

Exploring the Potential of Integrating Traditional Culinary Knowledge into Community-Based Tourism Development: Evidence from Nochchiyagama and Surrounding Rural Areas in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Traditional knowledge systems are rapidly changing due to modern social modernization, and attention has increased on their preservation and adaptation to new socio-economic needs. Accordingly, cultural heritage, folk beliefs, folk customs and indigenous knowledge are key elements that represent the identity of a society. These resources can be contributed to regional development by integrating them with economic sectors such as the tourism industry. Sri Lanka is also a country with a long history and multiculturalism, and folk beliefs, religious customs, festivals and indigenous knowledge systems that are unique to different regions are still preserved. Especially in rural areas, these cultural elements are closely intertwined with local life, and there is also the potential to develop them as tourist attractions. The main problem addressed in this study was to examine the potential for integrating traditional culinary knowledge in Nochchiyagama and its surrounding rural areas into community-based tourism development. The primary objective was to propose suitable strategies for utilizing traditional culinary knowledge as a resource for community-based tourism. A qualitative research methodology was employed, utilizing both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through structured interviews conducted with 40 purposively selected participants. Secondary data were gathered from research publications, academic articles, tourism-related documents, and annual reports published by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority. The findings revealed that Nochchiyagama and its surrounding rural areas possess a rich repository of traditional culinary knowledge. Knowledge related to traditional food recipes, local food production methods, food preservation techniques, and the utilization of local agricultural products continues to exist among the local community. The study further identified that this culinary heritage has significant potential to be developed as a tourism resource capable of providing unique cultural experiences for visitors. Rural food-based experiences, traditional cooking demonstrations, and programs showcasing local food culture were recognized as valuable opportunities for promoting community-based tourism. The study concludes that integrating traditional culinary knowledge into community-based tourism development can not only help preserve local cultural heritage but also contribute to strengthening regional economic development.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, Culinary Knowledge, Cultural Heritage Folk Beliefs, Nochchiyagama.

INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH

Tourism is a rapidly growing industry in many countries of the world and has provided economic growth and employment opportunities to many countries. The changing world economic pattern, which is increasingly characterized by globalization, is raising the prospects for the future of international tourism. Accordingly, international tourist arrivals and tourism industry revenues are also increasing. Unlike the Americas and Europe, which are traditionally identified as major tourist destinations, there is a trend of increasing tourist arrivals in regions such as Africa, Asia Pacific and the Middle East. It can be seen that the world tourism industry has

grown significantly in the last two decades (Agrawal, 2011). In 1950, the total number of tourists in the world was about 25 million, and by 1990, it has increased to 435 million (CBSL, 2011).

Considering the current state of the international tourism industry, international tourist arrivals were 939 million in 2010 and increased to 980 million in 2011. According to reports from the UNWTO, 1.1 billion international tourist arrivals (Overnight Visitors) were recorded during the period from January to September 2024, which is an increase of 11% compared to the same period in 2023. Focusing on current tourist arrivals, Sri Lanka has welcomed 1,010,249 tourists in the first six months of 2024, which reflects a significant growth of 61.6% compared to the same period in 2023 (SLTDA, 2024). Accordingly, this remarkable increase indicates a strong recovery in the tourism sector. It can be said that it is largely a growth opportunity for the tourism industry.

Accordingly, the tourism industry can be described as a sector that contributes significantly to the gross domestic product of almost every country in the world. Here, a tourist destination is a very important element in relation to the tourism industry. Tourism is not an industry that is concerned only with tourist destinations or only with the income generated from them. The tourism industry is transformed into a business and the tourist interests that are formed around the destination areas and intermediate areas are different from each other. When examining tourist interests, a religious place, an ancient shrine, a recreational activity, an artificially created place, a forest experience, a coastal activity, etc. can be identified in different forms relative to each other. Just because a place is unique does not mean that it is suitable for the tourism industry. That place must have tourist attraction experiences, government intervention, human labor, and beauties that can attract tourists. All tourism resources in the world can be included in the two categories of naturally created tourism resources and man-made tourism resources accepted in the tourism industry.

Many countries in the world have made tourism a turning point in the development of their countries, not only because of its economic benefits, but also because tourism connects many social, economic, political and cultural aspects. The world economic pattern, which is changing from moment to moment with modernity based on globalization, is eager to meet the future goals of international tourism. Through this, international tourism traffic patterns, income earning conditions, etc. are developing. As a result, tourists are focusing on new tourist destinations instead of traditional tourist destinations. The tourism industry, which contributes significantly to the gross domestic product in many countries of the world, is also operating in Sri Lanka, contributing significantly to the country's gross domestic product. As a tourist destination, Sri Lanka has inherited many attractive attractions for tourism arrivals, with the rich nature of the resources concentrated in a tropical island such as beautiful beaches, lakes, waterfalls, mountain scenery, rainforests, and ruins of ancient civilizations (Silva, 2011). When focusing on the tourism industry in Sri Lanka, tourism can be identified as the third largest foreign exchange earner.

Moreover, natural formations in any country can be transformed into beautiful tourist destinations through human influence. The same idea is being implemented in various regions of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, it can be identified how the tourism resources required to meet the future needs of the tourism industry and improve its contribution to the gross domestic product are established in the country. In its contribution, it is essential to accurately identify the internal tourist destinations of Sri Lanka and identify the environmental and cultural factors that primarily affect the transformation of those tourist destinations or any area into a tourism promotion zone and to develop the aspects that should be developed in them and take steps to enhance those facilities. This study also aims to study the importance of that necessity, namely, to study how the cultural heritage or traditional beliefs and consciousness of Sri Lanka are positioned to determine tourism promotion zones. The main objective of this research is to identify the suitability of using folk consciousness based on traditional cuisine in Nochchiyagama and its surrounding rural areas in promoting the tourism sector. Accordingly, suitable proposals are made for developing the study area as a tourism promotion zone based on folk consciousness based on cuisine in the proposed study area. Accordingly, in this research, the basic components of the above-mentioned cultural heritage are generally referred to as folk consciousness based on traditional beliefs. Accordingly, the suitability of using folk consciousness based on traditional culinary heritage in the rural area around Nochchiyagama for promoting tourism activities is studied here. Accordingly, this research studies whether the folk consciousness

based on traditional cuisine in the Nochchiyagama suburbs of the North Central Province has the suitability of promoting tourism activities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a qualitative research approach in conducting this research study. The primary objective was to examine the suitability of using traditional culinary knowledge systems in Nochchiyagama and its surrounding rural areas for tourism promotion. Out of the 36 Grama Niladhari divisions of Nochchiyagama Divisional Secretariat, five divisions namely 'Dombawalagama', 'Galadivulwewa', 'Oththappuwa', 'Andarawewa' and 'Adampane', were purposively selected considering the prevalence of traditional culinary knowledge systems. For this research on the suitability of using traditional culinary knowledge systems to promote the tourism sector in Nochchiyagama and surrounding areas, 40 individuals were selected as the study sample using purposive sampling method from the entire study area.

Data Collection

The researcher both primary and secondary data were collected for this study. Primary data were collected through structured interviews with selected elders and knowledgeable community members who had experience and knowledge of traditional culinary practices. The interviews were conducted using a prepared set of questions to collect qualitative information related to traditional culinary knowledge systems and their potential for tourism promotion. The study did not use questionnaires or focus group discussions as separate data collection methods. The structured interviews were conducted individually with the selected participants. Secondary data were obtained from research books, research papers, government publications, and relevant institutional reports. These sources were used to develop the theoretical background and support the interpretation of the research findings.

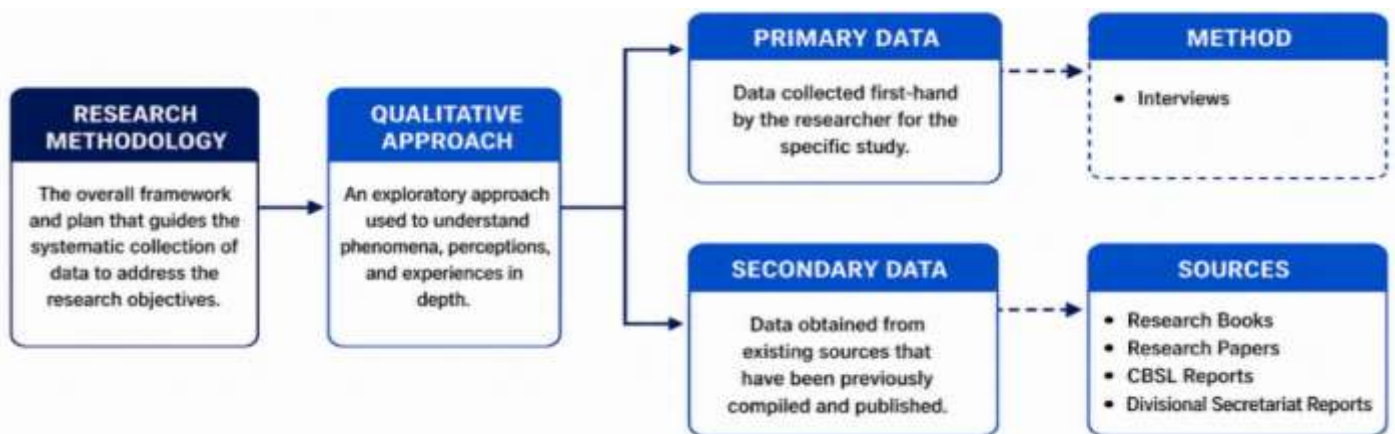


Figure 1: Data Collection Methods (Source: Developed by the Researcher, 2024)

