

A Study on Wild Life Tourism of Assam Reference to Gibbon Wild Life Sanctuary

Dr. A. C. Borah

Nazira College, Nazira, India

Abstract: *Since the time immemorial man got inspiration from nature in improving his ways of living and maintaining coordination with surroundings. Technical advancement and modernization are forcing man to think and respect nature as a cure to all kinds of ills that afflict man today. Hence the varied flora and fauna of any region are becoming one of the main attractions for the tourists. Indian sub-continent has very important place on the wild life map of the world. All representative animals are found in India. There are about five hundred species of mammals, over two thousand species of birds, many species of fishes, reptiles, amphibians and more than 30,000 forms of insects found in this subcontinent. The Asiatic lion, one horned great Indian Rhinoceros, the magnificent Royal Bengal Tiger, the massive Indian elephant and large Indian gaur are the big five of Indian forest. Why should we care about disappearing animals? Because of its economic value, survival value, scientific value and nature's beauty. At present wild life is becoming an increasingly important recreational asset and tourist attraction everywhere. They maintain the health of the living landscape and productivity of the ecosystem. Wild life represents the result of many years of evolution and constitutes an environmental heritage to the past, a world which once surrounded our ancestors. We are accountable to the coming generation to leave an inheritance an unspoiled world with intact living beauty and richness. Study of tourism is become a global concern today and regarded as a development tool in many parts of the world. The role of tourism in the income generation is very significant. Tourism has emerged as an instrument of employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. The tourism industry is regarded as one of the fastest growing industries in the world. What is interesting about this industry is that while the number of tourist in the world is growing at a rate of about 5.5% per annum, the receipts from the tourism are growing at the rate of about 8.1% per annum. Thus the potential of this industry contributing to the economy is immense. The study area Gibbon Wild life Sanctuary is located in the Jorhat district of Assam extending from 260 40' N to 26045'N latitude and 94020,'E to 94025'E longitude. The river Bhogdoi flowing in a direction from South East and North West distinctly demarcate the sanctuary by a permanent physical barrier. Most part of the boundary line of the sanctuary stands the settlement areas and tea gardens. It is a small sanctuary of 20.98 sq. km which is topographically characterized by an almost level land with an average contour height of 90 metres from sea level. The main objectives of this study are as follows: 1) To study and examine the growth of Gibbon Wild life Sanctuary as a tourist destination, 2) To investigate the sensitive issues of the sanctuary, 3) To study the government role for promoting Gibbon Wild life Sanctuary as a tourist destination of Assam and 4) To find out some positive measures to create a strong bio-diversity in the sanctuary. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected through a set of questionnaires prepared for the survey and secondary data are collected from different published and non-published articles, books, journals, magazine etc. Field data are then analyzed and made correction where necessary, finally an action plan has been prepared.*

Keywords: Tourism, Wild Life, Development

1. Introduction

According to environmentalist and naturalists there should be at least 33% area of forest in a country. For ideal ecological balance there should be 60% forest on the hilly mountainous terrain and 20% forest cover on plains. In India, the data shows we have 22.8% area under forest, but the recent satellite pictures show that we have hardly 10% to 11% forest area. These forests are natural habitat of the wild life animals. In Assam we have the Reserved Forest area and Proposed Forest area is 14212 sq km and 2102 sq km respectively in 2010-11. The total Forest area excluding unclassified State Forest is 20092 sq km and 3778 sq km area is under protected area as reported by State Forest Department. Thus, the reserved forest area constitutes around 18% and total forest area excluding unclassified forest with constitutes around 26% of the total geographical area of the State.

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kinds of ills that afflict man today. Hence the varied flora and fauna of any region are becoming one of the main attractions for the tourists.

Indian sub-continent has very important place on the wild life map of the world. All representative animals are found in India. There are about five hundred species of mammals, over two thousand species of birds, many species of fishes, reptiles, amphibians and more than 30,000 forms of insects found in this subcontinent. The Asiatic lion, one horned great Indian Rhinoceros, the magnificent Royal Bengal Tiger, the massive Indian elephant and large Indian gaur are the big five of Indian forest.

Till 1952 the management of wild life in India consisted of no more than regulation on hunting. Although a few protected areas had been declared before this, it was with the formation of Indian Board for Wild Life in Mysore in 1952 that wild life preservation and management began on a serious footing in India. The Wild Life Act was passed in 1972. This was the first unified national act for wild life protection and deals with hunting, creation of protected areas and control of trade in

Volume 8 Issue 6, June 2019

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wild life product. Following the passage and adoption of the Wildlife Protection Act in 1972, came Project Tiger in 1973 and several special programmes aimed at preserving endangered species. A significant step towards wildlife conservation was taken in 1982.

Why should we care about disappearing animals? Because of its economic value, survival value, scientific value and nature's beauty. At present wild life is becoming an increasingly important recreational asset and tourist attraction everywhere. They maintain the health of the living landscape and productivity of the ecosystem. Wild life represents the result of many years of evolution and constitutes an environmental heritage to the past, a world which once surrounded our ancestors. We are accountable to the coming generation to leave an inheritance an unspoiled world with intact living beauty and richness.

