One of the major trends in tourism is the continuous reiteration of tourism as a vehicle for women empowerment, mainly through employment generation. However, there is ignorance about the gender-blind framework embedded in the employment opportunities offered by tourism. In this context, the paper highlights an overwhelming influence of patriarchy on tourism. Further, the paper raises questions on if tourism offers a space for women to choose the employment opportunities or force them to opt as a survival strategy? Core to the issues is not only ensuring better working condition in the sector but the need to examine the claim made by the tourism industry as one of the major employer of women within the right-based framework.

Context:
One of the major trends in tourism is the continuous reiteration of tourism as a vehicle for women empowerment, mainly through employment generation. The UN World Tourism Organisation dedicated World Tourism Day 2007, to women, “Tourism Opens Doors for Women” and followed it with its Global Report on Women in Tourism 2010 highlighting tourism’s role in empowering women politically and economically. In the Indian context, the National Tourism Policy, 2002 identifies rural tourism and ecotourism as a means to poverty reduction, creating new skills and enhancing participation of women in tourism. However, there is ignorance about the gender-blind framework embedded in the employment opportunities offered by tourism.

Notional integration: In the context of the formal sector, experience on the ground shows that the lens adopted in tourism focuses only on notional integration of women and not on actual integration. For real integration to take place, gender hierarchies embedded in social structure need to be challenged. Instead, points of engagement with tourism including economic spaces has strengthened the existing hierarchical societal structures. Sexual division of labour seen within homes (like cooking, cleaning, care giving) are replicated in the kind of opportunities open to women in the hospitality sector of the tourism industry.

Opportunities offered by tourism are characterized with glass-ceiling that prevent women to access jobs at higher position. Wage disparity, lack of support for working mothers in form of crèches / day care facilities, lack of flexible timings, lack of safety measures to ensure women’s right to work etc. are the common features associated with women working in tourism industry.

Since tourism is seasonal in nature, and women are employed at the lower rungs of the labour market, their services are not required during lean season. This leads to insecurity of employment. Further, the contractual nature of their employment, deprives them from many benefits that a full time employee enjoys like medical benefits, insurance and bonus. Feminisation and informalisation of these jobs strengthens stereotyped role of women wherein they are seen as passive and compliant work force who will accept exploitative work conditions I without questioning violation of their rights. Nature of work like late working hours, serving alcohol (which is a social taboo) and dress codes (which objectify the woman’s body) contribute to women working in a high risk environment. Further, high value placed to satisfy customers, privileges their needs over those of the employees. Very often this results in employee complaints either being summarily dismissed or tokenistically addressed.

Invisible labour force: Women working in informal sector such as street vendors, artisans, sex workers, are not even recognized by the tourism industry. Women involved in these kinds of work are treated as encroachers causing frequent evictions. This also emerges from the perspective that street vendors and sex workers are criminal, therefore violating their right to access public spaces, right to livelihood and also breach their Right to Life.

Street vending represents the largest category of informal work occupying women1. Women tend to opt for small businesses like selling trinkets, lamps, food items, etc. which does not require much capital and also provide flexible timing to meet their dual responsibilities. Street vendors face unique kinds of livelihood risks because of the legal, physical, and socio-cultural environment in which they work. They face constant eviction threats, fines and harassment by traffic policemen. This is aggravated at tourism sites where more emphasis is laid on beautification to attract high-end tourists. The prevailing notion of beautification does not have space for street vendors who use
pushcart or sheets to display their goods, pursue tourists to buy the goods, serve various need of tourists in informal ways and make the place chaotic.

Compared to men, women street vendors are more likely to operate in insecure or illegal spaces, trade in less lucrative goods, generate a lower volume of trade, and work as commission agents or employees of other vendors. As a result, they tend to earn less than men vendors. Since street vending is not much profitable source of earning, in few places like Puri, good number of men have taken loans in their wife’s name due to mushrooming of micro-finance services. Street vendors have poor social protection and their working conditions on the streets expose them to a variety of safety and health issues. The lack of toilets has an adverse effect on women’s health and many suffer from urinary tract infections and kidney ailments.

In general, street vendors’ unions / associations are formed at very few places including in tourism destinations. In case of existing unions/associations, there is negligible membership and participation of women. Therefore, voices of women street vendors remain unheard in these unions/associations. Bhowmik (2005) in his article says that “...the male vendors are more visible as they sell greater varieties of goods – clothes, fruits, household items etc. Most of the food vendors are male. The level of unionisation is higher among them and they are thus able to protect themselves better than the women vendors. Women vendors are mainly small vendors and are hardly unionised. These factors add to their invisibility.”

Non recognition of street vending at tourism site is clear in the National Urban Street Vendor Policy (2009). Tourism sites are not included in the definition of public areas. To ensure gender focus in the Town Vending Committee, which is a decision-making space, the policy states to establish TVC with at least one third of representatives of women in categories of street vendors. However, in view of the negligible participation of women vendors in existing street vendors’ organisations, it is difficult to say if they will be able to influence the decisions in their favor. Thirdly, demonstrating financial accountability will actually exclude women street vendors who come from poor background and are many a time burdened with the loans to run the business or to meet family needs.

