

# Transformations of Women in Tourism Work: A Case Study of Emancipation in Rural Nepal

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## Abstract

*A key challenge still exists for emancipation of women in the tourism industry in Nepal. The research addresses how females in Nepal transform themselves through engagement with trekking in remote areas. The authors investigated a female only tourism enterprise to determine how women can encounter avenues to reliable income support. Interviewees were members of Empowering Women Nepal (EWN), a Nepali Non-Government Organisation (NGO), and their interviews were used as a case study regarding women's training. Open ended questions focused on the background of women who are likely to engage with tourism, barriers preventing engagement in tourism, the positive and negative side to tourism, avenues of support, and specific outcomes to date. The research found that rural and remote Nepali women are being emancipated via engagement with tourism.*

## Keywords

*Tourism work, Nepali women, transformation, emancipation, grounded theory, case study*

## Introduction

Throughout rural Nepal, women have traditionally been marginalised; undertaking home duties and childcare responsibilities whilst simultaneously working in the fields (Hillman & Radel, 2021, 2017; KC, 2012). The

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commencement of women's involvement in Nepali tourism is connected to their rudimentary positioning in the trekking industry (Acharya, 2001; 2010). Tourism to Nepal began in the 1950s after the opening up of the country to the West by the monarchy (Upadhyay, Pradhan, & Grandon, 2011). In Pokhara, Nepal, a number of women's only tourism enterprises have been established to enable women to transform themselves and their lives in the trekking industry. Some of these organisations include the Annapurna Daughter's Club, Malla Sisters' Trekking Agency and Women Empowerment Trek, amongst others. However, this paper concentrates on Empowering Women Nepal (EWN). Beginning in 1994, the '3 Sisters Adventure Trekking Company', established and run by three sisters, Lucky, Diki and Nicki Chhetri, became synonymous with new directions in tourism for women in rural and remote Nepal (Chhetri, 2009). The '3 Sisters' are entrepreneurs and innovators among Nepali women and have worked very hard in the intervening decades to establish the idea that working in tourism was a positive profession (Bricker, Black & Cottrell, 2013). In recent times, they have educated more than 600 women, aged 18-49 years, who come from various parts of the nation (Upadhyay et al., 2011). The 3 Sisters companion company, Empowering Women Nepal (EWN), works in partnership with 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking to promote and empower women through adventure tourism. Together they combine practical skill-based training programs, designed to extend educational, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities (see EWN, 2021, <https://www.3sistersadventuretrek.com/empowering-women-of-nepal>).

Nepal is a landlocked nation of 140,800 sq. km; and is slightly larger than Arkansas, USA (Nations Encyclopaedia, 2017). It is bordered by India on its east, west and southern sides and the Autonomous region of Tibet (China) on the northern side. The area flanking the northern border of Nepal is home to eight of the ten loftiest mountains globally, including Mount Everest [Sagarmatha] (8848m) (Shrestha & Aryal, 2011). Nepal is also the world's 93rd largest nation by land dimension and the 41st most densely inhabited nation (GSO, 2013; see Figure 1 below). A substantial dependence on tourism and farming makes Nepal's economy quite susceptible to climate changeability (The World Bank, 2003). As farming is the core of Nepal's financial system, it affords a means of support for over 80 percent of the inhabitants and constitutes 40 percent of the nation's GDP. Weaving and carpet manufacture are the most significant manufacturing endeavours, comprising about 80 percent of foreign exchange returns. Although, this decreased in 2001-2002 owing to the general slow-down in the global economy and incursions by Maoist rebels on factory proprietors, and employees (Baral et al., 2004).



have made to transform themselves from impoverishment and secure a pathway to emancipation through engagement with tourism. At the same time, we offer both gendered theoretical and hegemonic concepts to critique the position of women in Nepal.

