

KASHMIR'S THREATENED HERITAGE: STUDY OF BIJBHARA TOWN

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Abstract

Kashmir in general and district Anantnag in particular espies a sui-generic pulpit in whole India. Because of the axiomatic truth the region (Anantnag) has been a source of attraction for expeditionists, writers, bards, saints and scholars. Valley of Kashmir instead of its natural treasure is vastly embedded with the scintillated and sheering aforementioned heritage monumental sites that succor to cater the tourists from all nooks and corners of the globe. Heritage destinations are espying master attention to one of the growing niche market segments in the travel industry today. Over the years the popularity of heritage tourism has grown with travelers and with those developing new tourism attractions. Consequently, the present research paper has been devoted to highlight the quintessence and uniqueness of monumental heritage of the study area – Bijbehara (Anantnag). This research paper is mainly based on the secondary data to draw attention towards this potential tourist area. The heritage presentation must acquire a major thematic emphasis in the present position and future prospects of tourism in Bijbehara-(Anantnag) as well as whole state of Jammu and Kashmir. Henceforth, the suggestions provided are programme and strategic oriented with special reference to the study area Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: Heritage, Monumental, Potential, Recommendations, Threatened.



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INTRODUCTION

The rich natural, religious, festive and creative heritage is sporadically pervaded in every nook of country- from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. In most of the states of South Asia, heritage tourism has been flourishing rapidly. The government of these states has been exploiting their varied cultural properties to boost up their respective tourism industries. Heritage tourism encompasses elements of living culture, history and natural history of places that communicates value and steward for the future. Kashmir is perhaps the only unfortunate state where despite of its rich cultural heritage not a single heritage site was opened for the business of tourism. On the other surface the destination (Anantnag) refurbished with gargantuan potentialities of heritage sites vizely Vijeshwara temple (Bijbehara), Shrine of Lal

Ded and Baba Naseeb Din Gazi (Bijbehara), Aishmuqam cave and mosque, Quimoh cave, Bumzuv cave temple, Amarnath cave, Kanelwan Prachin cave (Chota Amarnath), Martand temple (Sun temples), Monumental ruins at Dara Shikhov garden (Bijbehara), Nagadandi (Achabal), Moghal Hamam (Achabal), Moghal Sarai (Omaoh) etc. are of prominent reference in state tourism. Though at large some studies have far been under taken on growth and development of tourism in state because of identifying the potential of especially heritage tourism, and as a result is presently doing a reasonably a good job towards vogue and vertex of the industry. Among of a few below mentioned studies directly or indirectly dealing with the concerned perspective are by Iqbal Bhat (2007), K.L Kalia, Ram Chander Kak, C.L Kaul (2009), Iqbal Ahmad (2005), etc. further the help can be derived from the work of current research scholars, concerned organizations, government departments, tourist service chambers which are considerably noteworthy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. The study would systematically enlist and map the potential heritage tourism resource of Bijbehara of Anantnag district in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To acknowledge the opportunities, scope, constraints and gray areas with regard to the growth and development of heritage tourism in the study area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

During the process of this research paper a valued help has been espied from the very secondary sources that prompted to furnish the hidden knowledge about few of the monumental sites which was perhaps unacquainted to the scholar. The other elements of the study problem not available from second hand sources committed a manifold field effort in the collection of primary data though come to know the genuine problem.

MONUMENTAL HERITAGE IN BIJBEHARA (DISTRICT ANANTNAG- J&K)

Bijbehara latitude $33^{\circ} 38'$ and longitude $75^{\circ} 9'$, a historic town is situated at a distance of 48 km in the south of Srinagar in district Anantnag. It has comparatively long and interesting historical background; the archeological explorations carried here for time to time has always yielded better results. 'Baron Hugel' states that Bijbehara one of the ancient capitals of Kashmir. He further suggested that the sobriquet of the town as 'Bijbehara' actually emerged from Vijaypra (the city of Victory). Another tradition goes that 'Bijbehara' has derived its name from Vijay Bijrii, a king believed to have gained it in its neighborhood about 67 B.C.

