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**Women in Tourism and Hospitality -A Case Study of
Bhaktapur**

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Article

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Abstract

Globally more women are employed in tourism and hospitality industry which is also a very lucrative means to achieve gender equality, women empowerment and socio-economic upliftment of women. Empowerment of women and tourism are interrelated, and both terms should be developed side by side for better future. However, the gender-based roles in tourism and hospitality are defined by the nature of work along with the requirements of tourist. As far as Bhaktapur is concerned, tourism is one of the main sectors in the state that contributes in income and employment to people. This study explores the contribution of women in tourism and hospitality industry in Bhaktapur. Various aspects have been explored such as women employed in various hospitality and tourism sectors, the total number of women employed, category and duration of jobs, socio-economical upliftment. The main information is based on numerous sources of social learning like field visits while doing researches, visit of different sites, focus on group discussions, General Questionnaire Survey, and a number of interviews and interactions with the professionals of tourism sector in Bhaktapur.

Keywords

*Bhaktapur,
Empowerment,
Socio-economic,
Tourism, Women
entrepreneurs*

Introduction

Tourism is one of the most exciting and growing sectors globally. It is considered as one of the main elements for the development of employment generation, economic growth and

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is effective in reducing poverty. Joshi and Dhyani (2009) stated that “tourism development in any area invariably leads to economic growth of that area, which is manifested in terms of increase in income and employment opportunities, infrastructural growth, improvement in the standard of living, etc.” World Travel & Tourism Council’s (WTTC) research study reveals that travel and tourism is one of the world’s thriving industries, generating approximately US\$ 1.7 trillion annually and creating 319 million jobs to the global economy in 2018 (Bastola, 2020). Similarly, over 600 million international tourists take on a holiday to different parts of the world annually (Mahatara, 2019). Both men and women, irrespective of their age, caste and background have found opportunity to uplift themselves through this sector.

Women empowerment and tourism

Women empowerment may be defined as promoting women’s sense of self-worth, their ability to control their own choices, and their right to impact social change for all. It is closely associated with female empowerment – an essential human right that is also crucial to achieving a more harmonious, prosperous and a balanced world. Women’s empowerment and promoting women’s rights have appeared as a part of a foremost worldwide movement and is continuing to break new ground in recent years. Days like International Women’s Empowerment Day are also gathering momentum. However, empowerment of women is categorized into five main sections, educational, social, political, psychological and economical.

Women play a crucial role in development of tourism as well as nation and in return tourism and hospitality allows women to uplift their socio-economical status. Women make up half of the workforce and population globally, so tourism and hospitality industry provides them opportunities, facilitates to acquire experience as well as skill and empowers them to develop the whole world. On 16th November 2007, as United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro, while addressing International Women Leaders Global Security Summit in New York, said “When women are empowered, all of society benefits.”

Other studies validate that the segregation of women’s work in tourism and hospitality takes place, showing that women are overrepresented in the lower-level positions (Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Costa, Carvalho, & Breda, 2011; Hemmati, 2000; Simão & Breda, 2014) and that they still have significantly lesser opportunities to reach management positions. According to Rydsik, Pritchard, Morgan, and Sedgley (2012), in tourism and hospitality women are often excluded from having access to mentoring opportunities (since they are not regarded to have career potential), and they suffer from sexual harassment, exploitation, stereotyping, as well as promotion and salary discrimination (Pritchard, 2014; Rydsik et al., 2012). If tourism and hospitality industry can tackle the issues of harassment and exploitation, then it will attract more women, both as employee and the employer. Slowly, as the women’s right issue has become a prominent factor globally, women have marched ahead and taken ownership of several travel and hospitality companies as well as have been designated to higher positions.

In case of Bhaktapur, the tourism sector has provided various entry points for women and opportunities for creating self-employment in small and medium sized income generating activities, thus creating paths towards the elimination of poverty of women and local communities.

One of the most popular tourist's destinations in Nepal is Bhaktapur and it has tremendous potential to flourish economically through tourism. It has been observed that tourism and hospitality sector has changed the economic and social standard of remote areas of Everest and Annapurna. This has encouraged more and more women to come forward and take charge of hospitality industry and contribute significantly to the local as well as national economy. The scenario and social norms have gradually changed as life has become more difficult and an extra income is a welcome relief to any family. This phenomenon has pushed women to step outside of their home in search of work and one of the most lucrative sectors for them has been tourism and hospitality. Women now are not only working in the lower level of this industry but several have become chefs, guides and even business owners. It is evident that women's socio-economic status has been improved through tourism and hospitality industry in spite of several challenges they face in juggling double roles as homemakers and career women.

