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# Reviving Heritage: Exploring The Matak Kingdom of Bengmara Its Ancient Ponds and The Potential for Tourism and Entrepreneurship Development

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### ARTICLE INFO

### **ABSTRACT**

Cultural and heritage tourism serves as a significant driver of economic development by attracting visitors from outside regions. In recent years, North-East India has witnessed remarkable growth in its tourism sector, with heritage tourism playing a key role in contributing to the region's and the nation's economic progress. This form of tourism emphasizes engaging with cultural settings, such as historic landscapes, visual and performing arts, unique ways of life, values, customs, and traditional events. The city of Bengmara was built in the middle of the present-day Tinsukia by King Sarbananda Singha. Bengmara was the capital of the Mattak Kingdom. Sarbananda Singha became king and initially established his capital at Rongagarh, about ten

Sarbananda Singha. Bengmara was the capital of the Mattak Kingdom. Sarbananda Singha became king and initially established his capital at Rongagarh, about ten kilometers north of present-day Tinsukia, in the year 1788. Later, in 1791, he shifted the capital to Bengmora, which is the present-day Tinsukia. Several tanks were dug in the days of Sarbananda Singha viz. Chauldhuwa Pukhuri, Kadamonipukhuri, Da DharuaPukhuri, MahdhuwaPukhuri, Bator Pukhuri, LogoniPukhuri, Na-Pukhuri, Devi Pukhuri, KumbhiPukhuri, and RupahiPukhuri. All these historical ponds still exist in the present city Tinsukia. Tinsukia has a lot of potential for tourism, including its natural beauty, cultural heritage and its historical importance.

**Keywords:** Cultural Tourism, heritage, historical importance, Matak, poverty.

The proposed study will be carried out with the following objectives:

- 1. To examine the key prospects and challenges of tourism in present-day Tinsukia town, with a focus on the historical monuments of the Matak Kingdom.
- 2. To explore various strategies for promoting tourism in the region, based on the analysis of secondary data.
- 3. To provide relevant and practical recommendations for the development of tourism in the area.
- 4. **Methodology of the Study:**The methodology of the study is based on both primary and secondary data. The area of the research work is the Tinsukia town of Assam. The primary data collection is based on stratified judgmental sampling method.

#### **Introduction:**

The city of Bengmara was built in the middle of the present-day Tinsukia by King Sarbananda Singha. Bengmara was the capital of the Mattak Kingdom. Sarbananda Singha became king and initially established his capital at Rongagarh, about ten kilometers north of present-day Tinsukia, in the year 1788. Later, in 1791, he shifted the capital to Bengmara, which is the present-day Tinsukia. Several tanks were dug in the days of Sarbananda Singha viz. Chauldhuwa Pukhuri, Kadamoni pukhuri, Da Dharua Pukhuri, Mahdhuwa Pukhuri, Bator Pukhuri, LogoniPukhuri, Na-Pukhuri, Devi Pukhuri, Kumbhi Pukhuri, and Rupahi Pukhuri. All these historical ponds still exist in the present city Tinsukia. Tinsukia has a lot of potential for tourism, including its natural beauty, cultural heritage and its historical importance.

Cultural and heritage tourism refers to travel that is centeredon experiencing the history, traditions, art and way of life of a particular place or people. It involves visiting sites and events that represent the cultural identity and historical significance of a destination. Heritage tourism focuses on centers on historical and ancestral elements of a place. It includes visit to historical monuments, heritage buildings, ancient ruins, museums etc. The goal is to learn about and appreciate the legacy and identify of different communities and civilizations. Heritage tourism not only support cultural preservation but also contributes to local economies.

Heritage tourism helps protect and maintain historical sites, traditions, and local customs by generating interest and funding for conservation. It boosts to local economies through job creation, small business growth and increased spending on accommodations, food and local crafts.

Heritage tourism promotes understanding of different cultures, histories and identities, encouraging respect and global awareness. It also encourages local communities to take pride in their heritage and actively participate in its preservation and promotion.

