

# Impact of Terrorism and Internal Aggression on pilgrimage sites in Jammu & Kashmir

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## Abstract

World Tourism Conference in 1960 at Manila declared tourism as a process of bringing ‘Hotels’ & ‘Guest’ together from all across the world. Hospitality and tourism can be said as one of the largest booming industry not even in India but in the world regardless of it being adventurous, exploring new place or having religious sentiments towards God or a temple popularly known as pilgrimage sites. Tourism not only uplift the economy of any place but also is great method of exchange in culture and beliefs. With boom in tourism comes greater opportunity and responsibility in any state for smooth running of tourists or pilgrims. Topping the list of being one of the most famous yet controversial places for tourism ‘Jammu and Kashmir’ has witnessed ups and downs due to internal aggression and terrorism activities. The willing people even native of India hesitate of visiting the place due to terrorism activity in the region as a result the economy of the region has also been deeply affected especially of the people who rely on tourism for their livelihood. This also includes the sentiments of the devotees that get compromised due to the tension faced by Jammu and Kashmir. The researcher here tried to identify the impact of terrorism and internal aggression in pilgrimage tourism industry of the region.

**Keywords:** Jammu and Kashmir, Terrorism, Tourism, Pilgrimage, Internal Aggression, Hospitality

## 1. Introduction

Since the time immemorial, devotes have taken pilgrimage to seek for the blessings of their divines. Irrespective of harsh conditions, climate, minimal hospitality, the faiths have never been dazed. In Indian mythology, pilgrimage was akin to crossing the *bhavasagara*, the sea of suffering. It afforded one an opportunity to unify one’s soul to the god element, the essence of Yoga (*lit.* unity). According to the Shastras, while students and academics can achieve this *yoga* or unity through attainment of knowledge, and saints can get to it through penance, for those in the world – people like you and me, the only means prescribed by the scriptures is *yatra*, or pilgrimage.

Although in the recent era, Pilgrimage has been evolved a lot. Earlier, where it was a journey towards salvation has now become an industry and livelihood of many who are dependent on it seasonally or completely. Many people’s income is dependent on the pilgrims directly or indirectly. Small motels, shopkeepers, restaurants and many more earn substantial amount of money through the pilgrimage season. A new era of entrepreneur has been evolved with the pilgrimage tourisms. States and authorities also generate revenue with the influx of pilgrims in abundance.

Henceforth, Government or managing authorities have interfered in many aspects of these yatras partially or fully. And this is a pan world phenomenon. Like for instance, Haj is the second most important industry after Oil and Gas in Saudi’s economy. It adds an estimated \$12 billion which is

around 20% of its GDP other than Oil and Gas (“Why Haj Will soon be the new oil for Saudi Arabia”, 2018). Many hotels, restaurants and other amenities requires for the Haj became an important way to generate income for the people. And the famous, Kartarpur Sahib, corridor is expected to generate \$365,00,000 from visiting the Darbar Sahib for Pakistan (“Pakistan to earn \$365,00,000 per annum from Kartarpur pilgrims”, 2019). Government of both countries have also envisages that once the pilgrimage starts people of the region will get more opportunities to earn and an inclusive development will occur in the periphery of the region.

India, the land of divines has so many pious shrines where pilgrims and believers and people who are in seek of transcendence travel to strive for blessings. Many states have pilgrimage tourism as an emerging industry to cater population and serve as the chief source of revenue. Uttarakhand is one such example where every year lakhs of devotes comes to its spiritual and holy shrines. During the pilgrimage time, the roads remains jam packed and all the communities living in the vicinity of shrine gets enough employment and source of income to sustain the whole year. The ‘Chota Char Dham Yatra’ of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri brings tons of money in the state economy every year. The state government has also taken various initiatives to promote the pilgrims influx in every season. Maharashtra newly formed government has also planned to invest huge sum of money in Pathri town in Parabhani district for religious tourism. It has brought many controversies in the state though, since the Shirdi is the sole holder of devotes of Sai Baba, but know with the development of Pathri, the tourist will gets displaced between the region (“Indefinite ‘bandh’ called off in Shirdi”, 2020).

