ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage tourism refers to travelling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present, such activities are found in living communities, these are signs that the past and present spoken of is authentic and rooted in the experience of the people. The importance of this study was to bring the historical genesis of the Achabal in compact form for creating the historical as well cultural aesthetics among the peop[e. This was to be achieved by focusing on establishing the potential of cultural heritage tourism and finding out constraints and approaches for making cultural heritage tourism a main driver of rural development. Cultural heritage tourism can be used to generate financial and social benefits by using resources within the communities. The intention was to find out if the site under study area does have such cultural heritage resources, if so, how these resources could contribute to the development of heritage tourism along with natural tourism.

Keywords: Tourism, Rural, Scenic Tourism, Achabal Nag, ParganaKuthar, Martand.

INTRODUCTION

Achabal is located in the west of Pargana Kuthar (P K is a group of villages in Tehsil Shangus, district Anantnag in south Kashmir). The latitude of Achabal is 33.41 and longitude 75. 17 (Bates, p.155).It is about six miles away from Anantnag town and lies in its south-east side. It is 58 kilometers away from Tourist Reception Centre Srinagar on Awantipora Anantnag road at an altitude of 1667 meters (Farid, p.75). The ancient Hindu text of Nilmatpurana mentions the existence of a spring Aksipala (Kumari, Nilmatapurana p.236), which is a present Achbal-Nag. In Rajatarangini Achabal has been mentioned by the name of Aksavala as a Village founded by the king Aksha. (Rajtarangani, p.50).It was not only an ancient tirtha rooted in the earliest known belief of Kashmir Naga-cult, but it was also a delightful place of the kings who had planted Chinan, poplar and flower trees in it (Stuart, p.110). The place is noted for its spring, which is the finest in Kashmir and supposed to be the reappearance of a portion of the river Bringhi (Vinge, p.347), whose waters would suddenly disappear through a large fissure underneath a hill at the village Wan-Divelgam in the Brang Pargana (Hassan, p.97). It is said that once, in order to test this, a quantity of chaff was thrown in the Bringiriver at Wan-Divalgam and that chaff sprouted at Achabal spring (Koul, p.116).Achabal is the most important heritage site which can sustain the unemployed youth of the area by way of much concern and focus from the authorities. It would act a core place to facilitate the move of tourists towards the others areas of the historical and scenic importance in the area around the Achabal site. The study would like to place the historical genesis of this site and its fascination for recreation among the Royal class during pre-modern times. The study tries to link the potentialities of this site from historical heritage and scenic perspective. Such type of micro level studies has always been out from the sight of researchers because of multiple factors. So it is an endeavour to document the history at micro-level and also try to explore the possibilities of
heritage and scenic resources that could benefit the local community through people’s regular visit towards such historical locations. So it becomes essentially to trace out the areas or sites popularity through contemporary sources during its heydays. Same has been brought fourth regarding the Achabal site by reviewing the mention of Achabal site in primary and secondary sources.

OBJECTIVES

- To document the tangible and the intangible (customs, rituals, beliefs) heritage. Or to identify cultural heritage resources available in the study area.
- To conserve and preserve the heritage sites to sustain their integrity and authenticity.
- To bring out an understanding of this historic site and peoples attraction towards it during past.

HYPOTHESIS

1. The local community has a positive attitude towards cultural heritage development.
2. Rural cultural heritage tourism resources have a potential of uplifting the economy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

No comprehensive work has been done on this topic so far, but some works are there on tourism and heritage that provide us brief idea regarding the potential of tourism in Kashmir. The books entitled Kashmir Heritage Tourism, (2007) by Iqbal Ahmad, Kashmir Valley and its Culture, (1997) by S.R. Bakshi, Kashmir, Tourism Monuments and Folklore by S.R. Bakshi, Cultural heritage of Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh, (1997) by Nagendra Kumar Singh, and Tourism Dynamics in a Developing Economy, (1994) by Mahmuda Shafi. These works highlight the importance of tourism and its effect on the economy. In these works, more emphasis has been laid on arts, crafts, economy and cultural heritage of the state.