Heritage tourism supports sustainable development by balancing economic growth with cultural and environmental conservation.

## **Objectives of the Studies:**

The proposed study shall be conducted with the following objectives:—

- 1. The present paper has been an attempt to highlight the main prospects and problems of tourism in the present Tinsukia town through historical Monuments of Matak Kingdom.
- 2. The present paper has been an attempt to discuss various approaches that could uplift the same on the basis of some secondary data.
- 3. To make necessary suggestions.

## Methodology of the study:

The methodology of the study is based on both primary and secondary data. The area of the research work is the Tinsukia town of Assam. The primary data collection is based on stratified judgmental sampling method. I have collected the secondary data from the books published by non-government organisations of Matak Community and other relevant data has been collected from policy papers as well as research papers published in various journals. All collected data has been analyzed.

#### **Review of Literature**

The review of literature is very important for an investigator to study the work done earlier in the related field to conduct a successful study for any worthwhile study in any field of knowledge of investigation to find out the observation of previous studies which is help for an investigator and familiarizes him with the studies conducted before, so that a clear prospective of his own problem might emerge. A careful review of the research Articles, Journals, book etc. are the sources of investigated one of the most important steps for the investigation of any field.

The preliminary survey of previous studies literature, discussion and experience re-lated to the problems under investigation may accomplish a number of purposes. The research for related material is a time consuming but fruit full phase of any research programme.

### Its Specific Purpose is:-

The review of related literature brings the researcher up to date information of what others have done and thus to state the objectives clearly and concisely. The research can avoid unintentional duplications of well established findings it is of no use to replicate a study when the stability and validity of its results have bum clearly established. The review of related literature gives the researcher an understanding of the research methodology which refers to the ways the study is to be conducted. It helps the researcher to know about the previous studies.

# Brief reviews of the available researches are given below:

Entrepreneurship started catching up in 1980 just as professionalism in management caught up during 1970s. However, confusion still prevails as to what exactly we mean the term entrepreneur.

There is no generally accepted definition or model of what the entrepreneur is or dose. Much of literature on entrepreneur is fragmented and highly controversial.

The French economist Cantillon, the first to introduce the term entrepreneur, defined him as an agent who purchased the means of production for combination into marketable products. Furthermore, at the moment of the factor purchases, the entrepreneur was unaware of the eventual price, which he would receive for his product. Entrepreneurs perform a vital function in economic development. They have been referred to as the human agents need to mobilize capital, to explore natural resources, to create markets and carry on trade. It will be said that the entrepreneurial input spells the difference between prosperity and poverty among nations (1)

Adam smith, father of political economy define entrepreneur was a propriety capitalist a supplies of capital and sometimes working as manager, intervening between labour and consumer. He also pointed entrepreneur as employer, master, and undertaker but more famously identified him with capitalist. (2) Peter Kilby has summarized in his study as follows:

The array of all possible entrepreneurial roles encompasses the perception of economic opportunity, technical and organizational innovations, gaining command over scarce resources, taking responsibilities for the internal management of the firm in all its aspects.

To obtain adequate financing, to adopt techniques and organization, to maximize factor productivities and minimize unit cost, to improved substitutes for non-available skills and materials-these takes on the

production side will more often than not represent the critical entrepreneurial function in the modernizing economy of the twentieth century.(3)

Dutta (1997) in his study on, "Women entrepreneurs in Assam, problems and the role of the promoting organizations" has highlighted that the state adopted model developed by NISIET for promotion and development of entrepreneurship among women. In Assam women faced large number of problems some of which are inherent and some are technical in nature. People coming from other states have been dominated in business. Attitude of financial institutions to provide financial assistance has been inadequate. Middle men are dominating in marketing of the products produce by women entrepreneurs to develop entrepreneurship among women and manage business on scientific lines, there is need to provide training to women. (4)

