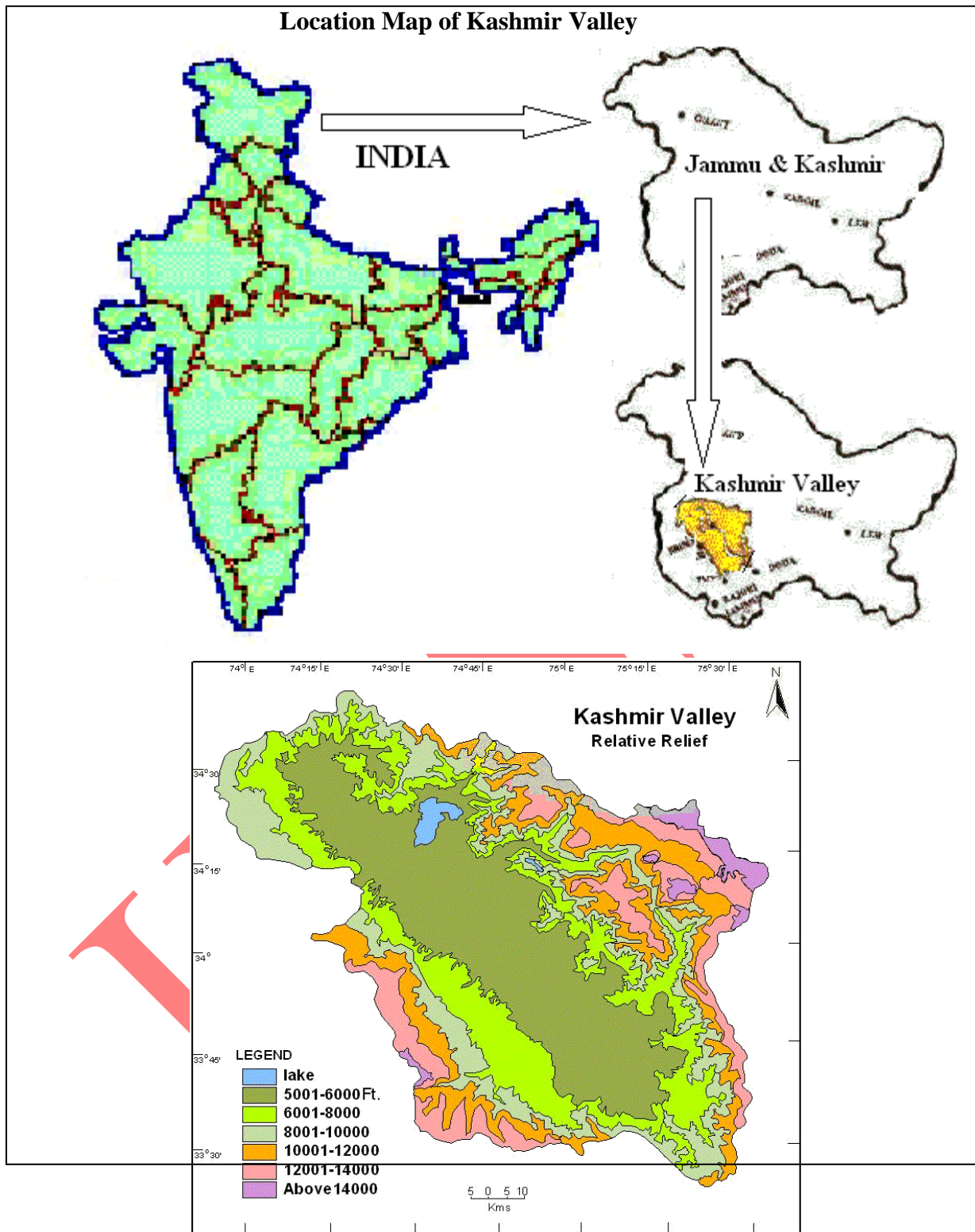
5. To establish criteria for low impact tourist development in rural areas to ensure that the environmental attributes, landscape values and the visual and rural character and amenity is not compromised. Conservation of the natural, cultural and built environment.

