



THE COMMODIFICATION OF HANDICRAFT IN MANIPUR TOURISM

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ABSTRACT: As rich as its natural riches is, Manipur's art and craft. Each ethnic group in this state of Northeast India has a unique culture and tradition that is reflected in both its art and crafts. In fact, Manipur's handloom and handicraft products are so expertly made that they are now well-known over the world for their styles, vibrancy, and utility. Additionally, the state is among India's top producers of bamboo crafts. Among the many crafts produced in this state are Paper Mache, decorative ivory, textile weaving, stone carving, block printing, hand embroidery, collectible dance dolls, bamboo, and cane work.

Manipur's potters are talented in both black and clay pottery creation, therefore it's worth visiting to observe them in action. The tribes of Andro, Thongjao, and Nungbi, on the other hand, have perfected the art of pottery over the years, and that too without the aid of a potter's wheel. One of the best goods to buy in Manipur is wood carving. To create items like a wooden tray, spoon, drum, etc., the artisans rely on local wood.

People are looking for solutions to better incorporate sustainability into their businesses and goods because it is vital. The environmental impact of the fashion industry has come under scrutiny, and numerous businesses and brands have been asked to work together and independently to become more sustainable.

KEYWORDS: Manipur, Northeast India, Art and Craft, Handloom, Decorative Ivory, Sustainability, Environmental Impact, Thongjao Tribe, Nungbi Tribe, Fashion industry.

I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The review offers an insightful and descriptive analysis, focusing on subjective perspectives. It is built upon a paper that draws from secondary data gathered from various sources such as government publications, archives, journals, books, and online platforms. Through the exploration of a wide array of online sources and scholarly journals, I examined historical trends and academic viewpoints. This method allowed for a comprehensive review of the literature, enabling me to blend new insights with existing knowledge and broaden the scope of my analysis.

II. OBJECTIVES

- i. The objective of commodification handicraft in Manipur Tourism are to promote local artisans, boost the economy, and preserve traditional craftsmanship.
- ii. To promote sustainability into their businesses and goods because it is vital.
- iii. The objective is also to stimulating economic growth, and so that it's a win-win situation for both the artisan and the tourism industry.

III. INTRODUCTION

Manipur's tourism industry is on the brink of exciting growth, fueled by the state's breathtaking natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Its verdant forests, winding rivers, and majestic mountains make it a paradise for eco-tourists and adventure seekers alike. Beyond its landscapes, Manipur's diverse population and vibrant traditions, including its renowned Manipuri dance, offer travelers a deep immersion into its cultural tapestry (Chaudhury, Rahman, & Sarkar, 2023).

Despite its relatively small population compared to the rest of India, Manipur's influence in sports and arts is remarkable on the national stage. This cultural richness forms the bedrock for the state's tourism aspirations. A detailed 20-year plan has been crafted to steer tourism development towards sustainability, addressing crucial aspects like infrastructure, private investments, and environmental preservation. The aim is to not only boost the economy but also create job opportunities and safeguard the environment (Lhouvum, 2016).

Furthermore, with borders opening up to international trade, Manipur stands at a strategic crossroads. It has the potential to become a pivotal center for cross-border trade, especially with neighboring Myanmar. By leveraging its geographical advantage and fostering trade partnerships, Manipur can unlock new economic avenues while fostering cultural exchanges (Trivedi, 2017).

In the evolving landscape of global tourism, where travelers seek authentic experiences and eco-conscious destinations, Manipur is well-positioned to shine. Through thoughtful planning, investments, and promotion, the state can emerge as a top-tier tourist hotspot, offering visitors unforgettable experiences while ensuring sustainable development and prosperity for its communities (Mehrotra & Chaudhury, 2023).

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Manipur's tourism is centered around its natural beauty, culture, history, and adventure opportunities, which have been targeted for development with increased attention. Revered as the "Switzerland of the East" by former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Manipur's lush landscapes and vibrant culture make it a unique destination. Despite its potential, there's a need to focus on branding and positioning to better showcase the state's distinctiveness and highlight its hidden gems for tourists to discover and enjoy (Akoijam & Meitei, 2016).

