

A Study on Interactive Tourism: Experiencing Local Ambience and Artifacts in Assam

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Hitesh Sharma

Roll number: 146105012

Under the Supervision of
Debkumar Chakrabarti, PhD



Department of Design

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

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Dedication

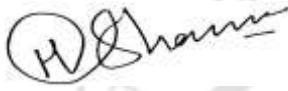
I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved father Sri. S. C. Sharma who took very good care of entire family despite my mother's very early journey to eternity and encouraged me to pursue higher studies.



Declaration Certificate

28 May 2021

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “A study of interactive tourism: experiencing local ambience and artifacts in Assam” being submitted in the partial fulfillment for the award of Ph.D. degree, is an authentic work of my research work carried out during the period from December 2014 to May 2021 in the Department of Design, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati under the supervision of Prof. Debkumar Chakrabarti. I have not submitted the thesis earlier for any other degree or diploma.



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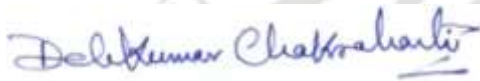


Supervisors Certificate

28 May 2021

The thesis entitled “A study of interactive tourism: experiencing local ambience and artifacts in Assam” presented herein by Mr. Hitesh Sharma (Roll No. 146105012) was undertaken under my supervision. The volume of work submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati has not been submitted by him earlier for any other degree or diploma.

He has undergone six specified courses and fulfilled all the requirements as mentioned in the rules and regulations for submitting the thesis for the Ph.D. degree of the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati.



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Abstract

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world and now days almost all strata of society have some association with it. Ample number of research regarding tourism impacts highlighted its effects on the host society of the visited place from the point of view of variations in economy, environment and sociocultural life. Tourism research has mostly neglected to examine tourism impacts on tourists about their likings. Friendly and interactive environment at the destination can affect the tourist positively and he will be able to develop deeper understanding about the place and the people that may contribute in developing belongingness with the ecosystem of destination. Such kinship may further enhance the chances of word to mouth publicity, referral, revisit, elongated stay etc. that is good for the destination from all aspects.

Interactivity in tourism (between tourists and local residents) could be introduced during accruing/experiencing memento as at that time tourist remains emotionally high and willing to contact persons around.

To study the interactive tourism a culturally rich destination Northeastern state of India Assam (Assam a Northeastern state of India) has been explored in this research. Despite its cultural treasure the destination is popular among tourist only for its religious and natural destinations. Select volunteered (purposive random) tourists visiting Assam for more than five days were inquired about tourist destinations and tangible form of culture the handicraft products that may become a preferred memento. It is found that those visited tourists are having very less idea about the destinations, people and performing culture of Assam and the key reason for this lack is identified as absence of interaction opportunity with the local people. (Enquiry of people of Assam staying/stayed in different states of India were also asked about cultural exposure of Assam's culture in fellow citizens of those states suggested similar trend of lack of knowledge.

Some efforts for popularizing cultural practices of Assam among incoming tourists are done at the entry points of the capital city Guwahati in form of cultural exhibits. Such displays were examined and found that these exhibits are missed out by the approaching tourist due to its location and placement. Online information availability explorations about the handicraft products of Assam as memento indicates information gap about wide spectrum of products with special design elements.

Purchase experiences among tourists of widely available silk products in the city center of Guwahati city suggests that it has a lot of issues related to furious service design that cannot be resolved at current location due to lack of space and involvement of multiple organizations. Other handicraft products that have potential of becoming popular memento have scattered shops throughout the city mostly known to the local people. Attempts were made to understand about different symbolic elements of popular culture of Assam so that uniqueness of these identity elements could give an opportunity to tourists for understanding, participation, observation, consumption and interaction.

Such (Handicraft) products (of Assam) are traditionally prepared at some specific villages so field visits were conducted to these ethnic villages to understand the

product verity, its preparation practice, producing artists and tourist preparedness of these villages. It is found that products are produced here with traditional producing practices; the artisans involved in producing these high-quality handicraft products are living very low life style and they are sailing these products to village entrepreneurs and sometimes sailing it themselves; tourism prospects are also not very encouraging here due to lack of touristic infrastructure, furious service design and language barrier.

Stakeholders of these villages were examined to know their aspirations from tourism development in their area and it is found that despite non availability of touristic infrastructure they have a lot of expectation from it as they believe via such act in close contact of tourists they could get admiration for their high skills and due price for their produce so that they and their upcoming generation continue performing the art form and protect it from becoming extinct.

Lack of information and interaction opportunity, improper display of exhibits at entry point, lack of information on the network availability, service design hails found at market place, lack of tourism preparedness at the villages and aspirations of stakeholders with tourism development initially at small group level leads to the idea of a centralized interactive/informative 'hub' with experience and sale activity having strong identity of Assam near city center networked with the traditional handicraft producing village stakeholders with noticeable promotional exhibits at entry points.

Scheme for the conceptualized interactive 'hub' may fit to address service design hails found in the Guwahati also at traditional handicraft producing village handicraft shops and presenting experience of cultural practices with possibility of inactivity. Concept of the 'hub' also gave opportunity to present information about Assam in the form of murals on the inner wall of the 'hub'. It is also proposed that the 'hub' will be networked with the stakeholders so that interested tourists could be facilitated with logistics and village level hospitality.

Further exploration were conducted about location of the 'hub' near the city center and it is found that congested capital city Guwahati is a hill locked city from all direction and located on the south river bank having very less possibility of space availability within it, on the other hand city extension North Guwahati located on the north bank with people practicing culture in its raw form, availability of many tourist interest spots, a lot of open area, clean sandy river bank that extends for several kilometers during surge of river, point of interest for expansion suggested by many leading researchers will be a good choice for the 'hub'.

As mall culture is expanding worldwide and these malls are lookalike in different city the proposed 'hub' should have strong association with the hosting state Assam. To attain this strong association with Assam elements sturdily connecting to the Assam were identified via visiting several heritage monuments of Assam. These identified elements were presented in front of a group of native people of Assam for validation. After validation some mock ups and ideation were explored via developing some schemes.

As reported in one of the research that tourist coming to Guwahati, on the way to explore popular tourist spots of Northeast, using the city as stop gap only and staying

here for a day or half, the proposed 'hub' will give tourist an option for passing a day or half with stay facility as elongated stay of the tourists is good for destinations economy.

During this elongated stay tourist may interact with actual local residences instead of specially trained profit oriented employees at the commercial establishments run by big corporate houses and government tourism department. And there would be a possibility of local residents becoming entrepreneur. During this interaction there would be high chances of cultural exploration and exchange, its appreciation and developing better understanding about the people of Northeast and other parts of India. Similar approach may also be tried out at other places of varied interests.



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Tourism viewing to local interaction

Chapter overview

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries and in tune to specific to look Northeast India focus on development, involving residents in tourist destination locations new possibilities may be addressed. Improved local residents' interaction with tourists it not only contributes in economic development, beyond this a content and enlighten tourist can contribute in building special image about the destination and motivate people to visit the place. This chapter accesses the possibilities and chalked out a plan that it is being studied in the present thesis work.

1.0 Introduction

The thesis work examines an interactive platform to improve social wellbeing visiting others and experiencing sharing identifiable cultural elements that are yet to get spotlight attraction. And towards this the present ambiance of tourism scope in a location in North-east India is being studied. Attempts were made to see the possibilities and support background whether prescribing a design solution is feasible to implement directly.

Look North East approach of Government of India has initiated many developmental steps emphasizing improved bondage between local residence and people of other parts of the country.

Tourists being attracted to beautiful flora and fauna, explores different tourist locations in Northeast. Guwahati is being used as its gateway because of its geographical location and the tourists used to spend one or one and half days here for its religious significance. The tourism facilities are provided here by government initiatives, NGOs, and in recent time established corporate houses are entering in this; yet the local ambiance to please the tourists' satisfaction seems not adequate. Visiting tourist-designated places does not provide good facility to interact with local people and sharing their culture and tradition.

Viewing to facilitate more close interaction with locals of Guwahati the current study being reported herein that was undertaken if memento buying experience can be an effective idea; memento buying can be an integral part of the visit as it memories about the wonderful experience of the trip. Handmade products of Assam are of unique nature and quality, and it is observed that Assam silk is one of the products people like very much. These products are available in city shops but it lacks in providing attractive buying experience to the visitors. Bamboo cane is the another interesting resource artifact seen to be suitable for tourism; and yet there are many things are there that can be explored as elements of improve tourist interest.

This led to an idea that if facility to make them visit to Sualkuchi, among many silk villages of Assam, located near Guwahati famous for its distinct silk products or facilitating its miniature replica in form of a silk promotion 'hub' in and around the city of Guwahati to have a better interaction experience and buying. Should these be a single product importance or multiple product experience facility be provided. Who will provide such facilities; what items can be displayed; when these facilities would be used as selling units or these also would provide hands – on experience of making, if this can be a designated 'hub' where normal selling buying and service relevant to common tourist destination be provided; what would be the 'invitation to my home' appeal and involvement of local residents' and artisans' of varied expertise; these issues are coming to fore and appear all important to think.

Also question comes how to promote this to tourists of far distance places. Can a multimedia awareness campaign for such experience-based tourism be conceptualized as a promotional approach as well as providing a physical platform to facilitate interaction?

This thesis work has looked into a possibility considering real life experimentation and suitably implementation that is expected towards facilitating harmonious interactivity among local residence and visitors of Assam in the background of Northeast feel, which following the similar path can be further explored in other parts

of country. The thesis deals with such ideas that include identifying content elements, skills, creativity, joy and efforts involved in memento creation, as visualized by stakeholders and local entrepreneurs viewing to improve interactive tourism through experiencing local residents' lifestyle and artifacts that can be used as mementoes by the tourists. The issues can be accessed with the thought prevailed and being practiced at present that can be used as supportive reference material while thinking on the possibilities and briefly these are discussed below.

1.1 Issues of Tourism impacts

Tourism, in other way to visit others, is one of the oldest phenomena of exchanging and sharing knowledge and skill between a location specific community and others. It exists globally from the ancient time but due to limited link between history and now tourism-research is considered as a new occurrence in academics (Rabotic, 2014). Humans age old desire for exploring distinct places, gathering new knowledge, exploring business opportunities, experiencing renowned cities, spirituality, leisure, participation in festivals, understanding ways of life and civilization was the main driving force for a person to visit different places located away from his regular place of stay. For many early years' tours were prerogative to merchants, scholars, elite class and leaders of society (Lickhorish & Jenkins, 1997). Long distance tours were mostly conducted through the sea route. Mentions of earliest travelers are widely found in the ancient literature and monuments (Rabotic, 2014). Lickhorish & Jenkins in 1997 further elaborates that tourism scenario remained unchanged for many initial years till seventeenth century when many developments happened in the society. Rapid growth and industrialization gradually increased the wealth among different strata of society that boosted the leisure activities. Some major developments like emergence of new technologies for fast and cost effective transportation, better road connectivity, availability of paid holidays for the employees in different sectors, and establishment of peaceful environment after the Second World War affected the tourism positively to become an industry of masses. Today tourism is one of the largest industries contributing in the area of economy and employment globally.

Movement of mass travelers for touristic purpose affected the society and environment in multiple dimensions. Many times it affected in encouraging way and sometimes in a discouraging way. The finding of the studies on tourism impacts on the society at the destination has mixed opinion. Various studies conducted on the residents found that they consider the overall impact as positive as tourism provides overall up-liftment especially in economy, infrastructure development and employment (Gretia et. al., 2015; Akis et al., 1996; Liu et. al., 1986; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996). Ward and Berno in year 2011, cited on the basis of social exchange theory that residents directly benefited by tourism has positive attitude towards it, as compare to the residents that are not economically benefitted by the tourism have less encouragement towards it (Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Kuvan & Akan, 2005). For studying these effects of tourism on the residence of tourist destinations researchers alienated these impacts broadly as economic, environmental and sociocultural (Garcia et. al. 2015). India remains a referred location of others since very long. And Northeast part provided an attraction with some mystic calling.

1.1.1 Tourism Impacts on Economy

Tourism is now one of the biggest contributors to economy and contributing drastically in the economy advancement and development. Travel and tourism is also one of the largest sectors that creates jobs, drives exports and generates prosperity across the world (WTTC 2018). Further the report states that the sector has contributed 10.4% of total global GDP and observed 4.6% growth which helped in creating 313 million jobs in year 2017 that was 9.9% of total employment. The projection of the report is also very encouraging as projected contribution by year 2028 is likely to be 11.7% in total GDP and likely to be 11.6% in employment. Tourism is playing a significant role in economy and employment around the world. Unprecedented growth of tourism is also affecting different stakeholders positively and negatively (Garcia et. al., 2015, Ko & Stewart, 2002). The positive economic impacts as mentioned earlier and further observed by many researchers including Liu and Var in year 1986, that the residents of tourist destination are having more opportunities for employment (Gilbert and Clark, 1997; Johnson et.al.,1994) due to increase in massive investment supporting local business. Further study of economic benefits by Haralambopoulos and Pizam in year 1996, and by other researchers in the area suggests that there is an increase in governmental revenue, income of the individual, quality of life (McCool and Martin, 1994; Perdue et. al., 1990) standard of living (Gilbert and Clark, 1997; Johnson et.al.,1994) and greater attitude towards work for the residents. Many other researchers observed development of local infrastructure (Belisle and Hoy, 1980), uplift in the destination maturity (Sheldon and Abenoja, 2001), and increase in leisure opportunities (Milman and Pizam, 1988).

In contrast to this some researchers throws light on negative economic impacts faced by the residence like increase in cost of commodities/services (Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996), cost of living (Liu and Var, 1986, McCool and Martin, 1994), more dependency on tourist season (Gretia et. al., 2015), less employment opportunities during off seasons (Garcia et. al., 2015), an increase in property value and housing prices (Garcia et. al., 2015), that sometimes making it unapproachable to the residents. Northeast India may be explored as the people here are most cordial and the above mentioned are not that affect negatively as it would be additional benefits to them. Thus facility to experience local hospitality can be looked into in and around Guwahati as it is considered as gate way to Northeast India.

1.1.2 Environmental Impacts

Researches on environmental effects on the tourist destination also have diverse views and found that the tourism assists in protecting the natural environment (Garcia et. al. 2015. Akis et al., 1996; Andereck et al., 2005, Liu & Var, 1986; Yoon et al., 2001), makes the city visually appealing (Garcia et. al. 2015.; Perdue et al., 1987); on the other hand, some researchers found residence of tourist destination worrying about the possible contamination to environment tourists may create (Garcia et. al. 2015, Johnson et al., 1994; Yoon et al., 2001), enormous congested destinations (Garcia et. al. 2015, Andereck et al., 2005; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Johnson et al., 1994; Yoon et al., 2001), and other short term and long term environmental effects like littering of the surroundings. North East India is seen as an eco-tourism destination and the negative environment impact cannot be ruled out; necessary look

into is required while taking any step for tourism developments, visitors as well as local residents both need to be careful.

1.1.3 Sociocultural Impacts

Tourism also has influence on sociocultural aspects of different stakeholders. There is no consensus among the social science researchers about sociocultural effects of tourism on residents, as many of them stress upon its favorable impacts but some of them advocate about its adverse impacts (Dogan, 1989). The encouraging side of tourism affects explored by some researchers suggests that an overall sense of wellbeing consisting material life, public life, health and safety increased in the residents of tourist destination (Kim et al., 2013). Also encouragement is observed in cultural activities (Garcia et. al., 2015; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Yoon et al., 2001); conservation of historical monuments and archaeological sites (Garcia et. al., 2015, Akis et al., 1996; Andereck et al., 2005; Yoon et al., 2001), strengthening pride for culture among the followers, reinforcement in cultural values system (Garcia et. al., 2015; Andereck et al., 2005), by promotion of the tourism. Some researchers studying about ill affects observed that tourism might cause various social problems like begging, gambling, drugs abuse, prostitution, increase in crime graph (Piuchan et. al., 2018; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Kim et al., 2013), which also needed to be addressed.

Many of the positive benefits for the community could be encouraged and negative aspects could be eradicated in tourism through proper planning, systematic promotion approach and encouraging community involvement at the level of planning and implementation, so that tourist visit in convenient environment (Besculides et. al., 2002, Armenski et. al. 2011). Socio culture tourisms positive effects may be one of the main contributor in establishment of domain cultural tourism that includes visiting historic or archaeological sites, being involved in community festivals, watching traditional dances or ceremonies, or merely shopping for handcrafted art. Many established studies have shown that this form of tourism can provide direct benefits to community residents who share their culture with the visiting tourists (McCombes, 2015).

Ample number of research regarding tourism impacts highlighted the effect of tourism on the host society but tourism research has mostly neglected to examine tourism impacts on tourists and tourism development at the destination they are visiting (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Sroyetch, 2016; Joo et al., 2019). Although study of tourism impact on tourist is logical and meaningful as it emotionally connects tourist to the destination and many popular destinations to which tourists are emotionally connected has observed increase in repeat visit by tourists (Sroyetch, 2016; Joo et al., 2019). This less explored area has a lot of potential as memories acquired during the trip and feelings developed about the destination is added advantage derived of holiday making (Prentice et. al., 1994). In long run it may contribute in establishing social contacts between visitors and hosts that is crucial for visitors' satisfaction and their intention to return again (Andereck et al., 2005, Carneiro & Euse bio, 2010, Pizam et al., 2000; Reisinger & Turner, 2003), and further it may contribute in suggesting about visiting the destination to friends and relatives by the enlighten tourists. One of the most important positive consequences of tourism is broadening of national as well as global peace and understanding, reducing

religious, racial and language barriers (McCombes, 2015), that tourists can carry forward. Positive views held of each other and close relationships between visitors and hosts are crucial for the sustainable development of the destination (Kastenholz, 2013). Varied cultural Northeast India can provide such scope if proper facility is created.

1.1.4 Emotional aspect of Tourism

Li et al. in year 2015, found that emotional aspects plays crucial role at different stages of the tourism. It contributes from the stage of tour planning, destination selection and remains till the tour completion and tourist satisfaction stage (Correia and Pinto, 2007), explained during tourism planning sequential decision are taken by the likely to be tourists, firstly at the emotional state of push from his place of regular stay; secondly probable destination that pulls to fulfill the desire. Further explored 'Expectancy Value Theory' that defines expectation as the probability that a certain attitude would lead to positive or negative benefits, also enables to allow the integration of the emotional components in tourist motivation. Positive emotions like joy and happiness are most prominent universal outcomes expected by the tourist through well laid tourism industry (Jordan, 2019). Emotions also contribute during tourist exploring shops of the visited destinations where tourist shoppers are able to examine, feel, and think about items even if shopping is not a major motive for travel (Meng & Xu, 2012), which is very relevant in today's Northeast India visitors.

Destinations should understand and exploit this emotional state of tourist while planning tourism promotion in order to get the added advantage.

1.1.5 Guest-Host interaction

Tourism provides a platform for meeting two populations, one of them is stable population who are residents in the very location and another generally want to explore less known and variable ones are the tourists (Bimonte, 2008). Interaction between tourist and residents' are mostly influenced on guests' and/or hosts' attitudes, opinions, and ultimately lifestyles (Sharpley, 2008). Quality of interaction and exchange of resources (Bimonte 2016; Bimonte & Punzo, 2007; Reisinger & Turner, 2002), also affects residents' perceptions against the satisfaction of tourism and tourists' willingness to pay (Bimonte & Punzo, 2011). Saxena in year 2006 had sighted (Altman and Taylor's, 1973), that social penetration theory which was developed in early seventies argues that 'relationships become deeper and more personal as interactions proceed and time passes such relationships are described as 'mega' relationships that are above financial relations.

Frank closer interaction lead to more noteworthy memory and significant experience of an unconventional destination (Kastenholz et. al., 2013; Cohen, 1979). Further in addition to interaction, shared beliefs and shared behavior between members of each group significantly forecasts persons' degree of emotional harmony with one another According to the emotional solidarity theory (Durkheim, 1912/1995), individuals' affective bonds with one another are enhanced as their interaction increases (Joo et al., 2019). Kastenholz et. al. in year 2013, in his research on Portuguese village found that very less superficial limited interaction happens mostly on streets, selling points of services/ products particularly on restaurants, less frequently on grocery shop or

other places. How these extremely fruitful interactions could be increased for achieving greater multidimensional goals like emotional solidarity, creating harmony, increasing revisit chances, prescription chance of the destination by visited tourists etc. in similar semi urban environment is a big challenge for tourist destination planners.

In case of Northeast and specifically the Guwahati, today as visibly Government has taken an inclination in this issue and many local residents are coming to fore; home stay and providing facility to inviting tourist to different new places. Now it needs to see if such approaches are perceived by visitors as well as by the residence service provider exposing culture and sharing each other's life style. Not only the already known and grown locations, country sides virgin landscape may also provide specific tourists attractions.

1.1.6 Souvenir as messenger

Souvenir carries and refers an abstract image of a series of pleasure experienced. The dictionary meaning of word souvenir is a thing that is kept as a reminder of a person, place, or event. During tourism activity tourists tend to obtain souvenir that function as reminders of their special time spent at the visited destination (Sthapit & Peter Bjork, 2019). Kong & Chang in year 2016, referred many researcher and found souvenir shopping as an indispensable tourist activity during tourism as a source of amusement and helps in forming travel experience. Gordon in year 2004, elaborated about peoples liking about the souvenir, it is a tangible object reminds them about their special movements and events.

Various types of souvenir mentioned by the Gordon that include pictorial images, piece of the rock, symbolic shorthand message, inscribed words associated with the place/time and local products. Traditional and locally made products are mostly preferred as mementoes. Shopping is a leisure activity but it also provides an opportunity for visitors to become exposed to the host culture (Meng Xu, 2012). G. Cetin and A. Bilgihan in year 2015, had sighted (Sims, 2009) that the tourist demand for traditional and local products can also be linked to the quest for authenticity.

Northeast India is a treasure house of artifacts of local origin that many of them remains un-noticed by the tourists and efforts to make aware with few known items are being made through various Governmental efforts and non-Governmental organizations (NGO) and gradually interest is building up. How the artisans of these items including other lesser-known artifacts directly can get entry in mass tourism development, may be looked into - so that, apart from selling-buying emotional aspect, interpersonal bondage between residents and visitors would also strengthen. A conscious effort in these issues may be looked into.

1.1.7 Tourism role in development of understanding diversity and harmony

Communities being remained separated from each other, probably due to communication lac and other social security issues, created their own distinctive culture and tradition. Now we talk about inter community harmony. Hence people should visit each other beyond his own native location's "Emotional Solidarity

framework” as described by Durkheim is widely accepted where he argued harmony is forged through individuals possessing similar beliefs and behaviors as a result of interacting with each other (Woosnam, 2011). Similar idea was explained by the contact theory that is based on the assumption that the attitude and behavior of groups or individuals can be changed through intercultural contact and interactions (Nyaupane et. al., 2008) and such contacts create an opportunity for mutual acquaintance and ultimately can enhance understanding and acceptance that in due course of time reduce inter-group prejudice, conflict and tension (Nyaupane, 2008). L. D’Amore in year 1988, elaborated that tourism can bridge the psychological and cultural gaps that exist among diverse group of people and it can contribute to the appreciation of the diversity in the world. Woosnam et. al., in year 2017, found in addition to interaction, shared beliefs and shared behavior between members of each group significantly forecasts persons’ degree of emotional harmony with one another. Thus newer means of bringing people close to each other needs to be explored.

In addition to the above it can be said that cultural and deeper understanding leads to bonding between people that could be achieved through interaction between stakeholders of tourism. It is also observed that in many destinations very less even though happens, superficial limited interaction happens mostly on streets, selling points of services/ products particularly on restaurants, less frequently on grocery shop or other places (Kastenholz et. al., 2013), despite having potential of achieving greater multidimensional goals like emotional solidarity, creating harmony, increasing revisit chances, prescription change of the destination by visited tourists etc. at tourist destination.

People of Assam and other northeast state while visiting other main land parts of India are sometimes facing acceptance issues. Among many preventive measures building, increased awareness about their culture could help in increasing acceptability of such culturally rich people (Bezbaruah M. P., 2014), by others those who are not aware of these population verities.

In other words, one of the two principal players in tourist host interactions, the tourist, is overlooked means what is there requirement; thereby limiting the extent to which residents’ perceptions about what to be prepared to invite and comfort them can be fully understood as part of an exchange process (Sharpley, 2014).

Present research is an attempt to explore a tourist destination that is rich in heritage, biodiversity and cultural resources but tourists are not able to connect to its native people and culture. Further in order to develop deep understanding and togetherness possibilities of increasing interaction between tourists and indigenous people needs to be explored. For study purposes a culturally rich state Assam, of one of the biggest culturally diverse area in Northeast India can be selected where signs of contemporary development are visibly coming up.

1.1.8 Assam and the Northeast region of India

India’s North East region is not only blessed with vast natural resources in its biodiversity and water wealth but also the region is vibrant in terms of history, culture and religion (Bhushan, 2005). During the independence of India from the British rule the region left two per cent contiguity with the rest of India through Siliguri corridor

(Balasubramanian, 2013), remaining 98% inhospitable international boundaries (Shukla Commission, 1997). During that time in 1948 NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency) was created and some part was separated from Assam. States of Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram were separated from greater Assam in 1963, 1972 and 1987 respectively (Kalita and Gogoi, 2015).

Till today, in whole North-east and in particular to Assam, tourists come for Natural recourses like world famous Kaziranga national park, fig. 1(a), unique animal species single horn Rhino, fig. 1 (b), huge lush green tea state, fig. 2(a) and famous pilgrimage Kamakhya temple, fig. 2(b), remained as major attractions. Guwahati the capital holding city of Assam is considered as a gateway to Northeast India as it is well connected with main land India through road, railways and air transportation. Tourism developed in these fields and wherever the new tourist destinations are being built up are in tune to corporate development and at the same time local involvement in building of home stay type of small resorts at outskirts of Guwahati, where local residents can visit along with their visitors for outing with brief stay facility are also seen recently. Residents' direct involvement are not seen as beneficial in tourism development by local guests whereas for overall local tourism development requires interaction with outside tourists. How local residents can involve in this, it requires to be studied.



Fig.1 (a) Kaziranga National park of Assam - an identity of natural tourism, (b) Single horn Rhino indigenous to Assam - special attraction in its own habitat



Fig.2 (a) Tea garden of Assam of Assam -possibility is being explored to induct in tourism map, (b) Famous Kamakhya temple of Assam

Assam is one prominent and most approachable state of the Northeastern region of India and known for its tea. It is a land of beautiful mountains, waterfalls, cheerful people (Bhusan, 2005). Along with the rolling hills the state is also blessed with the, dense forests, green valleys, large waterways and rich bio-diversity making it a paradise for the tourists (Kalita & Gogoi, 2015). Natural resources and scenic beauty of the state remains a place of interest from the centuries (Kalita & Gogoi, 2015). It

is mentioned as a melting pot for various cultures (Mishra, 2019), since ancient times Assam contained within in the Assamese cultures.

From the ancient times Assam was having trade ties with the neighboring provinces and countries like Burma, Tibet, China by mountain passes, land and water routes (Bijukumar, 2013). After the independence Assam has become gateway to North East India due to its landmass adjoining to the main land India (Mathur, 2011). Recently many people are exploring tea-tourism visiting tea production with stay facility in gardens. Thus not only pilgrimage and nature, the socio cultural showcasing is also taking part in recent trend in tourism development.

1.1.9 Socio cultural evolution of Assam

Culture is a combination of knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities acquired as a member of society (Matthew Johnson, 2013). Cultural evolution and ways of life in Assam is a unique fusion of various distinct recesses like Austro-Asiatic, Negritos, Dravidian, Alpines, Indo-Mongoloids, Tibetan-Burmese and Aryans, penetrated into Assam through different routes and different times (Kalita & Gogoi, 2015) and division of composite communities stayed together in undivided Assam. Gradual changes in geographical boundary after the India's independence affected in cultural segregation among separated population groups and urge for maintaining respective cultural identity also got momentum.

Choudhary in year 1953, in his detailed work states that the socio cultural history of Assam through epigraphs, literature and other available resources and mentioned about various contributors to the foundation of Assamese culture. Different recess like Alpine, Aryan and Tibeto-Burman contributed in development of heterogeneous socio-religious component of the culture. Religious life of people of Assam has historical collaboration of the preexisting ideas of Saktism and Tantricism of tribes with Alpine Aryan system of Hinduism. Social groups used have a common bond due to interdependence and dwelling together.

Liberal outlook of Hinduism prospered here that helped in adjoining different people from varied backgrounds. Over the period of time some royal family used to have some inclination towards allied arts that is visible in fine art of ancient period depicting portrayal of woman playing musical instruments and dancing etc.

When talking to dress and other decorative artifacts, ancient literature, epigraphy and sculptures depicts people of Assam wearing stitched (sucividham) and non-stitched cloths; males used to wear a loose piece of clothing wrapped tightly around the waist with folds on front of the body hanging down to just below knee called 'dhoti'; upper garment 'Uttariya' were specially wore by the higher class of society and special cloth on the head tied round the heads through a sheet round their shoulders were also worn by male of distinctive status, now that culture is not found in common and mostly it has become a festival or occasional wear.

On the other hand, women still today use girdle (Mekhla Chador) Fig. 3 (a), and girls also follow them fig. 3 (b). The dress is worn around the waist and upper garment usually ornamented with embroidery art depending upon the class. Material used for making such dyed using ink like lac and embodied clothes for different climatic

conditions are varieties of cotton, woolen, leather and silk i.e. Pat, Muga, Edi etc. All the required cloths and raw material were historically produced inside the house as almost every household used to have handloom. Existence of a special class of weaver was also found during that time and used to make cloths using all these type of materials.



(a) (b)
Fig. 3 Traditional dress of Assam for ladies (a) Women wearing Mekhla chador, (b) girls also following them

Artisan of Assam traditionally used to have special reputation in the subcontinent, masterpieces produced using materials like silk, cotton, gold, ivory, wood, leather, clay, cane and bamboo got appreciation for unique craftsmanship. Both male and female used to work here on loom Fig. 4. Along with clothing, mention of use of combs made of ivory or bamboo, vast variety jewelry made of different precious material like gold, silver etc. wore from head to foot, jeweled mirrors, perfumes and tilak (a mark red paste) on the forehead between the eyebrows indicated their marriage status as well as feminine grace were noticed in historical evidences and are still in use. Some luxury items like fan made of bamboo, cane and date palm tree; garlands; umbrella etc. were also used.



(a) (b)
Fig. 4 (a) a weaver showing her craftsmanship (b) man are also involved in weaving

Singing and dancing fig.5, was noticed being performed in Assam from the ancient time as stated by Chinese traveler Yuan Chwang. Singing was based on ragas and accompanied by large variety of musical instrument like reed flute (vahi), double pipe (kali), conch shell, drums, small drums (damru) and dancing took place during dramatic performance and religious ceremonies. Singing and dancing are integral part of Vaishnavism culture of Assam and known to great Vaishnavism saint of Assam Sri. Sankardeva, although he taught these art forms to his followers. ‘Gayana-Bayana’

(singing and instrument play) was a special class of musicians who used to perform religious music whose techniques were based on specific style of socio-religious music form namely Kirtana, Baragita, Namaghosa and other musical works of Vaishnava preachers. Sculptures refers to poses of dance and dancing. Beside Vaishnava dance form Bihu dance, fig. 5, depicting community celebration of joy related to good harvest is still a prominent part of Assamese folk culture, mostly locals, visitors are also welcome to participate.



Fig 5. Young boys and girls enjoying Bihu dance, where tourist may also participate

Rice being the staple food for the people, different combinations of rice flour, molasses, milk etc. are seen in use, especially at the time of festivals like Bihu. Drinks like rice-beer locally called 'Laopani' are prepared in home for consumption and various rituals and its heritage that is reported by Bahadur in year 1977, in his work Caste tribe and culture of India, Assam. Traces of consumption of unripe betel vine and unripe betel nut are found in epigraphy and literature which is unique to the Assam in entire subcontinent. Can these be included while exploring an approach to involve local residents in tourism?

1.1.10 Cultural practices of Assam a continuing journey inviting others to participate

The fusion of communities took place at different time periods in antiquity made Assam a home of different tribes, castes, language and religion. Assamese language is spoken by about twenty million people of Assam along with that forty-five languages are spoken by different communities including three major families: Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan and Indo European. Neo Vaishnavism introduced by Sri Sankardeva in Assam that was excisable to person of different caste and creed, created an atmosphere of tolerance and inclusiveness (Begum, 2016). Such vast cultural practices evolved over the period of time are still followed with enthusiasm and proud by all generations of people together. Fig. 6, presents few pictorial evidences and brief explanatory descriptions are provided in figure legends.

Many such installations are spread over in both banks of Brahmaputra, and remained unnoticed by tourists visiting Guwahati. These can also be included as components

of the approach for exploring newer tourist's locations. As the population comprises of plain-land dwellers and tribal specialties along with influence of other invaders makes visitors experiencing a mixed feeling of satisfaction.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)



(g)



(h)



(i)



(j)



(k)



(l)



Fig. 6 Assam cultural images (a) people of different age group singing traditional song together tourist may enjoy such live performance (b) Bihu performance only by women, female tourist may learn and join (c) picture depicting Assamese women going to collect water for special occasion creating a gorgeous environment (d) a group of Missing group in their dress having special design and motifs related to them tourist may admire the special design (e) a dance performance using Japi creating a divine atmosphere (f) Huchari group getting ready to bless the people by singing special songs tourist may take their blessings (g) A traditional pot used for offering Tamul Paan (unripe betel nut and betel vine) (h) verity of bamboo products available on Bihu product shop (i) special mask making performed in Assam (j) gold smith making jewelry with unique design (k) crafts man making a bell metal product (l) weaver making some traditional cloth (m) Jalpan (breakfast) served in traditional style (n) a unique way of serving on biodegradable plates made up of banana bark (o) entrance of a Namghar (prayer house) (p) big temple of lord Shiva located at Sibsagar (q) Rongali Bihu ends with special prayer around an auspicious tree related to the festival

1.2 Problem statement

Assam is gifted with a lot of natural and cultural resources despite hosting such a huge cultural diversity the state is stated as paradise unexplored by some leading researchers, due to its lacuna in attracting tourist to its full potential (Sarma, 2008). Many reasons for such tourist shortfall are studied over period of time by the policy makers i.e. its remoteness, a sense of perceived insecurity, insurgency issues, unconstructive publicity of the place etc. (Das & Shukla, 2013). Many attempts were also being made to overcome these gaps from time to time. The issue is addressed recently in a more systematic and planned way through tourism policy of Assam (2017) that insist to utilize its resources to its full extent in an economically way through increasing the tourist inflow.

New ventures such as Cruises, Ethnic Tourism, Tea & Golf, leisure Tourism, Transit Tourism, Adventure Tourism and Monsoon Tourism are explored to give tourists more options and to lengthen tourist stay in the state, as elongated tourists stay is beneficial for the tourist destinations (Kalantzi et. al., 2017). During this additional

time, tourist may have an opportunity to develop deeper understanding about the people, their ways of life. Such understanding about the people and culture of Assam is found very much missing when a pilot study prior to go to main idea generation phase was conducted among 60 randomly selected tourists visited the state in different times of year.

Most of the literature on tourism is about residents' perceptions on tourism impacts on them, while the tourist is overlooked (Bimonte & Punjo, 2016). Interaction is must for developing belonging-ness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) weightage in the researches requires for appropriate strategy options. Interaction opportunity with residents is missing while traveling culturally rich state Assam (pilot study mentioned above). Rural development project with aim to establish a replicable model tourist village managed by the local community for economic up-liftment was initiated (Kalita, 2010), but the project is not taken well by the tourist as distance from city center and security is a key concern for the tourists while traveling beyond the city area in Assam.

Acquiring souvenir is an integral part of tourism visit. It's a very emotional decision on part of tourists, as the experience deals with aesthetics where tourist shoppers are able to observe, feel and think about items even if shopping is not a principal reason for their travel (Snepengeret, et. al., 2003). Assam and as a whole Northeast India has experienced socio political disturbances and recently attempts are being taken by various means and methods to bring the situation to normal. In the time when Assam situation is gradually coming to be stable it is the best time to initiate interaction opportunity between the tourists and the native people as the tourists remains in an enlighten state of mind during acquisition of souvenir. Tangible form of Assam culture i.e. handicraft products of Assam, as means of tourism promotion was explored by some researchers (Sarma, 2008), but there is dearth in research related creating interaction opportunity using such tangible form of culture for developing deeper understanding and cordial relationship between tourist and stakeholders.

People of Assam are very happy to showcase their culture and appreciate of someone follows it, that can be seen in two recent incidents when in 2019 an astronaut Mr. Mike Fincke took Gamucha to space station fig. 7(a), it become a big headline in the Assamese newspaper and news channel. Similarly use of Gamucha by Prime Minister of India always give pleasure to the people of Assam,7(b). Another incidence took Assamese media attention when during Indian cricket league one bowler Jofra Archer celebrated after taken a wicket by dancing Bihu dance of Assam, fig. 7 (c).



