



## **PROSPECTS OF ECO-TOURISM IN ASSAM- NAGALAND BORDER AREAS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SILDUBI AND CHANGPANG**

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### **ABSTRACT :**

*Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries. It is a major source of foreign exchange, domestic product, income and employment. Within the broad sector of tourism nature based tourism and eco- tourism has emerged as a strong segment over the past decades. Eco tourism is a concept in which ecological aspect of a landscape is given importance to create a site for tourists. North East India is one of the thrilling parts of India that create perfect combination of life, culture and ecology. North east India has plenty of natural endowments such as dense forests, variety of flora and fauna, rivers, hills, waterfalls, mountains etc. Eco-tourism typically involves travel to destination where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attraction. It is intended to offer tourists an insight into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.*

*In this paper attempt has been made to examine the prospects of eco-tourism in Assam – Nagaland border areas with special reference to Sildubi and Changpang. Sildubi and Changpang situated at Assam-Nagaland border have been famous for its crude oil. These places are situated amidst nature; blooms in its beauty; remain as unexplored rain forest for the adventure loving visitors, who love the beauty of nature and also can enjoy some delicious ethnic cuisine freshly prepared. This area is rich of many ethnic communities, ethnic dialects, behaviours, food habits, traditional dress codes well as folk culture of the ethnic groups. However deforestation has been damaging the bio- diversity, flora and fauna and evergreen forests of this area. To retrieve the loss of natural resources and maintain ecological balance as well as to enhance eco- tourism in the area of Sildubi, Changpang and it's neighbouring villages the Sildubi- Changpang Circle eco-tourism development society has been organising'Sildubi- Changpang North East Ethnic Festival (SCNEEF) annually since 2017. In this paper attempt has been made to understand the prospects of eco-tourism in bordering villages of Sildubi and Changpang and the significance of SCNEEF in this regard.*

**Keywords:** *eco-tourism, cultural diversity, ethnic communities, Sildubi, Changpang*

### **I.Introduction:**

Ecotourism is a type of tourism to conserve and improve natural rural

areas. This is quite different from a typical tour to a place. Ecotourism includes a keen focus on learning and



developing the rural areas and the people residing there. In this regard it is quite important that ecotourism helps to conserve natural resources, boosts the economy, creates opportunities for travel and discovery, encourages understanding between cultures and raise people's consciousness. The three common concepts within ecotourism are nature based, educational and sustainable (which includes economic and social criteria). Within the varied components of ecotourism, both benefits and costs exist and in some circumstances there is disequilibrium towards greater costs. Ecotourism has the potentiality to benefit local communities in many ways, from creating jobs and boosting the economy to conserve natural resources as well as encourage those who are actively working to protect the environment. Ecotourism also promotes sustainable development. At the same time it creates an opportunity to explore beautiful places while learning about local cultures and traditions.

Sildubi, a remote village of Assam situates approximately 40 km to the south of Jorhat and approximately 30 km to the north east of Golaghat. It is basically an agricultural village with its fertile land and products in the forms of vegetables and paddy. The revenue village sildubi includes Sonajan, Mirijan and Sildubi, a part of Gorajan is also under the revenue area of Sildubi village. In the high land of the village few small tea gardens are there. Presently Sildubi is popularly known for its ONGC establishment. In 1970 ONGC run their first drilling operation in Sildubi. The name Sildubi is derived from a 'dubi', locally called for a pool of water and 'sil' means rock or stone. So, a pool of water with rock is Sildubi. In the Kakodunga valley and under the Kakodunga rain forest, Sildubi is full of natural beauty and bio-diversity. Sildubi is well known as picnic hotspot of Jorhat District. Sildubi has the charm to attract the tourists who love nature and many people from different places come to this place to spend time in the lap of nature. In Sildubi there are a good number of



large and small rivers and streams like Gorajan, Baliajan, Kulajan etc. (all these are tributaries of Kakodonga river) which flow down the plains of Assam to meet the river Brahmaputra.

