

# ROLE OF COMMUNICATION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF BAKKHALI AS A TOURIST CENTRE AND IMPACT OF CYCLONES ON BEACH TOURISM ON SUCH TROPICAL COASTS.

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Development of tourism in the extreme southern end of an estuarine delta is a very much troublesome journey since tourists, generally try to avoid troubles. Only the adventure-loving, energetic tourists take interest to travel over hazard-stricken paths.

Sir Andrew Fraser, though, was charmed with the beauty of the Bakkhali sea, but our countrymen were not interested so much and not even at present, though communication is now easy enough. However, Bakkhali, the southernmost island of the Namkhana-Kakdwip group of island beside the Muriganga Channel of the Hooghly river, had to wait almost a century for the proper recognition from the tourists' end. Observation also has a positive conclusion regarding the cyclonic impact on such tourism sector since cyclone season does not match with tourists' season.

*Index Term* : Estuarine Island, Communication, Beach Tourism and Tropical cyclone

## **INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF RECOGNITION OF WEST BENGAL COAST**

Beach- tourism develops on the beauty of the sea and shares the same geographical location with cyclonic phenomena at the interface between land and sea on the tropical coasts. The eastern state of West Bengal in India situated in the north of the Bay of Bengal consists of two coastal districts of East Medinipur in the west and South Twenty Four Parganas in the east. These two districts, placed in opposite sides of the river Hooghly, inherit different types of geomorphic features. The Medinipur coast in the west, is a continuous coast of the eastern coast of India retaining comparative stability than the estuarine coast of South Twenty Four Parganas in the east. (fig. no.1).

