

DEVELOPING LINKAGE BETWEEN WILDLIFE TOURISM AND HANDICRAFT FOR LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK

DEEP JYOTI GURUNG¹

CHANDAN GOSWAMI²

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Abstract

The Kaziranga National Park is renowned for the diverse flora and fauna present in the region, many of whom are endemic to the region. Kaziranga has been a major tourist attraction since many years for wildlife tourism. Surrounding the National Park, there are villages inhabited by different communities, which are rich in their culture and tradition. Their tradition includes various methods of making handicraft products. These handicrafts are sold near the Kaziranga National Park on the roadside of Indian NH 37, souvenir shops and souvenir outlets of the resorts. The study attempts to identify the potential of handicraft market around Kaziranga National Park and to explore the possibilities of shifting the attention of tourists coming for wildlife tourism to handicrafts so that the local artisans are benefitted.

Keywords: Wildlife, handicraft, sale, tourist inflow

Introduction

Kaziranga National Park is located between Longitude 92°50' East and 93°41' East and Latitude 26°30' North and 26°50' North and is spread over Nagaon and Golaghat districts in Assam. Kaziranga National Park is renowned for the varieties of flora and fauna preserved in the park especially one-horned rhino, wild buffalo deer, tiger and elephants need special mention. Various species of migratory birds are also seen in Kaziranga National Park. This significant characteristic of Kaziranga National Park has led the park to

¹ Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Tezpur University
Email: mrdjgurung@gmail.com

² Department of Business Administration, Tezpur University, Email: chand@tezu.ernet.in

be inscribed as World Heritage Site (wildlife) by UNESCO-IUCN in the year 1985. It is also given the status of Tiger Reserve forest in December 2007. Kaziranga was first open on 1937 for visitors and since then the richness of Kaziranga National Park (KNP) has attracted tourists from all over the world. Tourism plays a very important role in the economy of the region.

It generates employment and income leading to community development. (Ige and Odularu, 2008; Aref and Redzuan, 2009) Kaziranga National Park earns huge revenue due to tourist inflow (Government of Assam). In the last ten years KNP has earned huge revenue from Rs 5.3 lakhs in the year 2002-2003 to Rs 2.06 crore in the year 2012-2013 (TOI, 2014). The local communities living adjacent to potential tourist spots can avail the economic opportunities (Goodwin, 2002). Rural areas dependent on natural, social and cultural resources can benefit from tourism (David, 2011). The stakeholders of wildlife tourism such as interpreters, taxi operators and hoteliers in KNP have reaped most of the benefits out of the tourist inflow in Kaziranga National Park. But the local artisans (only 4 per cent of the revenue) and farmers (only 7 per cent of the revenue) have failed to get any benefit out of the tourist inflow. (Hussain et al, 2012).

It clearly shows the inequality in revenue sharing by the different segments around Kaziranga National Park. The lopsided distribution of tourism benefits can hamper the tourism development of an area. (Sekhar, 2003). Panigrahi argues that ethnic communities should be encouraged to enrich their ethnic heritage and skills so as to make their tradition more attractive. (Panigrahi, 2005). The lack of locals benefitting from tourism is identified as one of the primary causes of revenue leakage (Mbaiwa, 2005).

The local artisans around Kaziranga National Park are known for their masterwork in carving wood in the form of one-horned rhinoceros, crane, tiger, elephant, deer etc. The tourists value souvenirs as a symbol of their travel experience (Literell et al, 1994) and are specially interested in handicrafts created by local craftspeople rather than produced in factory (Asplet et al, 2000). Learning a new culture is also an important motivation factor for tourists by mixing with local people and shopping for local arts and crafts. (Sirakya et al, 2003).

Objectives

- a) To identify the present scenario of handicraft market of Kaziranga National Park.

- b) To explore the possibilities of promoting handicrafts among wildlife tourists visiting KNP.
- c) To propose means to popularize handicraft segment of Kaziranga National Park for sustainability and progress.

