

Preservation of Historic and Heritage Sites for Tourism Development

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Abstracts

Dima Hasao district which was earlier called North Cachar Hills district is an administrative district in the state of Assam, India. The district headquarters is at Haflong, the only hill station in Assam, also known as Switzerland of the North East. The district has many attractive sites, a rich culture, and a history. This paper highlights on potential and importance of heritage tourism. The impact of tourism development on local inhabitants' socio-economic life and the development of the district in general. The study is conducted through a field survey and with the help of some reliable sources. It is clear that the preservation of historical sites not only contributes to the district's socio-economic development but also helps to gain its identity in the world. The necessary steps are to be taken for the preservation of heritage sites for the betterment of future generations. This paper linked heritage conservation with tourism development which is an important key for the popularity of the district and the way to preserve the historic sites. Certain steps followed in the development of heritage tourism are discussed at the end of this paper.

Keywords

Heritage/historic sites, tourism, Dima Hasao, preservation.

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Introduction

Dima Hasao district which was earlier called North Cachar Hills district is situated in the southern part of Assam. The district is bounded by Manipur and Nagaland in the East, Meghalaya, and part of Karbi- Anglong district in the West, parts of Nagaon and Hojai districts of Assam in the north, and the south Cachar district. The district covers an area of 4888sq .km and is mainly bounded by the Borial range. The Borial range is the highest hill range of Assam. It is a tertiary mountain range in North East India with an area of approximately 80,000ha between the Brahmaputra and Barak basins, stretching across to Meghalaya on the west, Nagaland, and Manipur on the east. The other main range is the Khartheng range from Ditokcherra to Garampani. The rivers like Kapili, Diyang, Mahur, and Langting, originated from the Barail range. The district is inhabited by ethnic tribal groups, namely Dimasa, Zemi Naga, Kuki, Hmar, Biate, Vaiphe, Hrangkhoh, Jaintia, Karbi, and Khelma. There are also non-tribal groups like Bangali, Nepali, Assamese, and Deswali. The main occupation of this tribe is basically Jhum cultivation.

It is important to preserve the historical sites of every nation for the potentialities of tourism. The historical prospects of the Dima Hasao district of Assam are widely known for its natural beauty with a large number of flora and fauna, Dima Hasao district can be a perfect tourist destination in the near future if proper infrastructure and communication system are well established. Despite abundant historical sites in the district, only a few sites have been discovered so far. Dima Hasao district, a paradise of Assam is still left unexplored.

The Objective of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to focus on unexplored historical sites and attempts have been made to study the important heritage sites of the district. The study aims at the development of heritage tourism for the promotion of tourism in the district which could otherwise help to retain its cultural values and identity. Dima Hasao district has a mixed and unique culture. The district is the home of many tribals with different customs and traditions having their own history. The focus has been initiated on the study of the heritage of different tribes that is still unfamiliar.

Methodology

This study is developed through descriptive as well as explorative methods. Field study and direct interaction with the localities were taken into consideration. The close study of the important heritage sites followed by close observation and discussion of their views regarding the importance of conserving the cultural heritage

for the benefit of the locals in building the economy and social life. The research is also focused on the contribution of tourism to the preservation and conservation of the heritage sites of Dima Hasao.

Critical Analysis of the Heritage Sites of Dima Hasao District



Fig: 1 Monolithic One-stone House

The Monolithic One-Stone House of Maibang

This stone house was once built by the Dimasa king on the bank of river Mahur. It is rather confusing as to which Dimasa king built this monolithic single-stone structure. It is known from various sources that King Maghnarayan ruled over Maibang from sixteen to the 18th century and built this one-stone house. Now the stone is given the name Ranachandi Temple dedicated to the goddess Ranachandi as some say that it is an ancient Hindu temple which belongs to the twelve century. The rock cut is also known as Longtaini noh or Stone house in the Dimasa dialect. A rock-cut roof type of monolithic hut is beautifully carved. There are four doors like rock cutting on the walls of the temple. There is also an inscription inscribed on the rock near the temple which cannot be resite. As far as the sources the story of the Stone House of Maibang is very interesting. The first Capital of the Dimasa kingdom was Dimapur before Maibang. However it was known that the Dimasa tribe was defeated by the Ahom king and was forced to leave Dimapur and settle at Maibang. Dimasa king was once again attacked by Koches. One night during the fight a deity arrived in the dream of Dimasa king. King in his dream asked the goddess to grant him power so that he could protect his kingdom. The deity told the king to build a stone house in which he would find a weapon with which he could fight back the coaches. The goddess placed a condition that the house must be completed in a single night using a single piece of stone. According to legend, the king carried the large stone on his back from the top of the mountain to the place on the bank of the Mahur River. As he nearly completed his construction

the rooster crowed before the daylight. The king believed he had failed to complete the task given by the deity and walked out of the house leaving his kingdom. This unique historic site of the Dimasa kingdom is yet to be explored in depth. It can be a national heritage site if enough initiative is taken from the state as well as the central government. At present, the maintenance has been taken under district administration and some of the local NGOs.