## **Background**

### **Emancipation from poverty in rural Nepal**

Theories of gender inequality assert that females' position in most situations are distinctive from males due to their treatment as inadequate and disadvantaged (Chettri, 2009; Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2000). The significance of females in the tourist arena has been recognised and currently many women are afforded skills and training to operate as tour and trekking guides (Grossman-Thompson, 2015). Gender and caste therefore have an influence on women and in the past, have dictated the conditions under which women were permitted to engage with any form of employment. Connected to this, 'Gramscian hegemony' offers theoretical possibilities for sanctioning an uncomplicated awareness of gender subordination and oppression, more than just a straightforward identification of beliefs (Zompetti, 1997, p. 71).

In the paper 'La domination masculine' (1990), Bourdieu examines the concept of symbolic domination, that is, gender inequality (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 170; McNay, 1999). Referring to his research about the North African culture of Kabyle, Bourdieu illustrates how male authority adopts an inherent, self-distinct status in the course of its imprint on the social sphere which is then assimilated and replicated in the habitus<sup>i</sup> of people (McNay, 1999). This then, goes some way to explaining the conditions experienced by Nepali women who then often find a way forward to 'lift themselves out of poverty'; and, become transformed and emancipated.

### **Conditions for women who are likely to engage with tourism in Nepal**

Nepal is an extremely rich nation in terms of the potential offered through growth in nature-based and cultural tourism products (Regmi & Walter, 2017). However, deeply entrenched traditional patriarchal values and gender-based social expectations make it difficult for Nepali women, particularly in remote and rural locations, to enter and succeed in the tourism arena (Hillman & Radel, 2021). Although there is evidence that conditions are improving, Nepali women suffer from a number of challenges. Nepali women's social status has generally improved over the past decades. For example, female literacy rates have risen from 9.2% in 1981 to around 34.6% in 2001 (Upadhyay et al., 2011) up to around 53% in 2015 (Ministry of Health and Population, 2011). However, while education is gaining ground, more than 1 in 10 (12%) women aged 15-49 years have experienced sexual violence. Women who are employed in paid roles are more likely to have experienced sexual violence (18%) than women who are

employed but do not earn wages (11%) and women who are not employed (also 11%) (Ministry of Health and Population, 2011; see also Hearn, 2012).

However, violence is just one reality for Himalayan women. As noted by Sherpa (2007; see also McMillan, O’Gorman, & MacLaren, 2010), Nepali women may be generally characterised through a small but confounding set of social statistics. Firstly, they are underrepresented in politics and bureaucratic employment. Secondly, throughout South Asia, more than 75% of women who reside in mountainous and remote locations fall below the poverty line. Thirdly, there is a significant lack of infrastructure development in these regions, and this creates generalised inadequate access to basic services such as health, education, water, electricity and sanitation. After all, in Nepal in particular, the continued existence of the caste system, gender inequity and social exclusion further aggravate the already demanding conditions for these women (Resurreccion, Goodrich, Song, et al., 2019).

According to Gramsci (1971), hegemony is a form of power correlation linking the prevailing nucleus of power and its subaltern “fringe” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Gramsci considered the dominant social and administrative arrangement as hegemony. He contended that through hegemony the dominant group could influence not only the nation but also the constitutional and social foundations of a culture. Thus, the influential group could affiliate itself with other factions to form an amalgamated and cunning hegemony of traditional values. Comparisons are strongly implied here between Nepali women’s position in their culture, and the assumed power of their men.

### **Barriers preventing women from engaging in tourism**

Local and village-based tourism within Nepal is seen as a way forward for women who find it difficult to access financial, educational, health and other opportunities in rural and remote regions. Development agencies believe that women should be included in facets of tourism and wider economic endeavours. Consequently, this would afford women the chance to foster leadership expertise and achieve broader recognition within their villages (Palikhe, 2018; Hillman & Radel, 2016; Scheyvens, 2000).

A number of government, international and social organisations have been focusing on women’s development and emancipation in Nepal over the past three to four decades. For example, projects such as the Small Farmer Development Project, Production Credit for Rural Women, Micro-credit Project and other intensive banking programs, have been implemented to reduce women’s marginalisation (Upadhyay et al., 2011). However, despite these efforts, Nepali women’s participation in the socio-economic development of the country, and in tourism in particular, remains limited (see Upadhyaya & Upreti, 2008).

