

CHAPTER – 8PROSPECTS OF TOURISMPROSPECTS :

'Prospects for the future expansion of the world tourist industry, in the long term, seem almost limitless'. Estoril Seminar, O.E.C.D., Paris – 1967.

North Bengal has all the possibilities of emerging as a promising destination for domestic and overseas tourists. The northern part of this belt of West Bengal, comprising the districts of Darjiling, Japaiguri and Koch Bihar offers perhaps the most potential tourist circuit having immense scope of development of tourism in the area tapping the abundant resources and selling points which are three districts possess – individually as well as on a regional package basis. But in spite of the hilly and scenic terrain of Darjilling and the vast natural forests of Jalpaiguri the tourism development in the region has been stagnant. Darjiling no more remains the most beautiful of the hill stations of the country and has suffered a lot over the years owing to the uncontrolled growth and human onslaught on its rich natural bounty. The internal strife in the hill areas of the district has done no good to tourism promotion in the area. Unless some very positive and well-planned measures are taken up for tourism development in the area, Darjiling is not going to offer much in the future leading to diversion of tourist population to other places of the country. Again Jalpaiguri, though blessed with a very rich flora and fauna, has not witnessed major tourism development activity in the area. Jaldapara Rhino Sanctuary is perhaps the only place accessible to tourists through Tourism Dept. of the W.B. Govt. The other places of tourist interest, having a very high potential too, still remain catered to by the forest development programme only. Places like Jayanti, Bhutan Ghat, Rajabhatkhawa, Gorumara etc. continue to remain areas

of interest from the forestry point of view only. The famous Buxa Fort continues to remain out side the tourist circuit due to its inaccessibility (**Appendix – 8**). Hence the potential tourism development in this region has to take into account the following aspects –

- (a) Not confining tourism to location only and emphasizing creation of activities commensurate with the location and the locale.
- (b) Promoting tourism on a regional basis.

Therefore, the need is to present the entire region as a tourist package bringing some potential tourist spots in North Bengal's tourism map. These are-

LAVA :

This is one of the most potential places of tourist interest, which is away from the hustle and bustle of congested Darjiling town. Situated at an altitude of 7200 ft. this '*little slice of paradise*' belongs to Kalimpong subdivision and 32km away from Kalimpong town. Lava has multi-faced personality. The rolling hills, twittering of birds hidden in the lush foliage, beautiful Oak, Pine and Fir trees, blooming flowers – all fascinate everyone. When fog descends deep into the valley and the dark-mountain-tops look like islands floating in a sea of muslin, one may be mesmerized by the loveliness of Lava. From this lazy hamlet one can get a panoramic view of the Eastern Himalayan ranges and the Jelepla and Rechila passes.

The corrupting influence of urbanization has not been able to wipe out all vestiges of local ambience and tradition. A monastery nearby imparts religious instruction to young acolytes dressed in gorgeous shades of saffron and magenta. There is a rest house in Lava, which is owned and run by the West Bengal Forest Development Corporation. The name of this rest house is

Lava Nature Education and Wilderness Resort. There are few private hotels in Lava market area. *Yangki Resort, Hotel P. P. and Unique Lodge* thus provide shelter to the tourists. The rate charges range from Rs. 300 to Rs. 650.

LOLAY GAON :

Perched at an altitude of 5500 ft and 56 km from Kalimpong town this little human habitation offers one of the most fascinating views of Kanchanjunga and the other towering peaks. The sunrise as seen from Jhandi Dara, a viewpoint in this village is more spectacular than that of Tiger Hill. The natural beauty of Loley Gaon is incomparable. In fact it is a harmony of green and blue.

The Darjiling Gorkha Hill Council, which has taken over Darjiling's tourism, is responsible for turning Loley Gaon into a tourist spot from the forest area. There is an orange orchard here. The forest department has made some tents on the orange orchard where tourists can spend nights. Besides these tents, DGHC also provides bungalows. A tourist lodge named after a local bird '**Dafey Munal**' too provides accommodation facility to the tourists. Loley Gaon Nature Education and Wilderness Resort of Forest Department is also an important shelter to the tourists.

SUNTALEY KHOLA :

85 km away via Samsing from Siliguri, Suntaley Khola is a place in the backdrop of glistening green and blue sky with the touch of everlasting beauty. Trekking from Samsing to Suntaley Khola will bring one closer to the nature. The sinuous flow of mountain streams will whisper in the one's heart. The music of the rustling leaves and hides and seeks of shadows with the trickling sunrays through the conifer leaves will take one to a pure and pristine world.