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig: 7 Assamese culture followed by others (a) felicitation of Mike Fincke Took Assamese Gamucha to space station (b) PM of India using Assamese Gamucha in public life (c) appreciation throughout the Assam received by Jofra Archer for dancing Bihu during a cricket match

Some efforts for popularizing culture of Assam took place, fig. 8, recently with Government efforts. Exhibition to showcase Assam culture from time to time through organizing events and exhibition at ‘Delhi hat’, in New Delhi, fig 8(a), Sankardev Kalashetra in Guwahati fig 8(b) to showcase Assam culture from time to time through organizing events and exhibitions, and rural tourism project Sualkuchi 15KM East of Guwahati on north bank of Brahmaputra, fig. 8(c). These efforts are well taken by the people of Assam but tourist appear not motivated about it due to various reasons not adequate to invite.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig: 8 Cultural demonstration efforts (a) Assam stall at “Delhi hat” in New Delhi (b) Sankardev Kalashetra Guwahati (c) rural tourism facility at Sualkuchi near Guwahati waiting for visitors

Many festivals are organized time to time for attracting tourist to the rural destinations of Assam, fig. 8 but such festivals are mostly joined by the residents and missed out by the tourists of other regions due to information lack etc. Such festivals have scope for better planning and implementation.



Fig: 9 Eco tourism festival organized near Guwahati city

For promotion of culture of Assam some festivals are organized in Guwahati city for small durations demonstrating culture and products of Assam. Such festivals are mostly visited by the locals, most of the handicraft shops remains without customers even during the peak hours fig. 9, on the other hand tourists are looking for such events, fig. 10, but misses due to unavailability of tourist calendar and visible awareness drive. A long-term approach may be required so that tourist may enjoy festivity throughout the year.



Fig: 10 Various initiatives for promotion of culture and products (a) Northeast cultural festival (b) Saras fair to market rural products of Assam (c) Khadi shop at a festival (d) shop selling multiple hand made products (e) handloom product shop at Saras fair (f) handloom product shop at NE cultural fair

1.3 Research gap

Tourism provides a meeting platform for two populations: residents- the stable population and tourists-a variable one (Bimonte, 2008). The residents of a tourist destination ponder about income, exposure, marketing, product development, etc. (Garcia et al., 2015). On the contrary, tourists are looking for activity, value for money, connectivity, information, seamlessness, etc. (Bulhalis and O’Connor, 2005) for optimum utilization of their lazier time and make their travel memorable and unique. In the context of tourism, both the populations are impacted by each other either positively or negatively (Ko and Stewart, 2002). Researchers have classified these impacts into three broad categories: economic impacts, environmental impacts, and socio-cultural impacts (Jurowski and Gursoy, 2004). A lot of reported researches are available on the consequences of tourism on the locals or residents. It would not be overstated that there is a shortage of research about the effects of tourism on the tourists (Bimonte & Punjo, 2016; Sroyetch, 2016; Joo et al., 2019), and their interaction with the residents of the tourism sites. Generally, residents of a particular place have some unique cultural heritage in tangible and intangible forms, and they practice their traditions through arts, crafts, foods, festivals, etc. There is a lack of research exploring the cultural heritage of a particular place as the medium of interaction between tourists and locals. It could also be interesting to study the influence of such interactions in developing belongingness and invoking more extended stays by the tourists. Design researchers have the scope to investigate how to facilitate these interactions between tourists and residents that can impart long-lasting memories in tourists’ minds and could be instrumental for referral/visit (Ryan, 2010).

Hence, in the present research, the researcher has planned to study the less-explored issues of tourism, which are crucial for facilitating local resident-tourist interactions as depicted through schematic diagram (Fig. 11). Prominent tourist destinations in the north-eastern state of Assam, India, have been taken as case studies.

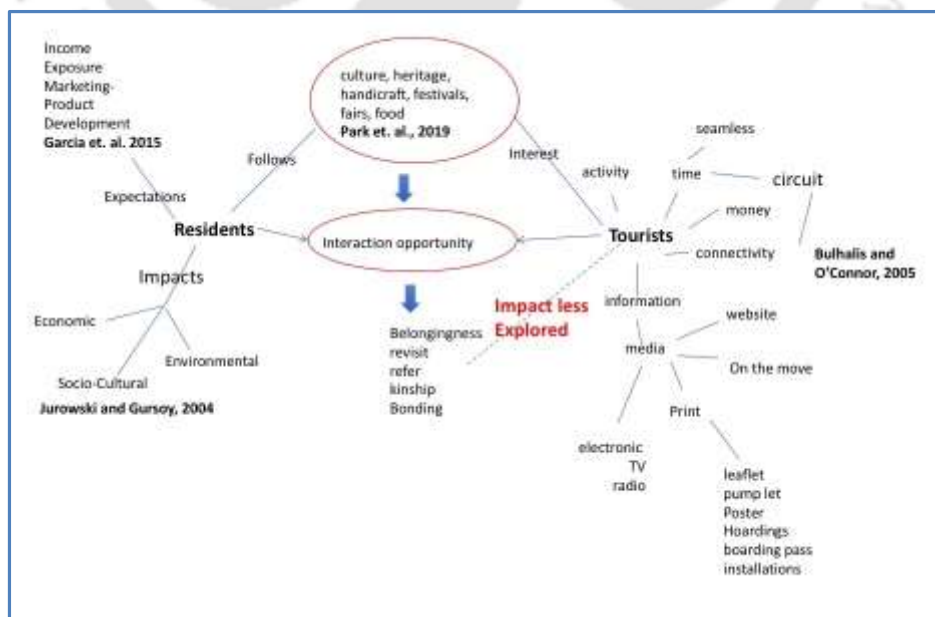


Fig. 11 Semic diagrams showing the research scenario

1.4 Research Questions

With the above understanding few questions come to fore and how these can be addressed? These may be summarized as below:

- What items can be chosen and how these can be exploited in today's contest of "make in India" era and go global with interpersonal community interaction ensuring quality life of mutual respect?
- If artifacts are representing Assam culture what would be the information status about the handicraft products of Assam among the tourists?
- How would be the tourist experience while purchasing memento from Assam?
- How does the cultural heritage of a particular place impact the tourism experience of the tourists?
- What would be the state of handicraft producing villages in the Assam from touristic point of view; can it be visited easily?
- What would be the aspirations of artist and other stakeholders in such villages of Assam?
- What could be the possibilities of presenting handicraft products of Assam as memento in informal, informative, and memorable way among the tourists to promote interaction between residents and tourists?

1.5 Hypothesis

If a shopping cluster type of facility center, favoring Assam cultural ambiance, is created in a location outskirts of Guwahati, easy to visit by the tourists, where showcasing varied handicraft products along with provision to know the production systems that is normally followed in actual sites, may draw visitors who have less time for shop hopping in city market place, would create a micro-tourism interaction between natives and tourists.

1.6 Aim and objectives

Aim

The study aims at exploring possibilities of popularizing handicraft products of Assam as a memento and cultural messenger among tourists in an interactive environment between tourists and residents for developing cordial relationship between both the stakeholders.

Objectives

The study focused specific objectives to look into;

- To understand tourist experience while purchase of widely available unique local handicraft produces as memento from Assam
- To explore the handicraft producing processes in Assam if these can become tourist interest to enhance root level interaction between residents and tourists
- Possibility of design intervention for a system that can present handicraft products of Assam and its producing villages in informative, informal and memorable way among the tourists for developing affinity with the residents through interaction.

1.7 Study design

An approach of qualitative biased study was undertaken during the thesis work. Study design consists of two main components survey and exploration, fig. 12. Primarily survey is planned to know the information availability about the Assam and bonding status with the people of Assam among the tourist already visited Assam. As the travelers are talking with local population during memento buying mostly so visit is planned to the memento market of the most significant capital city of Assam. Traditional village visits are planned to understand the artifact memento creation and views of people involved with it so that some explorations can be done considering interaction opportunity between tourist and residents.

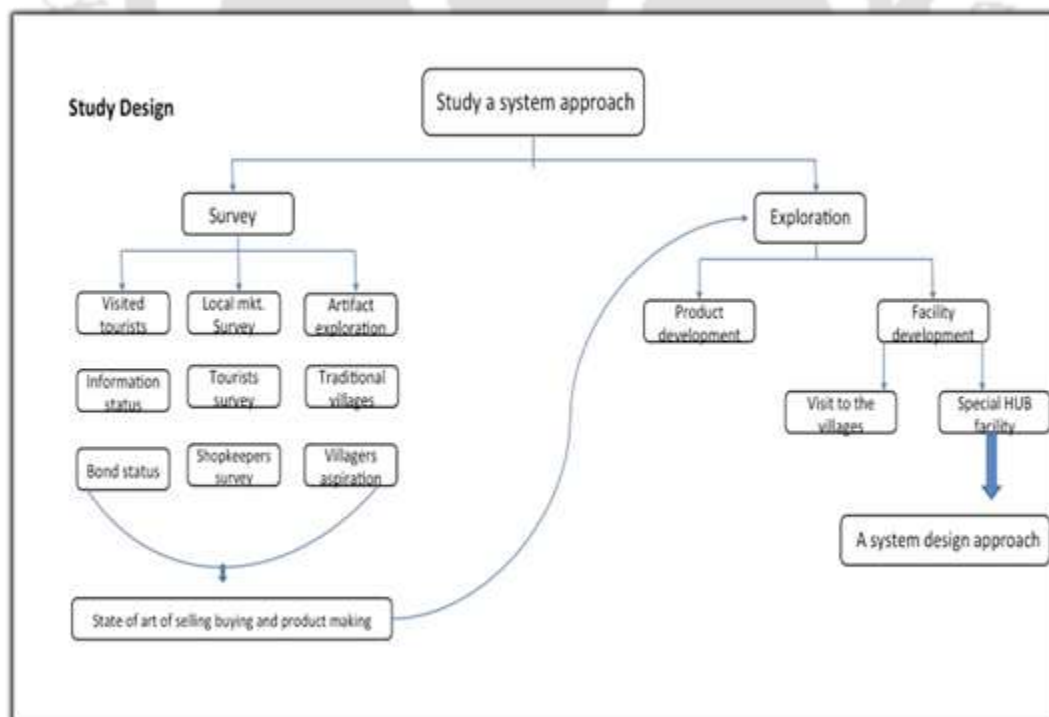


Fig. 12 Entire Study design explained

1.8 Organization of thesis

Ways and means of popularizing handicraft products of Assam in an interactive environment between tourist and residents in order to develop cordial relationship between both the stakeholders and offering a network system design has been looked into during the thesis work, and the effort and outcome has been presented in five chapter documents; chapter briefs are as below.

Chapter 1: Introduction- Tourism viewing to local interaction

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries and in tune to specific to look Northeast India focus on development, involving residents in tourist destination locations new possibilities may be addressed. Improved local residents' interaction with tourists it not only contributes in economic development, beyond this a content and enlighten tourist can contribute in building special image about the destination and motivate people to visit the place. This chapter accesses the possibilities and chalked out a plan that it is being studied in the present thesis work.

Chapter 2: Service design prevalence of handicraft products as popular memento among the tourists visit Assam

This chapter explores the background possibility of improving interaction among local residence and tourists through sharing culture and tradition prevailed in Assam. Qualitative assessment was made to see the elements/items that are in practice in Assam and be used as interaction elements and memorable memento opportunity.

Chapter 3: Determining developmental aspirations by stakeholders

Qualitative assessment of elements likely to influence the tourism status of the traditional handicraft producing villages of Assam was conducted and it was decided to explore views and aspirations of various stakeholders relevant to tourism development in their areas of expertise. This chapter looks into the possibilities of introducing village artisans in tourism viewing sustainability of their trades and improved interaction with others.

Chapter 4: Exploring possibility of tourists' interaction facility centres with artisans

Unique design of traditional handicraft of Assam have a lot of opportunity to catch tourist attention while service design of city based shops lacks in interaction opportunity with artisans and traditional producing villages of Assam are not prepared for large-scale tourism activity. This tends to look into tourism promotion conceptualizing interaction facility center convenient to demonstration cum sale place with skill demonstration of making of the handicraft products in an informative,

interactive environment and appropriate service design for these traditional products at a close distance from main the city where tourists can visit comfortably. The proposed 'hub' could be networked with stakeholders of artifact producing villages so that it could also work as a facilitator for the tourists who want to visit these producing villages.

Chapter 5: General Discussion and Conclusion

The chapter summarises the qualitative diagnostic approach taken to get an idea on improved interaction between tourists and local residents, exploring the possible means and methods through sharing traditional artefacts, skills and culture. Findings are discussed here in brief followed by concluding remarks and limitations of the study and further scope.



CHAPTER 2

Service design prevalence of handicraft products as popular memento among the tourists visiting Assam

Chapter overview

This chapter explores the background possibility of improving interaction among local residence and tourists through sharing culture and tradition prevailed in Assam. Qualitative assessment was made to see the elements/items that are in practice in Assam and be used as interaction elements and memorable memento opportunity.



2.0 Introduction

Assam is well-known as a heritage of composite culture with plain landers tribe and neighboring invaders from the ancient times. The cultural richness of the state can be seen in the practices and products here. Despite hosting such cultural diversity the state is mentioned as an unexplored paradise of India by some researchers (Sarma, 2005). Most of the tourists visiting Assam are missing such rich culture and fascinating people, as their priorities mostly are religious and natural destinations of Assam and they don't have enough knowledge about such cultural richness.

Although agriculture is primary occupation of the most of the people in the state, along with it almost every household in this region is practicing some form of utility art and craft in their houses. Almost every administrative district of Assam is having something heavenly craft diversities to offer to tourists that require appropriate reinvention, attention and exposure (Kalita & Gogoi, 2015). Mention of craftworks of Assam is found in Indian epic Mahabharata, Ramayana and various writings of philosophers/scholars visited Assam from ancient time.

In Mahabharata there is a mention of some of the products from this region gifted to the Indian mythological king Yudhisthira i.e. fleet houses, utensils of jade (*Asmasaramaya bhanda*); swords with hilts of white ivory (*Suddhadantatsarun asin, Sabha*). This means that through mentioning there the products, various forms of art and craft items was very developed in Assam during that period (Dasgupta, 1998). The region created a unique identity due to its exclusive silk products and mentioned as Suvarnakanakanan (the golden silk producing province) in the same epic (Mahan, 2012). Dasgupta in 1998, further reported about mention of the prominence of Assamese textile in the biography of renowned Indian emperor Harshwardhan, Harscharitra written by famous Sanskrit poet of that era Banabhatta.

In recent time period European Traveler Jean Joseph Tavernier in 1662 wrote about good quality Assam silk. Every woman of Assam is a born weaver (Chakravarty, 2015). Girls not having any idea of some form of craft mostly weaving considered as misfit for marriage (Phukan, 2012). Many prominent handicrafts specially Assam Silk got patronage of Ahom rulers also and flourished further as sericulture was made obligatory household work (Mahan, 2012). All the four varieties of natural silk i.e. Eri (also called Endi), Muga, Pat (mulberry) and Tussar are produced in Assam (Baruah, 2016), among these Eri and Muga Silk are considered to be of indigenous origin (Chakravorty et al., 2007).

Naturally yellow colored Muga silk got a geographical indication tag for the Assam. This verity of silk has extreme durability and its luster increases after every wash. It has some medicinal value also as it attracts ultraviolet rays and protects skin from its harm (Geog. Indi., 2017). Assam silk products looks like a piece of art that weaved by master craftsmen traditionally with abstract figures of animals, birds, human forms, creepers, flowers, diamonds, etc. (Chakravorty et. al., 2010). For promotion of these specialty silk products department of handloom has organized 49 district level fairs, 22 Special Handloom Expos and 5 National Handloom Expo in the State during the year 2009-10 (Roy, 2013). Purchase of silk items is also done during the trip (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988) by the tourist visiting Assam to keep it as treasure memento.

Along with weaving, other handicrafts like jewelry making, brass metal work, bell metal work, pottery, terracotta, ivory, cane and bamboo are practiced in Assam traditionally (Gogoi, 2012), and have a lot of influence on the life of people of Assam daily utility & wear as well as festival additions. Due to wide presence of such rich age-old tradition of art and craft practices of Northeast India some researchers also referred this region as “craft-haven” (Sarma, 2005). There are special places in the region famous for a particular craft association, like village Sualkuchi for handloom products made of Muga silk, Hajo for brass metal work, Sarthebari for bell metal work etc. All these may be explored to attract/draw tourists.

Mentioning of some specialty artworks performed here is found in various epics and scripts written by visitors of the ancient period. In contemporary period tourists are having very less information about this, whereas various local art industry and artisans may attract tourists to these locations and encourage them to buy their artifacts. Detailed information about the destination, ways of life around it, historical background, cultural heritage can play very curtail role in tourist planning a visit (UN report, 1999); how cultural resources of Assam can attract tourists in better way that needs to be explored. For understanding current status of cultural awareness particularly about the traditional handicraft products of Assam among the visited tourists to the state and also status of their contact with such culturally rich local people needs to be understood.

A lot of youngsters of Assam are traveling to main land India for education and employment. During their stay in different parts of country they used to associate with people of other parts of India. An exploration about the cultural awareness about Assam to the fellow Indian citizens of other parts of India is also getting acquainted through such persons migrated from Assam.

In order to give first look about cultural practices of Assam to the visitors entering the state through capital city Guwahati, some exhibits of local handicrafts and performing arts are seen installed at entry points of airport and railway station. Effectiveness of such installations and other awareness campaign can be studied.

Shopping remains as an integral part of tourism activity. Researchers found that a good amount of tourism budget of the visitors i.e. 24.5% of expenditure made by foreign tourist and 14% of expenditure by domestic tourist goes in shopping. Shopping is gaining importance for tourism in terms of actual consumption of goods purchased, and as a source of enjoyment and satisfaction (Tosun et. al., 2007). In touristic shopping clothing, souvenirs, artworks and handicrafts are purchased as reminders and mementos of travel experiences (Timothy & Butler, 1995, Timothy, 2005). Such purchase trend not only contributes to the market around but also promotes local available products (Lickorish & Jenkins, 1997).

New age tourists used to gather information from the online resources; the products purchased gives satisfaction of proud possess. Tourist to Assam may search about locally available handicraft products on internet as shopping is considered as one of the most pervasive leisure activities engaged in by the tourists during the tour (Snepenger et. al., 2003) and they tend to prefer locally available handicraft products.

What is the common perception of products availability and ease of acquiring the same during the tour time and what are the products and traditional elements can influence were studied?

2.1 Objectives

Basic objective of this part of the study was to understand the status of cultural/traditional elements that can have potential to draw tourists' attention in addition to popular tourism scenario in Assam that people are well known.

2.2 Survey Planning

A survey was conducted among the tourist-visited Assam to seek information about tourist spot of the state; awareness status of tangible form of culture i.e. handicraft products of Assam and mingling with the people of Assam during the trip. The outcome of the pilot study suggests that most of the participants consider entire Northeast India as cohesively. Information about tangible culture and contact with local people also reported negligible that hinders in developing bonding with the local people. Some of the participant came to know about local handicraft products on arrival mostly through friends or people involved in tourist service sector. Inappropriate opportunity of interaction with local people and culture were also reported

Exploration about the information exhibition about the culture of Assam at different entry points of prominent city Guwahati of the state suggests, that are overlooked by the visitors due to improper placement and heavy rush at the entry points.

Online information about the art-fed of Assam on widely used search engines is also found inappropriate.

Further explorations of purchase experience of widely available handcrafted silk products of Assam among the tourists were conducted in the main city center market area Panbazar of Guwahati city. The findings indicate towards improper service design at the shops and tourist doesn't find the shops welcoming that undesirably effects any possible interaction.

Further surveys were conducted to explore other symbolic elements of popular culture of Assam from tourism point of view. The survey indicates a lot of cultural depth in the state that may be of tourist interest but not reported by the most of the tourists already visited tourists, may be due to lack of information/ visibility of the local culture. It is observed that a lot of other handicraft products are traditionally produced in the Assam and some villages are conventionally known for some specific products verity. Such products are having possibility of becoming popular among the tourists as memento but lack of tourism infrastructure; furious service design of shops and language barrier (as most of the people are able to speak only local languages) is found at the villages that hinder the tourist movement at the villages. Scope for interaction is also very low as the craftsmen's are distributed in different helmets of the village and proper arrangements for guiding the tourists are not in place.

Cultural tourism is gaining popularity now days as tourist are attracted towards diverse cultural at the visited destinations. In order to understand this surveys were conducted to explore other symbolic elements of popular culture of Assam that may be presented to the visited tourists with opportunity of interaction and mingling with local people. The survey explored the popular elements of the culture of Assam that are unique to the state and represents cultural depth in the state that may be of tourist interest but not reported by the most of the already visited tourists, may be due to lack of information/visibility. Along with other cultural elements other handicraft products that are traditionally produced in the Assam were explored at the traditionally producing villages that are typically known for some specific products verity. As such products could be considered by the tourist as preferred memento. Tourism infrastructure, service design at village handicraft shops and scope for interaction opportunity with the local people is also observed at these villages.

2.2.1 Method

To collect the varied information towards a single goal the research was divided into following six stages comprising in sections.

Section 1: Investigation about the awareness status and mingling with local people among groups of already visited tourists.

The section is an exploratory one where already visited tourists (purposive random selection) to Assam were explored to know about their information on tourist spots of Assam, preferred memento and mingling with local people. An open ended questioner was asked to them regarding their suggestions to upcoming tourists.

Section 2: Experience of people of Assam stayed in other parts of India

A lot of persons from Assam are going to main land India for education and employment purpose. Interviews were conducted among such persons (purposive random selection) to know their experience with fellow citizens of other parts of India about the key destinations, culture and practices of Assam.

Section 3: Study on the information exhibition about the culture of Assam at widely used entry points

Observations were noted at the entry points of capital city Guwahati i.e. arrival area of Guwahati railway station and Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (in short LGBI airport).

Section 4: Online information about the artifact of Assam

As internet is widely used for gathering information and Google is the most preferred search engine, observations were conducted on this search engine with key words 'Artifact of Assam' as artifact items are uploaded that when searched these appear that can be said mostly informative to tourist as memento.

Section 5: Tourists experience on prevailed facilities for shopping

On advice of persons involved in hospitality business and shopping centers to know what was the tourists tend to visit cluster of shops located mostly at city center market area, like Panbazar of Guwahati city. Their shopping experiences about service design were understood through interview, simultaneously shopkeepers and their staffs were inquired about tourist buyers need and experience. Personal observations were also documented to know the facts.

Section 6: Exploring symbolic elements of popular culture of Assam from tourism point of view

Attempts were made to understand about various symbolic elements of popular culture of Assam so that uniqueness of these identity elements could give an opportunity to tourists for understanding, participation, observation, consumption and interaction.

2.2.2 Selection of participants'/ study location

For section one all of the participants were selected with the specific criteria considering the information required; purposive random selection was considered. The criteria were kept as each participant must be stayed in Assam for more than five days, as five days is a good time to understanding the local people and their practices. Most of the contacted participants were having some association with Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, an institute of national importance located in Guwahati. The institute accommodates more than five thousand students/staff from the states of India other than northeastern states and also from many parts of the world. The participants used to stay in Assam for visiting their relatives in campus, exploring the state/ Northeast India and participating in various institute events. Total numbers of 60 participants were contacted. All the participants were native of other than northeastern states of India. Demography data suggests that among the sixty numbers of participants, 32 were male and 28 were female participants between age group of 18 to 55 years and representing different strata of society due to their varied nature of occupations.

For section two twenty-four number of participants was selected through personal contacts and with the help of some friends. Among these fifteen participants 8 were female and 16 were male between the age group of 18 to 65 years. Their occupation ranged from students to working professionals. Some of the participants were married with native of migrated state and settled their permanently. On the other hand, some of them were studying there or came back from main land India after completing their studies and other assignments.

Location for section three observation on information exhibition about culture of Assam two spots were selected as arrival entry points of prominent Guwahati city i.e. Guwahati Junction railway station and LGBI airport, to know the inviting gestures presented their in.

For section four of the study popular search engine Google was explored for understanding online information availability about handicraft products of Assam

with key words “artifact of Assam” as tourists may search online about such products as mementos. Top seven results were considered as it’s a good number for gathering information from hand held device i.e. cell phone of 5-inch screen size that is noticed as common handheld device normally used by such people.

To understand the facility of memento buying of silk products of Assam available tourist participants were selected from the multiple visit to the market area at evening time as tourists usually visit market place at this time after exploring their key interest destinations. Shopkeepers were also contacted to understand them and their experiences with the tourists.

Assam is culturally rich state and huge varieties of societies are staying here with unity and harmony. With a lot of diversities, a popular culture is widely visible here that is also claimed by the government of Assam. At preliminary level and for general tourists these popular cultural elements may be of tourist interest and may provide an opportunity to visitors to understand, participate and interact with local people. Among these elements some tangible form of culture i.e. handicraft products of Assam may also be considered by the visiting tourist as memento. Such products are traditionally prepared in some villages spread throughout the Assam. Visits of these villages were conducted to gather deep knowledge about such products and interaction opportunities with it and at Guwahati two established showrooms situated in Ambari location were also visited to know the buyers’ behavior by observation without asking them any specific question. The observations were based on Panbazar regular shopping area as tourists prefer market place visit than a compact showroom as in Ambari.

2.2.3 Execution of survey

The survey with the tourists was executed at the guesthouse of the IIT Guwahati throughout the year, between 2017-2020 along with that other participants were personally contacted over phone and internet means.

Participants staying/stayed in different parts of India were contacted personally or over the phone to understand their experience about cultural awareness of their native state among the fellow citizens of other states of India.

Observations and documentation were made on cultural exhibits installed at arrival of capital city Guwahati’s railway station and Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi Airport Guwahati. Comparative analysis of these exhibits were conducted with two popular tourist destination of India i.e. Ajmer railway station of Rajasthan state and Ahmedabad airport of the Gujarat state. These were considered to get an overall idea about what is happening in different locations being far away from each other.

To understand the present state of service design from the tourist point of view, field visits were conducted to 12 number of Muga silk shops located in the Panbazar area (where most of such shops are located) of the Guwahati city of Assam. Both exterior and interior of the shops were examined and documented. Exteriors were analysed considering approach of the shop, visibility of signboard, customer entry/exist path, etc. and interior were analysed by direct observation of the customer area, merchandise visibility, merchandise display table, trial rooms, etc. Other customer

amenities like car parking area, kids' area (as most of the customer are female accompanying kids and other family members), payment options (nearby ATM or credit/debit card swapping machine), the washroom, tea stall (other than providing food which may serve as a relaxing and discussion area for customers) etc. were analysed.

In order to know the tourists' view regarding above-mentioned facts, an exploratory inquiry was conducted via self-administered questioner (predominantly open-ended) which was developed based on available information in various literature resources (Saikia & Nath, 2015; Kalaiyarasi, 2014) and used for this purpose. To understand the seller's point of view shopkeepers and sales persons were interviewed and documented to know their demography, understanding about the product and experience with the tourists (customers).

To understand the popular local cultural elements Government of Assam online portal were considered and observed. Assamese society comprising of native of Assam from different parts of the state staying and working together in IIT Guwahati was closely observed. Also, observation from tourist interaction point of view and existing service design were made via field visit at five selected traditionally handicraft producing villages i.e. 1. Sualkuchi of Kamrup district for weaving products; 2. Sarthebari of Bajali district for bell metal products; 3. Hajo of Kamrup district for brass metal products; 4. Sunarigaon of Tezpur district for jewelry products and 5. Asharikandi of Dhubri district for terracotta products.

The full survey, covering the above, was basically followed a qualitative approach and information were collected from people chosen randomly for specific purpose and direct observation to have an overall grasp on the issue.

2.3 Survey responses

The response collected by different means and methods are presented section wise below on handicrafts and cultural heritage of Assam in the background of Northeast as a whole.

2.3.1 Section 1: Investigation about the awareness

Tourist spots of in and around Assam

About the places of tourist interest from Assam, the participants suggested destinations from entire Northeast India, where the region comprises of total number of eight states naming Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Suggestion of the tourists' participants indicates that they are not able to distinguish across different states of the region and perceive all states of Northeastern India as a single unit. Probably information about different states is merged in their mind unintentionally. As per the received responses (rounded off) from the respondents (n=60), the most suggested destination is Cherapunji (30%) located in Meghalaya state, followed by popular wild life destination of Assam, the Kaziranga National Park spread across different districts of Assam (18%); Shillong of East Khasi hills district Meghalaya state (17%), Guwahati the capital city of Assam (12%), other destination suggestions were Dawki of West Jaintia hills, Meghalaya

(7%), Sivasagar of Assam (5%), Majuli of Assam (4%), Jorhat of Assam (3%), Tawang located in Arunachal Pradesh a state (2%), and Nagaland a state as a whole (1%), fig. 13, expresses these in a pie-chart presentation on pilgrimage about 100% response on Kamakhya temple of Guwahati was reported, who visited Guwahati.

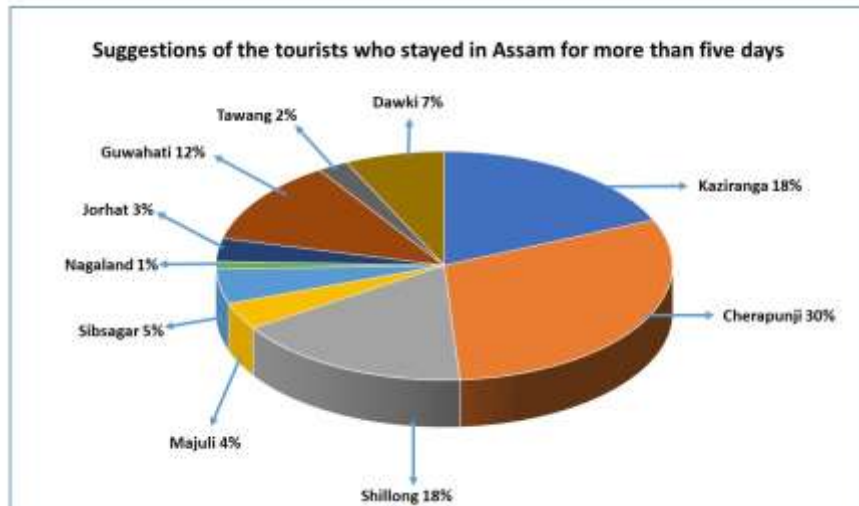


Fig: 13 Destination suggestions of preference expressed by persons (n=60) who stayed in Guwahati for more than 5 days as visitor.

It suggested that to explore new places were not in their mind. Hence scope may be explored.

Memento from Assam

Suggestions received about memento suggests most of the respondents recommended, fig. 14, world famous Assam tea (53%), followed by bamboo artifacts (15%) & wooden Rhino replica (15%), shirts made up silk with traditional motifs (3%), Silk product including Sari and Mekhla chador the traditional dress worn by women (3%) and Gamucha the traditional towel with specific design and motifs (10%). These mentioned items indicate that majority of respondents are mentioning agriculture products and widely noticeable artifact items like wooden replica of rhino and bamboo art fed etc. The survey was conducted to know the possibility of traditional handicraft items/ promotion (other than big size bamboo furniture and other decorative products as these are difficult to carry back).

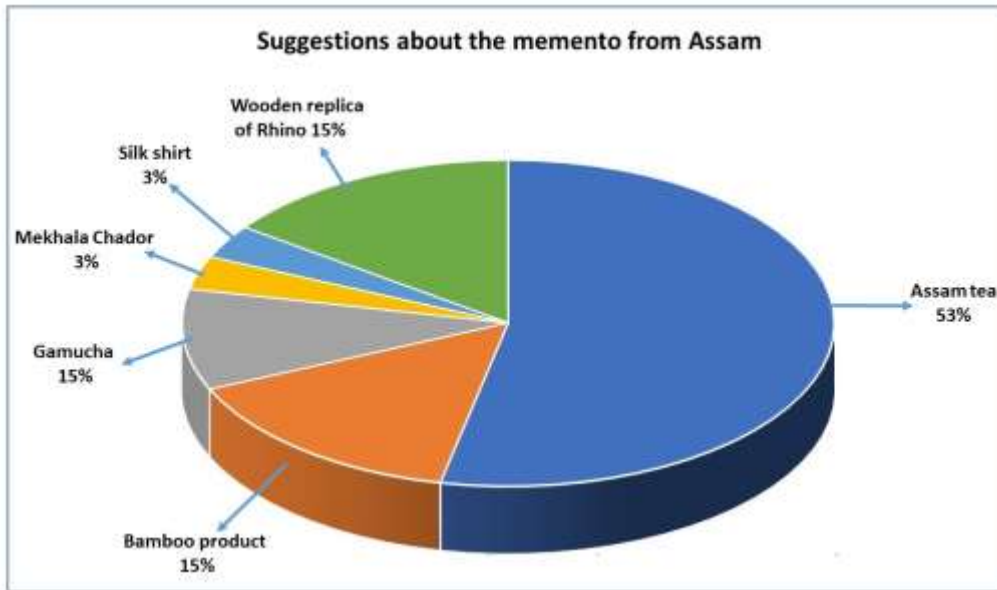


Fig: 14 suggestions about memento from visitors who stayed in Assam for more Than 5 days in Assam

About reference contact from the state

Majority of contacted respondents about 87% of them are not reported any contact person as a reference for information from the state, to whom they could suggest to an upcoming traveller after going back, fig. 15. This indicates that despite their stay in Assam for more than five days they are not able to develop a bond with the local people.

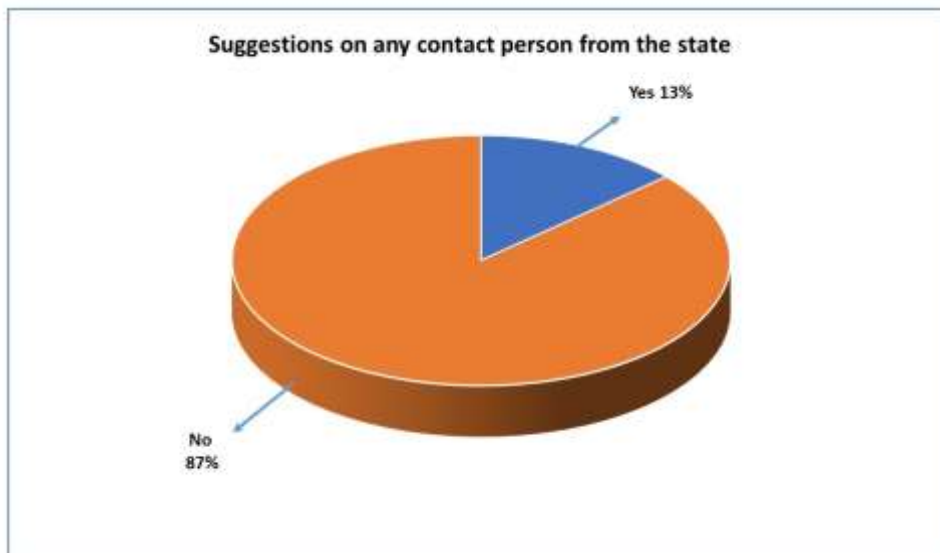


Fig: 15 Contact persons from Assam can be suggested to new travellers as by the tourists who stayed in Assam for more than 5 days

Possible reason for missing a contact person

Out of total number of 60 respondents, 52 respondents who responded for not having any contact details of person from Assam was asked about possible reason for not having any contact, 54% (28 respondents) of them reported about communication opportunity lack followed by 35% (18 respondents) who enjoyed flora and fauna only. Out of them about 11% (5 respondents) were not interested in meeting people and develop any contact, the response distribution is shown in fig 16.

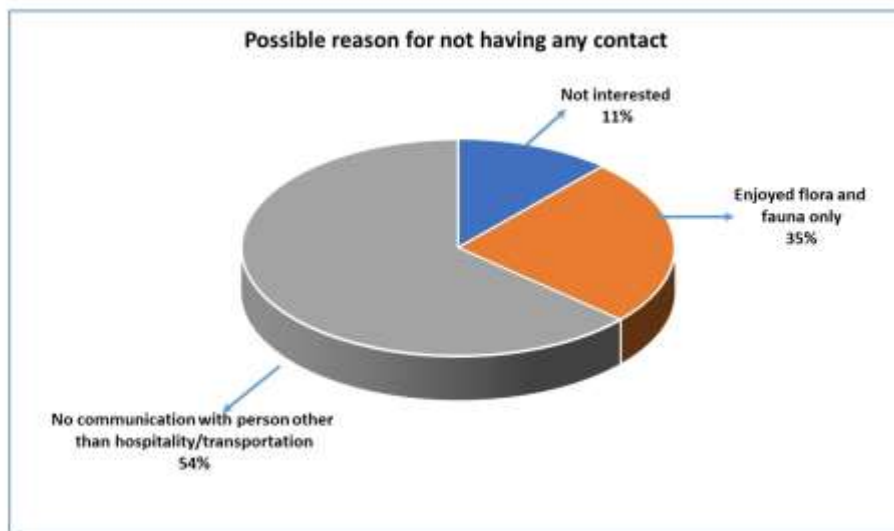


Fig. 16. possible reason for not having contact person from Assam suggested by persons stay in Assam for more than 5 days

Key observations

This stage of study suggests that there is lacuna of information about the tourist spots of Assam among the tourist visited and stayed for more than five days. Information/awareness campaign reported as mentioned above the handicraft products of Assam could be considered to project as possible memento. Mingling between the tourists and local people that create an opportunity for mutual acquaintance (Nyaupane, 2008; Thyne et. al., 2006), may be addressed by creating proper facility.