Suri and Surpuria (1983) made a study of the stress on women entrepreneurs, using data from a sample of 40 entrepreneurs with an experience of two years or more in Ahmadabad city. The finding showed that the married migrant women entrepreneurs coming from nuclear families experienced a greater role of stress than the unmarried local entrepreneurs from joint families.<sup>(5)</sup>

Prasad and Rao (1997) have analyzed the "Socio Economic Background of Women Entrepreneurs- A case study of Andhra Pradesh". The author draws the inference that first generation entrepreneurs should go for non-technical industries. Workshops and Refreshers courses should conducted by various institutions to overcome different types of problems faced by women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs should go for joint ventures to run industry on scientific lines. <sup>(6)</sup>

Choudary (1980) in his study has examined successful characteristics of rural entrepreneurship by taking sample of 73 units drawn from Wanaparthy Taluk in Mehboobnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. The analysis clearly highlighted that rural youth need proper education and training facilities along with conducive environment and better report and communication with government and other agencies meant for entrepreneurship development.<sup>(7)</sup>

Kumar in his study in 2006 examined the labour related problem among women entrepreneurs in Northern India. In his study he revels that women entrepreneurs face the problem of labour absenteeism and labour turnover. Women entrepreneurs' should manage their enterprises in a scientific manner. Worker should be trained as per requirements of business. Progressive wage structure and better leadership style can act as effective tools to sort out these problems. These techniques will also solve the problem of negative attitude of the labour.<sup>(8)</sup>

David Ricardo a contemporary of JB Say supported Smith opinion that industrial manufacture and agriculture farmer synonymously as entrepreneurs through his book "The Principals of Political Economy Taxation." According to him the farmer and the manufacture can no more live without profit than the labour without wages. So, there should be a prime motive of every entrepreneur to facilitate capital formulation and economic development. (9)

According to professor Fellner in his study mentioned that the invention or discovery of the entrepreneur relates in its pure form exclusively to how other people will react to specific market opportunities and incentives in circumstances' that are new in some essential respects. The circumstances may be new either in either in the sense that new incentives are created foe the same market participants or in the sense that the types of market participants on whom the same incentives are tried are different from those of the past, or they may be new in both sense. (10)

According to Paul H. Wilken in his study points out that managers and entrepreneurs perform different functions:

Entrepreneurship involves combining to initiate change in production where (management) involves combining to produce. Management therefore refers to the on-going co-ordination of the production process, which can be visualized as a continual combining of the factors of production. But entrepreneurship is a discontinuous phenomenon, appearing to initiate change in the production process and then disappearing until it re appears it initiates another change. (11)

However each year, hundreds of thousands of new business are formed to provide the products resulting from new technology, to sell improved products ("the better mousetrap"), and to provide new and improved services. Thus, the natural environment of entrepreneurs is small business. They play a smaller role in large organizations. However, Moses Shapiro warns:

The internal "empire builders" and "office politicians" are often entrepreneurs who can find no useful outlet for their drivers and minds and so turn to a perverted kind of entrepreneurship that has no socially or economically productive result. Such people are ultimately, destructive of all corporate enterprise, through rarely fatally.

Decision making and other forms of authority he vested in himself and himself alone, and he keeps his hands on all phases of the business. He is essentially a generalist, understanding production, moving deftly in financing, creative in marketing, quickly grasping the significance of data, and highly intuitive. He enjoys risks, not because he needs danger in his life, but because in risks he can prove his value. (12)

Hunter (1997) highlighted that sustainable tourism as a socially established set of goals, which is always being shaped and reconstructed by different stakeholders in the society. (13)

In the words of Coccossis (1996), sustainable tourism denotes to an approach that aims to minimise the negative environmental impacts of tourism by solving the physical loss triggered by tourists. These losses include the natural resource degradation due to tourism related activities by the tourists. (14)

# **Findings:**

# **Importance of Historical Monuments:**

Historical monuments are vital links to our past. It gives us in formations about the social, political, economyand also the geographical conditions during that period. They preserve the heritage architecture and culture of earlier civilizations, serving as tangible evidence of a nation's history. Historical monuments are crucial as they connect us to our paste and preserve the legacy of our ancestors. These monuments serve as educational tools, offering insight into historical events, architectural styles and cultural values. They also promote entrepreneurship through tourism, bringing economic benefits to the region. Moreover, they instill a sense of pride and identity in citizens, reminding us of our shared heritage. Protecting and preserving historical monuments is essential to keep history alive for future generation.