TARKHOLA :

Tarkhola is 80 km away from Siliguri, but it has a distance of 30 km from Kalimpong and only 10 km from Rongpo. With the touch of haunting wild Tarkhola can provide something very special to one. Endless shades of green and the music of supreme silence will fill one with the ever-elusive pure euphoria. It is place for sports with flavours of mountain. Hand Gliding, Rafting, in the fast moving streams, Rock-climbing or Trekking through the virgin forest will take one to the world of challenging encounters. One can enjoy Tarkhola by staying at Rongpo or Kalimpong.

MONGPONG :

Tucked away in a beautiful corner about 22 km north east of Siliguri, near Sevoke, is a popular picnic spot known as Mongpong. Resting on the immediate foothill its surrounding scenery is very attractive. It is the place where river Teesta descends into plains running from mountainous country. The limpid beauty of rippling water of the Teesta presents a panoramic view here. From here one can view the relic of British Raj- the *Coronation Bridge*. This splendid construction is built on an arch across the Teesta. Well past its period of longevity, the bridge is still going strong - an indication of the solid constructions during the Raj.

However the place boasts of a fabulous bungalow and a log hut. Not only is the bungalow exquisitely designed, it is luxuriously furnished as well and against the backdrop of the trees, it provides a gorgeous view. Around 30 ft below the compound runs a rail tract. The train's lazy and elegant movement adds a touch of nostalgia to the beautiful surroundings. Spending a couple of days in Mongpong is really attractive than having to search hopelessly for accommodation in the jam-packed hill stations of Darjiling or Gangtok. One



TOURIST TENTS AND HUTS IN LOLAYGAON



THE MAJESTIC CORONATION BRIDGE NEAR MONGPONG

can take here long walks along the pebbled bank of the Teesta or even through the dense forest comprising the Mahananda wild life sanctuary. Forest department has built up tree huts here to observe the aerial view of the area. Boating and rafting facilities are also available for the amusement of visitors. *About 2000 to 5000 picnickers arrive here everyday during December to March.*

Mongpong is easily accessible from Siliguri. Bus services are available from the Bidhan market bus stand. While camping at Mongpong, one can make short trips to Garubathan on the road to Lava or Damdim or even Bagrakote.

MAHANANDA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY :

The sanctuary lies near Sevoke on the way to Kalimpong. The area of the wild life sanctuary is vast (almost 127.22 sq. km.) from the foothills to the rolling plains. The Mahananda's ecosystem is an excellent habitat for numerous wild life species. Natural diversity in its flora is exquisitely lush with variety, colour and rich in collectiveness. Wherever one stretches his eyes an adequate number of Mammals, Birds, Reptiles and Insects are to be seen living in a world free any sordid interference. *The Nature Interpretation Centre* at the premises of Range Office is worth a visit. Tourist office, Siliguri organizes '*Safari Tour*' by bus to it between November and March. There is a weir inside this sanctuary called *Mahananda Weir*. The weir is a beautiful picnic spot.

CHALSA :

Chalsa is one of the potential tourist resort of Jalpaiguri district. It is situated near Malbazar. The surrounding wavy hilly tract, enchanting beauty of green vegetation and tea gardens, the playing of clouds on the foothills are the wealth of tourism development of Chalsa. Considering its immense potentiality

as a tourist resort State govt. has proposed to build 'Tourist Village' here. Meanwhile the construction programmes are going on. *Sinclair's Hotels and Transportation Ltd* has commenced work on Rs.14 crore holiday village resorts. The proposed complex would cater to the upper class and the upper middle class holidaymakers. The resort will consist of cottages and villas with clubhouse facilities built to merge with the environment. There would be 96 self-contained cottages here some of which have already been opened for the tourists.

LATAGURI :

This potential tourist destination belongs to Western Dooars (Jalpaiguri) and a little distance away from Malbazar and Chalsa. The entire surroundings are covered with thick unravaged forests with beautiful trees. It is also a little paradise of birds. Different species of birds take refuge here whose chirping break the silent of nature. Lataguri is an ideal place for nature lovers. Beautiful visiting spots like Khagrijan, Chikanmati, Gorumara National Park, Brahmanijhora, Murti, Bindu, Chapramari are adjacent to Lataguri. So tourists who plan to go Lataguri can touch these fascinating spots too.

Recently State Govt. has planned to build a bird watching centre here. A Deer park will also be set up. For this purpose Govt. will bring fifteen Sambar deers from Manipur. A breeding centre is also under consideration to increase the deer population. To spread the tourism Govt. has planed to build a tourist lodge here.

