CHAPTER-IV

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF STATE TOURISM SECTOR.

4.1. Problems of State Tourism Sector

The theme of World Tourism day celebrated on 27th September 2003 was ‘Tourism- A driving force for poverty alleviation, job creation and Social harmony’, stressed the significance of tourism and its relevance to the developing countries. Tourism is the principal foreign exchange earner for around 83 per cent of the developing countries of the world. This sector helps to improve local environment and upgrade the quality of goods and services mainly transportation, hotels, catering, handicrafts and cultural activities.

Assam has tremendous strength of tourism attractions. The wealth of tourism resources endows Assam with comparative advantage, over many other states. Yet for many reasons this advantage has not brought for Assam the preeminent position that it deserves.

4.1.1. Lack of proper infrastructure facilities

Lack of proper infrastructure facilities are the major impediment of tourism sector in the state. These facilities are mainly related with transport and communication, power, star category hotel, clean accommodation, availability of water sports equipment and other logistics of tourism. Most of tourist destinations in the State are not easily accessible. The maintenance of existing infrastructure is another problem of state tourism.
The total length of National Highway (NH) in the country is 66,754 km and Assam share is only 4.25 percent. Compared to 20.3 km NH length per thousand sq.km. geographical areas and 6.5 km N.H. length per lakh of population (2001 census) of the country as a whole, Assam has 36.2 km per thousand sq.km geographical areas and 10.6 km NH per lakh of population in the State.

The state includes 2283.71 km railway route in 2008-09 comprising of 1126.59 km under Broad Gauge and 1157.12 km under Meter Gauge. The proportion of Broad Gauge route length to the railway route works out at 49.33 per cent for the state, and the state shares only 2.26 per cent the country’s total broad gauge railway route length.

The Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati is the only International Airport in the North East India. But this airport is not up to the expected level. The number of aircraft movement in 2007-08 has increased 11.4 percent compared to 2006-07, but the number of passenger handled and Cargo handled in the airport recorded decline of 17 percent and 88 percent respectively. The aircraft movement to other airports at Tezpur, Jorhat, Silchar, Dibrugarh and Lilabari is very poor.

The shortage of frequent power cuts and load shedding is a common phenomenon in the state. The growth of the power sector in the State is not encouraging and rapid increase of demand has made a wide gap between demand and supply of the electricity in the state. The required demand of electricity in 2008-09 was 6,433.00
million units, but the supply of power during this period was 4015.00 million units only. The overall power supply position in the state has not been satisfactory during the past several years.

4.1.2. **Absence of a Tourism Policy**

The Government of India recognized tourism as an industry and tourism become the third largest foreign exchange earner in the country. The National Tourism policy was formulated in 2002 to bring tourism in a systematic manner, position it as a major engine of economic growth, to harness its direct and multiplier effect for employment and poverty eradication in an environmentally sustainable manner. This policy also highlights on four ‘S’ on which global tourism is based i.e. Swagat (welcome), Suvidha (facilities), soosna (information) and Suraksha (Security).

The Meghalaya Government maiden tourism policy was formed in 2001 to attract more tourists from India and abroad and at the same time allow benefits to reach the grassroots of populace so as to mitigating innumerable problems faced in this regard.

The Assam government has made an attempt to formulate a tourism policy in 1987. Again in December 1992 an exercise was made to frame certain rules on tourism. But these efforts did not bring any concrete result. Recently on 25th Feb. 2009, State government has formulated its first tourism policy named tourism policy of Assam 2008 to fully harness the tourism potentiality of the state. This policy was formulated in the line of National Tourism policy 2002. Though this policy includes certain strategies for tourism development, but lack of sincere effort of state government hinder the
implementation of this policy. State Government also proposes to provide financial incentives to commercial undertaking in tourism sector. These fiscal incentives are only for large scale tourism units. The new tourism policy does not propose any financial incentives to small business units.

4.1.3. **Lack of Proper Co-ordination**

The tourism resources in Assam are properly taken care of by the concerned departments and agencies. The State forest department has identified conservation of existing bio-diversities as thrust area. Though the forest resources are the prime attractions of both domestic and foreign tourists, but the state forest department is not interested to develop tourism in the State. There is virtually no Co-ordination between Department of Tourism and State Forest Department. The Department of Tourism has no proper information to guide tourists to visit in the national parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries in the state. In Kerala the Kerala State Forest Department has been managing number of eco-tourist destinations and has been recognized as a pioneering organisation, to develop eco tourism in this state. The Department of Archeology has been handling the demand of tourists in historical and religious tourist destinations. But the Department of Tourism and Department of Archeology has no effective coordination for upliftment of State tourism. Tea tourism is another important area of state tourism. There is also no co-ordination between public industries and private industries like tea industries, oil and coal industries. The Department of Tourism and Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) have not maintained co-ordeal relation with tea and oil sector to promote state tourism. Even,
there is no tangible and effective coordination between the twin bodies of Assam

tourism- Directorate of Tourism and ATDC. The lack of coordination is recognized as
to striking mark of the development of tourism in the state.