Status of women

The status of women in Nepal continues to be underprivileged. The main areas where women lag behind are education, decision-making opportunities, income, health and active involvement in policy making. The prime reasons for this systematic discrimination are poverty, illiteracy, social customs and beliefs as well as lack of awareness of their own rights.

The formation of women's committee or mother's group in rural areas have provided women with benefits such as access to loans, skill development, entrepreneurship resulting in self-awareness and decision making. Similarly, urban women are major land/house owners and have access to economic resources including bank credit to expand their economic horizon thus becoming independent. The access to education has also produced technocrats, bureaucrats, bankers, educators which is a welcome change as these positions were traditionally held by men. Overall, the future looks bright as more dynamic women have become frontrunners to inspire others to lead and achieve what they truly deserve.

Tourism in Nepal

Globally, it is perceived that tourism and hospitality creates a win- win situation for both government as well as the people especially in a developing nation like ours. Nepal has been a popular tourist destination since 1951. It has diverse topography and attracts about a million tourists from all over the world. Tourism is one of the main sources of foreign currency and employment in Nepal. Nepal is a multicultural and blended country with more than 123 spoken languages, over 125 ethnicities and cultural traditions. Tourism in Nepal, despite having a long history started to accelerate since 1950's, after the end of autocratic Rana Regime. Before 1950s, only a handful of tourists visited Nepal under strict permission of Rana regime. In other words, in Nepal tourism started to flourish in 1950's through mountaineering activities. On 29th of May 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary (New Zealand) and Tenzing Norgay (Nepal) became first people to stand on the summit of Mt. Everest (8848m). This highlighted virgin and pristine Nepal into international arena. During 1960's Nepal began direct links to Indian cities and this land locked country became more accessible to the outside world. From 1955, Nepal started issuing tourist visa. The same year a private airline called 'Himalaya Airways' started operations followed by state owned airline Royal Nepal presently known as

Nepal Airlines in 1958. By late sixties the hippies started to come to Nepal. They followed a radical and liberal anti-war philosophy along with experimentations with drugs and religion in order to discover their inner-self and find peace. By 1973 Nepal declared hashish as illegal and by 1979 the hippies' number began to slow down.

From 1975 to 1999, Nepal was a popular destination for tourists of all categories. Nepal's topography is varied and it contains high mountains, rivers, valleys, national parks, flora and fauna. The holiday makers, adventure seekers and cultural tourist each found something to their taste. The tourist count increased year after year. In 1998 Nepal celebrated "Visit Nepal 98" to strengthen Nepal tourism. There was a brief decline in tourism due to the Maoist movement in Nepal from 1999 to 2006. However it again recuperated by 2015. Figures released by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation show that the number of tourists has increased from 602,855 in 2010 – 2011 to 803,092 in 2011 – 2012. The earthquake of 2015 slowed down tourism for some time however it bounced back and registered positive growth and even crossing one million in 2018 and 2019.

As most of the population living in the core area of study are the Newars, the social structure of the native of Bhaktapur is also an important factor to comprehend any aspect for economic and social growth of the city. Newar community is socially divided. In Newari context, individual being the smallest social unit, the household and group being the association of people for a common cause known as Guthi.

The smallest social unit is the household which is coordinated by the senior most male member known as *naya*, who takes the prominent decisions regarding the family. This may include but not limited to, all economy generating activities, educational choices, setting rules for all household members, maintaining discipline and family's religious choice. The female head of the family known as *naki(n)* is responsible for managing the entire housekeeping and also engaging as well as encouraging other members in income generating activities like farming, weaving, painting etc.

Traditionally, most of the natives live in a joint family in a large house having a single head of the family which facilitates to maintain harmony among large number of family members. The Newar joint family (the household unit) has specific characteristics which make it distinct from the normal Hindu joint family. Despite residential and property separation, several joint families act as a single unit among them for purposes of social and ceremonial functions, be it domestic or communal (Levy, 1992).

In spite of being in a large joint family, Newari women enjoy higher social status than non-Newari women. With modern times families have started to separate into nuclear family allowing more freedom to women to lead their lives or pursue their choice of career. One of the key features of Newari social structure is *Guthi* system. It is an association of people formed for various special purposes like maintenance of palaces, temples and religious structures as well as to organize/manage cultural and public ceremonies. In recent times, various new and modern organizations have emerged based on societal needs such as women's associations, youth society, social workers organizations and volunteer associations are some of it (Nepal, 2019). Newari system allows equal and active participation from both sexes which shows liberal outlook of the Newars regarding women.

