

CHAPTER – III

SOCIO-CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ECO-TOURISM OF THE STUDY AREA

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Kumargramduar Block located in the Sub-Himalayan West Bengal has its ecological, geographical, anthropological, biological, ethnic, historical and religious importance. All the above aspects make the area as the 'India in miniature' in the truest sense. Ecology, geography, anthropology, biology, ethnology, history and religion together make the cultural setting of any area. So Kumargramduar Block is a cultural milieu and the area seems to have turned into a hub of cultural diversity in the entire Sub-Himalayan West Bengal.

Tribal and non-tribal intermingled each other and both communities live in perfect peace and harmony in the area. Among the tribals Mech, Rabha, Santhal, Bhutia, Oraon, Madeshia and Bodo are principal groups of populations. Rajbanshi and non-Rajbanshi Bengalees are the most remarkable population groups here besides the tribal. The tribal and non-tribal perform their own socio-cultural and religious rites. The socio-cultural and religious rites amongst the people are distinguished from each other. Since long, both tribals and non-tribals have been living in the area. The author observes that the cultural impact of the non-tribals on the tribal is significant. Most of the tribals are nature lovers and they worship the nature as God. Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity are the major religions practiced here. Non-tribals are generally Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists. Tribals and non-tribals in the area celebrate their religious and cultural functions. Kumargramduar Block i.e. the area under study has therefore, enough potential for excellence in the field of eco-tourism in view of its precious socio-cultural heritage.

3.2. MAN AND CULTURAL ECOLOGY

Man and culture are the indispensable parts of the human civilization. Man is dependent upon culture for sustenance of his livelihood. Man moulds culture for his need. Culture is incorporated as one of the most dynamic constituents of ecology.

Ecology is 'the relation of plants and living creatures to each other and to their environment, or the study of this'. Ecology is also defined as 'the natural relationship (or study of the relationship) between plants, animals and people and the places in which they live'. Ecology is the study of natural history of the mother earth. It 'refers to the study of the relationship between living organisms (the biota) and their physical environment (the abiota). In its broadest sense ecology is the study of organisms as they exist in their natural environment. Ecology is the study of the relationship between plants and animals with respect to the human beings. So all ecological phenomena are broadly classified as two types such as natural and cultural. Natural components are related to nature. Cultural components are related to man and his belief, habits, customs, religions and society. There are in a wider sense, no distinctions between nature and culture. Without the natural environment the existence of culture is beyond imagination. The origin of human culture lays on the natural according to own desires. Man should not change the natural setting according to his will. When he can do, the carrying capacity of the nature is affected and ecological balance is disturbed. Nature is the pavement for the sustenance of human beings and protection of culture.

Cultural ecology deals with the scientific study of human culture in relation to the environment and society. It is a precious discipline to evaluate man's culture and society with special emphasis on environment. Culture is changed according to time, place and space. One culture dominates the other cultures and cultural diffusion occurs. In the semi-urban segments of Kumargramduar Block, the author observes that there is enough cultural diffusion in the area which can mostly be attributed to the process of globalization and modernization – the two important socio-cultural phenomena in the third world countries. Indigenous culture is found to be affected in large scale. Indigenous culture has changed. New lifestyles, dresses, food habits etc. have taken its place. These changes have occurred in the semi-urban commercial centres like Kamakhyaguri, Barobisha and Kumargramduar in North Bengal. Because the people of these areas have easy access to communicate with other parts of the country. People from diverse areas have gathered here with their merchandise to sell. As a consequence, a cultural diffusion has taken place in the area.