4.1.4. Marketing

Marketing is a critical aspect of tourism sector which is linked with the
supply of tourism products to meet the demand of visitors. Tourism market includes
identification of the target markets, creating awareness of destinations and tourist sites,
disseminating information to the target customers and promoting tourism demand
through various means so that tourism marketing is not only concerned with reaching
out to the customers but also with information content and its dissemination in an
effective, efficient and timely manner. The aggressive marketing efforts are required to
translate awareness in to tourist arrivals. The Assam State Tourism Department has
unable to arranged aggressive marketing network to sell tourism products to visitors.

4.1.5. Publicity

Publicity is an effort to make available certain information of State
tourism to the public. The information about Assam tourism are not available in the
major Indian cities. The official website of Assam tourism is not up to required level so
as to give detail information of state tourism. The financial assistance received from the
Ministry of tourism for promotional activities of selected fairs and festivals has not been
utilized property. In order to make effective use of the resources for overseas publicity,
the application of information technology need to be promoted. The state tourism
agencies have been ignoring this emerging aspect of publicity. The lack of publicity at
national and international level is the cause of limitation to explore rich tourism resources of the state. Though the Assam Tourism Development Corporation and Directorate of Tourism have participated number of national and international tourism fairs and festivals, it is premature to comment on the impact of such participation in terms of significant increase in the tourist inflow to the state.

4.1.6. **Lack of proper finance to entrepreneurs**

Local entrepreneurs in major tourist destinations in the state are not getting proper financial assistance from the government, bank and other financial institutions. Even government has not introduced any tourism related financial scheme for the entrepreneurs. The micro entrepreneur activities in tourism products and cultural activities are in unorganised form. The micro entrepreneurs have been engaged in selling of tourism products to tourist in different tourist destinations i.e. cultural activities, handloom products, handicraft items etc. Micro entrepreneurs are still in the grassroots level. They need proper training and financial support to fulfill the demand of domestic and foreign tourists in an innovative way. The state government has not made any provision of soft loan and tax relaxation to encourage local entrepreneurs to set up modern facilities and other logistics of tourism in the major tourist destination.

4.1.7. **Role of financial Institution**

Bank and financial institution in the State are interested to provide financial assistance mainly to the industrial undertaking. Financial institutions have their common notion that state tourism sector is not in a viable position to earn profit.
So, they are reluctant to invest and encourage in state tourism sector. The role of financial institutions has become the stumbling block to promote tourism in the state.

4.1.8. Absence of tourist guide

The state tourism is facing the acute problem of trained tourist guides in the important places of tourist attraction. It is difficult to satisfy the inquisitiveness of the tourists in main tourist spots. The department of tourism initiated a program to train tourist guides. The effort did not yield good performance as most of the trainees left the job. Some of them found other means of livelihood while others are not interested with this profession.

4.1.9 Insurgency Problem

Insurgency and law and order situation in the state is recognized as another major problem. The tourists have general perception that Assam is always plagued by trouble and stress. Insurgency and other problems are highlighted more than the positive aspects. The threat of insurgents and veiled exaggeration of insurgent problem by the national media could deter tourist enthusiasts in coming to Assam.

4.1.10. Absence of perspective plans and Sustainability in Tourism

Unplanned and uncontrolled growth of tourism sector may destroy the base of state tourism. Most of tourist destinations in the states have been facing trouble due to poor planning. A proper plan and project must includes environmental impact studies, carrying capacity studies, instruments of spatial and land use planning, instruments of architectural controls, strategy for preparing the local community to safeguard its cultural identify and awareness programme for local participation and
local commitment to the project. The state tourism department still have no perspective plans to develop state tourism sector

4.1.11. Village and rural tourism

The state government failed to develop the concept of village and rural tourism in the state. Rural tourism is the showcase of the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural location benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the local people. Rural tourism is definitely useful for a country like India, where almost 74 percent of population resides in its 7 million villages. The states like Kerala, Goa, Himachal Pradesh taking full benefit of rural tourism. Like Kerala, Assam tourism department has decided to set up model villages in the state and developed two tourism village named sualkuchi and Durgapur in Kaziranga with association of financial assistance of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). But both these tourism villages are still in primitive stage.

