

# Rethinking Tourism and Sustainability-Developing Chandubi as a tourist destination

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## **Abstract:**

The ancient concept of travel is now popular as tourism in today's consumerist society. People travel to different places for rejuvenation of their health, for a change from the daily monotony of life, to learn about new places, besides their interest in learning and experiencing the new in different places from the point of view of culture, environment, heritage, etc. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen more movement of people across the globe to see and experience the attractions of various places. Due to the growth of mass tourism, the fragile ecology is facing a threat; besides the age old heritage resources are being challenged due to constant invasion by natural and man-made issues. Under such circumstances it is essential to practice tourism in any destination with a view to maintaining sustainability. The example of Chandubi is cited here to understand the features of tourism and sustainability for the growth of any destination. Chandubi is a remote place in South Kamrup, located about 58 kilometres away from the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport of Guwahati in the North East Indian state of Assam. The region is blessed by tea gardens and tall teak forests besides being surrounded by fresh green hills all around. It is an abode of flora, fauna and waterfalls and is home to the Rabha and Garo communities. Their traditional life and associated culture besides a beautiful fresh water lake is a feast for the eyes of the tourists. Chandubi attracts tourists all the year round and is a favourite tourist destination. Assam is well known as a tourist destination but the need of the hour is to popularise other destinations which are not oft beaten tracts. Chandubi with all its added features can encourage all forms of tourism and enable the tribal communities to participate in the same for their economic, social, and cultural wellbeing. The study is an attempt to develop the lesser known Chandubi as a destination by practicing sustainable tourism and by embracing all stakeholders including the local communities, visitors, government, and the industry.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Tourism, Destination, Culture, Heritage, Stakeholders.

## **Introduction**

*“And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lovely cry of the whippoorwill or the argument of the frogs around a pond at night? The Red Indian prefers the soft sound of the wind itself cleaned by the midnight rain, or scented with a pine. The air is precious to the Red Man, for all things share the same breath, the beasts, the trees, the man.....”* Chief Sealath of the Suwanish Tribe of the American Indians' reply to the President of the United States Franklin Pierce in 1855. This is in reality

the essence of man's response to the various gifts of nature.

The World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Sustainable development has since 1992 Earth Summit been placed on the global agenda and its importance has also been associated with the development of tourism. Three basic principles of sustainable development which is also applicable for tourism development are (i)

development must be ecologically sustainable, (ii) social and cultural sustainability, (iii) development must be economically sustainable (Bezbaruah, 2000).

Having considered the importance of sustainable development, it is necessary to have an understanding about tourism. The relation between tourism and leisure is an old world phenomenon. During the early times people used to move to different places for seeking pleasure through various sports, for religious purposes, for seeking education in distant lands, for business etc. Travellers in ancient times used to move to the spas in Rome for rejuvenating their health, still later in the Middle Ages there were people like Marco Polo and others who used to travel long distances for the sake of seeing the world and visiting empires. The act of moving was then associated with travel and who so ever participated in these activities were called travellers as there was no luxury attached with the travellers. With the introduction of improved modes of transport and communication and aircrafts travel particularly after the II nd World War became convenient and gradually it became a leisure activity. As the travellers increased, the hotels and accommodation centres also became busy and welcomed travellers who now began to be called tourists in a consumerist society as travel now came to be associated with leisure and pleasure. With the introduction of modern transportation particularly with the introduction of fast moving transportation like railways and airways people started moving around the globe. There are various reasons which motivate and have motivated people to travel around the world. One important reason for travel today is to move away from the monotony of day to day life and experience the new and less travelled places, to enjoy exotic holidays in the islands, beaches, mountains, deserts, waterways, Ayurvedic spas and wellness centres etc. Besides heritage cities and monuments, hill stations, are still popular with tourists all the year round and people flock to these places to enjoy the beauty of these destinations. Tourism is the fastest growing economic activity. It touches every aspect of human activity like social, economic, cultural, educational, etc. In view of the increasing number of tourists today to various destinations to experience the natural and man made beauty

these popular destinations are facing a threat from the hordes of visitors as most of the monuments are several centuries old and fragile and also the ecology of the hill stations are facing the brunt of the overcrowding visitors. Due to the growth of mass tourism, the fragile ecology is facing a threat; besides the age old heritage resources are being challenged due to constant invasion by natural and man-made issues. The 21st century has seen more movement of people across the globe to see and experience the attractions of popular and lesser known places. Under such circumstances it is essential to practice tourism in any destination with a view to maintaining sustainability.