The interior segments of Kumargramduar Block preserve the virginity of cultural heritage and are the real treasure-love of the area in terms of culture. These

places have turned into eco-tourism hotspots incorporating nature with culture. The block has 'potential for excellence' as far as eco-tourism is concerned. Eco-tourism is developed along with the protection of cultural heritage. Though culture is changed on the basis of time, place and space, yet cultural heritage should be initiated for protection of the identity of human beings. The identity of human beings is dependent upon the ecology. Here comes the question of human ecology which is important to highlight the identity of human beings with respect to environment. Human ecology, therefore, 'deals with the study of man in relation to his environment'. Culture and identity are interconnected and both of them mould each other. Culture shapes the identity of human beings and the identity conserves the culture. So culture ecology of Kumargramduar Block seems to be enriched in the interior portion of the study area. The author is captivated to observe the protection of purity and sanctity of the cultural heritage of tribal like Mech, Rabha, Santhal, Oraon, Bhutia, Madeshia and Bodo in the interior parts of the study area. Their lifestyles, social customs, food habits are protected here. The indigenous cultural heritage along with forest, natural springs should be used as the eco-tourism hub for the sustainable development of the area.

3.3. IMPACT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL HERITAGE ON ECOLOGY

Socio-cultural heritage is a part and parcel of ecology and is also a pride matter of society. Kumargramduar Block is enriched for diverse socio-cultural heritage. Every village has a distinct identity for its precious socio-cultural heritage. The author observes cultural diversity among different groups of populations like Mech Rabha, Santhal, Oraon, Bhutia, Madeshia, Bodo and Rajbanshi. Being a 'mini-India', Kumargramduar Block is proud of its cultural diversity along with diversity in the nature. Lush green forests, flowing natural springs and rivers, diverse culture and pristine religious shrine of Paglarhat are the precious treasure for eco-tourism.

Socio-cultural heritage of the area is slowly becoming problem ridden. Life styles and customs of the people are slowly changing in the inner segments and rapidly in the semi-urban commercial hubs like Kamakhyaguri, Barobisha, and Kumargramduar as a result of the impact of globalization and the so-called modernization along with the other areas of the developing countries.

Tribal are the forest dwellers and have been protecting the forests since time immemorial. Their culture is so related with forest and wildlife. But the so-called modernity and the civilized society have deprived them of the right of forests and wildlife. So forest conservation and wildlife protection cannot be practiced successfully. As a result, regional ecology is affected because most of the tribal along with some non-tribal poachers cut the forest and poach the wildlife illegally for the sustenance of their livelihood along with the boundless desires of the non-tribal poachers.

Tribal have no right over the forests though their culture is interconnected with the forests and wildlife. The tribal are found to have moulded their lifestyles and culture on the pavement of ecology. So the ecology of the area is affected. Now the indigenous people of Kumargramduar Block are not in a position to preserve their socio-cultural heritage in the form of virginity. The author has surveyed in the study area to show the relationship between the socio-cultural heritage and ecology. He finds out that tribal are dependent upon local ecology from their birth to death. Even in the religious ceremonies, they use different parts of the different plants. As such plants are incorporated into their livelihood and culture. Plants are related to tribal life. So pressure on ecology and natural un-equilibrium affect the tribal society in a broad extend. There are cultural diversities among the tribal but the author observes that there is a 'Unity in Diversity' in the basic pattern of all tribal socio-cultural heritage. The 'Unity in Diversity' is also found in the entire Himalayan Region. So the impacts of socio-cultural heritage on ecology and vice-versa are the most significant features in the area to study the socio-cultural heritage and eco-tourism potential of the areas like Kumargramduar Block of the Sub-Himalayan West Bengal.

3.4. TOURISM, DEVELOPMENT AND ECOLOGY

3.4(a) TOURISM – A SERVICE SECTOR OF ECONOMY

Tourism is one of the most remarkable financial activities of the entire Himalayas now-a-days. It is a service sector of the economy. It is systematized along with proper infrastructure. Infrastructure for tourism is dependent upon the good communications, in credible hospitality and tight security.

