Exploring the Role of Folklore in Sustaining Cultural Tourism in Meghalaya

Phibapynhun Pariong

Assistant Professor, Department of Hotel Management, Royal Global University, Guwahati, Assam

Abstract:

Meghalaya, known for its colourful customs, extensive oral history, and breathtaking scenery, has emerged as a major destination for cultural tourism in Northeastern India. The region's identity is fundamentally shaped by the rich history of customs, rituals, and folklore upheld by its indigenous groups, which are predominantly the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes. In Meghalaya, cultural tourism has grown to be a substantial industry, drawing tourists from both home and abroad who are interested in learning more about the distinctive traditions, celebrations, artwork, folklore storytellers, and way of life of the local tribes. This study explores the function of cultural tourism in Meghalaya, emphasizing how it advances sustainable tourism, cultural heritage preservation, and socioeconomic development.

The state's cultural tourism revolves around festivals, traditions, and folklore, these celebrations provide guests with the excitement of Meghalaya's dynamic culture as ancient myths, stories, songs, enchanting festivals, and traditional ceremonies, which play a vital role in supporting and advancing cultural tourism and provides an unforgettable adventure into the core of indigenous heritage.

Furthermore, the study looks at how folklore tourism gives local people the chance to become more economically empowered through guided storytelling and ensuring the preservation of tourism centred around the folklore stories of Meghalaya which is crucial for sustaining the strong cultural legacy of its native communities, providing tourists with a more profound link to the ancient traditions and intriguing legends of the region.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism, Folklore, Heritage preservation, Indigenous Traditions.

INTRODUCTION:

Cultural tourism has gained significant attraction worldwide as a means of preserving heritage while promoting economic development in local communities. In India, the northeastern state of Meghalaya stands out as a key destination for such tourism, due to its remarkable blend of indigenous traditions, breathtaking natural landscapes, and rich oral history. The region's unique identity is shaped by the customs, rituals, and folklore of its three predominant indigenous groups—the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes. These communities have maintained a rich cultural heritage over centuries, rooted in age-old practices, mythological tales, and vibrant festivals. This paper however explores the rich indigenous relationship between folklorism and tourism on sustaining cultural tourism in Meghalaya. The research aims to study more on how mythical legendry folktales attract tourists to visit places around the state and to preserve "Mei Ramew' which is the mother nature and the ethnic community popularly known as the Hynñiew Trep Hynñiew Skum of Meghalaya which means 'seven huts' and 'seven families' the Khynriams, Pnars, Bhois, Wars, Marams, Lyngngams and Nongtrais. (Lyngdoh, 6, July, 2021)

Over the years, cultural tourism in Meghalaya has grown significantly, attracting visitors both from within India and across the globe. Tourists are drawn not only to the state's natural beauty but also to its dynamic traditions and deep-seated cultural practices. Festivals such as the Nongkrem Dance, Shad Suk Mynsiem, Shad Sukra, Behdiengkhlam, and Wangala Dance reflect the essence of Meghalaya's cultural identity, providing an immersive experience into the heart of its indigenous heritage. However, what makes Meghalaya's cultural tourism particularly distinctive is the role of folklore—stories passed down through generations that reveal the values, history, and beliefs of the Khasi, Jaiñtia, Garo communities. Meghalayan folklore is rich in mysticism, with many legends linked to the state's stunning landscape. The state is regarded as the "Abode of Clouds," and its natural beauty is frequently interpreted as a reflection of its rich cultural legacy. One of the most prominent stories is about U Syiem (The Chief), a mythical king who ruled the Khasi Hills and was thought to have extraordinary abilities. Tourists are drawn to sites linked with these traditions, such as sacred groves, caverns, and waterfalls, which are regarded as spiritually significant. Similarly, the Nohkalikai Falls, one of India's tallest waterfalls, is associated with the tragic legend of a woman named Likai, who, consumed by sorrow and wrath, threw herself down the cliff. This story elevates the emotional and spiritual experience of viewing the falls, making it more than just a gorgeous destination. The fascinating surroundings of these natural features make them must-see sites for visitors, boosting tourism tremendously. Furthermore, the living root bridges of Meghalaya, which are frequently depicted in tradition as sacred and enchanted, are a big draw. These bridges, made from the roots of ancient rubber trees, demonstrate how Meghalaya's tribal inhabitants work in harmony with nature. The stories behind their origin and use capture tourists even more, combining cultural tourism with eco-tourism and attracting those who value distinctive and sustainable methods. Tourism should be viewed through the lenses of the folk in order to enhance the visitor perception about the folk culture and to enhance the image of the destination. (Gautam, Lyndoh, & Nibhoria, 2016)

