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Findings, Recommendation, Conclusion and Scope of Further Study

Outline of the Chapter

After an extensive study on various aspects of rural tourism in the concerned study area, inferences drawn from the study has highlighted both the prospects and challenges of rural tourism initiatives in the Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya. This chapter features the research studies major findings, pertinent recommendations, and the factual conclusion drawn. The objectives of the research findings are to assist academicians and tourism stake holders to frame realistic policy framework for better implementation and monitoring of rural tourism initiatives with respect to economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts. This chapter summarizes the entire research undertaken and highlights the inferences derived from the study and the findings from the study will be of help for future research.

7.1 Findings

This extensive study on “*A study on Rural Tourism in Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya: Prospects and Challenges,*” gives an overview of rural tourism initiatives and highlights the gains for the rural communities and the rural economy. The study also highlights the perception of the rural residents towards rural tourism development and the challenges arising thereof.

After an extensive study of available tourism literatures on rural tourism initiatives and the outcome of the primary study, it is evident that of late a lot of tourists from other north-eastern states and mainland India are preferring the rural circuit zones of the state of Meghalaya. The statistics on tourists' arrival has witnessed a steady growth of tourist footfalls in the state (Table 1.4). Out of the 12 districts in the state of Meghalaya, Ri-Bhoi district's tourist statistics in the rural tourism circuit zones are quite encouraging and there is tremendous potential for further enhancement of rural tourism initiatives in the 4 blocks of the district, due to the rich source of flora and fauna, vibrant cultural fabric of the residents' tribes and proximity of the rural tourist destination via the national highway 40 and much improved district roads.

The study area is transitional between two major urban places, namely the city of Guwahati in the north and the city of Shillong in the south connected via the National Highway-40, which passes through the middle of the district. Due to its strategic transitional location, there has been urban influence on the socio-economic structure of the district especially the places near the NH-40. Though the district was constituted in 1992 and after almost 3 decades of its existence as full-fledged district, the urban centres has witnessed quick economic growth, whereas the rural centres are still depended on traditional agriculture and allied activities and are staggering with a weak rural economy. However, with Government intervention and new economic policies, the rural sectors of the district with abundant rich tourism resources are being able to look at alternative livelihood options through scheme of alternative tourism like rural tourism, village tourism etc. Rural tourism being a niche tourism form has been able to steadily lay its foundation in the 4 blocks of the district, namely *Jirang, Umling, Umsning and Bhoirybong*. Due to the pleasant tropical climate, fascinating topography of the district, rich tribal cultural fabric, and proximity to the urban centres of Guwahati and Shillong, alternative tourism forms are becoming very popular in some of the blocks of the district, and it has become a quick short or weekend getaway for people from the urban centres. The subsequent tourism policies of the state of Meghalaya and Homestay schemes have given impetus for the sustainable development of tourism in rural and tribal areas of the district.

The main objective of the study is to highlight the prospects and challenges of rural tourism in Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya and to identify the barriers and to offer suggestions for rural tourism development in the study area. Extensive review of

tourism literature was carried out on Tourism Concepts, Tourism Impacts, Community Based Tourism, Tourism in Meghalaya, Origin and Rural Tourism Concepts, Alternative Forms of Tourism, Benefits and Significance of Rural Tourism and Activities in Rural Tourism.

Based on the reviewed tourism literature on rural tourism, the study proceeds to highlight the concepts and constructs of rural tourism and its practices are well clarified. Rural tourism being a niche tourism form is part of a bigger umbrella namely Alternative Tourism or Special Interest Tourism and it includes under its radar other niche tourism forms like Nature, Village, Eco, Agri, Ethnic and Adventure Tourism. The activities available for tourists and visitors under the Rural Tourism Initiatives include experiences of village lifestyles, exposure to farms, trekking, angling, boat, and animal rides, cycling, participation in rural social events and festivals and also opportunity to purchase locally manufactured handicrafts, handlooms, and agricultural products.

Rural tourism initiatives at global level are playing a significant role and it is equally very important in India context that can play a significant role in uplifting the regions of rural India. The concept and dynamics of rural tourism is very relevant in India, where about 68.84% of the population reside in about 6,38,000 villages and the majority of the rural residents are primarily engaged in agriculture and allied activities and are seeking for alternative livelihood options due to the various challenges.

From tourism perspective, India being a vast and diverse country with many tourism sites and attractions can attract many fold tourist's footfalls. The rurality feature can be an important pull factor to boost rural tourism initiatives in rural India. Some of the states in India like Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Kerala etc have already initiated the rural tourism initiatives and is gaining popularity not only from domestic but also from overseas tourists. India's northeast bestowed with pristine natural resources has tremendous potential for implementation of rural tourism practices. Some of the popular rural tourism sites in the region are the Mawlynnong village in Meghalaya, Khonoma village in Nagaland, Taiphakey village in Assam and many more.

