



A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURISM INDUSTRY IN ASSAM

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Abstract: Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19), a highly contagious disease was first identified in Wuhan Province of China in December 2019. COVID-19 created incalculable loss to human life as well as the economy worldwide. The present study made an attempt to explore the impact of COVID-19 on tourism industry in Assam. Assam, a state in the North Eastern Region of India is famous for its natural beauty, wild life, tea tourism and places of cultural and religious importance. The state is called the gateway to North East India. It has huge prospects of tourism industry which can generate both income and employment. The study used data of arrival of both domestic and foreign tourists in Assam before and during the pandemic and found that inflow of both categories of tourists substantially reduced during the pandemic period in the state. This implies that revenue earned by the Govt. from this sector would reduce as a result of decrease in the inflow of tourists in the state during the pandemic. To boost the tourism sector especially during post COVID period, appropriate measures are need of the hour in attracting more tourists in the state.

Key-Words: COVID-19, Contagious disease, tourism industry, Revenue, Pandemic.

I. INTRODUCTION

Corona Virus Disease, abbreviated as COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease. The vector responsible for the deadly disease is identified as SARS-COV-2. The first incidence of COVID-19 was identified in Wuhan province of China in December 2019. In India, the first case of COVID-19 pandemic was detected in Kerala in January 2020. As on March 20, 2023, India is placed at the second spot in terms of number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 after the USA (Wikipedia).

The pandemic adversely affected all spheres of human life. Lock downs were imposed to contain the spread of the disease worldwide. Economic activity slowed down during the pandemic. The pandemic caused GDP contraction, high unemployment, weak supply chains, breakdown of the tourism industry, and decrease in govt. income and so on (Wikipedia). The pandemic hit economic activity across all sectors. The present paper relates two issues- COVID-19 and tourism industry in the context of Indian state Assam by examining the impact of the former.

As a result of outbreak of COVID-19, livelihood of the people mainly transports workers, construction workers, daily labours, traders etc. was severely affected leading to increase in poverty. Against this background, the paper seeks to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on tourism industry in Assam.

II. Brief Review of Literature:

(i) Sahoo and Ashwani (2020) made an assessment of COVID-19 on Indian economy by analysing its impact on growth, manufacturing, trade and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector based on the secondary data. The study found that the impact was severe on trade, manufacturing and MSME sectors.

(ii) Boruh (2021) studied the economic impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sectors of Assam based on literature reviews and its suggestive measures. The author made an in-depth study of a total of 20 papers and obtained the result. On the basis of literature reviews the study found that due to COVID-19, the whole economy of the world experienced sluggish growth and the possibility of a severe economic downturn is very high.

(iii) Tourism is one of the sectors most affected by the Covid-19. The pandemic has made effects on economies, livelihoods, public services and opportunities on all continents. No nation will be unaffected. Destinations most reliant on tourism for jobs and economic growth are likely to be hit hardest (UNWTO).

(iv) Kapparashetty (2020) in the paper "Impact of COVID 19 on Industrial Sector – A Study" examined the impact of covid-19 virus on the overall industrial sector and its impact on the economy. The study found that manufacturing industry had been hit in many ways due to the Corona effect and the scale of operations of the industry, with consequent effect on quality, cost and production volumes reduced.

(v) Jagdale and Ganatra (2021) in their article "Impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic on Tourism Industry of India" examined the effect of COVID-19 on the tourism sector of India. The study reveals that tourism is a potentially great employment generator besides being a significant source of Foreign exchange for the country. The study reported that the drastic outbreak of the novel corona virus had caused great losses to the tourism industry.

III. Objectives of the Study:

- (i) To examine prospects of tourism industry in Assam;
- (ii) To examine the impact of COVID-19 on tourism industry in Assam and
- (iii) To suggest measures for development of tourism in Assam during post COVID period.

IV. Data Source and Methodology:

The present study is based on secondary data. To analyse the objectives set for the study, information has been collected from secondary sources like Govt. Reports, online articles, papers etc. Tabular analysis and statistical tools like bar diagrams and line diagrams have been applied to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on tourism industry in Assam.

V. Prospects of Tourism Industry in Assam:

Assam is one of the seven states in the North Eastern Region of India. The region is linked with mainland India through the Siliguri Corridor known as Chicken's Neck. The scenic beauty of Assam is world famous. Green Tea fields, forests, hills, Brahmaputra River and its tributaries, the Barak River and its tributaries have enriched the natural beauty of Assam. Rolling hills, dense forests and rich bio-diversity of Assam attract domestic and foreign tourists in the state. Assam is world famous for its one horned rhino found in Kaziranga National Park. The famous Kamakhya temple is also located in Assam. There are national parks, wild life sanctuaries, bird sanctuaries and reserve forests in the state. The famous Kaziranga National Park and Manas National Park are UNESCO heritage sites. Other places of tourist attraction in Assam are Manas National Park-the only tiger reserve in Assam and famous for the rare golden langur and the red panda, Majuli Island, Umananda Island (the smallest river island in the world), Hajo, Haflong, Son Bill in Barak valley and so on. Therefore, Assam always attracts tourists due to its natural beauty and places having historical, cultural and spiritual importance.

Tourism industry occupies an important place in the economy of Assam. It generates employment. It contributes to the state income. There is huge potential for development of tourism industry in Assam. Despite its potentiality of tourism, the sector is beset with a numbers of problems. The main problems of development of tourism in Assam are identified as lack of infrastructure, lack of tourist guides, lack of coordination, poor accommodation etc. The govt. has taken various steps for development of tourism in Assam. The govt. has granted industry status to the tourism sector in recent times. It is expected that the new status will encourage and increase private investment in the tourism sector.

