



NEW EMERGING TRENDS ON TOURISM IN KATHUA DISTRICT: SCHOLASTIC ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS AND HERITAGE SITES

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Abstract

Tourism has become a crucial industry in today's world, contributing significantly to the economy of Kathua district. It creates job opportunities, promotes cultural exchange, and generates income for local commodities. One of the most popular types of tourism is the exploration of religious and heritage sites, which hold immense value for people all around the world. In Kathua District, there are a number of tourist places but religious and heritage sites have their own importance. This paper makes an effort to make a detailed study of famous Religious and heritage sites of kathua district. The objective of this study was to provide insight into the opportunities and problems faced by the tourism industry in the Kathua District. The results of the study may help the locals and the tourism department to develop these destinations with an attractive image to attract more tourists.

Keywords: Tourism, Religious sites, Heritage sites, Kathua district, Tourism Development

INTRODUCTION:

Tourism plays a significant role in the current era. Tourism has emerged as a vital aspect of numerous economies globally, fostering job creation, cultural exchange, and revenue generation for local communities. Nevertheless, religious and heritage sites are among the most popular tourist destinations worldwide. These sites carry great significance for a multitude of individuals across the globe. These sites hold significance not just for their historical importance but also for their cultural and spiritual value. Numerous individuals journey to these sites to connect with their faith or to gain knowledge about the history and customs of diverse religions and

cultures. Churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues are among the most frequently visited religious sites across the globe. These sites often showcase exquisite architecture, artwork, and artefacts that symbolise the beliefs and rituals of their corresponding faiths. Individuals from all walks of life and faiths visit these sites to appreciate the architectural splendour, comprehend their historical and symbolic importance, and partake in religious ceremonies and rituals. Alternatively, heritage sites denote locations of notable cultural or historical significance, and heritage tourism involves visiting a place mainly to immerse oneself in its cultural, historical, or natural significance.

The concept of heritage tourism rests on the notion that specific destinations possess distinctive qualities or attributes that make them worth exploring and experiencing. These destinations can encompass archaeological sites, monuments, buildings, and landmarks acknowledged for their cultural and historical importance. Governments and organisations frequently safeguard and conserve these sites to ensure their accessibility for future generations to visit and appreciate. Tourism enables people to learn about the customs and traditions of diverse communities, savour local cuisine, explore historical and religious sites, and encounter the everyday life of locals. By sharing their culture and traditions, countries can promote a more profound comprehension and admiration for their way of life, encouraging respect for diversity and providing opportunities for cultural transformation. Furthermore, tourism can provide economic advantages to local communities by creating employment opportunities, generating income, and supporting the development of infrastructure.

Kathua is a district located in the northern Indian union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Positioned in the southern region of the Jammu division, the district shares its borders with the state of Punjab to the south and southwest, Jammu district to the east, and Udhampur district to the north. The district headquarters is situated in the town of Kathua. Kathua district is 81 km away from Jammu. Kathua district boasts of a rich religious and historical heritage, with numerous ancient temples, forts, and monuments scattered throughout the region. The district is also renowned for its scenic beauty, with the picturesque River Ravi meandering through the region, encircled by verdant hills and forests. The district presents a distinctive fusion of culture, heritage, natural beauty, and economic prospects, rendering it a favoured location for both tourists and investors. Kathua district is home to

numerous religious and heritage sites of immense historical and cultural importance, which entice visitors from across the globe.

The tourism industry in Kathua provides a diverse range of attractions to explore. The district's diverse topography comprising both hilly and plain regions leads to variations in climate, culture, and traditions from one place to another. The summer season. The higher altitudes of the district offer a pleasant and cool climate, while the outer hills are characterised by a tropical climate. Kathua is also renowned for its numerous religious shrines. Kathua boasts several important temples, including the Dhoula Wali Mata Mandir, Jodia Mata Mandir, Mata Sundri Kote, Mata Bala Sundri, and Asha Purani Mata Mandir. The district is also home to the historic Ariwan temple, which is dedicated to Lord Shiva and is believed to have been built in the 4th century by Raja Vikramaditya. Kathua offers many other exciting tourist places, including historical forts like Jasmer Garh Fort and Jasrota Fort, which also has the Mahakali temple. These forts are a must-visit for history buffs and offer stunning views of the surrounding landscapes.