GAJOL DOBA:

This is a beautiful potential tourist destination located near Siliguri. The river Teesta, its sandy bank and the picturesque natural surroundings have

changed this spot as a tourist site. *The Sahara India Pariwar* will set up an **Integrated Sahara Tourism Project** here. The project will include a golf course, clubhouse, and wooden chalets, air-conditioned rooms and other water sports. Eight-seater helicopter will be used in addition to other vehicles.

BHUTAN GHAT :

Bhutan Ghat is the pride of Dooars for its excellent beauty. It is about 35 km away from Alipurduar, the Sub divisional town of Jalpaiguri district. It is an ideal place for "*one who has been long in city pent*". The steel-blue water of river Raidak, emerged from the hills along a bend and flowed here in a vast, swift torrent over many – splendoured rocks. The panoramic view of Raidak is really attractive here. The murmuring of the river breaks the silent of nature. One can be much thrilled watching the cormorants and wild geese dive into the river water in frequent sorties. If one takes a stroll here (with the guide of Forest Department) he would understand the appearance of nature. The forest of prized teak trees, the forest floor teeming with yellow-brown leaves and the canopy of Simul, Khair and Sal- all fascinate everyone. The excited chatter of monkey troops and their terrible racket in the trees overhead, charm every tourist. The sudden rushing of a herd of deer beautifies the forest more. Sometimes if luck favours one might see the king of jungle – the Tiger. The beauty of Bhutan Ghat becomes more attractive when evening spreads her wings over the towering Simul and Khair trees.

Bhutan Ghat is also a paradise for picnickers. There is a beautiful forest bungalow in the deep forest. From there, the wild life like tiger, wild elephant and other different animals are visible.

TOTO PARA :

*“O, Wonder,
 How many goodly creatures are there here!
 How beauteous mankind is!
 O, brave new world
 That has such people in’t!”*

-- W. Shakespeare.

Tourism shows an interesting relationship with cultural anthropology – study of primitive or folk cultures, and for exotic ancient culture, a tourist might move for long-haul travels. That which appears to be a common place, incongruous and grotesque in our way of life, becomes an object of tourist’s curiosity (Schanche, Don A, 1972, P. 45).

People in different parts of the world are unique in their physical appearances, dress, food, manner and ideal. In the case of Dooars i.e. Toto para they are due potential tourist resource. 30 km from Madarihat, Totopara on the banks of the river Torsha near Bhutan border is the only habitation now of the Dooars aboriginals – the **TOTOS**. Totos are one of the rare species of mankind of world. Their number has dwindled to less than a hundred now. A tea garden near Banarhat bears the name Toto para, probably a survival from days when Toto settlements were more numerous. To have knowledge of these living rare species of world social scientists, anthropologists, medical personnel very often visit this place. It is an ideal place for **Ethnic Tourism**.

Toto para is not well accessible by transport network. From Madarihat one can go to this place by taxis, jeep or maruti. The number of buses for going to Toto para is very limited. So the tourism potential has remained backward.

KUNJ NAGAR OF FALAKATA :

Kunj Nagar is a new tourist cum picnic park of Jalpaiguri district. It is situated 5 km north away from Falakata and the river Torsha is flowing along it. Department of Forest and Falakata Golden Nature Club have taken active effort to upgrade its status as a tourist spot.

The natural beauty of Kunj Nagar is really excellent. If one sits beside the river Torsha he can see the Jaldapara sanctuary. At night bisons, rhinos, elephants and deers come to drink water and this scene thrills one easily. At the dawn the chirping of a number of migratory birds and their flying bring another feeling in one's mind. The blue firmament and floating clouds above the river Torsha are very exciting.

Electrified wires to prevent the movement of wild animals into it encircle the entire park. The park is well decorated. There is a statue of rhino made of plastic. If one does not know it before, he must think it as real. Besides this, there is an '**Animal Animation Centre**' where ill animals are treated by forest department.

In the months of December, January and February a number of picnickers gather here. Forest department provides necessary things for the picnic parties. The entry fee of the park is 4 rupees per head. It is probably the second largest picnic spot of North Bengal after Mongpong of Sevoke near Siliguri. There is a forest rest house here.

