

PROSPECT OF ECOTOURISM IN SILDUBI AND CHANGPANG: AN ADJACENT AREA OF ASSAM AND NAGALAND BORDER OF NORTH EAST INDIA: A CASE STUDY.

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Abstract

Tourism in present scenario is considered as one of the fastest growing industries in the world. It can be divided into various segments like ecotourism, historical tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, ethnic tourism, religious tourism health tourism etc. Among them ecotourism is the most responsible type of tourism. This study is confined to Sildubi and Changpang, an adjacent area of Assam and Nagaland Border of North East India. The area is undisturbed and unexplored till the date and it is rich in natural paradise and socio-cultural diversities. The area has enough prospects for ecotourism venture because of its accessibility, pleasant climate, richness of natural beauty, and suitable place for view point, high stock of biodiversity and native culture of simple and friendly people.

Key Words: Tourism, Ecotourism, Sustainability, Biodiversity, Cultural diversity.

1. Introduction:

Travel and tourism sector is at present days considered as one of the largest industries of the world, with ecotourism as the fastest growing segment. Since 1980s the ecotourism sector has grown and grown with an annual growth rate of ten to fifteen percent. In simple words ecotourism means management of tourism and conservation of nature in a way so as to maintain a fine balance between the tourism and ecology on one hand and the needs of the local communities for jobs on the other. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia with citation to the International Ecotourism Society has described it as a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial mass tourism. It means responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment, and improving the well-being of the local people. The term 'ecotourism' was coined during the early 1980s by Hector Ceballos Lascurain, a Mexican architect and expert in sustainable tourism management and planning. He also put forward the preliminary definition of ecotourism. In an interview with the members of International Ecotourism Club established in Athens, Greece he himself told that his definition in 1983 was "Ecotourism is that tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both past and present) found in these areas. Ecotourism implies a scientific, aesthetic or philosophical approach, although the 'eco-tourist' is not required to be a professional scientist, artist or philosopher. The main point is that the person who practices ecotourism has the opportunity of immersing him or herself in nature in a way that most people cannot enjoy in their routine, urban existences. This person will eventually acquire an awareness and knowledge of the natural environment, together with its cultural aspects, that will convert him into somebody keenly involved in conservation issues". In that same interview he himself again remarked that he had revised that preliminary definition in 1993. According to that revised definition "Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy, study and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present), that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations". That definition was officially adopted by International Union for Conservation of Nature in 1996. According to that definition ecotourism denotes nature tourism with a

normative element. The word which is always related to ecotourism is eco-tourist. They are wide range of travelers of all ages and interest who travel natural areas. They always take special care for restoring cultural, social, economic and environmental sustainability in the natural areas that they travel. They are very conscious about reducing the carbon footprint of their travel.

2. Study Area:

The area of the study is situated on the border of Assam and Nagaland which are categorized as partial hill state and mountainous state respectively in the Indian Himalayan Region. According to the census report of 2011 the location code or village code of Sildubi village is 294059. It is located near Borholla area of Titabar Sub Division of Jorhat District of Assam. The total geographical area of the village is 385.8 hectares and it has a total population of about 1602 nos. Its adjacent area Changpang is a village panchyat located in Bhandari block of Wokha District of Nagaland. According to the census report of 2011 the village code of Changpang is 267415 and the total population is about 565 peoples. The study area is connected to the other parts of the country through roadways, railways and airlines. The nearest railway station is Kamarbandha Ali which is about twenty kilometers away and the nearest airport is Jorhat Airport which is situated at a distance of about 40 kilometers.

