

Problems and Prospects of Tourism in newly created Charaideo District of Assam.

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ABSTRACT:

Charaideo was the first Capital of the Ahom during 1253 AD and retained as capital till 1397 AD. It was also known as *Jerusalem of the Ahoms* due to a burial ground for the Ahom Kings, Queens and nobles. Its importance is more due to historical, religious and tourism perspective as well. Charaideo is considered as one of the important districts on tourism perspective for the maidams, tanks, temples, and stone bridges which were constructed during Ahom period. The importance Charaideo even noticed by the government of Assam and for which they declared it as independent district.

Key words: Ahom dynasty, tea tourism, tea traders/entrepreneurs, Jerujalam of the ahoms, Maidams, silasaku, pukhuri.

INTRODUCTION:

The concept of tourism got modern look in the current days. However, since time Immemorial people of different region have been travelling from one place to another for specific or even for general purposes. In early days, most of such travels were related to either learn new things or to earn livelihood for survival or at times as pilgrimage. But, after Industrial revolution in England, people started travelling for pleasure, basically social, historical and cultural places of importance. Whatever the reasons may be it is no denying the fact that travelling is an inevitable activity for every human being. This phenomenon of people going pleasure travels, eventually helped in the evolution of the concept of modern day 'tourism'. (Singh and Prasain 2014:16)

Charaideo was the first Capital of the Ahom¹ during 1253 AD and retained as capital till 1397 AD. (Bora and Bora 2005:113) It was also known as *Jerusalem of the Ahoms* due to a burial ground for the Ahom Kings, Queens and nobles. (*ibid*) Its importance is more due to historical, religious and tourism perspective as well. Charaideo is considered as one of the important districts on tourism perspective for the maidams, tanks, temples, and stone bridges which were constructed during Ahom period. The Maidams reveal the superb skill of sculptors and fine form of architecture.² Today the Maidams or burial vaults are the places of tourists' attraction. Therefore, the district has a great potential for promoting its tourism culture. Some of the historical monuments of Charaideo are reminisces about its past glory.

The importance Charaideo even noticed by the government of Assam and for which they declared it as independent district. The importance is more felt on tourism purpose and it is due to the following reasons.

AIMS/PURPOSES AND THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- The aim of the study is to find out the potentialities of the tourism in Charaideo district.
- To find out the problems of this region for which the inflow of tourists are restricted.
- To suggest the way for future prospects and development of the tourism potentialities in Charaideo including tea tourism.

METHODOLOGY:

- The information related to the above study is collected through field study.
- The secondary data are collected from various published works of the recent times including the government documents.

POTENTIALITIES OF CHARAIDEO AS TOURIST DESTINATION

Charaideo is about 30 km away from present Sivasagar town. The mode of transportation to Charaideo is mainly by road and rail. The nearest airport to Charaideo is located at Jorhat (Roroia airport) which is about 70 km away from Charaideo. (Bora and Bora *op.cit*:111) The nearby Bus and Train station of Charaideo are Simaluguri Bus station and Simaluguri Railway station.

Sukapha(1228-1268AD),the founder of the Ahom kingdom, established his Capital at Charaideo due to its high land and safe from flood. (Baruah 2013:222) As per government revenue record the Charaideo Capital complex covers an area of 35 bighas and 19 lossas of land. (Field Survey,DC Office, Charaideo). Charaideo is now historically important for maidams, tanks, temples,roads and stone bridges of Ahom period. So Charaideo has a great potential for promoting its tourism culture. Some of the historical monuments of Charaideo are highlighted as below:

- 1.The Ahoms belong to the *Tai* or *Shan* race inhabiting in Southern Siam, Southern China happened to be the early settler of Eastern Assam of the Brahmaputra Valley. In the early part of 13th century they established their state in the eastern division of the Assam State where from the actual ruling of the Ahom dynasty started.
- 2.The burial vaults of the Ahom Kings, Queens and Nobles are known as maidam.

The historical monuments(temples/maidams) of Charaideo:

Monuments	Constructed	Located	Purpose	Current_Position
<i>Lankuri Dol and Deoshal</i>	Constructed by Ahom King Godadhar Singha	at Baku Pukhuri Habi village, Dhobabor Mouza	Originally it was known as Gotadole designed like a Pagoda.	This monument was damaged during British period.
<i>Maibela Dol</i>	Built by Godadhor Singha during 1681-1696 AD.	situated Dhobabor Mouza.	It was the worship place known as solid shine, Pagoda.	Preserved as documentary evidence.
<i>Maidams at Chararideo Hill</i>	Constructed during the ruling of Ahom King	Four maidams of Ahom Kings are: Godadhar Singha, Rudra Singha, Shiva Singha and Rajeswar Singha. Among these the maidam of Godadhar Singha is the larger one.	Looks like the mummies of Egypt.	Preserved by Assam State Archeology Department & Archeological Survey of India.
<i>Bali Maidam</i>	built by Ahom King Siu-Tau-	It is situated in present Bakupukhuri habi,	Bali Maidam is known as the grave-yard of	Preservation is for public viewing and for