Data Analysis

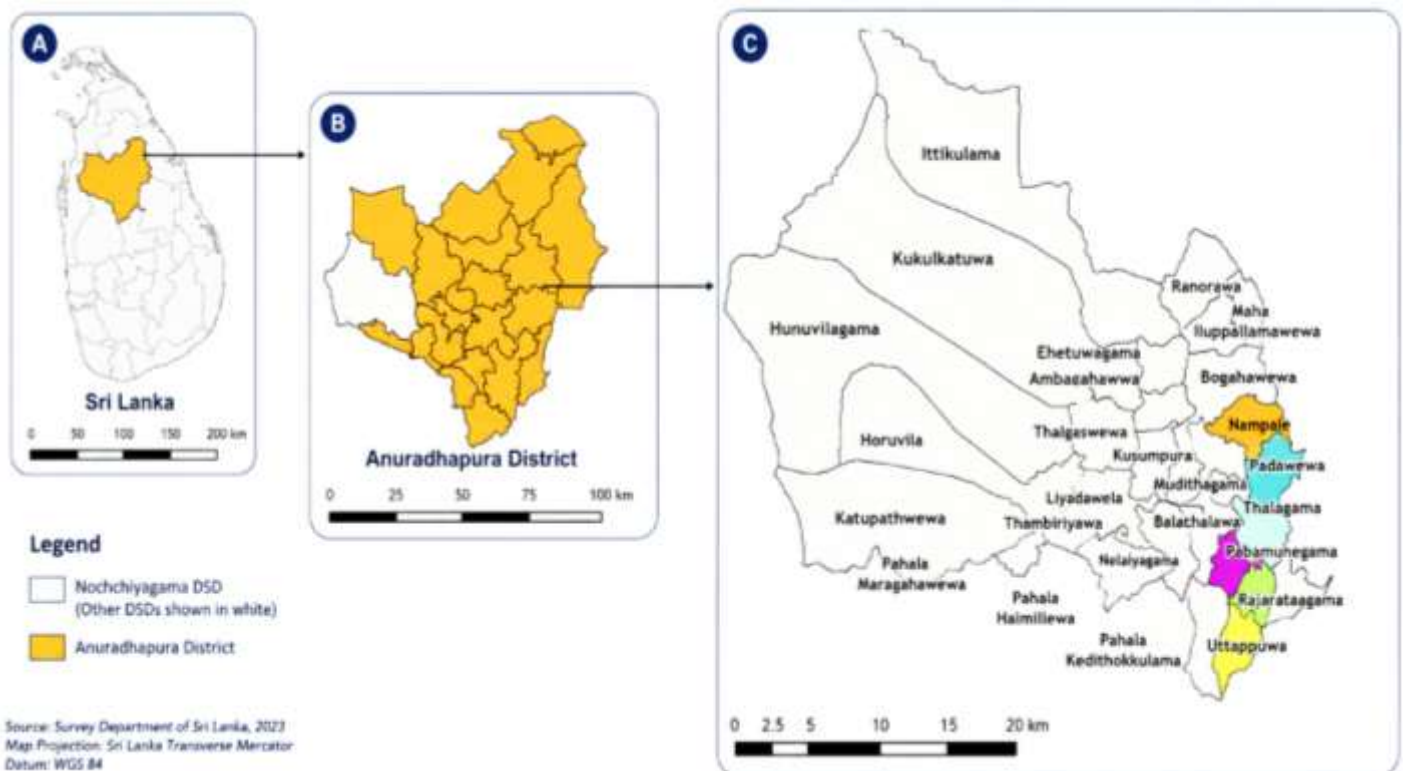
The primary data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The interview data were carefully reviewed to identify important ideas, repeated views, and common patterns related to traditional culinary knowledge and its potential for tourism promotion. The identified information was grouped into relevant categories and further organized into main themes and sub-themes according to the objectives of the study. Secondary data were used to support and explain the findings obtained from the interviews. Research papers, research books, annual reports of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, reports of the World Tourism Organization, and reports of the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority were consulted as secondary sources. Although this study used a qualitative approach, simple percentages were used in some parts of the findings to summarize the responses of the 40 participants. The percentages were calculated based on the number of participants who gave a particular response out of the total sample of 40 participants. These percentages were used only to clearly present the response patterns and were not used for statistical or inferential analysis. Therefore, the graphs and percentages presented in the findings are descriptive summaries of the interview responses and do not represent a separate quantitative

research method. The findings were presented according to the main themes identified through the analysis. Throughout the research process, the confidentiality of the participants was maintained, and the findings were interpreted based on the information obtained from the participants and relevant documentary sources.

Geographical Setting of the Study Area

Nochchiyagama is a Divisional Secretariat Division in the Anuradhapura District of the North Central Province of Sri Lanka. It is bordered by the Vilachchiya Divisional Secretariat Division to the north, the Karuwalagaswewa Divisional Secretariat Division of the Puttalam District to the south, the Central Nuwaragam Province Divisional Secretariat Division to the east, and the Wilpattu National Park to the west. Nochchiyagama Divisional Secretariat Division covers an area of about 967 square kilometers. Nochchiyagama Divisional Secretariat Division, which can be identified as a unique regional unit in the North Central Province, has a population of approximately sixty-one thousand. The total population of the Grama Niladhari Divisions of Dombawalagama, Galadivulwewa, Oththappuwa, Andarawewa and Adampane selected for this study is reported to be 8574 people (Divisional Secretariat Divisional Report, 2023). The data sources used to obtain information on the population distribution and population characteristics of the study area were the Survey Department reports, the Resource Profile of the Divisional Secretariat and the Grama Niladhari reports. These demographic and geographical characteristics provide an important background for analyzing the social, economic, and cultural activities of the study area.

The main route to access the Nochchiyagama area is from Anuradhapura city, passing through Puja town, and then travelling towards Colombo for about 25 kilometres. A map showing the geographical location of the Grama Niladhari divisions of Dombawalagama, Galadivulwewa, Oththappuwa, Andarawewa and Adampane, which represent the area surrounding the Mahaweli H zone of the Nochchiyagama Divisional Secretariat Division of the Anuradhapura District, has been prepared using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. This provides a clear understanding of the physical location, land distribution and spatial spread of the relevant Grama Niladhari divisions.



Map No. 01: Geographical location of the study area (Developed by the Researcher, 2024)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sri Lanka can be seen as a state that has inherited an advanced culture. Sri Lankan culture can be seen as a state that has flourished through a number of factors, including agriculture, traditional beliefs and consciousness, rituals, *hela vedakama*, customs and traditions, and traditional food and drink. Accordingly, cultural diversity can be seen within Sri Lanka and the presence of cultural elements unique to each region at the rural context and regional level can be seen as a uniqueness. The Rajarata region, a tank kingdom with cultural values, was a unique region. This is because the Rajarata civilization inherited a culture unique to the region as well as an advanced agricultural industry under advanced irrigation technology. This fact can be investigated based on the rural areas of the Nochchiyagama Divisional Secretariat Division, which represents the Anuradhapura District and belongs to the Rajarata civilization.

3.1 Traditional Consciousness Reflected in Culinary Traditions

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. Many countries in the world have turned to this industry for the economic benefits it provides. Developing countries in the world have also made tourism their mainstay. Many people travel for leisure, business, pilgrimage, sports, and health reasons. A tourist is a person who travels from his/her home environment to another environment for a period of not more than twenty-four hours per year without seeking financial gain (WTO, 1993). Although tourism did not exist as a business in the early days, it has gradually developed. As various countries have come to understand the importance of tourism, which has been developing, countries have focused on moving towards new dimensions of the tourism industry. Among them, tourism based on culture is very important. That is, many countries have their own cultures. They are used in cultural tourism, and they include the history, ancient ruins, customs, and traditions, arts such as dance, art, drama, flavors, and cuisines of those countries. They can be broadly classified into two fundamental categories, namely tangible and intangible aspects. Among these, culinary tourism is very important. It can be seen as a unique method that can be used in the development of a country's tourism industry. Food-based tourism can be seen as appreciating the history, culture, and environment of a country or region or an area within a country and providing them with the food and related customs presented by them as an experience to tourists. One of the most important factors in food-based tourism can be seen as the fact that the tourism industry is subject to the effects of constant seasonal factors, and therefore can be created as a solution to it. It can also be seen as a strategy to improve tourist attractions and to provide prosperity to the local community. It can be said that many countries such as Italy, India, Japan, China, the Philippines, etc. have been involved in this food tourism business for these reasons. These related activities can include food-based festivals, exhibitions, shows and health-friendly foods - and these countries can also use various strategies here. In Sri Lanka, there seems to be a culture related to local food that is unique to Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankans have a long history and it seems that they have paid primary attention to all aspects of nutrition and health when preparing and eating food. The staple food is rice, and the use of spices, vegetables, fruits, etc. are the mainstays of Sri Lankan food culture. Sweets such as *Kavum Kokis* and foods such as *Indiappa*, *Pittu*, etc. are unique to the country. Similarly, there are characteristics unique to the country in terms of eating habits, cooking methods, and serving methods. These tastes in Sri Lanka also vary regionally. Relative differences can be seen in the northern part of Sri Lanka, such as a taste similar to South Indian taste, and a mild taste mixed with spices in the southern part. Furthermore, during festivals, foods prepared according to other special tastes can be seen. Among these, unique culinary patterns of food consumption can be seen in the food culture in the Nochchiyagama suburb of Anuradhapura District in the North Central Province. The Anuradhapura district in the North Central Province is currently one of the most attractive tourist destinations. However, it was identified that there are many unique culinary traditions that have been passed down through traditional folk consciousness in the Nochchiyagama suburbs located outside the famous tourist center of Anuradhapura, within the Mahaweli (H) zone of the periphery. Accordingly, this study revealed a traditional culinary recipe that can be discovered in the Nochchiyagama suburbs. It seems timely to raise these unknown traditional food traditions in this study area to the national level and open them up to tourism attraction. For this, it is possible to create a high level of tourist attraction through wide publicity by utilizing natural heritage sites, culinary arts, Ayurveda, etc.

