

## Feasibility Study of Tourist Destinations in Barak Valley

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**Abstract**— Tourism is amongst the better flourishing industries in the world, tourism industry accounts for more than 10% of the global GDP. Several national economies today depend largely on the tourism industry for their sustenance and growth. Owing to their high tourism potential, several regional pockets in India have benefitted greatly with the advent of tourism. Of the several leisure and heritage tourist destinations, many unexplored pockets lie in the north-eastern region of the country. One such pocket is the Barak Valley in south Assam. The valley has rich cultural heritage and immense diversity owing to its proximity to Bangladesh and other predominantly tribal states of northeast region. The valley is yet to register any significant progress in terms tourist influx, this can be attributed to its absence from the recognized tourist circuits. This paper intends to evaluate the feasibility of the tourist destinations in the Barak Valley region through a qualitative analysis method based on responses to a primary survey conducted on site. The result of the mean weighted average shows high feasibility value. The study also reveals that there is a need for physical infrastructure development for promoting sustainable tourism in the region.

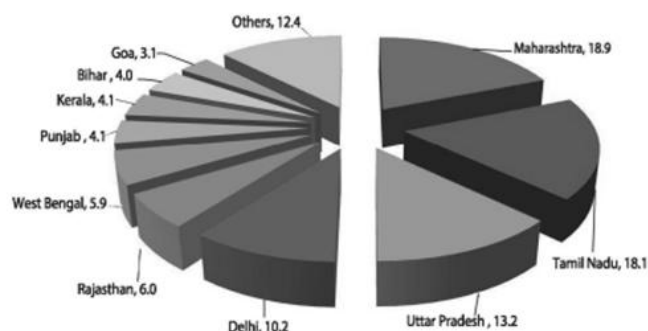
**Index Terms**—Barak Valley, Feasibility Study, Qualitative Analysis, Tourism.

### I. INTRODUCTION

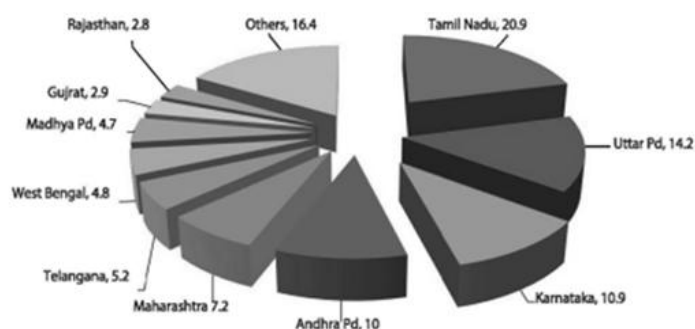
Tourism sector is amongst the modern day leaders of global economy, showing progressive positive growth over the past few decades. Like most other sectors, with the arrival of the corona pandemic in 2019 the sector took massive hits. The long hauling travel bans and other restrictions have further damaged the prospects of an early revival for the sector. The last year when the industry functioned to its strength without any major global obstacles was 2018. The data with regard to tourism in the year 2017 could be used as a metric to understand the industry well, as 2017 was preceded and succeeded by pre-pandemic years. In 2017, the economic growth of the tourism industry was an astounding 4.6%, which was 1.5 times the overall economic growth of 3%. With an active employment of 313 million, tourism accounted for 10% of the global employment and generated a staggering 10.4% of the global gross domestic product in 2017. By 2028, 100 million new jobs could be created in the travel and tourism sector of which 10 million is expected to be in India[1].

2017 saw India's progressive growth in the tourism industry. Over 10 million tourist footfall in 2017 meant an annual growth of 14% as compared to 2016. The foreign tourist arrivals in India also recorded a 5.6% growth. The Foreign exchange earnings of India grew by 19.1% in 2017 compared to the global growth rate of 7.5% for the same period[2]. Domestic tourism also witnessed a sizeable influx of 2.5% in 2017 compared to the preceding year. The compound annual growth rate of domestic tourism in India between 1991 and 2017 was 13.1%[3]. But even with such exponential growth rates parts of India have not witnessed significant advent and growth of tourism. One such area has been the North Eastern Region of the country. The lack of tourism in the area can be established citing the lower foreign as well as

domestic tourist footfall in the region. None of the eight north eastern states feature in the 10 most visited states in India [2].