Changpang village is one of the oldest villages in Lotha lower Range in Wokha district of Nagaland. This village is situated in South-western part of Nagaland bordering the state of Assam, sharing border with Sildubi. Established before British rule in India, the relationship between the people of Assam and Changpang go back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Like other tribes and villages of Nagaa the people of Changpang also had a friendship with Ahom King Gadadhar Singha. As per records, till 1972 Changpang people enjoyed the tax collected from the Naga Khat and Mikila Khat which were gifted to them by the Ahom king Gadadhar Singha. In the earlier days most of the lotha Nagaa people of Changpang used to go for marketing in Sildubi and other nearby villages and buy items like cotton, ginger, dry chili and other eatable goods in exchange of salt, rice

and domesticated animals such as goat and cow. In the year 1982, after obtaining petroleum exploration license from the state Government of Nagaland the ONGC produced oil in Changpang and since then Changpang has been included in the oil map of the country. The Lotha Nagaa community is the main habitants of Changpang who preserves their custom, culture and traditions through generations till today.

Deforestation has been damaging the bio- diversity, flora and fauna and evergreen forests of Sildubi and Changpang. To retrieve the loss of natural resources and maintain ecological balance as well as to enhance eco- tourism in the area of Sildubi, Changpang and it's neighbouring villages the Sildubi- Changpang Circle Eco-Tourism Development Society (registered as RS/JOR/238/H55) has been organising' Sildubi- Changpang North East Ethnic Festival ( SCNEEF) annually since 2017. In this paper attempt has been made to understand the prospects of eco-tourism in bordering villages of Sildubi and Changpang and



the significance of SCNEEF in this regard.

## **II. Aims and Objective of the Paper:**

The basic objectives of this paper are

1. To understand the prospects of ecotourism in Sildubi and Changpang area of Assam Nagaland border.
2. To analyze the significance of SCNEEF in enlarging the scope of ecotourism in Sildubi and Changpang.

## **III. Methodology:**

In this paper analytical and descriptive methods have been used. Data have been collected from both the primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been collected through non-participant observation method. Secondary data have been collected from books, journals, research papers and internet sources.

## **IV. Discussion and Findings of the study:**

From the analytical study on the prospects of ecotourism in Sildubi and Changpang with special reference to the significance of SCNEEF we get the following findings.

1. The SCNEEF had developed the ecotourism potentiality of Sildubi and Changpang area to a great extent. The festival has rejuvenated and mobilized the local youths to various creative dimensions. In the festival they organize theme song in all participating dialects, scholarly talks and workshop on North Eastern ethnic dialects, presentation of ethnic culture by different invited groups, traditional dress and fashion show competition, musical nights, friendly volleyball match between teams from Assam and Nagaland, partial trekking to the nearby Tssori Hills, Jeep Safari, camp fire, Pong fai tien, artificial butterfly park, monsoon trekking and many more attractive and creative activities to attract the tourists coming from different places representing different tribes and cultures.

2. The SCNEEF has facilitated a platform to promote the indigenous traditions and culture of North Eastern people and has provided the opportunity to different ethnic tribes to showcase their cultural identity. Nearby Sildubi a large number of tribal villages exist and



people of these villages pursue their ethnic tribal customs and traditions. The Tai Khamyang (Shyam) community people, residents of Balijaan Shyamgaon are said to be descendants of those who came to Assam in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century from Thailand via Patkai Hill ranges. They still maintained a link with their past and preserve their own art and sculptures that echo their distinctive history, culture and traditions. They play some traditional musical instruments which are still used in Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, China and Vietnam. Although there have been slight variation from original Tai-Khamyang culture, the villagers still adhere to the original customs. Each of their villages has a Vihara, where monks teach Tai and Pali scriptures to students. Like the Shyam community, the Turung community people also reside in nearby villages of Sildubi which mainly speak Singhpho language and Tai language. Long back Burmeses monks came and visited the village and teach the practices of Buddhism. In the temple of Turung villages a large number of books are

found written in Singhpho and Tai language. This link of singhpho has made possible the gracious presence of ‘Singhpho King’, his royal highness Chon Bisa-Nang Shingpho in the festival. The festival has raised a hope to build a good relation with the foreign countries of Southeast Asia through the link of past and ethnic dialects. Besides the Tai Ahom, the Mishing, the Deuri, the Nepali, the Sonowal Kachari, the Thengal Kachari, the Lotha community people are together residing in the foothills of Assam Nagaland with their indigenous identity, culture and traditions. The SCNEEF has assimilated these tribal culture and traditions in one platform.

