



A STUDY ON PROSPECTS OF TEA TOURISM AND ITS LINK WITH HUMAN CAPITAL IN ASSAM

Barnali Das, Asst.Prof/HOD (Humanities)

Jorhat Institute of Science & Technology, Jorhat (Assam), India

Abstract : Tourism industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world; which has a special place in a labour abundant country like India. More precisely, it has strategic importance in Assam as one of the north eastern states for its unique beauty and cultural abundance. As per the reports of World Travel and Tourism Council (2018), tourism sector provided 1 for 10 jobs worldwide and 1 in 5 of all the new jobs created in 2017. In Assam, tourism industry can be a boon for the local people. Because tourism industry can absorb different categories of labours viz. unskilled, semi-skilled and highly skilled labour and can solve the growing unemployment problem and thereby, boost their quality of life. Among all other dimensions of tourism industries in Assam, Tea gardens can be a promising one for its beautiful gardens and bungalows, old trees and green lawns which are always centre of attraction for the tourists. According to OECD, labours can be regarded as human capital or assets instead of cost, which holds good for tourism industry also. Similarly the tea industry is also depend on its workers and their quality as human capital. This study attempts to highlight the prospects of tea tourism in Assam and to trace out the basic infrastructural factors specifically human capital for the development of tourism industry in Assam.

Index Terms: Tourism industry, Tea gardens, labours, quality, Human Capital, Development.

1.0 Introduction

Tourism industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world; which has a special place for a country like India with its bountiful natural as well cultural heritage and diversity in itself. More precisely, it has strategic importance in Assam as one of the north eastern states for its unique beauty and cultural abundance. Assam can acclaim itself a all season tourist destination for its colorful people, its biodiversity, unique wildlife, untapped-unexploited wonderland for its plentiful natural and cultural heritage. It is the gateway of the North eastern states. As per the Tourism policy, Assam, 2017 for promotion of tourism it has started a campaign namely, 'Awesome Assam' as brand name. In Assam, tourism industry can be a boon for the local people. Because tourism industry can absorb different categories of labours viz. unskilled, semi-skilled and highly skilled labour and can solve the growing unemployment problem and thereby, boost their quality of life.

1.1 Tourism as a source of livelihood

The Union Government has recently declared to give top priority on five 'T's i.e. Tradition, Talent, Trade, Technology and Tourism for overall development of the nation. Tourism is one of the fastest and largest growing industries recently and in is extremely a labour intensive one. As per statistics, 9.5% of global GDP is contributed from travel and tourism industry and nearly this sector generated 8.95 of total employment (WTTC, Travel and Tourism Economic Impact, 2015). This sector accounts for 30% of world's trade of services while 6% of overall global exports of goods and service. In reference it can be mentioned that in case of India, Travel and Tourism

sector contributes around 7% to the GDP and it is also providing livelihood around 3.67 crore people in India (Travel and Tourism Economic Impact , India,2015). It is further anticipated that Travel and Tourism Sector will provide 296 million jobs by 2019 to the global economy. It is a driver of growth and economic prosperity, which accounted 1 job in 10 worldwide and 1 in 5 of new jobs 2017. Apart from foreign exchange earnings, economic development, it provides direct and indirect employment to the local people. Employment by hotels, restaurant, travel agents, guides, tourism information office and etc. are the direct employment. On the other hand, restaurant suppliers, accounting service, various handicraft producers, marketing agencies, construction companies that built tourist facilities etc. are indirect one. Hopefully, tourism industry has a lot of potentiality for the development of Assam. Though a considerable amount of revenue is generating from tourism sector still this whole industry has miles to go. It can be a gainful sector for resolving alarming unemployment problem if planned properly. It is an well known fact that tourism industry can equally provide employment for unskilled, semi skilled and highly skilled people. It is recorded that tourism industry has provided employment to 2,73,454 people in the year 2013-2014. A clear fact is, development of the tourism sector is depends on the quality of the work force or labour which are the human capital or real assets instead of cost.

Apart from that number of tourists from India and Foreign countries as well as the revenue generated from them is a special concern for further development of the tourism sector in the state. Following table shows Indian and foreign tourists visited Assam and respective revenue earned in that particular year.

