CHAPTER- 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the problem

Tourism is an upcoming, fiercely competitive and rapidly evolving industry in the present times, especially in case of developing countries. In the past decade, tourism industry has been given special attention by the policy makers, development experts all over the world. This has resulted in emphasizing more on the destinations having tourism prospects. In addition to that, when tourism merges with religion, especially in a country like India, which is a divine abode of thousands of Gods and Goddesses who bless the country with their presence and where religion and spiritual aspects always acts as one of the determining factor of the civilization, it results in the acceleration of tourism in the form of devotees. The study area, the Nilachal hills is the home to the holy shrine and abode of Mother Goddess Kamakhya, has always been bestowing her blessings upon the inhabitants of Assam and together with it, has been conferring a specific and unique identity to the entire state. The Nilachal Hills comprising the Kamakhya temple, the temples of Dasamahavidyas and their respective Bhairavas are situated 8kms west of the official centre of the modern city of Guwahati, the gateway of North-East India. As there are other temples by the same name in Assam, for proper identification, this temple has been called as the Nilachal Kamakhya. The Kamakhya temple is dedicated to the Goddess Kamakhya and is one of the oldest and the most sacred centre for Tantric Hinduism. This is one of the most venerated Shakti shrines in India and is regarded as one of the 51 Shakti Peethas. Archaeological and historical evidences prove that the Kamakhya temple was constructed by Chilarai, the celebrated general of Koch King Naranarayan in 1565 A.D. The original temple was destroyed by the Muslim invader Kalapahar. During Ahom rule, several kings contributed for its development. Rajeswar Singha in 1759 and Gauri Nath Singha in 1789, Pramatta Singha etc. constructed temples of various Gods and Goddesses within the Kamakhya temple complex. (Goswami,1998) This greatest shrine of Tantric Shaktism find mention in the inscription of the Allahabad pillar of Samudragupta. This legendary and historical identity of the main temple of the region attracts lakhs of tourists every year to the region.
The Nilachal Hills, also known as the Kamagiri (with an average altitude of 193 mts) is located in the south bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra. It covers an area of 3.29 sq. kms. It is a hill complex comprised of three joint hills (locally known as the Brahma Pahar, Vishnu Pahar and Shiva Pahar) are erosional remnant hills having Satpura strike, more or less 700 million years old. This ancient hillock lie placidly and the new young Himalayan river, Brahmaputra, annually washes its feet with its flooded waters.

Along with the worship of Goddess Kamakhya, the Dasamahavidyas are also worshipped here in the different temples of the hillock. They are Kali, Tara, Sodasi, Matangi, Kamala, Bhuvaneswari, Bhairavi, Chinnamasta, Bagala, Dhumavati etc. These ‘Mahavidyas’ are worshipped with their Bhairavas, like Mahakaala, Aksobha, Pancavaktra, Tryamvaka, Dakshinamurti, Kavandha, Ekavaktra, Matanga, Srivisnu etc. (Goswami,1998). Besides these, there are several other small and big temples within the hillock along with sacred ponds (kunda) that makes the region a constant attraction for the people all over the world. Assam, thus, plays a prominent role in contributing her due share to the rich store of Indian culture. The Goddess Kamakhya is the presiding deity of Kamrup (Assam). The temple carries a unique identity for the whole of the state. Most of the people of India know nothing else about Assam except Kamrup Kamakhya. Even foreigners (from far off countries like various European countries, U.S.A., Australia etc.) come to visit this temple and pay their homage, and such is the influence of this holy temple that many of the foreigners even take up our cultural heritage along with them to their native countries. It is said that the worship of Goddess Kamakhya grants "Moksha" or Ultimate spiritual liberation. The temple has earned great tourist attraction during the past few decades. Initially, the flow of people was due to religious aspects, however, now there are also some other aspects that attracts people from far and wide to visit this place, irrespective of caste, creed or religion. This has resulted in the growth of tourism industry over the place. Many people have got employment in this sector and have already acquired self-employment opportunities bearing even more potential along with the overall development.

The tourist attraction and the growing number of tourists from all over the country and the world have resulted into a gradual growth of the Kamakhya township (as referred to in Census 1971) in and around the Kamakhya temple with growing religious
and economic activities. The whole of the Nilachal Hill consists of numerous temples which was managed by a Management body which was known as the Kamakhya Debutter Board being operationalised since 25/10/1998 afterwards handed over to the Bordeuri Samaj from July 2015. There are post office, dispensary, a library, police beat house, schools (both primary and high schools for girls and boys separately along with a Higher Secondary school), welfare association etc. which have gradually upgrading the region into a satellite town of the Guwahati metropolitan city.