VI. Results and Discussions:

1. The Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism Industry in Assam:

COVID-19 outbreak has adversely affected people mainly daily labour, construction workers transport workers, small traders and so on. The livelihood of the people was adversely affected during the pandemic. The present study is devoted to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry in Assam. The following table reveals that total tourists (Indian and foreign) visited Assam has drastically fallen between 2019-20 and 2020-21. Tourist inflow to Assam decreased by around 74% during the times of COVID-19 (from 2019-20 to 2020-21). The direct effects of decline in tourist arrival in Assam are clearly on the revenue earnings of the govt. from tourism and creation of employment opportunities connected with the sector.

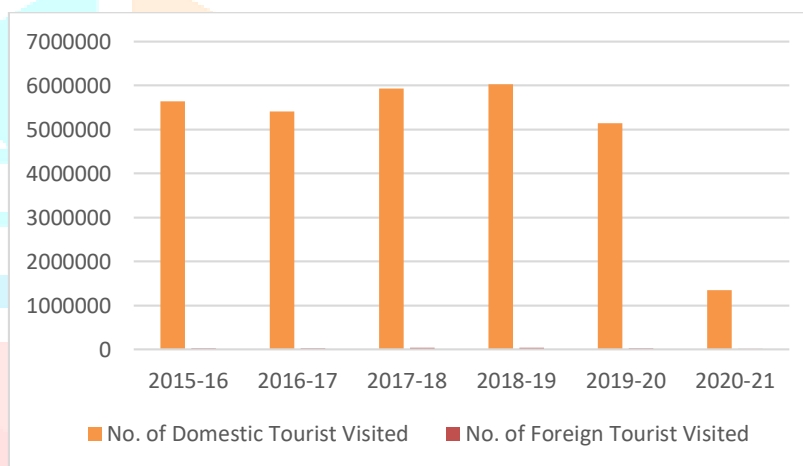
Table 1: Tourist Arrival in Assam in Recent Times

Year	No. of Domestic Tourist Visited in Assam	No. of Foreign Tourist Visited in Assam	Total No. of Tourist Visited in Assam	Growth in Total Tourist Visited in Assam (Percentage)
2015-16	5642950	26320	5669270	-
2016-17	5413156	28419	5441575	-4.02
2017-18	5934791	31369	5966160	9.64
2018-19	6027002	41209	6068211	1.71
2019-20	5146307	18594	5164901	-14.89
2020-21	1351690	346	1352036	-73.82

Source: Statistical Handbook Assam, 2018, 2019, 2020 &2021

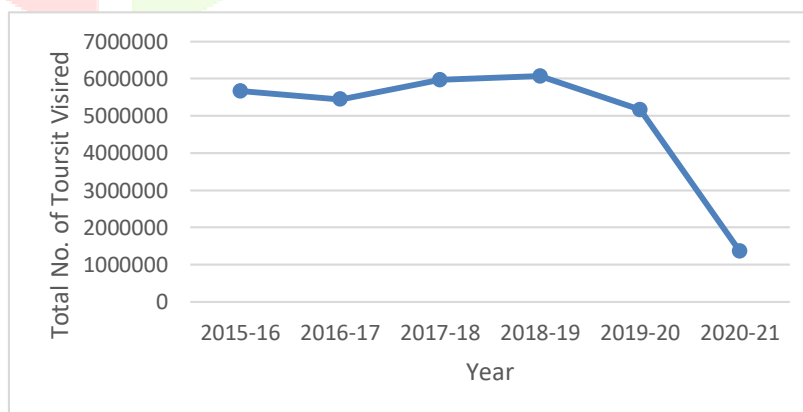
Figure 1 presents category of tourists visited in Assam. It is seen from the figure that both Indian and foreign tourist inflow to Assam declined in times of COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure1: Domestic and Foreign Tourist Visited in Assam from 2015-16 to 2020-21



Source: Author's calculation

Figure 2: Tourist Visited in Assam from 2015-16 to 2020-21



Source: Author's calculation

The above figure reveals total tourist inflow to Assam during the period 2015-16 to 2020-21. It is observed that the arrival of tourist in Assam has substantially fallen from 2019-20 to 2020-21.

VII. Suggestions:

For eliminating the problems that stand on the way of development of tourism industry in Assam especially post COVID period, the following measures may be undertaken:

- (i) Well educated and well trained tourist guide should be made available in attracting tourists.
- ii) Personnel in hotel, restaurant, transportation and tourism agency should be well trained in attracting tourists.
- (iii) Renovation of monuments and ruin sites should be made to preserve their antique characteristics.
- (iv) Proper publicity of tourism potentialities in Assam can play an important role in attracting tourists. Social media platform and internet can be used for well planned publicity of tourism potential in the state.
- (v) Lack of infrastructure is a major constraint that stands on the way of development of tourism in Assam. Hence, adequate infrastructural facilities should be made available to attract tourists in the state.
- (vi) Formulation of proper tourism policy is necessary for development of tourism in the state.

VIII. Conclusion:

Assam has immense potentialities of the development of tourism industry in Assam has immense prospects of natural, cultural and religious tourism. Tourism industry is a source of revenue of the Govt. It creates employment opportunities in the state. COVID 19 caused devastating effects on economic activity across all sectors. Tourism industry witnessed downturn during the pandemic period also. The study used data of arrival of both domestic and foreign tourists in Assam before and during the pandemic and found that inflow of both categories of tourists substantially reduced during the pandemic period in the state. This implies that revenue earned by the Govt. from this sector would reduce as a result of decrease in the inflow of tourists in the state during the pandemic. To boost the tourism sector especially during post COVID period, appropriate measures are need of the hour in attracting more tourists in the state.

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