

The Therapeutic Landscape: Exploring the Relationship Between Tourism, Mental Health and Community Resilience of Sivasagar District, Assam

Krishnamoni Saikia

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Geography & RM, Mizoram University, Mizoram, India

Abstract:

Tourism has long been recognised as a significant contributor to economic development, but its impact on mental health wellness and community resilience remains underexplored. This paper examines the intersection of tourism, mental health, and community resilience, highlighting the therapeutic potential of travel and tourism in promoting mental well-being. We argue that tourism can play a vital role in fostering community resilience, enhancing mental health, and promoting sustainable development. Through a critical review of existing literature and case studies, we identify key mechanisms by which tourism can support mental health wellness, including social connections, cultural exchange, and environmental engagement. We also discuss the challenges and limitations of tourism in promoting mental health and community resilience, and propose a framework for responsible tourism practices that prioritise mental health and community wellbeing. The research is conducted in Sivasagar district, Assam, India. Sivasagar district carries the legacy of bright History from the Ahom Dynasty. A mixed-method approach has been applied to analyse the data(quant+qual). Both Primary and secondary sources are used for the collection of data. 201 samples from the Sivasagar district are used for this study. Pearson's Correlation matrix is used for the statistical analysis of the dataset, and Q-GIS is used to prepare the study area map. This research contributes to the emerging discourse on tourism and mental health and provides insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers seeking to harness the therapeutic potential of tourism for sustainable development.

Keywords: Tourism, Community resilience, mental health.

1. Introduction:

"In Sivasagar's gentle breeze, find your soul's release, where history whispers secrets, and nature's beauty brings peace."

-Anonymous

Tourism is a significant contributor to India's economy, accounting for 9.2% of the country's GDP and employing over 40 million people (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020). Assam, a state in northeastern India, has emerged as a popular tourist destination, attracting visitors from across the globe with its rich cultural heritage, diverse wildlife, and breathtaking natural beauty. Sivasagar District, located in the heart of Assam, is home to numerous historical sites, including the iconic Sivasagar Tank, the Rang

Ghar, and the Talatal Ghar, which showcase the region's rich cultural and architectural heritage (Saikia, 2018). However, the rapid growth of tourism in Sivasagar District also raises concerns about its impact on local communities and the environment. The influx of tourists has put pressure on the district's infrastructure, leading to issues such as overcrowding, pollution, and strain on local resources (Goswami, 2019). Moreover, the commercialisation of local cultures and traditions has raised concerns about the erosion of community identity and the loss of traditional practices (Bhattacharya, 2020). Against this backdrop, this study explores the impact of tourism on mental health and community resilience in Sivasagar District, Assam, with a focus on assessing the current state of tourism infrastructure and services. Specifically, it examines the effects of tourism on the mental well-being of residents, the factors contributing to community resilience or vulnerability, and identifies areas for improvement and opportunities for sustainable tourism development. By understanding the complex relationships between tourism, mental health, and community resilience, this study aims to inform policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities about strategies for promoting sustainable tourism that benefits both visitors and residents. Against this backdrop, this study explores the impact of tourism on mental health and community resilience in Sivasagar District, Assam, with a focus on assessing the current state of tourism infrastructure and services. Specifically, it examines the effects of tourism on the mental well-being of residents, the factors contributing to community resilience or vulnerability, and identifies areas for improvement and opportunities for sustainable tourism development. By understanding the complex relationships between tourism, mental health, and community resilience, this study aims to inform policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities about strategies for promoting sustainable tourism that benefits both visitors and residents.

2. Significance of the Study:

The study on "The Therapeutic Landscape: Exploring the Relationship Between Tourism, Mental Health and Community Resilience of Sivasagar District, Assam" is significant as it aims to inform sustainable tourism practices, enhance community well-being, preserve cultural heritage, support economic development, and contribute to academic knowledge. By exploring the intersections of tourism, mental health, and community resilience, the study seeks to provide insights for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities to develop strategies that benefit both visitors and residents, ultimately promoting a more holistic and sustainable approach to tourism development in the region. Sivasagar district carries the legacy of the Ahom Dynasty, which ruled for 600 years in Assam. Because of the Ahom Dynasty, now Sivasagar district is now a widely known heritage tourism destination. It provides opportunities towards the socio-economic development of the native people. Hence, this study signifies.