Study of tourism is become a global concern today and regarded as a development tool in many parts of the world. The role of tourism in the income generation is very significant. Tourism has emerged as an instrument of employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. The tourism industry is regarded as one of the fastest growing industries in the world. What is interesting about this industry is that while the number of tourist in the world is growing at a rate of about 5.5% per annum, the receipts from the tourism are growing at the rate of about 8.1% per annum. Thus the potential of this industry contributing to the economy is immense.

One of the earliest definitions of tourism was given by an Austrian Economist Hermann V. Schullard, in the year 1910. He defined tourism as 'the sum total of operators, mainly of an economic nature, which directly relate to the entry, stay and movement of foreigners inside a certain city, region or country'.

According to Hunziker and Krapf 'tourism is the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, in so far as it doesn't lead to permanent residence and is not any earning activity'.

World Tourism Organization defined tourism as the movement of the people away from their normal place of residence for a period of not less than 24 hours and not more than one year.

In order to promote tourism resources, different States of India like West Bengal in association with Sikkim Tourism and Darjeeling Gurkha Hill Council, has been conducting various programmes every year. Assam is very popular place for tourist with its maximum forest areas, comprises of five national parks and sixteen wildlife sanctuaries in different districts of the state. In this context, one needs to examine why tourism has not attained the take-off stage as yet in Assam. Assam has tremendous strength of tourism attraction but the progress on tourism yet to be inadequate. It has numerous factors in its favour that would be conducive to develop the

tourism sector. Therefore, it is an interesting field of research how we able to generate a need for tourist to come to Assam and how can a satisfactory experience can be delivered to them. In this background, an attempt has been made here to study the development of tourism in Assam reference to Gibbon Wild Life Sanctuary of Jorhat district.

2. Importance of Study Area

The study area Gibbon Wild life Sanctuary is located in the Jorhat district of Assam extending from 26⁰ 40' N to 26⁰ 45' N latitude and 94⁰ 20,'E to 94⁰ 25'E longitude. The river Bhogdoi flowing in a direction from South East and North West distinctly demarcate the sanctuary by a permanent physical barrier. Most part of the boundary line of the sanctuary stands the settlement areas and tea gardens. It is a small sanctuary of 20.98 sq. km which is topographically characterized by an almost level land with an average contour height of 90 metres from sea level.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) To study and examine the growth of Gibbon Wild life Sanctuary as a tourist destination,
- 2) To investigate the sensitive issues of the sanctuary,
- 3) To study the government role for promoting Gibbon Wild life Sanctuary as a tourist destination of Assam and
- 4) To find out some positive measures to create a strong bio-diversity in the sanctuary.

4. Data Base and Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected through a set of questionnaires prepared for the survey and secondary data are collected from different published and non-published articles, books, journals, magazine etc. Field data are then analyzed and made correction where necessary, finally an action plan has been prepared.

5. Findings and Analysis

Gibbon Wild Life Sanctuary as a Tourist Destination:

Gibbon Wild Life Sanctuary is located at Jorhat district of Assam. It was previously known as Holongapar Reserve Forest and was declared by the British Government in 1881. On 30th July 1997, this reserve was declared as Gibbon Wild life Sanctuary by the government of Assam and in 25th May, 2004 it was renamed as Holongapar Gibbon Wild life Sanctuary. It is 22 kms away from Jorhat Town and only five minutes drive from Mariani Railway Junction. Best time to visit Gibbon Sanctuary is October to February.

Flora:

The sanctuary has a very rich biodiversity. Most of the vegetation within the sanctuary is evergreen in character and is

composed of several canopy layers. The upper canopy consists mostly of *Dipterocarpus macrocarpus* rising 12 to 30 mtrs. Other species are:

Vernacular name	Scientific name
Nahar	Mesuaferrea
Ajhar	LageerstroumiaFlosreginae
Hinguri	Castonopsis
Silikha	TerminaliChebula
Modar	ErythrinaIndica
Outenga	DilleniaIndica
Seleng	SappiumBaccatum
Odal	SterculiaVilorea
Sam kothal	ArtocarpusChaplasha
Thekera	GarciniaMorella
Pipal	Ficusreligosa
Bandardima	Dysoxylumprocerum
Sapa	Mechliaispp
Bhelu	Tetramelsmudiflora
Bhomra	TerminaliaBelerica
Sassi	Aqualariagolacha

Besides these, Sotiana, Gonsoroi, Accacia, Lateku, Jham, Mango, variety of evergreen shrubs and herbs make up the lower canopy and ground layers. The most common of these are Dolu bamboo, Bojal bamboo, Jengu, Houka bet, Tora, Kaupat and Sarat etc. These species will not only meet the requirement of the present generation but also ensure the need of the future generation of wild life of the sanctuary.

Fauna:

It is a special tourist attraction of the Jorhat district, Assam for its conservation of the primates species of the animal kingdom where we can spot the Hoolock Gibbon. People from different places visit the sanctuary to take view of this rare species. The other wild life creatures found here are:

Primates: Assamese Macaque, Pig-tailed macaque, Stump tailed macaque, Capped Langur, Slow Lories.

