

THE PROSPECT OF PROMOTING GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN MEGHALAYA: A REVIEW

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Abstract

Gastronomic Tourism is the type of tourism that involves people travelling to different places for the sole purpose of eating local food and engaging in local food related activities. Culture is also an important part of the gastronomic tourist experience because local food signifies the culture of a destination. Meghalaya, a north-eastern state in India, is rich in culture which is an attraction to tourists. Food forms an important part of the Khasi culture of the Khasi tribe of Meghalaya. The Khasi culture is an attractive tourism product with its dances, festivals, attires, religious practices and so on, however, Khasi food is not yet celebrated as a cultural tourism product. Tourists who visit Meghalaya often miss out on tasting and eating Khasi food because of many reasons which are mentioned in this paper. This paper employs content analysis and anecdotal approach towards achieving the objective of projecting the prospective aspects of gastronomic tourism promotion in Meghalaya. Therefore, Khasi food has the prospect to be promoted as a tourism product of Meghalaya because it is inherent with the Khasi culture and accordingly gastronomic tourism in Meghalaya will be branded as an image and promoted for tourism development in the state.

Key words: *gastronomic tourism, prospect, Meghalaya, Khasi culture, Khasi food*

JEL Classification: *L83, Z32 and Z39*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is said to be one of the largest contributors to the growth and development of many countries in the world. The tourism sector accounts for 10.4% of the global GDP and 319 million jobs (10% of total employment in 2018). In the views of the UNWTO General Secretary, Pololikashvili (2019), there is a rise in the middle class in emerging economies; there are technological advances, new business models, affordable travel costs and smooth visa processes and most importantly a 5% rise in the international tourist arrivals in 2018 which reached the 1.4 billion mark (2 years before it was predicted to do so) and the Asia and the Pacific Region recorded for highest growth in arrivals in 2018 with 7% growth. In South Asia, destinations like Iran, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India have seen double digit growth in international tourist arrivals by 19% (UNWTO, 2019). Pololikashvili (2019), further commented that the tourism export earnings have reached a figure of USD 1.7 trillion and this figure has helped and is still helping destinations to create more and more tourism jobs with more focus on innovation and entrepreneurship. As a link to innovation and entrepreneurship, tourism has branched out in many forms giving rise to more unique travel experiences. One of these forms include the celebration of local food in the form of gastronomic tourism.

The trend today is that most people are travelling not for sightseeing and other cliché activities

but the influence of social media has made them sought after unique and special interest activities with gastronomy being one of them. More and more tourists in the world are looking for concrete learning experiences, and in this endeavour the gastronomic experience, in highly diverse ways, is playing an increasingly prominent part (UNWTO, 2012). Gastronomic tourism is a type of tourism which involves the travel to places for tasting, experiencing and relishing the local food and cuisines. This is special interest tourism and it is gaining a lot of popularity all over the world. According to Hall & Sharples (2003), local food is important because of its taste, image, freshness, experience, quality and also because what, why and how one eats says something about oneself, why one travels and the society one lives in. Food represents a significant part of the culture of a region because it is evidence for intangible heritage (Updhyay & Sharma, 2014). Initially, when people traveled to other places (apart from their place of origin), they would crave for their own type of gastronomy since they were unaware of the uniqueness of local/regional food. For example, an Indian travelling to Italy would prefer Indian food in Italy rather than Italian food. However, with the growing significance of culture and traditions through local cuisines and delicacies, many tourists today are increasingly adventurous in trying out 'non-home' food. Therefore, as there is a strong connection between food and identity, food becomes an important aspect in promotion of tourism (Richards, 2002) and a cultural ingredient that positively presents a destination (Jones & Jenkins, 2002).

According to Karim (2006), visitors are attracted to a destination when it offers authentic and attractive food and in this way the destination will take the advantage of using food as the main attraction and developing marketing strategies with food as the focus. This is possible because unlike other travel activities and attractions, the gastronomy of a destination is regularly available all-round the year, any time of the day and in any weather (Richards, 2002). Therefore, this paper seeks to:

- 1) Present a review on previous researches on gastronomic tourism and successful marketing strategies of other countries in terms of gastronomic tourism.
- 2) Explain through content analysis how the gastronomy of Meghalaya particularly that of the Khasi tribe is an attraction and is exotic to many tourists today because it represents a significant part of the Khasis' unique culture.
- 3) Suggest ways to promote gastronomic tourism in Meghalaya which is a positive prospect for the state and increasing the awareness on Khasi food amongst the travelers and the world through an anecdotal approach.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gastronomic Tourism

