

Women Empowerment and Self-sustainability through Tourism: A case Study of Self-employed Women in Handicraft Sector in Kullu Valley of Himachal Pradesh

S.P. Bansal*
Jaswinder Kumar**

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Different people use empowerment to mean different things. However there are four aspects which seem to be generally accepted in the literature on women's empowerment. Firstly to be empowered one must have been disempowered. It is relevant to speak of empowering women, for example, because, as a group, they are disempowered relative to men. Secondly empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party. Rather those who would become empowered must claim it. Development agencies cannot therefore empower women—the most they can achieve is to facilitate women empowering themselves. They may be able to create conditions favorable to empowerment but they cannot make it happen. Thirdly, definitions of empowerment usually include a sense of people making decisions on matters which are important in their lives and being able to carry them out. Reflection, analysis and action are involved in this process which may happen on an individual or a collective level. There is some evidence that while women's own struggles for empowerment have tended to be collective efforts, empowerment-orientated development interventions often focus more on the level of the individual. Finally empowerment is an ongoing process rather than a product. There is no final goal. One does not arrive at a stage of being empowered in some absolute sense. People are empowered, or disempowered, relative to others or, importantly, relative to themselves at a previous time.

According to the United Nations out of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty around the globe, 70 percent are women. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours. The overwhelming majority of the labor that sustains life – growing food, cooking, raising children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house, hauling water – is done by women, and universally this work is accorded low status and no pay. Women earn only 10 percent of the world's income. Where women work for money, they

* Director, Institute of Vocational (Tourism) Studies Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla (H.P.)

** Research Scholar, Institute of Vocational (Tourism) Studies Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla (H.P.)

may be limited to a set of jobs deemed suitable for women – invariably low-pay, low-status positions. Women own less than 1 percent of the world's property. Women make up two-thirds of the estimated 876 million adults worldwide who cannot read or write; and girls make up 60 percent of the 77 million children not attending primary school.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The aim of the present study is to gain insight into the concept of women empowerment from event tourism in context Kullu valley of Himachal Pradesh where women have become self reliant and empowered by making their traditional handicrafts as the source of income from tourism. These handicrafts have become prime attractions for not only domestic tourist but also foreign tourist. The research focuses on three specific objectives as follows:

- To study the need of women empowerment from tourism.
- To study role of Kullu handicraft in women empowerment.
- To study the perceptions of local women about tourism and empowerment.
- To suggest measures of women empowerment from tourism.

WOMEN AND GENDER

Women are often viewed as 2nd-class citizens, commonly marginalized to very limited activities and privileges, some women struggle to earn even very basic rights. One of the biggest challenges preventing women from rising to equal status is dependence on their husbands, as men are the traditional breadwinners. Particularly in rural communities, the only paying work available is manual labor, leaving women unable to earn even the smallest wages. It's an unfair cycle – no work, no money, no power, no decision making, no work, no money.

For all the negative impacts tourism is blamed for (environmental degradation, cultural exploitation, economic dependence, etc), the empowerment of women is one of the industry's most consistent and commendable positive influences. Granted, many of the most common jobs for women in tourism are low-skilled, low-paying positions that may actually reinforce existing gender stereotypes. But, when approached with cultural sensitivity and commitment to the community, responsible tourism can provide opportunities beyond some women's wildest dreams.

While the reasons for any particular woman's powerlessness (or power) are many and varied, considering women per se necessarily involves questioning what we/they have in common in this respect. The common factor is that, as women, they are all constrained by 'the norms, beliefs, customs and values through which societies differentiate between women and men' (Kabeer, 2000, p. 22). The specific ways

in which this operates vary culturally and over time. In one situation it might reveal itself in women's lower incomes relative to men, in another it might be seen in the relative survival rates of girl and boy children and in a third by severe restrictions on women's mobility. Virtually everywhere it can be seen in domestic violence, male-dominated decision fora and women's inferior access to assets of many kinds. A woman's level of empowerment will vary, sometimes enormously, according to other criteria such as her class or caste, ethnicity, relative wealth, age, family position etc and any analysis of women's power or lack of it must appreciate these other contributory dimensions. Nevertheless, focusing on the empowerment of women as a group requires an analysis of gender relations i.e. the ways in which power relations between the sexes are constructed and maintained.

