



# AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON CULTURAL TOURISM POTENTIALITY OF ASSAM STATE

**-Dr.K.V.S.NARENDAR**

Tourism has emerged as the largest global industry of the 20th century and is projected to grow even faster in the 21st century. The economic might of the tourism industry has helped to transform societies often for the better. Tourism provides a major economic development opportunity for many countries and a means for improving the livelihoods of their residents. It enables communities that are poor in material wealth but rich in culture, history, and heritage to use their unique characteristics as an income generating comparative advantage. Sustainable tourism development increases employment opportunities, maintains the natural environment, and delivers a quality experience to visitors. Not only this, it tends to encourage the development of multiple-use infrastructure like roads, health care facilities, sports centers etc., that benefits the host community in addition to the hotels and restaurants that cater to the needs of visitors.

The concept of modern tourism came into being in the second half of the nineteenth century hand in hand with the development of the nineteenth century hand in hand with the development of the industrialization society and globalization of the world.

## **CULTURAL ASPECTS AND TOURISM:**

Assam is the meeting ground of diverse cultures. The people of the enchanting state of Assam is an intermixture of various racial stocks such as Mongoloid, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Iranian and Aryan. The Assamese culture is a rich and exotic tapestry of all these races evolved through a long assimilative process. The natives of the state of Assam are known as "Asomiya" (Assamese), which is also the state language of Assam.

The state has a large number of tribes, each unique in its tradition, culture, dress and exotic way of life. Diverse tribes like Bodo, Kachari, Karbi, Miri, Mishimi, Rabha, etc co-exist in Assam, most tribes have their own languages though Assamese is the principal language of the state.

### **WEAVING OF ASSAM:**

Weaving is one traditional craft that every Assamese woman takes pride in. The Assamese women produce silk and cotton clothes of exquisite designs in their looms. Assam is renowned for its exquisite silks namely Eri, Pat and the world famous Muga silk. Gandhiji complimented the Assamese weavers as artists who could weave dreams in their looms.

The **Gamocha** is one of the most easily recognizable cultural symbols of the Assamese people besides the tamol-paan (areca nut & betel leaf) which is an integral part of almost all socio-religious ceremonies.

The Gamocha, a white rectangular piece of cotton hand woven cloth with primarily a red border on three sides and red woven motifs on the fourth (in addition to red, other colors are also used) is put to many uses. It is used as a towel, as a waistcloth or a loincloth; a Bihu dancer wraps it around the head in a knot, it is also hung around the neck at the prayer hall and thrown over the shoulder to signify social status or respect. Gamochas, also known as bihuwaans, are offered during Bihu as a token of love. Significantly the gamocha is used equally by all, irrespective of religious and ethnic backgrounds.

### **DANCES OF ASSAM:**

Bihu is the most popular folk dance of Assam. Bihu dances are performed by young boys and girls during the Bihu festivities which represent youthful passion, reproductive urge, and joy. It is characterized by brisk dance steps, and rapid hand movement. Dancers wear traditionally colorful Assamese clothing. The dances are accompanied by musical instruments like dhol(dholak), penpa, gagana, banhi(flute) etc. Though the origins of the Bihu dance is unknown, the first official endorsement is cited to be when Ahom king Rudra Singha invited Bihu dancers to perform at the Ranghar fields sometime around 1694 on the occasion of Rongali Bihu.

### **Satriya Nritya**

Satriya Nritya is the classical dance form of Assam which represents the Satriya culture, the basis of the religious and cultural fabric of Assam. It is one among eight principal classical Indian dance traditions. Whereas some of the other traditions have been revived in the recent past, Satriya has remained a living tradition since its creation by the founder of Vaishnavism in Assam, the great saint Srimanta Sankardeva,

in 15th century Assam. The core of Satriya Nritya has usually been mythological stories. This was an artistic way of presenting mythological teachings to the people in an accessible, immediate, and enjoyable manner.