### **Tourism and its sustainable nature**

Sustainable tourism according to United Nations World Tourism Organisation UNWTO is about the optimal use of the resources of the environment, conserving natural and built heritage, and biodiversity, respecting socio cultural and traditional values of communities, besides ensuring socio economic benefits to all stakeholders. Sustainable tourism is considered to be that tourist activity that adjusts to a particular natural, cultural and social structure of a landscape. Sustainable tourism is a tool associated with eco-tourism development. In case of developing a particular landscape from the point of view of sustainable tourism local participation is necessary for the socio economic development, territorial structure and regional accessibility, developing connectivity of the areas with the international road and air networks. When a place is developed as a tourist destination, communication, electric supply, road condition, sewage disposal facility, provision of service industry, recreational facilities etc also develops. These facilities are not only enjoyed by the tourists but also by the local population as well. Sustainable tourism is a positive approach which aims at reducing the tensions and friction created by the complex interactions between the visitors, the environment, and the community of the tourist destination. Considering the loss or harm that may be caused to the eco sensitive destinations where community are the natural protectors of the environment it is of utmost importance for the tourists and the host communities to ensure that tourism does not lead to a loss or degradation

of the environment and the cultural identity of the destinations. Apart from contributing towards human development through socio cultural and economic well-being of the communities, Sustainable Tourism Development prioritises on preservation and conservation of national heritage and conservation of natural environment. While developing any area for popularising tourism activities different kinds of strategies needs to be kept in mind for example the tourist carrying capacity of the particular area, or some areas may be popularised for bringing in more tourists etc. In this way it is necessary for the Governments of every nation and states to have a futuristic plan for developing the destinations. Sustainable tourism has the capacity to maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time and does not degrade or alter the environment. For sustainable development, environment conservation and management of visitors and service business all are interlinked. Environmental problems evolving from tourism are manifold. The introduction of tourism implies increased stress on resources. Tourists are supplied at the expense of the local population. Tourists are not aware of how to use natural resources sustainably which leads to degradation of the resources. In developing countries tourism generates wastes, sewage, wastewater disposals which are not managed or planned (Tourism and Sustainable Development, Sustainable Tourism: A Non Governmental Organisation Perspective). In this connection it is essential to mention that owing to the global awareness programmes on sustainability, sustainable tourism has come to be viewed as an alternative to the popular meaning of tourism. Sustainable tourism brings to the forefront tourism which respects local people and the traveller, cultural heritage and the environment (Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future- a multimedia teacher education programme- Sustainable Tourism, 2010) besides earning foreign currency and generating employment. In most cases communities appreciate when the quality of life, heritage maintenance etc is enhanced from tourism. Also as tourism leads to minimal environmental and socio cultural change it adds to increased economic benefits such as job creation and tax revenue. Social benefits may include undertaking community participation and improving environment (Butler, R. 1993). Through geo tourism which protects the

geographical character of a place, business for the prevention of pollution can be encouraged. Economic upliftment is also possible through improved livelihood or skills, increased protection of natural resources, maintenance of lifestyle, stories, songs, ritual tied to culture (comment by Watt, H.V. 2001).

### **Benefits from Sustainable Tourism**

According to World Tourism Organisation (WTO) sustainable tourism leads to the management of all the resources so that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled with the cooperation of businessmen, customers, supplier, and locals. Sustainable tourism teaches how to respect the socio cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values. Sustainable tourism provides a superb way to help alleviate poverty and offers local farmers, poachers, fishermen etc with an alternative means of income. These people can become green guardians that use their local expert knowledge to grow awareness of the unique attributes of the fragile ecosystem and help to bring back cleared areas back to their natural state.

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As the term suggests sustainable tourism means developing tourist destinations embracing the support of a wide variety of stakeholders including the host communities, public sector, industry, media, the tourists with a view to protecting the environment, developing the social and economic conditions of the

destinations through political support, activities of the tourists and the tourism industry as a whole. No single definition is perfect for explaining the term sustainable tourism as the term has got a wide dimension. However the definition adopted from the Bruntland Report may suit the purpose. This could lead to a definition like “that tourists, tourism industry and host communities use resources today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own”.

Sustainable tourism can be achieved through Responsible Tourism, Alternative Tourism, Soft Tourism, Eco Tourism, Environmentally friendly tourism, and cultural tourism involving the visitors learning about the history and culture of a particular area, urban attractions which provide new uses for derelict sites, Minimum Impact Tourism etc (Swarbrooke, 1999; 2010, P 14). Amongst the many principles behind sustainable tourism management few principles have been adopted from Bramwell et al. (1996). (i) The approach sees policy, planning and management as appropriate and indeed essential responses to the problems of natural and human resource misuse in tourism. (ii) The concerns of sustainable tourism management are not just environmental but are also economic, social, cultural, political and managerial.

