

# Unexplored Hindu's Religious Pilgrimage sites for tourism in Kashmir valley (J&K)

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## Abstract

*Tourism is a vital component of the modern economy, contributing to the development of a region and its people. In 2016, the tourism industry in Jammu and Kashmir contributed over 6 percent of the state's gross domestic product. The Valley of Kashmir, also known as Paradise on Earth, is a tourist's must-visit destination. The valley has witnessed a significant growth in the tourism industry due to the diversification of its offerings. This paper makes an effort to make a detailed study of famous Hindu Religious tourist places in the Kashmir division of union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, India. Kashmir, which is known for its scenic and natural beauty, Because of geographical and cultural beauty, is also famous for its pilgrimage places and its numerous world-renowned religious festivals. The study revealed that despite the various shortcomings in the sector, the Kashmir valley has the most impressive Hindu pilgrimage sites that are centuries old. Its huge tourism potential is being neglected other than Amarnath yatra. Problems like meagre infrastructure, poor community participation, and lack of attention to the administration's sector are adverse aspects that have constrained Hindu religious pilgrimage development in the study area.*


**Keywords:** Kashmir valley, Tourism, Religious tourism, Hindu pilgrimage


## Article Publication

 Published Online: 31-Dec-2021

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Index Journal of Multidisciplinary

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## Introduction

Over the past six decades, tourism has continued to expand and diversify. It's one of the fastest and largest growing economic sectors of the world. As per estimates in 2016, the tourism industry of Jammu and Kashmir contributed over 6 percent of the state's gross domestic product. Jammu and Kashmir have been identified most potential sector after agriculture and horticulture. The J&K's tourism industry now contributes a huge sum of money to the state's economy each year. The industry has grown due to the increasing number of domestic and foreign tourists. Religious tourism is the core of peaceful life. People in India prefer to travel to religious places. Religious tourism can be understood as all kinds of travel followed by motivation on the religious ground (Rinschede, 1992). This type of tourism is habitually voluntary, unpaid, and limited time (Blackwell, 2007). There are various religious destination places all over India. Every state of India is famous for one or another religious or pilgrimage destination through which the state earns revenue and provides employment to its population. The state of Jammu and Kashmir has been the center of position to the key religions, with lots of holy sites which are placed in and around the Himalayas so this way, tourists simply get to feel the spectacular landscapes and terrains but also have the chance to worship at the numerous religious shrines of the union territory.

There are various pilgrim sites in and around Jammu and Kashmir that cater to Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus. The famous Amarnath Temple is located in the heart of the state. Kashmir, the most favored tourist destination for centuries, is famous for its immense natural beauty, pleasant weather, landscape, and rich heritage. Travellers worldwide have visited Kashmir Valley and have made it a focal commercial and cultural exchange route between India and the East for centuries. It has provided Pilgrimage tourism, Ecotourism, Adventure tourism, medical tourism, and many more. The most significant places here are Dal Lake, Amarnath cave Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonmargh, Wular lake and Mughal Gardens. Kashmir has a composite culture characterized by a mixture of art, religion, philosophy, and music. This is because of the co-existence of various religious groups in the state. Various religious and philosophical communities have existed for hundreds of years. The state has been a massive example of religious tolerance and brotherhood where a Temple, Mosque, and a Gurudawara have been staged side by side in Hari Parbat Fort Kashmir.

### Review of Literature

Religious tourism refers to the spiritual journey initiated to a sacred place or a shrine, where members are inspired somewhat or fully for religious motives (Puscasu, 2015; Rinschede, 1992). Buzinde et al. (2014) entitled religion tourism as belief tourism in which people travel for pilgrimage, pastor and occasionally for leisure commitments. The literature commends that Religious tourism portends travel to a sacred place such as shrines, temples, monasteries, mosques, churches, stupas etc. The motivations after religious travel could be worship, compassion, festivities, charity, helping and accomplishing peace and salvation. Religious tourism is used for peace making amid communities, sustainability, and revolution (Rashid, 2018). Religious tourists are expanding over the years with a share of 10 per cent of the entire tourist's arrivals of the world (UNWTO 2017). Moreover, data has shown that pilgrimage sites have regularly been the epicentre of the massive gathering (Ahmed & Memish, 2019; Sznajder, 2017). These religious and heavenly attractions not only focus on societal solidity inside communities (Rao, 2001).

