

Geography of EcoTourism in Gaya City

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ABSTRACT

The word "TOUR" has its origin from the Latin term; TORNUS which means lathe or wheel. The full turn of the wheel or lathe forms a circle or a circuit. Just like this, tour involves the process of a journey in which one returns to the starting point. The word 'tour', it is noted, was first used to refer a journey in which one travels and visits a number of places in a circuit. A tourist leaves home to get away from routine grind but the end of all is that he is only eager to go back to his sweet home.

Keywords :- Tour, Tornus, Journey, Circuit, Tourist.

Introduction :

Tourism, today is one of the world fastest growing industries. It earns over \$ 3.5 trillion worldwide, generated by over 500 million international travelers. Even though the country has vast potential to this sector, India's share continues to be 0.38% (1998) and the receipts 0.51% of the world receipt.

Tourism is an industry which has a social phenomenon with economic consequences. It has a number of social and economic benefits. Tourism has now become the largest industry in the world. The vastness of its market, its unpredictability, the diversity of the product itself and about all the financial and sociological rewards to be gained, have made this industry one of the competitive markets in the world. Both in the sphere of national integration, tourism remain a very positive and major force.

The greatest advantage of tourism is that it is a "smokeless" industry, one that, does not threaten the quality of life in the severe ways that

industrialization can. It earns foreign exchanges without exporting national resources. The expansion of tourism has many ramifications which are of concern to the geographer, migration of people, changes in transport, increased accessibility, changes in land use, urban development, cultural diffusion etc.

Gaya City (M. Cor, 3,38,197,2001) situated at 24° 47' N and 85° 00' E is a place of pilgrimage of international importance is sacred both to the Hindus and the Buddhists. Gaya, like Varanasi, is one of the most ancient living cities of the world and has been enjoying a prime place in the cultural history of India. Located on the bank of river Phalgu, it is a city of seven hills endowed with winsome landscape.

Gaya is the 2nd largest city in the state of Bihar and is an important junction on the Grand Chord section of the Eastern Railway. It is connected with the historical Grand Trunk Road, the National Highway No.2, by two roads 28

Kms. Dobhi and 32 Kms. Long Sherghati modern roads.

Physiographically it denotes a transition between the Bihar Plain and the Chotanagpur Plateau (presently Jharkhand State). Culturally too, it has a well-marked transitional location between the Aryan Magadh and the non-Aryan tribal' Jharkhand of Jharkhand state. Though Gaya is a historical cultural centre, it has immense development and prospects of the Eco Tourism.

Eco-tourism :- Eco-tourism is based on natural environment i.e. rivers, ponds, hills and hillocks, parks, woodland, caves, spa-centres etc. Eco-tourism in simple words means management of tourism and conservation of nature in a way so as to maintain a fine balance between the requirements of tourism and ecology on the one hand and the needs of local communities for jobs new skills, income generating employment and better status for women one the other. In recent years, efforts are being made to promote "Eco-tourism".

River Phalgu And Ghats :- The united streams of the Nilajan (Buddhist Niranjana or Niranjana) and the Mohane, 3 Kilometers north Bodh Gaya, was known as Phalgutirtha and formed the face or front of Gayasura (Gayasurmukha). Being the river of Gaya it has been regarded more sacred than even the Ganga. It is the first VED (holy site) visited by the lakhs of Gaya pilgrims and here he makes his first offerings for the emancipation of the souls of their ancestors. According to the Gaya Mahatmya (eulogium), the Phalgu is the embodiment of Lord Vishnu himself. One tradition states that it formerly flowed with milk and another states that Sita offered PINDA (ball of rice flour) on the

bank of Dasarath, the father of Ram.

The term "Plmlgu" means, the hidden fruit (PHALGU), Water, the fruit of the river is hidden beneath the sand. The river dries up soon after the cessation of the rain. One finds, water in the dry-bed of the stream by digging a ditch only a few feet deep.

High bank GHATS are found on left side of river Phalgu "the Phalgu here (old Gaya) impinges on a high rocky bank on the steep side of which are many GHATS leading down to the river bed, while above high water is the Vishnupada temple with many minor shrines and the houses of the Gayawals. Main GHATS are Vishnupad, Sitala, Babhni, Gayatri, Dev and Jihwalol GHAT. These GHATS present a very panoramic view from opposite (eastern) side or from the newly built road-bridge South of the Vishnupad Temple across the river.

Ponds (Sacred And Secular) :- Whiles observing the land use map of Gaya, one may observe four big tanks (s) Dighi Tank (or Rabindra Sarobar), (b) Ramsagar Tank (c) Bisar Tank and (d) Baitarni. These are occasionally called SAGARS. But the area and number of such tanks have decreased during the last seventy years. The area where at present is Azad (former Vitik) Park, was one of the several tanks, (during the early decades of 20th Century, it was known as BHUTHA TALAB) but now due to congestion of the area, rising demand for settlement, the depression was leveled by the offals and it has been transformed into a beautiful park. In the same way Katokar pond was filled up in the seventies and turned into whole sale market centre of grains. Again during the pre-independence times, Rabindra Sarobar was

extended upto the present Commissioners Office. Sacred tanks are varied and are distributed mainly in Sacred (ANDAR) Gaya. These area:-

(I) Uttarmanas (Or North Manas Or Sitla Tank) : It is situated in the northernmost part of Gayapuri the old city of Gaya. It has stairs on all sides and is adjacent South to be Pitameshwar Temple.

