



Problems and Prospects of Spiritual Tourism Development in and around Greater Guwahati

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ABSTRACT : *Being a fast growing industry and inexhaustible industry potentials, it has several positive sides like income generation, foreign exchange, employment opportunity. Among the different facets of tourism, spiritual tourism is one of the chief modes for attracting a large numbers of tourists. The state of Assam has numerous temples and other religious institutions. The capital city of Guwahati itself is a hub of many temples. Though it seems like religious yet it has different social positive effects in the form of spiritual tourism. Here an attempt has been made in this paper to bring into light the potentiality of spiritual tourism in near future and the other associated benefits that the locale can get out of it. Attempt has also been made to trace out the drawbacks of the temples and to overcome those.*

Keywords: *Dependency, People, Pabitora, Sanctuary, Tourism.*

I. Introduction:

Spirituality has recently become an important subject of research in social and business areas [1]. Spiritual tourism is an important component of Indian tourism industry as India is a land of spirituality endowed with many places of worships, pilgrim centres and religious monuments [2]. In spite of being numerous tourist destinations for tourism to develop, the industry is still struggling in the Contry in general and the state of Assam in particular. The pathetic condition for such poor condition of tourism is due to the lack of proper planning mechanisms. Proper maintenance, inadequate infrastructure, mismanagement are some of the important causes for the contemptible development of tourism in the state of Assam [3]. So here is the question how to develop the industry in the state with proper planning and strategies for excellence. Tourism in Assam is still in infancy. However the capital city of Guwahati along with its surrounding has a good numbers of temples which have enormous potentiality for the spiritual tourism to proliferate in the region. So

study has been carried out in and around the capital city of Guwahati which is blessed with several spiritual tourist destinations which again possesses *enormous tourism potentiality*.

II. Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the project are as follows-

- 1) To find out the hitch of the tourist destination.
- 2) To find out the solution on the hitch of the tourist destination and make proper strategy.
- 3) To highlight the potentialities of the tourist destination with special events.

III. Study Area:

Guwahati being the capital city of the state has a great prospect for spiritual tourism to develop, as the city is full of several tourist destinations in and around it which bears spiritual importance throughout the nation. The city of Guwahati is located in Kamrup district which is divided by the mighty river Brahmaputra into North and South.