## Major historical ponds of ancient Bengmara the present Tinsukia:

**Napukhuri:** Na Pukhuri is a historical pond located in Tinsukia, Assam. It is a cluster of nine ponds. In the year 1788 A.D. after the Moamaria uprising that the powerful leader of the rebellion Mezera pro-claiming independence established the Matak Kingdom with its first capital at 'Rongagara' on the bank of river Dibru. After that he took the name of Sarbananda Singha. After three years of his reign the capital was shifted to 'Bengmara' the present headquarter of Tinsukia District in the year 1791.

King Sarbananda Singha of the Matak Kingdom showed his kindness by having 24 tanks dug in different places. The biggest of these is Na-pukhuri, which means a group of nine ponds. It was made in 1972 A.D. This tank covers an area of around 11.75 acres and filled with natural water, which is why it is called a lake. To make this historical place more attractive the Tinsukia District Administration planned to turn it into a tourist sopt and amusement park. They built a 400 meter tiled path and a 1200 meter jogging track. Many play items have also been installed for children. Visitors can also see the old structures from the late 1700s, built during the time of the Matak Kingdom.

**Tinkunia Pukhuri:** Tinkunia Pukhuri is a triangular shaped pond located in the heart of Tinsukia. It is a historic pond and its name, meaning "three cornered pond," reflects its unique shaped. This pond was excavated during the reign of King Sarbananda Singha, the ruler of Matak Kingdom in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The pond was dug under the supervision of his minister, Godha Baruah. Over time, the area surrounding Tinsukia Pukhuri developed into significant settlement, and the name "Tinsukia" is believed to have been deriving from this pond. So, there is a great historical importance because, today, Tinkunia Pukhuri stands as a testament to the rich history of Tinsukia. A statute of King Sarbananda Singha has been installed at the centre of the pond, honoring his contribution to the region. Recognizing its historical significance, the Directorate of Archaeology of Assam has listed Tinkunia Pukhuri among newly discovered archeological sites in the state.

**Rupohi Pukhuri:** Rupohi Pukhuri (Pond) is one of the historic pond excavated during the reign of king Sarbananda Singha of the Matak Kingdom in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is located near the Tinsukia Town, this pond is part of a series tanks dug as part of the urban development of Bengmara (now Tinsukia), which served as the capital of the Matak Kingdom. These water bodies not only served practical purposes but also reflect the architectural and cultural advancements of that period. Till today, Rupohi Pukhuri stands as a testament to the rich history of Tinsukia, offering visitors a glimpse into the region's past. While it may not be as prominently featured as some other historical sites, its significance as part of the Matak Kingdom's legacy remains noteworthy.

**Bengmara Pukhuri:** Bengmara Pukhuri (Pond) located in Dag No. 402 of Tinsukia town, this pond covers a water area of 3 bighas, 4 kathas, and 19 lechas. The surrounding land includes Dag No. 401 and 593, covering 3 bighas and 2 kathas. The registration number of the pond is 1123.

According to historian Rajkumar, during the reign of the Matak Kingdom, there was a severe drought, which caused great distress among the people. In order to provide water, the king ordered the excavation of a large pond. However, instead of water, many frogs came searching for water and died there. Because of the dead frogs (beng in Assamese), the pond was named Bengmara (meaning "killed frogs"). Later, the name of the kingdom's capital was also derived from this pond and came to be known as Bengmara.