Note: After this section the data in percentage figure is presented in next section and no chart would accompany, the results as visualized representation.

2.3.2 Section 2: Experience of people of Assam stayed in other parts of India

The state of Assam is in developing stage and looking for opportunities for education and employment people venture out. Many of the young students and professionals are visiting main land India for better education facilities and employment opportunities. During their stay in different cities of India they used to blend with other students/coworkers and many of them settle in those cities. Their experience of

acceptance and the information sharing and awareness level about the culture of Assam may be considered.

Survey

A total number of 24 such people (10 females and 14 male) in the age group of 18-65 years who stayed out of Assam in cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Pune, and Jabalpur for more than 5 years were chosen randomly to understand the cultural exposure about their state among the fellow citizens of other parts of India. To understand it better detailed interview were taken and qualitative responses was gathered.

(A) Experience of respondents

The common findings of such explorations are presented here.

(i) Awareness lack about tourist places: The participants observed awareness lack about places of Assam, they found generally people think that Assam is full of forest and hills. Some of the persons know about Kamakhya temple and Kaziranga national park especially about single horn rhino.

(ii) Awareness lack about culture of Assam: The participants found that practicing culture of Assam was never point of discussion due to awareness lack. Very few people sometimes ask about Bihu dance.

(iii) Information lack about traditional artifacts of Assam: The participants reported about information lack about the artifacts of Assam. The only known product from Assam is popular tea of the state. In recent years when Prime Minister of India portrayed with wearing Gamucha of Assam, people came to know about it and participants felt proud about it. They reported that projection efforts of artefacts may contribute in preservation of art and motivate artist to continue in that art. Issues of sustainability of such many artifacts which are facing threat of wiped out in the flow of modern replacements may be looked into. "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India) would be routed through these grass root attractions.

(iv) Home stay: Few participants associated with tourism and travel agency reported that people want to know about distinct culture and way of life in close contact with local people but such facility is not available widely in Assam. The development in tourism took a corporate bias, local residents involvement in micro level induction as opined by themselves would be an additional beneficial approach.

2.3.3 Section 3: Study on the information exhibition about the culture of Assam at widely used entry points

The state of Assam is located at the Northeastern part of India, and approach to this part of India is through 22km wide Siliguri corridor by road shown in fig 17; that is located in the Indian state of West Bengal between two neighboring countries Nepal and Bangladesh.

The journey to Assam from main land India is through this corridor only via all

possible means of surface transport i.e. road or railways, that makes the journey elongated and time consuming. Visitors to the Assam tend to reach the capital city Guwahati after a long and tiresome journey. Guwahati is well connected by airways.



Fig:17 Siliguri corridor connecting northeast India to the main land India

Invitation through cultural imaging

Different agencies working in the field of tourism promotion acted to introduce some cultural components of Assam to the just arrived tourists at specified entry points in the form of exhibits at widely used entry points i.e. Guwahati railway station and Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport Guwahati. The exhibits displayed in fig. 18, showing local culture to give visitors firsthand information about the culture of Assam. The installations were observed and examined from tourists' point of view. These are posing an inviting but as these places are not to spent time probably do not provide any specific information or motivation to tourists those who normally made their tour plan in advance.



Fig. 18. Installations showcasing cultural elements at different entry points i.e. LGBI airport and Guwahati railway station, these create an ambiance of inviting

At Guwahati railway station a total number of three big installations were placed demonstrating popular dance form Satriya Dance, mask of Assam and a lady dancer in welcoming pose, fig. 19. These installations are placed at main entry point and clearly visible. On LGBI Airport the installation on the right hand side from main entry gate of arrival is showing traditional masks of Assam, fig 20(a), dimensioned around 10 X 10 ft. and on the left just before the staircase and conveyor belt are two statues showing musical tradition of Assam, fig. 20(b).



Fig. 19. Installation at Guwahati railway station



(a)

(b)

Fig. 20 (a) installation on the extreme right side of the arrival entry gate (b) statue of drummer and accompanying person on the extreme left just before the conveyor belt at LGBI Airport Guwahati.

Positioning related issues

At the main railway station of Guwahati city there are two gates one is for entry, another one is for exit. It is observed that the installation is made next to the entry gate, fig. 20, and detained passengers coming out of platform are using the exit gate that is far from the entry gate that can be seen in fig. 21, in respect of schematic layout presented in fig. 22. Tourist would come to entry point only at the time of departure and only see that installation at the time of departure. Thus location placement of images also needs to plan in such a way that is visible to incoming tourists/guests/people.



Fig: 21 Cultural installations at Guwahati railway station next to the train boarding entry gate

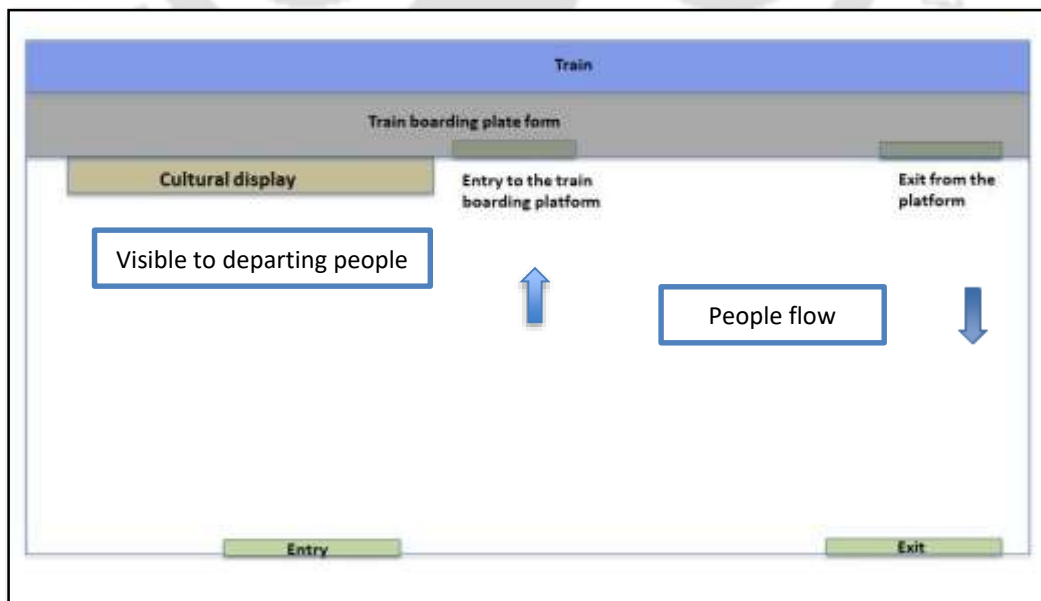


Fig.22 installation lay out at Guwahati railway station, schematic diagram

On the airport, there is only one arrival hall shown in the schematic layout as presented in fig. 23. The main installation is on the right-hand side of the hall and conveyor belt is on the left side. Most of the visitors arriving Guwahati tend to approach conveyor belt in hurry missing the installations.

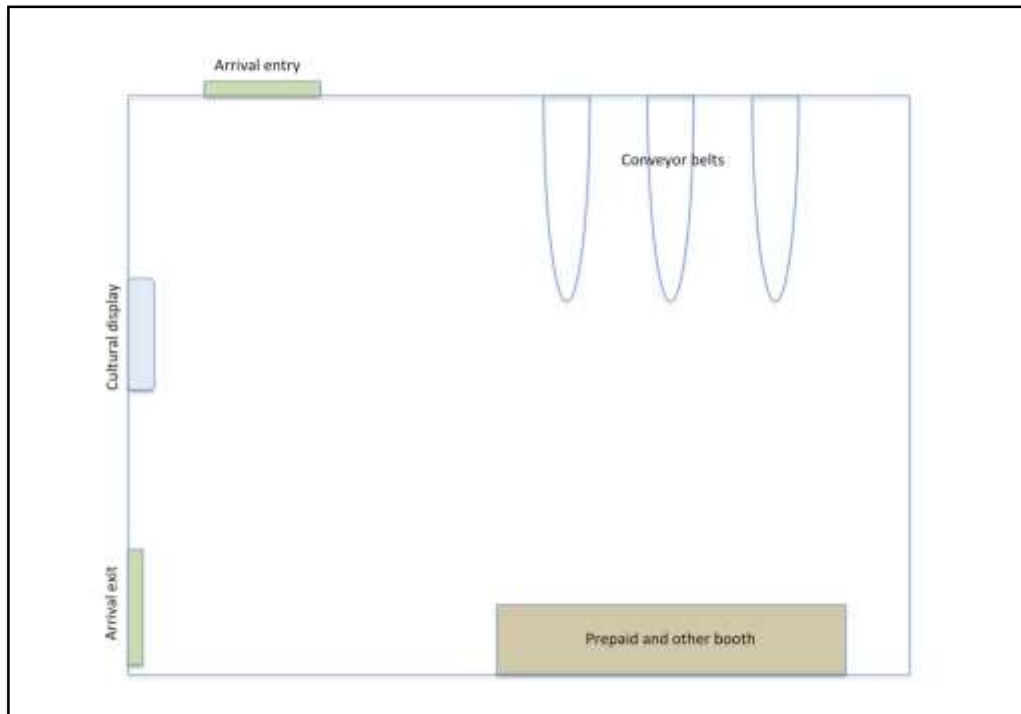


Fig. 23 installation lay out at Guwahati LGBI airport, schematic diagram

Similar positioning related issue was also observed at Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Airport located at Kolkata the nearest metropolitan city to Guwahati. Here the inviting cultural display, fig. 24, is positioned at the arrival of the airport that is used by tourist departed from Guwahati.



Fig: 24 Advertisement with specialty handloom product at arrival of Kolkata airport

Cultural exhibits observation at other Indian cities as reference

The cities and places observed for understanding their approach of presenting cultural elements can be referred on its easy attention.



Fig: 25 Cultural elements at Ahmedabad airport incorporated in the main building giving flavor of state (a) installation depicting Akshardham temple giving special global identity to Ahmedabad (b) famous Lal-darwaja gate of the city recreated (c) different events representing culture of the state (d) photographs of other key interest of the state

The elements of culture at Ahmedabad airport, fig. 25, are predominately visible as large size cultural displays are looking like integral part of the main airport building.

On the other hand, ceiling of the Ajmer railway station, fig. 26, utilized to demonstrate the cultural display so that it can be seen in full rush conditions at the railway station.



Fig: 26 Cultural elements at Ajmer railway station (a) ancient story depicted on the pillar on the upper side visible in extreme rush situation (b) traditional cultural patterns on the upper pillars (c) patterns depicting culture on the roof

Guwahati and Ajmer railway station installations comparison

The below observations were made on pertaining, their visibility and varied elements representing cultural elements.

(a) Positioning: Comparison about positioning of cultural elements suggests that at Guwahati railway station the installation are positioned at the entry gate of train boarding station and at railway station of Ajmer it is drawn at the gate that is used for entry as well as exit.

(b) Visibility: At Guwahati railway station the exhibits are of big size and can be easily seen if some tourist goes towards departure side of the station by chance but at Ajmer railway station it is visible and can be seen by the arrived tourist at entry.

(c) Elements: Cultural element displayed on Guwahati railway station comprising masks of Assam, Satriya dance of Assam and a lady in traditional dress in welcoming mode, and on the other hand display elements at Ajmer airport are depicting royal culture of Rajasthan.

Conclusion: The observation suggests that the cultural display at Guwahati railway station is rich in visibility and elements, as compare to the display at Ajmer railway station but due to its positioning at departure side of the railway station it is not getting the desired impact. And tourists going back from the Guwahati city could not understand it due to limited opportunity of cultural exposure during their trip.

Guwahati and Ahmedabad airport installations comparison

The below was noticed in terms of positioning, visibility and elements used to display.

(a) Positioning: Comparison about positioning of cultural elements suggests that at Guwahati airport the installation is placed on the extreme right hand side of the arrival entry gate, although conveyer belts are on the left hand side that catches the movement of arrived passengers crowd. Many travelers look for toilets after arrival that is also on the left hand side of the entry point. Two statues of the musical instrument playing Satriya dancer are kept on the left hand side below the staircase and before the conveyer belt. On the other hand, at the Ahmedabad airport the installations are in the part of main airport building giving a feeling of moving inside a fort or gallery.

(b) Visibility: At Guwahati airport the exhibits of approximately 10 fit X 10 fit size are placed in front of huge wall properly visible from the front of the exhibit and the two statues of larger than life size are below the staircase but at the Ahmedabad airport the exhibits are predominantly visible as the exhibits are part of the airport building at the arrival.

(c) Elements: Cultural element display on Guwahati airport are about the masks of Assam accompanied by a 1:1 statue of a single horn rhino on extreme right side and two statues at the left side of the entry gate. At the Ahmedabad airport multiple elements are placed about the culture and the city.

Conclusion: the comparison of two airports arrival points suggests that there is high chance of missing the installations at the Guwahati airport due to its comparatively smaller size and positioning opposite to conveyer belt. The statues near below the staircase and behind the conveyer belt are also missed out due to hurry as travelers are very keen to pick their luggage as soon as possible to move out of airport but at the Ahmedabad airport the predominant installation gives an amazing look and feel

2.3.4 Section 4: Online information about the artefact of Assam

As the use of cell phones has increased drastically, it was noticed that most of the tourists, upon whom the survey was conducted tend to search for information on smaller size of screen of the phone. Also tourists mentioned they used to search for local handicraft items to procure as souvenirs through internet enquiry with key words ‘Artifed Assam’ on the widely used search engine “Google” on 2nd July 2019.

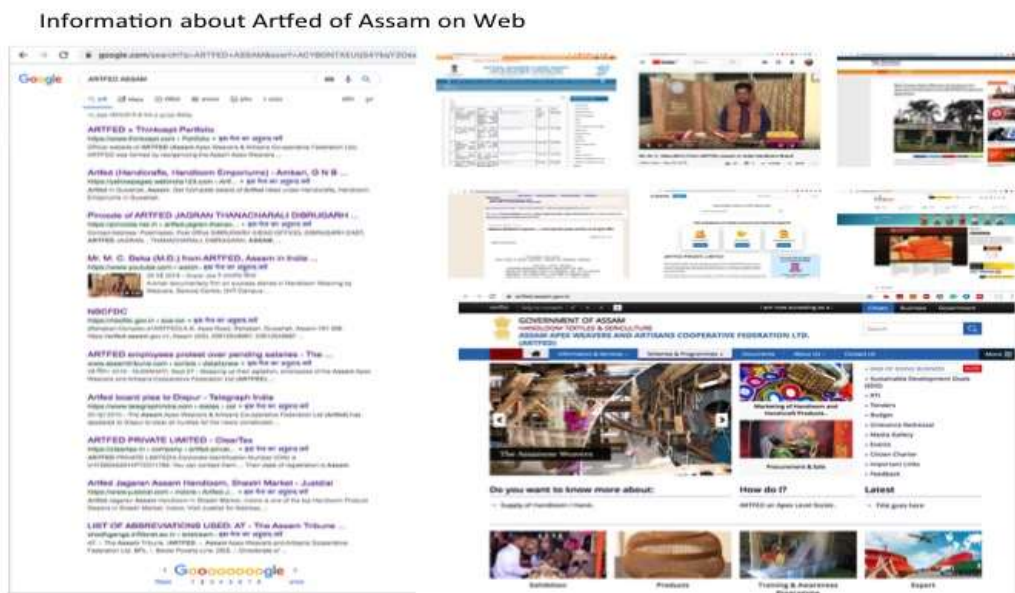


Fig. 27. Online search (Google, 09/12/2019) results about artifacts of Guwahati

Internet enquiries as presented in fig. 27, using key words artifact Assam is showing first few information only at basic introductory level at the later stage it is found that the information is not presenting real essence of Assam followed by some information related to sale not informative, about the sale and missing informative information about the products, its users and creators. How detailed information in an easy to retrieve manner be presented needs to be looked into.

2.3.5 Section: 5 Tourists experience on prevailed facility of shopping

Investigation was made about the service design of one widely available popular handicraft product- the silk as an example. The observed location for shopping was Panbazar, fig. 28, the main city center area of the Guwahati city where on the passing Hem Baruah Road clusters of silk shops located on the both sides of the road.

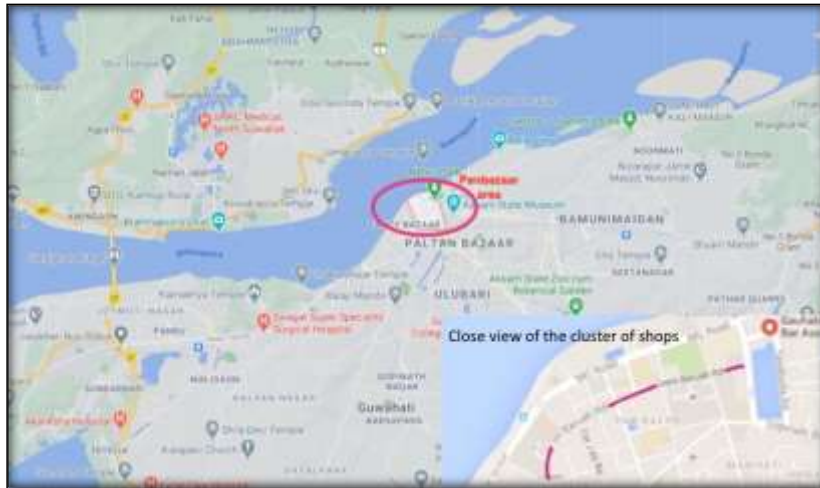


Fig. 28 Study area city centre market Panbazar (shown on Google map)

Demographic data of tourists visiting silk shops located in Panbazar, Guwahati

A random survey was conducted during tourist peak time of October 2017-2019, and tourists were picked up from the groups of people visiting silk shops.

Demographic data suggests of total 65 participants suggests (rounded off) that 44% were up to graduation qualified; 52% were housewives; 86% were domestic tourist; 71% were visiting with family members/friends; 82% were unaware of the silk product before arriving in Assam and 60% of such came to know about silk product from family members or friends. This led to make an attempt to create awareness among the tourists, and the means and methods to study for this.

Tourists views on silk shops

(i) Exteriors of the shop: Views of respondents and observation (all responses are rounded off) about the silk shops exterior suggests 86% of tourists reported that shops were not clearly visible from the road as vehicles were parked in front of the shops; 68% faced inconvenience in getting down from taxi as the road was very busy with no proper parking space; 85% found approach of the shop, fig. 29, was not inviting.



Fig: 29 poor visibilities of shops and limited space in front of silk shops at city center Panbazar area of Guwahati

(ii) Shops interior and amenities: Views of respondents and observation (all responses are rounded off) on silk shops interiors and amenities as presented in fig.

30; 92% of the respondents did not find silk shop sizes to be convenient (from entry exit point of view); 89% found product visibility was inconvenient to understand the product details; 65% product display table was found inconvenient (from product visibility in full spared point of view); 86% found arrangements for product trial room facility not in place; 71% reported wearing inconveniences of available products; 69% were uncomfortable with the wearing assistants available in the shops (they prefer woman assistance over man); 72% said that they were not prepared to buy such high price products (Assam silk is high cost range around Rs. 5000 and above for a saree); 57% want to have more online payment options or ATM nearby. In other amenities 53% said that most of the shops were away from food stalls and 48% said about non-availability of washroom within/ near the shops.



Fig. 30 Observation snaps showing the prevalent state of the shops; from top left (a) Small size of shop, improper entry/exit, (b) Obscure display of products, (c) Improper display table, (d) Non availability of trial room (e) Non availibility of space for other acomponaying persons (f) Non availibility of space for other family members Kids

Views on silk\products

All the tourists reported (all responses are rounded off) about excellent quality of Assam silk products; 78% of them rated the craftsmanship of the product was very high (which is driven by inner instinct of individual); 64% percent of the respondents were not satisfied with the product verity and unable to understand its type by name not known to them; 71% shown interest in knowing about making of silk product if there is any difference than other verities of silks available in their native locations; 82% of them mentioned that they would prescribe these products to their friends and relatives; 78% opined that good purchase experience along with knowledge about craftsmanship and production process of silk product would be helpful in building cordial/friendly relationship between tourists and native people (host).

Direct observation of shops

Panbazar, the market place under study, is situated in the heart of Guwahati city has a lot of silk handloom shops. These shops were observed and documented from tourist ease point of view. The area is having around 30 silk shops having an average three customers at a time accompanied by an average two persons observed at many times of day. The shops are on both the side of the Hem Baruah road, which starts from Dighali Pukhuri, and expanded up to Fancy Bazar area requires considerations for attention to the tourists' needs and comfort (Fig 28).

Moreover, it is found that exterior shopping environment is particularly important and it must be considered acceptable and pleasing before the interior of the shops is ever experienced (Yuksel, 2007), which is the motivating factor to attract tourists. Further as observed by Yuksel in 2007, in addition to this, respondents showed a high willingness to talk to salespeople, spend more time browsing and exploring the products, and spend more money than originally planned when the climate of the "Tourist Shopping Habits" is perceived to be stimulating.

Views of sellers

Sellers demography data suggests that 70% of them were in the age group of 35-50 years and remaining in the age group of 22-35 years; all male; 80% of them were graduates; 70% of them were not proficient in other then mother tongue (all responses are rounded off). It suggests that proficiency in handling varieties of tourists there is a need for awareness cum training. About the products, all of them having sufficient knowledge of product quality but 60% of them did not have sufficient knowledge about various stages of silk production. they reported about insufficient customer amenities.

It is found that possibility of having comfortable interactive environment for bond development are very less in Guwahati based shops mainly due to space limitation and still they were reluctant to move to other sites also. Many of them opined for traditional handicraft producing village exploration as a possibility for tourism cum sale importance.

Observation of Service design at village based shops

Observation of village based handicraft products suggests that despite scope for the larger and systematic shops, various issues of service design i.e. improper display of products, improper approach to the shops, small size shop, improper display tables etc. exists in the village shops also. Even village at Sualkuchi declared as silk village of Assam, requires product display, and awareness important; fig. 31, presents few snap shots of Sualkuchi and some other relevant handicraft products. All these can be studied through a service design approach, covering the raw material procurement, production stages and marketing.

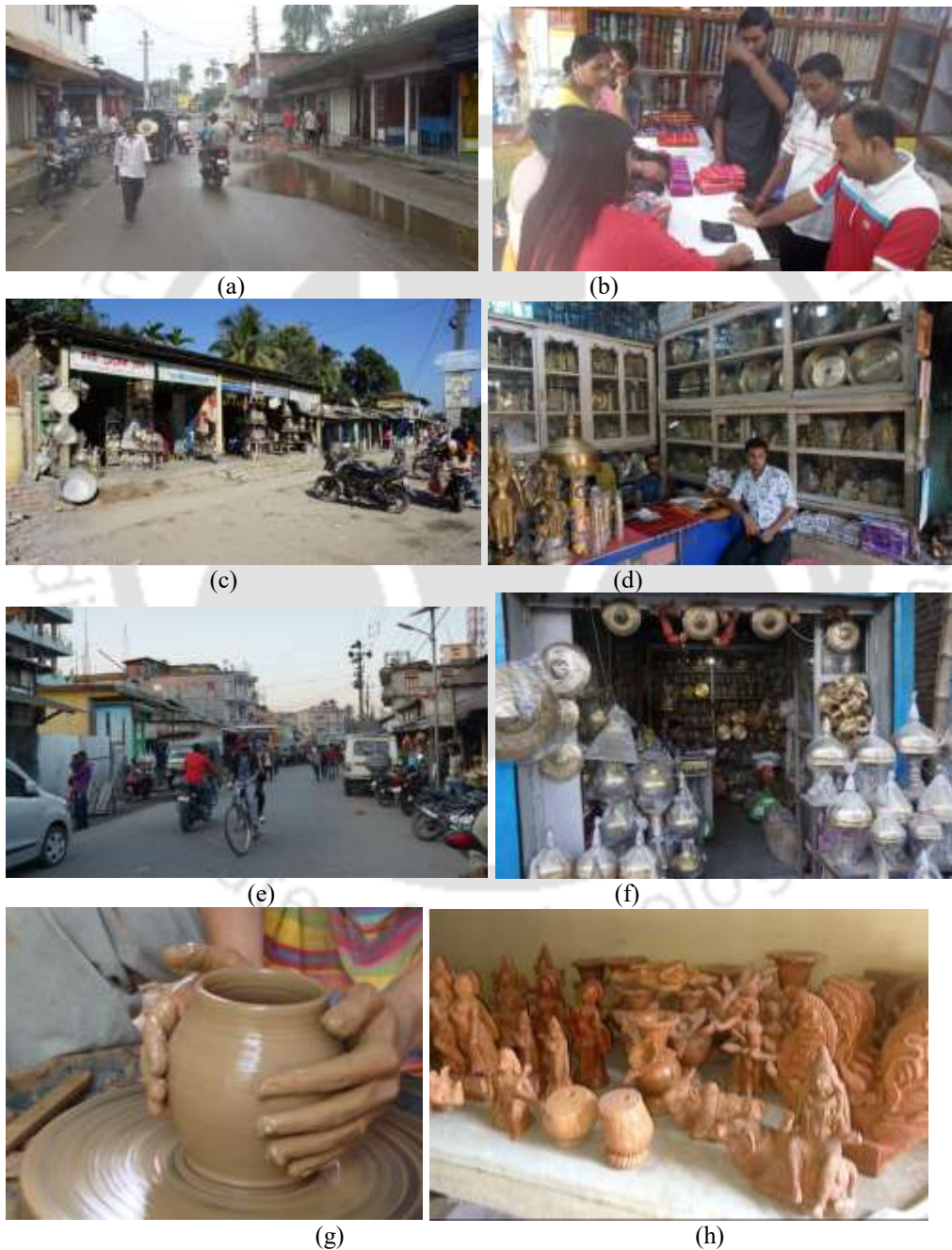


Fig: 31 Service design at village shops (a) Main market at Sualkuchi (b) Silk shop at Sualkuchi market (c) Main market at Sarthebari (d) Bell metal shop at Sarthebari (e) Main market at Hajo (f) Brass metal shop at Hajo (g) Product making at Asharikandi (h) Finished products at the village

2.3.6 Section 6: Exploring symbolic elements of popular culture of Assam from tourism point of view

There are many symbolic elements associated with culture of Assam. These elements represent beliefs, feelings, pride, identity, etc. of Assamese Society. The culture and practices are distinct to different group of natives of Assam. Among them some are widely visible throughout the Assam and acknowledged (Govt. of Assam, 2020). Beyond the boundary of people of Assam these can be showcased to invite visitors, and for that facility and infrastructure need to be studied, and a participatory approach of understanding the means and methods can be developed. Some of the filtered out documents of Assam culture are presented below. If these can be used or how these are used as tourism experiences.

Gamucha

The Assamese Gamucha, Fig 32 is a piece of cloth generally of white rectangular in shape with red color boundaries on three side and distinct motifs on the fourth side. It is common offering during the Bihu and used to give honor in Assam. It is essential wearing during any social or religious gathering (Govt. of Assam, 2020). It is also given Geographical Indication of Assam. Different types of Gamucha as per use are Uka (means plain) Gamucha used for daily use, Phulam Gamucha decorated used for wearing during congregation, Bihuwan Gamucha used during Bihu usually contains floral motifs, Tioni Gamucha is slightly bigger than the normal Gamucha wore during working in paddy field, Anakota Gamucha wore by the bridegroom during the marriage etc. (Govt. of India, 2019).

Gamucha's are hand woven by local artisans and considered as a traditional woven skill at every household. To promote this heritage item its mechanized production is not allowed. This Gamucha is a utility as well as inviting element of culture; can its manufacturing be explored as an item of tourism promotion. There is scope- it needs to be studied.



Fig. 32 (a) special Gamucha made-up of Muga silk with Japi like motif (b) traditional way of welcoming using Gamucha (c) Gamucha made with cotton fabric

Tamul Paan

Tamul- Paan where Tamul is areca nut and Paan is betel-leaf (Dogra, 2018), is associated with every home and community culture Fig 33; consumption and offering to the guest in traditional bell metal utensil called Xarai, an offering tray with a stand in bottom usually made-up of bell metal is integral part of culture of Assam. Tamul Paan is essential offering to the deity in all the ceremonies in Assam, general public consume it after every meal that gives a high feeling to them (Saikia, 2013). It's a tradition that is followed from the ancient time. An awareness platform can be created to invite people to experience this unique style of expressing honor and respect to guests.

It represents the agriculture based society culture and the tradition is carrying/ carries an identity. To make it a contemporary use, the possibility of giving a modern look keeping the essence intact may be developed as a gift item and if its long-lasting



Fig. 33. Unripe Betel-nut are offered in a traditional pot in Assam with Pan- a Chewable leaf along with other relevant herbs and lime. Is a culture symbol for house hold daily use” can be presented through a contemporary design”

feature be added can be a memorable item for the tourists. Such development explorations are not seen much in practice, and in time with the demise of elderly people, who are customary users- the practice is in danger of losing its presence. Revival and newness design feature may be tried out. Can it be made a special packaging exercise?

Jaapi

Jaapi, fig. 34, a traditional conical hat has a lot of significance in Assam. It is woven with bamboo/cane and palm leaf. It is also given as honor and integral part during the Bihu dance performance. Assamese people used to hang it as decorative piece in the house gives welcoming impression to the visitor. Farmers also use it to protect themselves from the sun and rain (Agarwal, 2014).

This item with various shape is being used for honoring fig. 34(a) and also as protection while working in fields fig 34 (b), its unique shape and colorful design makes it a preferred memento. Making product diversity can be explored as tourism experience.



Fig.34 use of Japi (a) for felicitation (b) as protector in the field; with colorful appearance it is used for festival and for honoring/ welcoming a person.

In different shape and size and material is already being used as mementos and for that there are few specified emporiums are there in Guwahati though they are made with organic material ex. Bamboo and others; now metal made variations is also available for tourist's memento purpose.

Festivals

Festival of Bihu is mentioned as state festival of Assam as it is prevalent among various ethnic communities and social groups of Assam. It is celebrated in three parts during a year (Govt. of Assam, 2020). The festival is not like other pan India festivals that are associated with religion but mostly associated with agriculture cycle. The three parts of Bihu festivals are Bohag Bihu, Kati Bihu and Magh Bihu (Mahan, 2012). The Bohag Bihu celebrated in mid of April when Assamese new year starts and climate of Assam gradually changes from a relatively dry hot to wet summer that is appropriate time for festivity as reproductive cycle of most plants are renewed and tropical landscape is still penetrable and conducive to human activity.

Being an agriculture society, cattle are significant source of farming activity; the rituals of Bohag Bihu starts on the Sot- Sankranti (the cusp between the Assamese months of Sot and Bohag) with Goru-Bihu or "The Day of the Cattle" when cattle are bathed, nurtured and worshiped, cattle are hit with confection by sticks made from two plants, Dighlati (*Lit sea Salic folia*) and Makhhati (*Flemengia Strobilifera*), both found in the local woodlands. Songs sung during the Bohag Bihu incorporates the condition of nature and plants at that time. People of Assam belief that earth conceives during the Assamese month of Ahar (late June) so that dances and rituals performed during the Bohag Bihu is associated with increasing fertility of land. Another association of Bihu with nature establishes as Traditionally Bihu dance performed under the Fig tree and occasionally under the other tree as the fig fruit is very small, but in that seed, lays the enormous tree of the future.

This has gained importance in tourism and there are other lesser-known cultural activities by name Bihu can also be presented as tourism intent.

Kati Bihu is followed by Bohag Bihu usually celebrated in the month of October or November without any festive sprit, as it is the time of the year in Assam when food resources are running low and current crop is not ripe for harvesting. Planting a plant of Tulsi (*Basil*) and lighting of lamp in the field are important activates of the festival. People of village consider lighting of lamp fig. 35 (a) as worship for good crop and

but some people view this practice as a method of pest control. Magh Bihu celebrated at a time when entire India is in festive mood due to transition of the sun semantic of the northward movement of the Earth on the celestial sphere. The time coincides with a time of post harvesting when fields are empty, a hut like structure fig. 35 (b) is made using bamboo, straws and dried banana leaves in the fields that put-on fire and offered special food item to the Agni-devta (God of fire). Some special food items are prepared during this time using rice flour and jiggery, also consumption of certain things like Moa Aalu (*Dioscorea Spinosa*) is considered mandatory during Magh Bihu festival. Community fishing is also practiced during the Magh Bihu mostly in rural Assam (Sarma P., 2008; Barua, 2009).

It is such a community dance from where experts as well as learners both join with equal excitement of festival mood; scope to join visitors can also be explored as facility platform for visitors and local resident's interaction.



Fig.35 (a) Special prayer in the field during Kati Bihu (b) Mejighor or bhelaghor an artistic creation of special message (Amonikhali village creation asking people to not put their mask down in pandemic) with local material and skill built during Magh Bihu has potential to draw tourist attention close to kite festival

Besides Bihu other festivals celebrated in Assam are the Raas festival, Douul Utsav, Ambubashi Mela at Kamakhya Temple, Dehing Patkai festival, the Tea festival, Madam Mafi etc. (Begum 2016). Brahmaputra river festival, Brahmaputra Pushkar mela, Silla Noi (Kite river festival) etc. are new addition by department of tourism (GP, 2020). Such festivals continue throughout the year and tourists need to plan their journey for participating in it. There is scope to develop tourism calendar and to facilities to participate would obviously draw interested visitor's attraction.

Popular dances of Assam

People of Assam have a dance associated to different occasions and to appreciate season change and new agriculture cycle (Sarma P. 2008). Presence of different dance form performed in Assam is found in ancient inscriptions and literature. Hieun S Tsang a Chinese traveler to the Assam during 7th century was entertained by songs and dance every day for a month by King Bhaskar Barman also during 9th century inscription states that then king of Kamrup reconstructed the Shiva temple and worshiped the deity with songs and dance. Dancing figures with various instruments are found in different temples throughout the Assam. (Kandali, 2009).

(i) Bihu

Bihu, Fig no.36, is an ancient folk festival of Assam and mentioned as national festival of Assam by some researchers (Sarma P., 2008). the most popular folk dance of Assam and celebrated by all the communities of Assam (Kandali, 2009). Due to patronage of Ahom king the dance reached to the royal amphitheater from the fields. Bihu dances are performed by young boys and girls to echoing youthful passion, reproductive urge and joy.



Fig.36 Performance of Bihu dance where experts as well as learners both join with equal excitement of festival mood tourist may also join

(ii) Satriya Dance (Nritya)

Great Saint Sri Srimant Sankardeva of Assam introduced Satriya dance in later part of 15th century in Assam and since then it flourished in Vaishnavism ministries known as Satras for more than 500 years in its pure intact form (Kandali, 2009). The dance form is one of the eight classical dance forms India (Devi & Saharia, 2016). The dance, fig. 37, usually based on mythological stories contains a religious essence containing about 64 in number syntax known as mati-aakhar (ground exercise) (Kandali, 2009). Both male and female perform the dance that is combination of single hand gestures known as Asamyukta hastas and two types of double hand gesture known as samyukta hastas (Devi & Saharia, 2016).



Fig.37 Satriya dancer depicting grandness of lord Krishna using different Mudra (hand gestures), tourist can feel the elegance

(iii) Barpeta's Bhortal Dance (Nritya)

A legendary Shatriya dance artist Narahari Burha Bhakat at Barpeta district of Assam invents Bhortal Nritya. This dance is performed by male dancers plying big cymbals in unique pattern (Kandali 2009). The dance is shown in fig.38 A group of dancers performing Bhortal dance playing big cymbals creating a divine atmosphere that connects spectators to the god.

(iv) Jhumur Dance

Jhumur dance is popular dance among the tea tribe of Assam. This dance is mostly performed during religious activities like Karma puja and Tusu puja of these tribes. In this dance group of young girl dancers perform dance on bit of wooden drum called dhol (a wooden drum) by holding each other's waist, fig. 38(b), (Khataniar, 2020). Tribal tourism – a concept was all related to tribal life and sharing the particular specificities can also be the major attraction.



(a)



(b)

Fig.38 Dance performance (a) Bhortal dance (b) Jhumur dance- a tribal addition to Assam that may interest tourists

(v) Bagurumba Dance

Girls of Bodo community of Assam performs Bagrumba dance. These Girls perform the dance, fig. 39, in their traditional apparel on the sound of specific musical instruments like Siphung (flute), Kham (drum), etc. The dancers move like flying butterflies in horizontal line and circle repeatedly (Brahma, 2019). The community dance can create an interaction platform with visitors.



Fig.39. Performance of Bagrumba dance where dancers are dancing like butterflies

(vi) Deodhani Dance

Not only the communities' pleasure dance experience unique item also creates such an event, a composite cultural feeling; Deodhani is such an event. The word Deodhani originated from Sanskrit denotes a shaman having the inference as "the sound or echo of a deity" (Pfeffer & Behera, 1997) implies its association with God. It is termed as a frenzied dance, fig. 40, performed by Gods women (Kandali, 2009).

The girls to please snake goddess Mansa mostly perform the dance. During the controlled dance performance, the girls moves in step waving of boundless hair and brandishing of swords typically accompanied by the traditional musical form of Ojapali (Urban, 2018) where Oja leads the chorus and makes setting for Palis to repeat the rhythm on the music of cymbals and flute (Kandali, 2009). The dance is performed in Maa (mother goddess) Kamakhya temple of Guwahati as a festival and it is believed that whoever taking part in this dance receive some superficial power from the Goddess.



