CHAPTER-7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary

Tourism has been the only industry that has developed in the study area. The historical background of the temples present in the region, the myths and legends associated with the temples and the region as a whole has contributed directly or indirectly in attracting the attention of the people all over the world. The present study is however not only based upon the religious aspect of the temple-centric tourist destination. An attempt has been made to study the overall aspects of tourism, development and associated developments in the region, the study of which has been organised and presented in seven chapters. This includes the introduction of the study area, status of tourism in the Nilachal Hills, the impacts, affects, developments in context of tourism and also the prospects of further improvement.

The first chapter of this research work provides for a general introduction to the study area and to the topic taken for this work. It also states the distinct objectives of the study and the questions which has been helpful in carrying out the work. The database used and the methodology followed also founds mention in this chapter along with the record of literature that has been reviewed during the research work. This chapter also tells about the organisation of the work and mentions about the significance of the work.

The second chapter deals with the geographical, historical and demographic background of the study area. People all over the world are always attracted to this part of our country due to the legendary and mythological stories associated with the ancient temples of the region, thus, always maintaining an inquisitive attitude. Thus, the mythological and legendary background of the region gives an unique identity to the whole work apart from being a source of attraction. The study of the demography includes starting from the history of evolution of settlement and peopling, the trend of growth of the population including the social stractification observed in the region. It also tries to analyse the density of population in relation to the elevation of the area and has thus been tried to depict in the cartographic representation.
The third chapter revealed the tourist destinations that has been a constant source of tourist attraction of new destinations that can be helpful in attracting more tourists to the region. The overall status of tourism in the Nilachal Hills, starting from the preferred arrival time of the tourists, types of mode of transportation and accommodation facility the tourists chose upto the trend of tourist growth has been discussed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter describes about the impact of tourism upon nature, upon the society which leads to commodification of the religious beliefs and culture, standardisation, loss of authenticity and the creation of staged authenticity. Tourism has also resulted in economic inequality. This chapter also throws light on the impact of tourism on economy which includes creation of a new economic class in the region, growth of new economic activities in the region and even some other allied employment sources.

The fifth chapter studied about the developments which has been associated with tourism sector of the region. It also studied about infrastructural development and also social developments. The chapter also tried to interpret about the attitude and perceptions of both the tourists and the local people based upon the data collected through primary survey. It has been observed that the tourism industry has helped in opening up of the mindset of the local people. It made the local people more tolerant and ready to embrace people from all over the world in a friendly manner.

Apart from the traditional tourism in the region which has been based upon the religious aspects of the temples present in the region, the study also reveals the prospects of tourism in other forms like ecotourism, adventure tourism and medical tourism. All these have been tried to study in the sixth chapter of the research work.

And finally the research has been summarised and the major findings has been highlighted followed by some suggestions which can be fruitful to use for the further development of tourism industry of the region and for the improvement and benefits of the host community followed by a proper conclusion.
7.2 Conclusion

From all the discussions done so far, it has been observed that there has been a gradual transformation in the trend of tourism in the region. From a purely religious attraction, gradually the tourism sector in the region has developed into new dimensions - engulfing all sections of the society and even all religions now-a-days starting from religious beliefs, love of archaeology to love of nature. Moreover, tourism has brought about a lot of changes in the social structure, demographic structure and social practices and customs in the region apart from the remarkable economic and infrastructural changes in the region. Tourism has opened up the mind of the local people making them more tolerable, reasonable and approachable.

The Nilachal Hills proves to be a meeting ground of people of various sections of the society irrespective of caste, creed, social status etc. similarly as the Kumbh mela. Moreover, the region provides a unique identity to the state (Assam) in front of the whole world and even play a great role in upgrading the economic status of the country by earning foreign currency. The region also paves the way for promoting brotherhood and an unique example of tolerance and hospitality.

The region has a unique combination of spiritual, religious, aesthetic ambience; speechless scenic beauty, rich natural resources, amazing archaeological and sculptural elements in the region being supported by interesting legendary beliefs which has the capacity to attract people of various tastes and interests. Moreover, the privileged geographical location of the region, situated at the heart of the Guwahati city which is called the Gateway of North-East India and being well-connected with railway and airway, also provides great scope of development of the region in all the sectors.