Therefore, this research conducted in the Nochchiyagama suburbs regarding the use of local food and beverages for the tourism industry reveals many unique results.

3.2 The History of Traditional Sri Lankan Cuisine Industry

Sri Lankan local food culture seems to have a long history. From the beginning of man, the methods used by them to obtain their daily food are evident throughout history. Information about this is revealed from the earliest period. Man, who started hunting animals by chasing them, learned to eat fruits and meat by burning them with the discovery of fire. Accordingly, a very important milestone in cooking was marked with the gradual production of clay items. Recently, these facts were confirmed through research conducted on primitive man by Dr. Shiran Deraniyagala. Accordingly, it has been shown that primitive man killed and burned seashells and wild animals to fulfill his food needs, and may have eaten grains and bones.

Furthermore, literary sources, chronicles, inscriptions, medical texts and cookery books are mainly important for uncovering historical information about the traditional food culture of Sri Lanka. With the emergence of Aryan settlements in the 6th century BC, information about the food system of Sri Lanka is found in chronicles. As mentioned in the Mahavamsa, when King Vijaya and his entourage visited Tammanna, Kuwanna provided food based on grains (Mahavamsa, 1966). This is evidence that the knowledge of grain use, food processing and food preparation methods existed in the early society of Sri Lanka itself. In the early period, there was a diet based on the natural environment, and over time, as the human lifestyle became more complex, the methods of selecting, preparing and tasting food items also developed. Due to this development, cooking became not just a necessity but an artistic process and it developed to the point where it can be recognized as the Art of Culinary Arts, one of the ancient "*Sivsata Kalas*".

The Saddharmaratnavali is a source that provides important information about the ancient Sri Lankan food system. A large number of local potatoes and vegetables can be identified among the food items mentioned in it. For example, potatoes such as *kukulala* (*Plectranthus rotundifolius*), *katu ala* (*Dioscorea pentaphylla*), *gonala* (*Dioscorea esculenta*) and *vel ala* (*Dioscorea alata*) seem to have played an important role in the diet of the people at that time. Information is also mentioned here on the use of vegetables such as *puhul* (*Benincasa hispida*), *karabatu* (*Solanum virginianum*), *kekiri* (*Cucumis melo*) and *vetakolu* (*Luffa acutangula*). These facts make it clear that ancient Sri Lankans had developed a diverse food culture by utilizing natural resources.

The Mahavamsa also contains a lot of information about rice-based foods. It mentions food methods such as rice porridge, milk rice, rice cooked with sugarcane, rice prepared with jaggery, rice prepared with honey and rice prepared with special medicinal ingredients. This shows that rice had become a fundamental part of Sri Lankan food culture. Furthermore, information about food related to the Anuradhapura period is found in the Saddharmalankara. In particular, details about sweets, spices, fish dishes and special foods prepared for festive occasions are included here. These facts indicate that food in ancient society was not only a nutritional requirement but also an element associated with religious, social and cultural activities. Another important source on the art of cooking is the *Supa Shastra books*. The *Supa Sastra Book*, written in the late 18th century in connection with the *Rajagedara* tradition of the Kandyan period, contains information on ancient food preparation methods, food combinations, flavoring methods and cooking processes. This can be considered an important source for documenting Sri Lankan culinary knowledge.

Epigraphia Zeylanica (1933) and the Inscriptions of Ceylon (2001) also provide important evidence of ancient food culture. The Thonigala Inscription (Epigraphia Zeylanica) and the Medirigiriya Inscriptions (Inscriptions of Ceylon) reveal information on food items, grains, beverages and other food resources provided to temples, government institutions and charitable activities. This shows that there was an organized system for food production, storage and distribution. Furthermore, knowledge of traditional food can be identified from medical texts. Texts such as the *Bhesajja Manjusava* and the *Yogaratnakara* describe the medicinal properties of food, its use and its relationship to health. However, it was only later that this ancient body of food knowledge was organized into separate culinary treatises. It seems that local food traditions and their associated knowledge systems were gradually challenged by various foreign influences, invasions and social changes. Therefore,

through the study of documented sources, the traditional food culture of Sri Lanka can be identified as a local knowledge system with a long history, linked to environmental knowledge, social traditions and cultural values.

However, there has always been diversity in local traditional foods. For example, it is said that seventeen types of food can be made from the '*jackfruit*' eaten. It can certainly be recognized that those types of food must have been diverse in taste. At that time, the villagers were naturally aware of diseases and the medicines to be given for them. Therefore, they did not need to go to doctors constantly. They knew about extremely hot and cold foods and they also followed measures for that. But unfortunately, as a nation, the natural food culture built over thousands of years has been distorted by the transformation that occurred during the colonial era, and it can be recognized that the Sri Lankan civilization has become imitative even in food, distorting the national identity. Here, we should especially emphasize that whenever the deterioration of food culture, which is a part of the culture itself, occurs, our national identity also distorts. However, it is a matter of appreciation that certain traditional foods, how they are prepared, and secret recipes, etc., still survive in undeveloped and unknown rural contexts. It can be pointed out that it is a strong responsibility of all of us to preserve and pass them on to future generations.

3.3 Traditional Cuisine in the Nochchiyagama and Surrounding Rural Areas

The people of the Nochchiyagama suburbs of the Anuradhapura district in the North Central Province seem to be primarily engaged in a rural context. Therefore, their lives are more peaceful and connected to the environment. Accordingly, the people of the Nochchiyagama suburbs, which belong to the study area, find most of their food in their estates, fields, paddy fields and their own chena cultivation. In the past, most of the people focused on eating what grew in their area. They even planted things obtained from the natural environment such as *moringa* (*Moringa oleifera*), *kathuru moringa* (*Moringa oleifera*), *plantain* (*paradisica*), *jackfruit* (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*) and etc. in their fence borders. Also, in the past, food was obtained through agriculture and the main food of all the parties was '*rice*'. Vegetables etc. were also grown through chena cultivation. Similarly, in the study of the culinary arts of the ancient Anuradhapura Kingdom, information about many food recipes is revealed through literary sources as well as inscriptions. Information about vegetables, fruits, sweets, meat, porridge and various desserts can be identified through the study of historical sources. In the study of information about the types of sweets used in ancient times, it can also be identified that coconut was used in the preparation of those sweets. It is also seen that meat foods were also included in their meals. It can also be seen that milk, ghee, etc. were also included in their meals. Thus, in the investigation of historical information on traditional culinary arts, it is seen that there was an advanced consumption tradition during the Anuradhapura Kingdom and that the Sri Lankans had a good knowledge of various foods. However, when paying attention to the traditional food patterns of the people of the Nochchiyagama area outside the city of Anuradhapura, which is known as a famous tourist center, many peculiarities were revealed. Also, a lot of information was revealed about the method of preparing those foods and the various methods of preserving them. In all these food preparation methods, the knowledge and folk consciousness that they have inherited can be particularly identified and it can be pointed out that it is a need of the age to preserve the folk consciousness associated with that traditional cooking for future generations.

3.4 Food Habits and Food Consumption Patterns Unique to Sri Lankan Culture

Regarding the food methods specific to Sri Lankan culture, it can be seen that the food habits of the people of this country show a unique socio-cultural orientation. It can also be seen that Sri Lankans have incorporated unique elements that are unique to them into their food habits. Also, since ancient times, Sri Lankans have spent a lot of time preparing food. It can also be seen that they prepare it well in a planned manner. Often, the basic reason for this can be pointed out that Sri Lankans are not used to fast food. They are very fond of food and drink found in the natural environment. It can be seen that the relationships that man has had with nature since ancient times have been a major factor in this. It can also be seen that sharing any food and drink they get with their loved ones at any time has been a good habit of Sri Lankans. Similarly, choosing food according to health-preserving methods developed according to an accepted methodology was also a habit. Therefore, local foods obtained from the natural environment were given priority in the daily diet of Sri Lankans. Ancient Sri Lankans did not forget to include foods that are beneficial to personal health and provide energy in their daily meals.