The paper emphasises the importance of the sustainable form of tourism for conserving the environment from the inroads of tourists. The example of Chandubi is cited here to understand the features of tourism and sustainability for the growth of any destination. The study is an attempt to develop the lesser known Chandubi as a destination by practicing sustainable tourism and by embracing all stakeholders including the local communities, visitors, government, and the industry. The place though visited by many local tourists is famous only within Assam and is counted as an important destination locally amongst other tourist destinations of Assam. It is out of the oft beaten tracts.

Situated in the extreme north eastern region of India, in the eastern Himalayan range is the Land of the Blue Hills and the Red River (Brahmaputra) i.e. the state of Assam. So far as Assam is concerned, she can be considered as a tourists' paradise. The state as a destination has been gifted with a wide variety of tourism

potentials—wild life, flora, migratory birds, silent valleys, turbulent streams, sky kissing mountains, sprawling tea gardens, archaeological monuments, etc. Assam is a land of all seasons. She is famous for her green cover and tall thick rain forests and deciduous trees. Thus the high mountain ranges of Assam can be used for popularising adventure sports. Various tourist destinations in Assam particularly the tea gardens have golf courses which is visited by a large number of foreign and indigenous tourists. In order to protect the environment and the local communities from disruptive tourism activities, it is essential to introduce such activities so as to protect the environment.

### **Developing Sustainable Tourism in Chandubi**

Chandubi is a remote place in South Kamrup, located about 64 kilometres away from the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport of Guwahati in the North East Indian state of Assam. It is located in the National Highway 37 away from the small township of Mirza in South Kamrup of Kamrup district in Assam. The place can be reached through Borihat and Loharghat. It is less polluted and people make their living by weaving and working in the agricultural fields. They are self-sufficient in food and clothing. One can enjoy scenic beauty all along the way through the blue green hills; lush green tea gardens till one reaches the destination. Through the entire route to Chandubi there are corridors of tall teak tree forests and other huge trees having medicinal properties. The destination is also the habitat to wild Asiatic elephants. Chandubi is a natural paradise with evergreen and deciduous trees. The beauty of the meandering lake with clear sparkling water is in itself a feast for the eyes of the tourists. The beauty of the lake is enhanced by the migratory winged visitors from autumn through winter season. Local and domestic tourists visit Chandubi in large numbers during the winter to enjoy the beauty and the serene atmosphere, the cool breeze, the distant silent hills of Chandubi. The local communities are the guardians of the forests and the products. Small hamlets comprising of ethnic communities like the Rabhas and the Garos are perched within the teak forests.

The name Chandubi is believed to have originated from the Khasi word Chan Ubleis (Ublei-Gods); dubi is water body. It is also believed that a British Officer named the lake as Chandubi or the place where the sun sets. The Chandubi Lake was formed during the Great Assam Earthquake of 1897. The region is blessed by tea gardens and tall teak forests besides being surrounded by fresh green hills all around. It is an abode of flora, fauna and waterfalls and is home to the Rabha and Garo communities. Their traditional life and associated culture besides a beautiful fresh water lake is a feast for the eyes of the tourists. Chandubi attracts tourists all the year round and is a favourite tourist destination. Chandubi with all its added features can encourage all forms of tourism and enable the tribal communities to participate in the same for their economic, social, cultural wellbeing. The sylvan beauty of the sprawling tea gardens of Assam and the shady trees in between is a gift of nature but it has been designed by man. These maintain equilibrium in nature. A visit to the tea gardens can be included in the itinerary for the tourists. Golf Courses can be developed, and Tennis Courts and other types of recreational facilities for tourists are usually in conjunction with resorts and are planned according to internationally accepted standards. These can be designed within Chandubi for enhancing the economic condition of the local people. Cultural and ethnic museums and other type of special facilities like scenic cable cars extending upto the mountain side places can be developed in Chandubi. Adventure and sports have always been an integral part of tourism. The type of sports that can be popularised in Assam particularly in Chandubi are golf, tennis, horse riding, cycling, swimming, boating, angling, parachuting, sky diving, hang gliding, canoeing, trekking etc. Trekking does not require much investment therefore trekking can be made into a popular sport particularly for a state like Assam which has large tracts of virgin lands. This is also true for the vast evergreen Chandubi. It helps the tourists to understand the vegetation of the destination and know better the value of endangered plant and animal life.