3.4(b) ECO-TOURISM POTENTIAL OF KUMARGRAMDUAR BLOCK

Kumargramduar Block has a unique potential for tourism in the entire Sub-Himalayan West Bengal. The area is encircled by the adjoining 'Land of Thunderbolt' and 'Land of Gross Happiness' Bhutan on the North, Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) of Assam on the East, historical 'City of Beauty' Cooch Behar on the South and the remaining parts of the Buxa Tiger Reserve (BTR) and the famous Shivalinga of Jainti hill on the West. Kumargramduar Block can be used as a tourism-hub in the entire eastern Himalaya along with the Dooars region if an appropriate step is taken by the Government vis-à-vis the participation of the grass-roots' population of the area.

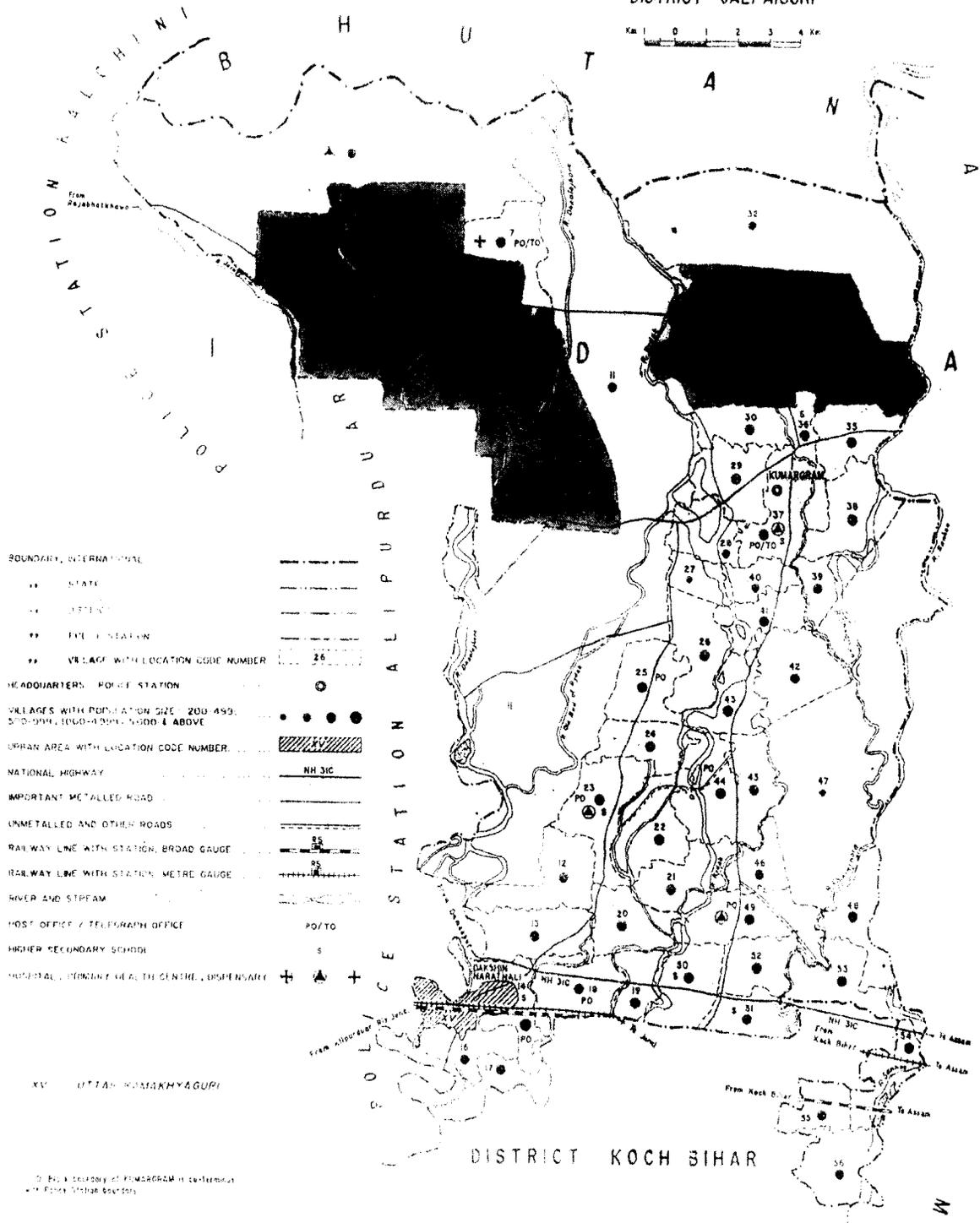
Kumargramduar Block has an incredible feature for tourism namely the virgin green forest and its wildlife, majestic history, holy religious places, famous silk manufactures industry. In addition, Kumargramduar Block is a land of 'two leaves and a bud'. Being a riverine land, numerous rivers and springs are flowing over the block and these become the 'lifeline' of the entire region. Kumargramduar is one of the erstwhile gateways (duars) for entering the 'Land of Heavenly Peace' Bhutan. These diverse constituents can make the region as an incredible tourism hub of the Sub-Himalayan West Bengal. According to Pravin Sheth (1997) "Sustainability depends on culture, economy and freedom of the people to relate development with environment." Eco-tourism is responsible to the sustainable development of the region.