Emancipation, in point of fact, is a form of empowerment, a transformation of gender interactions from social order to autonomous strategy. This has been achievable as a result of Micro Finance ventures that have been operating via gender relationships in a complementary structure instead of a confrontational framework. Gender emancipation has turned out to be an expansive category which includes empowerment of females without generating reservations about patriarchy (Jain & DasGupta, 2021). It signifies advancement, an equilibrium in gender interactions when contrasted with the unique women's emancipation attitude. Additionally, empowerment is not just a problem of a reshuffle of power both financial and civil; it also concerns a change in ideals (Yadav, 2016).

A further challenge for women in Nepal is the overall age structure of the population and the associated dependency rates. In 2020, about 28.81 percent of the Nepali population fell into the 0–14-year age group, about 65.36 percent into the 15-64 age group and about 5.83 percent were over 65 years of age (see <https://www.statista.com/statistics/422727/age-distribution-in-nepal/>). With a total dependency ratio of around 62% (53% youth dependency and 9% elderly dependency) opportunities for women to engage in employment outside of the household are still significantly limited. Nepali women's status has seen gradual changes through exposure to paid employment and tourism industry access. However, there remains a failure to address issues associated with the dual roles and challenges of gendered identity and labour (Acharya, 2001, 2010, 2013; Dhakal, Khadka & Gautam, 2021). Gender inequality continues to hold women as unequal and underprivileged (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2000) in a society run for centuries via patriarchal (and therefore hegemonic) principles.

### **Patriarchy**

The subservient position of women in Nepal – although arbitrated by differences of class, caste and ethnicity – is illustrated in the Nepali adage, “If my next life is to be a dog's life and I can choose, I'd rather be a dog than a bitch” (Manchanda, 2004, p. 237). The countenances of Nepali women are of females smuggled for involuntary prostitution, or compelled to beg and, in certain instances, even to be used as organ donors (UNODC, 2017). Or, of pallid women who pass away ignored in childbearing, because the invisibility of mother and infant neonatal mortality in Nepal is strongly affected by socio-cultural attitudes and beliefs (Pandey, 2007). Destitute and uneducated females are incarcerated for miscarriages or pregnancy terminations, despite the fact that termination was decriminalised in Nepal in 2002. Termination is obtainable on demand, up to 18 weeks after conception in situations of rape or incest, and at whatever time if the pregnancy presents a threat to the female's existence or bodily or intellectual health, or if there is any deformity of the foetus (Guttmacher Institute, 2017). Menstruating females are banished *tounhygieniccauchholoo<sup>iii</sup>* (cow)

sheds because menstruation is seen as intrinsically “impure”. There are also controls imposed on what women can eat, where they can travel and with whom they can intermingle. This plainly amounts to hegemony and gender-based prejudice (*The Guardian*, 2017). There are anecdotes of females with no son, deserted or superseded in polygamous matrimony, because the status of women is traditionally defined in terms of their marital and sexual status. Nepali culture, in general, considers females as subservient to males whether they are daughters, mothers or spouses. Social control principles are powerfully male directed and females are required to submissively obey all determinations made by males who are the possessors of the family unit (see, for example, Awwad, 2001). Females are thus in an exceptionally underprivileged situation in Nepali culture where there is an absence of societal economic as well as political emancipation of females (Pandey, 2007). Furthermore, there are also instances of habitually underprivileged female children burdened with a 1:4 measure of work force burden in comparison to their brothers (Manchanda, 2004; Pandey, 2007).

