

Women's Participation in Tourism Industry: Challenges and Opportunities in Gorakhpur District

¹Siddharth Singh



²Dr. Manish Kumar Singh



¹Junior Research Fellow, Department of Geography, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract

The tourism industry is important for the economy and culture of a place. It helps create jobs and makes local customs and ways of life stronger. More women are getting involved in tourism as it grows in India. They still do not have a big say and face a lot of problems. Gorakhpur district is a place for tourism. However, women do not play a role in developing the tourism industry there. This research paper wants to look at what women do in the tourism industry in Gorakhpur district. It will study how women help the economy and society what kind of jobs and business opportunities are available to them and what kinds of economic and institutional problems they must deal with. The tourism industry and women in it are very important to this research. Women, in the tourism industry face challenges and the research paper will try to understand these challenges.

Keywords: Tourism Industry, Tourism Development, Women Empowerment.

1.Introduction

The tourism industry is one of the world's fastest-growing economic activities, playing a vital role in the overall development of any region. Tourism development can also lead to road, transportation, housing, communications, and other infrastructure expand, providing new employment and income opportunities for local people. Women's participation in this process is crucial, as they can naturally play a dominant role in sectors such as service, hospitality, and cultural preservation.

Gorakhpur district holds an important part as socio-economic and cultural development in eastern Uttar Pradesh. The region attracts numerous visitors every year because of its spiritual heritage, historical relevance, and strategic location near prominent pilgrimage and Buddhist sites. Places such as the Gorakhnath Temple have long been point of devotion, drawing pilgrims

and tourists from different parts of the country and abroad. Additionally, Gorakhpur serves as a connecting point for travellers visiting nearby destinations like Kushinagar, Sant Kabir Nagar, Valmiki Nagar and International visits to Nepal. The growing movement of tourists has supported the expansion of several associated sectors, including accommodation facilities, food and catering services, handicraft businesses, local trade markets, and transport networks. These activities play an important role in empowering the district's economy and favouring regional development.

Despite the large tourism potential, the role of women in the development of the tourism industry in Gorakhpur district remains relatively limited and weak. Owing to various socio-economic, and cultural factors, women are often restricted to low-level, unorganised sector, and low salaried occupations. Limited access to education, lack of vocational training, prevailing social stereotypes, safety

concerns, and restricted participation in decision-making processes are among the major factors contributing to this situation. These challenges hinder women from getting awareness regarding their potential and this limits their active participation in the tourism sector.

Therefore, it is mandatory to study the role of women in the development of the tourism industry in Gorakhpur district, so that by understanding their contributions, potential, and challenges, steps can be taken toward empowering them. This study will contribute to the inclusive development of the tourism industry and promote women's empowerment.

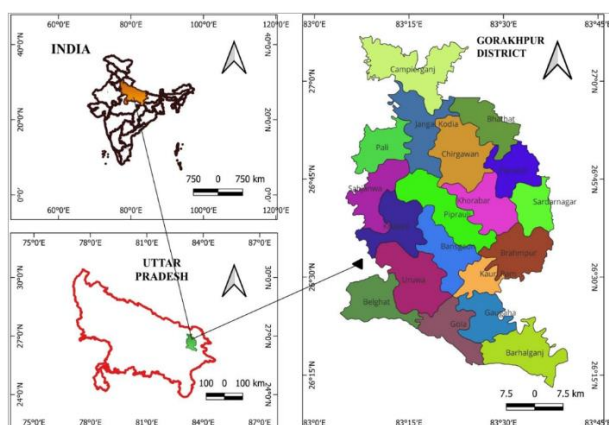


Fig.1 location map of study area

2. Study Area

Gorakhpur district is located in the north-eastern part of Uttar Pradesh and serves as an important administrative, and socio-economic hub of the region. Geographically, the district lies between approximately $26^{\circ}13'$ to $27^{\circ}29'$ north latitude and $83^{\circ}05'$ to $83^{\circ}56'$ east longitude. Gorakhpur district is administratively divided into several development blocks and tehsils for effective

governance and administration. It is bordered by Maharajganj district to the north, Kushinagar and Deoria district to the east, and Sant Kabir Nagar districts to the west and Azamgarh to the south. Several rivers, including the Ghaghara, Rapti, and Aami flow through the district and contribute significantly to its agricultural landscape and ecological system. These rivers generally flow across the district and support irrigation and rural livelihoods. The total area of the district is approximately 3,321 sqkm (square kilometre).

According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Gorakhpur district was nearly 4.4 million. A large proportion of the population resides in rural areas, while a smaller percentage lives in urban settlements. Agriculture remains the primary occupation for a significant section of the population, especially in rural areas, and continues to play an important part in the district's economy and livelihood structure.