Table :1.3 Indian and Foreign tourist to Assam and collection of revenue

Year	Tourist staying in tourist lodge	Tourist in other accommodation	Total revenue earned from tourist lodge only (Rs. Lakh)
2014-2015	21092 (Indian) 422 (Foreign)	4842734 (Indian) 19583 (Foreign)	211.77
2015-2016	42988 (Indian) 1077 (Foreign)	5599962 (Indian) 25243 (Foreign)	1057.24
2016-2017	24036 (Indian) 474 (Foreign)	5389841 (Indian) 6735 (Foreign)	252.39

Source : Directorate of Tourism, Assam

1.4 Tourism and human capital

As tourism sector is regarded as labour intensive sector. It has immense potential in creating job opportunity for semi-skilled, highly skilled and unskilled people too. It has been mentioned earlier that tourism sector has provided gainful employment to the local people of Assam for last few years. Growing unemployment scenario in the state can be resolved by providing gainful employment opportunities to the unemployed man force in this sector, which can be helpful to convert unemployed people to a potential staff or work force of the tourism sector. The relation between human capital and tourism is a direct and strategic one. Because the growth and prosperity of the tourism sector is depend on good quality staff or man power. It is the level of education, training, skill and supportive environment as well as infrastructure that determines the future growth of the tourism and any hospitality sector. Before analyzing the relation between human capital and tourism sector, the idea of human capital is an important one. Here, name of T.W Schultz (1961), Becker (1964), Mincer (1962) can be cited in defining and generation of human capital. Their study reveals that human resources are the holders of human capital, it is the acquired human capability that can enhance performance of the holders in socially valued productive activities. They take into account the innate and acquired skills to incredible for human capital formation. In their view, human capital is generated by investing in people which will entail returns in future. It is the knowledge acquired through education and training by individuals that are essential for skills needed in the organizations as well as in society. According to Mincer (1962), human capital is a form of schooling and education that prepares the existing and prospective workforce for a quality performance in any organisation in the society. According to Schultz (1961), one among the different ways to develop human resources is health facilities and services, broadly conceived to include all expenditure that affect the life expectancy, strength and stamina, the vigour and vitality of the people that can enhance human capital. So, Health and nutritional aspect is also a matter of concern for human capital theorists. Apart from that time element is a very important aspect for development of any sector like tourism and hospitality. If employees are not only skilled but posses sound health they can dedicate ample time for their work.

2.0 Tourism industry in Assam

Though whole north east region has immense scope to exploit tourism potentialities, Assam has its special feature like scenic beauty, cultural multiplicity, friendly nature and cordial behavior of the native people. Assam can be a favorite destination for tourists due to its exotic wildlife, colorful festivals, historical monuments, beautiful rivers and tributaries, green tea gardens and golf courses of course. It has its various dimensions of tourism prospects in line of nature tourism, cultural tourism, pilgrim tourism, wild life tourism, adventure tourism, eco tourism, tea tourism and others.

Nature tourism : Assam among all NE regions is a hotspot of biodiversity. It is the hub of animals, birds and other rare species as well as reservoir of different kind of flora and fauna. This region is covered with dense forest, Crystal clear streams, waterfalls, bird sanctuaries, national parks, several tiger projects etc. which has substantial potential for income and employment generation of local people.

Cultural tourism: Assam has its unique cultural features with mixed cultural groups. The state is known for its different tribes and groups having unique cultural heritage. Each and every tribal community has its own customs, festivals, religious beliefs, ethnic language, dressing and food habits, unique song and dance ethnicity which attracts numbers of tourists from overall India and outside also.

Pilgrim tourism : Pilgrim tourism in Assam has lots of potential. Various religious places like kamakhya temple, barpeta and batadrawa satra, madan kamdeb, umananda, basistha, navagraha madhab mandir attracts lots of tourists to the region. Never the less Majuli, the largest river island is a centre of attraction for tourists from a long time.

Wildlife tourism : Its wildlife is always electric due to its national parks for its one horned rhino, gibbon, golden langur, golden cat, the pigmy hog, white winged duck etc. Every year thousands of tourists are visiting this wildlife and bird sanctuaries including Kaziranga, Manas, Nameri, Dibru-saikhowa, Pabitora and others.

Adventure tourism : Assam has its immense potentialities regarding adventure tourism in different parts of the states. It can take measures to provide different adventure opportunities like rock climbing, trekking, rafting, parasliding in different valleys, hills, forests and high current rivers. Though department of tourism promoted those various adventure activities; still there is enormous scope for hug gliding in the area.