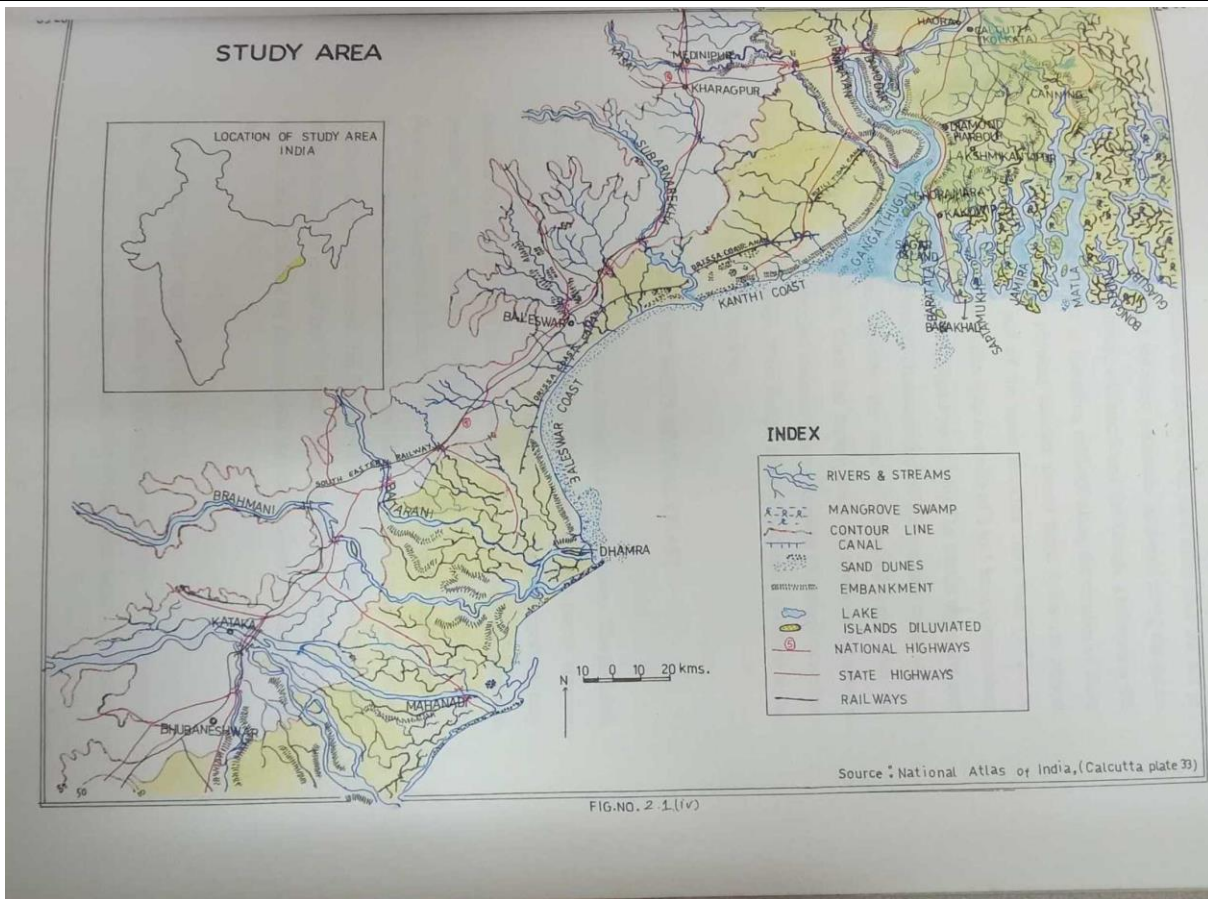


Fig. No.1 Estuarine S.24 Parganas coast, Kanthi (Medinipur)coast alongwith Orissa coast  
Source: NATMO Calcutta Plate No.33