Gastronomy is "the art of selecting, preparing, serving, and enjoying fine food" (The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2000 as cited in Amira, 2009). Gastronomy is the study of the relationship between culture and food and someone who is seriously involved in gastronomy is often involved in tasting, preparing, experiencing, experimenting, researching, discovering, understanding, and writing about food, and, usually but not exclusively, about wine (Kivela & Crotts, 2005). There is a relationship between gastronomy and tourism because tourists cannot travel without eating at destinations where they are staying or visiting. Gastronomic Tourism is the activity of eating and drinking local food and wine along at destinations in order to embrace and capture unique experiences which would reflect the local culture as well. To travel with the interest and motivation for food at different destinations is known by many names like food tourism, culinary tourism, gourmet tourism, food and wine tourism, gastronomic tourism and so on (Henderson, 2004). Food tourism or Culinary Tourism can also be referred to as gastronomic tourism as a niche area of tourism. (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Hall, et al., 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2005a, 2005b). Gastronomic tourism applies to tourists and visitors who plan their trips partially or totally in order to taste the cuisine of the place or to carry out activities related to gastronomy (UNWTO, 2012). According to Green & Dougherty (2008), culinary tourism or gastronomic tourism is based on integrating tourism with unique local and cultural food systems as a means to promote economic development. This kind of tourism highly depends on exceptional dining experiences and food quality plus the

cultural aura at destinations. Therefore, when a destination is attractive based on unique culinary attributes and local cultural heritage, then that destination becomes a food tourism destination for food travellers (Beltrán, et al., 2016). When it comes to 'local food', tourists may eat it if they want to have a cultural experience (Sims, 2009). Culture is an important part of tourism and food is an important part of culture (du Rand, et al., 2003). Therefore, Gastronomic Tourism is a subset of Cultural Tourism (Scarpato, 2002; Karim, 2006; Chaney & Ryan, 2012; Sahin, 2015) because food represents a part of the culture and traditions of the local people in different places. In the opinion of Hillel, et al. (2013), food is a symbolic power of cultural identity and it stands at the heart of gastronomic tourism. According to Shenoy (2005), the unique local food or cuisine of an area can be used as a distinctive resource for marketing in order to get more visitors. Many countries today focus on their unique local gastronomy culture which helps them in promoting their region so as to incur economical returns that lead to regional development, protecting and sustaining local culture and meet the tourist demands of today (Sahin, 2015).

Gastronomic Tourism and Culture

According to Scarpato (2002), a meal involves food choices, customs, manners and traditions which collectively form a cultural artifact. This evidently shows that food and culture are mutual in nature. With the increase in globalization in today's world, food is the only intact product that culturally differentiates among regions and communities and which is an important keystone of cultural identity (Delamont, 1994). Food culture is considerably important as a part of the total cultural product of an area and many countries have incredibly unique food cultures which account for the tourist experience along with the culture, heritage and hospitality of the area (Beer, et al., 2002). Festivals, dancing and cooking are the cultural elements which are mostly used in tourism (Schlüter, 2012). Therefore, when people dine together, their eating results in a shared cultural experience (Chung, et al., 2016). Up to the 1970s-1980s, gastronomy tourism centred around dining at 3 star restaurants only particularly in France but today it is focusing more on experiencing different cultures (Santich, 2004) and hence, it was only till the mid-1990s that it was discovered by the researchers that there is a strong link between food, culture and tourism (du Rand and Heath, 2006). According to Sims (2009), local food acts as the enhancer of visitor experience especially in terms of culture and heritage. In the words of Okumus, et al., (2007), authentic experience and cultural knowledge is gained when outsiders and locals have food together because local cuisines represent a core element of the destination's intangible heritage (Guruge. 2020). Guruge (2020) further added that tourists who are eager to eat and experience local cuisine, refrain themselves from eating at international hotels and fast food chains like McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut etc.

According to Schlüter (2012), the intangible cultural heritage of a community is very delicate especially when there are changes within the society and travel habits brought about increasing exposure to mass communication which results in cultural homogenization that threatens local traditions. This is predominantly evident in Latin America where junk food like McDonald's hamburgers from the United States is getting adapted to local tastes. Therefore, it is very important that cultural pride and identity are essential ingredients in a place in order to survive for a long time and increasing interests in culinary tourism may actually help in sustaining old traditions which are in the course of disappearing. This case is true for Meghalaya because with the spread of globalization in terms of food, the indigenous heritage and identity of Khasi food is threatened by the dominating influence of fast food chains and other types of cuisines which have even made the locals adapted to their tastes. Therefore, it is only through the celebration, promotion and sustainability of Khasi food through gastronomic tourism that will prevent it from disappearing from the culture, identity and pride of the Khasi people.

