
Media, Conflict and Tourism: Insights from Kashmir

Suheel Rasool Mir and Mansoor Ahmad

Department of Sociology, University of Kashmir, Jammu & Kashmir, India

Corresponding author: mirsuhailscholar@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Once known for its natural beauty and called as heaven on earth, Kashmir is torn between two nations of India and Pakistan. The verdant green forests, sweet springs, perennial rivers, picturesque, alpine scenery and pleasant climate of Kashmir valley has remained an internationally acclaimed tourist destination. But unfortunately, conflict and instability in Jammu and Kashmir have been a major hindrance to its development and progress levels. Tourism is identified as the engine of growth and development of Jammu and Kashmir economy in general and Kashmir valley in particular. The development of tourist industry can have a significant impact on the overall growth of the state, because of its ability to create direct and indirect employment, as well as growth in allied industries. Tourism will likely contribute to the growth of secondary sectors such as handicrafts, which have historically benefitted from visitors to the state. As tourism is widely recognized as a major mechanism of employment generation, especially in the service sector, holds significant role for poverty alleviation and unemployment in the state. Kashmir being an important tourist destination in India and elsewhere has witnessed downfall because of the ongoing unrest especially during the last two decades which has hindered the smooth growth of tourism industry. The tourism in the whole state was affected badly due to the conflict, tourists stopped to visit Kashmir. All the tourism stakeholders were in loss and the unemployment increased swiftly in the state as a whole due to the turmoil in the Kashmir and created negative image of valley in the minds of tourists. Tourism around the world is considered as a noteworthy device of advancement and in the current past it has demonstrated its potential by rising as the quickest developing industry contributing around 9% to worldwide Gross Domestic Product 8.7% of aggregate business. The present paper investigates the impact of conflict on the tourism sector in Kashmir and followed by some suggestions and recommendations aimed at optimally exploiting the potentials of Kashmir tourism in the fast improving socio-political scenario.

Keywords: Conflict, Kashmir valley, Economy, tourist, tourism

“The world tourism organization (WTO) defines tourism as comprising the activities of people travelling to places that are not within their normal environment and the period of travel and stay does not go on for more than a consecutive year. The travel to the place is for purpose leisure, business travel and other such activities (WTO, 2002)”.

Tourism is one of the world's fastest-growing industries, and for many countries, especially those in the developing world, it holds promising economic backing. It is very vital component of nations economy and has many social advantages as well, Not only does tourism create job opportunities and possibilities for economic development, but it can also do so in regions

having few other economic resources (Czarniawska, 2004). For these reasons, many countries, mainly in the developing world, have been proactive to build up tourism industries as part of national development strategies (Crouch *et al.* 2005). Although Kashmir is acknowledged as the heaven on earth because of its abundant charming spots and attractions despite that Jammu and Kashmir is an industrially backward state without a strong industrial stand. In Kashmir tourism sector is a significant contributor to economic growth and development. The verdant green forests, sweet springs, perennial rivers, picturesque, alpine scenery and pleasant climate of Kashmir valley has remained an

internationally acclaimed tourist destination (Iwashita, C. 2006).

Tourism is identified as the engine of growth and Development of Jammu and Kashmir economy in general and Kashmir valley in particular. The development of tourist industry can have a significant impact on the overall growth of the state, because of its ability to create direct and indirect employment, as well as growth in allied industries. Tourism will likely contribute to the growth of secondary sectors such as handicrafts, which have historically benefitted from visitors to the state. As tourism is widely recognized as a major mechanism of employment generation, especially in the service sector, holds significant role for poverty alleviation and unemployment in the state. Tourism plays an indispensable role in economic development. Kashmir knows for its extravagant and breath taking beauty throughout the world, Kashmir has aptly been described as 'The Paradise on Earth'. Kashmir is safer than most of the other Indian tourist's spots as far as safety of women tourists are concerned with no harassment. The people are particularly warm, respectful, and polite and are incredibly friendly and happy to see more foreign tourists coming to Kashmir

Research Question

Conflict is an enigmatic and compelling phenomenon, and its relationship with tourism is complex and multifaceted.

Objectives with Descriptive Methodology

- ❖ To explore the impact of conflict, political instability on the tourism industry in Kashmir

With the help of this objective the researcher will study how the state of Jammu and Kashmir has been affected by conflict as well political instability. For this objective the researcher will collect the information from secondary sources and will conduct intense research on Books, Journals, Research Papers, and government Records and scientific investigation of newspapers and other relevant unpublished archival material available on this subject.

- ❖ To provide some suggestions and recommendations aimed at optimally exploiting the potentials of

Kashmir tourism in the fast improving socio-political scenario.

Source of Data: This paper aims to clarify this relationship and examines how conflict affects tourism in Kashmir. The nature of the paper is literature based and secondary sources of data are used to support the present argument, the researcher will carry out sociological analysis of various factors which have adverse impact on tourism. The researcher will also try to explore long and short term impact of conflict on tourist inflow in Kashmir.