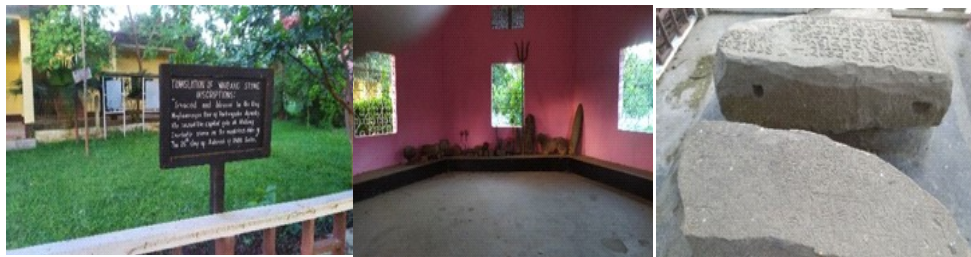


Fig: 2 Maibang Rajbari

Maibang Rajbari

Maibang Rajbari is located at Purana Maibang Village of Maibang which is the capital of Dimasa kingdom. It is known from the sources that Rajbari is a place where the King once settled his kingdom. It is said that the Meghanarayan king of Dimasa built his kingdom at Purana Maibang, now the name of the village has been changed and kept as Rajatani Halali which means the king's residential area. The ruins of the Dimasa Kingdom can still be found at this place. Some stone tools and pottery were found at this place, also the stone inscription was written in Devanagari Script of the Saka era of 1498. The written is one of the pieces of evidence that Dimasa King Meghanarayan was the ruler of the Dimasa kingdom at that time. Maibang Rajbari was inaugurated on 17th August on the auspicious occasion of the 70th Independence Day of our country in the year 2018, an important project was made as 'SOCH' Rajbari. Such an antique piece of the Dimasa kingdom still remains hidden from the world. This place could be a great tourist attraction if proper maintenance is done as this is the only place where we can gather informative historical content about one of the oldest inhabitants the Dimasa Kachari. More could have been excavated and explored if the archaeological survey had been taken on this site.



Fig: 3 The Ruined Asalu Fort

Asalu Fort

Asalu Fort is situated at Asalu village of Dima Hasao district about 45km from Haflong town. Asalu village has great importance in the history of Assam and India. In the year 1832, the British occupied the southern part of the Dimasa Kingdom and formed a sub-division headquarters at Asalu village. This village is known as the first British administration center of Dima Hasao formally in North Cachar Hills. The fort was constructed as the administrative center in the western direction of Asalu village, now known as Asalu Fort. Colonial rule had spread in almost every part of Assam, and the Dima Hasao district was one of the trading points for the British, due to the wide availability of material resources. The ruins of colonial architecture can be seen at Asalu village. The roof of the building has collapsed and the walls are in bad condition. If the fort is not repaired or cased on time, the remaining portion of the building will no longer be seen.



Fig: 5 Hajong Lake

Hajong Lake / Tortoise Lake

Hajong village located in the Maibang subdivision of the Dima Hasao district of Assam, India is mainly known for its hiterrainspins. The place of interest of the

