

## **Rural Development through Community Based Tourism: an Assessment of Jaffna District with reference to Intangible Cultural Heritage**

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### **Introduction**

In recent years, tourism has attracted the attention of many scholars in development of literature. In Sri Lanka, as elsewhere, the dominant theme in the literature has invariably been the emphasis on the argument that the tourism industry is a conduit of development of the rural economies and also enables developing countries to participate in the global economy. While this is not in dispute, the literature is silent on identifying Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as tourism assets that has power to develop communities. This article thus identifies and argues the ICH assets' capacity to develop rural communities in Jaffna district through Community Based Tourism (CBT).

### **Background**

After the three decades of war, Jaffna is rejuvenating with the local and international support. However, it is wise to check for alternative economic strategies to alleviate the burning poverty in Jaffna while preserving the existing authentic Hindu and Christian cultures. Sri Lanka suffered from a three decade of war which hindered the overall development process of the country. Jaffna district in particular suffered enormously with its restricted connectivity to the southern part of the country and to the rest of the world. The industries were collapsed and the professionals fled the region in search of refuge. At present, per person monthly income of Northern Province is Rs.5,515.00 and is the lowest per person

income in the country as well (Department of Census and Statistics, 2015) . Present government has identified tourism as a promising industry to develop the country (Ministry of Economic Development, 2011). Further, the government initiated a six years project (2011 – 2016) to develop the tourism sector in Sri Lanka with strategic mediations (Ministry of Economic Development, 2011). Jaffna district has plenty of untouched tourism potentials: natural and cultural, through which the Northern tourism could be developed upon (Mathivathany & Sasitharan, 2012).

“Intangible cultural heritage” is defined in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and know-how, transmitted from generation to generation within communities, created and transformed continuously by them, depending on the environment and their interaction with nature and history. Intangible cultural heritage exists only in the present. The expressions of the past that are no longer practised are part of cultural history, but are not intangible cultural heritage as defined in the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Intangible cultural heritage is what communities today recognize as part of their cultural heritage. Therefore, it is often called “living heritage”. Intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation and is constantly recreated by groups in response to their environment, their interactions with nature and their history, providing them with a sense of identity and continuity. In this article, main consideration is given to those examples of intangible cultural heritage which promote mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals as well as the principles of responsible and sustainable development.

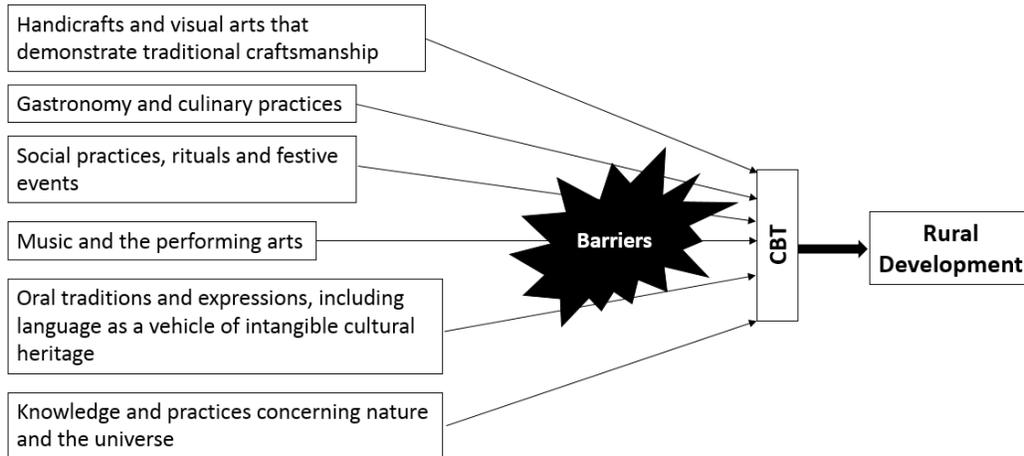
ICH is well preserved in Jaffna since the district had limited connectivity to the rest of the world for nearly three decades of time. Review of previous literature highlights the potential of ICH to promote as a tourist attraction in a sustainable manner. Further, the previous articles identifies Jaffna as a place where culture is well preserved although tourism is not properly implemented.

