

Effects of Covid -19 Pandemic on Tourism in Kashmir

Showkat Ahmad Dar¹, Naseer Ahmad Lone²

¹Department of Political science and Public Administration
Research Scholar of Annamalai University Tamil Nadu, India

² Assistant Professor, Chandigarh University

Abstract

Tourism is defined as leisure travel. Tourism generates jobs and promotes long-term growth, benefiting local economies. The Mughal emperor Jahangir called it "paradise on Earth." Snow-capped mountains, enchanting gardens, majestic waterfalls, apple orchards, deep gorges, and poplar, deodar, and chinar trees are among J&K's top attractions. Tourism is big business in J&K. Tourism, the country's largest service industry, boosts the state's GDP, foreign exchange, employment, and tax revenue. Jammu and Kashmir are popular tourist destinations due to their successful development. The Covid-19 outbreak hit Kashmir just as the tourist season was starting, dampening spirits. Travel and tourism have spread a novel coronavirus that is highly contagious. This jeopardises the industry's future. This paper examines how the COVID-19 lockdown has affected the tourism industry and other activities. COVID-19 is expected to have significant effects on Kashmir tourism through 2020, resulting in reduced visitor numbers and travel restrictions. The pandemic had severe consequences for the economic development of Kashmir Valley, located in the Indian state of Kashmir. Poorer people (tourist stakeholders) were also severely harmed; the findings show the COVID-19 pandemic's early effects on tourism and cost.

Keywords: *Covid, Tourism, GDP, Impact, Livelihood, Importance, etc.*



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INTRODUCTION

"If there is heaven on earth, it is here in Kashmir," said Jahangir, the Moghul Emperor. Kashmir is located 566 kilometres from New Delhi at the top of India. The Himalayan and Pir Panjal ranges awe visitors. It has become a favourite shooting location for Bollywood directors and filmmakers due to its mesmerising eye-catching view. This is where you can witness nature's flawless art, surrounded by heavenly beauty. Kashmir's true beauty lies in its lakes, snow-capped hills, springs, and rivers. India's jewel-encrusted crown is this alluring heavenly land. Do you want to experience the allure of Paradise? Make a trip to Kashmir!!!

In this article, I'll show you how the Covid 19 pandemic has affected Kashmir tourism. In Kashmir, tourism is a major industry that accounts for the majority of the state's revenue. COVID-19 now poses a direct threat to direct employment in the state. Hotel employees, tour operators, Shikara owners, restaurant employees, trek organisers, tour guides, and others are all thinking about it right now. Tourism is an important tool for global development, and it has recently

Corresponding author

darshowkat41@gmail.com

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demonstrated its potential by becoming the fastest growing industry, contributing around 9% of global GDP and 8.8% of total employment. Tourism is estimated to employ between 40 and 60 percent of J&K's total population.

A significant industry in J&K, its financial effect is obscure. These incorporate J&K's rich legacy and culture, incredible friendliness, and lovely scene. As well as giving a position and unfamiliar trade, tourism advances nearby enterprises like handicrafts and handlooms and keeps J&K in the public and worldwide spotlight. J&K may one day become a significant worldwide tourist objective. Tourism's job in the J&K economy and in financial improvement has for some time been recognized.

According to Union Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy, the three COVID-19 waves that hit the country in early 2020 resulted in the loss of jobs for around 21.6 million people. Tourist arrivals dropped by 93 percent during the first COVID-19 outbreak wave, 80 percent during the second, and 65 percent during the third, according to Reddy. The impact of the pandemic on tourism was investigated in the study. According to the study, the first wave resulted in the loss of 14.6 million jobs, followed by 5.4 million in the second and 1.7 million in the third. According to the tourism minister during Question Hour in the Lok Sabha, 35 million people worked in the tourism industry prior to the pandemic. The tourism industry, according to the minister, suffered during the three coronavirus waves that ravaged India and the rest of the world. Tourism officials in J&K claim that tourist arrivals in Kashmir broke a 10-year record in March 2022, indicating that the industry is finally recovering. In the months of January and February, 1, 64,964 Kashmiris and 495 foreign visitors visited the valley. Gulmarg, Sonamarg, and Pahalgam, a winter destination for over 3.5 lakh tourists in 2022, are followed by spring tourism around Srinagar's Dal Lake. The Kashmir Tulip Garden in Srinagar, at the foothills of the Zabarwan range, attracted 3 lakh visitors in its first 20 days, according to officials. 1.55 lakh tourists visited J&K in February alone, breaking a seven-year high.

Research objectives:

1. To unmask the meaning and importance of the tourism sector in Kashmir.
2. To explain and analyse the impact of Covid 19 on the tourism sector in Kashmir.