Bhalka forest, Dhumpara forest, Raidak forest, Sachaphu forest and Bhutanghat should be used as distinct eco-tourism centres. Eco-tourism is an ideal tourism activity by which environment of the locality is protected. Eco-tourism means eco-friendly tourism. Tourists should visit the area vis-à-vis they educate the common fold to conserve the nature and to restore the pristine beauty of the lush green forests for the sustenance of human beings.

Besides the forests, tea-gardens should be used as the centres for tea-tourism for economic development of the area. Outlook about tea-tourism must be developed in an eco-friendly means. Chuniajhora, Jainti, Kartika, Kumargram, Newlands, Sankosh, Turturi, Rahimabad, Raidak, Phaskhawa tea gardens should be developed on the basis of tourism infrastructure. The tea-garden authorities along with the local

MAP: KUMARGRAM (TEA GARDEN)

WEST BENGAL
 C.D. BLOCK KUMARGRAM
 POLICE STATION KUMARGRAM
 DISTRICT JALPAIGURI



- BOUNDARY, INTERNATIONAL
- .. STATE
- .. DISTRICT
- .. TOWN
- .. VILLAGE WITH LOCATION CODE NUMBER
- HEADQUARTERS: POLICE STATION
- VILLAGES WITH POPULATION SIZE: 200-499, 500-999, 1000-4999, 5000 & ABOVE
- URBAN AREA WITH LOCATION CODE NUMBER
- NATIONAL HIGHWAY
- IMPORTANT METALLED ROAD
- UNMETALLED AND OTHER ROADS
- RAILWAY LINE WITH STATION, BROAD GAUGE
- RAILWAY LINE WITH STATION, METRE GAUGE
- RIVER AND STREAM
- POST OFFICE / TELEGRAPH OFFICE
- HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL
- HOSPITAL, DISPENSARY, HEALTH CENTRE, DISPENSARY

XV UTTAR KUMARGHYAGURI

DISTRICT KOCH BIHAR

1:25,000 Scale of KUMARGRAM in co-terminus with Police Station boundary.

Gram Panchayats should be developed with tourism infrastructure for the benefit of the local economy vis-à-vis ecology. Because economy and ecology have same roots namely 'Oikos' which means 'house'. They are both interconnected and interrelated.

Kumargramduar Block has a remarkable history in the Indian National Movement. Kumargramduar Police Station is a historical memento because during 1942 A.D. the local villagers under the leadership of Shri Magha Dewani had captured the police station. In 1942 A.D. Gandhiji had called the famous Quit India Movement against the Britishers. The people of Kumargramduar Block had joined this movement with the leadership of Shri Magha Dewani and local Jotedar Shri Madan Singh Barua. So Kumargram Police Station has a historical significance in the history of Indian freedom struggle. The author proposes to recognize this police station as a tourism centre due to its historical significance along with the oldest Kali Temple of Paglarhat. This temple is famous for its antiquity. A large number of people gather here during the occasion of annual worship. Devotees come here not only from the locality but also from beyond the border. Paglarhat Kali Temple is an ideal place for religious tourism. Endibari is famous for silk production. It has also become the place of tourist interest.