In remote areas where one in every two-family units are occupied in seasonal emigration, where females characterise the greatest group, the agro-economy is managed by women (Manchanda, 2004). Females are the most dispossessed in the prevailing feudal system notwithstanding their role in Nepal's agro-economy (Shrestha, 2011). They are disallowed familial assets even though they operate rural family units alone when their spouses are absent working for money (Forum for Women, Law and Development [FWLD], 2006). When the males come back, oftentimes they wed other women and the spouses are compelled to leave. If the women re-marry, they become outcasts (FWLD, 2006). Due to Hindu beliefs, daughters are wed at a young age. Some become grandparents even before they experience menopause (*Kantipur*, 23 February, 2004, cited in Manchanda, 2004, p. 243). Emancipation for women in rural Nepal can be achieved through the development of recognised and unofficial prospects for small business marketing.

de Beauvoir (1956) asserts that ‘woman’ is an archaic perception and not an innate reality. Through claiming this, she plainly highlights the dissimilarity between sex, as genetic actuality, and gender, as the cultural understanding or sense of fact; i.e., sex is the genetic factor and gender is the social factor (see Carl & Hillman, 2012). To be a woman is of no significance, but to be a female is to have become a female, to coerce the physique to adapt to an historic impression of ‘woman’, to persuade the physique to become a customary symbol (Butler, 1988). To become emancipated, women must overcome this ingrained stereotype.

### **Towards emancipation in rural Nepal**

Although Nepali women have been, and continue to be, significant actors in the development of Nepal, their continued subordination has obscured their contribution

to their communities (Gurung, 2004). Women's participation in development of tourism in their remote communities has shown both positive and negative impacts. This also includes limited decision-making power, restrictions on mobility, lack of control over resources and land, and reduced access to training and capital, (Upadhayaya & Upreti, 2008). Feminist philosophy has frequently been critical of commonplace justifications of sex and sexuality that declare that the consequence of women's social presence can be developed from some circumstance of their genetic makeup. In differentiating sex from gender (see Carl & Hillman, 2012), feminist thinkers have challenged fundamental accounts that accept that sex imposes or requires specific social implications for women's happiness (Butler, 1988).

The remoteness and isolation of much of Nepal, is the clear drawback for adventurous travellers who undertake journeys to the country. Spectacular scenery and inaccessible locations represent the allure and experience of the destination. However, the continuing lack of even rudimentary infrastructure in many regions presents significant challenges for women attempting to develop tourism business. There are many issues in accessing skills development and health services; most remote women struggle with language barriers; and there are increasing concerns around safety for both visitors and the women who act as trekking guides. Even considering the risks, Lama (2000) noted that for women developing such tourism enterprises including guiding, accommodation and food ventures, there are positive opportunities for them to communicate with diverse nationalities and find their voice in a world that has been largely silenced. Tourism is particularly sensitive to economic, environmental and socio-political events which strongly affect international visitors' willingness to travel (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women [UN Women], 2011). In 2015 for example, Nepal was hit by devastating earthquakes in April and again with aftershocks in May (Paris, 2015). As a direct result of the environmental crisis, tourist numbers plummeted, and this continued to have long-term effects<sup>iv</sup>.

In the past, women working in this sector were more inclined towards domestic chores. The trend has changed with many evolving as entrepreneurs, hotel owners, guides and porters (KC, 2012). There are also significant opportunities for women to participate in the manufacturing and sale of souvenirs through the growth in women's cooperatives and enterprises (see, for example, the Sabhung Women's Microenterprise Cooperative (Namlo International, 2016) among many others). While it is also extremely difficult to ensure that women have some control over and involvement with the income derived from tourism enterprises (Scheyvens, 2000), there are a growing number of cases of women's groups using tourism revenue for the benefit of community projects (Ateljevic et al., 2008). Thus, either affirmative or deleterious aspects of tourism can affect Nepali women nationwide and their quest



for emancipation'. The next section presents the methodological approach to the research and explains how the data was collected, analysed and interpreted.