Mohammad Ashfaq and Shazia Parveen’s article entitled “Potential of Pilgrimage in J&K: An Analysis of Rajouri and Poonch Districts,” (2014) highlights shrines of different religious communities as possible tourist attractions. This article explains and supports the idea that the economic impact of religious tourism should not be neglected or underestimated. Additionally, the paper argues that religion and tourism have much in common. “Tourism Industry and Pilgrimage Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir: Prospects and Challenges,” by Zameer Ahmad Bhat (2013) presents tourism as the fastest growing industry in India. Tourism makes an enormous contribution to local economies through job creation and sustainable development. It attests tourism in Jammu and Kashmir as one of the most important sectors of the economy. Being the largest service industry, tourism is a significant contributor to the state GDP, earns foreign exchange for the country, provides widespread employment, yields tax, revenue etc. In this article the author has highlighted Jammu and Kashmir as an immense potential for pilgrimage tourism.
METHODOLOGY

For achieving the desired goals and objectives of the study, I have used the primary sources consisting of Revenue records, Census reports, Archival sources, Gazetteers and Travel accounts. Moreover, I have conducted the field survey and interview method to explore the history and potential of the site under study. The Secondary sources have also been used to have a holistic view of the study area.

Discussing the historical legacy of the site

Lawrence writes;

Perhaps most beautiful of all the springs is Achabal, which gushes out of the Sosanwar hill, and was at once enlisted by emperor Jehangir in the service of beauty and pleasure. (Lawrence, p.22)

The water of the spring sprouts from several adjacent spots near the foot of a low spur which is densely covered with deodar trees and at one place it gushes out from an oblique fissure large enough to admit a man’s body and forms a volume some 18 inches high and about a foot in diameter (Koul, p.116). Two streams rush down from the springs. Achabal is surrounded by villages alive with running water and is completely over shadowed by massive Chinar trees. Abul Fazal speaks of it in the Ain–I – Akbari as, “a fountain which shoots up to the height of a cubit, and is scarce equated for its coldness, limpidity, and refreshing qualities. The sick who drinks it’s water recover his health” (Ain-i-Akbar, p.358. also Cited in; A study of Persio Arabic Sources, p.123).In 1620, the Mughal Empress (Begum) Noor Jahan is said to have been so impressed by the spots beauty that she not only laid a garden but also constructed Hamam and pavilions(Hussain, p.211). Bates in his Gazetteer mentioned that it was made by Jehangir (Bates, p.177). According to Tarikh-i-Hasan, Achabal is known as Begumabad or Shahibabad and was built at the instance of Noor Jahan, above the spring of Achabal; with a beautiful garden, strong buildings and stony bath. (Tarikh-I- HassanEng Trans, A.R. Khan, p.208). Abdul Hamid Lahori also gives the name of this spot as Sahibabad (Bano, et al, p.117).