Every year devotees of all economic classes, starting from common people to sadhus and sanyasis from all over the country, rushes to the temple during the Ambubachi mela which is celebrated for four days during the months of June/July every year. This again leads to the earning of more revenue by the government from the tourism sector. Due to the growing importance of the temple, the transport and communication system has also developed considerably in the region, with trekkers, buses, taxis plying from the foothill to the temple in the west and east of the hill, which, according to the legend, has been constructed by the mythological demon king Narasapur. However, due to the convenience of transportation through the motorable road, these now remains almost unused.

The permanent residents of the Nilachal Hills comprises of the priests (commonly known as Panda) and people serving with various designations (eg. Cleaners, gardeners, gatekeepers etc.) of the numerous temples of the hillock (mainly the Kamakhya temple). They live in lands which were donated to their ancestors by the Ahom king Shiva Singha during the early part of the 18th century. These donated lands are called the Debottar land. The priests and their families’ main source of earning are the donations from the devotees. However, with the change of time and development in the standard of living, people began to opt for higher education resulting into various high grade jobs or some other economic activities.

Apart from the religious aspect, the whole area has a great scenic beauty and rich environmental status which makes it a perfect destination for nature lovers. Moreover, with rich cultural heritage of the area, along with the holy temples and peaceful environment, some ashrams have been developed in the hillock amidst natural
beauty providing shelter and rehabilitation to the people suffering from urbanized/ urban borne stress.

An analysis of the above facts shows that this area with a number of ancient temples and rich natural environment and cultural heritage has a great potential for developing into an ecotourism spot. Development of different types of tourism in the region will have a great impact on the residents of the region and also to the state as a whole. The development of the township like condition in the hillock has given a new direction to the importance of the region. It has further scope of developing into a cultural and socio-economic hub and also for serving as a satellite township to the everyday expanding Guwahati metropolis. The temples of the Nilachal Hills have also given employment to a number of people directly or indirectly. Many people depend upon the temples for their livelihood. Thus, a further study from geographical point of view can help in the further development of the study area. Moreover, the area also shows prospects of some other forms of tourism, whether be adventure tourism due to the hilly terrain and existence of dense forests or medical tourism, due to the presence of a Yogic hospital. Taking in view of its future prospect, a systematic study on the holy region (Nilachal Hill) has been tried to make, that may help the authorities to some extent for taking constructive steps for the betterment of our country.

1.2 Objectives

1. To analyse the trend of tourism development in the Nilachal Hill that has been influenced by the religious beliefs of people.
2. To evaluate the pattern of the overall development of the area in relation to the development of tourism industry.
3. To study the impact of tourism in the Nilachal Hills.
4. To find out the prospects of other forms of tourism in the study area.

1.3 Research questions

1. How do the temple environment of the Nilachal Hills help to grow different types of economic activities of the dwellers?
2. How does the prevalent myths and legend and religious beliefs provide scope for economic development of the region?
3. In what ways tourism helps the residents to enhance their standard of living?
4. What are the prospects of other types of tourism in the region?
5. What is the pattern of economic and infrastructural development of the region?

1.4 Database and methodology

The database used and the methodology followed in carrying out the research work can be described as follows:

Selection of the study area

The Nilachal Hills, though geographically being a very small area, comprising an area of 3.29 sq kms., provides an unique identity to the state of Assam, in front of the whole world. Whenever talked about the North-eastern part of the country, from the tourism point of view, or places of interest to be visited, the Mother Goddess Kamakhya temple, located in the study area tops in the list. The fame of this holy place has been increasing, no less than the other famous temples of India. Thus, the area has been selected to study the trend of tourism development and prospects of further development in various sectors and also tourism in other different forms.