Research Methodology

The study is based on a series of personal interview of stakeholders in handicraft segment of Kaziranga National Park. Although the study is mostly based on primary data, secondary data were collected from various journals and websites. The stakeholders were classified into four different groups:

- (i) Local artisans: A total of 20 artisans were personally interviewed for important data and cross checking the reliability and validity of data. The interview was unstructured and probe questionings were done. The interviewees were given full freedom to express their experiences and opinions related to the handicraft segment of KNP region.
- (ii) Souvenir shops of KNP region: Two out of three shopkeepers were personally interviewed, including the oldest souvenir shop established in 2004. The interview was unstructured and interviewee was allowed to explain the phenomena from seller point of view.
- (iii) Resorts with souvenir outlets: Three out of four resorts were visited for enquiry and observation. The in-charge of the souvenir outlets of the resorts and other concerned authorities were enquired about the tourist choices and the products in their outlets.
- (iv) Tourists: A total of 44 tourists were being personally interviewed regarding their views, choices and preferences about the handicrafts of Kaziranga National Park.

Handicraft of Kaziranga: The Existing Scenario

The marketing mix (McCarthy, 1964) identified for the handicraft items of Kaziranga National Park are as follows:

Product: The handicraft items are prepared from *Gmelinaarborea* locally known as *Gomariwood*. *Gmelinaarborea* has moderately hard wood which is pale yellow in color when fresh and yellowish brown after seasoning. of *Gmelinaarborea* make it ideal for making handicraft. Some artworks also use '*Camellia sinensis*' (tea plant) as an important part to complete the handicraft. The finish products come in various sizes from six inches to thirty inches. However in certain shops the artists have designed much bigger items

mostly on demand. The choicest products for the tourists are the small rhinos (six to twelve inches).

Price: The prices of the items mostly depend on the size and design of the product. The place of purchase also determines the price of the handicraft items. The souvenir shop sells the handicraft at 30per cent to 40per cent higher price compared to the local artisans. In the souvenir outlets of most of the resorts the price is raised to 200per cent of the price at the artisan's shop. Market skimming strategy is used in which the products are introduced at a high price but with time and bargaining the price lowers down. Since there is no standard pricing followed for the handicrafts, the sellers take the liberty to sell the products in a high price. The table below shows the base prices of the handicrafts followed by most of the artisans at their workshop.

Table1. The price of handicrafts based on size

Size (in inches)	Price (in INR)as on 17/11/2014
6	100
8	150
10	200
12	250-300
14	350-400
16	450-500
18	500-550
20	550-600
22	650-700
24	750-800
26	850-900
28	950-1000
30	1000-2000

Source: Primary data

In case the product is created on demand the price can rise very high depending on the size, design and working hours. The price can be as high as 35000INR for one handicraft.

Promotion: The handicrafts of Kaziranga are promoted in various ways by various stakeholders of handicraft tourism. The artisans display their products at the front of their workshop to promote their products. Souvenir shops use window display to attract customers. The resorts with souvenir outlet have mentioned about the outlet and its product in their websites. Most of the resorts are mostly promoting Kaziranga National

Park, as a destination only for wildlife tourism. The travel blogs and other tourism related websites also haven't mentioned enough about the handicrafts around the Kaziranga National Park. Some souvenir shops and artisans benefit from the word of mouth promotion of handicrafts by the tourist guides and hoteliers. Out of thirteen renowned hotels and resorts only four resorts have souvenir outlets for sale. Though most of resorts don't include handicraft as an integral part of their tourist plan, they use handicrafts for decoration which stirs interest of tourists towards handicraft of KNP region.

Place: The workshops cum shops are spread around the Kaziranga National Park from Bagori to Rajabarion either side of National highway 37 covering a distance of 34.9 km. The densities of artists are very low towards Bagori but it is very dense at Rajabari Bokakhat. Some of the artisans reap the benefits of being on the tourist. The artists whose workshop is located near the tourist tracks benefits the most from the tourists. There are three souvenir shops in Kohora. One souvenir is located near the ticket counter of Kaziranga National Park, and reaps the benefit of its location as most of the tourists do this shop. Two others are located next to each other near the gate to the ticket counter. One of this is the oldest souvenir shop of Kaziranga National Park and reaps the benefit of its relationship with the guides and hoteliers.