The vibrant folklore deeply rooted in Manipur's cultural heritage isn't just a tourism asset—it's a powerful catalyst for social change. Embracing and celebrating these tales brings communities together, fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging. Moreover, the richness of Manipuri folklore has the ability to bridge divides and foster connections beyond borders, nurturing understanding and appreciation on a global scale.

As Manipur embraces its cultural legacy, it can serve as a beacon of unity and diversity, enriching both local communities and global relations (Singh, 2015).

Tourism and handicrafts go hand in hand, as travelers often look for unique souvenirs to take back home as reminders of their adventures. In India, crafts are deeply rooted in the history, religion, and culture of each state, serving as a source of inspiration for designers and showcasing the country's rich heritage worldwide. The North-East region, with its eight states, offers a treasure trove of cultural diversity and breathtaking natural landscapes, making it a sought-after destination for travelers. While tourism presents economic opportunities, it's crucial to balance development with environmental conservation, especially in remote areas. Moreover, the region's exquisite crafts, including bamboo and cane products, traditional metals, and hand-woven textiles, add to the region's charm and offer livelihood opportunities for local artisans. Together, tourism and crafts create an enriching experience for visitors, allowing them to immerse themselves in the region's culture while supporting local communities (Das, 2014).

In Manipur, art and craft are as diverse as the natural beauty that surrounds it. Each community in this Northeast Indian state brings its unique cultural traditions to the forefront through various crafts, from intricate handloom textiles to exquisite bamboo creations. Local artisans showcase their skill in pottery, wood carving, and stone carving, with some tribes even mastering pottery without the use of a potter's wheel. Women play a significant role in preserving tradition through loom weaving, while hand block printing and hand embroidery add artistic flair to everyday items. From functional pieces like bowls and candleholders to decorative toys made from cloth and bamboo, Manipur's craft scene is a testament to its rich heritage and creativity. The craft of weaving Kauna mats, crafted from reeds grown in marshy areas, adds a unique touch to Manipur's artisanal legacy (Tour My India).

V. MARKETING BRANDING AND PROMOTION

Improving tourism marketing and promotion in Manipur requires a thoughtful and ongoing effort. We need to showcase the state's serene environment, breathtaking natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and vibrant festivals to attract more visitors. Creating a compelling brand or slogan that captures the essence of Manipur will serve as a rallying point for all our promotional activities.

Our branding strategy should reflect the unique aspects of Manipur, ensuring that visitors are drawn to its diverse attractions. We must consistently align our branding efforts with promotional campaigns, events, and online platforms to create a positive impression among potential travelers.

It's crucial to streamline our various festivals and events into a cohesive promotional strategy. Events like the Manipur Sangai Festival and Shirui Lily Festival should be strategically marketed to both local and international tourists. Additionally, exploring the possibility of hosting major global events, such as cycling races or theater festivals, can elevate Manipur's profile on the world stage.

We need to develop robust digital marketing strategies to reach our target audience effectively. Showcasing Manipur as a year-round destination through online campaigns and digital content will help attract more visitors. Emphasizing experiential, adventure, and heritage tourism can diversify our offerings and appeal to a broader range of travelers.

Furthermore, initiatives to promote luxury and honeymoon tourism alongside heritage tourism can cater to different segments of travelers. Implementing planned branding strategies can ensure a steady flow of tourists throughout the year. Collaborating with international tourism organizations and allocating a significant portion of our tourism budget towards branding efforts are vital steps in enhancing Manipur's visibility globally.