Eco-tourism : Though eco-tourism is a new concept for Assam, yet it has tremendous scope for it. Beautiful nature and favorable climatic condition can be a asset for eco-tourism in Assam. Hopefully it also meets the local need of the people, promoting their welfare as well as preserve environmental sustainability.

Tea tourism : Tea tourism can be a special kind of attraction for the tourists. Age old lush green tea gardens, grass fields, golf fields, sprawling bungalows, enchanting song and dances of local community is a boon for development of tea tourism in Assam. Here, it can be added that Tourism

Policy of Assam, 2017 has specially mentioned promotion of tea tourism in the state along with other potential tourism sectors.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

This study is going to focus on some basic facts regarding prospects of tea tourism in Assam as well as make us acquainted with human capital i.e the workers are crucial for growth of this sector. To meet the need of this study, following objectives are to be considered—

1. To become familiar with the prospective tea gardens which can be considered as potential tourist spots.
2. To trace the quality of the tea garden workers as well as their quality of life.
3. To identify the major issues related to their (workers) quality of work.
4. To recommend some probable solutions to overcome the problem of tea garden and tea garden workers.

2.2 Data and Methodology

This study primarily depends on qualitative as well as quantitative data drawn from in-depth interviews and discussions with tea garden workers and members of management level. Here, focus group discussion is an important contributor for qualitative data. This study has been performed with the help of both Primary and secondary data. The primary data are collected from the selected tea gardens and the labours and employees working there. Similarly, the secondary data are collected from various journals on tea gardens, newspapers and different govt. and non-govt. publications, survey books and internet sources etc. To collect information from the workers, seven tea gardens from Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Sonitpur are randomly selected.

2.3 Findings and Probable strategies :

Here, the study analyses various facts and fall-outs regarding prospects of tea tourism and its linkage with human capital i.e tea garden workers in two sections--

i)Prospects of Tea tourism in Assam : Millions of tourists from all over India and abroad visited Assam for its awesome wildlife and ancient pilgrimage spots; gradually tea gardens are become another hub of attraction for them to visit. Following are some of the popular tea tour destinations in Assam, where tourists can relive a lush greenery experience with exotic food and cultural show. e.g Baniyan Groove (Jorhat), Thengal Manor (Jorhat), Kaziranga Golf Resort (Jorhat), Misry sahib's bungalow (Jorhat), Mankotta chang Bungalow (Dibrugarh), Purbi discovery (Dibrugarh), Wild Mahseer (Sonitpur), Wathai Heritage Bungalow (Tinsukia), Diphlu River Lodge (Nagaon). These tea gardens along with other handful gardens of Assam can be flourish as prospective tourism destinations if following points are to be considered---

1. Tea gardens of Assam provide a picturesque beauty to the lush green valleys and plains of Assam. It is undoubtedly a picture to behold in a wayfarer's mind . The aesthetic satisfaction that is provided by a mere look at the rows of trees and tea bushes arranged in order id beyond any comparison.
2. The native population of these tea gardens is a colorful group of merry people with numerous traditions and customs. Celebration is an integral part of their life. The jhumur dance with its unique accompaniment of drum beating along with homemade drink can relax any man's mind.
3. Adventure sports and activities like rafting, golf, nature walks, trekking are some of the additional benefits tourists can avail through the parallel tea tourism.
4. Interaction with the tea workers and partaking in the tea making process by the visitors will definately attract people towards the beverage and also usher in a change in the lives of the tea garden workers from their usual routine works.
5. Overnight stays in the spacious and exquisite bungalows of these tea gardens can settle down even a heavy heart. The traditional ways of treating guests and serving is something to be pampered with in one's lifetime here.
6. Economically, it is one of the most profitable and viable industry to be developed here. India along with its South Asian counterparts is experiencing tremendous change in its tourism sector due the introduction of tea tourism.
7. Interaction among the tourists both national and international has brought about a consciousness among the tea garden population to move towards betterment in terms of improved health and hygiene, higher level of education and skill development, social security, enriched hospitality and many others in these gardens.
8. Since, tea tourism in Assam is paralleled by eco tourism, industrial tourism, nature tourism etc. due to which it provides a diversity of sorts to the travelling minds.