Sustaining Cultural Tourism in Meghalaya

The preservation and promotion of Meghalaya's folklore through tourism helps to preserve cultural tourism in the region. Tourists are drawn to festivals founded in myth and tribal customs, which showcase old rituals and celebrations. The Khasi tribe celebrates the Nongkrem Festival, which includes rituals for good harvest and prosperity. In contrast, the Garo tribe celebrates Wangala, a harvest festival in which they pay respect to the Sun God, Misi Saljong. Such activities provide tourists with a direct view into the live customs of Meghalaya's tribes, which helps to support cultural tourism.

Furthermore, the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo tribes' oral traditions are passed down through generations. Folklore, whether about natural spirits, forest guardians, or legendary wars, is essential for sustaining these societies' languages, rituals, and customs. Local tribes can share their past with the world by involving tourists in storytelling and cultural events, ensuring that these traditions remain dynamic and relevant in the present period.

In the face of globalization, which frequently results in cultural uniformity, folklore-based tourism emerges as a form of cultural resistance. As tourists discover and appreciate Meghalaya's unique customs, local communities are encouraged to maintain their traditional practices, thereby preserving folklore. In turn, tourism provides a long-term source of income, giving the younger generation an incentive to continue engaging in their family customs.

Ecotourism and conservation

Many of Meghalaya's folklore tales are based on a great respect for nature. Sacred forests, such as Mawphl-

ang Sacred Grove, are conserved due to their spiritual value. According to Khasi belief, the forest is home to old deities and spirits, and disrupting it could have disastrous effects. Tourists visiting these areas are educated on the importance of environmental conservation, which is integrated into the region's folklore. This method encourages ecotourism, combining natural and cultural preservation to protect the environment and local customs.

By combining tourism and storytelling, local tribes can conserve their customs, dialects, and traditional practices while also promoting environmentally sustainable tourism. The rich fabric of Meghalaya's myths and stories, as well as its stunning scenery, continue to entice visitors, ensuring that the culture and environment are preserved for future generations.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

This paper is based on the following main objectives.

1. To Examine the Relationship Between Tourism and Folklore.
2. To explore community involvement in folklore tourism.
3. To propose strategies for promoting folklore tourism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is exploratory research with a qualitative technique that includes both primary and secondary data.

The primary data is collected through interaction, and the questionnaire was distributed to the tourists visiting and attending various sites, festivals, and locals for filling. It consists of several questions along with the answer in MCQ form. The respondents have to answer on their own.

Secondary research is conducted by studying many publications, research papers, articles, and numerous government websites about folklore and cultural tourism, such as the Meghalaya Tourism website.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Tourism based on myths, legends, and folktales which is regarded as a subgenre of cultural tourism has gotten less attention as opposed to cultural activities based on history. Traveling to destinations based on their literary associations has been extensively investigated; however, this study investigates the relationship between tourism and myths, legends, and folk stories. The study aims to investigate the connection between myths, legends, and folk tales from the Hynñiew Treps/Khasis, a tribal indigenous people in Meghalaya, North East India. It seeks to investigate the extent to which the Hynniew Trep of Meghalaya regard myths, legends, and folktales as contributing to meaning making and identity transmission among tourists visiting the region. The Hynñiew Treps of Meghalaya are storytellers with strong traditions.

