

## **Tourism in Assam: A Case Study of Religious & Historical Places of Biswanath & Lakhimpur District**

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### ***Abstract***

*Tourism is an important industry of the nations. The tourism industry develops depending upon the natural composition, historical and religious monuments and institutions which contribute a great deal towards the development of the national economy. The tourism industries lighted the social, cultural, political and economic environment of the nation. Tourism boosts the revenue of the economy, creates thousands of jobs, develops the infrastructures of a country, and plants a sense of cultural exchange between foreigners and citizens. On the other hand, it also helps to identify the unexplored sectors for tourism development.*

*The state of Assam is rich in culture and historical monuments. The history of it tells us about the legendary of her glory from Stone Age to modern age. During the tenure of the dynasties different types of structure and religious institutions were constituted. Today these structures and institutions are become one of the most attractive place for tourist. Lakhimpur and Biswanath districts are two important and culturally rich district of Assam. In these two districts, there are many cultural and religious sites which always attract the tourist. In this paper some of explore and unexplored tourist sites will be thrash out to understand the consequence of the tourism industry of Assam.*

***Key Words:*** *Tourism, Historical, Religious, Explore, Unexplored, Dynasty, Monuments*

### **Introduction**

Tour and tourist is an important task of human life. The movement of human beings from one place to another has been continuing since ancient ages. The report of the visitors of different phases and their reports are also recognized as the basic sources of history. Depending upon tour and travels, the tourism industry has been growing in the states which contribute a great deal towards the development of the national economy. These tourism industries not only develop the economy of the country but also lighted the culture of the nation. Therefore, the tourism is demarcated as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon. The tourism industries contribute numerous benefits and advantages to the host country. It also contributes towards the complete growth and development of a country by bringing numerous economic values and benefits and helping in build the country's brand value, image & identity. Tourism

boosts the revenue of the economy, creates thousands of jobs, develops the infrastructures of a country, and plants a sense of cultural exchange between foreigners and citizens. With the development and expansion of the tourism industry in the world, the new and unexplored sectors which are essential for tourism development is also identify.

The history of Assam tells about the legendary of her glory from Stone Age to modern age. During the time of Danava dynasty, Naraka dynasty, Varmanas, Mlechchha dynasty, Kamarupa-Palas, Ahoms, Shans, Chutia kingdom, Dimasa Kachari kingdom, Bodo – Kachari dynasty, Moamorias and Burmese invaders, different types of structure and religious institutions were constituted. Today these structures and institutions are become one of the most attractive place for tourist.

With tales of conquest, dominance, victory, and chivalry, Assam has a long history from the Paleolithic period to colonial conquest, backed by the innumerable stranded ruins; reverent yet thought-provoking shrines: grass carpeted cemeteries, and incredible wildlife. When it comes to historical tours there are many places to explore in Assam but it's the temples that attract the maximum attention. Especially the famous ones like Kamakhya Temple, Navagraha Temple, Umananda Temple, and Basistha Ashram, each with a charm of its own, and grand epics that further add to the intrigue. When it comes to spiritual enlightenment another place that is worth mentioning is Poa Mecca which is believed to have the 1/4th sanctity of Mecca. Even the wildlife reserves have a share of history too. With Mother Nature's most fabulous creations and wildlife reserves like Kaziranga National Park and Manas National Park, Assam hosts an emblematic concentration of wildlife which makes them a highlight even in the UNESCO world heritage sites.

Assam owes a lot of its history to Ahom dynasty, the determined rulers who have ruled over the state between the 13th and the 18th century. Owing to them Assam got Asia's first amphitheatre. Rangghar in Sivasagar sharing space with various other archaeological sites like Da-Parbatia, Madan Kamdev, Agnigarh, Suryapahar, Deoparbat, Amb Ambar excavations and Moidams. The archaeological sites of Assam have a deep mythological connection too, which can be seen in the form of attractions in Tezpur, the City of Eternal Romance. In Assam, one can find a heady mix of nature, and history too in the form of Majuli, the best place to visit in Assam. One of the largest riverine islands in India, Majuli has a good number of Satras too, established by Sankardeva and Madhavdeb. Other prominent attractions that one should explore over a historical tour to Assam are Sualkuchi, Jorhat, Sualkuchi, Borduwa, and Guwahati. The researcher, therefore, in this study wants to investigate the development of historical tourism in religious historical places of Assam with special reference to Biswanath and Lakhimpur district, Assam.

