

**Social Science Researcher****Vol. 3 No. 1***Social Science Researcher*
ISSN: 2319 – 8362**North Lakhimpur College**

HISTORICAL TOURISM IN UPPER ASSAM: BACKGROUND AND POTENTIALITY

*Atanu Gogoi**Dept of History, North Lakhimpur College (Autonomous)*
atanu_nlcollege@rediffmail.com

Abstract

Tourism is presently one of the largest, fastest growing and highly organized industries in the world. It is a highly complex phenomenon and important human activity of great significance. Historical tourism is one of the branches of tourism which has immense potentiality in Assam in general and Upper Assam in particular. Upper Assam, presently comprising seven districts, is endowed with rich heritage and glorious history stretching from the ancient to modern period which provide a wide background and great prospect for historical tourism. Ancient relics of the Doyang and Dhansiri valley, medieval historical sites, temples and monuments, modern legacies of the British rule and elements of heritage and cultural practices in different parts of the region can attract both domestic and international tourists. The promotion of the tourism industry can bring a tremendous change to the society and economy of this underdeveloped region. However, tourism fails to flourish here in spite of great potentiality and resources for a variety of reasons such as poor publicity, lack of proper preservation, weak infrastructure, failure of the govt. and private sector to promote the industry etc. This study aims at focusing on the historical assets of upper Assam and to find out the ways to overcome the impediments hampering the growth of tourism.

Keywords: Heritage, Archaeological remains, Neo-Vaisnavite movement

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as a significant and multi faceted industry with far reaching impacts in the age of globalization. In many countries, as a major sector of national economy tourism ranks higher than other dominant industries and plays a vital role in strengthening the economy by earning a huge amount of foreign exchange and providing employment to thousands of people. However, tourism has wider implications encompassing not only economic but also socio-cultural, educational and political aspects. The complex nature of tourism phenomenon implies that various disciplines are involved in its study and development of tourism requires systematic study from different angles. It also requires proper assessment of available and potential tourist attractions, facilities, prospects and problems of tourist places etc.

Potential development of tourism in many places can be explained in terms of their historical background. Aspects of the past are increasingly used in the construction of tourism products for a number of expanding and varied markets and historical tourism is a major branch of tourism nowadays. Such historical tourism not only includes trips principally motivated by aspects of the past, but also historical excursions and activities undertaken during non-historically motivated holidays. The tourism product may be composed of preserved, collected and interpreted historical artifacts, sites, buildings, districts and even whole towns, including memories and associations of places with historical events and personalities. The selection from the past as a quarry of possibilities and its presentation for contemporary consumption results in heritage which may draw upon folklore, mythology and products of the human creative literary and artistic imagination. Historical tourists may be motivated by a search for identity or fantasy. Historical and heritage tourism is almost synonymous and has an overlapping relationship with many other forms of tourism. These include the historical aspects of cultural, art and festival tourism, many aspects of place-specific and ethnic tourism including costume and gastronomy, and those trips associated with museums, art galleries, monuments and archaeological and historical sites.

Assam, the land of the red river and the blue hills, is a state of India in the northeastern part of the country. The mighty river *Brahmaputra* is flowing from the east

to west bisecting its plain areas. Upper Assam means the eastern part of the state and it is considered to have covered territories of a few districts lying on the north and south banks of the *Brahmaputra*. This geographical identity of the region was a creation of the government of the East India Company who organized the territories to the east of river *Dhansiri* on the south bank of the *Brahmaputra* and the territories to the east of *Biswanath* on the north bank of the *Brahmaputra* as a separate administrative unit in the name of Upper Assam. However the term 'Upper Assam' is presently used to mean the territories covered by the districts of *Dhemaji* and *Lakhimpur* on the north bank and the districts of *Tinisukia*, *Dibrugarh*, *Sivasagar*, *Jorhat* and *Golaghat* on the south bank of the *Brahmaputra*.