place is Hajonglake popularly known as Tortoise Lake which is located in the Langting Mupa reserve forest. There are seven rare varieties of turtle species and is the only place where natural tortoises are found in Assam. The story behind this naturally occurring lake surrounded by giant trees and thick bushes inside the deep forest is mysterious and strange. Known to some reliable sources, once upon a time the villagers dwelling in that village led a very happy and prosperous life. But suddenly everything changed. One large snake identified as a python living in that village swallowed their cattle every day. So, to save their cattle and their life they killed the giant snake. The villagers cut the snake into pieces and distributed the meat among the villages except women refused to have the meat of the snake as believed to be an evil soul. She got a warning from God in her dream to leave the village on that same night. As soon as she left the village all the villagers had sunk into the earth and a lake formed. Verities of tortoises living inside that lake were once human and were transformed into tortoises because they had practiced sin by killing that giant snake. This belief is still alive among the villagers around the lake, they even perform Indigenous pujas by offering goats and chicken to “Cajole” the jungle Gods to protect them. Though the incident that happened in that village is threatening over time, the people of that village are no longer performing any jungle puja. The killing of tortoises is quite common in the present day. Every year on the bank of Hajonglake. The tortoise festival is organized by the district administration to create awareness among the localities about the safety of the endangered tortoise. At the same time initiative should also be taken to conserve and preserve this important heritage site, certain steps should be taken to develop the lake and the surroundings, and a remarkable lakeside garden should be created without disturbing the ecosystem so that the place could sustain tourism.

More places of interest for Tourist attraction at Dima Hasao



Fig. 6: Jatanga Bird-Watching Tower

Jatinga Bird suicide point: Jatinga is located in Haflong Dima Hasao district of Assam. It is commonly known as the Valley of Death or Birds, The place has immense scenic beauty with mountains and rivers flowing from the Barial range, which is breathtaking. The place is famous for “The Bird Suicide Mystery”. The birds from different places come here and commit suicide either in a fire or somewhere else. This natural phenomenon cannot be explained. Now, this mysterious annual event of migratory birds, committing mass suicide has attracted the eyes of many scientists. Certain factors might be responsible for the suicide tendencies of these birds, these could be due to fog, clouds, and mist. The villagers believed that the evil spirits might be responsible for the bird to commit such a mysterious act. It happens in the late monsoon between the month of September and November. Nearly 40 species of local and migratory birds are involved in this mysterious act. The suicide attempts start from 1 pm to 10 pm, which is a strange thing that happened. Suicide tendency is common in humans but is very rare in the case of birds. Scientists from different parts of the country visited the place and started researching this unnatural phenomenon. Various studies have been conducted to find out the causes behind this phenomenon. The result shows that 44 species have been attracted to light sources. The real reasons behind the Jatinga bird suicide mystery cannot be confirmed as there are different reasons cited by the researchers.



Fig: 7 Haflong Lake

Haflong Lake: Haflong Lake is a man-made lake at the heart of Haflong town of Dima Hasao. This lake is popularly known as the Scotland of Assam. It is said that the lake was first built by the British in the nineteenth Century to store the rainwater, as during winter rainfall is very less and most of the areas become dry. Haflong Lake is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful lakes in Assam, this lake is a perfect tourist spot for several reasons and is located at the heart of the hill station. The lake is well maintained and the water body is kept clean, this lake has a

mesmerizing effect especially in the evening as it offers a haven for thousands of migratory birds. One can visit Haflong Lake by road or railway. From Haflong Hill Railway station one can reach Haflong Lake through local transport or can hire taxis and an auto rickshaw.



Fig: 8 Abandoned rail track and bridge of Dima Hasao made by the British.

Historic sites of meter gauge railway track bridge, and tunnels: The meter gauge railway track connecting Lumding and Silchar with a length of 221 kilometers was built by the British in the late nineteenth century through the most difficult Barail mountain in Dima Hasao district of Assam. However the train no longer runs through the meter gauge track because of the new broad gauge railway track. It is marked in the history of India as the most marvelous engineering work ever before. The bridges and 37 tunnels were a major attractive work of the British. The meter gauge track between Mahur and Harangajao which is not converted to a broad-gauge track is now abandoned. This abandoned rail line should be given a national heritage tag by **The Indian National Trust for Art and Culture Heritage**. The first-ever historic walk organized by the Rotary Club of Haflong Hill, A Ray of Hope Society, 43 Assam Rifles, supported by the Dima Hasao tourism department to promote and preserve our heritage and historic meter gauge railway track. The British took about 16 years to complete the rail project. The Badarpur- Lumding section, this track was mainly built to transport Assam tea, coal, and timber. Currently, this rail line has become a tracking adventure for its scenic beauty and calming nature. It could be more exciting if the Assam railway board provided a Toy train, especially for tourists for sightseeing and many underlying discoveries. The initiative should be taken by our government to conserve this century-old meter gauge rail track for the promotion of tourism in the Dima Hasao district.