Also, cooking only the amount that suits one's taste can be pointed out as a unique feature that can be identified in the food culture of this country. Preparing enough food for everyone in the house or in a public place and minimizing waste is a characteristic of this. The ancients considered food to be a sacred object.

Therefore, eating while bowing to the rice bowl is a key feature that can be identified in ancient Sri Lankan society (Andagama, 1998).

- Washing hands before meals and eating in a proper place was a customary practice.
- Maintaining good posture while eating was considered important.
- People avoided eating while walking or standing.
- Stepping on fallen rice grains was regarded as disrespectful.
- Food was traditionally eaten and shared using only the right hand.
- Food was mixed gently with the fingertips before eating.
- Meals were consumed quietly and politely.
- Licking fingers or touching utensils with soiled hands was considered impolite.
- It was customary to eat sweets or fruits after the main meal and chew betel afterward.
- Guests were first welcomed with a glass of water before being invited to eat.
- Ensuring that guests did not leave hungry was a valued cultural practice.
- Food and drinks were served respectfully to satisfy the needs of guests.

Furthermore, it was confirmed that there are several food patterns unique to the area among the people of the Nochchiyagama suburbs. Accordingly, these food patterns can be seen at various times when people eat food, serve food, and prepare food. Accordingly, order can also be considered an important factor in the eating pattern. It also seems that there has been a certain order in the villagers when eating food since ancient times. First, the normal meal is taken. That is, under the normal meal, everyone eats 'rice'. After the 'rice' meal, a bitter dish and a special sweet are eaten. After that, fruits are eaten. These food consumption patterns are used not only in normal life but also in hospitality. The attitude of the people of this area was that this is an essential part of hospitality. This method is used even in charitable festivals such as '*Sanghika Dana*' held in modern times. Another unique feature of the food patterns native to these regions is the methods used for various occasions. That is, there are special methods for weddings, funerals, etc. At a wedding, many dishes are placed on the table for the guests to eat. Among them, the '*therum vyanjanaya*' is special. It is placed for the guests to choose from during the ceremony. If the guests are unable to choose the food, they are forbidden to eat from that table. Through all this, the ancients try to show the awareness of the culinary arts that exists between the bride and groom. The dish they choose is made using *polos* and *eggplants*.

Moreover, in this area, there are special dishes made for '*Malabatha*' at funeral ceremonies. Dishes like pumpkin, salt and pepper, dried chili paste, and chili paste are prepared for it. They are used for that with a bitter taste. Various methods of eating at a place like a wadi can also be identified. In the past, it was forbidden for them to eat food while tying a jatawa or talappawa. It seems that in the past, it was considered an offense to the extent of being fined. Therefore, it seems that people in the past have followed it well. These customs can be seen in practice even today. Even in the food taken to the paddy field, special features can be identified in the past society. Some of these elements can be seen in use even today. During agricultural activities, the food taken to the paddy field was the murutthettuwa, and it was an integral part of the yoke with dried fish or halamassan gravy, and it was also customary to use chopped coconut pieces with it. When studying the methods of serving food in the past in these areas, it was found that guests who came in the past did not eat on seats but sat on the floor without any discrimination. Accordingly, mats were spread and they sat on them. If a special guest was given a device called a '*kuru adiya*'. It seems that the food was eaten by placing the plate on it.

Moreover, it can be seen that the caste system was also influential in the past social mechanism when serving food. Food on a plate was accepted only if the guest was a farmer. If the food was served in a low caste, it was served on a leaf. That is, a banana leaf was placed in a pot. That pot was also very beautiful and special. It was made of leaves and was covered with a net to prevent sweating. Similarly, eating is also done in a device called a '*madakkuwa*' (Hemaloka Thero, 2008). It can be identified that the ancient inhabitants carried out their food

consumption according to the food patterns adopted by these unique methods. Similarly, the eating habits of the people of the study area can be shown as a concept fundamentally linked to the culture of the Sinhalese people of this country. Every aspect of it is linked to the local culture. When considered as the food habits of the people of this area, it does not spread over a wide range.

This is because according to the Sinhalese culture, the ancient villagers were accustomed to following food habits that were similar to everyone in the Sri Lankan civilization. It was identified that the people of the Nochchiyagama suburbs have been serving a glass of water before eating food since ancient times.

"When a guest comes to the house for lunch, we sit at the dining table and grab a glass of water from the kitchen to talk. It is still a custom today, no matter who is in our house"

(Interview with researcher, 2024.10.22)

The above-mentioned interview conducted in the study area reveals that a glass of water is offered as a symbolic invitation to eat. Also, since the Sinhalese people are also accustomed to eating *bulath kola* (Piper betle), it is mandatory to wash their hands and mouth. After washing their mouths thoroughly, they go to eat. They also provide an opportunity to clean their mouths after eating as a habit. These are done by those who serve food in the house. For this, after eating, they offer *pilamull*, *bombu*, *edaru* branches or pieces of roots for this purpose. It is believed that it is done even during a Sangha donation.

"On Sangika Dana Day, we offer the monks in our area the alms we have prepared, and then offer them sticks"
(Interview with researcher, 2024.10.22)

The above-mentioned interview can reveal the truth behind the proposed food consumption patterns. Also, since ancient times, the people of the Nochchiyagama suburbs believed that the secret to their health was the local food they consumed and the above-mentioned eating habits. Similarly, a plate or something like that is mandatory for eating. In the past, a pot or a leaf was used for this. Nowadays, a plate is used. Also, the habits of eating with the right hand and eating without making noise, sitting down and eating are popular among the people of this area. They can be considered as good customs that have been socially accepted since ancient times. Thus, through the interviews conducted in the Nochchiyagama suburbs, it was revealed that the villagers of the study area use traditional methods in their food consumption process.

3.5 Food preservation methods in the surrounding rural areas of Nochchiyagama

Moreover, in the investigation of culinary traditions in particular, it can be seen that the practice of food preservation is not unique to the study area but is a traditional practice of the entire Sri Lankan people. It seems that people who were familiar with thrift and orderliness resorted to this. If a food species is obtained from the natural environment, these preservation methods are used not only during the growing season but also during the periods when it is not available. It can also be seen that special methods of preserving these foods are followed for use during the rainy season. Accordingly, this can be seen as something that has been done traditionally. Many of the preservation methods are carried out by the ancient people of this area. It can be seen that they had good knowledge about the foods that can be preserved by drying them in the sun or by fire. The people of the Nochchiyagama suburbs mostly use *jackfruit* (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), *breadfruit* (*Artocarpus altilis*), etc. to preserve food.

"In our area, jackfruit grows on trees during the jackfruit season. We cut the jackfruit into small strips and dry those in the sun or in smoke, then put them in a jar"

(Interview with researcher, 2024.10.22)

"If you remove the 'pothu' of the jackfruit, dry it in the sun, fry it in oil, add sugar and honey, and it can be eaten for days" *(Interview with researcher, 2024.10.22)*

By following proper methods of preserving such foods, the relevant food items could be used even during times of scarcity. The villages of Dombawalagama and Galadivulwewa, which were selected as study areas, can be identified as areas where jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*) and breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*) were abundant. Therefore, it seems that the villagers in those areas had practical knowledge and experience in the traditional methods of preserving jackfruit and breadfruit-based foods. Accordingly, first the jackfruit or Breadfruit seeds are cut into small pieces and boiled in hot water for a short time.

Here, they are not boiled excessively, and then dried thoroughly under the sun. Others also use the method of drying by smoke by placing them in a basket near the kitchen stove. The dried jackfruit and cardamom prepared in this way are called "*Atukos*". Dried and preserved jackfruit and breadfruit are used as a staple food and as a flavoring during the dry season, and are sometimes mixed with sugar and honey and consumed as sweets. In addition, pickling is another important traditional method used for food preservation. Ingredients such as salt, lime, bilimbi (*Averrhoa bilimbi*), and ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) are used for this. Ginger is used to enhance the flavor of the food, and honey is sometimes added to the bilimbi. Others prepare it without using honey, using salt and other ingredients, and then dry it and add it to the food. It is clear that traditional food preservation knowledge has been passed down from generation to generation through such methods.

The combination of sour and sweet flavors in *mallum*, *sambol* and various *vegetable-based dishes* can be identified as a special feature in the local food culture. Another popular traditional method used to preserve food items is to bury jackfruit seeds in sand. The "*sand jackfruit seeds*" prepared by this process are then boiled and used to prepare various vegetable dishes. Furthermore, in some cases, jackfruit seeds are mixed with local spices such as ginger and pepper to make food products such as *aggala*, and are also consumed as sweets when combined with honey. Thus, it can be observed in the study area that people have adopted various local and traditional food preservation methods to extend the shelf life of the food items used in their daily food consumption patterns. It is clear that this traditional food preservation knowledge can be used to develop various food products by connecting them with modern market needs and thereby building self-economic stability.

