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## Impact of Media Inaccessibility on the Growth of the Tourism Industry in Kashmir

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### Abstract

The state of Jammu and Kashmir, known for its beautiful landscapes, soothing winds and pleasant temperatures, is one of famous tourist attraction of the world. A sizeable population from the Valley is associated with the industries who earn their bread and butter from the tourism sector. The immense potential of the tourism industry of the state contributes handsomely in the economic growth and overall development of the state. However, the growth of this industry has a direct bearing upon every single statement presented by media in print or electronics. People schedule, reschedule and cancel their trips and vacations to Kashmir based on the media reports, the authenticity of which, at times, is questionable. The major dealings with the tourists are through the people from the lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Thus, the media comments either don't strike their ears or they are unable to respond any kind of queries and allegation against the tourism industry. Considering the importance of media in the tourism industry, the paper analyses the accessibility of media in 24 villages of district Anantnag of the state, which ports many important tourist attractions like Pahalgam, Verinag, Achabal, Kokernag, Daksum etc. This primary data based study is catalyzed by the secondary sources wherever necessary. The paper finds out that lack of accessibility to media has become a greater obstruction to the people of Kashmir in explaining the ground realities of Kashmir, which if left unattended will sink the tourism and its related fields even deeper towards bankruptcy.

**Keywords:** Kashmir, tourism industry, media reports, Anantnag

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### Introduction

The tourism industry has been one prime area that boosts the economy of a locale. And when the locale is the place like Kashmir, then it has even greater impacts. It involves many socio-economic parameters as the livelihood of a sizeable portion of the people living in the vicinity of these tourist places is solely dependent on it. Their relations with the tourists have also been very cordial which acted as a latent force of tourist attraction apart from the picturesque Kashmir.

However, with the advent of media and new paradigms of communication these days, it has influenced the growth of tourism both ways. It acts as a silent force which has a huge impact on the aspiring tourists and pilgrims to the state. The paper will explore the relationship between media accessibility and the growth of the tourism industry of Kashmir while studying the phenomenon in 24 villages of district Anantnag.

### Objectives of the study

The study has centered its focus on the following objectives:

1. To understand the trends of tourists (national and international) to the valley of Kashmir.
2. To study the impact of media on the growth of tourism industry in Kashmir.
3. To analyse how media accessibility patterns can make and break the pace of Kashmir tourism.

### Methodology

The explorative study has employed interview schedule as a research tool in a sample of 240 households selected purposively from all the twelve tehsils of district Anantnag of the state.

### Jammu and Kashmir: A Paradise on Earth

Jammu and Kashmir, It is the northernmost state of India, lying between 32° 15' and 37° 05' N and 72° 35' and 80° 20' E at the apex of Indian sub-continent. Among the neighboring countries, the state has China to its north and east, Afghanistan to its north-west, Pakistan to its west; whereas to its south the states like Himachal Pradesh and Punjab also share their borders with Jammu and Kashmir. 'Kashmir the name that flashes so many thoughts in mind and one of primary thought is the scenic beauty of Kashmir, the topography of the place and its attraction has been admired all over the globe and for which it's called paradise on earth, the place is well known for its range of towering mountains, rivers, meadows, large glaciers, cuisine, culture and heritage etc' (Sumaira & Luban, 2018) <sup>[11]</sup>.

The state is called as the paradise of earth. Amir Khusro the famous poet once said that,

*“Gar firdous bar royee zameen ast  
Hamee-ast-o-hamee-ast-ohamee-ast”<sup>[1]</sup>*

