



Globalization and Prospects of Cultural Tourism Industry in the Hills of Assam: The Case of Dima Hasao District.

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Abstract

Cultural tourism is the subset of tourism which is concerned with a traveller's engagement with the culture of geographical groups or distinct ethnic groups, specifically the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, the history of those people, their art, architecture, religion(s), and other elements that helped shape their way of life. The prospects of the development of the cultural tourism in Dima Hasao district is very high because of the fact that each and every tribe in the district have their distinctiveness in dialects, forms and patterns of family, marriage practices and procedures, indigenous religious practices, kinship systems, village self-governing institutions, economic activities, bachelors' dormitories, community festivals, colourful dresses and ornaments, art and artefacts, dance forms, music, songs and musical instruments. However, the role of indigenous tribes in the district for promoting tourism is not at all satisfactory for lack of trained personnel among them.

The aim of this paper is to focus on the prospects of cultural tourism in Dima Hasao district, the benefits of cultural tourism for the district and some suggestion for eradicating the problems on the way of developing the district into a tourist district. The analysis is based on secondary sources of information and personal observation.

Key Concepts: *Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Dima Hasao District*

Globalization has affected almost all aspects of our life like economy, technology, polity, culture, environment etc. And, it has left almost no society in the world untouched and led to varying interdependence. It can simply be defined as a process of the unification of the world as a result of extra ordinary advances in information and communication technology. Anthony Giddens (1990: 64) has described globalization as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'. This intensification involves a change in the way we understand geography and experience localness.

As well as offering opportunity it brings with considerable risks linked, for example, to technological change. More recently, Michael Mann has commented:

"... what is generally called globalization involved the extension of distinct relations of ideological, economic, military, and political power across the world. Concretely, in the period after 1945 this means the

diffusion of ideologies like liberalism and socialism, the spread of the capitalist mode of production, the extension of military striking ranges, and the extension of nation-states across the world, at first with two empires and then with just one surviving.” (Mann 2013: 11)

Globalization is a process which has implications not only for social, economic and cultural institutions of the developed countries but are also transforming the societies of the developing countries of world. But the patterns and direction of the changes brought about by the process varies from region to region. The policy makers of the developing countries who have adopted policy to privatize and liberalize their economy under the impact of globalization are facing challenges from the oppositions. And the academicians and the political forums of these countries are also coming out with the problems and prospects of the process of globalization.

According to Held et al. (1999:2) “globalization may be thought initially as the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual”. Globalization is the central driving force behind the major economic, cultural, social and political changes that are affecting virtually all the world’s people today. It is seen as the overall consequences of closely interlinked processes of change the areas of technology, economic activity, governance, communication and so on.

In this era of globalization, tourism industry has become the largest and fastest growing industry in terms of earnings and the number of people involved. What is tourism industry? It is **‘smokeless industry’** because it does not emit smokes like most other production sector industries. It is a **‘naturally renewable resource industry’** in the sense that the tourists do not consume the landscape, customs and the monuments etc. of the region concerned. It is **‘landscape industry’** which means that the geographical location of the area concerned naturally attracts the tourists. It is also a **‘problem free industry’** because it does not involve different steps of works like packaging, transportation and shipment of the products like other manufacturing industries. This industry is mainly composed of the following five allied industries:

1. **Attraction or beautification:** the name of which suggests the beautification of the tourists spots by making systemic arrangements of decoration and other facilities. This induces the tourists to visit the area.
2. **Transportation:** this involves the facilities of transport to the tourists’ spots like buses, taxis, auto rickshaws etc.
3. **Accommodation:** which involves the hotels, guest house etc?
4. **Supporting Facilities:** like shops, marts and restaurants.
5. **Infrastructures:** this involves the travel agencies which ensure the successful functioning of all the other components.

Because of the intensification of the worldwide social relations through globalization, people across the world has become curious enough to know about the culture of even the smallest ethnic groups with distinctive features. Those curious people are not satisfied by reading or by viewing in audio visual aids. They want to satisfy their curious mind by viewing the culture of the people physically and if allowed by learning and participating in

the culture of different ethnic groups in the globe. For this reason **cultural tourism** has become one of the most profitable branches of tourism industry in the world.