Souvenir industry also offers opportunities for women artisans but the issue of women influencing the market in their own interest remains in question. By and large, women artisans are seen as shadow workers and not as actual workers. Getting access to market, increasing cost of raw materials capital and credit are few major challenges faced by them. For e.g. there is minimal increase in the cost of lac bangles but cost of lac has increased over the years. High cost of renting spaces in tourism destinations has pushed women to opt for an interior location in the market place as the front ones are captured by private players. Dual responsibilities of women artisans have affected their capacity to earn maximum profit. Ghumar Mahila Swayam Sewa Samiti and Grameen Blue Art Pottery Samiti (men’s group) is formed by Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) near Jaipur to promote blue pottery work. Due to their domestic responsibilities, they find it difficult to spend long hours and produce the products at large scale. Therefore, in case of large scale orders, they take support of men’s group and in turn, share the profit with them.

Initiatives taken to promote women artisans focus more on production level and do not take into consideration women artisan specific needs like linkages to the market and access to credit. For e.g., Jaipur Rugs Foundation aims to empower women carpet weavers to establish collective enterprises by providing sustainable livelihood opportunities. In practice, however, the women weavers are mostly employed on piece-rate basis to weave the carpets in their homes. Designing and marketing of the products are done by the JRF team. There is no doubt that the initiative supports women to earn their livelihood using their skills, but it raises an important question if it is leading towards building entrepreneur skills? Another example is TRIFED who is involved in improvising the production and marketing skills of artisans involved in blue pottery work. The training programs conducted by them These initiatives need to be supported by other social interventions, which will allow for women to gain physical mobility so that she access markets in her immediate vicinity as well as participate in festivals/exhibitions elsewhere, which are also opportunities to network and find further avenues to sell their products.

On seeing the linkage with tourism sector, the Ministry of Textile has taken initiatives to promote handicraft and handloom products through various development schemes such as Baba Sahab Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas yojna, Design & Technology up-gradation scheme, Marketing Support & Services Scheme, Human Resources Development Scheme, Handicrafts Artisan comprehensive Welfare Scheme and Research & Development Scheme. However, complicated procedures of availing the schemes and reluctant attitude of government officials including bank officials
are major challenge faced by artisans from every craft. Lack of awareness about the schemes and the procedure, limited physical mobility and dual responsibilities affects women’s access to the schemes.

To protect the interest of artisans, Handloom (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act 1985 aims to reserve the articles for exclusive production by handlooms. Lack of awareness, lack of proper mechanism to implement the Act and lack of proper mechanism to differentiate the products made by handlooms and powerlooms are major impediments in this regard. Current proposal to change the definition of Handloom by including any loom, other than powerloom; on which, at least one process for weaving requires manual intervention or human energy for production is not accepted by weavers. It will allow indirect use of power which will serve the interest of factory owners and not the weavers. Another one is Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act 1999 (GI Act) which is an indication of identified goods showing its link with the place of origin. The Act has the potential to retain the authenticity of the products which is a major concern at tourism destinations. It is seen that market is captured by artefacts made in other states and not by the local artisans. This has affected the development of local artefacts. Since the focus is more on earning revenue through serving business interest and not the interest of local artisans, only those handicrafts are being promoted which has demand in the market. However, implementation of GI Act remains in question. There is lack of awareness about the Act. Further, the Act is silent about monitoring the infringement of GIs which means the producers are suppose to monitor false uses of their GIs on their own. This is a very cost effective measure is not an affordable option for artisans.

There is a demand for sexual services at many tourism destinations, which are being serviced by masseurs, sex workers and very often street vendors. Since the entire operation of providing these services is clandestine in nature, women involved in offering these services also remain hidden and unrecognised. There is no question of them raising their voices against harassment from customers, police and local goons. Tourism is the season which attracts many sex workers to the destination, though at the cost of their well-being. Police and local goons see them as a source of earning extra money. The same applies to the massage parlors where situation is even worse. Women working in these spaces are perceived as ‘available’ to satisfy every whim and fantasy of the clients and not as someone skilled with the art of healing. It is also true that these parlours are often used a smokescreen for trafficking. However, when raids take place, the police do not use their judgement in separating the spurious ones from the genuine parlours. This often works as a deterrent for genuine healers to take up this work.

Often, to curb trafficking and prostitution, massage parlours are not given permission by state authorities. This in turn encourages massage parlours being run in covert ways to meet the demand at tourism destinations. This not only exposes the women working in these parlours to exploitative situations, but also raises question on women’s right to life with dignity. It is ironic that on the one hand, there is no recognition of sex workers and masseurs, but at the same time, there is significant sexual objectification of women in tourism industry encouraging sex tourism.

**Conclusion:**

Patriarchy has an overwhelming influence on tourism. Women’s bodies and lives are seen through this perspective and the work assigned to them is a manifestation of this. Tourism in urban areas is being promoted claiming to empower women with little awareness of social, cultural and political barriers faced by women at tourism destinations. Mere tokenistic engagement of women in the tourism industry is mistakenly perceived as women’s Empowerment. The process of including women is often disconnected with the fact that their participation in domestic and public spaces is inter-woven with social and cultural norms. These norms demand sensitively designed interventions made at every level to promote women participation in tourism.

- [http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/street-vendors](http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/street-vendors)
- Street Vendors in Asia: A Review, Sharit K, Bhowmik, Economic and Political Weekly, May 28-4 June, 2005

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