The areas included within Upper Assam presently were once parts of the ancient kingdom of *Kamrupa*. However, in spite of a flourishing culture and political set up witnessed by the region, ancient historical sites and religious shrines are limited here. In contrast to the ancient period, there are a lot of historical sites and monuments that belonged to the medieval age when the royal houses of the *Chutiyas*, *Kacharis* and *Ahoms* ruled over different parts of the region. The rise of the Neo-Vaisnavite movement was particularly instrumental in founding a lot of *thans* and *satras*, i.e., *Vaisnava* monasteries during that period. Such a vibrant course of history naturally left some indelible marks, which are scattered in various places. The cultural heritage of Assam is not only ancient but is also of varied nature.¹ Its history reflects a unique admixture and union of different ethnicity which in turn creates a heterogeneous ethno-cultural environment. The habitation pattern, food habit, dress, life style, festivals and all other cultural elements of different ethnic groups can be very attractive to the tourists. Because of a long and significant historical process, ingredients considered favourable for development of historical tourism are found in abundance in the region.

ANALYSIS

A study of the history of Assam reveals that the ancient kingdom of *Kamrupa* is considered to have once covered many parts of the present northeastern region of India including the *Brahmaputra* valley and *Bangladesh*. The territories of present Upper Assam naturally fell under it. Some recent research works, however, tend to give the

impression that there might have been few other independent political centers and cultural zones in the region that existed con-temporaneously or at different times.² The disintegration of the ancient kingdom(s) of Assam by the middle of the 12th century led to the rise of some Mongoloid political powers in Upper Assam such as the *Chutiyas* and *Kacharis* and some landlords called Bhuyans. Some petty communities such as the *Morans* and the *Barahis* also carved out their own principalities there. The early thirteenth century marked the beginning of a new era in the region with the advent of the *Ahoms*, a branch of the *Tai-Shans*, under a prince named *Sukapha*. The *Ahoms* succeeded in founding a strong kingdom in Upper Assam. In the course of time, they subjugated most of the powers of the *Brahmaputra* valley, ruled for six hundred years and played a significant role in shaping the identity of Assam and the Assamese. It was during this period when *Sankardeva* preached the Neo-Vaisnavite religion in Assam and its legacy is still found. The history of modern Assam started with the British rule from 1826 when the East India Company annexed the state to its Indian empire after concluding the treaty of *Iandabu* with Burma. The colonial history was largely a saga of exploitation. It also marked a transition in the political and socio-economic set up. The British Raj laid the foundation of industrialisation in Upper Assam; the most prominent being the tea plantation, oil and coal industries. The politico-economic need of the British led to a process of urbanisation and improved transport and communication system too but in a limited scale. During the colonial rule, Assam established its identity with the rest of the country and became an organ state in independent India.

Upper Assam is situated in one of the greatest routes of migration of humankind. Down the ages, she received the people of different strains pouring into India, who added new elements to the country's population and cultural complexion. Across her geographical boundaries, there came men, ideas and means of production to mingle together with the aboriginals and shape a new mode of living and a rich culture.³ One can find traces of many races in Upper Assam such as Mongolian, Dravidian and Aryans etc. The unique life style of the non-tribals and tribals manifest diversity in unity and unity in diversity. Among the racial groups living in Upper Assam the caste Hindus are Aryans, the *Koches*, *Chutiyas*, *Deories*, different groups of the *Kacharies*, *Morans*, *Ahoms*, *Misings* etc. are of Mongolian stock who were Hinduized in the course of time. *Phakials*,

Khamtis, Khamyangs, Turungs and Aitons also belong to that stock but they are Buddhist in religion. A few villages in Upper Assam where we find *Sema, Tangsa* and *Nocte Naga* population are either Christian or *Vaisnava*. The settlement of the Muslims took place in Upper Assam from reign of *Ahom* king *Suhungmung* in the early sixteenth century. The British rule witnessed further demographic change with the migration and influx of new ethnic and linguistic groups such as the Tea garden workers, *Bengalis, Rajasthanis, and Nepalis* etc. All these added more variety to the historical and cultural complexion of upper Assam.

