

IMPACT OF RURAL TOURISM ON LIVELIHOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF *REIEK* VILLAGE, MIZORAM

Ghanashyam Deka¹

Rural areas everywhere in India are experiencing critical financial and social changes, for the most part initiated by the universal exchange of advancement and fortifying the part of rural development approach. There is an expanding consciousness of the need to go with changes in rural sector through the enhancement of their financial base which is the main means for their financial survival. Rural tourism has been viewed as a method for accomplishing such economic and social improvement because of its ability to produce neighbourhood work and stimulate outside interest in them. This paper aims to examine the importance of rural tourism for rural development, analysing the impact of rural tourism on the socio-economic development of *Reiek* village in Mizoram in India.

Keywords: rural tourism, anthurium, business tourism, rural development

Tourism is one of the biggest and rapidly developing industries in India today. Latest patterns in this industry show expanded interest for new sorts of tourism, among which most prominent are nature-related and rural brands of tourism. This paper intends to expand the understanding of the significance of rural tourism for reasonable rural development, and is subsequently partitioned into two parts. In the first part, the paper offers the definition and primary types of rural tourism. This segment provides a review of rural tourism, types of rural tourism, and its advantages for rural ranges. Second part of the paper is committed to clarifying the idea and standards of maintainable rural advancement and distinguishing proof of the role of rural tourism in it. The paper concludes with summary and suggestions for

¹ *Ghanashyam Deka* is an assistant professor in the Department of Geography, Pachhunga University College, Aizawl (Mizoram). Correspondence regarding this article must be addressed to: assameseguy@gmail.com

improving the quality of rural tourism, which can further contribute to rural development. The claims are substantiated through an analysis of the impact of rural tourism on the socio-economic development of *Reiek* village in Mizoram in India.

Tourism constitutes a multidimensional phenomenon, which has followed the evolution of humankind. Nowadays, it constitutes a social necessity or even a social right as is recorded by the increasing number of tourists. Tourism has played a determinative role in the developmental course of many regions, in the developed as well as in the developing world. Tourism has been studied for its economic (Martin & Uysal, 1990; Mathieson & Wall, 1982), environmental (Farrell & Runyan, 1991), cultural (Chambers, 1997; Smith, 1989), and social (Milman & Pizam, 1987; Wylie, 2000) impact. Initially, it was presented as a direct developmental outlet for regions endowed with natural and cultural resources. However, nowadays the promotion and the evolution of tourism often constitute a target of high priority and also an alternative option for any region, even for the ones that lack significant wealth-producing resources.

India is a developing nation with its huge population base. Lack of distributed industrialization, increasing unemployment, rapid population growth, etc., are some of the common challenges that the country is facing. Rural areas are still dominant in the country's population sharing. The vast rural areas provide ample avenues for tourism. A stroll on the harsh trails of Indian towns will permit to experience different antiquated groups inside the rural villages like the villages of Rajasthan, Varanasi, Maharashtra, Assam, etc. along with different conditions of life in the nation. It will additionally permit to go over the rural tourism in India and the explanation for its expanding ubiquity with the progression of time. In the event that tourists need to see and experience antiquated India, its ways of life and customs, its culture and traditions, they can embark on a journey to the villages of India that still hold the glimpse of its rural or traditional lives.

Among the north eastern states, Mizoram is one of the mountainous states covered with verdant forests dominated by thick bamboo groves, teeming with vibrant wildlife, sheer cliffs and breath-taking waterfalls, picturesque villages of houses built on stilts, a land of dramatic seas of morning mists that enfold islands of hills and peaks. Mizoram, the land of sociable, hospitable, and fun-loving people, is called the "Songbird of North East" (Pachau, 2009).

This is the land of Highlanders, who are by nature carefree and hospitable to the visitors.