3.6 Traditional Food Recipes Specific to the Rural Context in the Study Area

The food culture of Sri Lanka is diverse according to geographical, social and economic backgrounds. The daily food patterns of the people in each region have changed according to the lifestyle, environmental resources and professional nature. For example, the food consumption patterns of fishing communities differ from the food habits of people in agricultural areas, and the food patterns of people living in urban areas also show distinct characteristics. It can be seen that rural communities have fulfilled their food needs by maintaining a close relationship with the natural environment since the early stages of history. They adapted to a simple diet based on trees, vines, forest-related plants and natural resources. Since the ancient Sri Lankan rural people lived in areas near forests, it seems that they included the leaves, fruits, tubers and other plant foods available from the forest in their daily diet after trying them. Accordingly, the people of the Rajarata region have also used various food items obtained from the natural environment since ancient times. These foods not only fulfill nutritional needs, but also serve as a means of survival during times of crisis such as drought and famine. It can be observed that some of the foods used during those times are still available among the people in rural areas today.

Rice (*Oryza sativa*) is the staple food of the Sri Lankan people. *Rice* is usually included in two or three main meals of the day. Rice is prepared in various ways, including *kiribath*, *yellow rice*, *white rice*, *red rice*, *vegetable rice*, *olu rice* (*Nymphaea pubescens*) and *lotus seed rice* (*Nelumbo nucifera*). These types of food are distinguished by their taste, aroma and nutritional value. *Kiribath* also occupies an important place in Sri Lankan food culture, and is prepared in various ways. *Imbul Kiribath*, *milk rice* prepared with *green gram* (*Vigna radiata*) and *milk rice* prepared using *cow's milk* are among the main ones. Furthermore, various grain-based foods such as *grass rice* (*Setaria italica*), *millet rice* (*Panicum miliaceum*), *raw rice* (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*) and *corn rice* (*Zea mays*) also occupy an important place in the traditional food culture of the people of Rajarata. Similarly, traditional foods such as *pittu* also occupy a special place in the food culture of the people of Rajarata. Foods such as *Kurakkan pittu* (*Eleusine coracana*), *Igiti pittu*, *Madu pittu*, *Kudu pittu*, *Cassava pittu* (*Manihot esculenta*) and *Jackfruit pittu* (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*) are among them. Nowadays, *Kurakkan*, *Cassava* and *Jackfruit-based pittu* are widely used because the ingredients required for preparing these foods are easily

available from the local environment and they are closely associated with the traditional food habits of the people. Moreover, the Nochchiyagama suburb can be identified as an area where *rotis* are widely consumed. *Kurakkan roti*, *Cassava flour roti*, *Godamba roti*, *Kiriroti* and *rotis* prepared with the wild *plantain* (*Artocarpus nobilis*) are among the traditional foods here. The types of dishes consumed with rice are also diverse in the food culture of this area.

They can be classified as *Hodi types*, *Mallum types*, *Badum types* and *Sambol types*. Food items such as *milk gravy*, *coconut gravy* (*Cocos nucifera*), *chilli gravy* and *steamed gravy*, which are served in times of illness or when appetite is poor, are consumed by the rural people. In addition, various types of gravy such as *polos mallum*, *palakola mallum*, *Del mallum* and *cassava mallum* are also included in the daily diet. Herbal-drinks also have a special place in the traditional food system of this area. Herbal-drinks are prepared by the rural people to meet nutritional needs, increase physical strength and various health needs. For example, herbal-drinks made from *hathavariya* (*Asparagus racemosus*) and *undupiyaliya* (*Desmodium triflorum*) have been traditionally used for health care purposes. Moreover, porridges prepared using *mustard* (*Brassica juncea*), *coriander* (*Coriandrum sativum*), *rice flour*, *kithul flour* (*Caryota urens*) and *kurakkan flour* (*Eleusine coracana*) were used to increase physical strength. Furthermore, the data revealed that porridges based on *heen bovitiya* (*Osbeckia octandra*) and *barley* (*Hordeum vulgare*) were used for conditions such as diabetes. Thus, the interviews conducted in the Nochchiyagama suburbs revealed a lot of information about the various traditional foods and beverages available in the area. A large number of cereal-based foods, potato-based foods, leafy foods, porridges, beverages, gravies and sweets were identified.

This food preparation process shows that the rural people of the Nochchiyagama suburbs have developed a unique food knowledge system based on local knowledge, environmental understanding and experience acquired over generations. Therefore, this traditional food culture can be recognized not only as a local cultural heritage, but also as an important cultural resource that can be used for sustainable tourism development. The traditional food culture in the rural areas surrounding Nochchiyagama is not limited to just the process of food consumption, but is deeply intertwined with the environmental understanding, life experiences and indigenous knowledge system of the people of that area. These food patterns, which were developed through interaction with forests, tanks, farmlands and natural resources, contain special knowledge about identifying local plants, preparing them in a way that is suitable for eating and using them according to different occasions. Especially, people living under dry zone environmental conditions have developed methods of preparing low-cost and nutritious food using natural resources. Furthermore, these traditional food recipes can also be considered a medium that represents the social and cultural values of rural society. Food preparation methods, selection of ingredients, use of medicinal plants as well as food sharing traditions have been transmitted from generation to generation at the family and community level. Although these local food systems are gradually declining due to the influence of modern food patterns today, in rural areas like Nochchiyagama, those food traditions are still alive and the need to preserve them as a local heritage is clear.

Accordingly, interviews and field studies conducted in the suburbs of Nochchiyagama revealed a lot of important information about the various traditional foods and drinks in the area. Accordingly, it can be identified that various food traditions related to grains, potatoes, greens, porridges, beverages, gravies and sweets still exist in the life of the rural people. It appears that the knowledge about the selection of ingredients used in the preparation of these foods, their preparation methods, flavoring methods and the use of food according to special occasions has been built on generational experiences. In particular, these food traditions illustrate the self-sufficient lifestyle of the rural people and the close relationship with the natural environment. The practical nature of the indigenous knowledge system is demonstrated by obtaining the ingredients required for food preparation from the surrounding environment, identifying their nutritional and medicinal properties and using them in a way that suits daily needs. It can also be recognized that this knowledge has functioned as a system of shared experiences not only at the household level but also at the community level.

Therefore, the traditional food culture in the rural areas around Nochchiyagama is not only a food consumption pattern, but can be considered an important local heritage element that reflects the history, environmental

adaptation, social relations and cultural identity of the people of that area. Although these traditions are changing to some extent due to the influence of modern food patterns today, this knowledge is still preserved in the older generation and its transmission to future generations is an important step in preserving the local cultural heritage.

Table 1: Food Recipes Unique to the Nochchiyagama and Sourounding Rural Areas

Food Recipes Unique to the Nochchiyagama and Sourounding Rural Areas					
Grains Foods	Tuber Varieties	Leafy Varieties	Fruit Varieties	Medicinal Foods	Other Recipes
Wee (<i>Oryza sativa</i>)	Kukulala (<i>Dioscorea esculenta</i>)	Hal Kola (<i>Vateria copallifera</i>)	Karamba (<i>Carissa spinarum</i>)	Wel Mee (<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i>)	Polos Ambula (<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i>)
Bada Iringu (<i>Zea mays</i>)	Kodola (<i>Dioscorea alata</i>)	Telambu (<i>Sterculia foetida</i>)	Eraminiya (<i>Ziziphus oenoplia</i>)	Rasakinda (<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i>)	Polos Kanda (<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i>)
Kurakkan (<i>Eleusine coracana</i>)	Kidaram (<i>Amorphophallus paeoniifolius</i>)	Olu (<i>Nymphaea pubescens</i>)	Mora (<i>Dimocarpus longan</i>)	Kotala Himbutu (<i>Salacia reticulata</i>)	Kos Cutlet (<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i>)
Cowpea (<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>)	Kahata Ala (<i>Dioscorea dioscoreifolia</i>)	Telatiya	Thalamba (<i>Limonia acidissima</i>)	Olu Dandu (<i>Nymphaea pubescens</i>)	Thal Thibbatu (<i>Solanum trilobatum</i>)
Kollu (<i>Macrotyloma uniflorum</i>)	Wel Ala (<i>Dioscorea alata</i>)	Mee Kola (<i>Madhuca longifolia</i>)	Wal Indi (<i>Phoenix pusilla</i>)	Manel Dandu (<i>Nymphaea nucifera</i>)	Divul Hodda (<i>Limonia acidissima</i>)
Thanahal (<i>Setaria italic</i>)	Kandala Ala (<i>Dioscorea sp.</i>)	Tepu Kola (<i>Costus speciosus</i>)	Kikilmassa (<i>Flacourtia indica</i>)	Kohila (<i>Lasia spinose</i>)	Thibbatu (<i>Solanum torvum</i>)
Meneri (<i>Panicum miliaceum</i>)	Innala (<i>Plectranthus rotundifolius</i>)	Kara Kola (<i>Canthium coromandelicum</i>)	Bulanga and Masan Gedi (<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i>)	Iramusu (<i>Hemidesmus indicus</i>)	Thal Kola Vanjanaya