According to local legends, Kathua is associated with the epic Mahabharata, and it is believed that the Pandavas visited the region during their exile. It is also said that Lord Krishna came to the area to retrieve the Koh-i-Noor diamond from the demon Jamvant. The diamond is now part of the Crown Jewels of the United Kingdom. These legends add to the historical and cultural significance of the region, making it a fascinating destination for tourists and history enthusiasts. Religious and heritage sites are significant contributors to Kathua's economy, with the industry being a well-known draw for visitors. For a vast number of residents in Kathua, tourism serves as the primary means of earning a living. The protection and preservation of religious and heritage sites is a vital undertaking that will help to ensure that these treasures are

available for future generations to enjoy and appreciated. By understanding the importance of religious and heritage sites,

we can promote a more inclusive and accepting society, one that embraces the diversity of our cultural tradition .



OBJECTIVE:

1. To study and explore the religious and heritage sites of Kathua district.
2. To find out the major problems that are facing religious and heritage sites of Kathua district.
3. To provide some suggestions that may show beneficial for the future development of religious and heritage sites of Kathua district.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The present study utilises existing secondary data to provide a descriptive analysis. The secondary data utilised in this research was collected from various sources, including journals, magazines, newspapers, research articles, the internet, and the tourism site of Kathua district.

1. STUDY AND EXPLORE THE RELIGIOUS AND HERITAGE SITES OF KATHUA DISTRICT:

- **Fort of Jasrota and Jasrota kali mata temple:** After Gulab Singh became the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir in March 1846, the seat of imperial power was made a wazarat (district) of the Jammu Province. During the reign of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, Jasrota comprised of two tehsils and thirteen parganas. Jasrota was established by Raj Jas Dev of Jammu in 1019 AD and later passed on to his uncle Raja Karan Dev. Although the rulers of Jasrota belonged to the Jamwal clan, they were commonly referred to as Jasrotias, named after their capital city of Jasrota. Jasrota was a region of great royal power during ancient times. The Jasrota Fort is also known as the "Raja Sansar Chand Kila" as it was built by Raja Sansar Chand II, who was the ruler of the region during the late 18th century. The fort is situated on the banks of the river Ujh and is surrounded by beautiful lush green gardens. The fort is now a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India and is open to tourists. Visitors can explore the various parts of the fort and enjoy the beautiful

views of the surrounding landscapes. The reconstruction of the ancient temple of Maha Kali has turned it into a popular religious site. Many devotees visited the temple during Navratri period. Located on a hillock on the outskirts of the quaint



Jasrota Fort

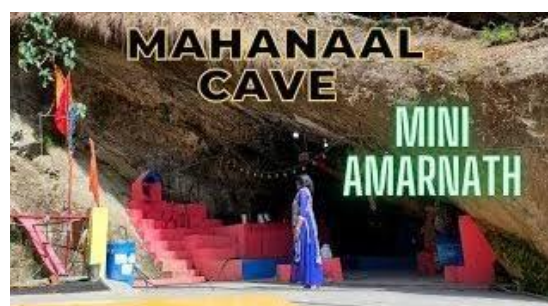
- **Mahanaal Temple:** Jammu is home to several Lord Shiva Cave Shrines, including one natural cave situated in the serene surroundings of Jakhole Panchayat in Kathua District. To reach this cave shrine, one must take a detour from the Jammu-Pathankot National Highway at Rajbagh (Ujh). After crossing the villages of Jasrota, Dhanni, and Bakhta on the northeastern side, it's a twelve-kilometre drive to reach the village of Jakhole. From there, one must walk a five-kilometre path that offers a panoramic view of the surroundings to reach the famous natural Shiva Cave, also known as Mahanal, which is over 150 years old. The journey from Lakhanpur takes approximately fifty minutes, while it takes approximately thirty-five minutes to reach the village from Rajbagh. The sacred image housed within this cave is the Svayambhu Shiva Lingam. The attachment of devotees to this natural cave is so great that it has earned the nickname "Chotta Amarnath" or "Mini Amarnath" among sages and people alike. The Shiva Cave at Mahanal is steeped in legendary lore. One legend surrounding the cave states that about 150 years ago, the villagers noticed milk oozing from the rocks and falling onto the natural Shiva Lingam. Villagers began worshipping the place and it has been revered ever since.

village of Old Jasrota, the holy shrine of the Goddess is situated just 5 kilometres away from Rajbagh on the Jammu-Kathua National Highway and approximately 20 kilometres away from Kathua.