The present study is an attempt to highlight the problems and prospects in various sectors of developments in the region based upon the field studies and random interviews of local communities and tourists during the span of last 6 years specially emphasizing the tourism sector. However, due to lack of precise data and being dependent on primary random data, the exact picture may not be revealed and there is a scope to do further studies. However, an attempt has been made to find out the solutions that may be helpful in sorting out the problems and lacuna arising out of the differences
between expectations and prevailing conditions. A proper coordination among the local people, tourists, the ATDC and various government departments and district administration can prove beneficial to uplift the region in international scenario, besides developing the local conditions.

7.2.1 Major findings

On the basis of the survey, data collection, data analysis and information collected, various observations are revealed. Those observations and findings are discussed below:-

- Nilachal hills is a hill complex of three joint hills - the Brahma Pahar, the Vishnu or Barah Pahar and the Shiva Pahar. The region is a home to more than 50 temples (considering the temples within the Kamakhya temple complex and the Kamakhya temple as one unit and Chakreswar temple and the seven other temples within its campus as one unit) and four ashrams. Of the four ashrams, one is specially devoted to Yogic practices and activities (the Umachal Ashram) another is devoted to worship and regular prayers only (the Kalipur Ashram); another is specially engaged in spiritual research and spiritual attainments (Bijoy Krishna Sadhan Ashram) and the fourth is engaged in domestication of cows and regular worship (Bhairabi Ashram). These ashrams were at first used as meditation spots by the Sadhus, Sadhvis, Swamiji’s which were later developed as proper ashrams by their followers and are still maintained by them. There are 9 Kundas (Soubhagya Kunda, Riin Mosan Kunda, Amrit Kunda, Ramrath Kunda, Gaya Kunda, Bhairavi Pukhuri or Kaso Kunda, Durga Kunda or Chandrawati Kunda, Kaam Kunda and Barah Kunda) scattered in the Nilachal Hills. There are total 5 paths by which one can reach the hilltop from the foothills of the Nilachal Hills one staircase (constructed by Narakasura and a Kutchcha road in the west (near Pandu Ghat); the Mekhela Ujua staircase (constructed by Narakasura) and another staircase from Kalipur Bus stand and the main motorable road. There was another ashram locally known as Pillimama Ashram which is located near the Tokeswar temple. However it has been deserted since last five years due to the lack of followers of that particular Sadhu.
(almost forgotten by the local people) and the infrastructure has been left fallow. However, during Ambubachi mela, it gives shelter to a large number of Sadhus coming from different part of the country and even from abroad. But as per local people, this left over place has become a home to some anti-social elements to some extent.

- There is an archaeological evidence (seems like a broken piece of some old sculpture) found at the height of 136 meters above sea level, at the northern slope of the Hills, on the way to Siddhi Ganesh temple. Another new temple named Bal Bhairava is being constructed near the Bhairavi temple. The Umachal Rock Inscription (the earliest epigraphic source found in North-East India) located at a height of 101 meters, is not being properly maintained. Even it lacks a proper sign-board, indicating the inscription and its description due to which such a preservable unique identity of our historic time, lies silently like an ordinary rock in the heart of the Nilachal hills.

- Along with the growth and development of Tourism in the region, a lot of vices has been observed in the recent times. There is a tradition and ritual of washing hands, legs and face by the tourists in the Kunda's within the Kamkahya temple complex before Darshan or before offering puja to the deity. However, the chemical testing of the water of the Kunda's reveals that it is not hygienic enough and may affect the health of tourists and local people. Deforestation and illegal cutting down of trees has been noticed in various parts of the hills. Even the region has also experienced landside (though in smaller scale, but with chances of being aggravated) in various locations within the hills. Solid waste littering is another serious problem seen in the region, leading to pollution and unhygienic conditions in the region, especially in and around the highly populated part of the region, i.e., near the Kamakhya temple complex. Some of the temples at the midst of dense jungle, out of the reach of tourists and common people are used by some anti-social elements, used as a safe place for consuming drugs, tobacco, alcohol etc.

