

Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum

Women in Tourism: Unpacking the Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Prospects

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BRIEFING NOTE 31

HIGHLIGHTS / KEY POINTS

- Travel and tourism supports 1 out of 11 jobs across the globe and is expected to grow over the next 10 years with additional 24 million direct jobs. The dynamics of gender relations, especially in relation to host & guest societies is the emerging domain in the tourism discourses. So, in thinking about the dynamics of gender relations it is fundamental to talk about the livelihood conditions, the conditions of women in the labour force, women entrepreneurs, and women as part of the community.
- The latest Global report on Gender and Tourism from the UNWTO (United Nations World Travel Organization) says that 54% of people employed in tourism are women but the fact remains that only 12% of women are employed in tourism in India.
- The theorising around gender and tourism is an infancy stage in India. Because in India, we lag behind in the data around the employment of women in the Tourism industry. The problem gets further aggravated because the industry is very fragmented and employment is hugely based on seasonality, which makes it very tough to quantify and identify the number of women workers in the Tourism sector.
- Tourism has depleted natural resource, as it has encroached livelihoods and further enforced women's drudgery. It has sometimes also led to cultural commodification, twisting culture out of context, its meaning and its function. Cultural communities are promoted to suit the needs and the eye of the tourist rather than seeing them through the ways of their cultural practices.

The 2019 report of UNWTO highlights that the tourism industry added 3.6% to the 2018 World GDP. According to a similar report by UNWTO in 2010, women make up a large proportion of the formal tourism workforce where they are well represented in the service and clerical level jobs. The report also states that women constitute a major share of the workforce in the tourism industry across the world and are also engaged in invisible work in family businesses. The pre-existing gender norms not only affect the supply of labor force in the tourism industry but also affect the nature of demand for it. These gender norms along with cultural practices also lead to segregation of work leading to differences in income of male and females in the industry.

At the same time, the tourism sector claims that it provides significant employment opportunities for women. The UN Women's organisation supports the belief that tourism opens doors for women. Further the National Tourism Policy enhances women's participation in Tourism. However it would be worthwhile to examine that whether women chose livelihood opportunities or whether they are forced to opt for livelihood opportunities in the sector. Apart from ensuring better employment opportunities in the sector, the question remains to be asked is whether tourism is a significant employer in the rights-based framework. The forum thus attempted to raise these questions and at the same time unravel the complexities of women's roles in the tourism sector and the opportunities that are available for them. The purpose was to also understand the current trends of participation of women in the sector, the scope, the challenges and opportunities for women as formal or informal workers, entrepreneurs. And further how the tourism sector could play an important role in providing women a secure source of livelihood, independency and identity. The speakers for the forum were S. Meera (Nodal Officer, Indian Institute of Travel and Tourism Management, Nellore), Navpreet Arora

(Proprietor, Fun on Streets, Kolkata), Chinmayi Sarma (Assistant Professor, Jamia Milia Islamia University) and Ritu (Freelance Researcher and Consultant). The discussion was chaired and moderated by Deepa Krishnan (Founder, Magic Tours).

Story of the Tourism discourse: a broad perspective

Tourism as an industry is very broad and encompasses a variety of other sectors such as hospitality, travel and accommodations, guide tours, gems and jewellery, food and beverages, textiles, construction and infrastructure projects thus providing employment opportunities in all these sub-sectors and also to others including mechanical, construction, manual labourers. With its recognition as an industry, there is a wide range of income generation opportunities for women in both formal as well as informal sector. Since jobs in tourism are flexible and can be carried out from a variety of locations such as workplace, community and household, it is of great advantage for women as it allows them to take care of their household responsibilities as well. Yet there are a number of caveats.