4.1.12. Brand image

Dearth of strong brand image of state tourism is a weakness to introduce comprehensive marketing strategy. A brand is symbol, a mark or name that acts as means of communication to bring about an identity of state tourism product. Brand positioning emerged as a vital tool to understand how brand are positioned in the mind of customer in relation to relevant attributes. It is based on the functional attributes or emotional associated with the brand. Positioning is the pursuit of different advantage (Subroto Sengupta 1999).
4.1.13. **Absence of quality Manpower**

The quality of tourism attraction depends largely on the quality of services provided. The state is in short supply of trained manpower in hospitality sector. The tourism industry needs manpower at different skill levels, but it is difficult to find right type of people. To meet the demand, the industry absorbs people from different institutions. Yet the common feeling is that these people are not readily employable and need a lot of investment through in house training programme to bring them an acceptable level.

4.1.14. **Lack of awareness**

Lack of awareness among the people about the importance of tourism is the feature of state tourism. The states like Kerala, TamilNadu, Sikkim have evolved institutional arrangement of effective participation of the people in promoting tourism, sharing the benefits among the people and developing a tourism friendly environment.

4.1.15. **Heavy Tax Burden**

The state tourism sector exists multiplicity of taxes introduced by different department i.e. value added tax, Luxury Tax, forest entry fees etc. The forest department has introduced dual prices as entry fees for domestic and foreign tourists. The foreign tourist has to pay higher amount of fee to the state forest department to visit the national parks in the state. The taxes of State tourism need to be rationalized and reduced to make the destination competitive.
4.1.16. **Paucity of fund allocation for tourism development**

Tourism has not attracted the desired Priority despite many steps taken to generate employment in this sector. Though state government has increasing budgetary allocation in annual plan, but this is not enough to meet the demand of state tourism. The state government can create a tourism development fund that could be utilized for tourism related investments.

4.2. **A ‘SWOT’ Analysis**

The ‘SWOT’ analysis of tourism sector in Assam ( acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and Threats ) have been analysed to know the ‘strengths’, ‘weakness’, ‘opportunities’ and ‘threats’ of state tourism.

4.2.1. **Strengths**

- The rich natural beauty, serenity and exotic flora and fauna of Assam are the invaluable resources of the development of eco-tourism.

- Assam tourism cannot be viewed in isolation because Assam is the gateway of north east region. The eight states of the North-eastern region form part of the East Himalaya region, which extends from Sikkim eastwards and embraces the Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal.

- Assam is famous for one horned rhinoceros. The world heritage site Kaziranga National Park is an ideal tourist destination in the state.

- Assam has great diversity of wildlife. Every wildlife destination has their individual charm and beauty.
The state water resources (river and lake) can harness to provide a unique experience of adventure and leisure tourism. The mighty river Brahmaputra and its many tributaries, beels (lakes) have immense potential for tourism development in different areas like river cruises, water sports, white water rafting and kayaking, etc.

The state can generate a variety of tourism activities like- Eco-tourism, wildlife tourism, rural tourism, pilgrim tourism, cultural tourism, medical tourism, festival tourism, Tea, golf and nostalgia tourism to offer varied needs of varied tourists.

The state is also famous for rich historical significance.

Tourism policy of Assam 2008 recognized as an important catalyst for economic development and also for poverty alleviation.

Rich cultural heritage where communities, cultures, religions and customs of different hues intermingle freely here to constitute a homogeneous blend.

The world famous Assam tea and green carpeting tea gardens are the attraction of romantic tourists.

The State is known for the largest fresh water riverine island in the world, ‘Majuli’. Majuli is a Centre of Assamese vaishnavite culture which has not only preserved but also continue to practice.

The state is favorite tourist destination in India.

The Silk oriented Assam hand loom product and rich arts and crafts products are the unique tourism products.
The Hindus religious temple Kamakhya is a world famous pilgrimage centre.