Standing aloof from the adjacent plains of Assam and the other neighbouring states, Mizoram is an exotic location. The state is sharing more than one-third of its boundary with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Mizoram is still considered remote and hence, an unfrequented destination that helps maintain its charming appeal. There are quite a number of places in Mizoram which are must-see tourist spots. Travelling in Mizoram, not unlike in any other mountainous region, is painstaking and hazardous at times, but it has its own rewards. Thus, site seeing, adventure tourism, rural tourism, etc. are the major attractions. After becoming a new state in 1987, Mizoram was to look for revenue and new sources of income for its development. Tourism was supposed to be an excellent source in the state for the same. Keeping in this mind, the state government declared tourism as a major industry in March 1993. Since then, the state government began many programmes including construction of tourist lodges, development and modernization of some select tourist destinations, and identification of rural and adventure tourism spots. *Anthurium festival* organized in *Reiek* village is a joint venture of the central government and the state tourism department as part of promoting rural tourism in the state.

Objective and Methodology

The present paper is an attempt to study the rural tourism and its impact on the people of Reiek village.

Both primary and secondary data are used in the present study. Details on the area, description of the festival, and statistics on the village population are collected from secondary sources. On the other hand, primary data are collected with the help of a questionnaire. Interview method was used to gather information on the involvement of the locals in the festival, specifically to know about the income pattern and level of family involvement in tourism business during the *Anthurium* festival. Fifty respondents were selected for the study, through purposive random sampling.

The Study Area

Reiek is situated about 30 kilometres to the west of Aizawl sprawls. According to the demand-supply rating among the tourist destinations, Reiek is the second most popular destination after Hmuifang Tlang (Deka &

Pachua, 2015). During the time of active insurgency, it was a famous hideout for the rebels as the place has number of caves with steep slopes, higher ridges, and gorges. It was used as a watch tower to safeguard the village from enemy intrusions. In 2006, in collaboration with the central government, Mizoram Tourism Department of the Government of Mizoram started an Anthurium Festival. Horticulture department also takes part as a collaborator in this famous festival. At present this festival has become the icon of the state tourism as it attracts a huge number of visitors in the month of September. It is a successful tourism promotion venture celebrated every year at the tourist resort in Reiek village at the foothills of the mystic Reiek mountain during the peak season of the beautiful and exotic Anthurium blossoms.

The festival is a three-day extravaganza that showcases various cultural and traditional activities of the people of Mizoram. Other attractions include music, dance, traditional games and sports, handloom, handicrafts, and a reproduction of a typical Mizo village. The festival also includes archery, rifle shooting, and angling competitions. Cultural displays of traditional attires of different tribes are also a regular feature of the festival.

The festival is indeed an experience not to be missed. The enchanting and mystic Reiek mountain is surrounded by thick lush green temperate trees and bushes that echo with legends, folklores, and feats won by Mizo chiefs, for whom Reiek mountain was a hunting preserve. The spontaneity and spirit of celebration that the festival evokes rejuvenate the mind and the body.

This is one destination worth exploring. The mountain itself, though appearing to be of gentle slopes on its eastern side, has spectacular rocky cliffs notched with caves and caverns with luxuriant natural forest preserved since the days of the Mizo chiefs. It is only an hour's drive from Aizawl for which taxis and private vehicles are available. The mountain road takes one through the lush green hills, crosses the Tlawng River as it gushes through a narrow rocky gorge, and then climbs up the hills winding up gradually making a comfortable drive, during which one comes across a few cascades which are a photographer's delight. It is like a museum of the ancient Mizo way of life. The Mizo tradition and culture were still prevalent just a few decades back. Houses were made of bamboo and wood. Rice was pounded in a big wooden mortar. The walls were decorated with animals' heads and horns; and homes have a spacious kitchen with a fireplace. All these traditional implements and attributes of the Mizos seem like a thing of the past now.

The typical Mizo village has a few huts designed in the traditional way and the huts contained certain entities that are central to daily Mizo life like the fireplace, mortars, bamboo basket for keeping chickens, corn grinding machine, wooden tool for spinning yarn out of cotton, bamboo baskets with straps for carrying rice and other commodities to field. On the right side of the entrance, there is a hut bigger than other huts. It is known as *Zawlbuik* or bachelor's dormitory. It was spacious and in a tribal setup, it was always the largest house. In the olden days, it was where bachelors would assemble every night after working in the paddy field. It was a place of learning and where oral traditions were kept alive, passed down from one generation to another.