Meera¹ began by explaining the nature of the Tourism industry, which she says is not a formal industry entirely. It includes both skilled and semi-skilled people and a compendium of many smaller segments like accommodation, hospitality, handicrafts and the like. So the nature of industry is quite different. The most fundamental aspect of the industry is that it provides seasonal employment and does not offer much scope for full employment opportunities. Further then, women are part of the sector despite its nature, which adds to the problem when employment is seasonal and there is always an element of risk involved in it. This means that there is a good part of the year when one has to remain without a job. She emphasizes that the nature of the industry thus should be kept in the background, when looking at things from a gendered perspective. Further, she underlines that the statistical data is also sometimes misleading and not just enough. The WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council), the UNWTO and the Ministry of Tourism, all of them carry different data figures and do not give a sense of the number of women working in the sector. Also the latest Global report on Gender and Tourism from the UNWTO (United Nations World Travel Organization) says that 54% of people employed in tourism are women but the fact remains that only 12% of women are employed in tourism in India.

In talking about the gender dynamics, Meera² emphasizes that with Travel and Tourism expanding, that supports 1 out of 11 jobs across the globe and is expected to grow over the next 10 years with additional 24 million direct jobs, the dynamics of gender relations in host and guest societies is the emerging domain in the tourism discourses. The theorising of gender and tourism is in infancy in India primarily because of the problem of quantification of gender disparity in India is not sufficient. There are no clear numbers of how many women does the tourism industry employ, because of the fragmented nature of the sector. Further she argues that the interplay of gender and social constructivism makes things more complex. Women in India are being construed to play certain roles. Women are expected to play certain roles and do not play certain other roles. There is another belief that women working in the tourism sector are doing just an extension of the domestic household activity. This comes from the fact that the hospitality aspect of Tourism industry is something that is part of women's activities inside the household and therefore an extension of their domestic work. In that sense there would be a probability to expect more women in the sector but unfortunately that is not the case. Also at the same time even though women represent between 60 to 70 percent of the global tourism workforce but they mostly represent the low skilled and low paid occupations, in housekeeping and customer contact areas. Moreover, women frequently suffer segregation in terms of education and training and on an average, are paid less than male workers for comparable skills. But at the same time tourism as an industry generally also doesn't pay well in comparison to other industries. However when we look at the disparity in wages, it seems to be very large and in both vertical and horizontal segregation. Further the sector poses additional challenges to reconcile work and family responsibilities for both men and women, which include high variable demand cycle with irregular working hours, part-time employment and unpredictable shifts. That holds one of the reasons for lesser women in the sector.

Meera³ elaborates the gender dimension in the tourism industry through three aspects- entrepreneurship, skill development and intervention. She explains this through a study that she conducted in parts of Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, with an attempt to understand the

challenges of women entrepreneurs in tourism industry, identification of skill requirements of women artisans (especially with respect to cultural tourism) and identification of community engagement in eco-tourism destinations. In talking about the women entrepreneurs she refers to the small-time entrepreneurs who have small shops, their challenges and to understand why they make less profit in comparison to male shop owners. Because out of the 40 entrepreneurs contacted in the study, 25 of them said that they made lesser profits. An attempt was thus made to find out what is it that actually leads to such a situation (in parts of Kerala, Periyar region and other eco-tourism destinations and some parts of Andhra Pradesh). The second aspect of the study which was the identification of skill requirements of women artisans, was mainly to understand the capacity building aspects and the skill gaps that existed among men and women. This research was carried out in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh which took into account Kalahasti and Tirupati regions where Kalamkari is practiced as an art. The study attempted to find out the skill requirements of the women artisans and if there are any women centric factors which deter them from accruing the skills required. The third aspect which was to identify the community engagement in eco-tourism destinations, was solely conducted in Kerala in four eco-tourism destinations. The study took a political sustainability approach to really understand how many women are able to participate in the eco-development committee as members and in decision making positions. The attempt was to understand how many of them are able to give inputs for decision making, how many of them have opportunities to form trade unions etc.

