

TOURISM IN ASSAM

Trend and Potentialities

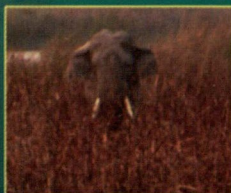
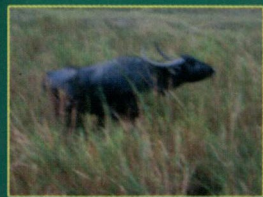
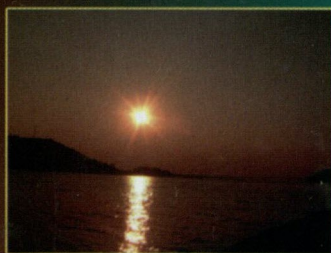
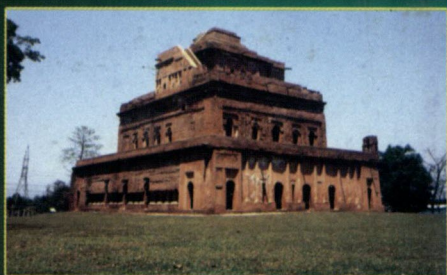


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Prasanta Bhattacharya

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PRASANTA BHATTACHARYA



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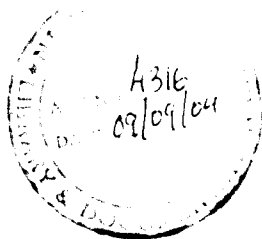
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The term 'tourism' literally means travel and its associated aspects. It has, however, presently assumed a new connotation. If we consider the term in the present-day context, it includes the totality of relationships and phenomena arising from travel and temporary stay of strangers (Bhatia, 1991). However, tourism excludes traveling related to remunerated activity and establishment of permanent residence by strangers. The term includes all interconnected processes, especially economic, that come into play through the temporary movement of strangers from a certain district, state or country. Tourism is a phenomenon of modern civilization. With the development of science and technology, transport and communication have brought countries and societies nearer making movement of men and material easy. Besides, rapid urbanization, rising standard of living, detachment of persons from the countryside environment and increasing leisure time have caused a travel-boom all over the world. It has been estimated that in 1991, there were 450 million tourists all over the world, which is more than the entire population of USA and Russia taken together. They spent about \$278 billion, which is about 5.5% of the total international trade of that year. The global flow of tourists, however, substantially increased during the period 1991-2002. It crossed 7 million mark in 2002 with a growth rate of 4.3% over the figure of 692.9 million in 2001 (WTO, 2003). The tourists' stay generally brings prosperity to the area concerned and creates job opportunity for the local people. Christaller stated, "tourism is a branch of economy which avoids central place and the agglomeration of economy" (Christaller, 1955). This means,

as a sector of economy it has an inherent tendency to improve the conditions of otherwise backward peripheral areas.

Considering the importance of tourism in economic development, countries like India have made planned efforts to promote it in different parts of its territory. As a remarkable step in this direction, the Indian Government set up the Tourism Development Council in 1958. Subsequently, the states and union territories of the country started establishing independent government departments to look after the affairs of tourism. Assam is the pioneer state of the north-eastern region in this respect. With a humble beginning in 1958, the department has now been able to extend its information and accommodation network to as many as twelve centers distributed in some districts having great promise for tourism development. This has helped considerably in creating at least an atmosphere to attract visitors from inside the country and abroad. In 1979, for instance, the state was visited by 2,320 foreign tourists accounting for 0.3% of the total foreign tourists who came to visit India. But the volume of tourist flow did not increase in the subsequent years mainly because of the socio-political unrest then prevalent across the state. It is only after the end of the foreign national movement in 1985 that the tourism industry in the state could slowly overcome the long six years setback. But the emergence of insurgency and political uprising among different tribal groups for their ethnic identity from the later part of 1980, which still continues in some form, put another blow to the industry. As a result the volume of foreign tourist inflow declined to as low as only 479 in 1995. The ups and downs in the law and order situation of the state thus badly affected the industry. Meanwhile, the central government initiated a positive step to uplift the tourism sector in the state by withdrawing the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) in 1995. The RAP, which was imposed in 1962, acted for a long time as a strong barrier for the foreign tourists who were willing to visit the state.

