

WOMEN IN NEW PROFESSION: A STUDY OF WOMEN IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY OF KERALA.

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the fastest developing businesses globally, growing on an scale of 4-6 per cent annually (UNWTO, 2004). Originating from the European tradition of the 'Grand Tour' in the mid-1800s, it has flourished on account of the revolution in the civil aviation industry, coupled with globalisation that pave wave for 'open skies' policy, as well as the emergence of the WTO that opened up borders for trade and commerce. In Kerala, it exposes the beautiful ecology - beaches, backwaters, lakes, lush green forests pristine mountains, wildlife, etc. spiced with arts, culture, and health, especially ayurveda. Over the years, women too have worked their way into the workforce in the tourism industry of Kerala, which was once predominantly male. The study exposes the employment in the tourism industry for women which ranges from front offices, F&B, housekeeping, personnel, landscaping and gardening, guides, transport - air, land and water, in the organized sector, down to the wayside shops, souvenir shops, food path hawkers, street vendors, florists, dhabas and teashops in the unorganized sector. The study evidences the factors which has motivated women to transform themselves from being a docile homemaker, into becoming an active employee in the tourism sector. It gives an insight of how mental blocks, social ethos, patriarchy and traditions, moderate women engagement in tourism, in Kerala.

Keywords: Tourism, Women, Motivating Factors, Stigma

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Introduction

Tourism development and cultural studies are part of sociology from many angles. Tourism is studied from economic and cultural perspective whereas culture is studied from the perspective of social change. Culture is another important consideration for tourism. In order to understand the world of culture many people traveled and documented their experiences in written and visual forms. Tourism thus plays an important role in literature and in journalism, as the scope of tourism in these two areas is abundant.

The multifarious route of tourism expansion includes various phases - economic, political, social, cultural, environmental relations, etc. These phases have been articulated and configured in various ways and change over time. Since tourism and its related activity has become an important part of society and its development, the social, economic and political relations that result, are part of overall issues of power and control (Morgan and Pitchard, 2000). These power relations can be articulated through race, class or gender. Hence it becomes necessary to analyse gender as part of tourism (Selwyn,1994; de Kadt,1979; Nash, 1996; Britton,1982; Kinnaird & Derek, 1994). Tourism involves processes which arise out of intricate and diverse societal realities and relationships that are often hierarchical and unequal. All parts of the process embody different social relations of which gender relations is just one element. Whether we examine divisions of labour within the tourism process, the social construction of sites in the landscape and as part of 'heritage', how societies construct the cultural 'other', or the realities of the 'tourist' and the 'host', it is necessary that we examine issues of relationships, differences and inequalities in terms of gender relations (Aerni,1972). This allows us to concentrate on women's and men's differential experiences, as well as its influence in the construction and consumption of tourism.

Tourism is considered a very effective tool for poverty eradication and employment generation. Employment is seen as being of both a direct (in accommodation or tourism facilities) and indirect nature (arising from secondary tourism provision or in work resulting from the general increased spending power within the 'host' area) (Archer, 1982; Mathieson and Wall, 1982). However, it is widely accepted that employment opportunities do arise from tourism development. It is the quality, and type of work activities available, the differential access of men

and women to these employment opportunities, the seasonality of employment, and the existing and new gender divisions of labour generated, which are important for development. Though W.T.O. and other international bodies have highlighted women's achievements in the tourism sector, studies point out that women are yet to get equal opportunities and status on par with men, in this burgeoning industry. (Bagguley, 1990; Rees and Fielder, 1992). Levy and Lerch, 1991; Monk and Alexander, (1986) have shown that in many tourism development areas employment opportunities have been confined to unskilled, low paid work, such as kitchen staff, chambermaids, 'entertainers' and retail clerks. In addition, calls for the 'flexibility' of service as envisaged by a new dynamic tourism (Poon, 1989, 1990) that can easily respond to changes in demand, further complicates employment structuring.

