

Tourism Industry & its Promotion and Development in Post-Liberalization Period in Assam: A Case Study of Bell- Metal and Brass-Metal Crafts Industry in Assam and its Prospects in Propelling Tourism**Dr. Satyajit Das,**

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Abstract

In post liberalization period, among the other industries, the tourism industry has been given much emphasis by both central and state Government. But due to various causes and reasons, the tourism industry in Assam is not yet so developed as in other states of India. But there are many potentialities and prospects for tourism development in Assam. Tourism resources like nature or wildlife, religious institutions, cultural and folklore or ethnic heritage, archaeological and historical heritage are abundantly found in various parts of the state. Tourists both foreign and domestic have been visiting Assam for different areas of interest. Large amount of revenue is earned by the Government of Assam through various tourist spots and sites of the state. But due to infrastructural underdevelopment such as lack of good transportation and communication, accommodation, lack of maintenance and cleanliness, food and drinking water facilities as well as less publicity of sites and spots, it has not been possible to develop the tourism industry. The Tourism Policy of Assam, 2008, published by the Department of Tourism, Government of Assam has given importance on the religious and cultural heritage tourism. According to this policy document, proper steps would be taken for promotion and development of cultural and folklore or ethnic tourism in Assam. In post liberalization period also like other industries, tourism industry of Assam has not so developed because of infrastructural bottlenecks and lack of adequate fund provided for tourism development. As for example bell metal crafts of Sarthebari and brass metal crafts of Hajo are well known folk handicrafts of Assam. These two crafts have tremendous potentialities as a rural tourism industry but because of financial weakness of the craftsmen, infrastructural underdevelopment, problems of marketing and lack of competitive market, lack of publicity are the main constrains against a proper development and establish of tourism industry. These two traditionally most precious and rare rural industries will not survive in future in the face of the challenge of globalization and liberalization if necessary steps are not taken.

Key words: Tourism, Infrastructure, Folk-handicraft, Heritage, Industry, liberalization, Propelling

Introduction:

In post liberalization period, among the other industries, the tourism industry has been given much emphasis by both central and state Government of India. But due to various causes and reasons, the tourism industry in Assam is not yet so developed as in other states of India. But there are many potentialities and prospects for tourism development in Assam. Tourism resources like nature or wildlife, religious institutions, cultural and folklore or ethnic heritage, archaeological and historical heritage are abundantly found in various parts of the state. Tourists both foreign and domestic have been visiting Assam for different areas of interest. Large amount of revenue is earned by the state Government from various tourist spots of Assam.

In post liberalization period also, like other industries, tourism industry of Assam has not so developed because of infrastructural bottlenecks and lack of fund provided adequate fund for tourism development. As for example, bell metal crafts of Sarthebari and brass metal crafts of Hajo are well known folk handicrafts of the state of Assam. These two crafts have tremendous potentialities as a rural tourism industry, but because of financial weakness of the craftsmen, infrastructural underdevelopment, and problems of marketing and lack of competitive market, lack of publicity are the main constraints against proper development and establish of tourism industry.

Objectives of the study:

The major objectives of the study are given as follows-

- a) To study the promotion and development of tourism industry in the post-liberalization period in Assam.
- b) To study and assess the problems of bell -metal and brass- metal crafts industry in Assam.
- c) To study and analyze the prospects of bell and brass-metal crafts industry in propelling Assam Tourism.

Research Methodology

The study is broad based on the both primary and secondary information and data. Primary data were collected from the field and secondary data from various relevant books and magazines, news-papers and also from internet or e-sources. Observation and Interview methods were applied for collection of relevant data and information and interpretation of the problem were made qualitatively.