Talking about the findings of the study, Meera⁴ shared that as far as the aspect of challenges to women entrepreneurs was concerned, it was found that the gender specific factors alone do not contribute for their underperformance. In other words, the factors which are pertinent to women, like social taboos or mobility aspects, are not solely responsible for the underperformance of women entrepreneurs. The reason for underperformance is mainly because of tourism specific factors, which is seasonality, non-availability of finance, irregular income. For the second aspect of the study, with respect to finding the gender dynamics of skill development of the artisans in Tirupati and Chittoor district area, it was found that there is a positive

correlation between skill requirements and women centric factors. This means that women who are artisans in that particular area contribute a lot towards the Kalamkari work but unfortunately don't get an opportunity to train themselves, or to teach it for the other future generations or even to sell their products directly in the market. They need an intermediary to present their products and to make their products reach the market. So, as far as skill requirements are concerned especially in Andhra Pradesh in this particular region, the women artisans need to be trained more and because of this reason they are not able to get opportunities to present themselves or even perform better.

As far as the aspect of intervention in the study was concerned, Meera⁵ argues that it was found that there was no gender difference in political sustainability. The research for this aspect of the study was conducted in Kerala where the HDI index is gender positive. So technically the gender inequality is comparatively less. The women committee members do get an opportunity to present themselves in the committee meetings and to make their voice felt. However she observes that the participants shared that they do hold various administrative positions in eco-tourism committees but many times women are denied the higher positions. So the women have to mostly settle down by being the Vice-President and cannot become the President, for which mostly men are opted. In that sense even though there exists no discrimination as far as representation is concerned, but when it comes to holding power, there is discrimination.

Further Meera⁶ concludes that there is work that needs to be done on gender and tourism, however it is not just limited to gender. Because she contends that gender disparity or discrimination not only exists in tourism, it is prevalent all over. And it shows in states where people have a positive approach towards women and gender is being construed positively, women are progressing fast. But in places where there isn't a gender positive approach, the discriminations seems to loom large. So, it is not only about correcting gender disparity but correcting all measures which go towards gender equality.

The case of Eco-Tourism and the tale of women's drudgery

Chinmayi Sarma in her paper, Indigenous Women in Assam: Bearing Burdens of nature, culture and

market brings to light the effect the recent neo-liberalism and climate change have on the local communities, mainly women. She emphasizes how the market forces when come to work in the tribal regions affect the lives of these communities and bring in major cultural changes. The paper highlights the impact of consumerism on the ethnic culture in the indigenous areas by taking Chayani Borduar Forest Reserve as an example. It brings to forefront the vulnerabilities of indigenous women arising as a result of the rising pressure of showcasing the primitive modes of operation to the city eye. This has an impact on the overall social structure of these communities as it guides the nature of work for males and females in the community.

In a similar light, Sarma⁷ began by presenting her argument with a micro perspective, which is required to understand the actual meaning of empowerment in women's lives affected by tourism. She pushes for us to understand the cultural dichotomies that arise in the face of tourism practices in a particular context. She specifically talks about the case of eco-tourism. It is important to understand the difference between a tourist and a traveller, because the gaze of both remains different. As it is the gaze that determines how a space would be attributed a certain quality and terminology, between the host and the guest community. This terminology between what the host community understands versus the guests of the space, determines a lot about the economics. As space is a very contested category. She gives the example of the Sandubi lake (in Guwahati) for instance, where a lot of nature trail and walks happen. There are many "backpack travellers" who visit this area and stay in the homestays of the locals. The water distribution system in the area is an indigenous system created traditionally by the local community. However with so many travellers who throng the area (especially on the weekends from the Guwahati city) have extremely degraded the whole water distribution system, because of excessive presence and misuse of the indigenous systems. Because of this reason, there was a minor tremor in the region and the whole traditional system collapsed. It collapsed due to the pressure of the over-bearing presence of "tourists". Thus Sarma emphasizes that it is important to understand whether there are tourists or travellers and how their presence effects the local eco-systems. At the same time, Sarma also gives an example of preservation in

the face of heightened eco-tourism practices. In a place called Mawlynnong in the Meghalaya, there are many sacred groves and double decker/single decker root bridges. Now the local community got together and created a system where there are community volunteers who collect tickets from tourists visiting the place, so that the system doesn't disintegrate.