**Objectives:**

1. To study the religious historical places of Biswanath and Lakhimpur district, Assam.
2. To study the importance of tourism in the study area.
3. To study the prospects and problems of religious tourism in the study area.
4. To study the impact of religious tourism on the socio-economic development of the study area.
5. To suggest remedial measures to improve religious tourism in the study area.

**Research Methodology:** To test the objectives of the research paper, a historical and descriptive method has been adopted to analyse the research problem. Necessary information and data have been collected from primary and secondary sources of data. The researcher has also physically visited these historical and religious places and interacts with the locality to collect necessary data and information about these religious and historical places. The secondary data were collected from historical books, journals, government documents, research articles, etc.

In Lakhimpur and Biswanath District, there are lots of religious and historical places, which always attract the tourist. The historical places and the religious place of this two districts reflect the glory of the past and provide information and messages to the masses. The major places of it related to the tourism can be lighted as under.

**Area of Study**

**1. Malini Than:** Malinithan is an archaeological site that consists of ruins of a Hindu temple of the early medieval period on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra River in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The archaeological studies of the ruins indicate that the temple was built with granite stones during the period of Aryan influence in the region, distinct from the other temples in the northeastern region built with bricks. It was built by Chutiya king Lakshminarayan in the early 15th century. This was the period when the Chutiya kings had started setting Brahmins in different areas of their kingdom offering them land grants. Durga/Kechai-Khaiti is believed to be the chief deity who was worshipped in the ruined temple in her Shakthi form.

**2. Basudev Than:** Basudev Than, pronounced or Narua Satra is a satra located in Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur, Assam. The grandson of Sankardeva established it in the 17th century. Originally known as Laumura Satra, this satra is well known in Assam and other parts of India. Damodar Ata established this satra in the 17th century as Laumura Satra. However, the plot of the satra was transferred to many people

many times. This led to the name na-rua which might mean 'not stay'. The name Basudev Than is related to the Assamese word for lord Vishnu-- Baxudew.

**3. Padumoni Than:** The Than is situated about 35 km away from Lakhimpur town towards Dhemaji. The Shaktipeeth was established at the time of the role of Ahom dynasty in Assam.

**4. Harhi Devalay:** The Devalay is situated near Dhakuakhana in Lakhimpur district. In ancient times the devotees were offered Human sacrifice at this place. Human sacrifice is now banned. although, different sacrifices like birds, buffalo, etc are still popular there.

**5. Madhabdev Janmasthan:** Madhavdev (1489-1596) is an important preceptor of the Ekasarana Dharnma known for his loyalty to his guru, Srimanta Sankardev as well as his artistic brilliance. Initially a sakta worshipper, he was converted to Ekasarana Dharma by the Sankardev and became his most prominent disciple. He became the religious as well as artistic successor of Sankardeva after his death in 1568. He is known particularly for his book of hymns, the Naam Ghoxa, as well as a large selection of songs called Borgeets. Madhabdev was born in May 1489 at Leteku Pukhuri in Lakhimpur District of Assam

**6. Bodula Than:** The Than or Satra is situated near Narayanpur in Lakhimpur District. This is a Mahapurusia Satra. The Vaisnavite Satra is popular among the disciples of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva. The Satra was established at the time of Ahom role.

**7. Beloguri Satra:** The Mahapurusia satra is situated near Badula than. The Satra Was also established at the time of Ahom Role in Assam. Now, Assam govt. has decided to establish Madhabdev Kalakshetra at this place to develop tourism and preserve the materials related to Madhabdev.

**8. Phuloni Than:** The then is situated near Narayanpur town. Hundreds of devotees come here to pray regularly.

**9. Sangini Satra:** The Mahapurusia satra is situated near Badati. The Disciples of the satra is basically from Missing Community. The Satradhikar or the head of the Satra is Also from the Missing Community. Perhaps it is the only Satra where the Satradhikar is from Missing Community.

**10. Naharati Than:** It is situated at Kandali village near Bihpuria town. The Mayamoria Than is famous among the disciples of Srimanta Aniruddha dev.