### **Tea Folk's Jhumur Dance**

In the passage of more than a hundred years of their settlement in Assam, the tea tribes have developed a synthesized form of dance called "Chah Baganar Jumur Nach". This is a beautiful dance to watch. A visitor to any tea gardens can easily see this dance. The tea tribes have a synthesized form of dance called "Jhumur Nach", performed by girls and boys together, or, sometimes by the girls alone, with the precision of footwork while clasping tightly each other's waist.

### **Deodhani:**

The Deodhani dance is associated with the worship of the snake goddess Manasa. A Deodhani girl, in an inspired state, goes on dancing to the accompaniment of Kham (drum) and Ciphung (flute) propitiating many a deity beginning with Shiva and ending with Lakshmi. There are actually two types of Deodhani Nritya. One is a semi-classical dance and the other one is a trance form (not a dance). The Deodhani Nritya found in Mangaldoi and southwest Kamrup area, which is linked to the Sukanani Oja-Pali. Specially the Deodhani Nritya was observed at Kamakhya Temple.

The dances of the Bodos are associated with the Kherai Puja festival where Bagurumba dance is the most popular. Other folk dances are incomplete without the Jhumur performed by the Adivasis which is a synchronized dance of boys and girls to the sounds of drums and flute.

### **TRADITIONAL DRESS OF ASSAM:**

Gamosa is an indispensable part of almost all socio-religious ceremonies in Assam. It is derived from the Kamrupi word 'Gaamasa' (gaama+chadar) which was used to cover the Bhagavad Purana at the altar. It is considered as an act of purification and used to clean the body after bath. It looks like a white rectangular piece of cloth along with a red border on three sides and woven motifs on the fourth. Assamese men wear the dhoti-gamosa which is their traditional dress. Bihu dancers wrap it around the head, and it is often used to cover the altar at the prayer hall or the scriptures. The other things like Tamul paan and Xorai also important symbols. The former is considered as offers of devotion whereas the latter is a bell used for container medium.

### **Folk Music:**

Assam is rich in folk music. From the time of the Kamarupa Kingdom followed by Ahom Dynasty, Assamese culture has been influenced by each of its rulers except the British rule which ended the Ahom Dynasty. The indigenous folk music has influenced the folk music of artists like Bhupen Hazarika, Parvati Prasad Baruva, Jayanta Hazarika, Utpalendu Choudhury, Nirmalendu Choudhury and many others. Classical Assamese music is divided into Borgeet and Ojapali which combines narrative singing with dancing. The music of Oja-pali has a raga system of clear traditional orientation.

### **Art and Craft:**

It's been more than two thousand years that various traditional crafts have emerged in Assam. The traditional crafts like pottery and terracotta work, brass craft, jewellery making, musical instruments making, cane and bamboo craft, silk and cotton weaving, and Woodcraft are a major source of employment for the people of Assam. Weaving is the most ancient of all the practices where even now women take pride in the possession and occupation in the handloom industry. Gandhiji lauded the Assamese weavers as artists who could weave dreams in their looms. Various ethnocultural groups make exclusive types of cotton garments with embroidery designs and colour combinations.

### **FESTIVALS OF ASSAM:**

Assam is full of festivals, the most important being the Bihu. It is celebrated to mark the important points of a cultivator's life over a yearly cycle. A non-religious festival which is celebrated irrespective of caste and creed. Rongali or Bohag Bihu celebrated in mid-April with the coming of spring and the beginning of the sowing season. It is also known as Rangaali Bihu ("rang" means merry-making). Next is the Kangaali Bihu (kangaali meaning poor) is celebrated in mid-October. It is called so because by this time the harvest is brought home. The Magh Bihu is celebrated in mid-January. There are community feasts and bonfires which take place. Also known as the Bhogaali Bihu ("bhog" means enjoyment and feasting).

### **CUISINE OF ASSAM:**

Assamese dishes are said to be less spicy than any other Indian dishes. Assamese are mostly non-vegetarian, and their staple diet is rice. Fish, chicken, duck and pigeon and pork are widely eaten and quite popular. Fish curry is another favourite which is prepared as a sour dish called Machor tenga. Baked fish wrapped in leaves with white mustard paste is a popular delicacy called Patot diya mas where 'pat' means leaf in Assamese. Dried fish is a traditional tribal cuisine. Mutton, duck pigeon and fowl are many of the varieties of meat preparations. The presence of traditional 'detoxifying' appetizers like Khar is prepared by burning the stem of the banana tree.

