



Impact assessment of lockdown amid COVID-19 pandemic on tourism industry of Kashmir Valley, India

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ABSTRACT

The term tourism includes those people that travel to different places, either locally, nationally or globally for vacation and relaxation, but also for social or economic motives. It is one of the progressive industries whose activities influence the economies of various nations to a great extent. It is significant to note that various past crises have troubled global tourism, but the rapidly evolving global COVID-19 pandemic has confronted this sensitive industry with unprecedented circumstances. The tourism sector contributes significantly to Kashmir's economy, which is a land of unimaginable scenic beauty with a perfect nature with shining lakes, glaciers and meadows, colourful gardens, orchards and saffron fields, with the magnificent snowy Himalayas, and home of popular pilgrimage sites, in sum a perfect acclaimed tourist destination for national and international tourists. We have chosen it as the study area for the present paper. Tourism is a part of Kashmir valley's tradition and contributes massively to its economic development. The present situations of travel and tourism has promoted the spread of highly infectious novel corona virus, which spoils tourism and raises serious questions about the future of this sector. The present paper addresses two important concerns: first it pertains to the unprecedented sociocultural and economic impacts that Kashmir's tourism industry faces amid current conditions, and second it relates to the significant change in the tourist profession and other activities due to the COVID-19 lockdown. The study draws on documentary research with semi-structured interviews, using purposive sampling together with a phenomenological approach. The findings of the study provide a rapid assessment of the reported impacts of COVID-19 on Kashmir tourism all through 2020 with a speedy decrease in tourist arrivals including documented travel restrictions. The research revealed that the stakeholders of tourism changed their means of livelihood from tourism which comes to a halt, to other possible means and the differential regional impacts of the pandemic on tourist centres as well as the severe implications on the economic development of Kashmir Valley. The findings also reveal that lower economic groups (stakeholders of tourism) were deeply affected by this pandemic. Thus, recognizing the early impacts of COVID-19 and summing up estimates of the damage to the tourism economy amid lockdown and beyond is important to restore tourism activities in Kashmir, vital for people's livelihoods.

1. Introduction

Across the globe, tourism has emerged as a vital pillar of development through both forward as well as backward linkages, whether employment, gains in income, growth of other indigenous sectors, foreign exchange earnings, or infrastructural development etc., which it entails. In many countries and regions of the world, the development of tourism is looked upon as the golden ticket for social and economic development. Tourism is the magnet of foreign exchange income, employment opportunities, thereby triggering economic growth and acting as a tool for poverty alleviation (Vilayphone, 2009).

Tourism development is often justified with reference to its potential towards economic improvement. To be precise, it is not wrong to say that tourism is widely assumed as a potential vehicle which helps to minimise the growing economic voids between the so-called Majority World and the Developed World (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Tourist destinations in nature are like intangible assets, where tourists heavily rely on their alternate destination perceptions while making a decision on destination (Um-Crompton, 1990). Most economists agree that economic developmental benefits are provided by tourism (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Bull, 1995; Gartner, 1996; Mihalic, 2002; Balaguer & Cantavella-Jorda, 2002; Tisdell, 2005; Tribe, 2005; Sharpley & Telfer,

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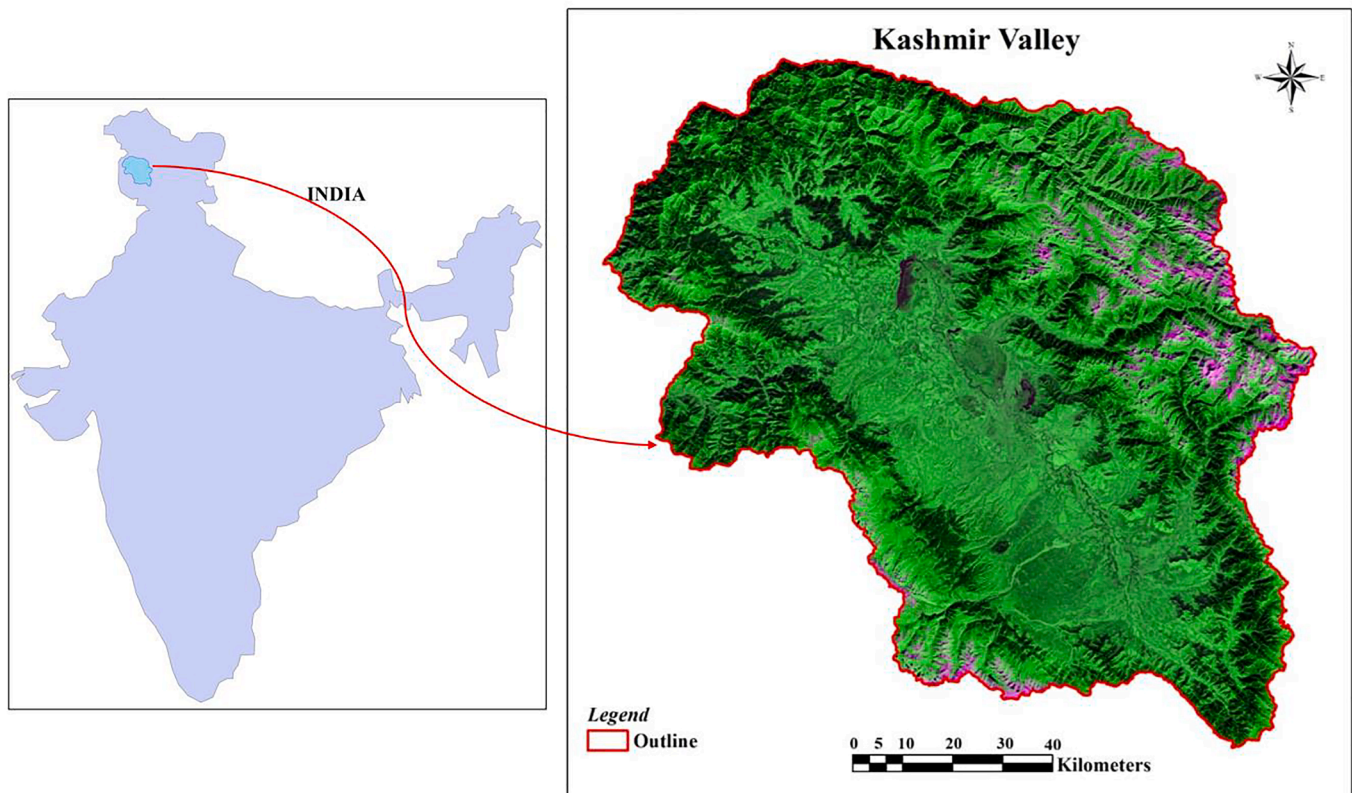


Fig. 1. Location map of the Study Area (Kashmir Valley).

2015; Scarlett, 2021). Tourism is one of the important tools for sustainable alternative development in areas where different sustainable livelihood forms are not viable, such as agriculture (Lane, 1994). Tourism development is the driving force for the progress of backward and rural regions (Smith, 1989). In developing countries tourism is considered an important indicator for regional and national development (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). The direct contact between visitors and residents of an area brings about socio-cultural impacts by tourism (Ogorelc, 2009). Thus, it is quite obvious that the economic development of the host country or region is directly influenced by tourism. Tourism is the utmost pleasurable way in pursuit of fun and relaxation with activities such as sightseeing, camping and exploring new places if the tourist destination is free of obstacles like turmoil, diseases, delinquencies and catastrophes. It is a product of modern social arrangements, beginning in Western Europe in the 17th century, although it has backgrounds in Classical antiquity (Walton, 2020). Epidemics and pandemics are the most frightening factors for travellers as in such cases, it is difficult or even impossible to avoid the disease. Besides, not only the travellers but also other people they contact during the journey are at risk. Travellers play an important role in the transmission of epidemics or pandemics between locations (Hollingsworth et al., 2006). From late 2019 to 2020, the world has been in the grip of a novel coronavirus, which has resulted in local, regional and international restrictions on travel, immediately affecting nationwide economies, including tourism. The tourism industry is not very smooth and has to face many other obstacles. On the contrary, the tourism industry is very sensitive, volatile and highly vulnerable to the factors that influence people's decision to travel (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006).