Fig: 9 Panimur waterfall

Panimur

Panimur is located at a distance of 46 Km to the northeast of Umrangso and can be approached from Nagaon via Lanka- Diyungmukh, the distance between Panimuur and is 36km. Panimur is again 120 km from Haflong, the headquarters of the district. Panimur is endowed with scenic beauty and a serene natural landscape. The area is ideal for rafting, and trekking, and most importantly, the place is holy, most of the puja and the rituals have been done in this place. The Dimasa people consider the place as a pilgrimage and on every Magh Purnima, they take a holy bath at the Manipur fall. However, due to inadequate communication facilities, there is less inflow of tourists from outside the state and the country as well. The area can enjoy a tourist season from October to February. Considering the virgin nature of the resources, the area can sustain control venture of tourism promotion.

Garmampani

The place is situated at a distance of 300 km from Guwahati, 50 km southeast of Kaziranga, and 124 km away from Haflong at the extreme west of the district end on the eastern bank of Kopili. Garampani is one of the promising tourist destinations. It has a few natural hot springs (garampani). Apart from hot spring bathing, the spot is ideal for picnic and wildlife observation, especially elephants that use to visit this hot spring for the water's sulfur and mineral content. The Garampani Wildlife Sanctuary is the smallest wildlife sanctuary of Assam, covering an area of 6.1 sq. km of alluvial terraces of Dhansiri River enriched with tropical semi-evergreen formations. Hoolock, Gibbon, and a variety of birds are assets of the sanctuary. Though the site is only 50 km from Kaziranga where tourists from different parts of India and the world visit in large numbers yet Garampani has failed to attract tourists due to poor infrastructure and due to the lack of publicity. its popularity is still confined to the locals.

Megalithic stone jars sites of Dima Hasao

The stone jars in Dima Hasao were first cited by John Henry Hutton and James Philips Mills, British Civil servants in the year 1929. The stone jars were discovered in different places in the district. The presence of such stone jars was recorded in Kobak, near Umrangso, Derebore now Hojai Dubungling, Molongpa, Kartong, Bolasan (now Nuchubunglo), and Ndunglo. These stone jars found are a unique phenomenon, similar to the jars present in Laos and Indonesia. No one knows what these stone jars were initially used for due to a lack of written records. One can assume those stone jars were used to store alcoholic beverages popularly known as rice beer, the beverage is consumed in festivals as a traditional liquor, reflecting the symbols of culture and tradition. The presence of such a unique archaeological phenomenon shows the significance of the places for the development of tourism in the future. The sites could attract a large number of tourists if proper maintenance is made.

Strategy for Heritage Tourism Development and Conservation of Historic Sites of the Dima Hasao District

Heritage is being seen as a resource not only for cultural promotion but also for socio-economic sustainable development and the well-being of people, especially through its use as one of the main attractions for the tourism industry. certain steps can be followed for heritage tourism development in the district.

- **Education:** The main instrument for the development of tourism is education .it is through education awareness can be created among the public in general and youth in particular. The government should make every possible effort to improve the education system at every corner of the district so that the importance of preserving our heritage sites can be spread far and wide.
- **Mass Communication:** Media is another important tool to highlight information and facts. Social media can be best for spreading information and data. with the help of Media, one can popularise the unexplored and neglected sites of the district.
- **Sustainable Historic/ Heritage sites:** The Historical monuments and archaeological sites should be preserved in such a way that it stimulates the growth of the economy and creates job opportunities. The importance of government action is to be sustainable. The aim should be the long-term use of tourism as a main vector for the conservation and preservation of Heritage sites.
- **Transport system:** Transportation is the key to tourism. Without proper transport facilities, tourists will hardly visit the sites. Good transportation can link one place to another, therefore our transport infrastructure is one of the important bridges of heritage tourism development.

- **Participation of the local people:** The population plays an active role in contributing to cultural heritage preservation. People must be responsible and aware of the importance of preserving their heritage sites. Participation in awareness programs will enhance their knowledge of heritage.
- **Tourist Service facilities:** Accommodations should be provided such as Hotels, homestays, Campsites, vehicles, picnic facilities, etc at the tourist spots. Above all the safety measures for tourists is to be taken into consideration.

Conclusion

Dima Hasao district the land of immense beauty, an abundance of natural resources, and historical places are partially explored. The district is still lacking in a certain development, and road communication and infrastructure are not proper in some places, these create a gap between resources and development. The district which is compared to a foreign country like Switzerland the most famous tourist place in the world to some extent failed to keep up with tourism. So, the purpose of the paper is to enhance the district's tourism industry with a focus on the preservation of heritage sites of the district.

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