	Pha, in 1268 AD.	Dhopabor mouza.	Sukapha, the first Ahom King.	documentary evidence
<i>Phuleswari Konwari Maidam</i>	Constructed by King Shiva Singha in 1730 AD.	It is situated in Bakupukhuri Habi village, Dhopabor mauza.	Phuleswari Konwari was married by Shiva Singha and made her Borkonwari. She ruled the Ahom Kingdom for about 5 years.	Preservation is necessary as it is evident that during 17 th century women were empowered to rule.
<i>Naphuki Aideor Maidam</i>	Constructed by King Shiva Singha in 1730 AD.	Situated in present Bakupukhuri Habi village, Dhopabor mauza.	On the memory of the step mother Naphuki Aideo of King Shiva Singha.	Preservation is necessary as it shows the generosity of the Shiva Singha to build the maidam for his Step mother.

Similarly, Ahom Kings constructed the following *Pukhuris* (ponds):

Name of the Pukhuris	Excavated by	Location	Reasons
<i>Buragohain Pukhuri</i>	Buragohain Dangaria (Prime Minister of Ahom King) in roughly 1253 AD	Near the residence of Buragohain when the Capital was established at Charaideo.	Buragohain as a Prime Minister made it for the exclusive use of his family.
<i>Rohdoi Pukhuri</i>	constructed by Ahom King Godadhor Singha in 1682 AD.	Situated in Pator gaon, Dhopabor mauza.	King, Godadhor Singha given settlement to Rohdoi by digging the tank including piece of land as gratitude due to her bravery and helpful attitude shown to the King.
<i>Sunadoi Pukhuri</i>	Constructed by Ahom King Godadhor Singha in 1681 AD.	Situated in Na-gaon, Dhopabor mauza.	Sunadoi was a woman who helped Godapani Konwar during his absconding time. After assuming as King, Godadhor Singha dug this tank for Sunadoi.
<i>Petudhuwa Pukhuri</i>	Constructed by Borgohain.	Located near Nimaigarh Habi, Dhopabor mauza.	It was dug to wash the meats of the animals consumed by the paiks.
<i>Bheseli Pukhuri and Bauli Pukhuri</i>	King Sukapha built both of the Pukhuris.	These tanks are situated near Nimaigarh Habi, Dhopabor mauza.	Bauli and Bheseli were the two sisters from Borahi community. Sukapha married both of them and dug these two tanks for their use.
<i>Chetia Phukanar Pukhuri</i>	Constructed by Pikchai chetia Borphukan in 1620 AD.	It is situated at Nimaigarh Habi, Dhopabor mauza	The residence of Pikchai was near to the tank which lies near Rohdoi Ali.
<i>Bailung Pukhuri</i>	The tank was dug in 13 th century by the Ahom Royal house.	This Pukhuri is situated near Nimaigarh Habi, Dhopabor mauza.	Bailung were the priestly class of Ahoms. This tank was dug exclusively for the Bailungs.
<i>Kuta Borphukan Pukhuri</i>	It was dug by Kuta Borphukan in 1696 AD.	It is situated Adabari Handique village, Dhopabor mauza.	Kuta was made Borphukan Dangaria during the reign of Rudra

			Singha. The tank was dug for his personal use.
<i>Borpukhuri</i>	Excavated by Kuta Borphukan in 1696 AD.	Located at Adabari Handique gaon, Dhobabor mauza.	Borpukhuri was dug for Borphukan's official use.
<i>Digahali Pukhuri</i>	It was dug by Ahom King Gobor Raja in 1674 AD.	Dighali Pukhuri is situated at Aaibekha grant; Dhobabor mauza.	The tank was dug for the purpose of the paiks gathered for war fare. Originally Dighali was the daughter of Gobor Raja.
<i>Mithapukhuri or Borgohain Pukhuri</i>	Constructed in 13 th century by Borgohain Dangaria.	The tank is situated Baku Pukhuri village; Dhobabor mauza adjutants to the residence of Borgohain in the west side of the capital.	It was dug for the use of Borgohain
<i>Kur Dhua Pukhuri</i>	It was dug by the royal house of Ahoms approximately during 13 th century.	Situated at Baku Pukhuri gaon; Dhobabor mauza.	The tank was dug for the purpose of washing the hoes just after finishing the works of the maidams at Charaideo.
<i>Saw Dhuwa Pukhuri</i>	It was dug by the Ahom Royal houses in the 13 th century.	Saw Dhuwa Pukhuri is situated at Baku Pukhuri village; Dhobabor mauza	The tank was used by royal house to wash the dead bodies of the King's just before entombed at Charaideo.
<i>Konseng Borpatra Gohain Pukhuri</i>	It was dug by Konseng Borpatra Gohain, a prince of king Supimpha (1493-1497AD.)	This tank is situated at Borpatra Tea estate, Baruchali mauza	It was a royal water pond.