Hatipota is one of the adjoining tourism hotspot near Bhutan. It is famous for its majestic scenic beauty of the mother earth. Tourists can observe the hills of Bhutan from here. Jainti is also a remarkable place. It is famous for the river Jainti and Jainti tea garden. Near the Jainti tea garden, Mahakal hill is also important though Mahakal is in Kalchini Block of Alipurduar Sub-Division of Jalpaiguri district.

3.4(c) ROAD DEVELOPMENT FOR ECO-TOURISM MANAGEMENT

The author proposes the Government of West Bengal to make Jainti-Hatipota-Mahakal as a tourism circuit and it can be extended towards Newlands-Kumargram-Sankosh tea garden for the benefit of the tourists along with the local community. Barobisha-Bhalka-Paglarhat Kumargram-Newlands-Kalijhora circuit should also be invoked for the tourism development. Kalikhola is a border semi-urban area of

Bhutan. It is the gateway of Bhutan. The Government of India can improve the region as a broad extent.

The Government of India should open this route namely Barobisha to Kalikhola via Kumargramduar with the bi-lateral discussion of the Royal Government of Bhutan. If this route is to be operated, a new venture will be created in the SAARC Region. This can boost the tourism potential in the eastern Himalaya. This route will be connected with the newly under construction four-lane National Highway (N.H. 31C). In near future, Barobisha-Kalikhola-proposed route can be extended towards the South to the N.H. 31 near Bakshirhat via Rampur and Saldanga. From Bakshirhat it also can be extended towards Bangladesh near Balabhut Border of Tufanganj Sub-Division of Cooch Behar district. So the entire Sub-Himalayan West Bengal can be developed. But all these economic development must be invoked with eco-friendly measures.

Kumargramduar Block is in the Buxa Tiger Reserve. According to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, these development works are prohibited here but these works shall be implemented for the benefit of tourism and economy. So sections of these acts should be amended. As such over-bridges along with natural setting should be made under the instructions of the architect and other experts' team. Reckless driving and noisy horns must be regulated in this area.

3.4(d) PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL POPULATION FOR ECO-TOURISM MANAGEMENT

Kumargramduar Block is a 'mine of eco-tourism' of the Sub-Himalayan West Bengal. So it should be used properly to restore the eco-tourism hub. Tourists should protect the nature and educate the local community regarding the ecology. Local community can earn money by selling their handicrafts to the tourists. Tribal can expertise in handicraft. Folk-dance of the tribal and non-tribal is also unique feature to captivate the tourists. Peoples' participation along with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), local volunteers' organizations and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) can boost the eco-tourism of the region. Eco-tourism is a continuing process and it has multi-dimensional aspects. Kumargramduar Block can lead the entire Sub-Himalayan West Bengal to boost the tourism potential and to protect the regional ecology.

In the tourism sector particularly eco-tourism Kumargramduar Block in the Sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Public participation is essential to develop the sector. Public involvement is in two ways which means, in eco-tourism namely public involvement as service providers and as tourists. Indian belief, tourist is like god (ATITHI DEVOH BHABOH). The roots of tourism sector in Indian Sub-Continent has this ancient lineage. Tourism is the people based activity. Eco-tourism is also the people-oriented economic activity along with the protection of the environment.

Local people should display their handcraft products to the tourists. Tribal are good guides of the nature because they have good connection with the mother earth since time immemorial. Nature is incorporated as a part of their lives. They are good protector of the nature.