A Guide to Gastronomic Tourism Marketing

As evident from the above literature, local food holds an important position in a destination's image especially in relation to tourists seeking novel experiences and in order to combat the increasing effects of globalization on local food and local businesses, the only way is to initiate advertising, marketing and promotion of local food. Many countries have already advanced in their gastronomic tourism marketing strategies and are doing well because they have projected their own unique cultural identity via local food. They have taken advantage of their unique resource and have used it for attracting tourists from all over the world. Kivela & Crotts (2006) also agreed to this fact that destinations with advantageous ingredients to support a gastronomy tourism strategy possess resources which include unique and/or multiethnic cuisine, creative chefs, unique marine and agricultural products, unique culinary heritage, and so on. Therefore, one cannot picture Italy without pasta and pizza and one cannot picture Asian countries without noodles, dim sums and street food and so on. Therefore, whenever tourists want to have novel gastronomic experiences, they have already pictured the places they are going to with the local foods associated with them. Tourists who often re-visit a destination for its food and allied attributes are influenced mainly by the gastronomic marketing techniques of the destination. Destinations that often project their local and indigenous culture and heritage through food and culinary arts, are bound to receive more tourists especially tourists who are 'food-trotters' or 'searching- for- new- and- unique- local- food-trotters'. Gastronomy experiences are powerful tools for marketing the destination (Kivela & Crotts, 2005).

Gastronomic marketing in tourism comes in three different ways: serving food in restaurants, organising food feasts or festivals where food plays a major role in tourist marketing and sale of canned or packed foods (Ardabili, et al., 2011). The pictures and information in marketing media and marketing tools could facilitate in promoting positive images of destinations. Now the communication tools used in culinary marketing were diversified, including brochures, pamphlets, internet, advertising initiatives, radio, TV and printed material (du Rand, et al., 2003). The internet had developed rapidly during recent years and could be used as an effective advertising and promotional tool, not least in the tourism and hospitality industry (Wan, 2002 as cited in Su & Horng, 2012). Therefore, Richards (2002) said that tourists often placed considerable emphasis on how they feel at a destination, and how they experience what the destination offered (the marketing techniques and offers used to attract tourists), by carefully selecting that special restaurant and/or food that might fulfill a particular personal desire. Recently the researches regarding advertisements and marketing tools which were applied to culinary tourism development mainly contained the exploration of brochures and web-sites and media can be applied largely in marketing gastronomy (Su & Horng, 2012).

Khasi Food

The Khasi tribe of Meghalaya consumes Khasi food which is indigenous and culturally linked. According to Nongbri (2006), Khasi food is defined by simplicity since times immemorial and rice or *Ja* is the staple food (Meghalaya Basin Development Authority, 2016; Govindasamy et al., 2018; Blah & Joshi, 2013; Nongrum & Dohtdong, 2018). Rice or *Ja* is cooked in many ways and the most famous one is *jadoh* (flavoured rice cooked with pork/chicken viscera). The Khasis rely mainly on agricultural produce like maize, millet, roots like potatoes, sweet potatoes, yam, beetroot, carrots etc, on pulses like beans and soyabeans, on vegetables and leafy vegetables like mustard leaves, radish, turnip, pumpkin, tomatoes, cabbage, peas etc. Most of the Khasi snacks are also made from raw or cooked rice (steamed, baked or fried) namely *puthoro* (steamed rice pancake similar to Uttapam of South India minus the oil), *pukhlein* (fried rice snack mixed with jaggery), *pumaloi* (steamed rice snack similar to idli of South India), *pudoh* (steamed rice snack stuffed with pork meat inside), *pusla* (steamed rice snack on leaves), *pusyep* (steamed rice snack similar to idli of South India), *jashawlia* (sticky rice), *punei* (steamed and fried black sesame snack), *rymbai-ja* (boiled beans) and so on. Apart from rice, the Khasis are also fond of meat (especially pork and beef), vegetables (especially wild and green vegetables like *jamyrdoh* and *thied jamyrdoh* (chameleon plant and roots), *sla tyrso* (mustard leaves), *pashor kait* (banana stem), *jalyngiar* (common sowthistle), *jatira* (Oenanthe linearis), *khliang syiar* (centella), *lungsiej* (bamboo shoot), *jarain*, *jangew*, *jathang*, *jamyrdoh*, *jajew*, *jada*,

tyrkhang, lapong, sheng etc. and so on), dried fish (*ktung and tungtap*) and chutneys (*tungrymbai*- fermented soyabean chutney, *puđina*- mint chutney, etc).

The different fruits consumed by the Khasi people include orange/mandarin, pineapple, mango, banana, papaya, indigenous fruits like *sohphie* (mirica), *sohphienam* (mirica cerifera) *sohphoh* (Khasi pear), *sohpyrshong* (carambola), *sohphan* (jackfruit), *sohshang, sohbah, sohbrap* (passion fruit), *sohphlang, sohlangdkhur* (mulberry), *sohmylleng* (gooseberry) etc.

The Khasi people also consume a lot of domesticated meat like chicken, duck, pork, beef, fish, mutton, rabbit and wild meat like deer, squirrel, *japieh/dohpieh* (paddyfield frogs), crab, dried fish and many wild birds. The Khasi people also eat insects like *niangphlang, nianglong, kber, niangtaser, niangryndia* (eri-silkworm) etc.

These Khasi food items are a representation of the tradition and knowledge of food and food preparations that were passed down from the ancestors to the present generation. They symbolise the culture and nutrition that are naturally beneficial for the community/tribe. Therefore, these traditional foods and food preparations must be preserved so that the indigenous knowledge and ethnicity via food will not be lost (Blah & Joshi, 2013). Traditional food knowledge preservation results in two important things- cultural and heritage preservation and healthy food habits.

