

## Research Paper

## A STUDY OF TOURISM POTENTIALITIES AND PROBLEMS IN SAGAR ISLAND OF WEST BENGAL

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### ABSTRACT

*Tourism, the fastest growing industry of the world can provide an ample scope for employing a large number of people when other sources of employment are scarce. Being enriched with several natural and cultural resources, Sagar Island of West Bengal can establish itself as an attractive tourist destination. The present study is an attempt to analyse the tourism potentialities along with the problems of the study area being based on the data derived from both primary and secondary sources.*

**Key words:** Tourism, tourist destination, Sagar Island

### INTRODUCTION

Traditional Indian cultural heritage gave importance to visit various TIRTHA or pilgrim centre to earn virtue. Gangasagar is that famous pilgrim centre where people go to earn virtue and for scenic attraction (Dasgupta, et. al., 2006). The famous Bengali saying 'Sab tirtha bar bar Gangasagar ekbar' amply signifies the importance of the place. Sagar Island is well known for its 'Gangasagar mela' which is held at the last day of the month POUSA i.e. POUSA SANKRANTI. It falls in the middle of the month of January. By the attraction of this religious ceremony Hindu pilgrims visit the place in large numbers and this fair established itself as the second largest gathering of pilgrims in India after the famous KUMBHA MELA. Although the general flow of tourists are being continued throughout the year for viewing the 'Kapilmuni Ashram' and to enjoy natural beauty of that place.

### ABOUT THE STUDY AREA

Sagar Island is located in the south of Sundarban of South 24 Parganas district under Diamond Harbour Sub-division. It is located between 21° 37' to 21° 57' north latitude and 88° 2' to 88° 11' east longitude with an approximate area of 213.83 sq. km. The island is surrounded by the Muriganga River in the north and east, Hooghly River is flowing in the west and the southern limit is demarcated by Bay of Bengal. With an inhabited village of 44 the total population is 154202 at Sagar.

### LEGENDARY HISTORY

According to puranic record, Kapil - the great sage selected this island for his salvation in the VEDIC era. But the name of the island is derived from a king named Sagar who ruled in Ayodhya. Sagar planned an ASWAMEDHA YAJNA. The Horse of the yajna was stolen by Indra. In search of this horse sixty thousand sons of Sagar came to the site where Kapil meditated. Disturbed Kapil was enraged. All the sons of Sagar then melted in the fire. As his sons did not come back, Sagar called his grand children Angshuman to find them out. Angshuman reached this island and found the ashes of his uncles are spread all over the Ashram. Under such circumstances he touched the feet of Kapil and asked to take back the Horse of yajna along with the permission for funeral of his uncles. Kapil advised to bring Ganga in this

island. He said if the ashes of these sixty thousand sons of Sagar are washed by Ganga water then they will be free from all sines. After the death of Sagar, Angshuman and after Angshuman Dilip planned to bring Ganga but failed. It was Bhagirath who inherited the throne was successful in this mission and Ganga water came to this island to wash the remains of the son's of Sagar.

According to Ptolemy this was the site of a port belong to Gangaridhi people. During the reclamation of the land objects of Archaeological interest were discovered inside the jungle and also under the earth. It is assumed that this land was the part of main land. It is due to subsidence of land, it becomes island and the path through which people are now approaching to Sagar by vessels was once land area with a civilization. This civilization exists at the time of Morya and the Guptas. In the history of Bengal we found a powerful king named Pratapaditya. He had its naval base at Sagar, at that time Sagarwip was known as 'Chandican Island'.

Under the British rule in the year 1819 the clearance of jungle was started and 500 families from Arakan settled in the land. In the year 1822 the construction of road started and the first road constructed from Kalagachi to Gangasagar. Telegraph line was installed in the year 1831. Every year the Govt. had to organise Sagar mela thus adding to minute developments. It was after the independence the Govt. took the Mela very seriously and centering the annual events, various developments in this island took place.

### OBJECTIVES

- To evaluate the tourism potentialities in Sagar.
- To study the existing tourist facilities along with the satisfaction level of the visitors.
- To identify the problems associated with tourism in the study area.
- To evaluate the scope of developing the tourism at Sagar.

### METHODOLOGY

The entire study is based upon the data derived from both primary and secondary sources. Due importance has been given upon field study. Primary data has been collected using pre- prepared questionnaire from 100 visitors. In addition selective personal interview has also taken during field survey. Secondary data has been procured from Block

Please cite this Article as : Suman Kumar Kundu , A STUDY OF TOURISM POTENTIALITIES AND PROBLEMS IN SAGAR ISLAND OF WEST BENGAL : Golden Research Thoughts (Feb ; 2012)

Development Office of Sagar, Govt. websites, journals and reports. The statistical analysis has been performed as descriptive.

#### MAJOR TOURIST ATTRACTION IN SAGAR

The main attraction of Sagar is to visit 'Gangasagar mela' during the month of January. In addition, tourists came from various other states with an interest to take holy bath in Gangasagar and to offer puja to the saint- Kapil. There are so many other spots, viz. Sagar light house, solar plant, wind mill, Casuarina forest, deer park and sand dunes covered with Ipomoea biloba attract the local as well as outsider throughout the year.

#### IDENTIFICATION OF TOURISM POTENTIAL

For the identification of tourism potential top eight pilgrimage spots as mentioned in the official website of West Bengal Tourism Department have been taken. A comparative study of these spots has been made from the composite indexes which are based upon several parameters, viz. religious attraction, accessibility, fooding & lodging, souvenir products, administrative facilities etc. The general hypothesis is that higher values of composite index, higher will the tourist potential and vice-versa. The analysis may vary from person to person based on individual's preference, interest and choice.