Discussion:**Tourism Industry and its promotion & development in Post-Liberalization Period in Assam:**

Assam has tremendous strength of tourism attractions like scenic beauty, cultural variety, ethnic mixture and diverse flora and fauna. Such wealth of tourism resources endows Assam with comparative advantage over many other states. Yet for a variety of reasons this advantage has not brought for Assam the preeminent position that it deserves. It is therefore imperative to give a dynamic thrust to tourism promotion and to chart out bold new directions to to tourism growth. Tourism is a journey of imagination. Imagination nurtured with a vision can open up infinite possibilities for tourism in Assam. (Tourism policy in Assam, 2008)

According to the Tourism Policy of Assam,2008, The main objectives of it have mainly focused on a high priority in the economic development of the state, environmentally sustainable, socio-culturally enriching and economically beneficial to the people; effective participation of the people in promoting tourism; to improve the quality of the existing tourism products; to promote adequate and comprehensive development of infrastructure of international standards; to devise pragmatic and long term Human Resource Development programmes to create capacity for the local people to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the tourism development and encouragement to Public Private Partnership(PPP) for creating quality tourism infrastructure and ensuring better management of tourism projects.

According to the Tourism Policy of Assam, 2008, as mentioned in the objectives, it is very appreciating for further promotion and development of tourism industry in the state of Assam. But in post liberalization period also like other industries, tourism industry in Assam has not so developed because of infrastructural underdevelopment such as lack of good

transportation and communication, accommodation, lack of maintenance and cleanliness, food and drinking water facilities, as well as less publicity of sites and spots.

The Tourism Policy of Assam, 2008, Government of Assam has given importance on the cultural heritage tourism. According to policy document, proper steps would be taken for promotion and development of cultural and folklore heritage tourism in Assam. As for example, bell-metal crafts of Sarthebari and brass-metal crafts of Hajo are well known folk handicrafts of Assam. These two crafts have tremendous potentialities to establish as a rural tourism industry as well as tourist craft village. These two traditionally most precious and rare rural industries will not survive in future in the face of the challenge of globalization and liberalization, if necessary, steps are not taken.

a) Problems of Bell-Metal and Brass-Metal Industry in Assam

i) Bell-Metal Craft Industry at Sarthebari

The bell-metal craft of Sarthebari in Barpeta district in Assam is considered as a folk handicraft. Sarthebari is well known as the craft village where decorative and useful bell metal products have been traditionally made from generation to generation by the village artisans. The village is located about 95 kms. away from Guwahati towards west. Bell metal is genuinely tourism potential craft because from historical period to the present age, this craft has been contributed tremendously to the economic development of the state.

The bell metal is a byproduct of two metals copper and tin. The combination of 78 percent of copper and 22 percent of Tin makes the bell metal.

A field was carried out a field to study the problems and prospects of bell-metal craft for development of tourism at Sarthebari of Barpeta district. Sarthebari may be called a traditional folk village for the practice of the manufacture of bell-metal's decorative items and household utensils from generation to generation traditionally.

According to the respondent, Mr. Pankaj Deka, belonging to Sarthebari, the village has been divided into some *Chupa*. He said that the bell metal craft is a traditional business for the villagers. Majority of male persons are involved and associated with this craft. There are no other occupations for those who are engaged in this craft. According to him, the new-generation of course is engaged in other occupations. But a few of them have been trying to practice with view to sustain the age-old tradition.

The raw materials of this craft are broken metal of bell metal crafts which are supplied by "The Assam Co-Operative Bell –Metal Utensils Manufacturing Society Ltd."

In the contemporary time, the neo-Vaishnavite Satra culture had largely contributed towards the expansion of the bell-metal craft as the Satras have used various items of bell-metal like *Bhogjhora, Dugdogi, Pikdani, bankanhi, banbati, Chariya and Jari-Lota* etc. (Tamuli, N; 2010;1). Besides India, this bell metal craft is also exported to Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Germany, Italy and Japan from Sarthebari. So, it is proved that this folk craft internationally famed and popular.

ii) Problems of Bell-Metal Craft Industry at Sarthebari

There are so many problems regarding bell-metal crafts of Sarthebari, Assam. According to the registration under, Industry Department in 2005, the data had showed that there are 282 'Garhsals' (the place where the bell metal crafts are manufactured) and about 1200 craftsmen

or artisans engaged in this craft. But the economic or financial condition of each artisan is very poor. They are mostly illiterate and health condition of them is pitiable. The state government has not provided facilities like health and education to the artisans who are not aware of the development in contemporary world. Illiteracy is one of the main obstacles for deterioration of this craft.

