

Impact of Disaster Events on The Development of Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir Since 1990

Shazia Parveen¹, Dr. Kh. Moirangleima², Rouf Ahmad Wagay³

Abstract

The tourism sector has played a crucial role in connecting J&K with the global community, providing new opportunities for investment and revenue generation. This has not only led to the creation of jobs and socio-economic development for the local population but has also contributed significantly to poverty reduction and sustainable growth. Tourism is a key component of the economy, making a substantial contribution to the State GDP as a multibillion-dollar industry. Additionally, it serves as a major source of employment, directly and indirectly employing around 60% of the population in the absence of a strong industrial sector. The Jammu region, known for its temples, attracts a large number of pilgrims year-round. However, the tourism sector is influenced by a variety of factors, both internal and external, that impact the industry. Natural disasters and unforeseen events are prime examples of such factors, as they can have profound effects on individuals, society, and tourist flows. These disasters can strain government resources and social stability, significantly affecting the state's tourism industry, which is crucial for the overall economy. This study aims to explore the impact of natural and man-made disasters on tourism in Jammu and Kashmir, as well as strategies to mitigate their adverse effects.

Keywords: Tourism, Natural Disaster, Economy. Employment opportunities,

Introduction

Disaster either Natural or man-made have an adverse impact on the development, economy, and health of both developing and developed nations and have put pressure on populations across the world. As per the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) disaster is “a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic, or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources” (UNISDR, 2009). Disasters that are the result of natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods, cyclones, and droughts are called natural disasters. Natural disasters come in so many ways and forms. Examples are; earthquake, flood, volcanic, Eruption, Tornado, tsunami, wildfire, drought, hailstorm, heat wave, hurricane, epidemic, famine, lahars, lamina eruption, mud flow, solar flare and other disasters. Those that are the result of anthropogenic activity such as industrialization, wars, global terrorism, political conflicts, and economic crises are defined as man-made disasters. A combination of natural and man-made disasters has affected most countries around the world and resulted in large-scale mortality and morbidity, destroyed livelihoods, creating millions of refugees, and migrants. In other ways, we can say that disaster is a catastrophic event that causes serious commotion of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic and environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope seeing its own level of resources. For example, it destroys the natural surroundings and resources which the industry depends on. Jammu and Kashmir in general and Jammu in particular is affected by multiple disaster due to its geographical and climatic and poor socio economic and several terrorism related violence. The combination of natural and man-made disasters has had adverse effects on key aspects of Jammu region's economy, including key sources of revenues such as agriculture, horticulture, handicrafts, and tourism. These disasters have stretched the administrative machinery of the region and left its population vulnerable. One of the most affected sector is tourism which is a largest contributor in states revenue, contributing about 8 to 9 percent in SGDP. The first reaction after a natural disaster has occurred is that tourists will avoid that destination. Because they will be scared that the site is dangerous. Another reaction of tourists after a natural disaster has occurred is that tourism will likely decrease drastically. Jammu region is prone to multiple hazards on account of its topography and varying, extreme climate. The region has suffered massive floods, devastating earthquakes, and recurrent avalanches and landslides. The earthquake in 2005, the massive floods of 2014, turmoil in 2016 are among the major disasters the region has faced over the past 23 years. The state has also borne the effect of disputes between India and Pakistan, witnessing regular cross-border infiltrations, state-sponsored terrorism, and violent attacks like Uri (2016) and Pulwama (2019) attack. The displacement of communities from their homelands, long-drawn-out protests leading to curfews, and regular clashes between terrorists and armed forces, have been some of the manifestations of the violence in the region.

Corresponding Author: Shazia Parveen

¹Research Scholar, Banasthali Vidyapath, Rajasthan

² School of Earth Sciences, Banasthali Vidyapath, Rajasthan

³Research Scholar. D.A.V.V Indore M.P

gwagayrouf@gmail.com

Study Area

Jammu region, a scenic part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, is located between 32°17' and 36°58' north latitude and 73°26' and 83°30' east longitude. It serves as a transition zone between the majestic Himalayas in the north and the arid plains of Punjab in the south. It is bounded by China in the north and east, by Afghanistan in the north-west and by Pakistan in the west. Punjab and Himachal Pradesh States border it in the south. Jammu & Kashmir State has a geographical area of 222,236 sq. kms. Comprising 6.93 per cent of the total Indian Territory which includes 78,114 sq. kms. under illegal occupation of Pakistan and 5,180 sq. kms. Illegally handed over by Pakistan to China and 37,555 sq. kms. Under illegal occupation of China where Census could not be taken. Thus in an area of 101,387 sq. kms. 10,069,917 people inhabit, resulting in a density of 99 persons per sq. km. The altitude of the region varies from 300 meters above sea level in the outer plains to over 5000 meters in the middle Himalayas. Administratively, state is divided into two divisions Jammu and Kashmir.

