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**Editor-In-Chief**

**Prof. K. N. Shelke**

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**Tourism Potential in Dooars Region: An analysis and the way ahead****Shomik Saha***Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Salesian College, Siliguri, (W.B.) India***Kalpak De***Centre-in-Charge, LC – 01721, SMU-DE, Siliguri, (W.B.) India***Abstract***Tourism in the young sort is a part of education and in the elder, a part of experience.**- Francis Bacon*

Tourism has become one of the most flourishing industries in the world. Today, it is the second largest and fastest growing industry, next only to the petroleum industry. Worldwide, tourism is emerging as one of the biggest employers compared to any other economic sector. It offers opportunities for economic, cultural and political exchanges, generates employment, foreign exchange and raises living standards. It facilitates social integration and international understanding. The Dooars region is characterized by rich plant and animal bio-diversity with 60% species being endemic to the area. The generic diversity of mammals here is also the second highest among the country's tiger reserves. If you love the quaint ambiance of the lush green forest, the lapping river, the serene mountain landscape, green carpet like tea gardens and above all the adventurous wildlife Dooars is the place to be for you. A serene escapade into nature's bounty with the varied flora and fauna around you is surely an everlasting experience to cherish.

The modern India is emerging as the second largest growing economic power in the world though sadly, despite the strong economic growth, huge domestic capacity and service potential, India still witnesses alarming disparity between the rich and poor and poverty and backwardness in the rural areas where the communities are ready to sprout with even a little encouragement and support. Tourism in general too has still a long way to walk to take a turnaround and recognize Responsible Tourism as a key to reduce the disparity and drive conservation efforts and help communities to establish their ownership on local resources. In this paper an attempt has been made to review the status of tourism in Dooars region of North Bengal and the opportunities ahead for industrializing tourism.

**Key Words:** Tourism, Employment Foreign Exchange, Social Integration, Dooars, Tourist, Tourism Infrastructure, Eco-tourism

**I. Introduction**

The vast potential and the need for rapid development was recognised only in the Seventh Plan (1985-1990), subsequent to which tourism was accorded the

status of an Industry, thereby encouraging private investments in this sector. The national action plan for tourism (1992), defines the objectives of tourism development in India and the primary strategy for its development:

- It is a unifying and a nation-building force, through fostering greater national and international understanding, particularly amongst the youth of the country.
- It serves to preserve and enrich India's cultural heritage.
- It brings socio-economic benefits.

**The strategy for achieving these objectives has been outlined as:**

- Improvement of tourist infrastructure
- Developing areas on a selective basis for integrated growth, along with the marketing of destinations on the basis of a 'Special Tourism Area' concept.
- Restructuring and strengthening of institutions for development of human resources.
- Evolving a suitable policy for increasing foreign tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings.

**II. Tourism development in Dooars :**

The Dooars region is characterized by rich plant and animal bio-diversity with 60% species being endemic to the area. The generic diversity of mammals here is also the second highest among the country's tiger reserves.

If you love the quaint ambiance of the lush green forest, the lapping river, the serene mountain landscape, green carpet like tea gardens and above all the adventurous wildlife Dooars is the place to be for you. A serene escapade into nature's bounty with the varied

flora and fauna around you is surely an everlasting experience to cherish.

It is unfortunate that due to socio-political and geographical reasons, the entire Dooars region has remained neglected and backward from the development point of view. It is pertinent to mention here that progress and benefits have not reached the Dooars region even today. The concept of Tourism development is very little in this region and is in its infancy. A few states like Sikkim and Assam have taken a few strides in developing tourism, with emphasis on eco-tourism, wildlife tourism, cultural tourism and adventure tourism. The other states have also commenced their efforts during the last decade.

However, the tourism development of the dooars region needs to be targeted via a regional approach rather than an individual state approach. The basic needs for tourism development of this region needs efficient infrastructure, good connectivity between the states and require ultimate peace in dooars and region. The entry permit formality required for a few states for both domestic and international tourists is a major deterrent to the region's tourism attractiveness. Government must identify Dooars as a potential foreign tourist destination and must take "special plans" for development of tourism in this region.

**Location advantage**

- Dooars has a location advantage and can be covered as a part of either Darjeeling-Sikkim tour or a

trip to Kingdom of Bhutan or Assam.

- To attract foreign tourists, Dooars should be promoted along with Darjeeling Himalayan region.

The annual tourist inflow to the State during 2010 - 2011 was 1,65,25,000 tourists, comprising 1,55,00,000 domestic tourists and 10,25,000 foreign tourists.

It is to be noted that Dooars accounts for nearly 10-15 per cent of tourists in eastern region.