Tourism in Bhaktapur

As far as Bhaktapur is concerned, tourism is one of the main sectors in the state that contributes to income and employment. The core area of Bhaktapur is dotted with religious monuments that are unique and classified as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The historical inhabitants of core area of Bhaktapur are the Newars. The social structure of Newars is quite unique and divided among the two major religions of the country, Hinduism and Buddhism. The Newars, constitute a stratified caste-society with the full range of status-groups typical of Hindu societies, but complicated by a vertical division into Hindu and Buddhist groups (Furer-Haimendorf, 1956; in Furer-Haimendorf,1966,p.14). This religious divide is further segregated according to their hereditary professions. The major population is of Jyapu community who are farmers with large land holdings. The other major caste groups are specialized professionals such as painters, metal and stone smiths, potters etc which cater to the daily lives of the Newars as well as fulfil their ritual and cultural requirements.

Bhaktapur is known as *Khwopa* in local Newari language. It is considered as the cultural capital of Nepal, Bhaktapur's history goes way back to the early 8th century and it used to be the former capital of Nepal from the 12th to the 15th century. Until the early 18th century, the rulers built several temples and palaces with the wealth generated from the trade with Tibet and India and protected the city as an independent country surrounding it with border walls and several city gates. The city finally was annexed into the greater Nepal when the rulers lost the war against the gorkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah in late 18th century.

Bhaktapur is located at 12 km east of Kathmandu city and lies at 1401 meters above sea level. Bhaktapur district spreads over an area of 119 sq. km and the core area of ancient inner city is 6.88 sq. km. Bhaktapur has a population of about 100 thousand people, most of whom are farmers. Out of which about 64 thousand live within the core city area. Others are artists, businessmen, public employees, craftsmen and handicraft manufacturers. Being part of an ancient trade route between Indo- Tibet benefitted Bhaktapur immensely. The local traders, artists and craftsmen generated lot of wealth as a result and this in turn allowed them to invest in temples, rest houses, water sprouts, monasteries and palaces. The rulers thus invested in temples, palaces and monasteries which are today the cultural heritage of the nation. During the construction of the monuments the architects used the influence of Tibetan and North Indian designs along with the traditional Newari architecture as a result, several unique temples were built in the city that are today considered as master pieces and cultural heritage.

The city has several squares such as Dattatreya, Taumadhi, Pottery, Nyatapola and Durbar Square where exquisite and amazing examples of finest architecture can be found. Some of the monuments that can be found in these squares are five-storeyed temple of Siddhilaxmi and Bhairab Nath temple in Nyatapola square, the palace of 55 windows, Taleju temple, the golden gate, Jagannath temple, and Pashupatinath temple in Durbar square, Dattatreya temple and Pujari Math in Dattatreya square.

Apart from the above mentioned monuments the city also has several ponds like Siddha Pokhari, Naag Pokhari, public shelters and Buddhist monasteries. Apart from being known as the city of temples and palaces, it is also famous for *Haku Patasi* (traditional hand woven

black saree with red border for women), *Bhadgaule Topi* (Black tight knitted cap for men), *Juju Dhau* (Royal Yoghurt), handicrafts, thangka paintings, Nepalese *Lokta* paper and pottery.

In recent times, tourism infrastructure as well as manpower has developed in Bhaktapur. According to Bhaktapur Tourism Development Committee, (2021), there are 61 hotels and guest houses in Bhaktapur. Four of them are owned by women who have completed Bachelor level of education. There are 72 skilled women staff in these establishments as receptionists, accountants, marketing & sales officers/executives who have various educational background ranging from S.L.C. to Master level. Similarly, 103 unskilled women staff are working in these institutions as housekeeping staff, sweepers, kitchen helpers and dishwashers whose educational level range from illiterate to S.L.C.

Similarly, there are 82 handicraft shops/outlets in core area of Bhaktapur. 27 of them are owned by women. 68 women are directly involved in these outlets as skilled women who carve, paint, weave etc. and 35 women are unskilled who manage the sales.

There are 82 local guides in Bhaktapur as well out of which 5 are women and 2 are national level guides. Bhaktapur Municipality's tourism department also employs 42 staff out of which 37 are men and 5 are women.

Beside above mentioned income generating activities women are also involved in other income generating businesses like working as vendors, thangka painters, and wood carvers.¹

The city has been collecting tourist entrance fee from every foreign tourist, for visiting the core area of the city since 1993 and the amount is used for preservation of culture, restoration of heritage monuments, cleaning and maintaining the city, building and developing infrastructure, educating and creating skilled manpower as well as ensuring that the city is one of the best tourist destinations in Nepal. The Municipality is also distributing grants for traditional tiles, bricks and timber to encourage the locals to construct their building in traditional manner. The city which was once not clean and tidy, has today become one of the ten cleanest cities of Asia through its cleaning efforts. In admiration of the preservation and restoration efforts of the city, in 1979, Bhaktapur was rightfully enlisted by UNESCO in World Heritage Site.