The bell metal craft of Sarthebari has faced two types of problems-internal and external (Tamuli, N; 2009-10; 4). The organizational weakness and non-leadership are the main internal problem. Due to organizational weakness, there is no proper welfare policy for the bell-metal artisans. Due to organizational weakness, decision of the price of coal charcoal and its quantity are also affected (ibid, 2009-10; 5).

The prime problem regarding bell-metal is the shortage of raw materials. There are no sufficient raw materials for making bell-metal items. The important raw materials for bell-metal are of two types-the broken bell metal and coal-charcoal. But in present times, the shortage of the broken bell-metal and coal charcoal, the bell metal craft becomes problem oriented. Due to the shortage of raw materials, the '*Garh-Sals*' have to closed for a long time in a year. The rising higher price is also a big constraint for making bell-metal utensils and other items. The market of broken bell-metal is completely controlled by the capitalist businessmen. There is no control over price rate of broken bell-metal by the Government. Similarly, due to Government law, the coal-charcoal is also unavailable. So the middle brokers have taken the opportunity to increase the price of coal-charcoal as well as to decrease the amount of it in bags. (Talukdar, N, 2009-10,61)

Machinery materials are another significant problem regarding bell-metal craft of Sarthebari. In present times, lower priced machinery made bell-metal products of Muradabad have attracted the customers towards it. It has adversely affected the bell-metal craft of Sarthebari. In spite of having better quality traditionally handmade bell-metal items of Sarthebari, it becomes difficult to face the challenge of machine-made items from outside competitive market of Assam. So, bell-metal craft has faced another problem.

Another problem regarding bell-metal craft is the lack of suitable market. The poor rural artisans have faced the problem of selling their products at reasonable prices. So they have to depend always on either the co-operative societies or the middlemen to sell their products at very low prices.

Duplicate materials are also a major problem for this craft. In the market of the present times, the availability of the duplicate items which are of similar types as those produced at Sarthebari. These items are not actually a bell-metal. Here, the main problem is that middlemen or brokers prefer to sell this for their business-profit and non-identification of actual bell-metal items over duplicate one. The bell-metal craftsmen and artisans do not get any financial assistance from the respective departments of the Government.

Besides these, there are lots of problems faced by the bell-metal crafts and industry in the recent times. One of the major problems is that its marketing and competition with same product manufactured by other states or industry.

i) Brass-Metal Craft Industry of Hajo

Like the bell metal craft of Sarthebari, brass-metal craft is considered as a traditional folk craft of Assam. This brass-metal craft is processed and manufactured at Muslimpatti village located at Hajo of Kamrup (rural) district. The village is approximately one km towards the south of the main town centre of Hajo and adjacent to Hayagriv-Madhav temple.

The Muslimpatti village is mainly inhabited by the Moriya community, religiously belonging to the Muslim. They are artisans and craftsmen of various brass-metal utensils. These brass-metal items and utensils have been used in various religious purposes and worship activities of the temples. So, various types of utensils and items have been provided to the temples by the artisans of brass-metal craft of Muslimpatti village of Hajo. For this reason, they had been exempted from paying land revenue

The brass-metal crafts have been practiced traditionally from generation to generation in this Muslimpatti village. The artisans have the tremendous skill, ability and magnificent artistry for making different types of decorative items and utensils with aesthetic designs.