Tourism was declared an industry in 1992 by the Government of Assam to encourage private investment particularly in creating required infrastructural facilities. For such a highly dynamic and sensitive sector of economy, an appropriate and reliable information base is indispensable. But the industry in Assam is still not properly equipped with necessary literature and information to help tourist in deciding their destinations and stay. Even information on various aspects of travel of the tourists, their perception and expectations are not yet properly maintained by the concerned authorities which stands as a great barrier in carrying out any systematic study on this sector. Whenever approached for getting an overall picture of the status of tourism in the state, the department of tourism generally provides the records of tourist arrivals in the government tourists' lodges only. It is not enough to know merely the exact number of tourist arrivals in different places for a series of succeeding years. This only indicates whether the tourist trade is growing or declining in the state. What are more important to understand include the mode of arrival, length of stay, kinds of accommodation needed, the amenities desired and the amount of money that a tourist is ready to spend. Without these basic information, it is not at all possible to visualize the problems faced by the tourists and the quantum of requisites to be provided to satisfy their needs. It is really surprising to note that such an important industry in the state has reached its present status without having a scientifically organized information base. Still more important point to be noted is the fact that the state government has not so far been able to come up with a realistic plan capable of addressing all the problem and issues relating to the development of tourism in the state. Under such circumstances, it has neither been able to allocate required fund nor has it succeeded in attracting private investors to improve the condition of the sector.

Another important aspect of tourism needs keen attention. The geographical factors like seasonal variation in climatic condition, accessibility to and cultural context of the places of tourist interest greatly affect the movement of tourists. Most of the tourists coming to the state prefer to visit the areas rich in wildlife, some important sacred places and archaeological sites. While exposing all these assets to attract the tourists, especially those who come from abroad, necessary care should be taken to indicate the most convenient period for visiting a site or an asset. This requires a detailed geographical study and clear documentation of the spatial and environmental aspects concerning tourism. It is also equally important to assess the degree of attraction of the natural, historical and cultural features of the state from the perspectives of the tourists and to prioritize them accordingly for development.

It is thus seen that a systematic assessment of the tourists and tourist resources of the state is an urgent need. There is immense scope for study in the field of tourism development in Assam from geographical perspective. Such type of study can substantially contribute not only to the theoretical aspects of tourism, but also to the growth and development of tourism as an industry in the state. It can also help the tourist organizations and travel firms by way of assessing the need of tourists, identifying potential tourist spots for development and designing various tourist maps and guide books. A geographical approach of study of tourism can provide a holistic view by synthesizing various physical and human aspects relating to it, which may be helpful in evolving measures for the development of tourism.

It is in the above background that the present work has been designed to evaluate the status, progress, problems and potentialities of tourism development in Assam. Precisely, the main objectives of the study are:

- i. to evaluate the status of existing facilities for tourists in the state;

- ii. to assess the natural and human resources concerning tourism in the state;
- iii. to study the pattern of tourist flow, mode of arrival, origin and destination of the tourists, length of their stay, kind of accommodations used and the nature of expenditure made;
- iv. to study the status of the existing tourist spots and to identify potential ones for further development of the industry and to prepare tourist map to facilitate movement of tourist across the state;
- v. to assess the degree of attraction of the tourist spots on the basis of the tourists' perceptions and preferences;
- vi. to evaluate the spatial variation of supply and demand of tourist resources and
- vii. to give some workable suggestions for the development of the sector in Assam on the basis of the findings of the study.

The course of the study has three different stages:

Pre-field Stage

This stage includes consultation of relevant books and journals, maps and reports and individual experts and organizations working in the field. There is dearth of systematic and reliable data on various facets of tourism industry in the state. However, some of the necessary secondary data and information have been collected from the Department of Tourism, Government of Assam and Directorate of Archaeology, Directorate of Museum, Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Government of Assam and other relevant sources. A thorough review of available literature on the field has also been made in this stage to develop a theoretical background on the problem.

Field Work Stage

It includes: (1) Visiting the tourist spots (both existing and potential) in order to evaluate their existing status including accommodation and other facilities available and future prospects for development. The spots have been thoroughly investigated and photographed from the perspective of tourism. Moreover, necessary data for the preparation of tourist resource maps of the spots including their immediate neighbourhood have been collected. (2) Selected tourists, both domestic and foreign, have been interviewed directly or sometimes sending purposively designed questionnaire to understand their perception and impression on tourism and quality of functioning of the associated agencies. (3) The minds of the local people have been intimately read on the spot in order to understand their views on and expectations from the existing or probable tourist industry in their localities.

