

Problems and Prospects of Farm Tourism in Assam - A Case Study in the Muga Farm of Sualkuchi, the Silk Hub of Assam

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Abstract: Being agriculture dominated economy; the prospect of farm tourism is very wide in India. Unfortunately due to lack of proper knowledge about the concept, it has not got proper attention in our tourism planning. Farm tourism a branch of agriculture and rural tourism refers to the process of visiting a farm for a holiday, participating in its operations and learning about the agrarian society. This type of tour activity is highly beneficial for those farms that needs extra source to meet their running expenses.

In Assam, though other varieties of tourism concept are more or less introduced, farm tourism is still an untouched idea. To make the concept known to the policy maker, tour operator and other agencies, we have proposed a study on the topic titled –“Problem and Prospect of Farm Tourism in Assam- A case study in the *Muga* farm of Sualkuchi, the Silk Hub of Assam”. It is to be noted that, Sualkuchi, the silk village of Assam has a government sponsored Muga Farm with an area of about 1200 bighas of land in the northern hilly part of the village with sole objective to produce muga fibre. But due to lack of proper initiative and high running cost, the farm, though have high potentiality is being tagged as a sick one. On the other hand the number of tourist flow into the silk village has been increasing in the last five years for initiation of rural tourism by different govt. and non govt. agencies. Our proposed study would focus upon the issues related with farm tourism. We would study whether the concept can be introduced in the said Muga farm of Sualkuchi or not. The problems on synchronization of farm tourism with present tourism structure would also be highlighted. Though our study would be limited to Sualkuchi’s Muga Farm only, we would also try our level best to prescribe a macro view of the problem so all the farms of North- East get its fruitful result. The study would be done with a field survey in the farm and Government departments associated with the farm. Results of primary data will be blended with secondary information collected from various books, publications etc to make the analysis worthy.

Keywords: Tourism, Agriculture, Rural development.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Tourism may be defined as the processes, activities, and outcomes arising from the relationships and the interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities, and surrounding environments that are involved in the attracting and hosting of visitors. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) recommendation, “tourism comprises the activities of person traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes”. Hunziker and Krapf, in 1941, defined tourism as "the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising out from the travel and stay of non-residents, in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity." In 1976, the Tourism Society of England

defined it as "Tourism is the temporary, short-term movement of people to destination outside the places where they normally live and work. It includes movements for all purposes."

Farm tourism is a part of rural or agricultural tourism. It refers to the working farms that supplement their income with some form of tourism business, most commonly from accommodation by renting extra guest room, converting a separate farm building to accommodation units. Also, providing camping facilities, operating a farm house, restaurant, selling farm product, leasing, fishing rights, are some of the characteristics of farm tourism. The concept of farm tourism may be developed for its economic benefits of supplementary farm income with little investment and represent a successful symbiotic relationship for areas neither farming nor tourism could be independently justified. It also provides the opportunity for the urban families to experience agricultural and farm activities through exposure and actual participation in them. In some cases the opportunities for the farm family members to meet other people also prove beneficial for socio-cultural exchange.

The village Sualkuchi is located in the Kamrup district of Assam which is rich in silk weaving culture. In fact it is the only village in Assam where silk production is done in a commercial basis in an extended manner. The silk industry has been the major source of income and also carries tourism significance in the region. The handloom silk industry has enabled the village to be a commercial hub of the state and also been successful in attracting number of tourists to the region. Apart from silk business, the village is also very rich in art and culture and natural beauty. Vaishnavite religion is the heart and soul of the people of Sualkuchi. The river Brahmaputra in the south, hillocks around the east and west side of the village have added natural beauty to the village.

