RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RURAL TOURISM: A CASE STUDY ON ANEGUNDI, KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to explore the role of tourism in bringing rural women empowerment in a small rural area of Karnataka. Studies around the world show that tourism enterprises have increased the power of women within both the family and the community. Experience in Spain, Greece, France, Britain and Ireland has demonstrated that the involvement of women in rural tourism ventures has helped to transform their economy and development of rural areas. In future rural tourism is predicted to have a great growth potential in India by tourism scholars. There has been a radical shift in the kind of tourism in India from „mass tourism to „experience based tourism” whereby the tourists want to see the authentic lifestyle of rural people. The research paper is focused on rural women empowerment in a small rural setting of India located at Koppal District of Karnataka addressed as “Anegundi” through rural tourism. The research has been undertaken for purpose of achieving rural empowerment in a small village of Anegundi by empowering women through rural tourism.

Key words: Rural tourism, Women empowerment, Gender equality, Rural development

Introduction: Since the 1848 Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Conference and the subsequent Declaration of Sentiments, issues of women empowerment have infiltrated into almost all spheres of the global and local debates, within and outside the academia. Tourism is one of such phenomenon that engages both the global and the local and has been no exception to this turn. There is no more profound avenue to demonstrate that women empowerment has entered the realms of the most popular and rapidly growing global industry than the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)’s resolution to include women empowerment among its ‘triple commitment’ objectives to the Millennium Development Goals (UNWTO, 2008). The strength of tourism can also help to improve livelihoods of rural people by alleviating poverty, ensure or improve environmental sustainability, and promote gender equality and empower women. There is no region in the developing world where women seem to be equal to men in terms of legal, social and economical rights.

This gender gap influences the access to and control of resources, political voice, in economic opportunities, and power relations. Ultimately, the costs of these inequalities cut broadly across the society and ultimately harm everyone.

STUDY OBJECTIVES:

The aim of the present study is to gain insight into the concept of women empowerment in the rural setting from the event rural tourism in context of Village Anegundi at Koppal district, Karnataka where women have become self reliant and empowered by making their traditional handicrafts and offering tourism services to the tourist community as the source of income from tourism. These handicrafts and tourism services have become prime attractions for not only domestic tourist but also foreign tourist. The research focuses on specific objectives as follows:

• To identify the significance of rural tourism in bringing rural women empowerment
• To study the role of tourism entrepreneurship and fibre handicraft in women empowerment.
• To understand the perceptions of local women on rural tourism entrepreneurship and empowerment.
• To recommend the measures for women empowerment through rural tourism at Anegundi

THE STUDY AREA:

The rural setting of Anegundi is the study area, known for its historical and mythological significance, perched on the bank of river Tungabhadra. Anegundi is the legendary kingdom of Kishkinda of the monkey prince Sugriva. It is also the cradle of the Krishnadevaraya dynasty of the glorious Vijaynagar Empire and falls in the core zone of the World Heritage Site of Hampi. This rural setting has significant cultural and natural tourism resources in form of unique sculptures and architecture style of vernacular rural houses, distinctive Anegundi Utsav, rural handicrafts, folklore and rural natural beauty makes it more precious and attractive rural tourist destination and it also possess enormous economic empowerment opportunities though tourism entrepreneurship for rural women at the village.

However in order to understand the condition of women in Indian society in general. The following factors are taken into consideration

a) Low female literacy level
b) Women’s contribution to production/ reproduction is not adequately recognised
c) Non recognition of women’s work
d) Lack or poor levels of skills/ training for women workers
e) Poor health conditions and poverty
f) Absence of social security measures for women workers and unequal wages
g) The gender dimension of child labour
h) Poor access to resources / land/ property ( issue on property right, access and use of common property resources )

RURAL TOURISM AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN ANEGUNDI, KARNATAKA:

With the advent of urbanization and industrialization, and thus exhausting work, noise, various pollutions, more and more tourists yearn for the areas of preserved nature, clean air, healthy food. The ideal refuge for these tourists are precisely the rural, village areas and farms - an oasis of peace, which Anegundi is the symbols of wealth, fertility, and prestige of Karnataka. Anegundi have a favourable condition for tourism development in the countryside. There are particularly favourable conditions of preserved nature, with a mild climate, clean air, still unpolluted riverside landscape, attractive framing lands, and sculptural garden. Spending time in Anegundi gives tourists the opportunity for walking, bicycling, recreation, fishing, swimming, grazing of animals, picking of vegetation, and other recreational as well as leisure activities in nature. Those tourists who demonstrate an interest in carrying out handicraft work and agricultural work can also be involved in it. The village also has the glories histological background and mythological significance which makes it an idea tourist destination for pilgrims and heritage lovers.