The archaeological remains, monuments, holy shrines, some modern artifacts and colourful culture of the people of Upper Assam represent and manifest the historical developments of different periods and cultural heritage of the region. It has several ruin and monument sites. Some of the architectures reflect the *Gupta* style, while some others are of later period revealing a combination of *Ahom, Mughal* and indigenous traditions of art and architecture. However heavy rainfall, high humidity, a high range of annual temperature and frequent earthquakes caused immense destruction and loss to many such structures.⁴

The archaeological remains of *Doyang-Dhansiri* valley present a significant specimen of ancient and medieval culture of Upper Assam. A large portion of these now falls under the district of *Golaghat* and the remaining parts fall under the districts of *Jorhat, Nagaon* and *Karbi Anglong*. Ruins of secular buildings and temples of brick structure, endowed with sculptures, water tanks, ramparts and water ditches have been found at *Duborani* near *Barpathar*. Structural remains of two fortified embankments are discovered at *Rajabari* in *Alichiga-Tengani* to the north of *Barpathar*. Remains of ancient brick structure found at *Ahom Gaon* of *Kamarbandha* and a brick mound along with a *yonipitha* and a terracotta plaque of a female figure discovered at *Sarupathar* also belong to this culture. Another centre of this culture is believed to have been developed at *Deopani*, 40 km. south of *Golaghat*, where remains of brick architecture and stone sculptures are found. Archaeological remains of one form or other such as brick temple architecture, brick mounds, terracotta plaques, stone sculpture, images of gods etc. are found at *Kasomaripathar* and some of the above-mentioned places. One of the major archaeological sites of this cultural zone is found at *Deopahar*, a small range of hills, near

Numaligarh, which is marked by the scattered ruins of temple architecture of stone and images. The wide extent of the ruins is an indication that at some point of time there was an extensive residential complex built entirely of stone.⁵ The archaeological site of *Numaligarh*, located on the bank of the river *Dhansiri* and presently famous for a rampart built of mud and brick, is supposed to have had ancient origin and link with the culture of the adjoining areas which was reinforced during the medieval period. The archaeological remains of this region certainly present a great prospect for historical tourism.

A notable archaeological structure located in the district of *Golaghat*, which still stands intact, is the *Shiva* temple of *Negheriting*. The present temple was built during the medieval age by *Ahom* monarch *Rajeshwar Singha*, which is one of the finest of all temples built in Assam during the late medieval period.⁶ The origin of the temple, however, can be traced back to ancient times.⁷ Other important historical shrines of *Golaghat* district include several *Vaisnava satras* and places of worship that belong to the non-Hindus.

The district of *Jorhat* lies to the east of *Golaghat* district on the south bank of the *Brahmaputra*. We find traces of historical development and few archaeological sites in the district only from the medieval period when its territories constituted a part of the *Ahom* kingdom. *Purnananda Burhagohain*, the Prime minister of *Ahom* monarch *Gourinath Singha*, shifted headquarter of the kingdom to *Jorhat* in 1794 on the bank of the river *Dichoi (Bhogdoi)*. However, the royal establishment, struggling for survival in the declining phase of the *Ahom* power, could leave only a few marks there in the form of some *maidams*, tanks etc. One of the *maidams* found at *Nara Hiloidari gaon*, situated a few kilometers away to the east of *Jorhat* city, is claimed to be of *Lachit Barphukan*, a famous *Ahom* general. During the British rule, *Jorhat* served as an important centre of administration and tea industry.

A very important place of Upper Assam from the perspective of heritage tourism is *Majuli*, one of the largest freshwater riverine islands in the world and a sub-division of *Jorhat* District. The mainstream of the *Brahmaputra* in the south and the *Kherkatia* channel of the river in the north surround *Majuli*. The island is famous for its various *satra* institutions and architectural and cultural assets.⁸ *Majuli* became a centre of the

Neo Vasnavite movement from the medieval age. In the course of time, a number of *satras* were founded in Majuli. These *satras* have been playing a vital role not only in the propagation of the *Vaisnava* faith but also in promoting the *satriya* culture which include performing art such as *bhaona* (folk drama) and in *satriya* dance etc. among many other cultural assets. The important *satras* are *Garamur*, *Kamalabari*, *Auniati*, *Bengenaati*, *Samaguri* and *Dakhinpat*. *Majuli* provides living space to many ethnic communities who have created a colourful cultural mosaic in the island. Moreover, *Majuli* is marked for some creative art and crafts of vintage nature such as pottery. According to archaeologists, *Majuli* appears to be a missing links between the *Mohenjodaro* and *Harappan* civilizations.⁹ Apart from the *satras* of *Majuli*, there are few other historic *satras* also in *Jorhat*.