It is spread over 62 kanals, the garden is 247 meters long by 155 meters wide (Revenue Records). It is aligned along the north-south axis; with the southern edge along its highest point (the site of the water source).The garden is segmented into three terraces, with a central water stream along the north-south axis that features three fountain basins. There are two walkways on either side of the axial water stream. Smaller side water channels to the east and west parallel the principal axial stream, and receive water from a stream running east-west on the third terrace. The garden is accessed at its northern end, from the street level. One enters through two small pavilions on the first terrace. Passing the gate, the visitor finds the first pool, which has a square shape and features nine fountains. This pool receives water from the second terrace, which is accessed by two sets of stairs on either side of the axial water stream. On the second terrace, the axial water stream leads to the second pool, which is square in shape with a five-by-five array of fountains. Looking both east and west from the second terrace, another garden feature, known as chabutra is visible. Water entering the second pool passes under two storied balahdari or a large pavilion. This balahdari has three arches on its southern elevation and one along its northern elevation. Beyond the balahdari on the second terrace lies the third pool, which is rectangular in shape. In the centre of this rectangle, a one-story balahdari and its walkways divide the pool into two squares, each of which contains a five-by-five array of fountains. The third terrace was also the most private area of the garden; named the zenana (harem, or women’s) garden. It has a rectangular water tank flanked by two small square pavilions. This water tank was used as a woman’s bathing pool (interview with Mohd Shaban, April, 2015). First Noor Jahan got the upper part of this garden developed, because of which it is also known as the Bagh-e-Begumabad."It contains the ruins of a Hammam (hot water bath) which used to derive its heat from a ‘Logical Lamp or tosng’ in local parlance, ‘the lamp which magically kindled was put out during repairs” (Dewan, p.146-47). The locals pronounce it as ‘Achaval.’ The Mughals renamed it as Sahebabad and Begumabad, both after emperor Shahjahan’s daughter Jehanara, who was also known as Begum Saheba (Ibid, p.147). FidaHasnain explains, ‘Jehangir had breathed his last in the garden, but Noorjahan did not disclose his
demise and removed and buried his entrails at Chingus in Rajouri to preserve the body, Jehangir’s body was later buried at Lahore.”

The deterioration of Mughal gardens including Achabal started with the advent of Afghan rule in Kashmir. The Afghans vandalized the Mughal gardens to show their supremacy. They targeted many Mughal architectural grandeur and artifacts in the Achabal garden. The Sikh rulers also showed their indifference towards revival of the Mughal gardens (Wani, GK). It was on the insistence of British that the garden, which had fallen into decay, was re-enclosed on a smaller scale by Gulab Singh, the grandfather of the Maharaja Ranbir Singh of Kashmir. A quaint doorway built in the time of the late Maharaja Ranbir Singh gives admittance to the second terrace of the garden. The balahdaris and pavilions were ordinarily repaired by Maharaja Ranbir Singh (Khan, p.208). According to Hasnain, Maharaja Hari Singh opened the garden for public. After 1947, the successive regimes failed to conserve Achabal and its condition kept deteriorating. Vinayak Razdan also makes the same argument that the garden had fallen into decay, was re-enclosed by on a smaller scale by Gulab Singh and later by Ranbirsingh (Razdan, online portal).

About the Achabal garden Bernier writes;

Returning from Send-bray (Bawan), I turned a little from the high road for the sake of visiting Achiavel (Achibal), formerly a country house of the Kings of Kashmir and now of the Great Mughal. (Razdan) What principally constitutes the beauty of this place is a fountain, whose waters disperse themselves into a hundred canals round the house. The spring gushes out of the earth with violence, as if it issued from the bottom of some well, and the water is so abundant that it ought rather to be called a river than a fountain. It is excellent water, and as cold as ice. The garden is very handsome, laid out in regular walks, and full of fruit trees apple, pear, plum, apricot, and cherry. Fish ponds are in great number, and there is a lofty cascade which in its fall takes the form and colour of a large sheet, thirty or forty paces in length, producing the finest effect imaginable; especially at night, when innumerable lamps, fixed in parts of the wall adapted for that purpose, are lighted under this sheet of water (Kak, pp 137-38). Achabal Bagh is much smaller than it was in Mughal days. But nothing can spoil the natural loveliness of this river, gushing out of the honeycombed limestone cliff, just at the point where the mountains intrude farthest on the plains. It is an ideal site. If I were asked where the most perfect modern garden on a medium scale could be devised, I should answer without hesitation, Achabal. Nowhere else have I seen such possibilities for the combined appeal of a stately stone - bordered pleasance between ordered avenues of full-grown trees, and a natural rock and woodland upper garden with haunting, far reaching views where the white wild roses foaming the firs and the boulders, rivaling the sheet of water, Bernier praised (Stuart, pp.191-198).