As with all other forms of employment, these areas of 'tourism work' both reinforce and often transform gender divisions of labour. A gender focus within the hotel and catering industry in Britain raises interesting conceptual issues. Gender stereotyping is evident and sex segregation at different levels of employment activity is apparent. Women work as counter and kitchen staff, domestics and cleaners, while men work as porters and stewards. Over 50 per cent of men employed in the industry are in a professional, managerial or supervisory occupation (Crompton and Sanderson, 1990). Women are recruited into work which is deemed to represent their traditional domestic responsibilities for which they will be inherently skilled (Rees and Fielder, 1992). The tourism department encourages people living in coastal areas to keep tourists as paying guests. In the food sector of the industry women are at the bottom of the hierarchy as restaurant helpers, cooks (not Chefs) and waitresses-all the lowest paid parts of the food sectors. Chefs in fancier restaurants where salaries and tips are substantial are more likely to be males.

Evidence from Goa, India, also suggests that in general the low skilled and wage jobs are occupied mostly by women particularly in hotels. A number of migrant girls from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are engaged in the sale of small handicraft items and as masseurs on the beaches. It is an important source of income for them. In addition, a number of Goan men and women run small shacks serving food and drinks on the beach. Women/families are also involved in keeping "bed and breakfast" tourists in their private homes, letting out rooms or a part of the house to tourists, preferably foreigners.

In travel agencies and airlines, women have considerably higher share But still majority are at the operational level and are confined to the front desks (Davidson, O'Connell and Sanchez Taylor, 1996). Foreign control areas are also male dominated. (Equations, 2000). Access to tourism-related employment is overtly gender biased. There is overwhelming evidence from the literature that suggest that the majority of jobs, especially those of low skill and wage, are occupied by women. However, it is important to emphasise that prevailing social norms regarding 'women's work' have underpinned and allowed this to take place (Hennessey, 1994).

India, a highly pluralistic society, has been an attraction to the world from time immemorial. The diverse caste systems, cultures, villages and people continue to enthrall the whole world. Which other land has so different castes, classes, languages, faiths, attires, cuisines, music? Right from 17th century, different travelers Huen Tsang, Ibn Batuta did not come to India to trade, but to interact with the "Indianness" of the people of India. In fact, the Mughals, the Portuguese, and the British who encroached India, came to India not only for political reasons but also to exploit the cultural and natural resources of the country. Traditionally, India had more than 500 princely states and according to history there were a number of empires in India, the prominent among which were the royalties of Mysore, Gwalior, Travancore, Cochin, Kashmir, etc. The kings who were ruling these vast empires invited the foreigners for several purposes, which gave them the occasion to visit India. These initial historical visits to this country increased in frequency over the centuries and gradually evolved into the vast tourism industry as we see it today.

During the past 60 years, i.e., post-independence, several changes have occurred in India including in the field of tourism. However, today, tourism is one of the biggest industries in India owing to its natural beauty and exotic destinations. Kashmir and Kerala were considered as the most preferred destinations alias 'visitors' paradise.' Because of the political turmoil in Kashmir, most of the tourists from overseas currently prefer Kerala for their holidays. Although tourism has been having many ups and downs due to the political uncertainties, Kerala has earned the credit of being a Super Brand. Kerala enjoys an added advantage thanks to its weather without extremes. Thus, today tourism in Kerala is one of the most happening and fast developing industries.

Tourism, although one of the largest industries in Kerala, is still dominated by men. It is estimated that in Kerala, the largest inflow of foreign exchange is through tourism. Though data on women employment from different regions of the world claims high share for women, even up to 45 to 50 percent, it is not visible in the tourism industry. It has been found that women are employed mostly in the low skills and low paid jobs. The state of Kerala had always attached a stigma towards women working in tourism industry. Low salary is associated with women employment in the tourism sector. The proportion of wages of women to that of men is considerably less, particularly in the case of part time and temporary employees. Still, inequality and gender discrimination prevails. The present study focuses on women in Kerala, who were successful enough to enter into this industry and now promoting the tourism industry in Kerala.