Ahom Kings also gave lot of importance on infrastructure development of their estates and road connective. To make durable and strong road they used stones locally known as *Sila* which are available easily in plenty. Even these roads are in use now in many places. The details are as under:

Name of Stone Bridge(s)/Roads	Constructed by	Location	Construction Design, purpose and materials used
<i>Dorika Silasaku</i>	This <i>Silasaku</i> was a stone bridge built by the Ahom King Pratap Singha (1603-1641AD).	over the river Dorika and on Dhodor Ali just east of Simaluguri and by the side of Rajgarh	It was a stone bridge made of thin lackori bricks with lime surkhi mortar. The foundation of the bridge is plain and it stands upon some pillars.
<i>Rohdoi Silasaku</i>	Constructed by Godadhor Singha (1681-1696AD).	It is situated on Dijoikona river of Kenduguri.	The bridge stands on two pillars. The foundation of the bridge is slightly carved and there are three arches made up of thin lakori bricks with lime surkhi mortar adjacent to the pillars.
<i>Dhodor Ali</i>	Dhodor Ali was built by Ahom King Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696 AD).	It is a historical road named Dhodor Ali from Kamarbondha (Golaghat) to Namrup across Charaideo.	The length of this road is approximately 300 km. It was properly constructed to protect the same from river erosion and

			communication purpose.
<i>Romoni Ali</i>	Godadhor Singha constructed this road.	Now this is the main road connecting Santak and Simaluguri.	It was constructed in memory of Romoni. Purpose is to connect Dhodor Ali at Simaluguri to Charaideo via Santak.
<i>Rohdoi Ali</i>	Constructed by Ahom King Godadhor Singha (1681-1696)AD.	Connecting from Dhodor Ali to Nagapahar on the name of Rohdoi,	Rohdoi helped Godadhor Singha to escape from Lora Raja. Hence, it was short of gratitude to Rohdoi.

TEA GARDENS:

Existence of mini, medium and large size tea gardens, cater to the need of local market having potential as well for the needs of regional, national and international markets. Hence, tea industry is a matter of great tourism importance for the tea traders and more specifically for the tea growers and tea lovers.

Tea tourism is wonderful recreational experiences that satisfy the tourist while visiting tea gardens. On the contrary the Tea estates owners/ corporate as well as the government are jointly planning to extend additional facilities in and around the tea garden to attract tourists towards generating additional revenues. At the same time this would serve the purpose of the interest of the tourists. Of course, Tea tourism provides opportunity to generate information and experience related to tea which has emerged as a very recent niche in the world tourism situation. Further, tea tourism upholds the environment and preserving the heritage and culture of the tea tribes. Moreover, this will create employment opportunities specifically to the local youths and in turn the socio-economic problems of the region may be tackled. There are many home stays at tea garden and tourist gets accommodation with hospitality and recreations. While staying in the gardens, they may experience the process of tea plucking, tea producing, cultural festivals of the tea tribes and staying at the tea bungalows are a part of the tea tourism which is connected to nature. It is quite popular among the Chinese, the people of Sri Lanka, Kenya, Malaysia and Taiwan (Sharma and Bhowmic, 2016: 1120-1122). Currently it is getting admired in India too, especially in Upper Assam where the deep green nature resonates all around the valleys. The government of Assam thus, preparing perspective plans on infrastructure and logistic support to be provided for the tea tourism in almost all the destinations: the hilly terrain including the remote areas. So that through 'tea tourism' the specific tourists would experience in the midst of a tea garden or estate a home-stay feeling in a tea-village or in modern resort of heritage bungalow. In addition, trekking, rafting, tea-testing, visiting tea factory (*ibid.*) and all these are integral system that the tourists can enjoy altogether. Even tea traders/entrepreneurs venture their business proposition after availing such facilities as tea tourists especially they can enjoy staying in the part house of the garden workers or villagers, freely interacting with them and in turn the villagers /tea workers can earn a part of their livelihood subsidy which broadly known as home stay. In this process the traders/tea entrepreneurs would be more sensitive at the micro level.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Charaideo, the first Capital city of the Ahom Kingdom possessed distinct features of having many man-made tank, maidams, palaces, big temples, stone bridge etc. But these have not been projected, publicized and showcased effectively for the public display. However, for the purpose of overall economic development of this region, tourism needs to be developed which will in turn generate revenue directly and indirectly open up numerous opportunities for the entrepreneurs. Further, the place is having potentiality to engage educated

unemployed youth towards the prospective field of tourism. Therefore, the place needs to be revamped to tackle the problems.