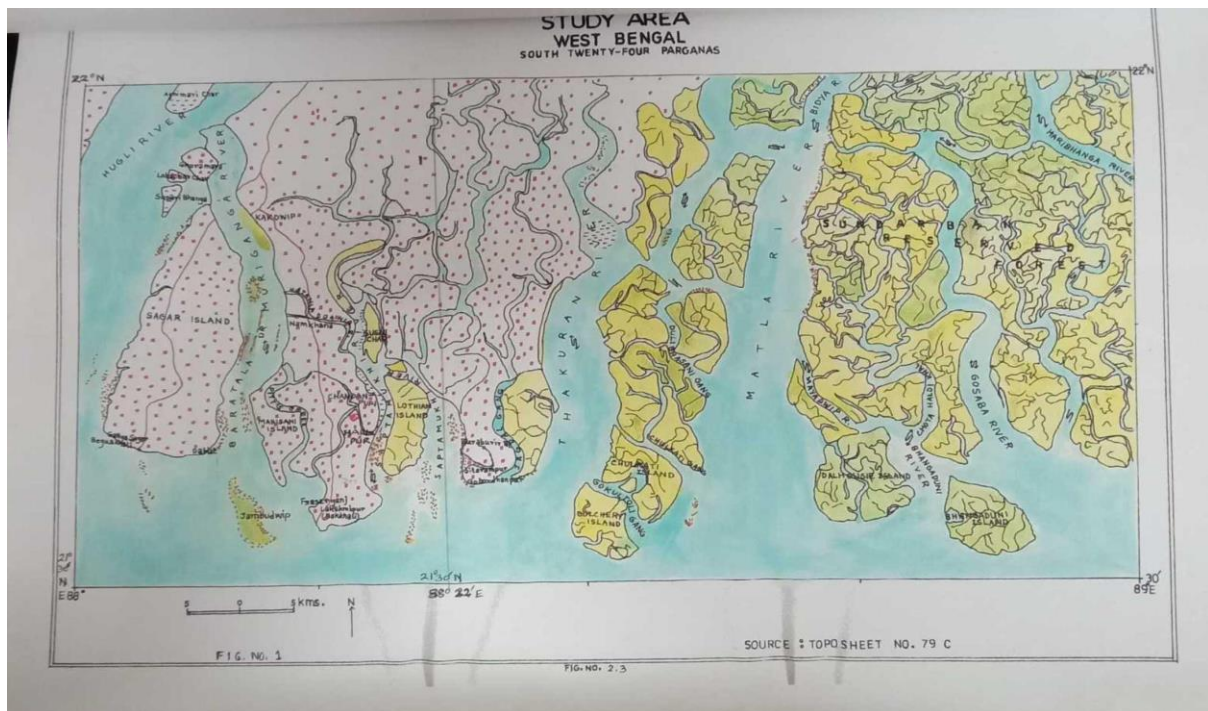


Fig No.2 South 24 Parganas coast showing Sagar Island and Bakkhali  
Source:NATMO Calcutta Plate No.33

Coastal location inherits the natural view of oceanic waves and from this end the twin spots of Bakkhali and Frasergunj, keeping the distance of approximately two kilometers from one another, is positioned in the southernmost island, and on the east of the riverine island of Sagar Island in South Twenty Four Parganas (fig.no.2). By virtue of such coastal situation, these places inherit natural resources for tourism. Sir Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, towards the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was charmed with the beauty of the wide beach at Frasergunj which was previously known as Narayanitala. He

wished to develop the place as a tourist centre. He tried to popularize the place among the Europeans and also tried to build a sanatorium here. (<https://bakkhalihoteliers.in>).

Some enthusiastic British also came for enjoying the sea-view and solitude. Meanwhile, Fraser had to return back earlier and his dream to develop the place as a tourist centre ended at its bud.

### **INHERITED PROBLEMS REMAINING IN THE TWIN SPOTS OF BAKKHALI-FRASERGUNJ**

The continuous coast of Bakkhali-Frasergunj embedded with both opportunities of tourism resource and at the same time the deficiency with their positioning at the southernmost island of estuarine coast, elongated in north-south direction (fig. no.1), suffered for a long time for the proper utilization of their resources, only for very poor topographical situation, claiming difficult infrastructure for communication with river-bridge over Hatania-Doania which is not only high-price oriented, but stability of such development is also questionable in such estuarine creek. The largest creek

among others is Hatania-Doania was to cross by country boat till the first decade of this century. The urban tourists from Kolkata and the suburbs were naturally reluctant to tackle so troublesome journey for spending the weekend holidays. It is clear from the discussion that Bakkhali had to go through a long journey towards reaching the present stage or getting the proper status of a tourist centre. Our objective is thus designed in the following manner.

#### **OBJECTIVE:**

We have two objectives for the present article. At first, we shall try to present the journey of our study area from a virgin rural and certainly the coastal village to an urbanized tourist place.

For the next, we shall observe the impact of cyclonic phenomena on the economies based on tourism only.

In order to fulfil our objectives, we shall follow the methodologies described next.

#### **METHODOLOGIES**

Different web-sites have helped a lot in searching about the history of the development of tourism in the twin spots of Bakkhali and Frasergunj.

For the second objective, we have to depend primarily on the unpublished Thesis of the Author herself and secondarily on the Atlas of cyclone tracks prepared by the Meteorological Department.

#### **WORKING STEPS**

*Our working steps for the present study will be like the followings.*

At the outset, a brief description of Bakkhali-Frasergunj in the previous years or the experience of the first visit of the author will make an idea about the tourism activities in the study area and other aspects regarding this.

On the next, the efforts exerted by the local people or the Administrative persons or by private entrepreneurs will be jotted down chronologically, so far as it is possible.

On the third, the deficiency and developing strategy of transport and communication that helped tourism in our study area, will be highlighted.

For the second objective, the seasonality of cyclones and the seasons of tourism will come into focus. List of previous cyclones is a necessary requirement. The cyclones that hit the land through South Twenty Four Parganas or Medinipur or Bangladesh or the neighbouring state of Orissa must be considered since there is every possibility of being affected by these cyclones.

A brief description of the economies connected with tourism will be listed on the next.

At last, the impact of cyclone will be studied after field observation starting from Aila. Now we shall proceed as per our requirement.

