

Role of Tourism in Socio-Economic Development of Mizoram

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Abstract: Tourism has been recognized as an activity generating a number of socio-economic benefits. From economic point of view, it is especially important in developing countries as it is a catalyst to economic growth and generator of employment. The State of Mizoram is endowed with rich tourist resources. This paper attempts to highlight the role of tourism in socio-economic development of Mizoram while discussing the need for tourism development in the State.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mizoram is a mountainous state that became the 23rd state of the Indian Union in February 1987. It is sandwiched between Myanmar in the east and the south and Bangladesh and Tripura in the west with its northern frontiers touching Assam and Manipur. The state of Mizoram occupies an area of great strategic importance as it has a long international boundary of 722 kms with Myanmar and Bangladesh. The tropic of Cancer passes through the heart of the State. The total geographical area of Mizoram is 21,087 Sq. Kms that constitutes 0.64 % of the geographical area of India. 86.27 % of its total area is covered with forests. Mizoram has a pleasant climate throughout the year, during winter, temperature normally ranges from 11 °C to 24 °C and during summer it varies from 18 °C to 29 °C. The average annual rainfall varies from 2,160mm to 3,500 mm. The state is predominantly an agrarian state with more than 70% of its population engaged in agriculture. Handloom and handicrafts (especially of bamboo and cane) are the other traditional cottage industries in the state next to agriculture.

The State is the most urbanized with 46% of the population living in urban areas. Nearly 86% of people profess Christianity. The state has an impressive literacy rate of 91.33% which makes it the third highest among the states and union territories of India. The total population of Mizoram as per 2011 census is 10,97,206 (Female- 5,41,867 Male- 5,55,339) and the population density of the state is 52 per sq. km. Majority of the population in Mizoram belong to the schedule tribe. The local people patronize their rich tribal cultural heritage, colourful customs and lively traditions even today.

So far as tourist resources are concerned, Mizoram is indeed endowed with rich tourist resources. The tourism potential of Mizoram in particular and of North East India in general has not been fully exploited. The Ministry of Tourism calls the region a “paradise unexplored”. The people are peace loving and hospitable by nature, and the State is conveniently free from insurgency and ethnic strife that are often witnessed in other parts of North East India. There is no status or class distinction in the Mizo society. Today Mizoram is the most peaceful state in the entire country and is one of the safest places to travel in India.

II. NEED FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The fundamental question is “Is it really necessary for Mizoram to develop and promote tourism?” This is the first question that should be addressed by all people, anti or pro tourism. Mizoram needs an industry like tourism for the following facts:

- (i) **Development of heavy and medium industry is not feasible in Mizoram:** In Mizoram, it is not possible to develop any heavy or medium industry because of its geo - physical location. Mizoram is located in hilly terrain and is in the highest zone 5 for earthquakes. For development of heavy and medium industries, the ideal site should generally be flat, well connected by transportation facilities and regular supply of power. Mizoram is a mountainous state, the nearest railhead is Silchar which is 180 kms from Aizawl and the State is not self-sufficient in power. As such, it may not be feasible to develop heavy and medium industries in Mizoram.
- (ii) **Remoteness from main markets makes transportation of products from Mizoram uneconomical:** The perception in the main markets is that Mizoram is far away, in terms of physical distance, psychological

distance, economic distance and time distance. Even the transportation within Mizoram is time consuming, and to some extent dispiriting. No direct air connectivity with main markets in India or international airports like Delhi or Mumbai. Rail connectivity of Mizoram with the rest of the country is almost non-existent. Even Silchar, the major rail head (180 km away from Aizawl), is not connected by fast trains. As a result, transportation of local produce from Mizoram to main markets would be time consuming and costly.

(iii) **Only light and ‘smokeless’ industries based on indigenous resources are advisable:** As per the India State of Forest Report 2017, Mizoram has the second highest forest cover among the states and union territories in India next to Lakshadweep. Out of the total geographical area of 21, 087 Sq. Kms. around 18,186 Sq. Kms i.e. 86.27% of total area is covered with forests. Mizoram is predominantly an agrarian state with more than 70% of its population engaged in agriculture. Handloom and handicrafts especially of bamboo and cane are the other traditional cottage industries in the State, next to agriculture. It is therefore advisable to develop only those industries that are light, ‘smokeless’ and based on agricultural, forest and human skill resources.

(iv) **Abundance of natural, cultural and human resources:** Mizoram has abundance of natural, cultural and human resources which would make it an attractive and ideal tourist destination. Mizoram has 61.24% of its population between in the working age group of 15 to 59. The other factor in favour of tourism is the peculiar characteristics of tourism where consumers need to travel at their own cost to the destination for consumption of tourism and it cannot be vice versa. In other words, the cost of travel from their place of residence to Mizoram is borne by tourists themselves.