3. Significance of the Study:

This study is intended to serve as the guideline for development of ecotourism in a sustainable way in the study area. Preparing a document on prospect of ecotourism and sustainable development in Sildubi Changpang area is a new research study. In recent years, tourism development used to take place in the area with less planning. This study envisions creating a model in ecotourism development in the area after addressing key issues and potentialities based on site surveys, feasibility and attractions. The study will help different stakeholders including government agencies, local bodies and different organizations to prepare working plan and programs for the development of ecotourism and sustainable management of culture, heritage, economy and biodiversity. The area under study is fragile, pristine and relatively undisturbed. It is an unexplored rain forest with lots of natural beauty, flora and fauna. People can visit this area to enjoy the tastes of folk culture of different ethnic groups, ethnic behaviors, ethnic dialect, delicious ethnic cuisines and traditional dress codes. It will surely fulfill the expectations of the adventure loving visitors.

4. Materials and Method:

Research methodology is the most important aspect of research work and is a way to systematically solve research problems. It facilitates the research work and provides reliability and validity to it. The information collected for the purpose of the study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data include information gathered from survey, field verification, and interview schedules with the key informants. Intensive observation was also made to acquire necessary information. Secondary data was obtained from various published and unpublished sources like relevant literature, news papers, journals, related websites, social media and others.

5. Discussion on Findings:

5.1 Prospect of Ecotourism in the Study Area:

Ecotourism is a new concept in the North Eastern province of India and the indigenous people have lately started to take a keen interest in it. The area under study which is located at the border of Assam and Nagaland has lots of prospects for the development of ecotourism practices for its natural beauty, pleasant environment and cultural diversity. It is a combination of flat paddy fields, small tea gardens and green hills interspersed with a very beautiful stream. In the plain the width of the stream increases which gives the area its scenic beauty. It is within the jurisdiction of Assam and known as Sildubi village. It is already famous for family picnic because of the spectacular landscape. The other area Changpang is a very beautiful village with its rolling hills, dense forest and the same beautiful stream. It comes under the jurisdiction of Nagaland. The area has a very pleasant climate throughout the year with mesmerizing landscape and sociable and hospitable inhabitants. It is blessed with huge diversity of flora and fauna. The area is endowed with rich vegetation of dense and mixed evergreen forest with thick undergrowth mainly of bamboos, bananas,

various shrubs, reeds, creepers, elephant grass etc. The forests are covered with different kinds of valuable trees like Bonsum, Hollok, Jutili, Nahor, Badam, Champ, Simul, Bhelu, variety of canes and lichen, orchids, rhododendron etc. The different species of wild animals found in this area are mountain goats, barking deers, jungle cats, few tigers, wild boars, fowls, pheasant, quails, various reptiles and fishes. It is the homeland of various tribes from both the states having their own distinctive culture, custom and tradition. All the people from different ethnic identity live a very peaceful life amidst lots of joy and merriment. Most of them are cultivators, tea garden workers and daily wage earners. They represent different cultures, dress codes, food habits and traditional attire. The area under study is abounds with hilly landscape and it can be a wonderful trekking destination with beautiful scenic vistas. Besides these, there are various scopes for other activities like rock climbing, biking, jungle safaris, angling, hot air ballooning, shopping indigenous products, meditation, etc. With the rich variety of landscape, flora and fauna, ethnic and cultural diversity of the people of the area, it can be a very suitable place for ecotourism venture.

