

## Research Note

# Empowering Women through Tourism: A Study of Kullu Valley

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the issue of women empowerment through tourism in Himachal Pradesh, a predominantly rural state where tourism is a flourishing industry. The tourism industry cannot be visualised without women participating actively in the growth of the industry. The role of women in informal tourism settings such as running home-stay facilities, restaurants and shacks, crafts and handicrafts, handloom, small shops and street vending is significant in Himachal Pradesh. Women have gained tremendous importance since the advent of alternative tourism. General perceptions of the native population are that females play a passive and submissive role in tourism. Through this paper an attempt is made to understand female perceptions and to determine if tourism is actually leading towards women empowerment. Using stratified random sampling, 150 females were selected on convenience as well as judgement basis from the Kullu area of Himachal Pradesh, India. The selection of Kullu area was based on tourist arrivals; Kullu district of the Himachal Pradesh is amongst the top three tourist destinations in the state. While selecting the sample, care was taken to choose respondents that represented the entire population. An opinion survey was administered on the sample. Response to each statement was evaluated on a 3-point scale of ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’ or ‘Cannot Say’ and each opinion and statement were assessed statistically using frequencies and percentages. Survey results indicate that tourism is actually leading towards empowering women.

**Keywords:** Alternative tourism, informal sector, local community, tourism, women empowerment

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## Women in Tourism

Tourism has demonstrated its potential for creating jobs and encouraging income-generating activities to benefit local communities in destination areas. The tourism

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sector definitely provides various entry points for women's employment and opportunities for creating self-employment in small and medium sized income generating activities, thus creating paths towards the elimination of poverty among women and local communities in developing countries.

Tourism, both international and domestic, is a booming industry worldwide that is growing at a rapid pace. It has emerged as a strong economic force. The upsurge in tourism has affected people's lives one way or other as tourism is a service industry that is people oriented. Women have also been contributing directly and indirectly in both the organised and unorganised tourism sectors. In fact, the tourism industry cannot be visualised without the active participation of women in its growth. The tourism industry is one of the major employers of women. It offers various opportunities for independent income generating activities while simultaneously affecting women's lives in destination communities.

In gender terms, the ILO reports (2001; 2007) that women account for 46% of workers in wage employment in tourism globally. However, expanding the definition to include catering and accommodation brings the proportion of female labour in tourism up to 90%. To quote the report:

"They [women] occupy the lower levels of the occupational structure in the tourism labour market, with few career development opportunities and low levels of remuneration (some estimates suggest that wages for women are up to 20% lower than those for men). The greater incidence of unemployment among women is attributed to their low skill levels and their low social status in many poor countries. They also tend to be the first affected when labour retrenchment occurs as a result of recession or adjustment to new technology. It should also be noted that the majority of workers in subcontracted, temporary, casual or part-time employment are women (ILO, 2001: 74)."

According to the Global Report on Women in Tourism (2010): "...tourism has the potential to be a vehicle for the empowerment of women in developing regions. Tourism can account for better economic opportunities and can prove to be a vehicle for upliftment of women than any other economic activity. Women in tourism are still underpaid, under-utilised, under-educated, and under-represented; but tourism offers pathways to success." According to UNWTO/UN (2010) findings on women's role in tourism include:

1. Women make up a large proportion of the formal tourism workforce.
2. Women are well represented in service and clerical level jobs but poorly represented at professional levels.
3. Women in tourism are typically earning 10 to 15% less than their male counterparts.
4. The tourism sector has almost twice as many women employers as other sectors.
5. One in five tourism ministers worldwide are women.

6. A large amount of unpaid work is being carried out by women in family tourism businesses.

These UNWTO/UN(2010) findings do not present a very rosy picture of women empowerment through tourism. Based on these findings, it can be deduced that though tourism offers tremendous employment opportunities for women, they are mostly occupying clerical positions and not serving as professionals. They are hired to do menial jobs and are often less paid than their male counterparts.

A very strong argument in favour of tourism development is that it generates employment at different levels due to the wide range of services and products it requires. Tourism does provide a range of activities where women can participate and also creates opportunities for entrepreneurship development. Global data on numbers of women and men working in tourism-related professions suggest that the organised tourism sector is a particularly important sector where 46% of the workforce comprises women (in general, 30-40% of the workforce is women) (ILO, 2007). It appears that there has been a broad increase in the participation of women in the tourism industry at a global level.

