

Traditional Occupational Groups and Tourism in Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

The present paper will analyze the role of traditional occupational groups in the promotion of tourism in Kashmir. The traditional occupational group is a social group of persons associated by some common tie or occupation, following a set of social practices which inculcate certain norms and values implying continuity with real or imagined past. In Kashmir these groups range from agriculture to handicrafts. Both men and women are involved in these occupations. These groups play vital role in the promotion of tourism as tourism is a social phenomenon, which involves temporary break with normal routine work to observe and enjoy the experiences in everyday life (Khan 2012). Tourism is an ever expanding service industry with latent vast growth potential and has therefore become one of the crucial concerns not only for the nations but for the international community as well. Tourism is a source of interaction between the exogenous and endogenous groups based on trust and hospitality for which Kashmiri's are well known. So these groups are of no exception. Their role is reflected in the promotion of tourism by offering tourists wide range of Kashmiri artisans made products (carpet, shawls, pottery, wooden toys etc.)

KEYWORDS: *Traditional Occupational Groups, Tourism, Handicrafts, Pony Rider's, Willow Work.*

Introduction

Tourism is a social phenomenon, which involves a temporary break with normal routine work to observe and enjoy the experiences in everyday life (Khan, 2012). Tourism consists of the activities undertaken during travel from home or workplace for the pleasure and enjoyment of certain destinations, and the facilities that cater to the needs of the tourist. Travel and tourism have been important social activities of human beings from time immemorial. The urge to explore new places within one's own country or outside and seek a change of environment has been experienced from ancient times. Tourism is an ever expanding service industry with latent vast growth potential and has, therefore become one of the crucial concerns not only of the nations but also of the international community as a whole. From the sociological perspective tourism is a social activity. It is about interaction between different communities -hosts and guests- and encounter between different cultures.

This approach studies social classes, habits and customs of both hosts and guests in terms of tourism behaviour of individuals or groups of people and the impact of tourism on the society. Presently, the sphere of tourism is a world-wide phenomenon. The outcome of increasing tourism has been found to be critical and crucial catalyst in accelerating the rate of social-economic development. Tourism is one of the rapidly growing sectors of the world economy. The development of the tourism sector not only increases economic growth directly, but also stimulates the growth of other sectors through backward and forward linkages and increases domestic incomes and effective demand (Gokovali&Bahar, 2006). Tourism is an attractive tool for the economic growth, specifically in the developing world. Tourism has supported many developing countries to move away from a dependency on agriculture and manufacturing sectors. Ability of tourism to earn foreign exchange and to raise income and employment has been well recognized in economic literature. Tourism industry has an extraordinary complex integration with many industries spread over many sectors and is considered as an umbrella industry containing a set of inter-related business participants.

Apart from economic benefits, tourism plays a vital role in cross-cultural exchange of the two cultures. It helps to learn about different languages, life styles and tradition. It provides opportunities to adopt the qualities of different cultures vice-versa, as tourists are also bound to cause tension among the local population by introducing new life styles and progressively promoting social, cultural and religious disruptions. Tourism provides opportunities to local people to raise their living standards by increasing employment opportunities. Tourism serves as a means of conserving the cultural heritage of the local area which otherwise might be lost due to development. It provides scope for conserving local dance, art, craft, music, drama, dress and old historic monuments Tourism round the globe is considered as a major tool of development and in the recent past it has proved its potential by emerging as the fastest growing industry contributing about 9% to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generating 8.7% of total employment. As per the estimates of United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), global tourism receipts hit a record by earning US \$1075billion in 2012 (Mir, 2014).

Objectives

The study has the following two-fold objectives

- To assess the impact of traditional occupations on the tourism industry of the state.
- To examine the role of handicrafts, houseboat owners and pony riders in the promotion of tourism.

Methodology

The present study is based on the secondary data, collected from various sources of publications such as books, magazines, journals, research articles, newspapers etc. as well as from electronic sources.

Tourism industry in Kashmir

Among the world's tourist destinations, Kashmir has its own place. By virtue of its rich physical geography and the pleasant climate, the valley of Kashmir has emerged as a world class destination for both domestic as well as international tourists.