STUDY AREA

The Valley of Kashmir occupies the topmost position in the map of India. Kashmir, along with the region of Jammu, Ladakh and Gilgit forms the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Located approximately 1730 m above the sea level; it has Tibet in its east and Pakistan China and CIS in its west. The south of Kashmir is bordered by Punjab, while on the southwest is Himachal Pradesh. The Valley of Kashmir covers an area of about 7.2 percent, out of the total area of Jammu and Kashmir State. It lies between the 32° 22' to 34° 43' N latitudes and in between 73° 52' to 75° 42'E longitude. It lies beyond the upper bounds of the tropical zone and the lowest latitude coincides with 32° 17' N. The spindle shaped valley has a basin of about 85 miles (104 kms) long and 25 miles (40 kms) wide (Raza et. Al., 1978).² Fig. 1

The display of natural boundaries, the physical location, the compatible seasonal division, the richness of flora and luscious fruits and tempting vegetables have attracted everybody's imagination in the Valley of Kashmir and as such it is rightly called „Paradise on Earth“ evidence goes and traces it to over 1000 B.C. (Lawrence 1999)³

Kashmir Valley is endowed by nature with location advantages that it has the potential to become hub of tourist activity. It is surrounded by beautiful mountains and snowcapped peaks which makes the stay in Srinagar pleasant. Excellent scenic, cultural, religious and cultural places are within short distances ranging from a few kilometers to 40 kilometers. Even drive, walk or horse ride to these places is enchanting. Snowy peaks, frozen lakes, ski slopes, pine forests, fresh water streams are the major tourist attractions of the Valley



Source: - *The Valley of Kashmir, The Land*, Moonis Raza, Ali Mohammad (1978)