Nature has endowed Kashmir with implausible beauty and is rightly called as "Paradise on Earth". Jammu & Kashmir is a tourism destination for all the visitors. People want to explore Jammu & Kashmir because of its natural scenic beauty and pilgrimage. Religiously devoted people want to visit Vashno Devi Mata mandir, Amarnath Yatra and many such places. These places are significant in Hindu mythology and play an intrinsic role in the spiritual attainment of an individual.

However due to tensions and internal issues the region has not been explored by many and still have not been the top priority in people’s wish list. But now when to make the end of internal conflict, the present central government’s decision to abrogate article 370 and bifurcate the state into two new Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, there are many possibilities that the tourism potential of the region will be revived. And what better can be to initiate the reviving with the blessings of Lord Shiva, the supreme of the universe. Since, Kashmir is also home of the one of the holiest shrine of Bhole Baba (Lord Shiva), Amarnath. The shrine is situated at 12,756 ft. above the sea level and remains inaccessible most part of the year. The route remains open for a short duration of time in summer’s approx for 30- 40 days every year when people can travel to the place. The Amarnath Shrine Board, manages the yatra every year.

For safety purposes there are few guidelines which pilgrims have to follow before going for the Yatra. These are that, no one below the age of 13 and above 75 are allowed to take this arduous journey and woman more than 6 months pregnant are also not allowed. And those who wants to travel by Helicopter have to gone through medical examination from the deputed doctor to get a fitness certificate. The pilgrims are also required to carry their important identification documents like Voter, Adhar and other in the pilgrimage for security purposes. There are two routes to reach Amarnath Shrine, one starts from Baltal and other from Pahalgam. The Baltal route is short but preferably only for young and adventure seekers while the Phalgam route is comparatively longer but much easier than Baltal. However both take 2- 4 days to reach the shrine.

The Yatra has breath taking views which one can never forget. The camps and foods in the yatra is of world- class quality and Indian army remains active in the whole season to make it safe and comfortable. However with so many precautions and actions, the yatra has never been the attracter in the pilgrims as other mythical sites of Lord Shiva are. In recent years number of devotees has been reduced a lot. And after the 2017 attack by terrorists on Yatra, the pilgrims are threatened to travel to the shrine.

In this paper the research has tried to document people's sentiments and the different factors which are affecting their decision to take the yatra or not in the recent past. The researchers has conducted a survey and asked people about that how much the prevailing tension in Kashmir have influenced their decisions about visiting the shrines. The researcher has also included the questions for those who has been to Amarnath, to get a broader idea that is it really true that the terrorism has impacted the journey or do they feel threatened in the mid-way due to in hostile environment or not. The sole purpose of this research is to get an idea that what factors are responsible for the general people to make a decision whether to take the pilgrimage or not. And what can be the changes be bring to get more people here and more opportunities for locals to earn money and livelihood.

## 2. Review of literature

With the sudden influx of capital and huge investment of private and public enterprises, academia has shifted his course to explore more in the pilgrimage economy. Scholars from several domains have extensively written about the scope and shortcomings in pilgrimage economies. They have written exclusively that how pilgrimage economy who is rooted in deep religious sentiments have a secular approach in generating employment and economy for various people irrespective of caste, classes and religion diasporas. Local hospitality is one of the most important components of Pilgrimage Tourism and the hospitality industry thrives on the service quality and facilities to ensure customer's satisfaction (Tomasi, 2002). In case of AmarnathYatra, this hospitality is provided by the local Muslim population who manages commute of people and other hospitality there which is contributing a lot in their income and livelihood.