Tourism and gender enterprise

The concept of entrepreneurship is derived from the French word "entreprendre" which means "undertake" (Carton, Hofer and Meeks, 1998). Shane and Venkataraman (2000) define entrepreneurship as the use of opportunities for the discovery, evaluation and promotion of goods and services provided, forms of organization, markets, processes and raw materials that were not available before. Entrepreneurship has an increasing importance in the tourism sector as in all other sectors (Çalkın and Işık, 2017). The tourism sector is highly dependent on entrepreneurship because its survival is closely linked to entrepreneurial activities and sustainability (Crnogaj, Rebernik, Hojnik and Omerzel Gomezelj, 2014).

Research shows that female employment in tourism and hospitality is both vertically and horizontally segregated, and women employees find employment in subordinated posts

¹ *Thangkas are the traditional paintings of Nepal. They are hand painted on cotton canvas and mostly have a religious theme. Initially only men were involved in thangka painting but presently more and women are engaged in it.*

with low levels of income (Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2015; Obadic & Maric, 2009). Vertically, in tourism and hospitality businesses, women often hold lower levels of occupations with fewer opportunities with upward mobility (Carvalho, Costa, Lykke, Torres, & Wahl, 2018). On the other hand, horizontally, while women generally work as receptionists, waitresses, travel agency salespersons, cleaners, room attendants, men are typically employed as barmen, gardeners, porters, maintenance staff, and other positions.

Tourism is regarded as leisure travel that generates employment and economic benefits to all. As tourism is based on human relationship and connection it is an equal opportunity employer. From gender perspective, several sections of tourism that focuses on service and care, prioritizes women as potential employees. It is a disproportionately important employment sector for women as there has been a steady increase in their employment in tourism at a global level, largely driven by growth in developing countries (Shah, 2000). Women can find a voice and independence through their involvement in tourism activities- by becoming part of decision-making processes and carving out new roles in their families, homes, communities and within local power structures (see UNED, 1999; ODI, 2000).

However, the development of gender research in tourism enquiry is a complex tale and the key protagonists in the story have been largely (but not exclusively) women (see, e.g. Kinnaird and Hall, 1996). Gender is an erratically represented but an increasing focus in tourism studies. However, currently there is a rising awareness and use of gender perspectives in tourism.

Three issues are central to the conceptual framework for understanding gender in tourism (Kinnaird et al 1994, p.5).

The first issue is that tourism processes are created from gendered societies and systemized by gender relations. Secondly, gender relations over time update and are updated by the interconnected economic, political, social, cultural and environmental dimensions of all societies engaged in tourism development. Lastly control, power and equality issues are expressed through race, class, and gender relations in tourism practices.

It is evident from the three issues above that men and women are involved in a different way in the structure and intake of tourism. Gendered “realities” form tourism marketing, guests’ motivations, and service provider’s actions.

Tourism has long been perceived as a fertile field for entrepreneurial initiatives (Nikraftar & Hosseini, 2016) due to a predominance of small firms and relatively low entry barriers (Williams, Shaw & Greenwood, 1989). These same factors have repeatedly led to tourism entrepreneurship being premised on its potential to empower women (Martinez Caparros, 2018) and it has been identified as providing opportunities specifically for women entrepreneurs (Haugen & Vik, 2008). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2019), for example, claims that tourism can empower women through income-generating opportunities in small and larger-scale tourism firms. Martinez Caparros (2018) cautions that whilst tourism is often depicted as an economic sector that holds potential to empower women due to its diverse, dynamic and flexible nature (Peeters & Ateljevic, 2008), it remains a highly gendered activity that reinforces traditional gendered performances by offering temporary and part-time employment in traditionally gendered skills.

In reality, there are disparities in tourism development, and one of the avenues to comprehend the changing dynamics and to promote change toward equality is through the study of gender relations. There is also a vast diversity in tourism experience, and one dimension to concede is gender in, perspectives, knowledge, behaviors and tastes, which is valuable in tourism planning from environmental impacts to marketing strategies. Gender, as ideology and as affiliations between the sexes, is a primary element in human interactions, and is thus an important feature of future tourism.