The first tourism policy of India saw its light in November 1982, though conscious effort to boost tourism was initiated since the time of independence. The broad

framework of the first tourism policy was to boost tourism for economic gains and social integration and also to project India as a significant tourism destination through its glorious historical past and its diverse vibrant cultural fabric.

The present study was carried out to see the prospects of rural tourism initiatives in the said study area. The study also was carried out to identify the various challenges associated with rural tourism development along with to highlight the both the positive and negative impacts arising to rural tourism initiatives in the study area in context to economic, socio-cultural and environmental aspects.

The respondents of the primary data were from the rural community of the study area i.e., from the blocks of Ri-Bhoi district namely *Jirang, Umling, Umsning and Bhoirybong*. The respondents included the village headmen (*Dorbar Shonong*), Women Panchayat member (Seng Samla) and local tourism stake holders. The researcher himself interviewed the respondents with the help of a well-structured questionnaire. Inferences drawn from the responses of the respondents was to analyse how the rural communities of the study area perceived about the concept of rural tourism and also to identify the consequences of rural tourism development in the study area.

The schedule for the respondents were categorised into 4 parts, i.e., profile of the respondents, Economic Impacts, Socio-cultural impacts, Environmental Impacts and Challenges of rural tourism development. The data collected from the primary study was investigated and analysed by using statistical test in IBM SPSS (25) and so as to identify the impacts of rural tourism initiatives on the local rural communities and also to ascertain the prospects and challenges of rural tourism initiatives in the said study area.

7.1.1: Findings on Present Status of Tourism - Meghalaya and Ri-Bhoi District

1. Meghalaya the abode of clouds has become a significant tourist centre in the northeast. A decade or two ago tourism in Meghalaya was primarily concentrated in the East Khasi Hills district primarily in an around the Shillong city, but off late it has been observed that tourists foot fall has been experienced in the other districts of the state. The number of tourist destinations has increased significantly since the last two decades, especially in the rural locations of the state. There has been gradual increase

of footfall of both domestic and overseas tourists and there is a great demand for alternative tourism forms like rural tourism, eco-tourism etc.

2. At times, the number of tourists surpasses what the tourist destination can handle, leading to increased pressure on its available resources. Infrastructure to absorb the tourists flow is not adequate and at times creates conflicts between the host communities and the tourists. With the completion of the highways and other district roads initiated by the NHIDCL- Traffic snarls could be checked to some extent and remote rural tourism destinations could be more accessible.

3. Government initiatives, planning, implementation, capacity building, training, policy framing and hand holding to support the rural local communities in starting tourism endeavours is not significant (primary data-questionnaire no. 8 & 22, challenges) . Hence it can be seen most of the government initiatives in the tourism sector is not able to function properly unless they are in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode. It has been observed that the potentialities for developing the tourism sector as a stable source of revenue earning are not matched by proper policy and strategy. The expected development and promotion of the tourism sector in the state is primarily not due to the infrastructural bottleneck but other factors like inferior amenities in the tourist destinations, lack of well-planned package tour, skilled manpower deficiency, polluted environment, unreliable communication networks, host communities being unreceptive towards the tourists at times, benefits from tourism receipts are channelled towards a few individuals, etc.

4. The new tourism policy 2023 of the government of Meghalaya is projecting to take the state's economy to \$ 10 billion by 2028 and it envisions to position Meghalaya as a favoured tourism destination by harnessing its tourism potential. The new policy has several thrust areas including core and auxiliary infrastructure, connectivity infrastructure, new tourism circuits, private sector partnership, tourist safety etc. According to the new tourism policy, government will endeavour to work towards creating land banks across all major tourist's circuits of the state which then can be leased to tourism operators to build infrastructure or undertake tourism related activities. The vision of this new tourism policy is to encourage the sustainable growth of the tourism sector so that it has a holistic development of the economy and the local communities. The new tourism policy also emphasises on tourism manpower

development, as it has been observed in Meghalaya there has been dearth of trained tourists-guides in popular tourist's spots and as a result there is hardly anyone to satisfy the curiosity of the tourists. With the mushrooming of many hotels, lodges, guest houses, homestay's, restaurants, café's etc there will be a lot of trained manpower requirement.

5. Another aspect identified by the researcher is that many of the government agencies entrusted with the development of tourism are not primarily from tourism background and most of these agencies or departments are headed by bureaucrats and technocrats who have multiple departments to look after, thus creating a gap hence comprehensive development is often not achieved.

6. In Ri-Bhoi district, there has been a development of a few high-end resorts based in the rural blocks, however these resorts have become the destinations itself, rather than the rural area. The popular slogan of sustainable tourism development- '*Tourism for the People, of the People and by the People*' is not very apt in context with Meghalaya, as the local community's participation and involvement is significantly low in this sector. There seems to be less adequate knowledge about the benefits of tourism sector apart from the quick economic gains.

7. The development of rural tourism schemes in the study area is still in a nascent stage, despite the abundant tourism resources available. A few of the villages of the district have initiated the rural tourism scheme with the support of the stakeholders and there has been a steady flow of tourists in these circuits, however, there have been limited amenities and tourism activities.