Other important aspects of handicraft segment of KNP are as follows:

Process: The artisans acquire the *Gmelina arborea* from nearby villages. There is no standard measure to fix the price for a tree. It follows the rule of thumb and bargaining before the trade between artisan and villager is settled. The price of tree can range from Rupees One thousand five hundred (1500 INR) to Rupees Eight thousand (8000 INR) depending on the size and quality of the wood. After giving some basic shape to the woods it is exposed to sun for a period of seven to ten days to avoid it from cracking. Then the wood passes through rigorous work of several hours (or days) depending on its size and design. Other items required to finish the product are kerosene, adhesive, sandpaper, and varnish. Application of these items further adds to the number of hours and cost required to finish the product.

Table 2. Total material cost (monthly)

Material	Average monthly required quantity	Market Price (as on 17/11/2014)	Material Cost
Varnish	10 litre	250 INR per litre	2500 INR
Kerosene	15 litre	30 INR per litre	450 INR
Sand paper	100 pieces	3INR per piece	300 INR
Adhesive	6 litre	211 INR per litre	1266 INR
TOTAL MATERIAL COST (exempting the cost of acquiring wood)			4566 INR

Source: Primary data

People: For a tree of 1500 INR minimum three laborers are required to chop it whereas for a tree of 8000 INR the need of laborers rises to seven laborers. Each labor comes at a cost of 200 INR for a day work. The artisan also has to bear the transportation cost of the woods from the villages to the workshop. Each artisan has employed some craft people (wood *mistiri*) and assistants (*jogali*).

Table3. Average wages of employees

Employee	Average daily wage per person (as on 17/11/2014)	Average wage per month (30 days)
Craft people	250 INR	7500 INR per person
Assistant	150 INR	4500 INR per person

Source: Primary data

In order to unite the artisans of KNP region certain pioneering artists have started a committee with the name '*Milijuli Hasta ShilpaSamiti*' (not registered as on 17/11/2014). The committee aims to unite and standardized the local artisans.

Customers: In contrary to the traditional thinking that tourists are the main customers of these handicrafts, the handicrafts are mostly purchased by the people of Assam and neighboring states travelling through the National Highway 37. Employees of nearby oil refineries play a significant role as regular customers of these items. According to the artisans, during tourism season (i.e., November to April) around one hundred to two hundred tourists visit their workshop. Most of the tourists come to the artisans to see their work and the process of making handicrafts with no intention of real purchase. Most of the tourists purchase small items (6 inches to 14 inches) for convenience to carry and flight. Rarely though some very interested tourists ask for shipment of some big handicrafts and pays for the handicraft as well as shipment of the product. In certain cases, dealers from Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Tezpur, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, and Guwahati approach the artisans for bulk purchase in reduced rates. However, most of the artisans do not want to sell their

products to such dealers as the rate offered by the dealers is very low and amounts to no profit. The souvenir shops and resort's souvenir shops also purchase from the local artisans at discounted rate.

Competition: There are around twenty to twenty five workshops cum shops in the radius of Kaziranga National Park. The trend of entering the market as a competitor in handicraft segment of KNP region is very simple. Most of the new entrants have been trained by former producers. After learning the work properly, the apprentice starts own workshop and strives for share in the same market. They are also actively training others who will be able to join the competition after 3 years to 5 years of learning. The market also faces competition from entities outside the KNP region. In the souvenir shops and resort's souvenir outlets handicrafts from Tripura, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Golaghat (Assam) competes with the handicrafts of the KNP region. Surprisingly most of the souvenir shops and resort's souvenir outlets have around 90per cent of handicrafts from outside the KNP region.

Major Hindrances

- I. The handicraft artisans actually incur a lot of cost of production the handicraft in comparing with the profit received.
- II. The market for handicraft items is facing competition from low cost imported items.
- III. There is no proper distribution channel to sell the products, thus the artisans are totally dependent on the passerby of NH 37 and tourist visits.
- IV. There is no support from the government so far to the local handicraft artisans.
- V. There is lack of coordination and standardization in the handicraft market which is a threat for sustainability of the local handicraft segment.
- VI. There is a no linkage between wildlife tourism and handicraft in KNP region.
- VII. The stakeholders of wildlife tourism in KNP region are not playing satisfactory role in supporting local handicraft segment of the region.
- VIII. The locations of local artisan's workshops cum shops are far from the place of tourist stay and interest.
- IX. The new entrants confesses that they entered the market knowing that there is not much scope in this market, just because this was the skill they had learned from many years.