Women in tourism and hospitality

While women are still struggling for equality at work in several areas, they have stamped their presence and place in catering, hotels and tourism for quite a while now. The most significant change happened during and after World War I (1914 to 1918 C.E.) when most of the men had gone to war leaving women to take charge of the industry. The everlasting impact happened after the Second World War (1939 to 1945 C.E.) when the society was forced to change its attitude and accept the fact that women were equally capable of working outside their home.

Although a gradual change is trending, the fact that women's needs and requirements have been largely ignored by stakeholders. Decision making and policy makers are mostly men who exclude women from voicing their demands and changes required to formulate policies that are parallel to women's progress and overall growth.

There are very few women working in professional work in Nepal. Limited participation in politics, bureaucracy and judiciary does not stop women from making a remarkable contribution in the decision-making process at the household level. Women serve as decision-makers in farm management, domestic expenditure (food items, clothes and other expenses), the children's education, religious and social travel, household maintenance and also capital transactions.

One of the sectors that offer a great amount of potential and livelihood opportunity to women is tourism and hospitality. This sector has also given opportunities to women of the rural areas as several of them now work as the owner of the lodges, restaurants and trekking agencies.

Other groups of women were those who worked as guides and were better qualified than the porters. They opined that males and females were both equal in all terms but social institutions and laws determined what women were to do in comparison to men. Their argument was that though the trend of gender inequality had been addressed by the government or non-government organizations, the unequal practice was still prevalent (KC, 2012).

Women's tourism businesses lead to women's economic empowerment; tourism education and training promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the sector; Women are leaders in the tourism and hospitality sector and are represented and influential in decision-making spaces; and it empowers women to work collectively for justice and gender equality. Therefore, there is an urgent need to change the policy and make it more women centric to facilitate women so that a healthy gender equality is achieved.

The objectives of the study are: a) To study the correlation between tourism and gender equality. b) To explore different aspects of tourism to determine possibilities for women empowerment in Bhaktapur. c) To assess the contribution of tourism in women empowerment in Bhaktapur.

Methodology

This research is based on qualitative approach. An effective constructionist perspective was adopted to dig out the truth which is the most influential and sophisticated construction (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The study is based on tourist activities in Bhaktapur district and the involvement of women in tourism and hospitality. This research paper aims at voicing the challenges faced by women in tourism and hospitality industry, to meet this purpose, the data collection was based on Grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss, it commonly practices the subsequent data collection methods: Interviewing participants with open-ended questions along with Participant Observation (fieldwork) and/or focus groups as well as study of articles, texts and artifacts.

Feminist theory has been applied for research as, Feminist theories which attempt to explain the gendered structure of the workforce differ in terms of both the degree of importance which is attached to capitalism and patriarchy, in determining men's and women's role in the workforce and the extent to which the two systems are interrelated (Sinclair, 2005).

To gain diverse insight into finding men's and women's role in workforce, women from different hospitality fields related to tourism were interviewed. To obtain a deeper understanding of women in tourism and hospitality, men and other family members' views were also incorporated.

Theories of gender inequality display that there is a different yardstick for men versus women when it comes to the socio-economic circumstances due to the fact that women are undermined as underprivileged and inferior to men. Nepal is no exception to this as well even though tourism creates a wide range of opportunities for women through the complex value chains it creates in the destination economy (Narayana, 2017).

The field work was carried out by the author of the core area of Bhaktapur. The data collected from different sources and close observation was made during field visit of Bhaktapur city. The author, being part of the tourism industry, is familiar with tourism practices in Nepal. Hence, personal experiences, emotions and observations are reflected in this research. Personal interaction with local women engaged in tourism in Bhaktapur has also been included for reference. During the interaction with local women, two distinctly different views emerged. While, the young women were positive and optimistic about their future while associating with tourism related businesses, elderly women were of the opinion that the young women were neglecting household chores and duties as they were devoting more time to tourism and hospitality industry. However, both the young and elderly women had a common point that the extra income through tourism and hospitality was a welcome relief.

A vast range of literature has been referred to comprehend the relationship between women and the tourism and hospitality industry. The study is based on primary as well as secondary data. Data has been collected from the Bhaktapur Municipality and Bhaktapur

Tourism Development Committee. The research area were different historical squares of Bhaktapur namely Dattatreya, Taumadhi, Pottery and Durbar Square.

Apart from data collection, interview with different stakeholders, mostly women (hotel and restaurant owners, shopkeepers, street vendors, local guides, and municipality of Bhaktapur) was conducted from September 1st to September 15th in core tourist area (Durbar, Dattatreya, Nyatapola, Taumadhi & Pottery squares) with the objective to understand the challenges and connection of tourism and hospitality industry with women. Interview was conducted on approximately 40 tourists (domestic as well as foreign), 40 men (mostly who were related to women in tourism), 40 women (directly/indirectly connected to tourism) as well as municipality staff.