Creating user-friendly digital information centers, such as a Manipur Tourism app, will improve accessibility for travelers worldwide. Implementing effective traveler data management systems to ensure safety and security, along with collaborating with international tourism forums, are essential for consistent brand development. Allocating a substantial portion of the State Tourism budget, approximately 8-9%, towards brand promotion campaigns demonstrates our commitment to elevating Manipur's tourism industry. Enhancing the marketing, branding, and promotion of tourism and handicrafts requires a multifaceted approach. Few of them are as follows:-

- a) **Create an Engaging Website:** Craft a user-friendly website dedicated to Manipur tourism. This platform should offer insights into local attractions, cultural events, accommodations, and travel tips. Incorporating interactive elements like virtual tours and itinerary planners can enhance the visitor experience.
- b) **Printed Materials:** Develop eye-catching brochures, calendars, and posters showcasing Manipur's unique offerings. Distribute these materials through tourism offices, hotels, and travel agencies to reach a wider audience.
- c) **Collaborate with National Campaigns:** Partner with national campaigns like 'Incredible India' to showcase Manipur's tourism potential. By collaborating with the Ministry of Tourism, Manipur can gain visibility in promotional materials and social media campaigns.
- d) **Promotional Videos:** Produce captivating videos highlighting the natural beauty and cultural richness of Manipur. Share these videos on television channels, streaming platforms, and social media to attract potential travelers.
- e) **Participate in Tourism Fairs:** Attend tourism fairs across the country to showcase Manipur's attractions. Engage with visitors, distribute promotional materials, and network with industry professionals to boost interest in Manipur as a tourist destination.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Manipur's cane and bamboo crafts are renowned for their quality, owing to the plentiful availability of raw materials and the sustained global demand for such products. Talented artisans in the region craft a diverse range of items, including sofa sets, stools, mats, basketry, trays, chairs, tables, flower vases, and ashtrays, among others. Their skill and creativity have made Manipur a hub for bamboo craftsmanship, with these ornamental and practical pieces prized both locally and internationally.

SI NO	TYPES OF HANDICRAFTS IN MANIPUR
1.	Bamboo and Cane Crafts
2.	Crafts in Kauna
3.	Pottery
4.	Black Ceramic
5.	Glazed Pottery
6.	Weaving of Textiles (Hand-Woven and Embroidered Fabrics)
7.	Woodcarving
8.	A Block Print
9.	Organic Fiber Crafts

Table 1: Types of Handicrafts in Manipur

In Manipur, artisans pour their skill and creativity into crafting unique handicrafts that are treasured both at home and abroad. Kauna, a reed found in marshes and bogs, is transformed into beautiful mats and cushions by numerous artisans, coveted not just in local markets but also in countries like the UK, Netherlands, Germany, France, UAE, Switzerland, and Latin America. Pottery, an ancient craft in Manipur, is meticulously crafted using traditional techniques, reflecting the region's rich cultural heritage. These handcrafted pots, painted in vibrant colors, serve both practical and aesthetic purposes, adding a touch of tradition to homes. Meanwhile, women in Manipur carry on the tradition of textile weaving, known as Laichamphi, preserving an important aspect of the state's cultural identity. Wood carving, born out of necessity, sees artisans skillfully shaping locally sourced wood into various items like trays, spoons, and drums. Block printing is another distinctive craft in Manipur, producing intricately designed towels, ritual costumes, and more. Despite facing challenges in the market, Manipuri crafts hold immense potential for growth both locally and internationally. However, the number of craft producers and exporters in the region remains limited.

Among them, Ahenba Products in Imphal specializes in bamboo handicrafts, offering a range of items like mats, chairs, and flower vases. Similarly, the Rural Industrialization Centre of Manipur focuses on exporting a variety of handicrafts and loom-made goods from their location in Imphal, contributing to the promotion of Manipur's rich artisanal heritage.

In Manipur, basket weaving is more than just a craft—it's a cherished tradition that sustains both culture and livelihoods. With an abundance of cane and bamboo, artisans skillfully create a wide array of baskets for everyday use and special occasions alike. From ceremonial baskets like Heijing Kharai to household essentials such as Likhai and Sangbai, each piece reflects the community's rich heritage and craftsmanship. The involvement of various tribes, including the Maring people of Chandel District and the Meeteis, underscores the collaborative spirit and diversity within Manipur's artisan community. Women, in particular, play a central role in basket weaving, showcasing their talent and creativity while contributing to their families' income. Through generations, this tradition has been passed down, with each weaver adding their unique touch to the craft.