Objectives

- To understand the various segments of tourism industry in Kerala where women are involved
- To analyse the factors that motivate women to enter into this profession

Methodology

Qualitative method was used to collect from the women employed in the tourism sector. We have used the "restaurant, catering and hotel industry" to provide a proxy for the "tourism industry": these sectors are the largest employers in the tourism industry overall. Tourism industry in Kerala are mainly categorized into – hill tourism, rural tourism, backwater tourism, city tourism and beech tourism. After the review of secondary data available and discussion with experts in the field, the different areas for data collection was finalized. Thus Thekkady(rural tourism), Munnar(hill tourism), Trivandrum(city tourism), Kumarakom(backwater tourism) and Kovalam(beech tourism) were selected as the area of study. From each area, a government and private hotel was selected using purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling method was used since the investigator wanted to purposefully select those hotels where maximum number of women was employed in the different hierarchy. From each of the hotels selected, all women working in the different echelons were studied in depth using an Interview guide and an observation guide developed to suit the study.

Findings

The higher echelons in most government hotels and resorts were devoid of women. None of these establishments visited during the study had a woman in the capacity of General Manager (GM). The only exception of women transcending the gender stereotyping was the case of one heading a travel agency and another managing a home stay. In the former case, the lady was a clear-headed, articulate lady entrepreneur who emerged to run the family business. The latter was a woman who by default and accident entered into managing the enterprise following her husband's decision to diversify his textile and stationery businesses.

Towards the end of the study, the KTDC, a corporation under the Department of Tourism, was found to have initiated a drive to recruit women. It was only in 2008, that the KTDC for the first time recruited women into these key positions, and that too after a lot of resistance from the male bastion. These women recruits had the advantage of having worked with KTDC for some time. This perhaps would augur well for women considering the fact that women are the best candidates considering their disposition to hospitality. Even the KTDC has only two women in the capacity of manager in the whole of Kerala.

The Heads of department, usually designated as AGMs or Managers (manned also by women) e.g. Training Manager, Manager - F&B too remained out of bounds for most women. Common to both sectors – Private and Government, the representation improved when one went down the lower echelons – at the level of Assistant Managers, Supervisors, and finally, Operatives (frontline workers). Even where women are the main tourism workers in most countries, they tend to predominate in the majority of menial, semi-skilled, domestic and service type occupations and only a few are seen in the managerial level.

The Front Office consists of Reception, Check in and Check out, Reservation, Telephone Communications, Helpdesk, Travel Desk, and Accommodation. The jobs included under front office activities in the resorts were ushering (welcoming, garlanding, offering flowers, ferrying) the guests from the transit points to the resort which was often positioned off road. Almost half of the front office staff in the government sector consisted of women- a handful were regular and the rest on contract. S, a senior supervisor comments that during the earlier days it was

unimaginable to find women even standing before the hotel. He too vouched for the fact that it was indeed the society's problem. Until a decade and a half back, it was quite impossible for women to find a suitable alliance owing to this stigma associated with women working in this industry. Women's involvement was limited to the lower cadres such as casual labourers. Gradually, it was from the perspective of marketing that changes came into KTDC. Customers, especially women gradually started to demand that other women to relate to and attend to delicate and personal aspects. Quite naturally women gave the front office a more presentable appearance. The private sector on the other hand showed a variation. In private resorts, women accounted for almost a third; yet, they stayed on longer and worked the same shifts as men. The front offices in private business class hotels were keen on employing women so as to add to the ambiance; hence recruitment was often high (almost 80% in the best establishments).

In administration women accounted from a range of a third to almost half in the government sector; the presence of women by comparison was very low in the private sector. Administration was attached to the back office and looked into all sundry matters related to settling of bills, wages, and communications. This was a common presence all through out. The role of the personnel in HRD & Training was to pro-act on guest feedback by organizing continuous coaching for the employees. This division was a new introduction in the government sector; previously training used to be undertaken by the respective department heads. This division was however very strong in the up class hotels in the private sector, where personal feedback was provided in the event of a complaint. They also looked into induction. 40 per cent of those involved in the training division were women.