- Apart from the Dasamahavidyas temple, the rest of the other temples including the Shiva temples, are located in the slopes of the hill which are not easy to be traversed by common people. As for example, there is only one way to Siddhi
Ganesh (winding staircase) amidst dense jungle. Tourists and even some of the local people has no knowledge about the existence of this temple. Those unexplored parts and hill slopes are a home to a number of caves of tigers.

- The land of the Nilachal Hills are donated lands which were donated to the Kamakhya Devalaya and the priests and Shevaits by the then Ahom King Shiva Singha. These lands are known as the Debottar land. No tax or revenue is required to be paid against these Debottar lands. No permission from the Government is required for construction of houses or establishing any business in the region. The land even could not be sold to anybody by anybody. The land goes automatically to the new generation of the original owners. Though the buying and selling of land is prohibited in the region, yet outsiders are entering in the region because they are either given rented houses or appointed as caretakers by the original owners. The Ashrams are also allotted huge areas under their jurisdiction.

- It has been noticed in my personal observation that people in the region establishes a new temple wherever they see any sculptural signs in the rocks lying all over the region. The local people are seen lighting diyas in every sculptural existence in and around the Kamakhya temple complex which in due course of time are converted to temples. From the fact that images and forms of Gods and Goddesses in stones and rocks are found here and there in the region, it may be deduced that these stone pieces must be the remnants of the old Kamakhya temple which was built by Narakasura and was demolished by Kalapahar. If all those small temples are taken into account, there will be more than 300 temples within the whole of the Nilachal Hills. E.g., establishing of Chakreswar temple, and the various Ganesh temples in every part of the hill. Some such remnant archaeological evidences (broken pieces of stone with various sculptural imprints) are seen within the compound of the Mahakaal Ganesh temple. Some of such rock sculptures has been protected by the Department of Archaeology of Assam Government within the region (E.g. Bal Bhairava and the Ganesh sculpture near Mahakaal Ganesh).

- The yearly and occasional renovation of the Kamakhya temple complex (e.g. reconstruction of the Chinnamasta temple, the Kameswar temple, white washing
of Kamakhya temple, construction of public toilets, drinking water facilities, concretization of the whole compound of the Kamakhya temple etc) is solely the responsibility of the Doloi samaj (earlier of the Kamakhya Debottar Board). Till date (May, 2016) the central government or the state government cannot interfere in these aspects. However, the motorable road and other developments can be done by the Government. From local enquiry it has been revealed that sometimes renovations of the temples are done by the people who owns the particular land over which the temple is located. (E.g. the Samshaan Kali temple near the Bagalamukhi temple is being renovated by Jyotish Kalita, a Shevait of the Kamakhya Devalaya., who owns that particular land.

- Earlier the items sold in the stalls of the Nilachal Hills, representing the culture and traditions of the region (e.g. the pendants, the malas, the Shankhas, bangles etc) were manufactured locally, but due to commercialization and growing number of tourists and growing demand of these items, these are brought from Siliguri, Hajo etc, at cheaper rates, leading to loss of local handicrafts and resulting into duplicacy. Moreover, in earlier times, flowers and other herbs like tulsi, Bel leaves etc were cultivated in the nearby areas, specially Maligaon (the name of the region was coined due to the dwelling places of the Mali’s, i.e. the gardeners of the Kamakhya Devalaya. But now a days, these accessories are also brought from Guwahati’s market that are imported from outside.