7.1.2: Findings regarding Profile of the Respondents

The first category of the schedule consisted of the profile of the respondents who were the local community members from the villages of the four blocks of the study area. The profile included their block name, gender, age group, tribe, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, monthly household income, dependency on tourism business and primary occupation of the village. The profile data analysis highlights the following deductions:

1. Out of the total 440 respondents from the four blocks of the Ri-Bhoi district -from *Jirang* block there were 131 respondents, from *Umsning* block there 123

respondents, from *Umling* block there were 127 respondents and from *Bhoirymbong* block there were 59 respondents.

2. Gender distribution among the respondents stood at Male 237 (53.9%) and Female 203 (46.1%).
3. The age distribution of the respondents in the study area was categorised in to 5 age groups. The age group of 31 to 40 had the maximum respondents at 187 (41.1%) and the age group above 60 had the least respondents at 5 (1.1%), the age group of 41 to 50 had 158(36%) respondents, age group of 20 to 30 had 69 (15.7%) respondents, age group of 51 to 60 had 27 (6.1%) respondents.
4. The tribe distribution of the respondents was categorised in to 4 groups namely *Khasis*, *Jaintias*, *Garos* and *others*. Maximum of the respondents belong to the *Khasi* tribe with 359 (81.6%) respondents, followed by the *Garo* tribe at 47 (10.7%), *Jaintia* tribe had 13 (3%) respondents and other hill tribes had 21 (4.8%) respondents.
5. The marital status of the respondents was distributed as married 318 (72.3%) and unmarried was at 122 (27.7%).
6. The educational qualification of the respondents was categorised in to 6 groups namely *under matric*, *matric*, *higher secondary*, *graduate*, *postgraduate* and *PhD*. Majority of the respondents was *graduate* at 209 (47.6%), followed by *matriculate* at 111(25.3%), *under matric* at 61(13.9%), *postgraduate* at 37(8.4%), *higher secondary* at 21(4.8%).
7. Majority occupation of the respondents of the study were *self-employed* 222 (50.2%), followed by *farmers* at 120 (27.3%), *government service* at 48(10.9%), *private service* at 47 (10.71%) and *unemployed* at 3(0.7%).
8. Household income distribution of the respondents of the study was categorised in to 3 groups, namely less than Rs 20,000 per month, Rs 20,000 to Rs 50,000 per month and above Rs 50,000 per month. Majority of the respondents were from the income group of Rs 20,000 to Rs 50,000 at 194 (44.1%), followed by in the income group of less than Rs 20,000 at 129(29.3%) and above Rs 50,000 at 117 (26.6%).

9. Out of the total respondents 76.8% were depended in tourism activities and business and the rest 23.2% were not depended in tourism activities or business. Out of the total 440 respondents 174(39.5%) were fully depended on tourism and 164 (37.3%) were partially depended on tourism and 102(23.2%) were not all depended on tourism activities or business.
10. It was observed that the source of income for the village population is agriculture and allied activities. Out of the total respondents, 96.1% echoed that the main source of income was from agriculture and allied activities.

From the above findings it can be concluded that rural tourism initiatives in the study area have tremendous potential to grow and further expanded. Since the literacy and income level are high as the educational qualification of the majority respondents are graduates at 47.6% and 44.1% of the respondents have household income between Rs 20,000 and Rs 50,000, tourism initiatives at village level could be initiated though in a small scale and in a sustainable manner. It was also observed in the study that about 50.2% of the respondents were self-employed and 76.8% were depended on tourism activities and business, hence rural tourism in the village or surrounding areas can be further expanded, as the required skill sets and involvement from the rural community members already exist. Though the occupation of the respondents constituted 27.3 % farmers in the study area, the farming community of the village can collaborate with the other community members involved and depended on tourism business, so that alternative livelihood options could be initiated for the farming community at large. Furthermore, due to abundance of pristine natural resources and the rurality factor in the study area, the inhabitant rural communities can tap the rural tourism resources so that their income levels could be increased.

7.1.3: Findings regarding the impacts of rural tourism on local community development.

Wherever there is a high demand for a tourism destination, invertedly there seems to be subsequent tourism development and this tourism growth also exerts some pressure on the destination and its peripheral locations. Some of the effects of this growth can be seen as positive, whereas others can be termed as negatives. Furthermore, if the negative effects are not checked at an earlier stage, the destinations appeal eventually fades out and huge irreversible damages are caused to the eco-system and the socio-

cultural fabric of the host communities. Whenever tourism demand is growing at a fast pace, be it in urban areas or rural areas, some level of negative impacts is caused if carrying capacity is not taking care of along with the positive benefits.