4.2.2. **Weakness**

- Inadequate infrastructure facilities in state tourism sector.
- Expensive travel cost due to absence of adequate rail transportation.
- Awful approach roads to majority of the tourist destinations in State.
- Lack of air connectivity to majority tourist destinations.
- Inadequate and lack of clean and hygienic accommodation facilities.
- Lack of quality man power in hospitality sector.
- Paucity of fund allocation in state tourism.
- Heavy tax burden of tourists.
- Limited awareness of tourism products in major tourist destinations.
- Dearth of strong brand image.
- Absence of trained tourist guide in the major tourist destinations in the state.
- Absence of proper financial support and lack of incentives to entrepreneur in state tourism.
- Lack of adequate financial assistance of financial institution in state tourism.
- Poor publicity.
- Lack of co-ordination among the concerning departments in state tourism.
- Problems of insurgency.
- Lack of proper utilization of central and state government funds.
- The state is not in a position to earn the benefit of village and rural tourism.
Absence of sufficient resort type accommodation in major tourist destinations.

- Lack of indoor activity facilities.
- Dearth of clean and hygienic public convenience facilities in tourist destinations.
- Absence of entertainment facilities in major tourist destinations.
- Absence of sufficient public private synergy.
- Lack of adequate institutional mechanism of Assam Tourism Development Corporation and Directorate Tourism for implementing Tourism plan, projects, and schemes at a faster level.
- Absence of Interpretation centres at wild life areas and Archeological destinations.
- Inadequate safety and security measures of the tourists visiting major tourist spots in the state.

4.2.3. **Opportunities**

- Assam could be real gateway not only northeastern states but also other Asian countries like Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.
- The ‘Look East’ policy initiatives of the Government of India would be helpful for marketing Assam Tourism in South Asian and south East Asian markets.
The Government of India has accorded the special attention of economic development of north-eastern region. So there is ample scope of speedy development of tourism in the state.

The tourism resources endows Assam a pioneering State in north eastern region.

Development and diversification of eco-tourism will be a new enchanting aspect for both domestic and foreign tourists.

The proper implementation of State maiden tourism policy 2008 can make Assam a major national and international tourism destination.

The encouraging private participation mainly the investment of Taj Group of Hotels in five star hotel is the new dimension of state tourism.

Assam tourism has ample scope of positioning tourism as a unique brand.

The world heritage site Kaziranga National Park has becoming an ideal tourist destination and the both domestic and foreign tourist’s arrival has been increasing continuously to this destination.

The world largest fresh water riverine island ‘Majuli’ would be the next ideal tourist destination in the state.

The introduction of LTC tourism to the Central Government employees by the Ministry for Development of the North Eastern Region (DONER), permitted the use of private airlines to the north eastern states is an encouraging step of state tourism sector.
• The increasing number of aircraft movement to the Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati, which also includes low fares airlines, is another positive direction of state tourism.

4.2.4. Threats

• Image of Assam as an in-secured state due to the problem of insurgency and violent political movement.

• Frequent bandh and strike due to political instability in the state is another major threat of state tourism.

• Unrestrained growth in tourists can result environmental degradation.

• Increase in biotic pressure due to increase in tourism.

• Construction of resorts and amusement parks and other tourism developments causes ecological damage including deforestation and pollution of rivers and lakes.

• Mass tourism brings social problems, includes exploitation and trafficking of women and children for sex and cheap labour.

• Tourism project often fail to consult, engage or adequately compensate local communities for loss of livelihoods, agricultural land and access to natural and common property resources such as forest, river, lakes etc.

• The state eco-tourism sector fails to adopt Global code of ethics adopted by World Tourism Organisation.

• The state tourism has been facing stiff competition of other north eastern state specially Sikkim and Meghalaya.
• Possibility of unauthorized and illegal flow of visitors into the state due to insurgent activities in north east region.

4.3. **Prospects of Tourism in Assam**

The growth of tourism in Assam is considered as significant one in the context of economic benefit of this sector. The foreign tourist arrivals increased from 13,799 in 2007-08 to 14,533 in 2008-09. Domestic tourism is one of the major contributors in state tourism. The inflow of domestic tourist records 36,98,706 in 2008-09 as compared 34,89,814 in the previous year.

The state offers huge potential for employment and economic growth by utilizing the state tourism resources like unique natural beauty with flora and fauna, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, historical monuments, pilgrim centre, tea gardens, industrial and commercial institutions, rich arts and crafts and colourful festivals. The state is well endowed with aesthetic scenery and offers enough sights for the national and international tourists. The mighty rivers, evergreen forests, invigorating climate, religious places, national parks and cultural heritage are the unique attraction of state tourism.

The state Assam also offers unique and unmatched virgin destinations for eco-tourists because of its vivid diversity in terrain, environment, wildlife sanctuaries and National parks with unique flora and fauna, climate, ethnicity, culture, language, food habits, dresses and so on. The state is also known for two major river systems the mighty Brahmaputra in the north and Barak in the south- into which drain the fast flowing rivers, rivulets and streams gushing down from steep hills.
A forest cover of 35.24 percent has made the state into a bio-diversity hot spot. The reserved forest area constitutes around 20 percent of the total geographical area of the state.

