Possibilities and Obstacles of Archaeological Tourism in Bangladesh : A Case Study of Nabaratna Temple Compound

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[Abstract : In the global context, tourism is an effective currency earning industry. In Bangladesh, tourism has not yet been established as a well-planned industry. The development of the tourism industry is closely linked to the development of the country's economy and cultural diversification. However, the cultural heritage of this country is neglected both quantitatively and immeasurably. But, in terms of tradition, Bangladesh is much more prosperous than many nations in the world. There are so many archaeological sites are identified all over the country without being proper preservation. Therefore, many archaeological sites are facing destruction due to a lack of proper preservation. However, with proper conservation and development of infrastructural facilities, the archaeological sites of Bangladesh can be a tourist attraction for both national and international tourists. There is ample opportunity to develop the archaeological tourism industry of the country. One such aesthetic and potential archaeological site is the Nabaratna temple located in the Sirajganj district. In the present study, the possibilities and obstacles of archaeological tourism around the Nabaratna temple have been presented.]

Key Words : Archaeological Tourism, Nabaratna Temple, Cultural Heritage Management

The importance of the tourism industry is immense among the lucrative sectors of the world today. This industry refers to a place where visitors travel for recreation or gather knowledge (Mathienson and Wall 1982 : 87). The visitor gains entertainment and gets an idea of the region's people, society, and culture (Cooper, 2008; Holloway & Taylor, 2006). The people of a region can be economically self-sufficient through the tourism industry. In addition, the tourism industry is a service sector where to attract visitors, and one has to ensure their food, accommodation and recreation (Machintosh and Goeldner 1986 : 50). Nowadays, many countries have managed their domestic and foreign exchange earnings by improving the quality of the tourism industry (Nasser, 2003, pp. 467-479). The industry is directly linked to the development of communication systems, hotel and restaurants system, banking, tourist guide and recreation (Poria et al. 2003 : 89; Silberberg, 1995, pp. 361–365). Looking at our neighbouring country India, it can be seen that their archaeological sites are

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considered as one of the sources of revenue as they have taken appropriate measures to attract tourists (Bhatia 2012: 45). Since our country is rich in natural beauty and cultural heritage, there is a tremendous possibility to develop the archaeological tourism industry.

The role of the community is much more critical in the development of the tourism industry based on cultural heritage. Suppose the tourism industry, based on the region's cultural heritage, can be developed by giving importance to the community. In that case, the area will be formed as an Innovative Habitat through which local and foreign visitors will be able to entertain and gain knowledge. At the same time, a new way of earning money for local people will be opened. Thus the cultural tourism industry will also play a significant role in economic growth (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 2002).

In the global context, cultural heritage management has emerged as a challenge for many communities. Standard quality accommodation, good quality food, communication system, security, etc., are essential elements for the expansion of tourism. In this case, the community has to be hospitable; particular attention has to be paid so that the tourists are not dissatisfied in any way (Nasser, 2003, pp. 467-479).

Tourists visit European cultural heritage tourism industries, especially festivals, banquets, music, theatre shows, village and rural life such as farm or Sunday market, local production, general sightseeing, rural buildings and environment, historical and religious monuments or famous people's homes (Barre, 2002, pp. 126-130). To brand a heritage, people from all over the world need to visit the area. European cities usually present their cultural cities in this way. Therefore, enthusiastic people from various parts of the world became interested in seeing those heritages (Evans, 2003, pp. 417-440). Heritage refers to the culture, performing arts, museums, archaeological sites, etc. Besides, people are curious about history, archaeology, archaeological sites, art, lifestyle, architecture, scenery etc. Tourists see these traditions to fulfil their aspirations (McCain & Ray, 2003, pp. 713-717).

According to Rosenfeld, the expansion of the cultural heritage tourism industry requires assessing the significance of a place or heritage, emphasis on quality, comprehensible to visitors, historical buildings, monuments, museums, archaeological sites and historical sites for visitors. Besides, festivals, crafts, ethnic heritage, music, ethnic music etc., need to be presented. The culture of minorities also needs to be given to visitors (Rosenfeld, 2008, 6-7). Cultural heritage is generally analyzed from these three dimensions; cultural, political and economic. From a financial perception, it is possible to achieve economic growth through proper management (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996).

On the other hand, information technology is required to present the heritage to the public. The heritage site manager will demonstrate the informative image of

the site in a global context. Even if it is far away, interested tourists can get an idea of the heritage of a place (Pearce, 1982, pp. 145-164). With the advent of the Internet worldwide these days, tourists will be more inclined to travel if site-related data is available on the Internet (Hurbert, 2001 pp. 312-333).