- The Kamakhya temple, being a Shakti peeth, sacrificial cult is being followed here, but now a days, majority people does not support killing of animals as a result of which, symbolically animals or pigeons that was to be sacrificed , are left here open as stray animals. The result of this is that we can see hundreds of pigeons and goats straying in the campus of the Kamakhya temple. However, to carry on the age old traditions of sacrificial cult, the temple management authority sacrifices a goat every day. The meat of the goat is offered as bhog to the Goddess and are fed to devotees on daily basis. However, every year a buffalo is sacrificed on the Maha Ashtami i.e. the eighth day of Durga puja which is considered to be a great occasion in the region. According to legends, earlier, there was even a custom of human sacrifice which has been banned ages
back, but as a tradition, still a dummy is sacrificed at the time of Kali puja held at
the Samshaan Kali temple very secretly at midnight. It is said that common
people are not allowed to associate in this particular occasion. Another
interesting aspect of the sacrificial cult followed in this region is that, here,
people sacrifices goats, pigeons, buffalo, but not cock/hen and pigs because
these are considered to be impure, according to the Hindu tradition.

❖ A very discouraging finding that has revealed during interview with local people
is that most of the local people (specially the younger generation) has taken up
the profession of priest in the Kamakhya Devalaya. But most of them don't even
have the proper knowledge about the actual culture and tradition of the region,
nor do they have any knowledge in Sanskrit language, thus having no
knowledge about the meaning of the hymns, chants, prayers sung to worship the
goddess.

❖ Another finding that reveals a thinking aspect is that, most of the temples of the
region are left in the hands of the priests which are outsiders, hailing from U.P,
Bihar, Nepal etc. which don't have the minimum knowledge about the temple or
the history of the region. This will discourage the inquisitive and curious tourists
who have the natural tendency to know about the historical background of the
destination in addition to sightseeing.

❖ It has been noticed that highest number of tourists arrive during the month of
June every year. It has been observed that before 2011 the foreign tourists
visited in highest number in June and the rest of the year the arrival of foreign
tourists was very much less. However, from the year 2011, it has been noticed
that the arrival of foreign tourists has increased even in the other months of the
year (as per data provided by the Assam Tourism Department). From survey it
has been revealed that now a days people come to the Nilachal Hills, not only
for religious aspects but also for seeking peace of mind amidst natural beauty
and some for educational tours. Of the national tourists surveyed, most of the
tourists comes from West Bengal, Bihar, U.P, Jharkhand, Tripura, Rajasthan
and Manipur. However, tourists from South India or North India are very less.
The reason of this maybe, South Indian people mostly visits Tirupati temple and
North India people basically visits Vaishno Devi temple in Jammu & Kashmir.
Most of the Panda (priests), specially of the older generations has their special group of devotees who visits almost every year or at regular intervals. Their feeding and lodging are mostly provided by the respective Panda's in their own residence. Of the Pandas interviewed almost everybody supports the sacrificial cult practiced in the Nilachal Hill. From field survey (on random basis) it has been found that some of the priests also run other kind of business or has shops or stalls etc within the region. Some of them are engaged in permanent business whereas some others does during the time of Ambubachi mela. Whereas a few are also doing jobs in private or government sector. Such section of people are either doing it as hobby or maintaining family tradition. The permanent shops in the region are generally owned by the local residents but they give rent or appoint hired people from outside the region to run the business.

It is observed that population concentration is the highest in and around the Kamakhya temple complex and in the foothills. However, settlement is sparse in the middle part and the slopes of the hill. The settlement seen near the ashrams and other temples are mostly temporary in nature, dwelt by the caretakers of those ashrams or temples, allowed to settle there by the management authority of the respective ashrams. It is seen that the wealthy section of the people of the region resides in and around the Kamakhya temple whereas the comparatively less wealthy and middle class people lives in the middle portion of the hills.

During Ambubachi mela it becomes impossible for the few lodges to accommodate lakhs of devotees. Thus some of the local people, (about 80 to 100 households), provides shelter to their already known families (regular devotees). The Ashrams located in the region also opens their door to tourists during Ambubachi but still they cannot accommodate all, so they have to stay in temporary camps set up in the region. During Ambubachi mela food and drinking water is provided to all devotees by the temple management authority free of cost and outside the temple complex, individual people can also provide voluntarily.

During the time of my survey there are 106 cleaners, 80 gatemen (including 4 ladies), 25 security personals and 500 priests in the Kamakhya temple complex.
Except the priests, the other workers are paid by the temple management committee and they are made liable to work at any of the temple within the Nilachal Hills. And almost 99% of these workers are local people. Thus, a great section of people are earning their living.