Fig.40 Performance of Deodhani dance Assam community dance culture associated with such music experience an indigenous musical instrument

The cultural heritage depicted through various indigenous dance forms can be made available to tourists in a smaller scale to practice and to explore further enriching.

Music of Assam

Assam community dance culture is associated with rich music experience and indigenous musical instrument. The culture of Assam is often referred to as hybrid culture; it is also true for the music of Assam. Assamese people used to have song for almost all the phases of life i.e. birth, marriage, different stages of agriculture, weaving, for pleasing deities etc. (Goswami, 2018). Assam has around two-thousand-year-old tradition of raga based musical Ojapali a performing an art where dance and act. Further time-to-time additions of new style were introduced in the music. Vaishnavite saint of Assam Mahapurush Sankardeva and Madhavdeva introduced Borgeet (songs celestial). Ajaan Fakir a Sufi saint introduced fusion of Islamic

religious style music with Assam folk music, christen missionaries introduced Gospel songs, impact of Bangla songs and music is also visible (Borthakur & Kalita, 2018).

Assam has a history of some unique musical instruments, fig. 41 & 42, and along with popular Indian instruments. Mention of such instrument is found in mythological text and the sculptures of deities with musical instruments found in Assam at different archeological sites (Das, 2018). Borthakur in year 2009 elaborated about the musical instruments continue in practice by of varied people of Assam, instrument sometimes mingle with each other and sometimes entirely differs in characteristic. Locally available raw material also contributed in making musical instruments like Pepa (a type of flute) from buffalo horn, Toka (clapping instrument), Bahi (flute) and Gogana (jaw harp with silk string) from bamboo.

Expert artisans, bell metal worker, carpenter and potters also make musical instruments like Nagara, Kurkuri, Taal, Dhol etc., Dhol (double sided barrel drum) is integral part of Bihu festival of Assam. A lot of variations of the instrument in shape and size are found in ethnic diversity of Assam. In Ojapali instruments Khutitall (chambels), Mridangam along with instruments with string and wind like Bina, Benu are used (Baruah, 2016). There rich experiences can be enjoyed with the players and the instruments may people can also carry with instructional manual. There are many such items are there and there is need to study which one can give identity of the culture and the place.



Fig.41 musical instruments variety in Assam (a) Pepa traditional musical instrument (b) Dhol (wooden drum) musical instrument of Assam (c) Toka made up of bamboo



Fig.42 More musical instruments verity in Assam; (a) flutes (b) Gogona performed by girls (c) cymbals played by hand

Cuisine of Assam

A place expressing its uniqueness through its cosines; and the experience is long lasting. Assam is a meeting point for diverse cultures that incorporation of diversity is also visible in food items here. Cuisines of Assam have a lot of verity in type, fig. 43, ethnic food items, preparation methods and in tastes that are count six in number i.e. sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter and astringent. Traditionally a lot of alkaline is consumed here in place of salt, as during ancient times sea salt was not available here (Saikia, 2013). Paddy is the main crop of Assam and its outcome rice is stapled food here (Saikia, 2009; Saikia, 2013; Hussain; 2019). Large verity of rice like Bora, Joha, Komal, Betguti, Malbhog etc. are produced in Assam and as per the process of husking its available as Ukhuwa or brown rice and Aroi or white rice (Saikia, 2013). Rice is prepared and consumed in a lot of ways in Assam. Boiled rice is rinsed for one or two days to ferment and consumed with salt, raw mustered oil, onion, ginger, chili etc. as a preferred dish Paitha Bhat in Assam (Saikia, 2009).

People of Assam generally take three meals a day, among these two meals are taken as main course third meal is considerably lite in nature is called jalpan or breakfast, fig. 43 (a, b). Jalpan are widely prepared during Magh Bihu festival of Assam. Most of the breakfast items are prepared using rice or rice powder. Almost all Assam households used to have a Dhenki a large wooden mortar (foot pounder) used for husking and grinding of grain as per requirement (Saikia, 2013). In some preferred breakfast preparation is Sunga Pitha, fig. 43 (c), that is prepared by putting rice or rice powder with a little water in fresh bamboo culm and burning it in fire. (Saikia,

2009). Other types of dishes like laddus (sweet ball with other ingredients) and pithas (local cake) of varieties i.e. Til Pitha, Ghila pitha, Gokul pitha, Sutuli pitha, Pani pitha etc. are prepared with rice flour mixed with one or many ingredients like jiggery, Sesame seed, coconut powder etc. Rice flakes or komal sawal (soft rice) are consumed with curd and jiggery (Saikia, 2013; Hussain, 2019). The world-famous Assam tea is also consumed and offered in different ways like black tea, green tea, milk tea, spiced tea etc. with the snacks nowadays. Although people of Assam earlier did not know tea they used to consume fruit juices (Saikia, 2013).



Fig.43 Ethnic food items; (a) Jalpan (breakfast) (b) Jalpan in other combination (c) Suga Pitha preparation (d) non-vegetarian meal (e) vegetarian meal

People of Assam used to take both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food, fig. 43 (d, e), verity (Hussain, 2019). A large variety of leafy and solid vegetables is consumed in Assam, many of such vegetables contains medicinal property. Labra (mixed veg) is a popular dish of Assam that is prepared using a large variety of vegetables like pumpkin, knolkhol, brinjal, cabbage, cauliflower etc. Boiled/roasted potatoes, roasted banana leaves, roasted brinjal, boiled pumpkin, are also consumed here. (Saikia, 2009; Saikia, 2013). Pulses are also consumed in Assam with a lot of preference, among them black gram or mati-dali have a lot of significance as a fest is incomplete without it (Saikia, 2013).

Among Non-vegetarian food of Assam, a special fascination is evident towards fish here, other popular meat preferred here are of goat, duck pigeon, chicken etc. (Saikia, 2009). Around 190 types of fish found in wetlands (water bodies) of Assam that is available in both smaller sizes i.e. Moa (Ompok moh), Puthi (Puntius sp.), Singora (Mystus vittatus), Kawai (Anabus testudineus), Goroï (Channa punetatus), Karati (Gadusia chapra), punga (Tetradon), chanda (Chanda nama), khalihona

(Khalisalalia), darikona (*Rasbora daniconius*), misha (*Maerobrachium*), eleng (*Rasbora elenya*) and of big sizes i.e. magur (*Clarius butrachus*), bhangon (*Cirrhina reba*), cheniputhi (*Puntius*), kurhi (*Labeo calbasu*), rahu (*Labeo rohita*), pabha (*Ompok padba*), bahu (*Catla*), sital (*Notopterus chitala*), kandhuli (*Notopterus*), sol (*Channa striatus*), silgharia (*Labeo pungsia*), kash (*Silonia salienio*), basa (*Eutropicthys vacha*), ari (*Aoricthys seenghala*), borali (*Wanago attu*), kharia (*Notopterus* sp), pithia (*Tor putitor*) (Saikia, 2009; Saikia, 2013). People used to cook fish here as per varied taste preference with a lot of different ingredients and procedures like baking in foil of banana leaf, steamed fish, fish curry, roasted fish, stewed or fried, dried fish etc. (Saikia, 2009; Saikia, 2013).

Some food restrictions are also followed by people of different religion like Hindus avoid to take chicken, beef and fishes like Food restriction Saal (*Channa marulius*), Sengeli (*Channa bleheri*), Singi (*Heteropneustes fossilis*), Mirika (*Cirrhina mrigala*), inertia (*Clupisoma garua*); followers of Islam avoid to take pork (Saikia 2009; Saikia 2013).

Practice of consumption of country liquor, fermented rice beer known as Laopani or Saanj is also found among tribal and Ahoms (Saikia, 2013). Can any specific item be claimed to attract tourist's attraction; an in-depth study is required.

Craft practice of Assam

Art and Craft is an expression of inner instinct of an individual and of the community as a whole. The people of Assam have been skilled in numerous art work such as brass metal work, bell metal work, ivory work, weaving, jewelry making etc., there are some special places associated with such artwork creation spread throughout the Assam. The specific communities reside in different places and clusters of artifacts production. Mostly the production is to meet the local consumption and its nationwide expansion and globalization attempt could not only make the artisan survive the age old culture can be presented and contemporary design development considering utility and pleasure position sentiment be retained. The brief description of some of the craftwork is presented here to express the possibilities to showcase, this section reports a qualitative (not quantitative) status documentation of tangible elements.

(i) Brass metal products: Assam has a tradition of producing specialty products using brass metal. The products are of different shape and sizes having strong association with the life style of the people of Assam. The products made of brass metal are used in daily life and some are kept with proud in display and used on special cultural and religious purpose. Many of such products of Assam used to have special design element a stand like structure at the bottom of the product, fig. 44 (a), example of traditional lamp, that makes it unique to Assam. The design element is introduced believed to be by the Tias, an ancient ruler of Assam. Name of such products used to have prefix "Ban" (i.e. Ban-thal, Ban-Bati) which means pan or bowel in the language Tai's. (Dasgupta, 1988; Sarma 2008). Muslim patty is a village of Hajo subdivision of Kamrup district of Assam is known for specialty brass metal work, it is around 24 kilometers from Guwahati city on the other Northern bank of river Brahmaputra.

A special Muslim community called Moria is associated with brass metal work product production. The ethno name Moria is probably given by surrounding Assamese people because of nature of work of hitting which is similar to an Assamese word moriowa /mariba used for betting (Roushan, 2016). Some of the brass metal products are Chaki (lamp), Charia (common bowl), Gacha (lamp stand), Karia (milking pot) etc.



Fig.44 Samples of brass metal item; (a) traditional lamp (b) craftsman making brass metal product (c) a table top made-up of brass metal product (d) Brass metal products (e) brass metal producers in producing village

Artifact Analysis: Brass metal

Table no. 01 presented here-in expresses final element analysis that address the location of brass metal objects, including public or private, where they are stored, displayed, or carried, if they are part of a larger whole or system, and if they are owned, shared, or communal or corporate property.

Table. 01. Describing about brass metal products place of availability, composite material, reusability, cultural association, pleasant offering and ownership proud of the product

Location of the object		Hajo	
Nature		Public	
Storing consideration		Displayed on with decency	
Material Analysis			
Material	Composition	Durability	Disposability
Brass metal	Mix material	Extremely longer lasting	Reusable can be remold
Aesthetics Analysis			
Visual assessment	Historical reference	Experience	Emotional assessment
Unique product design of most of the products associated with Assam	Traditional association with Assam	Proud of ownership	Indicates association with Assam
Interactive qualities			
Explicit characteristic	Social intent	Shared Intent	Adapted use
Honor offering and daily use	Part of society	Belongingness with Assam	May be included in lifestyle

(ii) Bell metal products: Bell metal products, fig. 45, are produced and used in many states of India from the ages. Such products are also traditionally manufactured in Assam and are integral part of life style of people of Assam (Kalita & Prosad, 2016) Sarthebari is a town of Bajali district of Assam is famous for creators fig. 45(a, c), producing bell metal products (Sarma, 2008). Design and variety of many bell metal products are similar to some brass metal products the difference is in manufacturing technique as brass metal products are formed from beaten thin sheets of brass on the other hand bell metal products are produced using cast in mold's.

Some of the brass metal products are big plate (Thali, fig. 45 b) for serving food material, Banbati (cup joined to a circular rim), Banthal (round dish joined to a circular rim), Barkah (gong of bell metal), Bata (flat circular thal with raised rim used for betel-nut) fig 45(c), Tal (brass cymbals used in religious orchestra) fig 45(e), elegant product for offering traditional mouth freshener fig. 45 (d) (Dasgupta, 1988).



Fig.45 Bell metal producers in traditional producing village (a) Bell metal artist (b) big plates made up of bell metal (c) artist giving final touch to the product (d) a finished product with minute engraving and (e) final products of bell metal

Artifact analysis: Bell metal

Table 2 describes the overall status of the craft produced near Guwahati, place called Hajo.

Table. 02. Describing about bell metal products place of availability, composite material, reusability, cultural association, pleasant offering and ownership proud of the product

Product		Bell metal product	
Location of the object		Hajo	
Nature		Public	
Storing consideration		Displayed with decency	
Material Analysis			
Material	Composition	Durability	Disposability
Bell metal	Mix material	longer lasting	Reusable can be remold
Aesthetics Analysis			
Visual assessment	Historical reference	Experience	Emotional assessment
Unique product design of most of the products associated with Assam	Traditional association with Assam	Medicinal benefits of the dishes, Proud of ownership	Indicates association with Assam
Interactive qualities			
Explicit characteristic	Social intent	Shared Intent	Adapted use
Religious use, honor offering and daily use	Part of society	Belongingness with Assam	Benefits suggests for inclusion in lifestyle

(iii) Weaving: Weaving, fig. 46, is a traditional creative art of Assam almost every household here used to practice this art for self-use and for the use of others. Traditionally Cotton, woolen and silk products were produced in cottage industry of Assam with unique designs fig 46 (c). The state is widely famous for its specialty silk products. All four varieties of silk Pat (Mulberry), Muga Erhee (Endi) and Tasar are produced here (Phukan, 2012). Among these Muga silk “the pride of Assam” is rearrests in the world due to its natural yellow color and luster. It is only produced in Assam and got a geographical indication registration for it. Muga silk products are extremely durable and its luster increases after every wash. Wearing Muga silk products is also believed to be good for skin as it protects from ill effects of ultraviolet rays (MoT Govt. of India, 2017).

Silk industry flourished during Ahom rulers as they gave patronage to it. There were special looms ran during that time under the supervision of royal family called Rajgharia looms producing distinctive cloths for royal family (Phukan, 2012). Sualkuchi also called Manchester of Assam, as almost every household are involved in weaving here. This largest silk village of Assam is situated in Kamrup district

around 25 KM from Guwahati city. Silk weaving is also done in some other districts of Assam but Sualkuchi is leading in it. The weaving is done by both female and male fig 46 (a, d).



Fig.46. Weaving a regular practice; (a) lady weaver (b) traditional weaving in Assam (c) Excellent weaving in traditional design (d) male weavers are also working in the sector

Artifact analysis: Silk Weaving

Table 3 describes the overall status of the Silk weaving produced near Guwahati, place called Sualkuchi.

Table. 03. Describing about pat Muga silk products GI to the product, material strength, natural luster and benefits, cultural association, social use and ownership proud of the product

Product		Pat Muga Silk products	
Location of the object		Sualkuchi	
Nature		Private	
Storing consideration		kept with decency	
Material Analysis			
Material	Extraction	Durability	Disposability
Silk	From butterflies	longer lasting luster increase after every wash	
Aesthetics Analysis			
Visual assessment	Historical reference	Experience	Emotional assessment
Unique product motifs of most of the products associated with Assam	Pat Muga got GI for Assam	Gives gorgeous feeling	Indicates association with Assam
Interactive qualities			
Explicit characteristic	Social intent	Shared Intent	Adapted use
Wore during any social gathering	Part of society	Belongingness with Assam	Proud of ownership

(iv) Traditional Jewelry: Traditional items of Jewelry with ethnic designs as shown in fig 47 (a, b, c, e, f) are also popular among the people of Assam. They unique ethnic designs are mostly inspired by nature and some products used in daily life. There were jewelries for both man and women from the ancient time. Broadly jewelry of Assam can be divided into three categories plain, enameled (Minakara) and jeweled (Bakharpata or Bhakarmani). On the basis of use it could be subdivided as per its association with the body part for which is made for like Anguthi (finger rings), Biri (Neckless), Keru (ear ornaments), Kharu (bracelet) etc. (Dasgupta, 1988) There were sub varieties in these jewelries (MoT Govt. of India, 2017). These jewelries were used in most part of the Assam but places like Jorhat, Sibsagar, Barpeta and Goalpara were main centers for Assamese Jewelry (Dasgupta, 1988).



Fig.47 Traditional jewelry products (a) earrings of different sizes and design, (b) necklaces with earrings, (c) pendants in golden chain, (d) necklace design inspired by peacock, (e) a lady wearing traditional design pendant, (h) traditional bracelet, and (g) an artist making jewelry

The product sophistication and specialty may attract tourists' attention. Some of the jewelry products are mentioned below that represent the huge variety.

- (i) **Finger Ring (Anguthi):** Jethinejia (lizard tail shape), Marnejia (peacock tail shape), Hirakhatoa (set with diamonds), Barbiphulia (shaped like barbi flower), Padumkali (shaped like a lotus bud) etc.
- (ii) **Beads (Mani):** Silikha (shaped like Terminalia citrilina or Haritaki fruit), Parachkua (shaped like pigeon's eyes), Polmani (Beads of coral), Phutumani (beads like melons), Mukutamani (beads of pearls) etc.

- (iii) **Neckless (Biri):** Jon-Biri (neckless with crescent moon shaped pendant), Dholbiri (with drum shaped pendent), Panchsari/Satsari/Nasari (with five/seven/nine strings of beads), Kanthara (neckless) etc.
- (iv) **Ear ornaments (Keru):** Jangphai Keru (cylindrical ear plug of amber), Long Keru (clove shaped gold ear), Dighal Keru (long shaped), Nejepata (tail shaped ear-rings), Karnabala (shaped like bangles), Lokapar (ear ornament), etc.
- (v) **Miscellaneous other ornaments:** Gam Kharu (special wristlets), Kankan (heavy bangles), Kalka (paisley shaped ornament for turban), Keyura (ornament of upper arm), Junur (jingling ornament for the waist) etc.

Artifact analysis: Jewelry products

Table 4 describes the overall status of the Jewelry products produced near Tezpur, place called Sunarigaon.

Table 04. Describing about Jewelry products of Assam place of availability, composite material, unique designs, reusability, cultural association, pleasant offering and ownership proud of the product

Product		Jewelry products	
Location of the object		Sunarigaon Tezpur	
Nature		Private	
Storing consideration		kept with safety	
Material Analysis			
Material	Composition	Durability	Disposability
Gold or silver with gold plating	Gold mixed with copper, Silver	longer lasting	reusable
Aesthetics Analysis			
Visual assessment	Historical reference	Experience	Emotional assessment
Unique product design of most of the products associated with Assam	Traditionally part of Assam life style	Gives feeling of proud	Indicates association with Assam
Interactive qualities			
Explicit characteristic	Social intent	Shared Intent	Adapted use
Used to be procured in two set daily use and party wear	Part of society	Belongingness with Assam	-

(v) Pottery and terracotta: Pottery and terracotta art, fig. 48, as example, was prosperous during the Ahom's rulers of Assam as special patronage given to them from the rulers. During the period of Tungkhungiya an Ahom king, art of terracotta tile making grew further as large masonry buildings decorated with beautiful and intricate panels during that time (Dasgupta 1988). Goalpara district of lower Assam is famous for making earthen toys fig 48 (a) specially dolls of terracotta and Asharikandi village of Dhubri district was initially famous for pottery work but on later stage terracotta product are also widely produced here. A large variety of pots produced in pottery and some pottery boats are found in excavation in around Guwahati.

Most of the pottery products were used for cooking and storing eatables, some other were used as lighting lamps, children toy, bhaona (traditional drama of Assam) mask fig 48 (b), decorative piece and for religious rituals. Still Assam upholds its pride in innovating clay artifacts. Possibility may be looked into for design development with clay and using other material along with it where other than local artisans outside experts and learners can explore newer challenges.



(a)

(b)

Fig.48. Terracotta is one of the living art in practice; (a) excellent terracotta in traditional producing village in Assam (b) character masks for traditional play

Artifact analysis: Pottery and Terracotta

Table 05 describes the overall status of the terracotta products produced near Dhubri, place called Asharikandi.

Table. 05. Describing about terracotta products place of availability, material used, environment friendly disposable nature, cultural association, and ownership proud of the product

Product		Terracotta products	
Location of the object		Asharikandi	
Nature		Private	
Storing consideration		kept with decency as decorative peace	
Material Analysis			
Material	composition	Durability	Disposability
Earthen	Baked after making	Drop hazard	Thrown when broke
Aesthetics Analysis			
Visual assessment	Historical reference	Experience	Emotional assessment
Unique product for special use	Protection from royal families	Ownership proud	Indicates association with Assam
Interactive qualities			
Explicit characteristic	Social intent	Shared Intent	Adapted use
Different shape and size	Part of society	Belongingness with Assam	Proud of ownership

(vi) Cane and Bamboo products: Assam region is a mountainous landscape region with tropical climatic conditions that is good for development of forests. Such especially blessed terrain helps in flourishing of many household industries. Bamboo is widely available here with a lot of varieties. The flexible nature of bamboo makes it usable for making various products, fig. 49 mentioning some examples. Bamboo made products are integral part of Assamese people from the centuries and almost every household knows carving bamboo for use.

Some of the products widely produced in Assam are Japi a conical hat that is used for covering scull during sunshine, some decorated ones are used for honoring; flooring made-up of bamboo are used for sitting or sleeping that gives natural insulation in different climatic conditions; bamboo products of bigger sizes are also used for keeping or carrying goods, fig. 49 (a and b), some such products are Khorai, Duli, Dukla; some fishing are polo, jakai, Khalil, cheapa etc. and daily life bamboo products are widely used in households, fig. 49 (c). Some other products are also created and used for religious, fig. 49 (d), furniture purpose, fig. 49 (f) and some new age products are providing environment friendly solutions, fig. 49 (e). Bamboo craft is practiced in almost all the district of Assam.



Fig 49. Bamboo product sample, (a) bamboo made storing product with small neck (b) bamboo product with a cap (c) fishing and daily life products (d) mostly used for religious purpose (f) environment friendly product (g) excellent furniture from bamboo in traditional producing village

Artifact analysis: Bamboo products Assam

Table 06 describes the overall status of the cane and ivory products produced throughout the Assam.

Table. 06. Describing about bamboo products universal availability, environment friendly nature, cultural association, and daily use of the product

Product	bamboo products		
Location of the object	Most parts of Assam		
Nature	Private		
Storing consideration	kept with decency as decorative peace		
Material Analysis			
Material	composition	Durability	Disposability
Bamboo		variable	Thrown when broke
Aesthetics Analysis			
Visual assessment	Historical reference	Experience	Emotional assessment
Unique product with special design	Protection from royal families	Useful in daily life	Indicates association with Assam
Interactive qualities			
Explicit characteristic	Social intent	Shared Intent	Adapted use
Different shape size and use	Part of society	Belongingness with Assam	Proud of ownership

(vii) Ivory products: The art of making decorative and daily life use objects from ivory were practiced in Assam from the immemorial time. Mention of creative ivory products of Assam is found in many Indian epic and ancient writings of scholars visited Assam. Many products made of ivory were popular among the Assamese people. Some specialist ivory products, fig. 50, like mat made of ivory strips, ivory hilted knife, and ivory replicas of elephant are kept in few temples and Namghar (prayer house) of the state.

Now days this art is not practiced in most part of the world due to malpractices adopted by some of the raw material suppliers and subsequent protest by animal right activists. This art was practiced in almost all the district of Assam. Along this many other art form including painting, sculpture, specialty woodwork etc. were practiced in Assam from the very early days that can be seen in museum and other such places.

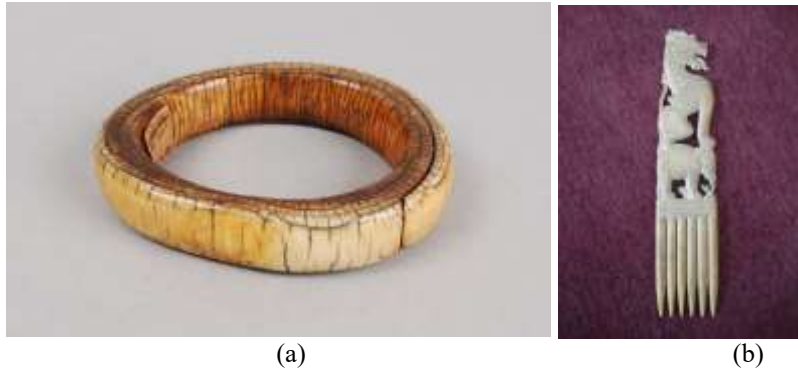


Fig.50 Samples of Ivory products of Assam; (a) wrist bangle (b) a comb made up of excellent ivory work (<https://in.pinterest.com/pin/547046685979360589/>)

Vast cultural heritage of Assam and elements associated with Assamese identity have a lot of possibilities to creating a distinct identity for Assam and its people if popularize in a dynamic way.

Artifact analysis: Ivory products

Table 07 describes the overall status of the ivory products produced throughout the Assam.

Table. 07. Describing about ivory product unique design, rear material, cultural association, pleasant and ownership proud of the product

Product		Ivory products	
Location of the object		Most parts of Assam	
Nature		Private	
Storing consideration		kept with decency as decorative peace	
Material Analysis			
Material	composition	Durability	Disposability
Ivory	engraved	Very durable	Thrown when broke
Aesthetics Analysis			
Visual assessment	Historical reference	Experience	Emotional assessment
Unique product with special design association with Assam	Protection from royal families	Useful and decorative	Satisfaction
Interactive qualities			
Explicit characteristic	Social intent	Shared Intent	Adapted use
Different shape size and use	Part of society	Royal feel	Proud of ownership

Such may often obsolete in practice can be revived and be made rear experience tourism. With the above it is known that there are many items and traditional practices that can contribute in looking at tourism in different way, providing scope for tourist/guest to meet residents, know their culture and traditional artifacts.

2.4 Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter investigations were conducted about tourists information and associations with local culture and people of Assam; experience of people of Assam who stayed in different part of country about information status about cultural practices followed by them; effectiveness of on arrival cultural display in prominent city Guwahati; online information availability about handicraft of Assam; service design issues about widely available handicraft silk products and other handicraft products at traditional producing villages. It is found that tourists to Assam consider entire Northeast India as a single unit despite huge cultural and ethnic diversity among indigenous communities that indicates about information gap. Some established research works suggest that handicraft items are most preferred memento by the tourists but investigation among the tourists to Assam suggests that they prefer agriculture products most notwithstanding. Assam has an age old culture and tradition of producing excellent unique handicraft products. It is found that most of the tourists visiting Assam for wildlife, and there is less tourist attractions due to lack of knowledge about the culture and there are not much efforts were made to experience/interact with local residents.

Experience of people of Assam who stayed in other parts of India suggests that fellow citizens of different states of India are having very less information about the culture and practices of Assam. In recent years they came to know about very few elements (specially Gamucha) as some prominent ministers of government of India use it in daily public life.

Online information on extensively used search engine about the handicraft of Assam highlights information about the bamboo products of Assam that is widely available throughout the India now a day. The products made up of bamboo cannot cater tourists desire for uniqueness while other products would have been displayed.

Tourist during their stay in Assam and wish to acquire a memento came to know only about the traditional silk products of Assam. They tend to visit market place with cluster of silk shops located in city center of capital city Guwahati. During exploration they found many vital issues related to convenience of purchase and furious service design. Although they like the product but found the shops were not welcoming in overall appearances.

Further the research about other unique handicraft items that have potential for becoming popular memento were conducted at the traditional producing villages, as such items are widely procured by local people and available at few specific shops only for local people use and in Guwahati city few Government emporiums are there. It is found that traditional villages are known for a special product made-up of a specific composite material. A lot of products are produced in these villages varied in size, design, use and using different materials can be explored for tourism interest.

Tourists experience on prevailed facilities indicates that tourists are interested and knowing and owning handicraft products of Assam but the service design of Guwahati city center based shops are not welcoming to them. If the something could be done to improve purchase experience, then tourist likely to prefer these handmade products. Interactive-ness would be the new challenge as well a fresh opportunity to sustainable growth; if tourism can play role in it.

In search of accruing memento and experiencing the skill of making it, tourism development may be boosted in these villages but for proper hospitality management involvement of different stakeholders is must. What stakeholders think and suggest about such activity is extremely important to understand. That is explored and presented in next chapter.



CHAPTER 3

Determining developmental aspirations by stakeholders

Chapter overview

Qualitative assessment of elements likely to influence the tourism status of the traditional handicraft producing villages of Assam was conducted and it was decided to explore views and aspirations of various stakeholders relevant to tourism development in their areas of expertise. This chapter looks into the possibilities of introducing village artisans in tourism viewing sustainability of their trades and improved interaction with others.



3.0 Introduction

United Nations general assemblies in 1987 thrown light on sustainable development, the organization defined it as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. It has very vast context as every sector is having its own interpretation and implication of it. Assam has a legacy of making unique handicraft products of various types as evidenced in chapter two. Among them handloom weaving has an overwhelming presence in the socio-economic life of people of Assam since time immemorial. Loom owners of Assam selling their products mainly in local markets in absence of proper marketing channel (Phukan, 2012). Similar trend is observed in other craft items where the artisans involved in producing these high-quality handicraft products are not getting enough benefits of their hard work and living very low life style.

Sometimes they are sailing such products themselves in nearby locality/cities, fig.51 (a, b), struggling to get fair price for their products and living a below average life not encouraging to invite visitors, fig 52 (a, b). Some developments are happening in very recent time when online market giants are taking some interest in such products (ET, 2020) but approaching these rural creators is very challenging. Despite of its tremendous potential quite often it is praised in meetings of varied nature of expressing indigenous delights, the handloom industry has not flourished in commercial sphere to the desired extent from the years (Dutta, 2015). As travel and tourism is an evident economic activity and the industry is flourishing now-a-days, the sector can take advantages of flourishing travel and tourism industry around the world. It would be a win-win situation for both travelers and host as tourists would get chance to explore some unexplored products in friendly interactive environment and host will have additional earning opportunity, and thus there will be motivation to keep the skill rolling on.



(a) (b)
Fig. 51 Products in sales; (a) brass metal worker sailing his produce to nearby locality (b) bell metal worker came to sell his products all the way from Sarthebari to Guwahati city



(a) (b)
 Fig. 52 Living condition of traditional artists; (a) bell metal village Sarthebari
 (b) weavers house in Sualkuchi

It is noticed that tourists visiting Assam mostly for wildlife, natural beauty, holy shrines, lush green tea gardens, vibrant and colorful cultural festivals (ESA, 2017). To harness the growth of tourism the tourism department with the help of various levels of governments and private sector has done a lot of work in infrastructure development and creation of other tourist-centric facilities over the years (ESA, 2017) mostly in the urban environment. The department in its recent policy decided to develop new spots and circuits all around the Assam (TPA, 2008).

This initiative may really help the economy and employment of region directly and indirectly. It has a direct impact on the income generation of native people through foreign exchange earnings, infrastructure development and exchange of culture among tourist and visitors (Haque, 2016). Its major indirect positive impact is mostly on the local handicraft as such items are one of the preferred memento among the tourists due to its uniqueness and they give a lot of importance to objects purchased during the trip (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988) as it reminds of a memorable experience of the visited place (Gordon, 1986; Littrell, 1990; Smith, 1979); they carry a “human touch” with purchased handmade products. This purchase by the tourists not only contributes to the market around but also promotes locally available specialty products (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997) and an emotional interaction between them.

In a research conducted by Yuksel in 2007, respondents showed a high willingness to talk to salespeople, spend more time browsing and exploring the products, and spend more money than originally planned when the climate of the tourist shopping habitats is perceived to be stimulating. Some other research also suggests that the souvenir shopping is an extreme emotional decision on part of tourists, the experience deals with aesthetics where tourist shoppers are able to examine, feel and think about items even if shopping is not a principal reason for their travel (Snepengeret, et al., 2003). Enough research has not been done on sustainable benefits derived by informal traders from the sales of handicrafts to tourists and very little has been focused on the handicraft value chain (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2001). The less explored area requires a lot of attention as stake holders of such handicrafts producing region have a lot of aspirations from it.

Assam has an age-old tradition of producing handicraft products. A lot of unique artistic products are associated with the state traditionally i.e. apparel products made up of special silk variety Pat Muga, bell metal and brass metal products with unique

designs, ethnic jewelry products with exceptional work, cane bamboo products etc. Livelihood of huge number of people of Assam depends on handicraft products producing sector, infact the sector appears to be the second largest sector, providing employment after agriculture in rural Assam.

A lot of stakeholders are directly or indirectly associated with this sector in different capacities i.e. producing artist, traders, shop keepers, NGOs etc. Understanding and inclusion of local people in planning and development is extremely important for success of any development activity including tourism, as any development step should meet their aspirations or reservations on such development activity. In this chapter an attempt to understand the views of various stakeholders associated with some prominent traditional handicraft producing villages for the possibility of promoting sustainable development of such villages via rural tourism.

Effort has been made to get familiarity with the stakeholders' views and tourism possibilities in the area of rural tourism at Sualkuchi the silk village of Assam and Sarthebari known for traditional bell metal products, on the other hand it is found through artisans at jewelry producing village Sunarigaon that they have reservation to show their traditional skills and designs to the visitors to protect authenticity.

Silk cloth weaving is one of the oldest and largest practiced handicrafts in Assam. Glory of extraordinary silk products of Assam is mentioned in Indian epic Ramayana, Mahabharata and Arthshastra written by great ancient Indian scholar Kautilya. During the time of Ahom kingdom in Assam special royal patronage was given to the silk culture as sericulture was made obligatory household work that help in its further flourishing (Mahan, 2012).

All the four varieties of natural silk i.e. Eri, Muga, Mulberry and Tussar are produced in Assam (Baruah, 2016). Among them the Muga silk of Assam got geographical indication for the state as it is only available here. The verity has extreme durability and its luster increases after every wash. From the health point of view, it absorbs ultraviolet rays and protects skin from its harm (Geog. Indi. 2017).

With such tremendous qualities, Assam silk product may become a convenient memento. Assam silk products are very popular among the local people but not presented well to the tourists in the capital city Guwahati based cluster of shops.

Bell metal products are second largest practiced handicraft in Assam. Handmade products produced of bell metal are very popular among people of Assam and almost every household used to have one such product in their house for daily or occasional religious use. Many products produced here could be identified by its unique design elements. Form, shape and sizes of such bell metal products vary as per the use.

Enough research has not been done on sustainable benefits derived by informal traders from the sales of handicrafts to tourists (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2001). This present study explores aspirations and reservations (if any) of the stakeholders so that it can be incorporated in planning of development of rural tourist destinations. Such understating is very important in the process as stakeholders used to have deep understanding about the possibilities and hails about the destinations. With the help

of stakeholders' proper focus can be given to the product quality and satisfaction that could lead to the concept of customers' delight (Saikia and Nath, 2015).

3.1 Study area

Stakeholders information on two major handicraft sectors, e.g. silk and bell metal was considered for study. The responses/findings are assumed to be nearly similar for other artifacts also. To get an exemplary insight of the production villages. Sualkuchi and Sarthebari location was chosen.

Silk products are prepared throughout the Assam but Sualkuchi is a village also known as 'Manchester of Assam' as almost every household is involved in silk producing activity and is the largest silk producing village of Assam. It is Guwahati Sub-division of Kamrup district situated on the north bank of the mighty Brahmaputra about 30km from Guwahati the capital holding city of Assam on the latitude of 26°10'0"N and the longitude of 91°34'0" E (Agarwal et. al., 2015).

Sualkuchi has about 17,000 Silk working looms and more than 25,000 people are directly or indirectly employed in the silk industry. Sualkuchi produces more than 31.00 lakhs linear meters of silk fabrics out of the total production of about 42,19,055 linear meters of silk fabrics in Assam (Agarwal et. al., 2015). It has good possibilities of becoming a popular rural tourist destination as components of heritage are the main attractions for both domestic and international tourists since they fulfill desire for curiosity that helps in learning and appreciation of local cultures (Bak, 2007).

Such act is supposed to provide an opportunity for tourist to experience, appreciate and buy authentic silk products by paying its due price that may create good income to the families of employed weavers in this industry as they remain poor, despite working 10-12 hours a day, and the benefits derived from handicraft sales are not reflected in their livelihoods (Richard, 2007).

Sarthebari is a place of Assam knows for traditional bell metal products. The place is geographically located at 26.35°N and 91.22°E and around 80 km from the capital city of Assam. Bell metal products are widely produced in cottage industry here and about half of the population of the area is associated with production of bell metal products.

3.2 Case study on silk village Sualkuchi

The study conducted at traditional silk village Sualkuchi; the study approach and observations are presented below.

3.2.1 Methodology followed

To understand the state of tourism at Sualkuchi several field visits in different time of year were carried out to understand the ground level scenario. Sualkuchi has been added in tourism to explore available product list and has facility to stay also. While talking about stakeholders related to silk in this case would be a person or group of persons who has an interest in a unit of production and marketing, and directly/or

indirectly affecting or getting affected by development in the unit. In case of village Sualkuchi stakeholders' are multilevel players and presented in stakeholders' map and showing their correlation in fig. 53. In this study focus was on the interaction and convenience of tourists from various aspects including service design as that was reported missing in the survey conducted in the Panbazar silk shop market cluster of shops and presented in chapter two, so they are kept in the center. During their possible visit to the village they will be mostly interacting with the skilled artisan in their work environment to understand and learn the high skills of the artisans on the product they are working on.

Other stakeholders are sometimes directly or indirectly associated with the tourists but seems to having some lacking in having some correlation among themselves. Entrepreneurs are also associated with tourists as they may visit their shops in search of products as entrepreneurs are maintaining good stock of the final product of different types and varieties. Other government organizations like cooperatives/ societies / institutions / business/ service providing groups comprise to the entire stakeholders, they also are having association with the probable tourists using different platforms and campaign.