Geo-tourism stresses the creative link between man, nature and culture and has tremendous potential for attracting tourists in to the state. The state geo-tourism resources include picturesque town like Haflong, the world’s largest river island – Majuli, the world heritage site Kaziranga National park, four other national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and impressive heritage sites.

The state also has tremendous potential to develop rural tourism which may bridge the gap between the rural and urban people. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in partnership with the UNDP (United Nation Development Programme ) launched rural tourism in the state to showcase the cultural heritage of rural people and to leverage this opportunities to generate livelihood opportunities for rural communities. The foreign tourist arrival to rural areas in Rajasthan, Gujarat and South India shows an increasing trend in every year. Once the infrastructure reaches to villages and the concept is marketed well domestically and internationally, nothing can stop a mini boom in tourism industry.

Assam as a tourist destination is a real place of adventure tourism for its riverine area with turbulent rivers, mystic blue hills, wild terrain and serene countryside of green valleys. Angling in the Jia Bhoroli River in Namemi National Park is a popular event where one can catch the golden mahaseer. An annual angling competition is regularly organized by the Assam Bhoroli Angler’s Association and attracts large
number of anglers from India and overseas in every year. The river jia Bharali is also
popular for river rafting. Boat racing is a very popular sport in the state, organized
during festival occasions. The boat racing event of Hajo, Sualkuchi, Barpeta can be
compared with the snake boat racing event in Kerala.

The state includes many old pilgrim places of great significance mainly
being the most venerable kamakhya temple. Hajo is another religious centre of Hindu,
Muslim and Buddhism. Other prominent religious tourist destinations are Borpeta,
Batadrawa, Tezpur, Sivasagar, Majuli etc.

The Government of India’s Look East Policy is a strategy to increase the
flow of tourists between India and ASEAN. Association of South East Asian Nations
consisting of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines,
Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and India. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh
described India’s Look East Policy as ‘in the present phase of our Look East Policy, we
in India seek to deepen our economic integration by entering into free trade or
comprehensive economic partnership agreements, both with ASEAN as a whole and
with individual countries of the region’. North Eastern Region is an integral part of
Government of India’s Look East Policy and has its immense opportunity to earn the
benefit of tourism.

Assam is the gateway of the North-eastern region. The state has been
playing a pioneering role in the economic development of this region. Guwahati is
considered as nerve centre of North East and it is connected by air to all important
places of this region. The headquarters of North-East Frontiers Railways also located at Maligaon in Guwahati.

The Government of India has special attention on the socio-economic development of this region. Recently the North-eastern council provided financial assistance for infrastructure development in tourism sector. The Government of India has also relaxed its LTC rules for Central government employees to travel to the north eastern states. Now Central government employees are permitted the use of private airlines in L.T.C. package. This will certainly helps to promote tourism of this region.

The state maiden tourism policy ‘Tourism Policy of Assam 2008’ is a pragmatic policy designed to ensure optimum utilization of rich tourism resources of the state. The main objective of state government is to promote tourism as a means to ensure sustainable economic development and positive social change through development of tourism.

The private sector has been playing a vital role in the development of state tourism. The state government also encourages the private participation in tourism with certain fiscal incentives. The investment of Taj Group of Hotels in five star hotel in Guwahati is also a milestone of state tourism sector.

The Ministry for Development of the North Eastern Region (DONER) has taken up various schemes of infrastructure development of this region. DONER has identified connectivity as a major impediment of this region and improved air connectivity to all the state capitals.
The air travel is the most popular mode of travel mainly for international travel. The Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport records an increasing number of aircraft movement. The low fare airlines movement to this international airport is also an encouraging aspect of state tourism.

The state Assam has immense potential for growth of tourism. The state tourism needs sincere government initiative in making infrastructure and proper implementation of its policies. The involvement of host community also plays a vital role to satisfy the inquisitiveness of our guests.

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PHOTO ALBUM
Entrepreneurial Activity in KNP

American Eco Tourist in KNP
Mask in Majuli Satra

Foreign Tourist in NGO Activities in Majuli

Auniati Satra, Majuli
Jhumur Dance in KNP

A Group of American Tourist in KNP

Tea Plucking
Ferry Services to Majuli

A.T.D.C. Eco Resort in Majuli

Mishing Village in Majuli