Jasrota Kali mata temple

However, one day, a woman from the nomadic community collected milk from this pious place and used it for her own benefit. Following this incident, the milk stopped oozing from the roof of the cave, and instead, water started dripping over Lord Shiva's Sanctum Sanctorum. Throughout the year, devotees from within the state and other parts of the country throng this place in large numbers. However, the heaviest rush is seen on the first day of the year, Mondays, Mahashivratri, Nag Panchami, and during the Holy Month of Shraavan, which coincides with the annual pilgrimage of Shri Amarnathji. Devotees consider this cave shrine to be a highly sacred place of Lord Shiva, where the wishes of pilgrims are believed to be fulfilled upon offering prayers.



Mahanaal Cave

● **Jasmer Garh Fort** :Our state is surrounded by many ancient forts of historical significance, each with its own unique stories to tell. One such fort is the Hiranagar Fort, which was previously known as Jasmergarh Fort and is believed to have been a treasure house of ancient monuments during the reign of the Dogra rulers. This fort, which dates back to the 16th century, serves as a tangible reminder of the Dogra kingdom's legacy in the region surrounding Hiranagar town, providing a glimpse into the rich history and traditions of the Dogra rulers who once occupied the area. Located just one kilometre from the town and a mere 5 kilometres from National Highway-1A, the Hiranagar fort is easily accessible to visitors, thanks to the abundant transportation options available in the vicinity. At the heart of the fort lies the temple of Mahakali, which serves as the main attraction for visitors to this historic site. While the temple sees a steady stream of devotees throughout the year, it becomes especially crowded during the holy period of Navratri, when the number of pilgrims visiting the site increases exponentially. Special religious functions are held during this time to accommodate the surge of visitors.



Jasmer Garh Fort

● **Asha Purni Mandir**: Situated in the heart of the city's Main Bazaar, the Hiranagar fort temple is a historic and revered site, commonly known as the "Prachin Mandir of Kathua". Ashapurni temple is believed to have been built by the revered saint Bhagat Chajju Ram, and is thought to date back to the year 1949. The Mandir Bhawan Stands at an impressive

height of approximately 30 feet. The main entrance to the temple is located on the northern side of the Mandir Bhawan, and at the top of the structure sits a magnificent 10-foot idol of Mata Durga Ji, which serves as a stunning centrepiece and a focal point for worshippers and visitors alike. Legend has it that the Hiranagar fort temple is situated at the very spot where the AASH (Veins) of Mata Durga were cast away by the Sudershan Chakra of Lord Vishnu, making it a particularly sacred and significant site for devotees of the goddess. According to local tradition, it was at this spot that the name "Asha Purni" originated, and over time, the temple came to be known by this moniker, cementing its reputation as a sacred and venerated site for pilgrims and worshipping

● **Basohli Fort** :Basohli Fort are located in the city of Basohli, approximately 69 kilometres from Kathua, and serve as a testament to the region's rich cultural and historical legacy. Basohli is renowned worldwide for its unique style of Pahari paintings, which have come to be known as the Pahari School of paintings and have played a significant role in shaping the region's artistic and cultural identity. The architectural grandeur of the monumental complex in Basohli has garnered international acclaim, earning it the title of the "Wonders of the Hills" by a renowned international traveller, and further cementing its status as a must-see destination for visitors to the region.