### **Study methods**

The methodological approach was undertaken utilising a case study approach (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2009) of a 'female only' organisation that empowers women to find viable and practical employment opportunities in rural and remote Nepal. Yin describes the case study research approach as a pragmatic investigation that explores a current incident within its authentic situation. This occurs when the limitations between occurrence and circumstance are not plainly apparent; and where several sources of verification are employed (Yin, 1984, p. 23). The analysis and findings of the case study were informed by the use of a grounded theoretical approach (Charmaz, 2006, 2008, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). Lengthy, open ended, in-depth interviews were carried out in situ. Thematic analysis was carried out on the case study interviews (see Richards, 2020) using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2008, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). Thus, the approach taken was of a constructivist grounded theoretical technique, where the lives of the participants were excavated for thoughts, ideas and words about perceptions of the running of EWN (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Grounded Theory is a qualitative research approach where the emerging theory is grounded in the data (Khan, 2014; Douglas, 2003). The constant comparative method is used with the data, where the words of participants are compared against each other to identify similar areas of interest within the data (Framm, 2013). Data is analysed, sifted, sorted and observed to detect similar themes and categories. Once categories are identified, data is further distilled to create solid concepts which are then used as main category headings (Bulawa, 2014). This makes the construction of a robust grounded theory that has emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2006, 2008, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). Analysis and method come about concurrently in case study research (Zucker, 2009). This fits perfectly with a grounded theory methodological approach.

Case study research can implement single-case or multiple-case strategies. A single case study is suitable where it exemplifies a critical case, where it is a radical or exceptional case, or where it is an expository case (Gustafsson, 2017; Yin, 2009). Solitary cases permit investigators to examine occurrences in depth to afford rich explanation and consideration (Darke, Shanks, & Broadbent, 1998; Walsham, 1995). See Table 1 below for examples of single case study research.

**Table 1**

STUDY	JOURNAL	CASE-TYPE	LENGTH	DIVISIONS	FIGURES & TABLE'S	APPENDIX
Curtis & Morris (2015)	British Journal of Occupational Therapy	Single	6 p.	*Abstract, *Introduction, *Literature review, *Method *Findings, *Discussion *Conclusion	-	-
Van Hout & Bingham (2013)	The International Journal on Drug Policy	Single	7 p.	*Abstract, *Introduction, *The single case study method, *The single case study, *Discussion	-	-
Vallat-Azouvi, Pradat-Diehl & Azouvi (2014)	Neuropsychological Rehabilitation	Single	18 p.	*Abstract, *Introduction, *Case report, *Discussion	4	1
Kozintseva & Skvortsov (2016)	Psych Journal	Single	13 p.	*Abstract, *Elementaristic and holistic tradition in neuropsychology, *Materials and methods, *Results, *Discussion, *Conclusion	3	-
Cassel & Humphreys	Neuropsychological	Single	18 p.	*Abstract, *Introduction, *Case description,	2	-

Source: Gustafsson, 2017

Case studies as a research method or approach have conventionally been regarded as requiring rigour and objectivity when contrasted with other social science methods. This is one of the key reasons for being especially conscientious to convey research design and realisation. Regardless of this, they are commonly used because they can present perceptions that may not be attained with other methodologies (Rowley, 2002). Moreover, it has been suggested that utilising more than one case study can weaken the significance and implication of the single case (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991).

The interviews were undertaken at the offices of the 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking agency located in Pokhara<sup>vi</sup>, Nepal. Interviewees were members of Empowering Women Nepal (EWN), a Nepali Non-Government Organisation (NGO), run by and for women. The 3 Sisters organisation is a subsidiary of EWN. The main categories and themes that emerged from the interview were used as the main sub-headings for the Findings and Discussion sections of this paper (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The research project is intended to be used as a platform for further research into the area of women, work, tourism, emancipation and transformation (see Hillman & Radel, 2021; Radel & Hillman, 2013) in Nepal.

Participants were recruited via email and through already established links from previous research visits to Nepal. The authors visited the offices of the company on a pre-arranged date and time, and carried out open ended, in-depth interviews. The interviews lasted over 90 minutes and a number of broad, open-ended questions were asked about the entry of women into the trekking business in Nepal, how this particular idea of entrepreneurship came about, how women are located for the program (and future employment), who trains the women, the type of training, and the length of training modules. Furthermore, how the women gain employment, who they work for, and examples of trained women working in the trekking industry in Nepal were all discussed. As this is a qualitative, grounded theory approach, specific questions were not used. Rather, a question/interview schedule was utilised to guide the in-depth interview (Picken, 2018).