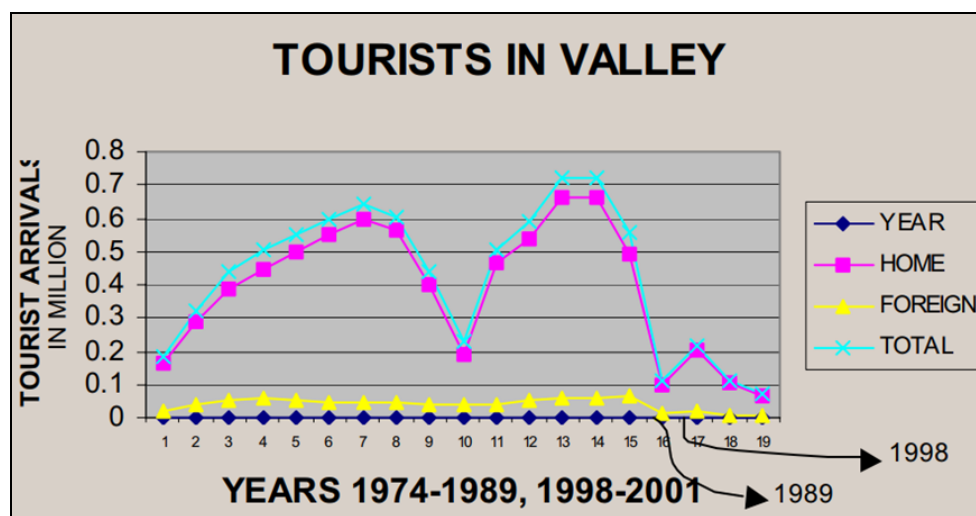
(If there is a paradise on earth, It is this, it is this, it is this)

Kashmir is also known as "Switzerland of East". The extravagant beauty of the famous tourist attraction, Kashmir, is furthered by its location between the Great Himalayan range to the north and the Pir Panjal range of mountains to the south. These mountains are the sources of rivers like Jhelum, Chenab, Lidder, besides many streams and springs that add to the mesmerizing beauty of the state. It has moderate temperatures which makes it one of the preferred vacation destinations especially for the tourists of the country.

Jammu and Kashmir is primarily an agrarian economy. However it has some considerable support from sectors like tourism, manufacturing, construction, etc. However, ‘the violence has directly affected the economy of the state including important sphere of livelihood like horticulture and handicrafts’ (Raghvan, 2012). Nonetheless, the revival of the tourism has enabled the state economy to progress significantly amidst other growing sectors like handicrafts, fisheries, etc. The tourism these days is an important economic sector in the picturesque state of India as the state is a global tourist destination which has made the state economy to progress leaps and bounds. ‘Tourism sector contributes about 6.98% to the state gross domestic product’. The ‘sector is the most popular source of income and employment generation for the J&K state economy’. ‘The industry has given jobs to a very large number of people, particularly of the younger generation and generated economic activities in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the State, which owes dependence to a large extent to this industry’.

### Tourist Trends in Kashmir

It is a hard fact that till late 1980s the State of Jammu and Kashmir, used to attract large numbers of tourists both from national and international arenas of the world, but the growth received a serious blow with the outbreak of militancy in the year 1989. It went on till 2002 when the state was heavily influenced by the insurgency incidents.



Source: 20 Year Perspective of Tourism Ministry of Tourism, Government of J & K <sup>[2]</sup>

Fig 1

Table 1: Tourists coming to Kashmir Valley since 1969.

Year	Numbers of Tourists (000 Nos.)		
	Indian	Non-Indian	Total
1969	129.75	19.95	149.70
1974	148.32	19.30	167.62
1978	443.34	59.32	502.66
1980	548.49	46.03	594.52
1985	465.60	38.02	503.62
1995	0.32	8.20	8.52
1996	0.37	9.59	9.96
1997	7.02	9.11	16.13
1998	99.64	10.25	109.89
1999	199.90	15.99	215.89
2000	104.34	7.58	111.92

2001	66.73	5.86	72.59
2002	24.67	2.69	27.36
2003	182.21	8.96	191.17
2004	358.10	18.63	376.73
2005	585.70	19.68	605.38
2006	412.88	20.01	432.89
2007	417.26	24.58	441.84
2008	551.04	21.59	572.63
2009	577.34	23.91	601.25
2010	710.50	25.98	736.48
2011	1282.36	32.12	1314.47
2012	1274.67	37.17	1311.84