(Lyngdoh, 6, July, 2021)

Folk stories, myths, and legends express the unique cultural features of an ethnic community that set it apart from others. Many countries throughout the world are using legends to promote their famous sites since authorities understand the potential of legends in attracting tourists. The use of stories as a description of tourist attractions emphasizes their indigenousness, emphasizing oriental and otherness ideas. As such, the current study emphasizes the importance of myths, legends, and folk tales in encouraging cultural tourism. This study seeks to highlight the importance of myths, legends, and folk stories in fostering cultural tourism. The paper highlights the significance of myths, legends and folk tales

in promoting cultural tourism. Tourism should be viewed through the lenses of the folk to enhance the visitor perception about the folk culture and to enhance the image of the destination. Tourism should be viewed through the glasses of the folk in order to improve visitor perceptions of folk culture and the destination's image. (Gautam, Lyngdoh, & Nibhoria, Augmenting Tourism and Hospitality Experience: A Study of Myths, Legends and Folk tales of East Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, India, 2016)

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS:

Meghalaya, a state rich in culture, folklore, and natural beauty, provides an exceptional opportunity for the growth of cultural tourism. Tourism and folklore have a symbiotic relationship that encourages the preservation of indigenous history while delivering economic benefits to local communities. This discussion meets the research objectives by providing insights into how folklore supports cultural tourism in Meghalaya and recommending solutions for its promotion.

1. Examining the Relationship between Tourism and Folklore

In Meghalaya, folklore and tourism are inextricably linked, with both parts contributing to the rise of the other. Folklore enriches the tourism experience by offering context and meaning for natural landscapes, festivals, and cultural landmarks. For example, Nohkalikai Falls, one of Meghalaya's most popular attractions, is associated with local tales, which add to visitors' enjoyment for the location. The story of Nohkalikai, a tale of tragedy and loss, is passed down through generations and becomes a source of fascination for travelers, resulting in a mix of emotional and cultural involvement.

This relationship is mutually beneficial: folklore tourism helps revitalize and conserve oral traditions, many of which are at risk of extinction as younger generations urbanize. As tourists interact with these stories, they indirectly help to the preservation of local culture. Furthermore, as tourism grows, it encourages the community to continue sharing and protecting its customs. According to(Smith, 2009), cultural heritage tourism is critical for protecting intangible cultural assets such as folklore while also improving community pride and visitor experience.

Folklore is an important component of Meghalaya's social and cultural fabric, rather than just amusement. The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes' myths and stories are inextricably linked to the terrain, providing tourists with a more complete picture of the region. Storytelling tours, traditional performances, and interactive encounters enable visitors to connect with the region's long-standing traditions. According to (Cohen, 1998), such exchanges foster "existential authenticity," in which tourists seek genuine and meaningful experiences with the local culture.

2. Examining Community Engagement in Folklore Tourism.

Folklore tourism's long-term viability is dependent on community involvement. Local people in Meghalaya, particularly indigenous tribes, are the primary keepers of folklore. The active participation of these communities in tourism activities guarantees that the advantages of tourism are shared equitably and that the local culture is genuinely represented.

Folklore-based tourism gives locals economic opportunities, particularly as storytellers, guides, and performers. Guided storytelling tours, in which local elders retell narratives about sacred groves or traditional sites, enabling visitors to interact directly with indigenous knowledge. This type of community-based tourism encourages communities to take ownership of their cultural heritage while also ensuring that they reap direct economic advantages from tourism operations.

Furthermore, incorporating local communities in tourism development strengthens the importance of these traditions within the community. Younger generations are frequently exposed to folklore through

participation in tourism activities, ensuring the transmission of cultural information across generations. According to (Tisdell, 2001), integrating local residents in tourist efforts develops a sense of pride and responsibility for conserving their cultural identities.

3. Proposing Strategies to Promote Folklore Tourism

Several ways might be offered to develop folklore tourism in Meghalaya, with an emphasis on sustainability, community involvement, and authenticity:

a) Creating Folklore-Centred Tourism Circuits

Creating tourist circuits centered on folklore can attract niche travellers seeking cultural experiences. For example, a dedicated "Folklore Trail" may include visits to sights such as the Living Root Bridges, Nohkalikai Falls, and Mawphlang Sacred Forests, as well as storytelling sessions explaining the mythological significance of these locations. These circuits could be offered as immersive experiences that provide a better understanding of the region's culture.

b) Promoting cultural festivals and folklore-themed events.