It is to be noted that, out of various silk producing states Assam has the distinction of producing all varieties of silk i.e. Mulberry, Muga, Eri and Tasar. In the Muga production; the land holds monopoly in the world. Muga silk has a special quality, characteristic and reputation based upon the climatic and production characteristics unique to the geographical area of Assam. The Muga silk has been registered as the Geographical Indication (GI) of Assam under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection Act, 1999). This is the first Geographical Indication of the state. The silk village Sualkuchi where Muga cloth is weaved in large extent has also a government run Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) popularly known as Muga Farm. In this farm, rearers of Sualkuchi are allowed to harvest moths that give Muga fabrics. The farm was established in 1970 under Department of Sericulture, Government of Assam. The total areas of the farm is about 1200 bighas and at present the number of trees in the reserve are only 3000 that yield only a little Muga cocoon. Among the various reasons for the low yield of Muga, the prominent one is the paucity of fund. According to the government procedure, the farm is open for the local Muga rearers and 10 percent of the production goes to the coffers of the farm. The state government provides the salary component of the employees and the running expenditure has to be meted out from the earnings of the farm itself. But due to meager earnings, the condition of the farm is in a dilapidated situation. Lack of government financial assistance has compelled the farm to remain poor though vast prospects are lying underneath. To help this government institution, which otherwise could have played a great role in the expansion of Muga production in the region, we have proposed a study titled "Problems and Prospects of Farm Tourism in Assam-A case study in the Muga Farm of Sualkuchi, the Silk Hub of Assam".

Up till now very less research work has been done on the prospect of farm tourism in India. However in recent times, states like Kerala and Haryana have taken initiative to boost farm tourism as it may give additional income to the money-starved farm owner. One important element of farm tourism is that, it should not harm the main activity. Rather, tourism should benefit the farm to improve its financial status. If the sericulture department with the help of Tourism Department synthesizes the farm tourism concept with the Muga farm of Sualkuchi, the economic situation of the unit would be much stronger than its present status. This study would focus upon the aspects that would help to grow tourism in the farm itself. The study, although preliminary in nature, would be able to provide ample opportunity for such farms whose existence is in financial mess despite having strong infrastructure.

III. OBJECTIVES:

The primary objective behind this study is to popularise the concept of farm tourism in Assam and to find out the way to revive Muga farm of Sualkuchi (Sualkuchi VGR). However to fulfill this objective, we have to analyze some other issues which can also be termed as the objectives of the study.

- (1) To study the tourism significance of the silk industry of Sualkuchi.
- (2) To identify the opportunities of farm-tourism and to synthesize the concept with present set up.
- (3) To suggest measures for the expansion of the concept in the North East region.

II. METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCE:

By its very nature, the topic, problems and prospects of farm tourism, necessitate explanation of vital and convoluted areas of tourism through a comprehensive and schematic investigation based on collecting and collection of field data duly blended with the book knowledge. Thus our study would be based on data obtained from both primary and secondary sources.

For primary data, a field survey is done in the *Muga* farm to collect information regarding the functioning of the farm. Appropriate questionnaire is prepared to capture the various dimensions of the farm. Employees of the farm are interviewed to get information and they are later on cross-checked with the respective department documents in the head office. In the investigation, it is found that the number of registered rearers in the farm is 30. Out of these 10 rearers are interviewed with a separate questionnaire to see the opportunity in the business and to go deep inside the farm functioning. Sample of the rearers are selected on the basis of age, time of involvement, harvesting period and trade structure.

III. GEOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF THE STUDY AREA:

Physiographical Frame Work:

Sualkuchi is located on the banks of the mighty river Brahmaputra. The village has a mixture of plains and hills and hillock. The area also has some low line areas like *beels* and swamps. The hills in the area are not very high i.e. they have moderate heights.

Soil condition:

As Sualkuchi is located in the Brahmaputra valley, the soil of the area is of the alluvial type. The colour of the soil is black which is very fertile for growing crops. Again we can find another type of soil as there is the presence of hills and hillocks in the area. The areas of hills and hillocks contain red hilly soil with small pebbles. The plain areas are fertile as they are located on the banks of the river.

Hydrology:

As discussed above, Sualkuchi is located on the north bank of the mighty Brahmaputra. The village has a good drainage system as the river Brahmaputra flows through the south of the village. As the river is in the middle belt there is decomposition and sedimentation. The mighty river is also linked by the small streams in the area.

Climate:

The climate of Sualkuchi is of a moderate type i.e. it is neither too hot nor too cold. The maximum temperature is about 38 degree centigrade and the minimum is 21 degree centigrade in summer and in winter the maximum temperature is 27 degree centigrade and the minimum is 17 degree centigrade respectively. The annual rainfall is 1500mm.

Flora and Fauna:

The area of Sualkuchi has semi evergreen forest. The trees which can be found in the area are mango, simolu, coconut, betel nut, banyan, banana, jack fruit, som, sualu etc. The area is not rich in fauna as it is densely populated. There are no wild animals in the area. Cow, goat, dog, etc. can be seen in the streets and fields of the area. However the area is rich in birds. Many birds can also be seen as the area is on the bank of a river. Lots of aquatic birds can be seen in the area. The birds which can be seen in the area are pigeon, sparrow, bat, etc.