According to United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2003) the intangible cultural heritage is manifested inter alia in the following domains :

1. Handicrafts and visual arts that demonstrate traditional craftsmanship
2. Gastronomy and culinary practices
3. Social practices, rituals and festive events
4. Music and the performing arts

5. Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage
6. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

**Illustration 1:** Proposed model to promote CBT through ICH in Jaffna



**Findings**

**1. Handicrafts and visual arts that demonstrate traditional craftsmanship**

Traditional handicrafts and visual arts are the mainstay of the material culture of communities. These form the majority of souvenirs purchased by travelers, especially in new destinations before the advent of mass produced goods, which tend to be less expensive or easily available. In some cases, the sale of handicrafts constitutes one of the few sources of income for indigenous communities with barter economies, enabling them to begin to make investment decisions (Giudici, Melis, Dessi, Francine, & Galvao, 2013).

The traditional industries and crafts of Jaffna reflect the traditional arts of the people and their cultural heritage influences by the land in which they live, so different from the rest of the island. Both in the simple life of the villager as in his economics the humble Palmyra and its products (mats, baskets, containers, hats, wall hangings, necklaces, bags, purses etc.), take a high place in the life of the Jaffna people. The tourism income earned by the *Ellalei* people of Jaffna is used to purchase supplies from local markets so as to continue handicraft production. In developed markets like Jaffna town, handicrafts tend to be displayed at fairs and

specially-designed markets, as their major tourist appeal makes them excellent occasions for craftsmen to promote and sell their products.

Figure 1: Handicrafts of *Ellalei* people out of Palmyra leaves



## 2. Gastronomy and culinary practices

This category includes all foods and beverages that have special significance for cultural groups or are associated with certain geographical places (Vitic-Cetkovic, Krstic, & Jovanovic, 2015). As a popular category with tourists, gastronomic heritage has put many places on the tourist map, especially in Jaffna town and increasingly in Point Pedro and Nallur Temple area. Examples include sweets, ice cream, Palmira products (*Kottakilangu*, *juggery*), *Jaffna cool*, and other traditional Hindu foods of which contribute to rural development. Although it is not available, cooking classes also can be introduced as an activity to promote CBT in Jaffna. The Jaffna food, fruites and drinks are listed as follows

Table 1: Food & beverage in Jaffna

Category	Item
Jaffna Food	Crab curry, prawn curry, fish head curry, <i>Pittu</i> (steamed mixture of rice flour and scrapped coconut), <i>Thosai</i> (fermented crepe or pancake), <i>Odiyal kool</i> (Jaffna soup), snacks: <i>Panangaig pani yaram</i> (Palmyra fruit juice mixed with wheat flower).

Fruits	Jaffna mangoes – sweet and juicy, best in the dry season, <i>Nelli</i> – small green sour fruit, highly nutritious and with therapeutic properties, Palmyrah fruit – delicious flesh , similar to lychees but milder in flavor, Grapes – widely grown and no wonder they are famous, <i>Itharai</i> banana – unique to Jaffna, Jackfruit –largest tree born fruit, used in custards and chips.
Drinks	<i>Nelli</i> crush and the Rosarian Sisters’ Rosetto wine made from grapes, sugar, cinnamon cloves (available in Rosarian Sisters’ Convent in Chundikkuli).

Figure 02: *Odiyal kool* (Jaffna Cool) & *Panangaig pani yaram*



### 3. Social practices, rituals and festive events

Among the broadest and most vibrant ICH categories, this covers the secular and sacred, every day and extraordinary. How much of it has market appeal or should be commodified for tourism is often a major contention. Most festivals featured in this study have some performing arts or gastronomic focus, combined with other ICH categories. They include displays of century-old customs at well-established events like Nallur Kovil Festival (July/August), Naguleswaram Kovil, Keerimalai (February), Nagapoosani Amman, Nainativu (June), Thai Pongal, a harvest festival (January), Deepavali, the “Festival of Lights” (October/November) which face the challenge of maintaining authenticity and managing tourist numbers. Although it is sensible, the Jaffna Hindu’s birth rituals, puberty rituals, wedding rituals and death rituals are unique and consisted of high tourism potential if planned and managed carefully.