Popular Khasi cuisines include:

- 1) *Jadoh*: Rice cooked with chicken stock/pork stock/chicken or pork entrails along with onion and ginger paste, turmeric, salt and black pepper.
- 2) *Jastem*: Rice cooked with onion and ginger paste, turmeric, salt and black pepper along with some vegetable oil.
- 3) *Jadoh snam*: Rice cooked with chicken's/pig's blood mixed with water along with onion and ginger paste, turmeric, salt and black pepper.
- 4) *Dohsyiar kylla/Dohsyiar Myllem*: Local chicken cooked with mustard oil, onion-ginger-garlic paste, turmeric, salt and black pepper. Myllem is a village in Meghalaya famous for this chicken recipe.
- 5) *Doh jem*: Chicken/Pork entrails cooked with mustard oil, onion-ginger-garlic paste, black sesame paste (optional), chillies (optional), turmeric, salt and black pepper.
- 6) *Doh sniang neiiong*: Pork cooked with onion-garlic paste, black sesame paste, chillies (optional), turmeric and salt.
- 7) *Dohkhlieh*: Boiled pork head cut into small pieces and mixed with onion, ginger, chillies and pork brain.
- 8) *Doh masi shain*: Minced beef balls mixed with onion-ginger-garlic paste, salt and black pepper cooked in mustard oil.
- 9) *Doh masi thylliej*: Beef tongue cut into small pieces and mixed with onion, ginger, chillies and salt.
- 10) *Tungrymbai*: Fermented soya bean chutney
- 11) *Tungtap*: Fermented fish chutney

III. NEED FOR THE STUDY

Globalization is a phenomenon by which events, decisions and activities on one part of the world usually have a profound impact on individuals and communities in other parts of the world (Giddens, 1990). Globalization has immensely contributed to increased economic returns, richer socio-cultural exchanges, technological advancements and environmental conservation methods and all these factors have a significant impact on tourism.

Hall & Mitchell (2002) said that it is only beginning to be comprehended that the features of globalization have deeply affected tourism and gastronomy. According to Mak, et al. (2012), globalization can affect the local gastronomic identity and image and can lead to the consequence of lack of 'sense of a place' for locals and tourists. The rising popularity of fast food like KFC, McDonalds, Subway, Burger King and so on has impeded the attraction of the unique local food and cuisines at various destinations. As a result of this, globalization in the food industry has a great influence on the culinary supply at destinations which consequently influences tourist food consumption (Mak, et al., 2012).

Finding a fast food restaurant is very easy in every city. For those who do not have time to eat especially for the tourists who are on tour, fast food seems to be the safest and fastest option and it is cost friendly. This creates a problem at destinations wherein the local food does not become an option for tourists especially if the local food is 'Slow Food' and when the local food is dominated by these fast food chains. Most regions in Meghalaya also faces this problem. The tourist inflow to Meghalaya has increased over the years because of the many exotic tourism resources that are constantly being explored from time to time. There are many niche areas with great potential which the state can focus on in the aspect of tourism promotion. One of these areas is Cuisine Tourism (Meghalaya Tourism Policy, 2011). Cuisine Tourism, Food Tourism, Culinary Tourism and Gastronomic Tourism are synonymous. Khasi food is exotic but despite this, it is not still branded as an image of Meghalaya for tourism purpose. The reason lies with globalization and the lack of awareness about the importance of sustaining Khasi food among the locals and also among the tourists.

According to Meghalaya Tourism (n.d.), delicious cuisines are best explored as part of Meghalaya's cultural diversity apart from festivals and historical landmarks. Although Khasi food is unique and represents an important part of the Khasi culture, no initiations have been made to properly project it as tourism product that motivates tourists to visit Meghalaya. According to Dixit & Mawroh (2019), Khasi food has been featured in many media and social media platforms like 101 India, NDTV Good Times, Hunger Knocks, The Ticket to Travel etc by the tourists who have experienced Khasi food and found it

memorable but they were only personal experiences not meant for promoting and marketing Khasi food as a tourism product. The Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (2016) has made a comprehensive report on the role of entrepreneurs in sustaining local indigenous foods and food systems and on helping farmers establish their businesses. For this report, this government department interviewed a food expert who is the Chairman of the North East Slow Food Agrobiodiversity & Society (NESFAS), Mr. Phrang Roy, about the local and tourist demand for local indigenous cuisines in Meghalaya and Mr. Phrang Roy responded that the average tourist visiting Meghalaya who is not knowledgeable about the place would definitely not taste and eat local food. Furthermore, Mr. Phrang Roy commented that the state should not be happy with 'quantity' tourists but with 'quality' tourists who are willing to spend their money on local foods and local products. Another factor for hindering tourists to eat Khasi food is hygiene according to Mr. Phrang Roy. He said that the Tourism Department should encourage food establishments to maintain hygiene otherwise tourists coming from nearby areas like Guwahati usually pack their own food, eat at the destination, throw it there and return home. This is a big problem in terms of promoting gastronomic tourism in Meghalaya. There should be measures as to maintain hygiene in the food establishments and make the local indigenous food appealing to the tourists through proper promotional tools. Mr. Phrang Roy further added that the initiative of NESFAS to set up Mei-Ramew cafes and Chef's Alliance which cook and serve local indigenous foods in hygienic conditions has made an impact on the local communities and visitors to the state.