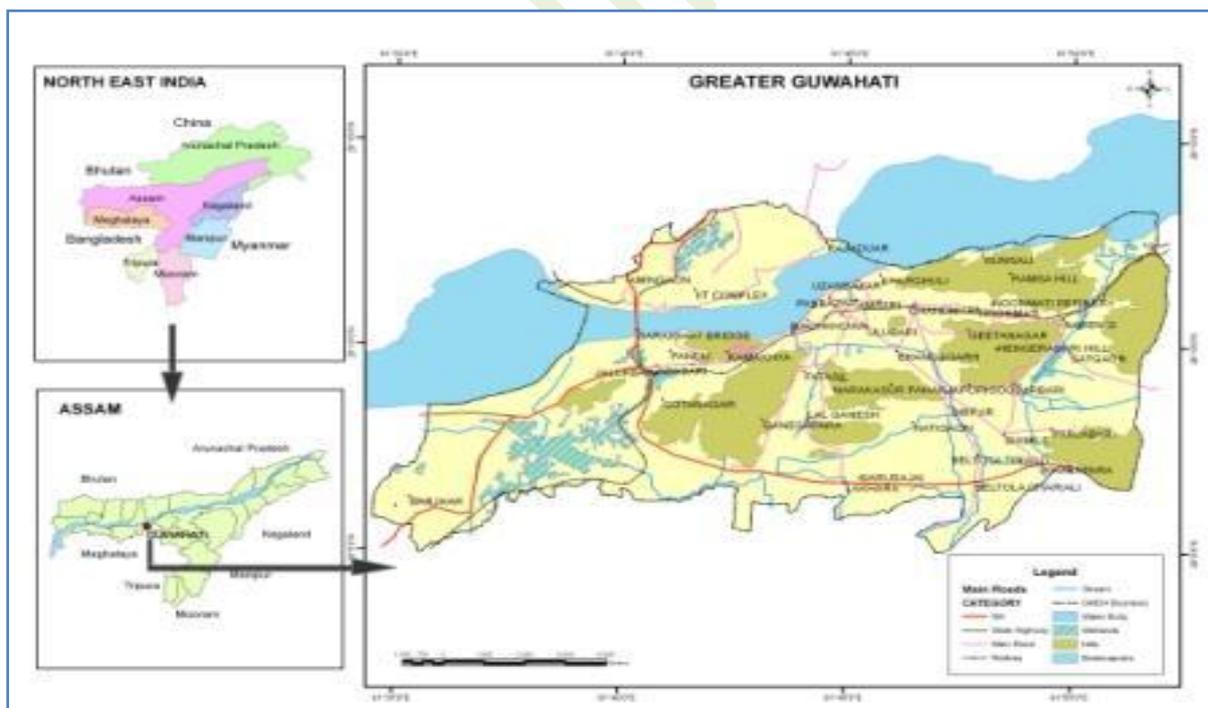


Fig: LOCATION MAP OF GREATER GUWAHATI



However the southern part is better known as the Guwahati City by having so many administrative, political, commercial as well as cultural organizations into it. Guwahti was declared as the Capital city of Assam as back as in 1973 which were earlier at Shillong, Meghalaya. The surrounding of the Guwahati city is very beautiful covering by hills and monad nocks. The mighty river Brahmaputra flowing through it has given an extra charm to the city. Moreover many others like to say the mighty Brahmaputra as the lifeline of the people of Assam as most of the culture; economy was highly based on it in ancient days.

Since ancient period the people in and around Guwahti were of highly religious believers and as a result of those lots of big and small temples found around the city. The city itself is known as the city of temples locally. Apart from religious tourist places it has also some other places of importance due for their natural beauty, wildlife etc.

Table 1: Some Important Tourist Places in and around Guwahati:

| Name | Location | Character | Distance from Guwahati |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Kamakhya temple | Nilachal hiils | religious | In the city |
| Basistharam | East Guwahati | religious | In the city |
| Balaji temple | Near ISBT* | religious | In the city |
| Sukreswar temple | Panbazar | religious | In the city |
| Lankeswar temple | Lankeswar, West Guwahati | religious | In the city |
| Hayagriba Madhava temple | Hajo, | religious | Around 25km |
| Kedarnath temple | Hajo | religious | Around 27 km |
| Ashwaktanta temple | North Guwahati | religious | 15 km |
| Madan Kamdev | Baihata Chariali | Religious/ Archaeological | 30 km |

*Inter State Bus Terminus

Source: Field Survey 2016-17



Here we have seen that a lots of tourist places are there around the city of guwhati of different interest. So the place has a very huge prospect of tourism development but due to the lack of proper strategy a

IV.Methodology:

To achieve the objectives there is need of going to field survey to get some on field data i.e. the primary data of the various tourist destinations mentioned above. After collecting the data it has to be analyzed with proper care for analysis. The data has been collected with proper way that is taking interview to the persons concerned of the respective tourist destinations. During the collection of the data the local people nearby the temples has been also taken into account to verify the interview with the authorities.

V.Significance:

Spiritual tourism is a journey to a sacred place or shrine of importance to a person's belief or faith. It is a tour for attaining spiritual improvement or getting creator's bliss [4].Spiritual tourism is recognized as one of the major contributors in states revenue. Many countries are known for their spiritual heritages. In India the state of Utrakhand has made significant promotion in the field of spiritual tourism. Tourism has been a major driver of economic growth and livelihood promotion in most of the remote areas of Utrakhand [5]. But organized research activities are yet to be seen in this field. Therefore the study bears a great significance as there is high need of promoting the tourist destination to attract more tourists. Tourism also gives economy of a region a milieu without investing much more. It also solves the unemployment problem to a considerable extent. The tourism based on nature and wilderness also makes the people aware about the environment depletion and its high need for the survival of the entire ecosystem.