Laboratory Stage

This stage includes - (1) Processing and analysis of the primary and secondary data using meaningful statistical and cartographic techniques. (2) Drawing of maps by using conventional and modern methods: attempts have been made to prepare tourist maps of some important areas of the state to focus on the places of tourist attraction both existing and potential and facilities available therein. The basic framework of those maps are based on the topographical sheets of the Survey of India, NATMO and the maps brought out by the Department of Tourism and local civil authorities. Help of setellite imageries has also been taken to update the informations. (3) Interpreting the results for final presentation.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT WORKS

The modern concept of leisure and tourism is essentially a product of western world. The importance of studies on recreation has been rapidly increasing in the western world. In

this context, one can turn his attention to the work of Murry (1930), where he discussed the significance of recreational land use in northern Michigan. He pointed out the types of land useful for hunters and fishermen and stressed on the contributions that geographers may make to this field.

Brown (1935) discussed the phenomenon of tourism and suggested several techniques for measuring its magnitude, pattern and economic value. Later on, Prophet (1947) stressed on the need of adequate statistics and of the development of research procedures. Several studies have been completed in specific areas after Murry's work. These studies pointed out the general character of recreation, its form and economic importance in different study areas. The contribution of Deasy (1949) and Prophet (1945) in Michigan, Greeley (1942) in New England, Zierer (1952) in western United States and Foscue (1949) in the Rockies and in Mexico are important in this regard.

Hedrick (1934) made a pioneering attempt in the field of systematic survey of recreational forms and values. He tried to produce maps of various items of recreation and described the environmental features that hold significance in the distribution of tourists' spots. His work was primarily based on the inputs as per the questionnaires sent to township assessors in the state of Michigan.

The works of Jone (1933), Booth (1948) and Walfe (1951) were intended to depict the character and distribution of the phenomena connected with recreational land use. Jones compared the features of recreational regions of Canadian Rockies with a mining town in British Columbia. Booth analyzed the lakeshore characteristics and nature of lakes themselves in terms of recreational values in the state of Washington. The study deals with the application of techniques in recreational mapping. Wolfe, on the other hand, studied the source areas of the occupants of summer cottages in Ontario, based on home addresses secured from local postmasters. Other two important

studies in this line are that by Carlson (1938) and Hodges (1945), which deal with recreational districts of New Hampshire. The former deals with the financial contribution of recreational activities to local and state government. The work of Hodges deals with the classification of recreational facilities and expenditures incurred by the tourists in those districts. The work was based on field interview.

During the period from the late 1940s to early 1950s, several surveys were conducted by state agencies in the USA based on questionnaires filled by the tourists. They stated their origins, routes, distances of travel, types of accommodation they used and expenditure they incurred.

Scientific study in recreational geography in the true sense of the term is of recent origin. Though geography of tourism has already figured as an important branch of applied geography, it is only in the last few decades that geographers, especially the American geographers, have shown much interest in tourism as a subject of serious study. International tourism, however, has received less attention because of its lesser importance in earning foreign currency for the United States. American people travel abroad in large volume and as a result, travel agencies have occupied an important place in the American business world since the early part of the 1950s. The picture is, however, gradually changing. Now there has been a great increase in the volume of foreign tourists to America. Therefore, the American geographers in the recent period have taken up this important theme for geographical study and research.

On the other hand, tourism has received much attention from among the economists and geographers in Europe since long. One can therefore find a rich literature on tourism in different European languages. As a matter of fact, the European geographers laid the foundation of tourism studies.