The district of *Sivasagar*, which lies to the east of *Jorhat* on the south bank of the *Brahmaputra*, is the richest district of upper Assam in terms of medieval archaeological remains, which therefore, presents a fertile ground for historical research and historical tourism. Such abundance of the archaeological remains can be explained by the reason that the territories covered by the district once formed the core areas of the *Ahom* kingdom. The *Ahom* monarchs founded several capitals there such as *Charaideo*, *Charagua*, *Bakata*, *Garhgaon* and *Rangpur*. Some of them were adorned with fortifications, palatial buildings, temples, tanks, burial graves and other structures that bear testimony of an advanced culture and engineering skill. The cluster of monuments, built during the six centuries of *Ahom* rule, is of great significance to modern Assamese culture.¹⁰

The oldest archaeological remains of the *Ahom* age are found at *Charaideo*, the first permanent capital of the *Ahoms*. It was founded on a hill in 1253 A.D. by *Sukapha*, the founder of the *Ahom* kingdom in Assam. Though the capital was shifted to *Charagua* in 1403 A.D. by *Ahom* king *Sudangpha*, *Charaideo* continued to be a significant place for the *Ahoms*, which they used as a centre for *maidams* of the kings and queens. The construction of the *maidams* presents a unique architectural style and cultural aspects of the *Ahoms*. Ruins of some of the *maidams* and other architecture still exist at *Charaideo*, which are viewed to be very significant historical resources.

Another *Ahom* metropolis *Garhgaon* is also considered important for its archaeological remains. Founded by *Ahom* king *Suklenmung*, the city was developed as a fortified capital complex. A ring of *garhs*, i.e. ramparts, surrounded the city, which were further protected by deep ditches outside the ramparts. The most important monument and a fine specimen of *Ahom* architecture that still exists here is the seven-storied palatial building called *Kareng Ghar*, built by king *Rajeshwar Singha*. Next to *Charaideo*, *Garhgaon* was the most revered and well-known capital cities of the *Ahoms* retaining its importance even after the shifting of the capital to *Rangpur* by king *Rudra Singha*¹¹ in 1698 A.D.

Rangpur (*Che-mum* or city of joy) was the most colourful capital city of the *Ahoms*, which measured 12 miles long and 10 miles wide on the left bank of the *Dikhow*. *Rudra Singha* excavated a huge tank called *Joysagar* there and constructed three temples called *Joy doul*, *Devi doul* and *Shiva doul*. There is another temple on the northwestern corner of the tank named *Nati Gosair doul*. The complex covering about 1000 bighas of land was surrounded by an 18 feet high rampart. It was soon embellished with various royal premises such as *Talatal-ghar* palace with a few underground storyes, *Rang-ghar*, a high pavilion of brick with two roofs for entertainment under *Pramatta Singha*. The *Talatal-ghar* was enlarged into a multi storied-structure under *Rajeshwar Singha*.¹² This palace was adjoined with the palace of *Garhgaon* and river *Dikhow* by underground tunnels providing escape route to the royal family in times of emergency. It was a stupendous feat of architectural achievement considering the technological constrains of medieval times. Other notable archaeological remains of *Rangpur* include *Gola ghar* (an arsenal) and a number of small temples called *douls* such as *Rangnath doul*, *Fakua doul*, *Ishaneshwar Devalaya*, *Gouriballabh doul* etc.

The modern town of *Sivasagar* also bears several archaeological remains. The town, earlier known as *Kalanchupar*, gets its present name from a huge tank named *Sivasagar*, excavated during the reign of king *Siva Singha* in 1734 A.D. who constructed three *douls* on its banks and devoted them to lord *Vishnu*, *Siva* and mother goddess. There is a Tai museum on the western bank of the tank, which was built in 1992 to display the rich cultural heritage of the *Tai-Ahoms*. Apart from these monuments in and around *Sivasagar* town, many other medieval archaeological remains are lying scattered

in different parts of the district. They include the *Rudrasagar* tank and temple built by Ahom king *Lakshmi Singha* in 1773 A.D., *Gourisagar* tank and the *douls* built on its bank during the reign of *Siva Singha* in 1723 A.D., the *Barpatra doul* and tank of *Kalugaon*, the stone bridge constructed over the river *Namdang* by *Rudra Singha*, the *douls* of *Namti* and *Thowra*, the *dargah* of saint *Ajan pir* etc. Moreover, many medieval tanks, *Vaisnava satras* and historical shrines belong to non-Hindu religion in different parts of the district.