MONUMENTAL HERITAGE

i) Dara Shikoh Monument: - The architectural monuments of Bijbehara include the magnificent Mughal garden on the banks of river Jhelum. The garden known as Badshahi Bagh was laid here by Dara Shukhov (1632-1658 A.D.). A stone inscription in Persian was recovered here that related with a foundation of a building, the inscription reads; By the grace of God, Dara Shikoh, on 22nd day of the Ramdan in the year of the Hijri 1060 (corresponding to 1656 A.D.) in the reign of Shah Jahan Badshah Gazi completed this building which was erected under the superintendence of Daroaga Mohd Zahid Abdul Hassan Samarkandi. At the present time a ruined monument is in pristine figure in Dara Shikoh garden on the embankment of river Vyeth (Jhelum). The construction as per the historical evidence is composed of Budshahi style of bricks in peri-style manner with the terracotta and lime-mortar showing a fast grip. The configuration of the Dara Shikoh monument is somewhat akin to the works of Zain-ul-Abiden that in somber inferences the distinctive architectural niche.

ii) Bued Masjid Bijbehara: - The erection of mosque (Bued Masjid) is ascribed to Sikander sobriquet as Buet Shikan. The edifice is rectangular in plan and measures 40 x 40 ft. It is a two storey mosque with bifacial tin sloped style arranged by unparalleled and quire less wooden stilts on the sky top floor. The first storey is raised of Devri-stones, coated external facade in cream lime plaster, while the second storey is constructed of wooden balks of lattice work. The space between balks is filled by well finished bricks. The roof renovated was actually earth and birch-bark leaves. The upper storey has two open air verandah (corridors) one in north and other in south side, usually supported by four columns. The corridors are enclosed with mesh screens which are formed of small pieces of wood. The upper storey has also four windows filled with trellis. The khankah is under the supervision of local Muslims and prayers are offered daily.

Tomb of lael Ded: - There is small grave in the south-eastern corner of the Bued Majid of Bijbehara. It is supposed be the tomb of Lael Ded. The tomb is covered with fire dried brick wall in a quad- rectangular form which is crowned by a minaret in pyramidal posh. The solid facade of walls was confetti with pine wooded balks configured with lattice work bi-portal widows. The pyramid roof which is expanded and terminate in an open turret crown by a high pinnacle. The tomb has been proved a pilgrimage shrine since yore and myriad scale of

pilgrims incessantly were plea the auspice homage and offers votives in insight to assume serene repose to their conscience at the hallowed abode.

iii) Vijeshwara or Vijaya Bijrii temple: - This temple is located in the centre of Bijbehara not far away from the National Highway. It is surrounded by the residential houses of the local community. Because of the height and sheer shine of its upper portion it can be espy from the outskirts of the town. The original temple of Vijeshwara was one of the majestic temples of the valley of Kashmir, that temple was constructed on a huge raised platform. It was master piece of Kashmir temple architecture. The sanctum sanctorum was of such a dimension in length and breadth that eleven storeys in pyramidal form were constructed over it, housing the statues of Hindu pantheon. It is said that structure was so high that at the time of sunrise its shadows fell on Koil plateau in Pulwama district and at time of sunset fell on the Martand plateau. The main temple was surrounded by a number of smaller shrines and residential rooms for the pilgrims which also served as a wall for the defence of the temple. During civil wars the people and the rulers took shelter in the salubrious ambiance of the temple. According to various historical axiomatic sources the ancient time suffered some damage during the consecutive civil wars in Kashmir especially the reigns of Raja Naar, Raja Anant, Raja kalash, Raja Bakshachar, Raja Har. The temple was raised to ground during the helm of Sultan Sikkander 'Baut Shikken' (an iconoclast, the idol breaker) the statues of pantheons were broken down into pieces.