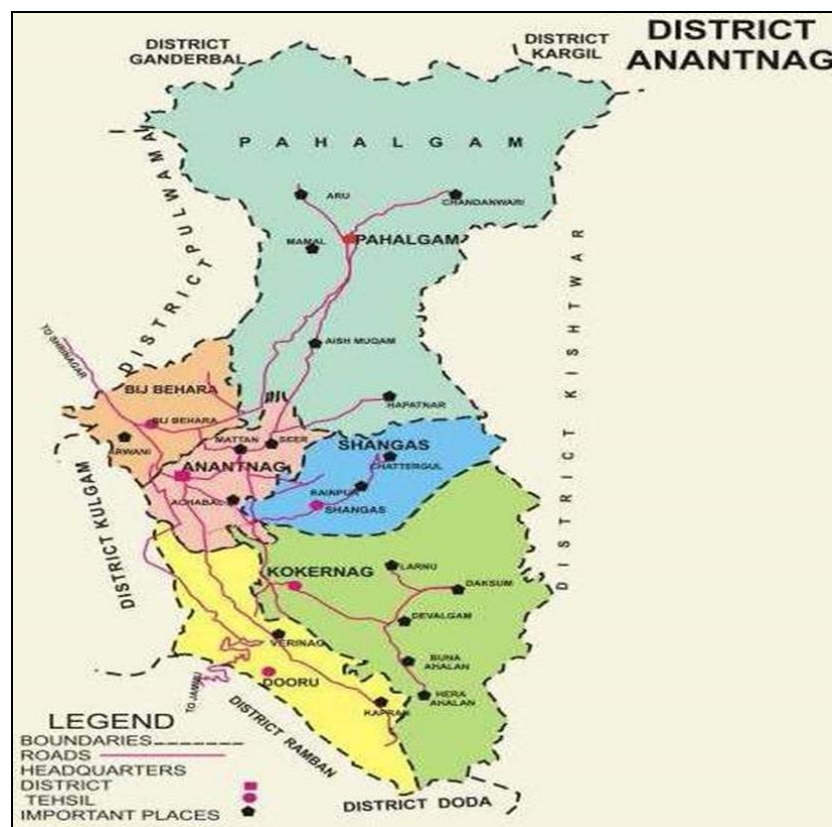
**Source:** Department of Ecology, Environment and Remote Sensing, J & K <sup>[3]</sup>

It is evident from the above numbers that the greater political instability in Kashmir, particularly the 1990s witnessed a drastic decline in the numbers of tourists to Kashmir. The 2004-05 Annual Report of Ministry of Home Affairs states that, “tourism had become one of the worst hit sectors during the turmoil in Jammu & Kashmir in early 1990s and a large part of tourism related infrastructure got damaged. The number of tourists had touched an all time low in 1995. With the installation of popular Government in the State in October 1996 and, again, after the election in September and October 2002, decline in terrorism related violence in 2003 and 2004 and the overwhelming desire for peace demonstrated by people of J&K, the State has witnessed a jump in the number of tourists visiting J&K”(Ministry of Home Affairs, 2005).

Thereafter, typically from the year 2002 the trend was increasing with every successive year. ‘The Department of Tourism, J & K, has Tourist Offices in all the tourist resorts of the State. In addition, there are 6 promotional offices outside the State, one each at New Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Chennai and Kolkata’ <sup>[4]</sup>. The efforts of government in reviving the tourism industry have also started to surface in the valley. The progression trends also show progressive increase in the numbers of tourist till 2020.

### Anantnag District Profile

Fifty-three kilometers towards the south of Srinagar (the summer capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir) is located, a beautiful place called Anantnag. Anantnag “the land of countless springs” (District Profile) [5] (Lawrence, 1895). However, the district is also being called by the name ‘Islamabad’ which was suggested to the town by Islam Khan, the Governor of Kashmir in 1663.



**Source:** www.anantnag.gov.in

**Fig 2:** Anantnag and its neighboring districts

It is the only district among all the 22 districts of the state that shares its boundaries with as many as 8 districts. It has Ganderbal to its north, Doda to its south, Kishtawar to its east whereas Kulgam lies to the west of the district. Furthermore, it also has Kargil to its north-east and Ramban to its south-west, while Srinagar and Pulwama lie in its north-eastern region. The details are portrayed in the map given in Figure 2.