During any type of social instability, visitors are highly affected by coups, protests, warfare, and political strikes. This has both direct and indirect impacts on tourism. Direct consequences of instability include decreased tourist influxes which result in loss of revenue and GDP; indirect consequences are decreasing employment and reductions in various sectors of the economy, e.g. cleaning, food services, and

maintenance businesses (IEP, 2016). With regard to instability and terrorism, Fletcher and Morakabati (2008) revealed that tourism faces an elevated extent of impacts where the tourist flow is restricted by uncertainty, growing fear, scrutiny of risk towards the impacted destination in addition to physical damage. Thus, increased security levels and safety measures are necessary because they determine tourist flows or decisions (Beirman, 2003; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). Amid the various obstacles, fluctuations and instabilities affecting the tourism industry, the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as one of the leading deterrents for tourism globally. Micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) are also the major victims of this pandemic (Shafi et al., 2020). In addition sustainable development goals are also badly hit by this COVID-19 pandemic particularly in states of negligence (carelessness), like Nigeria (Fagbemi, 2021).

COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is a disease found recently in December 2019 in Wuhan, China affecting the human respiratory system of a person. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the global outbreak of this deadly virus as a pandemic on 11th March 2020. This COVID-19 has caused worldwide deaths at least 3.5 million dead and over 165 million cases (WHO, 2021). In order to tackle the further ill consequences of this pandemic governments across the globe imposed travel bans, curfews, movement restrictions. Most countries have closed their borders to foreign tourists to control its spread which resulted in 78% decrease in international arrivals, 120 million direct tourism job cuts, about US\$ 1.2 trillion loss in export revenues (UNWTO, 2020). In the year 2020, 100% global travel restrictions were imposed by United Nations World Tourism Organization, as a result the tourism industry has become more compromised than other industries in the economy. This sector of the economy is deeply shattered by the COVID-19 pandemic (Shretta, 2020). India, famous worldwide for its hospitality, culture and tradition was generating enormous taxes and creating substantial employment opportunities through international tourist arrivals (Ahmed & Krohn, 1992). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the overseas tourist arrivals to India registered a drop of 66.4% in March

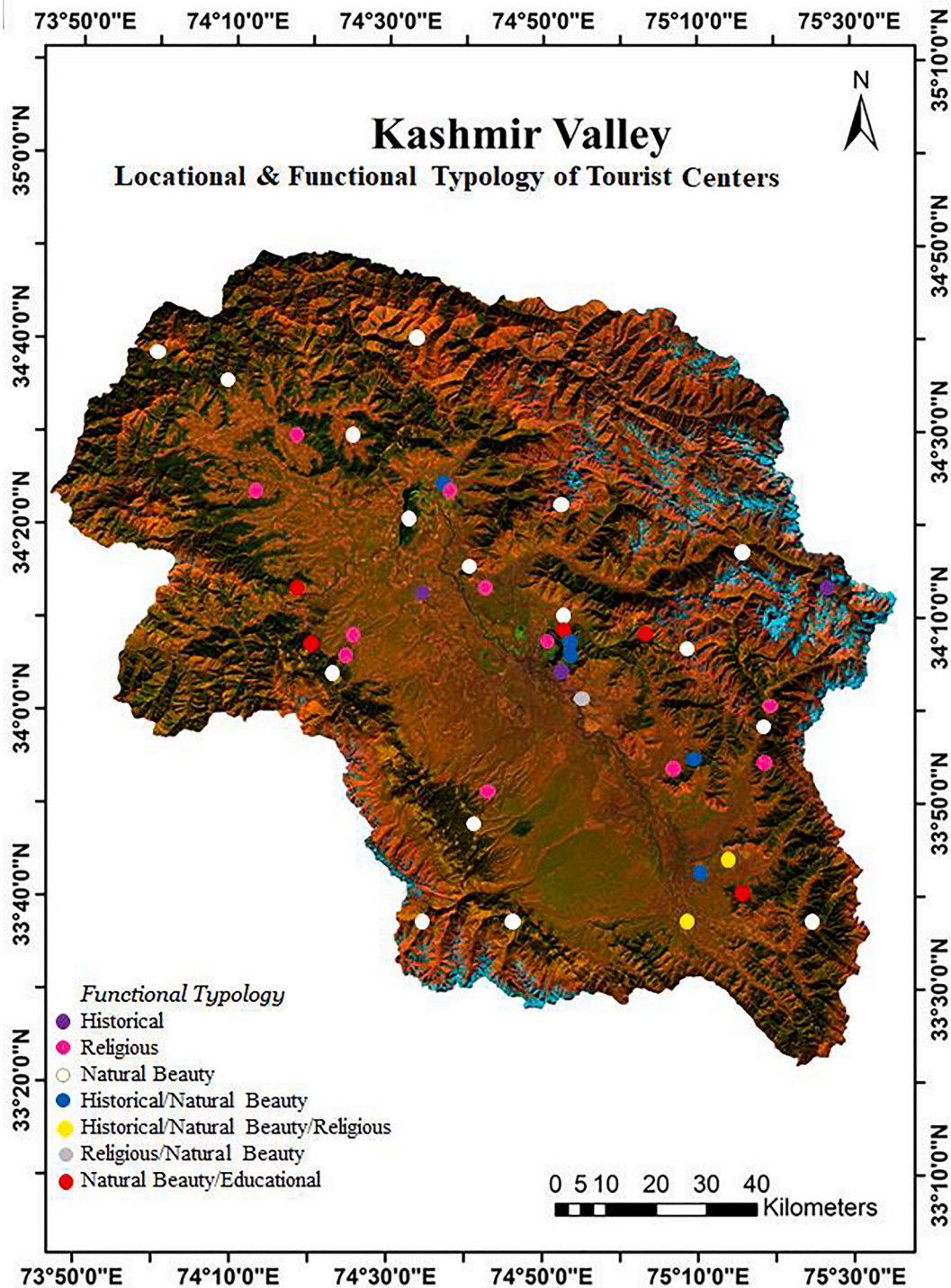


Fig. 2. Locational and Functional typology of Tourist centers of Kashmir Valley.

2020 compared with March 2019 (TAN, 2020). The consequences of this resulted in around US\$ 17 billion annual loss in revenue and 40 million direct and indirect job losses in India (FICCI, 2020; Scroll, 2020).

Applications of remote sensing and GIS play a vital role in providing platforms to practitioners and the scientific community with a wide range of benefits. These benefits include visualization in a more comprehensive and straightforward manner, real-time tracking of reported and confirmed number of COVID-19 cases, direction of spread, contact tracing and also identification of hotspot areas taking into consideration the factors responsible to check dispersion and community spread of this deadly virus (Boulos & Geraghty, 2020; Dong et al.,

2020; Franch-Pardo et al., 2020). Presently, for tracing, monitoring and mapping SARS-CoV-2 cases globally remote sensing and GIS techniques have been frequently applied (Ahmadi et al., 2020; Arab-Mazar et al., 2020; Boulos & Geraghty, 2020; Parvin et al., 2021). Similarly, regional COVID-19 infection risk assessment is evaluated on the basis of remote sensing and GIS techniques (Kanga et al., 2021)

Kashmir Valley is blessed with unparalleled beauty but has been stricken by instability like terrorism, conflicts, disturbances, protests, continuous strikes, and turmoil for decades. Travel and tourism are among the most affected sectors with a massive collapse of international demand amid global travel restrictions; many borders were closed to