It is big business for those local businessmen from the Rabha and Garo community who organise eco camps in interior Chandubi where nature lovers are treated to the nature and

culture, the serene surroundings, local ethnic cuisine, stay amidst nature in cozy tent houses where the beautiful Chandubi Lake flows by gently, or tree houses in the midst of tall teak forests. Chandubi borders the neighbouring state of Meghalaya.

Located around 64 kms away from the city of Guwahati which is the "Gateway to the North East of India" Chandubi is the most popular tourist destination of South Kamrup region. It is away from the hustle and bustle of the horizontal and vertically developing urbanised city and is perched in the nature's lap. The tourism providers can introduce different modes of entertainment like photography, ethnic tourism, historical tour, sound and light programmes, selling memento, postcards, setting up hotels which would serve local Assamese cuisine, etc. This would also lead to economic alleviation of the local people as they would be involved in providing the business. Measures should be taken to introduce environmentally sound technologies to minimise the consumption of local water through rain water harvesting, maintaining gardens, and recreational centres. Besides proper sewage treatment facilities, converting garbage waste to organic wastes to be used for hotel gardens is a great educative way by which tourists can experience nature and learn about conservation and traditional uses of natural resources even in a city. These are the few ways by which destinations can be developed for tourist purposes. Chandubi has everything to offer to a tourist from its vast array of cultural, geographical, ethnic, and natural diversity. So far as maintaining the sustainable form of tourism in Chandubi is concerned it is also necessary to establish prior importance to the rural areas which are especially attractive for its pristine surroundings. In Chandubi the host communities participate in preserving the serenity of the place and are engaged in farming and rearing of eri cocoons.

The Tourism Department of the Government of Assam has its office in Chandubi besides it has a lodge providing accommodation facilities for the tourists. The place is famous as a picnic spot on the banks of the lake and the use of loudspeakers are prohibited to allow the migratory birds an open free space. The place is accessible by motorable road and personal cars, buses and taxis on rent are used to reach the

destination. The nearest airport to reach Chandubi is the Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, and Guwahati Railway station is the nearest railway station which is used by the tourists to reach Chandubi. In the Chandubi Lake coloured country boats are used for ferrying passengers to and fro to the mainland. It's a means of communication for the local people. The boats are owned by the local tribal folks of Chandubi and boating facilities are also available for tourists on payment of charges. Night stay is also becoming popular with the local people participating in the business of operating eco-tourism resorts. Food and campfire are available where local people perform songs and dances for show casing their culture.

Over the last decade the Government of Assam has been organising the Chandubi Festival from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 5<sup>th</sup> January every year. The aim is to popularise the place from the point of view of eco-tourism and make people aware that Chandubi is also a biodiversity hotspot. This tourism festival is one of the finest festivals in the whole of South Kamrup. The idea is also to convert the lake into an economically viable lake which can sustain the local communities. Local people participate whole heartedly in this festival where Ethnic Food Festival is organised. It caters to the taste buds of lakhs of tourists who visits this winter tourism festival. Besides garment exhibition displaying a huge array of ethnic and Assamese handlooms in a riot of colours vie with each other are very popular. Local people weave and sell their products in these exhibitions. Apart from these the bamboo, cane and clay handicrafts made by local artisans, the dance festivals of various communities of Assam are all part of the Chandubi Festival. The primary aim of this festival is to popularise Chandubi located in remote Kamrup and to develop the area from the economic point of view, to popularise the bamboo culture etc.

The landscape of Chandubi is attractive and can be developed from the sustainable point of view. Apart from enjoying the abundance of nature, walking tours through the beautiful winding village roads, through the tea gardens, lush green paddy fields and surrounding hills of Meghalaya keep inviting the tourists with open arms. Chandubi is also a trekker's paradise where one can learn about the nature, culture

and life style of the ethnic communities, the social patterns, the practices of agricultural norms, about the environment etc. Nature has gifted Chandubi with a vast variety of resources which can be enjoyed by the tourists. The Kulsi River which flows to the Chandubi Lake from Meghalaya is in itself a rich resource of aquatic animals. The spectacular natural view on the way to Rani Khamar is a very important tourist asset. The cascading waterfalls of Chandubi at Soloka Dare in Baroigaon, and the Kafadonga waterfalls are the glorious features of Chandubi. The call of the wild at Chandubi the elephants, jackals, the chirping of the myriad birds, the sound of the dew drops falling over the roof tops which slopes down the tourist tents are the best natural features of Chandubi. If this bliss of nature is provided to the tourists in a packaged form it will definitely not lead to the destruction of the environment but can be a great learning experience for the visitors. People visit Chandubi particularly during the winter season starting from November to February. People throng the place with a view to living through the culture and the psyche of its people. In some heavily industrialised, urbanised countries rural areas are viewed as lost worlds, where life was simple and idyllic, which now provide playgrounds where urban dwellers can seek antidote to the ills of modern urban living. They seem to be timeless places where any change is to be resisted and the main priority is the protection of the physical environment. People are of the view that healthy rural areas are the ones which are alive with economic and social activity rather than ones which are physically well preserved (Swarbrooke, 1999; 2010). Chandubi is such a place which is alive and vibrant.