Based on cultural heritage, the tourism industry has been discussed academically all over the world for the last few decades. In the current context, cultural heritage is seen as one of the significant components of the tourism industry that inspires consumers to explore and travel to cultural heritage (Swarbrooke, 1994, pp. 222-229). The tourism industry based on cultural heritage is essential in many ways; firstly, it has a positive economic and social value; secondly, it plays a role in creating identity and preserving heritage; thirdly, it harmonizes people and their culture (Nuryanti, 1996, pp. 249-260).

Simultaneously, investing in the development of tourism infrastructure around the country's archaeological sites is likely to become one of the primary sources of incomes for the country (Richards and Munsters, 2010: 3). In this study, Nabaratna Temple in Sirajganj district has been selected as a case study to pursue the possibilities and obstacles of archaeological tourism. The research work was carried out using primary and historical sources. And the methodologically archaeological survey and questionnaire-based interviews were conducted. Identifying the possibilities and the obstacles of archaeological tourism in the country is the main objective of this study.

1. Research Methodology

This study is primary data-based research. Besides, historical sources were used to understand the historical context of the Nabaratna temple. Methodologically, an archaeological survey was conducted, and interviews were taken on 200 visitors from local and other districts through the questionnaire. Of these, 72 were college and university students, 40 teachers from different schools, colleges and universities. Twenty-four people engaged in the agriculture profession, 30 people engaged in small and medium trade. There were also 30 unemployed youths and four rickshaw pullers.

2. Objective

The objective is to identify the possibilities and the obstacles of the country's tourism industry. Review what steps should be taken to develop archaeological tourism in the country by formulating a specific policy to identify the obstacles and presenting the need to preserve the archaeological sites for visitors and future generations.

3. Study Area

Sirajganj is located in the northern part of Bangladesh. This district is significant for its cultural and natural heritage. The location of Nabaratna temple is at

Hatikumrul village under Ullapara upazila in Sirajganj district. Locally the temple is also known as Dolmancha. The main spire of this three-storied temple is nine. That is the reason to call it as Nabaratno temple. To the east is the entrance, to the north is the staircase, inside is the roof covered with a round shape dome above the main building. The central chamber is thought to have been used for worship. The reason for choosing the Nabaratna temple as the subject of this research is the aesthetic construction style of the temple. It is also speculated that this may the largest Nabaratna temple found in Bangladesh.



Figure 1 : Nabaratna Temple. Source: Author.

The plaques are carved by gods and goddesses, full of medieval artwork, quite aesthetic and of high quality. There is also a *Dochala* temple and a *Shiva-Parbati* temple in the open space in front of the Nabaratna temple.

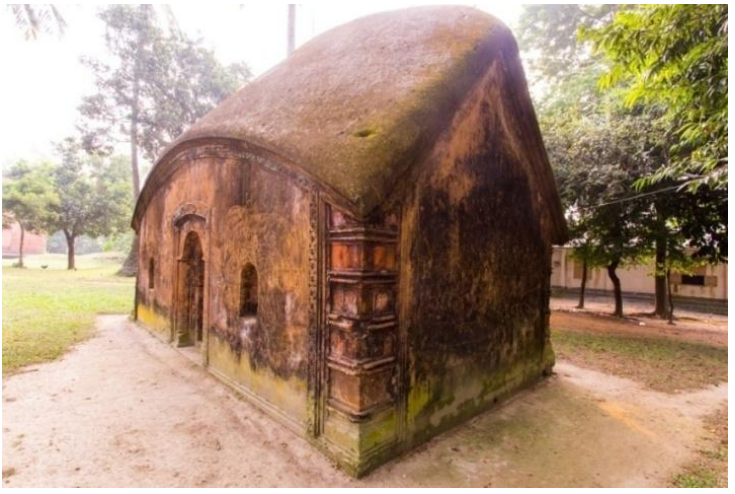


Figure 2 : Dochala Temple. Source: Author.



Figure 3 : Shiva-Parbati Temple. Source: Author.



Figure 4 : Shiva Temple. Source : Author.

Four temples, including the Nabaratna temple, are unique archaeological sites built in terracotta poetry. There is no defensive wall around the complex.