WOMEN AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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; Gibson, 2001; Harvey *et al.*, 1995; Kinnaird *et al.*, 1994; Long & Kindon, 1997; Scott, 1997). These issues have been discussed both in general and in relation to specific tourism settings and it has 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). However, it has also been noted that tourism can offer the possibility that gender roles and relationships be renegotiated (Gibson, 2001; Meethan, 2001; Sinclair, 1997a, 1997b). As Meethan (2003) has argued, cultural change through tourism cannot simply be accounted for in terms of a shift from one state into another, but rather needs to be seen in processual terms as the manifestation of social, economic and cultural phenomena among which tourism is only one element. Further to Timothy's (2001) call for the continuation of researchers' delving into the socio-cultural underpinnings that have created gender disparities in tourism, then, longitudinal studies of tourism destinations should provide particularly valuable insight into how gender relations have affected and are affected by tourism development over time.

The early work on tourism which began the critique of modernization models in relation to tourism development argued that tourism development is likely to reflect and even to reinforce existing inequality and stratifications in society (De Kadt, 1979). Gender relations have on the whole been a case in point, with many studies indicating that women's access to tourism work, and certainly the more remunerative sources of tourism employment, tends to fall behind that of men, thus reflecting local norms regarding the sexual division of labour (Harvey *et al.*, 1995; Levy & Lerch, 1991; Long & Kindon, 1997; Scott, 1997; Wilkinson & Prativi, 1995). Concurrently, however, small and micro enterprises, and especially family run businesses, have been found in many settings to be relatively beneficial to women because of the

opportunities they offer for women to earn extra income and to improve their status both within and outside of the household (Gibson, 2001). Long and Wall (1995), for example, have discussed the improved status and mobility of women running home-stays in Bali. Likewise, Bouquet (1982) and Garcia-Ramon *et al.* (1995) have discussed the ways in which rural women's farm tourism activities in the UK and Spain respectively afforded women a sense of pride in their work and the opportunities to interact with the outside world.

WOMEN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Women have played an 'invisible' role for a long period of time in the economic development of rural areas, as they have been perceived as helpmates, wives and mothers, and as generally subservient to the dominant economic work of men, both in farming and outside it (Bock 1994; Sauge`res 2002; O'Toole & Macgarvey 2003). Nowadays, local economies are beginning to include the female labour force on the local agenda for economic development. Reforms in agricultural policy and many European initiatives and policies have focused on supporting actions to enhance entrepreneurship, alongside schemes to finance and foster the creation and growth of women's businesses in rural areas, especially mountainous and disadvantaged regions (Kazakopoulos & Gidakou 2003), thus changing women's role and giving them an opportunity to take part in business activities largely similar to those traditionally performed by them at home (Anthopoulou 2006). Various work has sought to examine women entrepreneurs (Baygan 2000; St-Cyr & Ganon 2004; Bruni *et al.* 2004; Smith-Hunter & Boyd 2004) and many studies have discussed personal characteristics, industry/business choices, and barriers to success (Greenberger & O'Neil 1993) as well as theoretical issues in an attempt to explain why women do the jobs they do (Little 1991).

Another well-documented issue is that of women in farming (Symes & Marsden 1983; Gasson & Winter 1992; Whatmore 1994; Petrin 1997; Gidakou 1999; Robinson 2001; Kazakopoulos & Gidakou 2003; Bock 2004; Anthopoulou 2006; Iakovidou *et al.* 2006; Verheul *et al.* 2006 Anthopoulou (2006) believes that, given the reduction of agricultural incomes in the last decade and the decreased employment opportunities in the countryside, the motive of creating additional family income, and the need for professional activity and socialisation outside the home, rural women turned their interest to jobs that utilise 'the knowledge and skills accumulated in the family and local community'. As farming families have turned to diversification, growing numbers of women have taken paid off-farm employment or have engaged in non-agricultural activity on the farm (Sauge`res 2002). Many researchers have tried to describe the profile of women entrepreneurs outside farming in rural areas.

