

Tourism associated developments in Nilachal hills : a geographical analysis.

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Abstract

Nilachal Hills is the abode of a number of temples, the presiding deity being the Mother Goddess Kamakhya. Situated at the heart of the Guwahati city, it is a cultural and religious hub of the whole of the North-east India. This unique status of the region has resulted into a gradual flow of tourists in the form of devotees, thus encouraging tourism industry. However, the growth of tourism has resulted into a series of changes which can be termed as development in coherence and in association with the tourism industry which has been tried to study in this paper. The findings of this paper helps to identify the prospects of further development in the region.

Keywords: Tourism, Tourism-associated developments, employment, infrastructural development, social development

1. Introduction

Nilachal Hills is a hill complex comprising of three joint hills, locally known as Brahma Pahar, Vishnu

Pahar and Shiva Pahar, is located 8kms west of the official centre of the Guwahati city. The Nilachal Hills is the abode of the most important Shakti Peeths of

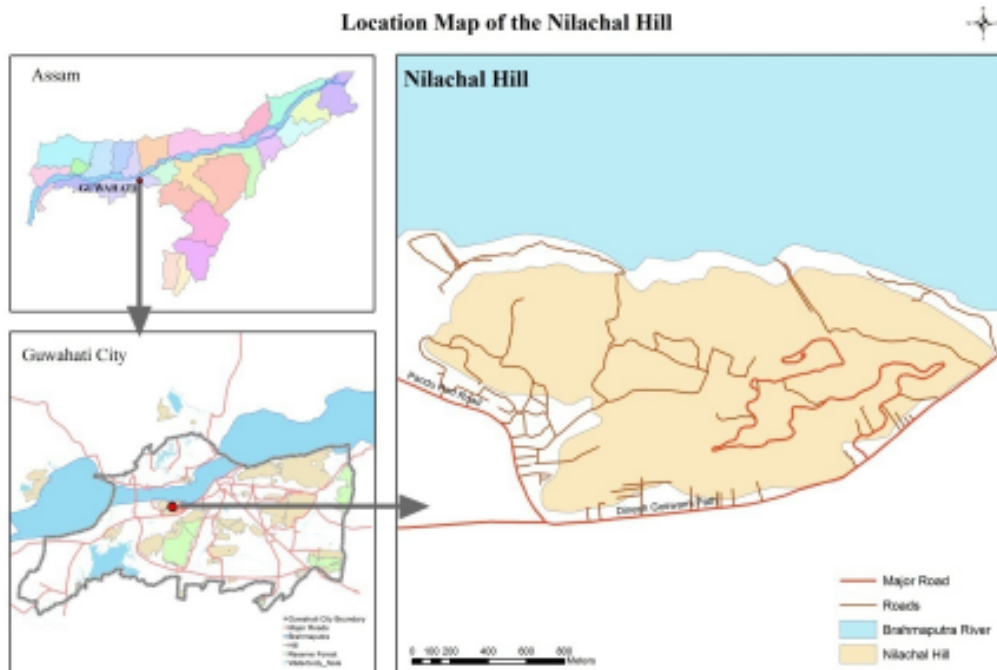


Fig 1: Location of the study area

the country along with the Dasamahavidyas and the various other temples. From all parts of the country and also from abroad, people come to pay their homage to the Mother Goddess Kamakhya, the presiding deity of the region. The region is located south of the mighty river Brahmaputra. Apart from the numerous temples, there are also Ashrams in the region and sacred water bodies, which are locally known as "Kunda", the presence of which has attracted great number of tourists during the past decades. These give incentive to the growth of tourism industry in the region.

Tourism is said to be the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction of tourists, business suppliers, host governments and host communities in the process of attracting and hosting these tourists and other visitors. (Macintosh and Goeldner, 1986). This phenomena ultimately results into the growth of tourism industry. As development of any industry leads to the development of a number of allied services, tourism industry is no different. Its gradual growth in the Nilachal Hills has led to the overall development in all the sectors which has been tried to identify in this research paper. This article also tries to examine how tourism has become a source of various local developments. The observations presented here are based on extensive field study, based on primary data.

2. Objectives

The main objectives of the paper are :

- i) To identify the developments that has occurred in various aspects in the region.
- ii) To analyse the scope of further developments related to tourism, i.e., Tourism-associated developments.

3. Database & methodology

The study being a very micro level one, secondary data is not available. Therefore, we had to depend on extensive field work and primary level data, which has the scope of deviating from the up-to-date status (due to on-going daily developments in the region).

The methodology followed in the present study is the collection of field data through field visits and close observation along with the interviews with the local residents and tourists, devotees who has arrived more than one time in the region. The next step involves analysing the collected data and lastly presenting the collected information into work.