Kashmir has attraction for relaxation and recreation to both indigenous and

exogenous societies. The valley is famous throughout the globe for its alluring and enticing beauty and glorious charm that pleases one's mind, body and soul. The natural splendour of the Kashmir valley is bound to mesmerize the visitors. Kashmir has immense potential for tourism from both domestic as well as international tourists. While mountainous landscape of Kashmir valley has attracted tourists for centuries across the globe. Some notable tourist places in Kashmir valley are Dal Lake, Mughal gardens, Nishat Bagh, Gulmarg, Yeusmarg, Pahalgam etc. Kashmir's natural landscape has made it one of the popular destinations for adventure tourism in South Asia. Kashmir has remained a place of attraction for tourists since centuries. Due to its scenic landscape, beautiful valleys, lakes, snowclad mountains, lush green forests, sweet springs, perennial rivers, picturesque, alpine scenery Kashmir valley has remained an internationally acclaimed tourist destination. Kashmir provides various types of tourism for the tourists. Some of them are Health tourism, Adventure tourism, Ecotourism, Pilgrim tourism, Wildlife tourism etc. Kashmir, tourism has a great potential for employment generation, even for people without specialized skills. Due to its spillover effect, it provides impetus to allied sectors like Handicrafts, Handlooms and Transport. It has the capacity to provide jobs in the unorganized sector and acts as an incentive to preserve cultural and heritage assets (Government of J & K, 2013). In Kashmir where the scope of large-scale industrialization is very limited and the potentialities of agricultural development are scarce, the role of tourism in overall development is immense.

Traditional occupational groups in Kashmir

A social group consists of individuals, defined by formal or informal criteria of membership, who feel united or are bound together in relatively stable patterns of interaction (Scott & Marshall, 2009). Traditional occupational group is a social group of persons associated by some common tie or occupation, following a set of social practices which inculcate certain norms and values implying continuity with real or imagined past. In Kashmir, the traditional occupational groups range from agriculture to handicrafts. The traditional occupational groups have been doing these occupations for generations. In these occupations people use the tradition-based means and modes of production. The use of modern machinery is very little and most of the work is done manually. Most of the people associated with these occupations are illiterate and poor, and are residing in rural areas. Modern tools and techniques are least preferred and most work is done by the use of simple handmade tools and simple machines which too are made by specific traditional occupational groups. Both male and female are involved in these occupational groups. The traditional crafts/handicrafts are one of the sources of livelihood for a number of rural and tribal people and even urban people. Though agriculture contributes majorly in Kashmir's economy, these crafts support human subsistence on secondary basis. The traditional handicrafts and other goods are famous throughout the world and many Kashmiris, directly or indirectly, are related to these traditional occupations for their income. Climate of valley is vital for it is in winters that most people find these traditional occupations suitable to generate their income. These traditional occupations are a part of the Kashmiri culture and play an important role in introducing material cultural richness of Kashmiri culture

to others. Some of the traditional occupational groups in Kashmir are Shawl/*Pashmina* weavers, Basket weavers (*toukreevunne*), Carpet weavers (*kaleenbaap*), Mat weavers (*wagoovunan*), Walnut Wood work, Stone carving (*sangtarshi*), shikarawalas, houseboat wala, Fishermen (*gadehhaanz*), Namda weavers, Embroidery workers (*telehlagun, aarekaem*), *papier-mâché*, pony riders (*gouerweal*) etc.

Role of these groups in promotion of tourism in Kashmir

These groups play vital role in the promotion of tourism. Their role is reflected in the promotion of tourism by offering tourists wide range of Kashmiri made products (carpet, shawls, pottery, wooden toys etc.), their hospitable nature, their specific art or act of welcoming or greeting visitors. Their way of wishing a guest with usual "salaam-sahib" has been known much earlier in the western countries than the "Sayonara"-the Japanese goodbye.

Handicrafts

Handicrafts are the products which are produced either completely by hand or with the help of tools. Mechanical tools may be used as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. Such products can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant. Handicrafts play very important role in representing the culture and traditions of any country or region. Handicrafts are a substantial medium to preserve rich traditional art, heritage and culture, traditional skills and talents which are associated with people's lifestyle and history. Handicrafts are hugely important in terms of economic development. They provide ample opportunities for employment even with low capital investments and become a prominent medium for foreign earnings.

Kashmir popularly known as the paradise on earth has been very famous in handicrafts sector since ages. Kashmir is very famous in handicrafts because of its unique design, cost and quality of products. Handicrafts have remained a key economic activity in the state of Kashmir valley. Kashmir has also a great contribution towards exports from the handicraft sector. It was during the reign of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, popularly known as Budshah or the great king who ruled Kashmir from 1420-70 AD that handicrafts were introduced in Kashmir. Zain-ul-Abidin hired skilled craftsmen from Central Asia to train local inhabitants in a number of handicrafts which were till then altogether unknown to the people of the state. Since then craft legacies continued and got encouragement and patronage from different rulers, princes, visitors to the valley, thus skills passing on from generation to generation. Jammu & Kashmir has comparative advantage in producing high quality and world famous fabrics of Pashmina and Kani shawls, silken, woollen and cotton fabrics and crafts like papier-mache, wood work, Tila work, Sozni, Crewel, etc. These products are famous world - over because of their unique craftsmanship.