Eateries or local food stalls/ joints are still very less for grabbing the attention of the tourists visiting Meghalaya. In Shillong, the Khasi food is somehow overpowered or overshadowed by other cuisines like Chinese or Indian cuisines. While there are many Chinese, Indian and Multi-Cuisine restaurants in Meghalaya, there are still very less local food outlets (The Meghalaya Basin Development Authority, 2016). In today's urban context, traditional food is mostly not included in celebrations such as weddings, parties etc. People prefer other types of cuisine such as Chinese, Indian, Continental, etc (MLCU, 2012). The entry of modern food has also affected the image of the indigenous Khasi food because they are prepared instantly with very less time consumption. According to Lala (2014), globalisation has caused people to shift their food habits and food cultures from local traditional foods to fast foods and cooking. This can be seen in the increasing demand for modern food like pizzas, burgers, noodles, cakes, etc which are not inherent to the Khasi food systems. When asked about North Indian food and traditional food of Meghalaya, Mr. Phrang Roy is of the opinion that North Indian food and foods like McDonald's burgers and Maggi (which are unhealthy) are publicized all over the world and

consumers automatically prefer them due to constant branding and advertising however when it comes to the traditional food Meghalaya, which is healthy, consumers refrain from eating it because of a specific and unique taste caused by fermentation and with inadequate advertising, it remains unpopular even in the state itself (The Meghalaya Basin Development Authority, 2016). Traditionally many local people did not hold their own cuisine in high regard, and often viewed it as not being sophisticated enough and definitely not something a tourist would want (Kapner, 1996). A study was conducted by Nongrum & Dohtdong (2018) which focused on the changing consumption of traditional food of the rural people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and they found that most rural folk in these areas consume modern or fast food like juices, soft drinks, potato chips, chocolates, sweets, wai wai, maggi, bread, biscuits and other salted snacks which are evidently cheaper than traditional Khasi food. In some shops, chinese fast food like noodles, dumplings, etc are being sold. These people understudy were also found to consume traditional food on a weekly or a monthly basis whereas they consume modern/fast food on a daily basis. As a result of this, many indigenous Khasi food items are becoming extinct (Dixit & Mawroh, 2019). In order to prevent this, there must a start of recognizing Khasi food as an important part of the cultural tourism product and accordingly increasing the awareness of its indigenous and unique richness among the locals and consequently transpiring it to the outside world via tourism promotion.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This paper is purely a narrative or review of the prospective aspects to be implemented for the promotion of gastronomic tourism in Meghalaya. Therefore, the methods of content analysis and anecdotal approach (personal observation and exploratory) were used in order to define themes that are appropriate for achieving the objective of gastronomic tourism promotion in Meghalaya. Content Analysis was used on a document report published by NESFAS in the year 2015-16. Codes were taken and themes were created from the ideas presented in an event called the Indigenous Terra Madre (ITM) which was held in Meghalaya in 2015 and this event was documented in the above report. Themes from the content analysis have provided viable prospective opportunities for promoting gastronomic tourism in Meghalaya. An Anecdotal Approach was also employed for initiating prospective gastronomic tourism food spots and trails in relation to Khasi food in Meghalaya. The anecdotal approach has taken findings of the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (2016) which has aroused the elicitation of developing prospective gastronomic tourist food trails and spots in and around Meghalaya. The findings have helped in highlighting the importance and potential of

Khasi food as a tourism product. **Figure 1** explains the conceptual framework of this paper.

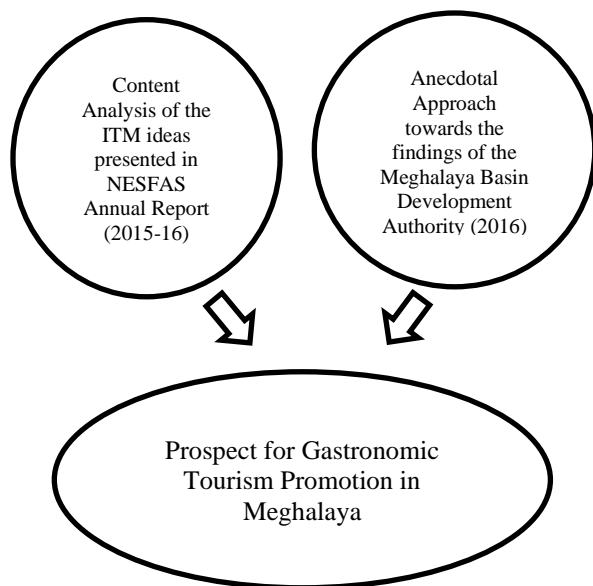


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the study (Source: author)

