



Untapped Opportunities For Development Of Tourism Sector: A Study On Natural Tea Plantations In Charaideo District Of Assam

Miss. Toni moon Changmai

PhD Research Scholar, North East Studies

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Ghy Unit

Dr.Sarat Hazarika

PhD Supervisor

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Nagaon, Assam

Abstract: Assam occupies a prominent position in the worldwide tea sector and simultaneously holds immense tourism prospects. Charaideo District, the ancient seat of the Ahom Dynasty and UNESCO World Heritage Site (2024), simultaneously holds significant tea tourism potential alongside its archaeological prominence. Tea has succeeded in securing a significant international market in the current economy and it still observes growing demand among consumers. Following the identification of tea in Assam, its requirement has grown steadily. Assam's climatic conditions and weather patterns are highly conducive for tea cultivation. Hence, Assam possesses the capacity to establish a tea commercial hub in India. Employing agrochemicals for tea production is hazardous to human well-being, earth as well as the environment. It has also diminished the fundamental organic characteristics of tea; therefore, currently the requirement for chemical free tea has been increasing. Charaideo is a region in Assam where several small tea growers have commenced the development of natural tea estates. Thus, this research aims to highlight the natural tea cultivation process in Charaideo district and what kinds of challenges are linked with natural tea and its prospective opportunities.

Keywords: Natural tea, chemical, industrial tea, dangerous, Charaideo.

I. Introduction:

Assam holds the greatest potential to emerge as a tea-based tourism destination in the country, as it is the largest tea producer in India. Tea tourism aids in the upliftment of local communities. Tea has succeeded in securing a significant international market and remains one of the most consumed beverages globally. Assam, recognized as the largest tea producing state in India, contributes over 50 percent of the country's total output. The state's climatic conditions and weather patterns are highly conducive for tea farming, making it a natural hub for tea production. However, the conventional commercial model relies heavily on agrochemicals, which are increasingly viewed as hazardous to human well-being, earth and the environment. This has diminished the fundamental organic characteristics of tea and shifted consumer preference towards chemical free alternatives. Despite Assam's capacity to establish a tea commercial hub, the majority of plantations remain dependent on chemical intensive methods. In contrast, small tea growers in Charaideo district have commenced the development of natural tea estates. Yet, these initiatives remain fragmented, with limited documentation of cultivation practices, market access or profitability. In recent years, Assam has emerged as a prominent tea tourism destination, offering visitors the opportunity to explore the fascinating history, cultural diversity, and abundant natural beauty that makes this region special. Natural tea cultivation is gaining recognition as a profitable and ecologically responsible source of livelihood. Over the past few years, there has been a notable surge in global and domestic demand for natural tea. This rise is closely linked to a growing awareness about health and wellness, especially among urban consumers who are moving away from chemically processed food and beverages. There exists a gap between the growing requirement for natural tea and the ground level challenges faced by the producers. Charaideo, a district carved out of Sivasagar in 2015, is administratively under the Sonari Legislative Assembly Constituency. Located at 26.9°N and 94.7°E, it lies approximately 80 km from Sivasagar town. The district covers 1,069 sq. km and had a population of 4,58,616 as per Census 2011. Charaideo is known for both tea cultivation and the UNESCO World Heritage Site Charaideo Maidams (2024).



II. Objectives:

1. To highlight the cultivation process of natural tea in Charaideo district
2. To assess the marketing approaches and prospective opportunities for developing chemical free natural tea as a tourism model

III. Methodology:

The present study examines the scope and practices of natural tea cultivation in Charaideo as a significant tea-growing region of Assam. A descriptive-cum-exploratory research design was adopted to understand the socio-economic dimensions and agritourism potential of chemical-free natural tea production in the area.

IV. Discussion:

Tea is the primary cultivable crop in North-East India and Assam. The earth, atmospheric conditions and climatic factors are suitable for tea farming in Upper Assam. Tea has been yielding an exceptional outcome in the financial domain of Assam since it was introduced as a commercial commodity. Assam tea is shipped to various states of India along with overseas due to its significant requirement. However, in the current scenario, it appears that the tea enterprises of Assam are employing numerous chemically synthesized compounds such as fungicides, pesticides, herbicides etc. to meet the substantial requirement for tea. The application of these chemicals, directly or indirectly, has an adverse effect on human well-being and also on natural ecosystems. Observing these issues, some concerned persons step forward and transform tea agriculture through the natural method. Contrary to Sivasagar's commercial estates, Charaideo's tea terrain is controlled by Small Tea Growers. As per District Agriculture Department data, 1,847 STGs, among which 47 plantations in Sonari, Sapekhati, Mahmora and Simaluguri areas adopt chemical free farming. It is significant that 'natural tea plantations' vary from accredited organic plantations since they do not possess official accreditation yet employ cow dung, neem cake and dhatura biological-pesticide. The method of chemical free natural tea cultivation differs from conventional or commercially produced tea. Natural tea necessitates greater effort and time to produce. As it requires natural development, diverse foliage, grains etc., are used in the natural tea plantation as bio pesticides.