Last but not the least, tourism brings with it a whole lot of benefits which is also true for tea. Rapid revival of the people socially, economically, spiritually and traditionally creates a better environment which is newly refreshed.

ii) Tea tourism and human capital linkage :

Survival of every tourist destination is relies on the quality of services it provides and of course the service providers. Tourism industry occupies different sort of services like lodging, catering, transportation, attraction, retail shops, eating and drinking establishment, entertainment and other hospitality services for those travelling away from home etc. This is also true for the tea gardens of Assam. For full-fledged development of tea industries as tourism destinations it is inevitable to provide all quality services in different categories and promotion of the same to attract tourists from different places. Therefore, the availability of skilled and trained manpower is a crucial element in the success of any tourism development plan or programme, so well trained manpower is must for development of this sector. However, unstable employment, low job status, long working hours and low pay

are the main constraints of employment in tourism industry. The immediate consequences of such a situation is the difficulty of recruiting suitable staff and high staff turnover, these are costly to the success of the industry.

It is evident that tea industry is a labour intensive sector in core. Tea garden community has their unique culture, festivals, dance and song, cuisine that relish the revitalizing experience for tourists stay in. The heritage bungalows amidst the lush, aromatic tea gardens and watching the labourers synchronously plucking leaves and working in the tea plantations can be amiable experience for them. Tourism policy of Assam, 2017 has a special mention for promotion of tea tourism in Assam along with other. This sector is providing different categories of works for the tea garden communities. It is the primary source of income for local inhabitants. Apart from that if tea gardens can be nurtured as tourist spots more employment generation would be possible in line of that. Many of the tea gardens in Assam have polo fields and golf courses, some of them have air strips and helipads maintained by the tea garden management. For maintenance of these facilities tea gardens will require skilful workers. For marketing and promotion also trained man power is essential. The workers engaged in different categories of in the gardens are the real assets or the human capital. The prosperity of tea industry as tea tourism is highly depend on the education, skill, on the job training for specific work as well as their health. The more labours are educated and skilled the services will improve and eventually will enhance customers satisfaction. Human capital is an indispensable input among various sorts of capital like natural, physical, financial and social capital for development of any tourism and hospitality industry.

For generating human capital - education, sanitation, cleanliness, skill training, basic amenities for the workers are inevitable.

Education is an important pillar of human capital formation. It is an integral component of human development. Education improves functional and analytical ability of human being. It provides economic as well as non-economic benefits to people. At individual level education augments efficiency and productivity of an individual through imparting desired knowledge and skill. It also affects one's earning, employability, health, intellectual fulfilment and other aspects of good life. Education creates a more productive and efficient workforce capable of taking more difficult task. In the global knowledge economy, people's skills, learning, talents and attributes become a key to both their ability to earn a living and as well as better service in the working sector.

Sanitation and cleanliness are some important aspects of status of health. Healthy individuals are more efficient in acquiring knowledge and skill and have better physical and mental abilities. Improvement in health leads to increase in ability and willingness to work as well as raises hours of work which entails productivity and efficiency of workers. Thus, forms an well-equipped human force. One among the five ways to develop human resources is health facilities and services, broadly conceived to include all expenditure that affect the life expectancy, strength and stamina and the vigor and vitality of the people (Schultz T. W. 1961).

Status of Health can be stated through various indicators like survival rate, average life expectancy across population, infant mortality, maternal mortality rate, sanitation, health care quality etc.

Skill training is an important aspect that determines the level of work efficiency and ability to perform a task easily. It is quiet necessary for a worker to have work specific skill development training for enhancement of one's work efficiency. Here, govt. of India's 'Skill India' and 'Hunar Se Rozgar Tak' can be very effective if the local community as well as educated and even less educated youths can be retained under this.

Other amenities like transportation facility, 24 hours electricity connectivity, internet connection, mobile or telephone service are the key requirement for facilitation of any sorts of workers in a society as human capital. If the local inhabitants can access electricity 24 hours, they will able to cater better function to the tourists in day time as well as night also. Information on quality of service and various portals of tourism packages can be considered from tea garden area if the youths can be trained properly on information technology and utility services.

In line with development and promotion of tourism in Assam, govt. highlighted various measures including physical infrastructure to development of human resources at par. They are---

- a) Involvement of local municipalities, Public Health Engineering, PWD. Local self-government such as Panchayat or Town Committees/Municipalities for ensuring day to day maintenance, cleanliness and hygiene, promotion of local cuisines, culture and handicrafts etc.
- b) Facilitating Water-supply, Electricity and Waste management services.
- c) Ensure Participation of local community for tourism development at any destination. Basically generating employment opportunities for the local population so that they can enjoy better standard of life.