**Devi Pukhuri**: Located in the mid of Tinsukia town, Devi Pukhuri is another notable historical pond Tinsukia. The main pond lies adjacent to the office of the Tinsukia Development Authority, situated on 1 bigha, 4 kathas, and 10 lochas of land under dag number 341 of Tinsukia town. The surrounding area includes 2 bighas, 2 kathas, and 18 lochas under dag number 331; 1 bigha, 1 katha, and 2 lochas under dag number 340; and 1 bigha of drain under dag number 342. Within this compound, there is also a public Shiva temple. The registration number of the pond is 1000.

Devi Pukhuri is an ancient heritage site of the Bengmara kingdom. According to popular belief, the pond was excavated with the intent of offering animal sacrifices and conducting rituals before the goddess for auspicious occasions. It is believed that the ancestors of King Sarbananda Singha of the Bengmara kingdom may have been followers of the Shakta tradition. A statue of an eight-armed goddess recovered from Devi Pukhuri is currently preserved in the Assam State Museum in Guwahati.

This historic pond has the potential to become a tourist center of present Tinsukia town. With proper conservation and promotion, its potential for commercial benefit cannot be overlooked.

**Shelukia Pukhuri:** Shelukia Pukhuri located 1.5 kilometers to the west of Bengmara Pukhuri. Shelukia Pukhuri lies 2 bighas, 1 kotha and 3 lochas of land under dag no 1273 of Tinsukia Town. The history of Shelukia Pukhuri marks it as a historic site in Tinsukia district. It was excavated during the reign of the Matak King Sarbananda Singha. Several local legends are also associated with this pond, and these stories are popular among the local people.

At present, the pond is facing encroachment issues along its banks. However, the local administration has taken steps to remove these encroachments. Shelukia Pukhuri is an attractive spot for tourists. The scenic beauty along the pond's banks draws visitors to the site.

**Bator Pukhuri:** Bator Pukhuri is located near the Sarbananda Singha Stadium in Borguri, within Tinsukia town. The pond occupied 3 bighas, 3 kothas and 13 lochas of land under dag number 253 of Rongagorah Mouza. The registration number of the pond is 223.

Preserving and enhancing the beauty of this pond as a historical landmark can contribute significantly to the development of tourism and local enterprise.

**Lemtem Pukhuri:** Lemtem Pukhuri is a historic site in Tinsukia, located about 4 kilometers from the main town. The pond covers an area of 1 bigha, 3 kothas, and 19 lochas. Its registration number is 193.

**Kunti Pukhuri:** Kunti pukhuri is another historic pond near Tinsukia Town, situated approximately 5 kilometers away. The pond covers more than 4 bighas of land, which is currently under encroachment.

**Chauldhowa Pukhuri:** Located within the royal estate of king city. (Raj Nagar) This pond is known as Chauldhowa Pukhuri (literally "Rice —washing pond) based on the local legend that rice for the royal family was washed here. The pond and its surrounding land, covering more than 10 bighas under dag number 4804 of Tinsukia town, are currently being encroached upon by a business group named Lohia. They have altered the structure of the pond and constructed a temple named Rani-Sati on its banks.

**Godha Pukhuri:** Godha Pukhuri is another important historic pond located about 1 kilometer from Tinsukia town. It covers 1 bigha and 14 lochas of land under dag number 3993. This pond was excavated by Godha Baruah, also known as Gopinath Baruah, the Chief Minister of the Matak King Sarbananda Singha. These historic sites must be protected from encroachment and conserved properly to attract tourists and preserve cultural heritage.

**Kebahi Pukhuri:** Kebahi Pukhuri located in Tinsukia town on land plot number 724, this historic pond covers an area of 10 bighas and 3 kathas. It still exists and there is a general belief that the name 'Kebahi Pond' originated from Kerahi Dhowa (washing of utensils). Currently, the pond is on the verge of disappearing. The government must take appropriate action to free it from encroachment and develop it as a centre of attraction for tourists.