WOMEN AND COOPERATIVES

Women, who constitute over 90 percent of weavers in Kullu valley , work in well-organized women weaving cooperative societies. The Co-operative Societies perform multiple functions from coordinating with weavers to marketing, assisting them to earn money. They earn around Rs. 5000 to Rs. 10,000 a month. The societies also run various schemes and provide gratuity and bonus money, given to the women who provides services and added to the cost of the service provided, generally as a reward for the service provided and as a supplement to the service provider's income. They are doing all types of jobs in weaving sector whether it is a managerial job or salesmanship job. This way they are earning good wages approximately around Rs 200 per day while working in co-operative societies. They make shawls, mufflers and stoles in various patterns and designs and sold in the markets also exported outside Kullu.

According to Gannon (1994), rural tourism appears to be the most attractive field for rural women. Small-scale enterprises in rural tourism seem to be better suited to the reality of the countryside and the profile of women entrepreneurs. Gidarakou et al. (2000) also argue that small-scale rural tourism businesses are the best way for women to enter the labour market. Cooperatives are an interesting form of social economy in rural regions and affect a specific category of the agrarian population: women. The social importance of cooperatives is considerable because they provide full- or part-time employment to a significant number of local women who have no other job opportunities—as these are limited, if not non-existent, in rural areas—and because by today's standards in the labour market, many rural women lack the formal qualifications (age, education) necessary to be hired in some form of dependent labour, but neither do they have the capital or self-esteem necessary to start a business of their own. Lyberaki & Paraskevopoulos in their studies found that the reserve of social capital in Greece is particularly limited, women's agro tourism cooperatives take on greater social significance because they operate in the countryside, where people's confidence in collective actions has been damaged owing to the recent history of agricultural cooperatives in Greece.

Community based tourism initiatives, particular of local women's groups and co-operatives can be an accessible and suitable entry point for women into the paid workforce. They seem to generate more long-term motivation than initiatives from outside. There are numerous examples where women and women's groups have started income generating activities on their own. These activities help to create financial independence for local women and challenge them to develop the necessary skills and improve their education. Research has shown that financial independence and good education lead to improved self-esteem of women and more equitable relationships in families and communities.

Himachali Handicrafts and Women

Throughout the year in the hilly regions of Himachal Pradesh, people practice their age-old skills takes place nonstop activities of making several handicrafts. Women play dominant role in these practices and it takes months of patient work before a crafted article of rare workmanship is ready to be revealed for public appraisal. The range of crafts in Himachal is vast and shows many facets of artistic dexterity. The woolen shawls and pattus of Kullu are no less striking. The location matters little, whether situated in the valley itself, or nestling against the contours of the mountainside, virtually every homestead in Kullu has a handloom which remains particularly busy during the winter months. With less work in the terraced fields, the women devote themselves to weaving the traditional Kullu shawls.

The shawl is believed to be relatively recent introduction to the tradition of Himachal Pradesh. Shawl weaving today become one of the most flourishing industries a means of livelihood. For people a secondary occupation to augment and supplement their income from farming. It is an employment generation device for household women of hills. The most unique identity of the people in Himachal Pradesh is the hand-woven costumes, which are crafted with excellent finesse. The scarves that the women wear on their heads are very popular and make significant style statements. The specially made shoes, which are made from dried grass, are the best to keep their feet warm during the cold climate. Costumes of Himachal Pradesh are mostly woven by hand and the handlooms are very popular throughout the state. Due to the cold and at times harshly cold climatic conditions, shawls are also very popular among the local people as well as the tourists. The people from Himachal Pradesh are renowned for their shawls. The shawls from Himachal Pradesh are very popular for their smooth texture, quality and finesse, and are the most stylist expressions of the costumes of Himachal Pradesh.