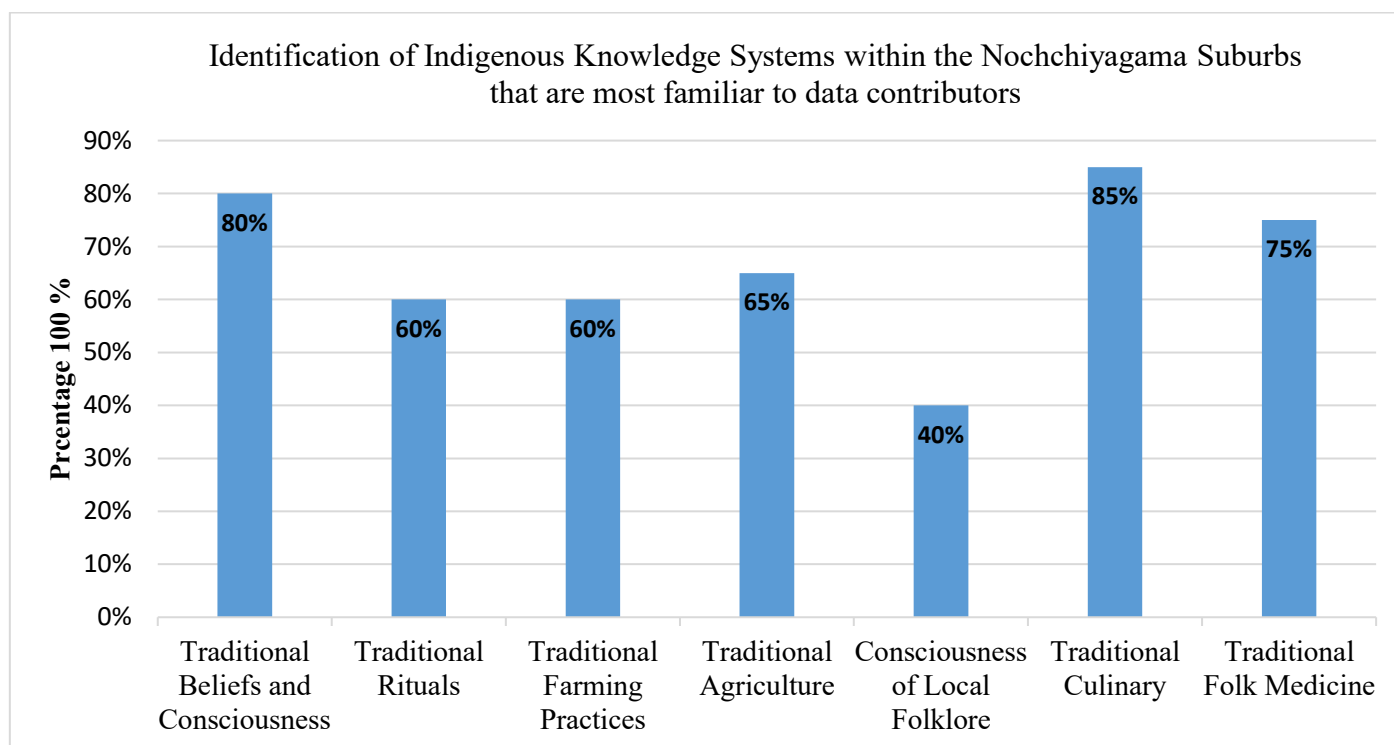
Source: Field Data Collection at Nochchiyagama and Sourounding Rural Areas, 2024

3.7 The Potential of Using Culinary Knowledge to Promote Tourism

In presenting the objectives and findings expected to be achieved in this research and presenting them for discussion, it is essential to examine the context of all the data collected. While this research primarily involves qualitative data analysis, it is expected to analyze the information collected as a whole. Accordingly, Nochchiyagama and the surrounding rural areas were selected as the study area for this research on the suitability of using culinary knowledge for the promotion of the tourism sector. Accordingly, the study area selected in this research included the Grama Niladhari Divisions of Dombawalagama, Galadivulwewa, Otthappuwa, Andarawewa and Adampane. The Nochchiyagama Divisional Secretariat Division consists of 36 Grama Niladhari Divisions and the study population of this research is the total population of the Nochchiyagama Divisional Secretariat Division. The total population consists of 19331 families (Divisional Secretariat Divisional Report, 2023). Accordingly, 40 individuals were selected for the sample of this study under purposive sampling. Here, data was collected from the elders and knowledgeable peoples in the rural context, taking into account the research objectives. Accordingly, the nature of culinary-related knowledge in Nochchiyagama and the surrounding rural areas was identified using structured interviews and FGDs. Here, data were collected from 40 data contributors included in the study sample using an interview guide and a structured questionnaire, and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis methodology. The main livelihood of the majority of the residents living in the study area is agriculture. In addition, public and private sector employment and business sector are also mainly active. Here, the basic socio-economic status of the community selected for data collection in relation to various demographic characteristics was examined by considering their age, gender, marital status,

educational status and their monthly income status. Furthermore, the region or area they belong to can be introduced as the most important factor in the population variables of this research on the suitability of using culinary-related knowledge in the study area for the promotion of the tourism sector. Accordingly, when focusing on the traditional folk knowledge prevalent in Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area, several aspects can be seen. This is revealed by collecting the following field data.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Suburbs of Nochchiyagama



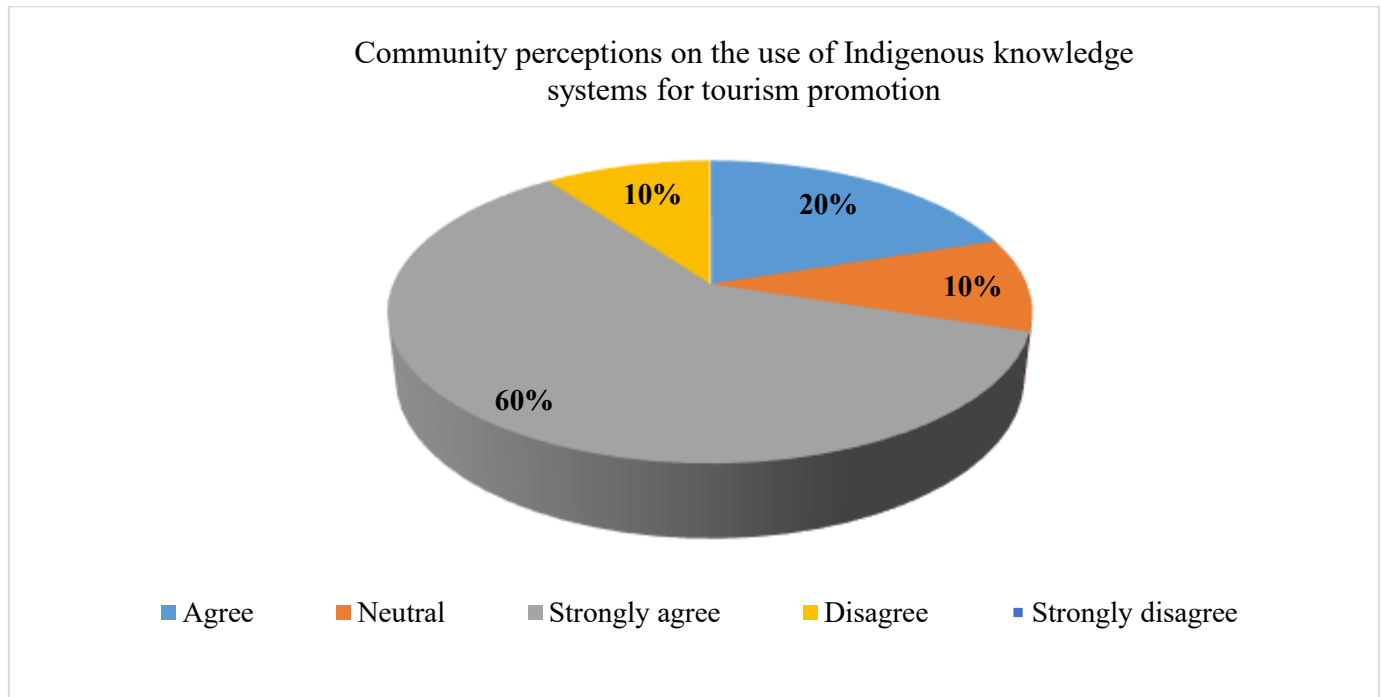
Graph No. 01: Identification of traditional folk Consciousness existing in the Nochchiyagama suburbs

Considering the above data graph, the above data graph was separated to identify the traditional folk consciousness that are most familiar to the data contributors selected in this research study in the Nochchiyagama suburbs. Through the ideas presented in this graph, it has been identified that the folk consciousness that are most familiar to each person are identified in the survey of the individual sample for various situations that are mixed with traditional folk consciousness in the study area. Accordingly, opinions were sought on various topics that are mixed with the folk consciousness of the villagers, such as traditional beliefs and consciousness, traditional rituals, local farming practices, traditional agriculture, folklore and local legends, traditional cooking and traditional folk medicine. During the survey, several traditional folk consciousness that were most familiar to the data contributors were identified among the folk consciousness existing in the Nochchiyagama vicinity. According to the values represented in the above data graph, a high percentage of individuals indicate knowledge related to traditional culinary arts. That is, traditional cooking. It is seen that 85% of the total sample showed a high preference for traditional cooking. Also, about 80% of individuals indicated that they were more familiar with the traditional beliefs practiced in the vicinity of the study area.