Nevertheless, India, having a population of over one billion people and motherland to many interesting and primordial religious cultures and events, views a trivial influx of tourists every year (Aramberri, 2004). This is strong proof of the primary snag in the destination along with religious occasion components that have not been recognised as competently as they must have been. Religious tourism not only has developed as an indispensable component of the lifestyle of Indians (Adrian Ivakhiv, 2003), but it has ensured a strong impact on other masses of the world as well the ambience in which they exist. Pilgrimage tourism bids immense prospects of engendering incomes, making foreign exchange and creating employment. At the present movement, every country of the world is striving to foster religious tourism in a big way. (American Geographical Society) Religious tourism is generating over 3.5 trillion globally. In India, it is presently the third leading export industry, but the international tourist influx share is only 0.37%. Besides economic, environmental and social development, tourism was also notable (Bar, Cohen-Hattab, Kobi, 2003). It has been acknowledged as an ambassador of harmonisation and international alliance (Claudia Liebelt, 2010).

It has brought a healthier understanding among different dominions and civilisations. Likewise, it has helped in protecting our culture, heritage and environment. Religious tourism is broadly recognised as a form of tourism in India because of the origin of numerous religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism. Domestic or local tourism in Indian states has been subjugated by religious tourism sites like Amarnath temple, Golden temple, Vaishno Devi, Tirupati, Shirdi temple, Ajmer Sharif Dargah and Jagannath Temple. Following statistics, religious tourism has 60% skate of domestic travel in India (Hindu, 2018). The majority of religious travellers are Hindus then, followed by Muslims, Christians and Sikhs (Livemint, 2018). The majority of our states have a special mix of religious tourism, but Jammu and Kashmir's union territory has a bravura mix of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh religions. The valley of Kashmir is universally known for its natural exquisiteness and leisure tourism than religious tourism, even though there are prominent resources of religious tourism. This study attempts to identify and the Hindu's religious tourism resources in Kashmir valley, which are less famous or have been forgotten with time.

In developing countries, tourism is deemed the most exciting and advanced industry. Tourism can especially be vital in regional development because it has broadened the region's economic base and generated the employment market. Many developing countries emphasise the expansion of tourism, as it is an affluent source for the economic development and growth of any country (developing or developed).

D. Mac Cannell. (1976) *The tourist: A new theory of the leisure class*: Berkeley: University of California Press. "Tourism and Pilgrimage tourism have been assumed to be closely associated, But the relationship among tourists and the religion and the religious contexts they visit has been overlooked" Collins-Kreiner et al. (2010). Smith, M. D. and R.S. Krannich, (1998) in a study on "Tourism dependence and resident attitudes". The main objective of the complete study was to assess "tourism dependence" and hypotheses that the rising level of reliance on tourism in the community is concurrent with a rising negative attitude about its development.

Kiran Shindey (2012), in her paper "Policy Planning, and Management for Religious tourism in Indian Pilgrimage site", viewed the policy framework of religious tourism in India. The case study centred on Vrindavan, a renowned pilgrim site and it was found that the state is not much immersed with investment or revenue of the tourism. This methodology not only works as forfeiture of revenue to state accumulating to the tourists on this site but also grants relaxation to 'quasi-religious entrepreneurs' from civic responsibilities. A similar case study on Kumbh Mela by Meghna Verma and Punyabeet Sarangi was also done. This paper, "Modelling attributes of religious tourism: A study of Kumbh mela, India" (2019), indicated that apart from religion, other factors play a significant role in religious tourism like service quality, motivation, safety satisfaction and event loyalty. The additional study "A geospatial approach to enhance religious tourism in India-A case study of Ujjain City" has been undertaken by Kakoli Saha, Rajrani Kalra and Rachna Khare (2020). It attempted to find measures to improve the facilities and comfortability to hinder undertaking religious tourism in the city. In his paper "Motivations for Religious tourism, pilgrimage, festival and events" (2007), Ruth Blackwell reviewed theories of motivation associated with religious tourism differed the field into two. It talked over content and process theories; the first one is to detect the real factors that direct this type of tourism by an individual. The second one looks into the association among these factors that influence an individual. It also classified its incentive to ease tourism management in delivering service to this type of tourism. Additionally, he studied the extent to which it impacts.

