

TOURISM DURING DOGRA PERIOD – A CASE STUDY OF KASHMIR VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine, the historical scenario of tourism of Kashmir valley, during the Dogra period. Though the Dogra rule was established in the year 1846, by Maharaja Gulab Singh, however, up to the establishment of residency in the year 1885, very few measures were taken to promote this smokeless industry, of J&K. It was for the last two decades of the nineteenth century, that the Dogra rulers in collaboration with the British officials took a number of steps for the improvisation of tourism, in Kashmir. Not only the means of communication, transport and infrastructure were improved, but facilities were also created for improving the air services, for the tourists.

KEYWORDS: Dogra Period, Residency, Tourism, Communication, Transport, Tourists etc.

INTRODUCTION

Jammu and Kashmir, located in the extreme north of the country is situated between, $32^{\circ} 17'$ and $37^{\circ} 5'$ N latitude and $72^{\circ} 40'$ and $80^{\circ} 30'$ E longitudes. The State covers an area of 2, 22,236sq. Km. This, however, includes 78,114 sq km under the occupation of Pakistan, 5,180 sq km handed over by Pakistan to China, and 37,555 sq km under occupation of Chinaⁱ. For administrative purposes, the State is divided into three provinces – Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh provinces. Among these provinces the Kashmir valley, acquires greater significance, so far as tourism is concerned. It is surrounded by an unbroken ring of mountains, which gave it the character of an enclosed vale. While the Pre Panjal forms quite a formidable barrier on the south and southwest, separating it from the Jammu region, the Great Himalaya and the north Kashmir range shut it off from the frost-bitten plateau-deserts of Ladakh and Baltistan. Seen from the crest of Pir Panjal, the valley offers the view of a huge green bowl, with its lakes and winding rivers set, within the frame of the snow clad mountain ramparts, which add incredibly to its scenic beautyⁱⁱ. This densely settled and beautiful valley has an average height of 1,850 meters, above the sea level, but the surrounding Pir Panjal range has an average elevation of 5,000 meters. The valley is an emerald set in pearls; lands of lakes, gushing streams, green turf, magnificent trees and mighty mountains where the air is cool and the water the sweat.

The year 1846 marks the beginning of modern tourism industry of J&K, especially in the valley of Kashmir, as the Sikh rulers, who ruled the Valley from 1819 to 1846, were suspicious about the machinations of the European visitors. Though the Valley, dotted with a large number of shrines, temples, tombs, gardens, lakes, historical monuments and river valleys saw visitation of a large number of travelers, from the ancient past. However the mere visits of travelers can't be termed, as the presence of tourism industry, prior to the Dogra rule. The presence of travelers has not positively affected the economy of the State, which is sine-qua-non for the tourism industry, in any part of the globe. On the other hand, these travelers were a burden on the State exchequer, as the latter always provided food as well as accommodation, to the former.

OBJECTIVES

- To highlight the role of Dogras, for the promotion of tourism industry in the Valley.
- To access the historical scenario of Kashmir tourism, during the Dogra period.

TOURISM DURING DOGRA PERIOD

The year 1846 marks a turning point, in the history of Kashmir, as the State of J&K were created in this year through the sale deed treaty of Amritsar. It was during the period of Dogras that the fame of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly the Valley of Kashmir, as a place with tourist potential along with its cultural heritage, had reached to different corners of the cosmos. The region acquired much significance with the dawn of the British Empire, on the political map of India. The close connection between the Dogra rulers and Britishers in India is the notable feature for giving a boost to the travel trade in the Valley, as a large number of Britishers started visiting the Valley of Kashmirⁱⁱⁱ.

