

## **Constraints and Prospects of Rural Tourism Development: An Overview of Tourism in Shyamgaon of Titabor of Jorhat, District (Assam)**

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### **Abstract**

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*Rural tourism focuses on participating in rural lifestyle, culture, art and heritage at rural location, religion, thereby favoring the local communities socially and economically. Most villages of Assam can be a tourist attraction and many villagers are very hospitable. Rural tourism also focuses the agricultural sector of village areas. Now a day a segment of urban population are interested to visit the rural areas and understand their perspective. This segment has been rapidly growing in the past decade and has lead to rural tourism becoming a good prospect. The income from rural tourism can contributed to revival of lost folk art and handicraft of villages. Rural tourism can provide to the poor households holds great prospects for development. Shyamgaon of Titabor of Jorhat district has great diversity of Buddhist religion, their culture and tradition and natural beauties which make this village a very attractive tourist destination. Three villages Baliyan Shyamgaon, Betbari Shyamgaon and Na Shyamgaon, 100 odd families and a wonderful tapestry of culture, religion, tradition and history that goes back 700 years. Residents of this village are said to be descendants of those who came to Assam in 13th century from Thailand via the Patkai hill range. The Buddhist temple (Viharas), pagodas with art and sculptures are the another sources to attract tourists. Although this place has a great potentialities it faces different kind of obstacles to developed the rural tourism of this place. In this paper an attempt has made to explore the prospects and constrains of rural tourism development of studied area.*

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**Index Term:** rural lifestyle, rural tourism, culture, Buddhist religion, Thailand

### **Introduction**

Tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for rural development. Any form of tourism showcases the rural life, art, culture, and heritage at rural location, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourist and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. It is manifested and may entail agricultural tourism, cultural tourism and eco-tourism. Rural tourism characteristics like, it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is predominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on presentation of culture, heritage and traditions. Many villages of Assam have great potentialities as tourist destination. Villages of Assam has specialty in their different culture, religions, folk art and lifestyle. Now a day a segment of urban population are interested to visit the rural areas and understand their perspectives. This segment has been rapidly growing in the past decade and has to lead to rural tourism becoming a good prospect. The income from rural tourism can be contributed to revival of lost of folk art and culture of villages.

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### ***Definition of Rural Tourism***

“Rural tourism is a multi-faced activity that takes place in an environment outside heavily urbanized area. It is an industry sector characterized by small scale tourism business, set in areas where land use is dominated by agricultural pursuits, forestry or natural area.” (*Dept. of Tourism, 1994*)

### ***Objectives***

The main objectives of this paper are as follows;

- To find out the potentialities of rural tourism in the study area.
- To identify the various constraints of rural tourism of the study area.
- To study the measures to develop the study area.

### ***Methodology***

The required informations are collected from both primary and secondary data sources.

- ***Primary data:*** This study is analytical one. Survey on studied area has been carried out to find out the prospects and constraints in the development of rural tourism. The data have also been collected from personal interviews with head of the village (Gaon Burha), members of families and Bhante (Bhikhux of Buddha Vihara) of Balijan Shyam gaon.
- ***Secondary data:*** The secondary data have been collected from sources like books and official documents with the facts about Balijan Shyamgaon available in the Balijan Shyamgaon All Assam Buddhists Association office. Research journals and Internet were also discussed and visited for the purpose.

### ***Study Area***

The analytical discussion of this paper is based on the study on three shyamgaon i.e. Balijan Shyamgaon, Betbari Shyamgaon and Na Shyamgaon of Titabor of Jorhat district. These shyamgaons are village of Shyam tribal group. Shyam also known as Khamyang is a tribal group. Khamyang is a Tai word deriving etymologically from “kham” means “gold” and “yang” or “jang” means “to have” and meaning “people of gold”. These three villages are said to be descendent of those who came to Assam in the 13<sup>th</sup> century from Thailand, via the Patkai hill ranges. That was the great migration from South Asia leading to 600 years of Ahom rule. The inhabitation of Balijan Shyamgaon, Betbari Shyamgaon, Na shyamgaon near Titabor remain Buddhists and have Temples (viharas) and pagoda with art and sculptures echo their distinctive history, culture and traditions.

