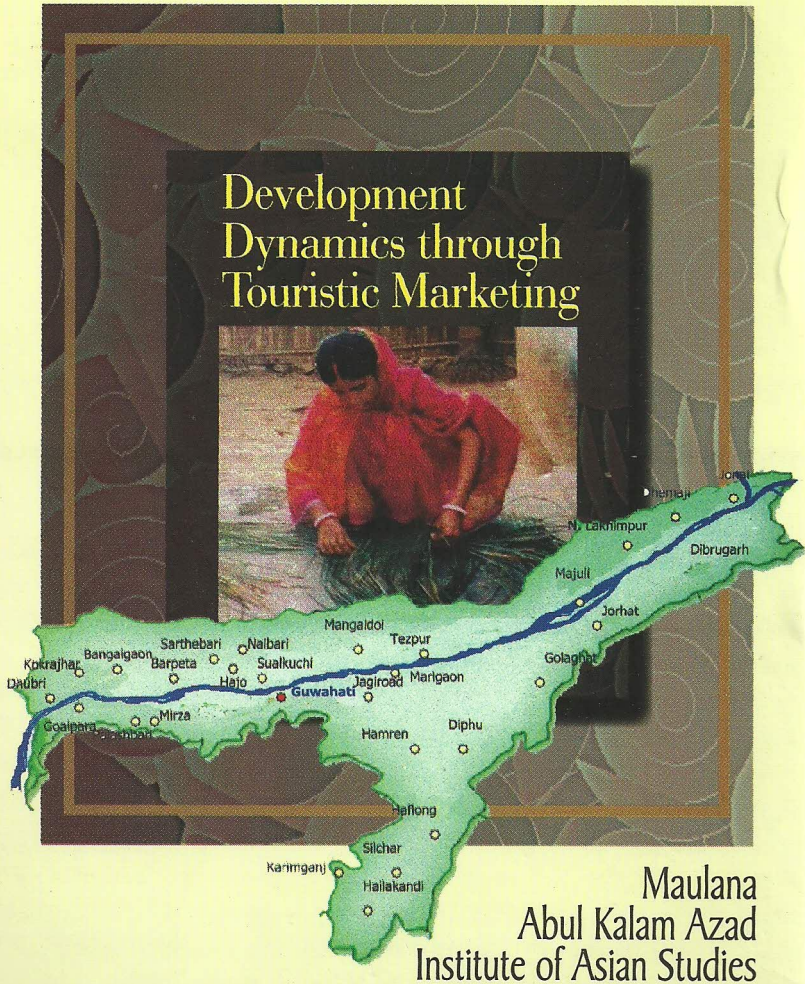


Traditional Crafts of Assam



Maulana
Abul Kalam Azad
Institute of Asian Studies

Mrinmoy K Sarma



Crafts are the one of the earliest expressions of human creativity. People have been using crafts for making their daily lives comfortable by producing crafts for utilitarian purposes, and to express their creativity by carving certain exotic and aesthetic materials. In both the cases the artisans have to work with their bare hands with minimal use of machines. The life in villages, specially those of the women folk, is greatly influenced by the craft works. This is more prominent in the third world countries where rapid urbanization and capital orientation have resulted in marginalisation of the rural citizens.

This book deals with the rich culture of crafts of Assam and discusses the global experiences of throwing the crafts making regions open to the tourists and tourism, who are often regarded as the high flying patrons of such exotic products. It focuses on the traditional hubs of the crafts with two important maps on general craft and textile crafts respectively. As a pathfinder in the field, the book will be useful to those who visit North-east India for craft tourism purposes, the research scholars and the policy makers for the development of the region.

Rs 595
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Dr Mrinmoy K Sarma is Reader in Business Administration at Tezpur University, Assam with an industrial-cum-teaching experience of more than 15 years. He serves as guest faculty in Asian institute of Technology, Bangkok. He holds considerable knowledge on the tourism scenario of the North East India and represented North East Council in TAAI conference in 2004.

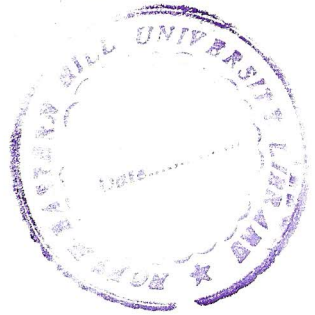
He has contributed to the academics in the form of several research publications in International and National peer reviewed journals and completed assignments as Resource Persons in reputed international and national conferences/workshops. His interest in tourism management has opened a wide vista on cultural dimensions of economics of tourism in developing countries. He has guided several M. Phil. and doctoral students also.

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Development Dynamics through
Touristic Marketing

Mrinmoy K. Sarma



Moulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies,
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To
My PARENTS –
Srijut Dr Kailash Ch. Sarma
And
Srijuta Renuka Sarma
Who are my inspirations, and my idols...

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I take this opportunity to thank the Tezpur University authority for allowing me to undertake this study.

I am grateful to Sri Umesh Patir, Sri Tarun Borah, Sri Uttam Baruah and Ms Tasmira Ahmed who helped me in completing the work. My deepest thanks go to my wife Santirekha Chowdhury (Sarma) and my little daughter Srutisree for bearing with me during the tough period of the research work.

