Inner Himalaya: An opportunity to turn the terrain to economic fortune

A number of indicators have revealed that India is facing regional imbalances that have left a large portion of its population economically backward. There are various factors responsible for this imbalance among which slow growth in infrastructure development in certain regions of India, is one of the prominent factor.

The Himalayan states have suffered because of the remoteness of the areas and difficulty in execution of infrastructure development plans in a limited time frame of 5-6 months in a year primarily because of the severe weather conditions that produce avalanches during winter and landslides due to incessant monsoon rains in these areas. In view of the above, there is a need to draw a comprehensive plan for the development of less developed interior areas in hill states. For example, in addition to the identified backward districts of Baramulla and Kupwara, the districts of Doda and Kargil have a huge potential to grow and contribute to the GDP of the nation. Environmental friendly industries such as tourism have a great potential in such areas. We have examples of Leh and Kulu districts of J&K and HP respectively, which have seen tremendous rise in income due to development of tourism. Leh, for example, recorded a high of 30% annual growth between 2014 and 2017. The potential of tourism in bringing backward regions of India into mainstream can be inferred from the international tourism data where India’s foreign exchange earnings from tourism has shown more than $23 billion in revenue in 2015, a significant hike from the $3.5 billion it made in 2000.

The need of the hour is to strengthen basic infrastructure ensuring road and air connectivity throughout the year. Secondly, the remote, picturesque and approachable areas have to be identified and private entrepreneurs invited to establish state of the art accommodation and related services at the identified locations Activities such as adventure tourism, mountaineering, trekking, rafting etc, need to be encouraged and supported. The historical legacies of rock sculptures, castles, monasteries, meadows and shrines etc could also play outstanding role for tourism development.