Furthermore many projects and programmes which espouse the empowerment of women show little if any evidence of attempts even to define what this means in their own context let alone to assess whether and to what extent they have succeeded. Instead traditional development goals, such as better health or increased income, are cited as evidence of empowerment. However, there has been a visible change among the younger generation with more and more of them opting for westernised clothes.

Women are extremely skilled in handicrafts and hence create masterpieces of art which is a must buy for any costume lover tourist. The beauty and smoothness of the Pashmina shawls and the soothing experience that comes from wearing it can only be felt. Manufactured from the hair of a type of goat also called Pashmina, these shawls are renowned across the globe. Women in Kullu valley learn the skill for handicrafts from the Self Help Groups (SHG) as well as from family traditions inherited and nurtured and developed through years of practice. The state government apart, the great demand for shawls, caps and mufflers is the impetus that has transformed a domestic, need-oriented industry into a craft of high

standards. These women weavers (Photo 1) sell their products to the societies as well as to the show rooms. These women also display their crafts in Kullu dussehera, the Minjor fair , Lavi fair, Winter Carnival and numerous other rural fairs provide them with occasion to sell their woolen fabrics, shawls, blankets, lois, pattus and patties etc.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study presents the results of a study of 150 women of Kullu valley of Himachal Pradesh who are working in handicraft industry. The paper explores the perceived impacts of handicrafts on their livelihood, sustenance and status in society. The women constitute approximately the 90% percent of weavers in the Kullu valley. The survey is conducted in different villages of Kullu and Manali and Bhunter region. To select a sample frame the following process was followed. Women weavers (n=230) in Kullu, Manali and Bhunter and neighboring villages were randomly selected for the interview. The women working in the handicraft sector are educated and dominant are up to secondary education (32.6%). The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions that related to self employment, empowerment and self sustainability. Fifteen Likert scale questions assessing women perceptions of the social, economic, empowerment and impacts of tourism on their livelihood were asked. Women were asked to indicate their perceptions on a 5-point scale from **1 (Strongly agree) , 2(Agree), 3(Neutral) , 4 (Disagree) and 5 (Strongly disagree).**

There were four socio- demographic questions also. (Table-1)

TABLE 1
Characteristics of women surveyed (n = 230) working in handicraft sector

Variable	Categories	Number	Percent
Age	20–29	42	18.2
	30–39	55	23.9
	40–49	62	26.9
	50–59	41	17.8
	Above 60	30	13.2
Education	Primary	63	27.5
	Matric	47	20.4
	Secondary	75	32.6
	Graduation	30	13.2
	Higher	15	6.3
Monthly household income	Upto 3000	35	15.2
	3001-6000	55	23.9
	6001-9000	69	30.1
	Above 9000	71	30.8

Marital status	Married	135	58.7
	Widowed	18	7.8
	Separated	22	9.6
	Single	55	23.9

Women weavers in Kullu valley feel strongly (mean 1.36) that their handicrafts (Table 2) like Kullu shawl, topi, dohru, muffler etc. are the prime attractions for tourists. There are lot showrooms on the Kullu Manali high way as well as in the Kullu, Manali and Bhunter city. The tourists visit this place to purchase these handicrafts. Women in Kullu valley have become self reliant and earning sufficient money to sustain their family.

Table-2

Statements	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	Mean	S.D
1. Handicrafts are the prime attractions for tourist	35	45	10	7	3	2.37	.77
2. I am able to generate sufficient income	54	43	2	1		1.36	.52
3. I have good status in society because of my work	51	42	5	2		1.46	.59
4. There is great demand of local handicrafts because of tourism	49	43	5	13		1.53	.61
5. Tourism has generated market for my handicraft products.	51	43	5	41		1.37	.56
6. I have become self reliant.	53	45	2			1.36	.57
7. My household's standard of living has increased because of tourism.	41	51	4	2	2	1.58	.67
8. There is full support of my family for this profession.	52	42	4	2	4	1.34	.59
9. Handicrafts business is advantageous to the economy of the local area?	55	43	2			1.25	.52
10. Because of tourism the handicraft industry is growing.	41	54	3	2		1.55	.61
11. Tourism has can make women self empowered.	41	54	4	2		1.68	.67
12. I am able to make own decisions.	51	46	3			1.35	.58
13. I am able to provide good opportunities of growth to my family	48	43	5	4		1.51	.62
14. My confidence level is high.	51	41	5	3		1.43	.57