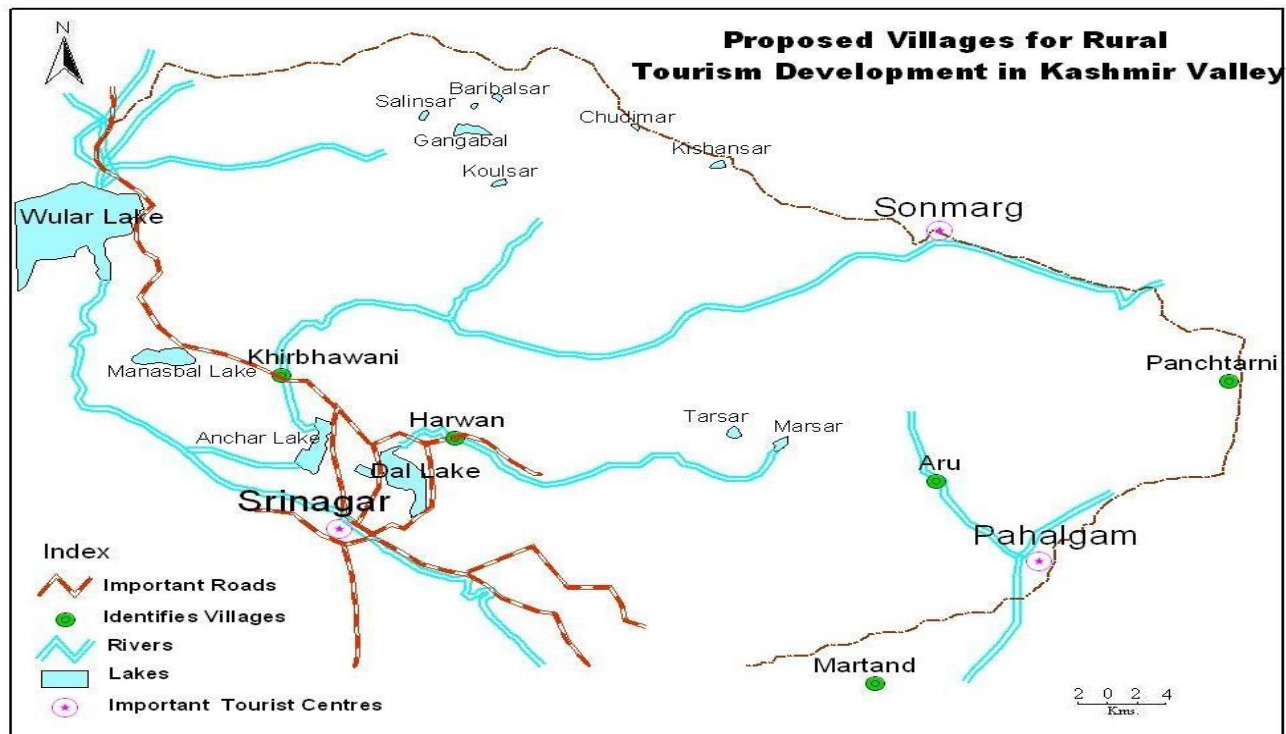
Fig. 1

PROPOSED RURAL SITES FOR RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PLAN IN KASHMIR VALLEY

Tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for Rural Development. The development of a strong platform around the concept of Rural Tourism is definitely useful for a country like India, where almost 74% of the population resides in its 7 million villages. Across the world the trends of industrialization and development have had an urban centric approach. Alongside, the stresses of Urban lifestyles have led to a “counter-urbanization” syndrome. This has led to growing interest in the rural areas. At the same time this trend of urbanization has led to falling income levels, lesser job opportunities in the total areas leading to an urbanization syndrome in the rural areas. Rural Tourism is one of the few activities which can provide a solution to these problems. Besides, there are other factors which are shifting the trend towards rural tourism like increasing levels of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture and improved accessibility, and environmental consciousness. In the developed countries, this has resulted in a new style of tourism of visiting village settings to experience and live a relaxed and healthy lifestyle. This concept has taken the shape of a formal kind of Rural Tourism. So we have to plan the same concept in our country in general and Kashmir Valley as particular. The important proposed sites for rural tourism development in Kashmir Valley are as follows:-

- 1. Kheer Bhawani:** - The Goddess Ragnya Devi is symbolised, as a sacred spring at Tula Mula. Within the spring is a small marble temple. The devotees of the goddess fast and gather here on the eighth day of the full moon in the month of May when, according to belief, the goddess changes the colour of the spring's waters. In this village the people come for worship of goddess and this village is having much cultural diversity. This village is near to Wangat River. (Fig.2)
- 2. Martand:** - located atop a plateau, close to the township of Anantnag, has a temple dedicated to Surya, the "Sun God". Built by king Laitaditya Muktapida (7th to 8th century AD), it is a medieval temple with a colonnaded courtyard and the shrine in its centre. The temple complex has 84 columns and offers a commanding view of the valley of Kashmir. This village is also having important tourist potential development. Rich in cultural as well as natural diversity. The beautiful gardens water bodies are found in this villages.

Fig. 2



Source: - *The Valley of Kashmir, The Land*, Moonis Raza, Ali Mohammad (1978)

3. Harwan: - This village is found in between Shalimar and Dacchigam. In the South of the village Harwan, on the hillside, one can see some remarkable remains of ancient ornamented tile pavements of the Buddhist era. The tiles depict the dresses of the people of that time, such as loose trousers, Turkoman caps or close fitting turbans and large ear-rings which present the central Asian influence. Harwan village is having huge Garden lined with flower beds and massive Chinar Trees with a beautiful canal flowing right through the middle. 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. Kashmir 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 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.

4. Panchtarni: - From Sheshnag one has to climb steep height up across Mahagunas Pass at 4276 mtrs. (14000 ft) for 4.6 KM and then descending to the meadow lands of Panchtarni at a height of 3657 mtrs (12000 ft). The last camp enroute to the Holy Cave is made here on third day. Here one faces cold winds which cause the skin to crack. The route to Mahagunas is full of rivulets, water falls, springs. Panchtarni is a very beautiful place in the feet of Bhairav Mountains.

Five Rivers flow here. It is said that the five rivers originated from Lord Shiva's Hairs (Jataon). This village has enough potentiality for rural tourism development.

5. Aru: - This village is having tranquil and serene meadow. Aru village is situated at a distance of approximately 107 km from Srinagar. Traveling to Aru is the perfect way to take a break from the pollution, dust and stress of city life. Towering at a height of approximately 2408 meters, it follows the shepherds' trail to the high Kashmiri meadows. On one side of the meadow of Aru is a gorge with a small hamlet of wood-and-stone houses. Some of these houses are built in the typical Gujjar-shepherd style with flat roofs and backs against the hillside. This village is having enough potentiality of cultural tourism. The Gujjar and Bakkarwal tribal people are found in this village. Running through this golden meadow is a ravine of the Lidder River, along with a small stream. Apart from enjoying the breathtaking beauty of the meadow, the other major attraction of rural tourism in Aru is trekking. Some of the popular treks of this region are those of Lidderwat meadow and Kolahoi Glacier. One can also go for a walk in the nearby woods and feel the sunlight peeking through the leaves.