### III. Perspective Plans

The perspective plan emphasizes nature and **eco-tourism** (forest and water based recreation, wildlife sanctuary, sightseeing), **adventure tourism** (mountaineering, rock climbing, trekking, rafting, boating), **culture and heritage tourism, and educational tourism**. Apart from existing tourist-based functions within dooars locations, a film studio, eco-lodges, eco-convention centre, amusement park, Aquatic Park, theme park, artisan's village cum vocational training centre, botanical gardens, and zoological garden can be proposed. Dooars has a huge tourism potential. It can attract foreign tourists through promotion of wildlife and tea tourism.

#### It is suggested that:

- A comprehensive tourism plan should be prepared for Dooars to promote the tourism industry. Promotion of tourism demands more transit accommodation facilities near the transit interchange points such as railway

stations, and regional bus stands, resorts for the year-round use, and development of tourist shelters in the forest areas.

- Effective utilisation of natural resources to promote under-utilised and lesser-exposed destinations in the region, and preservation of scenic and historic environments to attract domestic and international tourists.
- Strict enforcement and ban on activities such as illegal felling of trees in the forest areas, illegal boulder and pebbles extractions in the rivers, excavation of soil for brick kiln purposes, automobile movements within the sensitive natural zones, hunting and unregulated fishing.
- Siliguri, Basra in Kalchini and Karala in Jalpaiguri could be developed into continuous recreational stretches.

#### a) New centres

Government can also plan to set up a couple of tourism centers in Kolkata and Siliguri, which would act as "one stop destination" for tourism-related activities in the State. The Siliguri centre could be responsible for promotion of tourism in North Bengal.

On infrastructure front, Government must improve roads and highways and set up "quality hotels and resorts" in Dooars region.

#### b) Institute of Tourism

As per Tourism policy The Government must introduce specific tourism-related courses like those for subordinate staff in hotels, guides,

tourist coach drivers, etc in Industrial Training Institutes/polytechnics located at such places so that students can avail of training in nearby establishments. More food craft institutes should be set up in the district/municipal/census towns of the dooars region.

### **c) Getaway tourism in the vicinity of Siliguri, Malbazar and Alipurduar**

Within 60 to 70 km radius of above locations and along all the exit routes of the towns, about 40 or 50 sites should be identified and earmarked for development of tourist resorts, day centres, picnic spots etc. to provide facilities to weekend tourists & getaway tourists.

### **Highway Tourism**

To make the road journeys of tourists and other travelers safe, secure and pleasant, composite wayside facilities should be constructed on all National and State Highways within the entire North Bengal at distances of 25/30 kms.  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres of land at each such site should be identified/acquired and earmarked for constructing such facilities.

### **Heritage Tourism**

Heritage sites are precious for a country. In tune with the policy of the Govt. of India the Department of Tourism is taking appropriate measure for promotion of heritage tourism.

The historic Buxa Fort (2,600 feet/790 metres above m.s.l.) of Dooars:

People have sentimental attachment with the fort on accounts of its association with the struggle for

freedom. The Buxa fort here was used as a prison by the British, because of its remoteness. Many freedom fighters were imprisoned here including Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was confined inside the fort.

The said fort should be identified and efforts should be made to restore, preserve and promote it as places of tourist interest with Central/State assistance and/or with the help and participation of private sector, wherever feasible.

### **Adventure Tourism**

Adventure tourism comprises trekking in the forests and the hills, mountaineering, mountain biking, rock climbing, canoeing, kayaking, water skiing, yachting, river rafting, long-distance swimming and para sailing, car rally etc. Adventure Tourism should be promoted by the Government in consultation with the Forest and Environment Deptt, various Sports association of Dooars and Sports and Youth Services Deptt. and various NGOs.

### **Amusement Parks**

An Amusement Park is always a centre of great tourist attraction. Government must construct amusement parks in various tourist spots of dooars on priority basis. Smaller amusement parks may be constructed in the census/municipal towns and big industrial towns. State Tourism Department in consultation with the District Collectors and NGO's should identify and earmark suitable sites for this purpose and invite private sector to invest in such projects.

**d) Convention Tourism**

Siliguri is the gateway to North-Eastern States of India. It has the potential to develop into a world-class Convention Centre. The liberalisation of the country's economy has attracted the attention of international hospitality chains. Apart from bringing in foreign direct investment, international chains are likely to contribute to the upgradation of Indian managerial and marketing talent to global standards in the hospitality sector. International trademarks in hospitality will ensure the much-needed quality assurance for marketing India as a competitive tourist destination.

To facilitate this, suitable sites (each measuring 15/20 acres of land) for setting up state-of-the-art Convention Centres on the pattern of Vigyan Bhavan at Delhi should be identified and earmarked in and around Siliguri or Bagdogra. To achieve this target Bagdogra Airport should be upgraded as International Airports. Government must welcome Private Sector investment in this purpose.