Social and cultural values:

Sualkuchi, the Manchester of East, is also a place of shrine and center of Vaishnavite art and culture preached by the great Vaishnava saint Srimanta Sankardeva. The religious thought and rites taught by Srimanta Sankardeva are practised here from ancient time. The expansion and preservation of the Vaishnavite culture in Sualkuchi is done by the *Satras* and *Namghars* established here. Sualkuchi has a great number of *Satras* and *Namghars* which have their own history and rich culture. Sualkuchi is a place of shrine and people have faith on this religious culture. There are more than 100 *Satras* and *Namghars* in

the Sualkuchi. The *Satras* and *Namghars* can be divided into *Mahapurusiya*, *Damodaria* and *Harideviya*. *Satras* in Sualkuchi have magnificent and beautiful works of art, craft and scripture. Most of the *Satras* have the scriptures cut on wood. These scriptures depict the religious culture. Beyond these *Satras* and *Namghars*, Sualkuchi also has some Sat Sanga Bihar and Sasang which are mentioned below.

Langa Sasang, Bhahar Khowa Sasang, Sat Sang Bihar and Baronagaria Sasang are prominent among them. These *Satras*, *Namghars* and *Sasang* have played a great role in flourishing the religion and culture in the area. Moreover the Saktaya Dharmiya temples perform various pujas like Durga Puja, Lakhmi Puja, Manasha Puja, etc. with great pomp and show.

Sualkuchi is a land of fairs and festivals. Some of the important festivals celebrated in the Sualkuchi are Janam Utsav of Sankardev, Ashoka Astami Mela, Naow Khel, Raas Mahotsav, Durga Puja, Manasha Puja, Diwali, Sivaratri, Holi, Sri Krishna Janam Utsav, Kali Puja, Lakshmi Puja, etc.

Sualkuchi is also rich in literature, music, dance and drama. Sualkuchi is immensely rich in folk culture which includes *Dhiha Naam*, *Mohoho Geet*, *Naow Khel Geet*, *Biya Geet*, etc. Sualkuchi is also very advanced in written literature. Many writers have achieved great success in the field of literature. Sualkuchi is also rich in music and dance. *Ankiya Nat*, *Ankiya Geet*, *Yatra*, *Bhaowna*, etc. are performed and practised in Sualkuchi. As a whole, Sualkuchi is a land of religious, cultural and festive destination.

Demographic Pattern:

According to the 2001 census, the total land area of Sualkuchi is 9.37 sq Km and the total population was 25,861. Out of this, the number of males was 12, 767 and the number of females was 13,094. Density of population of Sualkuchi was 2706 per sq Km and the sex ratio was 1000:1025. The numbers of families are 4529. One important fact is that 100% of the population consists of Hindus. In other words, only one religion can be found in this silk village i.e. Hinduism.

IV. TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION:

Roadways:

Sualkuchi is well connected by the road way with the gateway of the North – East i.e. Guwahati. The road connected to Guwahati is wide and black- topped one. The village has good mini city service. ASTC buses and all kind of private cars and taxis run daily between Sualkuchi and Guwahati.

Waterways:

The inland-water transport connects Sualkuchi with Guwahati city as well as Palashbari. There are number of private boats (with motorized engines) that ply to Guwahati and Palashbari from Sualkuchi over the Brahmaputra River.

Railways:

The nearest rail station from Sualkuchi is Kamakhya. The main station of Guwahati i.e., Paltanbazar, is at distance of 35kms from Sualkuchi. As the road is well connected with Guwahati, there is no problem in reaching the railway station.

Airways:

The Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati, is about 35kms away from Sualkuchi. The airport is well connected by the road way.

V. PROFILE OF SILK INDUSTRY OF SUALKUCHI:

Presently, there are about 17,000 active looms working in Sualkuchi to produce different range of silk fabrics like *Mekhela-Chadar*, *Riha*, *Sarees*, *Dhara* (Khasi apparels), *Dara-Chadar* (Bride Dress), *Gamocha*, dress material in yards etc. Out of the total silk productions of Sualkuchi, 70 percent are *Mekhela-Chadar*, 20 percent silk sarees and 10 percent miscellaneous fabrics including Khasi dresses of *Dhara* and *Jemsing*. The cottage industry gives direct and indirect employment to more than 34000 people throughout the year in silk weaving and allied activities.