ADVANTAGES / POSITIVE EFFECTS OF DEVELOPING RURAL TOURISM IN KASHMIR VALLEY

Rural tourism is one of many challenged services among the landscapes, cultural heritage of rural communities. Tourism has many potential benefits for rural areas. The most important positive effects of developing rural tourism are the following:

- This activity generates local incomes, employment and growth of welfare;
- Rural Tourism is a valuable contributor to rural economy;
- Tourism can serve as an important source of tax revenues for local jurisdictions;
- Developing the auxiliary and alternative activities for rural population (V. Efros, P. Bacal, 2004);
- Assists viability of existing tourism and non-tourism business;
- Promotes the usage and sale of local food products;
- Contributes to local resident amenities and services;
- Develops business skills and can give local crafters;
- Increasing competition;
- Creates sense of pride;
- Prevents viable traditional occupations from being displaced;
- Contributes to the costs of providing economic and social infrastructure;
- Encourages the development of other industrial sectors, helping to stabilize the economic base;
- Offers to rural residents' business opportunities in activities that cater to the tourist trade;
- Attracts inward investment;
- Creates new employment opportunities;

- encourages employment opportunities, which keep people in the countryside;
- Creates jobs for rural communities, especially for those that are economically underdeveloped;
- Incorporating new technologies;
- Leads to opportunities for social and cultural exchange;
- Promotes information about the experience culture and lifestyles of rural communities;
- Takes part in the rural activities such as conservation work;
- Explores historical identities, interests in heritage;
- Ensures that tourism development protects rather than destroys cultural diversity and local community;
- Develops tourism that is indigenous to area-avoiding ‘copycat’ approach;
- Promotes unique cultural/ heritage features;
- Preserves tradition and heritage;
- Transmits the cultural and the natural values to the new generations;
- Enriches heritage with modern activities;
- Tourism can also support local culture in rural areas by encouraging restoration of local regional historical sites;
- Revitalizes local cultural traditions, events and crafts;
- Enhances the role of women;
- Promotes information about wildlife and landscapes, interests in the environment;
- Leads to environment improvements within the settlements;
- Respects the natural diversity of the destination;
- Protects the sustainability and the quality of environment;
- Takes steps to monitor carrying capacity as rural tourism develops;
- Facilitates a “recharge with energy” of the visitors;
- Represents a change from every day urban life;
- Enhances local quality of life.

The rural spaces are enjoying through a wide range of activities from traditional rural life pursuits such as fishing and shooting, to more passive activity, such as walking or horse riding. Many people value the ability to get away from their daily routine, to relax and revive themselves with the quietness and sense of peace, and beauty of natural surroundings. These can be enjoyed in the rural spaces and its great popularity brings consideration levels of spending into rural areas, rural business and services. As tourism has evolved a wide variety of other attractions and activities in the in rural areas and become the focus of visitor interest:

- peace and quiet, relaxing environment;
- health and fitness concerns, fresh air;
- outdoor recreation such as golf or horse riding;
- themed leisure attractions such as rare breed centres, wildlife and farm attractions, arboreta, museums,

- local food, drink and craft sold at the villages, farmers markets villages shop or tourism outlet;
- take part in rural activities such as conservation work;
- activities based on local heritage, such as visits to natural reservations and forest parks;
- local village feasts and festivals.

Tourism can offer rural residents business opportunities in activities that cater to the tourism trade. Such locally – operated businesses, which may be seasonal, can provide local residents with valuable opportunities to develop business skills and can give local retail establishment. Farmers growing fresh products can take advantage of tourism to establish direct marketing channels for ready-to eat products, which may also serve as outlets for processed foods such as jams, jellies, breads, and preserves.

DISADVANTAGES AND DIFFICULTIES FOR DEVELOPING RURAL TOURISM

- Encourages dependence on industry prone to uncontrollable change;
- Creates part time, seasonal or low grade employment;
- Incurs development costs and public service costs;
- Leads to local land and house price inflation;
- Creates a feeling of invasion by tourists;
- Generates overcrowding and traffic;
- Increases crime;
- Reduction in local services, e.g., food shops replaced by gift shops;
- Import of new cultural ideas- challenges the existing way of life;
- Increases “usage” and destruction of landscape features;
- Creates need for new developments which may not in conformity with the local areas;
- Increases pollution (noise, visual, air, water, litter);
- Affects local biodiversity;

CONCLUSION

By the general analysis of the rural tourism development in Kashmir Valley, an attempt was made to present the complex nature of the activity. Though rural tourism has the potential to be one of the most effective tools of regional development, it has not grown up to the expectations so far, due to several interrelated reasons like the political disturbances in the region and unawareness of the rural tourist attractions. The next step in the research of this topic was the detailed assessment of several rural tourist destinations in Valley of Kashmir. A study of this kind would serve various purposes: it would help to find out the importance of rural spaces in the Valley of Kashmir and analysis of the sustainability of rural tourism, and it would contribute to the understanding of what different interest groups (including local community members, tourists, ecologists or

businessmen) perceive as sustainable rural tourism development. A better understanding of these perceptions would help the planning of a rural tourism that is able to satisfy the needs of most groups for now and in the future.

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