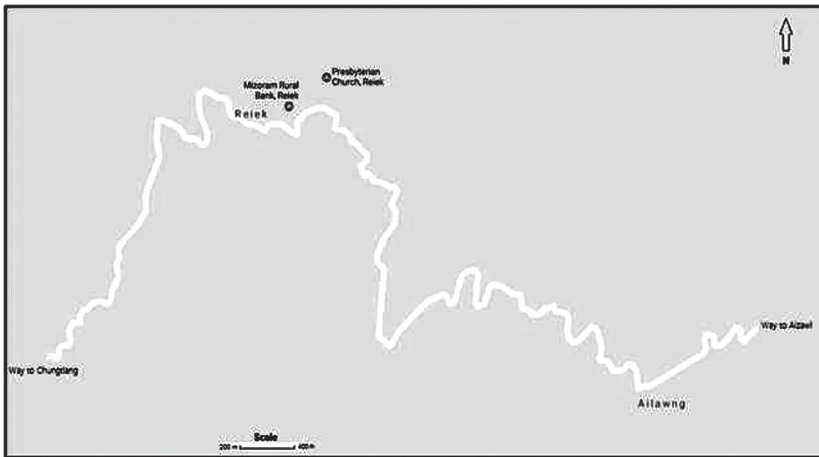


Fig. 1: Map of the study area, Reiek Village (Source: www.mapsofindia.com)

Before reaching Reiek, one enters Ailawng, the village of Khuangchera, the great Mizo warrior of the 19th century who was known for his unsurpassed heroics and wilful resistance to the early British army expedition that cost him his life. There still exists a cave named after him for only he had the courage to explore it fully in those days of taboos and superstitions.

According to the 2011 census, there were 360 households with a total population of 1672 in Reiek village. Out of the total population, 48% were male and 52% female: a rare phenomenon of ratio in favour of women in India. With a high literacy ratio (98.13%), the village has a total number of 929 working population. In the category of working population, male and female are equal since the number of girl child is higher in the age-group of 0-6 years.

In the early days, inhabitants of the Reiek area were *jhum* (shifting) cultivators. Later on, the foothills of the Reiek and Ailawng area were devoted to Anthurium cultivation under State Horticulture Department. This makes Reiek area famous for Anthurium flowers. Afterwards, the state tourism department made it into a successful tourism venture (under promotional scheme) which is celebrated every third week of September.

Conceptualising Rural Tourism

Fotiadis (2006) tried to define rural tourism. As far as the definition of rural tourism is concerned, an agreement has not yet been reached and, therefore, it ranges from a simple definition such as “tourism that takes place in the countryside” (Rátz & Puczko, 1998, p. 450) or “rural tourism is a mild form of sustainable tourism development and multi-activity in the rural region” to a broad one such as “a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their businesses” (Gannon, 1994, p. 51). This matter has been the subject of many debates in the literature without arriving at any firm consensus (Pearce, 1989; Bramwell, 1994).

Rural tourism always has the characteristics of much open space with less settlement and sparsely populated natural environment. Many outdoor activities can be performed with minimum of infrastructure with the involvement of the local community. In comparison with the urban, rural tourism is associated with less investment, small establishments, locally owned firms, fewer guests, closer guest relationships, personal amateur management, etc. Since 2006, Reiek has been hosting the Anthurium festival in its foothills. People are well organized to host the festival. On the other hand, from Anthurium to Christmas there is regular flow of visitors. During the last four months of the year, the village community works for tourism as it generates their livelihood. Besides, tourism supports other interests such as recreational management, home stay facilities, and niche marketing that give them an opportunity for earning.