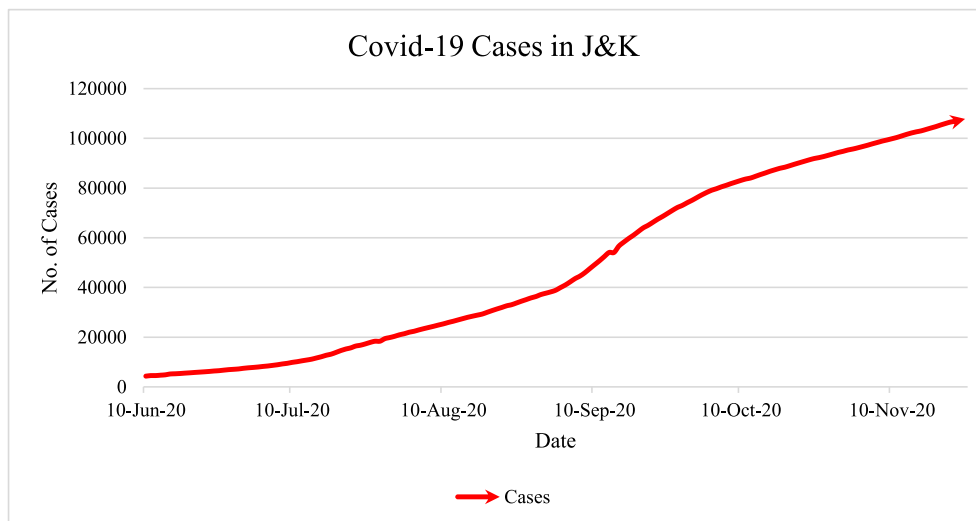


Fig. 3. Covid-19 registered cases in J&K. Source. JHU CSSE COVID-19 Data, 2020.

contain the virus (UNWTO, 2020b). Tourism in Kashmir Valley had been identified as the major industry next to horticulture and agriculture (Ahmad & Hussain, 2011), and the on-going pandemic that erupted in 2019 led to a loss of tourist arrivals which impacted the economy of the state and percolated down to every household of the valley.

Instability has hindered tourism development in the area, which in turn impacted other sectors of the economy which are directly or indirectly associated with the tourism sector in Kashmir valley. This study focuses on the impact of SARS-CoV-2 on tourism industry of Kashmir Valley. The significance of the study lies in the fact that it is a novel study assessing the COVID-19 impacts on the people directly or indirectly associated with the tourism industry of Kashmir Valley for their means of livelihood as they (stakeholders of tourism) changed their state of work from tourism to others sources as the pandemic has brought the tourism industry to a halt. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to understand all factors which directly or indirectly influence the destination of potential tourists and to build a good image in areas which face greater challenges in terms of tourist arrivals and are prone to such natural disasters like COVID-19 pandemic.

2. The study area

To study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on tourism, we have chosen the Kashmir Valley as the study area. It is located in a transition zone from the Ganges plains of India to the mountainous zone of the Himalayas, covering an area of 15,948 sq. km. and located between 33°20' to 34°43' N and 73°52' to 75°42' E (Fig. 1). Kashmir Valley as a half closed ecosystem is the gift of Jhelum River and its numerous tributaries that have deposited sediments from the mountains (Jamal & Ahmad, 2020). It comprises 10 districts, each with its own potential of tourist attraction. Kashmir Valley is to the Himalayas as Switzerland is to the Alps, commonly known as 'Paradise on earth', 'Switzerland of the east' (Chaudhary, 2002), or 'Kerala of the north'.

3. Material and methods

3.1. Data collection process

To fulfill the aims and objectives of the study two research methods were employed to collect the data. The first was documentary research for the collection of secondary sources of data viz., the Department of Tourism J&K (Jammu and Kashmir), and Satellite data Landsat-8 OLI for the locational and functional topology of Tourist Centres using Arc GIS

10.2. Point mark was prepared around each tourist spot in Arc Map 10.5 with separate colors depicting their functional topology. The collected secondary data from the above sources were analyzed and the relationship among the related variables was established.

In a second step, primary data were collected using purposive sampling between October and November 2020. The prime concern in adopting purposive sampling is the researchers judgement with respect to who can deliver the best facts and figures to achieve the objectives of the topic under study (Kumar, 2011). To fulfil the objectives of the study, a semi-structured interview was developed with open-ended questions. The interviews lasted between 15 and 45 min. Some were conducted near tourist sites, others at participants' homes. Informed consent prior to the interview was obtained from the home participants. Before home interviews, due care was taken i.e., how to knock at the main gate, how to open the gate, how to initiate the conversation. Field notes, audio-recording with prior permission of respondents and personal observation were included in the data collection. To clarify ambiguities at the time of data collection in the field, repeated interviews were conducted. In addition to show the level of COVID-19 impacts on tourist centres of Kashmir Valley, a GIS-based proximity analysis tool was used to draw a buffer zone around tourist centres on the basis of filed data collected from interviews, field notes and field observations. Similarly, we elaborated data of tourism-dependent persons who had to change their professions to other sources of income because the lockdown deprived them of their means of livelihood.

3.2. Approach and participants

To gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' views regarding the Covid-19 impacts on Kashmir tourism, a phenomenological approach was used (Goulding, 2005; Cova & Elliott, 2008; Bhar, 2019). In phenomenological studies, a small number of respondents is usually sufficient to reach saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Khan & Hamid, 2020). In addition to secondary sources of data we used purposive sampling to recruit and interview participants to get primary data. In order to obtain closer insights into the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry of Kashmir Valley, the researchers have opted for primary sources of data, focusing on the sociocultural and economic linkages of tourism in association with COVID-19. For this purpose, a number of tourist destinations were selected according to their socio-cultural and economic importance to the dependant population. Information derived from primary survey was analysed and major statements were extracted by researchers associated with the phenomena under investigation and structured into themes. Before the collection of data