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. The Indigenous Terra Madre (ITM) 2015: A Content Analysis

According to *Welcome to our world* (2007), slow food was started by an Italian food activist Carlo Petrini in a small Italian town called Bra in 1986. It was initiated with the aim of supporting and defending good food, starting eno-gastronomic (food and wine) pleasure and living a slow pace of life. Slow food believes in the new gastronomy which is the gastronomy that educates, gives freedom of food choices, allows for living well to the maximum and uses the local resources available. "Slow Food is committed to protecting traditional and sustainable quality foods, primary ingredients, conserving methods of cultivation and processing, and defending the biodiversity of cultivated and wild varieties. Slow Food protects places of historic, artistic or social value that form part of our food heritage, acknowledging the history and culture of every social group as it interacts within a broader network of reciprocal exchange" (*Welcome to our world*, 2007, p. 3). The Slow Food International, a global non-governmental organization, was started in the year 1989 as a means to protect and enhance the indigenous and local food cultures and traditions and work against the rising popularity of fast food culture all over the world by educating the locals and outsiders about the importance of origins and heritage.

A detailed documentation of the NESFAS Annual Report (2015-16) presented that in the year 2015, the 2nd Indigenous Terra Madre (ITM) was held in Meghalaya and it was locally called International

Mei-Ramew (IMR 2015) and 'mei-ramew' means 'mother earth' in the Khasi language. The event spread across 5 days from 3rd to 7th November, 2015 and it was initiated by The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (TIP) in Rome, Italy, Slow Food International, UN Agencies and other global supporters with the North East Slow Food Agrobiodiversity and Society (NESFAS) as the host of the event. The event was attended by 606 delegates from 62 countries representing 230 indigenous communities. The ITM 2015 programme included the inauguration, plenary and thematic sessions on food and food systems, taste workshops, butchery training, public campus programmes like film festival, photo exhibitions, musical performances and speakers' series, field visits to 9 host villages and food festival held at the Sacred Grove at Mawphlang village, Meghalaya. The closing food festival on the last day of the event was attended by more than 70,000 rural and urban locals.

"The aim remained to showcase indigenous traditional knowledge, evolving skills and sustainable practices that safeguard natural resources and contribute to a resilient food system that promotes a more humane future for a diverse world. ITM 2015 became a platform for these food communities to interact and engage with scientists and policymakers as they reflect on the theme, *The Future We Want: Indigenous Perspectives and Actions*. This international event served as an occasion to celebrate the wonderful cultural and biological diversity of indigenous communities as expressed in their songs, dance, dress, folklores and food systems that have evolved through generations of close interaction with nature. The traditionally marginalised voices, such as youth, women knowledge holders, the physically challenged, and indigenous farmers, pastoralists, hunter gatherers, remote dwellers and fisher folk, who would actively participate in the deliberations. The event was possible by the consistent efforts of the international alliance".

(NESFAS Annual Report, 2015-16, p. 23)



Figure 2- The various organizers, sponsors and supporters of the ITM 2015 held in Meghalaya (Source: NESFAS Annual Report, 2015-16)

Figure 2 shows the different organizers, sponsors and supporters of ITM 2015 held in

Table 1. Ideas/Themes taken from the ITM 2015 (NESFAS Annual Report, 2015-16) for prospective gastronomic tourism promotion in Meghalaya (compiled by the author)