Dibrugarh is an important district of upper Assam with considerable prospects of historical tourism. However, no other ancient archaeological remain is found in the district except some New Stone Age tools and a gold icon at *Chabua*. During the medieval age, the *Ahoms* erected a fort at the mouth of the river *Dibru*. The name *Dibrugarh* probably originated from that fort. Signs of medieval history and archaeological remains are found at several places of the district. Reference can be made to *Bahikhowa maidam* located at *Khowang* tea estate, *Barboruah maidam* located near a road junction at *Sesa*, *Lekai Chetia maidam* situated at *Sesa* near *Mankata Road*, *Sarumechlow* and *Barmechlow maidams* in *Lengeri Mouza*, the legendary sites of *Tipam* and *Salaguri*, *Bezor doul* situated at *Bezpathar* village in *Sepon Mouza*, *Raidangia doul* and tank at *Kalakhowa* in *Larua Mouza* etc. Historic shrines of the district include *Dihing Namti Satra*, *Dihing Satra*, *Dinjoy Satra*, *Garpara Satra*, *Kunda Ata Than*, *Mayamara Madarkhat Satra*, *Sri Sri Kali Aai Than*, *Sita Kunda*, *Baga Baba Mazhar* etc. The Christian Cemetery of *Dibrugarh* is a sign of the culture of the colonial rule of the British in this part of the state. The colonial rule led to the urbanization of *Dibrugarh* and it became a significant centre of tea and oil industry and junction of railway and water transport. In modern times, few industrial towns such as *Duliajan*, *Naharkatia* and *Namrup* developed in the district, corresponding to the growth of the oil industry.

Tinsukia is the easternmost district on the south bank of the *Brahmaputra* in Assam. The territories of the district once formed the remotest part of the ancient kingdom of *Kamrupa*. After the decline of *Kamrupa*, it became a part of the *Chutiya* kingdom with headquarter at *Sadiya*, which was annexed to the Ahom kingdom in the early 16th century. Towards the end of the *Ahom* rule, the *Matak* or *Moamariya* rebels forced the *Ahom* authority to concede autonomy to the former who founded a principality

at Bengmara, i.e., Tinsukia under a chieftain entitled *Barsenapati*. During the British rule, the region became important for the growth of tea, oil and coal industry as well as for some political activities.

The earliest example of cultural development of the district is traced around *Sadiya* of which the *Tamreshwari* temple is the most famous. Some temples of the area are *Patar Shal*, *Buraburi Shal* and *Baliababa Shal*. Other notable historic sites include *Protima Nagar*, *Bhismak Nagar*, *Ahom Pukhuri*, *Padum Pukhuri*, and *Boiragi Math* etc. An important archaeological remain found at *Sadiya* was a stone pillar with *Tai* inscription in it which is believed to have been inscribed in the 16th century. A number of tanks and few burial graves in *Tinsukia* town and the adjoining areas give testimony of the *Matak* kingdom of which the most notable is the *Tinisukia pukhuri*, i.e., the triangular tank. The name of the present town is derived from it.

The colonial period marked the growth of some industrial centers in the district of which the most prominent was *Digboi*. A glorious saga of discovery of crude oil in the late 19th century is behind the growth of the modern town of *Digboi*. *Digboi* boasts of two modern wonders of the world, a hundred year old oilfield which is still producing oil and the world's oldest operating oil refinery.¹³ The course of time has added many other elements to this historic town which can be helpful for heritage tourism. The centenary museum of *Digboi* can give the tourists a memorable idea of the historic development of the oil industry in the region while the war cemetery reminds them about the horror of the Second World War, which even touched the eastern border of Assam. Two other industrial towns of the district having the colonial background are *Margherita* and *Ledo*, which are famous for their coalmines. A historical landmark of this region is the *Stilwell road* built by American army officer *J.W Stilwell* during the Second World War connecting India, Myanmar and China.