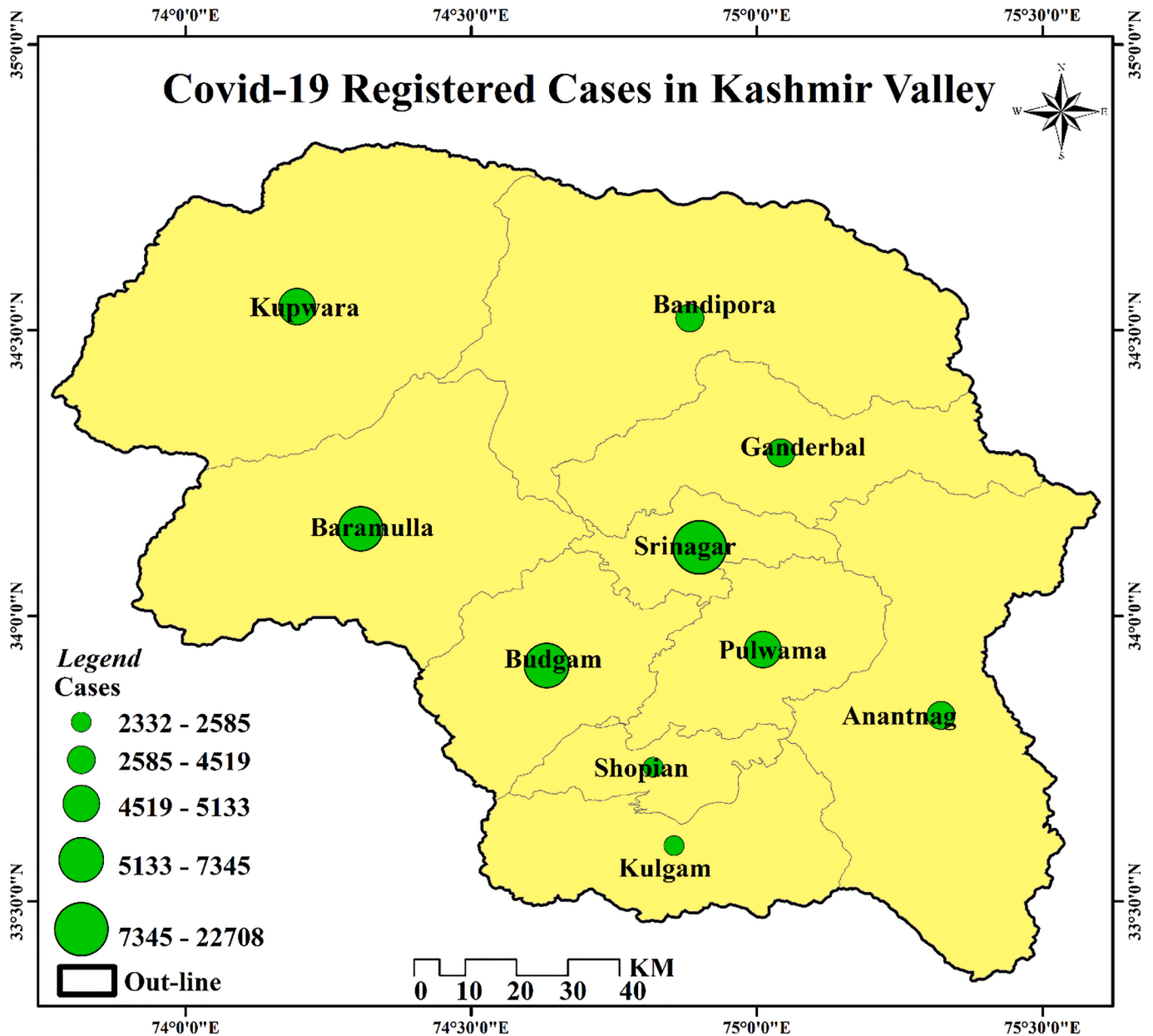


Fig. 4. Covid-19 registered cases in Kashmir Valley. Source: Corona world info (2020).

all participants were informed regarding the aim of study and were assured that this data would be used for academic purposes only.

4. Discussion and results

4.1. Functional and locational topology of tourist centers of Kashmir Valley

Fig. 2 below depicts the locational and functional typology of the main tourist centers of Kashmir valley. The map illustrates the relatively high number of tourist attractions and includes all tourist spots, nearly all holding different functions: religious, cultural, natural or historical importance. This multiplicity of tourist centers demonstrates the wide tourist potential of the Valley, including cultural, religious and adventure attractions, scenic beauty, historical or educational features. The regional physical aspects of the valley are the backbone of its basic tourist potential and can transform its downtrodden economy.

4.2. The COVID-19 pandemic in Kashmir Valley

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating consequences for all spheres of the global economy and all socio-cultural systems. As a result of COVID-19, the global GDP could fall by an estimated 1.5% to 2.8% in 2020, and the tourism export revenues could be reduced by \$910 billion to \$1.2 trillion (UNWTO, 2020a). Governmental measures and strategies on health (lockdowns, mobility bans, social distancing, stay-at-home campaigns, curbs on crowding, mandatory and self-quarantine etc.) have halted leisure, global travel and tourism. However, the tourism industry is considered to be very resilient in bouncing back, but it is highly sensitive and vulnerable to numerous socio-economic, political and environmental risks (Novelli et al., 2018; Sigala, 2020). However, the impacts, nature and unprecedented circumstances of COVID-19 are such that it is not only different from other vulnerabilities but can produce both long-term and profound structural and radical changes to tourism and associated activities. The impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism industry across the globe are uneven in space and time.

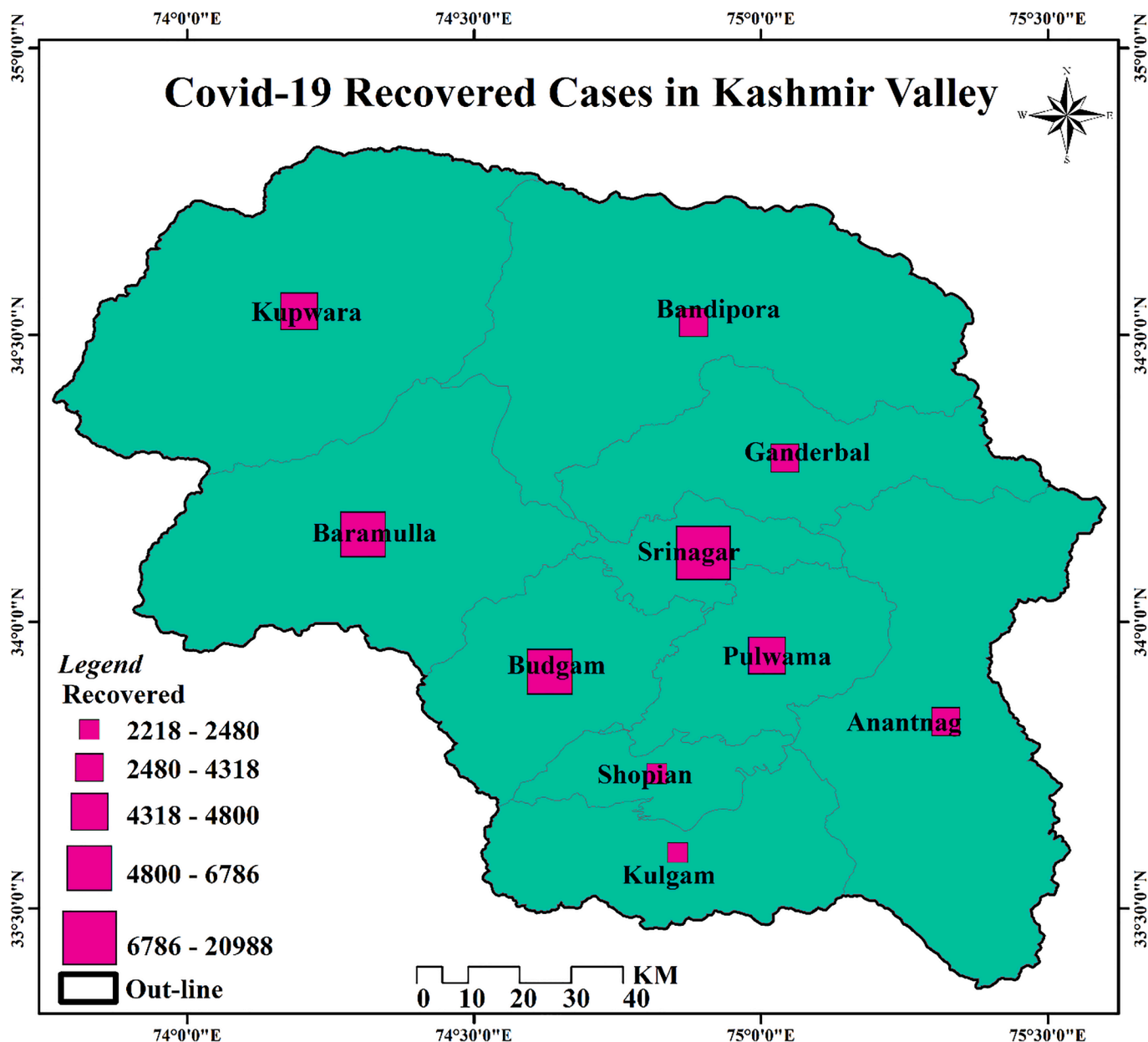


Fig. 5. Covid-19 recovered cases in Kashmir Valley. Source. Corona world info (2020).

According to the UNWTO (2020a) estimates, international tourist arrivals dropped to 78%, causing an export revenue loss of US\$ 1.2 trillion and a cut of 120 million tourism jobs worldwide.