The informal sector is the most direct source of income for local communities in tourism in the developing countries. In the developing world 60% of women (in non-agricultural work) work in the informal sector. Much of this is linked directly and indirectly to tourism. The role of women in informal tourism settings such as running home-stay facilities, restaurants and shacks, crafts and handicrafts, handloom, small shops and street vending is significant. But these roles and activities that women perform in tourism are treated as invisible or taken for granted.

Like other industries, in the tourism industry too, the typical 'gender pyramid' is prevalent - lower levels and occupations with limited career development opportunities being dominated by women and key managerial positions being dominated by men. In India too, women in the organised tourism sector are relegated to relatively low skills, low paying or stereotypical jobs like front-desk and reception, housekeeping, catering and laundry services. They face very high risks of sexual harassment and exploitation and are discouraged from forming unions or associations to consolidate their strength and influence. Proportionately, women earn less than men. Women feature significantly more in part time and/or temporary employment and are typically paid less than men for the same work done. The role that has been assigned to women is just the extension of the traditional roles they play in families and society, which is as a caretaker of the family and looking after their every need. The relative benefits of tourism development to women and men inevitably reflect socio cultural norms regarding gender relations and the sexual division of labour (Apostolopoulos & Sönmez, 2001; Long & Kindon, 1997; Scott, 1997). It has also been widely noted that women have been generally less able than men to access and benefit from tourism

work and business (Apostolopoulos & Sönmez, 2001; Scott, 1997; Sinclair, 1997a; 1997b; Swain, 1995).

### **Tourism in Kullu Valley**

Himachal Pradesh is a small hill state in India. The development of tourism in Himachal Pradesh began with the Second Five-Year Plan. Himachal Pradesh received about 15,089,406 tourists in the year 2011 (Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Himachal Pradesh, 2011). Of this, 14,604,888 were domestic tourists and, about 484,518 were foreign tourists from different parts of the world. Tourism is now a booming industry in Himachal Pradesh. The state is blessed with bounties of natural beauty, offering a cool and comfortable climate, a serene environment, fascinating customs, fairs and festivals and breathtaking thrills of adventure. Himachal Pradesh has 12 districts. High priority has been accorded by the State Government to the tourism industry, which has also emerged as a major sector for the development of the economy of the state. The Himachal government has also developed appropriate infrastructure for the growth of tourism in new areas where the private sector may be reluctant to undertake such activities initially. A number of new schemes have been initiated to boost Nature, Adventure, Historic, Religious and Rural tourism. 'Home Stay' is another scheme which has been initiated to promote rural tourism in the State. As a result of high profile media attention, a significant rise has been noticed in tourist numbers during the last few years. The contribution of the native community in general and women in particular is quite significant in these alternative forms of tourism in Himachal Pradesh.

Various steps have been taken by the authorities to promote alternative forms of tourism, which would not burden the fragile eco-system of the state. Rural tourism and community tourism are being promoted in the state providing tremendous opportunities not only for the rural people in general but also providing for sustainable tourism growth. This particular type of tourism is proving to be beneficial for the women of these areas and it has proved to be a provider of opportunities for the rural women thereby leading to women empowerment. Rural tourism is instrumental in empowering rural women.

### **Objectives, Aims and Scope**

Himachal Pradesh is a small hill state in India which is predominantly rural. The population of Himachal is 6,856,509 with almost 90% residing in the rural areas. Females constitute half the population with 3,382,617 with males being slightly more with 3,473,892 (Himachal Pradesh Population Census, 2011). Though the contribution of women is tremendous in the tourism sector in Himachal, much of their work is

indirect and informal in nature. Therefore the main objective of this paper is to determine whether tourism has truly empowered the women in the State.

The area of Kullu-Manali has been deliberately chosen because the district received the second highest number of domestic tourists in Himachal after Shimla and the highest number of foreign tourists followed by Shimla in the year 2011. Satellite areas around the district are rural and these places are frequented by tourists.

Table 1.