The trait that sets off the entire choice of action to go on a trip or to visit a tourist spot is contingent solely on the choices and motivations of the tourists (Stoddard, 1996). Once food, shelter and occupation were the central travel motivators to rove around and formerly religion, education and other determinants enhanced the list. Consequently, travelling for faith, spirituality, and heavenly forces are initial travel factors (Digance, 2003; Olsen & Timothy, 2006; Blackwell, 2007). Travel for holiness and religion is repetitively amid the most widespread travel stimuli, and several famed tourist places have been established mainly concurrently with to their connotation to events, sacred places and saints (Dallen, 2006; Gallagher, 2009)

### **Objectives of the Studies**

1. To examine the existing status of Hindu religious sites for tourism in the Kashmir valley.
2. To find out the major challenges of Hindu religious sites for tourism in Kashmir.
3. To provide some suggestions that may prove valuable for tourism and future development of Hindu Religious sites in Kashmir.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on secondary data, which has been collected from numerous sources like the Directorate of Tourism and Jammu and Kashmir, Tourism Development Corporation and Ministry of Tourism Government of India, World Travel and Tourism Council, and others research papers published and official reports. And various other organizations like World Travel and Tourism Council United Nations World Tourism Organisation. In addition to this, the data has also been collected from

other reliable sources like Periodicals, journals, newspapers, articles, doctoral thesis, Magazines, Books, Blogs, Newsletters, Research articles, Internet, and published and unpublished records of the Ministry of Tourism Government of India and J&K tourism.

### **Religious Tourism status in Kashmir**

The Valley of Jammu and Kashmir has a very alluring mixture of religious affection in its population and the akin can be seen in its religious places legacy. Earlier historical records intend that the Kashmir valley dominates Hindus and Buddhists (Philip 2013). The current culture of the region is a combination of three faiths: Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. The cultural diversity of religious tourism resources is wrapping temples, shrines, mosques and churches. Flooded with devotees with all beliefs, the pilgrimage sites of Jammu and Kashmir are of marvellous creations. The union territory has numerous holy sites located amidst the magnificent surroundings of the mighty Himalayas, beautiful valleys and exquisite spots watching the rivers (Malik & Hashmi, 2020).

#### **Khrew temple**

Khrew is the well-known important temple of Kashmiri Hindus (Kashmiri Pandits) situated on the hilltop. The temple is devoted to Mata Jawala Bhagwati (the Goddess of fire); at the foot of the hillock is a spring where devotees take a dip beforehand making the ascent.

#### **Awantisvara temple**

Awantisvara is located near Jaubrar, about a few kilometres to the northwest of the Awantiswamin temple. Build-in 883 A.D. in Greek design by King Avantivarman while he was leaving Srinagar and moving to Bijbehara, it is the first ruin of Avanitpur.

#### **Avantiswami Temple**

Avantiswami Temple was a Hindu temple situated in Awantipora in Anantnag district, close to Awantisvara Temple. There were two temples, one dedicated to each for Vishnu and Shiva. King Avantivarman built this temple in the 9th century A.D. on the bank of the Jhelum river

#### **Parihaspora:**

It's a town near district Baramulla. The city was the of Kashmir in the Shankervarman rule. It was founded in the 8th century A.D. via king Lalitaditya Muktapid of Kashmir. The most peculiar feature about this place is the prehistoric archaeological monuments in Parihaspora Patten: Buddhist monastery, ancient stupa, and Chaitya. It is also known as Kane Shamar, which means Stone city.