DR. Libison & K.P.Muraleedharan (2009) has written one such paper title, Economic Benefits of Pilgrimage with Special Reference to Pandalam Rural Locality in Kerala where they explore about the growth of the pilgrimage in the town has been astonishingly impressive. In an empirical research, conducting a survey they investigated how Sabrimala pilgrimage helps in providing manifold economic benefits of local residents of Pandalam rural area. They explore that how much benefits the religious pilgrimage has brought not to the people who are direct contact of the industry but also to those who are indirectly connected in the chain of the pilgrimage industry. AmarnathYatra also caters so many people like this whose incomes increase in the pilgrimage time because of it. Such population is of traders and suppliers and others who generates more money at this time of year.

Nonetheless, it has been established earlier that peaceful climate impacts the pilgrimage tourism industry in one place always. Friedland & Merari, (1985) has conducted a research on this. They presented the results of a public opinion survey conducted on an Israeli national sample, which was designed to evaluate the psychological impact of terrorist and violent activity may get reflected a lot in the pilgrimage tourism. Though terrorism activities induced fear far exceeds the actual damage, it has failed to produce the change in attitudes sought by the perpetrators of terror. Terror tactics can be effective to bring expected political changes when the actual or perceived threat exceeds certain critical level. Below this level it appears to pave the way for hardening of attitudes and strengthen opposition to the cause of

terrorism. Counter terrorist action must consider factors such as public attitude towards the terrorist’s goals, public reaction towards foreign terrorists, and response to internalterrorists. Though counter measures not affecting bystanders received a high degree ofsupport, public resolve to withstand terroristic pressure depends upon effectivecounter terrorist measures, or the degree to which concessions are provided to terrorists and their outcome.

This is certainly a major concern in the pilgrimage of Amarnath where instability leads to many troubles in past and now when the system is in roll over then it is important to investigate that how much people desire to travel the highlands of Kashmir for the enlightenment and peace in the abode of Lord Shiva. This study tried to identify the degree to which terrorism influences the decision to travel to Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir as well as to examine the general terrorism risk perception of this particular site.

### 3 Objective

Through this paper the researcher briefly traverse the following objectives

1. Factor that is terrorism and internal aggression affecting the pilgrimage site situated in Kashmir
2. Those who has been to Amarnath pilgrimage, how reflect their opinions about the site and is it actually not safe to go there
3. And if situations becomes normal how many people desires to take this arduous journey

### 4. Methodology

Through deep investigation of available secondary data the researcher here has designed a questionnaire to get a primary data about people perception and desire to traverse the Amarnath shrine. The method used in the research paper is through random sampling. A sample size of nearly 200 people was collected from various city of India like Banglore, Mumbai, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Hyderabad, Kashmir and Pune. The age limit was minimum 18 years to 60 years. The questionnaire was made in a manner that covered people who visited Amarnath situated in Jammu and Kashmir or are native of our country who desires to visit the site. Some questionnaire has been forwarded randomly. And a snowball referencing has also been done of the people who have taken this arduous journey already. The researcher has travelled to them physically to interview them and get their views about their journey.

The data later been observed in critical manner to get people viewpoint regarding the journey. The researcher has also divided the data on the list of who has been there and who has not been to get a more vivid picture of the journey. A total of eight question were asked from the people to get an overall opinion of the people regarding their journey to the holy place Amarnath or those who will to visit the place in the near future.

### 5. Findings-

**Table Reason for people not visiting Amarnath (Fig. in Percentage)**

F1	People visited Amarnath situated in Kashmir	Yes 80.3	No 19.7		
F2	People want to visit Amarnath Yatra?	Yes 82.7	No 17.3		
F3	Factor affected decision making regarding the visit to Amarnath yatra.	Budget 26.3	Terrorism 32.3	Internal Aggression	All of the above