JAGJIVANPUR- A GLORY OF PAST :

The Malda district has been luring a number of historians, archaeologists and other research scholars due to its historical importance, but



PANORAMIC VIEW OF BHUTANGHAT



EXCAVATION AT JAGJIVANPUR

recently the discovery of the structural remains of a monastery and several seals has changed the entire archaeological scenario of the district. The inflow of tourists is increasing day by day to have a glimpse of this monastery:

The site that yielded the treasure-throve is located 41 km east of Malda town. The most notable of the finds are some terracotta seals. But only one of the six seals excavated is intact. Many terracotta plaques have been recovered from the debris. According to archaeologists these are probably used to decorate the monastery's outer surface. Some decorated tiled-bricks have also been found, depicting motifs such as scroll, lotus petals and geometric designs. The discovered **Copper Plate** has a royal seal on top. A Dharmachakra lies at its centre, flanked by deer, on both sides and the inscription of the name of king *Mahendrapaladeva* below. Analyzing this, archaeologists have arrived in this decision that *it is a Buddhist Monastery of the 9th century*. The plate records king Mahendrapaladeva's announcement that General Vajradeva of his Army intended to dedicate the land adjacent to the Nanda-Dirghika-Udranga Mahivihara to the worship of Buddhist deities. The Plate introduces Mahendra as a sovereign of the Pala dynasty. On both sides there is an epigraphic account in the *Siddhamtrika script* of the 9th century.

Some objects of daily use are also recorded from the site. These include iron nails and terracotta lamps, spouted vessels, vase and trough are among the utensils identified at the site. *According to officials this is the largest discovery of post independence period in West Bengal*. Before its discovery there were excavated a number of Buddhist Monasteries in India but nowhere of these there was the name of their founder. From the obtained seals it has been known that its founder was Sri Vajradeva. Its name was Nand Dighi Bihar¹. This name was given perhaps by the name of a pond named Nand

¹ Bihar means Buddhist monastery.