*Domestic and international tourist arrivals in Himachal Pradesh*

District	Tourist arrivals (2011) in top two tourist districts of Himachal Pradesh		Total arrivals in 2011
	Indians	Foreigners	
Shimla	2,818,270	134,167	2,952,437
Kullu	2,659,527	138,488	2,798,015

*Source:* Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Himachal Pradesh

## Literature Review

There is a dearth of literature on women empowerment through tourism. Most of the authors suggest that there is a definite relationship between women empowerment and tourism in general. Ateljevic & Peeters (2009) explain the nexus between women empowerment entrepreneurship and tourism, emphasising that it is a process of social innovation.

### Understanding Women Empowerment

It is generally noted that empowerment is a process by which individuals, organisations and communities gain mastery over their own lives. Empowerment is self-actualisation of competencies which results in opportunities (Rappaport, 1984 cited in Sofield, 2003). Empowerment is always discussed within the topic of community development especially in ecotourism literature (Scheyvens, 1999; 2000; Zeppel, 2006). Scheyvens (1999) designed an empowerment framework to analyse the impacts of ecotourism ventures on local communities which consists of four levels of empowerment: economic, psychological, social and political. She emphasised the need for involving local communities in the development of tourism in their particular areas.

Empowerment has been defined as infusing people with power (Narayan, 2002) World Development Report, 2002; 2000), that is, providing access to resources, and

expanding an individual's power to make decisions, consequently resulting in greater autonomy (Kishore & Subaiya, 2008; Jejeebhoy, 1995).

Empowerment has come to denote women's increased control over their own lives, bodies, and environments. Women's empowerment, emphasis is often placed on women's decision-making roles, their economic self-reliance, and their legal rights to equal treatment, inheritance and protection against all forms of discrimination, in addition to the elimination of barriers to access resources such as education and information (Kishore, 2008).

Women's empowerment can be seen as a process in which the following elements will be considered: awareness/consciousness, choice/alternatives, resources, voice, agency and participation. This dimension of women's empowerment is linked to enhancing women's ability to make choices over the areas in their lives that matter to them, both the strategic life choices that Kabeer (1999) discusses and to choices related to daily life (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003).

Batliwala (1993: 4-5) surveyed organisations working for women's empowerment in South Asia in the early 1990s to stimulate discussion and improve programing. She suggests that "the process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power, may be termed empowerment." According to Batliwala "the goals of women's empowerment are to challenge patriarchal ideology; to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality;... and to enable poor women to gain access to, and control of, both material and informational resources" (1994: 130). She focuses on gender while recognising and attempting to address multiple discriminations. Batliwala recommends a comprehensive and integrated approach whereby women address their own objectives in the domestic and public spheres, and take collective and mass action.

Kabeer defines empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (1999a: 437). Kabeer recognises that the choices open to women are often limited compared to men of the same community – a manifestation of gender inequality – and that women can internalise their lesser status in society (2001: 24). The critical factor is whether the choices that people are making are based on their own preferences and priorities, or limitations in their options. To show a link between individual choice and wider social change, Kabeer suggests evaluating the consequences of choices "in terms of their transformatory significance, the extent to which the choices made have the potential for challenging and destabilising social inequalities and the extent to which they merely reproduce these inequalities" (2001: 26).

Rowlands does not clearly define empowerment, other than to say that "women's empowerment... encompasses women moving into positions of 'power over', but... also embraces their movement into 'power to, with and from within' – generative

rather than controlling power” (1998: 15). ‘Empowerment in close relationships’ with husbands, parents and mothers-in-law, “is the area of change that comes hardest; it is the place where the individual women is ‘up against it on her own’, and where positive and negative aspects of her life tend to be most closely intertwined” (Rowlands 1998: 23).

### **Understanding Gender and Tourism**

A well established tradition of work on gender and tourism has addressed a broad range of issues, case studies and approaches. Scholars within tourism studies have long argued that tourism is a highly gendered industry (Kinnaird, Kothari & Hall 1994; Kinnaird & Hall 1996). Kinnaird & Hall (1996: 100) argue “Unless we understand the gendered complexities of tourism, and the power relations they involve, then we fail to recognise the reinforcement and construction of new power relations that are emerging out of tourism processes. From the values and activities of the transnational tourist operator to the differential experiences of individuals participating as either hosts or guests, all parts of the tourism experience are influenced by our collective understanding of the social construction of gender.”