### **Anantnag Tourism**

Anantnag District is in southern sector of Jhelum Valley. It is because of its rejuvenating climate, the inspiring majesty, its lofty mountains, the melodious flow of sweet waters of its springs and streams, fertile soil, fragrant flowers and delicious fruits that the district has come to be synonymous with greatness. Of all the districts of the state, largest number of streams (Nallas) flow through the district like *Sandran*, *Brengi*, *Arpath* and the most important *Lidder* which takes off from Sheshnag Lake and irrigates maximum area of the district. The topography of the district shows that the district is surrounded by the snow clad mountains from north-eastern regions to the southern parts of the district. This uniqueness along with the presence of many canals and rivulets decides its distinctive climates from the other areas of the Kashmir valley.

Anantnag is one of the oldest districts among the 22 districts of J & K. Being one of the most tourism spots, the land harbours many of the major tourist attractions like Pahalgam, Verinag, Kokernag, Achabal and Daksum.

### **Tourism Contribution**

Tourism in J&K is one of the most important sectors of economy. Being the largest service industry, tourism is a significant contributor to the state GDP, foreign exchange for the country, provides wide spread employment, yields tax revenue etc. Jammu and Kashmir has immense potential for Pilgrimage tourism also. Therefore, it attracts large number of pilgrims from various parts of India. It involves the natives of the state as to work in hotel industry, restaurants, *shikarawalas*, houseboat owners, handicrafts, *pony-walas*, transport, guides, etc. Thus, tourism contributes handsomely to economy of state besides acting an important source of livelihood to a sizeable number of people. The tourism pilgrimage in the state, particularly the Amarnath Shrine Yatra in Anantnag district is also a handsome source of income to a large number of people in the district. Though, it faced many challenges as well wherein it has on most of the occasions to do of its own, as Hameed puts it, 'tourism failed during 1990's, after Kargil war, due to uprisings in 2008 & 2010, after devastating floods of 2014 & now due to mass killings in 2016. The private sector revived it earlier'.

### **Media and its Impact**

Tourism has direct bearing upon the Media comments especially of the insurgency hit state. The conduct of the native people with the tourists does never matter inside the state, when media projects a specific outlook of the state. People these days are glued to media and the conversations there of. Thus they plan and re-plan their visits to the state according to the current situations of the state. Many a times there are cancellations even on the small incidents. This has a huge bearing on everyone associated with the industry. Sensing the importance of the tourism sector in the economy of the state, the government which acts its sole promoter for all outside the state and national borders has time and again appealing the national and international fraternity to persuade the visitors to Kashmir.

'Media reports about Kashmir have added to negative marketing of the region which has become a big challenge for tourism industry to overcome'. Hameed supports the claim with an addition to it that, 'the media, particularly electronic, media has maligned Kashmiri's overall image by projecting Kashmiri populace as a violent society. Many agencies in India ignore Kashmir valley from highlights on tourism. Situations are created periodically to destroy peaceful atmosphere here, the game plan being to discourage travelers to visit Kashmir. As and when tourism gets revived some agencies work hard to reverse it'. Nonetheless, any under reporting or over reporting of the state will heavily dent the tourism industry of the state. The media reports must be authentic lest it will incur losses to the tourism sector of Kashmir and the people associated with it. 'Unfortunately media is showing negative image of Kashmir across global which has direct impact on tourism can be devastating.' (Mir & Ahmad, 2018).'

The major dealing with tourists of the state is by the people belonging to the lower socio-economic groups. Thus, their behavior is all that matters while constructing an outlook of the people of the state to the tourists. It finally becomes a recurrent chain of attracting the other tourists to the state.