During the rule of Dogra ruler Raja Pratap Singh the pandiths of Bijbehara constructed a new temple of mortar and fire dried bricks in the central hub of Bijbehara environ and named the temple monument as Vijeshwara temple in reminiscence of once the magnificent temple of Vijeshwara. This monument is now on the verge of crumbling tilt posture owing to lack of maintainance and the migration of Hindu gens from the vicinity.

iv) Harish Chander Ghat temple of Lord Shankar at Bijbehara: - An exhilarative monument temple of "Ekadush Rudra" is situated on the left bank of the Vitasta (Jhelum) on Harsh Chander Ghat. The National Highway touches the western side of temple premises. The world famous Mughal gardens of Bijbehara are situated near the temple complex. This monument temple is considered equal to the temple of Kashi Vishawanath. During the Hindu period a grand temple was constructed which was damaged in political upheaval and was ultimately demolished by Sultan Sikander. Credit goes to Maharaja Gulab Singh and

Maharaja Ranbir Singh who constructed the Harish Chander Ghat temple with the dismantled temples of Bijbehara. The new temple is a master-piece of Dogra-Kashmiri art of temple architecture. Ekadush-Rudra form of Lord Shankar stands on a splendid “pranali” in the centre of temple. The quadrangular platform on which the pyramidal temple monument is situated represents a charming look. The temple faces to the east overlooking the vistas. On the right side of the steps towards the main temple is a smaller square-shaped temple with sloped concrete roof which is decorated with an icon of Lord Lakashmi Narayan which is of exquisite beauty and finial. On the left side of the steps is a huge Shiva-Lingam. In the front of the temple is a Neandi (the sacred bull) seated on a small platform facing the temple. On one side of the Ghat on the Vitasta a Shiva-Lingam is installed surrounded by three walls which are decorated with statues of gods and goddess. Prior to 1990 the serene temple monument was one of the traditional halting stations for the Sadhus, pilgrims and the Tchar-e-Mubark (Holy Mece) on way to Sawammi Amarnath cave. The Tchar-e-Mubark could proceed further only after its stay for a night at Harish Chander Ghat Bijbehara. The monument has featured in numerous Hindi movies, serials, schematic as well as dramatic representations in the past.

v) Prachin cave of Lord Shiva at Thajjiwara Bijbehara: - The Prachin cave of Lord Shiva at Thijjiwara is located on the slope of a plateau of about 4kms in the east of Bijbehara town. Bijbehara-Pahalgam road traverses along the premises for the sacred shrine. Prachin cave of Lord Shiva at Thijjiwara (Bijbehara) is also known as “Prachin cave of Sawammi Amarnathji”. The cave has been the centre of attraction for devotees since times immemorial. As per the religious scriptures mother goddess observed staunch penance at Thijjiwara cave also called as “chotta Amarnath cave monument” to please Lord Shiva for revealing to her the Eternal truth of this “BRAHMAND” i.e. the unlimited universe. Pleased by Her Tapasya Lord Shiva granted her wish and selected extremely secluded abode in the Himalayas to reveal eternal secret of the creation of this limitless universe to Mother Goddess Parvati. The day, when Amar Katha was revealed was Shravan Purnimashi. This revelation by the Lord Shiva is called “Amarkatha” and the cave where it was revealed is known as holy cave of Amarnath. After the revelation of the eternal secret of the universe Lord Shankar came to be known as Lord Amarnath and an icicle Lingam appeared as His symbol in the holy cave. Hence, the cave of Thijjwara is an inseparable part of Amarnath pilgrimage.

Annual Yatra at the holy cave at Thijjiwara coincides with that of the last day of annual pilgrimage of the holy cave of swami Amarnath on “Srawan Purnimmashi”. It is the reason that the devotees has been paying obeisance at Thijjiwara cave monument since ancient times.

According to Thajjiwara Mahatam, one who is not in a position to pay obeisance at Amarnath cave because of physical disability or any other reason, can have Darshan of Lord Shankar at Thijjiwara cave monument. Such a devotee is bestowed with the cogitative spiritual benedictions as in the cave of Swami Amarnath.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

As we know that in-spite of natural beauty of Kashmir which is sobriquet as paradise (Jannat) tourist arrive this region for other purposes too apart from enjoy the natural products, they with over whelming caprice prefer to target monumental tourism (Diaspora tourism) in their package. This point keep in focus, our state government should economically consider upon it and special management must be applied for the preservation, protection and conservation of the monuments both at the micro and macro level. Looking at the tourist infrastructure of Bijbehara- (Anantnag) it is really regrettable because roads, transport facilities, accessibility, sanitation, on sight water supply, lighting, street illumination, signposts directions, accommodations (hotels and restaurants), communication technology, parking establishments, pedestriation, first-aid facilities etc. are found in rough and oblivious state. In whole Valley a single tourist reception centre exists merely in district Srinagar the ‘summer capital of state’ and another is in Jammu ‘winter capital of state’ which is not ease to reach for the tourists who visit Bijbehara-(Anantnag).