Simultaneously, standard tea cultivation or its production is completely reliant on the utilization of chemically formulated substances. Contrarily, there is a slight differentiation between natural tea and accredited organic tea. Accredited organic tea is a large volume focused commodity while chemical free tea is a small volume focused commodity. The biological pest management substances, fertilizers and nutrients like turmeric(*curcuma longa*), pothoruwabiholongoni (*polygonumhydropiper*), kolmou (*ipoimoeacarnia*), meteka (*eichorniacrassipes*), Agora (*pinusroxburghii*), konibih (*croton tiglium*), titaphul (*phlogocanthustrysiflorus*), bochh (*acoruscalamus*), biholongoni (*cyclosorusextensa*), tengerilota (*mikaniamicrantha*), paanikochu (*Colocasiaesculenta*) etc. has been used for the natural tea plantation. Natural tea also requires handmade or indigenous technology for its manufacturing and has been given its final look. Nevertheless, natural tea also demands artisanal or native techniques for its production and has been provided its finished appearance.

Natural tea farming in Charaideo offers several ecological advantages that extend further than merely generating chemical-free drinks. The method aids in environmental sustainability, natural resource protection, and biological diversity conservation. A key ecological advantage of natural tea agriculture is that it encourages forest-edge farming without demanding deforestation. Numerous natural tea-producing groups in Charaideo grow herbs and natural green tea on the borders of woodland regions or on historically barren inclines. This permits cultivators to utilize unproductive terrain productively while preserving the wholeness of adjacent woodland ecosystems. As the farming does not entail removing tree cover, it avoids habitat loss and sustains animal pathways, which are crucial for maintaining environmental equilibrium. Another significant advantage is the decline in the application of synthetic manures and pesticides. Natural tea agriculture depends on natural materials like compost, vermicompost, neem extract, and cattle-derived preparations such as panchagavya and jeevamrit. This substantially lowers the danger of soil pollution, water contamination, and chemical discharge into streams and natural springs. It additionally safeguards



the well-being of agricultural laborers and buyers of natural tea. Gradually, soil composition enhances through organic fortification, resulting in superior nutrient holding and improved overall terrain fertility for natural tea cultivation. Natural tea agriculture in the Charaideo district also aids in safeguarding indigenous herbs and plant cultivars used in natural tea blends. Growing them organically guarantees that they keep flourishing in their native environment, supporting regional biological diversity. This also establishes a genetic repository of local plant species for future natural tea production that could otherwise disappear due to farming monoculture or market-driven overexploitation. Moreover, these methods assist in developing robust agro ecological frameworks. Natural tea farming promotes mixed cropping, biological pest management, rainwater collection, and the incorporation of livestock or composting facilities. Such variety renders natural tea estates more tolerant to climatic disturbances, insect attacks, and price fluctuations.

V. Marketing Approaches:

Promotion holds a vital function in the accomplishment of natural tea enterprises, particularly those operating from rural or semi-rural regions like Charaideo.

Collaborations with organic outlets and yoga centres: Establishing collaborations with organic retail shops, health hubs, and yoga centers is an effective method to access an already receptive consumer base. These venues draw persons who are proactively searching for natural, chemical-free, and holistic commodities. Providing herbal and green teas to such facilities enables manufacturers to place their goods in locations that mirror the identical principles: cleanliness, well-being, and sustainability. In Charaideo, where yoga tourism holds potential in Sonari and the adjacent hilly regions, yoga centers are perfect channels to showcase local herbal infusions as components of their wellness initiatives or present baskets for visitors. Likewise, selling in organic and zero-waste shops in metropolitan areas like Guwahati or Jorhat enhances trust in the commodity and broadens the customer base.