Other Mammals: Asiatic elephants, Barking Deer, Sambar Deer, Wild Boar, Albino Boar, Porcupine, Tiger, Leopard, Jungle Cat, Indian Civet, Pangolin, Fox, Himalayan Oranges, Bellied Squirrel, Malayan Giant.

Reptiles: The Indian Python, Monitor Lizard, The Gacko Lizard, The Common Cobra, King Cobra, Viper, Other various Snakes. Tortoise.

Birds: Raket tailed drongo, Indian pied hornbill, Hill Mayna, Pied Maina, Bulbuls, Parakeet, Doves, Parrot, Owls, Eagle, Kite, Tree Pie, Flower Picker, Fly Catcher, Indian Roller, GoldelOriol. It is recognized as Important Bird Area in Assam (IBA)

At present the sanctuary is very popular for its resources – flora and fauna which are very much in demand list of tourists. It is the only sanctuary in India named after a Gibbon. The Sanctuary is officially extends to the Dissoi Valley Reserve Forest, Dissoi Reserve Forest and Tiru Hill Reserve Forest,

which are used as dispersal areas for elephant and other animals. Three extensive tea gardens that belong to the estates of Dissoi tea Estate, Kothalgruretea estate and Hoolonguritea estate span the distance between the Hoollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary and the nearest forests in Nagaland, the Dissoi Valley Reserve Forests. Other nearby tea gardens are - Katonibari, Murmurai, Chenija, Koliapani, Meleng, Kakojan, Dihavelleoguri, Dihingapar, Kothalguri, Dissoi and Hoolunguri. The Hoolonguri Gibbon Sanctuary is classified as Assam plains alluvial semi-evergreen forests with some wet evergreen forest. The Bhoogdoi River creates a waterlogged region dominated by semi-hydrophytic plants along the border of the sanctuary. The sanctuary has a very rich biodiversity and home of the apes in India, the western hoolock Gibbon as well as the only nocturnal primate found in the North East Indian states, the Bengal slow loris.

6. Major Sensitive Issues of the Sanctuary

Like other sanctuaries of Assam, Gibbon Wild Life sanctuary of Jorhat district is suffering from disorderliness of ecosystem. This is caused due to the large scale human interference in the forest resource, incompetent forest management policy and the mal practices of the few forest officials. The major problem of the sanctuary is the area coverage, which accounts only 19.49 sq. km. Within this critical area coverage the sanctuary which enjoys a floral support base, could not keep up the balance between the increasing demand for food and shelter for all available faunal species of the sanctuary.

Bearing an unique character in the North East of altogether having seven primate species Gibbon Wild Life Sanctuary is struggling with the problem of minimum support area for its inhabitants. The Sanctuary is under severe threat from non-availability of habitat, food and space particularly for its fauna family. Besides the seven species of primates, this small sanctuary is who providing food and shelter to the varieties of species of Mammals, Reptiles, Civets, Rodents, Deer, Amphibian and birds. The fertile soil of the sanctuary exhibits a thick forest cover in the core area. On the other hand the peripheral zone is just standing with degraded forest of low density. It represents a large scale destruction of forest cover resulting from illegal cutting of trees and encroachment of agricultural purpose.

There are so many thick and tall grasses and varieties of bamboo are in the sanctuaries which are important food item of elephant, primates and deer. Now, these are taken up by the people living adjacent to the sanctuary. Collection of large quantities leaves and grasses from the forest bed to feed cattle poses interferences. As a result the sanctuary becomes more and more prone to the shortages of foodstuff for the herbivores. Again non-availability of support of food, the primates of the sanctuary are striving for its survival. It is observed that most of the habitats of the primates are concentrated in the core of the thick forest cover.

Railway track is one of the major problems of this sanctuary. It divides the Gibbon family in to two groups. Though the

forest department had constructed two iron bridges to connect the both side of the sanctuary to facilitate free movement of wild life in the habitat but it is not enough.

The present scenario of the Sanctuary is not healthy. The sanctuary is suffering from acute deficiency in preserving the biodiversity. Clearance of forest cover from the peripheral zone of the sanctuary creates severe problem to the fauna.

7. Conclusion

Since time immemorial people have benefited in a diversity of ways from forests and forests wild life, but in the cotemporary world much damage has been done to both forests and wild life through unsustainable illegal resources use. Unless measures are taken to curtail unsustainable or illegal resource use, the benefits from forests and wild life will continue to dwindle. To reduce illegal and unsustainable exploitation of forests wild life, different measures urgently need to be applied. These includes – improved law enforcement capacity, public awareness and education campaigns and generating benefits for local communities through employment and improved economic opportunities such as providing goods and services. Full involvement of local people in managing and benefiting from the products and services delivered by forests and wild life is crucial for the sustainable conservation of these vital resources.

Necessary steps should be taken by the government, NGOs as well as local people. Spatial extension along with positive view of plantation is considered as an immediate and compulsory measure to eliminate all the constraints of growth and development of the sanctuary. The concerned authority from government and NGO's should come forward to protect all the living and non-living property of the sanctuary. Awareness should be create among the people of neighboring villages that the destruction of forest can be brought under control.