In order to enhance the overall quality of the data and its subsequent analysis, triangulation was employed so as to provide plausibility of the data itself (Kohlbacher, 2006). Three forms of research contributed to the triangulation for this project – the investigators field notes and observations, secondary data confirming the use of the data collected from the case study, and the EWN case study itself (Decrop, 1999). One approach to triangulating data is to compile fieldnotes throughout the fieldwork and directly following every dialogue or interview meeting. The notes are particularly beneficial as they cast added clarity on the documented subject matter or signpost particular inquiries that do not openly become visible in the dialogue transcriptions. Phenomena monitored are not restricted to oral exchanges. Non-vocal conduct, interactional characteristics (interviewee response) and overall components (individual comportment, personal use of body language, related spoken and non-spoken, for example) frequently offer significant clues if not straightforward awareness. Components of the surroundings (climate, ambiance, location, furnishings) can additionally be beneficially explained (Decrop, 1999, p. 159). To enrich validity and rigor in this research, methodological techniques were engaged to intensify the authenticity, integrity, confirmability, reliability and credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Decrop, 1999). Ethical clearance was applied for and granted from the authors' university. The findings presented in the next section provide a snapshot of emancipatory undertakings to empower and transform the lives of rural women in Nepal through engagement with the tourism industry.

### **Findings and discussion**

The current case study research has led us to identify the following main themes and categories that emerged from the data – Empowering Women Nepal (EWN), rural and remote Nepali women and tourism and, tourism training for women. These main themes were arrived at through a rigorous grounded theory constant comparison handling of the data. Each of these themes are discussed below in sequence.

#### **Empowering women Nepal (EWN)**

Through the data collection and analysis, the narrative of the EWN is a story of how one enterprise reacted to a vocational market need (emancipation of impoverished rural and remote women) and is being incorporated on an upsurge of market development in women's adventure tourism (Doran, 2016; Myers, 2010; see also Beezer, 1994). This unusual example of preparing and emancipating females has secured EWN global respect. The enterprise has developed into a distinctive campaign framework amid Nepal's 700 plus listed trekking agencies (Chhetri & Lama, 2013). The indented and italicised sections that follow in this part of the paper are the words of the participants.

*What we do in our ... company is a business, and mostly we are focusing for women, by women, mostly the women trekkers they come in our company, and we are providing services, female trekking guide, and assistance for visit by women. And, to make this possible, to produce women trekking guide, we have a training centre called Empowering Women Nepal that is an NGO. So, we train women through this institute... So, this way, we have been attracting the rural women to come into the tourism and to work in this industry and to make their life better, and to learn something, and to earn money; and they are making their life different than what they were [before] (Participant).*

Even though EWN and the 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking are operated by the same managers and function co-operatively to emancipate and include females in adventure tourism, both concerns have separate purposes. EWN encompasses scholastic and applied skills, and 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking delivers work and business prospects to EWN initiates (Chhetri & Lama, 2013). The training initiative within tourism has an emancipatory effect on the women who engage with the instruction.

*You know, this is a great profession for them, so we can keep some training for them, know they can make money and they don't have to leave their village or area. They are going [remaining] in their own place, you know, and so they can develop that. So, this is really [a] genuine profession that we can introduce for women. There is economic empowerment, leadership, everything you know (Participant).*

The emancipation mind-set, which is essential to an alternative development viewpoint, identifies a significance about independent choice making for districts, neighbourhood self- belief, direct consensus and experimental collective education. The basis for empowerment and emancipation is at the pragmatic level, as civic society is most easily organised around local concerns. The main purpose of empowerment and emancipation is to realise equality through transforming the women, organisations and arrangements that have upheld inequity (Abbas & Muneer, 2019; Mahat, 2003). Acknowledged for its tuition proficiency, EWN extends its facilities to environmental tourism development courses such as SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, Norwegian Development Fund, the Global Fund for Women, and beyond (Chhetri & Lama, 2013).

