

Rural Tourism Development: An Overview of Tourism in the Tipam Phakey Village of Naharkatia in Dibrugarh District, Assam (India)

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Abstract- Rural tourism is a recent offshoot of tourism sector that has grown up to be a potential business in its own space. Rural tourism is a form of nature based tourism that uncovers the rural life, culture, art and heritage at rural locations, thereby favoring the local communities socially and economically. Such form of tourism has created tremendous impact on the local economy and socio-cultural scenario of the concern area on one hand and carries a potential scope for the rural residents on the other hand. Rural tourism is an opportunity for rural development.

The Tipam Phakey village of Naharkatia has great diversity of culture, tradition and natural resources which makes it every attractive tourist destination. It is a store house of a unique Buddhist culture that has form the basis of attractions for outsiders. Here, rural tourism promotes the local economy, socio-cultural changes and life style of the people residing in and around the village. This present paper aims at exploring of rural tourism at Tipam Phakey village, which act as an incentive to promote local, socio-economic and cultural changes and lifestyle of the people residing in and around this tourist location and also to find out various constraints and possibilities of tourism development in the study area.

Index Terms- buddhist culture, rural tourism, rural development, tipam phakey

I. INTRODUCTION

“Rural tourism is a multi-faced activity that takes place in an environment outside heavily urbanized area. It is an industry sector characterized by small scale tourism business, set in areas where land use is dominated by agricultural pursuits, forestry or natural area.” (Dept. of Tourism, 1994)

Rural tourism is regarded as a part of both ‘Rural Development’ and ‘Sustainable development’. Rural tourism takes many forms, so it is difficult to give an exact definition. Rural tourism is a form of nature based tourism that uncovers the rural life, culture, art and heritage at rural locations, thereby favoring the local communities socially and economically. Such form of tourism has created tremendous impact on the local economy and socio-cultural scenario of the concern area on one hand and carries a potential scope for the rural residents on the other hand. Rural tourism brings people of different culture, faiths, languages and life style, close to one another and it provide a broader outlook of life. It not only generates employment for the people but it also develops social, cultural and educational values. Rural tourism is an opportunity for rural

development. Rural tourism is one of the opportunities that rural communities might consider to improve productivity and incomes. Sustainable rural tourism can generate long term benefits for villagers.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To understand the potentialities of rural tourism in the study area.
- To identify various challenges of rural tourism.
- To find out the impact of rural tourism upon the socio-economic conditions of the villagers.

III. METHODOLOGY

The required information's are collected from both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data and information's are collected through field survey and participant observation. Secondary data are collected from various relevant books, journals etc.

IV. STUDY AREA

The Tai-Phakey community of Assam is an integral part of the Assamese nationality. The Tai phakey is the branch of the great Tai race that entered Assam in the later half of the 18th century. The word *Phakey* has been derived from the Tai word *pha* meaning *wall* and *ke* meaning *old*. It Forms a small microscopic community in Assam, presently residing in nine villages of dibrugarh and tinsukia districts of upper Assam. The present study area is the Tipam Phake village, which is situated on the northern bank of the river Burhidihing of Naharkatia subdivision of Dibrugarh. This village was established in the year 1850 and main person in establishing the village was Pu thot Nong. The village folk speak a dialect similar to the language in Thailand and still follow the traditional customs and dress code of great Tai race.

V. FINDINGS

Tourism in the study area:

Tipam phakey village have great diversity of culture, traditions and natural resources, which makes this place very attractive tourist destination. Three tourism themes have been selected as benefiting both tourists and local people.

- **Eco tourism:** It is a responsible type of tourism which preserves natural resources as well as maintaining the well-being and social values of the local people. **Tipam Phakey Eco-Tourism Camp** was formed in 2010 September to include a number of natural activities and unemployed youth of the Tipam Phake village with a mission to conserve the amazing biodiversities of North East India in its vicinity right from its inception. Located on the bank of river Burhidihing at Tipam Phake village **TIPECT** is close to Dehing Patkai wildlife sanctuary (Rainforest of Assam). Tai phake Eco-tourism in this area has been an industry of international standard. With a unique blend of smell of Rainforest and touch of a minor but well cultured beautiful community of Phakials the “Tai Phakey Eco-Tourism Camp (**TIPETC**)” is an ultimate destination for wildlife lovers. It is difficult to record the exact number of tourist arrivals. Due to lack of any official records, however they estimated that around 6000 tourists visited the camp within the span of one year. Tourists are not only local and domestic, as well as foreigners from California, South Africa, Thailand etc.