During early days, involvement of the locals was limited, but it has been increasing gradually. Nowadays, there is a good gathering during the time of Anthurium festival. Villagers are ready with their small temporary shops that can earn a little from their guests. Selling of rice beers, different types

of traditional food, handicrafts, tea stalls, flower shops, temporary photo studios, and similar initiatives are the main activities engaged by the locals.

Importance of Rural Tourism in Reiek Village

Rural tourism can be a critical component for a dynamic connection between the urban world and the inland. This element of connection will permit the extension of the money-related and social traveller action in time and space. Rural tourism is connected with small-scale traveller exercises, of family or co-agent sort, which are created in the rural areas by individuals who are involved in farming. Its fundamental point is to furnish the ranchers with options and answers for their occupation and furthermore to enhance their pay and quality of life.

During the time of Anthurium festival, a majority of female workers are engaged in the business to serve tourists. Some small shops with sweet potatoes, local fruits, and homemade rice cakes with lemon tea are the common items sold by the villagers. Besides running of restaurants, selling of fast food is done by the entire family during the festival. Males, mainly young boys, are engaged with parking and levee services, selling of flowers, guiding some tourists to the hill top, taking care of shops, and similar functions. Some of the male workers also engage in selling of *Zo* (grape wine) which has a great demand during the festival.

Economic Profile

During the Anthurium festival in 2012, fifty select villagers were interviewed to know the economic profile of the village. The survey revealed that more than 74% of the businesses were run by female workers. This means higher number of female participation is involved in the profit-making process during the festival. The share of female workers increases and attains almost 100% during the months of October and November. There are a few male workers engaged again during the time between pre-Christmas and New Year celebration, during which time, most of the visitors are local and are mostly youths. Hence, for the safety and security purpose, male workers are found engaged in different activities.

The income varies depending upon the month and business types. The following table shows the details about the monthly income pattern in term of percentage:

Table 1: Month-Wise and Category-Wise Business in the Reiek Area during the Peak Season

| Months | Restaurant & Hotel | Handicraft | Flower Shop | Grape wine | Parking | Horse riding | Stationery | Others |
|--------|--------------------|------------|-------------|------------|---------|--------------|------------|--------|
| Sep. | 50 | 80 | 100 | 90 | 100 | 70 | 60 | 80 |
| Oct. | 5 | - | - | - | - | 5 | 10 | - |
| Nov. | 10 | - | - | - | - | 5 | 10 | - |
| Dec. | 20 | 20 | - | 10 | - | 15 | 10 | 20 |
| Jan. | 15 | - | - | - | - | 5 | 10 | - |

Source: Field Survey.

From the above table, it is clear that during the month of September, villagers earn the highest share of income from their business. It is followed by December that gives an opportunity for the seasonal businessmen in the village to earn. It is important to mention that most of the villagers are seasonal in regard to their business activities. It must be mentioned here that during the survey, the permanent stalls, shops, and the tourist lodge employees were ignored completely to assess the economic impact among the villagers, as they were part of the regular economic resource of the village.

During the remaining eight months, these workers either go to their agricultural fields or migrate to the nearby Aizawl city for their livelihood. Of course, some of the older age-groups and teenagers stay idle to serve visitors during the lean season. The average monthly income varies from rupees 3,000 to 20,000 during the peak season. The following table (Table 2) shows the responses regarding the monthly income of the people.

Table 2: Average Monthly Income of the Respondents in Reiek Village

| Average Income (in Rupees) | Number of Respondents | | % of the Workers |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|------------------|
| | Male | Female | |
| Below 3,000 | 2 | 8 | 20 |
| 5,000-10,000 | - | 21 | 42 |
| 10,000-20,000 | 8 | 5 | 26 |
| Above 20,000 | 2 | 4 | 12 |

Source: Field Survey.