Materials and Methods

This study is based on secondary data collected from various published and unpublished sources, data was collected from books, journal, survey reports, dailies, brochures, booklets, data records from various state institutions viz., central and state departments of tourism and disaster management, tourism development corporations, and Non-Government Organizations, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation and State Disaster Management Authority, Directorate of Tourism, Annual Economic survey of J&K, United nations world Tourism organization and other research published in national and international journals.

Result and Discussion

Armed Conflict

Since 1989, the tourism industry in the Kashmir valley has experienced a decline in its contribution to the economy. This can be attributed to several factors including the erosion of the tax base, increased expenditure, depletion of infrastructure, and issues related to law and order. As a result, the state's income has not seen significant growth. It is important to recognize that the economic impact of the conflict extends beyond a specific sector or investment opportunities. The livelihoods of local people, particularly those involved in tourism, horticulture, and handicraft industries, have been adversely affected. Additionally, the turmoil has compelled many traders in Kashmir to relocate their businesses from Srinagar to other parts of India. The correlation between conflict and development is significant and operates in both directions: conflict hinders development, while development failures exacerbate conflict. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasized in its 1997 policy statement and guidelines on conflict, peace, and development that sustainable development is unattainable without peace and stability, and conversely, peace and security cannot exist without meeting the basic needs of the population. The unrest in the region, especially over the past two decades, has impeded the growth of tourism and dissuaded many travellers from visiting India's top tourist destination. Furthermore, this turmoil has not only impacted tourism directly but has also had indirect effects on economic activities associated with the tourism sector. Due to militancy, the tourism industry has suffered significant financial losses. The health resorts in the valley now present a neglected and rundown appearance. The once picturesque and charming beauty of these resorts has faded, with no one taking responsibility for their maintenance and upkeep, neither the government nor those tasked with beautifying these locations. The primary focus of the government has always been maintaining law and order rather than prioritizing the upkeep of resorts. In the past, a separate budget was allocated for the development and beautification of these resorts. However, due to the rise of militancy, these funds were redirected towards efforts to combat and minimize the impact of militancy in the valley. Consequently, the once beautifully maintained gardens in these health resorts have been neglected and overgrown with bushes, thorns, and weeds. In some cases, these resorts have even become hiding places and safe havens for militants. Historical records indicate that security forces have encountered and killed militants within these resorts. Additionally, some tourist huts and bungalows have been destroyed by fire. The jungles surrounding certain tourist resorts have also suffered from the effects of militancy, as they have been recklessly stripped of timber by smugglers and other unscrupulous individuals. This state of disorder has also allowed land grabbers and squatters to encroach further into the tourist resorts. If we examine the Dal Lake, we find that its water is stagnant and contaminated with trash, sewage, and weeds. Moreover, the practice of spreading cow dung along the lake's periphery has contributed to the enrichment of its water with nitrates and phosphates. The situation is no different for Manasbal Lake. The lake is currently facing numerous challenges, including illegal encroachment on its periphery in Ganderbal and Qazibagh. This encroachment takes the form of vegetable gardens, toilets, residential structures, and garbage dumping sites. As a result, the lake's appearance is marred by wrappers, plastic bags, rags, vegetable peelings, empty cigarette cases,

and other types of garbage floating in its water. Additionally, the armed uprising in J & K has had a significant impact on Kashmir tourism and its associated industries.