3. Objectives of the Study

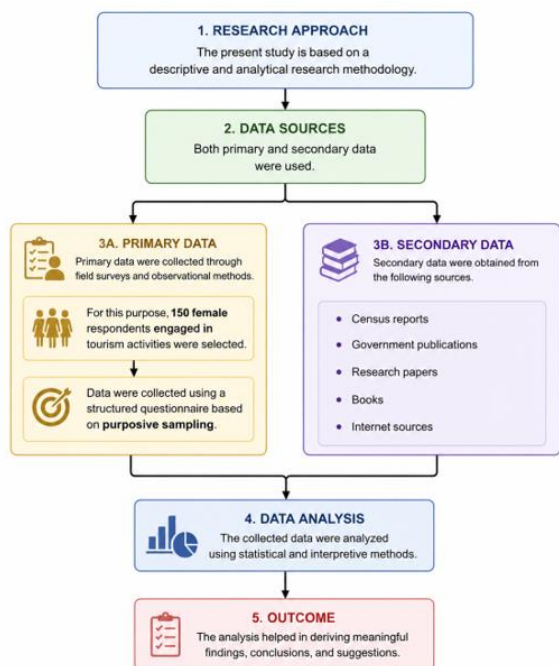
To analyse the social, economic and institutional challenges faced by women in the tourism sector.

4. Research Methodology

The present study is based on a descriptive and analytical research methodology. Both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were collected through field surveys and observational methods. For this purpose, 150 female respondents engaged in tourism activities were selected and data were collected using a

structured questionnaire based on purposive sampling.

Secondary data were obtained from census reports, government publications, research papers, books, and internet sources. The collected data were observed using statistical and interpretive methods.



5. Literature Review

Scheyven (2000) stated in his study that tourism can empower women only if they have decision-making, access to resources, and social respect. If tourism development is limited only to external investment and male-dominated structures, women may not receive the expected benefits.

According to the World Tourism Organization (2011), the tourism industry provides employment to women through services, hospitality, handicrafts, and small enterprises, and this sector has the potential to promote gender equality. The report also noted that in developing countries, women are engaged in large numbers in tourism-related

jobs, but they are mostly confined to unorganised and low-paying jobs.

Kaur (2012) explained that the tourism industry offers self-employment and income-generating opportunities for rural women, especially at religious and cultural tourism destinations. However, lack of education, social restrictions, and limited access to financial resources are major barriers to women's active participation.

Bhattacharya (2013) explained that women at religious tourist destinations struggle between tradition and modernity. While tourism provides them with income opportunities, social norms and patriarchal thinking limit their freedom.

Sharma and Singh (2015) found that women at religious tourist destinations in North India are primarily engaged in catering, cleaning, handicrafts, and informal sales activities. They argue that if provided with training and institutional support, women could play a more effective role in the tourism value chain.

Das and Mishra (2016), in their study of rural tourism and the role of women, suggested that self-help groups (SHGs) can be an effective means of connecting women to the tourism industry. Their study also found that women can succeed in tourism-based enterprises with training and marketing support.

Singh (2018) noted in his research that the state's Buddhist and religious tourist destinations have immense potential for tourism development, but female participation remains limited. He also suggested that the tourism industry could be made more inclusive

through self-help groups, skill development schemes, and women-focused policies.

According to Cole (2018), women at religious and cultural tourism destinations remain the "invisible workers" of tourism activities. They contribute significantly to tasks such as food preparation, cleaning, folk art, handicrafts, and informal vending, but are deprived of formal recognition and social protection.

Beniwal (2019) studied the situation of women workers at religious tourist destinations, concluding that while women are working in the tourism industry, they face challenges such as the unorganised sector, seasonal employment, and minimum wages. Safety and dignity at work are also major concerns.

Singh (2019) observed that, the situation of women workers at religious tourist destinations in Uttar Pradesh, stating that women are seen as "complementary workers" in the tourism sector. They receive lower wages, less stability, and less social security in comparison to men.

6. Challenges Faced by Women in the Tourism Industry

The major challenges facing women in the tourism industry stem from socioeconomic and institutional factors. Social stereotypes and traditional thinking limit their participation in the workforce.

Lack of education and vocational skills hinders their access to better employment opportunities. Most women are engaged in unorganised and low-paid work, which weakens their economic security.

Furthermore, limited security, financial resources, and participation in decision-making also hinder their empowerment.

The table below shows the major challenges faced by women in the tourism industry in Kushinagar district, based on primary data collected from 300 respondents. The study used a 4-point Linkert scale, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 4 representing "strongly agree." A higher mean value indicates greater severity of a challenge.

Table: 1 Analysis of Socio-economic aspects of women in the tourism industry

Serial Number	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Social Norm and Traditional thinking	3.32	0.58
2	Lack of education and professional skills	3.18	0.61
3	Unorganized employment and low income	3.41	0.55
4	Safety and workplace issues	3.26	0.60
5	Limited participation in decision-making	3.08	0.64
6	limited access to financial resources	3.22	0.59

Source: Primary data (2025)

After examining the table it can be concluded that "unorganised employment and low income" is the most serious challenge for women which should be taken into notice, with a mean value of 3.41. Its standard deviation (0.55) is relatively low, indicating a high degree

of similarity among respondents on this issue. This is particularly true for women working in the tourism industry which points out the economic instability and uncertainty of income generated.