| Sl.No | Ideas from the ITM 2015 | Prospect For Gastronomic Tourism Promotion In Meghalaya |
|-------|--|---|
| 1. | Government support | The Department of Tourism is one of the government departments that aided the ground activities of NESFAS during the event and this can be a great advantage in the future because through its support and initiative gastronomic tourism in Meghalaya can be promoted. |
| 2. | International partnerships | Successful alliance between The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (TIP), NESFAS and the Government of Meghalaya during the event which can help project and promote Khasi food at the global platform. |
| 3. | Celebration of traditional and indigenous food | The Chief Minister, Dr. Mukul Sangma encouraged the welcoming of the international indigenous communities, celebrating the confluence of culture and science and celebrating traditional food and flavours from all over the world during this event. This paved the way for recognising traditional food as very important for the state. Moreover, according to the Slow Food International (2015), the ITM 2015 celebrated the local indigenous food through shared meals, food tastings, workshops, demonstrations, pop up restaurants and fine dining experiences. |
| 4. | Branding and advertising | The Tourism Department of the state along with NESFAS arranged for the ITM/IMR 2015 as a brand and advertisement for visitors coming through Guwahati Airport, Assam by setting up a kiosk for providing information relating to the event and for convincing the visitors to attend it. This was clearly in terms of promoting the event and many visitors have visited and attended the event in Meghalaya which has paved the way for their knowledge about the local indigenous Khasi food which is the start of the gastronomic tourism journey in Meghalaya. |
| 5. | Focus on providing local indigenous food | The ITM 2015 focused on catering to the delegates and visitors by providing them with local indigenous and tribal food. This can positively be taken as an initiative to start serving tourists visiting the state with local tribal food and cuisines. |
| 6. | Traditional food display | During the event, the NESFAS Cooks' Alliance from ten villages displayed traditional food to the international delegates. The traditional food included wild edibles, salads, chutneys, snacks, meats and so on and this has educated the delegates about the richness of local food which can be a revisit factor for the delegates to Meghalaya. |
| 7. | The Ark of Taste | During the event, a catalogue called 'The Ark of Taste' was documented. This catalogue contained the edible plants and animals, recipes and preparation methods that are on the verge of extinction in the traditional food system. This catalogue can be a sustainable tool for preserving Khasi food and methods of cooking and this can be done by promoting them effectively. |
| 8. | Khasi Cuisine 2.0 | During the event, the NESFAS Cooks' Alliance, Chefs Osbert Rynjah, Daniel Syngkon and Artet Kharsati of food establishments Little Chef, The Jade Room and Alelang respectively came together to redefine Khasi cuisine in an experimental way by creating new recipes and mostly using local ingredients that can attract locals and visitors of the event. These recipes proved successful because they have given a new aesthetic appearance and taste to the Khasi cuisine which can be accepted worldwide. Unfortunately the Khasi cuisine 2.0 is still lacking in the current Shillong restaurant scene but with proper promotional methods, the new appearance and taste of Khasi cuisine can be factors for attracting tourists to the state. |

Meghalaya. As a part of the review of this paper, this event has given an insight to the researcher on how it was and can be a promotional tool for initiating gastronomic tourism in Meghalaya. This event exclusively focused on celebrating, showcasing, educating and promoting local indigenous food of North East India, particularly that of Meghalaya, to the global delegates, participants and attendees. This definitely paved the way for introducing the concept of gastronomic tourism in Meghalaya. Content Analysis was employed to analyse and decipher the ideas from the event ITM 2015 as documented in the NESFAS Annual Report 2015-16 which produced themes for the purpose of highlighting the prospect of promoting gastronomic tourism in Meghalaya. Content Analysis is the process of analyzing written, verbal or visual communication messages (Cole, 1988). Table 1 explains the ideas taken from the event ITM 2015 and themes that were created through content analysis which consequently explains the prospect for gastronomic tourism promotion in Meghalaya.

| | | |
|-----|---|--|
| 9. | Promotion through media and communications | During the event, the media and communications team included the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) of the Government of Meghalaya, local media companies, newspapers, international and national communication experts, press conferences, posters, kiosks, advertisements, local TV channels, All India Radio and social media. All these media and communications companies effectively publicised and promoted the slogan "eat local, grow global". This kind of promotion can be used for promoting gastronomic tourism in Meghalaya through these media and communications companies. |
| 10. | Awareness and education about local food | ITM 2015 paved the way for providing awareness and education about local food, nutrition and farming to the locals so that they themselves would not be ignorant of their own food system. Once the locals become aware of the importance of local food, they can effectively promote it to outsiders. |
| 11. | Tastes of Mei-Ramew | As a preparation for the ITM 2015, NESFAS hosted a food event along with the support of the Directorate of Tourism, Meghalaya. This event resulted in the knowledge of how 'cuisine and hospitality' can be promoted through the catchphrase "help local producers help our economy" . "Mr. Phrang Roy, Chairman NESFAS addressed the gathering on "The cuisine & hospitality of a destination — an important aspect in the quality of the holiday experience" " (p.32). Mr Artet Kharsati, a resource person of the event, also spoke about hospitality and food innovation . These initiatives can be properly utilised as a means of gastronomic tourism promotion in the state. |
| 12. | The Shillong Declaration and echoes of the ITM 2015 | After the event, the Shillong Declaration was made for what has been learnt and what needs to be done in future. It focuses on continuing to create a platform for the exchanges of ideas and experiences for protecting sustainable food systems, indigenous peoples and networks protection, transmission of traditional food knowledge and protection of culture and heritage which can be used as the main attributes for gastronomic tourism promotion in Meghalaya. The ITM 2015 became a benchmark of expectations and comparisons and the reason being that from then onwards, the state has taken baby steps in initiating and enhancing local indigenous food to the outside world. |

5.2. The prospective gastronomic tourism spots in Meghalaya with special reference to Khasi Food: An Anecdotal Approach

Khasi food is particularly common in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya and in and around East Khasi Hills District. These two geographical locations have been taken considering the higher number of tourist arrivals to these areas and it should not be mistaken that Khasi food can be found only in these locations. Furthermore, for the purpose of providing prospective gastronomic tourism spots in Meghalaya, these locations have the potential to strengthen the gastronomic identity of Meghalaya because of the frequent tourist visits to these locations. The gastronomic spots are already in existence since before

but because of improper and inadequate projection and promotion, they remain known only to the locals. Since information about these spots is not yet been publicized for tourism purpose, tourists who are gastronomy enthusiasts have visited these spots only with the help of local guides. Their personal articles, blogs and vlogs clearly show that they were taken to these gastronomic spots by local guides through custom itinerary. This means that none of the travel agencies or tour operators organizing tours in Meghalaya offer specific tours to these gastronomic spots to the tourists.