POTENTIAL TOURISM NUCLEI IN NORTH BENGAL

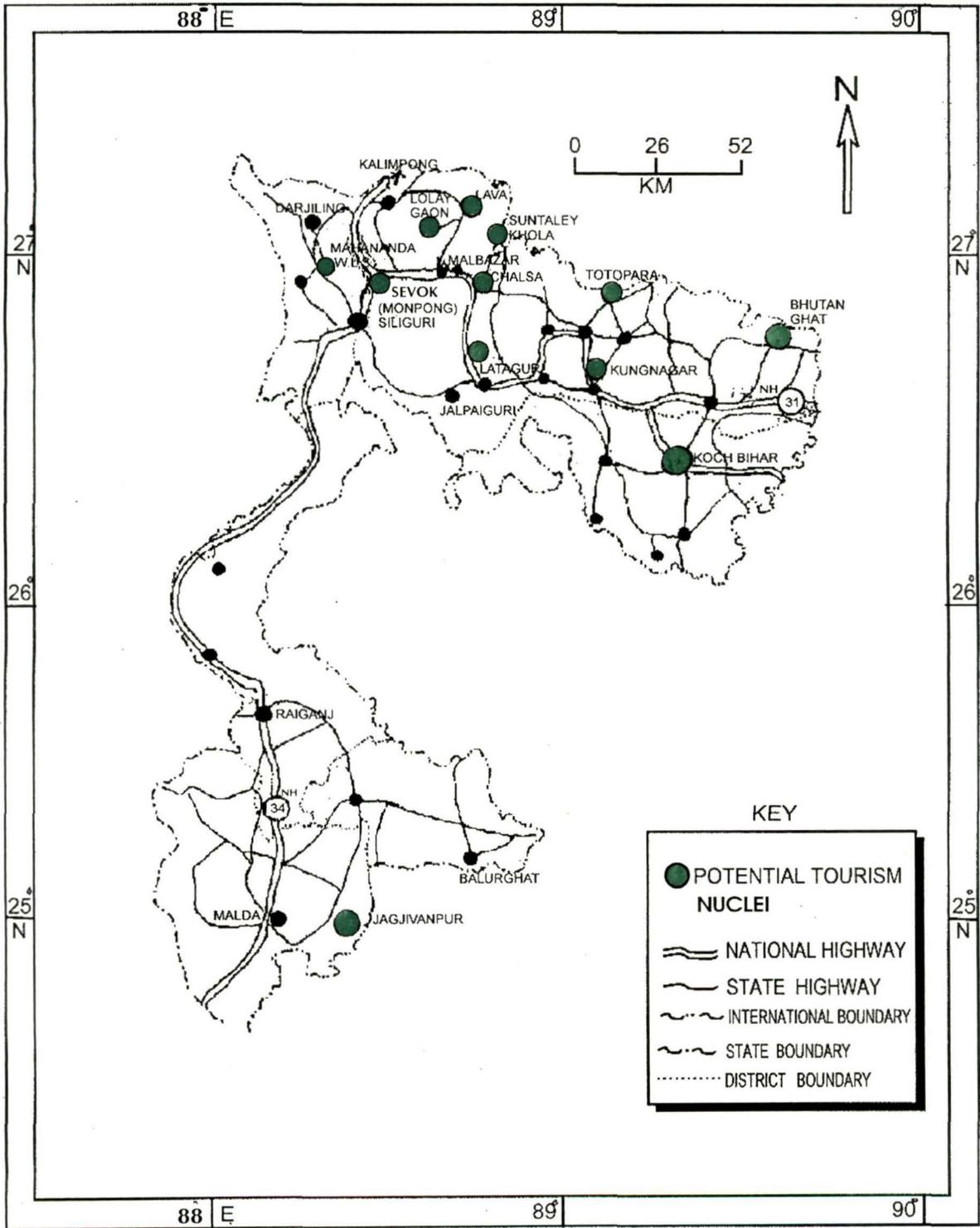


FIGURE-35

Dighi². The most miraculous fact is that this Dighi as yet lies. Hence realizing its antiquity and glory of by gone days a number of historians, archaeologists and other research scholars rushing here. In fact, *Jagjivanpur can break the traditional tourism activity in Malda district (Appendix-9)*.

RECENT TRENDS :

INITIATION OF HERITAGE TOURISM :

Thousands of archaeological and historical monuments are scattered throughout the country. These beautiful creations of man or heritage ruins of history contribute to the richness of any landscape. Besides these, the arts, songs, dances, dramas, fairs, people, lifestyles, bizarre traditions, manners and festivals also bring diversity in a region. These assets coupled with ancient ruins in some cases form the framework of tourism development. This is known as '**Heritage Tourism**'.

There is an immense potentiality of 'Heritage tourism' in Koch Bihar. It is being the only planned town with a very rich heritage in terms of buildings, places of worship and folk art, has still to find a place to the tourist circuit of the State. The beautiful architectural style of Koch Bihar Maharaja Palace has been repaired, restored and electrified to introduce Heritage tourism. A number of past facts are related to this palace, which still persists in the heart of people of North Bengal and neighbouring Assam. However the prevalence of 19th century Victorian buildings, built by the kings of the erstwhile Koch Bihar kingdom, a scientifically laid out town dotted with huge water bodies (dighis) add up to provide a unique heritage ambience, not available even on a much lower scale, any where in the state. The plethora of temples and mosques with varied

² Dighi is a Bengali term, meaning pond.