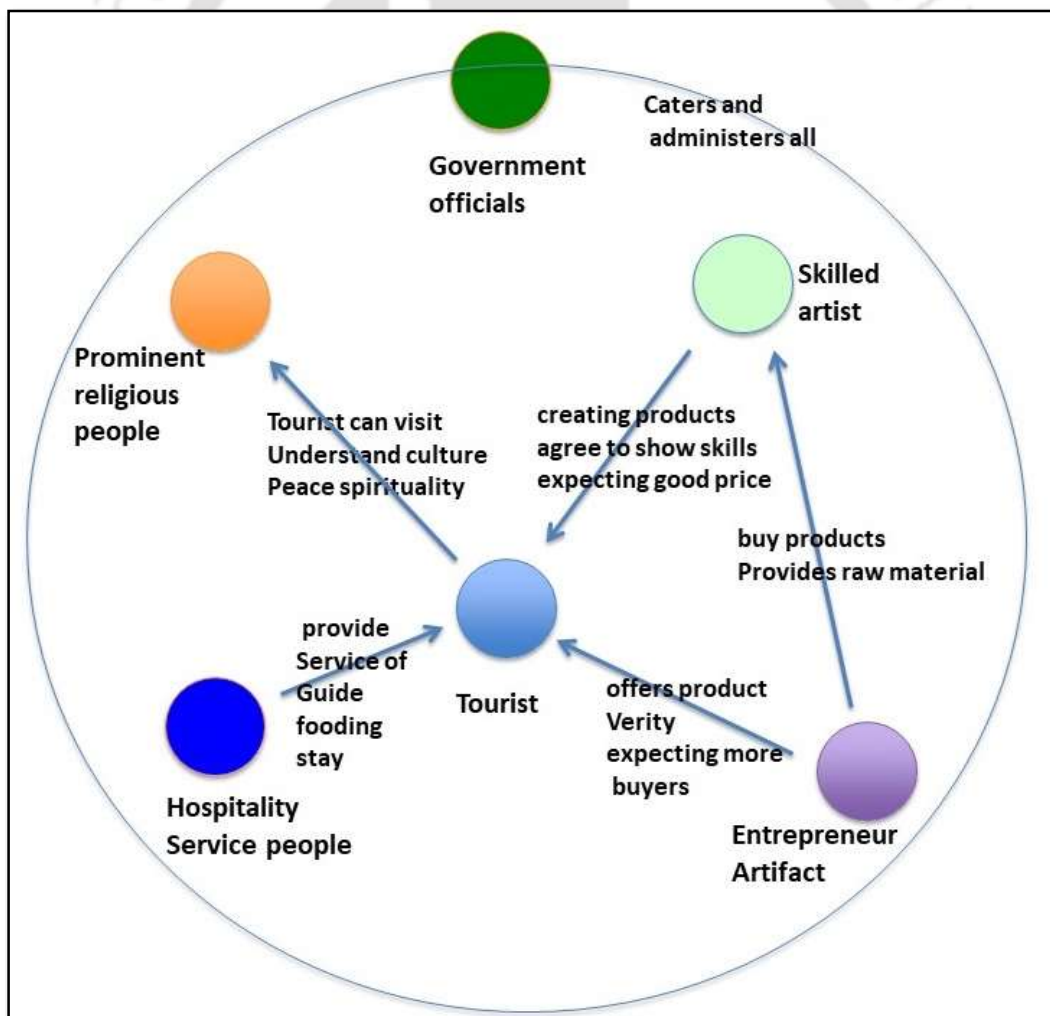


Fig: 53 Stakeholders map showing coexistence

Further information was collected following purposive looked into having group meetings and open-ended interviews of the various stakeholders comprising 10 number of artists, 10 numbers of entrepreneurs with experience of more than 15 years in the silk products and 5 government officials were contacted. Satradhikari, the main administrator of about 300-year-old Sri Hati Satra (prayer house), priest of an ancient temple situated in Sualkuchi, 6 number of people involved in service sectors and 10 number of local residence were taken into consideration as relevant information providers.

The main observation about the stakeholders' demography confirmed that most of them are proficient in local language only, sometimes they can understand Hindi, the national language of India, having hesitation in speaking. The stakeholders were briefed about the survey outcomes presented in chapter two.

Photography and videography were used for documentation. Some government/private agencies report and research papers in the similar research directions were consulted. Collected data were analyzed on the qualitative basis to highlight common/distinguished issues.

3.2.2 Views on tourists

Tourists opined in general that people of Assam are traditionally good hosts and almost same culture is followed in their villages across Assam. They are very inviting and love to have tourists in their village, fig. 54. Local artisans common feel was they are ready to showcase this great art of silk weaving to the tourists. They believe if more tourists visit the silk village it would be good for them as tourists can experience the expertise and pain of silk product making that may help in getting the due price for their product. Tourists movement in the area would bring out opportunities for the other hospitality related business and cultural/religious practice can be presented to the visitors. Tourist may enjoy the hospitality of the villagers. The distance between Guwahati to Sualkuchi and lack of time to travel this far probably is restricting direct tourists' movement to the Sualkuchi.



Fig: 54 Welcome gate at the entrance of traditional weaving village Sualkuchi

3.2.3 The Environment of the Village

On the enquiry about feel of the place, tourists mentioned as well as residents expressed that the rhythmic sound made by the looms and the flying shuttles is an integral part of their ambiance. It sounds like heartbeat to them. The weavers associated with this unique craft that shows their attachment with the craft practice also sing many traditional songs. The landscape and other attractions there in, fig. 55, appears to be inviting and the location though is promoted for tourists visit; it is yet to get polarized.



Fig: 55 Scope to explore the environment with tourism intents; (a) natural environment of the village that tourist can enjoy (b) memorials on father of nation (c) streets of the village (d) unexplored riverbank at the village (e) Satra at the village (f) ancient temple at the village

3.2.4 Views on silk products

All the entrepreneurs feel proud on the specialty silk products created in their area as that gives special name and fame to the village. They are also happy for getting the geographical indication for the specialty silk Muga of the Assam that is produced largely in their area. Special mention on the quality was the silk can be hand-washed and its luster increases after every wash. The produce has special medical value also as it absorbs ultraviolet rays to a great extent making the fabric very useful to protect the skin from ill effect of such rays.

Tourist may feel and experience the product with detailed understanding about its creation. Awareness on this to larger audience needs to be improved; ways and means for inviting people to use the product to be looked into through varied level of contemporary design creations as well as maintaining the ethnic distinctions.

3.2.5 Views on cottage silk handloom sector

It was noticed that silk handloom sector is a prominent cottage industry of the area from ancient time, even now almost every household in the village accommodates a working loom in their house fig. 56. It is an integral part of their daily life as production of silk products runs almost throughout the year.

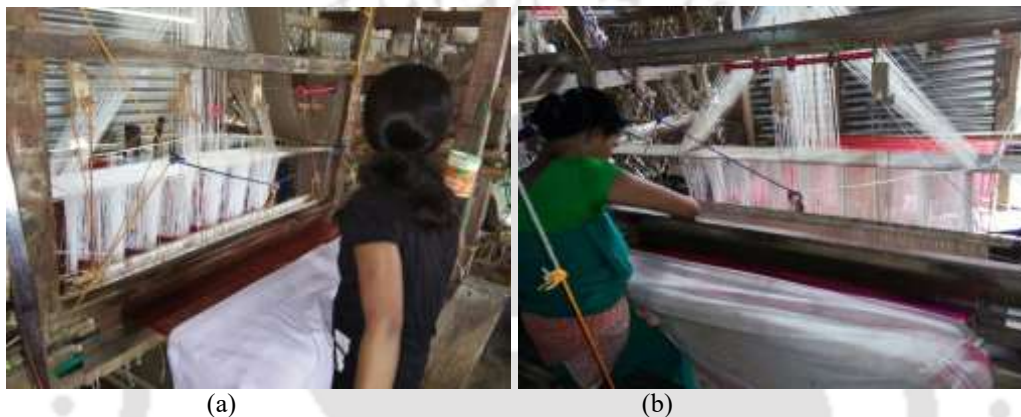


Fig 56. Female and male worker working on loom; specifically, the traditional motifs and design are being used; possibility for newer techniques and design is awaiting to explore.

3.2.6 Views on silk products variety

It was observed that the most prominent dresses made here are Mekhela chador (two piece cloths; one to wear at waist to cover bottom and another to cover upper body) and saree (an Indian women unstitched wearable drape of around 5-meter length) for females and Muga silk Kurta (a collarless shirt with big neck and buttons of slightly big length) for males. In contemporary time some other products like silk shirts, short kurtas etc. are also available nowadays. Tourist can explore and customize the available products, fig. 57.



Fig. 57 Product availability; (a) products traditional variety (b) new designs introduced to attract new generation

3.2.7 Views on silk products design motifs

It is observed and reported by the stakeholder in common that the silk products produced here are having some special design motifs associated with culture of Assam that gives these products a unique look and strong association with the state. These traditional motifs are of different types i.e. Phoolbuta (flower type), Japi (traditional Assamese headgear type), Gach (tree-like), Joon Biri (Assamese neck piece like), wild animal (the single-horned rhino) etc.

Some silk cottage industries also experimenting with some fusion designs (Fig. 58) related to different tribes of the region. Tourists may experience making skills of creating such motifs using different threads in a relaxed and calm environment that was missing at the Guwahati based shops.



Fig. 58. Contemporary design of motifs based on traditional design elements

3.2.8 Views on silk products competition

Some of the stakeholders reported about the threat from the silk products made in other parts of India with cheap and in combination of artificial raw material using Assam motifs. While visiting the village tourists may experience the qualities of original authentic Assam silk products.

3.2.9 Views on tourist infrastructure

Tourists (tourist when talking about requirements) and residents have expressed their happiness with the efforts of different organizations for initiation of the work for the development of tourist facilities in the area but reported about scarcity of basic tourist amenities that normally expected in current period. As most of the tourists are coming for very short time in the area so they are unable to explore the full area and product varieties as special arrangements of guide and the road signage are not in place. In lack of these the tourists are guided by the transport people who bring them to Sualkuchi to selected shops only of their preferences.

They in common suggested for improvements in this and also for elongated stay facilities so that tourists could spent more time in the area which would eventually contribute to the economy and tourists would also get exposed to different available varieties of the same product. The key infrastructure development suggested by the stakeholders is as summarized below and relevant agencies may consider it for planning and development:

(i) Accommodation: Although some accommodation is created under indigenous tourism project of Sualkuchi in the outskirts of the village but it is not popular among the tourists may be due to loneliness, stakeholders suggested for good stay places near to their locality to attract tourists; that means to have close interaction stay facility to be nearer to the production centers and shops. To overcome this many of stakeholders shown willingness to prepare one room with all amenities near their workshop for the tourists.



Fig. 59 Tourist stay facility build near Hajo ruined due non popularity

(ii) Children Park: It was pointed out that many of the domestic tourists are traveling with children and their destination decisions are driven by choices of children. Children park with all latest amenities would attract local tourist to the area and outside tourists would also be enjoying.

(iii) Parking: It was suggested for creating parking around the marketplace so that tourist could move hassle-free in the area. They also suggested for e-Rikshas from the parking area for an eco-friendly ride to the village would be a good option to move in and around.

(iv) Tourist Calendar: It was also suggested for developing tourist calendar with details of local special sacred days when working on loom is not advised as per their cultural practice but other local festivals can be enjoyed. That indicates requirement of development of a tourist calendar so that tourist can plan their visit, so that tourist can plan their journey accordingly.

(vi) Cuisine: It was pointed out that the need for more restaurants with both popular as well as local cuisines where food is prepared in hygienic conditions. Some of the entrepreneurs proposed for a kitchen run by weavers at the silk workshops where tourist can enjoy local cuisine made with local flavor.

The residents of the village were very proud to have such an ancient industry in their area that gave them global identity in form of getting GI for the Muga silk of Assam. They are having a lot of aspirations from the tourism development in their area as such activity would give them an opportunity to show their talent to the visitors so that they could get due price for their products without any middleman. Such activities not only would be helpful in improving their living standards but also encourage the younger generation to peruse the art with proud. The local entrepreneurs are the ones, who know about all the possibilities and hails of their area. Their views should be included by the policymakers so that a convenient tourism environment could be encouraged including them. Thus it would facilitate tourists to interact and mingle with local people to understand their cultural practices. As the village stakeholders reported about the lack of tourism infrastructure in their village but they proposed to prepare limited facility for tourists. So the idea of having a tourist facility center with modern facilities demonstrating miniature of traditional artefact producing village type atmosphere near the Guwahati city networked with their village was communicated to them and they were told that they will be consulted about further development.

3.3 Case study on Bell metal village Sarthebari

To understand possibilities of inducting bell metal in tourist map, a survey approach was taken and observations reported in brief are presented below.



Fig: 60 Office of the Sarthebari municipal board

3.3.1 Methodology followed: Fifteen residents spread around Panch Gram (set of five village) from Sarthebari, fig. 60, were contacted for understanding their views about the tourism development related to traditional bell metal craft practiced in their locality. The participants included 12 number of traditional practitioner of the craft form, 14 number of local entrepreneurs, 3 number of youth leaders, 2 number of government officials and 6 number of local residences. They prefer to follow their traditional life-style, speaks Assamese language, not fluent to tourists' language to interact and feel neutral as they feel, not proper scope to entertain visitors in their villages. They were found to be very cordial, this may be encashed to attract visitors breaking the boundary of limitations.

3.3.2 Views on tourists: Participants of the traditional bell metal producing village and other residents suggest that they had a tradition of welcoming visitors during the ancient times. Visitors mostly merchants and learners of the art, from nearby countries like Bhutan used to come and stay at their village. They would love to revive the practice again. They always want to show this great art of bell metal product to the tourists. They believe if more tourists visit the village it would be good for them as tourists can understand the expertise of bell metal product making and can purchase.

3.3.3 The Environment of the Village: Many households of the village involved in producing traditional bell metal products few of them also making products of brass metal. The sound of making and testing creates a unique Devine atmosphere. Almost every household of the village practice this traditional art form and still follow their traditional skill, fig. 61, which has scope to explore.



Fig: 61 Sarthebari village in look (a) Bell metal workshops in the village (b) Krishnguru sevashram (c) Oldest Namghar of the area (d) Cooperative office of craftsperson (e) clean village path road

3.3.4 Views on bell metal products

In common, residents of the village are having a lot of proud emotion for their traditional handmade products. Special compound material is used for making these products that have some medicinal value also they claim. Products are of variable sizes from small ball and to big size plates.

3.3.5 Views on cottage bell metal products

Residents expressed an overall feeling of pride to have such traditional industry in their village that gave them special identity. A lot of customers from state and neighboring countries used to come their village from the centuries to procure the specialty products made by them but they are worried that their future generation is not picking the profession due to lack of sell at appropriate price. Attempts taken by Government and non-government organizations were found not enough to motivate young members of their families to take up this as main profession.

3.3.6 Views on bell metal products variety

A lot of verity products are made in their village that is used in daily life and also in different religious and joyful activity. Most of the products are made in traditional designs. Some products have a special stand like base that is unique to utensils of Assam. Products are of reusable in nature that make them sustainable and environment friendly. There is enough scope to give these items a contemporary feel and still maintaining traditional flavor retained; design development intervention may be looked into.

3.3.7 Views on tourist's infrastructure:

Stakeholders are happy to welcome tourists as tourism activity development in their area could increase their income but they are worried about poor touristic infrastructure as it is in developing stage at the village and if tourist visit is not pleasant that may affect the village negatively in future. They are ready for small scale tourist arrival so that they can give personal care to them, they reported that such limited movement of visitor was happening in probably pre independence era of India, when people from neighboring country used to come and stay with them and shares life style and culture.

3.3.8 Tourist Calendar

Stakeholders of varied level, from practitioners to entrepreneurs and marketers of varied level, from Sarthebari too insisted for a tourist calendar (also seen as part of infrastructure element, 3.2.9(iv), as are also having some special days when they usually don't work but have relevant social events to share with others. Calendar will help tourists to plan their journey accordingly.

As the village stakeholders reported about the lack of tourism infrastructure in their village but they proposed for revival of earlier practice of tourists coming and staying with them in limited number. The idea of having a tourist facility centre with modern facilities demonstrating miniature of traditional artefact producing village type

atmosphere near the Guwahati city networked with their village was communicated to them and they were told that they would be consulted about further development.

3.4 Discussion and Conclusion

Community development by the active participation and involvement in the decision making of the entire community from planning to action leads to the self-reliance of the community (Thomson, 1961). Further direct involvement of the community members is constructive for all the members of the community. (Selvam, 2004). Researcher Voth in year 1975 mentioned that when different local groups put efforts for their own development with monetary assistance from outside the development process speeds up.

Bottom-up and participatory approaches considering various stakeholders is very useful in planning, developing, improving and management of entire development idea. In present study have been collected opinion of the stakeholders have been collected regarding present bottlenecks of the tourism status and possibility in Sualkuchi and Sarthebari. It has been noticed that various factors responsible for fewer numbers of tourists' turn up in both the places that include poor transportation from the capital city, lack of basic amenities for the tourists, less awareness drive of the tourists about this place, inappropriate guidance to tourists, lack of safety and security etc. Resolving these issues along with popularizing these places as tourist destination would attract more tourists what would be the approach and if any fresh attempt can be made along with developing infrastructure of these villages.

All these initiatives would directly contribute to income generation of the local people, their socioeconomic development, motivating their young generations towards these artistic activity, getting the justified price for the products and development of interpersonal relations. The present explorative study can be seen as a contribution to the sustainable development of the villages, as it presents views of the stakeholders whose aspirations are associated with such developmental activities and enjoying benefits there by.

This study is an initial exploratory study collecting views of stakeholders of the surveyed villages with the further possibility of research for identifying the other points of tourists' interest and creating awareness about them among the tourist visiting Assam and others to motivate groups that may include students and youths.

Information gathered from interviews of the various stakeholders of the villages indicates about their proud sentiments for the art performed in their area and the name/ fame of their village due to this unique traditional practice that got geographical indication for specialty Muga silk. The fame of the village further spread if tourist visit in their area see and understand it personally. Stakeholders of Sualkuchi village informed about making new product varieties that may attract new age customers. They are also experimenting with fusion of traditional motifs to introduce new designs to create variety in design. There is good scope on design development and product diversity. They are worried about cheap look alike silk products imported from other parts of country as that is hampering business negatively, such practice could be stopped by informing buyers about the authentic products, they also need some certifying agency to maintain the authenticity.

Stakeholders are having a lot of aspiration from tourism development in their area so that they could get due price for the product made by them, that may inspire their younger generation to involve in the art practice in longer run that may protect the art from existence. Stakeholders of Sarthebari also informed about the glorious days when people from different far regions and countries used to visit and stay with them for acquiring product and knowledge about traditional artifact items, the practice could be revived as they are ready to interact and show art form to the visitors. Contemporariness of the products can be thought off.

Some communication limitations may be there as they are mostly able to speak only their mother tongue proficiently and have very less understanding of other languages. Stakeholders are optimistic with the availability of working loom making rhythmic sound in the village, scenic beauty inside the village and beautiful location on the riverbank and ancient monuments, places of worship in their area for tourists' significance and at the same time also worried about the lack of essential touristic infrastructure in their villages. Like availability of tourist-comfortable accommodation, restaurants, parking for their vehicle, activity for their children, tourist calendar specifying important local events where others can also participate.

Information gathered from the stakeholders in a qualitative manner and observations on the spot suggest that although a lot of development activities are happening in such traditional villages with government and non-governmental organizations varied level interventions but they are not prepared for mass tourist visits. These issues draw attention; can these villages be brought under tourism and develop all necessary supports as well, it also triggers to think an additional measure. Can there be a possibility in present scenario, for some immediate steps that may be taken in form of conceptualizing a standalone spot near the city center to attract tourists towards such informative and interactive opportunity with showcasing handicraft products. Such spot may be networked with the stakeholders of such traditional handicraft producing villages so that a limited guided tourist movement can be initiated with the personal hospitality and care.

CHAPTER 4

Exploring possibility of tourists' interaction facility centers with artisans

Chapter overview

Unique design of traditional handicraft of Assam have a lot of opportunity to catch tourist attention while service design of city based shops lacks in interaction opportunity with artisans and traditional producing villages of Assam are not prepared for large-scale tourism activity. This tends to look into tourism promotion conceptualizing interaction facility center convenient to demonstration cum sale place with skill demonstration of making of the handicraft products in an informative, interactive environment and appropriate service design for these traditional products at a close distance from the main city where tourists can visit comfortably. The proposed 'hub' could be networked with stakeholders of artifact producing villages so that it could also work as a facilitator for the tourists who want to visit these producing villages.

4.0 Introduction

People of Assam are following their great cultural tradition with joy and proud. The cultural depth can be seen from the way of daily life, festivals, dances, cuisines, art practices etc. The Art and Craft is an expression of inner instinct of an individual and community practice by fellow members gives a comprehensive strength to bind a society and maintain a unique identity. Assamese people have been traditionally adroit in works of art, such as brass metal work, bell metal work, ivory work, weaving, jewelry making etc. and some special villages are associated with the practiced art form from ancient time. Findings of the current study conducted about awareness status of handicraft products of Assam among the tourist visited the state (presented in earlier chapter) indicates about lack of information among the tourist before the visit and exhibits installed at different entry points to Guwahati city are also require better planning execution. Online information about art fed of Assam is also sale oriented but the visitors cannot find price of the items justifiable without developing better understanding about the product verity, utility, sentiments behind, making and other expects.

Further exploration was made with one of the handicraft product “Assam silk” at city center based silk shops, it is observed that service design of the product is not welcoming for the tourist. Explorations of some the traditional handicraft producing villages of Assam indicates about the lacuna in touristic preparedness at these villages. Residents of these villages have aspiration from the possible growth in tourism activity in the area and want to share their traditional artistic skill and knowledge with the tourists.

Such activity would provide interaction opportunity between the tourist and local people that may contribute in development of bond between them. This bondage would eventually light on overall wellness. Government of Assam also insisted for some innovation for popularizing handicraft products of Assam (ET, 2020). As the villages are not tourist prepared now some speedy steps are explored in this chapter if a tourist center in the outskirt of Guwahati viewing facilitating the interaction.

4.1 Exploration initiation

While exploring the state of service design of common artifacts at city based shops and at traditional producing villages a lot of opportunities for improvement are identified and a scheme was developed incorporating views of the tourists and interaction possibilities with the local culture. Entire collected information from surveys and spot documentation was studied thoroughly and multiple brainstorming sessions were conducted with small expert groups containing 4-5 designers/design academicians as available to volunteer in discussion and in general it is concluded that there is very less scope for improvement at the current market place due to involvement of multiple agencies administering the area. It is concluded to think for an alternate space for accommodating all the thoughts. Further study was conducted about the possible solution in form of a ‘hub’ a special interactive area with all amenities for all including differently abled person.

Guwahati is a hillock city and river is flowing at one side so a convenient location for such possibility is also need to be identified. For this a survey about another possible location was conducted considering approachability from city center for convenience of the tourists and relevant information support from previous explorations done by some researchers on expansion possibilities of Guwahati city was also adopted.

Stakeholders' aspirations of the traditional handicraft producing villages, with the tourist arrival in their area for exploring the craft practices followed by them were compiled and adjoined with the 'hub' concept and a system design approach was taken to address some of the issues relevant to frame a scheme. Exploration and validation was conducted about rudiments that can give a feel of Assam in the proposed 'hub' networked with the traditional producing villages.

4.2 Service design- a lead factor to 'hub' concept

Service design issues pointed out by the tourists, supported by documentation of the study area were classified. Established research also deliberated regarding service design that suggests exterior shopping environment is particularly important and it must be considered acceptable and pleasing before the interior of the shops is ever experienced (Yuksel, 2007) which is one of the most motivating factors to attract tourists. Further observation on the respondents showed a high willingness to talk to salespeople, spend more time browsing / exploring the products and would not mind spend more money than originally planned when the climate of the "Tourist Shopping Habits" is perceived to be stimulating. As tourist-shopping decisions are emotional on part of tourists and the experience deals with aesthetics where tourist shoppers are able to examine, feel and think about items.

All the collected information presented before groups of design students and academicians from time to time while exploring ideas and simultaneously feedback refinements. Brain storming sessions were conducted to address key issues of the service design as per the aspirations of the tourists. After detailed discussion with it is concluded that it is very difficult to resolve various issues raised by the tourists at the present market locations because of various constrains like disruption in ongoing commercial activity, limited commercial area, involvement of various Government and other agencies etc. that leads to conceptualization of a 'hub' considering all the concerns of the visitors and to give them an opportunity to experience product making as well as sharing skill and knowledge through demonstration by the artists and providing buying of the product with facility of customization.

In this context interrogation were conducted about the possible location of the 'hub' near city center convenient to the tourists visiting Guwahati. Further study was conducted to identifying elements from culture of Assam that can be incorporated in the park to give it a strong association with the state and making it distinct from other big malls having almost same time type of look in different cities, so that visitors can fulfill their desire for experiencing uniqueness.

The key concerns about the ‘hub’- a tourist park are listed below.

- Scheme development for the ‘hub’
- Management of the park
- Tourists extension facility at the ‘hub’
- Location considering approachability and security
- Exploration of local elements of the Centre
- Incorporation of elements in the park

4.3 Scheme development for the ‘hub’

While exploring the state of service design entire collected information from interviews were analyzed and categories to classify similar issues so that strategies could be developed to resolve it collectively and opportunities can be explored to introduce more interactive cultural attraction around the proposed artifact shop. Based on the data analysis a sematic diagram as shown in fig. 62. is developed.

As per the diagram the four key issues related to the artifact shop are shop interiors, exteriors, other required amenities and opportunities from the cultural practice considering tourist desires of joy and learning. The issues associated with the shop interiors are space inside the shop, product display, furniture for display, presence of female assistant, product verity etc. are listed out along with the issues related to shop exterior such as visibility of the shop, convenient approach to the shop, spacious parking area, relaxed environment, arrangements for accompanying kids and elderly etc.

Other amenities pointed out by the participant tourists also considered these are changing room, washroom, teashop, automated teller machine (ATM), etc.

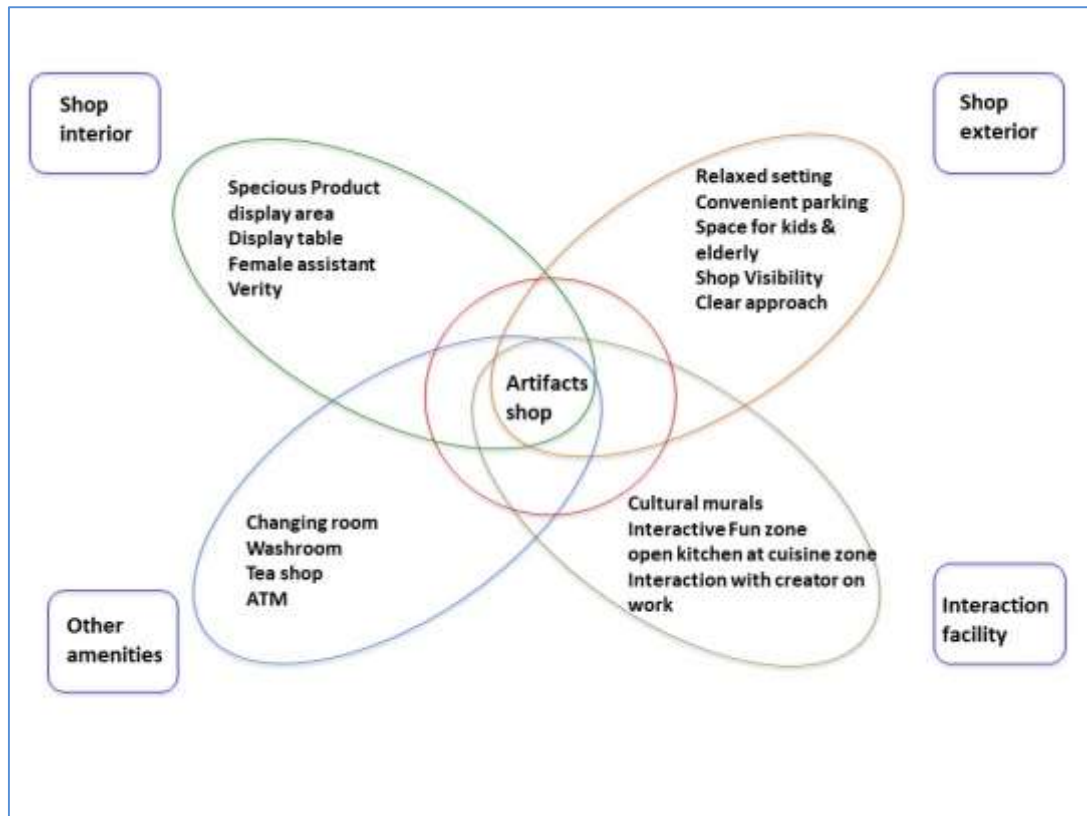


Fig.62. Butterfly diagram showing key considerations for the park

Accommodating these requirements pointed out by the visitors also provides opportunity for introducing other elements from the cultural depth of Assam that may engage tourists for information, interaction and fun experience in a convenient environment. Possibilities were thought of having four zones as shown in fig. 63, for introducing point of interest for the visitors so that they can halt there for at least half day as the more time spend will give the more scope interaction opportunity and mingling with local people to make their trip memorable. These additional inclusions are demonstration of product creation as desired by some of the tourist visitors to understand precision hard work and appreciate the skills of the local artisans, they may also opt for booking a particular product in making and also customized product as per their requirements.

Presence of an open restaurant inside the hub/park not only provide an opportunity to enjoy large variety local cuisines but also they can interact with the local cooks about recipe. A fun zone is also proposed in the 'hub' where tourists may learn dance steps and enjoy traditional fun games of Assam like *Koni Juj* (Egg fight) where two persons hit each other's egg alternately and the one who broke the egg of opponent will be declared as winner. Such proposed addition would provide extra interactive engagement to the tourist. Inner walls of the 'hub' may be used for demonstrating murals associated with culture and proud history of Assam so that enlighten tourist may share the proud.

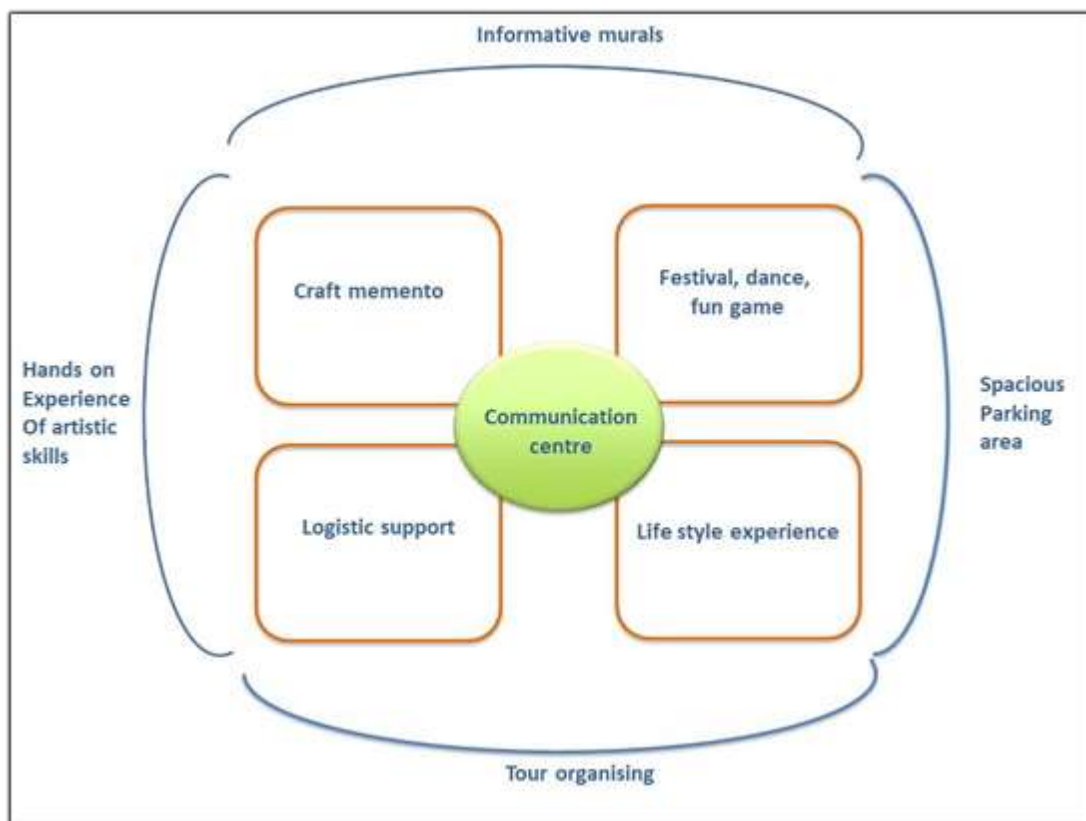


Fig.63. Concept figure of the park

Stakeholders of the handicraft producing villages are shown wish and willingness for being part in tourism activities. They can lead the activities of the park and share key roles in management of the system in consultation with funding agency government or NGO. Key management issues related to park management are discussed below.

4.4 Management of the park

Assam has a wise practice of having small societies formed by people for the people according to the need arise. People here are accustomed to democratically run a system and ready to play managerial as well as supportive role for the benefit of the society. That can be seen widely in functions organized here throughout the year, how meetings are called to form committee to run the function in best possible way. Similar approaches can be introduced in the park where Government/ NGO/ private firm can come forwarded to work as facilitator for involving local stakeholders. In order to manage the 'hub' as per convenience of the tourist the facilitating organizations can engage professionals to help the stakeholders' committee. Stakeholders may engage artisans on rotation basis from the villages and develop a calendar of engagement.

Local youths can be trained in area of tourist reception, hospitality and trilingual (Assamese, Hindi and English) for engagement in the park as guide like it is seen in the spice garden of the Panjim, Goa where multilingual local Konkani youths are working as guide/facilitator to the tourists and taking tourists to different locations of the garden to describe about multiple herbs and its extraction process in the natural

growing environment. Such approach may provide additional employment opportunity for the youths to work as a paid guide.

The idea of the park can be projected by an independent website along with linking with tourism department of government and other promotion websites.

4.5 Tourists extension facilities at the centre/ 'hub'

There is a scope for the centre, appropriate name may be given for such facility, to provide other extension facilities to the tourists, and they can be as listed below.

(i) Sale of handicraft products: Tourists are visiting places due to push by their regular place of stay due to hectic life style and they are pulled by a destination due to presence of relaxing environment and places of tourist interest. During their stay at the destination they tend to look for locally available mementoes. If locally made handicraft items are presented well before the tourists, they tend to pass more time exploring it and buy more items. In the proposed 'hub' most of the concerns of tourist buyers are addressed with additional elements to enhance tourists experience. All the handicraft items may be displayed in the 'hub' as regular sale or it can be displayed on rotational basis as specific occasion demand.

(ii) Hands on experience of handicraft making: In guidance of working creator tourists may try their hands in creation of products, that may give them an opportunity to understand the profound skills of working simultaneous on different steps of product creation. A joy of being part of a creation that the tourists can carry back with them would give an extra edge.

(iii) Local cuisine with open kitchen: People of Assam are following some special preparation methods for making delicious cuisines. Open kitchen concept is proposed in dining area of the 'hub' so that tourist can interact with the local cooks and learn the special preparation process. The environment of the dining area could be created using traditional bamboo furniture products to give a local look and environment.

(iv) Liaison with local residents and specific locations: Tourists are visiting destinations for a very short time and due to this limitation of time they look for seamless movement to cover most of the places of interest. Most of the time they are not aware of special entry arrangements available at the destinations. As most of the places are crowded with regular visitors and tourists in Assam, proposed 'hub' may have liaising with other popular destinations to provide tourists some special arrangements for witnessing the place to best utilise their limited time.

(v) Special workshop: To promote the local performing culture an event calendar comprising varied nature and duration workshops and special sessions with renowned artists is proposed in the 'hub' for increasing the interaction between local and the tourists. Tourists may participate and enjoy such workshops on passing.

(vi) River experience: Government is having a lot of encouragement for promoting river based tourism. River beach kite festival, river worshiping are the events organised on the main city bank of mighty Brahmaputra. Cycle tracks are also created to attract tourist on the city passing river Bharelu (river name) - a tributary of

Brahmaputra. As river flows are seasonal and variable throughout the year, when river is full of water then activities like angling, river watching can be encouraged and when river is low in flow at that time left out river bed can be utilised for picnic, sand house making etc. activities may be introduced by the 'hub'.

(vii) Common tourism assistance: With the help of tourism department of the state a tourist facilitation centre may be introduced in the 'hub' to assist tourists in extending or planning their tour when they are already in.

(viii) Short extended tour to and fro the city: Tourist coming from busy and hectic life in search of relaxation and amusement may directly come to the park to take a relaxed breath and enjoy the park environment. After relaxation if tourists want to move further to explore the city, the park may facilitate them by providing guided tour to the city.

(ix) Long stay with local help: Stay facility at the nearby locality of the 'hub' may be introduced where people living around may develop special guest arrangements at their houses and register with the 'hub' for getting a guest. 'Hub' in collaboration with professionals of hospitality field can organize a training session for such aspirants. Hygiene staff of the 'hub' may keep an eye on such arrangements created locally.