#### **SUN temple:**

Labiality Mujtahid, the third ruler of the Carlot Dynasty, built this temple in the 8th century. It's a Kashmiri Hindu (Kashmiri pundit) temple dedicated to Lord Surya. The shrine was sustained on 84 columns placed at regular intervals, which presents an amazing view of Kashmir Valley. The temple was demolished on the command of a Muslim ruler in the 15th century. The Kashmiri architecture fabricated in the temple was exceptionally appreciated.

#### **Amarnath Cave:**

Yatra to the holy cave of the Amarnath commences from Pahalgam, from where Amarnath is 45 km. It's an annual pilgrimage for Hindu devotees, and in large numbers, they take this journey to Amarnath cave. The Shrine, which is snow- a clade cave, is believed to be the holiest one in Hindu Religion and is dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is a stalagmite developed out of the freezing drops of water that drop from the cave's roof and raise vertically. The religious state that lingam increases and shrinks with the moon's phases, attaining its maximum apex during the summer festival, although there is no scientific evidence for this belief. On the way to the holy cave at about 16 km away from the Pahalgam, there comes Chandanwadi; it is believed that Lord Shiva

left its crescent moon at this place while end-route to Amarnath. At around 30 MMS from Pahalgam, the Sushant is blessed with the magnificence and beauty of nature and a mountain with seven peaks and an attractive lake are the key attractions here.

### **Shank Acharya Temple:**

Shankaracharya temple is situated on the topmost of Takht-i-Sulaiman hill adjacent to Dal Lake. It is devoted to Lord Shiva, also known as Jyeshtheshwara Temple. The temple dates back to 200 BC as a Buddhist construction, though the present Hindu structure possibly dates to the 9th century A.D. Adi -Shankara visited the temple and since then been associated with Shankracharya; that's how the temple got its name Shankaracharya.

### **Kheer Bhawani:**

It's the most important temple for the Kashmiri pandits in Kashmir. All around, the temple complex is covered with beautiful and smooth stones. It is believed that when any calamity has to occur on Kashmir and its people, the *nag* that is the spring at the Kheer Bhawani temple transforms its colour from sky blue to black.

### **Hari Parbat Fort:**

It is situated in the North-East of the city Srinagar on Sharika Mountain that is sacred to Hindus. The Fort was constructed by Atta Mohammad Khan, an Afgan administrator and Emperor Akbar erected the boundary walls of this Fort in 1592-98. Sharika Devi Temple is situated in Hari Parbat fort and is dedicated to Sharika Bhagwati the Goddess Jagadamba. The holy idol of the Goddess is having 18 arms and is sitting on Shri Chakra. The temple is one of the sacred sites for Kashmiri Pandits.

### **Kausar Nag**

**Kausar nag** or Konsar Nag Lake is a high-altitude oligotrophic lake situated at 13,000ft (3,962.4 meters) above the sea level. The lake is located in Pir Panjal Range in kulgam district of Kashmir. It's about 3km long lake and is scared to Hindus.

### **Mammal Temple**

Mammal or **Mamaleshwar Temple** is a Hindu temple located in Pahalgam town of district Anantnag in Kashmir Valley. It's located on the bank of river Lidder at a height of 2,200 metres (7,200 ft).

And it was this is the place where Lord Shiva beheaded Ganesha and then gave him an elephant head. Mam Mal word means *don't go*, and thus after this legend it was also known as Mammal temple. The temple was constructed around 400 AD (1,600 years ago) and it was reconstructed and opened for worship during the medieval period.