The development of tourism in rural Anegundi, as an organized activity began just over a fifteen Years ago initiated by Ms. Shama Pawar – Chairperson of The Kishkindha Trust. The Trust as nongovernmental body played a remarkable role in bringing sustainable
development of rural women empowerment in the village. The Anegundi as a rural tourist destination has a wide range of handicrafts and rural art products which promotes the rural cottage industry of Anegundi and also empowers local rural women with employment opportunity and economic stability. This handicraft cottage industry is run by Women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) known as Bhoomi society of working women of Anegundi.

The Bhoomi society of working women constitute a group of 15 Self Help Groups (SHGs) established at Anegundi village to bring women empowerment through economic independence for it members. Each SHG works in different creative areas, such as weaving, crocheting, banana fiber rope making, tailoring etc. This society supported by The Kishkindha Trust since 1997 is now an independent unit run and managed by the local women artisans of Anegundi. Bhoomi Society is the flagship project of TKT, which brought the women together, taught them the craft of making natural fibre products, gave them exposure to working with a range of premier designers and design students from across the country and abroad and as of this year; Bhoomi Society is an independent unit with the artisans managing their own administrative and production functions, producing natural fibre crafts that are sold across India and abroad, with TKT today only providing support in terms of building market links and knowledge dissemination.

Shorba is the brand name of the crafts produced by Bhoomi Society which comprise of locally available natural fibers such as banana, water hyacinth and river grass to make beautifully designed products. A labour intensive process, the fiber is first stripped from the stem of the tree and then rolled into a rope that can be woven or crocheted into a variety of products. Bags, Purses, Table Mats and other types of mats, Earrings and other jewellery, and other items are made by the artisans of Bhoomi Society. At present Bhoomi Society has grown to a strength of around 200 women, who are all skilled in a particular creative field and who regularly work (directly and indirectly) with designers to produce attractive range of handicrafts to the local market and tourist community specifically.

THE CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE DIRECTION TO STRENGTHEN RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN ANEGUNDI, KARNATAKA:

The local residents, stakeholders and the NGO’s collective viewpoints in the form of following challenges they faced in trying to come up with rural tourism ventures in the area and needs to be critically address:

- Lack of capital and investments in the rural areas by the government and private sector.
- Lack of business opportunity awareness and financial institutional support to bring out rural women entrepreneurship in the village.
- Low level of skill development among the rural women to carry out constructive developmental task.
- Lack of linkages between micro, small and medium enterprises for women entrepreneurship development
- Corruption and mismanagement of key development government institutions
- Lack of cooperation and participation from local Gram Panchayat in bringing out women empowerment and developmental plans in the village

RECOMMENDATION:

First, it is necessary to impart education, awareness and guidance about the significance of rural tourism and the various opportunities thrown for developing women entrepreneurship to
bring women empowerment in the village. In addition to this application of aggressive marketing strategy and market plan, propaganda and promotion to enhance the sale of tourist services and Handicrafts made by Women own enterprises . Second, Facilitate economic resources, technical assistance and consultation services to develop women entrepreneurship in the village by the government , gram panchayat and NGOs Third, Ensuring social security and safety to women is one of the primary need to empower women in the village . The cooperation, coordination and recognition from the family and the society is one of the major look out for bringing women Empowerment.

CONCLUSION:
This paper has indicated that women empowerment through tourism presents a complex situation with chances and challenges intricately woven together. The viewpoint of the research paper is to unpack the problems, threats in bringing women empowerment and to provide a perspective of hope amidst the seeming chaos. The example of Anegundi village reveals that indeed tourism has gone a long way to provide opportunities and that the challenges can be addressed by incorporating them in the ordering process to produce innovations in tourism. Such innovations will include facilitating and creating avenues for women to innovatively initiate and manage tourism projects that also address key global challenges.

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