



Tourism and People -Sanctuary Relationship: A Case Study of Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary of Assam

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ABSTRACT : *The ecological condition of today is so critical that if not checked in due time it will be out of control. The different human practices like agriculture, industrial activities have emerged as a prime factor for the destruction of nature and ultimately there lies a situation of ecological imbalances. People inhabiting near the wildlife sanctuary usually have an emotional association with the nature setting. Therefore conservation of natural resources and preservation of cultural and heritage resources are of global concern at present. Tourism practices can be of handy enough in this regard with proper management strategies. The Assam's Pabitora wildlife sanctuary is located in a strategic location surrounded by human habitated from all sides. Therefore a bottom up strategy is the need of the hour for the protection of the flora and fauna of the sanctuary in particular and the ecological balance of the sanctuary in general. In the present study an attempt has been made to understand the people sanctuary relationship and the role of tourism in making the livelihood of the nearby people with a sustainable way.*

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

I. Introduction:

People have a great urge to explore the nature and its inherent uniqueness. Such visit close to nature like National parks, Wild life sanctuaries is called nature tourism and a sustainable form of it is eco-tourism. Eco tourism has significant role to play in the interpretation of the nature and natural resources. Now tourism is popular among general people. Increased leisure times, incomes, extending mobility, are some factors responsible for such popularity of travel as an industry [1]. The state of Assam with its unique natural and cultural backdrop has able to catch the eye of strangers from time immemorial. Its hills and mountains and various protected areas. Tourism in Pabitora wild life sanctuary has gaining momentum during last few years. Both the domestic and international tourists to a great numbers gathered here to enjoy its rich biodiversity and scenic beauty. The high concentrations of the great Indian one horned rhinos are the



chief attraction apart from the different domestic and migratory birds. 'Forest has been very important natural resource for rural livelihood in India. In most Indian villages, local people are heavily dependent on forests mainly for fuel wood which is only dependable energy alternative they have, sometimes it also works as potential cash earning sources for households'[2]. The Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary of Assam is also surrounded by as many 21 villages inhabiting by people of different cultural background. Therefore the sanctuary is vulnerable one from conservation point of view.

II. Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the study are:

- i) to study the villager's relationship with the sanctuary
- ii) to examine the villagers' perception towards the sanctuary
- iii) to understand the local's willingness towards tourism.

III. Methodology:

The study has been carried out in the Pabitora wildlife Sanctuary and its periphery villages. The study based on the empirical observations and primary data. Altogether 830 households scattered in 21 different villages have been carried out. The data has been collected with the help of schedule and questionnaire by interview with the villagers nearby the sanctuary. The data's so collected have been analyzed with the help of different cartographic and statistical techniques to show the logical relationship of the same with the study.

IV. Result and Discussion:

Villager's Relationship with the Sanctuary:

'Forest has been very important natural resource for rural livelihood in India. In most Indian villages, local people are heavily dependent on forests mainly for fuel wood which is only dependable energy alternative they have, sometimes it also works as potential cash earning sources for households'[2]. The people of the forest periphery depend on varying degrees for their livelihoods. People may involve themselves for collecting fuel wood and fodder, which may affects the habitat of wildlife as well as the forest ecosystem. The rapid population growth and the high demand of forest produce may leads to extraction of forest resources. But the most significant fact about these protected areas is that most of them are located in the vicinity of the human habitat with



agricultural landscapes. However, the dependency of the forest fringe people on such protected area depends on variety of factors like economic status, availability alternative means of fuels, lifestyle, etc. While carrying out the survey in the fringe villages of the Pabitora regarding their tendency of dependency on the sanctuary local respondents have shown positivity towards the use of forest products for their day to day life necessity. The people are more fanatical to depend on the wildlife sanctuary specially the fuel wood and the fodder for the livestock. These are the universal cause for which people has to depend on the forest areas. In economic front majority of the fringe villages (48.69%) are still dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. The annual flood is again a hindrance for sustainable agriculture practice. Therefore it is difficult for the people of the villages to afford the modern source of energy for cooking like LPG, kerosene, etc.

To understand the level of dependency on the sanctuary by the fringe villagers, questions have been asked regarding the frequency of their visit to the sanctuary. Among the surveyed 830 samples from 20 peripheral villages, more than half are found to be daily visitor to the sanctuary, which showed their intense linkages with the sanctuary (Table1). Almost 58% of the people have revealed about their daily venture to the sanctuary which is followed by weekly visitors (11.20%). While people, those who visit the sanctuary sometimes represent 10.96%, followed by monthly visitor (8.31%), and Bi weekly (7.22%). Contrary to this only a limited number (4.81%) of fringe village dwellers do not want to visit the sanctuary for any purpose.

Table 1: Frequency of visit of fringe villagers to the sanctuary

Frequency of visit	Number of person	Percentage
Daily	477	57.46
Weekly	93	11.20
Bi weekly	60	7.22
Monthly	69	8.31
Sometimes	91	10.96
Not at all	40	4.81
Total	830	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2012-2013



The purpose of visit of the sanctuary differs among different people. But whatsoever the purpose may be, the main aim of the visit to the sanctuary is not at all advantageous for the sanctuary as much of such visits are associated with extraction of forest products. While answering to the questions the locals has admitted that they visit the sanctuary mainly for the releasing of their livestock, collection of firewood and fodder for livestock (Table 2). The majority of the people visit the sanctuary for cattle ranching.