4. Results and discussion

After detailed field survey in the study area, the

following developments have been observed :-

(i) Tourism and employment :-Tourism creates a multitude of employment opportunities in both the formal and informal sectors. Additionally tourism may create three types of employment opportunities: direct, indirect and induced. Direct employment refers to employment generated in hotels, restaurants, tour companies and night clubs. Indirect employment refers to people working in activities that at times are dependent on tourism and includes the construction trades, merchants, gasoline station attendants and others who are less dependent but still benefit from tourism. Induced employment refers to the additional employment resulting from the effects of the tourism multiplier as local residents re-spend the additional money they have earned. (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Through recreation of employment, tourism provide an opportunity for the local population to increase income and improve their standard of living.

In our study area, it has been seen that all the three types of employment opportunities has been developed due to the growth of Tourism. Direct employment has been generated in the form of various priests, workers and security personals that has been engaged in the temples. In addition, the hotels, restaurants, lodges, fast food corners, stalls, shops both in the foothills and in and around the temples. The taxis, buses, auto-rickshaws etc that ply within the region (from foothills to the hilltop) also added a section of young generation among the economic beneficiaries. In the form of indirect employment, it can be noted that a lot of renovations has been occurring in the entire region, starting from renovations of the temples to the construction of other infrastructures which engages a lot of labour and other workers giving then employment (though not permanent). Induced engagement in also seen in the region however one aspect that is strikingly lacking is the absence of Pharmacies or medicine shops within the region.

(ii) Infrastructural development: Infrastructure refers to structures, systems and facilities serving a country, city or area including the services and facilities necessary for its economy to function (Arthur and Sheffrin, 2003). It typically characterises technical structures such as roads, bridges, tunnels, water supply, sewers, electrical grids, telecommunications and so forth and can be defined as "the physical components of interrelated systems providing commodities and services essential to enable, sustain, or enhance societal living conditions (Jeffrey, 2009). The direct benefit of tourism in the region is the infrastructural development

that takes place to attract more and more tourists. . Only having a natural and cultural resource cannot help in developing tourism. To attract tourists, proper maintenance of those resources are required. Along with this, proper sanitation and hygiene facilities is the basic requirement. For this, from time to time the temples and other tourists spots are renovated and reconstructed from time to time, toilets and bathrooms are constructed for males and females separately with running water facilities and also provisions for safe drinking water. These are being maintained by the management authorities with the full help and support from the government. It has been noticed from time to time that the Kamakhya temple complex has been reconstructed and white-washed, old temples and the paths leading to them are also reconstructed. Even

the whole campus of the Kamakhya temple complex has been developed so that tourists can comfortably queue up. For security purpose CCTV cameras and metal detectors have been installed within the temple complex in addition to manual security system. The temples which are located in the hill slopes, like the Bhubaneswari temple , the Jai Durga temple, the Ban Durga temple, the Bagala Temple, the Kotirlinga temple, the Dwarpal Ganesh etc have been made accessible by constructing concrete staircases. Moreover, taking in view the safety measures , due to the locations of these temples in hill slopes, iron railings has been constructed along with the staircases. Drinking water facilities has been provided even to the remotest of the temples, like the Siddhi Ganesh temple.



Fig 2: Staircases leading to Kotirlinga temple



Fig 3 : Bagala temple



Fig 4: Staircases leading to Siddhi Ganesh temple (Near bank of Brahmaputra)



Fig 5: Staircases leading to Dwarpala Ganesh temple along with a resting shade for tourists

As expected, a lot of infrastructural development has taken place in the region. Foot bridge connecting the parking space and the Kamakhya temple complex, the parking spaces to accommodate the tourist cabs, private vehicles, vehicles of the local people etc. has been constructed in the region. The Prashanti Tourist Lodge has been constructed by the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) to accommodate tourists. Apart from this ten more lodges has been established in and around the main Kamakhya temple complex till my survey period (January, 2016) which provide fooding and lodging to the tourists which accommodates an average of 30 persons at a time. Moreover in the whole of the hill, till date, the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) has constructed five numbers of watch towers (view points) in various spots of the region so that the tourists can enjoy the scenic beauty of the Nilachal Hills and the beautiful views of the Guwahati city and the mighty river Brahmaputra. A water tank has been constructed by the Assam Government that supplies water to whole of the region. Another water supply project by Gammon

India Ltd. is under Progress, the water tank constructed at the western rim of the hill, nearing the Western Gate and the Mahakaal Ganesh temple. Apart from that, a branch of the State Bank of India is established near the Kamakhya temple and 6 (six) numbers of ATM has been established for easy money transactions for both the local people and the tourists that directly and indirectly supports tourism industry. In addition a health care centre has been run by the Kamakhya temple management authority which provides free health care and first-aid facilities to the tourists. However, during the Ambubachi mela temporary first aid and health care centres are also established to give proper service to the lakhs of devotees and tourists every year. Last but not the least, according to Hindu rituals, shoes are not allowed inside the temple and almost everyday hundreds of tourists visits the temple and there may always be a risk of losing shoes if one keeps it outside the temple compound. to avoid such an awkward situation, the management authority of the Kamakhya temple has provided for a booth where shoes and belongings of the tourists could be kept in safe custody with coupon facility.