HERITAGE TOURIST SITES IN KOCHBIHAR TOWN

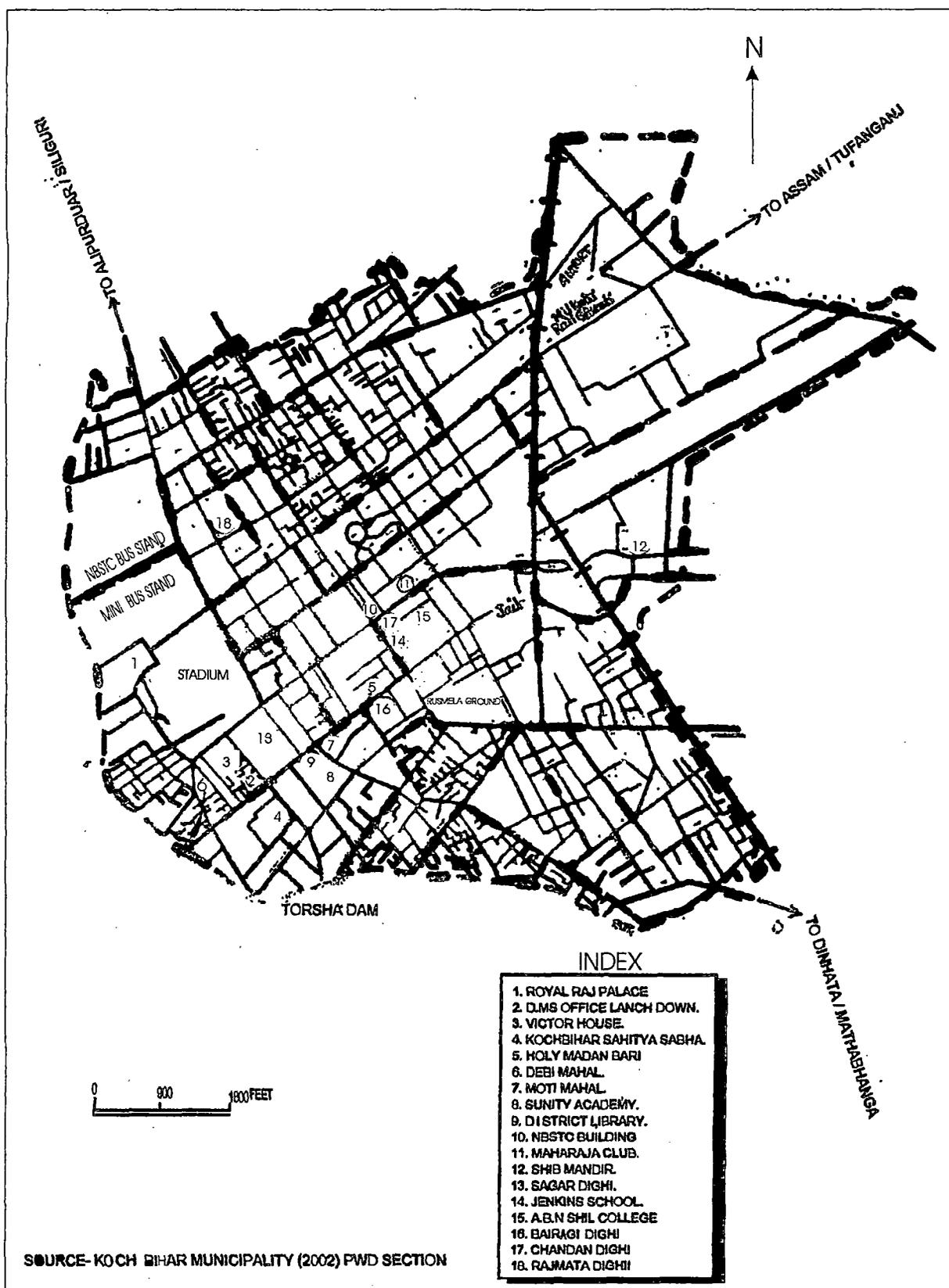


FIGURE-36

architecture, built between 17th and 19th century has further enriched the heritage of Koch Bihar (Appendix-10). To promote this idea, the Archaeological Survey of India declared Koch Bihar Palace as a National Monument. A museum has also set up in the palace to show the glimpse of royal collections and folklore of the area. The princess of Koch Bihar, Gayetri Devi¹ has provided a number of royal materials to this museum. The materials kept in the museum reflect the glory and tradition of past Koch reign. There are plans to set up an Archaeological Research Centre as well.

Recently, the archaeological survey of India has taken up excavation work at Gossanimari in Koch Bihar where the ancient capital of Kamtapur was located. It is believed that the excavation may reveal ancient buildings buried under the soil presently. This site may turn out to be tremendous interest for tourists as well as for researchers and scholars. *Apart from these, the region can boast of having a very rich folk culture too and still preserving their originality and reflecting the wide spectrum of the culture heritage of the region. So there is a vast scope to promote the emerging concept of 'Heritage tourism' in the region.* In this context the recent steps, taken by the Central and State govt. are very important to bring Koch Bihar in National tourism map.

ECO-CITY -A NEW EMERGING CONCEPT OF MODERN TOURISM :

Traditional tourism activity at present no more can stir man's curious mind. Man has been faded up with the monotonous touring. So he wants new experiences, new excitement and new fun and frolic. Hence a new form of tourism, wrapped up with environment friendly is emerging recently for the city dwellers. This is the concept of **Eco-city**. In this new concept tourists will keep themselves away from hustle and bustle of urban areas. They will take fresh air

¹ Gayetri devi is an inheritress of Koch Bihar dynasty and now living in Jaypur of Rajasthan.

and will rise up hearing the sweet-voiced songs of beautiful birds. Even tourists will also be touched by local cultures of the area. On the whole, there will be a close contact between man and nature.

Harnessing the rich scenic beauty of nature, heritage resources and cultures this new tourism activity is going to be blossomed in North Bengal for the first time. A spot has also been selected for it. It is **Panga-Bat Tala** located on the way of Siliguri-Jalpaiguri State Highway (About 34km from Siliguri) where the beauty of nature is spread throughout the entire area. *The smiling face of blue firmament, green pastures, panoramic view of Himalayan foothills, twittering of birds, murmuring of a tributary called Panga and the relics of Devi Choudhurani- all have provided the framework of Eco-city in the area.* Covering fifty acres of land it has been developing. Utilizing the blue water body of river Panga several ponds have already been dug out. Necessary arrangements for boating facilities have been made here. The construction of a number of huts made by local materials such as bamboos, canes are also proceeding silently.

As a part of Eco-city concept meanwhile a Motorists- Inn has developed in the area. The Motorists-Inn is providing employment opportunities to the local people. After completion of the entire project it is hoped that a large flow of tourists will begin to land here and the area will economically be sound.