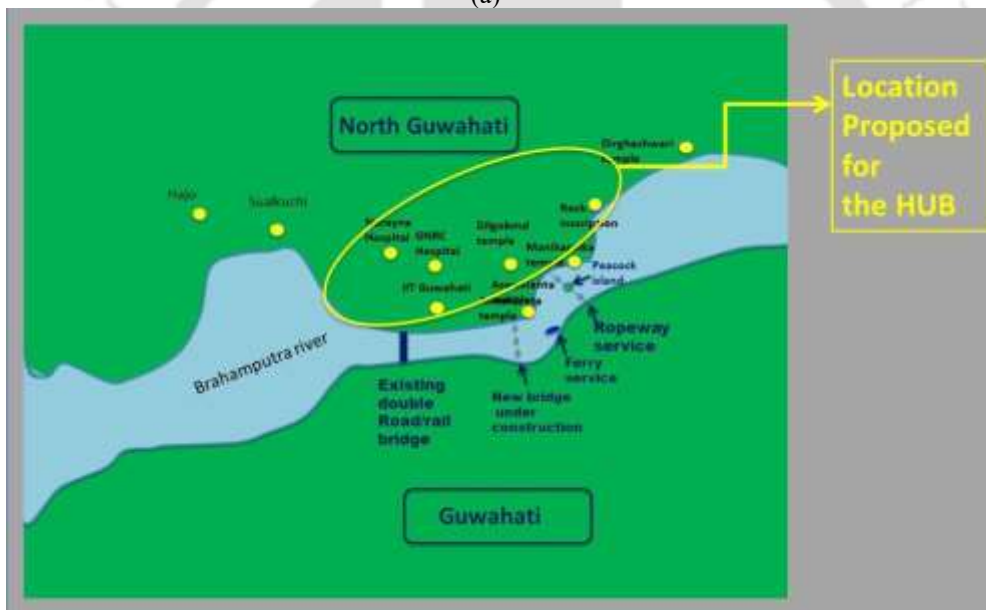
There are other relevant amenities require to consider as and whenever the need arises while executing the tourist extended facility centre/activity.

4.6 Location proposal for the park

The city of Guwahati is located on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. The south bank contains the main city area that have all the qualities of big city i.e. high rise buildings, densely populated population, high vehicular traffic on the road, noises etc. But the story is entirely different on the part of city on the northern bank. Although a lot of development activities are happening on this part but the life here is clam and peaceful, in the lap of nature that may be treasure for the tourist coming for relaxation and leisure fig. 64 (a, b).



(a)



(b)

Fig. 64 Guwahati across Brahmaputra; (a) View from Guwahati to north Guwahati (b) the area with other least explored places of interest where the 'hub' is possible in North bank

Big open roads and houses with big courtyard are widely seen on this part of North bank. Established researches on expansion of Guwahati city suggest that the city is expanded in unplanned way and further expansion scope is on this northern bank of the river Brahmaputra (Himani, 2018). This area is almost unexplored area by the tourist from outside Assam. The area accommodates a lot of places of interest related to history and heritage of Assam that may be of tourist's interest. A lot of development activities are initiated in the area with careful planning to protect its negative implication on the environment of the area. In a recent research, it is proposed to have a bicycle track on the river bank of this side (Borsaikia, 2020).

Broadly present touristic interest of North Guwahati can be divided into three categories.

- Heritage and Historical monuments
- Religious places
- New age developments

4.6.1 Heritage and historical monuments at North Guwahati

Heritage and history always attracts tourists' attention and the Northern part of Guwahati have a lot of places with strongly associated with the above mentioned domains. Some of these places are maintained by Archeological survey of India and others by local community; as tourism potential, fig. 65, may be cited as below:

(i) Rock Inscription: The rock inscriptions named Kanai Barsai Boa (name) is found in Rajadwar area of the North Guwahati, fig. 65(a). Strategic importance of this area during ancient period could be understand by three of such inscription related to military victories of regional powers over foreign invaders that attacked Assam from the west. One such inscription belongs to 1206 CE and other two from 1665 CE era. The size of these inscriptions varies, the biggest have girth of 37.8 feet and the smallest one measures 4.5 feet in length and 1.3 met resin breadth. Shapes of labyrinth, chessboard, circle, animal like figure, man, man riding animal, circle in a square, linear markings, circle, demon, lady, indeterminate objects etc. are found on the inscription telling about life and life style of ancient natives of this region (Das 2015; Bezbaruah & Devi, 2016). Such unexplored age old heritage could be of larger tourist interest if popularized among them.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

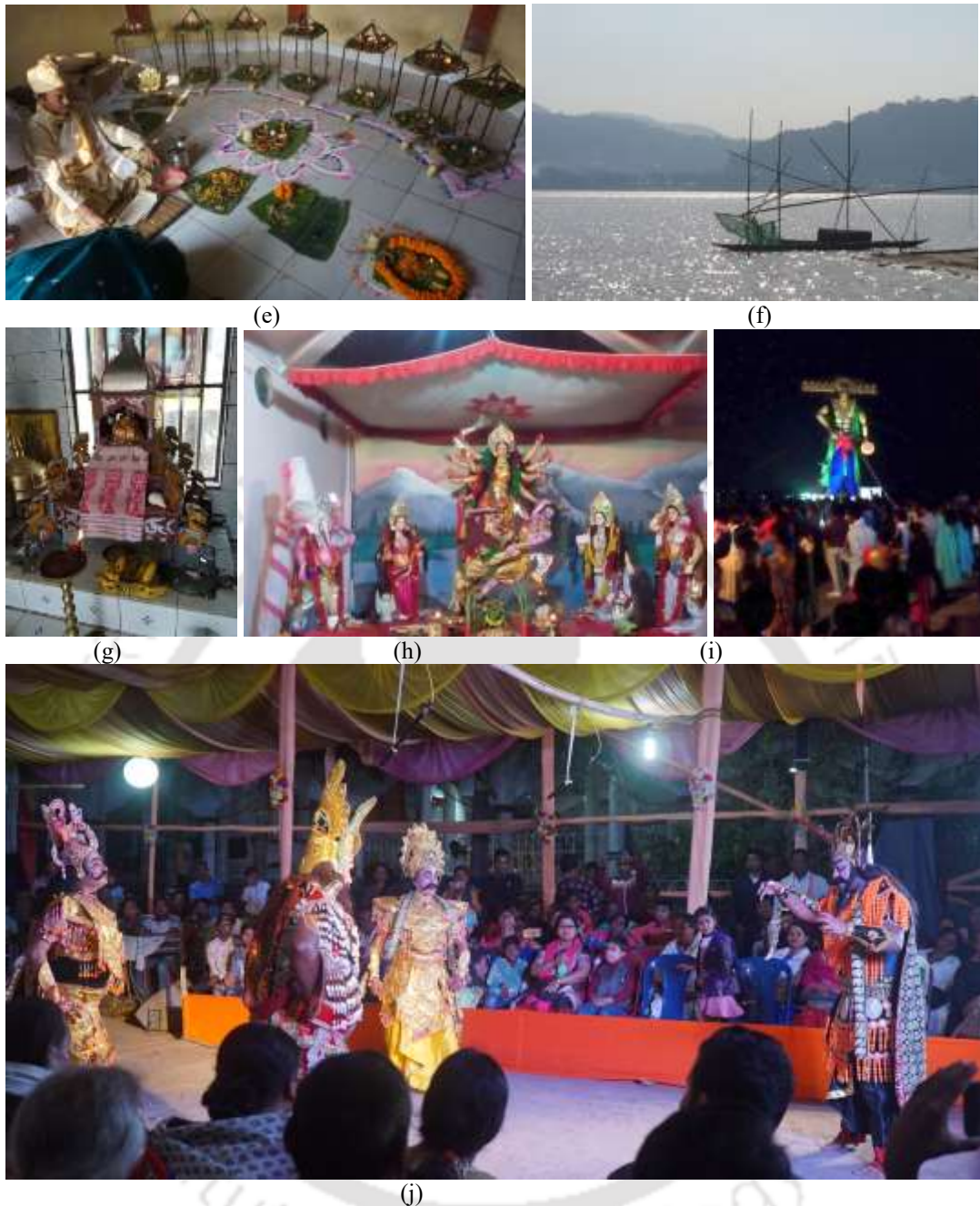


Fig. 65 Places and activities of tourist interest at North Guwahati; (a) rock inscription (b) Auniti Satra entry gate (c) Ancient Ashwaktanta temple (d) clean river bank for angling (e) religious procession where God came out of temple to bless the people (f) Me-Dam-Me-Phi a festival of remembering ancestors is being celebrated by Tai Ahoms community (g) Krishna temple at North Guwahati (h) Durga Pooja festival (i) Dashhara festival at North Guwahati and (j) Bhaona is being organized at Dolgobind temple, North Guwahati

(ii) Auniti Satra: Satras are closely associated with the life style of Assamese people, they socio-religious institutions that are established by Vaishnavite devotee of Assam, Srimant Sankardev and Madhavdeb (names). The Auniti Satra (name) was established in river island Majuli of Assam in 1663 A.D. by the Ahom King Sultanla and later a branch of the Satra is established in North Guwahati, fig. 65(b), area in 1915. A.D. The tourists visiting Satra may participate and appreciate the activities in divine atmosphere.

(iii) Ashwaktanta Devalay: The name of the temple, fig. 65(c), Ashwaktanta is made of two words Aswa means Hoarse and Klanta means tired, a mythological story where lord Krishna elope Rukmini for marriage his hoarse become tired and took rest here. The ancient temple was built by the Ahom king Siva Singha (1714-1744), which get shattered in 1900, which renovated by one British citizen lord Karjan (Das, 2015). The Ahom architecture is followed in building this temple. That could become a tourist hot spot as it is located on the hill that is exactly on the river bank and giving a marvelous view of river and the main city. Activities on the river like fishing, ship movement, rope way etc. may be enjoyed and captured from the temple premises.

(iv) Monikaraneswar Temple: As many of the tourists visiting Assam for religious interest, the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra has another age old religious attraction for them, that is Monikaraneswar temple. The temple is built aged back 10th and 11th century and later upraised by Ahom king Rudreswar Singha (1715-1769). Construction wise from foundation to middle of wall it is made using stones, middle to top it is made-up of flat bricks. Sculptures of God and Goddess with floral motif are engraved on the boundary wall of the temple (Das, 2015; Bezbaruah & Devi, 2016) The construction details and its relevance in the historic development of Assam culture would be an interest for many tourists, and for that awareness campaign may be looked into.

(v) Dirgheswari Devalay: Another age old medieval period shrine is located on Barghyachal hill in fulung area of North Guwahati. Followers of Shakti cult of Indian mythology consider this place as holiest place next to famous Kamakhya temple of Guwahati. Ahom King Siva Singha reign 1714 CE-1744CE constructed the present temple in supervision of Tarun Duwrah Borphukan. Some images of Hindu God and Goddess are engraved on the rocks around the temple (Das 2015, Bezbaruah & Devi 2016). The view of the northern bank is marvels from the hill top that tourist can enjoy after tracking and climbing the hill.

4.6.2 Religious places of interest at North Guwahati

Religious attractions are reported as one of the main priority of tourist visiting Assam. Places of religious interests of North-Guwahati are mostly visited by local tourist's other tourists from outside Assam can also join them.

Along with Satras, Dirgheswari temple and Ashwaktanta Devalay fig. 65, few more can also be added in the list.

(i) Dolgobind Temple: Dolgobind Temple is a Krishna temple is one of the biggest temples in the Assam, with over thousand pilgrims visiting a day (IT 2017). The idols of God Shyamaray and Govinda are kept inside the temple. The idol comes out of temple on a sacred day to bless the people, fig. 65 (d). The five-day long Dolutsav (name of festival) celebrated during Holi, the festival of color celebrated widely in India. Tourist may also join and enjoy the pleasure moment in godly environment.

(ii) Sankat Mochan Sewashram: It is new age temple located at the north bank of mighty river Brahmaputra just below the famous Saraighat Bridge. Along with daily

prayer the temple used to have special festivals during the starting of Hindu New Year. Viewing sun set from the temple is a unique experience, tourist have a perfect option for ending their day tour at this location.

(iii) Hare Krishna Temple: The Hare Krishna temple opening on 15th March 2021 is a recent addition to the North Guwahati that would also attract tourist from all over the world. Such developments are making this more attractive to the tourists.

There are many more religious installations and festivals of permanent worship by local community as well as seasonal/ festivals events that can be encouraged to share with tourists.

4.6.3 New age development

With such ancient legacy, the North Guwahati area of the city is witnessing a lot of new age developments that are making the place livelier and comfortable. Such developments include setting up of few institutions of international repute, industries, key offices of Government, new age transport development over the river etc.

(i) Institutes of National importance: North Guwahati accommodates one Indian Institute of Technology and one All India Institute of Medical Sciences that makes the place special and strengthens the idea of creating a ‘hub’ here. A lot of national and international visitors can enjoy the ‘hub’ with other places around the institute that may contribute to the income of local people.

(ii) Rope Way over the river: Ropeway service over the river Brahmaputra is started between Guwahati and North Guwahati. That not only contributes to the connectivity but also becomes a tourist attraction as they can enjoy scenic beauty on the both the banks of the river and witness sun set from the middle of the river.

Other advantages of area are clean environment, possibility of angling in fresh water bodies, excellent upcoming connectivity through construction of bridge over the river; waterways with the main city area etc. are making the area a tourist hot spot. Along with that the area has less population density and use availability of area as compare to Guwahati city that makes the area a good option for development of tourist center or ‘hub’.

4.7 Exploration of local elements of the proposed ‘hub’

Observations and collected information through surveys at different handicraft products shops that indicates about some basic requirements for the proposed ‘hub’. The requirements are specifically about identifiable main building, specious shops, secure entry gate, demonstration area, ethnic restaurant, specious parking and other basic amenities. Assam has a lot of cultural elements in tangible form and there is a scope for incorporation of these elements in the identified requirements to give a strong association with Assam. Facilities would be considered in such a way so that tourists could pass one half day at the park.

If such a facility center is conceived the below concepts may be looked into as composite elements to build.

4.7.1 Main building

Assam has a lot of preserved ancient monuments spread across the state mostly in upper part of Assam, as the recent dynasty Ahom used to had their capital in upper Assam and present monuments were around that capital. People of Assam are emotionally associated with these monuments and used to visit these places remembering proud and glorious past of their forefathers. They used to visit these places with children so that upcoming generation can learn and feel the proud of their ancestors.

Among these monuments buildings Rang Ghar, fig. 66, the oldest amphitheater of Asia was found more relevant for such ‘hub’ building as the purpose of this building was associated with entertainment during the rule and a lot of performances and games used to happen in the ground around this. The building of Rang Ghar have a huge hall like area with big windows that could be good source of natural light throughout the day.



Fig. 66 Rang Ghar the oldest amphitheater of Asia is located in Assam

This double storied building is made with of red baked bricks and having parabolic roof that looks like a big ordinary boat kept upside down such shape of the structure is unique to the Assam building style. The building is decorated with floral and geometrical designs with two beautiful stone-carved crocodile structures on either side. Big hall like structure having multiple windows with arches on the first floor of the building where Royal persons used to watch the cultural programs and traditional games that happened on *Rupohi pathar* (field) on the surrounding of main building. The surrounding field is now converted to a beautiful garden.

All these features may be considered for the main design of the area. Shape of the Rang Ghar building appears very applicable to the proposed park. Contemporary appearance may be tried out.

4.7.2 Entry Gate

Significance of well-planned and expressively decorated entry gate can be seen widely in Assam among traditional as well as contemporary gates. Entry gates in Assam use to have a lot of elements related to culture of Assam. From the tourist point of view also it has a lot of importance as new age tourists used to take self-photographs at different location in presence of unique elements at the gate would give them distinction.

Beyond this security is one of the major concerns among the tourists of Assam that can be ensured via appropriate gate design, providing single entry/exit point and ensuring proper gate keeping of the visited area. Several different gates, fig. 67, were observed at different locations in Assam for understanding the key features. It is observed that the gates are decorated with a lot of cultural elements mostly Harai, Japi, Royal signs, religious elements. That may be considered while designing the 'hub'.



Fig 67. Entry gates traditional and contemporary co-exist in Assam; (a) Traditional gate of Talatal Ghar an ancient monument of Assam (b) Gate of recently made Sukapha Samannay Kshetra (c) Gate of Ranghor another ancient monument of Assam (d) gate of a temple popular among followers of Hinduism and Buddhism (e) a gate containing a lot of traditional elements (f) gate of famous Kaziranga national

4.7.3 Handicraft Shops

The common observation about the visited shops in city market area suggests that the shops are very small in size making them congested and products kept in the shops are not getting desired significance. When we think of big open area for the shops we may take inspiration from the big halls of the ancient monuments from the Assam as in these ancient monuments used to have huge halls with wide windows. Such huge halls are traditionally in round or oval shaped for making it naturally lit throughout the day, such design may be considered for the artifact shops, fig. 68.



(a) (b)
 Fig 68. Huge hall in ancient monument that may be considered for arranging big shops the shop (a) Naturally lit huge hall of ancient monument of Assam (b) Closed huge hall

4.7.4 Skill demonstration

As tourists shown interest (common inquisitiveness expressed during survey meetings) in seeing making of these products, a mini demonstration area may be considered, fig. 69, for the demonstration area where craftsman would manufacture their products. Observation of traditionally craft producing villages of Assam it is witnessed that the work area is built with thresh on bamboo structure to keep it naturally cool during the summer. Similar environment may be considered in the proposed park to give a realistic look and its contemporary exploration can also be considered where with added work and tourists visit facility would maintain the original identity.



Fig. 69. A mini demonstration area may be considered like above
 (<https://krishijagran.com/agripedia/know-everything-about-assam-silk/>)

4.7.5 Product Display and Demonstration

It is observed that visitors from outside Assam are not able to understand the wearable products and its use as these products are kept folded in the shops. Such products can be demonstrated in an expressive way so that on seeing it, visitors could understand its type and use. Some explorations of display are tried out, fig. 70, with some of the products that could be placed in front panels for proper understanding and choosing by direct feel of the products.

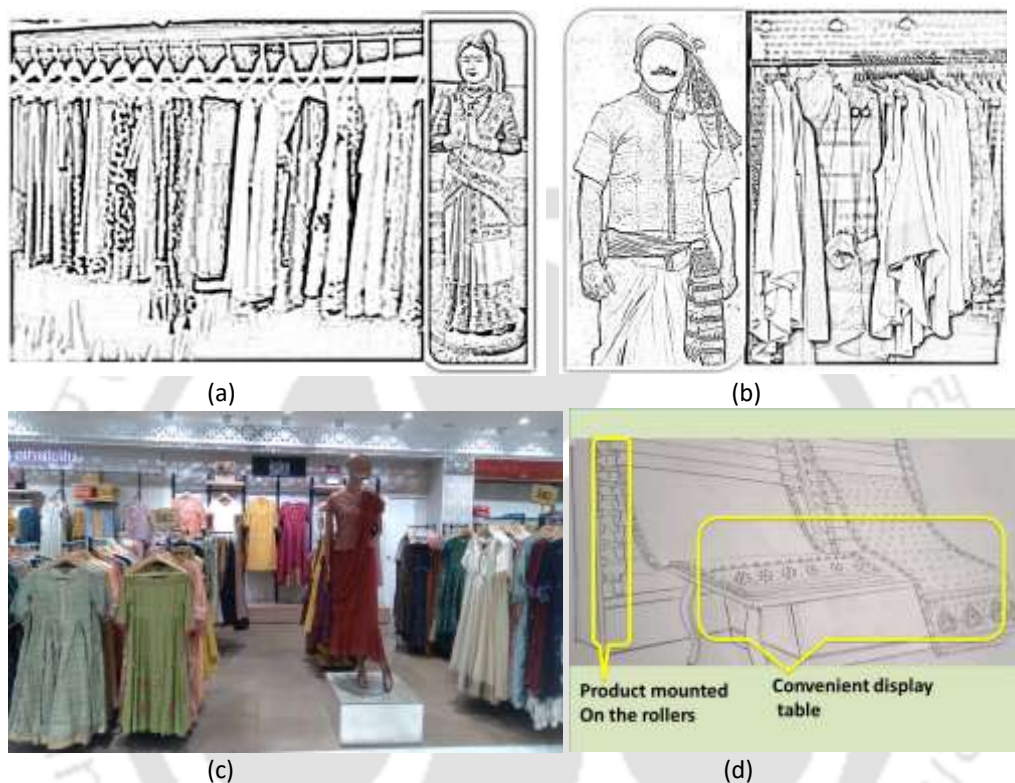
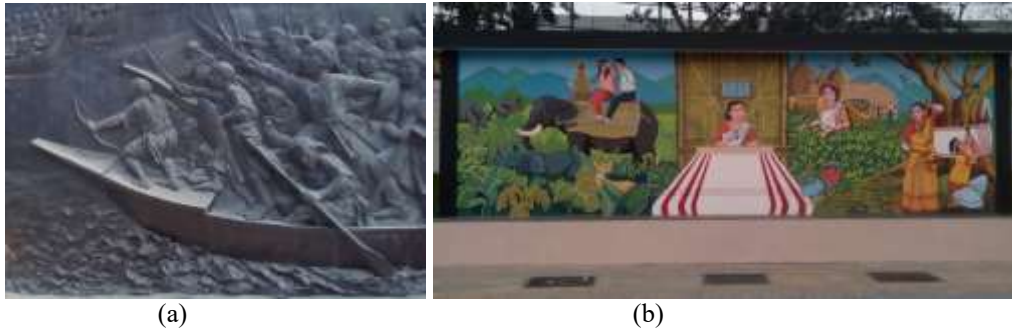


Fig.70. Exploration for product display (a) mannequin can be placed along with product to give an idea about it displaying traditional dress of girls (b) same approach for the dress of the boy (c) contemporary style of showcasing products (d) product may be rolled on rollers with special arrangements and can be rolled out on big convenient table arranged in front of roller unit

4.7.6 Murals on surrounding internal walls - contemporary and historical highlights

Assam has a great history of cultural practices, extraordinary warriors, battles, saints, mythology etc. these stories may be recreated, fig. 71, in the form of murals on the surrounding walls of the park, fig. 72, expresses some illustrations on practice, so that visitors can have appreciate the historical journey of the Assam.



(a) (b)
 Fig:71 Murals describing the time and pride; (a) mural related to famous Saraighat battle where Ahom army defatted the Mughals invaders (b) a mural showing some elements of Assam's culture

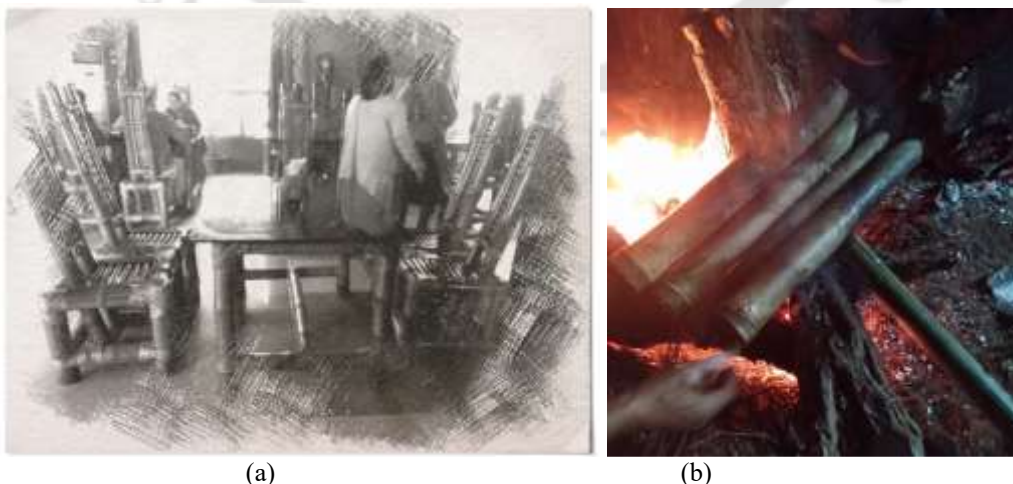
North Guwahati has created parks on river sides, Fig.72, that can be taken as inspiration while incorporating as decoration as well as these sites can be used for local explorations.



Fig:72 North Guwahati park with murals mostly visited by local people

4.7.7 Cafeteria serving local cuisine with facility of learning recipe

Assam has great tradition of preparing food dining area with traditional Assamese cuisine thought in traditional serving style, fig. 73. Open cafeteria concept can be introduced so that tourists can interact and learn about preparation of local dishes.



(a) (b)
 Fig:73. Serving food in traditional manner, (a) ethnic cuisine can be served in traditional environment (b) Visitors can see the cooking of special items

4.7.8 Park with open stage and traditional fun games

A park for kids and other accompanying persons can also be proposed around the shops so that parents can watch their children playing from the shops when they are still busy with purchasing. Enough seats with canopy can be placed for accompanying elderly person. Dance performance/learning option can be introduced on the open stage of the play area.

Traditionally some fun games were played in Assam. Elders are having sweet memories about such games but upcoming generation is not having much idea about such games and such games are facing threat for extinction. One such game is *Koni Juj* (egg fight) fig. 72, in this game each participant holds one egg and hit one others egg on his turn. The egg broken first declares the owner defatted. Such game may be played with new innovation like potpourri balls. On the one hand tourist, can enjoy such games and on the other hand it preserves and popularize such traditional games that are facing threat of extinction.



Fig:74. egg fight depiction

In the proposed 'hub' such games could be introduced so that tourists can have interaction with fun.

4.7.9 Other amenities

Other amenities of the park should be as per the standards followed by the Government of India. Specious parking: Parking of vehicles was a big problem as mentioned by the tourists and witnessed on the field study, so a huge parking space should be provided for the vehicles of the tourists. A drive-in facility may also be introduced.

Proper washrooms can be planned for all possible users and differently abled persons. Special baby care is thought near the washrooms. Shops for other utility items may be considered nearby. ATM facility may be considered near the main gate for both inside and outside users.

4.7.10 Flavor of staying with local feel

To have a feel of local stay ambience the 'Assam style housing, Fig. 75, which are abundant in rural areas, still some are existing in North Guwahati can be explored as basic look.



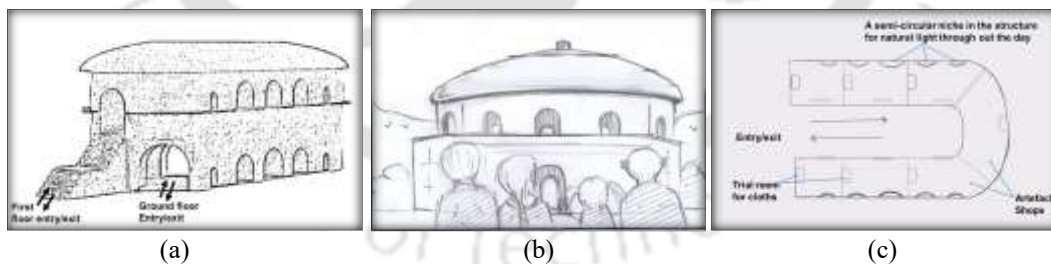
(a) (b)
 Fig. 75. Example of typical Assam Style house (a) an old house (b) contemporary houses are still using same style

4.8 Incorporation of elements in the park

While conceptualizing of a tourist park, it may have an identifiable central structure surrounded with many elements of Assam culture, e.g. Assam style houses, village ambiance with contemporary facilities, etc.

Central structure:

One three-dimensional model was visualized for the main building. The artifact shops can be arranged within it inspired by open amphitheater of Assam “the Rang Ghar”, fig. 76 (a), with a large double storied shop area with big window like arches for allowing day light throughout the day. The internal floor layout, fig. 76(b), may accommodate very spacious handicraft shops within it. That includes product display, sales counter, changing room facility and other common amenities depending on requirement, multiple structure of same style building and other Assam identity structure prevailed in combination may also be used. Being on the north bank of Brahmaputra it may create an ambiance. Nearby spots of the bank would lay the specific shapes and workshop etc. other facilities.



(a) (b) (c)
 Fig: 76 Schematic representation of selling/buying structure, (a) Model of the main artifact shop building (b) Comfortable and easily approachable exterior for visitors (c) floor layout style may be engaged inside the building inside the building. Depending on requirement multiple structure of same style and other Assam identity structure may also be used

Schematic profile of the park: Three number of explorations, with three different layout styles, fig. 77, parallel arrangement, fig. 78, concentric pattern and fig. 79, with sandwiched pattern, was tried out by keeping multiple shops with other amenities like single gate entry exit for making the ‘hub’ secure; proper planning and design can be developed on the area and the programme/facility to be fitted in. It would have large spacious parking area, park between the shops (drive-in excitement) where accompanying person can pass their time and visitors can keep an eye on them from

the shops. Display of big product making cum demonstration area may be kept where artisans can work comfortably and visitors can observe/interact with them. Restaurant serving local cuisines can also be planned near the shops so that visitors can enjoy the local cuisine and discuss about the product over there. Facility for washroom can be planned nearby so that everyone present in the 'hub' can use it, baby care room is also planned near the restaurant so that concern visitors have an option. Murals on the inner walls can be created in the exploration so that visitors can increase knowledge about the culture of Assam and also they may take selfie with the murals. Automatic teller machine (ATM) is proposed on the main gate so that persons residing inside visitors and persons of nearby locations to the 'hub' can use it.

Proper design of a theme park with above mentioned elements and necessities may be drawn; the above are the schematic presentations only that have come up from the discussions with various stakeholders.

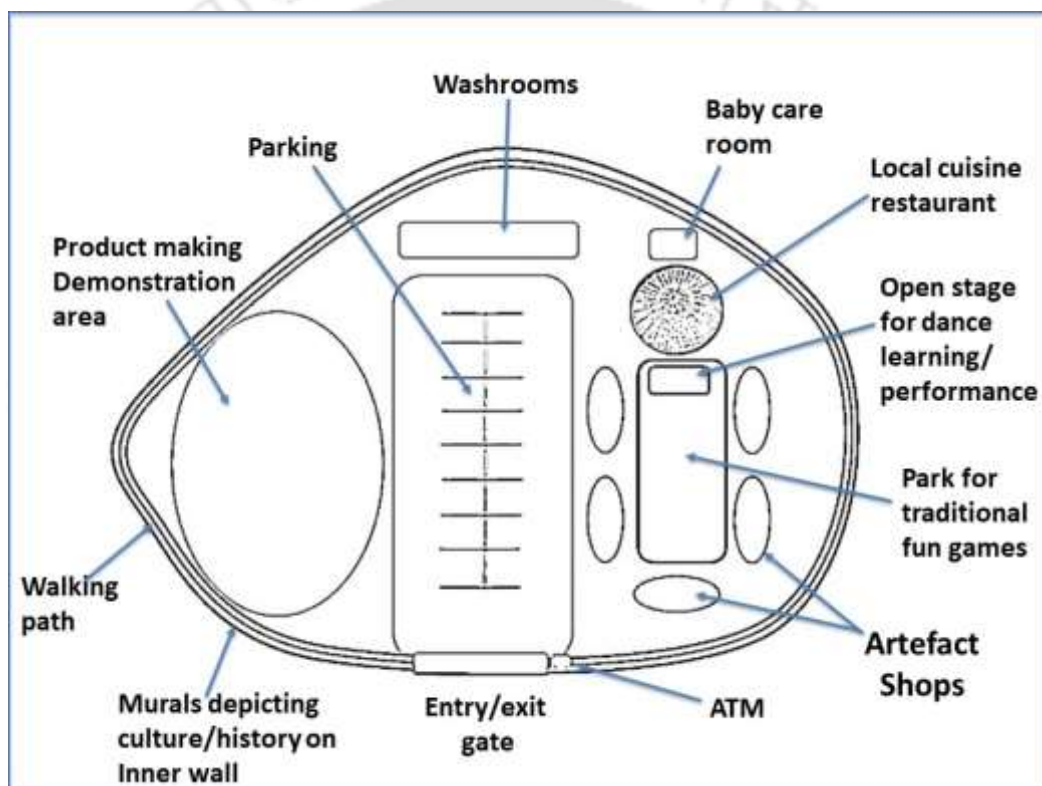


Fig 77. Schematic selling-buying area in a parallel arrangement no.1 along with parking area and silk experience area, the component mentioned in the diagram expresses the need specific requirements. Few elements are shown many more may be incorporated as per requirement

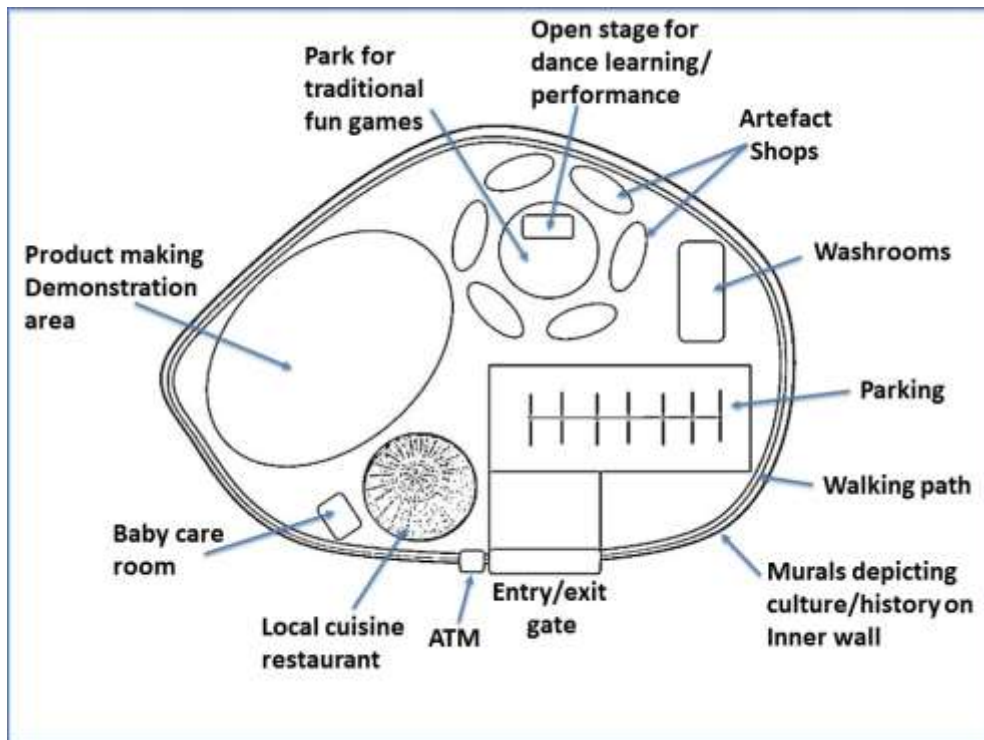


Fig. 78. Schematic diagram showing a concentric pattern of selling and buying area with other amenities in one side; and Model, the component mentioned in the diagram expresses the need specific requirements. Few elements are shown many more may be incorporated as per requirement

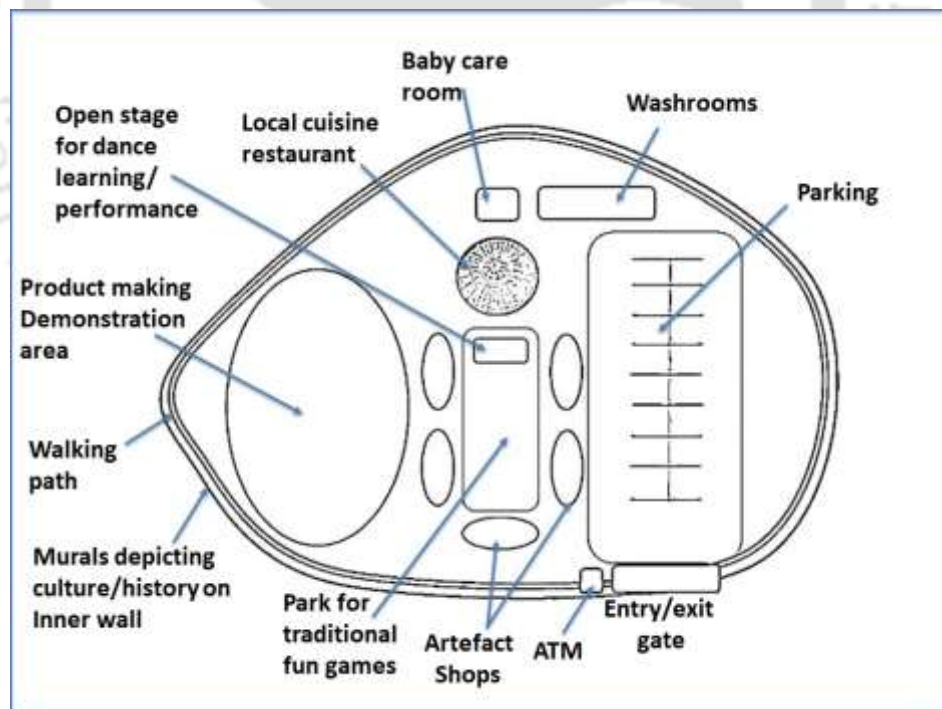


Fig. 79. Schematic diagram no. 3 centrally aligned showing the selling-buying is sandwiched between parking and other facilities, the component mentioned in the diagram expresses the need specific requirements. Few elements are shown many more may be incorporated as per requirement

As a well-planned high quality display shops with product variety and shopping environment are necessary to consider. This place should have uniqueness in identity along with supporting amenities (such as restaurants, pubs and entertainment facilities in close proximity, good pedestrian access and parking facilities and multi-functionality of the environment) guarantees that the place feels ‘alive’ (Jansen, 2000). Moreover, it is found that exterior shopping environment is particularly important and it must be considered acceptable and pleasing before the interior of the shops is ever experienced (Yuksel, 2007) which is the motivating factor to attract tourists. Further as observed by Yuksel in addition to this, respondents showed a high willingness to talk to salespeople, spend more time browsing and exploring the products, and spend more money than originally planned when the climate of the “Tourist Shopping Habits” is perceived to be stimulating.