5.2 Existing Practices of Ecotourism in the Study Area:

The area under study is already famous for family picnic during the winter and New Year's Day among the people of nearby areas. The scenic beauty always captures the mind of the visitors. During the winter season it becomes a busy picnic spot. But there was not any systematic ecotourism practice till 2017 in the area. Seeing the scope for the ecotourism practices in the area a group of enthusiastic people from both the states constituted a society with the name "Sildubi Borholla Changpang Circle Ecotourism Development Society". Under the banner of that society an ethnic festival was organized with the title "Sildubi Changpang North East Ethnic Festival" during the first half of January, 2017. Since its inception, the society is continuously organizing the festival till the date. When interviewed the organizers mentioned that they are receiving overwhelming responses from the people and are increasing year by year. That overwhelming response and inquiries have encouraged them a lot and they are going to celebrate that festival with more vigor and enthusiasm in the coming years. Their main motif is to form a cultural mosaic of the ethnic communities of North East India amidst natural environment. They strongly believe that such type of efforts will preserve the priceless cultural heritage of the province and at the same time will provide some sort of economic sustainability to its local community. As a part of their celebration they organize popular talks, vivid ethnic cultural programmes by different ethnic troupes, workshops on sustainability, traditional sports competitions, traditional fashion shows, and exhibition cum sale of handlooms, textiles and handicrafts. People can taste the ethnic foods and beverages of different communities of hills and plains. They even arrange jeep safari, horse riding, bike riding and trekking in affordable prices. The local community appreciates the endeavor of the society. But they are also in the opinion that in consideration with the scope of the ecotourism practices in the area it is quite less. The concerned stake holders including the government agencies should put some special emphasis for promotion of ecotourism in the area for sustainable development of natural resources as well as socio economic development of the local communities.

5.3 Restraints to the Development of Ecotourism in the Study Area:

Though the area under study has amplitude scope for the development of ecotourism venture, there are some restraints that push it backward. The poor people living in the area are not fully aware about ecotourism practices. They use to destroy the potentialities to meet their day to day living expenses. There is the lack of communication and balanced infrastructure facility in the area. The concern of the related government agencies is not satisfactory. They are not interested to format need based policy considering the potentialities of ecotourism in the area. In present situation there is an urgent need of coordination among the local community, government agencies, tour operators, travel agents and hoteliers which is totally invisible in the area. It is very clear from the study that there is no planning for the conservation of biodiversity in the area till today. Jhum cultivation in the hilly area and unwanted human intervention in the foothills are causing loss of biodiversity, natural resources and habitation of flora and fauna. Encroachment of the forestland is a serious problem which threatens the potentialities of ecotourism development in the study area.

5.4 Recommendations for the Development of Ecotourism in the Study Area:

In the present scenario ecotourism is the most popular and acceptable form of tourism because it gives immense importance for the maintenance of ecological balance in the concerned area. As the rural people of the study area directly or indirectly depend upon the forest materials for their living, strong awareness should be created among them for the conservation of the wildlife. They should be educated about the importance of biodiversity conservation as well as the importance of the conservation of their own ethnic and cultural diversity. The concerned government agencies, NGOs and local socio cultural organizations should take necessary steps for that purpose. The government should adopt proper plans and programs for the development of infrastructure and communication system. While doing so utmost care must be taken not to damage the integral habitats and landforms of the area. A well maintained link between local community, government agencies, tour operators, travel agents, hoteliers and concerned research bodies should be created for the fruitful development of ecotourism in the study area. There is an established tourism network in the region including Guwahati, Kaziranga National Park, Majuli, the biggest river island of the world and Sivasagar with its historical monuments. Each and every year lots of foreign and domestic tourists visit these areas. If the government agencies including the tourism department and the local civic bodies will impose a controlled ecotourism development strategy in the area, the mobility of the eco-tourists can surely be diverted to it. For that purpose all the stakeholders should take initiative for the popularization of the ecotourism potentialities of the area from the marketing point of view. To fulfill the goal reputed national and international journalists, travel and tourism experts from all fields should be invited as guests to acquire firsthand experience and then request should be made to publish their experiences in the magazines, research journals and newspapers.

6. Conclusion:

Rural India especially the area within the Indian Himalayan Region has a great potentiality for different growing segments of tourism such as ecotourism, historical tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, ethnic tourism, religious tourism and health tourism. But the entire concept of ecotourism is still at an infant stage. Considering the immense potentialities of ecotourism venture in the study area all the stakeholders should take some positive steps for its development. The government agencies should act as catalyst and facilitator and encourage more and more participation of local communities and private sector organizations to promote ecotourism in the area. It can be developed in a multifarious way to delineate it as one of the prominent ecotourism destinations of the region.

7. References:

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