CONCEPT OF VILLAGE TOURISM :

Of late, the concept of 'village Tourism' has come into existence in the field of Tourism. Basically it is a form of Eco-Tourism. The concept resembles that of Australian farm tourism, where tourists can book houses in

villages and stay as guests. This not only gives tourists a taste of country life, but also a first hand knowledge of the traditions, customs and culinary skills of the region. This idea was implemented by the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) in collaboration with Nepal Village Resort Private Ltd (NVRPL), back in 1997, when Sirubari, an idyllic Gurung dominated hamlet, west of Pokhara in the Shyangja district, was made a model village. Launching this programme was not difficult because major over hauling of infrastructure was not required. The great success of the project has brought the Pacific Asian Travel Association (PATA) gold medal in the Heritage and Culture category. Considering the great success of 'Village Tourism' in other countries, particularly in providing a substantial part of tourist revenue directly to the villagers, some parts of North Bengal can be wrapped up in this new concept. Few model villages at the foothills of North Bengal thus can be treated. Besides, the ever-increasing tourist inflow in Darjiling has tarnished its image as a clean and green area and has disrupted its network of basic amenities. *Hence it has become imperative to suitably identify, promote and channelize tourist inflow to satellite locales through the promotion of 'Village tourism'. Thus the virgin destinations like Takdah, Pedong, Sukhia Pokhari, Singla, Majitar, Siri khola, Tonglu, Simana, Gorubathan and some places of Buxa Tiger Reserve could be converted into tourist attractions.*

PLANTATION TOURISM :

Apart from these potential tourism nuclei, the State govt. has planned to utilize tea lands for tourism promotion. These tea lands are the ideal location for creating games facilities like tennis, golf or for setting up of tourist camp in Tents or log huts. This typical tourism activity is known as '*Plantation Tourism*'. Some tea gardens of Darjiling and Eastern Dooars thus have been selected for this purpose.

At the eleventh hour of the discussion of potential tourism nuclei, it is necessary to put some of the principles of PETERS (1969). These principles would help to assess the potential Tourism nuclei of the study area.

1. It is highly desirable that the potential tourism nuclei should be developed progressively throughout the entire study area so that tourism is spread as widely as possible and in this way the benefits, which accrue from the industry, are also widely spread in most parts of the region.
2. Priority should be given to those places of attraction, which can be most successfully developed. Tourists should equate such development with both the potential volume of tourist traffic and the probable expenditures.
3. Since it is impossible to develop all the potential attractions at the same time, it is important that similar or competing attractions should not be embarked upon until the volume of tourists can justify them; too many alternative or competing attractions may well jeopardize the success of others if the numbers and spending power of the tourists are not large enough to sustain them. Clearly, so in this case great care must be taken over priorities.
4. To promote the potential tourism activity the need of participation of local population is essential since the tourism projects are backed by local custom and hence stand a better chance of being viable economic propositions.

Finally, the government should aim at tapping the tourism potential in North Bengal to the fullest so that the tourist gets physically invigorated, mentally rejuvenated, culturally enriched and spiritually elevated.

PROPOSED TOURIST CIRCUITS :

To promote the tourism activity in the study area the existing tourist centres and potential tourism nuclei can be wrapped up on the basis of 'Tourist Circuit' concept. This will enable intensive development of selected centres, dispel the tendency to concentrate in a few mountainous tourist centres and encourage the diversification of tourist attractions, particularly in opening up economically backward areas, which hold many tourist attractions such as archaeological and historical monuments, places of natural beauty, festivals, arts and crafts. So, now an important task is to create a number of tourist circuits in terms of the totality of their infrastructure. Like 'Golden Tourist Triangle' of the North, which includes tourist spots in Delhi, Agra and Jaipur or the 'Golden Square' of South, several Tourist Circuits can be introduced in North Bengal. The Hill, Heritage and Forest added attractions could be brought under this package. All these combined together in such a package can certainly provide one of most promising Tourist Circuits in the region.

TOURIST CIRCUITS :

1. Siliguri—Mongpong—Chalsa—Gorumara—Jaldapara—Siliguri
2. Siliguri—Mahananda Wild life Sanctuary—Kalimpong—Lava—Lolaygaon—Malbazar—Siliguri
3. Siliguri—Mirik—Kurseong—Darjiling—Kalimpong—Siliguri
4. Siliguri—Kulik Bird Sanctuary—Pandua—Gour—Jagjivanpur—Siliguri
5. Koch Bihar – Rasik Beel Bird Sanctuary—Buxa Tiger Reserve—KunjNagar (Falakata).