One such dynamic is the gendered characteristics of tourism work. Feminist research has identified a clear segmentation of men’s and women’s work in tourism. This shows how the majority of women’s work is concentrated in seasonal, part time and low paid activities such as retail, hospitality and cleaning (Sinclair, 1997a; Chant, 1997). Gender refers to socially constructed roles and behaviours of men and women in which gender relations are characterised by unequal power and norms that determine an unequal distribution, of resources, work, decision making, political power, and the entitlement of rights and obligations in both the private and public spheres (Thierry, 2007). Gender is a system of cultural identities and social relationships between females and males, It is a significant variable in any study of human relations that is distinct from biological differences between sexes (Swain, 1995). Most tourism studies done in relation to gender tend to touch upon gender difference from the perspective of women tourists, which cover a wide range of issues such as perception, motivation, empowerment etc. Besides, some existing tourism research regarding gender cover mostly the issue of employment with its relations to gender segmentation and income inequalities (Breathnach, 1994; Jordan, 1997; Munoz-Bullon, 2009) and gender exploitation in tourism or the sex industry. Research has also been carried out on gender analysis in the tourism industry, for example Kinnaird et al. (1994) but the impacts of tourism and their potential to enhance the community lives are rarely studied from the gender perspective.

One of the earliest published collections of gender in tourism studies was an edited volume by Kinnaird et al.(1996) attempting to stimulate debate on the gendered

nature of tourism-related activities and processes, in the context when social construction of tourism was lacking a gendered component in the literature. The authors focus on three principle issues which are crucial to an understanding of gender in tourism (Kinnaird et al., 1994). First, tourism is a process which is constructed from gendered societies and therefore all aspects of tourism-related development and activity embody gender relations. Second, gender relations over time inform and are informed by the interconnected economic, political, social, cultural and environmental spheres of any society engaged in tourism development. Third, power and control are articulated through race, class, and gender relations in tourism practices.

### **Research Questions**

Review of literature has suggested that gender related issues are crucial in the tourism industry as there is a need to understand the gendered nature of tourism. It has been suggested by various authors that though tourism empowers women, a great deal of gender segmentation and income inequalities exist in the tourism industry. Focussing on these issues, the following research questions have been framed for this research paper

1. Does tourism contribute towards upliftment of women in Kullu region by making them self-reliant?
2. Do women in Kullu have a high confidence level because of tourism?
3. Does tourism present immense opportunities for employment of women (formal or informal) and income-generation in their native area, setting the foundations for poverty reduction and local economic development?

### **Methods**

This study presents the results of a study of 150 women of Kullu valley of Himachal Pradesh who are directly or indirectly involved in the tourism industry. The paper explores the perceived impacts of tourism on their livelihood, sustenance and status in society. The women constitute approximately 85% of the workforce indirectly or directly involved in tourism in the Kullu valley. The survey was conducted in different villages of Kullu and Manali and Bhunter region. Using stratified random sampling, 150 females (n=150) were randomly selected based on convenience and judgement from Kullu, Manali and Bhunter and neighboring villages for the interview. The final sample consisted of 50 respondents each from the destinations of Kullu, Manali and Bhunter areas of Himachal Pradesh. All the respondents were local residents of the study area. An opinion survey was administered on the sample. The survey consisted of 'six opinion statements' to gauge the response of the local female population on tourism as an instrument of women empowerment. Response to each statement was

evaluated on a three point-scale of 'Agree', 'Disagree' or 'Cannot Say' and opinions were assessed through statistics using frequency and percentage of respondents on each statement.

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents revealed that the majority of women working in the tourism sector were married and were in the age group of 31-50. The majority were educated up to matriculation level. Their household income per month was also good, with the income of the majority of the respondents being in the range of 10,001 to 20,000 Rs per month (Table 2).