### **Jwala Ji Temple**

The temple is dedicated to goddess Jwala Ji, Kul Devi of many Hindu Kashmiri pandits. It is located in Krew in district Pulwama. Every year on Ashadha month, the Jwalamukhi Fair is held, typifying communal harmony or Kashmiriyat as both Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims celebrate this festival. Kalhana, the famous historian, refers to this village in his book Rajatarangini as Khaduvi and mentions that three hundred and sixty freshwater springs exist there. At the pedestal of this hill, the shrine has a holy spring locally known as Bod Nag, Anu Nag or Nagabal, Aneek Nag. It is mandatory for devotees to take ablutions in the holy spring water before entering the temple complex.

### **Pandrethan temple**

Pandrethan temple also called 'Paani Mandir' locally, is located near Srinagar. This temple was assumed to be built around 921 A.D. and is an eminent example of Kashmiri temple architecture.

This temple was constructed by Meru Vardhana, the minister to King Partha and is devoted to Lord Vishnu.



**Sankara Guruvaram temple**

Sankara Guruvaram or Sugandesha temple is devoted to Lord Shiva; it is located in Patan near the Baramulla district. The temple was built by Shankaravarman of Kashmir, who administered Kashmir from 883 to 902 A.D. He was the son of Avantivarman, who established the Utpala dynasty, and after his death he thrived the crown. His father, Avantivarman, had established the Utpala dynasty and after his death in 883 A.D., his son thrived his crown. He constructed the temple in his capital city, known as Shankarapattana, and presently known as Patan. The temple is in a dilapidated condition and worship is no longer conducted here. Its architecture is similar to that of Shankaracharya Temple.

**Naranag Temple**

It is located in the lap of Harmukh Mountain at about 50 kilometers (31 mi) from the city of Srinagar. This site consists of a group of temples that are fronting each other at a distance of about 100 meters. Historians believe that the temple was dedicated to Lord Shiva by the then ruler Lalithdatiya Muktadiya of Kayastha Naga Karkota dynasty in the 8th century.

It is also said that King Avantivarman paid a visit to this temple and bestowed a pedestal for bathing ghat at Butcher. The art and skill of the temple today still surprise the visitors. The extraordinary architecture of the temple reveals the magnificent past and the glorious art and architecture of the 8th century. This temple is also said to be devoted to ancient Nagas. Hence, its name "Naranag" comes from it.

**Sharda Temple**

It is situated in Neelam, or Kishanganga valley close to LOC in Pakistan occupied Kashmir. This temple is located in a small village Shirdi adjacent to the confluence of the Kishanganga River and the Madhumati River. It is also a Shakti Peeth shrine built where the body parts of Devi Sati, the goddess had fallen while she was being carried by her husband, Lord Shiva. Hence, it is one of the 18 Maha Shakti Peethas, a highly-respected temple of South Asia. It is believed to be one of the three eminent sacred sites of Kashmiri Pandits, the other two being the Martand Sun Temple and the Amarnath Temple of Anantnag district.

**Impact of Pilgrimage Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir:**

Tourism is the best source of revenue for any economy by both public and the private sector. The tourism segment offers an instrumental approach for producing income for the government in any country. The tourism industry encourages sharing the heritage, religion, culture, religion, enhancing the knowledge about the traditional values of the place. Resulting, in tourism sector many subordinate sectors has been lately advanced such as travel agents, hotels transportation, tourist guides etc., which results in creating more employment opportunists to the locals and improve their living stander. Despite these promotions, enhancements and campaigns, religious tourism does make any influence. It does not add value to the economy of Jammu and Kashmir, which could be interpreted as the lately released report by the government. Though the number of pilgrim tourists to this state reached above 8 million in 2014-15, there is still no significant economic benefits from this sector of tourism as per the Economic Survey report of 2016.