Although, Sualkuchi has been producing traditional Assamese fabrics since time immemorial but it needs to be mentioned that the handloom products of Sualkuchi have been diversified in recent times. Now silk looms of Sualkuchi produce products like quilt, curtain, shower curtain, table linen, kimono umbrella, bags, etc. Sualkuchi is exporting these new products to the foreign markets of USA, Japan,

European countries, etc through ARTFED. Every year the state earns foreign exchange by exporting these diversified products to the outside market.

The Govt. has taken up many schemes for the improvement of handloom textile of Sualkuchi. It has introduced schemes to provide raw materials at reasonable prices, marketing support, welfare of weavers, etc. for ensuring continuous growth of the silk industry of Sualkuchi.

The industry of Sualkuchi is the pride of the village. However at present the industry is facing some problems. High price of raw material, lack of skilled labour, competition from cheap products are some important hurdles of the present time for the business. Muga looms, for which the village is known all over the world, are replaced by the Tasar looms. The reason of replacement is high cost of the Muga cocoons which makes the products very costly.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF SUALKUCHI AS TOURIST SPOT:

Tourism, as we know, transformed into phenomena today, has become a very complex activity. Tourism is a business of providing food, shelter, accommodation, entertainment, experience, etc. to the tourists. Different people undertake traveling for different purposes. People may travel for the purpose of religion, pleasure, entertainment, business, health, education, adventure, etc. When a tourist visits other place he/she gets an opportunity to know and understand the views of people and their views about the place to which the tourists belong. The most important advantage of tourism industry is that it provides employment to various persons because several individuals have to be engaged in this sphere to take care of the tourists.

Tourism has its own significance to play for the development of a region. Tourism also has its own significance in the silk industry of Sualkuchi. The silk industry of Sualkuchi is a great attraction for the tourist both from India and abroad. The weaving culture has immense potentiality to attract tourists to Sualkuchi from any part of the world. Every year number of tourists visits Sualkuchi as a part of daily tour programme conducted by Guwahati-based tour agencies and Assam Tourism Department. Apart from them, government officials of different states also visit Sualkuchi to familiarize themselves with the cottage industry. In the last few years officials of foreign countries have also visited the place.

VII. TOURISM PROSPECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN SUALKUCHI:

Sualkuchi, 'the Manchester of the East' has great prospects and opportunities for the tourism development. The village has a history of weaving culture, immensely blessed with nature and a place of great art and culture. Sualkuchi's prospects for tourism development are therefore indeed very bright if the destinations are properly explored and harnessed well. The village can attract tourists for its weaving, sericulture process, historical monuments, Vaishnavite culture, folk dance, music, the mighty river Brahmaputra, etc.

1. History of weaving culture:

Weaving culture in Sualkuchi is an age- old affair descending from generation to generation. The weaving art was known in this place from the days of Kautilya. The history of weaving can also be an attraction for the tourists.

2. Weaving industry:

The weaving industry itself can be a great tourist attraction. The whole process of producing fabrics is very eye-catching and unique right from reeling, twisting, bobbing, wrapping, design making, etc. Hence the whole process is always an attraction and has the potentiality to bring tourists to the destination.

3. Village Grazing Reserve:

Village grazing reserve can be developed as a lucrative tourist destination. The village reserve is meant for sericulture cultivation which has 1200 bighas of land. But this vast plot of land is not used properly by the Govt. and the local people. At this point of time, the Reserve is not able to do proper cultivation of Muga and Eri because of various causes. So a new concept of farm tourism can be developed here which will boost up the economy of the Reserve, and in the mean time the tourists will get an opportunity to know about the interesting life-cycle of the silk-worm. If the concept of farm tourism is applied it will be a unique attraction for the tourists in Sualkuchi.

4. Historical monuments and religious institutions:

Sualkuchi is rich in historical monuments and religious institutions. One can find temple at every *chuba* of Sualkuchi. The *Satras* and *Namghars* are big attractions for the religious tourists.

5. Fairs and festivals:

Sualkuchi is a land of fairs and festivals. The fairs and festivals of Sualkuchi are very colourful. Most of the fairs and festivals of Sualkuchi are religious and culture-oriented like *Janam Utsav* of Sankardev, *Ashoka Astami Mela*, *Naow Khel*, etc. The fairs and festivals give a picture of magnificent culture of the society of Sualkuchi. The fairs and festivals of Sualkuchi attract people of various places. These fairs and festivals of Sualkuchi have immense potentiality to attract tourists.