Poor Infrastructural and Inadequate communication in terms of rail, road and air communications are the major problems for development of tourism in Charaideo has been observed. Various services including facilities provided to the tourists are inadequate. There are important factors that determine the flow of tourist in a particular spot. The transportation is no doubt one of the crucial factors by which tourist can reach safely to their destination.(Bhattacharya 2004:322). In this regard more providing quality transportation is not sufficient rather good communication network leading to the tourist sites are necessary. In this regard the government needs to take necessary initiatives to develop the infrastructure and assurance of safe and secured transportation system to the tourist spots of Charaideo.

There is a lack of proper publicity in respect of the place Charaideo as a tourist place. The Assam government, department of Tourism and Archeology may jointly arrange for wide publicity through poster and pamphlets at various airports, embassies, hotels and restaurants in all the major cities of India. Publicity of the sites, monuments and other potential places of tourists should be made of this place through the publication of articles, research papers, tourist guide books etc. These measures would definitely attract the foreign tourists as well as the people from the neighboring states in India. (*ibid*:320). It is required to develop website of the place as well.

Lack of good quality hygienic hotels, restaurants and tourist resorts near Charaideo is another constraint for the development of tourism in the region. For developing tourism, role of private sectors is essential as the government functionaries providing such amenities are limited, hence private sectors may jointly cater to the need of supplying such facilities to the tourists through proper mode. Joint initiative in establishing modernized and hygienic stay arrangements for the tourists with logistic supports, clean restaurants and tourist resorts in these areas are urgently required.(Sen 2016:61)

Due to shortage of well trained tourist guides is one of the major problems for developing Charaideo as significant historical tourist's place. So the local educated unemployed youths are to be proper trained up as tourist guide by the district administration through CSR project of OIL India and Tea corporate.

Lack of awareness about the place among the locals and the entrepreneurs is the major hindrances for the development of tourism as has been felt. In this regard (Chutia and Saikia 2010:169) observed that people awareness can play a significant role in the tourism development. Therefore, proper care should be taken for awareness generation of the local people including the involvement of entrepreneurs in tourism development in Charaideo.

It is further observed that sufficient financial assistants have not been provided for the repair and maintenance cost of the historical monuments of Charaideo by the government of Assam for the protection of the historical monuments. There is an urgent need to take care and maintenance of these monuments which should be provided by the state and central government urgently and this should be in terms of finance, security etc. District authority are required to take initiative to develop tourism potentialities by conducting rural fairs, frequent vigilance etc to avoid entrance of cattle and other animals to the tourist places located in the district. Proper fencing should be ensured so that they cannot effort to loss the ancient items.

Potable water is absolutely not available in the vicinity of such tourist spots, sanitary system also not hygienic and gardening in most of the monuments located at Charaideo is not up to the mark. So the respective state government should take necessary initiatives to handle these problems.

Land encroachments by a few unscrupulous local people have been observed as cardinal problem. Due this reason the monuments remain invisible in the study area which affects the beauty of the monuments. For the purpose of tourism development government should take necessary action against encroachment of the adjacent

lands of the monuments rather evict the occupants who have been occupying such lands and protect the monuments.

Provision of sky-train and rope-way to have glimpse of the entire royal graveyards at a glance needs be provided in Charaideo. The activities like cycling, trekking, boating at the tanks, short distance bullock cart tours in the country side may be encouraged to attract tourist to Charaideo.

CONCLUSIONS:

From the above discussion it is learnt that there are numerous scopes of tourism development in Charaideo. The potentials are mainly due to i. tea tourism as the place is located in the midst of lush green tea gardens and ii. The location of historical monuments of Ahom dynasty including the big water tanks dug for various purposes as mentioned in the text are the main attraction of the tourists and archeologists; it is learnt that in spite of having immense potentialities for tourism in Charaideo the district have been facing problems due the following reasons as mentioned. This has further restricted the inflow of tourists:

- Lack of proper publicity and documentation,
- Protection of the historical monuments with clear-cut demarcation of boundaries of these monuments,
- Inefficient tourist guides,
- Inadequate and unhygienic logistic support such as potable water and sanitation,
- Rope way or ramp facilities especially for the handicaps/senior citizen tourists are to be implemented urgently.
- System, gardening, awareness of the local people etc. should help to develop the tourism industry at Charaideo.

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