Sir Young husband has described the garden in the following lines;

It’s delicious and remarkable sight makes it worth to visit. It is however, in spite of this a fascinating spot, and camp which the Maharaja pitched here for the entertainment of Lord Minto, was the prettiest I have ever seen, for the lines of tents accorded with the formality of the garden and the running water, the fountains, and the waterfalls gave a special charm to then encampment. (Husband, p.117)

In the later ages the Mughal Prince Dara Shikoh built a mosque in the garden (Koul, pp.118-119). There is also a trout farm for seed fish nearby. There are tourist bungalows and tourist huts nearby where the tourists can spend some moments in the lap of the beautiful setup. Accommodation is available at the nearby tourist bungalows or rest houses. The successive regimes during past three centuries vandalized the Mughal gardens like; Nishat, Shalimar, Achabal, Chashm-a-Shahi, Pari Mahal, and Verinag. However, among these gardens, Achabal was pushed to the verge of extinction due to lack of conservation measures.

The efforts and intervention of Indian National Trust for arts and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) Jammu and Kashmir chapter, to organize different cultural programs on different occasions revived the glory of Achabal garden to some extent. Owing to their immense historical and cultural value, the Mughal
gardens, including the Achabal had been included in the tentative list of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)’s heritage sites (Wani). With the pomp and regal splendour of the old court days gone and with all its natural beauty enhanced by the passage of time Achabal provides a unique setting for a Mela in mid-June, which is thus the best occasion to visit the place. But it is charming and delightful all through the spring and the summer (Sharma, pp.142-143). Entry fee of Rs 10 per person is being charged from every visitor to this garden. Several bollywood films of 60s, 70s and 80s were shot here (Revealed by local and also retrieved at http://www.tripadvisor.com/show user Reviews- Achabal Garden-Srinagar Kashmir).

During a discussion, Mr. Hamid Bakshi (Younger brother of late Bakshi Ghulam Mohd Ex-Prime Minister of Kashmir) said that a Musical event was organized in Achabal garden during Bakshi sahib's time wherein people thronged to listen to Radio Kashmir Artists singing songs joined by their composer late Mohan Lal Aima, the magical musician of yesterdays (autarmota.blogspot.in). In this particular event at Achabal, Aima sahib played the Traditional Noat (musical instrument), while the singers sang the popular song of Mehjoor “Az Roz Saane Dilber Myaane meaning Listen O loveliest sweet heart of mine! Stay here today! In such a beautiful manner that Bakshi sahib got up in the middle of the song and embraced Aima sahib in full public view. That was a memorable function at Achabal garden revealed by Mr. Hamid Bakshi with deep nostalgia.

**Potentialities**

Achabal sites not only the legacy of medieval period but it is the heritage of our ancient past because Achabal has been mentioned in Rajatarangini as a big town and according to Nilmataapurana it was centre of Naga worship for ancients. Various Foreign travellers have visited this site and elaborated its scenic importance. They worthily mention the sweet waters of Achabal spring. Abul Fazal also signified its importance by narrating that sick can recover his health if he drinks the water of Achabal spring. It’s due to spots beauty that it attracted the attention of Mughal rulers like Akbar, Jehangir and Shah Jahah. But due to the apathy and lack of conservation measures by the successive regimes in past, the historical Mughal Gardens like Achabal was pushed to the verge of extinction. Owing to their immense historical and cultural value, the Mughal gardens, including the Achabal were included in the tentative list of the United Nations Educational Scientific and cultural Organization (UNESCO)’s heritage sites. The Mughal gardens of Kashmir are part of a rich cultural and architectural heritage. Among all the important potential sites of the study area, Achabal attracts the unique place. It is a site which has been fully utilized for tourism purpose. This site can accommodate so many tourists but only problem is lack of proper roads. During summer season one can see a huge rush of tourists and results traffic mess all around the town that creates huge problems for locals as well as for tourists. These constraints should be looked at earnestly. The other sites of attractions are not far away from Achabal. Possibility of rural tourism development in the study area can be made easily due to wide spread popularity of Achabal. From Achabal tourists can safely move towards other parts of the Kuthar.