Fig 4 : Watch tower constructed by ATDC in the region



Fig 5: Foot bridge constructed near the Kamakhya temple

As a whole the main element of infrastructural development is the communication network and connectivity with the railway station, airport, bus stops etc which are well connected with the region.

(iii) Social Development :- Social development is about putting people at the centre of development. This means a commitment that development processes need to benefit people, particularly, but not only the poor, but also a recognition that people and the way they interact in groups and society, and the norms that facilitates such interaction, shape development process (Davis, 2004). Development of tourism in the region has led to a drastic kind of well-being and development of the host community. Tourism promotes economic development of the locality through employment opportunities which again leads to social development. As a destination attempts to improve its international competitiveness, it tends to offer services and facilities that are more effective and acceptable to tourist generating countries, which are often more developed. Local residents then have the opportunity to indirectly derive benefits from these developments which are primarily aimed at the tourists. Development activities such as the introduction of electricity, introduction of crime preventive measures or the paving of roads and construction of relevant infrastructure leading to further economic development and thus ultimately leads to social welfare.

Exposure to different cultures, people and social

practices through the growth of tourism industry influences the existing social and cultural beliefs of the host societies ultimately brings about social changes in the host societies. The constant exposure of the people of Nilachal Hills to the people all over the world and national level celebrities and politicians, broadens up the mindset of the people. As a result people has a craze for securing higher opportunities. Moreover, economically too, the people of the region enjoys a good position. This results in the crave for seeking higher education in better and developed areas of the country and even abroad. Thus, the children of the wealthy section of the local people chooses for acquiring higher education outside Assam. This has directly or indirectly helped in modernizing the mindset of the people, increasing their tolerance level. An open mind is the pre-requisite for effective cultural exchange. It does not necessarily mean that everyone agrees with everyone else; however it does mean that one can accept the existence of different views, opinions and customs, without arguing whose opinions and customs are superior. Higher tolerance and the acceptance of eccentricities are required in a close-contact situation often on the host side. Nevertheless it is important for tourists to acknowledge that they are temporary visitors who have come to see the host communities, culture, heritage and natural attractions and therefore they are the ones to be more tolerant and accepting of different practices and values. It is also important for the host communities to try to remain in control of the guest-host relationship.

Development of tourism has also brought improvements in the position of women in the society. Tourism industry tends to prefer the “feminine-touch” or rely on the friendliness of the female workers at different levels. It has given job opportunities to the women, an opportunity to work in the tourism industry. In the Nilachal Hills, it is seen that most of the stalls and shops and even running hotels and fast-food corners are run by women, thereby improving their social and economical conditions and standard of living as a whole and utilising the usually unexplored section of human resources.

5. Conclusion

Tourism has definitely brought about a lot of changes in the Nilachal Hills within the past few decades, in all sectors of the society whether be employment opportunities, or infrastructural or social development, however there are far more better scopes of development. Some of them may be very precisely

stated as below:-

5.1 **Tourist Guide:** Now-a-days, in maximum tourist destinations all over the country and also all over the world, there are tourists guides who are basically the youths of the local community. This is an emerging profession, very dynamic in nature and also helps in handsome earning. As local youths have the detailed knowledge of their locality, they can be a great contributor to the tourism industry, attracting tourists with detailed description (historical, mythological and even logical) of the temples, ashrams and all possible tourist attraction in the region. However, for this, local youths are to be trained up so that they can easily interact with people from any part of the world. This may include training them up in some of the foreign languages and developing their personality.

5.2 **Ropeway :** One of the most desired expect of tourism associated infrastructural development in the region since the past few years has been the concept of "Ropeway". This is one of the most sought-for development in the region because the region is entirely hilly and most of the tourist spots are located in the interiors slopes of the hills which has no connection with motorable road, thus accessibility is restrained to very few section of people (as physically unfit people cannot reach those destinations). This has resulted in the least tourist arrival in those spots. If ropeway is

introduced in the region, people will find it easier to explore the region. Environmentally too, it will be a better option than motorable road, as this will create minimum pollution.

5.3 **Eco-friendly accommodations:** Now-a-days people are more concerned about conserving and preserving the environment and environmental resources for the future generation, which in one word is called sustainability. However, side-by-side with this, development is also required. Thus comes the concept of sustainable development. It is a process for meeting human development goals while sustaining the ability of natural systems to continue to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depends (Brundtland Commission, 1987). To achieve this, more emphasis should be given on eco-friendly accommodations which refers to accommodations in the form of camps-huts, bamboo huts, tree-houses etc (which is an existing system followed in Nameri Eco-camp, Sonitpur, Brahmaputra Jungle Resort, Sonapur etc.) This new concept will also help in attracting adventure-loving, and nature-loving tourists in the region.

However, the above prospects need both the local people's initiation and Government intervention to make it a reality. With these steps put into action in the region, there will surely be acceleration in the rate of tourism developments and also tourism-associated developments.

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