**Figure 1: Share of top 10 States/UTs in India in Number of foreign tourist visits 2017[3].**



**Figure 2: Share of top 10 States/UTs in India in number of foreign tourist visits 2017[3].**

Parts of northeast are yet to be tapped by the tourism industry. One such area is the Barak Valley in south Assam. A conglomeration of 3 district Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi, the valley has strong cultural heritage and rich flora and fauna, but has yet not been explored by the tourism industry. “Despite the occasional spurts of enthusiasm exhibited by the State Tourism Department, tourism has never really taken off in Barak Valley”[4]. Several factors are responsible for the underperforming unexplored tourism avenues of the valley. Government tourism initiatives such as Swadesh Darshan have dedicated North-East tourist circuits but the circuits do not penetrate the southern part of Assam, i.e. Barak valley. A primary cause of exclusion of the valley from central as well as state government tourist initiatives is the dearth of identification of possible avenues or sites of tourist interest in the area. Detailed feasibility analysis of tourist sites can support the advent of tourism in the valley and in turn aid overall growth and development of the region.

## II. OVERVIEW OF BARAK VALLEY

Barak Valley lies in the southern part of Assam. It constitutes of three districts; Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. The valley derives its name from the river Barak which flows in an east-west direction through the valley. River Barak is the main primary source of water for the valley. Lying approximately between 2408” – 2508” N latitude and 92015” – 93015” E longitude, the Barak Valley covers a geographical area of 6922 km<sup>2</sup>, of which some 3839 km<sup>2</sup>(55.46%) comprises forests that are mostly confined to the peripheral hill areas. The central plains abound in wetlands that occupy a total area of 13737.5 ha[4].



**Figure 3: Map of Barak Valley**

### III. STUDY OF IDENTIFIED SITES

Tourists today have a varied range of travel interests. As the valley has developed into a sizeable economic zone, the target of developing any particular niche form of tourism in the area would be difficult to achieve. The development of tourist spots that cater to different experiences will enhance the tourism market size and prospect of the valley. Four sites were identified for conducting the feasibility study, Khaspur ruins, Malegarh Crematorium, Panch Pir Mukam, Kachakanti Bari.

#### A. *Khaspur Ruins*

Khaspur was the capital of the Kachari kingdom. All that remains today are mostly ruins of the once extravagant structure symbolizing the grandeur of the kingdom. The lack of conservation has been a problem for the site but with immediate attention the ruins can be a site of major tourist attraction. “Heritage tourism, as a part of the broader category of cultural tourism, is now a major pillar of the nascent tourism strategy of many countries....From a tourist point of view, Khaspur can be seen as a perfect blend of authentic heritage & culture experience” [5].

#### B. *Malegarh Crematorium*

Malegarh, Latu saw the first sparks of the Sepoy Mutiny in north-eastern India. Major Byng along with his men from the Sylhet light infantry met with the rebel forces here. The rebels fought valiantly emerging victorious in the battle. The battle also witnessed the martyr of 26 brave rebel soldiers and it is here at Malegarh that their bodies were buried[6]. In the years to follow a crematorium was built surrounding burial site.

#### C. *Kachakanti Bari*

Kachakanti Bari is one of the oldest and the most divine Hindu temples. It is dedicated to Goddess- Kachakanti. In the premise, there is a temple of Lord Shiva as well. It is a historical pilgrimage and the most commemorated temple for ethnically Bengali and Hindu people in the districts of South Assam, India. Kachakanti Devi is a beautiful incarnation of two powerful Hindu Goddess- Maa Durga and Maa Kali. The temple witnesses a high footfall of devotees all throughout the year.