4. Archaeological Significance

The Nabaratna temple is an archaeological site protected by the Antiquities Preservation Act of 1968. However, every archaeological site is undoubtedly significant. In terms of the features, the Nabaratna temple is a unique artistic specimen of Bangladesh.



Figure 5 : Notice for preservation. Source : Author.

The area of the temple is about 16 square meters. It is built on a high altar; the temple is around 15.5 meters long and 13.25 meters wide on each side. The main room is inside this square temple, the sanctum sanctorum with two verandas. There are 6 entrances on the outside of the veranda and 5 entrances on the inside. It is estimated that the temple had nine pinnacles; hence it is known as the Nabaratna temple. The bricks and terracotta plaques of the temple are made of various ornaments. The temple is full of medieval works of art, decorated with flowers, birds, plants and deities.

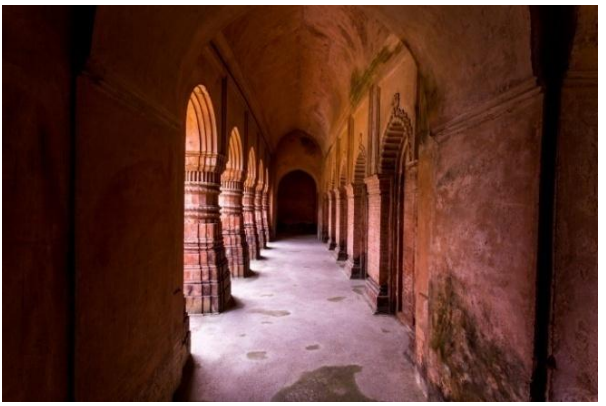


Figure 6 : Inside of the temple. Source : Author.



Figure 7 : Aesthetic artwork of terracotta. Source : Author.

It is assumed that Ram Nath Bhaduri, an official of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan built this temple during 1704 AD-1728 AD. During the reign of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan of Murshidabad in 1722, *Suba-Bangla* was divided into 13 Chaklas, 24 *Government* and 8 *Mahals*. Ram Nath Bhaduriwas probably a Zamindar (landlord). Since the construction period of Nabaratna temple is not known exactly, it is difficult to estimate the construction period of the other three temples as well. However, evaluate by the construction materials; it can be assumed that the Nabaratna temple and the other temples are contemporary.

5. Result and Discussion

During the archaeological survey, a questionnaire-based interview was conducted on visitors from local and other districts. The questions were mainly about their perception of the Nabaratna temple, about the prospects of archaeological tourism, about the significant issue for the development of tourism, their observation, obstacles to the development of archaeological tourism. The answers of the interviewees mentioned below:

5.1. Concept Rate about Nabaratna Temple

According to the first question of the interview, the result was about 50 of the interviewees know the Nabaratna temple very well. 60 people know something. 6o people have no idea, and 30 people have no interest in knowing.

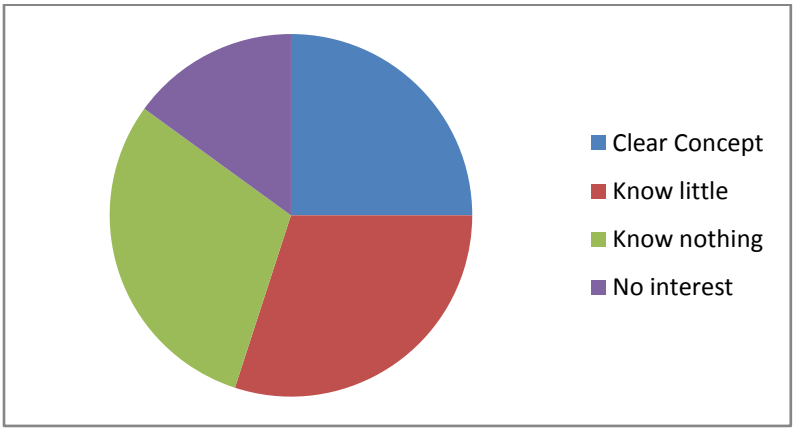


Figure 8 : Concept rate about Nabaratna temple.

There are some descriptions of the historical context of the Nabaratna temple on the signboard in front of the temple for the visitors. But in the development of the tourism industry, the scope of knowledge of the visitors can be further expanded through skilled guides. If there were tourist guide facilities, the visitor of any profession could know the details about the archaeological background of the Nabaratna temple.

5.2. Possibilities for Archaeological Tourism

When asked about the development of archaeological tourism around the Nabaratna temple, 40 of the interviewees said that the potentiality is much higher. 60 people said there is little possibility to develop archaeological tourism. 50 people said there is no possibility and 50 peoples have no idea about it.