- In the Nilachal Hills, generally garbage is collected by the workers of Municipal Corporation and is dumped in a dumping ground near the Samshaan Kali temple in the Southern slopes of the hill, however, it is seen that people throws garbage in various spots leading to aggravating the problem of environmental pollution.

- One of the reputed local people who is also a Shevait of the Kamakhya temple, who owns a large area of the Nilachal Hills has tried to construct a fruit garden by planting 1500 saplings of various kinds of fruits. According to him, the animals found in the Nilachal Hills like monkeys and various species of birds are deprived of food due to growing population and gradual depletion of natural and forest resources. Thus, growing fruit orchard may provide food and shelter to such species and will contribute in maintaining the ecological balance in the nature.

### 7.2.2 Suggestions

From the earlier discussions in the earlier chapters, it has been observed that the Nilachal Hills has a great scope and prospects of developing tourism industry in its various forms, however, due to various problems like absence of a good tourism policy, absence of tourist guides, to some extent insurgency etc., expected rate of developments has been lacking. The ATDC (Assam Tourism Development Corporation) was set up in June 1988 under the Companies Act of 1956 with the objective to boost and promote tourism in the state. It took over the maintenance and management of most of the tourist lodges, tourist bungalows, hotels, guest houses, entertainment projects etc., all the means of transport which had been under the control of the Department of Tourism, Government of Assam and many other functions performed by the said department to promote tourism in the state. Since then it has been making efforts in coordination with the Directorate of Tourism to accelerate the developments of tourism industry. It prepared an agenda to start as many as 25 new projects. Some of these have been already commissioned and some are in the process of completion. In Nilachal Hills too,
the ATDC has taken up a lot of infrastructural development including the setting up of the Prashanti Tourist Lodge, the construction of the foot-bridge, parking lot, watch-towers, resting shades, renovation of temples, construction of staircases to the remote temples and various kinds of infrastructural developments. Apart from this step, after a thorough research and study about the prospects of tourism in the region and based upon my personal observations. I have derived the following suggestions which may be helpful to accelerate the growth and development of tourism industry in the region:-

- The most aspired and desired suggestion for promoting tourism (even according to the tourists and local people interviewed) is the introduction of ropeway in the region. This may be used to connect the main temples within the region including the Ashrams which are located in the accessible parts of the region, the most important and fruitful will be the Umachal Yogic Ashram and Hospital. By the help of ropeway sick and aged people could be easily carried to the said locations. This mode of communication will be the most environment friendly and it is the most important specially in the hilly terrain.

- One of the most desired way of developing sustainable adventure and eco-friendly tourism industry in the region is by developing an "Eco-township" (a geographically smaller version of the upcoming concept of Eco-city). It refers to a township which will be built from the principles of living within close proximity with the environment. The ultimate goal of the eco-township will be to establish the area as a zero-carbon region, to merge the region harmoniously with the natural environment but also with the constant effort of stimulating economic growth, reducing poverty, obtaining higher efficiency of the resident population by improving the health of the local community. This concept of eco-township has been gradually gaining ground in various parts of the world like Germany, Russia etc. and even in our own country, in Gujarat, specially emphasising on Dwarka - the land of Lord Krishna. In our case, the main building block of eco-township will be setting up of eco-camps (as has been done in Nameri Eco-camp, Potasali, Tezpur) instead of setting up concrete lodges and hotels being supported by Ropeway.
This will be helpful for the tourism industry in two different ways, the first, it will maintain an eco-friendly and pollution free environment, secondly, it will attract more and more foreign tourists, specially from the developed and industrialized Western countries, the people of which are in constant search of scopes to be close to the nature and natural environment instead of confronting with concrete jungles.