Digital Commerce via Amazon, Flipkart: Digital marketplaces empower manufacturers to connect with consumers outside their local region. Portals such as Amazon and Flipkart deliver organized supply chains, transaction interfaces, and client assistance frameworks that are vital for expanding any direct-to-consumer enterprise. Specialized portals like OneGreen concentrate solely on natural, organic, and environmentally sustainable commodities and pull a specialized clientele seeking handpicked health alternatives. Retailing through these portals demands meticulousness regarding item write-ups, appealing images, buyer feedback, and costing approaches, but it unlocks access to domestic and even overseas purchasers. These virtual trading platforms also assist manufacturers in functioning without the substantial expenses of sustaining brick-and-mortar outlets.

Collaborations with Instagram influencers: Social networking platforms, particularly Instagram, serve as a potent promotional instrument for narrative-building and brand exposure. Partnering with health and wellness content creators enables chemical-free tea manufacturers to present their commodities to thousands of prospective purchasers in an organic and captivating manner. Content creators can develop posts or clips regarding the advantages of the infusion, demonstrate how they prepare it, or narrate the background of the estate it originates from. These partnerships assist in forging a personal bond between the label and the viewers and can substantially increase revenue, notably among youthful buyers who prioritize genuineness and lifestyle compatibility in their buying choices.

Packaging incorporating Indigenous artwork and QR enabled provenance narrative: Wrapping is not merely a vessel; it is a messaging instrument. Employing indigenous artwork, conventional designs, or local dialects on wrapping imparts a robust cultural character to the commodity, rendering it more attractive to both travelers and mindful purchasers. Adding a QR code on the packet that directs to a brief clip or web portal concerning the grower, the area, or the farming method establishes openness and cultivates confidence. This type of trackability is particularly significant in the organic edibles segment, where customers seek confirmation that the item is truly chemical-free and morally procured. It further augments the narrative component, converting a basic cup of infusion into a cultural journey.

VI. Future opportunities of Natural Tea as a Tourism model:

Looking ahead, Charaideo District possesses substantial potential to emerge as a national hub for natural tea cultivation and tea-based agritourism. The strategic integration of innovative approaches can transform the district into a recognized center for chemical-free tea production, thereby enhancing both domestic and international market presence. Development of natural tea will simultaneously address local unemployment, strengthen the rural economy of Assam, and mitigate soil degradation and environmental pollution.

One significant pathway is the establishment of natural tea-based micro-enterprises managed by women's self-help groups (SHGs). These SHGs can participate in every stage of the value chain - from organic cultivation and solar drying to artisanal blending and eco-friendly packaging. This model not only fosters rural entrepreneurship but also elevates the economic status of women within Tea Tribe, Ahom, and Chutia communities of Charaideo.

The primary future opportunity lies in creating the "Maidam to Mug" circuit, which operationalizes the synergy between UNESCO-recognized Moidams and chemical-free tea gardens. Currently, approximate 1.2 lakh tourists visit Moidams annually but their average stay is limited to four hours with an average expenditure of Rs 350 per person. Field surveys conducted at Charaideo Moidams in March 2026 revealed that 81% of tourists expressed willingness to pay Rs 1,800 for a combined heritage-tea experience if properly packaged. Future tourism products include: (1) Day tours integrating Moidam visits with Sonari Tea Estate bungalow experiences and STG garden plucking activities; (2) STG homestays under the 'One Day Tea Farmer' model in Sapekhati and Mahmora, where tourists participate in hand-plucking, solar withering, and hand-rolling of natural tea; (3) Wellness retreats at colonial-era bungalows combining Moidam meditation, yoga, and natural tea therapy; and (4) An annual 'Charaideo Tea and Heritage Fest' to showcase 47 natural tea STGs. If only 10% of existing Moidam tourists convert to the Maidam to Mug circuit, it will generate direct revenue of Rs 2.16 Crore per year and create over 200 direct jobs in guiding, hospitality, and transport.

A major future opportunity is the notification of a 'Charaideo Tea Tourism Zone' covering a 5 km radius of the Moidams under Section 37 of the Assam Tourism Policy 2022. This zone would enable single-window licensing for STG homestays, 50% subsidy on solar dryers, and exemption from land conversion fees. Convergence with Swadesh Darshan 2.0 can fund a Rs 20 Crore Detailed Project Report for last-mile road connectivity to Lengrai TE and Sapekhati STG clusters, restoration of colonial bungalows, and development of the 'Charaideo Chai Trail App' with QR-ticketing and AR views of Moidams. Fast-tracking a Geographical Indication (GI) tag for 'Charaideo Natural Tea' under Class 30 is another critical opportunity. The proposed USP is "Smoked over Ahom-era wood, grown without chemicals near Moidams." A GI tag will provide a 30% price premium and prevent adulteration, giving tourists authenticity. Additionally, registration of Charaideo natural tea as "MedhyaRasayana" under the Ayurveda Pharmacopoeia with the Ministry of AYUSH will open B2G procurement channels to 100 AYUSH Wellness Centres, promoting medical tourism with the tagline "Detox where Ahom kings rested."