Presenting the case of Assam, Sarma⁸ contends that the tea-industry tourism is a big thing there. Even though the tea industry is very famous in Assam but it is not indigenous to the state and people who tend to the tea industry are also not indigenous. They come from the Chhota-Nagpur belt. However there is the tea museum which tends to the tea industry tourism but at the same time it is only the outsider 'tourist' who can visit and not the locals as they don't have such resources. Also the tea workers are always women, who do not have any kind of access, entitlement or resources to be part of such a thing, like the tea industry tourism. They merely become objects in the whole process but not part of any other process. It is important that Sarma points this out, to actually show the (gendered) inequalities embedded in the tourism industry.

Sarma⁹ gives another narrative of how eco-tourism affects the traditional, indigenous practices of local communities. In the river island of Majuli in Assam there are many upcoming eco-tourism ventures, because of which the island is fast depleting and only one-fourth of it is left compared to what it was in the 1800's. The mask-making practice of Majuli is a very unique culture practiced on the island. These masks are not made by any ordinary sand or soil. It is made by a particular type of soil called the kumharmatti. But today because of the fast depletion of the island, the kumharmatti is also depleting. So now there is sand that is replacing the kumharmatti but one cannot make the masks out of sand. This is affecting the whole culture of masks. With the men also migrating outbound for livelihood opportunities, it is the women who are making the masks. However the women are making the masks with the plaster of paris and not the traditional kind. Further even though the tourists have always procured these masks because of its souvenir quality, but due to the loss of its traditional touch and now they being available on e-commerce outlets (like Amazon), the people too are not buying these masks anymore. So, the dichotomy is completely changing, and it then becomes important to keep these nuances in mind

when talking about tourism, eco-tourism being an upcoming phenomena.

Further talking about the politics of homestays, Sarma¹⁰ contends that with eco-tourism percolating, but there is no investment or support being provided either by the government or private players. That is why homestays came into being. But homes which are domestic spaces have been now made to convert into productive, economic spaces. So, women who were just women, mothers and sisters with their existing social relations have now had to become workers without wages. So yes apparently, the employment of women in industry is increasing, but are they becoming a part of the labour force or are they remaining to be people without wages (helpers), is a question that needs to be probed. So then it again becomes an extension of the women's domestic responsibilities where they are becoming confined to their houses which have now become productive spaces.

Sarma¹¹ further explains about this exoticization of eco-tourism that neglects the impact on the local community as well as women's burden of work. She talks about this through the example of forest villages and how the pastoral communities like the Gujjars and Bakarwals go to the meadows, use the trans-humans routes from the valley to the hill etc. Now a lot of vloggers (travellers making films of this process and blogging about it) have begun to follow these communities on these routes and record the whole process. However in this process the women are left behind and end up catering to the needs of those who are coming and filming them. They end up taking the parallel domestic responsibility of catering to the tourists and because of which their bodies are increasingly becoming burdened.

Another aspect to the whole homestay business which Sarma points out is the increase in violence in these homes now. This is primarily because there is increase in the levels of alcoholism, because the services provided to the tourists staying in these homes are not equivalent to the income getting generated. Also with liquor, which was initially the traditionally brewed liquor, used to be called saquoth or apong. But now that system is also changing as the normal liquor has made inroads in the community. Traditional liquor was never heavy on the body but the normal liquor is not. So there is a rise in alcoholism and domestic violence in these spaces and women are no longer safe in their homes which have turned them into homestays.

Also further one sees that in all the beneficial positions which involves money or liquidity, it is the men who are employed and not women. The women are left at the drudgery whereas it is the men who are being employed as travel guides or festival contractors. Moreover it is not even the tribal men from the forest villages who get employed but men from the mainland who get such employment opportunities.