Simple statistics like simple average and percentage of employment has been used in the present study to examine the involvement of women in tourism and hospitality industry. The total percentage share of employment, gender wise, has been used to highlight the present status of women's employment in tourism and hospitality in the city. In-addition, objective analysis has been made to study the role of women in tourism and hospitality industry. Therefore, the present study is analytical and explanatory in nature. By using interview method, it searches for both clarification and elaboration on the answer given and record qualitative information regarding the topic.

Literature Review

The concept of women in tourism and hospitality industry was considered strange till the early 20th century. However, the industry has gone through substantial change in the last fifty years. The global expansion and development of the industry has provided opportunities for women to enjoy an active and rewarding role which ranges from cleaning and kitchen staff to front line customer service employees to senior managers, C.E.Os and owners.

Boniface (2003) expressed that cultural tourism is to stay and grow with the help of best conducts and best characterizations possible. The author analyzes the various needs of cultural tourism and its significance, he also shows the obligations and benefits of cultural tourism while defining it based on its prominence. It expresses the work of principal needs in tourism. It includes various site presentations and examples for a better view of quality cultural tourism and its managing ways.

Byrne Swain (1995) mentions that gender is often implied as an assumed, vague term without referring to the common feminist literature. While it is clearly a theoretical standpoint, the concept is not expounded in the similar way that various definitions of tourism are assessed. The authors stress on tourism development progressions as indicators of social change and embodiments of social norms. International and domestic tourism industries continue to multiply in response to growing markets encouraged by consumers' increased leisure time and wealth. Thus, tourism as a means of economic development is ready for gender analysis, following the lead of the literature on development and gender.

Cole (2018) claims that there is no definite or natural relationship between women's employment and empowerment, also the policies do not support it. Programmes to change gender inequalities need to focus on social and traditional areas too. For example, the dual

load for women of working in tourism sector while playing a role of a homemaker as an unpaid and domestic care worker should no longer be overlooked by development policies and projects. This means, women's voices are essential in decision making and policy at every step. Finally, international organizations that are key role players as tourism thought frontrunners have been largely a failure in monitoring change. The international community needs to create parameters and raise awareness, follow up on recommendations, monitor and assess progress.

Figuroa-Domecq and Segovia-Perez (2020) have mentioned that the use of a gender perspective in the assessment of tourism has revealed noteworthy differences in all areas (consumption, entrepreneurship and employment) between both sexes, as an outcome of social structure and roles of gender. Therefore, it is evident that application of gender perspective in tourism research helps to distinguish, comprehend and offer differences and, where ever appropriate, diminish inequality.

Grimshaw, Holmes and Lake (2001) analyze the dilemma central to women's struggles over the last two centuries. It also talks about gender stereotypes and norms and also expresses the importance of locating political struggles and subjective contexts that are in accordance to women and their rights. The book also shows how women scholar or feminist scholars have emphasized on women's rights throughout the world. Women's Rights and Human Rights, the title of this collection, signals dilemmas central to women's struggles over the last two centuries. As they fought for legal, civil and political rights women have faced the challenge of discovering ways to claim equal rights with men while also defining women's specific rights, and to join with men in their struggles for human rights, while not forfeiting their interests and power as women. There are different definitions of human rights and women's rights in historical perspectives.

KC (2012) mentions that how women in tourism face challenges based on the roles they perform. Furthermore, her roles are determined by different factors such as family background, education, language, physical condition and the aptitude to set one's own criteria.

Shrestha, Maharjan and Raj Bhandari (2015) claim that the involvement of Jyapu women in domestic and community levels play an important role in conservation processes in Bhaktapur. Jyapu women do not usually play a major role in decision making processes, due to their low educational level. They strongly believe that in the recent years their engagement in economic activities has improved, which positively affects their ability to take part in various decision making processes.

Upadhyay (2006) has made an attempt to identify important events regarding tourism activities in Nepal since 1848 under the chapter chronological highlights on tourism in Nepal. He has projected the clear picture of the state of tourist arrival and tourism in Nepal before and during the Rana regime and how it took pace forward after the restoration of democracy in 1950. Whereas, the book has failed to include the policy of the government on tourism before and after 1950.

Upadhaya and Upreti (2008) have mentioned that several organizations and institutions have now emerged to raise awareness and to encourage active participation of women in

Nepal. A number of organizations like National Trust for Nature Conservation⁴ (NTC), International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP), Kathmandu Environment Education Project (KEEP), Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), Mother's Club Central Committee (MCCC), Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal (WEAN), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Labor Organization (ILO), Nepal Academy of Tourism and Hospitality Management (NATHAM) and 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking (P) Ltd. etc. are found to be involved in enhancing women's participation in mountain tourism. These organizations through their continuous efforts in past and present periods have been creating awareness about local women's potentials in tourism, empowering them by offering training and capacity building activities and helping to increase their involvements in mountain tourism.