Housekeeping department in a hotel or resort was responsible for room service, laundry, cleaning, linen stocking, and in a few cases gardening. Housekeeping in the government sector employed almost cent percent women; women operated as cleaners, linen-keepers, house women and even supervisors. In business class hotels the stewardess's job included cleaning the hotel rooms, the personnel accommodation, but excluded the lobby where they would have been visible. Some of the establishments engaged women as trainees and also on contract in order to assist women especially during the peak of seasons. In contrast, private business hotels employed relatively more men with women ranging from 20-30 per cent. In private resorts, almost about

80 per cent of the personnel involved in housekeeping were women, almost all sourced from the local community. 95 percent of the women involved as housekeepers in this study were women. Ladies were preferred for the latter because they persistently worked despite the hardships. Moreover, they came on time. A few women were recruited from the local area who were later trained on the job with no specific educational background. Women working here hailed from the low socio-economic strata. The latter were not consistent as they had other attractive options that made them unavailable to work as gardeners. Perhaps women are gregarious and prefer to work in a team/group for security reasons; secondly perhaps for sociological reasons, women command less wages and prefer to work locally in an around their domicile compared to men who were willing to travel greater distances to tap better opportunities. Hence socio-cultural factors influenced work. In countries like Barbados and Jamaica, women are employed in less stable, lower status work such as housekeeping, reception and other services. These jobs require low skill, are low paid and have the lowest security of tenure and benefits (Badger, 1993). Most housekeeping supervisors observe that in government properties, although there were men and women working together, it was mainly the women who did most of the work. Men generally find some excuse to avoid work, or even pretend to be busy.

The F & B and Kitchen was the section that operated together in order to provide food. Its operations included attending to guests, cooking, dishwashing, storekeeping, as well as in certain cases running the staff canteen. These tasks are undertaken by waitresses but not to the extent in the private sector), stewardess, chefs and cooks, storekeeper and cleaners. Although women rarely officiated as waitresses, there was women presence in the form of trainee waitresses in the government sector. Women also were in service as chefs, storekeepers and cleaners. The F&B also have women as cashiers in the restaurant. The F&B in private resorts offered a stronger participation of women to the extent of about 60 per cent. Women had a visible presence as Chefs, Waitresses and Stewardesses. Taj boasted an Executive Chef who happened to be a woman. In the private sector F&B had 25-30 per cent women who worked as hostess (ushers) and waitresses. 90 per cent of the dishwashers were women who were provided on contract by a private agency. In the food sector of the industry women are at the bottom of the hierarchy as restaurant helpers, cooks (not Chefs) and waitresses - all the lowest paid parts of the food sectors. Chefs in fancier restaurants where salaries and tips are substantial are more likely to be

males (Chant, 1992).

Sales – Corporate Sales Executive was found only in upmarket Star hotels mostly in the private sector. Here the sales personnel were regarded as brand ambassadors, as they interacted with the outside world and created a constant traffic of customers. These Executives (Sales) contacted the corporate sector for catering (both on-site and off-site) as well as guest accommodation. Banquets Executives managed for corporate/family occasions at the hotel. The hotel recruited only girls for sales in the capacities of Assistant Managers and Executives (about 2-3).

Ayurveda massage centres are typical to Kerala. Most hotels and resorts offer Ayurveda rejuvenation therapies, which is administered by both male & female doctors and assisted by male and female assistants known as therapists. In Kerala, there are 16 hotels offering Ayurvedic health centres in the Green Leaf category and 19 others under the Olive Leaf category in 2003 (Kerala Calling 2005). Most of the hotels and resorts boasted a well equipped Ayurveda massage centre. The number of personnel would be increased in order to accommodate the tourist traffic during peak seasons. Women have to handle only women customers and men handle men customers.

Guest Relations Executives usually interact with the guests to orient the customers with regard to the uniqueness of the locality (in the case of theme resorts), to usher them around, to familiarize them with the facilities and finally also to get feedback. In other hotels this is also designated as Customer Relations. Some resorts and rarely hotels employ guest relations personnel in the capacities of:

- Naturalists, who orient the guests regarding the spices, flora and fauna
- Sports Coordinator, who coordinates mostly water sports
- Demonstration - Traditional Arts, Sari Dressing, Cooking (karkkadakanji)

Security and gardening were often contracted out (outsourced) to some private agency or even cooperatives involving the local community in the case of resorts with strong emphasis on corporate social responsibility. Early advocates of tourism as a strategy of modernisation viewed tourism employment as a positive way of integrating underprivileged sub-groups into the mainstream economy (Levy & Lerch, 1991). Women working as security were involved in bill writing, issuing coupons and checking the bags of employees who leave after job. In the private

hotels of the city Gardening was tended by men, whereas in the resorts which were positioned in rural areas women were employed more. Women involvement in security was limited to those establishments where more women were employed.