Database

The study area, being very small in spatial context, it was not possible to collect the required amount of secondary data. For constructing the map of the study area, point data has been taken with the help of GPS in combination with the Survey of India, Toposheet No. 78N/12 (scale = 1:50000). Photographic documentation has been done to depict the existing tourist product and the environment of the study area. The whole of the research work was done basically with the help of primary data generated through field surveys. Data has been collected from interviews with various tourists and local people with the help of questionnaire (Appendix-I and II). For knowing the ground reality of the study area a sample of 2000 households have been taken on random basis and interviews has been carried out with the help of questionnaires. Facts are gathered and analysed and to know the religious beliefs and customs of the local people. Altogether 100 numbers of local priests, popularly known as "Panda" were interviewed (Appendix-III). For knowing the attitude of the tourists and the differences in attitude of
the tourists hailing from different places, samples has been collected by categorising the tourists into the following group. (Table 1.1)

Table 1.1 Sample size for Primary survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Tourists Interviewed</th>
<th>No. of tourists interviewed</th>
<th>% of the universe*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign tourists</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists from various states of India</td>
<td>1223</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists from various districts of Assam</td>
<td>1446</td>
<td>0.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local devotees</td>
<td>353</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>3122</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* "Universe" here refers to the total population of each category (Foreign tourists and Indian tourists) that arrived during the 3 years (2011, 2012, and 2013) as per data provided by the Directorate of Tourism, Government of Assam. (Total universe for Foreign tourists- 4838; Total Universe for Indian tourists - 3294850)

The data was collected during the span of 3 years i.e. 2011, 2012 and 2013, interviewed during various time of the year. But still, majority of the tourists interviewed was carried out during the Ambubachi mela within the interviewed period. But the foreign tourists are interviewed during the non-festival times. The categorisation of tourists based on their origin has been done after the completion of data collection. Though this survey has been conducted between 2011-13, yet, till 2015 regular field surveys have been done to update the observations regarding the developments.

For obtaining the demographic features of the region, data has been collected from census of India and to know about the total number of tourists arrival during the last 15 years (both in case of foreign tourists and Indian tourists) data has been collected from the Directorate of Tourism, Government of Assam.

For the historical background, mythological and legendary background of the study area and the history of peopling in the region, literary data has been collected by
extensive library works and internet surfing, from various books, journals, magazines, online articles, research works previously done, folklore, interviews with veteran localites of the region.

**Methodology followed**

The methodology followed in this research comprises of both inductive and deductive approach. Moreover an empirical and analytical method of study has also been used to derive conclusions of the work. The point data collected with the help of GPS have been processed and the maps of the study area have been prepared using ArcGIS 9.0 software using the methods of interpolation and thematic representation of the temples and Ashrams of the region using the point data. To find a correlation between the growth of economic activities and the elevations of the region, contour map and land use and land cover map has been prepared by digitizing the area with the help of three dimensional information gathered by GPS in combination with the satellite imagery of Digital Globe's Quick Bird Satellite which is available in the "Google Earth" application. The data collected through primary survey has been empirically and analytically processed to derive maximum output from the same, correlated with personal observations and the same has been tried to depict in tabular and graphic representations. However, in the occasions where figures could not be curved out from primary survey, in such conditions, pictorial (photographic) representation has been made to serve the purpose for revealing the ground reality. And lastly the whole of the work has been compiled up in the written form to give it a complete shape.

**1.5 Review of relevant literature**

Tourism has been defined by UNTWO (United Nations World Tourism Organisation) as activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their used environment for not more than one consecutive year. However, it is a complex and comprehensive term which, when elaborated, often includes travel, excursion, visits, pleasure trips, pilgrimage and many more. The present study is a culmination of all such activities which can be concisely and compactly referred to as tourism and the development that tourism can induce in a region. The present research work tries to study about all aspects of tourism of the study area (the Nilachal Hills), elaborating the
presently focused religious aspects and also the developments that tourism induces in the study area. An attempt has been made to arrive at the focal point of the research with the help of works done in the related theme over the years.

Ivanov and Webster (2013) in their work, has given a detailed analysis of how tourism contributes to the overall economic growth of a region, with the changing world scenario. Hartcombe (2012) similarly had tried to focus on the impacts of tourism, with special reference to the economic impacts, his area of study being Bangkok. Bersales (2005) investigated about tourism highlighting society, the challenges faced in the society, referring to the challenges that has been perceived in Philippines. As perceived earlier, tourism is not a pre-determined entity with pre-conceived forms and nature. It may take various forms coming at par with different prevailing situations. Such a study has been done in context of Africa by Brown (1998) by taking case studies from past and tried to put forward suggestions for future, for an appropriate form of tourism to be adopted in his study area. Ecotourism is one of the most important form of tourism in the present era, as it focuses on tourism development keeping in view the importance of preserving the ecosystem. It has found proper attention in the works of Donohoe and Needham (2006), Fennel (2003), Cole (2004), Bhattacharya (2005), Blamey (2001), Koeman (2010), Lindberg et al. (1998), Martha (2008), Ramachurjee (2014), Rana (2006) and Singh (2004).