Practicing Tour Operators, and the policy makers like the State Government and the North East Council (NEC) can take note of the findings of this study and might like to implement the suggestions and recommendations.

TRADITIONAL CRAFTS OF ASSAM

My drudgery will bear fruit if the economically poor but artistically richest of the rich artisans of my beloved State get benefited, even marginally by the findings of this work.

M. K. Sarma

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Introduction

Craft has been playing a vital role in the socio-cultural and economic milieu of a society. Hand made products have been a part of a society's culture, and crafts are often treated as authentic for the purity and direct human creativity associated with it. Human expressions take the form of a craft when one cannot indulge in the luxury of spending one's resources in works that do not serve any utilitarian purpose. Thus crafts have been the medium of creativity for the economically repressed ones.

However, crafts cannot be seen as only the mouthpiece of creativity of the oppressed. The silver lining is the tremendous economic importance the craft work itself is attached to. Though the utilitarian angle of the crafts in the recent times has given way to the aesthetic side of it, the values crafts carry have become manifold. Now-a-days crafts are attached with lifestyles of the people residing thousands of miles away from the place where it is being produced. Thanks to globalisation and the newly found lifestyles of the rich and powerful! This entails export of the creative, indigenous and authentic craft works across the continents.

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Tourism is invisible export! The tourists come to a destination and spend their money in terms of scarce foreign exchange; hence, the tourists are welcome in most places of the world. They not only come consume the services of the tourism sector or only products of daily needs in a destination. Most of the tourists spend considerable amount of money in shopping. They shop for souvenirs of their visit to the destination, to offer gifts (at depict their visit) to near and dear ones, and yes, of course to “bolster memories” at a distant and future time. To do so they look for products authentic to the destination that are pure and unique to it only. Researches have found that the tourists’ first preference in such a pursuit is the craft work of the host region. They buy the crafts and buy in huge volume (in monetary terms).

Many tourists roam around with an intention of visiting beautiful craft producing regions around the world. They like to experience the creative vistas the craftsmen go through; see for themselves the economic and social conditions of those weavers or wood carvers or potters whose artistic expressions are so marvelous. This is termed as Craft Tourism in modern tourism vocabulary.

Assam, the heartland of the whole of North East India is a colourful mosaic of various craft traditions. Being the abode of two most fertile valleys across the entire NE India, Assam has been attracting migrations since thousands of years. This makes the State a melting pot of diverse cultures, ethnicity, habits, skills, and more than anything else humanity. This has given rise to diversity in the tradition

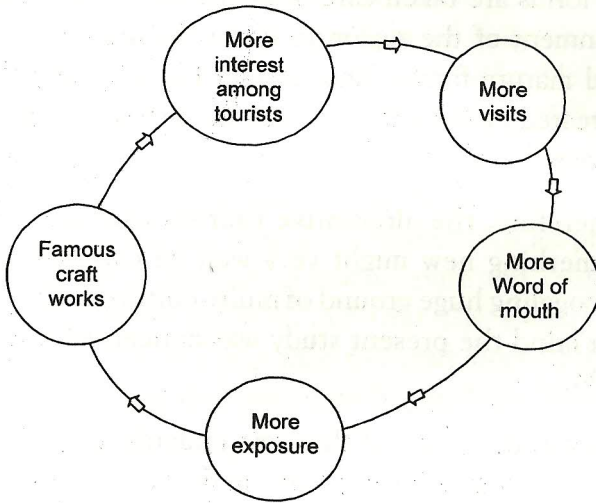
and social life of the State. In the process, different mind blowing creative forms like languages, dialects, songs, dances and tangible works like the crafts have taken birth. These forms are taken care of by the benevolent natural environment of the region to make them grow into full fledged mature forms. Thus Assam has a variety that is being reared by the jealous guardians of these cultures and traditions.

Therefore, the alternative tourists who are looking for something new might very well be exposed to this mind boggling huge ground of multi-culturism. With this aim in mind the present study was conceived way back in 2004.

Assam, being one of the most underdeveloped States of India (itself suffering from malnourishment) bears promises of development only in labour intensive sectors. Three such promising sectors suitable for a State like Assam are sericulture, agriculture and tourism. The State must try to adopt all these three with renewed interest so that overall development can be achieved. Tourism and sericulture in the form of craft works are tried to be linked with each other. It is heartening to note that both the sectors have the potentiality to complement each other, and growth in one sector will surely help in the progress of the other sector. If Assam become more famous in hand-made natural textile (product of sericulture) it can promote alternative tourism as more tourists will be interested in witnessing such a famous work. More tourists visiting the State means more will be the exposure of the craft sectors, and more

TRADITIONAL CRAFTS OF ASSAM

famous they will become. The following simple causal loop diagram will help in explaining the relationship between these two sectors.



All these reasons played the catalysts for initiating this work. The work simply explores the possibility of offering the craft works for touristic exposure so that a comprehensive future plan can be chalked out.

However, it must be noted here that it is not a comprehensive and exhaustive work on the crafts of the State. It only tries to expose the most prominent craft concentration so that the same could be offered for tourist consumption. The traditional pockets are only taken into account and hence the newly developed craft areas like craft villages and commercial hubs are not given prime importance.



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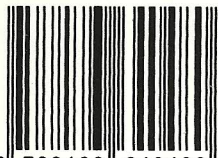
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