**Rupohi Pukhuri:** Rupohi Pukhuri is located in a place called Panitola in Tinsukia District. Notably, during the second Burmese invasion, the princes Rupohi of the Bengmara Kingdom was married to the king of Burmese for the develop unity and harmony between two kingdoms and protecting the nation and its people. At that time the Bengmara kingdom was ruled by Matibor Borsenapoti. The pond, dug in memory of Princes Ruupohee, still the legacy of that historic wedding.

**Prospects:** Tinsukia is located in the northeastern state of Assam, is a region rich in natural beauty, cultural heritage, and historical significance. Among its lesser-known treasures are the historical ponds scattered across the district. These ponds are not only sources of water or ecological hotspots but also bear witness to centuries —old traditions, religious beliefs, and community life. With proper planning and sustainable development, these historical ponds can become significant tourism assets, source of entrepreneurship development and contributing to the local economy while preserving cultural heritage.

i) Cultural and heritage significance: Many of the ponds in Tinsukia are linked to ancient legends, folklore, and religious practices. Some are believed to have been created during the Ahom era or by Vaishnavate saints. These water bodies were often central to community rituals, festivals and local governance. Tourists interested in Assamese history, spirituality and architecture would find such destinations enriching.

**Potential Activities:** 

Guided heritage walks

Storytelling sessions

Cultural festivals around pond sites

**ii)** Eco-Tourism Opportunities: The ponds of Tinsukia are often support a range of biodiversity, including aquatic plants, native fish species. These areas offer opportunities for eco-tourism that promotes conservation and education.

Potential activities:

Create bird-watching areas

Set up nature trails or guided eco-tours.

Encourage photography and environmental education.

**iii) Relaxation and Family Spots:** With some development, these ponds could become greater spots for family outings especially on weekends.

**Potential Activities:** 

Build seating areas, restrooms, and small food stalls.

Offer fun activities like paddle boats or fishing.

Host music or dance shows by the pond during special events.

**iv)** Education and Research: These ponds of Tinsukia town are also great places for learning. School, colleges and researchers can visit to study history, biodiversity or even water conservation.

What could be done:

Organize school field trips and college tours.

Encourage universities to study and document the ponds.

Hold workshops on history, culture, or environmental topics.

**v)** Local Jobs and Community Tourism: Tourism can create job opportunities for local people. Villagers can become tour guides, run home stays, or sell traditional food and crafts.

What could be done: Train local youth to be guides.

Support women's groups to start small businesses.

Problems: The historic ponds of Tinsukia town have carried the legacy of the Matak kingdom for centuries. However, over time, due to lack of proper attention from the administration, these ponds are now facing crisis. Many of them have fallen into the hands of illegal encroachers, making conservation efforts increasingly difficult. Due to inadequate promotion, the folklore and oral histories associated with these heritage sites are being forgotten generation by generations. Important information—such as when these ponds were dug, by whom, and for what purposes, needs to be made easily accessible. It is unfortunate that these monuments, which have preserved the history of the Matak community since its inception, have not yet become centers of tourist attraction. Due to inadequate research, analyzing their past, present, and future is a major reason why they have not gained popularity among the general public. Many ponds are polluted or have been neglected. Some ponds are disappearing due to encroachment or lack of protection. Basic facilities like toilets, signs, or roads are missing. To make this dream a reality, the above problems need to be solved. In this regards the Matak Autonomous Council, Matak Sanmillon, All Assam Matak Students' Union, Matak Yuba Chatra Parishad and the Matak Mohila Parishad should take initiatives for convert all the potentials into reality.

#### **Conclusion:**

The historical ponds of Tinsukia have a lot of potential to become special tourist spots. They offer a mix of nature, culture and history – all in one. By taking care of them and sharing their stories, Tinsukia (ancient Bengmara) can attract visitors from all over, while also giving locals new ways to earn and celebrate their heritage.

## **Notes and References:**

# **Primary Data:**

i) Field Survey

## **Secondary Data:**

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