6. Culture, Literature, Music, Dance and Drama:

Sualkuchi is very rich in culture, music, dance and drama. The folk culture like *Diha Naam*, *Mohoho Geet*, *Naow khel geet*, *Bar Geet*, etc are extremely rich in Sualkuchi which are of great attraction for the tourists. The Vaishnavite culture, Satriya Dance, art & craft and scripture of *Satras*, *Namghasr* and temples are immensely rich and are attracting tourists. The rich culture, literature, music, dance and drama need proper promotion to attract tourists.

7. River tourism:

The mighty Brahmaputra which flows through the south side of the village is a huge attraction for the tourists. The beach in the river can be used for sports like beach volley-ball, beach-cricket, and beach-football for recreation and relaxation of the tourists. The river can be used for boating, swimming and other water sports. The traditional fishing processes, angling, can also be of great attraction for the tourists.

VIII. VILLAGE GRAZING RESERVE, SUALKUCHI (VGR):

Village Grazing Reserve or *Sarkari Muga Gopasar* (popularly known as *Muga Farm*) in Sualkuchi was established in the year 1970-71. Village Grazing Reserve consists of 1200 bighas of land for sericulture. The farm comprises Som, Soalu and Eri trees and is situated in the north-east part of the village. The scenic beauty of the area is enchanting enough to attract people. Small hillocks, wide open fields and wet-lands have made the farm beautiful. An office, a twisting factory and a service quarter of workers are constructed near the first entrance of the farm. From these built-ups the land has taken an upward slope where the trees are planted in lines. The whole hillock is surrounded by a *pucca* road making the land accessible from all sides. From the top of the hill, one can see in and around of Sualkuchi including the Brahmaputra river in the south frontier.

The farm is a part of the state govt. initiative to enhance Muga production in Assam. Muga silk is considered as wild and it can be made only in a natural environment. The department of the sericulture of the state take cares of the farm. The initial project cost was borne by the sericulture department. In the financial set up, the state govt. needs to provide monetary help every year for the smooth running of the firm. However, it is also mandatory for the farm to earn running expenses by rearing Muga through community participation and through its own initiative. Registered rearers of the village community are allowed to use the farm for rearing Muga for which 10 percent of the production has to be deposited to the farm. All costs, including seeds are borne by the rearer except the infrastructural one. If the farm officials do the rearing of their own, then the whole productions are retained by the farm itself. The farm management, after deducting the operating cost, deposits the whole revenue to the department. The rearers' 10 percent also goes to the departmental treasury. According to the reports published in 2005, the total number of active Muga looms is 2817 in the village and it consumes more than 42000 kg of Muga yarns per year (Baishya, 2005). In our survey in the farm, it is found that only 3000 trees are available at present in the whole area though the total plant capacity are about one lakh. The enquiry about the under utilization of the resources revealed that though the farm's total land utilization was up to 50 percent till 2007, paucity of fund has halted the process of plantation of Som and Soalu trees. Moreover, absence of boundary wall around the land has cost the farm a lot. The people nearby the farm often take advantage of openness by cutting trees for their domestic use. The labour force of the institution is also far less than the required. It has a limited surveillance in the farm to stop this encroachment. The financial assistance in the last few years was so meager, that it is almost equal to none. Unavailability of seeds of moth has lessened the production capacity of the farm. The high price of the seeds and irregular supply at the time of production circle severely affected the rearers to embark upon the production process. It is to be noted that the production process right from the beginning, i.e. at the stage of hatching the Muga worm, is seasonal. Once the opportunity has been lost, one has to wait for the next circle of production, lying idle throughout the season.

In recent times, the problem of global warming has taken its toll which has hampered the production process and productivity throughout the region.

Tourists who comes Sualkuchi to know about the silk production and its culture also visit Muga farm (Sualkuchi VGR) as it is included in the itineraries of the conducted tour. Following table has shown the number of tourist visited the VGR in the last six years.