In Europe again, the British geographers played an important role in the study of travel and tourism. The publications

of Cosgrove and Jackson (1972) could draw attention of the geographers to the changing concept of leisure. Another important work in this field is by Rabinson (1976) in which the author has made an attempt to justify tourism as an appropriate subject of study for the geographers. It dealt with the historical background of tourism, the factors affecting the phenomenon as also the elements of it. Attempts were also made to measure the dimension of tourism, its spatial pattern and the issues involved in its planning. Other prominent geographers contributing to the literature on tourism include Stansfield and Rickert (1970), Mitchell (1969, 1979, 1981, 1984), Collins (1979) and Clawson (1963, 1966, 1984) of the USA; Wolfe (1964), Butler (1975, 1978, 1980), Rojotte (1975), Hellenier (1975, 1989) and Wall (1983, 1989) of Canada; Archer (1976, 1982), Coppock (1980, 1982) and Harrison (1980) of UK; Groetzbach (1963), Wolfe (1973), Benthien (1980), Ruppert (1984) and Ritter (1989) of Germany; Lichtenberger (1975) of Austria; Nice (1965) of Italy; Preobrazhenskiy (1982) of Russia; Mercer (1978), Pearce (1981, 1988), Pigram (1983) of Australia and Pacific region and Ferrario (1981) of South-Africa.

A thorough scrutiny of the available literature shows that some western geographers have specialized themselves in some specific aspects of tourism studies. For example, Driver and Toucher, Wolf and Pearce dealt with the behavioural aspects of tourism, while Rajotte, Miossee and Benthien discussed the land use aspects. Barbier, Lichtenberger on the other hand studied the regional aspects, while Collins, March, Henshall dealt with the planning aspects of tourism. Christaller, Wall and Ashworth analyzed urban centers, Ferrario and Coppack made resource analysis and Murphy, Young, Smith, Fesenmaier, Lieber, and Manning dealt with the outdoor recreational facilities from the view points of tourism (Singh, 1994).

A bibliographic search of tourism studies in the 1970s reveals a highly diverse and extensive literature contributed by

tourism geographers. The work of Kostic (1970) deals with spas in Siberia in general which are being exploited by the state. The author makes specific study of Nisevacka (east Siberia) spas and their changing nature of generation of electricity from thermal to non-thermal processes. He also tried to relate those findings to general spa situation in Siberia. The work of Martinovic and Kostic (1970) stressed on radio chemical as well as thermo-mineral analysis of water of the spas and its utilitarian value from medical point of view. Plans are formulated in that context for a greater use of the spas for development of tourist industry in that area. Mihajlovski (1970) dealt with the Iron Gate region, which is a part of Yugoslav-Romanian border covering a length of 138 Km. It consists of four narrow gorges and three basins and a large artificial dam constructed across the Danube. He highlighted the historico-cultural richness and the rising tourist activities in the region. Gerbier (1972) dealt with tourism and its effect on the way of life of the people in Noirmoutier Island. The author studied the tourist potentialities and possibilities of accommodating holidaymakers (Carter, 1973).

The work of Marien and Titus (1971) is concerned with tourism in the world, its changing nature and prospects in near future. Tanner (1972) dealt with the post-war expansion of water sports from angling to surfing and their growing diversity and stated that there was a lack of data in these fields. Barry and O'Hagan (1972) attempted an econometric analysis of the determinants of expenditure by British tourists in Ireland. They concluded that agriculture and tourism sectors of the Irish economy are broadly similar in respect of their economic effects. Both the sectors have low import content in the inputs and high multiplier associated with their exports (Johnson, 1973).

Abella (1971) studied the Balaton of Hungary, the country that can be classed among the developed countries from the point of view of tourism. He analyzed the infrastructure of

the lake Balaton on the basis of data collected from the cultural establishments, public health institutions, water supply, etc. Blake and Lawless (1972) dealt with the development of tourism in Algeria in 1966, when government decided to spend £ 65m over a period of seven years in an effort to attract foreign tourists and foreign exchange. The author stated that the anomaly of luxury tourism in certain parts of a country where living standard is generally low, and the need to preserve tourist assets from over-exploitation are problems to be resolved (Price, 1973).

Thresher (1972) analyzed the role of national parks and tourism on economic development and concluded that tourism can provide an immediate economic rationale for establishing national parks. The answers to the question of cost and benefit of such venture were supported by detailed financial examples. Circumstances show that a national park can be of considerable economic benefit to a developing African country and that may be justified for lack of any practical alternative to achieving the desired end. Mai (1972) examined the largest Canadian national park (The Wood Buffalo Park-44807 sq. km) out of 28 national parks of Canada. He also analyzed the recreational land use, the only type of land use allowed in the national parks and the gradually changing nature of the wilderness (Hamilton, 1973).