3. Study Area:

The study area covers the Sivasagar district, Assam. The population of the study is the students of Sivasagar district (adopted the students from higher educational institutes).

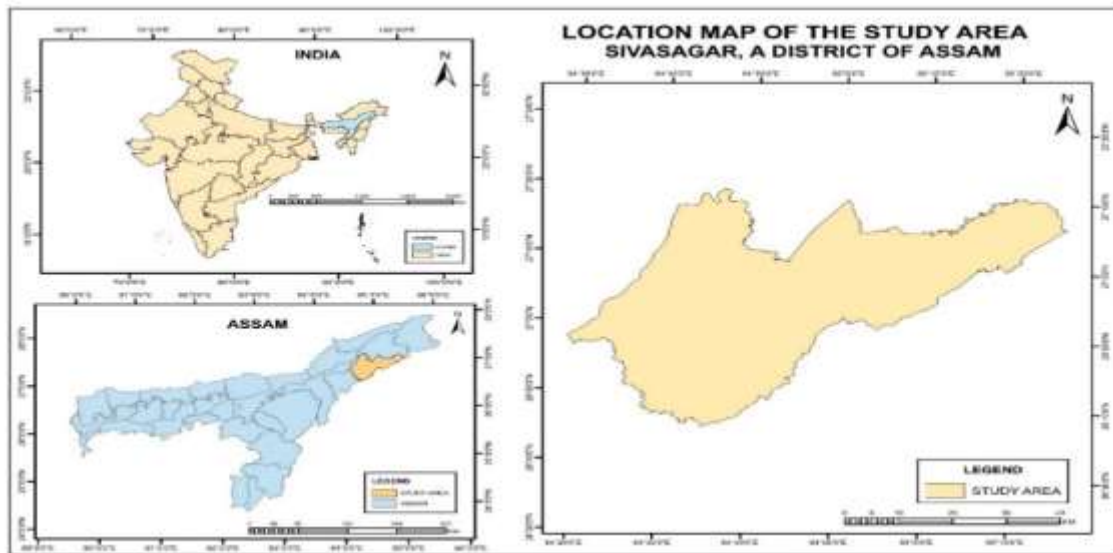


Figure 1: Map of the study area.

4. Research Questions:

- How does tourism affect the mental health of residents in Sivasagar District?
- What are the factors contributing to community resilience or vulnerability due to tourism in the area?
- How do locals perceive the impact of tourism on their mental well-being and community cohesion?
- What are the key areas needing improvement for sustainable tourism development in Sivasagar?
- What opportunities exist for enhancing sustainable tourism in the district while minimising negative impacts?

5. Objectives:

1. Impact of tourism on mental health and community resilience in Sivasagar District, Assam.
2. To assess the current state of tourism infrastructure and services in Sivasagar district, Assam, identifying areas for improvement and opportunities for sustainable development.

6. Literature Review:

Studies suggest tourism can have both positive (e.g., stress reduction, cultural exchange) and negative (e.g., cultural shock, social disruption) impacts on mental health (Gössling et al., 2018; Weaver, 2012). The impact of tourism on mental health is a complex and multifaceted issue. Research suggests that tourism can have both positive and negative effects on mental well-being. On the one hand, tourism can offer opportunities for relaxation, stress reduction, and cultural exchange, thereby contributing to improved mental health (Gössling et al., 2018; Weaver, 2012). For example, a study on tourists in India found that the experience of cultural immersion and relaxation led to significant reductions in stress and anxiety levels (Kumar & Kumar, 2014).

On the other hand, tourism can also lead to cultural shock, social disruption, and increased stress levels, particularly in communities that are not equipped to manage large numbers of tourists (Moscardo, 2008). Furthermore, the commercialisation of local cultures and traditions can lead to feelings of cultural degradation and loss of identity, negatively impacting mental health (Hutt, 2017).

Tourism can enhance community resilience through economic benefits, social connections, and cultural preservation (Twigg, 2009; Sharpley, 2014).

Tourism can have both positive and negative impacts on community resilience. On the positive side, tourism can enhance economic benefits, social connections, and cultural preservation, contributing to increased community resilience (Twigg, 2009; Sharpley, 2014). For example, a study on community-based tourism in South Africa found that tourism revenue had improved local infrastructure, education, and healthcare, enhancing overall community well-being (Manyara & Jones, 2007).