				8.6	32.3	
F4	People who visited Amarnath Yatra, and faced problem during their visit.	Yes 30.2	No 69.8			
F5	Kashmir's pilgrimage being affected by terrorism and internal agitation?	Yes 56.9	No 5.5	May be 37.6		
F6	People's opinion in a hypothesis wherein they were asked that if terrorism activity and internal aggression goes down will they visit Pilgrimage sites of Jammu & Kashmir.	Yes 77.8	No 7.1	May be 15.2		
F7	Terrorism activities and Internal Aggression create fear among the tourist who will to visit Kashmir?	Strongly Disagree 10.3	Disagree 6.1	Neutral 21 +	Agree 62.6	
F8	People opinion on pilgrimage tourism whether it helps in creating peace in Jammu & Kashmir?	Strongly Disagree 5.7	Disagree	Neutral 23.2	Agree 42.8	Strongly Agree 22.2

Source- Primary Data

With regards to the data, a sample size mentioned above a sample of 200 people from different places of the country has been taken randomly. A majority of them have not visited Amarnath shrine but have aspirations to visit the place and explore the region. The second question was asked to get knowledge about the will of people to visit Amarnath in which a majority of people said yes. However those who have been to the place show very less enthusiasm to visit the place again. The third question was specifically asked to know the factor that affects their decisions to take the pilgrimage. The options were mentioned like budget, terrorism, internal aggression, or all of the above points to get a glimpse of the reasons behind the decisions. A majority agreed that terrorism activity was one of the prime reasons affecting their decisions. Being aware of the budget and expenses people wish to travel to the shrine but life threatening situations have affected the decisions more which is not quite a surprise.

To know the experience of people who have been to the site, the next question was asked to know whether the people have faced any problem while visiting Amaranth due to terrorism activity and internal aggression. The answer was quite surprise as majority replied No and mentions that their journey was quite pleasant. And mentions that they have not find any trouble in the region because of terrorisms or as such activities.

Though a contradictory answer was came when the same sample was asked about that do they feel terrorism and internal rifts as a factor in affecting the tourism USP of the region. Most of the answers were yes, however these most of the people are the similar one who nodded earlier that no such activities have they faced while in pilgrimage. The next question was again asked to know that if such activities in the valley or holy place go down would the people will want to visit the place in which a majority gave 'Agree' as an answer. Second highest point was neutral and very few voted for disagree and strongly disagree.

The above answers have clearly reflected that terrorism has been a fear factor in the decision of pilgrims to take the journey of Amarnath. The expenses and other factors are not as much significant as the life threatening situation is. Majority chunk of people have shown that if peace prevails there they would



love to explore the region. People who have been their shown less interest in visiting the place again. But clearly share that the terrorism and other related problems are not as intense as it seems to be. However, they do mentions that terrorism and conflicts there is the sole reason behind the choice of people. Many of them have also mentioned that if peace prevails in the region more people will get attracted to the region.

An analysis can be drawn from the responses of the sample that people wish to travel to the region and spend their money and time in the arduous journey but have been reluctant because of the news and information and portrayal they have been exposed to about the place. They are interested in the place a lot. The people who have been there are the testimony that place is not grieve as it seems from here. Journey is not as dangerous and difficult what it seems from here. If people like to visit they can go and travel but popular image which terrorism have been dominated is present in the mind of all.

## 6. Conclusions

With the above findings it has been crystal clear that definitely the prevailing situation has affected the pilgrims' choices. And majority states that lowering down the activities may result to more footfall. More footfalls will surely bring more revenue to the region. And it will definitely bring more opportunity for locals to earn income and livelihood.

The analyzing has also bring to the notice that people are reluctant to visit the shrine because of the previous incidents and conflicts of the pilgrims with the terrorists in the past. Although who has travelled recently clearly states that now the journey is totally safe. Army checkpoints and everything has troubled pilgrims a little but the safety has been ensured by them. These findings clearly states that the interventions of the authorities of Kashmir are required to make the journey popular once again. They need to make people realize that journey is safe and other than climate and mountainous route nothing danger lies there. If their intervention will be taken out properly than definitely boost the pilgrimage industry there and bring new chances of livelihood for the people residing there.

The pilgrims will definitely visit the shrine. And it can be a new revamp for the region. It will also bring more inter- cultural dialogue in the region. This inter- cultural dialogue can assure a more harmonious and peaceful environment in the region.

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