Table: Tourist Visited Sualkuchi VGR

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Tourist						
Domestic	125	200	280	300	280	220
International	25	20	50	35	30	25
Total	150	220	330	335	310	245

Source: Field Survey

In the field survey it is found that tourists visit the VGR to know about the rearing process of cocoons and also to know more about the golden thread as it is the unique production of Assam. Unfortunately the farm does not posses any scientific way to provide the necessary information to cater the need of the prospective tourists. The officials of the farm are not equipped with latest information and they are incapable of communicating with the tourists other than in the vernacular language. The farm lacks mode of telecommunications, computers, constant electric supply and any other modern facilities though the scope to introduce these facilities are very wide.

VIII. TOURISM POTENTIAL OF SUALKUCHI VGR:

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries of the world. It has become the second largest economic activity in international trade. In India also, the sector has recorded tremendous growth. Assam is also not far behind the national trend. Every year, the flow of tourists into the state has been increasing. According to the reports of Assam Tourism, the number of tourists that visited Assam in 2011 is 43.55 lakhs and out of which .16 lakh tourists are from outside India registering a growth rate of 5.51 percent for domestic tourists and 7.98 percent for foreign tourists over the period 2006-'10. In recent times the Assam Tourism Development Corporation Ltd (ATDC) has taken various schemes and projects like Assam Bikash Yozana, Employment Generation Scheme, and Rural Tourism Projects etc. for tourism development in the state. The Assam Tourism Ministry has also concentrated in the development of wildlife tourism, cultural and heritage tourism, pilgrimage tourism, eco and adventure tourism, rural tourism, tea and golf tourism, etc. Not only the tourism ministry but also various NGOs and private firms have come out and have promoted various places of Assam as tourist destinations. But what we have noticed is that though various traditional types of tourism are introduced in Assam, one vital form of tourism is left out in the planning. Farm tourism, a part of rural tourism, is yet to be introduced in the tourism scenario of Assam. Introduction of this form of tourism can create an opportunity for development of tourism and it can improve the financial condition of the sick-farm in the state.

Sualkuchi VGR, popularly known as Muga farm among local people of Sualkuchi is one such farm which can easily be converted into a farm-tourism complex without hampering its main function of Muga production. From the analysis it is obvious that the number of tourists to the farm is increasing and as the production of Muga is not possible in any other part of the country, the status of the farm will always remain unique. The Geographical Identification (GIs) status of Muga has also added another advantage to the farm to be unique in future. Recent initiation of the government to consider tourism as a part of self-employment generation scheme has brought opportunity to the local youths to come forward into the business without government hassle. In this regard Sualkuchi VGR can also be converted to a tourist spot with private – public participation process.

STRENGTH OF SUALKUCHI VGR:

- Easily accessible from Guwahati.
- Established in the vicinity of silk-production center.
- Large urbanized people in the feeder area.
- Scope to introduce other sort of tourism like river tourism, pilgrimage tourism, cultural tourism and adventure tourism.
- Prospect for expansion with wide land area.

VIII. ACTIVITIES THAT CAN BE UNDERTAKEN IN SUALKUCHI VGR:

The differentiating factor of farm tourism to rural tourism is that, farm tourism is attached to a farm that deals with farm activities. These activities are mostly related with agriculture. Sualkuchi VGR has high a potential to incorporate other activities of tourism to satisfy the taste of visitors. The *Muga* Farm can easily be transformed into a farm destination as it has the potentiality to provide all the additional facilities that are required in farm tourism. The implementation of farm tourism requires both natural and artificial elements. It is seen that the geographical attributes of the village can easily solve these problems. Situated in a hillock, river in the frontier, rocky hills in and around Sualkuchi, historical monuments, cottage based production process have added vigor to the Muga farm to attract tourists from other places. The main activities that can be incorporated for the tourist in the farm are mentioned below-

1. Night Stay:

Sualkuchi VGR has 1200 bighas of land which means the VGR possesses enough land for building accommodation centers for the prospective tourists. The management can build traditional Assamese thatched huts or can also provide tent accommodations. These thatched huts and tent accommodations will provide a natural touch to the destination.

2. Participation in Farm Activities:

Participation in the farm activities like Muga cocoon rearing can be a huge interest for the urban people. Creation of soft fiber is a very delicate process and the important fact is that the cloth-producing process is totally hand-woven (Handloom). The opportunity to see the natural process of golden thread creation and weaving manually will generate attention to the people and would help people learn this unique process. The VGR would also provide people chance to participate in the rearing works. This will attract the urban tourists to the VGR.