Similarly, COVID-19 has been a death warrant for the tourism industry of Kashmir. Thousands of families who directly or indirectly relied on tourism have been out of work and are struggling to stay afloat. During the last three decades, tourism in Kashmir has suffered repeatedly from shocks, violence and turmoil. The abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution on 5 August 2019 was an additional blow, and COVID-19 came on top of it. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution was conferred an autonomy/special status to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, which gave some privileges to Jammu and Kashmir State and were not available to most of the Indian states. For example, Kashmir had its own flag, job reservations, its own constitution, and no outsider was allowed to buy land in the State. After its abrogation unrest and turmoil was seen from all corners of the Valley. Thus, as a consequence of the Pandemic and the abrogation of Article 370, Kashmir tourism lost about 160 million US\$ (1168 crore Indian rupees) (<https://thekashmir>

[walla.com/2020/08/j-k-tourism-industry-lost-1168-crore-rupees-to-art-370-covid-19-lockdowns/](https://www.wallawalla.com/2020/08/j-k-tourism-industry-lost-1168-crore-rupees-to-art-370-covid-19-lockdowns/)). The union territory of Jammu & Kashmir had registered a total of 107,819 COVID-19 cases until November 25, 2020 (Fig. 3). Among the districts of Kashmir Valley, Srinagar, the capital city has been hardest hit, registering the maximum number of cases 22,708, of which 20,988 cases recovered while 415 deaths were recorded (Fig. 4). It is followed by Baramullah with 7345 cases (6786 recovered and 161 deaths; <https://coronaworld.info/state/India/Jammu%20and%20Kashmir>). The districts of Budgam, Kupwara, Pulwama, Anantnag and Bandipora respectively registered 6804, 5133, 5036, 4519, and 4373 cases until November, of which there were 6398, 4604, 4800, 4318, and 4174 recovered cases respectively (Fig. 5). COVID-19 deaths amounted to 99 in Budgam, 82 in Kupwara, 86 in Pulwama, 77 in Anantnag, and 50 in Bandipora. Ganderbal, Kulgam and Shopain are the least affected districts of the state registering 4149, 2585, and 2332 COVID-19 cases and 37, 50 and 37 deaths respectively (Fig. 6).

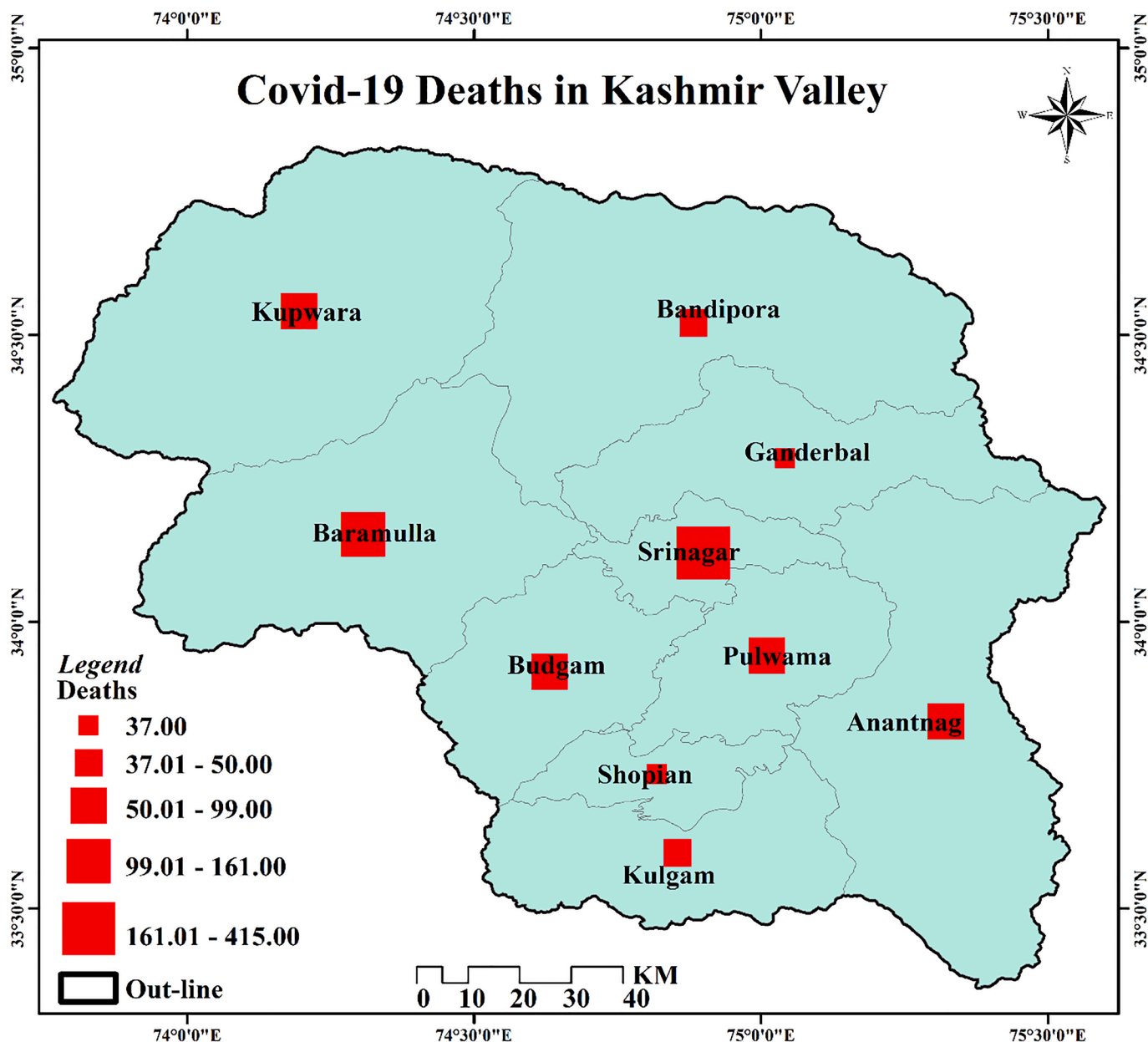


Fig. 6. Covid-19 death cases in Kashmir Valley. Source. Corona world info (2020).

4.3. Tourist flows to Kashmir Valley

One of the main aims of this study was to measure the tourist flow and its dynamics in association with instability. Fig. 7 shows the arrival of tourists to Kashmir Valley from 1988 to 2020, revealing that the tourist flow of 722,035 in 1988 decreased to 557,974 in 1989, a negative growth rate of -22.72%. It is very interesting to note that the growth rate of the tourist flow in the Kashmir valley always fluctuated with ups and downs from 1990 to 2020. The abrogation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019 was a severe blow to tourism in the Valley which only received 43,059 visitors compared to 2018.

However, comparing the tourist arrivals of 2019 and 2020 offers a disheartening picture. In January 2019, 25,095 visitors to the Valley were recorded, but only 4863 in the same period in 2020 with a negative growth rate of -81% (Fig. 7). February saw 15,903 tourists in 2019 and only 8182 in 2020. Similarly, in March 2019 tourist arrivals amounted to 21,237, but only 4643 in 2020. This was the month in which Prime Minister of India announced a complete lock-down for the whole

country from 22 March onwards. And this lockdown resulted in zero tourist arrivals in April, May and June 2020 (Figs. 8 & 9). The flow of tourists increased in June and July but with a very low growth rate. Similarly, August registered a mere 10,130 tourists due to the abrogation of Article 370. Thus, a decline of -93% was registered compared to July 2019 with 152,525 arrivals. In 2019, Kashmir valley received 565,532 visitors but only 25,922 from January to November 2020 (Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir, 2020). The tourism sector has been affected really hard by the abrogation of Article 370 and the COVID-19 pandemic (Fig. 9).