### ***Findings and Discussion***

#### **➤ About study area:**

During 1780-1795 in the rule of Swargadeu Gauri Nath Singh (at the time of Moamariah insurrection) 9 families were migrated from Patkai hills and Khamyang Hills. Those 9 families Gohain, Bailong, Tunkhang, Saolu, Salik, Sausang, Sauhai, and Pangyug had come to “Borgaon” of Titabor of Jorhat district for the purpose of settlement. But during 1880-1900 it fragmented into 3 Shyamgaon Na Shyamgaon, Balijan Shyamgaon and Betbari Shyamgaon due to some diseases like diarrhoea, cholera etc. Na Shyamgaon was established in 1836. The original language of the people of these villages is Tai Khamyang. The traditional dresses for female are Longwat, Chycup (belt) and Black chin and for male are Faalung and Faa.

**Table 1.1- Distance and Population of Three Villages**

No.	Name of villages	Distance from Titabor town ( in km)	No. of families	Population (aprx.)
1	Na Shyamgaon	8	48	250
2	Balijn Shyamgaon	12	28	200
3	Betbari Shyamgaon	12	32	200

The above table 1.1 shows the distance of three villages from Titabor town and no. of families and population.

➤ **Potentialities of study area as tourist destination:**

- **Three Buddhist viharas:** The three villages have their own Viharas as Balijan Buddha Vihar, Betbari Buddha Vihar and Navajyoti Buddha Vihar. Balijan, Betbari and Navajyoti Buddha Viharas were established in 1960, 1951 and 1836 respectively. These three Vihara shows the beautiful art and creation and culture of Buddhist. There is a big golden Buddha's statue in Balijan Vihara which donated by a tourist of Thailand. Among the objects d'art and relics preserved in these villages are a statue of the Buddha, a pair of Burmese chivar (robe), a golden kammawara (a religious book) and a large cane basket that was gifted to the Balijan Buddhist temple as a token of love and friendship by the Burmese general Mingimaha Bandula about 300 years ago. Each of the villages has a vihara, where monks teach Tai and Pali scriptures to students.
- **Cultural tourism:** It is concerned with the culture, religion, history and archeology of local people. The people of these villages celebrate several festivals related to Buddhism, held throughout the year which forms the basis of cultural tourism in this area. One of the important and popular festivals is the Poi Chang Ken i.e. festival of bathing of Buddha images, which falls every year on the last day of mid April. This is also called Pam Bihu. Poi Nin huk or Buddha Jayanti is another annual festival held in the full moon day in the month of May-June to celebrate the birth of Lord Buddha. Another festival, namely Maikom Sum Phai is observed on the full moon day of January, almost similar to the magh bihu of Assamese culture. These festivals often form the source of tourists' attraction. Residents of Balijan and the other two villages play traditional musical instruments like the Kong (flute), which is still used in Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, China and Vietnam. Although there have been slight deviations from the original Tai-Khamyang culture, the villagers still adhere to customs such as the birth ritual called khawn.
- **Village based tourism:** It is a type of tourism in which tourists share in village life and villagers gain economic and other benefits from tourist activities. The three villages itself forms a source of tourist destination. Tourists often come to witness the life style of the people of this village. The traditional way of life right from their traditional attire to their traditional food, forms a delightful destination for tourists.
- **Agricultural tourism:** The main cultivation of Buddhist people of these villages is rice. But tea plantation is another source of agriculture for some of them. The beautiful view of green paddy field with background of Naga hill and tea gardens are another source of tourist attraction.

**Constraints**

These three villages have many potentialities as a good tourist destination. But there has some constraint which creates many problems for these villages to be a good tourist destination and also barrier to develop rural tourism.