#### D. *Paanch Pir Mukam*

Paanch Pir Mukam is a 600 year old mosque in Hailakandi district. Atop the hillock where the mosque is situated is a mystic fire place. Further higher is pedestal with the footprints of the

‘Pir’, which means saint in Islamic faith. At the top is a shiv temple which has a pond full of snakes.

#### IV. DATA SOURCE AND COLLECTION

##### A. Data collection

The data collected was primary in nature. The data was collected through observation and physical survey at the sites. Interview method was used by the interviewer to record responses of the tourists at the site. The survey carried out was controlled in nature and the selection of respondents was based on pre-established parameters.

##### B. Selected Data Sample

The selected sample size of the survey was 20. Respondents were selected based on the pre-established parameters of their varying age, gender, occupation and travel interests. These parameters play an important role in the expected experience of a tourist[7].

The selected sites were of heritage and religious tourism in nature, responses to aligned travel interest implicated the respondent’s affinity towards these specific forms of tourism. These 20 respondents were taken to the 4 identified areas of interest for tourism. The interviewer accompanied the respondents to the site for observation of any variations affecting the responses of the tourists. The respondents were asked to take note of the availability and condition of allied services such as food and drinking water on site. The details of the selected tourists are listed in table I.

**Table I: Details of the selected tourists**

Tourists	Age	Gender	Occupation	Aligned Travel Interest
A	18	Male	Student	No
B	32	Female	Business	Yes
C	34	Female	Service	Yes
D	38	Male	Service	Yes
E	27	Male	Service	No
F	48	Male	Service	No
G	42	Male	Service	Yes
H	25	Male	Student	Yes
I	25	Female	Student	No
J	36	Female	Business	No
K	32	Female	Service	Yes
L	34	Male	Business	Yes
M	34	Male	Service	No
N	62	Female	Business	Yes
O	25	Male	Student	Yes
P	25	Male	Service	Yes
Q	25	Male	Business	Yes
R	60	Male	Service	Yes
S	54	Female	Service	Yes
T	42	Female	Service	Yes

#### V. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

##### A. SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is part of the natural progression of any strategic management process. It

analyses the strength, weakness, opportunity and threat to any process or plan. The strength and weakness aids analyzing the present condition of any plan, while the opportunity and threats shed light on its future prospects [8]. Inferences from observation were used to perform SWOT analysis in terms of tourism experience at the identified sites.

Observations from physical visits to the site were used to develop a SWOT analysis of the proposed tourist sites.

**Table II: Tourism SWOT analysis of the identified sites**

Site	Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
Khaspur Ruins	It has a very strong history and heritage. Campus is mostly vacant. The fort is recognized by the govt.	Artifacts, weapon & other items have been stolen. Nothing but the ruins remain at the site.	It represents the historical art & architecture of the valley which is otherwise dominated by the colonial style.	If not attended to immediately there might not be anything left of the structures that remain.
Malegarh Crematorium	Dating back to the first revolt for Independence in 1857, it has immense historic significance.	Encroachment of land has resulted in the loss of 14 out of the 26 graves.	The site can be developed into the first war memorial in the valley.	Private land and households have occupied all the surrounding area reducing scope for expansion.
Kachakanti Bari	Amongst the most visited temple in the valley. Considered by many to be awakened.	The temple is not part of any spiritual circuit.	It has large vacant plots inside for further physical infrastructure development.	The inflow of tourists from various cultures might disturb local religious practices.
Paach Pir Mukam	Revered by many the mosque has a 600 year old heritage. The Shiv temple atop the trek also adds tourism value.	There are no dedicated roads and is placed amongst hillocks.	Not just religious tourism, it has scope of being developed as a 1 hour mini trek.	Religious tension may be sparked due to trek to the Shiv temple through the mosque. Displacement of aboriginals

The table (Table II) below clearly indicates the immense heritage and religious significance of the proposed sites. There is also immense opportunity for further development of the areas. The weaknesses and threats can be easily mitigated with timely administrative intervention. These sites are also a testament to the evolution of the art, architecture, culture and heritage of the valley, dating back to the 15th Century.