A field survey was carried out in October and November 2020 to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the population dependent on tourism in Kashmir Valley. A total of 300 respondents who were associated with tourism at different tourist sites were interviewed personally by the authors as well as with the help of some persons with good knowledge of the procedure of interviewing. The total sample consists of only the associates of tourism who were wholly and solely dependent on tourism viz., photographers, tourist guides, hoteliers, pony riders, houseboat

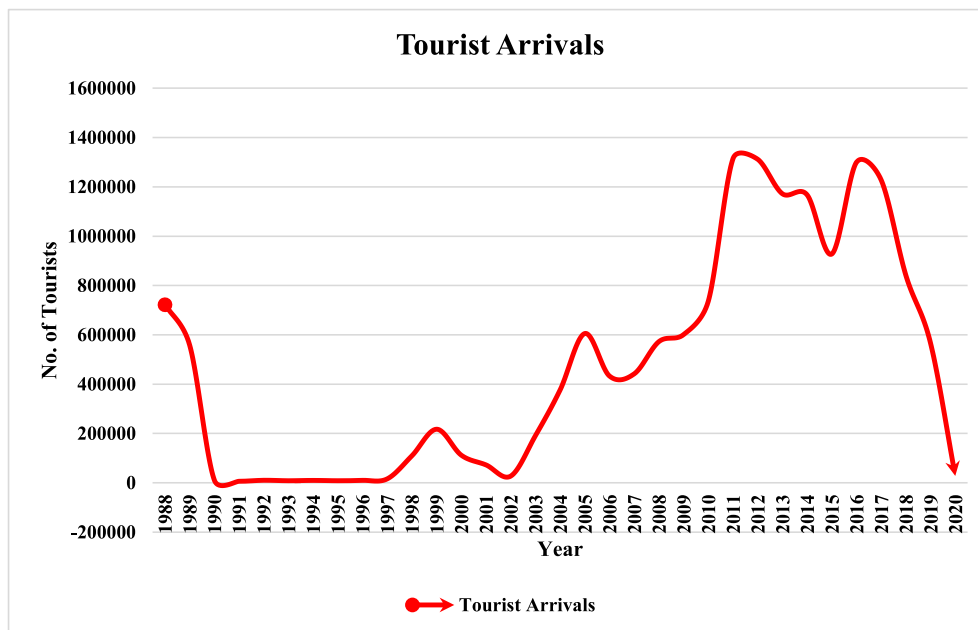


Fig. 7. Tourist Flow to Kashmir Valley. Source. Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir (2020).

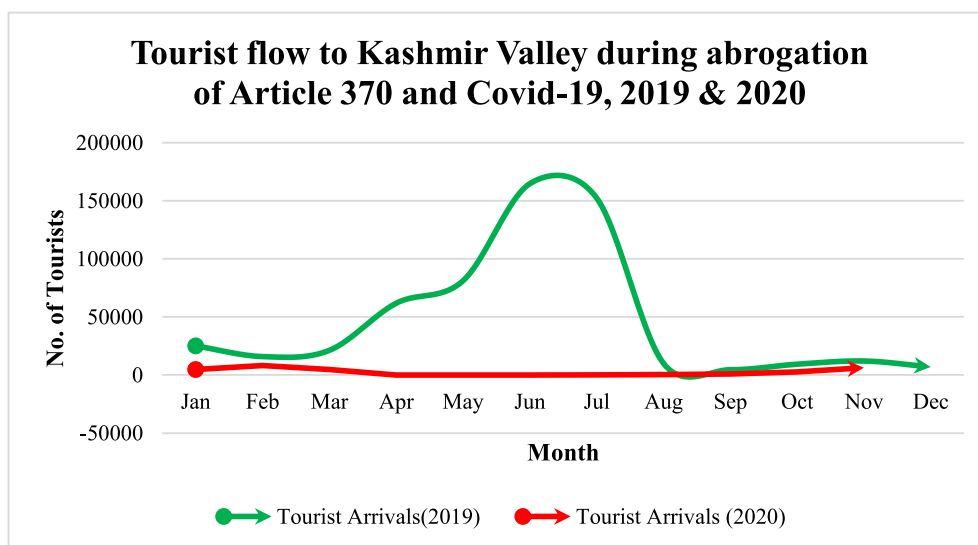


Fig. 8. Tourist flow to Kashmir Valley during, 2019–2020. Source: Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir (2020).

men, and shopkeepers (Table 1). The analysis of data acquired showed that out of the 300 respondents, 239 changed their state of employment from tourism to other means of livelihood. Among the photographers, 5 became local labourers, 12 started working in their own paddy and apple orchards, 8 went to other professions and only 4 didn't find any other job. Hoteliers are the category that suffered most from the COVID-19 lockdown; for them the year 2020 has been a nightmare, as all their rooms remained vacant and the hotels seem to them like graveyards. Among all the categories, the hotelier data show that out of 73 respondents only 37 started some other profession during COVID-19 and only 24 got themselves engaged on their own farms. Pony riders have also been hard hit by the COVID-19 lockdown, as they are mostly mountain people (Gujjar) who used to give a ride to tourists to reach different religious shrines like Amaranth Cave in Pahalgam, high reach meadows in Gulmarg and Sonmarg or show the scenic beauty in inaccessible areas. In this way they used to get a good amount of money to cover their families' needs, but during COVID-19 tourists were lacking,

which shattered their source of income. These people moved to nearby villages to work in their fields and house construction. Houseboat men (Shikara) are mostly found in Dal Lake, Mansabal, Nigeen Lake etc., and COVID-19 did not spare them. Most of them started dredging sand from rivers or worked in nearby areas as labourers to support their families. Similarly, shopkeepers who were entirely and exclusively dependent on the arrival of tourists changed their state of earnings to their farm field. This shifting of profession reveals that the middle and lower class population that depends on tourism for a livelihood has to face the hardest times to support their families by changing their professions.

5. COVID-19 pandemic and tourism: unprecedented sociocultural-economic impacts

Tourism is one of the world's major economic sectors, influencing livelihoods, economies, opportunities and public services globally. The impact of COVID-19 on tourism is therefore threatening the

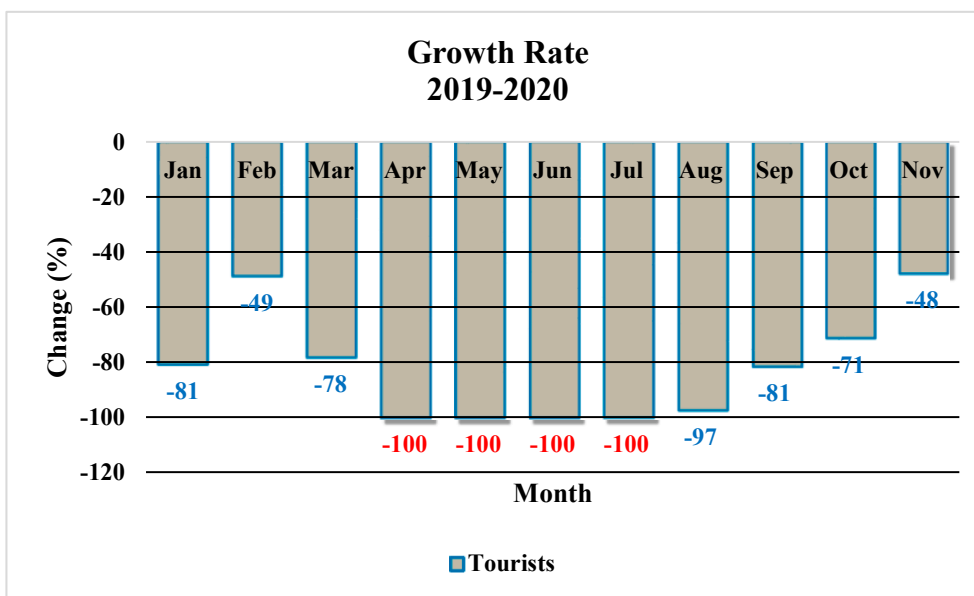


Fig. 9. Growth rate of tourist flow during abrogation of Article 370 and Covid-19 Pandemic. Source: Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir (2020).

Table 1

No. of associates who changed their state of employment from Tourism related activities to other employment due to Covid-19 in Kashmir Valley.

Types of Employment	New Profession				
	No. of persons	Local Labour	Worked in their own agricultural fields	none	other job
Photographers	29	5	12	4	8
Tourist Guides	31	-	17	5	9
Hotelier	73	-	24	36	13
Pony Riders	47	31	11	2	3
Houseboat man	42	23	9	-	10
shopkeepers	78	8	48	14	8
Total	300				

Source: Primary Survey Conducted by researchers, October and November 2020.

achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 because of increasing poverty and inequality (SDG1 & SDG10). The lockdowns have resulted in closed hotels, closed borders, and a dramatic drop of air, road and waterway travel. The COVID-19 pandemic has also hit cultural tourism. The global wealth of diversity, culture and traditions are the prime motivating factors for travel. The shutdown of markets for indigenous products, handicrafts and other goods have been particularly severe (UN, 2020). Many other cultural practices which highly rely on tourism revenue, such as cultural world heritage sites, festivals, marriages or pilgrimages were postponed or cancelled. Thus, the pandemic has deep socioeconomic impacts on tourism sector of the Valley leading to a substantial reduction in tourism revenue.