● **Mata Sundri Kote Temple** :Situated atop the Shivalik Hills at an elevation of 1000 metres, the ancient and holy shrine of Shree Mata Bala Sundari Ji stands as a revered and sacred site for pilgrims and worshippers of the goddess. As it is situated at an elevation above sea level, the shrine of Shree Mata Bala Sundari Ji offers a commanding view of the surrounding landscape, affording visitors a breathtaking panoramic vista of the natural beauty that surrounds it. The shrine of Shree Mata Bala Sundari Ji is located along the historic Old

Kathua-Billawar mule track, approximately 22 kilometres from the town of Kathua and 7 kilometres from Parnalla on the Dhar Udampur road, making it easily accessible to visitors from near and far. Journey to the shrine of Shree Mata Bala Sundari Ji takes visitors through picturesque pine forests and wild bushy plants, providing a serene and peaceful atmosphere for those making the pilgrimage. Upon arriving at the shrine, pilgrims must negotiate 107 steps to reach the temple, with a berry plant believed to be the spot where the idol of the goddess was discovered, enshrined nearby. Regular bus services are available from Kathua to both Kumari, which is approximately 13 kilometres away, and Parnalla, which is roughly 55 kilometres away. From Kumari and Parnalla, visitors must trek to reach the shrine, but the journey is well worth the effort for the spiritual and cultural significance of this holy site.

- **Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha :** The Gurdwara Singh Sabha is a significant religious centre for the Sikh community, situated in the heart of Kathua City. Known as Gurudwara Chowk, it serves as a hub of religious and cultural activities for the local Sikh community. The office of the Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee is located within the premises, managing the day-to-day operations of the Gurudwara. The Gurudwara is a beautiful example of Sikh architecture and features a large prayer hall where devotees can come to worship and offer their prayers. The complex also has a community kitchen, where free meals (langar) are served to all visitors regardless of their caste, creed, or religion. The area surrounding the gurdwara also houses a Sikh Missionary College, which aims to promote Sikh teachings and culture. The gurdwara is a hub of activity during important Sikh festivals such as Gurburab and Prakash Utsav, and festivities like Nagar Kirtan and car festival are carried out with great enthusiasm and devotion.



Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha

- **Airwan Temple:** The Shiva Temple at Airwan village, located near Parole and approximately 15 kms away from Kathua, is a well-known pilgrimage site. It is believed that the temple is of ancient origin, possibly dating back to the 4th century AD. Some legends also associate the temple's construction with King Vikramaditya. The Airwan village bears its name after the River Ravi. During the festivals of Shivratri and Baisakhi, fairs are organised near the temple, and there are several water sources, locally known as bowlies, in the vicinity where pilgrims take a dip before offering their prayers. The holy water in the bowlies near the temple is considered as Gupt Ganga and is used by people who cannot afford to travel to Haridwar, to immerse the ashes of their loved ones.

- **Jodiyani Wali Mata :** The Jodiyani temple is located in the Kathua district of Jammu & Kashmir, India. Situated in Banjal (Himalaya), the temple is approximately 80 km away from the town of Basohli. Basohli is situated on the right bank of the River Ravi at an altitude of 1876 ft in the same district. The locals and residents of nearby villages believe that Maa protects the flora and fauna of the hills. According to the legend, a few decades ago, a shepherd discovered the place while moving with his cattle. He noticed that his cattle fell into a deep sleep when left around the area. Curious about this phenomenon, he sought the help of a spiritual leader, who discovered that this place is a sacred site. This story has become ingrained in the religious sentiments of the community, and the place is considered holy. You can reach Poond Village by bus or private vehicle,

and from there you have to trek to reach Jodiyani Mata, a religious centre visited by hundreds of pilgrims during Navratri. Voluntary groups provide basic facilities to the pilgrims. The temple is located at an altitude of about 7,000 ft and commands a lot of faith from the local people. Additionally, Jodiyani Mata is a beautiful place with breathtaking natural beauty. The distance of the trek from Poond village to Jodiyani Mata Temple is around 15 km. The best time to visit the temple is during Navratri, which falls in the months of Chait and Shrad Ritu according to the Hindu calendar.