The term cultural tourism is used for journeys that include visits to cultural resources, regardless of whether it is tangible or intangible cultural resources, and regardless of the primary motivation. In simple words cultural tourism is the subset of tourism which is concerned with a traveller's engagement with the culture of geographical groups or distinct ethnic groups, specifically the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, the history of those people, their art, architecture, religion(s), and other elements that helped shape their way of life. Ain Hinsberg et al say, 'Cultural tourism means travel concerned with experiencing cultural environments, including landscapes, the visual and performing arts, and special (local) lifestyles, values, traditions, events as well as other ways of creative and inter-cultural exchange processes'. In the rural and tribal areas cultural tourism showcase the traditions of indigenous communities (their festivals, rituals etc.), their values and lifestyle as well as their unique creative products. Richard, G. (1996: 24) has defined cultural tourism as 'the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs'. Other concepts closely linked with cultural tourism are culture, tourism, cultural economy, cultural and tourism potentials, cultural and tourist offer, etc.

Cultural tourists generally spend substantially more time and resources than the other tourists. Framing policies for attracting cultural tourists is not only profitable from the economic point of view but from the point of view of cultural exchange for universal brotherhood. Therefore, leaving aside the conceptual part and keeping in view the development of Dima Hasao (one of the most backward districts of Assam) an attempt is made in this paper to highlight the prospects of the industry of cultural tourism in the hill district. The analysis is based on personal observation and secondary sources of information.

A brief Note on Dima Hasao District

Dima Hasao district is one of the two hills districts of Assam which enjoys the status of Autonomous District Council since 1952 under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. It lies approximately between Latitude $24^{\circ}54'$ and $26^{\circ}42'$ N and Longitude $92^{\circ}8'$ and $93^{\circ}53'$ E covering about 4888 sq. Km. The maximum and minimum temperature are 25.8° C and 5.3° C respectively. The average rainfall varies from 2200 to 2300 mm. On its east we find the states of Nagaland and Manipur, Cachar district of Assam on the south, Meghalaya state on the west and Nagaon and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam on the north.

Haflong is the district headquarters which is at an altitude of 3120 feet above the sea level and it sits on Sherkamma hills of Borail range. It is the only hill station of Assam in the real sense of the term. It is a cosmopolitan town with a panoramic view and moderate weather.

The district is full of hills whose ranges are Borail and from it sprang up other ranges viz.,

- i) Kharthong range from Dittockcherra to Umrangso,
- ii) Mahur, Gunjung and Dehangi range, and
- iii) Guilong, Haflong and Langting range.

The major rivers of the district are Diyung, Jatinga, Mahur and Langting. There are many hilly streams and tributaries of these major rivers of the district.

It has already been mentioned that the economy of the district is not good. Agriculture is the principal livelihood of the indigenous people of the district. They cultivate mostly paddy both in Jhum and wet paddy fields. The peculiar topography compels them to adopt Jhum cultivation. Barring a section of the Dimasa people who are doing wet cultivation, almost all the tribes are depending on shifting cultivation which is popularly known as Jhum Cultivation. Dimasa people as the very name means “Son of the river” live mostly in the locations down the hills by the side of any river or a stream. They practise wet land cultivation in the low lying lands between the ridges. Besides paddy, the people of Dima Hasao also cultivate maize, sesame, castor, ginger, chilly, gourd, pumpkin, brinjal and some other vegetables for their daily use. They also cultivate cotton, pineapples and orange by terracing the gentle hill slopes.

The road connectivity to reach the major towns of the district at present may be termed as good. The National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) has been constructing the four lane road under the East West Corridor project of the Govt of India. It goes to Silchar via Nagaon - Luming - Maibang - Jatinga - Harangajao. The construction of this road is completed up to Jatinga. The road between Lanka and Haflong via Diyungbra - Dehangi - Gunjung is also in good condition except in a few land slide areas. Heavy rainfall in the year 2022 led to land slide throughout the district. Most of the roads to the interior places of the district were damaged severely. However, the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council worked very hard to repair the roads on prime interest. At present, barring a few roads like Maibang - Semkhor road, most of the roads to the interior places and more particularly to the places of tourist importance are motorable.

The main tribes in the district are the Dimasas (the dominant group), the Zeme Nagas, the Hmars, the Kukis, the Biates, the Karbis, the Khasis (including the Jaintias or Pnars or Synthengs), the Hrangkhols, the Vaiveis, the Khelmas and the Rongmeis. And among the non-tribal groups are mostly government employees, traders and grazers living in urban as well as semi-urban areas of which the Bengali Hindus are the second largest group in the district.