3.4(e) DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF LOCAL POPULATION VIS-À-VIS CONSERVATION OF ECOLOGY

Eco-tourism can change their socio-economic condition as positive way in the area. The local community can earn livelihood in exchange of selling the tourism concept to tourists. So purchasing power of the common-folk can be raised. They spend their expense according to their need. In this way, poverty can be eradicated. People can send their issues to the schools for learning vis-à-vis they can be educated themselves through non-formal ways. As a consequence of it, public must be award. Public awareness is essential for environmental protection of the locality. Public should be got rid of superstitions. They can raise their voice against the social evils and for the conservation of natural objects including forests and wildlife.

Poverty is the root cause of mal development of any region. If poverty can be alleviated, public awareness campaign is to be successful through the educational extension. Public also should be involved in the study area to make sanitation and public health accessible for everyone. Thus public should participate in the campaign of environmental protection of Kumargramduar Block.

Now the Government of West Bengal under the directives of the Supreme Court of India has circulated an order to the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) to incorporate Environmental Education as a compulsory subject from Class-VI onwards. Environmental Education is a compulsory subject at the Higher Secondary level also. Even at the University level, Environmental Studies is also a compulsory subject. So students can be accessible to the knowledge regarding the environment. Students' community should take an initiative to educate

the common-folk of the block about all pros and cons of the environmental issues in the respective of locality.

Eco-tourism can initiate a revolutionary change in the society in the case of environment. Public involvement in the eco-tourism sector can boost the regional economy along with the ecological conservation. It can develop the entire Sub-Himalayan West Bengal along with Kumargramduar Block vis-à-vis it can protect the local environment. Thus this type of activity can enhance the sustainable regional development. So common people along with ecology should be benefited. The diagrammatic presentation is given as follows :