An anecdotal approach was employed to devise the prospective gastronomic tourism spots and trails in Meghalaya which can be explained in **Table 2**.

Table 2. An anecdotal matrix of the prospective gastronomic tourism spots and trails in Meghalaya (compiled by the author)

| Sl.no. | Name of the Food Outlet | Location | Food served | Prospective gastronomic trail |
|--------|--|---|---|--|
| 1. | Dukan Ja and Sha [Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (2016)] | In and around Meghalaya (East Khasi Hills District) | Dukan means shop, Ja means rice and sha means tea. Local food served comprises of jadoh, dohsyiar, dohjem, dohkhleh, jhursdieh, jhurkhleh, tungtap/tungrymbai etc. | 'Ja and Sha' gastronomic trail in Shillong, Meghalaya (just eating). 'Ja and Sha' gastronomic trail which includes eating local food and observing local cooking styles and methods in the Ja and sha outlets in and around Shillong, Meghalaya. |
| 2. | Restaurants serving Khasi food and snacks [Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (2016)] | In and around Meghalaya | Different types/menus of Khasi cuisine and snacks | Khasi Cuisine Restaurant Trail: 1. Police Bazar, Shillong (restaurants like Red Rice, Trattoria, Ja and Sha, 3 Olives) 2. In and around Shillong (restaurants like You and I Arts Café, Jadoh, Alelang, Café Shillong Heritage, Roots Shillong, Hotel Poinisuk) 3. In and around Meghalaya (Sao Aiom of Ri Kynjai Resort in Ri Bhoi District) |
| 3. | Local Khasi Food Stall/Dukan Ja and Sha | Bara Bazar/lewduh, | Authentic Khasi Cuisine and snacks | Dukan Ja and Sha Trail: |

| | | | | |
|----|--|---|--|---|
| | [Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (2016)] | Shillong, Meghalaya | | Mrs. I. Dkhar's Ja and Sha outlet which is the most famous for serving authentic Khasi cuisine and snacks at the heart of the Shillong's market (Iewduh). Mrs. I. Dkhar believes in serving only Khasi cuisine because according to her, the non-locals are also fond of it as well and most importantly, she believes in preserving the Khasi food and culture which would be a boon for attracting tourists to the place [Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (2016)] |
| 4. | Local food stalls at tourist spots | In and around Meghalaya (especially areas of tourist interest in the East Khasi Hills District where Khasi food is authentic) | Authentic Khasi food and snacks menu (can be on pre-order basis for lunch/dinner given the location of the tourist spot and the accessibility to food markets/ingredients) | Meghalaya is yet to set up local food stalls at tourist spots. Although a few are present, they are not prominent in attracting tourists to try and eat Khasi food. Proper banners/promotions are needed at tourist spots so that tourists will not feel the need to pack food or order non-Khasi food. |

VI. CONCLUSION

Examples and ideas of gastronomic tourism promotion in different countries/destinations have influenced Meghalaya to promote Khasi food in its inherent cultural nature; however, the extent of the same is not yet in the books of tourist activities in the state. This paper, although lacking in empirical evidence, it projects the prospective scenario in Meghalaya through content analysis and anecdotal approach (observation and exploratory) compilation of facts and potential aspects of gastronomic tourism promotion in the state. The state requires food experts especially those in the expertise of knowing about Khasi food ingredients and how to cook Khasi food and it is through them that more information can be disseminated to tourists or guests visiting the state. Even though a prominent institution like NESFAS has been able to teach, train and spread the information about the importance and authenticity of Khasi food and preserving its cultural trait, it is not yet enough in

terms of gastronomic tourism promotion. Many local chefs are trying to bring innovative ideas with regards to Khasi food on a plate and their initiatives and ideas can be a prospect for gastronomic tourism in the state. Culinary Tourism or Gastronomic Tourism marketing plays an important role in influencing tourist motivations to travel to a destination for engaging in culinary/gastronomic activities offered by the destination (Mawroh, 2017). Therefore, it only requires a push for advertising and marketing the unique image of what Khasi food has to offer to the tourists in relation to sight, pleasure and most importantly the taste. According to Su & Horng (2012), the information of cultural infusion and reducing the hindrances of local food experiences are extremely important to the marketing strategy draft. With the growing influence of social media, Khasi food can be aggressively promoted and the Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya and other major stakeholders can use it as a platform for attracting tourists to the state to try and eat Khasi food. Prominent marketing and promotional strategies must be implemented in order for the state to explore its niche tourism areas and one of them is Gastronomic Tourism.

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