Abitz, Jensen, Keldborg, Kring, Larsen and Skude (1972) wrote on value of tourism for peripheral areas, where a peripheral area was defined as being a geographical area, which in relation to other areas remained underdeveloped. The authors analyzed the tourism activity in the island of Mon and its impact on peripheral areas. The dream of the peripheral area was that tourism should enable that area to achieve the same level of prosperity as that of the towns. But the authors perceived that peripheral areas had only a marginal influence on tourism in Mon if it was considered in terms of four factors, i.e. ownership of tourist facilities, tourist purchase, income to local authority

from taxation and jobs (Nicholson, 1973). Bijkerk (1970) was concerned about the growing demand of outdoor recreation in the Netherlands. The author attempted to evaluate and develop methodology for ascertaining the demand for potential areas for various kinds of recreational activities because the growth of outdoor recreation in the Netherlands was not matched by scientific research in the field of outdoor recreation (Lambert, 1973). While highlighting the three main phases of economic development in France, Veyret (1971) mentioned the growth of tourism since World War II as one of the important stages of economic development of France. He mentioned that this stage could be reached after rural self-sufficiency in the mid-nineteenth century and industrialization of the Paris Basin. The author discussed the proposals that outlined the role of tourism in the country during the period of 6th French National Plan. Bravard (1971) discussed the tourism in the mountainous areas of Upper Tarantaise. He examined the recent trend and diversification of tourist activities and the extension of the tourist season. Aubert (1971) analyzed the situation of western Pyrenees National Park, which covers an area of 50,000 ha on the 70 km stretch of Spanish frontier. The peripheral zone of the park contains 30,000 inhabitants in 100 communes. Special management proposals had been devised to preserve the natural and historical sites of interest within the park. It was predicted that agricultural employment will certainly contract in future and hence it is essential to build up alternative forms of employment in the selected centers in the peripheral zone (Clout, 1973). Demarinis (1972) discussed the aspects relating to the decline of tourism in Italy. Though much had been done to preserve the Italian environment as a part of tourism planning, they had a very low rate of hotel occupancy (35%). But Italy leads the E.E.C. countries in respect of earning from tourism, having 2.2 m tourist beds (1.4m in hotels), which was the record highest number in the world (Davis, 1973). Mileska (1971) classified the tourist

centers in Polish Carpathians as health and recreational centers for both summer and winter holiday (Clout, 1973).

Warszynska (1972) discussed the tourist activity of Zywiec country of southern Poland and selected three distinctive constituents of the landscape viz. (1) land configuration, (2) water covered surface and (3) woodland scenery in order to appraise the qualities of natural landscape which attract visitors. Some features (i.e. absolute height, relative height, mean flow of water and extent of forested area) are considered from the three distinctive constituents, which can be specified numerically. Those features are then distinguished and used to calculate coefficient of attractiveness with regard to three related constituents. By considering the impact of season and the coefficient of attractiveness of constituents, the author suggested the areas by using various statistical operations, which were most suitable for further development of tourism. Senftleben (1972) attempted to analyze the trend of tourist flow to Bali in the early 1960's and the change that occurred after the development of Bali Beach Hotel and Ngurah Rai Airport in 1969. The author is optimistic about the future prospect of tourism in Bali, though the infrastructure is poor in the peripheral zone (Davis, 1973). Hoffman and Romsa (1972) has considered the hypothesis that the number of people (SMSA population) visiting a certain camp site in Kentucky is related positively to the population of the origin (SMSA), population density and income, and inversely to its distance. In the same way, correlation analysis indicated that population and distance explained 65% of the variation. With these findings an attempt was made by the authors to build up a predictive gravity model (Moseley, 1973).

Billet, Freschi, Herbin, Loup, Janin, Jali, Guerin and Preau (1972) prepared a series of papers on the theme of employment and tourism in mountain areas of Alps and outlined the diversity of tourism phenomenon and the related diverse employment opportunities (Clout, 1974). Pearsons (1973)

analyzed the development and impact of tourism industry in eastern Spain on the Costa Brava and the Balears, the Costa del Sol and Canary Island and commented on the role and the result of real estate investment, as tourism had already become Spain's largest industry (Sheail, 1974). Anon (1973) analyzed the efforts that had been made to ensure that Australia continues to share the worldwide expansion of travel both in terms of foreign and domestic visitors (Crabb, 1974). Mariot (1973) devoted his work to the methodological aspects of the geographical search on tourism. Considering Western Slovakia as the study area, he demonstrated the principles of a functional approach to tourist movement. This approach allowed considering tourism as a dynamic phenomenon not only in terms of the region of occurrence, but also in respect of the areas, which received the impulses of participating in tourism movement. Anon (1973) analyzed the competitive advantage of the two North Sea resorts of Sylt and Rom that lie on different sides of the Danish and German frontiers and both of which attract Germans and Danes, in different ways (Davis, 1974).