### **Rural and remote Nepali women and tourism**

Inquiries about females included in the tourism sector globally concur that the kind of tourism employment existing for rural females are predominantly low-remunerating occupations such as housework and food preparation. These are perceived as an augmentation of their standard (voluntary) familial responsibilities (UN Women, 2011). Over and above their tourism industry employment, females

are required to maintain their familial roles, with tourism intensifying their now substantial employment load (both home-based and occupational). Moreover, some females occupied in domestic tourism interests are frequently doing so minus earnings (Acharya, 2001, 2010, 2013; Sherpa, 2007). One participant offers an insight into their approach to enabling and empowering women in Nepal.

*Mostly in developing countries, women have to do lots of manual work, you know, and [have] a lot of responsibility, because of their working very physically [hard], and they are very physically strong, and mentally too. You know, this [trekking guide] is a great profession for them, so we can keep some training for them... know they can make money and they don't have to leave their [village/ local area] (Participant).*

The rise in female's standing through such work suggests an ideal space for Nepal to establish gender equivalence in terms of occupation. While considering the gender classifications still prevalent in Nepal, how these females uphold their familial responsibilities with their work continues to be disregarded (Hillman & Radel, 2016, 2021; KC, 2012). Traditionally, male-controlled private enterprise operated not only as a masculine structure but also as a status and cultural structure fabricated on underlying forces of control and subservience (e.g., Chettri, 2009; Ferguson, 1998; Holmstrom, 2002). Existing gender and cultural apartheid of less respected and minimally remunerated situations and vocations are the contemporaneous emblematic and quantifiable beneficiaries of these historic circumstances (Olsen, 2004). Thus, training the women in conjunction with their traditional roles appears to be a way forward.

### **Tourism training for women**

External development organisations have helped Nepali women to cultivate their self-conviction and become enthusiastically involved in tourism as a result of delivering education and training for them (Hillman & Radel, 2021; Gurung, 1995). Moreover, development agencies have made plain their idea that females should be integrated in all aspects of their activities. This subsequently offers females the prospect to advance leadership skills and realise widespread recognition for their districts (Hillman & Radel, 2016; Scheyvens, 2000). Indeed, one participant reiterates this in her approach to training of the women in the program; and suggests the connections to the service economy.

*So, we can train more women and introduce more women in tourism, because tourism is service oriented, it's a service and because before the women were in the service industry and when the money come, women are always behind. So, this is totally, I think, for women, and it's supposed to be. So, we can, we can encourage women (Participant).*

Educational sessions at EWN are carefully planned. The mission and objectives of the program are presented in many facets of training. This is because EWN is not a rudimentary educational curriculum. It purposefully educates females to realistically work in adventure trekking and cultivates leadership skills. Females chosen for this program exhibit an enthusiasm for autonomy and awareness in this field. The women mostly have necessary leadership ability, which is supported through education, training and future employment (Jackson, 2010, p. 89).

The Findings section has presented an overview of the state of Nepali women's efforts to transform themselves out of hardship through engaging with the tourist sector. By aligning themselves with women's emancipation groups, where an appropriate and gender specific form of training is the focus, women have benefitted from the effects throughout rural and remote Nepal. Focus has now been brought to the areas where some of the most destitute females in Nepal reside. Through the use of trekking guide adventure tourism many Nepali women are now able to envisage a more productive and financially secure future for themselves and their families. They have been able to achieve this with their newly learnt skills and their own ingenuity and resourcefulness. Indeed, as Smith and Barr suggest, co-operative supported social entrepreneurship, characteristic of the smallest elements of cultures (Smith & Barr, 2007), performs a valuable role in disadvantaged groups and remote areas (KC, 2012). Implications for the foregoing Findings are discussed, together with Conclusions, in the following section. We also present the limitations of the research, and future directions for research inquiry.