- X. The 'Milijuli Hasta Shilpa Samiti' has failed to take any significant steps for the benefit of the handicraft artisans. The committee was formed to unite the artisans of KNP, to create a common market and to set up machinery for artwork with the help of government. Not all the artisans are members of the committee. The committee collects 100 INR per artisan every month and deposits it in a bank for emergency purpose. There are total 80 artisans as members in this committee and they have the right to claim for loan from the committee. But many artisans show less or no faith on the committee.
- XI. The souvenir shops and souvenir outlets at various resorts are actually promoting handicrafts of other regions in comparison to the handicrafts of KNP region.
- XII. The tourists are interested to purchase handicraft items especially one-horned rhinoceros.
- XIII. Infinity resort of Kaziranga has a souvenir outlet that allows artisans to display their products and earn directly from the tourists. However, this is still in experiment phase.
- XIV. The Corbett foundation, the Axis foundation and some agencies are promoting local artisans but they are more concerned about the handloom segment. Here again the support and benefits are unfairly distributed among the artisans.

Propositions

- a) Tourism can contribute highly to the income and standard of living of the tourist place (Dyer et al, 2007). Especially in the areas where only few alternative sources of economic development are there (Andriotis and Vaughan, 2004). Thus the tourism inflow can richly benefit the lifestyle of handicraft artisans in KNP region.
- b) The government organizations, NGO's and other agencies can contribute into the development of new potential markets for handicrafts. The word market is not only limited to physical market but also electronic marketing can be done through internet. For example: websites like <http://www.handicrafts.co.in/>, <http://www.fabfurnish.com/home-decor/handicrafts/>, <http://www.craftshopsindia.com/> etc. have provisions for online purchase of handicrafts. Tourists are interested in shopping local arts and crafts (Srikaya et al, 2003) and handicrafts has been an important factor in attracting tourists in

domestic, regional and international level. (Yavari, 2009). Thus providing a proper platform for the tourists to purchase the handicraft items can be very beneficial.

- c) The stakeholders of tourism in Kaziranga National park need to consider the benefit of local artisans because successful tourism development is very much dependent on the support of local people from all aspects. (Sharma & Dyer, 2009). The local people supports tourism in a region only if they realize that there is balance in tourism benefits for all. (Ratz, 2010; Gurssoy et al, 2009). Therefore the KNP tourism programs should be developed keeping in view the local artisans. As the tourism programs developed locally and based on local areas are more effective. (Bowman, 2011)
- d) The handicraft artisans can offer some benefits to the tourist guides, hoteliers and jeep service providers to motivate them for bringing tourists to their workshop. The benefits offered should be able to motivate the referees as motivation is a driving force behind all behaviors. (Fodness, 1994; Sirakaya et al, 2003). In particular, tourist's decisions are highly influenced by the tour guides. (Mohamadkhani, 2008).
- e) A proper distribution channel needs to be set up for promotion and sale of handicrafts of KNP region. A proper distribution channel increases sales and profit for the producer and minimizes costs. The type of distribution channel required will be determined by the customer (Keegan, 2002). So a further study is required to establish an efficient distribution channel for the handicrafts of KNP region.
- f) The importance of slogan is well studied in the field of marketing. (Kohli and Leuthesser and Suri, 2007; Gordon and Pretorius, 2006; James and Gregory, 2004). Slogans are the most important part of branding. (Byrt, 2003). Thus, in KNP region certain slogans can be popularized to influence the tourists towards the purchase of handicrafts of KNP region. Slogans like "Take a rhino home" can be very useful in creating a unique brand identity for the handicrafts of Kaziranga National Park. (Kohli and Leuthesser and Suri, 2007).

Conclusion

The handicraft segment of Kaziranga National Park needs support and resources for its sustainability. All the stakeholders of KNP should play an important role to promote the beautiful skills. Government and other agencies should provide all the necessary support to

the handicraft artisans. With proper planning handicraft tourism can flourish together with wildlife tourism in KNP region.

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