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STATUS OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN BILLAWAR TEHSIL OF KATHUA DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Billawar has immense source of tourism. About 10% of Population depends upon Tourism and its allied activities directly or indirectly. Tourism sector in J&K has got potential to contribute a lot to Jammu and Kashmir's economy. Billawar area of District Kathua has vast potential for religious Tourism and the same would be harnessed fully. Billawar is known for its natural beauty, Snow Clad mountains, Breath taking meadows and majestic rivers. The role of trained and skilled manpower for success in any organization is Pivot and tourism industry is no exception. This Paper attempts to study the potential of Tourism in Billawar Tehsil of Kathua District. For achieving the objectives, the data has been collected by personally visited the Tourist Places and Secondary Data from brochures –pamphlets, Books, Newspaper etc. The Study reveals that there are various challenges and issues in the development of tourism industry via proper road connectivity, deprivation of basic facilities, lack of infrastructure, ignorance of tourist places by concerned authorities. Despite of these drawbacks' tourism in Billawar Tehsil spread at moderate speed. The State Govt.is keen to develop the areas of Religious and tourist importance, for which several projects are in the offing.

KEYWORDS: -Tourism, Mountains, Meadows, Brochures, Development, Infrastructure, Religious.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is known to be the backbone of Jammu and Kashmir and holds a strategic place in J&k economy by providing economic benefits like employment, foreign exchange, infrastructure development and development of local industries like handicrafts and handlooms which has placed J&K always in the lime light at the national as well as international level. Enhancing tourism industry is significant for the study area as most of the population derives their livelihood from the tourism sector and it also contribute in enhancing J&K economy.

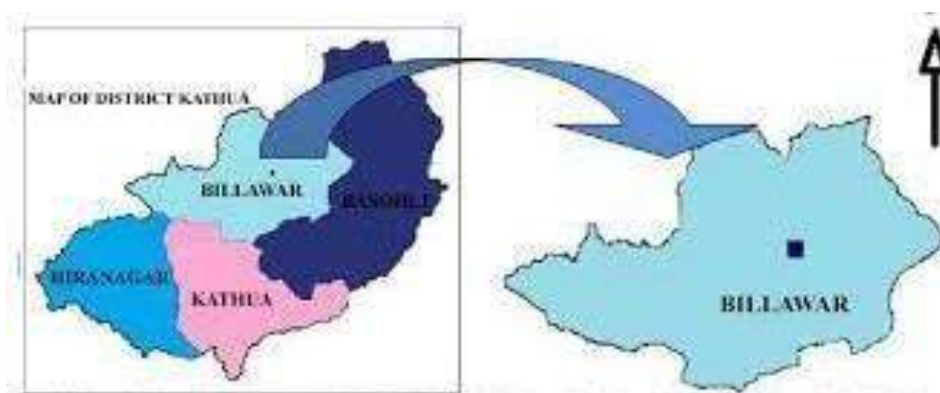
Tourism is a social, Cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of peoples to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/Professional purposes. The United Nations world tourism organizations (UNWTO) defines Tourism as People “Travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment” for leisure, business or other purposes. In this paper we will discuss about the Pilgrimage tourism. Pilgrimage Tourism is the type of tourism that entirely or powerfully motivates tourists for the achievement of religious attitude and practices. The study area has been a place of religious activities and natural beauties, which attracts thousands of Pilgrimages every year. This paper helps us to familiar with the pilgrimage tourism of Billawar and its social, cultural and economic impact on that particular area.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the status of religious tourism in Billawar.
- To identify the social, cultural and economic impacts of the pilgrimage tourism.
- To identify the potential of religious tourism in Billawar.
- To identify the economic dimension in Pilgrimage tourism.