The northern part of Upper Assam comprises of the districts of *Dhemaji* and *Lakhimpur*. This region too formed parts of ancient kingdom of *Kamrupa*. After the decline of the kingdom of *Kamrupa*, the *Chutiyas* subjugated the eastern part of the region and made it an integral part of their kingdom while the *Bhuyans* managed to create their spheres of influence in the western part. The emerging *Ahom* power, however, conquered and annexed these territories in the 16th century to their kingdom. The political

and socio-cultural development during the medieval period found expression here through several secular and religious constructions.

In *Dhemaji* district, some archaeological remains, probably of a fort and temple, are noticed at *Rajgarh* and the adjoining areas to the 6kms. northwest of *Jonai*. There is a brick structure surrounded presently by forest.¹⁴ Few other material ruins are found at *Rajakhana* of *Jonai*, *Bherachapari*, *Machkhowa*, *Choukhamgaon* and *Bardalani* etc.¹⁵ However, the origin, extent and history of these sites are yet to be explored. Two notable shrines in the district of *Dhemaji* are *Ghuguha doul* and *Manipuria Gosanir than*. *Ghuguha doul* is an octagonal temple and it is situated on the *Dhemaji-Dhakuakhana* road. *Manipuria Gosanir than* is presently situated in *Bardalani Mouza*. The origin of these ancient temples is not known exactly.

The secular archaeological sites of *Lakhimpur* are found in the form of ruins of *garhs*, tanks, epigraphs and other structures that were apparently constructed under the patronage of royal power or nobility. However, the main centre of political power always remained far away from this region, and therefore, there is not many large-scale fortifications, palaces or towns here. Ruins of an ancient town are found between the river *Dhal* and *Ghagar* to eight kms. east of present town of *North Lakhimpur*. A *Chutiya* king probably built the town during the medieval age which was deserted or destroyed by natural calamity like earthquake or flood.¹⁶ The Ruins of ramparts and temple structure were found at the site of present tea estate of *Harmati* also.¹⁷ The *Ahom* kings raised several *garhs* on the north bank of the *Brahmaputra* of which ruins are found of *Soatal garh* and *Dafala garh*, built by *Pratap Singha*.¹⁸ *Gohain Kamal Ali* was the longest medieval road in Assam which was built by the *Koches*. Parts of this road still exist that go through the districts of *Sonitpur* and *Lakhimpur*. We have few medieval copper plates issued by *Chutiya* and *Ahom* kings found at *Ghilamara* and *Dhakuakhana* in *Lakhimpur* district. A number of historical tanks are also excavated in upper north Assam.

Maghnowa doul, a typical temple of the *Ahom* age, probably presents the best example of architecture of medieval *Lakhimpur*. This temple, known as *Phulbari devalaya* also, is situated on the bank of the river *Pichala*. The design and style of architecture of this temple resembles much with *Garakhia doul* of *Nazira*.¹⁹ An

important historical shrine of *Lakhimpur* is *Vasudeva than-Narora satra*. Idol of lord *Vishnu* is worshipped here. The temple was founded by *Ahom* king *Jayadhvaj Singha* and rebuilt by *Siva Singha*.

We come across some significant Brahmanical shrines and *satras* in the district of *Lakhimpur*. One prominent *Sakti* shrine is *Harhi devalaya* in *Dhakuakhana* sub-division. The *Chutiyas* probably founded this temple and later on, it enjoyed patronization of the *Ahom* kings. The temple contains some beautifully carved stone images of which goddess *Durga* with ten hands is the largest.²⁰ Another such temple is *Garakhia than* located at *Selajan Sonowal Kachari* village. It was also probably built by the *Chutiyas* and had an octagonal foundation. Other notable Brahmanical shrines of *Lakhimpur* include *Boithawati than*, *Panchanan devalaya*, *Murhabhaga Gosanir than*, *Lokpani devalaya*, and *Pota Gosanir than* etc. A prominent *Vaisnava* monastery of *Lakhimpur* is *Gharmara satra*. It was founded by *Vaisnava* pontiff *Jadumanideva* and enjoyed patronage of the *Ahom* kings. It is presently situated on the outskirts of *Lakhimpur* town and marked for preservation of some medieval objects and classical manuscripts. Other *satras* of historical origin are *Vishnu Balikunchi*, *Gopalpur*, *Naharani*, *Govindapur*, *Barmahara*, *Belguri*, *Kangsapar*, *Kathpar*, *Govida Elengi*, *Gajala*, *Kahikuchi*, and *Deberapar* etc. There are two Buddhist shrines at *Gosainbari* and *Barkhamti* village in *Lakhimpur*. The *Khamtis* who were settled there by the British after their revolt in 1839 founded these.