In the above table, six respondents (12%) earn more than Rs. 20,000 while 13 respondents (26%) have their average income ranging from Rs. 10,000-20,000. Majority of the respondents, i.e., 21 (42%) earn between Rs. 5,000

to Rs. 10,000, while the remaining 10 respondents (20%) earn less than Rs. 3,000 on an average. It is important to mention that the average monthly income is calculated based on their four months' (peak season) income. Some of the workers engaged in parking and levee services earn a lumpsum amount during the anthurium festival only. After the festival, they migrate to the city as daily wage labourers.

Community Development Programmes in Reiek Village

Before 2006, Reiek was known only for the Reiek Tlang and hardly a few non-Mizo tourists used to visit this area. Earlier, only a tourist lodge and a small hotel were found in Reiek village. After starting of Anthurium festival, three new hotels and one private lodge were constructed along with the home stay facility in a few houses.

Water crisis was common in this area. During the months of February and March, few *tui-kebur* (natural water points) were available for the villagers. Recently, under the community development programme, villagers have been provided with water supply from the nearby Tlang drainage since this area is declared as important tourist destination. Regular jeep services are also available from Aizawl and Mamit.

The state government is also developing a few artificial view-points on the way to Reiek. Aizawl-Reiek Road has been expanded and it has become an all-weather road to visit Reiek and Ailawng. The traditional Mizo village in Reiek also has become a popular tourist attraction among the visitors. Due to the festival, Reiek, Tlang, and Ailawng started getting higher number of tourists which ultimately has an impact on the villagers and their income. After getting the fame of an important tourist destination, Reiek village is considered for a number of developmental agendas by different state departments lead by the Local Administration Department (LAD), Mizoram.

Field Observations

In particular, rural tourism contributes to the reformation of the countryside because it promotes agricultural income, especially through floriculture under horticulture. The impact is either directly, as an additional resource of income for the farmers who are additionally occupied with rural tourism, or indirectly by contributing to the general flow of money in the village.

It helps the residents of Reiek area to remain in their native village, so as to prevent rural depopulation and confront urbanism. It also provides alternative and complementary occupation solutions to those segments of the population who either cannot live only by the agricultural exploitation or as a daily wage labour.

It contributes to the preservation of traditional forms of rural occupation (homemade handicrafts, etc.) which are restricted by the globalization of the markets. Besides, Anthurium functions as a mechanism of direct selling, promotion and advertising of rural products and services; especially the authentic local products which are characterized by quality and hygiene. It also contributes to the revival of traditional settlements.

The rural tourism in Reiek area has also contributed to the promotion, exploitation, and protection of the cultural heritage (traditional Mizo culture, food, drink, customs, etc.) as well as to the humanizing of the relations between the visitors and the residents of the countryside and the environment. At the same time, it has incorporated the countryside in a more balanced tourist income breakdown.

Following Kreag (2000), Fotiadis (2007) discusses positive and negative impacts of rural tourism based on seven general categories which are: economic impacts, environmental impacts, social and cultural impacts, overcrowding impacts, impacts on the rendered services, impacts on the state and municipal taxes, impacts on the attitude of the community.

Considering the above-mentioned criteria, this study also assessed the negative impact of rural tourism in Reiek village. With the help of interviews with the villagers and Young Mizo Association (YMA), an associated NGO in Reiek, negative impact was identified by the researcher. Of the many challenges, inflation, seasonal occupations, noise and tensions during the festival time, change in the habits of the locals, water shortage, environmental imbalance, and pollution are marked as the serious problems for the people of Reiek. Earlier, liquor was prohibited in the state. But since 2015, it became available with easy access. This is also creating some trouble for the villagers during the festival time. Dumping of waste is also a challenge for the development of rural tourism in the Reiek area. Earlier, it was supposed to be a pollution-free, eco-friendly village, but different kinds of developmental activities along with the rampant clearance of forest cover (conversion of forest to

agriculture land) have created the problem of ecological imbalance, landslide, and water crisis in the area.