3. On-Farm Museum:

On-farm museum can be an immense attraction for the tourists. The museum will help to portray the whole rearing process of Muga cocoons and also the traditional way of weaving of silk in the village.

4. Oriented Tour of the Village:

Oriented tour of the silk village where the tourists get ample opportunity to see the silk-culture with traditional weaving factories would help the VGR to attract people. As the village is also rich in culture and natural beauty, these factors can be great attraction for the tourists, and Sualkuchi VGR can be an individual complete-package for the tour operator.

5. Entertainment Facility:

The farm management can introduce a concept where they can show various cultures of the Assamese society like *Bihu* Dance, *Satriya* Dance, dances of the various tribes, *Bhaona*, *Biya Naam*, etc. This culture centre within the farm will add another feather to the set-up.

6. Educational Excursion:

The management can further incorporate facilities for educational excursion for the students. Here the students will get the opportunity to know about the silk-rearing and the weaving process of the silk village. And the farm itself can be a centre of research for students of Botany, Biology, and Environmental Studies, etc.

7. Out- Door Recreation:

The farm can provide various outdoor recreations to the tourists like camping, trekking, horseback-riding etc. The farm can also provide fishing, angling and boating as the farm is situated on the bank of the mighty Brahmaputra.

8. River Tourism:

The Brahmaputra River which is in the south of the village can be explored with various river-related activities. River-rafting, angling and boating are some of the activities that can be easily included in tour itinerary. The bank of river Brahmaputra can be utilized for the purpose of beach-tourism related activities like water sports, beach volley-ball, beach-cricket, etc.

VIII. POSTIVE IMPACT OF FARM TOURISM IN SUALKUCHI VGR:

Converting the *Muga* farm into a self sufficient tourist unit will definitely affect the economy of Sualkuchi in various dimensions. The direct effect is obviously the increase of tourist inflow into the village. But indirect and long run effect can be envisaged in the following way-

1. Income generation:

With the development of farm tourism in Sualkuchi VGR, there will be a vast change in the earning capacity of the farm. The much needed fund for the growth of the farm will come from the activities of the tourists. Investing that income again in the *Muga* rearing will double the income within a short period. The idle land can be used for further plantation and it would generate more *Muga* production in future. The institution will be self-sufficient within a very short span of time and the negligible assistance from Sericulture Department would no longer be a problem for the expansion of the farm.

2. Employment generation:

Sualkuchi VGR will put a positive impact on employment scenario of the village. The project would open up new job opportunities in the farm and also outside the farm.

3. Infrastructural development:

Development and improvement of infrastructure is another important benefit. With the development of farm tourism in Sualkuchi VGR the infrastructure in and around the destination are bound to be developed. It includes development of the roads, water supply, electricity service, etc. So the whole community will be benefited from the initiative.

4. Balanced development:

Balanced development is almost certain with the development of tourism in the world. Farm tourism in Sualkuchi VGR will open up new opportunities for the local youths. It will reduce the burden of Sualkuchi silk industry to some extent and would help the cottage industry to flourish further.

5. Increase in the demand of local silk products:

With the development of farm tourism in Sualkuchi, there will be an increase in the flow of tourists to the VGR. And tourists have a tendency to collect souvenirs. If the entrepreneurs of Sualkuchi modify their products (as souvenir items) to cater the need of tourists, it will increase the earning of local people.

6. Auto marketing of industry:

Tourism development in the village can bring a new opportunity to the industry. The tourism development in the area will increase the flow of both the domestic and international tourists. When tourists come to a place, the publicity of the place automatically increases as the tourists visiting a place always tend to share their experiences with others. Hence tourism can be used as tool of auto marketing of the silk industry of Assam.

7. Change of product Pattern:

The silk industry of Sualkuchi is producing the traditional dresses with the age old design which meets the needs of the Assamese people only. The loom owners have not thought of the diversification of the products i.e. producing some other products in their looms which can be sold in the national markets as well as international markets. With the development of tourism, the tourists will come to the place and they will definitely have urge to buy silk fabrics. The tourist of a foreign country will not purchase the Assamese traditional dresses. They will seek products of their choices. This will encourage the loom owners to produce such innovative products. As a result the market of the industry will be widening.

IX. PROBLEMS:

Although Sualkuchi is very rich in natural beauty, weaving art, sericulture, historical monument, culture, etc. that bear immense potentiality for tourism development, still tourism scenario of Sualkuchi is not very encouraging. The tourist flow into Sualkuchi, despite having various advantages, is still very low. In the study we have found out following factors responsible for low inflow.

