

Prospects and Problems of Religious Tourism in Dhakuakhana Sub-division of Lakhimpur District of Assam

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Abstract- Religious tourism is regarded as planning visits to other towns, cities or countries for religious purposes. The development of religious tourism takes place through developing religious tourism circuits through a hub and spoke model, providing the tourists with the holistic tourism experience. It is necessary to ensure that the environment is clean and well maintained, nearby the religious places. In this study, an attempt has been made to assess the prospects and problems of religious tourism in the study area. For micro level investigation four religious places have been taken viz. Basudev Than Naruah Satra, Gopalpur Satra, Govindapur Satra and Harhi Devalaya; 25 people have been selected from each place and total 100 people have been surveyed. It has been found that Dhakuakhana has a great prospect of religious tourism, but some problems also there.

Index Terms- Religious Tourism, Prospects, Problems, Dhakuakhana Sub-division.

I.INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries which have vast scope for employment generation and income, a major source of foreign exchange earner of a nation. It can be considered as a measure for resolving interstate and inter community conflict, a great source of cultural exchange and assimilation. Generally tourism is a short term movement of peoples from where they live to another destination outside and work their activities at each location during that time of stay. Reasons for travelling may defer from people to people. So, depends upon their reasons, there are various types of tourism which are – cultural tourism, eco-tourism, religious tourism, wild-life tourism, wine tourism etc. Religious Tourism is the pioneer form of tourism which usually related to the followers of particular faiths who visits the holy sites of their own religious beliefs; for example, Christian travelling to Jerusalem and Muslims to Mecca. It is one of the oldest form of tourism which is begins almost with the dawn of humanity. By the biblical period, the religious centres had become the tourists place of faith. From the ancient times, religious destinations were a part of cultural landscape, historical and religious significance. So, locations which are considered as a holy sites, not only visited by the pilgrims but also by the non-religious tourists for a humanitarian cause, reason for friendship, marriage or as a form of leisure. The general meaning of religious tourism implies travelling with the prime motive of experiencing religion activities or the product they induce such as art, culture, tradition and architecture. Along with the cultural landscape religious destinations also had become a vital factor in local marketing and prime parts of the economy of hosted destinations by its antiquity. Some of the religious places of Assam such as Kamakhya Temple and Majuli Island attract thousands of religious tourists, researchers, charity workers and humanitarians creating a huge financial transaction in the destination.

Dhakuakhana, a sub-division of Lakhimpur District of Assam is such a historical place which has great prospects of religious tourism. Some spiritual tourist destinations of Dhakuakhana are – Basudev Than Narua Satra, Harhi Devalaya, Gopalpur Satra, Govindapur satra etc.

This paper makes an attempt to explore the prospects and problems of Dhakuakhana in terms of religious tourism which will helps to economic and socio-cultural development of the place in near future and also helps the tourists to visit Dhakuakhana to meet their religious faith. The provision to interaction with other people will help the domestic people to widening their mental horizon and to reduced religious orthodox.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of the study are-

1. To highlight the problems and prospects of religious tourism in Dhakuakhana Sub-division.
2. To recommend suitable policy measure for overcome the problems on the basis of findings of the study.

III. THE STUDY AREA

Dhakuakhana is a sub-division of Lakhimpur District of Assam, India. Geographical position of the place is between 27.60 degree to 27.35 degree north latitude and 94.24 degree to 94.42 degree east longitude. The Brahmaputra and Dhemaji District is on its east, Subansiri River and the North - Lakhimpur sub –division are on west. To the north of the place is Dhemaji and Majuli Island is on south. Like the other parts of Assam, Dhakuakhana is a home land of various ethnic tribes and groups including Chutia, Mishing, Ahom, Deori, Koch etc, each having its own cultural heritage. Major religion of the place is Hinduism; however there are also population of diverse faith such as Christianity and Islam. The tribal community Mishings also follows their ancient tradition of worshipping Doni-Polo; Sun and Moon God. This is such a historical place which has great prospects of religious tourism. Some, spiritual tourist destination of Dhakuakhana are – Basudev Than Narua Satra, Harhi Devalaya, Gupalpur Satra, etc. Besides this, the distance of Dhakuakhana and Majuli is very short which helps the tourists to visit Dhakuakhana who visits Majuli. Majuli, is the largest river island of the world which is the centre of Vaishnava culture. There are many satras in Majuli which are known as the centres of Assamese art, dance, drama, music etc. It is a safe haven for various migratory birds also. An average of 1000 visitors visits the satras every day throughout the year. It becomes a centre of attraction in the month of November when it celebrates the Ras-lila Festival. At that time more than hundred thousand pilgrims come for pilgrimage from different places of India and abroad.