According to reports of the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), about 144,500 person lost their jobs associated to the tourism industry of Kashmir. The estimated loss between August 2019 and August 2020 is estimated at around 5454 million US\$ (40,000 crores Indian Rupees), with the tourism sector worst affected. Some of the insights recorded by field researchers on COVID-19's impacts on the tourism industry dependants are given below:

Vajahat (Name changed) said: "COVID-19 is a horrible nightmare to tourism sector of Kashmir Valley and to all those associated with it. Last year after the abrogation of Article 370 by Government has deeply affected the tourist arrival after August, 5, and we were expecting to fulfil the deep marks of that and unfortunately the COVID-19 aimed continuous lockdowns has

affected us both physically and physiologically. We are in a trauma of injuries with no medicine. We hope the Government may take steps to aid the industry needing a financial package to cushion the Sociocultural-Economic Impacts of corona virus".

Nissar Ahmad a stakeholder of the tourism industry stated: "The Outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic spurring misery and despair followed by complete lockdowns from third week of March for months-long brought down stakeholders of tourism industry in the Valley to state of verge of liquidation. On account of this COVID-19 pandemic, borrowers are not in a position to pay the due instalments".

Mushtaq Wani, owner of a 100-bed hotel in Pahalgam with a view of lush green forests and the swift flowing river Lidder, said: "We were expecting very good progressive tourism promotion this year, but, Corona spoiled it all".

Tariq, a hotel owner in Srinagar is more worried about new establishments (entrants) and stated: "We are in this business from decades and we are having a good network throughout the country. When I saw my empty room, they seem like deserted with feared silence and hardly we are able to pay the maintenance of the hotel from the tourists, but what about those who are new to this, they are not able to break even".

Issa (Name changed), a government employee in the Department of Tourism reported that: "Who so ever is belonging to tourism industry is suffering due to the pandemic. Be it a stakeholder, a taxi walla, traveller agent, hotel owner, a shopkeeper, a pony rider, all of them are suffering".

Owais expressed his grief due to the losses he suffered because of the pandemic: "If you can't sell any item today, you may be able to see it tomorrow, but what if my hotel rooms remain vacant for a day, It means I lose a complete day. This is not the case with me alone but there are so many people whose bread and butter are dependent on tourists, like the house boat owner or a pony owner".

Mujtaba Javeed: "Kashmir tourism is influenced by an evil eye, every year some new happening arise and tourism has to bear it. However, when impact of COVID-19 pandemic is taken into consideration, Kashmir tourism has witnessed the darkest phase in the tourism sector ever".

Uzain Mushtaq, a student of 11th class (Secondary School) expressed his views in response to COVID-19 as "When Tulip garden Asia's largest was in full bloom with tulip flowers waiting for the arrival of tourists to record their beauty in the month of April, there was no one to witness, and their petals shattered into dust while waiting for them".

Anjum (Name changed): "It was my marriage in April this year and all arrangements were almost done. COVID-19 has impacted not only on our

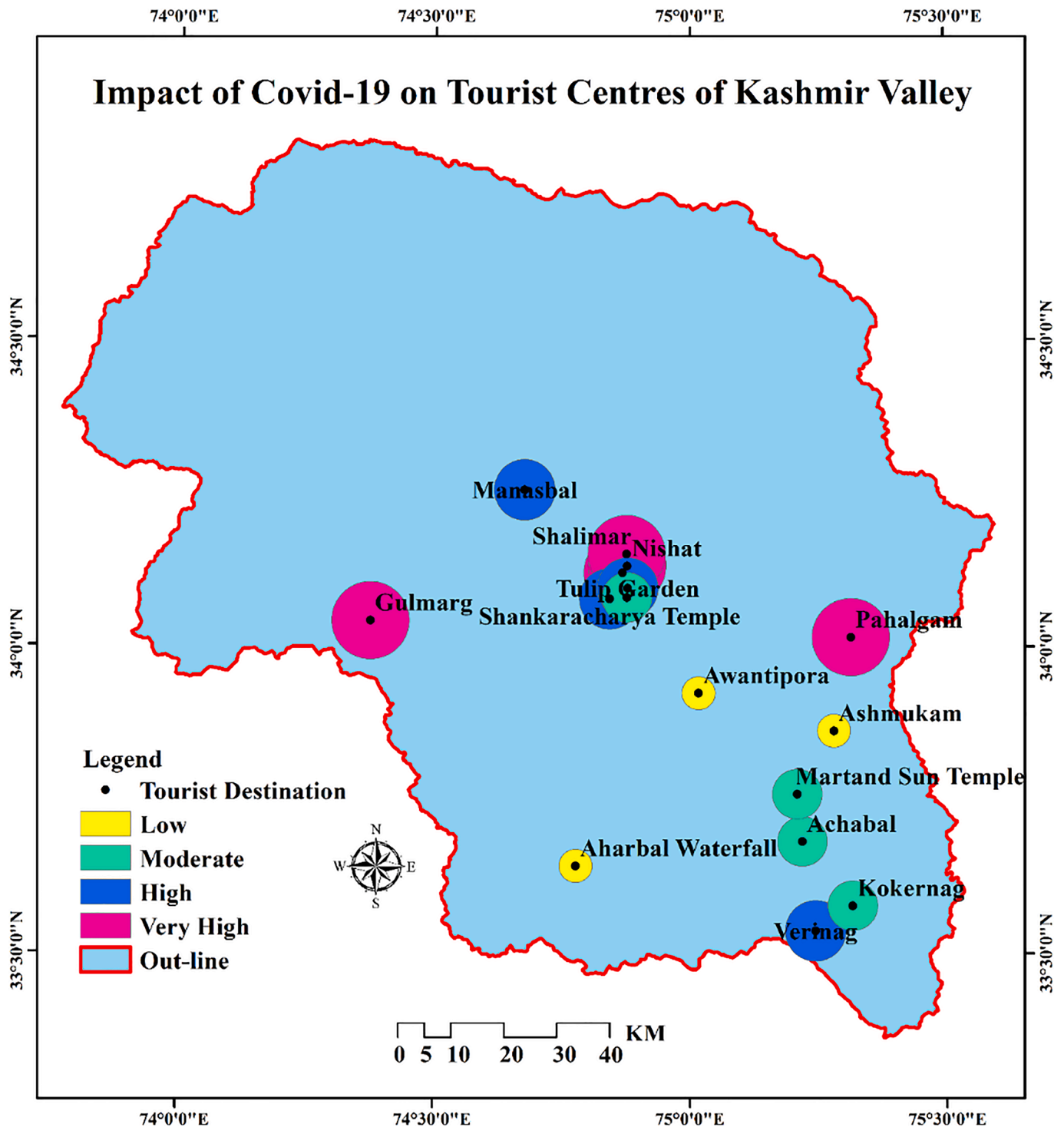


Fig. 10. Covid-19 effects on some important tourist destinations. Source: Field survey conducted by researchers between October and November 2020.

health but also our traditions. Kashmir marriage was famous for its own tradition, elaborate rituals, a few days of feasting, and huge gatherings because without them Kashmir marriage looks dull. But have been replaced this year by muted ceremonies attended by limited neighbours and few close relatives. We used to feed 4 guests together in a single big plate (Traem), but in this pandemic one single plate for each guest. It was disheartening to see that, this pandemic has changed our old tradition in a few months. Marriage for everyone is once-in-a lifetime affair, we wish and really feel bad that we could not invite most of our neighbours, relatives and friends. For money people it looks a small change, but this change saddens me inside” she said.

Javeed, a boatman of Hazratbal Srinagar residing on the banks of Dal Lake stated that “People used to come here from all parts of Jammu and Kashmir whenever it was a religious ritual. I have never seen deserted lawns and roads here in Dargah Harzatbal (Shrine) as during this pandemic. There was a large flock of pigeons and people used to feed them. But, unfortunately, that large flock is now mere a small count as not being feed like earlier”.