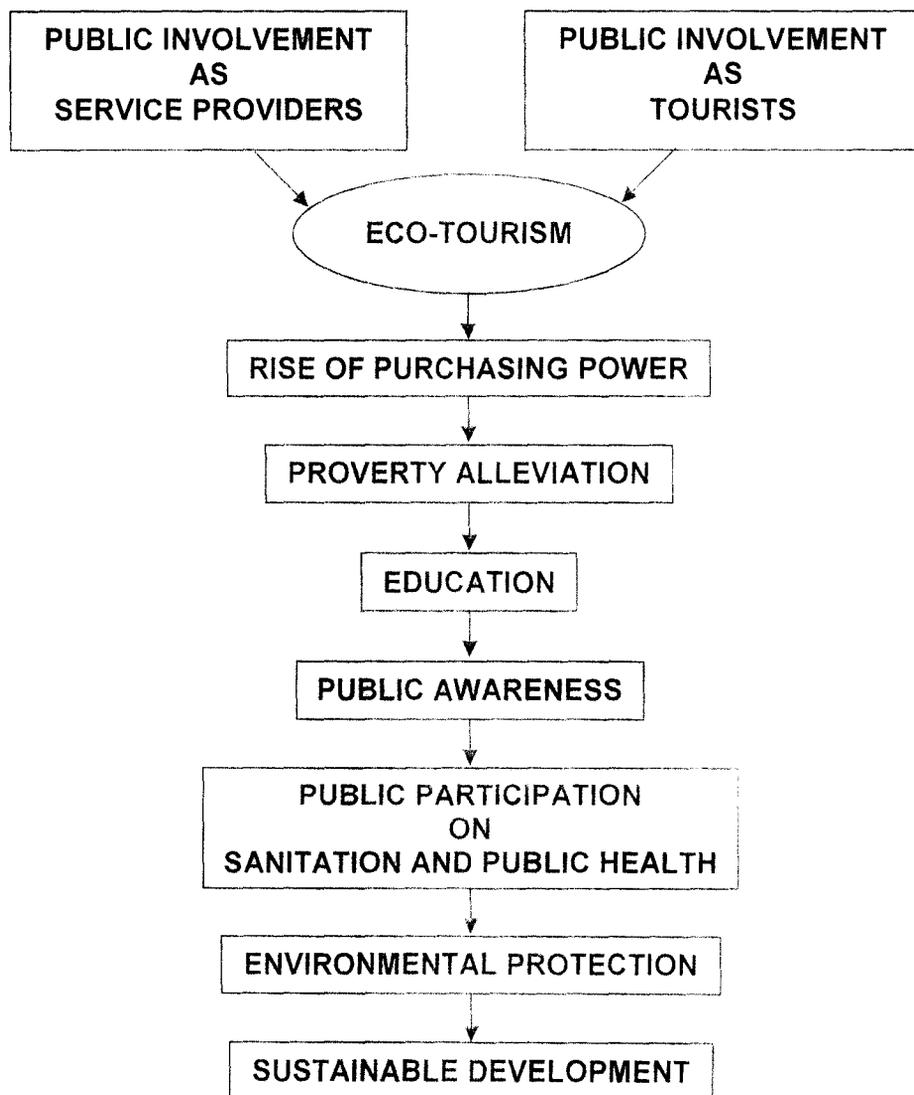


Diagram-3 (Prepared by the author) : Relationship among tourism, environment and development

3.5. ECO-TOURISM, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND ENFORCEMENT OF LAW

Dr. Alexander Von. Humboldt defines eco-tourism as “purposeful travel to Natural areas to understand the cultural and natural History of the Environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the eco-system while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of Natural resources beneficial to local people” Eco-tourism is the most remarkable concept for a large section of people in terms of public involvement in the tourism process along with ecological conservation. People are dependent upon the eco-system for their sustenance. Therefore, the immediate eco-system forms the natural habitat of the local population and becomes the source of their food, medicine and cloth etc. Eco-tourism conservation is thus very essential for the existence of the human society in a broader context.

Environmental management is a concept by which ecology could be conserved in an appropriate scale. Developmental activities enhance the pollution in the eco-system. So a proper plan could be envisaged for the protection of the environment. Kumargramduar Block in the Sub-Himalayan tracts of West Bengal has a unique position due to its lush green ecology, diverse populations and huge eco-tourism potentials. It is a part of famous Buxa Tiger Reserve. So it is a tourism hotspot among the entire Sub-Himalayan West Bengal. A large section of tourists travels here. For restoring the carrying capacity of the nature, eco-tourism is considered important and should be an essential tool for nature conservation here. For the environmental management, all local people should be involved. The local Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Community Organizations such as schools, college, clubs, post offices, rail stations and local NGOs can take initiative to protect the environment and get involved in eco-tourism under the aegis of the local PRIs in the study area.

Environmental protection is dependent upon the public awareness and the enforcement of laws by the appropriate authorities. Public awareness of Kumargramduar Block is initiated by the local Shaheed Kshudiram Mahavidyalaya, local schools, NGOs like WWF – India, ICIMOD and above all, the Departments of Environment and Forests, Government of West Bengal, West Bengal Pollution

Control Board (WBPCB), Paschim Banga Vigyan Mancha and other local voluntary groups.

Enforcement of laws is the most efficient administrative machinery to combat the environmental menaces. The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 should be implemented properly for the benefit of the forests, wildlife and above all, the human populations. Some provisions should be incorporated in the acts for the easy access to travel the core area of the Buxa Tiger Reserve with the sanctioning of the permit for the tourists keeping in mind the conservation of environment and its protection. Tourists are supposed to strictly abide by the rules and regulations of the environment.

Tribals' rights on the forests as an act in recent times have been helpful to extend same rights to the indigenous people also. They should use this right for the welfare of the forests and environment properly. They also get the land right over the forest lands. Tribals are used as 'Guide' for the development of eco-tourism in Kumargramduar Block of the Sub-Himalayan West Bengal due to their habitat and inter-linkages with the forests since primitive times.