1. Lack of infrastructure:

Sualkuchi has potentiality to be a tourist hot-spot but it has not been possible till now, because of the lack of proper accommodation and restaurant facilities. The spot does not have any standard hotel or lodge for the tourist to stay. There are only a few accommodation facilities in the village with out proper restaurant facilities for tourists. The destination needs proper guides so that they can attract tourists in the future. The proper elaboration of weaving and sericulture process will definitely attract more tourists in future.

2. Lack of publicity:

The destination is not popular among the tourists because of the limited publicity. The tourist flow to Sualkuchi is low compared to the destinations like Sivsagar, Kaziranga National Park, Tezpur, Majuli, etc. Though Sualkuchi has a lot to offer to the tourists, lack of proper publicity both in the domestic and international levels has created obstacle to the growth. The Government, ATDC and the tour operators are not promoting Sualkuchi as compared to the other above mentioned destinations. Sualkuchi can be a tourist hot-spot through proper marketing and promotional activity of the government, ATDC and tour operators.

3. Lack of Govt. and ATDC Initiatives:

Although the Govt. and ATDC have already introduced Sualkuchi has a tourist spot but not much developmental work have been done so far. Only one Govt. lodge was set up in 2002 named, Gandhmow-Sualkuchi Rural Project which has only three cottages. To develop Sualkuchi as a good tourist destination the Govt. and ATDC have to play an active role in all directions.

4. Lack of public awareness:

The people of Sualkuchi are not aware that Sualkuchi can be a busy tourist destination. They are also not aware of how tourism can bring socio-economic development to the area. Public participation is very less in this sector.

5. Lack of proper utilization of resource:

Sualkuchi has not been able to utilize the resources properly. Especially the river Brahmaputra has a great prospect for river tourism like boating, rafting, beach-tourism etc. But the river Brahmaputra is not used for such purposes.

6. Lack of innovation:

The planning process of the state tourism department is very traditional. The department yet to take innovative initiation to attract tourists from outside the state though there are large scopes for non-traditional tourism in the state. One such example is Sualkuchi VGR which can be transformed into a full-fledged tourist place with little modification. The modification will be a win-win situation both for the farm and the visitors.

X. CONCLUSION:

To convert Sualkuchi 'The Manchester of East' into a popular tourist destination, the problems mentioned above have to be removed. To overcome these problems, some measures have been suggested. Proper follow up of these measures will help Sualkuchi VGR in particular and Sualkuchi village in general to develop as a well known tourist destination all over the world.

1. Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) should work for generating public awareness among the local people about the importance of Sualkuchi as tourist destination. Awareness campaign should be conducted at regular basis to make the local people aware of the tourism aspects that can bring economic as well as social prosperity to the village.

2. Proper promotion of any tourist place is very instrumental for the tourist inflow to a particular tourist spot. The State Tourism Department should promote Sualkuchi and Sualkuchi VGR as a unique tourist destination of Assam.

3. The Tourism ministry at the very outset should give importance to develop the tourism infrastructure of Sualkuchi. Restaurants, cybercafés, PCOs, health facilities, securities, ATM facilities, etc. must be made available in the spot round the clock.

4. Local educated youth of the village can form NGO's and SHG's to work for the tourism development. Guide services, opening souvenir shops are some of employment opportunities that the new generation can easily grab in the business.
5. Assam Govt. should work out a comprehensive plan solely for Sualkuchi village by considering its sericulture importance. In the plan, due attention must be given to the concept of farm tourism and thus Sualkuchi VGR would get special attention.
6. To introduce the farm- tourism concept in other places of Assam, where farm like Sualkuchi VGR exists, proper steps must be taken by the government. NGOs and SHGs can also co-operate with the Govt. in this purpose.
7. Adequate budgetary allocation must be provided to the needy farm by the Govt. for infrastructure and other promotional activities. To make the people enthusiastic, Govt. can provide cheap credit facilities to the interested parties in this regard.

The silk industry of Sualkuchi is the backbone of the economy of the area. The whole economic activities of the village revolve round the industry. 95 percent people of the village are directly or indirectly engaged in the handloom industry. In recent times though various problems have crippled the industry, unusual initiative like Sualkuchi VGR can bring a change to the village economy.

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