Merely there is presently semi-government financial body as Jammu and Kashmir Bank investing on the faience and beautification of few historic oriented parks or Bhags, some of them are as Dhara Shikhov garden and Baadshahi Bhag Bijbehara, their all payment and non-payment based services are commissioned under the policy frameworks and programmes of the institution. This scheme has proved economical not only to the bank but too to the locals. But unfortunately, we had find that there are other institutions and departments ambivalently engaged in the supervision and management of monument heritage of Anantnag e.g. archaeological research institutions, Numismatic department, Department of art, culture and language, the autonomous body of Aukaaf and shrine board, Devasthan

prabhandhak committee, Municipality and panchayat institutions etc. All of these are irrelevant regarding the provisions amended for the monumental maintenance because this sector needs a sophisticated expertise to deliver the service in extolling and sustainable way for the present generation as well as enhance the opportunities for future generation. Although, according to the research findings, no attempt has been made to preserve these sites and make local people of district Anantnag as well as the tourists acknowledged about these heritage sites.

RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS

The present state of affairs doesn't augur and bode well for the long term sustenance of this growing heritage tourism industry. Once it is degraded or diminished, it can be hardly repaired and redressed. The need of the hour is to address the issue with urgent sincerity. There could be many possible suggestions and strategic recommendations in this direction:

1. The oysters of our heritage (monuments) need proper repairing, maintenance and raise funds for their proper conservation, management and protection in order to develop tourism in the Bijbehara Town of Anantnag district in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. Archeological explorations and excavations collapsed while the process of declaration of monuments as protected once disappeared. This is the time when we are left with no alternative other than to watch the destruction of our invaluable heritage properties.
3. The parking infrastructure shall be planned formidably at every heritage spot and clanged with signposts, manipulate by proper human resource to check numerous hotchpotch near the study area.
4. Many tourist spots of the Bijbehara Town popular with tourist have pedestrianised some of their principal thoroughfares. The result can greatly enhance the atmosphere of a site and encourage visitors to come shopping.
5. The private entrepreneurship in our district Anantnag (Bijbehara) of Kashmir valley has not reached to such heights that those can be easily motivated to contribute financial and management for heritage wealth. However, few semi government financial institutions could have been involved in the process; the flashing mention may be made of J&K Bank Limited, which in its development has marched to an exceptional apex. This bank can afford easily to invest in conservation, management and documentation of our heritage wealth.

6. The tourist visit such places require to return feasible accommodation centers like pahalgam sans to stay a single night.
7. We should maintain heritage tourism development as a prime priority, improvising and maintaining the competitiveness of study area Bijbehara Town (Anantnag) as a monumental destination.
8. Positioning and marketing should be carried out to establish the present image of study area as a heritage destination in relation to its competitors.
9. We should facilitate and encourage those involved with heritage conservation and management to make the significance of that destination accessible to the host community and visitors.
10. The heritage policy should be amended in stipulated manner and bona-fide attention must be paid towards heritage buildings through allocation of budget.

Laconically, we can confer that government of state should sophisticatedly undertake the management activities on behalf of its own business arrangements because it is overt from the above summed demonstrations that overall our heritage is on the trajectory of peril due to the oblivious attitude of state government and the autonomous body should be absolved from the affairs if not dispose the job of monument management accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Hence it is concluded that the tourism industry has the strong base in the study area of Bijbehara Town (District Anantnag) especially of Diaspora tourism. Its pristine monumental structures possess the unique identity inherited from earlier leviathan character Raja's, Maharaja's, Kings, and Nawabs etc. and envisaged an aspect of aesthetic and curiosity in the modern competitive platform of market niche. The causes that have been responsible to make the industry suffer are purely political to disturb the study area vis-à-vis the state, but the verve administrative heads will change the destiny of the industry if execute in aficionado form. Therefore the investment bodies shall be recommended in order to incur financial budget towards these heritages for the preservation and upkeepment which may inculcate to the accruing of income to meet the present needs of both the visitors and the hosts without harassing the opportunities for the future generations.

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