Conflict and Tourism in Kashmir

Tourism in Kashmir has suffered from a long legacy of conflict, suffered through many violent conflicts throughout its history and is still struggling against many conflicting sources within the state. Conflict/violence consistently has a negative impact on Kashmir tourism industry, even if tourists are never the people to get physically harmed. Conflict heavily impacts tourism industry. However the recent decades have proved challenging for the state Jammu and Kashmir due to emergence and escalation of a wide variety of violent uprisings. The continual political uncertainty in general and the long standing armed conflict in particular has unexceptionally impacted every socio-economic activity in Kashmir. Turmoil in the state, particularly of recent uprisings 2008, 2010 and 2016, hindered the smooth growth of the tourism and has discouraged most of the travelers from visiting Jammu and Kashmir most popular tourist destination. Add to this it also not only tourism but also indirectly the economic activities related to tourism.

How Conflict affects tourism

Conflicts have substantiality negative impact on tourism, on global level; tourism takes a drastic hit during times of conflict. The impact of this is even more devastating in countries that are dependent on tourism receipts. It was found that substantial increases in conflict /violence affects tourist arrivals in the long run. Therefore, conflict, or perceived conflict, can be incredibly detrimental to the tourism industry even if it is a small likelihood to impact a tourist's trip (Dann, G. 1996).

For the present, situation regarding tourism in Kashmir is grim. Kashmir being a disputed territory has both internal and external challenges to its tourism sector. Even countries with highly valued characteristics are hurt by conflict in their area. Likewise Kashmir Conflict impacts multiple aspects of tourism as well as the economy of state. Consequently, as the numbers of tourists visiting decreases as does the revenue, this can quickly devastate state's economy. Not only does conflict affect the people, but the loss of the tourism industry affects many jobs around the state, leaving victims jobless in an already unstable state and economy. Violence affects tourism both contemporaneously and with lagged effects (Neumayer, 2004). Even in a recent statement given by the United States president Donald Trump in which he warned American citizens to exercise maximum caution while travelling to India and avoid going to Jammu and Kashmir except Ladakh region and its capital Leh due to ongoing conflict and civil unrest

It is evident from secondary sources that People could choose not to travel directly after a conflict occurs, causing a lagged effect on the decline in tourism. Another reason for a delayed effect on the decline of tourism is when conflict is ongoing and therefore tourism drops off over time. Conflict, regardless of the time span in which it occurs, can drastically decrease the tourism industry, whether immediately or over time.

Media, Conflict and Tourism

In the era of informational society media dominates people's everyday lives by disseminating information, representations and images of the world on a global scale (Iwashita, 2006). Media in all forms has a prominent role in representations and constructions of places and tourist destinations. Hence, places are mediated by all kinds of media products no matter whether it is "new" or "old" media (Sandvik & Waade, 2008). Tourism is therefore considered to go through a mediatization process where tourism and media consumption are linked (Crouch: 2005). But in a conflict and disturbed state like Jammu and Kashmir, the media in general and electronic media in particular have distorted Kashmiri's overall identity by portray Kashmiri populace as extremists and violent. Many agencies in India ignore

Kashmir valley from highlights on tourism. Situations are created periodically to destroy peaceful atmosphere of state, the game plan being to discourage travelers to visit Kashmir. An increase in media coverage, causing people to back out of travel plans after hearing of conflict, is one of the primary reasons for declining tourist inflow. As and when tourism gets revived some agencies work hard to reverse it. They flare up the atmosphere by pronouncing controversial issues like abolition of special status of Jammu and Kashmir i.e. abrogation of Article 35(A) and 370 and various other issues which are obstruction for peace and development in Jammu and Kashmir. Latently Indian media and other agencies push Kashmir towards an economic depression by highlighting the issues which are unhealthy for state of Jammu and Kashmir. The people of Jammu and Kashmir wish a peaceful settlement of Kashmir and are always prepared for a meaningful dialogue. Thus peace here is shattered by the politics over Kashmir. Peace gets disturbed frequently and this is why business community in Kashmir supported the agitation in 2016 to favor settlement of the basic issue once for all so that they could also pursue their business interests like their counterparts in Jammu & Ladakh.

Tourism in Kashmir received setback during 1990's, after Kargil war, and series of uprisings from 2008 & 2010, after devastating floods of 2014 & in 2016. Yet year 2017 may not fully bring back smiles to tourism industry in Kashmir. People in general and youth in particular who are directly are indirectly affiliated with tourism somehow managed to reorganize the tourist sector from time to time and are inevitably working for revival of tourism each time. But paradoxically negative role of Indian media repeatedly haunt them. It has been observed that those who visit Kashmir fearlessly go back well satisfied and contented. They express dismay & shock over media propaganda outside Kashmir. Foreigners who come here feel that the world has been grossly misguided about the wonderful land of Kashmir. One of the reasons for that is the negative promotion or publicity the Valley has been receiving lately and the phobia created in the minds of the people who would have otherwise loved to travel to Kashmir. It has changed the attitude of the people or potential