It is observed from the perspective of tourism that history is instrumental in shaping and presenting some unique features of the region. A significant historical development of modern Assam is the discovery of tea and its commercial production by the British. Assam tea has not only established a worthy name worldwide but also created some legacies of its own. The tea garden labourers, who were brought out of the province and settled here by the British, added new elements to the culture and racial structure of Assam. Hundreds of tea gardens in Upper Assam with their historic root can be an attraction for the tourists. Moreover, some luxurious bungalows of the tea gardens, which were once used by the European managers, are still preserved and maintained as heritage by the respective authorities. The experience of staying in such a bungalow that presents a blend of old aristocratic flavour and modern amenities amidst a green environment can be very enjoyable.

Some historical methods and techniques innovated by the people of medieval Assam can be interesting for the tourists. The monuments of medieval Assam in general admittedly cannot match with those of South and North India in terms of their magnificence. However, the indigenous technique applied to prepare the cement called *Karal* used in these structures was quite unique. *Karal* was manufactured by using different ingredients. These materials were jaggery, snail lime, stone lime, black gram (*Phaesalus aurens*), xon (a kind of plant fibre), fishes, oil, resin of *Sal* tree, oil etc.²¹ The materials used in the medieval constructions were of such high quality that many of them survived frequent and severe earthquakes till date. The people of Assam also proved their expertise in paper making technology. The most Common carrier of manuscript in Assam was made from the bark of the *Agar* tree (*Acquillaria agalocha*) which is known as *Sanchipat* by following a certain process. Another material on which writing and painting were done was *Tulapat*, which had ginned cotton as its ingredients.²² Manuscripts and paintings on such unique materials used as paper are preserved in many *satras*, museums and under private possession and the tourists can develop interest on them. The people of Assam used another rare and historic technique in gold washing by which gold particles were collected from the sands of some rivers. Gold washing is no longer in practice but the rivers, which once carried gold particles still exist.

PROBLEMS OF HISTORICAL TOURISM

A historical study of Upper Assam gives the impression that the region has an interesting historical background and a rich cultural heritage, which enriches the prospect of historical tourism there. However, in spite of its potentiality the desired level of growth of historical tourism is not achieved. A variety of reasons such as lack of infrastructure, problem of insurgency, disadvantageous geographical location, poor preservation and maintenance of the monuments and weak publicity etc. seem to be responsible for its under development. As a matter of fact the north eastern region of India is lagging far behind the rest of the country in terms of the development of the industry and its socio-economic contribution is limited here. The status of Upper Assam is even worse in this regard and the tourism sector hardly has an organisational base there. We have found that

the same factors which are largely responsible for the under development of tourism in the north east are playing their part to obstruct its growth in Upper Assam also.

One of the main reasons of the low growth of tourism in Upper Assam is poor publicity and presentation of its historical sites and resources. Upper Assam is hardly presented by the media in the national level. If it is somehow referred to that too is not from the perspective of historical tourism. It is an unknown place even for many people of the country itself and they, therefore, do not develop any interest to visit it.

A sound infrastructure is a necessary precondition for development of tourism in any region. Unfortunately the tourist infrastructure in Upper Assam is quite poor which does not encourage the tourist to come to visit the historical places. Transport and communication to and from all places of Upper Assam is still not satisfactory. Condition of the most of the state roads connecting the potential historical tourist places is very pathetic. For instance, the experience of the tourists travelling by road to some historical shrines on the north bank of the Brahmaputra can be a miserable one for bad roads. Air transport and trains on broad gauge track are yet to be fully operative in all parts of the region. Growth of proper accommodation in the potential tourists' places of the region in the form of hotel, motel, tourist lodge, guest house etc. to cater to the needs of the tourists is a far cry even after six decades of independence. There is hardly any hygienic sanitary facility at the spots which are considered to have prospect to attract tourists. The minimum basic necessities are not available in most of such places.