- ❖ **Communication Problem:** Transport and communication can be regarded as major problem affecting the region. The region is remotely located and even lacking any definite medium for transportation. The source of transportation 2 rural buses to Balijan Shyamgaon and 3 Gramya taxi to Na Shyamgaon only. The road which connect Na Shyamgaon with Balijan Shyamgaon is in very bad condition.
- ❖ **Insufficient Financial Support:** Proper financial support can enhance the tourism potential of the region, this would help the folks to preserve the local culture, traditions, heritage, art forms etc, because according to mass thinking, maintaining culture is not commercially viable. Tourism can showcase the uniqueness of the place in the proper manner.
- ❖ **Maintenance problem of heritage:** Due to ignorance and insufficient finance some of heritage of these village are going to damage and this is not a good sign.
- ❖ **Problem of Guest house or resort:** Another problem of these places is lack of proper facility of guest house or resort. Only one guest house is available which is under construction.
- ❖ **Awareness problem of local people:** The local people of these villages are not aware about the potentialities of these place and other tourist related facilities.
- ❖ **Lack of Trained tourist guide:** The whole tourism concept is very indigenous in the region. Though initiative attempt have been taken by the local youths, yet the professionalism is lacking. They are lacking proper training to project in the manner from tourism perspective. Even head of the village and is not well known about the potentialities village.

### *Prospects*

There is a scope of rural tourism in three villages of Titabor. Tourism is increasing the life quality of the inhabitants of these villages and it reduces the differences between the rural and urban region. It seems important to know that the tourism cannot be a dominant sector of the region itself; however it may be a driving force with the other branches of the regional economy. Several Buddhist scholars from Myanmar, Thailand, Taiwan and Japan have already visited the three villages for research. The Balijan shrine is already a major pilgrimage spot for Buddhists of the Northeast. The first general conference of the All Assam Buddhists' Association, which is a regional chapter of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, was held at Balijan Shyamgaon in 1942. However, what is of immediate interest to the tourism department is the fact that these descendants of the original migrants have maintained a link with their past.

### *Measures*

After analyzing the prospects and problems of the study area on the basis of the primary data the following measures are recommended for the development of rural tourism in the Syamgaon of Titabor of Jorhat district.

- ❖ **More publicity about the prospects and potentialities** of rural tourism is necessary both in the national and international level about these three shyamgaon.
- ❖ **Local masses awareness program** about the rural tourism developments should be taken and its positive impact should be lounged in the grassroots level.
- ❖ **Infrastructure and transport service should be improved** to all three Buddhist villages of Titabor of Jorhat district. Tourist busses of international standard should be flying on the road.
- ❖ **It is necessary to set up guest houses** with minimum required need like good water facility, good restaurant facility, clean and hygiene bathroom facility etc. One guest house is not sufficient for those places.
- ❖ **A good market facility also required for** tourist concentration for the particular place or destination. The market facilities near these three villages are required to improve. The prevailing Xilikhajan Sunday market is so far from these destination or study area.

- ❖ *At least one or two tourism related workshop should be organize* in every year especially for youth generation of study area from which they can improve the tourism potentialities of their places and they can guide tourist properly as well.

### ***Conclusion***

Rural tourism can be defined as the ‘country experience’ which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in non-urban areas. The most important purpose of rural tourism development is economic and social development of the rural areas. Rural Assam has much to offer beyond agriculture. It has a great potentiality for different growing segments of tourism like Cultural tourism, agro-tourism, religious tourism etc. Rich in traditions of art, culture and natural resources Shyamgaon of Titabor of Jorhat district emerged as an important tourist spot. There is a scope of rural tourism in the study area. This village has the resources, man power and a down-to-earth approach that is in sharp contrast with the five star culture of tourism in city areas. Here, rural tourism promotes the local economy, socio-cultural changes and life style of the people residing in and around the village.

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