4.9 Village networking model involving stake holders

The proposed ‘hub’ should be able to give a good experience to the visitors. They can experience making of the product in proposed mini demonstration area and also explore / buy products from the shops in a relaxed environment. Some of the visitors may develop strong inclination towards such artistic products and may like to visit traditionally handicraft producing villages of Assam. For such limited number of tourist network with a group of villagers throughout the Assam and adjoining places of Northeast India can be created. Proper training sessions and capacity building concerning various aspects of tourism like tourist facilitator, home stay etc. may be conducted to prepare villagers for the tourism activity. Tourist may plan their journey from the ‘hub’ itself in a secure and relax environment as a facilitating point, fig. 80.

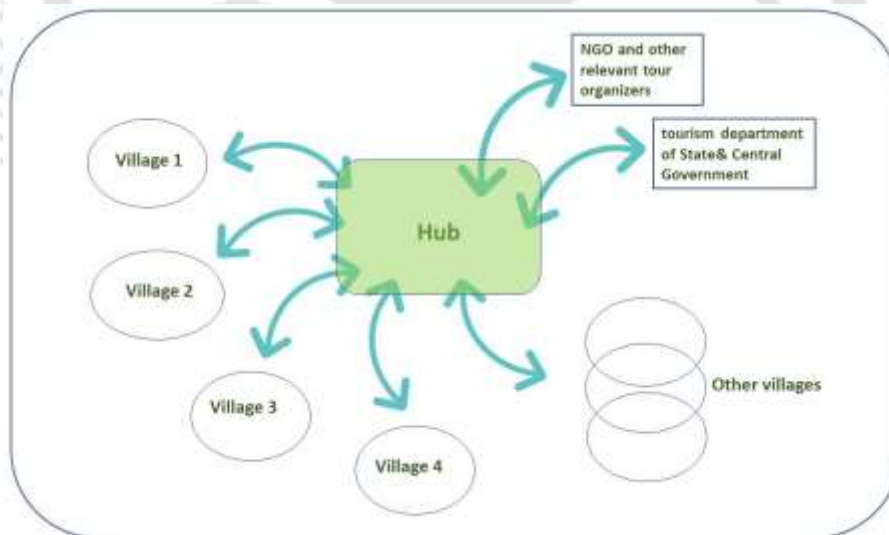


Fig 80. Networking model for the ‘hub’

As handicraft-producing villages are not tourist prepared and information about such villages are also not appropriate on the internet, further explorations were made for developing a conceptual networking model linking the villages and proposed ‘hub’, where the ‘hub’ can provide support to the intended tourists for the villages of original practice. In order to boost information availability on net some explorations were done.

4.10 Validation of the scheme

The schemes referred here in was presented before 54 number of participants comprising some of the tourists who have visited Assam; relevant stakeholders including tour organizers, young entrepreneurs, practicing artisans, visited tourists, and research scholars and academicians of department of Design, IIT Guwahati, where participants were comprising faculty members and students who represent entire India. A brief of survey result presented in chapter 2 of the thesis were presented before them as recap various aspects of identified limitations. The participants were told to rate different provisions on five point Likert scale where no. 1 was assigned to terrible, 2 to bad, 3 to average, 4 to good and 5 to excellent. Participants not familiar with the English language the questions were translated in their own language with the help of multilingual postgraduate qualified local volunteer. Almost all the participants gave response on the higher side of acceptability to the idea and suggested that such initiative would provide an interaction opportunity with the local people and boost the knowledge about the culture of Assam specifically about handicraft products indigenous to Assam, summarily a qualitative expression is presented in Table. 08.

Table. 08. Table of scheme validation on the 'hub' concept

Sr. No.	Criteria	Response
01	Lay out plan consists amenities related to tourists	4.8
02	Position of the entry/exit gate	4.3
03	Gate rating from security point of view	4.4
04	Shop approachability	4.8
05	Parking convenience as per boarding and de-boarding point of view	5
06	Shop exterior visibility	4.6
07	Shop approachability	5
08	Shop interior space	4.2
09	Product demonstration in the shop from visibility point of view	4.2
10	Product demonstration table	4.7
11	Provision for product trial room	5
12	Proposed wearing assistant of both the genders for clothing items	5
13	Demonstration area of product making	5
14	Murals related to Assam on inner walls	4
15	Availability of open restaurant serving local cuisine	4.3
16	Availability of washroom	5
17	ATM availability/positioning	3.7
18	Traditional local fun games availability	3.9
19	Dance performance and learning area	5
20	Location of the park considering connectivity developments for the city	5
21	Overall plan	4.5

Service design issues pointed out by the tourists, supported by documentation of the study area was classified. Established research about service design also deliberated regarding service design that suggest exterior (Yuksel, 2007) be given a careful thought of identity and uniqueness. As tourist-shopping decision are emotional on part of tourists and the experience deals with aesthetics where tourist shoppers are able to examine, feel and think about items.

4.11 Conclusion

Tourists give a lot of importance to overall shopping environment of tourist market place comprising product variety displayed in well-planned high quality shops. The place should look exuberant with unique identity along with supporting amenities. It should have local flavor restaurants and entertainment facilities in close proximity of staying. In the tourist movement area, as evidenced in many places cars are not allowed to facilitate walking should have good pedestrian access and parking facilities nearby and multi-functionality of the environment. The place should feel overall alive and pleasing.

Exterior shopping atmosphere must be considered pleasant and gratifying before exploration of interior of the shop by the tourist. It is stimulating for tourists to show inclination to talking sales personnel, spending more time browsing/exploring the products and quite often it is experienced that monetarily they spend more. Thus the whole ambiance should be inviting.

After the spread of multinational companies in retail sector world wide a common environment associated with the companies has spread all over the world because such huge companies have common branding strategies and strictly follow them in order to maintain trust and comfortable of their customers. On the other hand, as per the research, tourists give a lot of importance to unique identity of the shopping environment. Tourist used to be in different mindset during the trip. They look for place with esthetic appealing element at the visited place. If thinking about shopping cum demonstration a 'hub' concept in North bank of Brahmaputra, at Guwahati, Assam, the place should have elements from Assam to give it unique identity associated with the state.

All the tourist amenities pointed out during the survey and observation like proper service design at the shops, product manufacturing demonstration area, activity area for other family members specially kids, comfortable arrangements for senior family members, basic amenities, cuisine with ethnic dishes etc. should be enfolded in basic elements associated with Assam to give it uniqueness and association with Assam.

CHAPTER 5

General Discussion and Conclusion

Chapter overview

The chapter summarises the qualitative exploratory approach taken to get an idea on improved interaction between tourists and local residents, exploring the possible means and methods through sharing traditional artefacts, skills and culture. Findings are discussed here in brief followed by concluding remarks and limitations of the study and further scope.



5.0 Introduction

This thesis work has looked into a possibility its real life experimentation and implementation is expected towards facilitating harmonious interactivity among local residence and visitors of Assam in the background of Northeast feel, which following the similar path can be explored in other parts of country. The study was conducted about experience and interaction opportunities from the tangible form of culture. The investigation started with the service design status about the some of the traditional handicraft products of Assam among the tourist.

At the later stage the study explored the traditional handicraft producing villages from touristic point of view and recoded aspirations of different stakeholders associated with traditional handicraft products of Assam. In order to create interaction opportunity between the tourists and local people the research proposes a conceptual framework for a planned informative, experienced based interactive exhibition facility center adorned with identified local cultural elements where tourist can admire the local culture and pass a half day in an approachable, comfortable, secure and relaxed environment.

At the physical level the proposed center would have demonstration of creation of some of the handicraft products of Assam also facility of display and sale of such products in village like environment. At advanced level the center is proposed with network linkage with different stake holders of such traditional villages so that if an enlighten tourist want to visit the village can be facilitated by providing logistic support for seamless, secure and comfortable visit. Persons accompanying i.e. children, elderly etc. can enjoy the other joyful and informative amenities proposed in the center like lush green park, food court serving traditional cousins, cultural displays on the mural etc. Basic amenities convenience proposed in the center makes the center comfortable so that visitors can ponder on their main motive in a relaxed way.

The thesis approach was taken on a qualitative exploratory assessment of need, support possibility and schematic presentation of a center concept of unique nature. Depending on location and artifacts practiced nearby proper planning of hub and subsystems within may specifically be taken up.

5.1 Objective based outcome

At the beginning of the study the basic approach was framed to look into the possibility of popularizing handicraft products of Assam as memento and cultural messenger among tourists in an interactive environment; which was divided in three specific objectives for ease of assessing the current status and facilities.

The below can be seen as specific objective based outcome.

Objective 1: To understand tourist experience while purchase of widely available local produces as memento from Assam.

Observation: Handicraft products are tangible form of culture; it is found tourists visiting Assam are not having enough information about such form of culture. Most of the tourists came to know about nicely crafted traditional handicraft products of Assam after reaching Assam predominantly by the persons involved in service sector or sometimes by their friends and relatives. They tend to explore these products to consider it as memento, and visits cluster of shops in city center Panbazar area of Guwahati the capital city of Assam. The exploration, purchase and interaction experience of such unplanned buyers are not encouraging due to improper service design.

Objective 2: To explore the handicraft producing processes in Assam if these can become tourist interest to enhance root level interaction between residents and tourists

Observation: It is found that most of the traditional handicrafts items are traditionally produced in villages scattered throughout the state. Stakeholders of such villages are having a lot of aspirations from tourism development in their area but from the tourist point of view ease of exploration, interaction, service design and tourist amenities needs more attention for improvement at these villages.

Objective 3: Possibility of design intervention of a system that can present handicraft products of Assam and its producing villages in informative, informal and memorable way among the tourists for developing affinity with the residents through interaction.

Observation: Conceptualizing an interactive cultural space facilitating craft trade, craft demonstration/training and recreation demonstrating socio cultural background of local residence could be motivating factor to bring local youths in tourism entrepreneurship.

Guwahati city is very congested and overcrowded, having very limited expansion scope. City based craft shops of admired memento are having a lot of service design issues and traditional producing villages of such products are in early development stage. It is suggested to have a tourist extrusion facility centre or 'hub' with sale with product creation experience in an interactive environment could increase chances of mingling of tourists with local people.

Such facility ornamented with local culture is proposed at the north bank of Brahmaputra river, as the north bank of Guwahati have a glorious past as well as future due to various connectivity and development initiatives are introduced like ropeway for crossing the river, construction started of a six lane bridge connecting it with south Guwahati, establishment of institute of international significance, development of premier medical facility etc. The area is also suggested as futuristic hot spot by recent researchers of IIT Guwahati have explored some possibility (Himani, 2018) and a tourist designated bicycle path on Northbank of Brahmaputra with development scope retaining the natural beauty (Borsaikia, 2019).

5.2 Discussions and Findings

A great tradition of culture and practices evolved in Assam over a period of time. Such culture is persistently practiced here with same spirit in contemporary period also. People of Assam are happy to share their cultural practices and appreciate if someone tries to learn and follow it.

Tourism has grown beyond the wildlife and religious attractions; now it demands expansion for exploring new ways of interacting with locals to have exploration and exchange of culture with hands on experience of local products. Some efforts for introducing culture of Assam are put on by various agencies at New Delhi the Indian capital city and in Guwahati the capital city of state of Assam but they are mostly tempting people of Assam and seems not taken well by others due to various reasons.

Investigation on tourists who have already visited Assam suggest about lacuna of information and opportunity to interact local people for developing some understanding about them. Similar information lack about the culture of Assam is reported among the citizens of other states of India by the people of Assam while visiting/staying in different parts of India.

To give a glance about the culture of Assam to the arriving tourist few cultural installations are made on airport and railway station of Guwahati the prominent capital city of Assam but the tourists because of heavy rush and hurry due to long journey misses them out. Installations in two other popular tourist's cities can be referred here, Ajmer and Ahmedabad of Indian state of Rajasthan and Gujrat present installations depicting their culture on locations that are getting enough tourist attention as such installations are part of the main building and placed at appropriate positions along with people movement.

Tourists visiting Assam tend to buy memento as memory of good time spend in the state and established research suggest that they prefer local handicraft products of the visited places. Information availability of about such tangible form of culture of Assam on internet is mostly from commercial point of view with less information and interaction possibilities. Tourists intent to acquire/explore memento came to know about widely available traditional silk products of Assam through people involved in tourist service sector and sometimes through friends/relatives. They tend to visit the silk shops located at city centre of prominent capital city Guwahati but they don't find service design of these shops appropriate. Tourists want to know more about these classic products and its making but there is no scope for it.

Beside widely available silk products the state of Assam has a great tradition of creating other fine quality handicraft products that also have opportunity of becoming preferred memento. Such products are traditionally associated with a producing village. Such villages are scattered all around the Assam but not prepared for heavy tourist movement as touristic infrastructure at these places is in primary developing stage. Service design of produced handicraft items at these villages is also not encouraging and inviting.

Skilled artists of such handicraft producing villages are not in best of economic conditions. Stakeholders of the villages are having a lot of aspiration from tourism

development in their area as such activity may boost their earning and new generation will also be encouraged to join such unique creative profession in run that may protect the art form from extinction.

Huge scope is noticed for increasing interaction between tourists and local people during memento exploration and purchase but that could not be achieved to its full extent in current scenario neither at the Guwahati based market nor at the producing villages as the city based market has space constrains and management constrains due to involvement of different agencies in decision making; and villages are not tourist prepared. Some facilities created for village tourism are not getting popularity among tourists due to remoteness, security, language and other concerns of the tourists.

Various concerns of the tourists visiting Assam regarding memento exploration in interactive environment can be addressed through conceptual framework of a separate interaction based market place - a unique 'hub', where tourists can pass a day or half and experience creative skills of making handicraft products and procure them as per their requirement. Such conceptual 'hub' should be near to the city centre for convenient tourist movement.

Prominent touristic city Guwahati located on the south bank of river Brahmaputra and hill locked from other three sides, have very less prospect to have such for such centre in Guwahati due to heavy population density and scarcity of space. Semi urban extension of the Guwahati city, located on the north bank; the North Guwahati could be a good option for such 'hub' as it is housing true Assam like environment and scope for city expansion and river based leisure activity development. Similar argument for selecting this site is also reported by some researchers of recent PhD thesis work (Borsaikia, 2020 and Himani, 2018) carried out at IIT Guwahati.

Scheme for such conceptualize tourist hub was conceived considering service design hails pointed out by tourists while buying Assam silk as memento and also additional opportunities of presenting culture of Assam. To give the centre a unique identity and strong association with the state of Assam, explorations of elements were conducted observing many popular traditional monuments along with some recent developments. Such elements were included in schematic diagram and presented before some credible local people belonging to relevant government and non-government organization. A lot of encouragement was shown by the participants who volunteered themselves without any disagreement.

5.3 Thesis key contribution

The study looked into to create an awareness of an additional means and methods of more interaction between tourists and local residents exploring the possibility of showcasing the artifacts treasure as memento. The development in tourism is mostly are now with corporate style investment where local residence are engaged merely as employees or sub-contractor for some services. The current approach to bring more residence to be entrepreneurs. So, that tourist may interact with actual local residences instead of specially trained profit oriented employees at the commercial establishment run by big corporate houses. Such efforts would also provide opportunity to the local residents to becoming tourism entrepreneur. Such interaction would further boost chances of cultural exploration and exchange, its appreciation

and developing better understanding about the people of visited place. That may contribute in developing a bond to the place and people, and also increase chances of referral/revisit by the tourists.

Contribution to the knowledge: The thesis explored and compiled the various aspects related to tangible form of Assam's popular culture i.e. traditional handicraft products from present scenario and service design, to provide an interaction opportunity between tourists and the local people of Assam so that they can understand each other better and develop a cordial relationship. Purchase experience of the tourists and aspirations of the stakeholders of traditional handicraft products of Assam are recorded in the thesis. The thesis proposes a conceptual framework for an interactive service design, incorporating cultural elements of the Assam, to give a unique identity and association with local popular culture. Cultural components amalgamation will give tourists a distinctive experience as compare to widely available almost similar looking multi brand shopping malls. The thesis also provides a networking model of the 'hub' and stakeholders of different craft producing villages, so that they can facilitate the enlighten tourists who want to see these art form in actual village environmental.

Contribution to the design: The research is an attempt to study the popular cultural elements of Assam and came out with an idea of culturally enrich networked 'hub' where creation of tangible form of culture i.e. handicraft products of Assam are demonstrated in an approachable/interactive environment along with sale facility for such products so that tourist can experience/appreciate creation of such products. From design point of view thesis considered the method how popular cultural elements are studied to string it together to create a service design with interactive capability. Increasing visibility of artists and the products for appreciation and value addition.

Social contribution: The research is conducted in close contact of society so that real issues of the stake holders could be understood at grass root level. Social contribution of the research is, it provides an opportunity to the artists to show their inherent talent to the visitors in an interactive environment so that their practicing art could get admiration and due price. So that the upcoming generation could join the profession with enthusiasm and pride. That may further contribute in preservation of art form.

5.4 Limitations of the current study and scope for further research

Limitations of the research

The study is a self-financed study with limited team members so the study has some limitations too.

Area covered: The study is conducted in North-eastern state of India, Assam only to concentrate on cultural tourism possibility around the gateway city Guwahati seeking an immediate implementable solution. Although entire North eastern states and eastern India a have a lot of diversity.

Cultural Aspect: Assam is one of the prominent North Eastern state of India that hosts varied cultural dimensions. The conceptual framework is proposed considering popular culture of Assam based on qualitative information collection. Separate researches may be conducted covering various different cultural magnitudes of the Assam.

Handicraft products: Assam has a culture of producing different handicraft products. In this study only few products are considered among the popular culture. There are many more products as per cultural diversity that can be explored in deep.

Covering limited hamlet: It is found during the study that most of the handicraft producing villages are having different hamlet producing handicraft items. Compelling a big team of researchers more extensive work and qualitative enquiry can be done to cover all the hamlets of the villages. So that all the available resources can be identified and exploited for the benefit of stake holders.

Involvement of stakeholders of two villages only: Stakeholders of only two villages were contacted to understand the aspirations in deep due to language issue.

Scope for further study

Culture of a place may be deep understood for developing cultural spaces demonstrating unique ethnicity and unique products associated with the society so that the follower of such culture and practices may get admiration and good value for their practices. Such steps may contribute in preservation and flourishing of culture. Similar studies may be undertaken in specific locations of tourist potential for improving interaction between different stakeholders. A bigger area could be covered with institutional financial support so that various culture spread around the Northeast India could be covered.

The hub as conceptualised may be planned with service design and infrastructure in tune to creating an Assam style ambiance and how contemporary facilities can be incorporated with retaining the identity of richness of the local tradition and culture. The current thesis work concentrates on the feasibility issues.

5.4 Conclusion

A lot of tourists are visiting Assam fascinated by its flora, fauna and religious significance. An inquiry was conducted among the tourists visiting Assam to understand their information status about the preferred destination, popular culture, memento from the Assam and their contact with local people of Assam. It is primarily found that the tourists predominately have information about popular wildlife and religious destinations of Assam and it is observed that most of the tourists are missing popular culture of Assam. Inquiry about the mingling of tourists with the local people suggest that most of the tourists are not having any opportunity to interact with local people except people involved in established hospitality sector and transporting business.

To understand the information status about the Assam from the people of Assam who visited and stayed in different parts of India suggest that most of the people are only

having information about wildlife destination and tea of Assam. They also reported that in contemporary years they came to know about one of the traditional product Gamucha due to its unique appearance, special colour combination, design and motives of Assam as it is worn by some of the leaders of India.

Assam has a vibrant culture heritage that is visible in traditional products, monuments and life style of the people here. People visiting Assam hardly come across this rich cultural legacy. Some of the tourists during their trip to Assam came to know about widely available tangible forms of culture i.e. traditional silk products of Assam, mostly through persons involved in hospitality business or their relatives and friends. They tend to visit silk shops located in Guwahati, the most significant city of Assam. During their visit to the densely located silk shops, the visitors are not finding impression of welcoming atmosphere due to improper service design of the shops that are located in congested city area with extremely high traffic movement around, unplanned expansion of the shops and various other limitations. In such a clumsy environment tourist have very less opportunity to affectionately understand, connect, interact and appreciate the art form.

Different traditional handy craft products of Assam and understanding its special design elements that marks them exclusive to the Assam. It was found that there are some villages traditionally associated with an art form. Like village Sualkuchi is associated with silk products, Sarthebari is associated with bell metal products, Hajo is associated with brass metal products etc. Visits of such traditional village were conducted to develop familiarity and understand the ground situation.

During the visit of such traditional villages inquires and observations were conducted to understand thoughts towards tourists and touristic facility in and around the villages. It is found that stakeholders are honoured to be part of such art form practiced in their villages. They are willing to showcase their art form to the visitors; they are admitting that enough touristic facility is not there in and around their villages but they have a lot of aspirations from tourism activity development in their area. Observations about the touristic infrastructure also suggests about tourist infrastructure in early developing stage.

The total scenario discussed with a group of design academicians that leads to conclusion that it is not possible to properly exhibit the handicraft products of Assam in current market scenario. That leads to an idea of conceptualizing for an alternative demonstration cum shopping 'hub' for a welcoming, comfortable, relaxed and interactive environment to the tourists. The proposed 'hub' is planned with appropriate service design at the shops, product manufacturing demonstration area, murals demonstrating culture journey of Assam, activity area for other family members specially kids, comfortable arrangements for senior family members, basic amenities, cuisine with ethnic dishes etc. Various elements of popular culture were explored that can be incorporated in the 'hub' to give tourist a unique informative experience. Validations of all the identified elements were done to reconfirm its acceptance and suitability for amalgamation in the 'hub'. The number of subsystems will depend on the requirement to showcase the artifact and space availability.

As the city-based shops are not found suitable from the touristic movement point of view due to various constrains mentioned above it is required to think for a location

that is well connected to arrival departure point to the Guwahati city. North Guwahati located at the north bank of river Brahmaputra, that adjoins Guwahati with North Guwahati is found appropriate location for the park as the North Guwahati area has a lot of historical significance from ancient time and a lot of development and possibilities in contemporary time as mentioned by a lot of researchers.

Few tentative schemes were presented before some of the select tourists who have visited Assam, various stakeholders of different interest stakeholders, research scholars and academicians. All the participants have shown acceptability to the idea and suggested that such initiative would provide an interaction opportunity with the local people and boost the knowledge about the culture of Assam specifically about handicraft products indigenous to Assam. that may be materialized also.



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APPENDICES

A. Questioners 154-157

B. Published research papers 158-180

1. Sharma, Hitesh., Karmakar, S., and Chakrabarti, D., 2017, Exploring the purchase experience of Assam silk as a memento among the tourists to strengthen the bond between visitors and native people. In: A. Chakrabarti (ed.), ICoRD' 17-Research in craft and design for Communities Volume 1,679-690. [Print ISBN: 978-981 -10 -3520-3].**[Springer]**

2. Sharma, H., Karmakar, S., and Chakrabarti, D. 2017. The Possibility of Sustainable Development of Sualkuchi (The Biggest Silk Village of Assam) Handloom Sector through Promotion of Rural Tourism. In: Dr. Toolika Gupta Prof. Bhargav Mistry Dr. Barun Shankar Gupta (ed.), A treatise on Recent trends and Sustainability in Crafts and Design, 161-169[ISBN: 978-93-86724-21-2].

3. Sharma, H., Karmakar, S., and Chakrabarti, D. 2017. Bridging the information gap regarding various tourist destinations of North Guwahati to attract tourists. HWWE' 2017, Ergonomics for improved productivity held at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh

APPENDIX: A

Questioners

154-156

Questioner for understanding the information and bond status among the tourists who stayed in Assam for more than 5 days

In order to collect information from tourists already visited Assam and stayed in the region for a period of five days or more, as period of five days is a good period for developing familiarity with the place and people. The questioner was developed seeking suggestions for a prospective tourist who is very eager to visit and explore the place. The questioner is having two parts where part 1 contains questions related to demographic information's and the part 2 were having question related to the required information. Outcome of the questioner could suggest about the information stats of different places of tourist interest in Assam, information status about the different available mementos from Assam, about mingling with the local residents and to understand the reason if mingling not happening.

Part 1: Demographic questions

Q1. Your Name

.....

Q2. Age

.....

Q3. Gender

.....

Q4. Your native state

.....

Q5. For how many days you stayed in Assam during your trip

.....

Part 2: Subject specific questions

Q1. What are the three places you would suggest to your relatives/friends visiting Assam?

1..... 2..... 3.....

Q2. Which memento/mementos you will suggest from Assam to them?

.....

Q3. Any reference (contact person) details you want to share with probable visitor?

.....

Q4. If Q3 is answered as no, possible reason of not having any contact person?

.....

Questioner for understanding the information about culture of Assam in fellow citizen's of other than North-eastern state

Part 1: Demographic questions

Q1. Your Name

.....

Q2. Age

.....
Q3. Gender

.....
Q4. Profession

.....
Q5. Your native state

.....
Q6. For how many days you stayed out of Assam, in any other state of main land India

.....
Part 2: Subject specific information

Detailed Interview

Questioner for understanding the tourist experience on prevailed facility

Part 1: Demographic questions

Q1. Your Name

.....
Q2. Age

.....
Q3. Gender

.....
Q4. Qualification

(a) UG (b) PG

Q5. Profession

(a) Housewife (b) Working

Q6. State/country of origin India

(a) India/Abroad (b) Native state if Indian.....

Q7. Traveling

(a) Alone (b) Family/friends

Questioner about memento shopping experience

Q1. Information about silk products before arriving Assam

(a) Yes (b) No

Q2. Source of information about the silk products

(a) Advertisement (b) Family/friend

(c) Self Explored (d) hospitality/travel people

Q3. Silk shop visibility

(a) Cleary visible (b) Not visible

Q4. Region of non-visibility of shops

.....
Q5. Parking around Silk shops

(a) Convenient (b) Not convenient

- Q6. Approach of the Silk shop
 (a) Convenient (b) Not convenient
- Q7. Size of the Silk shop
 (a) Convenient (b) Not convenient
- Q6. Silk product visibility at the shop
 (a) Convenient (b) Not convenient
- Q8. Silk product display arrangements at the shop
 (a) Convenient (b) Not convenient
- Q9. Silk product craftsmanship
 (a) usual (b) high
- Q10. Are you interested in knowing making of these products
 (a) Yes (b) No
- Q11. Silk product verity
 (a) satisfactory (b) un-satisfactory
- Q12. Product trial room
 (a) Available (b) Not available
- Q13. Available Silk product wearing convenience
 (a) Convenient (b) Not convenient
- Q11. Product trial room
 (a) Available (b) Not available
- Q12. Silk product wearing assistant of same gender
 (a) Yes (b) No
- Q13. Product pricing
 (a) suitable (b) high
- Q14. Payment options
 (a) Convenient (b) Not convenient
- Q15. Would you prescribe these products to your relatives and friend?
 (a) Yes (b) No
- Q16. Good purchase experience and understanding craftsmanship would help to connect with the local people
 (a) Yes (b) No
- Enquiry on other amenities**
- Q17. Nearby Food/tea stall
 (a) available (b) not available
- Q18. Washroom
 (a) available (b) not available

Enquiry from the sealers

- Q1. Your Name

- Q2. Age

Q3. Gender

.....

Q4. Qualification

(b) UG (b) PG

Q5. Language Proficiency

(b) Mother tongue (b) Other

Q6. Knowledge about silk product making

(a) Yes (b) No

The questions were kept open ended so that various option different views could come regarding the options. and considering a about the different places of interest in and around the Assam, available memento in Assam, about a reference contact from Assam and if not than possible reason for missing a contact person. considering a persona of Indian tourist family that usually comprises of different generations in a single unit. For development of questioner a persona of Indian tourist was created, a family comprising different generations travel together that consist of a young couple with their paternal parents and kid.



APPENDIX: B

List of papers

1. Sharma, Hitesh., Karmakar, S., and Chakrabarti, D., 2017, Exploring the purchase experience of Assam silk as a memento among the tourists to strengthen the bond between visitors and native people. In: A. Chakrabarti (ed.), ICoRD' 17-Research in craft and design for Communities Volume 1,679-690. [Print ISBN: 978-981 -10 -3520-3].[**Spinger**]
2. Sharma, H., Karmakar, S., and Chakrabarti, D. 2017. The Possibility of Sustainable Development of Sualkuchi (The Biggest Silk Village of Assam) Handloom Sector through Promotion of Rural Tourism. In: Dr. Toolika Gupta Prof. Bhargav Mistry Dr. Barun Shankar Gupta (ed.), A treatise on Recent trends and Sustainability in Crafts and Design, 161-169[ISBN: 978-93-86724-21-2].
3. Sharma, H., Karmakar, S., and Chakrabarti, D. 2017. Bridging the information gap regarding various tourist destinations of North Guwahati to attract tourists. HWWE' 2017, Ergonomics for improved productivity held at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh [Springer] in press

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Exploring the purchase experience of Assam silk as a memento among the tourists to strengthen the bond between visitors and native people

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Abstract. Assam Tourism has a potential to provide a unique experience to tourists in addition to the known pilgrimage and forest resort to explore distinctive culture of the native people. Visitors purchase mementos like tea, bamboo crafts and they are always attracted towards silk products of Assam. Plenty reported researches are available on general retail management but it is generally found that very less focus has been on how the tourists perceive the exterior environment and what their responses to shopping locations are. In spite of excellent quality of Assam silk products, due to poor service design, purchase experience is not up to the mark. Based on a survey of tourist response to the service design and showrooms located in the Panbazar area of Guwahati owned by local silk weavers' societies, an idea of developing a 'Silk Promotion Hub' where tourists may spend some time to get experience of silk rearing, various handloom activities and appreciate/purchase the fine quality silk products have been conceived. Entire collected information from questioner, interview and videography was studied thoroughly and a brainstorm session was conducted with a small expert group containing 4 designers/design academicians, to identify the key considerations for the proposed park. Following brainstorming and discussions, some two-dimensional (2D) schematic diagrams were conceptualized for the 'Silk Promotion Hub'. It is expected that the intended design layout of the silk promotion hub/ park would be beneficial for hassle free informative purchase experience of the tourist. Most of the tourist might be tempted to buy the product. Moreover, informative experience and memory of the park would influence them deeply. This in turn would help in strengthening the bond between visitors and native people for a harmonious relation.

Keywords: Assam silk; tourist mementoes; purchase-experience promotion hub

Introduction

Assam, the 'Gateway of North-east India' is very rich in traditional Art and craft that shows the rich heritage of the cottage industry i.e. sericulture, handloom, bamboo and cane industry, pottery, gold jewelry making etc. [1] that attracts tourists. A Lot of purchase specifically silk items are done during the trip [2] that reminds of the experience [3,4,5] and would like to keep it as a treasure memento and such attention, care and interest binds the people with the visited place. Silk after weaving with abstract figures of animals, birds, human forms, creepers, flowers, diamonds, etc. [6] gives a unique product that everybody wants to have it as a memento. All together 4463479 tourists visited Assam during 2013-14 out of which 44,44,393 were domestic and 19086 were foreigners, which is very high as compare to 3479870 in 2006-07 [7]. It is also observed that most of the tourists coming to Assam are staying in Guwahati for one day [8]. Shopping is perceived as one of the most immersive leisure activities experienced by the tourists in a foreign location [9]. Research states that 24.5% of expenditure made by foreign tourist and 14% of expenditure by domestic tourist goes in shopping. Shopping is gaining importance as a tourist activity due to actual consumption of goods purchased by the tourists, and as

a source of enjoyment and satisfaction for them[10] in which garments, mementos, paintings and handicrafts are purchased as reminders experiences of their travel[11,12]. This not only contributes to the market around but also promotes local available products [13].

Assam silk may become a convenient memento that may help the tourists and their friends and relatives create a favourable image of Assam through the sharing of experiences along with other reminders of their travel like photos and videos of Assam, and other items they have purchased from Assam[14]. With such multiplier affect tourism shopping in Guwahati may form an integral part of the overall development in tourism sector and marketing strategy as a tourist destination. The creation of comfortable and enjoyable shopping experiences can be conceived to engage tourists more and compel them to extend their stay [15].

Improvement of product quality and customer satisfaction, which has become a source of competitive advantage in the industry, influences the entire purchase process. If the design exploration is based on customers choice and ideas can be produced by local skills, it would get buyers preference. Proper focus on the product quality and satisfaction of silk has led to the concept of customers delight [16]. Gender is also an important consideration as it is noticed that the majority of the consumers of Assam silk products are married female consumers[16] who visits shop with children and other family members, and they prefer outlets where there is a showroom, where the price is reasonable and also which provides offers such as a discount, free gifts etc. Despite the demand of silk in different markets producers are lacking for efficient marketing facilities, finding new markets, modern designs, pricing and packaging [17]. To support the requirements of the silk market a new outlet for the producer are to be developed.

Various Government and NGOs are working for upliftment of the people of Assam. Marketing of different products like tourism, handloom, handicraft etc. are done at different timings. As the department of handloom has organized 49 district level fairs, 22 Special Handloom Expos and 5 National Handloom Expo in the State during the year 2009-10 [17] for promotion of handloom products and tourism department is organizing different festival for tourism promotion through-out the year [18] Different ministries govern the above two departments which creates lack of coordinated efforts. Development of permanent silk souvenir promotion and demonstration park may compliment efforts of both the ministries involved in and also other ministry like culture and others may join as partners. A common platform may also provide opportunity to craftsmen and other organizations such as Cooperative, NGO's, self-help groups etc. involved in silk sales to demonstrate their products. The silk production area and sericulture activity may also be demonstrated to give the tourist a unique experience and silk production knowledge to students, designers and various other concern people.

This leads to an idea of developing a 'Silk Promotion Hub' where tourist may spend some quality time to get experience of silk rearing, various handloom activities and appreciate/purchase the fine quality silk products. Among products Assam is known for its tea; silk products are very popular among the local people but not presented well to the tourists. This study finds the feasibility of creating a mini tourist spot that exchanges a total silk experience between the tourists and artisans.

Methodology

To understand the present state of service design, field visits were conducted to 12 silk shops located in the Panbazar area (where most of such shops are located) of the Guwahati city. From the tourist point of view exteriors of these shops were analyzed. Main concern was on an approach of the shop, visibility of signboard, customer entry/exist path, etc. Inside the shop direct observation was conducted to analyze customer area, merchandise visibility, merchandise display table, trial rooms, etc. Other customer amenities like car parking area, a kids area (as most of the customer are female accompanying kids and other family members), payment options (nearby ATM or Credit/debit card swapping machine), the washroom, food stall (other than providing food which may serve as a relaxing and discussion area for customers) etc. were analyzed.

In order to know the tourists' view regarding above-mentioned facts, an exploratory inquiry was conducted with 65 female tourists visiting Guwahati silk shops using random sampling methods. A self-administered questioner (predominantly open-ended) was developed based on available information in various literature resources [16], [18] and used for this purpose. To understand the seller's point of view, 10 numbers of shopkeepers and sales persons were interviewed and documented to know their demography, understanding about the product and experience with the tourists (customers).

Entire collected information from questioner, interview and spot survey/documentation was studied thoroughly and a brainstorm session was conducted with a small expert group containing 4 designers/design academicians, to identify the key considerations for the proposed park. Following brainstorming and discussions, three numbers of two-dimensional (2D) schematic diagrams were conceptualized for further development of the idea.

Results and Discussion

Demographic data of tourists visiting silk shops

Demographic data between 18-45 years.; 44% were up to graduation qualified; 52% were housewives; 86% were domestic tourist; 71% were visiting with family members/friends; 82% were unaware of the silk product before arriving in Assam and 60% of them came to know about the silk product from family members or friends. This led to make an attempt to create awareness among the tourists and the means and methods to study for this.

Tourist view on silk shops

Exterior: Views of respondents about the silk shops exterior suggests 86% of tourists reported that shops were not clearly visible from the road as vehicles were parked in front of the shops; 68% faced inconvenience in getting down from taxi as the road was very busy with no parking space; 85% found approach of the shop was very inconvenient.

Shops interior and amenities: Views on silk shops interior and amenities suggests 92% of the respondents don't find silk shop size convenient (from entry exit

point of view); 89% found product visibility inconvenient; 65% product display table inconvenient (from product visibility in full spared point of view); 86% found arrangements for product trial room facility not in place; 71% reported wearing inconvenience of available products; 69% were uncomfortable with the wearing assistants available in the shops (they prefer woman assistance over man); 72% said that they were not prepared to buy such high price products; 57% want to have more payment options or ATM nearby. In other amenities 53% said that most of the shops were away from food stalls and 48% said about non-availability of washroom within/near the shops.