The idea of sustainable development through tourism in Chandubi is to promote valued visitor experiences which support local economies. Due to lack of space or overcrowding of the tourists in heritage monuments within the urban city scape, it has led to the need for better planning and amalgamation of leisure and consumption based development in the peripheral and peri urban areas. This has gradually led to developments within mixed land use schemes for creating sustainable and lasting tourist amenities. Experimenting Chandubi through photography, buying the handloom and handicraft items, and the food products from

the local sellers are among the many sustainable activities that can be practised at Chandubi. This can besides popularising Chandubi as a tourist destination can also uplift the local society economically. An important feature of the Chandubi Festival is to build cane and bamboo houses and huts with intricate designs to show case besides the cultural milieu of the ethnic communities living in the fringes of Assam and Meghalaya is also aimed at teaching the visitors about the importance of preserving the green coverage. As Chandubi has been used as a case study for developing the destination by practising sustainable tourism importance has to be given to the involvement of the leisure industry and the local stakeholders and focus Chandubi as a national and international tourism destination, yet with a view to protecting the virgin environment and the ethnic resident communities. Touched by civilisation and modernity yet not much affected by the inroads of tourists due to lack of continuous transport facilities the destination is pristine and protected from urbanisation and globalisation.

## Conclusion

Thus when destinations are developed, it is essential to keep certain factors in mind such as topography, wildlife, vegetation, employment and unemployment levels, cultural patterns, etc. When destinations are planned environmental quality factors should be considered, for example air quality, quantity and quality of water supply, cleanliness of public places, landscaping, open space, (MTM11.pp 15). For a destination like Assam with limited resources, these factors have to be taken into consideration as sustainable tourism is designed to integrate tourism development and the protection of natural environment at tourist destinations, particularly for the management of the planet's environment. Assam has immense natural beauty and is popular for her arts and crafts which are a way of life. Handicrafts and handlooms of distinctive beauty, the golden muga gives Assam her unique identity and advantage in promoting ethnic craft related tourism. The various forms of tourism which can achieve sustainability like ecotourism, nature tourism etc has the possibility of promoting Chandubi through a case study and this can show that the coming of

the tourists can improve the socio economic condition of the people, develop the road conditions, and these local movements can indeed provide a fillip to the development of tourist facilities and improvement of the tourist products. Eco tourism is not just an industry or an activity undertaken in the natural environment. It is an experience that an individual or group has that affects their attitudes, values and actions and developing behaviour that is conducive to maintaining natural environments and empowering the host communities thereby leading to a sustainable industry. Eco tourism can be further developed through public private partnership. In 1972 the term 'sustainable development' was first coined by the United Nations Conference on Human Development. In 1987, with the release of *Our Common Future* by the United Nations World Commission sustainability became more popular. For sustainable development of tourism though emphasis is laid on the public participation in the tourism activities Government needs to coordinate and control the activities so that the objectives of sustainability can be achieved. Besides the Government of each state and the centre gives priority to certain legislations for the protection of Wildlife, Forests and Environment. A place to be developed from the sustainable tourism point of view should see that community participates and must take care to bring conflicts to the minimal level where resources used by the tourists and the locals are the same. Though achievement of sustainable development is a challenging task it is necessary to strike a balance between the environment, the tourists, their activities and the growth of the stakeholders of the society.

## Suggestions

- It is better to stay in locally owned accommodations which will benefit local families.
- It is essential to book excursions that will contribute to the local economy.
- It is necessary to have respect for local culture, tradition, holy places, natural heritage of the destinations etc.
- A sensible tourist must always use resources sparingly in destinations. The need of the hour is to conserve resources in hotels by turning off electric appliances when not in use.

- Holidays should not disturb wildlife or their habitats.
- Empowering local residents at tourist destinations through local participation is necessary.
- The residents of the destinations must be offered health and a better future.
- The Government must introduce “tourist carrying capacity” and ensure legislation for protection of the local community.

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