domestic travelers. These people have no hesitation to come and see Kashmir but don't opt for this destination because of the negative hype created by the national media. During the last 2 decades, Kashmir was also a victim of negative publicity, which was largely related to the country's battle against terrorism. We were perhaps misunderstood, and as a result, misinterpreted on many occasions by international media. This had a direct impact on tourism development in the state. These media are a big obstacle for tourists because they have formed in them psychological dominance through which they want to control whole population of the country and it seems they are very much successful in doing this (Ek, R., & Hultman, J. 2007). While this type of behavior may be the earning part to their balance sheet, the government still has to answer as why it is not promoting Kashmir tourism at high level. Therefore, if an event of conflict happens in one part of Kashmir, media and other agencies generalize it to the whole state of Jammu and Kashmir and the surrounding being completely safe; lose tourist inflow indirectly and ironically. Thus have negative consequences to the whole state, and can be very difficult to come out of, since it creates a pessimistic, unsafe image for everyone. Thus the media is hypercritical on Kashmir with its disinformation and subjective campaign.

DISCUSSION

Jammu and Kashmir has been classified as one among the conflict areas of the world. The place has been suffering from last 70 years and reached its acme in early 90s. Besides the political crisis, the state has also been witnessing economic depression and social changes on the ground. Also media has contributed positively to the development of the global tourism industry; there have been occasions where media publicity has adversely affected tourism in several countries. Media, when not handled well, can have disastrous effects on tourism. For example, when there is bad news or a crisis the impact on tourism can be devastating. Before 90s the graph of the state was straight upright in terms of socio-economic scenario. In tourism sector Kashmir has seen a lot of ups and downs in the past two decades. The downward trend in tourism saw some slack in a short

period after the beginning of the new millennium. It regained some of its lost momentum from 2002 onwards but was again hit by the series of agitations in 2008, 2010 and 2016 which hit hard the tourist sector. On domestic tourism, the state has also slipped many places with tourists being diverted to the neighboring states like Himachal Pradesh.

CONCLUSION

Despite of being a highly disturbed and conflict zone, there has been not even a single instance when a tourist has been harmed or hurt by locals. During the most violent protests against the Amaranth land row in 2008 and in 2016, Kashmir was in turmoil, people were very angry for being killed, hurt, tortured, jailed and humiliated by security forces, they came on roads in thousands throwing stones on every government asset and trooper, but they never lost their senses of good hospitality and responsibility towards safeguard of tourists. In case of strikes, angry people torture vehicles plying on roads but tourist vehicles were given a safe passage. Media as an agent of globalization have a decisive role to play in putting emerging destinations. The relationship between tourism and media is vital and complex. Tourism is highly dependent on media reporting because the vast majority of travel decisions are made by people who have never seen the destination first hand for themselves. Unfortunately media is showing negative image of Kashmir across global which has direct impact on tourism can be devastating. Former secretary general of UNWTO Mr. Francesco Frangialli stated that Tourists are scared away from destinations caught in the glare of round-the-clock disaster coverage, causing communities dependent on tourism to lose their source of livelihood. It is important to realize how important tourism could be, as in the present conditions tourism alone could counter media's adverse projections. The revival of tourism is therefore of greater importance today for Kashmiri's overall image than the economic benefit that is derived from the trade.

REFERENCES

- Czarniawska, B. 2004. *Narratives in Social Science Research*. London, Thousands Oaks & New Delhi: Sage

- Crouch, D., Jackson, R., & Thompson, F. (Eds.). (2005). *The Media and the Tourist Imagination. Converging cultures*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Crouch, D. and Lübbren, N. (Eds.). 2003. *Visual culture and tourism*. Oxford, New York: Berg.
- Dann, G. 1996. *The Language of Tourism. A Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Wallingford: CABI.
- Ek, R. and Hultman, J. 2007. Produktgörandet av platser - En introduktion. In R. Ek & J. Hultman (Eds.), *Plats som produkt* (pp. 13-35). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Fornäs, J. 2002. Mediesamspel i tid och rum. In K. Becker, E. Bjurström, J. Fornäs & H. Ganetz (Eds.), *Medier och människor i konsumtionsrummet* (pp. 283-345).
- Nora: Nya Doxa. Iwashita, C. 2006. Media representation of the UK as a destination for Japanese tourists. *Popular culture and tourism. Tourist Studies*, 6(1): 59-77.
- Jansson, A. 2002. Spatial Phantasmagoria. The Mediatization of Tourism Experience. *European Journal of Communication*, 17(4): 429-443.
- Jenkins, H. 2006. *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York, London: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, O.H. 1999. Understanding and measuring tourist destination images. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 1(1): 1-15.
- Linna Jensen, J. and Waade, A.M. 2009. *Medier og turisme*. Århus: Academica.
- McCabe, S. 2009. *Marketing Communications in Tourism and Hospitality. Concepts, Strategies and Cases*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Månsson, M. 2009. The Role of Media Products on Consumer Behaviour in Tourism. In M. Kozak & A. Decrop (Eds.), *Handbook of Tourist Behaviour. Theory and Practice* (pp. 226-237). London, New York: Routledge.