Another point that Sarma¹² raises about eco-tourism and the exploitation around is how there is a burden on the local communities to reproduce long lost cultural practices to woo the curious traveller. One sees this that, what the Boro woman would not wear a Dokhna in normal times, she is now forced to wear it everyday especially during weekends because she has to adorn herself for the tourists. In that sense it becomes more of a form of museumizing themselves so as to attract more and more tourists. Also indigenous foods and dishes which are made through fermenting bamboo is a very arduous process. But now it has to be produced on a continuous basis to suit the needs of the travellers. So the spaces have become more and more demanding.



Source: Chinmayi Sarma, XXXI GEP Discussion Forum, Nov 2019

Further talking about the famous Hornbill festival of Nagaland, Sarma¹³ contends that a certain imagery that died with the colonial ethnographers has been re-invoked today, with the whole idea of the exoticization of the Tribes. There are now stalls of the 'head-hunting' tribes. It is ironic because the homogenization and exoticization of the tribes is done at the same time. As the idea still remains that development of these 'head-hunting' tribes can only happen through the mainstream idea of development, therefore homogenising the different contexts and histories of these tribes. Thus they bear the burden of their own development and at the same time museumize themselves for the mainland,

curious tourist/traveller's gaze. Further these festivals are not traditionally run community festivals, these are run by the government in order to increase mobility. However it is an extremely uphill task to even reach the destination of the Hornbill festival, because the roads are not good and Nagaland itself is a very daunting terrain. In that sense how is the economy getting mobilized, how is it changing lives of women, how is the HDI of Nagaland getting affected by linking to tourism practices, are questions that need to be pursued.

Lessons in building a sustainable community model

Ritu¹⁴ brought to light a case study of an action research project based in a village called Aati in Uttarakhand in the Kumaon region. The action research was an attempt to understand how communities could come together to invent local tourism initiatives. Ritu spoke about this as an insightful experiment because it moved beyond just the macro perspective and ventured into the nuances and complexities of the processes of gender, caste, economy as well as the local politics and how they play a role in building initiatives and contribute to the understanding of empowerment. The work was done by the Uttarakhand Environment Education Centre, under the aegis of ICSSR and the National Mission on Himalayan Studies, to understand the resilience of the hill communities. How would local communities themselves design initiatives which they thought would make their village or their hamlet resilient? So, it was a very bottom up approach.

Ritu¹⁵ elaborated that after their research in Uttarakhand, post the Kedarnath disaster, it was clear that environmental degradation was happening everywhere and there were serious issues around climate change. Moreover with growing disasters, the relation of people with the natural resources was also changing. The young women especially, clearly didn't want to engage in farming, or in the forest. The narrative was also around how these young women didn't even want to actually live in the village but wanted to get married outside or live in the town. This showed that the agriculture based livelihood was failing and there was crop degradation. This also pointed to the shift to towards non-agricultural livelihoods. This background was the motivation behind an action research based plan to arrive at the understanding of empowerment with the community.

In explaining the study, Ritu¹⁶ describes that the village Aati is located 50 kms from the Almora district, very close to a town called Danya, located right by the road between Almora and Munsiri. Therefore there remains a lot of tourist movement on this route. In Danya, itself there are a lot of hotels and shops where people stop by to get tea and food etc. Even though the economy has been agriculture based, but with the town nearby, has generated a lot of non-farm employment. The project started in the form of village meetings. It started with a very blank state by asking questions like what would the villagers want to do that would contribute to a resilient Aati. It started with these kinds of engagements, with women's group and village and youth meetings. The two main things that emerged which people really wanted to work on, was one to enhance their cash income and second was water security. The community decided this and further decided that they wanted to set up a small eatery- a local dhaba, on the roadside from where all tourists pass, which would serve local Pahadi cuisine. Further they proposed that if they have this shop then they can directly use and sell their locally grown produce, instead of going through a middleman or the market. This helped them to link the whole ecosystem together. For the water scarcity, it was proposed that polythene lined tanks be built which augment the storage capacity of a household, which contributes in regeneration and maintenance of springs. As the whole community was involved into this, including the women, they chose that the location of the dhaba be close to their house, so they don't have to travel a long distance and can contribute more productively. The women decided for themselves that as most of them have to cater to other household work also, so they rotate their shifts and help each other. Another issue that got resolved by the community meetings themselves was how unmarried young girls who were able to communicate in Hindi were supposed to be the ideal choice for working the dhaba. However the elder men and women resisted to this idea because of the safety of these young women. So over the course of discussions and meetings it was decided that the young men from the community would take turns to assist the girls in the work and also take care of any trouble or anti-social elements around. These ideas emerged organically and in that sense enabled the sustainability of the whole model.