Though, it is commonly observed that most tourism development occurs in the urban perimeters, hence the urban areas are subjected to maximum pressure in terms of both adverse impacts due to the uncontrolled development of tourism sector. However, in the recent times it has been observed due to the popularity of alternative tourism forms mostly catering in the vicinity or peripheral locations of rural circuits, these zones are also experiencing some adverse effects along with the favourable gains. An aspect of alternative tourism forms like rural tourism, village tourism, ecotourism etc is that the level of tourism activities and scale of tourism growth is generally in a small scale hence, the adverse effects due to tourism growth may not be detrimental to an extent, however, the rural circuits have fragile eco-systems and the rural host communities being simple, some of the impacts could leave a scar. The need of the hour is to cautiously develop the tourism activities in the rural circuits in small scale but with a sustainable and community-based tourism approach, so that the adverse effects could be checked and controlled.

To measure and access the impacts of rural tourism growth on the local rural community of Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya, three aspects has been taken into considerations i.e., economic, socio-cultural, and environmental. The respondents were from the 110 villages of the four blocks of the study area district and their opinions were recorded on a five-point Likert scale. The economic aspect included questions pertaining to (economic benefits, income , employment, local products, community services, inflation), socio-cultural impacts (Incentive for heritage preservation, cultural exchange, community pride, empowerment, promotion of local food, demonstration affect, alcoholism, gambling, drug trafficking & prostitution) and environmental impacts (preservation and conservation of natural resources, creation of parks, aesthetic value, partnering with SHG & NGO's, overcrowding, pollution, littering and reduction of open spaces).

7.1.3.1: Findings regarding the economic impacts of rural tourism on local community development.

To measure the economic effects due to rural tourism development in the study area, the primary data were collected from the village headmen, women members of the women committee and stake holders involved in tourism operations. The questionnaire had 16 items covering the economic impacts, however, only 14 items were considered and the 2 items relating to economic impacts were dropped because of poor load factor. The 14 items considered for the analysis were divided into five factors to analyse the economic impacts caused by rural tourism development on the local community development (Table 5.8). The five factors derived from factor analysis was further analysed through a Pearson correlation test, to observe the correlation between them (Table 5.23). Also, the data set was further analysed to assess the affiliation between demographic variables and economic impact due to rural tourism initiatives through a crosstabulation analysis and chi-square test of association (Table 5.27) and subsequent hypothesis formulated is validated in (Table no.5.28). Inferences drawn from the respondents are the following:

1. Most of the respondents (94.1%) agree that rural tourism initiatives in their village have provided economic benefits for the residents.
2. Regarding rural tourism initiatives has affected the standard of living of the villagers, just above half of residents (57.7%) has agreed to the statement and the rest of the respondents (42.3%) has disagreed that rural tourism initiatives has affected the standard of living of the community.
3. There has been a mixed response whether rural tourism has been able to stimulate the local village economy, just above half the respondents (53.2%) has agreed whereas about (44.4%) has disagreed that rural tourism has been able to stimulate the local village economy.
4. Most of the respondents (91.1%) agrees that new cultural activities and attractions have been created due to rural tourism initiatives.
5. Most of the respondents (94.8%) agrees to the fact that due to rural tourism development there has been considerable demand for local handicrafts and local indigenous delicacies.

6. Most of the respondents (88.2%) believe that due to rural tourism initiatives the local rural areas are getting highlighted among tourist's circuits.
7. Out of the total respondents (68.9%) agrees that recreational facilities in the villages have increased due to advent of rural tourism initiatives.
8. Most of the respondents (88%) agrees that due to the growth of rural tourism the youths of the villages are motivated to be engaged in tourism related jobs and activities.
9. About more than half of the respondents (60.2%) disagrees that due to the scope of rural tourism there has been private participation and investment in the rural areas.
10. Most of the respondents (85.2%) agrees that due to rural tourism initiatives the accessibility of the village has improved.
11. Out of the total respondents (76.6%) disagree that the local people are earning money by leasing their land & property for tourism purpose.
12. 69.8% of the respondents disagree that due to rural tourism growth and development there has been hike in land and property in the rural areas.
13. Most of the respondents (88.8%) disagree that due to increase flow of tourists there has been price hike in essential commodities.
14. Out of the total respondents (74.1%) disagree that tourism activity in the area is dominated by the non- natives.

7.1.3.2: Findings regarding the socio-cultural impacts of rural tourism on local community development.

To measure and analyse the socio-cultural impacts in the study area, the primary data was collected from the village headmen, women members of the women committee and stake holders involved in tourism operations. The questionnaire has 12 items covering the socio-cultural impacts. The 12 items considered for the analysis were divided into 4 factors so as to analyse the socio-cultural impacts caused by rural tourism development on the local community development (Table 5.15). The four factors derived from factor analysis was further analysed through a Pearson correlation test, to observe the correlation between them (Table 5.24). Also, the data set was

further analysed to assess the affiliation between demographic variables and socio-cultural impacts due to rural tourism initiatives through a crosstabulation analysis and chi-square test of association (Table 5.29) and subsequent hypothesis formulated is validated in (Table no. 5.30). Inferences drawn from the respondents are the following:

1. Most of the respondents (95%) disagree that rural tourism initiatives provide incentives to restore historical and heritage sites and buildings of the area.
2. Most of the respondents (96.9%) agree that due to rural tourism initiatives there has been more cultural exchange between tourists and local host communities.
3. All most all the respondents (99.8%) agree that rural tourism enhances & revitalize community pride and has given a cultural identity to the place and the community.
4. 99.1% of the respondents agree that rural tourism advancements have made the rural places good places to live and visit.
5. Most of the respondents (97%) agree that rural tourism initiatives have led to more awareness towards protecting culture and heritage.
6. All the respondents agree that rural tourism initiatives have been able to empower the local women of the communities and they are participating in tourism activities actively.
7. Most of the respondents (99.5%) agree that rural tourism has given an opportunity to the local communities to showcase their traditional indigenous delicacies cooked in traditional way to the tourists.
8. More than half of the respondents (57.3%) disagree that increased rural tourism in the rural areas has led to negative effect on the rural lifestyle and culture.
9. There has been a mixed response on whether local community prefer tourism related jobs rather than the traditional livelihood occupations, just above half the respondents (50%) has disagreed whereas about (49.6%) has agreed.
10. Most of the respondents (70.2%) disagree that increased flow of tourists to the rural areas has led to anti-social activities.

11. More than half of the respondents (60%) disagree that traditional village houses have been replaced by modern houses due to the boom of rural tourism in the rural areas.
12. Majority of the respondents (66.2%) agree that at times tourist visiting the rural locations behave in an insensitive manner, thereby disrespecting the local culture and traditions.

7.1.3.3: Findings regarding the environmental impacts of rural tourism on local community development.

To measure and analyse the environmental impacts in the study area, the primary data was collected from the village headmen, women members of the women committee and stake holders involved in tourism operations. The questionnaire had 12 items covering the environmental impacts, however, only 10 items were considered and the 2 items relating to environmental impacts were dropped because of poor load factor. The 10 items considered for the analysis were divided into 3 factors to analyse the environmental impacts caused by rural tourism development (Table 5.22). The three factors derived from factor analysis was further analysed through a Pearson correlation test, to observe the correlation between them (Table 5.25). Also, the data set was further analysed to assess the affiliation between demographic variables and environmental impacts due to rural tourism initiatives through a crosstabulation analysis and chi-square test of association (Table 5.31) and the subsequent hypothesis formulated is validated in (Table no 5.32). Inferences drawn from the respondents are the following:

1. Most of the respondents (91.6%) agrees that rural tourism initiatives have resulted in preserving the natural resources and landscapes.
2. All most all the respondents (98.4%) agree to the fact of the importance of protecting the environmental resources which aids in attracting the rural tourists.
3. More than half of the respondents (63.4%) disagree that rural tourism encourages the creation of parks and leisure area for residents.
4. Majority of the respondents (56.6%) agree that earnings from tourism has also facilitated preservation and conservation of environment.

5. Most of the respondents (94.8%) agree that due to rural tourism initiatives the aesthetic value of the local area has improved.
6. All most all the respondents (98.2%) are in the view that local community along with SHG's/ NGOs are partnering to protect the environment of the local rural areas.
7. Around (73.9%) of the respondents agree that rural tourism initiatives at village level have encouraged to adopt renewable & energy saving technologies.
8. More than half of the respondents (69.3%) disagree that due to rural tourism there is overcrowding in the rural areas.
9. Almost all the respondents (90.8%) disagree that tourism initiatives in the rural circuits have resulted in increased traffic and increasing levels of pollutions.
10. Around (83.7%) of the respondents disagree that rural tourism initiatives have fostered major construction activity for tourism development and thereby creating an ecological imbalance in the rural circuits.
11. More than half of the respondents (52.7%) disagree that open spaces in the rural areas are getting replaced by tourism infrastructures.
12. Majority of the respondents (67.5%) agree that garbage and littering in rural areas have increased due to rural tourism growth.

7.1.4.: Findings regarding the challenges of rural tourism for local community development and participation.

To measure and analyse the challenges of rural tourism and its sustainable development for the local community benefit and involvement in the study area, the primary data was collected from the village headmen, women members of the women committee and stake holders involved in tourism operations. The questionnaire had 22 items covering the challenges of rural tourism initiative and local community involvement and participation however, only 18 items were considered, and the 4 items were dropped because of poor load factor. The 18 items considered for the analysis were divided into 6 factors to ascertain the challenges, and local community participation in rural tourism initiative (Table 6.7). The six factors derived from factor analysis was further analysed through a chi-square analysis so as to understand the

opinions of the local community members regarding the challenges of rural tourism development in respective table nos. (6.9, 6.11, 6.13, 6.15, 6.17, 6.19) and subsequent hypothesis formulated is validated in respective table nos. (6.10, 6.12, 6.14, 6.16, 6.18, 6.20) and Pearson correlation test, to observe the correlation between them (Table 6.22). Also, the data set was further analysed to assess the affiliation between demographic variables and challenges for rural tourism development through a crosstabulation analysis and chi-square test of association (Table 6.23) and subsequent hypothesis formulated is validated in (Table no 6.24). Inferences drawn from the respondents are the following:

1. Around (84.3%) of the respondents agree that due to the implementation of government rural tourism schemes, infrastructure in the rural areas has developed to some extent.
2. Almost all the residents (98.4%) agree that the governments homestay schemes have fostered the rural tourism as affordable, clean accommodation is available in the rural circuits along with good quality local food.
3. Regarding the local people involved in tourism activities are trained or not through government various skill development programmes, there has been a mixed response from the respondents as (49.5%) agree and (48.9%) disagree and the rest (1.6%) chose to remain neutral.
4. Just above three fourth of the respondents (77.7%) agree that government agencies consult the local communities for implementation of any rural tourism initiatives.
5. Majority of the respondents (92.5%) agree that the village Dorbar Shnong along with the tourism stake holders and the local NGO's take rural tourism initiatives effectively and constantly monitor the impacts.
6. Most of the respondents (99.3%) agree that there is no communication barrier between the local community tourism stake holders and the tourist visiting the rural tourism circuits.
7. Almost (63.4%) of the respondents agree, whereas (36.6%) respondents disagree that their village has got metalled road and good transport connectivity.

8. Just above three fourth of the respondents (78.4%) disagree that tourism development activities are receiving financial and technical support from government agencies.
9. Most of the respondents (99.9%) agree that rural tourism initiatives can be an alternative livelihood options for the rural agrarian folks.
10. Most of the respondents (90.2%) agree that since the advent of rural tourism initiatives in their villages the migration of the rural y habitants to nearby towns and cities has been checked to some extent.
11. Majority of the respondents (99.3%) agree that due to the rural tourism development in their villages, marginalised community members especially the women folks are getting empowered by involving themselves in tourism activities and businesses.
12. 96.1% of the respondents agree that rural tourism has stimulated the demand for local handicrafts and handloom products.
13. Majority of the respondents (96.4%) disagree to the fact that rural tourism initiatives in the rural areas are not viable as there is huge cost involved in building infrastructure and other services in comparison to the tourist flow.
14. More than half of the respondents (63.9%) disagree that the rural tourism stake holders have the support of tourism bodies for sustainable tourism business.
15. Just more than half of the respondents (57.5%) agree that the rural tourism product has diversity to appeal to various tourist segment.
16. Majority of the residents (88.4%) agree that the village councils along with SHG/NGO's does monitor the rural tourism operations so as to retain it as a rural sustainable core product.
17. Majority of the respondents (97.7%) disagree that the rural tourism circuits have a tourist information centre.
18. Most of the respondents (96.6%) agree that local rural tourism stake holders have formed alliance with other tourism stakeholders to attract tourists to the rural areas.

19. Majority of the respondents (91.6%) agree that village authorities promote local fairs and festivals to attract tourists.
20. Majority of the respondents (97.3%) agree that rural tourism initiative is community-based approach rather than benefitting a few individuals only.
21. Most of the respondents (98.9%) agree that local community members involved in tourism business emphasize more on providing authentic and distinct experience to tourists.
22. Majority of the respondents (88.9%) disagree the government provides loans and special subsidies to the local community members to start their own rural tourism business.

7.2: Recommendation for development of rural tourism in a sustainable manner

The following recommendations are suggested for the sustainable development of rural tourism initiatives in the rural circuits:

1. Some of the rural circuits are endowed with abundant tourism resources, hence cautious approach should be adopted in developing tourism in these fragile ecosystems, keeping in view its carrying capacity (7.1.1-2 & 7 page no 186 & 187).
2. The ecological and socio-cultural aspects of the rural areas are an important rurality factor of the rural destinations; hence conservation and preservation of these aspects should be of the top priority while developing and expanding tourism operations (7.1.3.3-1 page 194).
3. For development of rural tourism, all tourism stakeholders ideally should be from the local community itself-so that maximum benefits derived from rural tourism initiatives should be routed towards the local economy and the local community (7.1.2-9 page 189).
4. There should be proper guidelines or legislations framed in the rural tourism policy, mere framing of policy is an easy task, but the implementation of the policy is not that easy unless supported and participated by the local community members and it should also mention about the duties and responsibilities of all the

local stakeholders involved in tourism business and for tourists at large, so that any kind of exploitation could be avoided (7.1.4-4 page 196).