Summary and Conclusions

As noted in this study and in many previous studies, it may be concluded that rural tourism is very much helpful for the rural development. It has manifold advantages to offer sustainability even in a remote village. The exercises related with travel, tourism, and diversion influence individuals in a wide range of ways, profoundly affecting social, cultural, and financial aspects of life in any individual. The rural tourism industry embodies friendliness and nourishment and can have huge advantages also for neighbouring rural areas. Rural tourism induces change in business or client insurance, wellbeing, new innovation, transportation, and culture. Mizoram tourism authorities and policy advisors generally believe that rural tourism can offer a “development path” for rural masses of the state.

The present study analysed the role of rural tourism in the light of the Anthurium festival in Reiek village of Mizoram. This festival has become the identity of Reiek village and the lifeline for many families in the village. The state government developed the idea and has promoted Anthurium festival as part of rural tourism since 2006. Some of the ongoing economic and financial programmes are to develop the village with different kind of infrastructure. Since it is a seasonal and part-time business for most of the villagers, they are less serious and curious about rural tourism.

On the other hand, some social problems have also developed due to the tourism-related influences. Sometimes minor clashes between the travellers and the locals have occurred. This also has direct negative impact upon tourism in Reiek. Since the venture of tourism department is still in the initial stage, negativity may be overcome gradually as there is much scope for improvement. Lack of better waste management and shortage of potable water are still two major challenges that hinder the development of sustainable rural tourism in Reiek village. However, in spite of these problems, an eco-tourism has also already been started by the government in this destination.

Thus, Reiek is gradually gaining momentum in being a significant locus of tourism. It is able to attract plentiful of tourists. More number of tourists offers better opportunities to the villagers. If this trend continues in future, it

is expected that Reiek may flourish as the best tourist destination in the entire state of Mizoram. This will again create ample opportunities to the villagers and the people of surrounding areas for earning and set up a permanent tourist business which will lead to a more integral development of the villagers in the Reiek area.

References

- Bramwell, B. (1994). Rural tourism and sustainable rural tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 2(1-2), 1-21.
- Chambers, E. (1997). *Tourism and culture: An applied perspective*. New York, NY: SUNY.
- Deka, G., & Pachuau, R. (2015). Potentiality Analysis of tourism in Mizoram. *International Journal for Social Science and Linguistics*, 3(2), 29-37.
- Farrell, H., & Runyan, D. (1991). Ecology and tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 18, 26-40.
- Fotiadis, A. (2006, September). *Cultural interactions in the rural tourism*. Paper presented at 2nd International Conference Tourism as a Meeting Ground of Cultures, Siófok, Hungary.
- Fotiadis, A. (2007). Cultural interactions in the rural tourism. In T. Rátz & C. Sárdi (Eds.), *Intercultural aspects of tourism development* (pp. 35-43). Szekesfehervar: Kodolányi János University College.
- Gannon, A. (1994). Rural tourism as a factor in rural community economic development for economies in transition. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 2(1-2), 51-60.
- Kreag, G. (2000). *More than you thought: The impacts of tourism*. Paper presented at National Extension Tourism Conference, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii.
- Martin, S., & Uysal, M. (1990). An examination of the relationship between carrying capacity and the tourism lifecycle: Management and policy implications. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 31(4), 327-333.
- Mathieson, A. & Wall, G. (1982). *Tourism: Economic, physical, and social impacts*. New York: Longman.
- Milman, A., & Pizam, A. (1988). Social impacts of tourism on Central Florida. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15(2), 191-204.
- Pachuau, R. (2009). *Mizoram: A study in comprehensive geography*. New Delhi: Northern Book Centre.
- Pearce, D. (1989). *Tourism development* (2nd edition). New York: Longman.
- Rátz, T., & Puczko, L. (1998). Rural tourism and sustainable development in Hungary. In D. Hall & L. O'Hanlon (Eds.), *Rural tourism management: Sustainable options: International Conference Proceedings of Scottish Agricultural College* (pp. 450-464). Auchincruive, UK.
- Smith, V. (ed.) (1989). *Hosts and guests: The anthropology of tourism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Wyllie, R. (2000). *Tourism and society*. State College Pennsylvania: Venture Publishing.