

As Women, Are We Really Economically Empowered? A view from the point of view of Tourism

<https://countercurrents.org/2018/04/10/as-women-are-we-really-economically-empowered-a-view-from-the-point-of-view-of-tourism/>

10th April 2018

Do we enjoy the same quality of life as our male counterparts? How can we, when the figures of women in influential positions tell us otherwise? Assuming that they are in those positions, it is an open secret that women are paid 25% less than men and in many cases much less.

Some of the data regarding women are self evident:

- While 53% of Pourakarmikas are men, 80.7% of manual scavengers are women.
- Indian Air Force has 5%, Indian Army 3% and Indian Navy 2.8% women (c. 2014)
- Only 11% of the total police force in India, are women
- Out of 24 sitting judges in the Supreme Court, only one is a woman!
- The average representation of women MPs (12.15%) is higher than the national average of women MLAs in state assemblies, which stands at a dismal 9%.
- 8% of all enrolled **undergraduate students in India are women.**
40.7% of all enrolled PhD students are women
- **Women earn 57% of what their male colleagues earn for performing the same work. The more educated the woman is, the wider the gender pay gap and this gap increases as women advance in their careers**

According to UNWTO, International tourist arrivals grew by a remarkable 7% in 2017 to reach a total of 1,322 million, according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. This strong momentum is expected to continue in 2018 at a rate of 4%-5%. In India itself foreign tourist arrivals grew at a rate of 9.7% and domestic tourists increased by 12.7%.

Fantastic figures, one would say, but what does it hold for women?

With the recognition of Tourism as an industry, there is a wide range of income-generation opportunities for women in both formal and informal sector. Tourism jobs which are often flexible and can be carried out at various different locations such as the workplace, community, and household creates a wide range of opportunities for women. In the tourism industry, the percentage of women who work in the industry is high, but their function is dominated by unskilled, low-paid jobs

Women face many challenges in tourism, because they are often slotted in low status, low paid and precarious jobs in the tourism industry. Stereotyping and gender discrimination have relegated women to mainly perform jobs such as cooking, cleaning and hospitality. Tourism by itself is seasonal and is volatile in nature. In many destinations links have been found between tourism and the sex industry which could make women more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.^[1]

Looking at some statistics with regard to women's employment. India is a country where 42% of the workforce are women. There is a 29-71% ratio of women to men in the Urban workforce, which means the rest are part of the rural *unorganised* labour class! So one asks where is the empowerment or is it that a woman having a job is itself empowering?...Pakodanomics?

The primary objective of this article is to look at the picture as it is, on the economic empowerment of women specific to the tourism industry. According to an UNWTO report women make up a large proportion of the formal tourism workforce: Women are well represented in service and clerical level jobs but poorly represented at professional levels.

- Women in tourism are typically earning 10% to 15% less than their male counterparts.
- The tourism sector has almost twice as many women employees as other sectors.
- One in five tourism ministers worldwide are women.
- Women make up a much higher proportion of own-account workers in tourism than in other sectors.
- Women perform a large amount of unpaid work in family tourism businesses

Notwithstanding these points, there is still much to explore and analyze. For example, how do women's pay levels differ between tourism jobs; how do women's hours in tourism compare with men's; and how to define and measure women's unpaid work in family tourism businesses?[2]

Tourism as an industry ranges on a very broad spectrum and encompasses employment opportunities in almost all its branch sectors. ie, people have a short sighted understanding of this industry. Most would only entail hospitality as a part of it. However, it ranges from, hospitality, travels and accommodations, guide tours, gems and jewellery, food and beverages, textiles , construction and infrastructure; women labour force in the rural sector who are involved in the mega tourism infrastructure projects which includes the mechanical, construction , manual labourers; the women in outsourced security services and those who are cleaners and manual scavengers and more. There are there government schemes that directly target women for skill development for this industry but only to the extent that it is for the class of workers that are at the staff level and not at the managerial level per se.