The process of commoditization has provided economic opportunities for artisans, enabling them to sustain their craft while meeting market demands. However, balancing commercialization with cultural authenticity remains crucial to preserve the integrity and quality of handmade products. Initiatives like Heritage Art exemplify the importance of supporting local artisans and promoting sustainable practices.

By engaging with businesses that prioritize ethical sourcing and cultural preservation, consumers can play a role in preserving Manipur's heritage while empowering its artisans. Through these partnerships, we can ensure that traditional crafts continue to thrive, providing a sustainable livelihood for generations to come.

HANDICRAFTS OF MANIPUR

Craftsmanship in Manipur reflects the region's cultural richness and the skill of its artisans. Some of the traditional handicrafts and their significance are as follows:-

- a) **Fishing Baskets:** Crafted by Manipuri women, "Lengthy" fishing baskets are intricately woven from bamboo and wood, allowing for the capture of fish in shallow waters. Meanwhile, men use "Long-oop" baskets in deeper waters, showcasing the diverse techniques employed for fishing across the region.
- b) **Storage Bins:** Versatile and meticulously woven, storage bins serve multiple purposes, from storing cotton to grains and vegetables. Each bin, crafted with precision from bamboo, reflects the practical needs of Manipuri households.
- c) **Bamboo Umbrellas:** Protecting against sun and rain, bamboo umbrellas come in various types, including "Yenkhrung," "Salaitep," and "Yengoi." These umbrellas, expertly crafted from bamboo, demonstrate the ingenuity of Manipuri artisans in adapting to environmental conditions.
- d) **Bamboo Headgears and Decorations:** Essential for traditional attire, bamboo and cane headgears add elegance to Manipuri tribal costumes. Adorned with intricately woven patterns and bamboo flowers, these headpieces are symbolic of cultural identity and pride.

TEXTILES & HANDICRAFTS AT TOURIST DESTINATIONS

To support the local artisans and craftsmen, it's proposed to set up dedicated centers at key tourist spots like Loktak and Shirui Hills. These centers would showcase the skills and creativity of various communities in Manipur, providing them with much-needed income and job opportunities. Incentives and support could be offered to entrepreneurs and artisans to encourage the growth of these crafts.

The people of Manipur are known for their remarkable skills in crafting exquisite handicrafts, which can be witnessed firsthand in the lively markets of the state. Tourists often admire products like Kauna items, bamboo and cane articles, intricate wood carvings, and colorful block prints. Particularly, the women of Manipur are highly skilled in weaving cotton fabrics, known locally as Laichamphi. Additionally, Kauna mats, made from water reeds, are a specialty of the region.

Some of the renowned handicrafts of Manipur include hand-woven textiles, water reed mats, Manipuri dance dolls, shawls, bamboo and cane work, and wood carvings. With its lush forests and rolling hills, Manipur offers a captivating landscape that enchants visitors. From the vibrant city of Imphal to the serene villages of Ukhrul and Bishnupur, each destination in Manipur has its own unique charm.

Known as "the jeweled land," Manipur boasts natural beauty and cultural richness. It has been an integral part of India since ancient times. With its nine districts, Manipur relies heavily on agriculture for its economy. However, due to its sensitive location, foreign nationals require Restricted Area Permits to enter the state.

Manipur is celebrated for its unique textiles, including the famous Moirangphee sarees adorned with intricate floral patterns. The state also excels in papier mache, decorative ivory, collectible dolls, and bamboo and cane work. Additionally, it is one of India's major producers of bamboo crafts, showcasing expertise in wood carving, textile weaving, stone carving, block printing, and hand-weaving.