Thus from the perspective of socio economic development, it is advisable to develop tourism in Mizoram in view of its resources and in view of constraint in developing other heavy or medium industries.

III. EMPLOYMENT AND TOURISM IN MIZORAM

Tourism has created various types of employment opportunities. Firstly, tourism creates direct employment for those who work in tourism enterprises such as hotels, tourist shops and travel agencies. Second, indirect employment for those jobs created in the supplying sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, manufacturing etc. Third, induced employment for jobs supported by the income made by direct and indirect employees. Lastly, construction employment opportunities for those jobs generated in construction of tourist facilities and infrastructures. It has been acknowledge that tourism creates opportunities for employment of the local people and increase their livelihood opportunities. It may be noted that tourism is an extremely labour-intensive industry thereby providing scope for employment, encourage entrepreneurship and self-employment among the locals. As per the UNWTO tourism is particularly good as a vehicle for economic development in developing countries and the less developed countries as it employs more local poor people creating changes in existing employment practices.

It is rather difficult to determine the exact number of people engaged in tourism sector and its related activities. The seasonal nature of tourism industry, high variability in working conditions, flexibility and the informality of jobs in several small units are some challenges in collecting data. The multi-sectoral characteristics of tourism industry post another challenge in collecting data related to tourism. For the purpose of analyzing employment in tourism sector, employment related to tourism may be divided into three broad categories. The first category includes tourism characteristic industries comprising of transportation services, accommodation, food and beverage services/ restaurants, travel agencies and other reservation services. The second category includes tourism connected industries comprising of readymade garments, footwear, processed foods, tobacco products, beverages, travel related consumer goods, soaps, cosmetics, glycerin, gems, jewellery, books, journals, magazine etc. The third category includes other services such as cultural and religious services, sporting and other recreational services, health and medical related services. The following table highlights the number of workers in tourism industries in Mizoram by formal /informal and by rural/urban:

Table No 1: Number of workers in Tourism Industries by Formal/Informal and by Rural/Urban

S/N	Industries	Rural		Urban		Total Workers
		Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal	
1.	Tourism characteristic industries	89	1891	932	7153	10065
2.	Tourism connected industries	0	1164	0	3198	4362
3.	Other Services	778	527	1980	1036	4321
Total		867	3582	2912	11387	18748

Source: Regional Tourism Satellite Account – Mizoram 2009-2010

The above table shows that 18,748 total workers are engaged in tourism activities during 2009-2010. Tourism characteristics industries like transportation services, accommodation, food and beverage services/restaurants, travel agencies and other reservation services contributes 54% of total employment in tourism. Tourism connected industries like readymade garments, footwear, processed foods, tobacco products, beverages, travel related consumer goods, soaps, cosmetics, glycerin, gems, jewellery, books, journals, magazine etc. contribute 23.6% of employment in tourism. Other services contribute 23.4% of employment in tourism. It may also be noted that formal employment contributes only 25.24% of total employment in tourism. Hence, majority of employment i.e. 74.76% are in informal sector.

It is observed that the effect of tourism on employment generation is more pronounced in areas where tourism infrastructure developments are being carried out by the State Government. In such areas, temporary employment opportunities are created for the locals during the construction process of such infrastructures. At Thenzawl in Serchhip District, the State Government is undertaking development of Golf Resort and Wellness Spa. During the construction process 50 to 100 locals are employed everyday as daily laborers. Even after construction is completed, around 50 locals are still employed as daily laborers for maintenance and upkeep of the infrastructures created. The locals are mostly engaged as cleaners, helpers, cooks, porters, gardeners and other such manual works. It is interesting to note that many of them are women. At Reiek in Mamit District, the Government develops tourist infrastructures like adventure theme park and a replica of traditional Mizo Village, during construction, most of the laborers are sourced from the locals. The daily earnings of the locals range from Rs. 400 to 900 per day depending on their skills.

Reiek village is situated at a distance of about 30 Kms to the west of Aizawl, it is about an hour's drive from Aizawl and is one of the most visited tourist places in Mizoram. The main tourist attraction at Reiek is Reiek Mountain and people come here to enjoy the scenic beauty of the Mountain. There is a tourist resort maintained by the Tourism Department at the base of Reiek Mountain. Eco-adventure infrastructures are also developed near the Resort. Development of tourism and related activities at Reiek has been undertaken with the participation of local communities. The local communities have a very positive view to tourism and community owned land and properties are used by the Government free of cost for development of tourist infrastructures. The villagers have set up Reiek Tourism Board with membership drawn from various NGOs and other interested people in the village. The Board takes up all initiatives of tourism development in the village and it constantly coordinates with the State Government in all aspects of tourism development. The Board collects entry fee to visit Reiek Mountain which is used for cleanliness and maintenance of the Mountain. The Board also selects and allocates seats to street vendors and other small business enterprises that have cropped up at the base of the Mountain. A minimal fee is collected from these business enterprises. There are ten families that have earned their daily livelihood through this.