Eco-tourism may enhance the economic growth and environmental protection in Kumargramduar Block. The relationships among the eco-tourism, economic growth, public awareness, enforcement of law and environmental protection are shown in different diagrams such as XOY and X_1OY_1 as follows :

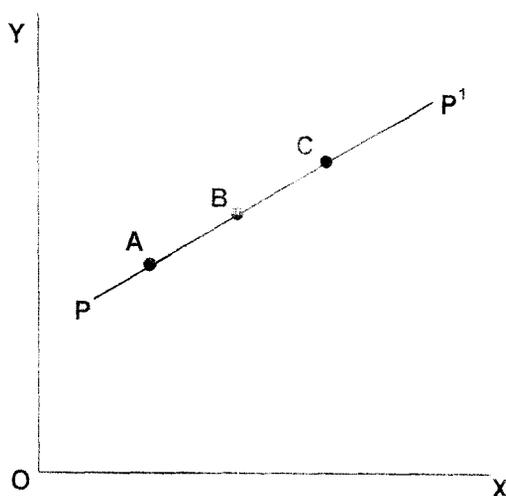


Diagram-4 : Graphical representation to show the relationships among eco-tourism, economic growth and public awareness

Here in the diagram (XOY), A, B and C indicate eco-tourism, economic growth and public awareness respectively. Eco-tourism may increase the wheel of economic growth in Kumargramduar Block. As a result, people may be accessed information carefully. PP^1 is a straight line that shows the relationships among these three variables.

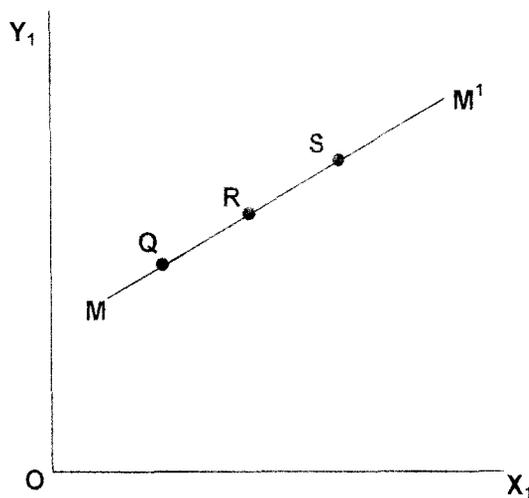


Diagram-5 : Graphical representation to show the relationships among public awareness, enforcement of law and environmental protection.

In the other diagram i.e. (X_1OY_1), Q, R and S indicate public awareness, enforcement of law and environmental protection respectively. Public awareness may increase the mechanisms for the enforcement of law in the study area. As a result, environmental protection drive may be initiated to a larger extent. MM^1 is a straight line that shows the relationships among these different variables.

Eco-tourism is a tourism practice by which tourism is developed on the one side and on the other side the local ecology is conserved. Eco-tourism potentials in the entire Kumargramduar Block may mitigate the environmental problems. It is one of the alternative routes for sustainable economic growth in the entire block. Being an under-developed area, eco-tourism will be able to give the socio-economic empowerment to the public in Kumargramduar Block. As such, the local population looks after the environmental issues in the locality. Environment-conscious public may raise their voice against the pollution-menace of the entire area. The law-

enforcement authority may be able to enforce the different provisions of the acts against the environmental problems effectively along with the involvement of the environmental conscious common masses in the entire block. Eco-tourism is therefore, the key to the environmental protection at local level in the study area.

3.6. CONCLUSION

Kumargramduar Block of the Sub-Himalayan West Bengal is an ideal eco-tourism hotspot. It has very significant characteristic attributes to become a centre of excellence in terms of eco-tourism potential. It is a treasure-house of socio-cultural heritage of the area. Mother Nature blesses here. Kumargramduar Block is full of lush-green forests, diverse, wildlife, flowing rivers and natural springs, memorable history, incredible religious centre and so on. All these ingredients of culture incorporated together make the area an ideal eco-tourism hotspot in the entire Sub-Himalayan West Bengal. A holistic approach is essential to make the region an ideal eco-tourism circuit from within the local community on one hand to the governmental level on the other. Eco-tourism can raise the awareness campaign for the environmental protection of Kumargramduar Block of the Sub-Himalayan West Bengal.