Saris are a staple garment for women in Manipur, crafted from 100% cotton on traditional looms. These saris feature a fusion of tribal and floral designs, reflecting the diverse cultural heritage of the region.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Manipur's tourism sector presents a hopeful outlook, featuring a variety of experiences in religious, adventure, and eco/leisure tourism. Its rich cultural heritage, distinct natural attractions, and historical sites add to its allure. However, challenges such as security issues, insufficient infrastructure, and connectivity limitations persist. Nonetheless, opportunities like developing border markets and fostering regional partnerships offer promise. Threats include perceptions of instability and potential exploitation of the ecosystem. Overcoming weaknesses, capitalizing on opportunities, and addressing threats are crucial for Manipur to fully realize its tourism potential.

STRENGTHS

- Manipur offers a diverse range of tourism experiences, catering to religious, adventure, and eco/leisure tourism interests.
- The state boasts a rich cultural heritage, showcased through traditional Manipuri dance forms and indigenous sports like Polo.
- Unique natural attractions such as Loktak Lake, Shirui Hills, and Dzuko Valley add to Manipur's tourism appeal.
- Historic landmarks like Kangla Fort and Keibul Lamjao National Park contribute to the cultural and historical significance of the region.

WEAKNESSES

- Security concerns, both real and perceived, pose obstacles to the development of tourism in Manipur.
- The absence of a Visa-on-Arrival facility for citizens of Myanmar at the Moreh-Tamu border impacts cross-border tourism.
- Limited tourism infrastructure, especially in terms of quality, experience, and site services, hinders visitor experiences.
- Poor road connectivity creates accessibility challenges for reaching tourist destinations within Manipur.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Border towns like Moreh present opportunities for developing border markets and promoting cross-border tourism initiatives.

- Enhanced highway connectivity linking destinations across states and Southeast Asian nations can strengthen tourism circuits.
- Collaboration with neighboring states for joint tourism development efforts can unlock the region's tourism potential.
- Expanding the railway network to Imphal and upgrading Imphal Airport to an international hub can facilitate easier access for tourists.

THREATS

- Perceptions of instability and safety concerns may discourage tourists from visiting the region.
- Apprehensions about an unstable environment could deter investments in Manipur's tourism sector.
- Overexploitation and commercialization of fragile ecosystems may lead to environmental degradation and loss of tourist attractions.
- A shortage of skilled workers in Manipur's tourism industry may limit the effective utilization of available resources.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

CONCLUSION

Manipur is a true gem of India, offering a blend of rich culture, stunning landscapes, and vibrant crafts. From ancient temples to thrilling adventure sports, the state caters to a wide range of travelers. Despite facing challenges like security issues and limited infrastructure, Manipur holds great promise for tourism growth, especially with opportunities for cross-border travel and improved connectivity. By celebrating its unique cultural heritage and supporting local artisans, Manipur can establish itself as a top destination for travelers seeking authentic experiences. With its fascinating history, breathtaking scenery, and flourishing crafts scene, Manipur is poised to capture the hearts of visitors from around the world.

RECOMMENDATION

- a) **Community Involvement:** Engage local communities in tourism projects to ensure their participation and benefit from the industry's growth. This can foster a sense of ownership and preserve cultural heritage while boosting economic opportunities for residents.
- b) **Safety Measures:** Implement safety measures and initiatives to address concerns about security, both real and perceived. By prioritizing the safety of visitors, Manipur can create a welcoming environment that encourages tourism.
- c) **Promotional Efforts:** Utilize digital platforms and participate in national and international tourism campaigns to showcase Manipur's unique attractions and cultural heritage. Effective marketing can attract more visitors and increase awareness of the region as a tourist destination.
- d) **Infrastructure Development:** Invest in improving transportation infrastructure, such as roads and airports, to enhance accessibility to tourist sites. This will make it easier for travelers to explore Manipur and contribute to the overall travel experience.

- e) Cross-Border Collaboration: Explore opportunities for cross-border tourism with neighboring countries like Myanmar to diversify tourism offerings and attract international visitors. Establishing border markets and facilitating travel arrangements can promote cultural exchange and economic growth.

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