Some incidents which led to tourist decline in the valley:

| Tourist Destination | Nature of Incident |
|---------------------|---|
| Pahalgam | On June 12, 2004 Four tourists were killed and 18 injured in the resort town of Pahalgam. |
| Mughal Gardens | On 25 May 2006, militants hurled a grenade at a tourist bus killing four persons and injured seven others. |
| Dalgate | Militant's hurled grenades at two tourist buses from West Bengal On 31 May 2006, injured 22 people at Dalgate. |
| Hazratbal | 1st June, 2006 four tourists were killed and six others, all of them from Gujarat, were injured in an explosion on their vehicle near Hazratbal. |
| OldCity Srinagar | On July 11, 2006 a grenade attacks in Srinagar claimed the lives of six tourists and wounded forty. A similar attack on May 31 against a tourist bus wounded 21. |
| Shalimar | An explosion took place on July 29, 2007 in a tourist bus at Shalimar Gardens. Six tourists were killed and 21 were wounded. |
| Gulmarg | In 2008, a grenade attack in Gulmarg killed one tourist and injured five. |
| Bijbehara | On July 28, 2012 two tourists from Maharashtra were killed and six were injured when militants hurled a grenade into a Tempo Traveller taxi in Bijbehara town in Anantnag district. |
| Srinagar | On 16th February 2013, a Spanish tourist was injured as valley witnessed several protests to oppose hanging of Afzal Guru. |

Such violent incidents certainly have a bad impact and discouraged people across India and abroad from coming to Kashmir valley. Such incidents create a perception of insecurity, deterring potential tourists from visiting the region, facing the possibility of becoming targets or being caught in the crossfire of conflict, jeopardizing their safety and wellbeing besides infrastructural damage.

Flood Sept. 2014

The September 2014 flood had a devastating impact on Jammu and Kashmir. A continuous downpour lasting 5 to 6 days from September 1st to 6th led to severe flooding in various parts of Jammu and most areas of Kashmir. Major rivers like Chenab, Sindh, Jhelum, Lidder, and their tributaries overflowed, with the Jhelum River in Srinagar reaching 22.4 feet, 4.40 feet above the danger mark. The floodwaters breached embankments, submerging hospitals, schools, residential buildings, and critical infrastructure. The force of the floodwaters caused bridges to collapse in low-lying regions of the Kashmir valley, particularly in Srinagar and Pulwama. Flash floods in Jammu destroyed 400 houses, while landslides, triggered by heavy rainfall, disrupted all modes of transportation including railways, airlines, and roadways. The catastrophic flood was a result of intense rainfall, poor drainage management, unplanned urbanization, and lack of preparedness. Srinagar city was submerged, resulting in the loss of about 300 lives, injuries to 53,082 individuals, evacuation of 226,000 people, and damage to 6.48 lakh hectares of agricultural land. Approximately 3 lakh houses were either fully or partially damaged. The Jammu and Kashmir government estimated the flood damage at Rs 43959.56 crore, leading to the cancellation of flights and hotel bookings until the end of October 2014. The tourism sector suffered significant losses, with infrastructure damages amounting to 1700 crore and hotels experiencing losses of 200 crores. Foreign tourist arrivals decreased by 23%, from 78802 in 2013 to 60845 in 2014. Travel agency TUI reported a 75% decline in new bookings for Kashmir compared to the previous year. Additionally, 100 houseboats in Dal and Nagin lakes were affected, with some completely submerged. The flood severely impacted the entire infrastructure at TRC. GSDP of J&K State is registering a negative growth of -1.57% during the year 2014-15 as compared to 5.63% during 2013-14 (economic survey 2015J&K). 200 vehicles of state road transport Corporation got inundated.

Conclusion

The impact of disasters on the tourism industry of Jammu and Kashmir is multifaceted and profound. Natural calamities such as earthquakes, floods, and avalanches, coupled with political unrest and security concerns, have significantly disrupted tourist arrivals and revenue streams in the region. Infrastructure damage, including roads and airports, hampers accessibility for tourists, while destruction of cultural and historical sites diminishes the attractiveness of the destination. Moreover, the perception of Jammu and Kashmir as an unsafe destination further deters potential visitors, exacerbating the economic downturn. The decline in tourism not only affects businesses directly involved in the tourism sector but also has ripple effects on related industries and the livelihoods of local communities reliant on tourism. Additionally, the social and cultural fabric of the region suffers, as tourism plays a crucial role in promoting cross-cultural exchange and preserving traditional heritage. Environmental degradation, exacerbated by disasters and unsustainable tourism practices, further threatens the fragile ecosystems and biodiversity of the region. In essence, the impact of disasters on tourism in Jammu and Kashmir extends beyond mere economic losses to encompass social, cultural, and environmental dimensions,

necessitating comprehensive resilience-building and sustainable development efforts to safeguard the future of the tourism industry in the region.

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