Table 2.  
*Socio-demographic profile of women working in the tourism sector*

Variables	Categories	Number	Percent
Age	20-30	30	20%
	31-40	45	30%
	41-50	35	23.3%
	51-60	24	16%
	Above 61	16	10.7%
Marital Status	Unmarried	12	8%
	Married	125	83.3%
	Widowed/Separated/Single	13	8.7%
Educational qualifications	Primary/uneducated	35	23.3%
	Matriculation	82	54.7%
	Graduation	27	18%
	Higher Education/Post Graduate/Professional	06	4%
	Household income	Up to 5000 Rp	07
5001-10000 Rp		47	31.3%
10001-20000 Rp		65	43.3%
20001 and above Rp		31	20.7%

## Findings and Discussion

### Perceptions of Respondents on Tourism Empowering Women

Tourism has definitely contributed towards women empowerment in the Kullu valley of Himachal Pradesh. More than 59% of women agreed with the statement that tourism has uplifted their social status. Tourism has proved to be a source of employment for the women folk of Kullu Valley of Himachal. More than 57% stated that they have become financially independent because of tourism. More than

53% of the native women agreed with the statement that working in the tourism sector has increased their self-confidence. They were also of the opinion that working in the tourism sector and interacting with the foreigners had definitely given a boost to their self-confidence. Himachal Pradesh is a predominantly rural state and the villages of Kullu district which are also rural offer much potential for alternative tourism. There is no dearth of alternative accommodation like homestays etc. in these places. According to the official website of Himachal Tourism Department, the number of registered homestays in Kullu district is 434. These homestay units are operated by the native population of the area. The homestay units which are managed by native women, provide opportunities to these women to work and interact with the tourists, More than 58% of women are in agreement with the statement that these alternative forms of tourism such as homestays provide more opportunities for the native women. Also, 66% of the women agreed to the statement that the majority of women work in the informal or unorganised tourism sector. More than 81% of the sample agreed with the statement that the majority of the workforce engaged in the making of handicrafts in Kullu are women (Table 3).

Table 3.  
*Tourism contributing towards women empowerment*

Sr. No.	Opinion Statements	Responses (n=150)		
		Agree	Disagree	Can't Say
1	Tourism has uplifted the social status of women in my area. (RQ1)	89 59.3%	40 26.7%	21 14%
2	I have become financially independent due to tourism. (RQ1)	86 57.3%	40 26.7%	24 16%
3	My confidence has increased because of my working in the tourism sector. (RQ2)	80 53.3%	45 30%	25 16.7%
4	Alternative forms of tourism like rural tourism etc. in my area employ more women as compared to men. (RQ3)	87 58%	44 29.3%	19 12.7%
5	Most of the women are working in the unorganised sector or informal sector in my area. (RQ3)	99 66%	37 24.7%	14 9.3%
6	In my area, the majority of workforce engaged in the handicrafts industry is women (RQ3)	122 81.3%	19 12.7%	09 6%

## Conclusion

It is evident from the study that tourism has uplifted the social status of women in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh by providing them employment. Tourism leads towards empowerment and economic upliftment of women. As in any other developing country, decision making has been a taboo for the women folk in India but the advent of tourism has changed the scenario in Kullu valley of Himachal Pradesh. Working in the tourism industry has made women in the area more confident and financially independent. Tourism has employed more women in the unorganised sector in the area and it can be seen that women have a definite role to play as far as tourism industry is concerned. There is no denying their importance in this industry. The handicraft industry forms an integral part of tourism and the women of Kullu have contributed tremendously towards the growth of this cottage industry as they make these products. Alternative tourism like rural tourism and agri-tourism cannot be visualised without women playing a role. In Kullu district, the majority of the workforce engaged in the alternative tourism is women and their responses indicate that women also play a role in promoting alternative tourism. It is the active participation of women that has led to the success of the homestays in Kullu.

Tourism has a positive impact on the status of women of Kullu area of Himachal Pradesh. Though women have benefitted from the tourism industry, there is a dire need to attach more significance to their contribution in this industry. Alternate tourism benefits women more than the traditional forms of tourism in the study area but it is also felt the women in the tourism industry take a back seat when it comes to occupying the senior positions. Through the survey conducted in the study area, it has been found that the majority of the women are employed in the informal or unorganised sector. Tourism has a great potential for women, provided a conducive environment is created for them. The benefits of tourism need to be dispersed in a more egalitarian manner so that the majority of the native women population benefit directly from it. Women empowerment is possible only by creating pro-women environment and policies. More avenues for women should be created in the tourism industry by offering special incentives to women entrepreneurs. The handicraft industry of the study area also offers great potential for women empowerment. This industry could also be promoted on a big scale. The need to acknowledge the important economic contribution of women and ensure their access to credit and capacity building is critical.

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