### **Customs of Assam:**

Customs and traditions play a significant role in the society and the Assamese strictly adhere to the customs laid down by their forefathers, pertaining to their communities. These customs are beliefs that originated in the past and have been followed ever since, generation after generation. The weddings, birth, death and festivals in Assam include many customs that are supposed to be followed by all. For instance, the Assamese use bamboo to welcome guests because of their attachment to the bamboo culture. Known as Jaapi, this is basically known as the sunshade of Assam. It is made of bamboo strips and dried palm leaves locally known as Tokow Pat. There are many types of Jaapi like the Halua Jaapi, Pitha Jaapi, Sorudoiya Jaapi, Bordoia Jaapi, Cap etc.

### **TOURISM POTENTIALITY:**

Assam is well blessed by Nature and it lays at the centre of one of the world's richest biogeographic areas. It is the treasure house of various economic resources. It has a rich cultural and ethnic heritage that can easily make it a tourist-spot. Tourism has the greatest potential for generating income and employment opportunities in Assam because Assam is not only characterized by the blending of flora and fauna it is also exceptionally rich in bio-diversity. Moreover the wildlife sanctuaries at various places of Assam can attract the tourists all over the world. Further, tea tourism and golf tourism of Assam will attract the tourists. This paper makes an attempt to explore the potentiality from Assam which will maintain a bright prospect of economic development in terms of tourism industry in near future.

Tourism is the world's largest industry and it represents the fastest growing segment of this market. The concept of tourism is new with tremendous potentiality for sustainable developments of nature-based tourist resources include beautiful forest and wild life and landscapes. But, before going to explore the prospects for economic development in the Assam in terms of tourism industry, it is better to have a look into the present socio-economic and political conditions prevailing in Assam. Today's Assam is composed of twenty seven districts. Tourism is one of the enormous service industries in India with its contribution of 6.23 percent to national GDP and 8.78 percent of total employment, witness more than 5 million annual foreign tourists arrivals and 562 million domestic tourists. According to WTTCR 2007, India ranked 6th in terms of price competitiveness and 39th in terms of safety and security. Assam is well blessed by Nature and it lays at the centre of one of the worlds richest bio-geographic areas. It is the treasure house of various economic resources. It has a rich cultural and ethnic heritage that can easily make it a tourist-spot. Tourism has the greatest potential for generating income and employment opportunities in Assam because Assam is not only characterized by the blending of flora and fauna it is also exceptionally rich in biodiversity. The important sites to visit are Sikhrisikhla, Bhalukjhora, Baokhungri Peak, Dibil Thakur Beel, Anthai Gufur, Goshain Bhita, Jarnagara etc. Dheer Beel, Diplai Beel are other attractive tourist spots to visit nearby Chakrashila wildlife sanctuary. Besides the animals and the birds of various kinds roaming singing and playing in the vast green forest, the state has many ornamental fishes, rare plants, medicinal herbs and exotic orchids. It has many tranquil lagoons and reverie locations like Deepar Beel, Barnadi, etc. that will attract the tourists for angling and boating. There are many other wonders and important things for the tourists in the state. Moreover, the various religious places and temples like Kamakhya temple, the Umananda temple, the Agnigarh and the Mahabhairavi temples, the Mahamaya temple etc. will encourage tourism industry in Assam. Besides it, the wooded hill stations like Haflong, Badarpur, etc. will attract the tourists for hiking, trekking and camping. Further, tea tourism and golf tourism of Assam will attract the tourists. Assam is also very rich in cultural heritage. It is a heavenly abode of various tribes, castes and communities having their religious and cultural festivals, the 'Bihu' for the Assamese, the 'Bathou' for the Bodos, etc.

**CONCLUSION:**

Assam's beauty like the rest of the Seven Sisters is unique but neglected. We tend to forget that there is a little paradise in our own country waiting to be explored. Assam with its ecstatic frenzy has always enraptured its visitors and never left them disappointed.

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