Some of the business class star hotels offered bakery items and confectioneries. In all cases they were operated almost exclusively by women. The **Gift Shop** were in-house shops which offered local spices, postcards and handicrafts (shawls, sculptures, motifs, antiques, etc.). They were given by the hotels on tender basis to outside people.

Motivating Factors

Most of the women employed in the lower echelons of the tourism industry did not take up the jobs for reasons of interest. Their decision to work as chamber maids, housekeepers, cleaners, gardeners, etc., was not so much conditioned by choice, rather, they were either living in the locality where tourism was operational, or they had to take employment for the sake of employment and as a source of income, or in still other cases, they took up those jobs since they had had no other options. This indicated their dire need of finance. Yet others took up employment because of the presence of their relatives or acquaintances in the same field. All this seem to suggest a lack of direction or purpose. In India, women's work outside the family may not ensure a better status within the family or society. However, at all levels of society, even among the poorest, parents realise the importance of the links between education, training, and employment.

A general observation of the women working in the tourism and hotel industry seem to show a tendency especially among those employed in the lower and middle cadre tended to withdraw from the workforce, if ever the family demanded their attention on account of the birth of a child, education of children or failing health of aged parents. In the present study, the same applied to most women, right from the level of the personnel from the operative level up to the middle level consisting of executive housekeepers. Most of them joined work for no particular reason and eventually took to like it. And the Government sector, well known for security, this was something that an average Kerala woman yearned for. Hence, any sort of employment in this sector whether it be in the government or private sector was welcome. Security and flexible

timings which did not hinder their family life seemed to be the primary agenda in the area of employment. The abundance of full time, part-time, seasonal, temporary and casual work available in the tourism sector was cited as a key attraction by many women, but most commonly by mothers of young children, caregivers, semi-retired women and students. One of the key informants, who officiated as a GM in a resort observed that, women from the local community had very little aspiration. They just wanted a job, not necessarily in the resort or in the industry. For this reason, upward mobility for women was a rare occurrence. Convenience of local area employment was cited as the reason for many women to take up employment in this sector. Had they had aspirations, the skies would have been the limit. K, a training manager, who was a male recalled how enterprising girls in his business hotel, interacted with airline personnel who boarding with them, and having impressed them later migrated to airlines and banking, where customer relations was considered a premium. Lila Leontidou (1993), in her study of gender dimension in tourism in Greece, says that female employment in tourism is highly segmented, with much larger number (employed) in the lower paid manual jobs, who have no ambition for a career but work out of economic need.

Those aspiring to work at the higher echelons, especially the ones with a definite academic qualification in tourism or travel were able to cite definite reasons. The reasons were “I like the interaction with the customers”, “I like any customer service, but particularly in a visitors attraction”, “I like the fact that you never know what’s going to happen and there’s always something going on” and an excited “there’s all sorts of things to do.....it’s really just diverse”. It sounded as of “love for interacting with people”; the challenge and feel of “freedom, team work and non-routine nature.” These are attributable to those who come here informed. There are a few who developed interest in the hotel industry as a result of the advertisements and articles in magazines and newspapers, which highlighted the abundance of opportunity. Some others were attracted of the prospect of being able to interact and socialise with people. There was a hint about the opportunities as well as the dynamic and interesting nature of the job. Some commented that the job was “never monotonous” in nature, “exciting” and “every day was different!”

For instance in the Taj Group of Hotels had individuals qualified in other professions. It was

shocking for the researchers to understand that there were professionals coming from various other professions, including law and engineering. They perceived it an excellent opportunity to “interact with people”. There were a few who were conscious of the immense prospects for this particular field abroad. Many of those with aspirations to climb the ladder in the industry had had some background - a friend, a relative or an acquaintance who have been working closely in this sector. Such individuals served as role models. Others had been handpicked by their teachers, who cited certain qualities in these youngsters appropriate and ideal to be in such an industry. Some of these youngsters were handpicked because they were “spontaneous”, “smart”, “active”, and with a “flair for public relations”. There are yet others who came in by sheer coincidence. One subject interviewed, claimed that this was the only professional entrance test she cleared. Subsequently she joined the course on hospitality and eventually stuck on as she did not have any other option. A number of young women who entered this industry by default, pretty convinced by their positive experience, decided to remain in this sector after conducting a quality of life assessment. This assessment took into account the advantages of flexibility and its positive impact on future family life (Romila, 2003).