3. The SCNEEF has strengthened the relationship between Assam and Nagaland. The festival has strengthened the ties and builds trust as well as instilled faith among the people of both the states. When in other parts of Assam-Nagaland border, conflict arises and people live in insecurity, people of Sildubi and Changpang have raised their



hands together for the development of the area.

4. The SCNEEF has raised environmental awareness among the people of both the states. Both Sildubi and Changpang situated amidst nature, blooms in its beauty, remains an unexplored rain forest for the adventure loving visitors who love the beauty of nature. But with the unexpected increasing of non indigenous population, forest depletion results damage to the bio-diversity, flora, fauna and shrinking of evergreen forestry of this area. The area is facing the problem of environmental degradation and it has become a matter of great concern. In recent years the physical absence of political boundary has played a catalytic role leading to reckless encroachment and consequent deforestation thereby aggravating the environmental problem. Increase in the Naga population and certain other factors have forced many of the Naga families to migrate from the interior of the state to the foothills of Assam Nagaland border. Thus increasing population and over

exploitation of forests and grasslands cause environmental degradation and ecological disturbance. The SCNEEF has organized various environmental awareness programme to build ecological balance in the area.

#### **SWOT analysis:**

Both Sildubi and Changpang have greater potentiality to grow in the sector of ecotourism. To find out a strategic framework for preserving and sustaining ecotourism in this particular area SWOT analysis is very important and hence some of the points are given herewith:

**Strength:** Natural beauty and bio diversity, instinctive hospitality, tribal culture and identity, distinctive housing patterns, ethnic cuisines and moderate climate of Sildubi and Changpang is the main strength of growing eco-tourism in this area .

**Weakness:** No awareness of ecotourism among the local people, no human resource development, lack of infrastructure, poor road connectivity,



lack of proper advertising, marketing, networking and backwardness among some tribes.

**Opportunities:** If both the state governments equally take a proper community approach and systematic initiative with the help of local youths there is enough opportunities to enlarge ecotourism, employability and economic development of Sildubi and Changpang.

**Threats:** In recent years Sildubi and Changpang have become a secret shelter place for certain anti social elements, criminals and extremists which take the advantage of non vigilance with regard to law and order.

## **V. Conclusion:**

### **Suggestions and Concluding remarks:**

Sildubi and Changpang have immense potentiality for ecotourism. To realize this potentiality following measures should be taken into consideration:

1. The SCNEEF organizing committee has taken its initiative and has succeeded to a great extent to introduce Sildubi and

Changpang as a ecotourism spot. In this regard it is the responsibility of state government of Assam and Nagaland to help the festival organizing committee through financial assistance.

2. It is the foremost responsibility of both the governments to stop forest degradation and open cast mining. At least 2 kms on each side of the state boundary should be declared as “No Men Land”.
3. Both the governments should take some environment friendly measures such as micro-watershed level management programees for both upper stream and downstream area to maintain environmental sustainability of this area.
4. The local tribes and local organization should take proper monitoring system so that anti social elements can not affect the social structure of the particular area.
5. The tourism departments of both the states should take effective steps for advertising and networking to grow ecotourism in this particular area. In this regard community approach as well as participative approach should be given proper importance.



To conclude, Sildubi and Changpang with its nature gifted beauty has the immense potentiality of growing in the sector of ecotourism. To realize this potentiality and make it possible some strategic steps need to be taken. If both the governments take adequate planning for development of Sildubi and Changpang, there are many possibilities

for development of tourism as well as partial employment of the local unemployed youth.

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