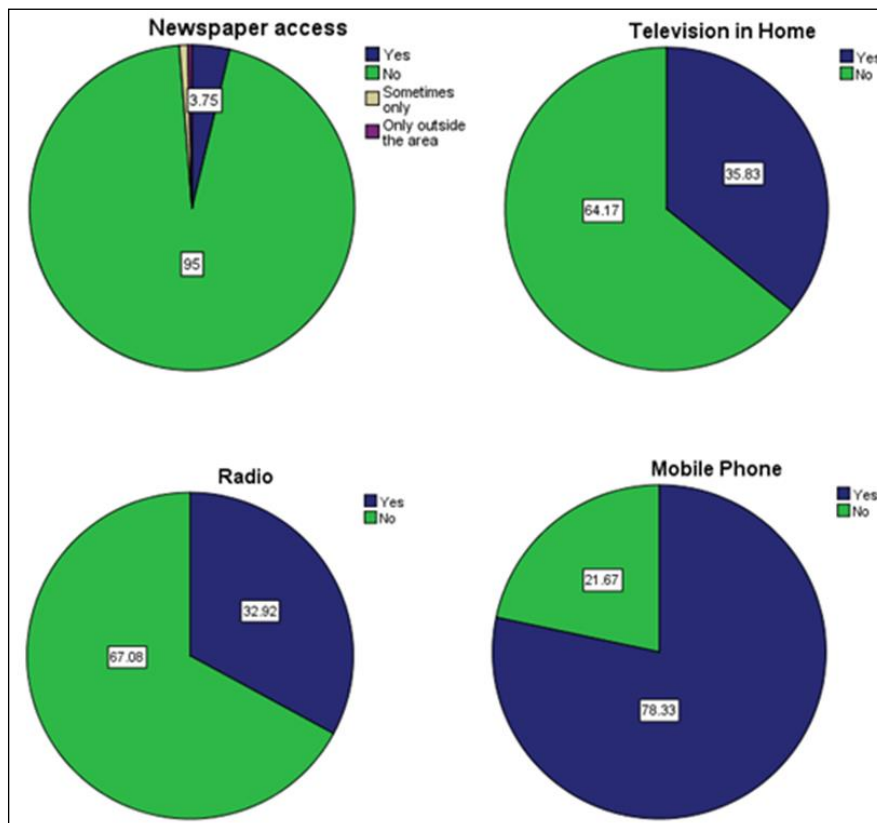
### **Access to Media and Communication**

People these days have moved ahead from telegraph, postal letters and money orders etc to radios, televisions and now to internet, laptops and cellphones. In the modern age of information and technological advancements, awareness of every happening around the globe is so important that it directly or indirectly affects your social setup. The mass media and communication besides providing the information, it educates an individual and is also considered fair alternative for entertainment. Today, it acts as one of the powerful agents of socialization having profound impact on both adults and children. With the flow of people across the borders, the ideas are transmitted and thus it becomes challenging to restrict the dilutions observed in the society.

From the sample of the households in the district, it was found that even in this era, the people are having least access to the modern means of media and communication. Figure 4 shows the awareness of the people from these areas with respect to most common gadgets utilized in accessing media and communication. The pie-chart

shows the percentage of the people who have access to these gadgets. For newspapers, one of the important means of information, 95 percent people outrightly rejected that they can avail the early morning newspaper. Among the 5 percent, many of them have access to the newspapers when they are outside their home zones for jobs or other purpose. Newspaper serving as an important means for the local job advertisements and admissions for education, has least takers in these areas. A whopping 95 percent people from these areas still don't have the daily newspapers at their doorsteps, they have to arrange for one if at all something needful like any job advertisement is published. Thus, the unawareness sometimes makes them even to miss many opportunities which could have changed their fortunes.

The story of the electronic media is no different from the print media in these areas. 65% people have no television sets in their homes where as the 67% people haven't even kept radio sets (affordable and cheap) in their homes. This evidence is enough to declare that about two third people from these areas are far away from the modern means of accessing the mass media. This eventually will keep them aloof and unaware about their surroundings.



Source: Computed from the primary data

Fig 3: Print and Electronic Media Accessibility

Most of the 78 percent people using mobile phones were having the java or Symbian phone. There were only few android phones that could have helped them to keep tract of the day to day happenings of the world. But this way they are also handicapped, thus reiterating the problem.

They will thus have no know how about what is being said about their behavior and how their hospitality is being talked about in media. They could have retaliated or corrected any over reporting or under reporting of the media, if they had the smooth access to the media and communications at their native places. At times there is no one to react any wrong message projected in the media readings which cools down the velour and enthusiasm of all those who visited and even those who aspire to visit the state. Moreover, the lower literacy figures of the district are also a cause that impedes the growth (see table below). This way the professionalism in the tourism industry is missing that could have attracted more and more people to visit the state.