The above discussion reveals that there is considerable literature contributed by the geographers from the developed world. If the works of geographers in the area of tourism studies are summarized, three major categories emerge: (a) studies of tourism as a general phenomenon, which examine the geographical factors involved in development of tourism in micro, meso and macro level, (b) studies on development of tourism or potentials for tourism development of a specific country or region and (c) studies of specific branches or aspects of tourism. Most of these studies have, however, been carried out in the western world, where the tourism industry has attained its maturity.

Tourism as an enterprise is concerned with all aspects of knowledge. However, the basic components related to tourism studies are psychology (motivation and preferences of tourists),

anthropology (human life and behaviour of society both in the context of guest and host communities), sociology (social conditions that facilitate and enable people to travel), economics (effect of tourism on balance of payments), business administration (fundamentals of business), geography (search of source and destination and their distribution in terms of tourist resources and tourists), ecology (relationship between man and nature), law (rights of consumers or tourists and quality of tourism services) and education (transmission of basic knowledge) (Bagri, 1995).

There is hardly any aspect of tourism, which does not have some geographical implications. In fact, all the branches of geography can contribute to the study of tourism in one way or other. With the growing importance of tourism in the national economy of many developed as well as developing countries, geographers organized themselves to exchange their views in the areas of tourism study. The interest of geographers in this field was marked by national conference of French geographers on Applied Geography in 1961, first national conference of Romanian geographers in 1968 and Conference of Tourism and Environment held in Britain in 1971.

In the international level, the establishment of IGU's (International Geographical Union) working group on tourism in 1972 marked the interest of the geographers. The conference of the working group of the Geography of Tourism and Recreation of the IGU was held in Australia in 1973. It was participated by geographers from ten countries and 23 papers were presented. The major areas of discussion were: (a) terminology relating to tourism study, (b) physical nature and development of tourism, (c) tourism as a factor of national and regional development, (d) international boundaries and their impact on the development of tourism and (e) the spatial behaviour of leisure-time activities. The working group under the chairmanship of Prof. B. Barbier called upon eminent

geographers world over to contribute their ideas and concepts dealing with leisure and tourism for a better understanding of the complex phenomenon. The range of publications and the conferences and meetings held reflects the increasing involvement of geographers in different countries both in domestic and international tourism. Apart from international tourism, domestic tourism and recreation are also a major area of research in some countries. As geography of tourism is relatively a new field of study, there is enough scope to develop it as an important subdiscipline within the domain of the discipline of geography.

So far Indian literature on tourism is concerned, reference may be made to the works of Chib, who is known as the 'father of Indian tourism'. He contributed a lot covering different aspects of tourism industry. Besides him, the works of Seth and Bhat (1993), Bhatia (1991), Kaul (1994), Dhar (1984), Basu and Basu (1984), Goswami (1982), Rai (1993), Sharma (1991), Sethuramalingam (1993), Khanka and Jalal (1983) and Bagri (1995) are worth mentioning. Kaul, Kumar and Sharma concentrated on tourism scenario of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan respectively. All these studies are concerned with economic or administrative aspects of the industry, but lack geographical perspectives. On the other hand, Dhar, Basu and Goswami throw some light on the importance of tourist and trekking atlas based on the ongoing cartographic presentations of NATMO for the development of tourism industry in India. In the same way, Sethuramalingam made an attempt to analyze the contribution of geographers to the development of tourism in India. He stated that the basic concern of the geographers is an examination of the areal occurrence of tourism in global, national, regional and local contexts. The work of Jalal and Khanka on the tourism development of Kumaun Lake region of Uttar Pradesh is oriented to practical solution of the problem of tourism sector through understanding the requirement of the

visitors. Bagri stressed on the importance of tourism education and its relevance to employment opportunities while considering the changing trends of tourism development in India. A few non-geographers who have contributed to the field are Mishra and Kundu (1970), Chatterjee (1975), Acharya (1980), Krishnaswami (1980), Kandari (1982), Bhatia (1983), Bala (1990) and Chopra (1991). But most of these studies have little to offer towards original ideas and are mostly descriptive in nature.