### **BAKKHALI-FRASERGUNJ DURING THE NINETIES OF THE LAST CENTURY**

Sir Fraser described wide beach at Frasergunj which is now named after him. We also observed wider beach at Frasergunj, compared to the narrow beach at Bakkhali. At the first visit at Bakkhali, towards the beginning of the decade of the nineties of the preceding century, there were only two Genoa trees on the beach which were disappeared later. The haphazard concentration of muddy and slippery surface with pores of pneumatophores of mangrove trees, probably with Bayen tree proves the existence of these trees on the beach. We may also draw inference from this that the sea was then in progressing mode at Bakkhali. Disappearance of mangrove from the beach might be the action of local people. But the progressing sea is proved with the narrow beach which was not more than 200 to 300 meters wide during the low tide period.

This is the natural or the Geomorphological set up of the place at that time. The economic activities prevailing at that time were mainly agriculture supported by fishing with large and small country boats. Fishing was practised on different scales. One was with personal and at family level. Another was collective with a group of people, but with a big net. All fishing activities were concentrated mainly on the Frasergunj beach due to its wideness. The fishermen, practising mainly the sea fishing, were also settled in the village, situated on the west of Frasergunj.

### **ECONOMIES RELATED TO TOURISM AT THIS TIME.**

Apart from the Government Tourist Lodge, located on the extreme east, beside the creek, named as Bakkhali, there were Sahana Tourist Lodge, Balaka Lodge, Bay View Tourist Lodge, Narayani Lodge and a Bank Holiday Home. Besides these, more two to three hotels might be there and all the hotels were located at Bakkhali, besides the metaled road from Bakkhali to Frasergunj. These hotels were not full always, rather were remained partly full, even during the peak tourist season.

Apart from the Hotels and Holiday Homes, there were a few restaurants besides the road, transverse to the main road from Bakkhali to Frasergunj for serving the tourists with breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Some van-rickshaw pullers who generally served the local people, served also the tourists for visiting Frasergunj or for going to the beach taking the aged tourists. No other economic activities were found at that time.

This phase, to speak the truth, remained unchanged for a long period even after achieving some kind of facilities. The historical development of tourism in our study area will be revealed in our next section.

### **EARLY HISTORY OF TOURISM IN BAKKHALI-FRASERGUNJ**

Mention has been made that the Governor, Sir Andrew Fraser tried to build a Sanatorium here. But his early return ended his dream. After that, it was only the decade of the sixties of that century that two persons at least viz. Mr. Kalipada Samanta and late Satish Sardar took a little initiative for tourism at very personal level by giving shelter to the tourists including food, but without any toilet facility since at that time these rural sites were totally devoid of toilet facility at their homes. So, this may be taken as the first effort towards tourism at Bakkhali. (<https://bakkhalihoteliers.in>). One Mr. Banerjee, the then Ranger of Bakkhali Forest took interest and established a small wooden cottage with eight rooms but with no floor and toilet facility. It was named as Balaka Lodge. It was later handed over to 'Paul Chowdhury Brothers' who developed the building retaining the old one also around the year 1987. This lodge still exists in Bakkhali.

The third effort was exhibited from the Administrative part. In 1972, the Government Tourist Lodge was built at the extreme eastern end of Bakkhali, besides the creek of Bakkhali. There were three wooden rooms as dormitory (Bungalow type) and 12 rent rooms (double bed).

In 1979, Sahana tourist Lodge was established. It is the first brick-built hotel with thatched roof and with toilet facility in Bakkhali.

Before 1972, the visitors were mainly temporary and could return back to their homes since there was no proper communication from Kolkata. The Government Tourist Lodge is the first one for providing proper facilities to the tourists. Still the arrangement was inadequate since transport and communication was in deep dark even after the Government Tourist Lodge being in service.

Developing proper transport system took another eight years to come into operation.