As the handicraft in Kullu is dominated by house hold women, most of the women (mean 1.46) perceive that they have attained good status in the society. As Kullu valley is the prime fascination for the tourists the tourists are also inclined towards the local handicrafts and local women perceive that tourism is resulting in the growth of market for the local (mean 1.37) handicrafts. Local women has become self

reliant and has increased the standard of living (mean 1.58) as they are contributing extra to their family along with other family members. Now there is full support to these women from their family members to their work (mean 1.34) which is making them more empowered. Most of the women now strongly perceive that handicraft business is advantageous to the local economy. Women also perceive strongly (mean 1.58) that because of boost of tourism in Kullu valley the handicraft business will enhance that will result in the more employment opportunities. While the concept of women empowerment is concerned these local women have strong opinion that tourism can empower (mean 1.68) the local women to good extent like they feel themselves. Women running their own handicraft businesses feel that they are now able to make their own decisions and not to depend upon other family members. While the most of family decisions are taken by these women (mean 1.51) and the growth of family is concerned other family members now give them good regard (1.43).

Based on survey it can be said that for women empowerment there is need of women participation . Women have experienced increased self-esteem and status within their community because of handicraft business and tourism. Women are more actively involved in decision-making in their community and have taken on new leadership roles. Handicrafts have provided them an opportunity to develop multidimensional empowerment at both the individual and collective levels. Women also require the training in how to obtain these microcredit loans as well as grant writing to secure small grants for investing in new occupations. Women-focused training and workshops on receiving micro-credit loans and small business management could help women to build more self-confidence in managing their own small businesses.

Workshops should be scheduled during a time and at a location that is convenient for women to attend. The handicraft work made women self reliant and enhanced their leadership skills. In addition, women should attempt to build their technological skills and learn to use the internet so that they can enhance their marketing skills. As tourism is spreading it is bringing many changes for the lives of women. The key to empowerment through tourism lies in local ownership by the community and the full integration of women. The community, governments, NGOs, and academics should try to find ways so that tourism can be successfully employed as a means towards women empowerment. Tourism has led to the economic empowerment through the development of occupation groups.

CONCLUSION

The example of self employed women in handicraft work in Kullu valley set a good example for the women empowerment from tourism. The positive contribution of tourism to women empowerment can only be determined if poverty reduction and the enhancement of women's dignity and role in the work

place are addressed” there is need to develop procedures and established mechanisms to ensure that women really benefit from tourism. To enable women socially and economically empowered tourism has addressed issues of poverty reduction and gave women a chance to earn a living with equity and dignity in Kullu valley.

There is need to take vigorous steps to support gender mainstreaming in national development processes so as to achieve women’s equality in the tourism sector and foster a network of activists, ambassadors and advocates and experts in gender issues from around the world . As very high percentage of women are employed in the tourism sector , there is need to improve the quality and conditions of women’s employment in tourism, as well as create increased economic opportunities for self-employed women and micro-entrepreneurs. There is need to establish a multi-stakeholder taskforce and build awareness about opportunities for women in tourism.