RESEARCH METHOD

Covid 19's impact on tourism in Kashmir was studied using both a survey and a documentary method. Primary and secondary sources of information are used in the research. The data were tabulated using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods with Purposive sampling. As a result of the Covid 19 incident, 299 people from the tourism industry were interviewed to get their thoughts on the impact of the incident on Kashmir's tourism. Aside from using official government publications and secondary data from books, journal articles, and the internet, the study looked at how COVID-19's pandemic lockdown affected tourism in the Kashmir Valley.

Study Area

I chose District Srinagar, a tourism hotspot, as the study area to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on tourism. The respondents were drawn from the tourism

industry, including Shikaras, tourist guides, shopkeepers, houseboat operators, hoteliers, and the Department of Tourism, as well as official reports.

Approach with respondents

Small respondents are typically adequate to accomplish immersion to acquire an intensive comprehension of the participants' viewpoints on Covid-19's effect on Kashmir and the travel industry (Guast et al., 2006; Khan, 2020). To acquire essential information, we utilized purposive sampling to enlist and meet with respondents, as well as optional wellsprings of information. The scientists utilized essential information sources to acquire a superior comprehension of the effect of COVID-19 on the tourism industry in Kashmir Valley, with an emphasis on COVID-19's effect on Kashmir tourism. For this reason, the Srinagar district was picked. Analysts who knew about the peculiarity being scrutinized broke down the information from the essential review, and significant articulations were separated and coordinated into topics. All respondents were educated regarding the review's motivation and guaranteed that their data would be kept stringently classified and utilized exclusively for research purposes before information assortment. Moreover, appropriate research ethics were noticed and followed during the study research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Background of the respondents

Table1. Demographic profile of the Respondents (Occupation)

S.NO	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
01	Shikaras	60	20.6%
02	Hotelier	76	23.41%
03	Boatman	55	18.39%
04	Shopkeepers	53	17.72%
05	Tourist Guides	55	18.39%
Total		299	98.51%

Source: Primary Data

The above table 1 reveals that the dominant majority of the respondents, i.e., 23.41% percent of respondents, were hoteliers. While 20.6% percent belong to the Shikaras. Further, the distribution of respondents with respect to their occupation. It is revealed that of the total respondents in the sample, 299, i.e. (18.39%) respondents were Boatman. Further, the majority of the respondents were 55 tourist guides, i.e. (18.39 %), while the shopkeeper respondents were only 53, i.e. (17.72%). Table 1 also reveals the occupation-wise distribution of the respondents. The study's findings on the Impact of Covid 19 pandemic on Tourism in Kashmir, as gathered from the respondents, are presented in tabular form below.

The Study adopted surveys, a questionnaire used to collect the response from 299 target respondents in both Kashmiri and Urdu language. The respondents were mainly chosen from the tourism sector as their occupation. The three-point scale has been adopted for finding the result from the respondents viz Y- Yes, N- No, and NI: No idea. The Three-point **scale** is mentioned below:

Table 2. Views of respondents on the effect of Covid 19 pandemic on tourism in Kashmir

S.NO	STATEMENT	Y	N	NI	Total
1.	Does Covid 19 affect your daily Livelihood?	211 70.5%	45 15.5%	43 14%	299 100%
2.	Are tourist arrival percentage declines in Kashmir due to the pandemic?	223 74.5%	52 17.39%	24 8%	299 99.89%
3.	Does Covid 19 affect your Job Profile?	241 80.6%	45 15.5%	13 4.3%	299 100%
4.	Does Covid 19 pandemic reduce the growth in the tourism sector?	196 65.5%	33 11.3%	70 23.4%	299 100%

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 shows that tourism is a major source of foreign exchange earnings and job opportunities, all of which contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction. A common way to boost the economy is to promote tourism. Most people believe that tourists can help bridge the "Majority World" and the "Developed World," and this is not incorrect (Moaworth & Muant, 2009). A tourist destination's alternate destination perceptions play an important role in the decision-making process when choosing a destination in nature (Um-Crompton, 1990). The majority of economists agree that tourism has a positive impact on economic development. In areas where other sustainable livelihoods, such as farming, are not viable, tourism is an important tool for sustainable alternative development (Laane, 1994). Backward and rural areas benefit greatly from tourism development. When a new coronavirus was discovered in late 2019 to early 2020, it sparked travel bans across the globe, affecting the economies of countries around the world as well as those in neighbouring regions.