### **DIFFICULT TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION FOR BAKKHALI-FRASERGUNJ**

Even in 1972, while the Government Tourist Lodge was in existence, there was no proper communication to Bakkhali from Kolkata and the suburbs. It was only in 1980, i.e. more eight years later from the establishment of the Govt. Lodge, a metaled road was constructed joining Namkhana to Kolkata. Namkhana is the northern part of Hatania-Doania. After reaching Namkhana, the tourists were to cross the creek by country boat or machine-driven boat even towards the first part of this century. They were to board local busses from Narayanpur, the opposite bank of the river, to reach Bakkhali.

During 1972, only 3 busses were in service from Narayanpur to Frasergunj and the road between Bakkhali to Frasergunj was a muddy road. In 1980, after the erection of road between Esplanade in Kolkata and Namkhana, the road transport between Narayanpur and Frasergunj also improved and Bakkhali was joined by metaled road with Frasergunj. After some years, five busses were in service from Narayanpur to Bakkhali, both for the tourists and the local people as well.

A developing trend of tourism got impetus after the completion of a proper connectivity with Kolkata. Some new hotels were constructed for the tourists after the improvement of communication to some extent.

### **ADDITION OF NEW INPUT IN TRANSPORT AND IMPACT ON TOURISM**

Vessel service started any time in the first decade of this century for crossing vehicles over Hatania – Doania. It means that the tourists may cross the river on boarding condition in their own vehicles, be the private or public ones and no need to avail any water transport. Now they can enjoy a safe journey while crossing the river. Whatsoever, this development in transport and communication certainly affected tourism industry. The number of hotels increased with a quick impetus and the location of hotels extended far towards Frasergunj which previously was concentrated mainly near Bakkhali.

This changing scenario is observed during the year 2017, while vessel or barge are available for crossing the transport vehicles. It is certainly facilitating but at the same time is very much time consuming especially during a peak season or a rush time. More than an hour or two are the waiting time for crossing the river.

This also used to create problems during low tide period due to low depth of water. In order to avoid this and both for improving tourism as well as fishing economies in this southern district, a plan has been taken for constructing bridge over this estuarine river with a high risk factor possibly during the second decade of this century. The construction started on the year 2014 and is not yet completed.

We can expect betterment in tourism economy in our study area with the completion of this bridge. We shall focus on the impact of cyclonic activity on tourism in such coastal location. But we must highlight the changing topographies both in Bakkhali and Frasergunj during the gap of less than 20 years.

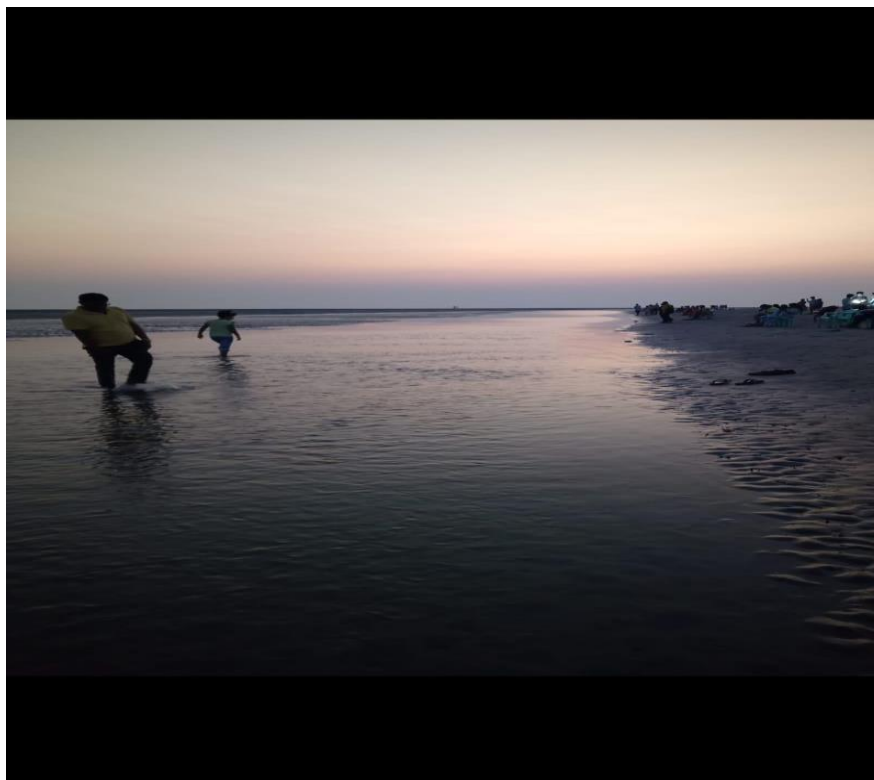
### **GEOMORPHIC CHANGES IN BAKKHALI AND FRASERGUNJ**