1. Textiles

The embroidered shawls are the most popular handicrafts of Kashmir. They basically fall into three different categories: Woolen, Pashmina, and Shahtoosh. The Pashmina and Shahtoosh are known for their fine quality (softness, warmth and lightness) because of which they are quite expensive. The cost of the shawls also

depends on the embroidery done on them. Different types of embroideries such as 'sozni' and Ari or hook are done on them. Birds, trees, architectural designs and mythological figures are the popular themes used for embroidery. Jamawar is a kind of shawl, which is decorated with colorful embroidery on both the sides. Embroidered silk shawls are also available here.



Weaved Kanishawl with elegant design

2. Carpets

The wonderful carpets woven in Kashmir are famous the world over. They are in great demand in the international market. In Kashmir carpets are not only available in cotton or wool but also in pure silk. They are very durable. Most of the carpet designs are tilted towards Persian designs.



Beautiful Kaaleenmade by locals

3. Wood carving

The craftsmen of Kashmir are highly skilled in the art of wood carving. Wood

carving is mainly done on walnut wood and the most popular designs carved on the wood are dragon, lotus flower etc. There are two types of wood carving practiced here: deep carving and shallow carving. Beautifully carved chairs, tables, jewellery boxes etc. are available in the markets of Kashmir.



A shop of wood carved products

4. PaperMache

Paper Mache is a well-known handicraft of Kashmir which is quite famous in the European countries. Some of the papermache handicrafts are bed lamps, pen boxes and decorative items.



Paper-mache gallery in Kashmir

5. Willow Work or Wickerwork

Beautiful baskets, tables, chairs etc. made from the willow is a great handicraft of the state. The Hazratbal area of Srinagar city in Kashmir is famous for this work. (Plate 5)

Handicrafts form an integral part of tourist experience, they represent local traditions and indigenous populations, also a valuable souvenir. Handcrafted objects as tangible components and craftsmanship as being intangible in culture are among the resources mobilized in tourism. The sale of cultural souvenirs in Kashmir is an important factor in the promotion of tourist attractions and national tourism identity, stimulating increased visitor numbers and encouraging repeat visits.

Many tourists would stop at a store or workshop selling traditional handicraft items. Besides evoking wonderful memories by tourists when taking a good quality handicraft home, it arouses the interest of others who see it to visit the destination. The travellers and tourists take these handicraft items to their own homelands which helped the arts and crafts of Kashmir to become famous in Europe and America and the shawls of Kashmir in particular became a fashionable item. Similarly, the original jewellery of Kashmir which was unique in design and very minutely worked attracted women from outside Kashmir. The Kashmiri handicrafts became important articles for the art galleries in many countries. Thus, while Kashmiris had no means and resources to export delicately manufactured products, the travellers to Kashmir helped advertising these products abroad. It helped in attraction of more and more tourists to visit Kashmir. Also the hospitable nature of people dealing with selling of these products impress the tourists to greater extend and it encourages them to visit Kashmir again and also suggests others for the same thing.

Pony walas /horse riders

Kashmir, the dazzling beauty of India, is known world-wide for its breath-taking blend of emerald allure (meadows) and soothing white (snow-capped peaks). Casting a spell of magic over this blend are the crystal clear lakes that has propelled Kashmir tourism to new heights. Sightseeing in Kashmir is a major activity that travellers usually prefer to do in the region, but other adventurous and recreational activities offered by the region are also on rise with numerous options available like skiing, trekking, water skiing, fishing, angling, golfing and horse riding. Among all the activities, horse riding in Kashmir is something that is enjoyed by almost all travellers. Exploring the beautiful mountain passes and eye-catching countryside on a horse back is a popular activity in the region.

Kashmir region of Jammu and Kashmir State is blessed with various pristine destinations like Pahalgam, Srinagar, Gulmarg where tourists do enjoy horse rides. In past where no or very less road connectivity to these tourist places was there and transport was not fully developed, the travellers and tourists used to visit such places on ponies. But in recent past and in present times horse riding has become a must to do thing because it is very much enjoyable and adventurous because one thoroughly explores this magical land.