The research aims to answer the following questions: a) What are the key factors for women empowerment in Bhaktapur? b) What is the contribution of tourism industry to elevate life style of women in Bhaktapur? c) How tourism can facilitate gender equality?

Findings

In Bhaktapur there are several interesting sites to visit but the maximum number of tourists do not miss the opportunity to visit the four major squares of the city. They are Durbar square, Taumadhi square, Pottery square and Dattatreya square. The study shows different income generating activities involving women in the above mentioned four squares.

Bhaktapur is one of the most popular tourist sites in Nepal, almost every tourist in Kathmandu valley will visit it. The tourists also believe that Bhaktapur is a city of artists and craftsmen, a lot of them like to buy souvenirs and gifts in Bhaktapur. All kind of souvenirs are found in Bhaktapur including low priced ones often sold by vendors. There are around 55 vendors in the inner city of Bhaktapur. Around 30 of them are women. They are mostly working in the above mentioned four major squares of the city.

While conducting interview, Participant A was asked "What challenges they had to face to come out of their home and become street vendor?" They stated that:

"At the beginning I had to face some objection from my family for becoming a street vendor but later when I brought home extra income, the objection changed to encouragement."

Bhaktapur manufactures a lot of handicrafts which includes Nepalese paper products, masks, puppets etc. There are 36 handicraft shops in the four main squares of Bhaktapur. They employ 72 people as sales person. Among them 22 are women. During the interview, a rare life story emerged where a father encouraged his daughter to join family business.

Participant B was asked "How did you end up managing the family shop?" They said:

"I was encouraged to join the family business by my father who has been running a handicraft shop for over 20 years. Although I attribute this encouragement to the fact that my family has only two sisters and I am the eldest."

There are 24 thangka shops in the four major squares of Bhaktapur. They employ about 144 thangka painters and sales persons. Out of the total number 43 are women.

While having an informal chat with Participant C, they were asked "what made you

choose thangka painting?” they casually mentioned:

“I have always been interested in thangka painting since childhood and my biggest inspiration was my grandfather who was a well-known thangka painter. In spite of being born in a thangka painter’s family, I had a hard time to convince my father to teach me painting as he believed that it was only meant for men.”

One of the traditional crafts of Bhaktapur is statue making. Traditionally, the statues made locally have been sold in China, India and Bhutan but now a days several European, North American and Asian countries buy them. There are 36 shops of metal and stone statue shops in the four major squares of the city. They engage 108 people as sales persons and carvers. Among them 32 are women.

The interview with Participant D revealed an interesting story of hard work and determination. When they were asked, “How did you end up in this career mostly dominated by men?” They stated:

“My father’s profitable metal statue workshop collapsed overnight due to a sudden paralysis attack on my father that left him bed ridden. My two elder brothers decided to go abroad to work and that left me with no option but to learn the technique of metal statue making from my maternal uncle and my father’s workers. Initially, I had a hard time convincing my father’s customer’s to buy my products but once they saw the quality of my work several of them continued to buy from me.”

Bhaktapur is famous for wood carving. The local wood carvers have travelled not only in Nepal but to other countries too renovating, restoring monuments and building new ones. There are 38 wood carving shops in the four squares of Bhaktapur. They engage about 152 people as wood carvers and sales persons. Out of the total number of employees 46 are women.

An interview with Participant E showed how every crisis creates opportunity. Upon being asked, “How they are coping with life?” They replied:

“After the earthquake of April 2015, several temples, palaces and heritage monuments were damaged and required renovation and repair. As my entire family of 6 (my parents along with 4 children) were woodcarvers, they were all employed by the local authority to renovate several monuments which gave us employment for several years.”

The interviews above reveal that although the families were hesitant initially to encourage women to learn skilled techniques or to run businesses, it resulted in the upliftment of the family’s economic status as well as boosted self-esteem of the women concerned. This in turn reflects the social mindset of the people regarding women and their role or status in society. However, with the advent of Tourism and Hospitality industry, women are breaking the glass ceiling and emerging as independent and strong characters.

Generally, the employment of women is relatively low compared to men in the tourism and hospitality industry. This may be due to several factors like social reservation regarding women, family obligations, and lack of technical skill. If proper technical skill is provided to women, it can definitely not only increase the sales and profit but also increase the rate of women’s employment.