But there are cases with a definite direction. One such case was CK, a comi-first in the kitchen. CK had always been fascinated by cooking, and hence harboured an ambition to become Chef, ever since her childhood. CK has no plans of marrying and settling down during the next five years to come. She is career oriented and thought that experience at each level is very crucial for a Chef; hence, she has been bent on achieve it before marriage. After marriage CK anticipates things to be different and was emotionally prepared. But fortunately, her fiancée was very supportive and understanding, and so, she hopes to at least become a chef de parti within the next 10 years. She would never the less prefer the Government because of the day duty timings for women.

A number of women commented that tourism is “best suited” for women because women like to help other people. This fits with gender stereo types of traditional gender roles and gender identity, wherein women are seen as being suitable for certain occupation, and they in turn, see themselves as suitable. While this is not always desirable, as many gender stereotyped occupations are low paid with few opportunities for advancement, it does allow women to enter

the tourism workforce based on their traditional gender roles and identity, which may boost their confidence in their ability to fulfill job requirements. As one women executive commented: “This job is a good confidence booster. I am meeting people all the time, so I am able to keep up with the social side of things. And that was the draw in the beginning. When I saw the advert for tourism, I thought that’s the people job and I am comfortable working with people”. One manager states that such “customer service” jobs simply appeal more to women. They can do a lot to make the people’s visits more comfortable and meaningful.

In general one could not refute the growing presence of women in hospitality. I, an executive house keeper, who had had 20 years of experience in the industry and had struggled her way to the top, asserts that the number of women working in the hospitality industry are on the rise. She cites two reasons for this increased involvement; one because there are more opportunities coming up, and secondly, there are also more women working there. Owing to the growing visibility people now know and have access to professionals working in this industry. Nevertheless, I, still feels, that the profession could do with a bit of PR to make it a more attractive proposition. The same feeling is echoed in the history of transistion of this industry. One of the young male GMs observed that, originally, tourism did not figure out in the mainstream employment for women. In the beginning, women were employed for gardening and in the housekeeping of rooms. But a decade or two later, these women, who were already into their middle ages, brought their children into the same field. Most of the women belong to the tribes and villages settled in the “lower camp”.

With the emergence of tourism as a career path and growing area of study, students of tourism studies cite many reasons for being attracted to the sector. Current and former students interviewed commonly described careers in tourism as ‘glamorous’, ‘exciting’, ‘demanding’ and ‘active’. One lady simply wanted to work in “some business,” where “people are happy and ensure that the travellers enjoy their vacation”. Another tourism student opined that tourism is not “a boring job”. She goes on to add: “A regular office job where you are just sitting and typing,... is not for me”.

However the GM of certain hotels observed that the job was often tedious and demanding, not necessarily glamorous as perceived by many from the outside. Even the tourism studies lectures and educators interviewed for this purpose were concerned that students' expectation of tourism careers were "unrealistic" and "fantasised". They worried that students never give enough thought to their career goals and have "vague ideas working in travel or for an airline". A good many hospitality educators maintained that students had "unrealistic expectation of extensive overseas travel opportunities as arising from their careers". Others were reluctant to consider less glamorous job opportunities with local authorities or small attractions. They were also keen to prepare their students for the stark realities of tourism as a generally being a relatively low paying industry. The author himself had witnessed how popular jobs in the Airline, Tourism and Cargo Management field, during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Many of the youngsters from the field of commerce eyed such jobs for reasons of glamour perceived to be associated with the Airline field, especially during the advent of the private airlines such as East West, Modiluft, and much later, Jet Air. But generally, it was found that the airlines and travel agencies preferred the fairer gender who were docile and easy to manage. Most of the women who joined this sector hailed from the affluent families, a good many of whom were employed in the Middle East. These girls were not really much worried about the pay package and enjoyed the glamour that the agencies offered in terms of air-conditioned environment, freedom to wear western attires, frequent dine outs (on achieving targets) and interaction with the elite, all of which was quite uncommon to the common man during those "conventional times" in an orthodox society of Trivandrum. Since these girls cared less about the pay, pay packages were generally kept 'deflated' much to the delight of the employers. The trend has not changed much, with number of aspirants increasing in geometric progression, to the number of jobs which improve only in arithmetic progression. One lecture puts it starkly" I try to be as brutally honest about job prospects - poor salaries and working conditions – as I can be. I also recommend that students undertake work placements which will expose the students to the realities of the workplace."