The prospects of the development of the cultural tourism in the district is very high because of the fact that perhaps in India it is the smallest geographical periphery where a number of distinct ethnic group reside with inner harmony in the sphere of emotional integration. The different tribes colourful in their attires, customs and traditions, distinctive dialect have a common lingua franca called Haflong Hindi with peculiar overtones of phonetics for communicating among themselves and the outsiders. Moreover, the urban Dimasa, Zeme Naga, Karbi, Hmar, Hrangkhol, Kuki etc. understand Assamese, Bengali, Hindi and English and they can carry on conversation in these languages in their own styles.

The strategy for the development of the tourism industry in general and cultural tourism in particular may be one of the ways to bring forth economic development and eradicate backwardness of Dima Hasao. Because, we have to remember that this age is the age of globalization wherein the capitalists are looking greedily to the abundant resources of the district. Therefore every care will have to taken in formulating strategy of economic development. In this respect the warning given by V.P. Singh is very important which reads “The employment opportunities which have to be generated as a result of globalization, privatization and liberalization will demand highly qualified professionals. The demand for the reservation of jobs in private sector and unwillingness of the

private sector agencies to oblige the state is an indication of the weakening of the state in discharging the duty of a welfare state. Thus the globalization will marginalize the weaker sections and inefficient sections of the society in coming years. But, on the other hand if handled with care it can bring a good fortune for the developing societies and facilitate the fast growth of the economy and other institutions of the society by setting a new path of development” (Singh V.P.:2004).

Turning to the prospects of cultural tourism in Dima Hasao district it can be said that each and every tribe as mentioned earlier have their distinctiveness in dialects, forms and patterns of family, marriage practices and procedures, indigenous religious practices, kinship systems, village self governing institutions, economic activities, bachelors’ dormitories, community festivals, art and artefacts, dance forms, music, songs and musical instruments. The district still remains a field of research for a number of researches by linguistics, social scientists, anthropologists, etc. The following table comprising the tribes of the district, their major festivals, dance forms and time of celebration will help the cultural tourists to experience the colourful culture in the district.

Details of the Festivals of the tribes in Dima Hasao District

| Sl No | Name of Tribe | Name of the Festival | Name of the Dance(S) | Time of Celebration |
|-------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Dimasa | Busu | Baidima, Jaubani, Jaupinbani, Renginbani, Baichargi, Kunlubani etc | Last week of January |
| 2 | Zeme Naga | <u>Chagaa, Hega</u> <u>n'gi</u> , Mlei-Ngyi | Haripivelim, Johumpeselim, Kerapsaplim, Hakalim, Nbzchuinelim etc | Last week of December. March 10 for Melei-Ngyi |
| 3 | Hmar | Sikpuiroi and Butukhuluong | Chawnlam, Darlam, Partonlam etc | December / January |
| 4 | Karbi | Hacha Kekan | Hacha Kekan | December |
| 5 | Kuki | Chavangkut | Jangchalam, Molkanglam etc | November |
| 6 | Biate | Nulding Kut | Buantumlam, Kolrikhelam, Rikifacholam, etc | 11 th January |
| 7 | Hrangkhoh | Rual Safak | Soksolkirlam | 1 February |
| 8 | Rongmei Naga | Gaan Ngai | Tamchan Lam | December / January |
| 9 | Khasi-Pnar-Jaintias | Behdeinkhlam | Behdeinkhlam | Mid July |

| | | | | |
|----|---------|------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 10 | Vaiphei | Lawmkivak | Salu-lam, Saipikhupsukh, Pheiphit lam | After sowing seeds |
| 11 | Khelma | Parsem Kut | KA CHIN ALA | 11 April |

Why Cultural Tourism Industry in Dima Hasao?

Development of cultural tourism in Dima Hasao district is important for a number of reasons. They may be listed as follows:

1. Cultural tourism is important for this district for various reasons. It will have a positive economic and social impact as it will establish and reinforce identity of the tribal communities in the district. It will help build image and preserve the cultural and historical heritage. With culture as an instrument it will facilitate harmony and understanding among the people.

2. The economic and social impact of cultural tourism will be caused by the incomes created by the cultural tourism business and supporting businesses. There will be an increase in local production since the cultural tourism activities will strongly connected with other branches of economy. As cultural tourism is employment demanding, there will be an increase in employment in the area, as guests start participating and appreciating local culture.