In a coastal location, geomorphic changes are very much common and significant. Progression and retrogression of sea is very natural, especially in such estuarine coast. This phenomenon is very much viable also in our study area. The beach characteristics actually reversed among Bakkhali and Frasergunj within 20 years period.

While describing our first experience, Bakkhali beach was narrated as a narrow beach with progressing sea and Frasergunj as a wide and normal stable beach. Now the sea at Bakkhali is far away from the old beach. An extensive sand deposit (bar) prevails in between the sea and the old beach (Plate no. 1).

Moreover, a small inlet separates the old beach from the sand bar. What is worthy of mentioning that the place is now recognized as only Bakkhali in lieu of the dual name of Bakkhali-Frasergunj. Some other new places of interests are added now with Bakkhali as ancillary tourism, rather these may be taken as sight-seeing centering Bakkhali. Those deserve discussion for this paper.

Plate No. 1



An inlet is between sand bar(left) and sea beach(right)

### ADDITIONAL ATTRACTION OF BAKKHALI

**Henry Island**, situated at more north of Bakkhali is such an ancillary tourist spot. To speak the truth, this place comprises of a virgin coastal beauty with wide sea beach, mangrove forest, a watch tower, and coastal vegetation and certainly without the hue and cry of the shop-owners, hotels and above all the chorus of different transport vehicles. Henry Island is an island with so much open spaces and fishing hatcheries and veries on its way. Luxuriant mangroves enhance the beauty as well as the virginity of the place. The place will maintain its simplicity only to that end, so far it does not develop as a tourist spot in true sense.



Plate No. 2

Henry's Island



Plate No. 3

Fishing grounds on the way to Henry's Island

Again, an island, in the Bay of Bengal named as *Jambudwip*, in the south of Bakkhali, is another place of interest now in Bakkhali. Towards the beginning of the nineties, Jambudwip was temporarily settled by the fishing persons. But fishing is not in practice now-a-days due to some administrative reasons.

Tourists are not taken in the island. But they can enjoy the journey through the Bay of Bengal and the island is shown from the distance. Due to low depth, it is not possible a safe boarding for a launch without a jetty. Moreover, the newly built island will also be safe without the human intervention. The launch service is organized from Frasergunj where a deep creek is there to support both deep-sea fishing and tourism.

It may be inferred from the above discussion that the present-day Bakkhali is more attractive to the tourists with the improvement in communication and other tourists' attraction. The completion of the bridge will do further betterment. Certainly the economies connected to tourism have been emerged now to a greater extent. We shall focus on these on the following section.

### ECONOMIES RELATED TO TOURISM AT BAKKHALI AT PRESENT

Innumerable number of hotels with all urban amenities are now ready to serve the tourists. These are extended not only towards Frasergunj, but on both the sides of the road, connecting Bakkhali to Frasergunj. Totos are available always for going to Bakkhali or Frasergunj or for a reserved visit to Henry Island or for launch service from Frasergunj.

Stalls consisting of consumermer goods like shell products, ornaments, soft toys, bags, hats etc. have been set up besides the road transverse to the Frasergunj-Bakkhali road. Generally these products are sold from more or less single shop, means these kinds of products are available in a single shop.

