

## **EXPLORING HERITAGE OF NEGLECTED REGION: A CASE OF RAJOURI AND POONCH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Jammu and Kashmir in India have been famous throughout the world for centuries due to its scenic beauty, clean, cold and thrilling fresh water lakes. In the year 2000, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir with the cooperation of central Government started the restoration of tourism in J&K. Thereafter, the State received a positive signal in terms of the number of incoming tourists, both foreigners and domestic. J&K is mostly famous for Leisure, Pilgrimage and Adventurous kind of travel and tourism. Besides this there are some other kinds of tourism which has still to realize its full potential, and which can be developed and Incorporated in brand Kashmir. The State has immense potential for heritage tourism throughout the length and Width of the region. Heritage sites and the culture of J&K reflect a composite character and retain the influence of Greeks, Mouyrians, Scythians, Parthians, Kushan, Huns, Turks, Mughals and Afgans. State is planning to conserve and promote its culture and heritage monument. Like other areas of the State, districts Rajouri and Poonch contain many places of historical importance and unique Gujjar and Phari cultural identity, and these can be developed, conserved and promoted for tourism related activities. Thus, the present study shall analyze various heritage monuments and historical important places of both districts and will also review the contribution of local governing bodies in this regard. Furthermore, it will also highlight the measures for conservation of heritage sites viz-a-viz development and promotion of heritage tourism in the area.*

**Keywords:** Rajouri and Poonch, Conservation, Heritage, Promotion and Development

### **INTRODUCTION**

India is a rich country in term of its Cultural and Heritage, the wealth of any nation is determined on the basis of overall economic progress which is essentially backed by Cultural heritage. India is filled with different types of Culture, Ethos, Beliefs, Customs, Tradition and Cuisine, which is combine result of influence of different civilization in past on India. India remains home of Aryans, Buddhists, Mughals and British's now they are not here rather their reflections still prevails in India society from Nagaland to Gujarat Kuch and from Kashmir to Kaniyakumari. Coming directly to northern most State of India that is J&K, this State also contributes a lot to Culture and Heritage of India. J&K has matchless historical and cultural background, this state shows typical Kashmiri Culture which reflects the

impression of Irani's, Dogra Culture shows the picture of Mangloies and Leh-Ladakh in J&K reflects the glimpses of Buddhist. Similarly Pahari and Gojari Culture in Rajouri and Poonch are somewhat different in experiencing.

Rajouri and Poonch, are the twin border district of the State Jammu and Kashmir under Jammu province, there are several places which can be developed as tourist destinations. Region is prosperous in heritage and culture, this region has monuments of ancient's time and religious places with elements of heritage but these sites could not get proper due because of ignorance of Government and also geographical disadvantage of the area. With the passage of times these monuments are losing their original beauty and identity, it is our prime responsibility to conserve these monuments and developed them in a sustainable manner which may provide a swing in tourist's activities.

This study is purposely under taken by considering Heritage Places of Rajouri and Poonch:

1. To enlist heritage sites of Rajouri and Poonch.
2. To classify various heritage tourist sites on the basis of their type.
3. To analyze tourism potential of each site.
4. To find out measure for conservation of heritage sites.
5. To highlight the government policies and role of community in conservation and development Cultural and Heritage of the areas.

## **DISCUSSION**

Rajouri popularly known as land of Kings, remained the region of great importance in ancient times; Panchal Desa was the Kingdom in Mahabharata times. The mountain range in the area of Rajouri and Poonch is known as Paschal (Panjal) on the name of Panchan Naresh whose daughter Dropadi was married to Pandvas. In 326 BC, Alexander the Great invaded in Poonch area to fight with Porus and to conquer the pricey State of Poonch, thereafter in 1020 BC, Mahmood Ghazanavi controlled the area by fighting Raja Tarlokan Chand of Poonch in this way the area remained under control of Mughals.