The contribution of Dogra rulers was commendable, as they took various steps for the construction of roads, improvement of transport and communication facilities, besides the development of tourism products and increasing accommodation facilities. As J&K was one among the princely states of British Indian Empire, therefore, the chief priority of the Dogras in the Valley was, to develop road communication in order to link it, with the rest of India. Thus the construction of roads not only connected the Valley with the rest of India, but also provided the protection to the Dogras and gave them security from the Russian peril. Their policies directly as well as indirectly gave a great boost to the tourism industry of Kashmir. Thus the Dogras in collaboration with the Britishers started the project of linking up the valley, by a cart road with the rail-head at Rawalpindi. The project commenced, in 1880 and was completed in 1890^{iv}. Now the distance from Rawalpindi to Srinagar, took only four days, in a Tonga. Moreover, the traditional route over the Banihal pass was also upgraded to a cart road. The road was first opened to traffic as a special case on 2nd May 1921, in connection with the annual transfer of the State government offices, from Jammu to Srinagar. For the people at large, it was thrown open only in May 1922^v. Srinagar was thus directly linked with Jammu. The railway line had already been extended from, Sialkot to Jammu, in 1890. Along with roads, telegraph lines, originally laid during Maharaja Ranbir Singh's reign, were extended to Gilgit and Ladakh. Telephone connection between Jammu and Srinagar, was also set up^{vi}. These steps broke the isolation of the Valley and linked it, with the outside world, moreover, these initiatives dynamited the hurdles and difficulties of travel, and the State was thrown open to the ordinary tourists^{vii}. Along with the growth in the number of visitors to the State, there grew up an infrastructure to cater to their needs. State government came forward and provided all types of accommodation for the sojourn of any class, right from the affluent to the most economic class. All the important tourist resorts and hill stations in the valley of Kashmir were provided with accommodation facilities, whether it was in the form of inns, huts, houseboats, tents or hotels. Waiting rooms were provided for both ladies and gentleman at Domel, Suchetgarh and Banihal for the convenience of visitors^{viii}. Sweepers were appointed at these waiting rooms, and Chowkidars were made responsible for the condition of these rooms. Latrines were provided in these waiting rooms, a provision already in vogue for the European tourists, along the Jhelum Valley Cart Road and the Banihal Cart Road^{ix}. In order to accommodate the increasing number of tourists, the concept of 'paying guest' was introduced in the State. However, it was obligatory for every person, who wished to open a boarding house establishment or to keep paying guests to the number of four or more, to obtain the permission of the Resident of Kashmir^x.

Some of these accommodation establishments were built on the river bank, in Harisingh Bagh. As the accommodation provided by the Maharaja was insufficient for the growing number of European visitors, camping sites were provided for bachelors in Chenar Bagh and for married couples, and single ladies in Sheikh Bagh and Munshi Bagh^{xi}. Some tourists in view of its natural beauty and serenity, preferred to set up camps in Naseem Bagh on the Dal. In order to see the comfortability of the European tourists, there had always been efforts, moves and initiatives impress upon the Maharaja of State, for creating avenues and to pass laws for their safety, security and comfort ability. Seen in this perspective on Maharaja Ranbir Singh's death, the British Indian Government again moved in the matter of the acquisition of land, or house property in the State by Europeans, but all in vain.

Thus, due to these initiatives taken by the Dogra Maharajas in collaboration with the Britshers, the valley of Kashmir, which had remained in seclusion for centuries, now came into close and direct contact with the rest of India. During this period, State's Foreign Department was responsible for the look-after of the tourists. With the development of motor transport and air travel, the number of tourists went on increasing, and people of the Valley began to attach themselves, for their living, with the tourists. The handicraft dealers, artisans, house-boat owners began to rely on the influx of tourists, for the sale of their products and services. The increase in the number of tourists encouraged the State to establish a 'Visitor's Bureau' (V.B), for the purpose of providing the necessary facilities to the tourists, for the promotion of tourist traffic and for keeping a record of visitors^{xii}. The Bureau functioned under a director and a gazette officer, thus it was for the first time in the tourist history of the State that a separate agency was set up^{xiii}. The industry was thus recognized as a commercial preposition, and tourist statistics was for the first time kept in a formal manner.