Further, adventure tourism being an emerging form of tourism, finds a place in the study and research all over the world. The present research work also tries to find out prospects of adventure tourism in the area. Adventure tourism has been studied by Swarbrooke et. al (2003), Patterson (2002), Hall (1922), as a new and emerging topic. In Indian context, it has been studied by Shaikh (2013), its problems and prospects with special reference to Goa and by Bhattacharya (2016) in context with West Bengal.

Another newly arising form of tourism is the concept of Medical Tourism. In international context, medical tourism, as a new concept has been studied by Howritz et. al. (2007). In Indian context, Kumar (2013) has tried to study about the prospects of medical tourism in India. Similar work regarding the problems and prospects of medical tourism has also been carried out by Rumaiya (2015).
In Assam's context, research work regarding tourism as an upcoming and flourishing industry, its trend of development over the years and further potentialities has been carried out by Bhattacharya (2004). Another detailed work regarding the development of tourism with special reference to understanding the nature of products and behaviour of consumers from economic point of view has been carried out by Saikia (2008), taking Tezpur as a base for study, however, also emphasizing on the nearby tourist destinations.

Nilachal Hills being the abode of the Mother Goddess Kamakhya and being known to the whole of the world, lakhs of devotees visits this sacred and environmentally beautiful place all year around. Majority of people come for religious purpose but most of the people also comes for research related works. As such, much of the research work has been done about the religious, sculptural aspects of the age old temples. The temples with their unique structure also attract the notice of researchers due to its mystic and controversial stories of its origin and development. Such mystery but popular myths and legends regarding the origin and development of the Nilachal Hills are studied from the ancient books like Yogini Tantra and Kalika Purana by various scholars from time to time. Kakati (1941) had made a thorough study about the religious aspects of the Kamakhya temple of the Nilachal Hills besides giving the historical evolution of Assam, from Pragjyotishpur to Kamrup and from Kamrup to Gauhati. Again Sarma (1978) has described all the myths and legends related to the origin of the Kamakhya temple, the name of the Nilachal Hills, the legend regarding the construction of the temple by Vishwa Singha, the destruction of the temple by the Muslim invader, Kalapahar. He has also described about the main festivals celebrated in the Nilachal hills, specially the Kamakhya temple, along with the management personals of the Kamakhya temple. Gait (1984) gives a very thorough and detailed historical description about Kamrup, home to Nilachal Hills. Talukdar (2004), Borpujari(1992), Barua (1966), Barua (1969), Baruah (1972), Sarma (1973) and Das (1978) , provides a detailed historical background of the Nilachal Kamakhya temple. A work regarding the ten mahavidyas has been done by David (1997) emphasizing on the tantric cult. Goswami (1998) studied the past and present conditions of the Kamakhya temple, while Deka (2004) studied the history and the tantric cult regarding the worship of the Goddess of Nilachal Hills. On the other hand, Mishra (2004) studied about the
socio-cultural background of the Nilachal Hills with special reference to Kamakhya temple connecting it to the Indian history and culture and last but not the least Sharma (1982) gave a detailed account about the antiquity of the Kamakhya temple.

However, as observed, regarding tourism and tourism induced developments, no such work has been done in case of Nilachal Hills, not only of Kamakhya temple but also including all the present temples of the area. Thus, there is a scope of proper study of the region to find out the prospects of tourism in its various forms. The present work is thus a humble attempt to focus on the tourism related issues in the study area.

1.6 Organisation of the Work

The research work regarding Tourism and Associated Development in the Nilachal Hills centring specially on the Nilachal Kamakhya has been to be evolved as an organized and systematic write up. For this, the whole work have been divided into certain well-defined chapters. Thus, the whole of the research work has been organized in the following manner:

Chapter 1 gives an introduction to the whole of research problem in the form of statement of the problem. For every research work, some pre-conceived objectives are set, to give the research a definite track. This chapter includes the objectives that have been set for the research purpose. Further to make the research precise and concise, some questions are set which are tried to answer during the research, based on the objectives. Those are called the research questions which are also included in this chapter. It also deals with the methodology and database applied to carry out the research. It also deals with the review of relevant literature that has been consulted while carrying out the research work. After discussing about the literature, the organisation of the work is precisely depicted followed by the significance of carrying out the research work.