In that sense, Ritu concludes that by following this process of community engagement, the power gets diffused, and enables empowerment at the individual level as well as the social and economic level. And tourism initiatives can then act as an innovative medium for such a transformation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is a need for a collaborative effort with multiple stakeholders involved, including individuals, policy makers, researchers and entrepreneurs, for change to happen in the sector. From the researcher's angle, there are a lot of dimensions in gender, especially in tourism which has not been explored in India as well as in other countries. So, probably an attempt can be done by the researchers, for instance to look into the gender sensitive demand perspective of tourism. It is found that women who travel alone are very less. So naturally in the demand aspect of women tourists are less. So perhaps there is a need to bring more women to travel. When women begin to travel more, there increases the scope for the role of women in tourism. Although role of women in tourism is a supply aspect, but still if demand is there, naturally more women will come into fray and they will be able to contribute more.

There needs to be the development of gender-based variables for understanding gender dynamics at various levels, forms and sectors, as tourism is not a single industry. There are women in entrepreneurship, in manager holding positions, as community members and at different levels in eco-tourism and cultural tourism. And thus it is important to understand the nuances of gender stereotyping and explore gender identity strategies.

Further gender stereotyping is also an issue that needs to be addressed and needs to undergo a change. And then prospects and challenges of gender presentation in tourism also needs to be

looked into. It means how women present themselves in tourism, like in what roles do we find more women and in what they are lesser in number. For instance, only 34% of women are there in managerial positions across industries, all over the world. So what are the challenges that women have in taking up managerial positions and how can they be addressed.

For policy makers, there is a need for the development of a gender sensitive participatory framework at various levels. This is recommended keeping in mind what the government has been doing as far as the gender issue is concerned in tourism. Not much has been done except for the introduction of safe and honourable tourism for women. And in that sense tourism needs a lot more push to come from the government. There is a need to come out with gender sensitive participatory frameworks, gender aware framework, exploration of discriminatory strategies, and gender responsive budgeting. And further directions for gender accommodation framework too, is recommended because women need certain special facilities, in terms of childcare, maternity leave, social security benefits. Further all these aspects have to be looked upon in policy making as well as in capacity building.

As far as the stakeholders are concerned, there is a need for minimising gender disparity through implementation of gender neutral strategies, such that disparity has to be minimised in the sense that women have to be given a chance to take up managerial positions. Further abstinence from gender blind practices to ensure mainstreaming of gender equity is a must. The term stakeholders will encompass tour operators, travel agencies and all others who are involved in tourism. So, probably a platform needs to be created where men and women are represented in the same way and they are also been given the right place.

Endnotes

¹ S. Meera, XXXI GEP Discussion Forum, Nov 2019

² S. Meera, XXXI GEP Discussion Forum, Nov 2019

³ Ibid.

⁴ S. Meera, XXXI GEP Discussion Forum, Nov 2019

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Chinmayi Sarma, XXXI GEP Discussion Forum, Nov 2019

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Chinmayi Sarma, XXXI GEP Discussion Forum, Nov 2019

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Chinmayi Sarma, XXXI GEP Discussion Forum, Nov 2019

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ritu, XXXI GEP Discussion Forum, Nov 2019

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

References

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Speakers at the Forum

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Ritu (Freelance Researcher and Consultant)

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