5. The main objective of rural tourism initiatives should be a meaningful, enriching engagement between host and tourists- so that issues and concerns of rural and urban areas can be shared and discussed accordingly (7.1.3.2-2 page 193).
6. Close monitoring of rural tourism growth and development is essential, and it should ideally be checked by the village council, local stakeholders, and the local NGO's so as to enhance the positive benefits and mitigate the negative impacts-so that a balance is maintained in the eco-system (7.1.4-5 page 196).
7. FAM tours to be organised for village community members and stakeholders to other rural tourism circuits by government tourism agencies-so that efficient practices and operations could be replicated towards a successful implementation and development of rural tourism initiatives. Likewise, once rural tourism initiatives have been developed, FAM tours could be initiated towards the tourism intermediaries so that these local tourism circuits could be highlighted.
8. Capacity building workshops and training should be done in village levels-so that local community members associated in tourism business or activities are trained- so as to be able to run and operate the various tourism businesses etc. Furthermore, all community members of a particular village where rural tourism initiatives are initiated, orientation program on benefits of rural tourism initiatives and on being tourist receptive is essential, so that any kind of friction between host and tourist could be avoided (7.1.4-3 page 196).
9. Tourist information centres should be opened in the various blocks of the district- so as to sensitise the tourist about local practices and traditional beliefs and other tourism related information and grievance from the tourists could be recorded and put forward to the local stakeholders for necessary considerations (7.1.4-17 page 197).
10. Rural tourism activities are needed to be developed along with basic amenities so that tourists are engaged through out their stay. Activities like participating in agriculture or farm activities, cycling, horse or pony rides, fishing, exposure to

local handicrafts and handloom making practices, retail outlet for farm and craft products etc (7.1.1-7 page 187).

11. Local fairs and festivals to be organised at village or cluster levels with the aid of the village councils and other tourism agencies. Exposure for tourist to local fairs and festivals could be incorporated in the tourist itineraries. The fairs should showcase only locally made products like handicraft, handloom, local food delicacies, indigenous jewellery etc. The festivals should also showcase the rich cultural fabric of the area so that the visit to the fairs and festivals could be an enriching experience for the tourists (7.1.4-19 page 198).
12. The local stakeholders involved in tourism business and activities need to form alliance with tourism intermediaries so as to attract tourist and also to maintain a constant demand of visitors (7.1.4-14 page 197).
13. At state level and further on district level marketing dynamics structures are to be prepared by government tourism agencies in collaboration with concern stake holders so as to promote alternative tourism forms in the rural circuits.
14. For further upliftment of the local rural community members, especially the women folks, agencies and stake holders should initiate women empowerment schemes, so that rural women community members can actively take part in tourism related operations and activities (7.1.4-11 page 197).
15. Some of the weekly rural markets could restructured and enhanced where tourists are also encouraged to visit them and only local products be it farm, handicraft, local food delicacies etc could be at display (7.1.3.1-5 page 191).
16. Fairs and festivals are to be organised by government and other agencies at rural level-so that rich socio-cultural fabric of the rural circuits could be showcased, which could be major pull factor for tourists to visit these rural sectors (7.1.4-19 page 198).
17. In order to strengthen the bond and to bring in more transparency between the rural tourism stakeholders, cooperative societies could be formed between them so that benefits from rural tourism initiatives could be routed to the local economy and the local community at large rather than benefiting a few individuals only.

18. The concept of mass tourism would be detrimental in a rural setup hence, it is important to check and regulate the inflow of tourist so that it should be at par with the carrying capacity or else it would be very difficult to develop tourism in a sustainable manner (7.1.3.3-8 page 195).
19. The local products like handicraft, handloom etc made by the local artisans, should be made available directly to tourists, so that distribution channels could be avoided, thereby resulting in maximum benefits to the local producer (7.1.4-12 page 197).
20. In rural tourism setups, communication could act as a major barrier between the host and the tourist hence, training in basic English and Hindi communication skills is of utmost importance for those involved in tourism operations or activities. The training could be imparted through various government initiatives like capacity building programmes and skill development programmes (7.1.4-6 page 196).
21. The local community members should be actively involved in tourism development, expansion, and promotion along with tourism development agencies-so that the local community members are aware of government rural tourism initiatives and the schemes associated with it (7.1.4-5 page 196).
22. Government interventions are required in remote rural areas in development of road systems and other related services-so that these areas could be easily accessible and tourism initiatives can be initiated (7.1.4-7 page 196).
23. Despite the national highway 40 passing through all the four blocks of the district-there aren't many local eateries offering the local indigenous cuisines and the ones present along the highway are mainly catering to the local population only. The existing eateries needs to be further developed with a more tourist centric approach.

7.3: Scope for further research/study

The present trend in tourism studies have highlighted that research area concentration is more on alternative tourism forms like rural tourism. In most of the tourism centric and developing nations, the concept of rural tourism is considered a viable tool for uplifting of local community and local economy. The main mission of rural tourism

initiatives is the development of the rural economy, rural community, and the rural environment, where community members involvement and participation in tourism operations and activities as tourism stake holders is pertinent for the sustainable tourism development. Benefits of rural tourism initiatives are many folds, the local community benefits through income generation, employment opportunity and entrepreneurial opportunities and alternative livelihood options. Demand is created for local tourism products like local crafts, handicrafts, handloom, farm products, local delicacies etc. Conservation and preservation of rural cultural heritage and the environment. Meghalaya being a picturesque state and all the districts having their unique features of tourism resources and with about 6839 villages, as per census of 2011 having tremendous scope for research studies on tourism initiatives especially the alternative tourism forms like rural tourism, village tourism etc. which will help in initiating or expansion of alternative tourism initiatives in other potential sites . Further, tourism studies on rural tourism initiatives will certainly create awareness among the local communities about a possible additional livelihood option and also the importance of conserving and preservation of local socio-cultural heritage and the natural resources for the future generations. Further, extensive research on tourism impacts will help the stake holders and the rural community at large be aware of both the positive and negative effects which would require careful and cautious planning so that any negative effects could be checked and mitigated. On the other hand positive effects could be augmented with proper policy framework.