Unfortunately, this newly emerging subject has failed to draw the attention of experienced Indian geographers. A survey of the progress of geographical research in India since independence reveals that Tourism and Recreation continues to have only 1.2 percent of share among other branches of geographic study (Sinha, 1983). Singh (1975, 1978, 1982, 1990), Kayastha (1964), Bharadwaj (1973) and Kaur (1985) are among the few scholars who stressed the importance of tourism studies from geographical perspectives. Singh and Kayastha are prominent geographers working on the Himalayan region. They consider climate as a resource-input for the development of Indian tourism. Kaur (1982) has contributed to religious and conservation aspects of tourism, while Bharadwaj (1973) is essentially a cultural geographer pointing out the importance of cultural aspects in tourism development. Other important contributors include Mishra and Thangamani (1982). They have concentrated on tourism planning. Krishnaswami (1982) studied the economic impact of tourism in terms of state earning, employment opportunities and resulting regional growth. Singh (1994) concentrates on sustainable development of vulnerable cultural tourist resources of Awadh region in Uttar Pradesh. Most of these works concentrate on macro and meso levels of Indian tourism scenario. But detailed examination of tourist resources in local level still remains an urgent need. It is thus seen that the study of tourism and tourist geography are still in the formative stage in India.

So far Assam is concerned, little work has been done in this newly emerging field, though tourism as a venture started in the late 1960s in the state. Since 1984, the statistical cell of the Department of Tourism, Government of Assam, conducted four pilot studies. Objectives of these studies were to evaluate the nature of tourist traffic by railway, road and to visualize the importance of two different festivals, viz. Ambubachi at Kamakhya, and Sivaratri fair which is held simultaneously at Siva temple at Sibsagar, and Mahabhairab temple at Tezpur. The department has conducted its last pilot study in 1987 to collect data about domestic tourist profile and to promote the required infrastructure in Majuli Island during the *Rash* festival. Unfortunately, no significant step has been taken on the basis of the findings of these pilot studies. Majumdar (1992) undertook a work concerning this line. This attempt has been made towards planning and optimization of itineraries for tourists covering the entire north-eastern region. Here a computer-aided model has been designed to give the destinations desired by the tourists with optimum time, cost and distance. However, this turned out to be not a workable model vis-a-vis present poor infrastructure in respect of transport and communication in the region. Some other relevant research papers in this line are by Singh (1996) and Bhattacharya (1996, 1997). Singh dealt with adventure tourism and described its potentiality in terms of jungle exploration, country canoeing, wind surfing, rock climbing, para-sailing and hang gliding in Manipur and identified five potential trekking trails, covering potential sites of those adventure activities. On the other hand, Bhattacharya deals with tourism in general, its development, and potentialities on the basis of field study carried out on tourist products and consumers (tourist), in Assam. In 1997, he made another attempt on recreational mapping, one of the neglected areas of tourism venture in Assam, and discussed the legal and technical

constraints. In this regard he stressed on the important roles that can be played by the geographers particularly in the area of recreational mapping.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

One may argue that an attempt at development of tourism in an agro-based and economically backward state like Assam is premature. This kind of attitude is, however, not at all positive, because development of tourism needs not wait for overall development of the state. With the potentials, as it has, the state can go ahead with the development of tourism industry without farther delay. Following points in this connection is worth mentioning:

- (a) Assam is a state with rich potential tourist resources. It is an enchanting land with exotic flora and fauna, exquisite landscape and rich folk heritage. It has also sites of archaeological remains and monuments, dating back from 7th to 17th centuries AD, which can play an important role in attracting tourists to the state in near future.
- (b) As the economy of this region is mainly agro-based, the tourism industry needing lesser import content can help in capital formation in this state.
- (c) Tourism is essentially a labour-intensive hospitality industry. It can provide room for a large number of unemployed youths of the region. If this kind of industry stands on firm ground, it may go a long way in providing subsidiary job opportunities to many.
- (d) Tourism has an important human purpose. It widens national and international understanding. The domestic tourists can play a major role in national integration, especially in a country like India with a varied regional culture. One must admit that many of the present problems in the peripheral states of India, like Jammu

and Kashmir, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur etc., are the results of the age-old socio-cultural and economic isolation from the country's main stream.