Table-1: Composite Index of Tourism potential of selected religious spots in West Bengal

Tourist spots	Religious attraction	Accessibility	Fooding and lodging	Souvenir products	Administrative facilities	Composite index
Gangasagar	4	3	1	2	2	12
Tarapith	3	3	4	2	1	13
Furara sharif	1	1	3	1	1	07
Kalighat	2	2	2	1	1	08
Dakshineswar	2	3	2	1	1	09
Tarakeshwar	2	2	1	1	1	07
Mayapur/Nabadwip	3	2	2	2	1	10
Belurmath	2	2	2	1	1	08

Source: Computed by author

Table-1 depicts a comparative picture of tourism potentialities through different value of composite indexes in some selected religious spots in West Bengal. The study area (Gangasagar) shows the second highest value (12) of composite index, next after Tarapith (13) which is situated in Birbhum district and is in better position than Gangasagar in providing fooding and lodging facilities to visitors. Though there is additional scope for introducing eco-tourism with existing natural sites in Sagar which keeps it in better position than other pilgrimage sites.

#### TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE ANALYSIS

##### ACCOMMODATION SECTOR:

Accommodation available at Gangasagar may be divided into three categories;

- Accommodation under the control of religious institution
- Accommodation under welfare trust and charitable societies
- Direct Govt. accommodation.

Altogether Gangasagar can accommodate 2162 persons in the present accommodation infrastructure of which only 75% is private accommodation and rest is Govt. accommodation. However this is not the picture in real scene because from the stand point of no. of beds only 15% is under Govt. departments and the rest under private establishments operating in the area. The study regarding satisfaction level of visitors shows that 80% availing these accommodations is found very unsatisfied.

##### TRANSPORTATION SECTOR:

Sagar is approached by water ways. There is one very well constructed jetty for the Govt. vessel but there are other small jetties, some are illegal in this island. From Kachuberia, the distance of Gangasagar by road is 30 km. This is well maintained by pakka road. But most of the roads

arising from it in the direction of East and West are kaccha road and brick roads. Public vehicles are available all the year round. In addition there are some private cars for hire. At the time of Gangasagar mela, some vehicles are also hired from outside to met the demand of tourists by the local authority. Field study reveals that 76% visitors are not satisfied with present transportation facilities.

##### SOUVENIR PRODUCTS:

The main purpose for visiting Gangasagar is to earn virtue by means of offering puja to the saint- Kapil. Hence there is a huge demand for offering materials at Sagar. Some of the visitors are also interested about sankh and shell products, pearls, utensils (Brass) etc. These products mainly brought from Orissa, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata.

##### PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH TOURISM

- Communication problem is at the top priority given by visitors at Sagar. They have to wait for a long time at the launch ghat for getting vessels to reach Kachuberia after crossing Muriganga River. Private vehicle charges are so high that a middle class tourist cannot afford it.
- Due to topographical barrier, there is no electric supply line connecting Sagar from mainland. A generator situated at Rudranagar has given some trace of light for a few hours in the evening. An attempt has also taken to generate alternative energy from wind and solar power. But they are not very much frequent in number and the total amount of energy generated from it is very small in comparing with the total demand.
- The tourists found it hard to get safe and hygienic drinking water. There is not the sufficient number of tube well established to meet the demand of tourists as well as local people.
- During the time of Gangasagar mela, this area is badly affected by severe pollution. The local authorities take much time in restoring the entire environmental condition which creates bad impression upon the tourists about the study area.
- The area is far behind in providing the basic needs of tourist like health services, internet and telephone facilities etc.

##### TOURIST RESPONSE ON DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

During the field survey, the visitors were given various proposals to identify the best suited for the development of tourism at Sagar.

Table-2: Tourist response on development proposals

Infrastructural development		Improvement of recreational facilities	
Suggestions	No. of respondent	Suggestions	No. of respondent
Accommodation facilities	75	Afforestation in sea-shore	52
Development of transport	51	Establishment of new tourist spots	46
Introduction of package tour	30	Introduction of sports tourism	67
Electricity and drinking water facilities	72		

Source- Field Survey, December 2010

Most of the tourists suggest developing the accommodation, electricity and drinking water facilities immediately (Table-1). They also propose for govt. initiatives to ensure transportation facilities along with the introduction of package tour covering the Sagar Island. Sagar is predominantly a rural area devoid of any recreation facilities. The visitors gave priority on improvement of recreational facilities and according to them several measures including afforestation along sea-shore to make the environment soothing, introduction of sports tourism and exploring of new tourist spots can attract tourists.

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**CONCLUSION**

Sagar is the most populated island of the Hooghly estuary. Over the last few decades the island has experienced a land loss of 12 sq. km. In this period more than 5 thousand people become landless as well as jobless and are treated as environmental refugee. A much more attention is required in rehabilitating these people along with job securities. In spite of being predominant agricultural area there is an immense scope for developing the tourism which can provide much more employment opportunities for the rural poor people. Already several initiative measures like electrification, improvement of accommodation and transport facilities have been adopted to promote sustainable tourism in Sagar but the rate of progress are quite satisfactory. The survey also covers the local people in order to understand the host-guest relationship. It is found that a slight irritation has already developed about the visitors. If necessary steps are not taken immediately to cop the problems associated with tourism at Sagar and to develop its infrastructure, tourism will not become a beneficial activity for the people of the study area.

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