There are various difficulties confronting the travel and tourism industry. As opposed to prevalent thinking, the travel and tourism industry is incredibly defenceless against the elements that impact individuals' movement choices, and this is particularly valid for the United States (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006). Visitors are significantly impacted by coups, protests, wars, and political strikes that occur during times of social unrest. Direct and indirect consequences for the tourism industry can be seen in this. One of the immediate consequences of insecurity is a decrease in tourist influxes, which in turn results in a decrease in revenue and gross domestic product (GDP). Also, jobs in cleaning, food preparation, and maintenance will be lost (IEP, 2016). Weakness and psychological oppression greatly affect tourism when the tourist stream is limited because of vulnerability, developing trepidation, and examination of hazards towards the affected objective. Therefore, expanded security and well-being are expected to safeguard vacationer streams and choices (Beirman, 2003). Tourism is being frustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as

different deterrents, vacillations, and hazards. In December of this current year, COVID-19 (otherwise called SARS-CoV-2) was found in Wuhan, China.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared this deadly virus a pandemic on March 11, 2020. As a result of COVID-19, at least 3.5 million people have died, and more than 165 million have been infected worldwide (WHO, 2021). To combat the pandemic's potential consequences, governments around the world enacted travel bans, curfews, and other restrictions. As a result of their border closures to foreign tourists, 79 percent of international arrivals have decreased, and 125 million direct tourism jobs have been lost. Despite its breathtaking natural beauty, the Kashmir Valley has been plagued by terrorism, conflict, unrest, protests, and labour unrest for decades. The travel and tourism industry has been especially hard hit, as global travel restrictions have reduced demand, and many borders have been sealed in an effort to contain the virus (UNWTO, 2020b). The ongoing pandemic in 2019 reduced tourist arrivals in Kashmir Valley, affecting the state's economy and affecting every household. Insecurity has hampered tourism development in Kashmir, affecting other economic sectors linked to tourism,

It is assessed that 144,500 jobs in the Kashmir tourism industry were lost because of the agitation, as per the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI). An expected \$5454 million USD (40,000 crores INR) will be lost between August 2019 and August 2020, with the travel industry area enduring the worst part of the misfortunes during this time span. Exacerbating the situation, COVID-19 has caused problems for the least fortunate citizenry who depend on the travel industry as a method of means. During our review, we saw Dal and Nigeen Lake boatmen selling products of the soil along the side of the road. They couldn't earn barely enough to get by because of an absence of purchasers and credit. This investigation discovered that the Kashmir Valley tourism industry is incredibly touchy and powerless against any public or global emergency. The current year's COVID-19 significantly affects Kashmir's travel industry, stressing the industry's now delicate establishments. After the COVID-19 pandemic closes, voyagers' portability decisions will be affected, with long-haul suggestions for the tourism business.

According to the study's findings, any type of disturbance reduces tourist flow, which leads to unemployment and poverty. As a result of the Pandemic, tourism in Kashmir has suffered a 160 million dollar loss. According to a field survey, 239 of the 300 respondents who were completely reliant on tourism changed their employment status from tourism to another source of income. The study discovered that because hotels and restaurants were closed, hoteliers suffered greatly as a result (Naikoo et, al 2021) of the lockdown because they lost their daily wages, which impacted their families. According to the shopkeepers, all shops were closed as a result of the pandemic, and there was no selling or buying going on. As a result, they were affected by the pandemic. In fact, they claimed that because they did not work, they could not afford to pay their children's school or college fees. Last but not least, all respondents agreed that the pandemic had a significant impact on Kashmir's tourism industry, while only a small percentage of people have encountered problems.

CONCLUSION

Some of the drawn-out outcomes of the COVID-19 lockdown on the tourism business should be visible in the mental, socio-social, and financial impacts on the business' different partners, which should be visible in this article. It is unavoidable that they will observe their direction in the

homes of each and every individual who is in some way or another associated with the tourism business, regardless of how dubious the association might be. A total of approximately 5454 million US dollars will be lost between August 2019 and August 2020, according to estimates. It has been discovered by the researchers in this study that COVID-19 has made life more difficult for those in the lower socioeconomic strata who rely on tourism as their primary source of income. The reliance of the Kashmir Valley's population on tourism is jeopardising the region's long-term economic development. Restoring tourism in Kashmir is critical for many people's livelihoods, and doing so requires assessing the immediate consequences of COVID-19 as well as estimating the damage to the tourism economy during and after the closure of the valley. To reduce the impact of emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic on visitors and businesses, policymakers should immediately restructure the tourism industry and develop policies to better manage tourist destinations. Clearly, tourism has played an important role in J&K's long-term economic growth and will continue to do so as supply and demand shift in the coming years. There is significant tourism potential in Jammu and Kashmir, which can be realised through collaboration between all stakeholders, including the federal and state governments, and concrete measures that build on the state's strengths and mitigate its weaknesses.

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