Another barrier of tourism development in Upper Assam is poor preservation of its tourist resources. Lack of proper preservation causes decay and erosion of many significant archaeological and religious sites. Negligence to the sites of our heritage does not augur well for the development of tourism.

The development of tourism in any region is more or less dependent on combined and supportive role played by the public and private sector which is conspicuous by its absence in Upper Assam. Unfortunately many loopholes are found in the policies adopted by the state tourism department. One such weakness is that only few tourists' places of the state are given importance and highlighted while many others are yet to receive the favour. In spite of their bright prospects many historical places of Upper Assam are excluded from the tourist map and they are not included in the programme of circular

tours conducted by the govt. departments. The private sector which usually plays a very positive role in the development of tourism is not that active in Upper Assam. We have found very little contribution of the private sector to the development of tourist infrastructure, entertainment, providing guidance to tourists etc. in the region. There are a few tourist transport operators there but they too do not maintain any specific tour programme.

The problem of insurgency has been affecting the tourism industry in the north east for a long time and Upper Assam is no exception. Insurgency and violence prevent the foreign tourists from visiting the trouble torn areas of Assam nor are they advised by their respective governments to do that. The region suffers from the tag of political unrest and it is not included in the itinerary of the tourists.

Growth of tourism in Upper Assam is handicapped to some extent by the factors of nature also. The region is marked for heavy rainfall from April to August. Moreover, the Brahmaputra and its tributaries cause flood every year there resulting in heavy damage to infrastructure like roads and railways and obstructs movement of travelers. It makes a tour to this part of the country seasonal and limited to a period between mid September and March only. The alluvial soil of the region is vulnerable to flood. The damaged infrastructure requires a huge amount of fund for reparation and restoration.

REMEDIES

In view of the problems mentioned above a lot has to be done for the growth of tourism in Upper Assam in general and historical tourism in particular to gain the material benefit from it. Developing new and reparation and proper maintenance of the existing infrastructure for tourists in the region are very important. The national highways running through the districts should be widened and converted to multi lane highways. State roads, air and rail transport need to be improved. On the other hand it is necessary to develop hotel, resort, tourist lodge etc. at least with moderate facilities at different potential tourist spots. Guest houses can be raised at the holy shrines for the accommodation of the pilgrims. There should be a strong campaigning and positive publicity in the state, national and international level about the historical origin and significance of the sites to attract the tourists. The government and private organizations

need to play a more active role to promote historical tourism in the region. Consciousness of the people and a change in their mentality can bring a change to the whole scenario. So there is a need to make the people aware of the prospects and problems of tourism there. Potential tourist places of Upper Assam deserve to be included in the tourist map and there should be provision of conducted tour covering the important historical and heritage places. Moreover, steps can be taken to open some stalls around the historical sites and holy shrines where different products and items of the region can be shown and sold to give the visitors a glimpse of its culture.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can say that there is no dearth of significant historical resources in Upper Assam which can really help to develop historical and heritage tourism. However, they need to be explored and exposed properly. We need a comprehensive plan to make use of the resources. Elimination of all the impediments mentioned above can ensure the progress of historical tourism in Upper Assam which is bound to bring an unprecedented socio-economic development to this economically under developed region. If tourism flourishes there it will not only provide ample scope to the people to enhance their income by selling consumer goods and services but also serve as a source of revenue for the govt. The process of investment in different fields of tourism and payment made by the tourists for services and commodities will cause a multiplier effect. For example, parts of the bill paid by a tourist as rent in hotel will be spent by the hotel to the caterer, laundry, power suppliers, entertainers etc. As a result money will be circulated to different segments of economy. Moreover, tourism can provide opportunity of direct and indirect employment to thousands of unemployed persons of the region. In fact, full growth of tourism there will give it a new identity. It is expected to enable the people to show their art and culture to the outsiders. Further, it will make them realize the necessity of preserving their natural, cultural and historical resources.

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