In 1596 AD, Mughal emperor Jahangir appointed Siraj-Ud-Din as a ruler of Poonch therefore; the area remained under the autocracy of Raja Razaq Khan, Shabaz Khan and Rustum Khan till 1720 AD. In 1891 this area was captured by Maharaja Ranjeet Singh and it remains under his occupation, under Khalsa Darbar Lahore till 1850, followed by Raja Moti Singh, Baldev Singh, etc. In war between India and Pakistan, Pakistan captured a portion of Poonch and that is still under their occupation. In the year 1965, Poonch District bifurcated into two Districts that is District Rajouri and Poonch but both the district on the basis of their similar climatic conditions and geographical location are perceived to be single entity, therefore it is often consider one region i.e. Rajouri-Poonch. As discussed this region passes through various regimes i.e. from the period of Mahabarta, Alaxender, Afgans, Mugahls and then Sikh, and so area of Rajouri and Poonch depict mixed impression of all in terms of Culture and Heritage. Starting from culture, people belonging from all ethnic groups are living in the State Jammu and Kashmir, but most of the Phari speaking people and Gujjar and Bakwarwal are living in Rajouri and Poonch. Both Gujjar and Phari being native of the same areas have their own unique and typical identity in terms of costume, music, songs, art, life style, marriages, occupation and language, which is not found in other part of the state in fact in India.

The region, Rajouri and Poonch have diverse kind of heritage wealth which could not realized in past. As these heritage sites are near to snuff out so, now these are getting attention. Similarly other public and pilgrimage heritage sites also attract the attention of all due to increase in connectivity and media coverage.

Heritage wealth of Rajouri and Poonch can be categorized into four kinds these are as follows

- A. Heritage Buildings
- B. Heritage Pilgrimage sites
- C. Heritage Places
- D. Cultural Heritage

There are total nine major heritage building, eight heritage pilgrimage sites, eleven heritage places of great importance and two types of distinctive cultural heritage.

### **A. Heritage Buildings**

**Chingus Fort:** Chingus is a Persian word which means intestine. During the journey of Mughal emperor Jahangir, his wife Noor Jahan along with their Army from Kashmir to Lahore via Rajouri, Jahangir died in the way near Rajouri. But, Noorjehan did not declare his death as it could lead to a war of succession. Hakims were called and his intestines were extracted to prevent the body from decaying before it reached Lahore. Thus, the intestines of Jahangir were buried here at a place which is so called Cringus, where a fort still exists.

**Dhandidhar Fort:** In the year 1846, Britishers sold Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh to Maharaja Ghulab Singh at that time Maharaja Ghulab Singh appointed Mian Hathu as a Governor of Rajouri by removing Raja Raheem Ullah Khan. Mian Hathu then Governor of Rajouri constructed Dhanidar Fort in the year 1855. The main intention of construction of this fort was to keep Dogra force at a safer site therefore; fort was constructed at place from where whole the valley of Rajouri could be viewed. It is just two kilometer away from Rajouri town, present panoramic and impressive view of the entire area as fort is on the top of hill.

During the time of insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, it was used by defense personal but now fort is in poor condition and a telecom company had installed a tower in it. Concerning agencies neither effort to establish an approachable road to it nor undertaken any measure to preserve this heritage building for tourism related activities. Now, it is heard that concerning department is going to start some construction work, let us see and wait for final upshot.

**Poonch Fort:** This is a very important heritage building and has immense historical importance, positioned in the heart of Poonch town. The foundation of building was laid by Raja Razak Khan and then constructed by Raja Rustam Khan in the year 1751. The beauty of this structure is that, it reflects unique architecture style of Mughals, Sikh and Europeans. During the regime of different rulers in their successive periods put their impression on the fort architecture. Like central portion reflects Sikh architecture, upper and lower most portion reflects European and Mughals architecture. Now, some Government offices are being run within this structure and rest of the portion of the fort is in very bad condition. Grass and plants occupied space in lawn and on walls. As per reports being published by various news papers a big amount of money had been utilized for the renovation of the fort but is in same

condition as it was, except with minor denting painting. However, it is claimed by concerning department in a recent reports in news paper that they are going to start 2<sup>nd</sup> phase restoration work which would be taken up at an estimated cost of Rs. 7.99 crore, again let us hope!.

**Other Monuments:** Similarly, there are few other monument which needs joint attention of Archeological Survey of India and tourism development authorities, the prominent among them are Moti Mahal and Sheesh Mahal and Gernal Singh house in Poonch and Mangla Devi Fort in Rajouri.