STUDY AREA

Billawar is a Town and a notified area committee in Kathua District of Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. It is situated on the bank of NAAZ and BHINI Nallahs. According to one belief, Pandavas visited Billawar in the last year of their exile and were attracted by “BILL” Trees in which Billawar abounds. The name BILL later on turned into BILLAWAR. Billawar is located at 32.62 Degree N 75.62 Degree E. It has an average elevation of 844 Metres. Billawar town is situated in the lap of the Shivallik mountains between the banks of the NAAZ and BHINI rivulets. Billawar had a population of 11916 of which Males constitutes 56 % of the population and females 44 % .Billawar is a paradise for tourism, especially religious tourism. The tehsil has some of the most ancient and revered shrines of Hindus. Apart from that its stunning lush landscape completely alluring for the nature lovers. Due to these places of tourist interest, the tehsil area is flooded with travelers all through the year. The town is conveniently connected with many major cities of the state through Roadways



Location Map of Billawar tehsil in Kathua District

METHODOLOGY

It is based on both filled survey and secondary data. The data for this study were collected from local residents which engaged in tourism activities, tourists were identify as a key factor in developing tourism in local communities.

RELIGIOUS ATTRACTIONS IN BILLAWAR

Billawar is certainly holy places with many spots of religious importance. Most of these are related to Hindus. These Temples are not only the strong hold of spiritual beliefs, but they also display the remarkable architecture of bygone era. Main religious spots in Billawar are

SUKRALA MATA TEMPLE

At the whopping elevation of 3500 feet above the Sea level, famous Sukrala Mata Temple of Billawar is visited by Pilgrimage from all parts of country. The Temple is dedicated to Mata Mal Devi who is locally believed to be the incarnation of Mata Sharda Devi. It was built by Madho Singh, who was an exiled Prince from neighboring state of Himachel Pradesh. Flight of many steps takes the devotees to the temple complex. It comes under Sukrala Mata Shrine. It creates source of livelihood for the people living in the vicinity of Mata Sukrala. Approximately 30000 devotees per month arrived at Mata Sukrala Mandir for worship the Godess. During Navratras huge number of devotees use to visit.



Picture View of Mata Sukrala Temple

BALA SUNDRI MATA

The Bala Sundri Temple is situated at Sundrikote in the Shivalk Hills of Billawar Tehsil of Kathua District. Located at an elevation of 1000 Mtrs. Above Sea Level, the shrine provides a breath-taking view of the surrounding landscape. The Temple has Godess Bala as presiding deity, an incarnation of Goddess Durga, Number of Devotees visit the temple during Navratras to seek blessings of Mother Godess. As per legend the temple of Mata Bala Sundri is 300 Years old and was constructed by the King of Akhnoor after the Goddess appeared in his dreams. To manage affairs of the Shirne, Mata bala Sundri Shrine Board was constituted Eight

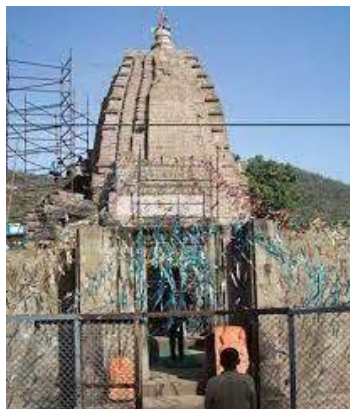
years back but its activities are not seen on the grounds. Mata Bala Sundri management committee is caretaker of the temple and it uses donations to run the affairs of the temples like Free Langers etc. It creates source of livelihood for the peoples living in the vicinity of the Mata bala Sundri. Approximately 25000 devotees per month arrived at Mata Bala Sundri for worship the Goddess.



Picture View of Mata Bala Sundri Temple

MAHABILWAKESHWAR TEMPLE

This is a magnificent old temple dedicate to Lord Shiva. It is exactly located in Mooni Village on the banks of the BHINI river in this Tehsil. It has very elegant and unique lingam formations that attract devotees in large numbers to this temple. However, the temple is equally famous for its architecture magnificence. There are many ancient beliefs that legendary warriors, the Five Pandavas had spent the last phase of their exile period at this place. They were followers of Lord Shiva and used to pray regularly at this place. It is believed that they selected this area due to abundant presence of BILWA Trees (a sacred Tree) which are one of the favourites of Lord Shiva. This temple was also called as Hari Hara temple in ancient times. Peoples from all parts of the state and country visit here in large numbers. But Monday in every wek is believed to be the most sacred day for visit. Shraavan month is also important period to visit this temple approximately 23000 devotees per month arrived at this temple. It also creates source of livelihood for the people living in the vicinity of this temple



Picture View of Mahabilwakeshwar Temple

PEER BABA

This Religious place is also called as Varun Devta by the local Peoples.it is situated on the banks of UJH river. the place is thronged by devotees throughout the year. Approximately 19000 devotees arrived at this place.