REFERENCES

- Akpınar, N., Talay, I., Ceylan, C. & Gunduz, S. (2005) ‘Rural women and agrotourism in the context of sustainable rural development: a case study from Turkey’, *Environment Development and Sustainability*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 473–486.
- Ananiadis, I., Notta, O. & Oustapassidis, K. (2003) ‘Cooperative competitiveness and capital structure in the Greek dairy industry’, *Journal of Rural Cooperation*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 95–109.
- Anthopoulou, Th. (2006) ‘Savoir-faire alimentaires et dynamiques entrepreneuriales des femmes rurales: étude locale dans le Péloponnèse (Grèce)’, paper delivered at the 3^eme Colloque
- Apostolopoulos, Y. and Sönmez, S. (2001) Working producers, leisured consumers: Women’s experiences in developing regions. In Y. Apostolopoulos, S. Sönmez and
- Bouquet, M. (1982) Production and reproduction of family farms in South-West England. *Sociologia Ruralis* 22, 227–244.
- Clark, T. & James, F. (1992) ‘Women owned businesses: dimensions and policy issues’, *Economic Development Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 25–30.
- Conway, L. & Sheridan, A. (2005) ‘Women, small business and regional location’, *Rural Society Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 55–76.
- D. Timothy (eds) *Women as Producers and Consumers of Tourism in Developing Regions* (pp. 3–18). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- De Kadt, E. (ed.) (1979) *Tourism – Passport to Development*. Washington, DC: Oxford University Press, published for the World Bank and UNESCO.
- Gannon, A. (1994) ‘Rural tourism as a factor in rural community economic development for economies in transition’, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 2, pp. 51–59.

- Garcia-Ramon, M.D., Canoves, G. and Valdovinos, N. (1995) Farm tourism, gender and the environment in Spain. *Annals of Tourism Research* 22 (2), 267–282.
- Gasson, R. & Winter, M. (1992) 'Gender relations and farm household pluriactivity', *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 387–397.
- Giagou, D. & Apostolopoulos, C. (1996) 'Rural women and the development of the agrotouristic cooperatives in Greece: the case of Petra, Lesbos', *Journal of Rural Cooperation*, vol. 24, no. 2,
- Gidakou, I. (1999) 'Young women's attitudes towards agriculture and women's new roles in the Greek countryside: a first approach', *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 147–158.
- Gidakou, I., Xanou, A. & Theofilou, K. (2000) 'Farm women's new vocational activities: prospects and problems of women's cooperatives and small on farm business in Greece', *Journal of Rural Cooperation*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 19–37.
- Greenberger, E. & O'Neil, R. (1993) 'Spouse, parent, worker: role commitments and role-related experiences in the construction of adults' well-being', *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 181–197.
- Long, V. and Kindon, S. (1997) Gender and tourism development in Balinese villages. In T. Sinclair (ed.) *Gender, Work and Tourism* (pp. 91–119). London: Routledge.
- Long, V. and Wall, G. (1995) Small scale tourism development in Bali. In M. Conlin and T. Baum (eds) *Island Tourism: Management, Principles and Practice*. Sussex: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.
- Meethan, K. (2003) Mobile cultures? Hybridity, tourism and cultural change. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 1 (1), 11–28. pp. 143–155.
- Scott, J. (1995) Sexual and national boundaries in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 22 (2), 385–403.
- Scott, J. (1995) Sexual and national boundaries in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 22 (2), 385–403.
- Scott, J. (1997) Chances and choices: Women and tourism in Northern Cyprus. In T. Sinclair (ed.) *Gender, Work and Tourism*. London: Routledge.
- Sinclair, T. (1997a) Issues and theories of gender and work in tourism. In T. Sinclair (ed.) *Gender, Work and Tourism* (pp. 1–15). London: Routledge.
- Sinclair, T. (1997b) Gendered work in tourism: Comparative perspectives. In T. Sinclair (ed.) *Gender, Work and Tourism* (pp. 220–234). London: Routledge.
- Timothy, D. (2001) Gender relations in tourism: Revisiting patriarchy and underdevelopment. In Y. Apostolopoulos, S. Sönmez and D. Timothy (eds) *Women as Producers and Consumers of Tourism in Developing Regions* (pp. 235–248). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Wilkinson, P.F. and Prativij, W. (1995) Gender and tourism in an Indonesian village. *Annals of Tourism Research* 22 (2), 283–299.