(Ii) Dakkhinmanas (South Manas) :

It is about 175 metres north-west of the Vishnupad Temple. This is a small tank sunk very deep, surrounded by buildings, and is called "Surya Kunda" (or tank of the Sun). There is a temple of Sun-god on the Western side of this Kund. During CHHATH (Sun Worship) great crowd gather here to venerable to the setting Sun as first ARAG (worship).

(iii) Vaitarni : Vaitarni is a holy tank, situated at a small distance from the foot of the Bhasmakuta, a small hill in the neighborhood of the Vishnupad Temple.

(iv) Sita-kund : On the right bank of the river Phalgu, just in front of the Vishnupad Temple is a Kund known as "SITAKUND" which is situated at the foot of the Nagkuta Hill (present Sitaa PAHAR). Four or five stairs from the foot of the hill, there is a small temple displaying goddess Janki offering PINDA to her father-in-law, Dasaratha who is receiving PINDA by extending his hand.

(V) Ramsagar : It is located about half kilometer north-west of Mundapristha (the Vishnupad Temple). On the eastern side there is a beautiful bathing ghat where the pilgrims shave their heads, bathe and offer PINDA during the "PITRIPAKSHA".

(Vi) Ramgaya Kund : Adjoining east of the Ramashila hill is constructed a tank lined with masonry, which often receives the water of the river Phalgu when it rises.

(Vii) Rukmini Kund : It is about two kilometers South-west of the Vishnupad temple and is close to the AKSHAVAT VEDI (undying banyan holy site). Ladies bathe in this tank and leave their garments for the sake of issue.

(Viii) Barahma-sarobar : About 230 metres from the Akshayat is located a small tank known as "BRAHMA-SAROBAR". It is believed that this tank is formed by Brahma Secular Rabindra Sanobar is in front of the Commissioner's newly build office-building. Bishar Tank is about 150 metres east of Gandhi Maidan.

The actual geographical causes for the existence of these water bodies is that the city of Gaya being the hottest place of India and in summer it becomes difficult to tolerate the baking heat of the Sun. To ameliorate the Summer heat, the Gayaites were in favour of at constructing a number of tanks or SAGARS as water breeze is are soothing than the land-breeze.

In former days, during the early decades of the 20th century, a number of smaller rectangular water-bodies were laid along several road particularly in the newly settle parts of SAHEBGANJ (new Gaya) to quench the thirst of the animals as well as for the cooling effects to the residents. These now-a-days are filled up and are obliterated.

Vegetation and Parks

AKSHAVAT (the undying banyan trees of immortal fame) : This sacred trees is located at 1.6 Kms. To the South-West of the Vishnupad Temple and is just under the Brahmayoni Hill.

This tree is of paramount importance to Hindu Pilgrims in point of antiquity and sanctity. It is believed that the was planted by Brahma. The Buddhist believe that Gautam passed six years under its shade. According to the mythological this Banyan. Tree has been made undying by Goddess Sita for its honesty and is existing from TRETAYUGA in its original form. The pilgrims make their offerins to the Gaya was (Priets of Gaya Sraddha) under this tree and conclude their Pilgrimage.

A number of parks like Azad, Jai Prakash Park, in the western side of Ramsagar Tank, park south west in the vicinity of the Vishnupad Temple, Collectorates and Commissioners office parks are scattered in the city giving beautiful secenery. Besides a large open space in the middle of the township known as Gandhi Maidan present a charming effect on the tourists. It has a Gandhi Mandap as well as sporisgallery.

Hills And Rock Exposers : According to Fa-Hien, "five hills form a girdle like the walls of a town". In the midst of alluvial ocean are dotted here and there islets of Archaean rocks of small hills ranges which are the outcrops of the Chotanagpur Plateau. The view from the Brahmayoni Hill at Gaya presents a striking picture of a low land country dotted with hills. On a clear sky day in the rains one could see the rugged ravines end rocks overlooking Gaya to a country green with crops and groves of palm trees, with hills rising on all sides farm the level plain. The town of Gaya has a ring of hills round her, the Ramshila Hills (715 feet) on the north, Katari Hill (454 feet) on the west and Brahmayoni Hill (793 feet) in the South. Besides are Abgila Hill (more than half cut for stone chips) and Sita Hill, Opposite the Vishnupad Temple in

the east, Murli Hill in the north west within the town. Again, the Vishnupad Temple is situated on a high rocky land supposed to be the extension of the Brahmayoni Hill, which once continued upto Sita Pahar and later cut by the currents of river Phalgu. These hills are corwned with temples like temple of Brahma on Brahmayoni, Shiva Temple on Ramshila, Krishna, Temple on Murli Hill and a dilapidated temple on the Aila Hill. Top of the Ramshila can be approached by stairs. A beautiful temple of goddess Mangalagauri has been laid in the eastern side of the Brahmayoni Hill.

Rock Exposures : Two Rock exposures are found in the bed of river Phalgu bellow the railway bridge. This appear to be the easterly extension of the Ramshila Hill. It has been depply cut and brokered by the river Phalgu when it is in spate.

Conclusion :

These sites of Eco-tourism should be provided with utmost infrastructural facilities like light, water supply, cleanliness, easy transport, toilet, tourist-literature and above all better law and order situations. If these are developed, they shall go a long way in economic betterment of the area on the one hand and developing the ecology on the other hand.

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