**e) Wildlife tourism**

There is tremendous scope for development of tourism based on wildlife in Dooars. The presence of a number of national parks, including Gorumara National Park, Neora Valley National Park, Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary and Buxa Tiger Reserve in Dooars, would also act as catalyst to the growth of wildlife tourism in this region. The Govt. should endeavor to create better tourist facilities at or near

such sites in conformity with the policies, rules & regulations for conservation of environment and ecological balance to enable tourists to appreciate the variety of flora and fauna in the dooars locations.

**f) Agro-Tourism**

There is a tremendous opportunity in agro tourism in both Darjeeling Himalayan and Dooars region. There are some firms working on this line. The tourist come and enjoys the natural beauty with fresh agri-products from the field. The region is still virgin and needs to be exploited. However, the infrastructure likes air connectivity, good road, electricity without disruption, clean drinking water, market access and other required facilities in the area or vicinity is required to be developed immediately for the betterment of agro tourism. West Bengal Forest Development Corporation Ltd. And some private enterprises are involved in this business since last few years in this region. But there is much more to be done in this line where hundreds of farmers can make additional income from this sector. The agro tourism can provide employment of hundreds of rural youths if promoted properly.

**g) Plantation Tourism**

Dooars of North Bengal has a large number of lush-green tea estates. Many such tea estates have some surplus lands and many of such estates are now eager to develop eco-friendly tourist resorts on their surplus lands.

The Government must encourage and consider the proposal of the willing tea estates.

#### **h) Tea Tourism**

Government must develop an Information-cum-Tourist Amenities Centre in each block of dooars region with a high-end tea interpretation Centre, which showcases the tea industries evolution. Government must encourage reputed hotel chains to develop such type of hospitality projects in different part of metro cities and also encourage investors to set up projects in dooars and locations. With an eye on attracting both domestic and foreign tourists, the government must embark an ambitious project for the development of an integrated tea tourism circuit. There is need to sanction specific schemes for the development of infrastructure and accommodation in North Bengal to promote tea tourism.

Tourists who are visiting Dooars areas had showed interest in staying in the tea gardens and see how tea leaves are plucked and processed. Tourists are also attracted to the lush green tea gardens and the scenic beauty. So why not promote the tea gardens as tourists' spots? The government should try to rope private parties so that it can commercially exploit the potential of tea tourism.

#### **i) Railway Tourism**

Siliguri is the gateway not only to the Eastern States of Bihar but also to Sikkim and the seven North-Eastern States. Siliguri at the foothills of the Himalayas is also gateway of

Darjeeling hill areas, Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal. For industrial and tourism development of North Bengal and for development of tourist circuits, Siliguri as well as various locations of dooars is required to be well-connected by railways with Delhi, Mumbai, Madras, Kolkata & Guwahati.

#### **The Railway Ministry may consider for introduction of:**

1. Super fast trains connecting Kolkata to Alipurduar Junction.
2. The tourism potential of Dooars and the prospect of showcasing its delights on a train similar to Palace-on-Wheels or Golden Chariot may succeed in doing the impossible. So, what better way to display the great greens than on board a beauty comprising exquisite cabins, well-stocked bars, dining cars and a very personalized service. The luxury-on-wheels will chug at its own pace between Siliguri and Alipurduar. The route could be the same as the existing one or amended if necessary; the idea is to take the tourist (ideally foreigners and NRIs who could afford the steep price) through Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary, Buxa National Park, Gorumara National Park, Chapramari Wildlife Reserve and Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary with highlights on Rajabhatkhawa, Nimati, Barobisha, Raidak, Raimatang, Bhutanghat, Buxaduar and Jayanti (nestled on the banks of river Jayanti between mountains and thick forests).

3. The Railway Ministry must consider the modernisation and preservation of the toy-train operating between Siliguri and Darjeeling as an item of tourist attraction.

Dooars has the much inherent strength for development of tourism for the entire region, which rightly christened it as Dooars.

#### *Name of the Tourist Spots in Dooars*

- Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary
- South Khairbari Leopard Rehabilitation Center
- Kunjanagar Eco-Tourism Park
- Makrapara Kalibari
- Toto Para
- Moorti River
- Chalsa Resort
- Garumara National Park
- Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary
- Alipurduar Town
- Buxa Fort
- Chilapata
- Rajabhatkhawa

- Jayanti
- Raimatang
- Jaigaon

#### **IV. Conclusion:**

India is pioneer in the sustainable development of communities through eco-tourism in rural areas. The Government must also take care and ensure that:

- To link protected areas or Natural Heritage Sites with peoples' livelihood through tourism.
- Need to protect nature conservation and preservation of traditional cultures (encouraging pride in indigenous and historical heritage).
- To find out alternative Livelihood for Protection of Important Natural areas and the Environment.
- Political stability, peace and safe visits for tourists.
- Need for Social Upliftment, Poverty alleviation, Peoples' Ownership in Rural India through Tourism.

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