IV. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The information regarding the present study has been collected from both primary and secondary data. The main sources of secondary data are the book, journal, and magazine, department of tourism govt. of Assam, Economic Survey, and Assam etc. Since the study area is Dhakuakhana Sub-division of Lakhimpur district, primary data has been collected from four main religious places, viz. Basudev Than Narua Satra, Gopalpur Satra, Govindapur Satra and Harhi Devalaya. From this four religious places 25 people has been selected randomly from each than and satra's, including tourist and people who are involved with religious activities and finally 100 people have been surveyed. A structured schedule has been used to collect the necessary information regarding problem and prospect of religious tourism in surveyed area.

V. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

5.1: Prospects of Religious Tourism in the Study Area

Religious tourism can be a vast source of income for a place. Growing economic condition can enrich the educational, industrial, health and all other sectors of life of the population of a place. Dhakuakhana is such a place, where there is enormous scope for tourism industry especially in terms of religious tourism.

As a part of Lakhimpur district of Assam Dhakuakhana is a culturally rich place. This place is a land home of various ethnic groups and tribes, who are culturally rich with their ethnic culture. Although Hinduism is the major religion of the place, other religions like Christian, Muslim, and sheikhs also in the place. The natural beauty of the place with river Charikoria, Brahmaputa, Subanshiri etc. can also attract the tourist easily. From the time of Ahom kingdom, there was a market on the bank of river charikoria which is now called as 'Mahghuli Chapari, the place was a centre point of peoples from various locations to make their business and enjoyed the 'Bihu' collectively for a short period. Later it becomes Phat bihu. Now-a days, every year at the last of 'bohag'(first month of assamese new year) peoples of Dhakuakhana

celebrate the 'Phat Bihu'. Thousands of people come from various destinations to this place at that time. Along with the handloom and textile industry of Dhakuakhana is vast and versatile. The skill in hands of people especially in women's has its own charm. The market of 'Missing Traditional dress' and the 'Muga' silk of Dhakuakhana is famous. It also attracts peoples to this place.

There are some eminent locations at this place which can attract tourists in terms of religious tourism. These places are like Basudev Than, Gupalpur Satra, Harhi Devalay, Gobindapur Satra, Monipuri Than (very near to Dhakuakhana) etc. From the medieval period of 'Assamese Literary History' peoples comes from various locations of Assam to these temples to meet their goals. A brief description of these holy places are-

(i) Basudev Than Narua Satra: It is a most distinguished holy place of worship of Basudeva (Assamese word for lord Vishnu) in Dhakuakhana. It is a product of 'Vaishnav movement' of Assam. A grand son of Sankardev (a saint of Assam), Damodar Ata established this temple as Laumura Satra in mid-17th Century during the time of Ahom King Jayadhwaj Shingha on the northern part of Sampora river. The main plot of the temple was donated by Chutia Kings Lakshminarayan and Satyanarayan in 14th-15th century and the original temple was built in that time. From their time, the plot of the satra was transferred to many people, but ultimately the land went to the hand of Damodar Ata and he established the temple at present day location as 'Narua satra' which means 'newly established'. It is situated 12 km west from Dhakuakhana town. The Basudev Mandir of the temple was established on 'Maghi Purnima' and from that time the people organize "Pal Nam" (a kind of sangeet) every year on that day. Along with Pal Nam, the festival of 'Dol Yatra' and 'Rash-Lila' also celebrated every year colourfully. More about one thousands of religionists of different destinations come to visit this temple every day and specially in the festival of Dol Yatra and the time of New Year and other festivals.