Tourism can improve the economic status of the area. Large number of students doing graduation and post-graduation, these students can contribute to the community in the near future by using the skills gained in promoting and developing rural heritage tourism for economic benefit. Heritage tourism is as much based on experience as it is on seeing. Providing experience for visitors has become a more important element recently and that has led to the growth of ‘experience economy’. Heritage tourism like any other tourism sector is one of the sectors that can generate huge revenue to our state. The economic status of the area around Achabal can only be improved if the community is motivated and encouraged to be active participants, engage in promoting cultural activities, engage in programs of cultural sustainability and development. Such initiatives can assist in uplifting the economy and hopefully the unemployment situation in the Pargana Kuthar (area around the study site) can be reversed. Tourism in general is an important source of foreign exchange.
Despite the fact, the area being culturally and historically important didn’t fetch rural tourism development. People are requesting the authorities for promotion of heritage tourism in the area so that the local community as well as the state can get benefit out of it. The area is believed to have a good potential for cultural heritage tourism due to the availability of shrines, historical and natural sites. In general, when talking to the respondents, they believed that cultural heritage tourism is a tool of economic development. Varieties of expectations were indicated by the community and such responses were showing willingness to engage in rural heritage tourism development for the sake of their economy upliftment. Having said so, this means the area is being accepted when stating that, rural heritage tourism resources have a potential of uplifting the economy in the communities of the local area in District Anantnag. The people have shown a positive attitude and do believe that cultural heritage resources in their local areas can bring change in their living conditions. Here we can mention the HYPOTHESIS 1 and 2 “people having positive attitude towards these historical heritage resources for tourism purpose for the upliftment of the people in the study area.” The finding clearly established the fact that no development has been occurred by the dint of heritage attractions. It has been so, all due to the negligent concern from the authorities.

**Approaches need to be followed**

There are different approaches through which tourism can be developed both in peripheries as well as in core areas of Kashmir. Various methods should be applied to form a plan for the development of tourism within the vicinity of Achabal. It is, therefore, necessary to follow integrated plan for the development of the sites around the Mughal Garden Achabal and Martand (The temple of Martand is situated at a distance of 5 miles away from Anantnag). Achabal garden has been already explored and is a popular tourist place in Pargana, but lacks various facilities to promote full-fledged tourism in the Pargana. Here we need to stress on primary sites (already explored one), then on secondary sites (unexplored ones), with special emphasis on indigenous arts and crafts, heritage and culture for which the demands by the foreign tourists would be very high. Such a plan of integrated rural development can create conditions for inter-regional and international transfer of resources to the area in a substantial measure and these resources can be utilised for the purpose of rural development. Placards, booklets, Photo Galleries can be developed to expose the area for more tourist flow. Features like scenic beauty, availability of trout fishes, heritage exhibition should be advertised so that it can pay for the economic well-being of area.

**CONCLUSION**

The site can be best concluded through the below mentioned table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SWOT analysis of tourism in achabal</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attractive, historical location</td>
<td>No existing tourism policy or plan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rich cultural Heritage</td>
<td>Underdeveloped destination</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprises unique synthesis of natural and manmade setting. This includes a combination of hill and water canals with monuments.</td>
<td>Poor connectivity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area associated with Hindu and Muslim faith with major religious centres of these communities.</td>
<td>Low awareness level about its tourism potential</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Site is linked with Phalgam, Kokernag which have been a part of travel circuit of Kashmir</td>
<td>Poor promotional Activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Potential for Eco-tourism.</td>
<td>Less Government spending</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential for heritage tourism</td>
<td>Lack of training infrastructure and hospitality</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Opportunities

- Can be linked with other upcoming tourist circuits in the valley
- Can tap into the prevailing high income international tourism market.
- Should be marketed as a revival of the sites and monuments of the area for travel.

Threats

- Perceived security problem
- Competition from other areas with good management policy directed towards marketing.
- Better facilities from competitors.
- Low information dissemination
- Lack of co-ordinated intervention from various departments.

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