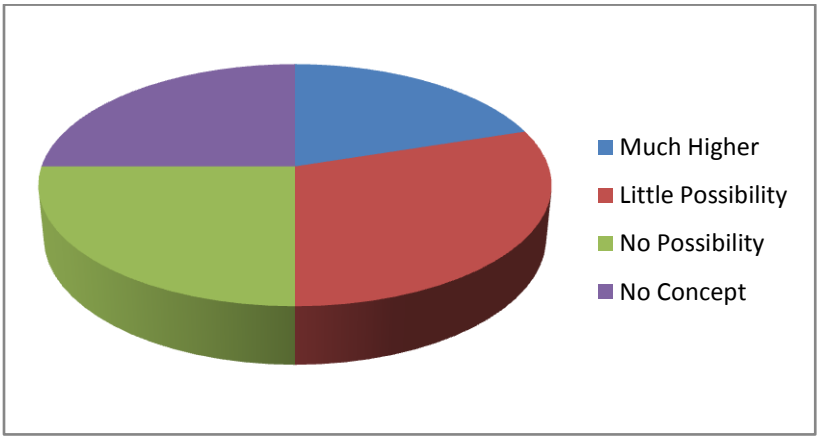


Figure 9 : Possibilities of Archaeological Tourism.

In the context of this question, it has been noticed that there is not much awareness among the people for the development of archaeological tourism industry in Bangladesh. Of the 200 interviewees, 50 have no idea about archaeology. Therefore, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (Bangladesh Tourism Corporation) needs to take the initiative to spread the idea among the people.

5.3. The important issues for the Development of Tourism Industry

In response to the question of what is important in the Nabaratna temple for archaeological tourism. 76 people said that there should be security measures. 60 people said that there should be accommodation and food facilities. 24 said that there should be a playground for the children and 40 said that there should be restroom for the visitors.

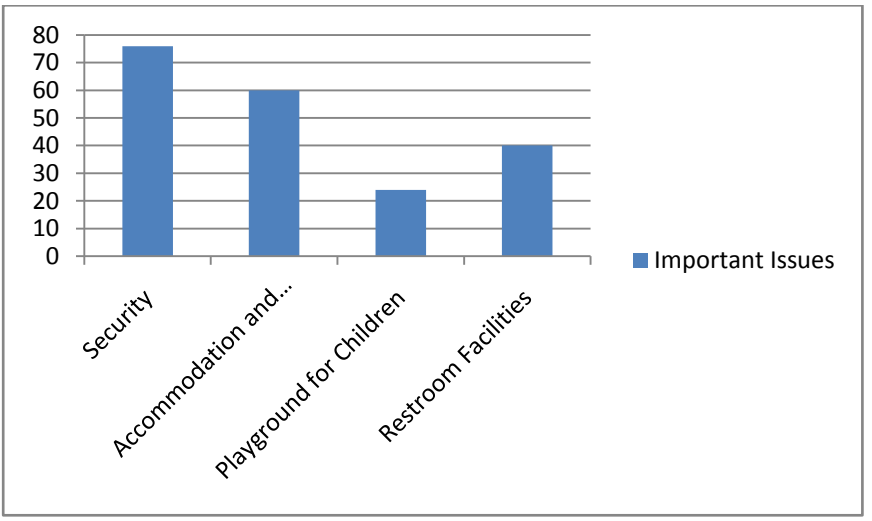


Figure 10 : Required facilities to develop tourism.

Visitors come from far and wide to see this temple. According to the visitors, there should be proper security, accommodation and food facilities, playground for children and restroom facilities for the visitors.

5.4. Obstacles to the Development of Archaeological Tourism

What are the main obstacles in the development of archaeological tourism- 60 visitors respond that there is no accommodation facility. 44 people felt that there was a lack of adequate security. 24 people said that there is no good food service. 50 people said that there is no entertainment other than visiting the archaeological site, and 22 said that there is no restroom facility for the visitors.