These utensils and items have various utility in temples and day to day works of every household of Assamese community. Especially some social functions, ceremonies and occasions like marriage, ceremonies of Assamese community, and the brass-metal utensils are largely used for different purposes and activities. Actually, the brass-metal is an amalgamation of two metals, bronze and zinc. The main raw materials for the production of brass-metal utensils are stone and coal. Like the bell-metal craft of Sarthebari, almost every household have a '*Garhsal*'-the place of manufacturing of brass metal craft, at 'Muslimpatti' village at Hajo.

iii) Problems of Brass Metal Craft Industry of Hajo

There are a lot of problems faced by the traditional brass-metal artisans. The main problem regarding is marketing. In the field visit, we came to know that almost all the artisans and their families are economically very weak. They do not get sufficient amount of money.

According to a respondent, Mr. Anil Das, a businessman and shop-keeper of brass-metal utensils and items, businessmen and shopkeepers have controlled the production and sale of brass-metal products made by the poor artisans. They supply raw materials, order to produce the products purchase the finished products at very low prices and sell them to the customers at a higher price. The poor artisans are not provided any financial assistance and remunerative prices for the products they made by virtue of hard labour. Thus, the artisans are exploited by the businessmen.

The shortage of raw materials is a big problem for the artisans as well as businessmen of brass-metal craft industry. Another big problem regarding brass-metal craft is the competitive market. Now days, large number of bell-metal products similar to those made by the comparatively light and bright shining craftsmen of Hajo but metal items and utensils manufactured by machines overflow the markets all over India. Though qualitatively, the handmade brass-metal products are superior than the machine-made items of Muradabad. Aesthetically the brass- metal handicrafts are more superior to the machine-made items of Muradabad.

b) Tourism Prospects of Bell-Metal and Brass-Metal Industry in Assam**i) Tourism Prospects of Bell -Metal Craft Industry**

In spite of so many problems, there is a tremendous prospect for the development of folklore heritage and rural tourism based on the bell-metal of Sarthebari as many tourists are interested in observing how such unique handicraft has been practiced by the rural folk generation after generation. So, for the development of this craft village, the Government through its concerned departments must chalk out plans and programmes.

ii) Tourism Prospects of Brass-Metal craft industry

There are tremendous prospects for the development of folklore and rural tourism on the basis of brass metal crafts of Hajo. But various problems faced by this craft have been hindering the realization of such prospects. In order to remove the constraints, the related Government Departments like Small scale and Cottage Industry, Cultural affairs and tourism must take short- and long-term measures.

Conclusion:

The paper is concluded with the following observations and suggestions.

- i) Publicity and advertisements are the most important tools for large scale marketing of bell metal and brass metal as well as for the folklore tourist attraction.
- ii) Publicity of the bell and brass -metal crafts through different forms of mass-media are of utmost necessity for marketing and capturing the competitive market.
- iii) For, expanding the business environment of bell and brass metal crafts, the '*Kahar Sangha*' (The Assam Co-Operative Bell –Metal Utensils Manufacturing Society Ltd) and other respective organizations and departments of the Government like Tourism and Industry should use big hoardings at various tourist sites and spots for attraction of tourists and easy accessibility of bell and brass-metal products.
- iv) The basic infrastructure like transportation and communication, accommodation facilities of artisans, food and drinking water facilities, available power and electricity supply, water supply, entertainment hall, market areas, medical facilities, rural crafts museum, schools and exhibition halls, the practicing hall should be provided and some sort of services must be modernized.
- v) The store house of raw materials and craft manufacturing equipments and establishment of a bell and brass metal crafts research institute are most essential steps.
- vi) Lastly, for making bell and brass metal crafts village as a tourism spot and a rural tourism industry, the whole village of Sarthebari and Muslimpatti village of Hajo should be provided the Geographical Indication Mark (GIM) and Trade mark and getting international recommendation through it.

Lastly, it is very important and essential to state that there is ample prospects in propelling tourism industry in Assam through utilizing these rich traditional folk handicrafts that have comprised of both bell-metal craft of Sarthebari in Barpeta District and brass-metal craft of Hajo under Kamrup(Rural) District in Assam as cultural heritage tourism resources in order to promote & develop the heritage tourism craft village where both the same have been traditionally manufactured as well as practiced from generation to generation with handmade methods.

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