### **Conclusion**

The research project and case study focused on the emancipation of women in rural and remote Nepal. The authors examined conditions for women who are likely to engage with tourism in Nepal, barriers preventing women from engaging in tourism, patriarchy, emancipation in rural Nepal, and positive and negative sides to tourism related activities for women. Through a case study approach, grounded theory was used to establish each of the following main themes: Empowering Women Nepal; rural and remote Nepali women and tourism; and tourism training for women.

During the research, it became evident that there were a variety of obstacles and impediments blocking many women in rural and remote Nepal from transforming into responsible and independent earners through engagement with the travel industry (Collinson, Habeel, Jawaid, Jean & Williams, 2013; Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995). These barriers are difficult to overcome in a gender biased patriarchal society, such as Nepal (Hillman & Radel, 2021; Swain, 1995). However, due to the hard work of women's grassroots organisations, such as EWN, the outcome of female's work prospects have significant policy consequences, including transformations of

women, in addition to continuing approaches (Chettri, 2009; Ghani & Iyer, 2010; Menon & Rodgers, 2015).

The transformation in women's status through such employment offers a perfect position for Nepal to create gender equity through work. While considering the gender categories still predominant in Nepal, how the women maintain their domestic obligations with their employment remains overlooked (Dube, 1997; KC, 2012). But, with the expansion of women into the tourism sector, these disadvantages will begin to be transformed.

However, as this case study research illustrates, it is possible for many rural and remote women, in developing economies such as Nepal, to transform themselves through engagement with, and hands-on training from, the tourism industry. Therefore, they can build a brighter future through work emancipation via tourism for themselves, their villages and their daughters. Indeed, as argued by Brewer (1994), qualitative based inquiry does not have to be quantifiable and rigid to be precise; as anecdotal, avid and unique research can also be principled, disciplined and significant.

### **Limitations**

As the research is qualitative in nature and uses a grounded theoretical approach to 'excavate' the data, the data and the findings are not generalisable to the wider female entrepreneur and emancipation of women populations. The findings are therefore specific to one group of women in rural Nepal. The limitations of this research include a case study, the use of a qualitative research analysis; and a narrow focus on one entrepreneurial association. However, as the research builds the basis for further inquiry, a suitable and stable foundation has been built from which to escalate future research into women's emancipation in Nepal.

### **Future directions**

This paper has presented a critical perspective on women's emancipation in rural and remote Nepal. Future directions for the research include; on-going research into marginalised women in Nepal; further research into the emancipation of women in Nepal; and empowerment of women in Nepal through engagement with the tourism sector.

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## End Notes

- i *Habitus* is one of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's most significant yet indistinct ideas. It signifies the corporal incarnation of cultural capital, to the profoundly instilled customs, talents, and temperaments that we acquire owing to our life encounters (Longhofer & Winchester, 2012).
- ii See Spivak, G. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea*, 21-78, for a full discussion of this.
- iii This is identified as the custom of *chhaupadi* and was banned by Nepal's Supreme Court in 2005. However, the custom is still commonly followed in areas of the nation, where little progress and gender inequity remain excessive (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/apr/01/nepal-bleeding-shame-menstruating-women-banished-cattle-sheds>)
- iv The 7.6 magnitude earthquake hit a large part of central Nepal and heavily affected the tourism business and livelihoods based on tourism. The overall economic loss due to the earthquake was equivalent to US\$7 billion, and the disaster effect on the tourism sector was estimated at US\$81,241 million, 11.5 percent of total tourism income.

- v A reviewer has suggested that we (the authors) include some further information about the 3 Sisters for balance. Please see -The Real Story Behind Three Sisters Trekking Pokhara Nepal ([holeinthedonut.com](http://holeinthedonut.com))- and please read the entire blog to draw your own conclusions.
- vi See Acharya, S. (2013). Women's participation in tourism in Pokhara. In Upreti, B.R., Upadhyaya, P.K. and Sapkota, T. (Eds). *Tourism in Pokhara. Issues, Trends, and Future Prospects for Peace and Prosperity*. Kathmandu: PTC and NCCR, pp. 155 – 172, for a full discussion of this.