In Champhai District, the State Tourism Department under NEDP 2016-2017 has undertaken development of homestays by partnering with the local families. This initiative was taken up on pilot basis in 6 villages of Champhai District namely, Zokhawthar, Hnahlan, Chawngtlai, Vaphai, Dungtlang and Vangchhia. Thirty five families from the six villages were selected as Home-stay Partners and they were given financial assistance for construction of additional room in the premises of their home which is to be used as Home-stay Unit. Maintenance and management of the room so created is to be borne by the Home-stay Partners. All income generated by the Home-stay Units will go the Home-stay Partners. The Home-stay Partners were given basic trainings in business management and hospitality. This initiative by the State Government has given opportunity to earn additional source of livelihood to the rural populace.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

In Mizoram, there has been a significant investment in tourism infrastructure since the inception of the Tourism Department in 1987. However, almost all investment in development of tourism infrastructures have come from the Central Government and implemented through the State Tourism Department. The Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India has been providing financial assistance to the states to develop and strengthen the tourist infrastructure at the tourist sites to make them more attractive for tourism. This effort was started in the Ninth Five year plan in the form of financial assistance for specific activities like construction of budget accommodation units, tourist resorts, wayside amenities, highway restaurants etc. These individual activities were pooled into full-fledged scheme during the 10th five year plan so that the states could request funds for building/improvement of the tourist sites in a more integrated and comprehensive fashion. This scheme of the 10th five year plan was further streamlined in the 11th five year plan. This plan made further efforts to harness full potential of tourism sector by improving infrastructure. This Centrally-sponsored scheme focuses on integrated infrastructure development of tourism circuits/destinations and also on the improvement of the existing products of the Ministry as well as development of new tourist products.

From the year 1985 till 2017, financial assistance to the tune of Rs.379.7685 crore has been sanctioned to the State Government by the Central Government for development of tourist infrastructures in the State. The

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India is the main funding agency funding 99.06% of tourist infrastructure projects in the State. The remaining 0.94% of funding was provided by the NEC. Investments in tourist infrastructure projects in Mizoram were mainly in the form of creating budget accommodation facilities. The following table shows the type of completed tourist facilities created by the State Tourism Department and its numbers:

Table No. 2: Type of Completed Tourist Facilities and its numbers

S/N	Type of Tourist Facility	Numbers
1.	Tourist Lodge	56
2.	Highway Restaurant	4
3.	Wayside Amenities	3
4.	Tourist Resort	2
5.	Tourist Complex	1
6.	Picnic Spot	2
7.	Viewing Gallery	2
8.	State Institute of Hotel Management	1
9.	Aerosport buildings	1
Total		72

Source: Tourism Department, Government of Mizoram

The above table shows that 72 number of tourist facilities have been created till 2019 by the Tourism Department, Government of Mizoram. Out of these only 66 of the facilities are in operation and 6 of them are yet to be operated even though construction has been completed. This is because though the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has provided financial assistance for construction and development of tourist facilities, management and maintenance of the facilities are to be met by the State Government, the State Government is unable to provide staff to run these facilities, hence, they remain idle assets in the hands of the Tourism Department.

Since 2016-2017 the State Government under its flagship programme of NEDP also made budgetary allocations for development of tourism in the State. During the year 2016-2017, an amount of Rs. 100.00 lakh was allocated for Rural Home-stay Scheme in Champhai District. Under this scheme, 35 families from 6 villages in Champhai District namely Zokhawthar, Hnahlan, Vaphai, Vangchhia, Dungtlai and Chawngtlai were selected as home-stay partners. Financial assistance to construct additional room in the premises of their home was given to these home-stay partners. These rooms were to be used as home-stays. The home-stay partners were given basic trainings in soft skills and hospitality management. Management and maintenance of home-stay units so created under this scheme is done by the home-stay partners and all income generated by the home-stay units go to the home-stay partner. This is a novel effort to develop rural tourism in the State and increase the livelihood opportunities of rural populace by providing them scope to earn additional source of income through tourism. This scheme was extended to six more villages in Mamit District and Khawhai village in Champhai District under NEDP 2017-2018. Budgetary allocation of Rs. 300.00 lakh was made to Tourism Department under NEDP 2017-2018. Out of this Rs. 135.00 lakh was allocated for extension of Rural Home-stay Scheme in Mamit District and Champhai District. Budgetary allocation made to Tourism Department under NEDP 2018-2019 was further increased to Rs. 550.00 lakh. This was done with a view to develop and improve various tourist infrastructures in the State. Therefore, a huge portion of the amount was allocated for repairs and renovations of various tourist facilities in the State.