“Social norms and traditional thinking” also emerged as a significant hurdle to women's participation, with a mean value of 3.32. This indicates that social norms still prevent women from actively participating in tourism activities. Women are still primarily seen as focused to primary activities and domestic works, if they move out towards tertiary activities or tourism industry it results into social disapproval and family pressure.

Similarly, “safety and workplace issues” are also a serious challenge, with a mean value of 3.26, indicating a lack of safety, transportation, and a conducive environment at the workplace. Working late at night, remote workstations and offices, inconvenience of commuting to distant places, the fear of workplace harassment crimes, and lack of institution and infrastructure impacts women's participation.

“Limited access to financial resources” has a mean value of 3.22, indicating that a lack of information and availability of credit, capital, and government schemes hinders women's entrepreneurial development. Lack of information, the complex formal procedures, and social dependency make it difficult for women to start and expand their own businesses. This limits their entrepreneurship.

“Lack of education and vocational skills” is also a major problem, with a mean value of 3.18, indicating that without adequate

training and skill development, women are unable to access better opportunities in the tourism industry. Education and skills are essential for effective participation in the tourism industry, but many women in Gorakhpur district lack formal education and vocational training. Lacking language skills, customer service skills, management skills, and technical skills, women lack opportunities and confined to low level jobs.

The table shows a mean value of 3.08 for women's limited participation in decision-making processes. While slightly lower than other challenges, it remains a significant problem. This indicates that women's participation in tourism-related planning and management remains inadequate.

Overall, the mean values for all challenges presented in the table are greater than 3.00, indicating that all problems are experienced seriously by women. The relatively low standard deviation indicates that respondents' responses are consistent and reliable. This table clearly underlines the need for effective policy interventions for the inclusive development of the tourism industry and women's empowerment in Gorakhpur district.

7. Opportunities for Women in Tourism

1. Participation in tourism-based services

The service-based nature of the tourism industry makes it particularly favourable for women. In Gorakhpur district, tourism-related activities such as accommodation, catering, religious material management, and tourist reception create new employment opportunities for women. In these

areas, women can utilise their traditional skills, hospitality skills, and experience to earn a regular income (Sharma 2018).

2. Small Enterprises Based on Local Resources

The tourism sector offers women the opportunity to establish small-scale enterprises using local resources. Women can create local art, handicrafts, traditional foods, and cultural items and market them to the tourism market. These products remain in constant demand at religious tourist destinations like Gorakhpur providing women with opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship.

3. Opportunities for Training and Capacity Building

Various government and non-government organisations involved in tourism development can organise training and capacity-building programs for women. Women can develop essential skills such as hospitality management, customer service, language skills, and business operations through the help of these programmes. Capacity building can help women become more self-sufficient, confident, and competitive in the tourism industry.

4. Economic Transformation of Domestic Work

The tourism industry provides women with the opportunity to transform domestic works into economic activities. Tasks typically considered domestic, such as food preparation, handmade goods, and decorative

items, can become sources of income through the help of tourism industry. This gives women's labour economic recognition and improves their societal status.

5. Expansion of Self-Reliance and Social Identity

Active participation in tourism activities not only provides women with economic independence but also provides them with social recognition. Earning an income boosts women's self-confidence and empowers them to play a more empowered role in family and social decision-making processes. Thus, the tourism industry has the potential to bring positive social and economic change in women's lives (Das 2020).

8. Suggestion

Special tourism training programmes should be organised for women to promote their skills in areas such as hospitality, management, hotel services, customer behaviour, language proficiency, handicrafts, and local product manufacturing. Financial helps, soft loans, subsidies, and marketing facilities should be provided to women Self Help Groups and women entrepreneurs to enable them to establish self-employment opportunities and tourism-related enterprises. A safe and supportive workplace should also be ensured for women in the tourism industry through factors such as safe transportation, flexible timings of work, and protection from workplace harassment. Moreover, women's participation in tourism-related planning and decision-making processes should be increased so that policies become more inclusive and practical. At the local level, a

women-centric tourism policy should be formulated incorporating provisions related to training, employment, entrepreneurship, and social security. Awareness and information dissemination programmes should also be conducted to inform women about government schemes, financial assistance, and employment opportunities available in the tourism sector. Women's leadership should be encouraged in the preservation of regional culture, traditions, and handicrafts, making sure that tourism development contributes to both cultural sustainability and women's empowerment.

9. Conclusion

The present study reveals that despite the significant role women play in the tourism industry in Gorakhpur district, their participation remains limited and unorganised. Social norms, lack of education and vocational skills, unorganised employment, low income, and security concerns are major obstacles to women's active participation. Primary data also presents that unorganised employment, and low income presents the most serious challenges for women. Despite this, the tourism industry offers women opportunities for service-based employment, entrepreneurship based on local resources, and self-reliance. Therefore, it's important to make tourism development policies in Gorakhpur district women centric and inclusive, ensuring women's participation and strengthening the tourism in the district, as well as women's empowerment and regional economic progress.

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