Specific schemes like the *STEP* scheme of Ministry of Women and Child Development and The Skill Development Scheme of Ministry of Skill development and Entrepreneurship attempts to train women to cater to the Hospitality Industry and the tourism sector with its range of services of starting from receptionists, to bartenders, drivers, government staff who come in contact with tourists like tourist mitras and guides, bakers and confectioners, stewards and cooks. However there is no data on how many women have got employment through this and the role of the ministry of tourism in ensuring that.

Big budgets of Rs. 10,000 crores announced for the *Start Up India Scheme* By the Prime Minister to encourage experimentation among start-ups. Till now its not clear which section of women have actually benefited through this scheme and/or have these schemes been linked to different sectors through different ministries?[3] There is a need to have an analytical data on how many women and which sections of women benefited trough this initiative. Are these start ups linking well with tourism developments in the region and how are they impacting the status of women in the marginalised sections of the various development sectors including tourism?

The processes and institutions created through the tourism projects do not have enough participation of women who are not evenly placed in positions to take decisions in these tourism development committees- Eg: the Asian Development Project of Community Based Tourism In Himachal Pradesh by the Ministry of Tourism.

Tourism initiatives are not inclusive enough to involve women in the decision making. Big tourism projects do not have any kind of processes where women of the marginalized communities can be included . The women in the Panchayats have very little participatory roles in decision making on tourism processes. The women who are members of the self help groups are not included in tourism initiatives effectively. There isn't any streamlining of work which would have well defined strategies to involve women. There is no sustainable mechanism to ensure long term or permanent participation of women in tourism projects.

Women have a very little role in giving consent in meetings called by the forest departments and other departments like tourism for implementation of schemes. Often men do the negotiations and acceptance without even considering the added burden that fall on women with these schemes. The needs of women are not taken care of even in the event of relocation as women are not given opportunities to talk about these. Some initiatives which only looks into the well being of certain section of women through running home stays and accommodation units by the Eco Tourism Development committees which can be seen in the Kanha National Park and in others. Advertisement of private companies in wildlife tourism reflect token initiatives which claims to contribute to conservation by serving sustainable livelihoods for the local Adivasi people.

With the present budget of 2018, there has been a reduction in the required contribution of the women workers who are enrolled in the Employees Provident Fund Scheme from 12% to 8%. The MUDRA loans provide only around Rs. 40,000 on average – hardly enough to start a productive enterprise. So women who have been the main takers have not been able to do good enough to cope up with massive shifts in livelihoods taking place in different regions. The tourism sector which has come up majorly in different regions has not been able to connect with such women takers either.

Although there are so many more points to consider, one can safely conclude that tourism is worth investing in; it has the potential to be a vehicle for the empowerment of women in developing regions. Tourism provides better opportunities for women's participation in the workforce, women's

entrepreneurship, and women's leadership than other sectors of the economy. But women in tourism are still underpaid, under-utilized, under-educated, and under-represented; but tourism offers pathways to success.

As illustrated, the success and failure of any economic empowerment initiatives hinges upon the intent of its genesis. Unfortunately, most of the so called drives in India fail rather despairingly because the entire emphasis is on the theoretical conception and barely any on its implementation and feedback mechanism to plug the loopholes into the same. The entire process of budgetary allocations, non bureaucratic decentralized distribution of authority, the emphasis on awareness and need of women forthcoming for such schemes and deployment of fool proof skill and training development programs, the feedback mechanism on percentage participation, successful completion, absorption into the work force, all of these parameters benchmarked against a time line of delivery are indispensable for any hope of real world success of the eyewash we indulge in the name of empowerment!

[1] http://www2.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/folleto_global_report.pdf

[2] http://www2.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/folleto_global_report.pdf

[3] (<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/modi-announces-tax-sops-funding-support-for-startups/article8114334.ece>)

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