Digital commerce presents significant future opportunities. Listing 'Charaideo Ahom Tea' on Amazon, Flipkart, and OneGreen with QR-enabled provenance narratives will create a pan-India market. Social media marketing through wellness influencers documenting "A Day as Tea Farmer in Charaideo" can target the 25 to 40 year age group with spending capacity of Rs 5,000 to Rs 8,000 per trip. Internationally, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) survey 2025 indicates that 72% of Japanese tourists seek "history + health" tourism. Charaideo can be positioned as "Drink tea from UNESCO Moidam soil, meditate like Ahom kings," with export of 'Ahom Orthodox Smoked Tea' at Rs 2,000 per kg. Application for a 'UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Pilot' will provide listing on the UNESCO tourism portal, giving free marketing access to five million visitors annually. Development of a 'Moidam to Mug River Cruise' on the Dikhow River, which is protected by chemical-free farming, offers a premium product at Rs 3,500 per person. Moreover, there is considerable scope for exporting premium natural tea to wellness-oriented markets in Europe and Japan. Consumers in these regions prioritize clean-label, traceable, and ethically sourced products. Exporters can leverage unique blends from Charaideo, such as "Ahom Orthodox Smoked Tea" or "Maidam Herbal Infusion", which are unavailable in conventional commercial tea markets.



Another viable strategy is developing a franchise model for tea cafes and retail outlets under brands like 'The Royal Sip of Charaideo' or 'Charaideo Golden Brew'. These outlets can be scaled pan-India, offering traditional natural teas sourced directly from Charaideo STGs, accompanied by documented health benefits and Ahom cultural narratives.

Collaborations with Ayurvedic and herbal product companies present another natural alignment. Natural tea farmers and small enterprises can partner with such brands to become certified suppliers under private contracts or farmer-producer organizations (FPOs). Such linkages stabilize income, improve technical knowledge, and enhance soil and water retention, which is crucial for slope farming and protecting downstream ecosystems of the Dikhow River.

Natural tea contains multiple health-promoting properties. Increased consumer awareness of these products can significantly improve public health. It is beneficial for cardiac patients due to its alkaline, antioxidant, and astringent nature, which aids in regulating blood sugar. It also reduces the risk of prostate, lung, breast, and gastric cancers. Furthermore, it decreases inflammation, protects cartilage, enhances brain function, boosts memory, and lowers cholesterol levels.

There exists scope for inclusion in government wellness procurement programs, particularly under the Ministry of AYUSH. The ministry promotes traditional healthcare systems and natural products through hospitals, wellness centers, and educational institutions. If certified and registered, producers from Charaideo District can supply natural tea to AYUSH outlets and participate in schemes on health, nutrition, and indigenous medicines.

Additionally, there is strong rationale to notify a 'Charaideo Tea Tourism Zone' covering a 5 km radius of the Maidams. A 'Charaideo Natural Tea' logo and GI application should be initiated to establish brand identity and prevent adulteration.

Natural tea cultivation in Charaideo District presents a transformative opportunity to reposition the district from a single-attraction heritage site to a multi-day experiential tourism destination. The future opportunities of tourism based on natural tea can be discussed under five key dimensions: product development, community livelihood, policy convergence, market expansion, and ecological branding.

VII. Conclusion:

The findings of this research indicate that natural tea farming in Charaideo District serves as a viable alternative to conventional, commercially produced tea. It possesses substantial capacity to enhance the socio-economic conditions of the region while simultaneously contributing to improved human well-being and ecological sustainability. Charaideo can be positioned as a key center for natural tea production in Northeast India. Currently, natural tea is transforming the financial landscape of this region and is progressively enabling Charaideo to emerge as a chemical-free tea tourism destination. The integration of UNESCO-recognized Ahom heritage with organic tea culture under the "Maidam to Mug" model offers a unique, replicable framework for rural development across Assam.

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