#### *B. Interview based Qualitative Analysis*

Qualitative Analysis was used for conducting the feasibility study. The experience of the tourists was registered through their responses to an interview after the visit. The responses

with regard to the experience were used to understand the feasibility and for concluding the possible improvements for enhanced tourist experience on site.

Responses of the tourists were registered against parameters which are intangible in nature. The responses of the tourists were mapped using a 1-5 numeric scale where, 1 – highly unsatisfied, 2 – Unsatisfied, 3 – Average, 4 – Satisfied, 5 – Highly Satisfied. The parameters for which the responses were recorded were: Climate, Food, Natural Beauty, Tourist assistance, Road Connectivity, Accessibility, Drinking water, Lighting, Acceptance, and Prospect of Revisit/Recommend [9], [10].

**Table III: Experienced based rating of identified sites by the selected respondents**

Site Factors	Khaspur Ruins	Malegarh Crematorium	Kachakanti Bari	Paach Pir Mukam
Climate	2.7	3	4.8	3.35
Food	1.4	1	3.55	3
Aesthetics	3	1.4	3.15	4.85
Tourist Assistance	2	1.65	3.5	4.15
Road Connectivity	4.85	2	4.1	2.6
Internal Accessibility	2.85	4.15	5	3.8
Toilet	2.25	5	4.4	3.45
Conservation	2.5	1.3	2.95	5
Acceptance	4	3	5	4.65
Prospect of Revisit/ Recommend	4.25	2.7	5	5
Mean Weighted Average	2.98	2.52	4.14	3.98

The above table (Table III) charts the average rating from all 20 tourists for each parameter at the individual sites. These values are based on the individual experience of the tourist, thus subjective in nature. The mere existence of a facility does not imply a good experience. Tourism experiences are multifaceted and subjective [11], [12]. The lower values of responses to the parameters of food, toilet and internal accessibility indicate that the sites are lacking in physical infrastructure. While the significantly higher acceptance and prospect of re-visit and recommendation indicates an inherent potential for tourism. The two sites with larger areas, i.e. the Khaspur Ruins and the Paanch Pir Mukam were graded poorly in terms of internal connectivity and climate, the lack of shaded areas could have impacted the grading of the climate as it was observed that the tourists prefer shaded areas to take a break while at site.

While the rich flora and fauna along with the well maintained burning stones at the Paanch Pir Makum aided its higher scores in aesthetics and conservation, the other sites were majorly let down on these factors. The influx of tourism will in turn enhance commercial activities at the sites but the absence of any eateries around the Malegarh Fort is a major hindrance at enhancing the duration of stay at the site. Most tourists enjoy the authentic cuisine of the area while on vacation but the absence of any mid-high end dining options surrounding the sites is a problem that needs attention. Barring a few description boards there are no major tourist assistance mechanism available on site. The localities around the Paanch Pir Mukam do

provide assistance in trekking and reaching the areas atop the hillock but here it was noted that the tourists not well versed with the local dialect found it exceedingly difficult to communicate.

## VI. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the above study that the identified sites have the higher values of factors inherently required for its development as a tourist site. Also, the sites have strengths in terms of their heritage and religious tourism prospect. The average of the mean weighted averages is 3.405 which is well above the average satisfaction rating, this establishes the high tourism potential of the sites. With administrative intervention in terms of regulating the surrounding area and development of physical infrastructure, the experience of the tourists can be further enhanced. The Kachakanti Bari can be made a part of the PRASHAD scheme of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. The recent arrival of broad gauge railway network and the already existing airport make the valley otherwise accessible and the necessary interventions at the studied sites can enhance the tourist footfall in the valley

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