Meghalaya's festivities, such as Shad Suk Mynsiem and Wangala, are already popular among tourists. Including folklore performances, storytelling sessions, and cultural seminars in these festivals might improve the tourist experience. These festivals promote Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia folklore while also allowing tourists to observe authentic cultural customs.

Cultural festivals are an important driver of cultural tourism because they provide unique experiences that attract tourists seeking authentic encounters. Promoting these festivals through focused marketing methods can boost attendance while also protecting and appreciating local folklore.

c) Using digital tools for folklore preservation and promotion.

In the present period, technology can help to maintain and enhance folklore tourism. Oral traditions, folklore stories, and mythological tales can be preserved for future generations by creating digital archives. These archives can be converted into digital storytelling tools like mobile applications and virtual tours, giving tourists a multimedia experience even before they arrive in Meghalaya.

Furthermore, social media campaigns can be utilized to promote Meghalayan folklore globally, generating a narrative that draws tourists to the state's cultural legacy. When done properly, technology integration can make folklore tourism more accessible while also assuring its preservation. (Raymond & Hall, 2008)demonstrate how digital platforms might improve cultural tourism by increasing accessibility and allowing for more diversified types of involvement.

Based on the questionnaire which has circulated among the locals and tourists through Google Forms, here are the potential findings and insights that can be derived from the responses:

1. **Importance of Folklore in Cultural Tourism in Meghalaya**

- Majority of the respondents are expected to consider folklore as a critical aspect of the cultural identity of Meghalaya, as the region's oral tradition and myths play a vital role in shaping its uniqueness. Most of the respondents have indicated that folklore is "very important" and "important" for maintaining Cultural Identity.

- Tourism and community members are likely to agree that folklore enhances the experience of cultural tourism in the region, making the trips more meaningful as they connect with the local culture and history through stories and myths.

2. **Community Involvement in Folklore Tourism**

- Moderate to high community involvement: Survey responses may reveal that local communities are moderately involved in folklore tourism, primarily through storytelling, cultural performances, and

handicrafts. However, there may be room for improvement in terms of active participation, with the younger generation perhaps being less engaged.

- Economic benefits: respondents might believe that folklore tourism provides economic opportunities, especially through guided tours and cultural events. Local guides, artisans, and performers frequently benefit from these activities, albeit there may be certain barriers, such as infrastructure development and government backing.

3. **Promoting Folklore Tourism**
- Strategies for improvement: Survey respondents are likely to offer numerous techniques for promoting folklore tourism which include:
- Government support and funding for cultural festivals and events.
- Digital marketing through social media and websites to attract a broader audience.
- Preservation efforts such as documentation of oral traditions, digital archives, and educational initiatives that involve both locals and tourists.
- Training programs for local guides and storytellers to improve their storytelling skills and engagement with tourists.

4. **Use of Technology**
- Positive attitudes towards modern technology: Respondents may argue that social media, websites, and digital platforms are crucial for promoting folklore tourism in the modern world. They can advise creating online collections of Meghalayan folklore or mobile apps that provide interactive storytelling experiences.

5. **Challenges in sustaining folklore tourism**
- Challenges identified could include
- Lack of visitor awareness: Some responses indicated that more awareness is required to attract tourists, especially for folklore-related tourism.
- Insufficient infrastructure: respondents point out the need for better infrastructure, such as roads, lodging, and tourists facilities to encourage folklore tourism.

The findings from the questionnaire indicate that folklore is deeply embedded in the cultural tourism sector of Meghalaya. While local communities are participating, more work is required to increase engagement, notable through economic empowerment and government backing. Digital platforms and modern technology are regarded as significant instruments for promoting folklore, but issues such as infrastructure and commercialization risks must be addressed in order to sustain and increase folklore tourism in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Here are a few recommendations that can enhance folklore in sustaining cultural tourism in Meghalaya:

1. Strengthening community involvement in folklore tourism: By organizing and planning training programs for the local storytellers, guides, and artisans to improve their storytelling abilities and interaction with the tourists.
2. Empowering local residents with tourism related skills such as hospitality training, multilingual communication skills, and the use of current technologies to improve service delivery.
3. Youth involvement: Ensuring the continuity of folklore tourism by involving the younger generation to sustain their roots and tradition of the community.
4. The government could also collaborate with the youths of the state by introducing folklore workshops

in schools and colleges, and cultural camps, that can teach more about the heritage and also involve the younger generation to be part of the folklore ambassadors.