Furthermore, when asked about traditional medicine in the Nochchiyagama vicinity, about 75% of individuals expressed the opinion that traditional folk consciousness existing in the vicinity of Nochchiyagama was a familiar folk consciousness. Moreover, the interviews revealed that traditional agricultural activities are also carried out in this area. Accordingly, a percentage of people who are 65% compared to other traditional folk consciousness work with traditional folk knowledge related to local traditional agriculture and that these folk consciousness are closer to them. Furthermore, it was revealed through the interviews that many traditional rituals are carried out in this area and these values were shown as a percentage of 60% according to the above data graph. Furthermore, a small percentage of 40% of the total sample of people could be identified that people

have shown interest in local folklore etc. However, when identifying how the folk consciousness in the study area are closer to individual lives, a brief review of the above data graph reveals that the villagers in Nochchiyagama and the surrounding areas have a closer relationship with traditional cooking and folk medicine as well as traditional beliefs and consciousness. Other folk consciousness can also be identified in the study area, and a group living in an agricultural area in a rural context based on the above folk consciousness and working more closely with traditional folk consciousness can be identified in Nochchiyagama and the surrounding areas.

Community perceptions on the use of Indigenous knowledge systems for tourism promotion

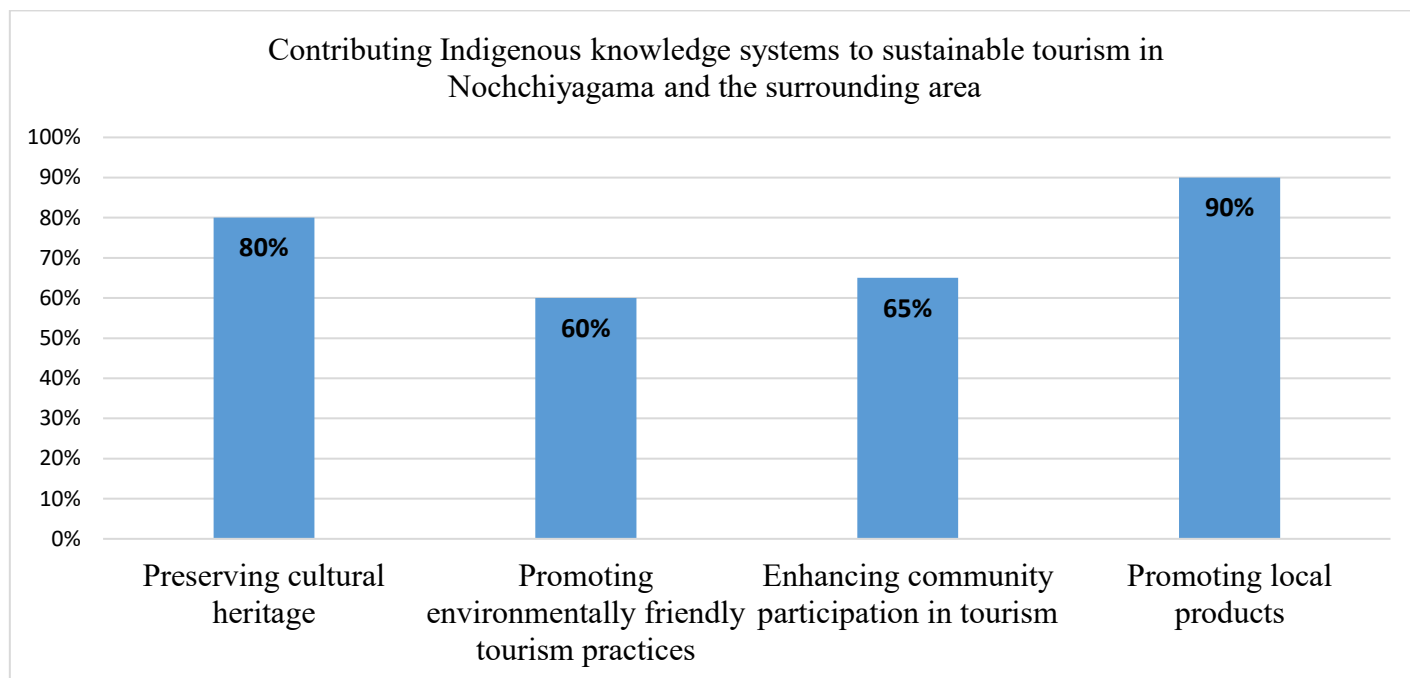


Graph 02: Community perceptions on the use of Indigenous knowledge systems for tourism promotion

According to the data in the above graph, when asking the data contributors about the possibility of using local knowledge systems to enhance the tourist attraction in the suburbs of Nochchiyagama, different opinions could be identified. It was observed that there were different responses among the data contributors regarding the introduction of these local knowledge systems, which are an intangible cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation, to the tourism sector. Here, about 20% of the total sample of people expressed their agreement with that proposition. It was also stated that about 10% of the people held a neutral opinion and the highest percentage of data contributors, representing 60%, strongly agreed with the use of local knowledge systems to promote tourism activities.

These responses indicate that the traditional knowledge, lifestyles, food culture, medicinal knowledge and environmental awareness of rural areas are recognized by the people as important resources for creating tourism experiences. However, it was observed that another 10% of the data contributors did not agree with this idea. They were of the opinion that using local knowledge systems preserved over generations for open tourism use could lose their original form and cultural value. Furthermore, they pointed out that presenting this knowledge to tourists without proper understanding could lead to its meaning being distorted or misrepresented. Accordingly, when analyzing the overall responses, the majority of the data contributors were of the opinion that local knowledge systems can be successfully used to develop the tourism sector in Nochchiyagama and its surrounding areas. However, it is clear that in carrying out that process, attention must be paid to the authenticity of local knowledge, cultural ownership and the protection of ancestral heritage.

Community Perception of the Contribution of Indigenous Knowledge Systems to Sustainable Tourism



Graph No. 03: Community Perception of the Contribution of Indigenous Knowledge Systems to Tourism

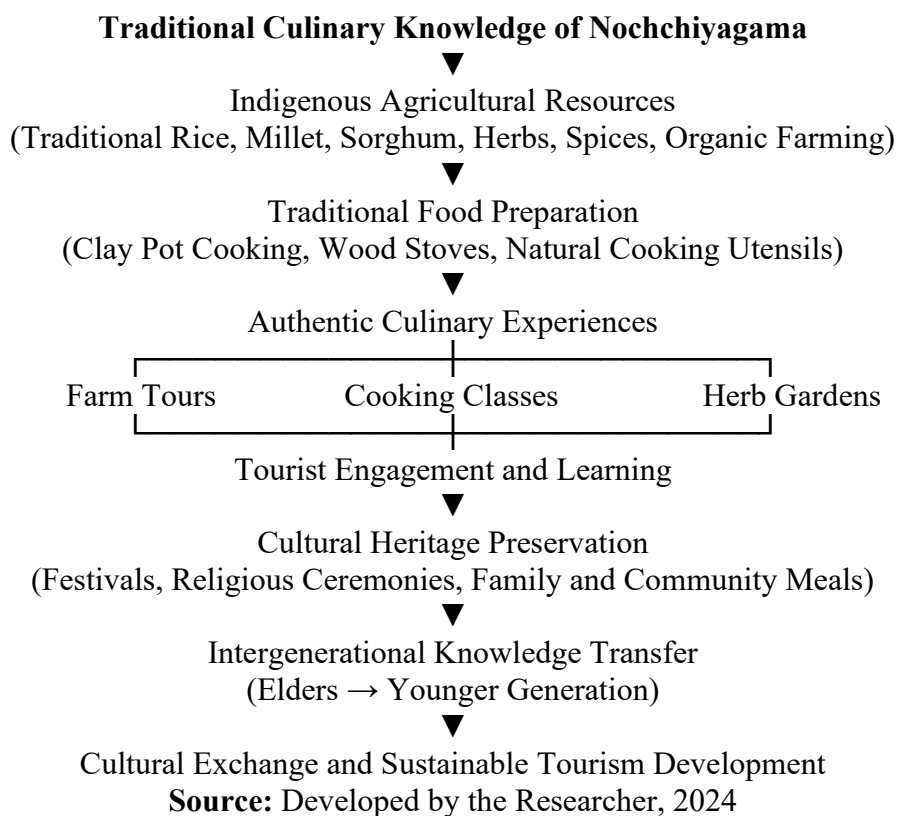
According to the study data, it can be identified that there is a positive attitude among the respondents towards the use of local knowledge systems for the development of sustainable tourism in Nochchiyagama and surrounding areas. They believed that integrating local knowledge systems that have been maintained for generations into the tourism sector can contribute to economic development as well as preserving cultural identity. According to the data analysis, about 90% of the respondents stated that the promotion of local products is important for sustainable tourism development. Accordingly, it seems that traditional food recipes, local food products and traditional culinary knowledge can be developed as tourism experiences. Also, about 80% of the respondents indicated the need to protect unpopular historical and cultural heritage. This shows that people are focusing on presenting local knowledge systems to tourists while preserving their original form and cultural value instead of commercializing them. Furthermore, about 60% of respondents emphasized the importance of promoting eco-friendly tourism activities, and about 65% of respondents indicated that community participation should be increased in the tourism development process. Accordingly, it seems that a sustainable tourism model can be built by integrating local knowledge, environmental conservation, and community participation. This process can create new economic opportunities for local guides, artisans, food producers, and other service providers. Accordingly, it can be identified that the people of the Nochchiyagama suburb are ready to make an active contribution to sustainable tourism development by preserving their cultural and environmental heritage and transforming them into tourism experiences.