- **Sukrala Mata Temple:** The Sukrala Devi Shrine is one of the most renowned shrines dedicated to the mother goddess, situated at a distance of 9.60 km from Billawar and approximately 75 km from Kathua. It is located at a height of 3500 ft on a hillock amidst serene surroundings. The temple's imposing edifice is coated with a white layer, standing majestically. Pilgrims have to climb several flights of steps to reach the venerated temple. The holy shrine is the abode of goddess Mal Devi, believed to be a reincarnation of Sharda Devi. The goddess has manifested herself here in the shape of a Shilla (Stone Slab) seated on a Brass Lion with a silver mounted head. Behind it, there is an image of Mahishasura Mardini (re-incarnation of Maha-Luxmi) standing on the body of Mahishasur, the Demon King. The goddess is depicted with four arms, and one of her hands holds a sword. The shrine is associated with numerous legends. According to one of them, the holy shrine

was built by Madho Singh, an exiled Prince of Chamba (Himachal Pradesh). The number of pilgrims visiting the shrine is increasing every year, and during the Navratri, the number goes up to over 50,000.



2. PROBLEMS IN RELIGIOUS AND HERITAGE SITES OF KATHUA DISTRICT

Many heritage sites and religious sites are struggling to attract visitors due to various issues. However, it is essential that local communities take charge of heritage management to ensure their preservation. Unfortunately, there are several challenges that hinder the likeability of these sites, including:

- **Lack of maintenance and preservation:** Many religious and heritage sites in Kathua district are in a state of disrepair due to a lack of proper maintenance and preservation. This has led to deterioration of the structures and loss of historical significance.
- **Lack of Proper Infrastructure:** The respondents at selected tourist sites have identified several issues related to basic tourism infrastructure facilities such as accommodation, food, drinking water, parking, sanitation, shopping, and shelter. These problems can significantly impact the visitor experience and deter potential tourists from visiting the area. The travel and tourism industry requires a diverse range of infrastructure, including physical infrastructure such as entry points and transportation systems, as well as urban

infrastructure such as roads, utilities, and communication networks.

- **Vandalism and theft:** Religious and heritage sites are unfortunately vulnerable to theft and vandalism, as they may contain valuable artifacts or cultural and historical significance that some individuals seek to exploit or damage.

- **Lack of basic education:** can cause problems in tourism in various ways. Firstly, it can impact the quality of service provided by workers in the tourism industry, such as tour guides, hotel staff, and transportation providers. Without basic education, these individuals may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to provide high-quality and efficient services to tourists. Secondly, lack of basic education can affect the ability of local communities to engage with tourists and provide authentic cultural experiences. Tourists often seek out authentic and immersive experiences, and lack of basic education in local communities can limit their ability to provide such experiences, impacting the overall appeal of the destination.

- **Environmental threats:** Religious and heritage sites are vulnerable to a range of environmental threats, which can include climate change, pollution, and natural disasters, among others. These threats can cause significant damage to the physical structures and artefacts, affecting the cultural and historical value of the site.

- **Lack of communication skills:** lack of communication skills can also be a significant problem facing religious and heritage sites. Tourist experience: The tourism industry often relies heavily on the ability of local guides to effectively communicate the historical, cultural, and spiritual significance of religious and heritage sites. Guides with poor communication skills may struggle to convey the necessary information and provide a satisfying tourist experience.

- **Lack of funding:** The issue of inadequate funding is a pervasive problem

faced by many religious and heritage sites globally. Insufficient financial resources hamper efforts to adequately maintain and repair historic structures, leading to neglect, deterioration, and the potential loss of priceless cultural treasures. Without sufficient funding, these sites cannot be preserved for future generations to appreciate and understand their historical, cultural, and spiritual significance.

- **Human Impact:** The rising number of tourists visiting religious and heritage sites has emerged as a significant challenge in recent times. The influx of visitors can lead to overcrowding, which can put undue stress on structures and artefacts, leading to irreversible damage. Additionally, the increased footfall can also lead to littering, which adversely impacts the environment and the aesthetic value of the site. Pollution caused by excessive vehicular traffic and tourism-related activities can further exacerbate the situation, leading to long-term environmental degradation.

Preserving religious and heritage sites of Kathua district demands a collective effort from various stakeholders, including governments, international organisations, and local communities, to safeguard these invaluable cultural treasures for posterity..

3. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE RELIGIOUS AND HERITAGE SITES OF KATHUA DISTRICT:

In order to tap into the tourism potential of Kathua district's rich culture and Religious heritage, there is a need to prioritise the development of these sites. The following suggestions can help to achieve the goal:

- **Preservation of historical and religious sites:** To promote tourism in Kathua district, it is important to preserve and maintain its rich historical and religious sites. Restoration and renovation of these sites, such as temples, gurudwaras, mosques, and other religious structures, can attract tourists and help preserve the cultural heritage of the region. This can be achieved by providing the necessary funds

for maintenance, repairs, and restoration work. By prioritising the preservation of these sites, Kathua district can attract more tourists, generate revenue, and promote the cultural heritage of the region.

● **Development of tourism infrastructure:** Tourism infrastructure is crucial for the growth and success of the tourism industry in Kathua district. It is essential to develop tourism infrastructure such as transportation, accommodation, and other tourist-friendly amenities to provide a comfortable and safe experience for visitors. This can be achieved by building and maintaining good quality roads and highways, upgrading public transportation systems, and providing facilities for tourists such as clean and safe accommodation, restrooms, and eating establishments. The development of tourist-friendly amenities like tourist information centres, signage, and maps can also help visitors navigate the area and locate important destinations. By investing in tourism infrastructure, Kathua district can improve the overall tourist experience, increase visitor numbers, and stimulate economic growth.

● **Promotion of religious and cultural festivals:** Kathua district has a rich culture that is closely intertwined with its religious festivals. These festivals provide a unique opportunity to attract tourists and generate revenue for the local economy. Therefore, it is important to promote religious and cultural festivals such as Baisakhi, Navratri, and Shivratri. Promotion can be done through advertising and publicity campaigns in local and regional media, social media, and other marketing channels. Additionally, organising special events and activities during these festivals, such as cultural performances, local cuisine and handicraft fairs, and traditional sports competitions, can help draw tourists and provide them with a memorable experience. By promoting religious and cultural festivals, Kathua district can not only attract tourists but also preserve and showcase its unique cultural heritage.

● **Community involvement:** Community involvement is vital for the successful development of religious and heritage sites in Kathua district. The local community has a wealth of knowledge and expertise in preserving and maintaining these sites, and involving them in the tourism industry can create a sense of ownership and pride. One effective way to involve the community is through community-based tourism initiatives. Such initiatives can provide employment and income generation opportunities for particularly those in rural areas. This can include offering guided tours of religious and cultural sites, providing home-stays and local cuisine experiences for tourists, and selling locally made handicrafts and souvenirs. By involving the local community in the tourism industry, the benefits of tourism can be distributed more equitably, and the industry can contribute to poverty reduction and economic development in the region. It is important to provide training and capacity building to the local community to ensure that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in the tourism industry effectively.

● **Improvement of Services:** Providing quality services is essential for creating a safe and healthy environment for tourists in Kathua district. Improving services such as sanitation, clean drinking water, and waste management can enhance the overall visitor experience and promote tourism growth. To achieve this, the local government should prioritise the provision of basic infrastructure and services to the tourism sector. Regular cleaning and maintenance of public spaces and tourist sites can also contribute to a positive visitor experience. Providing emergency services such as medical care and police assistance can enhance the safety and security of tourists. By improving services, Kathua district can attract more visitors, promote tourism growth, and contribute to the overall socio-economic development of the region.

- **Raising awareness through social media:** Social media platforms are powerful tools for promoting tourism and raising awareness of the cultural and religious heritage sites in Kathua district. By leveraging social media, tourism stakeholders can reach a wider audience, showcase the district's unique attractions, and engage with potential visitors. Social media can be used to share information about upcoming festivals, cultural events, and special promotions, and to highlight the district's historical and religious sites. User-generated content such as reviews, photos, and videos can also be used to showcase the visitor experience and attract more tourists. By creating a strong social media presence, Kathua district can increase its visibility and appeal to potential visitors, thereby contributing to the growth and sustainability of the tourism industry.