Muga silk products: All the tourist reported about excellent quality of Assam silk products; 78% of them rated the craftsmanship of the product high (which is driven by inner instinct of individual); 64% percent of the respondent were not satisfied with the product verity; 71% shown interest in knowing about making of silk product; 82% of them will prescribe these products to friends; 78% opined that good purchase experience along with knowledge about craftsmanship and production process of silk product will be helpful in building cordial/friendly relationship between tourists and native people (host).

Direct observation of shops

Panbazar, the market place under study, is situated in the heart of Guwahati city has a lot of silk handloom shops. These shops were observed and documented from tourist ease point of view. The area is having around 30 silk shops having an average three customers at a time accompanied by an average two persons observed at many times of day. The shops are on both the side of the Hem Baruah road, which starts from DighaliPukhri, and expanded up to Fancy Bazar area requires considerations for attention to the tourists' needs and comfort (Fig 1).

Views of sellers

Sellers demography data suggests that 70% of them belong to the age group of 35-50 years and remaining fall in the age group of 22-35 years; all male; 80% of them were graduates; 70% of them were not proficient in other then mother tongue. It suggests that proficiency in handling varieties of tourists there is a need for awareness cum training. About the products, all of them having sufficient knowledge of product quality but 60% of them did not have sufficient knowledge about various stages of silk production. They reported about insufficient customer amenities.



Fig. 1. Observation snaps showing the prevalent state of the shops; from the top left (a) on the Google map the study site at Panbazar, red marked stretch, (b) Improper visibility of shops due to parked vehicles, (c) Narrow approach to the shops, (d) Small size of the shop, improper entry/exit, (e) An obscure display of products, (f) Improper display table, (g) Non availability of the trial room and (i) Non availability of space for kids and other family members as well as convenience facilities.

Views of sellers

Sellers/salesman demography data suggests that 70% of shopkeepers belong to the age group of 35-50 years and remaining fall in the age group of 22-35 years; all of them were male; 80% of them were graduates or below education level; 70% of them were not proficient in other than the mother tongue. It suggests that proficiency in handling varieties of tourists there is a need for awareness cum training. About the products, they stated that all of them having sufficient knowledge of product quality and 60% of them were not having sufficient knowledge about various stages of silk production. Some of them also reported about insufficient customer amenities.

Concept generation for a silk promotion hub

To have a free and larger space, outskirts may be used for such development, considering communication facilities between Guwahati central areas to the specific location. To have a local flavour in the proposed hub, Assamese architecture style monuments like RangGhar, TalatalGhar etc. were visited for references. Several alternate sketches were made for accommodating all the essential amenities out of which three 2D models of possible Silk Promotion and Demonstration Park, Fig. 2, have been prepared.

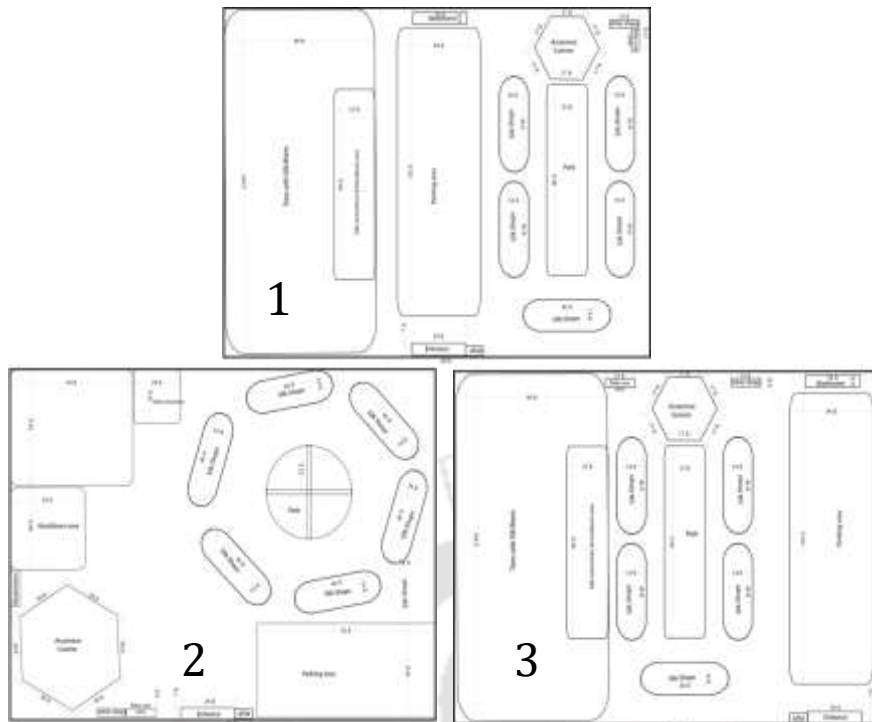


Fig. 2 . Model 1, expresses the selling-buying area in a parallel arrangement along with the parking area and silk experience areas; Model 2, provides a concentric pattern of selling and buying area with other amenities in one side; and Model 3, where the selling-buying is sandwiched between parking and other facilities.

Key consideration of Models taken were:

1. An area of 220ft X 169 ft. was taken for accommodating 270 people at a time.
2. Single gate for entry and exit is kept for the secure and relaxed environment.
3. The architecture of the gate will have elements of Assamese culture.
4. Big parking spaces were kept for the vehicles of the tourists.
5. Shop sizes were also kept big for good service design.
6. The architecture of the shop is kept like Rang Ghar (a house entertainment) a well-known monument of Assam.
7. Shop colors will also be taken from the Assamese tradition where light shade of pink is used in buildings.
8. To give ethnic environment Murals related to Assamese culture will be made on the walls.
9. Shops are kept in round or oval shape for making it naturally lit during the day.
10. Som (*Machilus bombycina*) and sualu (*Litsaeapolyantha*) plantation were done in a corner of the proposed park where silkworm can be kept.
11. The silk extraction area was kept for the demonstration of silkworm extracting.
12. The Weaving area was also kept nearby for the demonstration of weaving.
13. The park for kids and other accompanying persons were proposed in the center of the shops for better visibility from the shops.
14. The Dining area with traditional Assamese cuisine will be kept in traditional serving style.
15. Proper washrooms were planned for all the possible users.
16. A other eminities baby care zone is planned for infant care.
17. The other shops were planned for other utility items.
18. ATM is planned on the main gate for both inside and outside users.
19. All the amenities will be planned in such a way so that tourist could pass one half day at a park.

A well-planned high quality display shops with product variety and shopping environment are necessary to consider. This place should have a uniqueness of identity along with other amenities that enhances the appeal of the place in terms of engagement (such as eateries, clubs and entertainment facilities within a close proximity, good access to pedestrians and availability of parking facilities) ensures liveliness in that place [19]. Moreover, it is found that the environment surrounding the shop from the exterior plays an important role too and it must be perceived as acceptable and pleasing before even experiencing the interiors of the shop [20] which is the motivating factor to attract tourists. Further as observed by Yuksel[20], in addition to this, respondents are highly willing to talk to salespersons, spend engage in activities like surfing through and exploring the products, extend their cap on their expenditure when the climate of the Tourist Shopping Habits is considered as encouraging.

One very important consideration is that the visitors want to visit lively places. This need is considered in all the three proposed space layouts in current research to make the place dynamic. Apart from the aforesaid basic amenities, various other design considerations were deliberated in the model for the cluster of shops. Inspired from nature, rounded or oval shapes have been planned for the shops which sends a positive emotional message of harmony, protection gracefulness, integrity, perfection and completeness. As most of the visitors of silk shops are found female so curves are used instead of the sharp line and rectangle shapes, which are more feminine in nature. Moreover, round and smooth curvature in the furniture and space-layout design will be safe for the product as well as buyers. In the 'Model -1', the demonstration area and sale area are divided by parking space. If any visitor just wants to see from informative perspective, he can visit the silkworm rearing, silk extraction and handloom area without visiting the sale area. In the 'Model-2' visitors can directly land in the silk shop area and they also have an option to visit the silkworm area, the silk extraction area and Handloom area. In the 'Model-3' sale area is dominating as it is adjoining the parking area. Here, silkworm rearing and handloom demonstration area is for visitors who want more information about the product making.

Since the environment surrounding the shop from the exterior plays a pivotal role, this thought was conceived while planning of the space layout. Moreover, popular elements of Assam architecture incorporated in the planning. Space layouts of present planning for "silk promotion hub", also provides an opportunity to spend more time in the park to harness the stimulating buying. Souvenir shopping is a very emotional decision on part of tourists, the experience deals with visual appeal of the space where tourists are able to assess and correctly choose by feeling and thinking about items even though shopping is not a principal reason for their travel. In present research, the proposed model is also for giving long lasting and pleasing and user experience, rather than the only sale of products in the proposed park. Some researchers found that tourism increases chance to develop sympathy, tolerance and understanding between people and souvenir reminds place or person. This creates an invisible bond between the host and visitors. If Assam silk is purchased as souvenir, due to its longer lasting quality, satisfaction and natural golden color might create a bond between the people.

The present manuscript has been aimed to demonstrate the designing of a silk promotion hub based on available scientific knowledge from the literature as well as from the results of the questionnaire based survey from tourists and sellers. During

design of the silk promotion hub, due consideration has been given regarding the local cultural elements (local architectural form, colors, special greeting pots on the door, depicting festivals and stories on the mural), basic amenities (provision of the trial room, local cuisines with traditional serving style, kids zone, ATM's, parking area, washrooms), a comfortable ambience (inviting shop exterior, spacious shop, improved product demonstration, convenient entry and exit, the oval shape for naturally light during day time), experience of different stages of silk yarn rearing and making of silk cloths, etc. It has been planned to provide a new type of shopping experience by developing a market-place with the flavor of local identity. This market-place (hub) would resemble the villages of the silk-weavers with local architectural forms, natural habitats and cultural elements. This would be different from concrete based high-rise shopping complexes in the cities.

It is generally found that plenty reported researches are available on general management in the retail sector and very less importance has been given to what the actually tourists' perceives in terms of what they see in the surrounding environment and their the image created about the shopping locations [21]. Hence, in the present research, an attempt has been made to address this unexplored area of design and development of promotional hub based on perception and feedback from the tourist and sellers, apart from purchasers to enhance the overall shopping experience. Researchers [22,23,24] stated that due to its economic, social and psychological benefits, authorities are paying more attentions towards the development of such relaxing yet engaging shopping places at tourist destinations, so that it can ignite the customer's desire to visit and even stay more than they had planned. Present research is the same line to provide better shopping experience with extended stay and desire for re-visit.

Researcher [22] mentioned shopping malls are able to increase the time spent in the store, increase the expenditure, and evoke impulsive buying and the increased likability of the store, due to the positive emotions evoked within the customer. Moreover, it is found that the overall store ambience plays a significant role in development of customers' thoughts and actions [25] as the impression formed on the customer in the first glance, is likely to be in part generated by the macro-environment to which they are immersed in [25]. All these aforesaid aspects have been considered during the design of silk promotion hub which has been reported in present paper.

The proposed design of the silk promotion hub would facilitate the tourist to see and appreciate personally the highly skilled work of the artisans with traditional looms. By this arrangement artisans would get due admiration which is very essential for strengthening inter-personal relationship between tourist and host. The deeper understanding of the artisan and their products by tourists would help the weaver to get justified value for their products. It is found that similar types of promotional hubs have already been designed by various designers in different parts of the world but the present design concept is unique in terms of its cultural elements, attempts undertaken to strengthen the bond of inter-personal relationship among tourists and hosts (sellers, silk-weavers and local people).

Conclusion

It is expected that the intended planning and design of the silk promotion hub Park would be beneficial for hassle free informative purchase experience of the tourist. Most of the tourist may tempt to buy the product but informative experience and memory of the park will influence them deeply, which is good for strengthening the

bond between visitors and native people. Tourist department, local silk producers and agencies involved in silk product promotion are being contacted for feedback and possibility of implementation through public private partnership at the outskirts of the city towards the Hajo/Sualkuchi road where visitors and local people from Guwahati and around can visit easily.

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The possibility of sustainable development of Sualkuchi (the biggest silk village of Assam) handloom sector through promotion of rural tourism

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the biggest contributors to the economy and employment. Assam is famous among tourists for its natural resources and religious significance but the tourists generally visit Assam for a very short duration. Tourists tend to buy local handicraft products as mementos which preserve local crafts in its pure form. Sualkuchi village of Assam is the largest producer of golden Muga-silk products. Now-a-days silk industry of Assam is facing threat from imported cheap silk products from other parts of India. If tourists are encouraged to visit Sualkuchi, there is possibility to make the tourists understand about the delicate, laborious and time consuming process of handloom-woven Assam silk products. This in turn would help to provide the better purchase experience with proper reason of higher price of authentic silk products of Sualkuchi. Weavers also might get admiration for their craftsmanship and due prices for the produced products. The Assam government in its recent tourism policy emphasized on the rural tourism and some initiatives have also been taken in this area. This paper presents the views and expectation of different stakeholders of silk handloom clusters of Sualkuchi village for its sustainable development.

KEY WORDS: ASSAM SILK, RURAL TOURISM, SUSTAINABILITY, HANDLOOMS,

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1. INTRODUCTION

United Nations general assemblies in 1987 throw light on sustainable development it defines “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. It has very vast context as every sector is having its own interpretation of it. In history, there is evidence to show that the Indians have known the art of weaving for more than five thousand years as Egyptian mummies of that period were found wrapped in Indian fine silks and Muslins. Indian handloom sector is now facing many problems such as obsolete technology, haphazard production system, low productivity, inadequate working capital, conventional product range, weak marketing links, overall stagnation of production and sales and above all, competition from power looms and mill sector (Pratap and Naidu 2015). These issues are creating a hindrance for sustainability of handloom sectors. In Assam, handloom weaving has an overwhelming presence in the socio-economic life of the native people since time immemorial. The loom owners of Assam selling their products mainly in local markets in absence of proper marketing channel (Phukan 2012). In spite of its tremendous potential, the handloom industry has not flourished in commercial sphere to the desired extent (Dutta 2015). This sector could take advantages of flourishing Travel and tourism industry. In the present paper, the term ‘sustainability’ has been used to refer mainly the ‘socio-economic’ viability of the handloom clusters of the Sualkuchi village and the overall psycho-social growth of the weavers residing there.

Tourism is an evident economic activity around the world. It has direct as well as induced impacts (WTTC 2017, Haque 2016). It has a very high contribution to GDP of India as well. In 2016 it contributed Rs. 14,018.5 bn (9.6 % of GDP) which is forecasted to rise by 6.7% to Rs. 14,964.3 bn in 2017. This industry in total generated 40,343,000 jobs in 2016, which was 9.3 % of total generated employment, and it is forecasted to grow by 1.8 % in 2017 to 41,074,000 becoming 9.2 % of total projected new employments. Further by 2027, Travel & Tourism is forecasted to support 49,868,000 jobs (9.6% of total employment), an increase of 2.0% pa over the period. The contribution of domestic tourist spending recorded 88% as compared to 12% of foreign tourist spending in the travel and tourism GDP (WTTC 2017).

Tour and travel industry investment to earning ratio is also remarkable. Spending one dollar in tourism industry 3.2 dollars could be earned, further 1 million dollars spent in tourism generates twice as many jobs then the same amount spends in financial services, communication, and automotive manufacturing. Travel & Tourism has strong linkages to other industries within national economies generating significant indirect benefits (WTTC 2012).

Assam a prominent state of North–East India is very rich in traditional Art and craft that shows the rich heritage of the cottage industry i.e. sericulture, handloom, bamboo and cane industry, pottery, gold jewellery making etc.(Sharma et. all 2017) Tourists visiting Assam for wildlife, natural beauty, holy shrines, lush green tea gardens, vibrant and colourful cultural festivals (ESA 2017). Despite huge potential tourism destinations most of the tourists stay in most popular destinations for one or one and half day only (DoT 2010). In 2015-16 total domestic and foreign tourists visited

Assam were 5642950 and 26320 respectively as compared to domestic and foreign tourists visit of 3479870 and 16657 before one decade in the year 2006-07. To harness the growth of tourism the Tourism Department with the help of various level of governments and private sector has done a lot of work in infrastructure development and creation of other tourist-centric facilities over the years (Eco Survey Assam 2017). Assam tourism department in its recent policy decided to develop new spots and circuits all around the Assam (Tourism Policy Assam 2008). This initiative is really helping the economy and employment of region directly and indirectly. It has a direct impact on the generation of income and employment, foreign exchange earnings, infrastructure development and exchange of culture among people also (Haque 2016). Its major indirect positive impact is mostly on the local art and craft as tourists give a lot of importance to objects purchased during the trip (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988) It reminds of an experience (Gordon 1986; Littrell 1990; Smith 1979). This purchase by the tourists not only contributes to the market around but also promotes locally available specialty products (Lickorishv and Jenkins 1997) In a research conducted by Yuksel 2007 respondents showed a high willingness to talk to salespeople, spend more time browsing and Exploring the products, and spend more money than originally planned when the climate of the tourist shopping habitats is perceived to be stimulating. Some other research also suggests the souvenir shopping is a very emotional decision on part of tourists, the experience deals with aesthetics where tourist shoppers are able to examine, feel and think about items even if shopping is not a principal reason for their travel (Snepengeret, et al 2003). Enough research has not been done on sustainable benefits derived by informal traders from the sales of handicrafts to tourists and very little has been focused on the handicraft value chain (Kaplinsky & Morris 2001).

Assam has an age-old tradition of silk cloth weaving. Mention of it is found in epic Ramayana, Mahabharata and Arthshastra written by great ancient Indian scholar Kautilya. Later in the patronage of Ahom rule silk culture flourished further as sericulture was made obligatory household work (Bandana Mahan 2012). All the four varieties of natural silk i.e. eri, muga, mulberry and tussar are produced in Assam. (Baruah 2016) The Muga silk of Assam got a geographical indication, as it is available only in Assam. It has extreme durability and its lustre increases after every wash. From the health point of view, it attracts ultraviolet rays and protects skin from its harm (Geog. Indi. 2017). With such tremendous qualities, Assam silk product may become a convenient memento. Assam silk products are very popular among the local people but not presented well to the tourists in the capital city based cluster of shops (Sharma et. all 2017). Silk products are prepared throughout the Assam but Sualkuchi is a village also known as 'Manchester of Assam' as almost every household is involved in silk producing activity is the largest silk producing village of Assam. It is Guwahati Sub-division of Kamrup district situated on the North bank of the mighty Brahmaputra about 30km from Guwahati the capital city of Assam on the latitude of 26°10'0"N and the longitude of 91°34'0" E (Agarwal et. al. 2015). Sualkuchi has about 17,000 Silk working looms and more than 25,000 people are directly or indirectly employed in the silk industry. Sualkuchi produces more than 31.00 lakhs linear meters of silk fabrics out of the total production of about 42,19,055 linear meters of silk fabrics in Assam (Agarwal et. al. 2015). It has good possibilities of becoming a popular rural tourist destination as components of heritage are the main attractions of both domestic and international tourists since they satisfy the curiosity and relaxation to a learning experience and appreciation of local cultures (Bak 2007).

Such act will provide an opportunity for tourist to appreciate and buy authentic silk products by paying its due price and will create extra income to the families of employed weavers in this industry as they remain poor, despite working 10-12 hours a day, and the benefits derived from handicraft sales are not reflected in their livelihoods (Richard 2007)

Enough research has not been done on sustainable benefits derived by informal traders from the sales of handicrafts to tourists (Kaplinsky & Morris 2001). This research explores aspirations of the stakeholders which is very important in the process of development of rural tourist destination to incorporate their ideas and possibilities about the destination. Proper focus on the product quality and satisfaction like silk has lead to the concept of customers delight (Saikia and Nath 2015). Destinations should have uniqueness in identity along with supporting amenities (such as restaurants, pubs and entertainment facilities in close proximity, good pedestrian access and parking facilities and multi-functionality of the environment) guarantees that the place feels 'alive' (Jansen-Verbeke 1998) exterior shopping environment is particularly important and it must be considered acceptable and pleasing before the interior of the shops is ever experienced (Yuksel 2007).

This paper is an attempt to understand the views of various stakeholders for the possibility of promoting sustainable development of Suwalkuchi (the biggest silk village of Assam) silk industry via rural tourism. Further effort has been made to get familiarity with the work happening with possibilities in the area of rural tourism at Suwalkuchi and to collect views of various stakeholders.

2. METHODOLOGY

To understand the state of tourism at Suwalkuchi both primary and secondary data were considered. For primary data collection, open-ended interviews were conducted involving various stakeholders. Collected data were analysed on the qualitative basis to highlight common/distinguished issues. Moreover, several field visits were carried out to understand the ground level scenario. Photography and videography were used for thorough documentation. To get the information from secondary sources various relevant government/private agencies reports and research papers by various researchers in the similar research directions were consulted.

3. OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demography of the respondents: As stated earlier, various stakeholders were contacted for understanding their views. Five number of entrepreneurs were contacted in different hamlets of the area. They were in the silk product business for more than 15 years. Ten weavers were contacted on their workplace. Three number of government officials were contacted to understand the governments' role in the area. Satras mostly established by Jagat guru Sri Sri Sankardeva plays a crucial role in Assamese society. Satras are usually governed by Satradhikaries. Suwalkuchi has a more than then 300-year-old prominent Satra named sri sri Hati Satra. Satradhikari

of this satra was contacted and interviewed in this regard. Various other stakeholders like a priest of the prominent temple, service sector persons, local residence etc. were contacted.

3.2 Views on tourists: As per the stakeholder's Assamese society traditionally is a very good host. They love to have tourists in their village. They always want to show this great art of silk weaving to the tourist. They believe if more tourist visits the silk village it will be good for them as tourists can feel the expertise and pain of silk making. With this, they may get the due price for their product.

3.3 The Environment of the Village: As per the stakeholders, almost every household in the village accommodates a working loom. The rhythmic sound made by the looms and the flying shuttles is an integral part of their life. Many traditional songs are also sung by the weavers associated with this unique craft. They worship Muga silk thread.

3.4 Views on silk products: Everyone feels proud on the specialty silk products created in the area. They are also happy to get the geographical indication for the Muga silk of the Assam which is produced largely in the area. Special mention on quality was, this silk can be hand-washed and its lustre increases after every wash. Medically it absorbs ultraviolet rays to a great extent making the fabric very useful to protect the skin from ill effect of such rays.

3.5 Views on cottage silk handloom sector: As per the stakeholder's silk handloom sector is a prominent cottage industry of the area (Figure 1). It is an integral part of their daily life. It runs almost throughout the year except for some sacred days.



Figure 1. Female and male worker working on loom

3.6 Views on silk products variety: As per the stakeholders the most prominent dresses made here are Mekhela chader and saree for females and Muga silk Kurta for males. In contemporary time some other products like silk shirts, short kurtas, churidar are also available nowadays (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Use of different colors and motifs in various silk products

3.7 Views on silk products design motifs: Traditionally Phool buta (flower), Japi (traditional headgear), Gach (tree-like), Joon biri (Assamese neck piece), wild animal (the single-horned rhino) etc. are common motifs used here. Some silk cottage industries also experimenting with some fusion designs (Figure 3) related to different tribes of the region.



Figure 3. Contemporary design of motifs based on traditional design elements

3.8 Views on silk products competition: Some of the stakeholders feel a threat from the silk products made in other parts of India with cheap and artificial raw material using Assam motifs.

3.9 Views on tourist's infrastructure: Stakeholders appreciated different organization effort for initiation of the work for the development of tourist facilities in the area. As most of the tourists are coming for very short time in the area so they are unable to explore the full area and product variety. Due to such scarcity of time, they are guided the transport people to selected They suggested for elongated stay facilities so that tourist could pass more time in the area which will contribute to the economy of the region and tourist will also expose to different available varieties of the same product. The key infrastructure development suggested by the stakeholders is as follows.

3.9.1 Accommodation: Although some accommodation is created under indigenous tourism project of Sualkuchi in the outskirts of the city stakeholders suggested for more such stay places to attract tourist in large number.

3.9.2 Children Park: Stakeholders pointed out that many of the domestic tourists are traveling with children and their destination decisions are driven by choices children. Children park with all latest amenities will attract tourist to the area.

3.9.3 Parking: Stakeholders suggested to create some parking around the marketplace so that tourist could move hassle-free in the area. They also suggested for e- Rikshas from the parking area for an eco-friendly ride to the village.

3.9.4 Tourist Calendar: Stakeholders suggested for development of tourist calendar with details of local special days so that tourist can plan their journey accordingly.

3.9.5 Cuisine: Stakeholders pointed out the need for more restaurants with both popular as well as local cuisines where food is prepared in hygienic conditions. Some of the entrepreneurs proposed for a kitchen run by weavers at the silk workshops where tourist can enjoy local cuisine made with local flavor.

Community development by the active participation and involvement in the decision making of the entire community from planning to action leads to the self-reliance of the community. (Thomson, 1961) further direct involvement of the community members is constructive for all the members of the community. (Selvam, 2004). Researcher Voth (1975) researched when different local groups put efforts for their own development with monetary assistant from outside the development process speeds up. Bottom-up and participatory approaches considering various stakeholders is very useful in planning, developing, improving and management of entire development idea. In present research opinion of the stakeholders have collected regarding present bottlenecks of the tourism in Sualkuchi. It has been noticed that various factors responsible for fewer numbers of tourists' turn up in Sualkuchi include poor transportation from Guwahati to Sualkuchi, lack of basic amenities for the tourists at Sualkuchi, less awareness of the tourists about this place, improper guidance to tourists, lack of safety and security etc. Resolving these issues along with popularizing this place as a tourist destination would attract more tourists. All these initiatives would directly contribute to income generation of the local people, their socioeconomic development, motivating their young generations towards weaving activities, getting the justified price for the silk product and development of interpersonal relations. The present explorative research is a contribution to the sustainable development of handloom sector of Sualkuchi as it presents views of the stakeholders whose aspirations are associated with such developmental activities. This study is an initial exploratory study collecting views of stakeholders of the Sualkuchi with the further possibility of research for identifying the other points of tourist interest and creating awareness about them among the tourist visiting Assam.

4. CONCLUSION

Data gathered from interviews of the various stakeholders of Sualkuchi handloom clusters were found very useful and gave scope to the stakeholders to talk and elaborate freely about the current situation of handloom-clusters from the tourist point of view. They have shown a lot of aspirations about the development of Sualkuchi as a rural tourism spot. Interactions were further used to understand the intricate process of silk product production and lifestyle of local people. Primary data from interviews of the stakeholders as well as the secondary data suggest that promotion of rural tourism on the broader scale in Sualkuchi village would be very beneficial towards sustainable development of silk handloom clusters in the area.

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Bridging the information gap regarding various tourist destinations of North Guwahati to attract tourists

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Abstract. Tourists travel to explore new places to satisfy their desire for new experience with leisure. Assam is a preferred destination due to its abundant natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Guwahati city of Assam due to its geographical location and excellent connectivity with main land India is considered as gateway to northeast India. Guwahati city is located on the south bank of mighty river Brahmaputra and North Guwahati a part of greater Guwahati is on the north bank. The river is joining both parts of Guwahati. North Guwahati has a lot of places of interest both religious, historic and other importance. Despite its location near a tourist hub Guwahati, tourist inflow here is marginal. There are special heritage places in around North Guwahati area and a lot of new development is happening. Research suggests that tourists visit Guwahati the capital city of Assam as stopgap only for one or half day. Although North Guwahati is with huge potential for tourist destination but tourists seldom explore this part due to lack of awareness. In contemporary period tourists are having very less information about these great heritage of North Guwahati. This led to an idea of collecting information about heritage and new development of this area so that the same could be incorporated in the publicity material of various tourism promotion agencies at state and national level. This would help in drawing special attention of Indian and foreign tourists to this ignored place. These entire attempts would make North Guwahati as a tourist hotspot. This would help in economic as well as sustainable development of the area.

Keywords: Assam, tourism, heritage, culture

1 Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest industries of the world, it has positive impact on economy and creates prosperity across the world where it flourish [1, 2]. People are having natural desire for new experiences, knowledge and entertainment; this motivates them to travel [3]. As researched by Venktesh 2006 [4] the need to see the unseen and know the unknown stimulates people to travel to new destinations. Some researchers suggest that tourists are generally from the top stage of the need hierarchy established by Maslow, where they desire self-actualization by doing something new [5]. Selection for place to be visited is very important aspect of tourist plan and it depends on factors like constitute of culture, travel motivations, finances, previous experiences and others various factors [6]. In order to get fondness from tourists information about tourist spots and offered products required to be incorporated in the awareness and publicity material [7]. Detailed information about the destination, ways of life around it, historical background, cultural heritage plays very curtail role in tourist planning of visit [8]. Travel motivations of tourists assist in product development, improved marketing strategies, enhanced service delivery approaches which help in developing competitive advantage over other destinations [9].

Assam a prominent northeastern state of India is mentioned as an unexplored paradise of India by some researchers [5]. Almost every administrative district of Assam is having something to offer to tourists, this require appropriate reinvention, attention and exposure [7]. Every tourist destination in Assam has something heavenly and diversities to offer. Tourism in Assam is prominent for her unique natural beauty with flora and fauna, historical monuments, pilgrim centers, tea gardens and its colorful cultural festivals [10, 11, 12]. Generally the nature and wildlife is the main attraction of both domestic and foreign tourists. Despite huge touristic potential Assam's tourism development and promotion is considered in infant stage [7] may be because of Assam recently came up with its tourism policy which will establish a coordination among various departments involved in tourism development in the state and on national level.

A total number of 1431.97 million domestic and 8.03 million foreign tourists travelled in India in 2015 [13]. Assam was able to attract 4863826 domestic and 20005 foreign tourists in 2014-15[12]. Although the number was previous year but it is less then many states with limited tourism resources as compare to Assam.

Guwahati due to its geographical location and excellent connectivity with the main land India called "gateway to north east India". Tourist are visiting various places of the city like Kamakhya temple, Navagraha temple, Guwahati Zoo, Planetarium, Basistha Ashram, Srimant Sankardev kalachetra, Balaji temple etc. On the other hand historical and heritage places of attraction on the northern region of city like Madan Kamdev temple, Aswaktanta Devalay, Rudreshwar Devalaya etc. are not in known to most of the tourist due to lack of awareness. Most of the tourists stay in Guwahati a prominent city for a stop gap only for one or half day due to this information gap [18]. This paper is an attempt to collect tourist relevant information about northern region of Guwahati city so that it could be incorporated in the publicity material of various tourist promotion agencies on state as well as national level.

2 Methodology

The research is based on open ended interviews of stake holders and eminent people followed by personnel observation, exploration and documentation of tourist interest destination of northern region of area of the Guwahati city supported by secondary data taken from research papers, books, and information available on internet.

3 Tourist attraction in North-Guwahati

During the exploration, meeting various stake holders, documentation and observation various historical and heritage sites of the researched area a lot of tourism strengths were observed in the North Guwahati area. As majority of the tourists traveling Assam are domestic one it may be interesting for them to know about such unique places along with the tourist from the far. Some research suggests that once capital of this region was located at North Guwahati [19]. The collected information is of mixed nature but could be divided broadly in three categories Historical as well as Mythological and Contemporary.

3.1 Historical as well as Mythological Interest

3.1.1 **Rock Inscription:** The rock inscriptions named Kanai Barsai Boa is found in Rajadwar area of the North Guwahati. Total number of six such rock blocks with petro-glyphic inscriptions is identified. Strategic importance of this area during ancient period could be understood by three of such inscriptions related to military victories of regional powers over foreign invaders that attacked Assam from the west. One such inscription belongs to 1206 CE and other two from 1665 CE era. The size of these inscriptions varies, the biggest have a girth of 37.8 feet and the smallest one measures 4.5 feet in length and 1.3 meter in breadth. Shapes of labyrinth, chessboard, circle, animal like figure, man, man riding animal, circle in a square, linear markings, circle, demon, lady, indeterminate objects etc. are found on the inscriptions telling about life and life style of ancient natives of this region [20,21,22].



Figure 1. Heritage of North Guwahati

- 3.1.2 **Auniati Sattra:** Satras have a lot of significance in life of people of Assam, they are monasteries established by the great Bhakti Saints of Assam Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva .The Auniati Satra was established in Majuli in 1663 A.D. by the Ahom King Sultanla . Main branch of Auniati Satra is at North Guwahati est. 1915 A.D.
- 3.1.3 **Dirgheswari Devalya:** This medieval period shrine is located on Barghyachal hill in fulung area of North Guwahati. Followers of Shakti cult of indian mythology considere this place as holiest place next to Kamakhya temple of Guwahati. Ahom King Siva Singha reign 1714 CE-1744CE constructed the present temple in supervision of Tarun Duwrah Borphukan. Some images of hindu God and Goddess are engraved on the rocks around the temple. The Ganesh image engraved on the entrance of the temple is considered as largest engraved image of the Ganesh in the region. Some historian suggests that these Ganesh temples constructed around are the mark of boundary of the kingdom. The image of loard Hanuman is also engraved on one of the stone, which is very unique to the region. Two footprints believed to be of goddess Durga are engraved near the temple [20, 21, 22].
- 3.1.4 **Monikaraneswar Temple:** The Monikaraneswar Temple located on the of north bank of mighty Brahmaputra on the Manikhyalya hill. The star shaped original temple aged back 10th and 11th century, it was further upraised by Ahom king Rudreswar Singha (1715-1769). Construction wise from foundation to middle of wall it is made using stones, middle to top it is made-up of flat bricks. Sculptures of God and Goddess with floral motif are engraved on the boundrywall of the temple, only one rockcut sculpture of the lord Ganesh is a point of attraction on the way to the temple [21]. Shivalinga is placed in the inner chamber approached by a small cave [22].
- 3.1.5 **Aswaktlanta Devalay:** The name aswaktlanta is made of two words aswa mens Hourse and klanta means tired, the name is associated with During the time of Ahom king Siva Singha, Bijay Duwarah Phukan a mythological story where lord Krishna elope Rukmani for marriage his hourse become tired and took rest here. The ancient temple was built by the Ahom king Siva Singha (1714-1744) which get shettered in 1900 which renovated by the lord lord Karjan [22]. The Ahom architecture is followed in building this temple.
- 3.1.6 **Dol gobind Temple:** Dol gobind Temple is a Krishna temple is one of the biggest temples in the world, with over thousand pilgrims visiting a day [23]. The idols of Lord Shymaray and Lord Govinda are kept inside the temple. The five-day long dol-utsav celebrated during festival of colour Holi is celebrated with a lot of pleasure here.

3.2 Contemporary period tourist advantages

- 3.2.1 **Strategic Location:** As North Guwahati is a part of greater Guwahati, which is an established big tourist hub. Almost all the tourists visiting Northeastern part of India are passing some time here. If a marginal percent of tourist coming to Guwahati prefers to come here the number will be very huge.
- 3.2.2 **Clean Environment:** literacy level among residence of this region is society 93.685 [5] and a feeling of belongingness among the natives here; the pollution here in the area is at negligible level. Water pollution is also very less due to its location on the other riverbank of main Guwahati city. Air quality is also good as most of the hills here are associated with some religious place and having good vegetation, as cutting tree on religious place is against the faith and beliefs of Indian mythology. Like almost all residences of Assam used to have big courtyard with a lot of vegetation it is part of their lifestyle.

- 3.2.3 **Scope for Angling:** As most of the domestic tourist in Assam are from this region only [12] and fish is a preferred food among them. Due to purity of water on the north bank and presence of fishing community on this part availability of fresh fish is good here. So visitors and their kids can angling and fresh fish here.
- 3.2.4 **Traditional Houses:** As North Guwahati is a semi-developed place many age old ancient houses classified as Assam type with tapered roof and weather board , are located here. While visiting here tourist can have a look on these houses to understand Assames style and traditional architecture.
- 3.2.5 **Ferry Service:** The Inland water transport is running ferry services between these places in Brahmaputra river which could be a great experience for some of the tourist not having idea of river based cities. River banks are full of scenic beauty and sun rise/set with it reflection on river water creates very beautiful pictorial sights.
- 3.2.6 **Approach Road:** New Sarai Ghat bridge is between both the banks of the reiver Brahmputra created a new experience and opportunities for tourist to visit this northern region for a unique experience of long drive in the god of mother nature.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Places of ancient cultural heritage help us know about the past of that area [27]. Such places do not always get enough attention by the tourists due to various reasons [25]. Tourists always look for available information and things to see around the destination to make their journey pleasurable [27]. They enquire about destinations via various means including website, travel agent, tour operators etc. Guwahati the prominent city of Assam is known as gateway to north-eastern India [26]. This place has treasure of heritage and contemporary places of tourist interest but unfortunately it is visited by the tourist as a stop gap location mostly [18]. Tourism agencies has already put a lot of hard work to promote Guwahati as a favorite tourist destination by promoting places of tourist interests through various mediums but north-Guwahati has not received its due importance. There is a scope of adding a lot more information about the North Guwahati's treasure of heritage which has a lot of significance during ancient time due to its strategic location. Its historical background was almost neglected in the media and not got enough tourist attention due to its far away location from Guwahati city. The information collected through this research could be incorporated with the various media of publicity. So that it could harness its location advantage of being near a well established tourist hub Guwahati. Careful approach involving various stakeholder for promoting of north Guwahati as the popular tourist destination is to be worked out in emerging ways of tourism like eco tourism, them park, education tourism, medical tourism etc. To protect the unique cultural identity, eco system and life style of the native people, some region specific consideration may be required in form of special guidelines. These entire collective efforts will boost the development and economic condition of the local people.

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