Table1: No tourist to the eco camp (Year 2010-12)

Months	No of tourist
Oct-December	3380
Jan-march	2620

Source: eco camp

- **Cultural tourism:** It is concerned with the culture, religion, history and archeology of local people. The Tai-Phake celebrates several festivals related to Buddhism, held throughout the year which forms the basis of cultural tourism in this area. One of the important and popular festivals is the Poi Chang Ken i.e. festival of bathing of Buddha images, which falls every year on the last day of mid April. This is also called Pam Bihu.

Poi Nin huk or Buddha Jayanti is another annual festival held in the full moon day in the month of May-June to celebrate the birth of Lord Buddha. Another festival, namely Maikom Sum Phai is observed on the full moon day of January, almost similar to the magh bihu of Assamese culture.

These festivals often form the source of tourists attraction.

- **Village based tourism:** It is a type of tourism in which tourists share in village life and villagers gain economic and other benefits from tourist activities. The Tipam Phakey village itself forms a source of tourist destination. Tourists often come to witness the life style of the people of this village. The traditional way of life right from their traditional attire to their traditional food, forms a delightful destination for tourists.

VI. PLACES OF TOURIST INTEREST

- The Buddha Bihar or the Buddhist monastery situated at the centre of the village.
- Rain Forest.
- The Buridihing River.
- Bird watching site at Merbil near Naharkatiya.
- Tipam Mountain.
- Deomhalee pahar, Dighalighat Nagaghat, Sitakunda etc

VII. BARRIERS

- **Language Problem:** Language problem in the locality have been found to be one of the barriers in the enhancement of the tourism potential. People are found to be lacking proper fluency in Hindi, English or even Assamese language, for interaction with the tourists. Their mother tongue i.e. Tai language is pre-dominant.
- **Insufficient Financial Support:** Proper financial support can enhance the tourism potential of the region, which would help the folks to preserve the local culture, traditions, heritage, art forms etc, because according to mass thinking, maintaining culture is not commercially viable. Tourism can showcase the uniqueness of the place in the proper manner.
- **Communication Problem:** Transport and communication can be regarded as another major problem affecting the region. The region is remotely located and even lacking any definite medium for transportation.
- **Lack of Trained tourist guide:** The whole tourism concept is very indigenous in the region. Though initiative attempt have been taken by the local youths, yet the professionalism is lacking. They are lacking proper training to project in the manner from tourism perspective.
- **Lack of business planning skill:** The region has great potential as an upcoming tourist spot. But, in order to bring it to a greater platform, sound business planning has to be made. The region needs proper enhancement of its beauty and resources skillfully to bring itself to light.

VIII. SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS

- **Employment to youth:** Rural tourism contributes positively to the increase in employment and income levels of the youths. Youths are found to be engaged in one or the other work related to the eco-tourism camps. As per their information, about 17 youths are engaged presently, out of which 2 are girls.
- **Boost to the Handloom industry:** Traditional attires, especially of women are found to a delightful attraction for incoming tourist both domestic and outsiders. People, often found to be interested in purchasing the

garments, which is helping in gearing up the production of local handloom products.

- **Preservation of natural resources:** tourism in local areas in helping in preserving the rural eco system, since it forms the base to the tourism sector, also a part of the development funds are use in creating social forests and preserving existing forest.
- **Exchange of revenue:** employment avenues created by tourism demands have help in earning domestic income
- **Exposure to their religion:** Tai culture is one of integral part of Assamese culture, hitherto unknown. Tourism avenues have a given a due introduction to this almost hidden but old culture. Tourist interaction has provided the proper exposure to the world outside.

When tourists stay in a particular destination for a long time, they come into contact with the host people. This continuous interaction affects both host and guest as well as. This leads to a composite culture.

IX. PROSPECTS

There is a scope of rural tourism in the study area. Rural tourism as supplemental income can contribute to the increase of well being of the rural inhabitants, the reduced out migration and to the development of the rural area. Tourism is increasing the life quality of the inhabitants of the study area and it reduces the differences between the rural and urban region. It seems important to know that the tourism cannot be a dominant sector of the region itself, however it may be a driving force with the other branches of the regional economy.

X. CONCLUSION

Rural tourism can be defined as the ‘country experience’ which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in non-urban areas. The most important purpose of rural tourism development is economic and social development of the rural areas. Rural Assam has much to offer beyond agriculture. It has a great potentiality for different growing segments of tourism like Eco-tourism, Cultural tourism, agro-tourism, religious tourism etc. Rich in traditions of art, culture and natural resources Tipam Phake village of dibrugarh district emerged as an important tourist spot. There is a scope of rural tourism in the study area. This village has the resources, man power and a down-to-earth approach that is in sharp contrast with the five star culture of tourism in city areas. Here, rural tourism promotes the local economy, socio-cultural changes and life style of the people residing in and around the village.

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