For any form of development equal participation from both genders is essential. The industries, shops, hotels and restaurants must become gender friendly and accept that women have dual roles to play in Nepalese society as housewives and career women. As women are regarded as more emotional and caring, their participation in tourism and hospitality industry is invaluable. Therefore, it is imperative that policy makers, local and central government authorities should create suitable environment so that the number of women employees increase and more of them see tourism and hospitality industry as a favorable sector for employment.

It is clear that tourism and hospitality industry has generated substantial wealth in Bhaktapur. As a result, it has provided significant contribution in other sectors too. The revenue collected from tourism has helped to open six educational institutions of different levels in Bhaktapur.

Discussion

In the core area of Bhaktapur, most of the women are from Newar community. They mostly live in a joint family and have social duties as housewives as well as daughters. Most of them have to perform household chores and the married women have additional responsibility to take care of their children which leaves them very little time to work and bring in additional income to the household. Almost all the women employed have mentioned that time management and balancing the house and work is the key issue. If the other members of the family come out to support and share the household duties, this issue can be resolved easily.

Apart from the family constrains, few women have had to face harassment at work and they have been paid less than male counterpart in spite of putting in the same number of working hours.

Traditionally women in Bhaktapur are perceived as responsible for household chores, bringing up the children, cooking and cleaning of the house. Many women are also engaged in agriculture as well as in other income generating activities including tourism and hospitality. Although traditionally their main occupation was farming, they are now also engaged as artists, craftsmen, potters and other crafts. This shows that the general concept of women as housewives is gradually changing in Bhaktapur. In the past the women of Bhaktapur, like the rest of the country, had less access to education, knowledge, skill and opportunity as it wasn't considered important but now-a-days girls are sent to school and many have become professionals in different fields. At present, women serve as decision-makers in farm management, domestic expenditure (food items, clothes and other expenses), the children's education, religious and social travel, household maintenance and also capital transactions.

There are two major religions in Bhaktapur, Hinduism and Buddhism. Both groups worship the same deities although they may have two different names, both have similar social structure and speak the same language. This is natural as they are both part of the same society since centuries.

The Newars have several religious and cultural festivities and functions, many cater to girls and women specifically and they project the way Newari society perceives women in general.

Almost all of the socio-religious festivals and customs are women-oriented hence they require their time, energy, focus and effort. Some of the unique traditions like Ihi (the tradition of getting the girls married to the Sun god), Gufa (the religious ceremony when a girl reaches puberty) and Kumari (venerating a pre-puberty girl as the living reincarnation of the goddess Taleju) are all women centric that demand effort and consume their energy leaving little or no time to focus on economic activity including Tourism and Hospitality trade. Although these ceremonies and customs reflect how in a Newari society, women were respected and sheltered from harm through religious practices, it does not influence them to be socio-economically independent and become a key contributor to household income. However, a healthy balance between religious and economic roles has been more visible compared to past few decades. This may be due to the fact that social view regarding role, capability and importance of women is changing in Nepalese society.

Conclusion

Tourism and hospitality industry is one of the biggest global industries that creates employment and opportunities pushing economic growth. Although Nepal is a male dominated society, tourism and hospitality industry can become a suitable tool for Nepalese women to liberate themselves. Along with it, tourism and hospitality industry is the perfect tool for Nepal to foster development by generating employment and earning foreign currency as well as provide platform for Nepalese women to uplift their socio-economical status. Bhaktapur, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is one of the prime tourists destinations of Nepal and has several cultural and heritage monuments that attract a large number of tourists. Tourism and hospitality is one of the major sources of income of Bhaktapur that employs a lot of people. Although women of Bhaktapur engage in this industry to generate extra income, their number is low compared to men. Although there is a lot of potential for women of Bhaktapur to uplift their socio-economic status through tourism and hospitality industry, because of traditional and conservative constrains they are unable to exploit the benefits of this industry to the fullest. But as the whole world is transforming, this sector needs to be equipped for the demands of future. It is important and essential to recruit and encourage talented women for technical as well as top managerial positions in the tourism and hospitality industry to meet future demands. This will prove to be a practical move as more women are travelling for vacation and business, they have become a higher percentage of a hotel's clientele, it is necessary to strive for gender equality in the recruitment of personnel. If the women are provided education along with technical training to sharpen their skills and get family support, they can do wonders in the field of tourism and hospitality. This will allow them to play a greater economic role and make them independent. However, socio-economic empowerment alone will not bring women to the frontline of decision making process unless policy makers come out with pro women policies and planning; along with it a radical awareness programme and a woman centric dynamic education system is essential as well.

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