7.3.1 Contribution of this work to the existing body of knowledge

When crafting the research work the contribution of the study to the existing body of knowledge becomes essential to consider the unique insights and findings of the study that it brings to the fore.

- Since the study involves empirical research, it may contribute by providing real-world examples and data on the dynamics of rural tourism. This can enrich the existing body of knowledge with context-specific insights.
- Identifying and analyzing the trends and patterns of rural tourism within the four blocks of Ri-Bhoi district and across the other districts of Meghalaya, this study can contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing its success or challenges of rural tourism initiatives.

- Since the research includes an “impact assessment” of rural tourism on local communities, economies, and environments, it could contribute valuable information on the positive and negative consequences of such tourism activities or initiatives.
- This study on rural tourism explores the strategies for involving local communities and engaging various stakeholders in rural tourism development, thus it may contribute by providing practical recommendations for sustainable and community-driven rural tourism initiatives.
- The research also leads to the identification of gaps in existing policies and the need for the formulation of new policy recommendations for rural tourism development in the study area, thus it could contribute to shaping the future strategies at local or regional levels.
- Understanding the behavior and preferences of tourists in rural settings can contribute to the existing body of knowledge on consumer behavior in tourism. This knowledge is crucial for tailoring marketing strategies and improving the overall tourist experiences.
- Since the study explores the sustainable practices in rural tourism or conservation efforts associated with tourism activities, it could contribute to the knowledge repertoire on environmentally responsible tourism.
- Since the research emphasizes the importance of preservation of cultural heritage in rural areas through tourism, it may contribute to the discourse on the role of tourism in safeguarding the intangible cultural assets.
- The present study explores the concept and benefits of rural tourism, hence conducting a comparative analysis of rural tourism in different regions or settings can highlight the variations, commonalities, and lessons learned that can inform the best practices.
- The present study is carried out in one of the districts out of the 12 districts of the state, however further meaningful research can be carried out throughout the state of Meghalaya so that rural tourism initiatives can be initiated and implemented in proper manner. Further inferences from the present study will certainly help the Bureaucrats, Self Help Groups, NGO’s and other stakeholders to approach rural tourism initiatives in a more realistic and holistic way-so that

benefits from rural tourism is routed to the local economy and boost the rural community at large.

7.4: Conclusion

The concept of tourism is based on people travelling from familiar places to unfamiliar places, primarily due to break the mundane of routine life and to relax. Indian being a diverse country endowed with abundant natural resources and rich socio-cultural fabric and is one of the most sought-after countries in the Asian tourism circuit.

India's northeast is connected by a narrow stretch of land called the *chicken neck* with mainland India through Siliguri corridor located in the state of West Bengal. The north-eastern region comprises of seven sisters and one brother state. In north-eastern region due the various set back and challenges the tourism sector has not developed as compared with mainland India. But the last couple of decades, with more political focus in the region, there has been a significant development in context to infrastructure and other convenience services. The major cities and towns of the region has been witnessing a steady flow of tourists from both domestic and international. Majority of the population of the region habitat in the rural villages are in poor economic condition, hence there is an urgent need for the development of the region in terms of economic and social transformation. Due to immense reserve of resources both natural and socio-cultural, tourism initiatives are feasible tool for uplifting the rural economy and development of the local community.

The focus of the research study was to assess the prospects and challenges of rural tourism development and its effects on the rural economy and local community of the study area. The research study also identified the key attributes of rural tourism initiatives and being a viable tool in uplifting the rural masses and the local economy in the study area. The study also identified some of the bottlenecks of rural tourism development in the study area primarily due to the inadequate rural tourism policy framework and also due to less participation and involvement of the rural masses in tourism related operations and activities. The very concept and success of rural tourism initiatives in rural set ups is the involvement of the community members right from planning, operations and monitoring so as to see that minimum ecological imbalances are caused in the name of development and also the non-leakage of benefits especially the economical gains for the local population and the stake holders.

Rural tourism initiatives should always be started and expanded in small scales so as to be able to achieve sustainable development and be well within the limits of the carrying capacity of the rural sites. Another important aspect highlighted from the study is that meaningful and enriching engagement between the host and the tourists are limited as both are donning the role of sellers and buyers. Tourism receipts derived goes towards maintaining and aesthetic development of the rural attractions and other services. The epitome of rural tourism initiative could be achieved if the host and tourist shed their seller and buyers' perspectives and be more sensitive and respectful towards each other so that any kind of conflicts (if any) could be checked so that these rural tourism sites are good to live and good to visit.