Chapter 2 deals basically with the prevailing geographical background of the area, about its location, climatic conditions, geomorphology, drainage and the natural vegetation cover and land use land cover of the study area. Every place also has a history of its own. The study area, being an abode of a very important Shakti shrine, is a
pilgrimage centre and a tourist spot. So definitely, it too has an interesting history in the form of myths, legends and historical records. Thus, this chapter consists of the important myths and legends regarding the origin and development of the Nilachal Kamakhya and the Nilachal Hills. However, though the myths and legends are widely discussed and prevalent among people, they may not supplement the reality. So this chapter also tries to deal with this contradiction by revealing the myths and reality of the study area. Moreover, to know about the prevailing conditions and the future prospects of any region, one of the main elements of which one should have a proper knowledge is about the population, their history of settlement, the trend of their growth, their density of settlement, their quality and social stratification so that based upon the characteristics proper planning of doing field survey can be done. Thus, this chapter studies about the geographical, historical and demographic background of the study area.

Chapter 3 contains the main aspect of the research, i.e. tourism. It begins with an overall account of tourism in the area followed by the status of tourism in the Nilachal Hills. It also tries to highlight the main spots which attracts tourists from all over the world and also tries to project those spots which have the prospects to attract additional number of tourists in the near future. When talked about the status of tourism in the area, this chapter tries to throw light upon the various issues like trend of tourist growth, origin of tourists, their preferable time and frequency of visit to the place, mode of transportation and accommodation facilities opted by them within the area and also about the locations selected by them.

Chapter 4 tries to study the impact of tourism, both positive and negative on the various sectors of the region. It mainly deals with the study of impact of tourism on the nature and within this, emphasizes upon impact on water bodies, aesthetic environment and physical environment. It further studies about the tourism's impact on the society and economy of the region.

Chapter 5 deals with the various kinds of developments that has undergone in the region as a result of the growth and development of tourism industry. The developments includes economic development, infrastructural development, social developments etc. However these developments has different kind of reflections in the minds of the people. Local people, who have witnessed these developments every day, has different
kind of attitude regarding these developments. On the other hand, the tourists or devotees who visits the region frequently also has various perspectives regarding the developments. All these issues has been discussed after extensive field survey in this chapter.

Chapter 6 studies how the region has shown prospects regarding the developments of other forms of tourism. These emerging facts has been tried to identify in this chapter.

Chapter 7 comprises the summary, conclusions, major findings of the whole research and based upon the various findings during the course of the research, some suggestions has been put forward.

1.7 Significance of the study

Religion is a very sentimental issue. If it pierce in the bottom of the heart, it is very difficult to convince the devotees by putting any logic. Based on the religious sentiments of different sects, a group of people have engaged themselves in various economic activities both inside and outside the temples for providing facilities to the devotees and thus earn their livelihood. Activities like performing religious rites, marketing of certain commodities associated and partly associated with the religious sites have also developed lodging, fooding and transportation services in those regions. Even tourism has developed in many areas based on the religious faith, belief and the sights.

Most of the Indian people, irrespective of religion, have great religious sentiments. Most of them are associated with devotional activities and the common belief is that Gods and Goddesses are the incarnation of the supreme forces of nature. People also consider that all their desires, hopes and aspirations will be fulfilled if they worship the Gods and Goddesses with a devoted and holistic mind. Following the same notion, every year and almost every day, people from far off places from the whole country and even from abroad, with utmost devotion, come to the Nilachal Hills to offer their homage to the Mother Goddess Kamakhya along with the other Goddesses of the temples present in the hill. This has resulted to the growth of a strong economic base in the region concentrating the religious activities in the temple and a section of people in the region has acquired advantageous position in the society. The gradual and constant
inflow of tourists and devotees has also led to the growth of tourism and associated developments in the region, promoting the region to a township; fulfilling almost all the norms of the 1971 Census of India to be a town. The temples of the study area have also contributed to the tourism sector to a considerable extent. However, keeping in view some of the drawbacks of tourism and the growing concern of people for protecting the environmental aspects of the region besides giving opportunity to the local educated unemployed and downtrodden people, a study is to be made to develop the region to the level of an ecotourism centre. Also there are further scopes for developing various other forms of tourism, not only from the religious point of view but also from the point of view of adventure, culture, sustainability, etc in the region. But mere theoretical study will not serve the purpose. For giving the study an applicability there should be an idea about how the tourists feel regarding protecting the environmental beauty of the area and their views regarding the involvement of local people, also the opinion of the local people of the area is also very much important in the present day context in order to give the study a solid base. Thus, keeping all these aspects in view the topic can be considered as a significant one. Moreover, the area being popular internationally (especially for the Kamakhya Temple) and the upliftment of the area from economic point of view has also made the topic to be a significant one.

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