PROPOSED TOURIST CIRCUITS OF NORTH BENGAL

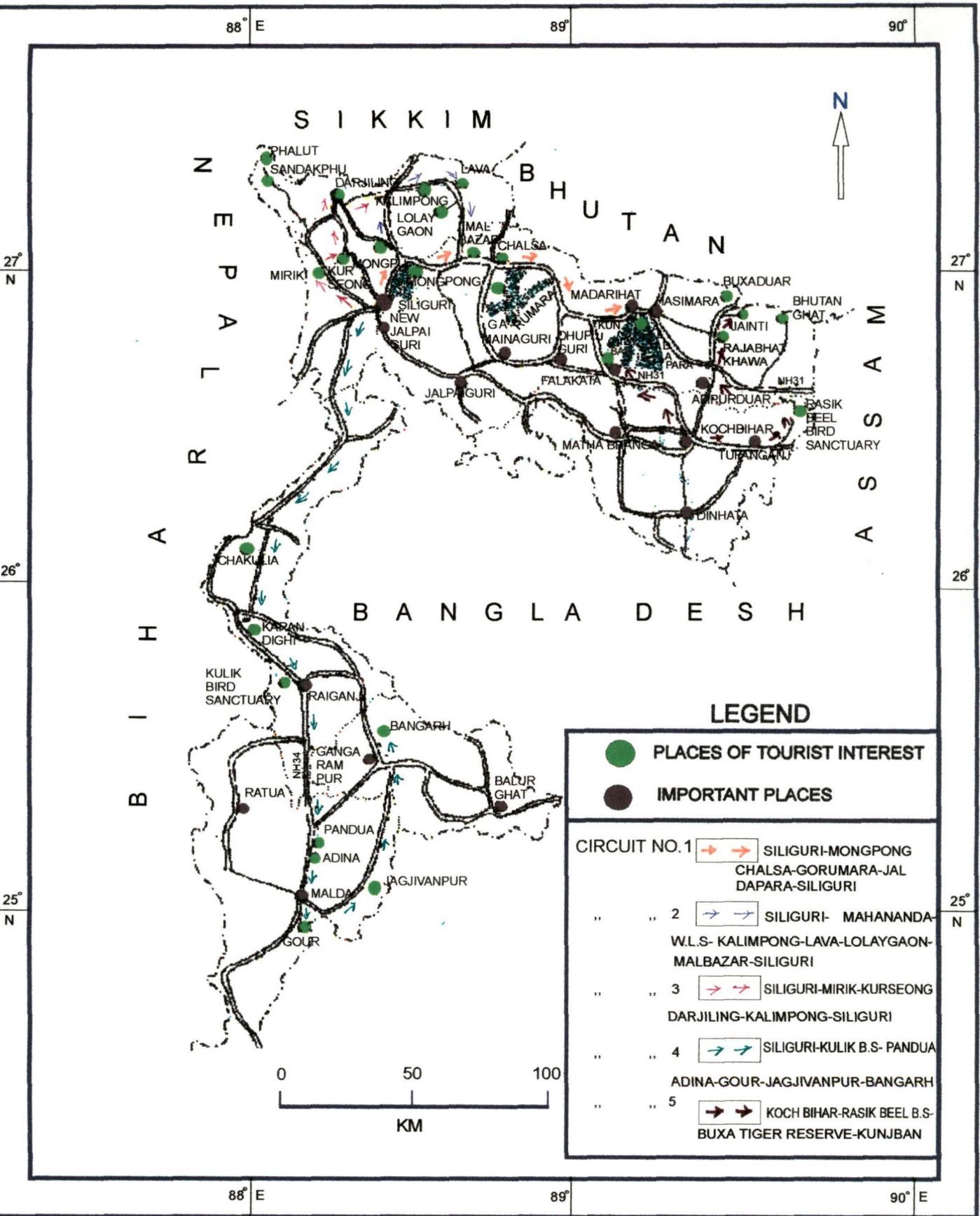


FIGURE-37

These regional '**Tourist Circuits**' package will open a new horizon in tourism sector of North Bengal. Through these circuits the remote places of tourism interest would be accessible easily to the tourists.

Tourist circuits will reduce the pressure of over congestion of Darjiling hill resorts and simultaneously these will disperse the tourists to other places like Lava, Lolaygaon, Gorumara, Jaldapara, Buxa Tiger Reserve and Koch Bihar. Even Gour, Pandua, Bangarh, Jagjivanpur etc. places will get a status of tourism through these circuits. *So it is a golden opportunity to utilize this package through the provision of adequate infrastructure in order to rejuvenate the poor tourism scenario of the North Bengal.*

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