In addition to the above said measures, Kashmir remained a popular tourist destination, due to its climate. When the temperature in the rest of India was rising in the beginning of June, the residents of India both foreign as well as domestic would migrate to Kashmir, which became a popular tourist destination during the Dogra period. Among the tourist resorts, Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg, Srinagar, Yusmarg, Aharbal etc., became much more popular during this period and the tales of their beauty reached even to the distant lands of the Americas. Besides the tourist resorts, the other attractions to foreign tourists were houseboats and to have a shikhara ride, in the waters of Dal, Nigeen and Jhelum. As a result, a large number of tourists from different parts of the world began to visit the paradise of the Indies. Soon it became a fashion in the western world, to spend vacations in this land of paradise. Thus the number of tourists who visited the valley of Kashmir^{xiv}, in the year 1924 was 547, which quickly increased to 2095 in the following year^{xv}. Among the 547 tourists, 437 were domestic and 110 were foreign. Similarly out of 2095 tourists, 1700 were domestic and 395 were foreign. However the important feature of these visitors during this period were that they were upper class tourists, as travelling was the privilege of a few who could afford both money and time to travel. For instance in the year 1924, the most notable of the guests were His Excellency the commander-in-chief of India, His Excellencies the governors of Bombay and the Punjab, the Resident of Gwalior, the Maharajas of Mysore and Patiala States, Raja Sahib of Mandi, Poonch and their retinue^{xvi}. This trend of tourism which was aristocratic in nature continued up to the 4th decade of the twentieth century and only assumed the character of mass tourism industry after 1947, when J&K acceded with India. It is noteworthy that the foreigners especially Europeans who visited the valley of Kashmir in a large number, added new dimensions to the tourist industry of the region. Their arrivals were good in the sense as they carried the news of the beauty and charm of the valley throughout the world. As a result large number of tourists both foreign as well as domestic began to visit the valley.

Table 1: Number of tourist arrivals in the Valley of Kashmir before independence

Year	Domestic Tourists	%age of Domestic Tourists	Foreign Tourists	%age of Foreign Tourists	Total Number of Tourists	%age change over previous year
1935	10457	65.86	5420	34.13	15877	----
1936	18342	83.97	3499	16.02	21841	37.56
1937	19274	77.97	5444	22.02	24718	13.17
1938	18694	77.52	5421	22.47	24115	-2.43
1939	22675	81.55	5128	18.44	27803	15.29
1940	20925	71.43	8367	28.56	29292	05.35
1941	21275	71.87	8327	28.12	29602	01.05
1942	8005	42.87	10666	57.12	18671	-36.92
1943	14525	52.86	12953	47.13	27478	47.10
1944	15101	44.84	18575	55.16	33676	22.55
1945	18407	49.35	18890	50.64	37297	10.75
1946	20606	75.59	6652	24.40	27258	-26.91

**Source: - (i) Annual Administrative Report of the Jammu and Kashmir State for the years (1934-1941)
(ii) Directorate of Tourism, Govt. of Jammu and Kashmir, 2012.**

Looking at the table 1.1, the valley of Kashmir received a sizable number of tourists in the year 1935 in which the foreign tourists comprised 34.13 % and the percentage of domestic tourists was 65.86. In the succeeding year the total number of tourists increased further, with domestic tourists touching the figure of eighteen thousand, however the number of foreign tourists went down to three thousand because of the disturbances throughout the European continent. Tourist figure remained more or less the same during the years 1937-38. However the only noteworthy feature of this period is that the percentage of foreign tourists, increased to 22 from 16% in the year 1936. After that, the flow continued to increase up to the year 1941, when the valley received 29602 numbers of tourists, out of which 21275 were domestic and 8327 tourists were foreign. In the year 1942, due for the 'Quit India Movement', the number of tourists went down and resulted in the negative growth rate of 36.92%, as compared to 1941. But from 1943 onwards, the number of arrivals constantly went up from 27478 in 1943 to 33676 and 37297 in the years 1944, and 1945 including 47.13%, 55.16% and 50.64% foreign tourists respectively. Due to the financial crises prevalent in Europe, because of the 2nd world war, the tourist influx came down to 27258, in the year 1946, this resulted in the negative growth rate of 26.91%, as compared to 1945. Among the total number of tourists, the number of foreign tourists declined from 18890 in 1945 to 6652 in 1946

Thus to conclude, it can be said that, the infrastructure and superstructure of this smokeless industry of Kashmir valley, was developed by degrees in collaboration with the Britshers. Also, seeing the development of this industry in the pre-independence period, it can be said that, the valley of Kashmir had already made an entry in the national and international tourist market, but still the development of the seed industry was not based on the scientific planning. The real development of the industry in fact, started with the Kashmir's accession to India.

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