## **B. Heritage Pilgrimage Sites**

**Shahdara Shrief Shrine:** Shadhra a holy place in tehsil Thanaandi, Rajouri which is associated with the name of great Saint Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah; this shrine has both religious and historical importance to visitors of all sections of society. During the regime of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Hari Singh was a spy/constable in his military, once Hari Singh had visited to Baba Ghulam Shah; Baba told him that one day he would be the title-holder of this territory. After a gap of few years, when that saying of Baba comes true and he becomes the Raja of the State J&K i.e Maharaja Hari Singh, then he visited Shahdara to shows thankfulness but Baba had already left this materialistic world to Heaven. Then he constructed this shrine, since the shrine becomes more famous to people of faiths of all religion in the State as well as throughout the country. Every day shrine received thousands of pilgrimage throughout lengths and width of country who handover their donation in various form and a 24 hour free Langar (Mess) is being available for blessed meal and tea moreover a quite good infrastructure had been installed for convenience of visitors. Free as well as rented rooms in guest house are available for budget and high class tourist. Further, various parks had been developed for making a pleasant experience for incoming tourist. There is a small market in the entrance of Shrine which is famous in India for wooden items like comb, spoons, wooden toys, etc.

**Mangla Devi Shrine:** This is another important Hindu Shrine in the area of Noshera, Rajouri. Originally this shrine was in Hamirpur area now in Pakistan, but in past a Bahrmin clamid that Mata had given darshan to him in his dream and told him that she had shift her Aastan (Place) from Hamirpur to the forest of Noshera. He also claimed that Mata had also told him exact place for her Shrine, so he visited their and found some Pendies (a shape of Devi made up of stone),after that by performing Havan and other rituals he established Astan of Mangla Mata at that place. Since then this place is famous in Hindu pilgrims, people used to visit there all round the year but heavy rush remains during the time of Fair in Nawratras, in the month of April and September. Along with Mata pendies there are two snakes made up of stone, it is also believed that once these snake were alive. Further it is believed that Tiger used to visit there for darshan. It is said that previously the Mata cave were closed but later on it automatically opens for devotees. In addition to this main cave there are two other cave namely Vashno cave and Nana Mata cave. Beside this there are some other historical fact related to Mangla Mata Cave. Local Shrine management committee and tourism development authority had developed some amenities for pilgrims but that does not suffice the entire purpose. In addition to developing parkas, there is a need to develop place and sites in the vicinity like Mugal Sarai etc. As cave is in the deep forest that might serve other related tourist activities in addition to pilgrimage.

**Ram Kund:** Ram Kund is the symbol of ancient art and tradition located in Mandhir, Poonch, it is also among the holiest temple found in the area. As per Archeological Survey of India temple was constructed by Raja Lalitaditya in 724-761 AD but some other believed that originally this temple was constructed during the time of Lord Rama when he visited to Kashmir. Beside temple, in foot hill of Shalsatar mountain range near temple there are three ancient holy spring namely Ram Kund, Lachman Kund and Sita Kund. According to Raj Tarngni of Kalhana, there are plenty of evidences which prove that, Ram Kund temple was originally constructed by Bagwan Shri Ram Chandra Ji.

**Buddha Amaranth Shrine:** This Shrine belong to Lord Shiva is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most religious place after Shri Amarnath Shrine of Kashmir, for Hindu Devotees in State Jammu and Kashmir located at Rajpoura, Mandi in District Poonch. It is much older than Shrine of Shri Amarnath Ji of Kashmir. Shivling, which is found here, is made up of natural white stone. As Shrine is in the foot hill and a beautiful river called Plust flow in close proximity of shrine, it is said that river name is based upon the fact that Rawan Grandfather performed tapsya here, after that rivers knows as Plusta river as Plusta was the name of Rawan Grandfather. Every year a large number of pilgrims especially from northern India used to visit there especially at the time of Puranmashi (Rakshabandan). From last few years the inflow of devotees is increasing in each subsequent year, therefore it is expected that in near future this ancient Shrine will attracts million of devotees like Shri Mata Vashno Devi and Amarnath.