Conclusion

The study clearly brings to light the fact, even in states such as Kerala which boast about the model of development and women empowerment, women still find it difficult to break the glass ceiling and rise in the occupational hierarchy. The higher echelons in most hotels and resorts

were found to be devoid of women. This is despite the fact that women dominate the personnel in the tourism industry. Vertically, the typical "gender pyramid" is found to be prevalent in the tourism sector. The key managerial positions were being dominated by men. The share of women in the management positions remains unacceptably low, with just a tiny proportion succeeding in breaking through the "glass ceiling". For that matter, data sourced hardly two years ago shows that even KTDC, the premiere government agency involved in promoting tourism, has only two women in the capacity of manager in Kerala. However, the representation was much better in the private sector, where at least one woman was found in each of these establishments. Common to both sectors – Private and Government, the representation improved as one went down the lower echelons. Women are consistently denied positions of leadership and responsibility within the industry, they are concentrated in low skilled and low paid occupations, they are being objectified as part of the tourism "package" and they can have their traditional roles perpetuated within an industry that feeds on uncomplicated images. Over 50 per cent of men employed in the industry are in a professional, managerial or supervisory occupation. Women on the other hand tend to be recruited into work which is deemed to represent their traditional domestic responsibilities for which they will be inherently skilled. Examining the occupations being particularly relevant in the tourism sector, one can see that more than 90 percent of people working in catering and lodging as waitresses, bartenders, maids, babysitters, cleaners, housekeeping helpers, launderers, dry-cleaners and the like are women.

The explosion of a possibility of education in the hospitality industry, coupled with the profession gaining respectability, and women becoming more empowered and demanding led to women proliferating into the tourism industry. Women were employed in less stable, lower paid and lower status work and in those positions in which the physical appearance of women could be made used of as in the front office. The situation in the tourism industry resembles the one in the labour markets in general. There is significant horizontal and vertical gender segregation. Horizontally, women and men are placed in different occupations - women are being employed more as waitresses, chambermaids, cleaners, travel agencies sales persons, and flight attendants.

There was a marked difference in the perception and mindset of those who were professionally trained for higher level jobs as against those who were unqualified and aspiring for lower echelons. The former with professional training, were confident on moving “up the ladder”. They also believed in the capability of the Private sector to reward competency and efforts much almost immediately. The motivation of a qualified manager may differ remarkably from that of a non-qualified housekeeper. They perceived the employment to be safe as they were close to their homes, or because they were familiar with the environment, having had a tradition on account of their parents being employed in this sector. Others found such employment, especially in the Government sector, to be a safe bet given the fact that they earned consistent supplementary income, with limited involvement. Security and flexible timings which did not hinder their family life seemed to be their primary agenda in the area of employment. Only those in the higher echelons had real interest in the field and came out of love for this job. They were fascinated by the scope of the industry and had this ambition since childhood. The students of tourism studies cite many reasons for being attracted to the sector and described careers in tourism as ‘glamorous’, ‘exciting’, ‘demanding’ and ‘active’. Balancing the needs of the family and achieving good family adjustments is the key to more participation of women. One could not dissociate the industry from the patriarchal trends in the society. Stigma associated with women employed in the hotel industry persisted despite sweeping changes. The middle class simply refused allowing their children working in the hotel and tourism industry for the simple reason that women working here were perceived to have “loose characters”. For this reason, it was hard to find a suitable alliance for a girl working here.

The society has attached a stigma towards certain jobs which still now remain unchanged. Women of Kerala are still not able to break the glass ceiling or change the mindset of the society. The family is the institution which has to change initially. A responsible media which could present a good picture of the industry to the public could go a long way in opening new avenues for women in this field. To conclude, political will, effective implementation of welfare schemes for women at ground level and providing full societal and familial support will help in resolving the issues which confront the women in this sector, and thus preserve their just position in society.

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