Investment from the private sector in tourism has been recently witnessed in Aizawl and other major cities in the State. During the 1980's, there was hardly any private sector participation in tourism. Therefore, the State Government maintained and run tourist accommodation facilities and other tourist infrastructures in the State. Now the scenario has changed and several private hotels and restaurants have cropped out in Aizawl and other major towns of the State.

V. NEW ENTERPRISES /BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AND TOURISM

The tourism industry consists of a combination of various economic activities and interrelated industries like the hospitality industry, transportation industry, travel agencies, tour operators, souvenir shops, entertainment industries and several other sectors that are directly involved in providing goods and services to tourists. These industries are further supported by other supporting industries providing and supplying their requirements. This indicates the extensiveness of enterprises involved in what is collectively called the tourism industry. Growth in tourism and expansion of facilities generates local production of various goods and services required, thereby boosting development of new enterprises.

With abundant natural and human resources in Mizoram there are huge prospects for development of industries based on indigenous resources. Out of the total geographical area of 21, 087 Sq. Kms. around 80% of total area is covered with forests. Mizoram is predominantly an agrarian state with majority of its population engaged in agriculture. Handloom and handicrafts are the other traditional cottage industries in the State, next to agriculture. It is therefore advisable to develop only those industries that are light, 'smokeless' and based on agricultural, forest and human skills. Development in tourism is expected to boost development of the following related industries in the State:

Cane and Bamboo: Cane and bamboo handicrafts are the most prominent crafts of the State. There are many skilled weavers who create intricately beautiful products. These traditionally skilled artisans make bamboo products like baskets, utensils, hats, handcrafted furniture, flower vases, wall hangings and other beautiful household items. Bamboo is the main material used in the traditional methods of constructing houses in Mizoram. Tourist facilities like resorts, guest houses and restaurants can be made to assimilate with the local environment by using local materials like bamboo and thatch which are abundant in the State.

Handloom: Tourism and handloom and handicraft industry has very close linkage with tourism industry. According to the UNEP and UNWTO (2005), tourists spend about 40% of their budget on souvenir and craft products. A tourist is always in search of something exotic to take back as memoir of his travel. Handloom industry is one of the largest cottage industries in Mizoram. This industry has been flourishing in the State since the olden days. Weaving is mainly done by women on loin looms. There are 39498 weavers in the State as per the Third All India Handloom Census. Thenzawl town which is about 91.5 kms from Aizawl has become the handloom hub of the State and is one of the most visited sites for tourists. It is said that Mizo women weave dreams on their looms. The beautiful and intricate designs are now used in shoulder bags, cushions and other furnishing items, shawls and different varieties of garments. Handloom products of Mizoram are in great demand in the national and international market.

Food and Agro-products: Food and agro-products also have close linkage with the tourism industry. Food is an integral part of cultural experience and food tourism/culinary tourism has gained popularity in the recent years. Foods have become one of the major factors for selecting a destination and at the same time tourism help promote local indigenous delicacies. Traditional use of agro-products of the State and increasing the amount of local foods in food industry will enhance the benefits of tourism in food and agro industry. Developing food experiences can diversify local economies and contributes to the attractiveness of a destination. It strengthens local identities and a sense of community while enriching the tourism experience of visitors. It can encourage agriculture and local food production industry as well. Mizoram has its own culinary delicacies like sticky rice, pounded rice cake, bamboo shoot, traditional vegetable stew and others. It is also a large producer of areca nut, ginger, turmeric and chili. Tea plantation and production has gained popularity in the recent years and opportunity to develop tea tourism in the State is promising.

VI. CONCLUSION

Though Mizoram is endowed with rich tourist resources, the tourism industry in the State is still in a very nascent stage of development and the tourism potentials of the State have not yet fully been exploited. The State Tourism Department heavily depends on Central financial assistance for development and promotion of tourism in the State. Therefore, tourism development in the State is carried on based on the Central Government's schemes and guidelines. The State has huge potentials in eco tourism, adventure tourism, community and nature based tourism. Proper and integrated planning to develop these sectors of tourism is much needed so that tourism may become an engine of socio-economic development and growth in the State.

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