Table 2: Literacy rate of Anantnag and J & K State

S.No.	Sector	Literacy Rate					
		Anantnag			J & K State		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	Rural	69.59	48.49	59.24	73.76	57.64	63.18
	Urban	80.71	62.41	71.97	83.92	69.00	77.12
	Combined	74.13	54.15	64.32	76.75	56.43	67.16

Source: Census 2011

The table shows that the rural areas are lagging very far in the literacy figures. Males are about 13 percentile points behind the urban counterparts whereas women lag by about 14 percentile points. These lower literacy rates become a reason for them being away from newspapers, media reports and other topics of discussion affecting their bread and butter. Even if some amongst the literates in Anantnag, primarily associated with the first hand dealings with the tourists find little time to go through the media reports owing to the nature of their work. This silently deflates the expected swelled numbers to tourists to Kashmir.

### Records Vs Media Reports

National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, in its 2020 report states that there is almost zero percent crime against the tourists in Jammu and Kashmir (*Crime in India 2020, 2020*). Comparing the records from 2018 to 2020, it hasn't come up with any significant and worrisome information/announcement which threatens the life and belongings of the tourists aspiring to tour Kashmir. "*Kashmir safest place for tourists: Of 1418 crimes against foreigners in India, JK reports*" reads an October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 headline of Universal New Timeline <sup>[6]</sup>. It goes on to state that 'despite political disturbances, Jammu & Kashmir is among few places having a clean record against tourists'. *Outlook* <sup>[7]</sup>, *Indian Express* <sup>[8]</sup>, *Deccan Herald* <sup>[10]</sup>, has endorsed the facts that the (erstwhile) state of Jammu and Kashmir has zero crime record against <sup>[9]</sup> tourists and it remains the safest destination for the tourists intending to plan their trips/camps, vacations or holidays in any season of Kashmir. These media cuttings shall be juxtaposed with the ones spreading rumors and fake propaganda against the security, safety and peaceful environment of Kashmir. This risks the families of thousands of people who have tourism their bread and butter.

Thus, the media personal also must focus on the ground realities, after refraining from under/over reporting of any incident. As no tourist has reported otherwise about Kashmir instead they 'go back pretty satisfied and contented. They express dismay & shock over media propaganda outside Kashmir. Foreigners who come here feel that the world has been grossly misguided about the wonderful land of Kashmir'.

### Suggestions

The study has the following suggestion for the development of tourism in the state as a whole.

- The education of the rural areas should be prioritized so that the tourism sector can be professional at every encounter with the tourists.
- The media must be made accessible in the rural areas by making the educational institutions mandatory to let the students be aware about the day to day happenings of the world.
- The state tourism development wing has to tirelessly take necessary steps to shoot up the connections of these rural masses with education and media, so as to project the reality and retaliate the unauthentic media reports strongly so as to present the actual and real picture of the picturesque landscape.

### Conclusion

Of course, the best of any information can be with the one who has mastery in it. However, we at times pay heed to many reports which are highly doubtful and create a phony and bogus mindset. Although, as far as media is concerned one rarely doubts on its authenticity but as they say greed makes you change even the universal truth. Kashmir tourism is also facing the brunt of similar allegations leveled against it, thus harming its very roots and simultaneously denying bread and butter to the families relying on tourism. In lieu of this, the study concludes that in picturesque Kashmir, lack of media accessibility to some areas is greater source of obstruction for the people in getting the know-how of what good or bad is being said about them and their motherland and simultaneously reacting to any such things.

Mehmood Ahmad Shah, Director of J&K Tourism says that 'the department is using social media platforms to counter negative perception in the media about the state and provide a "correct picture". "To do that we have started our own social media handles on Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, where we are showing success stories of our tourism business."We are recording interviews of VVIPs and celebrities who visit the Valley and putting out their experiences through social media. This will help present a correct and positive image of the Valley"'. (Firstpost, 2017)"

The state has to take necessary steps in countering this latent process of slowing down the growth of the tourism sector in the state. It unattended it will be biggest obstruction for the tourism to bloom in the valley especially when the state has returned to normalcy and more importantly in the wake of globalization.

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