VI. Result and Discussion:

The image of a tourist destination is an impression that a person holds about a state in which they do not reside. Therefore the promotion and condition of a tourist place bears significant impression for place's further recommendation. The field investigation and the information gathered from the survey have



enabled us to know about the real situation of the various destinations. There has been seen a tendency of the peoples regarding the tourism and its probable benefits. While finding out the answer to our first objectives it has been seen that there are lots of draw backs of the tourist destinations. It has been found that there are not proper transport network facilities with a affordable price. Also there is the problem of the good road condition for which lots of tourists are just discarding to go for it. The other difficulties the tourist are suffering from the proper tourist guides specially the foreign tourist facing problems during negotiation. Unsafe driving is another lacuna. The overall infrastructure facilities are not up to the level for many of the tourists. On the other hand on spot tourist lodges are very few. Therefore tourist has to travel a lot to go for a particular tourist destination. Though there can find some lodges yet due for the improper management of those the tourist highly refused to stay there. Some other lacuna that can be find out during our survey are like the manner of the priests are not good in some places, beggary is another problem for most of the religious tourists places.

From the first objective it has observed that there are lots of drawbacks of the tourist destinations individually and in general as well. Spiritual tourism needs some special care as it is highly sensible from the religious point of view. Therefore the people involves here should have the basic enthusiasm to serve the tourist. Improvement in the transportation sector is another solution, but how to improve? The above mentioned tourist destinations are highly festival specific. Therefore the transportation should be made available cheep and easier at least during the particular festival. However the road condition should be improved with proper technological use viable to the weather. The locals to be trained with proper linguistic knowledge like English and Hindi at least for the basic negotiation. Utmost care should be given while providing license to the drivers especially to the tourist taxies by the authority while regular monitoring and vehicle up gradation must be due in time. The drivers should be trained up properly by experts in case of safe driving and proper and decent behavioral approach with the tourists. The on spot tourist lodges should be improved with modern facilities like newspaper facilities, internet connectivity. One can also incorporate small museums, library and book stalls within the lodges. Providing



free foods on charity basis can be handy in abolishing the practice of beggary outside the temple premise.

The temples mentioned above are seen more active during some special events in the year. However, temples like Kamakhya are prompt throughout the year with full of pilgrimage. Therefore there should be specific strategies for tourism promotion for the different temples. During the pick season and festivals the temple’s management should be extraordinary to fill comfort ability of the pilgrims. Future recommendation is a must need for the sustainability of the tourism industry, Therefore the hospitality of the tourist should be kept into prime consideration for future recommendation and revisit of the same tourists.

Table2: Temples with their important festivals and observing season.

| Name | Important Festivals | Season |
|--------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Kamakhya temple | Ambubachi | June(monsoon) |
| Basistharam | Volbom/Shivratri | July/February (Monsoon & winter) |
| Balaji temple | Janmastomi | September (monsoon) |
| Sukreswar temple | Shivratri | February (winter) |
| Lankeswar temple | Shivratri | February (winter) |
| Hayagriva Madhava temple | Maghi Utsab | January (winter) |
| Kedarnath temple | Shivratri | February (winter) |
| Ashwaktanta temple | Shivratri | February (winter) |
| Madan Kamdev | Shivratri | February (winter) |

Source: Field Survey 2016-17

VII.Conclusion:

‘Spiritual tourism though seems to be a newer academic concept, but it is certainly not a new phenomenon, The term Spiritual tourism, of late has attracted



many researchers globally[6].Spiritual tourism like other facets of tourism has different benefits to the host community as well as to the tourists like economic, religious, cultural, etc. From the analysis it has been found that the various tourist destinations have great potentialities for the tourism industries if proper strategies and proper planning can be made with proper execution of such. In this regard examples can be cited for the temple located apart from the city which are lacking in loading facilities. The Madan Kamdev temple is located apart from the city for which there should be adequate facilities for the tourists to stay there as it would be costlier for the tourist to travel all along from the main city. However with the government initiative there are some government lodges but the management of those are not so good.

So to overcome such problems the government as well as the private sectors and NGO's have to work together. On the other hand the cooperation of the local people is also indispensable in this regard. One more important point here is that need of good entrepreneur to invest to this industry.

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