- Apart from archaeological richness, the Nilachal Hills is blessed with interesting legends and mythologies supported by the presence of the features mentioned in those mythologies i.e., the stone staircases constructed by the demon king Narakasura. The existence of these ancient parts uphill the Nilachal Hills is not known at all by the foreign tourists and by most of the national and regional tourists. Though the ATDC has taken steps for highlighting the Mekhela Ujua staircase (from Kalipur Bus stand to hilltop) by constructing railings and resting shades amidst the path, the other stone-staircase (from the Western side of the hill i.e., Pandu Ghat is in a neglected position. And in fact, this particular stone staircase has a more natural touch than the Mekhela Ujua path. If these paths are highlighted in international level with the help of proper advertisements in internet (with the help of photographs and videos) along with a brief account of the mythology and legends related to them, it will be helpful in attracting more and more foreign tourists who are more interested in such historical, natural and adventurous specialities in a tourist destination.

- A very peculiar characteristics of the Nilachal Hills and specially the Kamakhya temple complex is the human habitation which has merged within the temple complex creating a chaotic environment and an indiscipline situation. This has not only distracted the spiritual aspects of the holy temple but also aggravated the problems of solid littering and household garbage disposal in and around the temple complex. Though difficult, but this problem may be solved if the human settlement is restricted in and around the main temple complex and they are shifted outside a certain radius of the temple complex by providing proper
compensation. This will not only help in maintaining the holiness and sanctity of the ancient temples but will also help in maintaining the privacy of the local community.

- Another important way by which the natural beauty of the region including the ecological balance of the region can be maintained is by the way of declaring the forest cover of the region as reserved forests. That will prevent intrusion and destruction of natural vegetation, flora and fauna of the region, that will again help in promoting ecotourism and sustainable tourism in the region.

- Another important fact is that the flow of devotees reaches the carrying capacity of the region and the local community during the month of June every year due to the Ambubachi Mela, specially resulting from the arrival of the sadhus and sanyasis from various parts of the country. Sadhus stay for many days, from days before the starting of the event upto days after completion of the event, which possibly becomes a burden and exceeds the carrying capacity of the region, which will hamper the convenience of the local community and may aggravate the problem of pollution in the region. This problem may however be solved if Ambubachi mela is restricted only for the Sadhus and Sanyasis and the foreign visitors, and the common people be allowed in the other times of the year. The facilities made available by the government through the district administration should be enhanced during the time of Ambubachi mela, provided it does not hamper the regular supply of pure drinking water and electricity to the local community. More and more toilets should be made available to the flooding number of devotees during Ambubachi mela and management should give more emphasis on cleaning the toilets on regular basis during those days, the lack of which (in reality) leads to a very unhygienic conditions prevailing over the whole region. Another important aspect which arises during the time of Ambubachi mela is that the Sadhus and Sanyasis who comes during the festival often remains under the hallucination of Bhang (a kind of mild preparation of marijuana made from young leaves and stems of the
Indian hemp plant, cannabis Sativa) which is not tolerable or bearable by most of the devotees. Thus the consumption of Bhang and other such intoxicating things should be banned within the region, specially during Ambubachi mela which gathers lakhs of devotees at the same time. This step may even help in preventing any unexpected situation.

- Another most important suggestion which coincide with the making of Ropeway in the region is the promotion of medical tourism by proper advertisements of the Umachal Yogic Ashram at regional, national and international level and providing them government incentives for their upgradation and maintenance.

- It has been observed that the motorable road becomes very narrow from the Kamakhya temple complex to the Bhubaneswari temple. Moreover landslide has also been noticed from time to time in that part of the region. Besides the temporary stalls of puja samagris which has been set up in front of the Bagalmukhi temple also hinders the free movement of vehicles to the hill top making the road more narrow and creating artificial vehicular congestion in the region. Steps should be taken to sort out these problems by either broadening the street or by preventing such temporary stalls (by the government or by the local management authority of the region).

- An interesting suggestion which has been put forward by one of the local resident of the region during the course of my field survey and interviews is that, let the age-old and legendary temple of Mother Goddess Kamakhya temple be made Golden (like the Golden temple of Amritsar et al) with the huge amount of donations received during the whole year which will pave the way for attracting more and more numbers of tourists, which will ultimately help in the growth and development of tourism industry and the related socio-economic developments. However, how far this suggestion will be a practicable one is a thinkable issue.