- d) Conducting awareness programmes on Responsible Tourism among the local people living in the vicinity with help of Local Management Committees.
- e) Ensuring various skill development programmes in the local vicinity to eradicate the gap between demand and supply of skilled manpower in the tourism sector. A detailed study on HRD in tourism sector in Assam is required to highlight the education system in travel, tourism and hospitality.
- f) Attempts would be made to facilitate common standards, uniformity, harmony in curriculum, faculty qualification and education delivery towards making the hospitality and tourism sector a popular career option. In a nut shell, by providing better skills that can bring attractive wage offers to the people and encourage them to work in it.

2.4 Suggestions to improve the present scenario:

1. Govt. should make huge investment to break the geographical isolation and the barrier created in terms of communication bottlenecks.
2. A scientifically planned tea tourism development policy must be initiated by the government.
3. Development of Health and Hygiene of the tea garden population along with scientific knowledge in order to make a good presentation of the people involved in this endeavour.
4. Fast and complete riddance of anti- social activities which bring in fear and hesitation in the mind of tourists. To create a congenial atmosphere and restoration of peace and tranquility.
5. For the successful implementation of the “Uttaran Scheme” and to put up with the challenging situation, the state tea industry has to upgrade the quality of tea production.

3.0 Literature on Human capital and its performance

Human capital is a key area of interest under the discussions of tourism and hospitality sector. It is a pivot element in growth and development of any organisation or sector. It is a recognised fact that there is a positive relation between human capital i.e education, skill, ability, competency and performance of various sectors in a economy. One of the most significant contribution in the theory of human capital was by Schultz in the year 1962. He propounded some major issues covering knowledge, skill, qualification and ability of an individual on human capital.

Garry S. Becker in 1964 has elaborated this concept further and take into account the fact of firm specific human capital as well as some issues regarding health, time or the working hour also.

Mincer in his work in 1962 mentioned human capital is a form of education and schooling that will prepare the existing and prospective workforce for a quality performance.

Here it can mentioned that Blundell et al in the year 1999 highlighted three core components of human capital specifically - knowledge, skills, qualification, ability and competency on the part of an individual and the acquired expertise on the job . These attributes play a significant role in developing human resources demand for any given sector and as potential human capital.

Davenport in 1998 points out in What It Is & Why People Invest in human capital and further examined workers performance through ability and behaviour, noting time allocation is an issue to choice of tasks. Davenport mathematical model in the form of Total Human Capital = A represent for ability, B represent for behaviour, E represent for effort T represent for (time), and x is sign of multiplication. In this equation a multiplicative relationship enhances the outcome thus Total Human Capital = (Ability & Behavior) x Effort x Time investment $THC = A \& B \times E \times T$. It appears in the literature examined that between the years 2000-2005 emphasis on human capital dwell on individual traits as it impacts quality performance. It appears in the literature examined that between the years 2000-2005 emphasis on human capital dwell on individual traits as it impacts quality performance. (O.O. Metilelu,2014).

McDonald and Hopkin in the year 2003 in their research work opined that development of human capital to meet need of future the human resources is a key issue. They asserts that only a long term strategy can sustain human capital growth in tourism and hospitality industry.

Okorji and Okoye in their work in the year 2003 asserts that productive investment incurred in human beings through some major strategies like education, on the job training programme, medical care etc. can lead to enhancement of employees functionalities in terms of skills. The costs of human capital development include expenditure on education training and medical care etc.

4.0 Conclusion :-

Though it is obvious that during this pandemic situation, we need a lot of patience and well managed strategies to revive as well as restart tourism in this region. But, it is undeniable fact that the tea industry has its intrinsic role in developing the economy of Assam through its different dimensions viz. production, income, employment and of course a new prospect of potential tourism extravaganza still has ample scope for its growth. Though, this study cannot capture the whole phenomena about other issues related with organizational efficiency, human resource management practice, motivational strategies to overcome hurdles in tourism sector, role of govt. subsidy and investment in entrepreneurial ability. Despite all, the role of education, worker's accessibility of credit and other financial facility, business skill, specific work related skill of workers, and health status of entrepreneurs as well as workers, market knowledge, issue of spirit in taking new venture are some of the factors that has enough scope of study for growth of tourism industry based on tea gardens. And hope that there will be more study on the scope of tea tourism and its contribution in development of tea industry as well as the role of tea garden workers as human capital.

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