(ii) Gopalpur Satra: This is a historical and holy pilgrimage to the Hindus and especially to the vaishnavist which is a worship of Gopal (a Assamese name of lord Krishna). Besides this other stone statue of Bonshibadan, Vubanmohan, Keligopal and Lakshi-Narayan also concentrated here. It is established in the confluence of Korha and Kumotia River, which is located about 2 km from Ghilamora, a development block of Dhakuakhana sub-division. The satra was established by Banamali Dev in 1578 during the time of Ahom king Chakradhwaj Singha and his auspices. This is a sub-satra of Dakhinpat Satra (a main satra of Vaishnavism of Assam) of Majuli. The satra community celebrate the Rash-Lila, Dol-Yatra, Siv-Jayanti, Bihu and the death and birth date of Gurus of Vaishnavism every year.

(iii) Govindapur satra: This is a another place of worship of Vaishnavism. It is about 5km to east from Dhakuakhana town. The name of the area is also known as Govindapur where the satra is located. The satra is established by Niranjana Babu during the rule of Ahom King Siva Singha. This place also attract devotes from various destination of inner and outer Assam.

(iv) Harhi Devalaya: This is an eminent place known as Sakti-Pith of Durga Mata. According to a legend, when Gad Siva visited the world carrying his death wife Sati (another name of goddess Durga), a piece of bone shrivelled from her body at this place. Therefore the name of the place is Harhi (Assamese word for bone) and the name of the Devalaya is Harhi devalaya. Some other stone statue of Hindu God and Goddess are there in this Devalaya. These are: Siva, Kali, Manasha, Ganga, Chamunda etc. The festival of Durga Puja of Assam is celebrated well at this place. Every year at the time of this festival a number of buffalo, goat, duck etc. are sacrificed. Devotes are believed that it might fulfil their desire.

5.2: Problems of Religious Tourism in Dhakuakhana

Although, there are several prospects of religious tourism promotion in the study area, but some problems have also been face by the tourist as well as people who are involve in this activities. These are as follows-

(i) Language Problem: Most of the respondents have said that language problem is a major hindrance in religious tourism of Dhakuakhana Sub-division. Apart from regional or local language, the people who are involve in religious practices in different Satras and Thans of dhakuakhana do not know Hindi, English or other languages. Because of language problem, they could not properly communicate with the tourist.

(ii) Lack of Trained Tourist Guide: According to 75 percent of the respondents, availability of trained guide is a significant problem of tourism promotion. The guide plays a very important role in attracting tourists. Some of the respondents pointed out that the guide should have through knowledge about the place and the religious practices perform that particular place; guide should able to generate interest in the mind of tourists to visit the place.

(iii) Lack of Trained Manpower: More than 65 percent of the respondents said that lack of trained manpower is a major problem of hospitality. The trained people in hotel management may not be interested to go to rural area to work. The rural people who have been appointed are required to be trained for performing their duties. The success of religious tourism depends on the quality of service provided to the tourist.

(iv) Poor Infrastructure and Communication Facility: Lack of proper road connectivity, banking and ATM facility, poor quality of hotel and restaurant, poor network facility, lack of transport and tourism agency etc. are the significant problems of tourism promotion in Dhakuakhana.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

For overcoming the problems regarding religious tourism in Dhakuakhana, following recommendations can be made-

- Adequate education facility should be provide in rural areas of Assam as well as Dhakuakhana, which will reduce the language problem.
- Since tourist guide plays a very significant role in attracting tourist, so well educated and well trained tourist guide should be made available at government or private level.
- People who are involved in hotel, restaurant, transportation and tourism agency should be well trained.
- Sound rood connectivity, proper banking and ATM facility, good network facility should be make available.
- Enhancement of role of media in promoting tourism.

VI. CONCLUSION

Religious tourism is regarded as planning visits to other towns, cities or countries for religious purposes. The development of religious tourism takes place through developing religious tourism circuits through a hub and spoke model, providing the tourists with the holistic tourism experience. It is necessary to ensure that the environment is clean and well maintained, nearby the religious places. Marketing religious tourism destinations needs special training, as quite a major part of the visitors are attracted to these destinations due to reasons like studying old culture, evolution of practices and research, developing integrated infrastructure for religious tourism development, improved focus upon the minimization of the impact on the environment and maintaining the ecological balance, scrutiny of religious trusts, developing appropriate institutional framework to stimulate the growth of religious tourism. From the present study it can be conclude that Dhakuakhana Sub-division has great prospect of religious tourism. Again, it has several obstacles to promotion and development of religious tourism in the study area. If this problems could be reduce through proper planning, it will increase the inflow of domestic as well as foreign tourist and which will help to socio-economic development of the region.

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