Table 2: Purpose of visit to the Sanctuary.

Purpose of Visit	Number of households	Percentage
Collect firewood	143	16.63
Collect NTFP**	166	19.30
Cattle Ranching	477	55.47
Other	34	3.95
Not at all	40	4.65

** Non Timber Forest Product

Source: Field survey, 2012-2013

It is observed that that the fringe people are highly dependent on the forest. But it is not fruitful at all for the sanctuary in the long run. The promotion of grazing reserve to a wildlife sanctuary has restricted the local people in collection of the fuel wood from native forest, which has initiated some conflict with the forest department. But whosoever the cause may be the present scenario must have to change with strong initiative from government's side to overcome the problems of the locals with the help of all possible alternative means.

Villagers' Perception towards the sanctuary:

People inhabiting near the wildlife sanctuary usually have an emotional association with the nature setting. 'An effective conservation strategy for a forest could turn the local poor from intruders into its keepers by making them stakeholders in the earning opportunities that conservation provides' [3]. Understanding the peoples' perception regarding the protected areas bears great



significance in searching alternative strategy for conservation. It is felt by the conservationist at present day world that without the proper participation and positive attitude of the local people no protected areas can sustain for a long run. It is the local people only who know the area better than any other. Though the dependency of people nearby a wildlife sanctuary is inevitable but the rapid population growth in the periphery and ever increasing pressure on land exert negative effect on such natural settings. Therefore, there must be a need to develop a harmonious relationship between the nature and the demand of man on natural resources.

While carrying out survey in the fringe villages of Pabitora sanctuary, mix reactions were found in different villages. Out of the total respondents 89.04% shown their positive interest and attitude for the sanctuary while 10.96% of the respondents were found quite reluctant towards the sanctuary the sanctuary (Table: 3).

Table 3: Attitude of the villager towards the sanctuary.

Attitude of the villager	Number of respondents	Percentage
Positive	739	89.04
Negative	91	10.96
Total	830	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2012-2013

While answering to question of the necessity of the sanctuary, most of the villagers have replied that the sanctuary fulfill their basic household requirements as well as they have an identity in the national and international level for being a part of the world famous sanctuary which has the highest concentration of one horned rhinoceros. According to the villagers they are happy to have a wonderful biodiversity region nearby them with different wild animals as they are the part of this region. While answering the issues regarding the protection of the sanctuary 56.99% of the villagers wanted the sanctuary to be protected by modern amenities like putting guard wall, establishing observatory towers, etc, to restrict migration of wild animals and to protect the sanctuary from intruders. On the other hand a bulk of the respondents (43.01%) does not want to protect the sanctuary in terms of putting guard walls, fence, etc. However, they like to



protect the movement of wild animals. One of the main cause behind is that most of the people belongs to the group are mostly depends on the sanctuary for various purposes and the putting off guard walls will end up their dependencies on the sanctuary.

Local's willingness towards tourism:

Sense of community and participation are the main factors which can effect on process of community based tourism development. Without community participation and sense of community tourism development could not be achieved [4].The proper planning and management of the ecotourism can be handy in fostering the conservation on one hand and at the same time it can boost the rural, remote and poor communities in a sustainable manner on the other. By observing the economic opportunities associated with the sector, there grows a positive attitude amidst local people to participate in tourism related activities. Investigation in this aspect revealed that majority of the people (75.06 %) wants to be part of the tourism activities and adopt tourism as an alternative or supplementary means of their livelihood. People believe that apart from their traditional livelihood practice tourism may add some amount of to their income in one hand and boost the local arts, culture and traditional practices on the other. Another reason of the people wanted to engage in the tourism sector is that the tourism practice in Pabitora is very much seasonal, confined to the winter months. As this is the post harvesting season for the rural agrarian community, no labor intensive work left out in the agricultural fields. So they want to adopt tourism as an alternative means for monetary gain and capitalize those leisure time (Table 4).

Table 4: Willingness of the villagers to involved in tourism activities.

Willingness	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	623	75.06
No	207	24.94
Total	830	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2012-2013and2013-14



Tourism in most of the cases is seasonal. The seasonal variation is significant so far tourism and dependency of local community is concerned. Studies point out that in areas with significant seasonal variation in the number of visitors most people treat tourism related income as additional revenue on top of subsistence farming [5]. While carrying out survey during the pick season in Pabitora wildlife Sanctuary it has been estimated that the small shops investing Rs 3000 could able to generate almost Rs. 400 to 500 rupees as profit/ day. For the tourist peak seasons for 3 to 4 months, a small shop owner can earn Rs. 12,000 to 15,000/ month and it will be around Rs. 36,000 to 45,000 after the completion of the season. There are more than 20 such shops run by the locals during the pick tourist season (November to February).

V.Conclusion:

The Pabitora along with its fringe areas has emerged as a potential tourist site of the state of Marigaon district and the state of Assam. In spite of limited development of the area, tourism has gradually been seen as an alternative livelihood among the local community. Annual flood, damage to the agricultural crops by wild animals, rapid population growth and the economic backwardness together has worked as a motivating factor of the villagers of the sanctuary periphery to opt tourism as an alternative means to their livelihood. In this backdrop, community based rural tourism also have various positive impacts like economic, social and emotional empowerment of the host community.

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