However, over-tourism and poor management can erode community resilience by disrupting local lifestyles, creating social tensions, and degrading the environment (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Furthermore, the unequal distribution of tourism benefits can exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities, reducing community resilience (Scheyvens, 2002).

Sivasagar District in Assam, India, has significant tourism potential, with its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. However, there is limited research on the current state of tourism infrastructure and services in the district. Studies on similar destinations in India highlight the need for sustainable tourism development, emphasising the importance of community engagement, environmental conservation, and responsible tourism practices (Kumar & Kumar, 2014).

7. Database and Methodology:

To conduct the present study, both primary and secondary data have been collected. Primary data were collected through questionnaires, and secondary data were collected from Google and research papers. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. A simple random sampling approach was used to gather data. The sample size of this study is 201.



8. Results and Discussion:

The analysis of the objective “Impact of tourism on mental health and community resilience in Sivasagar District, Assam” reveals that tourism has both positive and negative impacts on mental health and community resilience in Sivasagar District, Assam.

Table 1: Impacts of Tourism on Mental Health and Community Resilience.

Dimensions	Impacts
Mental Health	Economic Empowerment
	Cultural Exchange
	Social Connections
	Infrastructural development

Community Resilience	Economic Pressure
	Stress and Anxiety
	Social Cohesion
	Economic Diversification
	Cultural Preservation
	Community-Based Tourism
	Social Disruption

The impacts outlined in Table 1 are expounded upon in Table 2, providing a more nuanced understanding of tourism's effects.

Table 2: Description of the impacts

Variables	Positive	Negative
Economic Empowerment	Create Jobs, Income opportunities for Local	Unequal distribution of benefits, Exploitation
Cultural Exchange	Promote Cross-Cultural Understanding, Preserves tradition	Cultural homogenization, Commercialisation
Social Connections	Strengthen social connections by fostering community pride, cultural events, and interaction between locals and tourists	Social disruption
Infrastructural development	Improves local infrastructure (roads, amenities)	Overburdening of resources, Environmental strain
Economic Pressure	Increases demand for services, Inflation	Rising cost of living for locals
Stress and Anxiety	_____	Overcrowding, Noise Pollution, Strain on resources
Social Cohesion	Foster Community Pride, Cultural events	Displace locals, create tensions
Economic Diversification	Encourage diverse industries (local craft, food)	Over-reliance on tourism, Vulnerability to shocks
Cultural Preservation	Supports heritage conservation, cultural revival	Alters traditional practices, the commercialisation of culture
Community-Based Tourism	Empowers locals, promotes responsible tourism	Potential mismanagement, unequal benefits
Social Disruption	_____	Changes Social Structures, displaces communities

The impacts of tourism on mental health and community resilience in Sivasagar District (as identified in Table 1) were further analysed using Pearson's correlation matrix. This statistical analysis helped understand the relationships between tourism impacts and these variables. Based on data collected through a primary survey, descriptive statistics were calculated using JAMOVI, a statistical software. Additionally,

Pearson's correlation matrix was applied to examine correlations between variables. The data was also visualised through scatter plots and density curves to better understand the relationships and distributions.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptives		
	Mental Health	Community Resilience
N	201	201
Missing	0	0
Mean	17.7	14.6
Median	18	15
Mode	18.0	15.0
Sum	3567	2938
Standard deviation	6.62	5.37
Minimum	6	5
Maximum	30	25

Correlation Matrix			
		Mental Health	Community Resilience
Mental Health	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
	95% CI Upper	—	
	95% CI Lower	—	
	N	—	
Community Resilience	Pearson's r	0.985***	—
	df	199	—
	p-value	<.001	—
	95% CI Upper	0.989	—
	95% CI Lower	0.981	—
	N	201	—