**Nangali Sahib Gurdawara:** Nangali Sahib is one of the oldest Shikh Shrine in north India and biggest in the State Jammu and Kashmir. It is situated near the bank of Dranguli, river of Poonch. This Gurdawara was established by Thakur Bhai Mela Siongh Ji in the year 1803 and further development took place during the period of Maharaja Ranjit Sing. This Gurdawara is famous in all over India. Every year large number of Pilgrims of all faiths visits here. Presently there is a free Langar, Community Kicthen and 70 guest rooms are available for incoming devotes and all other amenities are available for Pilgrims.

**Others:** There are some other pilgrimage centers which are historically very imperative prominent among them are Chote Shah Shrine in Mendhar Poonch, Doru Shaheed in Surankote, Dashnami Akhara in Poonch, Chhati Badshahi Gurdawara in Rajouri, Peer Badesar Temple in Rajouri and many more.

### **C. Heritage Places**

**Mugham Sarai:** There are numerous Sarai which were built by Mughals as rest house for their journey. These are very magnificent Sarai which depict different types of Mughal architecture. Some Sarai gets vanished as these could not preserve in past, the remaining are in very bad condations rather near to death. The important among them are:

1. Thanamandi Sarai in Rajouri
2. Mangla Devi Sarai in Noshera
3. Nadpur Sarai
4. Muradpur Sarai
5. And Mughal Sarai along historical Mughal Road.

**Usmaan Memorial, War Memorial and Balidan Bhawan:** All of these sites have been constructed in the name of those who lost and scarified their life in Rajouri. And their memories are preserved in the form of photographs, bhawans and statues.

**Noori Chamb:** Noori Chamb is associated with the name of Noor Jahan, Queen of Mughal Emperor Jahangir. It is a beautiful tourist place in the Baharamgala area of Surankote valley, famous for its milky water fall which fall from top of the rock and engulf the entire area. Emperor Jahangir along with his queen and military frequently travelled through Kashmir via Mughal road to Lahore and halt near Bahramgala at Noori Chamb where Noor Jahaan usually took bath under water fall. A mirror was also fitted there in rock wall for her makeup and remains of mirror are still there. During the month of summer large number of tourist including school children, College Students and employees of different organization, from different parts of the state visits there for site seen excursion.

**Bufliaz:** It is another beautiful place with the element of history, and this hill spot is on the bank of river. This is also initiation point of Mughal road, road from Jammu-Rajouri and Rawlakote-Poonch meets at this point and from here scenic view of Mughal road starts. Bunifals was the name of Horse of Alexander, who died here and buried here near the bank of river thereafter the place is famous by the name of Bufliaz.

**Mughal Road:** During the times of Mughals there were two routes which were in operation i.e. Silk Route via Kashmir, Kargil, Galgit, Balistan, Tibet to Iran and other South Asian region and 2nd historical route was Mughal Road, which was used by Mughal Emperors while travelling from Delhi to Lahore and then Kashmir via Mughal road. Up to year 1921 this was the only route which connects Kashmir to rest of erstwhile India thereafter 2<sup>nd</sup> route from Jammu to Srinagar via Bahinal made functional. Now, Jammu and Kashmir Government restore this historical route as an alternate 85 KM link to Kashmir from Bufliaz to Shopian, which connects Rajouri Poonch to Kashmir. This road opens avenues for leisure and adventure travel for the region. There are numerous untapped tourist sites which came in limelight after revival of Mughal road such as Peer ki Gali, Wet land in upper range of Peer Panjal Mountain and Mughal Sarais. J&KTDC trying hard to develop tourism infrastructure to boost tourism in the surrounding area of Mughal road, recently Union Tourism Ministry has sanctioned 800.15 lakh rupees for the development of wayside amenities along the Mughal Road from Bufliaz to Shopian for development of tourism.