3. Cultural tourism will lead to better overall infrastructure and living environment not only for tourists, but also for the tribes of the district.

4. Cultural tourism will help preserve the cultural and historical heritage. Tourism makes an important contribution to culture and historical heritage by providing means for keeping the traditions alive and finances the protection of heritage as well as increase visitor appreciation of that heritage. Tourism interest in the heritage site will be the key in providing political support for the management and protection of the heritage in question. Well-managed cultural tourism will encourage the revival of traditions and the restoration of sites and monuments.

5. In a world that is troubled by conflicts and xenophobia often based on misunderstandings, cultural tourism can facilitate cultural harmony and understanding among people. It is a two way understanding process. At the same time the tourists will learn the culture of the hosts and the hosts will also have some idea about the tourists who comes from a distinct group. More in-depth knowledge of other people's culture will stimulate understanding and a wish to cooperate. It promotes communication and integration.

6. Cultural tourism brings extra income to culture and is thus will be a very important supporting factor for culture of the tribes. The cultural tourists spend more money than the average tourist and travel for a longer time. As the increasing pace of life creates need for free time and preservation of past, cultural tourism will become a big business for the people in the district.

In spite of the high prospects of tourism industry in general and cultural tourism industry in particular, the district of Dima Hasao is not developed to a tourist district in the real sense of the term. It is so because of many endogenous and exogenous factors. For the development of tourism industry in Dima Hasao district, the following steps may help eradicating those factors.

1. The Central and the State governments must develop an action plan for development of tourism industry including the cultural tourism in the form of a development package for Dima Hasao alone. The whole project must be implemented by the Central government directly. For, the development of the district through the autonomous council since its inception in 1952 and the role of the state government in it is nothing but a bitter experience for the common people of the district.

2. To facilitate and encourage tourism the existing roads will have to be renovated and new roads to different beautiful and cultural sites will have to be constructed. The running of Broad Gauge trains and the Four lane road encourage the tourists to visit the district. But other roads are to be renovated and constructed so that the entire the district may be converted to tourist district. Only this will benefit the entire population of the district.

3. The educated mass of the district must come forward for the development of the industry. The local youth must get trained themselves for grabbing jobs in hospitality and management through different degree/diploma courses on tourism and management. Because without the involvement of local people the industry is a mere success. The concept of home stay and fruits of home stay should not be confined only to the urban people but it must be exposed to the village mass.

4. Lastly, the people of the district in general will have to insist upon the popular Hindu saying “Atithi Deboo Bhobo” (the guest is the God). Why do we worship gods and goddesses? Is it not for getting peace, progress and comfort in this life and in the life in the heavenly abode? Really speaking, the guests in the guise of tourists give incentives for the peace, progress and comfort to the hosts who are the owners and employees of hotels, shops, marts, restaurants, transports, travel agencies, tourist guides, workers in local artefacts and small scale industries.

In the conclusion it is claimed that tourism holds the key of economic development of this backward Dima Hasao district of Assam. From the last two consecutive terms of the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council under the leadership of Shri Debolal Gorlosa as the Chief Executive Member (CEM), great stress is laid on the development of tourism as an industry in the district. The tourist spots like Umrangso, Panimur, Haflong, Maibang, Jatinga Valley, Hajong, Khobak, etc are given new looks with road connectivity and beautification. In deed, Shri Gorlosa has incorporated beautification in any construction work. Number of beautiful statues of the legends are constructed in different places for reminding the local communities and the visitors about the glorious history of the Dimasas in particular. Still, much is yet to be done to develop tourism as the key for the development of the district. More particularly very less is done to develop cultural tourism which has tremendous scope for attracting the tourists. For bringing overall development of tourism in the district, the Central and the State government must allocate sufficient budget allocation to the autonomous council. But the policies or plans framed for tourism in the district must maintain equilibrium between economic and ecological aspects. The tourists should be attracted to wider areas and for a longer part of the year by the development of infrastructure and other facilities. Tourism should be made an integral part of any plan or programme framed by any government (whether Central, State or the Autonomous Council). The overall development of tourism and the allied industries will definitely provide a major source of income to the inhabiting backward tribes in the district and thereby upgrade the standard of living of the people.

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