- **Sustainable tourism:** Sustainable tourism practices are essential for promoting the long-term development and preservation of natural and cultural resources in Kathua district. Promoting sustainable tourism can attract environmentally conscious tourists while also generating economic benefits for the local community. This includes the adoption of eco-friendly practices such as the use of renewable energy sources, recycling, and reducing waste. Sustainable tourism also involves minimising the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, local culture, and communities. This can be achieved through responsible tourism practices such as promoting low-impact activities, supporting local businesses, and respecting local customs and traditions. By adopting sustainable tourism practices, Kathua district can promote responsible tourism development that balances the needs of visitors, the local community, and the environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW :

Literature review has been divided into following three themes:-

On the basis of Promotion of religious and heritage sites of kathua district:

(Atif Javed Qazi, 2018) Tourism is a rapidly growing industry in India and is making significant contributions to the country's economy in today's global market. With the increase in tourism, millions of jobs are being created in various sectors. Religious and heritage sites are particularly popular among tourists, and their visits provide a significant boost to the economy. These sites have become an important aspect of the country's tourism industry and are helping to generate revenue for the overall economy of the world.

(G. Syamala,2016)Religious places hold immense significance for the people of India. They visit these places to seek blessings from their gods and goddesses, often travelling long distances across different terrains. However, over time, these religious places have also become popular tourist destinations.Despite their religious significance, many of these places attract a large number of visitors due to their historical and cultural importance. This has led to the development of infrastructure and facilities to cater to the growing tourism industry. While these changes have brought economic benefits, it's important to ensure that the sanctity and spiritual significance of these places are not compromised.

On the basis of major problems that are facing religious and heritage sites of kathua district:

(S. Shanthi,2019) Pilgrimage tourism, centred around religious sites, is riddled with various challenges and contentious issues. One of the primary concerns is the lack of adequate drinking water for the pilgrims. Additionally, the parking facilities are not equipped to handle the surge in the number of vehicles, leading to further difficulties. The accommodation

options available to the pilgrims are also insufficient, given the large number of people visiting the sites. Furthermore, the authorities have failed to prioritise the clean-up of waste left behind by the pilgrims, exacerbating environmental concerns.

(Vridul Abrol,2020) It is widely recognized that effective management by local communities is a fundamental requirement for successful pilgrimage tourism. However, despite this, many tourists express dissatisfaction with the lack of proper physical infrastructure in rural areas. One of the key factors contributing to this issue is the scarcity of trained tourist guides, who play a crucial role in describing the cultural heritage of the destination. In addition to this, communication remains a significant challenge in tourism, further hampering the experience for visitors. It is essential that efforts are made to address these challenges to ensure a more fulfilling experience for pilgrims and tourists alike.

On the basis of some suggestions that may show beneficial for the future development of religious and heritage sites of kathua district:

(Bilal Ahmad Khan, 2013) It has been emphasised that in order to develop tourism, it is crucial to implement effective planning, development, and marketing strategies. Providing quality assurance is also essential to attract customers and encourage repeat visits. Encouraging ecotourism can help promote sustainable livelihoods. Furthermore, it is important to upgrade service quality in various tourist facilities such as hotels, airports, and railway stations. The awe-inspiring geographical landscapes and diverse ecosystems of these destinations leave a lasting impression on tourists.

(Daniel Levi and Sara Kocher,2009)Tourism at religious sites is a unique form of cultural heritage tourism that presents unique challenges for preservation efforts. One key challenge is balancing the preservation of the site's

cultural heritage with the needs of the local community to continue using the site for religious purposes. The presence of tourists can disrupt religious practices, so it is important to manage tourism in a way that is respectful to the site's religious significance. However, there is a risk that inappropriate tourist activities and commercial development around a heritage religious site can lead to the trivialization of the site.

CONCLUSION: Religious and heritage sites are essential components of the tourism sector, contributing significantly to the promotion of cultural exchange and the conservation of historical and cultural heritage. But many religious and heritage sites of kathua district like Mahanaal Temple, Mata Sundri Kote, Jodiyani wali mata, poor maintenance is the major barrier. So it is important to provide proper infrastructure in these sites. The development of religious and heritage sites in kathua district can have multiple benefits, including economic growth, preservation of cultural heritage and improved infrastructure making it a win-win situation for both visitors and local community.

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