6. Personal observations

While conducting the field survey, the researchers closely observed

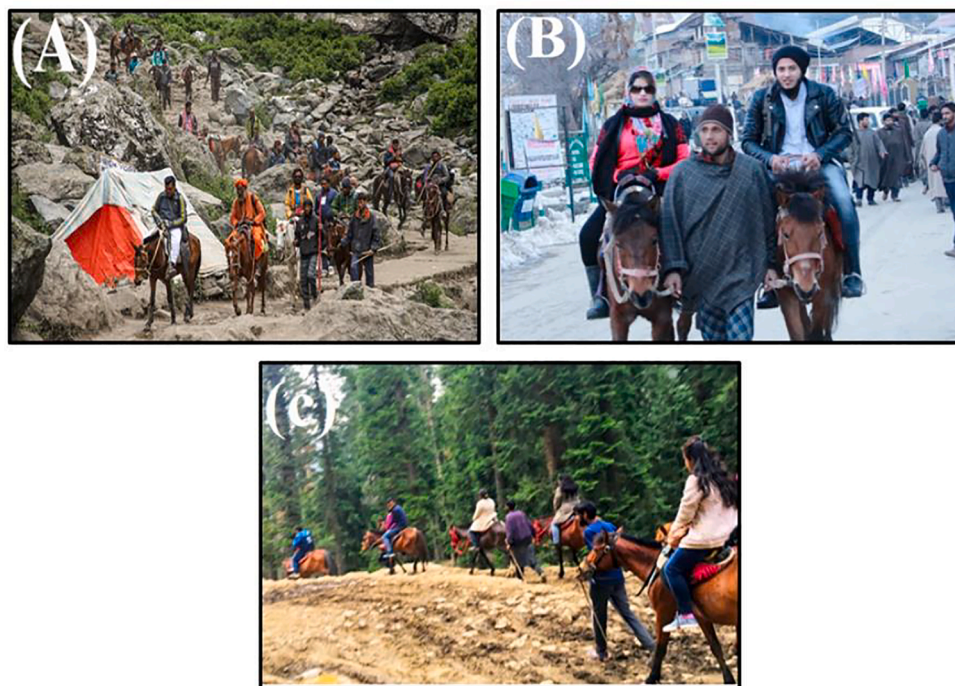


Fig. 11. a, b, and c: Pony riders carrying Tourists in Kashmir Valley. Source: (11a) <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/7/17/unprecedented-security-at-kashmirs-annual-hindu-pilgrimage> (11b) <https://kashmirilife.net/thousand-footfalls-break-pahalgams-long-holiday-generate-hope-165735/> (11c) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/travel/things-to-do/you-cant-afford-to-miss-these-things-in-pahalgam/gs49982031.cms>.

the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism industry and its associates. It was found that gardens for visitors were facing problems of maintenance. The locals used to enter without tickets after climbing over the fences and breaking the walls as no security personnel were deployed. Some of the gardens were looking like grazing grounds full of grass as for months no grass had been cut. In some places animals like cows, goats, sheep, dogs and horses could be seen roaming inside which were not allowed in the past because of maintenance and security of the gardens. Fig. 10 shows the levels of effects COVID-19 had on some of the tourist destinations in Kashmir Valley, in terms of maintenance, tourism associates, stakeholders, and tourist losses.

In addition, COVID-19 has made life very difficult for poorer segments of the society who are the hardest hit by it, earning their bread and butter from tourism. During the survey, we saw that boatmen of Dal Lake and Nigeen Lake were seen selling fruits and vegetables along the roadside. But there were not many buyers and they could hardly earn a good living. Nowadays many of them are dredging sand from Jhelum River to fulfil their needs. The pony riders of Gulmarg, Sonmarg and Pahalgam used to make their daily living by offering the visitors a ride on their horses (Fig. 11 a, b, c). In these tourist destinations, to most of the Gujjar families, visitors are the main source of income, but in this year, the COVID-19 pandemic hit them so hard that many sold their horses to satisfy the needs of their families. The religious places of all faiths have also been equally affected. All religious places in Kashmir Valley were closed, even Amarnath Yatra (religious tourism) was cancelled and replaced by a live broadcast on television and internet for the devotees. The number of yatris (tourists) who visited the shrine last year was 342,883 (Directorate of Tourism Kashmir, 2020).

7. Conclusion

The COVID-19 lockdown across the globe resulted in numerous psychological, socio-cultural and economic impacts on the various stakeholders of the tourism industry, with some of the consequences for years to stay. In the long run, they will percolate to each and every household associated directly or indirectly with tourism. The pandemic

has brought the tourism industry to a halt. It is not possible to predict when and where crises like natural disasters, a pandemic or epidemic, terrorist attacks etc. will occur, and to deal with them is difficult and costly. Travellers are flexible and develop alternate plans, changing a destination affected by a crisis and moving to another one. Tourism has the ability to attract visitors from different corners of the world, highlighting a variety of attractions, increasing a location's reputation and influence. However, in this global COVID-19 pandemic, all of these alternate plans lose their meaning giving no scope to any type of tourism, whether religious, medical or leisure. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic will have long-lasting impacts on the tourism industry, as even after its end it will affect travellers' decision to return to their former level of mobility. The outcomes of this study reveal that the tourism industry of Kashmir Valley is very sensitive and easily affected by any crisis, whether at the national or international level. Although the Kashmir tourism industry was already facing a crisis of political turmoil, the magnitude of COVID-19 is not comparable with previous crises and creates further pressure to strengthen its roots. The study illustrates that any type of disturbance has negative impacts on the tourist flow in the valley and paves the way for unemployment and poverty. During the pandemic, all tourist spots resemble graveyards, and the negative effects percolate down to each and every household associated with it directly or indirectly. The findings of the study provide an assessment of the reported impacts of COVID-19 on Kashmir tourism all through to the end of 2020 with a rapid decrease of tourist arrivals following travel restrictions. This COVID-19 pandemic has been a death warrant for the tourism industry of Kashmir. As a consequence of the Pandemic and the abrogation of Article 370, Kashmir tourism has lost about US\$ 160 million. A total of 107,819 COVID-19 cases had been registered till November 25, 2020. Srinagar has been hardest hit, registering the highest number of cases 22,708, of which 20,988 cases recovered while 415 deaths were recorded. This scenario of grief resulted in a decline of -93% of tourist flows in July 2020 compared with July 2019. The analysis of data acquired through field survey shows that out of the 300 respondents who were completely dependent on tourism, 239 changed their state of employment from tourism to

other means of livelihood. In addition, the pandemic also reflected unprecedented sociocultural-economic impacts. The estimated loss between August 2019 and August 2020 is estimated at around 5454 million US\$. The study highlights that COVID-19 has made life very difficult for poorer segments of the society who are the hardest hit by it, earning their bread and butter from tourism. The population dependent on tourism was forced to find new occupations, and the economic development of Kashmir Valley is seriously in jeopardy. Recognizing the early impacts of COVID-19 and making estimates of the damage to the tourism economy amid lockdown and beyond is important to restore tourism activities in Kashmir as it is vital for the livelihoods of many people. The results are an alarm for policy makers to restructure the tourism sector and frame the policies to manage the tourism destination better to reduce the impact of sudden disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights the hotspot affected area and provides an understanding and overview of scale and the type of the COVID-19 tourism impacts. Thus following the COVID-19 protocols at each tourist centre helps to limit the consequences of virus spread. Alternate sub-tourist centres should be developed at each local tourist centre where people can visit during such disasters when transportation system is halted. Face-mask, sanitizers, social distancing and as well as delimiting the number of tourists at a tourist place is the need of the hour to limit the dispersion and community spread of this disease. This will help to maintain the leisure and comfort of the tourists and frame an environment of less risk. The potential is enormous as the Valley is endowed with scenic beauty and a rich flora and fauna, but determination and intelligent planning along with a strong and comprehensive governmental policy are required.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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