A very good number of hotels and restaurants are also ready to serve the tourists. So many fast food shops of different kinds of foods are ready to attract the tourists. A small temple is now built on the sea beach. Other than these permanent stalls, roaming tea vendors are also found on the old beach.

It is true that the sea-bathing is not possible now due to the distance of the sea and also with the danger related to cross the sand-bar for taking sea-bath. Truism it is that despite the distance of the sea, the place consists of the beauty of the beach and some people earn money by renting sitting chair per hour generally with the exchange of 10 rupee.

### ADVANCING TRANSPORT ECONOMY DEPENDING ON TOURISM

At present, the development of transport is planned for the interest of tourism. That means that development of transport and evolving a place as a tourist centre is vice versa or complementary to each other. Road condition is very good now. Government bus service is available for Bakkhali. Before public service, private service started here. For local sight- seeing, enormous number of toto are always in service.

Inevitably, the market economy at Bakkhali enhanced significantly. Such a tourist spot, located on a fragile as well as an ecotone ecosystem, certainly

loses stability, at least to a little extent, while visited by a cyclonic system. In the next section, we shall review the impact of cyclone on tourism in Bakkhali.

### IMPACT OF CYCLONE AT BAKKHALI – PAST AND PRESENT

The study regarding the impact of cyclone on the tourism economy at Bakkhali is our second objective. It is admitted that this is a short venture as compared to the previous one. In order to fulfil this objective, we must enter to the domain of cyclonic activity not only in the Bay of Bengal, but specially we must concentrate on the occurrence of cyclones in our study area in respect of season as well as in consideration of their intensity or the magnitude. It is exhibited with the help of a table that is furnished below.

**Table no. 1**

#### OCCURRENCE OF CYCLONES AND DEPRESSIONS IN THE BAY OF BENGAL (1891-1990)

Season	Area	Depression	Cyclonic storm	Severe cyclonic storm
Pre-monsoon	Tamil Nadu	4	3	2
	Andhra Pradesh	4	3	4
	Orissa	--	2	5
	Medinipur, WB	1	--	2
	24 Parganas(WB)	1	1	2
Monsoon	Tamil Nadu	1	1	--
	Andhra Pradesh	71	19	5
	Orissa	265	61	10
	Medinipur(WB)	20	17	3
	24Parganas(WB)	40	15	6
Post-Monsoon	Tamil Nadu	22	10	13
	Andhra Pradesh	19	20	13
	Orissa	3	2	6
	Medinipur(WB)	--	--	--
	24Parganas(WB)	3	2	5
	Andhra Pradesh	19	20	13

**Table No. 2**  
**SEVERE CYCLONIC STORMS IN SOUTH 24 PARGANAS (1891-1990)**

1891	Pre-monsoon
1909	Pre-monsoon
1916	Monsoon
1937	Monsoon
1940	Monsoon
1968	Pre-monsoon
1970	Pre-monsoon
1971	Monsoon

It reveals from the table no. 1 that cyclones are mostly frequent in the study area in the form of depression in the Monsoon season. In respect of the West Bengal coast as a whole, the frequency of cyclonic storm is mostly once in a decade. In our case, Aila is the disastrous phenomenon in the coast of South Twenty Four Parganas with wind velocity remaining within 110 -120 kmph which is not much strong enough meteorologically. But it proved itself as a disastrous enough regarding its social connotation. This is a general feature in the district as well as in the state as a whole.

Any kind of economy including agriculture is susceptible to be affected while the place is visited by cyclonic hazard. But in case of cyclonic impact, the coastal settlement near the sea is always more prone to cyclone hazard while the inland areas might not so.

Bakkhali is situated in the juxtaposition of sea and it is also away from the main land by a north-south elongated land which is again divided into a few islands by 3 to 4 cross channels to reach only up to Namkhana. (fig. no.1&2). In order to associate tourism economies and cyclonic hazards at Bakkhali, temporal sequence of both cyclones and tourism is to be judged.