5. Encouraging and establishing folklore tourism by allowing the local communities to maintain and manage cultural sites like the Mawphlang Sacred Grove, arranging storytelling events, and preserving mother nature by running eco-friendly hotels. This concept can help in the equal distribution of economic benefits.

6. The government should prioritize more on developing better infrastructure, especially in the rural areas where many folklore tourist sites are located. This includes constructing better roads, improving tourist accommodations by giving more schemes to the locals, encouraging collaboration between the government and local businessmen, and providing basic facilities such as washrooms, resting and seating areas, and more local guides who can speak basic common language.

7. Using digital platforms such as social media, influencers, and tourist websites can help in promoting the state and its unique culture by narrating different myths and folktales of various tourist destinations can give great help in promoting tourist sites and awareness to people.

CONCLUSION:

In Conclusion, folklore plays an important role in shaping and sustaining the Cultural Tourism in Meghalaya. The state's rich and diverse oral traditions are deeply rooted in the customs and beliefs of the indigenous tribes of the Khasi, Garo, and Jaiñtia. which offers a unique cultural experience to the visitors. This paper highlighted folklore, storytelling, traditional performance, and eco-tourism, which creates a strong connection between the tourists and locals, making their experience more meaningful. The involvement of the local communities is the key to ensuring the authenticity and sustainability of the cultural exchange. Economic empowerment through folklore cultural tourism provides the local guides, storytellers, and artisans with the opportunity to benefit directly and economically, though more efforts are also needed to involve the younger generation in passing down the tradition from one generation to another.

Moreover, introducing modern technology, such as digital and social media platforms will give more opportunities to promote folklore cultural tourism. However, challenges like infrastructure development and the risk of cultural commercialization need to be addressed to ensure that tourism growth does not compromise the cultural and environmental virtue of Meghalaya. Strategies should focus more on government support for preserving folklore tourism to maintain its vibrant and sustainability for future generations.

REFERENCES:

1. Cohen, E. (1998). Authenticity and commoditization in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* , 15.
2. Gautam, D. P., Lyndoh, M. S., & Nibhoria, D. S. (2016). Augmenting Tourism and Hospitality Experiences: A Study of Myths, Legends and Folk Tales of East Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, India . *International Journl for Research Publcation and Seminar* , 1.
3. Gautam, D. P., Lyngdoh, M. S., & Nibhoria, D. S. (2016). Augmenting Tourism and Hospitality Experience: A Study of Myths, Legends and Folk tales of East Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, India. *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH PUBLICATION & SEMINAR*, 1.
4. Gautam, D. P., Lyngdoh, M. S., & Nibhoria, D. S. (n.d.). Augmenting Tourism and Hospitality Experiences: A Study of Myths, Legends and Folk tales of East k.

5. Lyndoh, s. (6 July 2021). Meaning making and identity transmission through myths, legends and folk tales: the case of cultural tourism in meghalaya . *turkish online journal of qualitative inquiry* , 3.

6. Lyngdoh, M. S. (6, July, 2021). Meaning Making and Identity Transmission through Myths, Legends and Folk tales: The Case of Cultural Tourism in Meghalaya . *Turkish online Journal of Oualitative Inquiry (TOJQI) Volume 12, Issue 6, July, 2021 : 8307-8315*, 1.

7. Raymond, C., & Hall, C. (2008). The digitalization of Cultural Tourism. *Journal of Heritage Tourism* , 3.

8. Smith, M. (2009). Issue in Cultural Tourism Stiudies. *Routhledge* .

9. Tisdell, C. (2001). Tourism, heritage and conservation: the role of indegenous communities. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 7.