Horse riding in Gulmarg and Pahalgam dodhpathri, Yusmarg, Kokernag and Lolab Valley are useful for enjoying the beauty of the locations. (Plate 6) Some of the famous routes and locations where tourists can enjoy horse rides are- Gulmarg-Khilanmarg trek (around 5 km); Gulmarg-Apharwat

trek (about 13 km); the striking KolahoiGalcier-Pahalgam trek (around 35 km); Ahrabal (about 51 km from Srinagar); at Aru Valley; and at Yusmarg. These destinations are abounding with horses that are readily available to hire.

Horse riding in Kashmir is one of the best ways to explore the beautiful countryside and mountain passes of Kashmir. These pony walas take tourists to the areas to which they can't go by vehicle or by foot. These ponies along with their owners are also used by tourists going for trekking to carry their luggage and trekking equipment up to the highland not accessible by foot. With rolling hills and soothing lush greenery all around, seeing Kashmir on a horseback is something one remembers for life.

The role played by these pony walas in pilgrimage tourism is also worth mentioning. These pony walas take the pilgrims to their visiting places like amaranth cave, Mata VaishnoDevi etc. through hills, mountains without caring for themselves. These pilgrimage centres are location on high altitudes and walking to these places by foot is almost impossible, particularly for old people and children. So the easy way out is to hire a pony which makes your journey easy and comfortable also.



Amarnathyatris on the way to the holy cave on ponies

Houseboats

Houseboats in Kashmir better known as floating houses are definitely one of the main attraction of Jammu and Kashmir tourism. These Houseboats attract tourists from all over the world. Houseboats in Kashmir provide a unique way to experience the old world charm of the region. The origin of the houseboat lies in the chapters of Kashmir's history. It is said that the native kings had forbidden foreign visitors, especially the Britishers, from constructing houses in the region and this gave rise to the concept of a houseboat.

Its evolution in Kashmir traces back to nearly 140 years when the first houseboat was designed by a British army general. Since the concept was creative and useful, it got an overwhelming response through a massive imitation thereby promoting a huge growth and finally evolving into an industry of today with an approximate strength of 869 houseboats.

The main scope of houseboat industry in Kashmir lies in its being a source of attraction for the tourists..Houseboats provide a unique and matchless experience of

staying and hold a unique position because of its intricate, wood-carved walls and ceilings which provide the unique experience of living on the water in cedar-paneled elegance with all the conveniences of a luxury hotel. Dal Lake and Nagin Lake are the two prime attractions of Kashmir that are known not only for their picturesque views but also because of houseboats. These houseboats offers a unique style of living on the rolling water in an elegantly designed set up outfitted with all modern comforts. Houseboat in Kashmir is mainly preferred by those who love to unwind and relax in the lap of nature away from bustling noises. Most of the houseboats also provide a Shikara for a leisure ride in the lake or to the nearest shore. Travellers can also enjoy shopping in a different way while staying at a houseboat. There are several Shikaras that sell flowers and handicrafts, thus creating a colourful vista of floating market. industry it is pertinent to mention here that the house boats of Dal lake have a great role in the income generations, as a good number of tourists prefer to reside in house boats during the visit to valley and hence boosting the economy of the house boat and shikara owners.

Conclusion

Kashmir is itself a famous tourist resort both at the national as well as international level. It is often said nature has blessed Kashmir with beautiful tourist places. However, this nature's beauty is further enhanced by traditional occupational groups who play a vital role in introducing material cultural richness of our culture to others and are significant as our cultural heritage. Tourists throughout the world are attracted towards the valley not only for its scenic beauty but are to the products of handicraft industry of the valley that are well designed by artisans, which tourists take with them as a source of remembrance and as a source of promotion when these tourists take them to their respective destinations. These well decorated crafts are durable and ever-green. Thus, it is evident from the above discussion that these groups foster the growth of tourism industry in Kashmir and in fact they are earning their livelihood from tourists by offering them ample of crafts. However, both tourism as well as these groups face severe crisis due to various uprisings which are inherent in the valley having political as well as social bases. The problem of uprising has been addressed by mass media by conveying positive message across the world. Thereby acting as a bridge between tourists, tourism industry and traditional occupational groups. Henceforth, they are interlinked with each other. In nutshell, I can conclude that to be a tourist is not every body's cup of tea. Those who have access can enjoy the nature but who did not have access can't even taste the nature.

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