Figure 3: A Brahmin kite in Jaffna



There are many traditional sports enjoyed by the Jaffna Hindus. A pastime typical of Jaffna is Musical Kite. Made in varying patterns of bird or animal form, the more common are the peacock and a conventionalized form of the bird kite, the form popularity called *Paruntukkodi*, a stylish pattern of the *Brahmin Kite*. *Kitti* and *Pullu* play are very popular with children, with a wide distribution in both South India and Sri Lanka.

Figure 4: Performance at Nagapoosani Amman Temple



#### 4. Music and the performing arts

This category includes cultural expressions such as music, dance, theatre, and others. The Devala dance art of Sri Lanka is very much similar to the South Indian *Devadasi* art. The three principle temples of Jaffna, the Sivan Kovil of Vannarponnai, the Nallur Kandaswami temple, and the Mavittapuram temple each maintained its own personnel of dancing girls (Raghawan, 1980). Dedicated to the temple, they lived in the temple premises. The dancing was done in the temple precincts only and not outside it. Unfortunately such traditions now have washed

away, but the *Devadasis* are still performing at temples during the festival seasons after visiting from outside.

Figure 05: A traditional dancing group & a dummy horse dance in Jaffna



The *Nadagam* has been so much a feature of Jaffna culture, although it is not localized in the Jaffna peninsula. Among the popular dramas staged by the Tamils were *vedi Arasan Nadagama* and *Gnanasundari*. Some generations ago *Terukkuttu* (a street play) was quite popular in Jaffna which themed Ramayanaya epic.

*Bharatha Natyam* on the other hand should not be forgotten although the origin of *Bharatha Natyam* records from South India. Most of the Sri Lankan performers have practices *Bharatha Natyam* in South India and being performed in Jaffna.

Figure 06: *Kottam* dance in Jaffna



The *Kolattam* and the *Kummi* belong to the category of dances, classified as the community or the Choral dance. The accompanying songs and tunes are simple,

but varied and graceful. The themes of the songs in the Kummi cover a wide range from poetical descriptions of nature to the simple joys of life and romances of the Spring season.

5. Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage

This category includes tales, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, prayers, chants and other elements that are orally transmitted from generation to generation. Language itself contains much that embodies a community's history and cultural identity. Showcasing this form of ICH in the context of tourism is sometimes problematic as it entails an intensive level of cultural exchange. There are different varieties of folk songs available yet to date in Jaffna. Those songs are sung by the farmers, mothers, husbands or wives, sons or daughters to celebrate different occasions in the life.

6. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

This category includes beliefs about the workings of the physical universe, land use, traditional farming practices and maintaining harmony with nature. The article will also look at historical agricultural and eco-friendly traditional practices of interest or with educational value for tourists.

More than in the rest of the country perhaps, the Jaffna peasant indeed earns his bread by the sweat of his brow. In his efforts to make the arid land respond to his unremitting toil, he has devised ways and methods of his own which he has perfected over the ages. With little or no irrigation by tanks, all water for irrigating the fields or plantations is from wells dug (*Aandi Linda*) all over Jaffna. Some of the most common vegetable grown in Jaffna are: onions, chillies, turmeric, ginger, pumpkins, brinjals, gourds, melons, yams, sweet potatoes, country cabbage, arrowroot and gram.

Methods of sowing are different from place to place in Jaffna. The seed is sown broadcast on dry seed-bed prior to the rains, without germination and covered by a layer of soil by the mamoty. The seed remain dormant until the rainfall. Lying exposed, a certain extent of loss is inevitable, expressed in a Tamil verse (translated in to English) as follows:

*“Remember well, of every four,  
One’s for the crab  
One’s for the bird  
One to die and  
One to grow.”*

Figure 07: Traditional prawn traps in Jaffna



As stated above there is a huge potential to develop Jaffna community based tourism through intangible cultural heritage assets. It is envisaged that proper planning, management and implementation process will derive true benefits of tourism to the Jaffna communities while protecting and preserving the ICH after value addition.

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