### **SEASON OF CYCLONE AND TOURISM AT BAKKHALI**

#### ***CYCLONE SEASON***

Cyclone as a natural phenomenon owes a seasonal characteristics in the study area acquainted with the Indian cyclones. These are distinguishingly recognized as pre-monsoon, monsoon and post-monsoon cyclones. But it is also true that all the four states in the Eastern coast of India viz. Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal face cyclones in different periods

depending on the Sun's position in its apparent annual march towards the north and south. To that end, Bakkhali, being a part of West Bengal coast is prone to cyclonic incidences during the monsoon period (fig.no. 2). Disastrous cyclones occurred in this coast in the past in the month of October as in 1737,1864 and in 1942. Cyclones in the month of May is quite rare for this coast. But in recent past, the cyclone Aila which is moderately strong hit the coast in the month of May.

#### **SEASON FOR TOURISM**

As there is a seasonal attitude of cyclonic incidences in the natural world, tourism also exerts some periodical thrust depending on some seasonal favour, or sometimes corresponded with temporal sequence with school examinations. Since coastal tourism at a short distance is mainly associated with family program, the examination in school or short holidays of 2,3 or 4 days' impose a great importance in tourist flux on such coastal location.

Coastal tourism generally runs round the year. Still there may be some preference of season or festivals etc. In West Bengal coast, autumn and winter season i.e. the months of October, November and December are the most preferable months. The northern Bay of Bengal is far from sun's position and no such cyclonic incidences occur in this season excepting the month of October. Only some small depressions sometimes visit either on the last week of December or within the first quarter of the month of January. Drizzle and cold makes the weather unease and discomfort for the tourists. Otherwise, this is a festive season, weather is fine with comfortable cold accompanied by holidays in schools.

But considering tourism during the summer holidays in the pre-monsoon months of April and May and June as the start of monsoon season, risks of thunderstorms and occasional cyclonic visits may create disturbances on tourism at Bakkhali and on other neighbouring coasts in West Bengal. Consequently, the economies related to tourism are affected to a lesser to a greater extent depending on the cyclonic visits.

## **TOURISM ECONOMIES**

Tourism economies consist of both large and small business sectors apart from transport. In situ transport stands for both toto and van-riskshow. At present, a few hotels can arrange electricity of their own by generator service at least for lifting water from underground and also can provide food for the boarders at the advent of cyclonic situation. They can run their business during the hazardous situation. But the shop-owners, vendors lose their income not for those days only, but they may suffer for the couple of weeks until the transport system is returned to its normal situation after affected by cyclone. Certainly, the transport system suffers the most at the advent of a cyclone.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Tourism provides a good return in a growing economy of a country. Tourism may be classified according to the places of interest. By nature, it may be mountain or hill tourism, or coastal or simply health tourism as was prevailed in India in the past. Old literatures support that many Bengali people visited the present day Jharkhand area (which Geomorphologically is the Chhotonagpur plateau area) for good water and good weather only for healing the ill health. It is true that only the plateau areas owe least fear of natural hazard whereas mountains suffer from earthquake and landslides and sometimes from flood incidences, coastal resorts on the Bay of Bengal have seasonal visits of climatic hazards. Religious tourism on the coasts or on mountains suffers for similar reasons. Only, tourism in Jungle area posseses low risks. Some of the places suffer genetically as Digha in East Medinipur or Sagar Island in South Twenty Four Parganas: coastal erosion and position over an Offshore Bar for the former and deltaic situation for the latter one.

However, anthropogenic awareness for the administration, local people as well as the tourists themselves may reduce the risks for such hazard -stricken tourism industries. Infrastructural developments regarding improvement of

forecasting system with exact time and location, transport and communication along with relief and rescue system can reduce the negative impacts from such hazards in tourism sector.

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