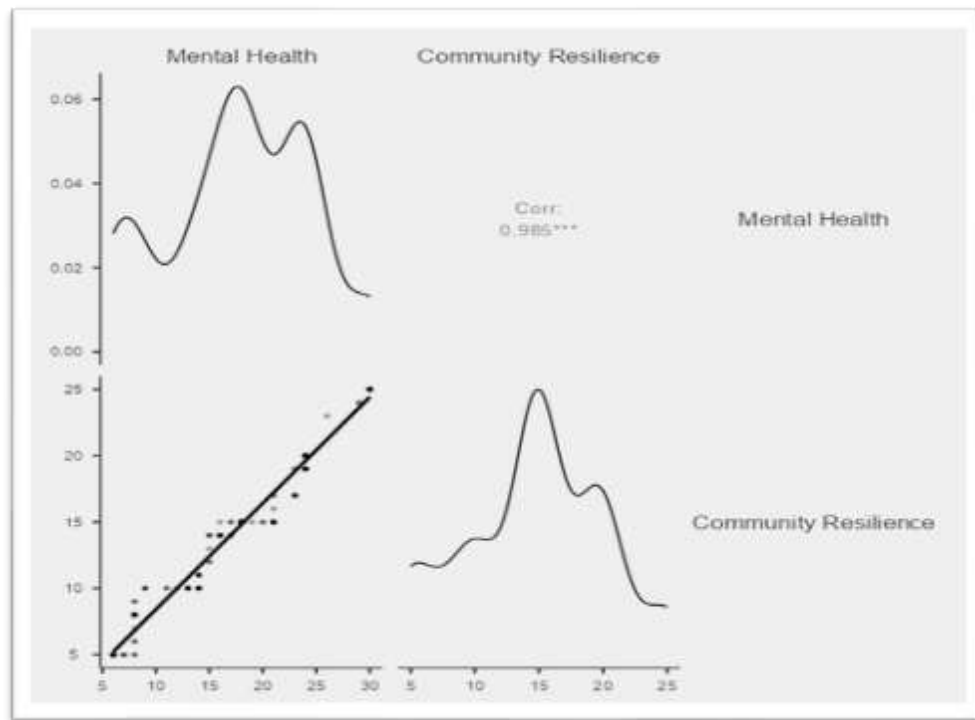


Figure 2: Scatter Plot.

The impact analysis of tourism on mental health and community resilience reveals that they are highly correlated. A highly statistically significant value of the above correlation matrix signifies that the tourism impacts on mental health and community resilience are linear. If one variable moves, then others tend to move together.

The data points in the Scatter Plot (Figure 2) are densely packed (Clustered), indicating a strong correlation between the variables, with a clear pattern or trend emerging from the cluster.

The current state of tourism infrastructure and services in Sivasagar district, Assam, identifies areas for improvement and opportunities for sustainable development.

○ **Current State:**

- Sivasagar has been selected under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme for eco-tourism development, which will enhance infrastructure and promote sustainable tourism.
- The district boasts various historical sites, such as Rang Ghar, Talatal Ghar, Sivasagar Tank, Joysagar Tank, and the Shiva dol complex, that showcase the Ahom dynasty's legacy.
- Brahmaputra River, tea gardens, and wildlife sanctuaries are bringing natural attractions to the district.

○ **Areas for Improvement:**

- Infrastructure: Upgrade roads, parking facilities, and amenities near heritage sites.
- Tourist Guides: Train and deploy more guides to share the region's history and culture.
- Marketing: Promote Sivasagar through digital platforms and collaborations with travel agencies.
- Community Engagement: Involve more local communities in tourism development to ensure equitable benefits.

○ **Opportunities for Sustainable Development:**

- Eco-Tourism: Leverage Sivasagar's natural beauty for activities like river cruises and wildlife tours.

- Cultural Tourism: Showcase traditional crafts, festivals, and cuisine.
- Community-Based Tourism: Create immersive homestay experiences and local activities that put money directly into the pockets of Sivasagar's residents.

By tackling these areas, Sivasagar is poised to emerge as a top tourist hotspot, fuelling economic prosperity while safeguarding its treasured cultural legacy.

9. Conclusion:

The therapeutic landscape of Sivasagar district in Assam holds immense potential to nurture mental well-being and foster community resilience. By embracing sustainable tourism practices, promoting cultural exchange, and empowering local communities, Sivasagar can become a beacon of hope for mental health and wellness. As tourists immerse themselves in the district's rich heritage and natural beauty, they can find solace in the tranquil surroundings, connect with the warm locals, and rediscover themselves. By investing in Sivasagar's therapeutic landscape, we can create a ripple effect of positivity, benefiting both visitors and residents, and making mental health and community resilience a collective responsibility.

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