**11. Borkalika Than:** The Shaktipeeth is situated near Howajan of Biswanath district. It was constructed by the Ahom ruler Swargadeo Rudra Singha in the year 1705.

**12. Kalyani Than:** Kalyanee Than is situated near Gamirighat of Gohpur Sub Division. At the time of Durga Puja more than 5 nos of buffaloes have been sacrificed in front of Devi.

**13. Gangmou Than:** Another noteworthy place to visit in this town is the "Gang Mou Than". The great vaishnavite scholar Srimanta Sankardeva is believed to have stayed in this place after crossing The Brahmaputra Due scare From enemies. For people visiting other archaeological sites of Biswanath and Gohpur area, Biswanath Chariali provides the base.

**14. Biswanath Ghat:** Beyond Biswanath Chariali, Towards the south, there is Biswanath Ghat, also called popularly "Gupta Kashi". The town is named after the ancient Biswanath mandir. It is called Gupta Kashi, in comparison with Kashi during the golden rule of the Guptas. Going by popular sayings, Kashi was home to the temple of 330 million gods. The ghat has a cluster of temples of different gods. A Siva temple was located at the confluence of the Bridhaganga (Burigonga) river with the Brahmaputra. But now what is left is just the stone posts, beams and other ruins. During the summer the temple remains underwater. Only in winter worship is done by constructing temporary sheds which draws a lot of tourists. Another Siva temple was built on higher ground. But it submerged underground during the great earthquake of 1897. It could only be partly raised by engineers. The current Biswanath temple had been built instead of it. One can visit from here the island of Umatumuni, an archaeologically famous place. Then there is the Siva dol in reverence of God Siva, built by Ban, the king of Tezpur of Hari Harar Yudha fame.

**15. Nagsankar Mandir:** The Nagsankar is a Temple of Lord Shiva situated at Nagshankar village 15 km from Biswanath Chariali on National Highway 52. This temple is said to have been built in the 4th century AD. "Nagsankar" temple premises includes a beautiful pond with tortoises who respond to the name "Mohan". Feeding the tortoises is a refreshing experience for the visitors.

**16. Maghnowa Dol:** It is situated at Maghnowa of Dhalpur Mouza in Lakhimpur district on the bank of the river Pisola. The breath of the dol is about 13feet and its height is about 40 feet. Historians think that the doll was constructed at the time of Ahoms.

**17. Buddha Bapusang:** The only Buddhist monastery of this area is situated at Gosainbari village in Kherajkhat mouza in Lakhimpur district. Most probably the monastery was established in the middle part of 19 century. Many tourists from different parts of the world visit the Bapusang every year.

### **Review of Related Studies**

Here, an attempt has been made to review the studies regarding tourism and its influence on socio-economic as well as cultural aspects. Nath and Gogoi (2000) reported in their book entitled 'Paryatam Aru Ear Bikash about tourism, its meaning and significance; international and domestic tourism; tourism and its cultural aspects in Assam; position of tourism in NE: problems and prospects etc.

Gogoi (2006), in his book entitled 'Paryatan aru Uttar-purbanchal' stated that there is a strong influence of historical places of North-East over religious tourism on that part. Badan & Bhatt (2007) conducted a study on understanding tourism. They discussed the latest advancements in tourism theory and thinking, retaining the thoroughness of content, diversity of applications, regional and international issues, economic significance, tourism operators and the role of technology in the tourism industry etc. with the help of numerous regional and global case studies and examples. Badan & Bhatt (2007), in their book entitled 'Culture and Tourism', explained that there is a socio-cultural impact on tourism.

Bhatia (2012) discussed the principles and practices of tourism planning and development, organization of tourism, marketing for tourism, and tourism in India. Mathur (2012) made some strategic frameworks for estimating local economic impacts on tourism.

### **Conclusion:**

Research on historical tourism at religious historical places is relatively very little in Assam as well as in North East India. At the same time, there is no detailed study made so far about the socio-economic and cultural impacts of historical tourism at religious historical places in Assam. This study, it is hoped, will have a special significance in the present competitive world as the lack of tourism management hampers the beauty and glory of the mentioned historical places. Hence, such a study is very important for managing and developing tourism and religious historical places of Biswanath and Lakhimpur district is not an exception.

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