Given the above statistic, the upsurge in the number of pilgrim tourists to the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir hasn't made any significant impression on the region's economy, excluding that it has risen some economic events in that of the local environment of pilgrimage places. It has been revealed that pilgrim tourists don't take any luxury tours. Consequently, they expend less and results a little impact on that region's economy. Pilgrim tours are of very brief length, which could last for about 2 to 4 days on the contrary, luxury travellers may stay for seven or more days. Thus, it's the luxury tourist who adds value to the region's economy, as the luxury tourists stay in hotels rating from one star to five star, enjoy eating in hotels and restaurants, and use houseboats and shikaras taxies, Ponies etc. Besides this, luxury tourists buy gifts and souvenirs for themselves, friends, and relatives. Thus, the luxury tourist adds more worth to the economy of the region than religious travellers.

## Challenges of Pilgrimage Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir

Development of tourism in Jammu and Kashmir proves that the industry has noted considerable all-inclusive growth in the region during the past 2-3 decades, most of the attempts, for its development has not yet been achieved so much more is left to be covered. The partial and rather unsatisfactory growth of this sector in the area has been due to many reasons it is tormented with and several dilemmas it has been facing. The vital factors, which have fractional the progress of tourism in Jammu & Kashmir, are cited below:

### Lack of religious cluster

Anantnag is the transit point for the eminent Amarnath Shrine, but due to the absence of any fascinating tourist circuit or activities within Kashmir, the travellers are not able to create substantial business for the tourism sector there. A number of economical tourists don't even use the hotels, lodges or restaurants and prefer to make their own food and travel by a rented bus or taxi.

### Lack of proper infrastructure:

Some usual issues related to stasis tourism infrastructure services like food, transportation, telecommunication, accommodation, drinking water, parking lots, sanitation, shopping, shelter have been faced in the absence of scarcity in the region. The sectors connected to the travel and tourism industry covers road transport, airlines, accommodation (hotels), and substructure facilitation systems, among others, are also lacking.

### Dispute in Kashmir

There are many challenges in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Foremost difficult is violence and turmoil in the Kashmir region. Due to conflict, disputes, clashes over the Kashmir region, the outsider people find it risky to come inside the State.

Kashmir division is locked due to aggression between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir region. Terrorism Violence and turmoil have severely affected the industry and tourism are one of the leading industries in the Kashmir Valley that has extremely suffered due to violent activities.

1. Absence of good promotion and marketing strategies.
2. Poor maintenance of religious and heritage sites.
3. Lack of passionate and trained professionals
4. Unequal and slow development of village tourism, lack of information about tourist profile etc.

## Suggestions and Recommendations

The tourism sector is a people rich service sector; its products and services are ratified through word of mouth, travel markets, advertising etc., to magnetize religious tourists from all across the world in huge numbers. To develop Jammu and Kashmir as the top tourist destination in the world, the Government and the administration of the UT of J&K, along with the other agencies associated with tourism, should take out several measures such as:

- To inspire the pilgrim's tourist to stay for longer, Jammu and Kashmir must foster potential alternative religious circuits like Kheer Bhawani mela, Shiv Khori- Machail, Ambran, to name a few. Ripening the condition of the highways, roadways, airways, local state transport, helicopter services and economical hotels would be beneficial intrusions.
- Creating Human Resource Development Institute for preparing and training the people involved with the religious tourism industry to adapt to the altering needs of the tourism sector.
- The government and other tourism-related organisations should take greater care of rising infrastructure amenities and for the extension of infrastructure, private sector participation should also be encouraged.
- Department of Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir should promote studies and investigations to obtain valuable inputs for preparing and designing policies and programs to enlarge tourism in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Organisations of specific fairs, meals, religious festivals, effective advertising events, etc., should be organised to

promote UT's religious tourism. National media should play a positive role by motivating and encouraging the tourists to visit Jammu and Kashmir and eliminate terror from their minds, which prevents them from visiting the beautiful religious places and other fascinating places of Kashmir.

Subsequently, it has become more crucial that the government in partnership with the concerned department in tourism and with NGO's should take up certain curative measures for the development of its human resource and other assets to pep the religious tourism industry, which else is anxious with more feasible and act as actual asset to the economy of the region, particularly in the production of gigantic occupation opportunities to unemployed youth of Jammu and Kashmir.

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