3.8 Promotion of the tourism activities related to traditional culinary knowledge systems

The traditional cuisine of Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area is embedded in the folk consciousness of the rural community and has made a significant contribution to promoting tourism in a culturally and environmentally sustainable manner. This cuisine is not just a collection of recipes. It represents the collective knowledge of generations, shaped by the natural environment, religious practices and agricultural lifestyles that define the lives of the people of this rural area. For the people of Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area, food is a central part of their identity and each ingredient, cooking method and ritual reflects a fundamental connection with the land and local customs. This culinary heritage is closely linked to the agricultural lifestyle that continues to exist, where traditional cultivation methods, the contribution of natural resources such as village tanks and methods of food preservation continue to be practiced.

Harnessing this folk consciousness around food can attract tourists interested in innovative experiences that go beyond tasting local cuisine in Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area, and instead add value to the cultural dignity of the community. Furthermore, the traditional food system in the rural areas around Nochchiyagama can be used for sustainable tourism development based on the active participation of the local community. By involving local farmers, food producers, women's groups, artisans and community representatives in this process, the economic benefits can be retained within the community itself. This creates new market opportunities for local products and can also improve the living standards of the rural people. However, when incorporating traditional food heritage into the tourism industry, it is important to preserve its original form, authenticity, and cultural dignity without destroying it. There is a risk of distortion of ancestral knowledge by changing or simplifying food for tourism purposes. Therefore, these resources should be integrated into the tourism sector, respecting the knowledge of local people and preserving their cultural dignity.

Furthermore, the process of traditional cooking and eating in Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area is often a ritual that is performed according to a certain method. It is tied to the spiritual beliefs and agricultural rituals of the rural community. Also, those foods reflect a strong connection with the natural environment, using ingredients grown by the farmers themselves or obtained from the paddy or chena cultivation. This connection is celebrated through culinary rituals, where the preparation and consumption of food can also be seen as various offerings made to the land, gods and ancestors. During the Vap Magula or traditional ploughing festival, rice and milk porridge are prepared and blessed to ensure a bountiful harvest. Such cultural festivals can be showcased to tourists as part of a new experience and allow them to participate in these sacred rituals. By experiencing the rituals associated with these traditional foods, tourists gain an understanding of the spiritual values of agricultural practices in the rural area of Nochchiyagama.



The food culture created based on traditional grains, traditional crops and medicinal plants that are unique to Nochchiyagama and the surrounding rural areas, but unfamiliar to the outside world, seems to have a high sustainable tourism potential that can attract today's healthy and environmentally friendly tourists. Accordingly, farm-based tours, as well as traditional cooking workshops using clay pots and earthenware pots and wood stoves for cooking food can provide tourists with a new tourism experience.

In particular, by creating spaces where the stories and techniques of the elders of the community who own this traditional knowledge or indigenous knowledge can be shared with tourists and the younger generation, a tourism service with unique cultural, educational and economic value can be built in the Nochchiyagama area. Moreover, promoting the traditional food culture of Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area as a tourist attraction is in line with the global trend for culinary tourism, where tourists seek food-related experiences that reflect the history, culture and values of a region. Positioning Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area as a culinary heritage-based tourism destination can attract tourists who are interested in exploring local flavors and understanding their folklore. In focusing on traditional culinary-based tourism promotion strategies, various methods can be used, mainly based on food recipes. Accordingly, several tourism activities that can be implemented to transform traditional culinary knowledge and cultural heritage into tourism experiences are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2:Traditional Culinary Activities in the Nochchiyagama and Sourrounding Area

Strategy	Traditional Culinary Activities	Expected Outcomes
Food Festivals and Cooking Competitions	Organizing food festivals, live cooking demonstrations, culinary competitions, and cultural performances	Increased tourist attraction and promotion of local culture
Establishment of the Traditional Culinary Centres	Creating food museums, culinary heritage centers, exhibitions, and cooking classes	Preservation of culinary heritage and educational value
Social Media and Digital Marketing Platforms	Promoting local food culture through social media platforms, videos, blogs, and digital storytelling	Global visibility and increased tourist awareness
Counducted the Traditional Culinary Workshops	Conducting practical cooking classes and cultural learning sessions for visitors	Enhanced tourist experiences and cultural exchange
Collaboration with Tourism Agencies and Tour Operators	Developing culinary tourism packages, food tours, homestays, and eco-lodges	Increased tourist arrivals and economic benefits

Moreover, when focusing on the Promotion of tourism activities related to traditional culinary knowledge systems, strategies that can be suggested based on the experiences of foreign countries can also be substituted. Accordingly,

Table 3: International Practice for Development of the Culinary Tourism Industry

International Practice for Development of the Culinary Tourism Industry	Potential in Nochchiyagama and Sourrounding Areas
Traditional Food Presentation Methods	Serving food on banana leaves, clay pots, and traditional utensils
Food Promotion Programs	Promoting millet, sorghum, traditional rice varieties, and indigenous crops
Food-Themed Tourism Development	Creating culinary trails and food tourism routes
Food Exhibitions and Workshops	Organizing food fairs, culinary exhibitions, and educational workshops
Specialty Restaurants	Establishing restaurants dedicated to traditional regional cuisine
Street Food Culture Development	Developing organized traditional street food markets
Food Competitions and Festivals	Hosting annual culinary competitions and food festivals
Culinary Villages	Establishing traditional food villages that provide immersive visitor experiences

The local food culture, shaped by generations of agricultural knowledge, environmental adaptation and cultural rituals, offers tourists a holistic experience that understands the deep values of sustainable living. Community-led tours, cooking experiences and participation in agricultural and culinary rituals can sustainably sustain the tourism industry in the area by highlighting the rich culinary heritage of Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area. This approach not only preserves the food heritage of the community but also creates economic opportunities and fosters intercultural exchange. Therefore, using the folk consciousness of traditional cooking in Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area to promote tourism can present this area as a unique and meaningful destination for tourists seeking a real connection with culture, nature and heritage.



Promoting the traditional food culture of Nochchiyagama and its environs as a tourist attraction is a valuable opportunity to showcase Sri Lanka's culinary heritage. For tourists interested in cultural experiences in particular, the region offers much more than food, with unique flavors and recipes that reflect the agricultural landscape and traditional practices of the study area. Highlighting these aspects through a well-planned promotion strategy can not only attract tourists to Nochchiyagama and its environs, but also strengthen the local economy, foster cultural pride, and create sustainable tourism opportunities. Therefore, it is a timely need to promote the traditional food culture of Nochchiyagama and its environs as a tourist attraction.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tourism is recognized as one of the most dynamic and diverse industries in the global economy, contributing significantly to economic development, cultural exchange and social interaction. It is a sector that thrives on diversity, including historical landmarks, cultural traditions and the uniqueness of local lifestyles. For areas like Nochchiyagama, where Indigenous knowledge is deeply rooted in traditional practices, the potential for tourism development lies in promoting new local experiences for global tourists seeking authenticity and meaningful connections. In this regard, tourism in the Nochchiyagama and surrounding rural context can act as a transformative force that not only boosts the local economy but also elevates the cultural consciousness of the community on a global stage. The central conclusion revealed by this research was that there is a unique potential for promoting tourism rooted in Indigenous knowledge in Nochchiyagama and surrounding areas. This potential is characterized by the diversity of cultural expressions that are deeply intertwined with the daily lives and historical contexts of the local community. Accordingly, the research study highlighted how these cultural dynamics can be leveraged as tourist attractions for tourists who are particularly interested in traditional food culture. Accordingly, the focus here was on the culinary traditions of Nochchiyagama and its surrounding rural context and how this research investigated how to use that food culture-related Indigenous knowledge to promote tourism. Accordingly, the findings of this research further confirm that the Nochchiyagama area possesses significant cultural and heritage resources that can be used as a strong foundation for the promotion of tourism in Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area.

Accordingly, it was revealed that the culinary traditions of the study area, which consist of local ingredients, recipes and traditional cooking methods in traditional food culture, can be used as a major attraction for food-based tourists. It was confirmed that various food festivals, cooking workshops and farm-to-table experiences can create new employment opportunities for local farmers and food producers while highlighting the culinary heritage of the region. However, attention should be paid to the risk of destroying the traditionality and cultural dignity of these traditions through excessive commercialization. Thus, culinary culture was identified as a fundamentally important factor among the Indigenous knowledge systems existing in Nochchiyagama and the surrounding area and it was concluded that it has a unique potential to attract global tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences. Accordingly, while recognizing tourism as a transformative force that uplifts the local economy, its success depends on a 'community-centered' sustainable approach based on a regulatory framework that protects traditional heritage away from excessive commercialization and an educational program that empowers the community. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the rural context of Nochchiyagama can be positioned as a meaningful cultural destination within the cultural tourism industry by implementing tourism strategies that safeguard local identity and cultural consciousness and are driven by the active participation of the rural community.

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