- (e) To develop tourism as an industry, it would be necessary to preserve the physical and cultural resources of the state. This type of work advocates and suggests measures for preservation and development of scenic beauty, greenery, parks, native flora and fauna, etc. of the state.
- (f) In the days of growing automation and consumerism, it is very difficult for a region to preserve its unique folk culture and craftsmanship that exist among its people. This can only be preserved, when one rediscovers their importance and commercial demand. Tourism is a major way by which indigenous art and craft can be re-evaluated and used gainfully.

As the present study addresses all the above issues on tourism development in Assam in required depth and dimension, it bears immense significance for the planners, government agencies, private investors, tourists, and above all the people of Assam, who are still lagging behind almost in the all fronts of development compared to many other states of the country.

TERMS AND TERMINOLOGY USED

Some of the terms used in the study having special connotation are defined below for their clear understanding:

Visitors, Tourist and Excursionists

In 1963 the United Nations Conference on Travel and Tourism in Rome coined a definition of a 'visitor' as someone who visits a country/ region other than that in which he usually resides for purpose other than that of earning money. The 'visitors' are subdivided into 'tourist' and 'excursionists'.

'Tourist' is a temporary visitor who stay at least 24 hours in another country/ region for recreation, health, study, pilgrimage, sports, business, meeting and family purposes. But the present study concentrates on those visitors who visit for the purpose of leisure and recreation. Those visitors who do not stay, overnight in a country should be classified as 'excursionists' or 'day visitors' (United Nations Statistical Commission, 1967). The present study concentrates mostly on tourist rather than 'day visitors' or 'excursionists'.

Foreign and Domestic Tourists

A foreign tourist is a person visiting India on a foreign passport staying for a duration of not less than 24 hours and not more than 6 months. The following categories of travellers are not included as foreign tourists:

- (a) Nationals of Nepal entering India through land routes along Indo-Nepal border.
- (b) All foreigners entering India from Bhutan by land.
- (c) Children aged less than three years.

On the other hand a 'domestic tourist' is a person who travels within the country (India) to a place other than his usual place of residence (at least 80 km - one way; National Tourist Resource Review Commission) and stay at hotels or in other accommodations run on commercial basis or *dharamsalal sarais / musafirkhana* (rest houses), etc. for a duration of not less than 24 hours or one night and not more than 6 months for the purpose stated above.

Travel Receipts/Foreign Exchange Earning from Tourism

These are receipts of a country or a state as a result of consumption expenditure, i.e. payment made for goods and services by domestic or foreign tourists. The tourist expenditure by a foreign tourist is in terms of foreign currency brought by them. It also includes receipts from excursionist but excludes international air fare.

Tourist Arrivals

The data presented in government publications (both Central and State Govt.) refer to the number of arrivals of tourists and not to the mere number of tourists. The arrival of the same individual who makes multiple trips to the country/different destinations of the state during a period is counted each time as a new arrival. This is true in the case of Indian nationals going abroad also.

Tourist Resources/Products

The term encompasses not only the tangible goods, but also anything which can be offered to tourist to satisfy his/her need or want including services.

Consumer/Tourist

Both the tangible and intangible goods and services are to be sold to the buyers or consumers. In the case of this study, the term 'consumer' is used as an equivalent term of tourist, who satisfies his/her need or want with tourist resources/products.

Accommodation Establishment

Place in which rooms are provided to tourists for stay and classified variously as hotel, tourist bungalow, travellers' lodge, etc.

Approved Hotels

Hotels that conform to certain laid down standards on physical features and standards of facilities and other services approved by the Tourism Department of Central and State Governments. They are graded as five star deluxe, five star, four star, three star, two star and one star. Apart from this, considering the scenario of hotels in Assam an additional criterion is being derived by the author (based on cost of overnight stay per person, and facilities available therein) to grade them as A, B, C and so on.

Occupancy of Accommodation

The occupancy rate refers to the ratio between available capacity (in terms of bed) and the extent to which it is used. Occupancy is worked out on the basis of the number of beds occupied by both domestic and foreign tourists. The rate is expressed in terms of percentage. The occupancy of accommodation is based on the data furnished by the hotel owners at the time of hotel survey conducted by the author.