Picture View of Peer Baba

GURUNAL

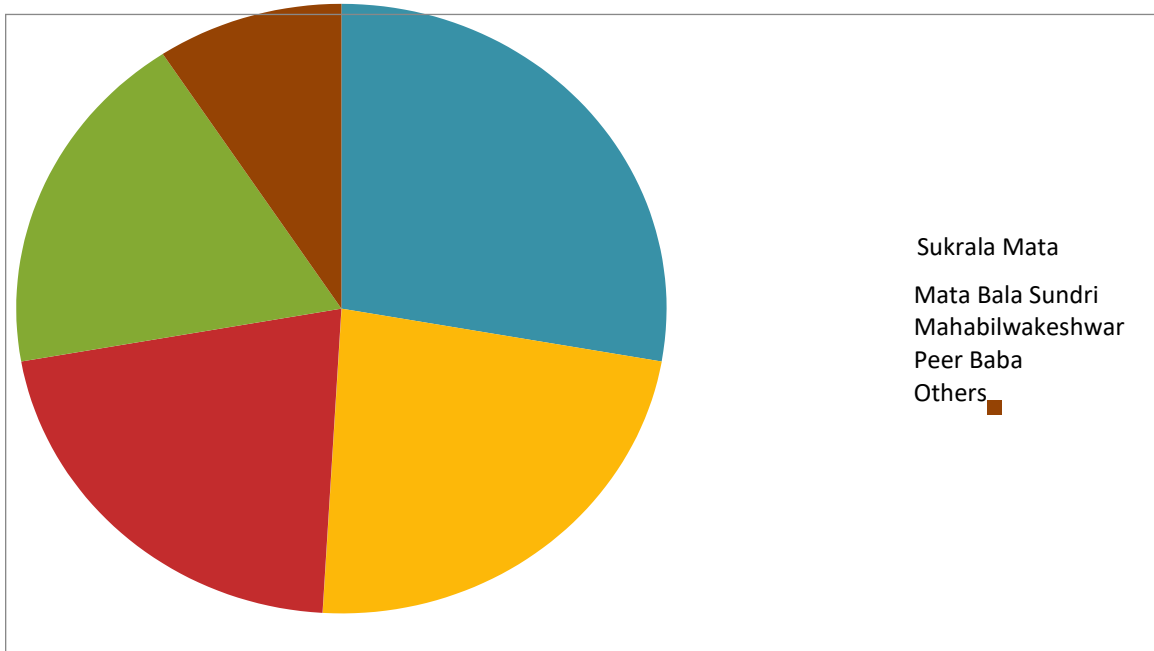
This destination is located on the banks of river NAAZ.it is religious place with about 320 natural springs found here. The place also has revered temple of Mata mal Rani located quite close.

HANUMAN'S STATUE

In Billawar, there is a huge statue of Lord Hanuman. It is built on a Big Rock inside the shores of river Naaz.The place has both religious significance and natural beauty to attract the tourists.



Picture View of Hanuman Temple



Pie Chart: -Status of Pilgrimage Tourism in study area (in Thousands)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The results of the forgoing study have clearly demonstrated that pilgrimage to tourism his playing a major role in socio economic development. Among other observations, it has shown that, for many countries of the region, the economic significance of pilgrimage of tourism is very large when measured against GDP and exports. For many countries in general and the least develop countries in particular, pilgrimage tourism is a sector in which they have comparative, If not competitive, advantages for which they can efficiently convert domestic resources into foreign exchange. If appropriately used, such foreign exchange can purchase the investment goods necessary to sport more broadly based economic develop based policies. The study has demonstrated that the social significance of pilgrimage tourism measured in terms of employment (especially unskilled labour) is very large. It has also illustrated that appropriate pilgrimage tourism related interventions can play a role in raising the standard of living and reducing poverty in local communities. It is offen necessary, however, to develop and implement policies that take advantage of the potential benefits of pilgrimage tourism in socio-economic developments.

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