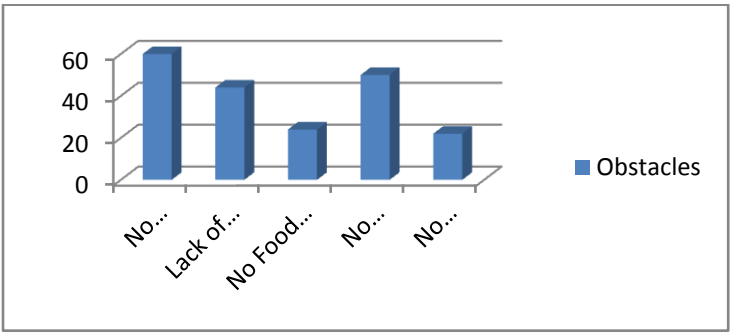


Figure 11 : Obstacles to the Development of Archaeological Tourism.

Some obstacles have been observed in the development of the archaeological tourism system of the Nabaratna temple. Visitors said in interviews that there is no accommodation for overnight stays, there is a lack of security, no good quality food shops, no arrangement for entertainment and no restroom facilities. The visitors think that it is important to consider the above issues to develop a tourism system around an archaeological site.

6. Recommendation

One of the special features of the Nabaratna temple is that there are three other aesthetic temples here. All temples are located in an open space. There is no protective wall around the four temples. However, during the fieldwork, it was observed that the locals did not much damage the site. The potential for archaeological tourism is greatly enhanced when the locals themselves take the responsibility of taking care of the archaeological site. Based on the data collected from the research, some recommendations for the development of Nabaratna temple based archaeological tourism are mentioned:

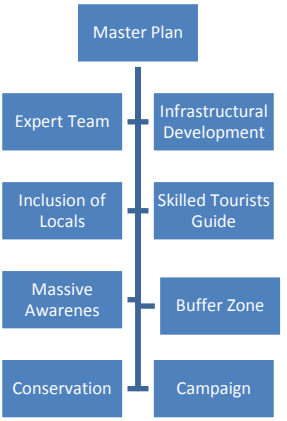


Figure 12 : Recommended Master Plan.

6.1. Expert Team

The issue of archaeological tourism is completely new in the context of Bangladesh. In order to present this new issue as a sustainable one, it is necessary to ensure the proper preservation of the archaeological site and the formulation of its tourism-based infrastructure. An expert team consisting of archaeologists, tourism management experts, cultural heritage management experts and archaeological site conservation experts should be formed. Firstly, an initiative should be taken to protect the archaeological site properly. Secondly, an expert team can be formed to make sustainable archaeological tourism.

6.2. Infrastructural Development

Among the most important aspects of the development of the tourism industry are the developments of communication system, accommodation, food facilities, restroom facilities, etc. The road to the Nabaratna temple though built. However, there is no overnight stay facility in the vicinity of the site. There is no good quality food shop and restroom. These issues need to be considered seriously in the development of archaeological tourism. Visitors come to this place from far and wide within the country, and even if someone from abroad comes to visit, it must be ensured that they can spend the night safely around the site. These issues are also reflected in the questionnaire-based survey on visitors.

6.3. Inclusion of Locals

Local people live in the vicinity of Nabaratna temple. If the locals do not know about the importance of the site, they will not take the initiative to protect the heritage. Besides, if arrangements are made for poor people to earn money on the basis of archaeological sites, they will be encouraged to preserve the archaeological site on their own initiative. In that case, the initiative can be taken to train local peoples as a tourist guide, arrange stalls to sell handicrafts to those who can make handicrafts etc. For example, Sirajganj is famous for its loom industry. So, visitors can visit the Nabaratna temple and buy the loom product simultaneously if there is a stall for loom product. As a result, employment opportunities would be possible for the locals through the Nabaratna temple based tourism.

6.4. Skilled Tourists Guide

Notably, there is no tourist guide in the Nabaratna temple. Visitors cannot get a good idea about the history and heritage of Nabaratna temple due to lack of tourist guide. In that case, an initiative should be taken to provide tourist guide facility for the visitors. It is highly recommended selecting a guide from the local village. As a result, visitors will get an idea about the historical context of Nabaratna temple. In addition, the guide must be well trained and be able to communicate with foreign visitors when they come from abroad.

6.5. Buffer Zone

Nabaratna temple is protected by the Antiquities Preservation Act, 1968. In addition to this temple, there are three other temples located around the Nabaratna temple. In order to properly preserve all the four temples, mechanical vehicles and noise pollution should be prohibited within the radius of at least one kilometer from the centre of the Nabaratna temple. There is a risk of an archaeological site being damaged by mechanical vehicles are much higher. In that case, car parking has to be arranged outside the buffer zone. The unnecessary movement inside the protected compound should be strictly prohibited.