#### **D. Cultural Heritage**

**Gojari and Phari Cultural:** Phari and Gujjar, are the dominating sect of people living the area of Rajouri and Poonch. Both Gujjar and Phari have their own typical cultural identity, like both are living in same place and in climatic condition in-spite of that both speak different language in different dialects and both have different occupation, music, different life style and clothing pattern. Phari people speak Phari language and Gujjar speaks Gojari. Phari includes people from Hindu, Muslims and Sikh community while Gujjar in Rajori and Poonch are all Muslims and these include Gujjar, Bakarwals and Dadi. Previously, Gujjar were famous for cattle, sheep and goat rearing while Phari were known for farming and related work.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

After studying and analysis of tourism in Rajouri and Poonch one can come across to various things for them following recommendation can be put forwarded these are:

1. District Rajouri and Poonch required the status of 'Hill Development Council' on the pattern of Leh Ladakh Hill Development Council, for development of tourism.
2. In average, development of Pilgrimage canters are somehow good because of involvement of Community and Shrine Management Committees but heritage building like Monuments are in very poor condition, as these comes under Government control, so there is a need to look after these degrading Monuments.
3. There are several heritages building in both Districts which need joints efforts of Archaeological Survey of India and Tourism Development Authorities for their preservation and development.
4. Most of the monuments are at those places where essential needs of travellers may not fulfilled, so there is need to develop shopping complex rather shops, Cafes, recreation facility ect., at places to attract more tourists.
5. Poonch fort is still in very terrible condition, although Government spent lots of amount which were released by Central Government but fort condition does not improve. Therefore, separate fort development body should be constituted by involving Locals, NGOs, Civil Society Members and concerning officials from Government for proper utilization of funds and monitoring of developmental work, otherwise these types of Monuments may not restored under slow and non effective policies of Government bodies.
6. In the area of Rajouri and Poonch Chingus and Poonch fort are very important forts, strategic planning needs for their restoration and preservation. For example, in the area of Rajouri and Poonch there is not any single Museum, Poonch fort may be developed into a Museum similarly the Chingus Fort can be converted into public library, this way both the building can be maintained and utilized properly.
7. There are other monuments, presently which are not under Government consideration but these monuments required special focus.
8. There is also need to conserve Mughal Sarai which almost lost their identity but these can be developed as an additional tourism product in the area therefore by diverting tourism in these places for improving tourism activates and increasing their duration of stay and spending patterns, which automatically help in locals and the economy as whole.
9. There is a mismatch in Government Proposal, Planning and implementations at grass rout level, so there is an immediate need to address these hazards like timely release of funds, corruption and coordination.
10. Awareness programs like road shows, fairs and innovative literately programme may increase tourism in the area.
11. Participation of local and tourism professional may be considered good for sustainable tourism development in the area.
12. There are need to address some prime things like road, rail and air connectivity which is missing in the area.
13. Rajouri & Poonch like Kashmir Valley attracts very less numbers of tourists that's too on the basis of its natural beauty, infrastructure development is very meagre.

14. Tourist huts are the only show case which reflects Tourism Development work but these huts are not strategically developed and maintain for tourism purpose.
15. Recently Tourism Ministry has sanctioned 800.15 lakh rupees for the development of wayside amenities along the Mughal Road from Buzilaz to Shopian, this amount should be utilized by engaging tourism expert purposely for fruitful result.

## CONCLUSION

There is immense tourism potential in the areas of Districts Rajouri and Poonch which is unexploited and could not be developed. If pilgrimage, Heritage and Leisure tourism potential of the area would properly identified and improve as per required parameters, Rajouri and Poonch may become tourism hub of the northern India. As we go through some important heritage places and Monuments these are all directly and indirectly associated with great happiness moreover these sites are at places where other types of tourism may grow like leisure, adventure, MICE etc., So proper research work by reputed agency rather professional with the involvements of locals may provide inputs for policy measure and result oriented implementation. There is also need to address the non involvements of non professional in tourism development activities. Beside this there is need to undertake aggressive programmes like promotion and awareness activities for tourism in the area. Similarly large numbers of tourist return back from Ladakh, Kashmir and Jammu, they can be easily diverted to Rajouri and Poonch by development of tourism product and appropriate infrastructure like hotels and by increasing promotion programmes. Tourism is the only hope for overall development of region otherwise its economy cannot improve because region is like in industrial, agricultural and other fronts.

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