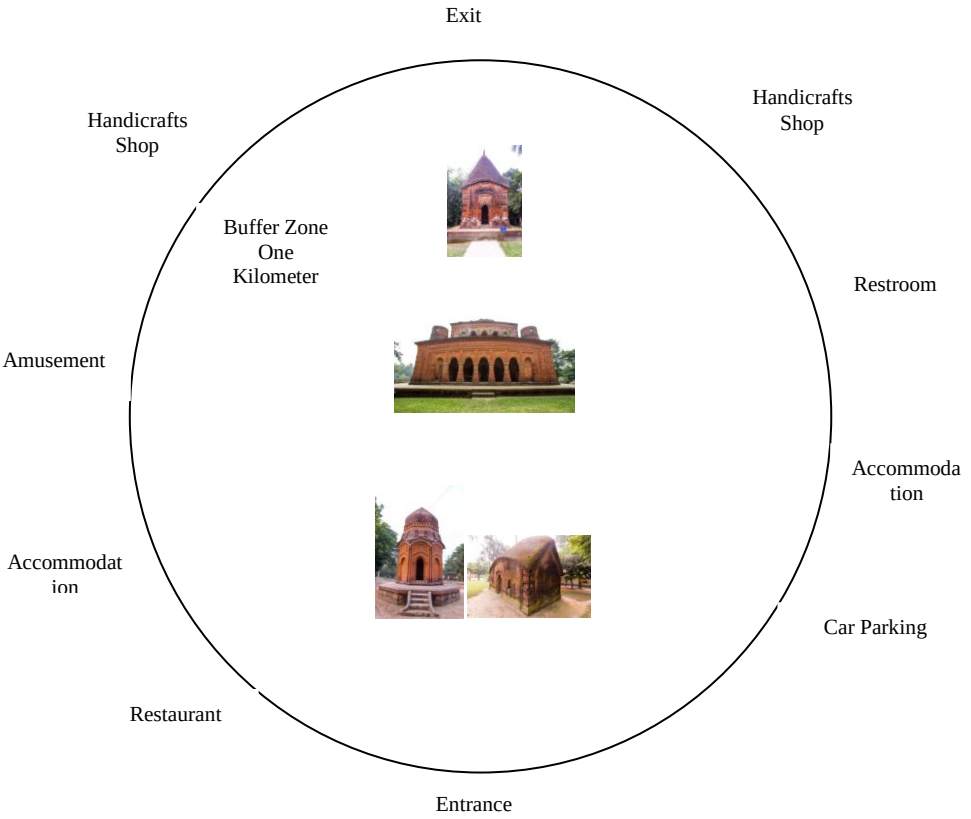


Figure 13 : Hypothetical Buffer Zone of Nabaratna Temple Area.

6.6. Massive Awareness

The local school, college, madrasa, needs to arrange awareness program to make the local awareness about the preservation of the heritage. Nabaratna temple

based seminars, symposium should be organized. Leaflets, handbills need to be distributed among the local people to raise awareness. The initiative should also be taken to raise awareness among the visitors. Dustbin should be provided for the disposal of dirt inside the buffer zone. A massive awareness program should be initiated to build sustainable archaeological tourism.

6.7. Conservation and Preservation

It was observed that cracks have appeared in several places on the surface of the Nabaratna temple. Therefore, more visitors should not be allowed to enter the temple at once. Also, the damaged part needs to be restored. Few terracotta plaques are fully destroyed of the *Shiva* temple. Replica plaques can be arranged in the destroyed part of the temple. Damaged parts need to be repaired. However, the characteristics of the archaeological site cannot be distorted.

6.8. Campaign

A campaign program should be initiated to promote the importance of the archaeological heritage of Bangladesh. Electronic and print media such as Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar, other private TV and radio channels and national dailies can promote the archaeological tourism of this country. In addition, domestic and international flights of Bangladesh Biman should have interesting souvenirs and magazines related to Bangladesh's archaeological tourism so that passengers become interested to know and see the archaeological site of the country.

7. Conclusion

Bangladesh has plenty of opportunities to develop archaeological tourism. In that case, a sustainable master plan should be initiated. As a result, the country's archaeological resources will be protected and earning source will be generated. Moreover, these archaeological sites can be one of the primary sources of income (Ivanovic, 2008: 27). A large number of tourists from home and abroad will visit the archaeological sites of the country if the visible obstacles remove properly. And since the people of this country are known as a hospitable nation in the world, it will also play a special role in the development of the archaeological tourism industry.

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