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DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DRIVERS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN RURAL TOURISM IN DARJEELING DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism has gained global popularity, with varying characteristics across regions. This study explores the demographic, economic, and psychological factors influencing women's participation in rural tourism in Darjeeling, West Bengal, India. Despite its proximity to Sikkim, Darjeeling remains under-researched, particularly regarding women's motivations. Data from 200 women, including 50 in the hospitality sector, were collected via a pre-tested, interviewer-administered questionnaire to understand the push factors for their involvement. The analysis shows that middle-aged, married women with secondary or less education dominate the rural tourism workforce. Their primary motivations are economic need, improved educational opportunities for their children, and escaping socioeconomic challenges. Significant economic drivers include contributing to family businesses and achieving financial independence. Psychological factors, such as improving living conditions and securing future stability, also play a crucial role, though aspirations for leadership and decision-making are less prominent due to cultural norms. The findings highlight rural tourism's critical role in providing employment and empowerment opportunities for women in Darjeeling. Enhancing participation and empowerment requires addressing economic and psychological needs, improving income levels, supporting leadership roles, and fostering greater family decision-making power. These efforts can strengthen women's involvement in rural tourism, boosting their socioeconomic development and quality of life.

Keywords: Demographic factor, Economic factor, Psychological factor, Rural tourism, Women participation.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism, one of India's fastest-growing industries, holds immense potential to empower women. It propels regional growth and significantly impacts employment, enhancing the performance of associated industries by a factor of two. In light of India's G20 presidency and India's effort to raise awareness of inbound travel, one of India's most significant service sectors, the Ministry of Tourism has declared 2023 as Visit India Year in honour of India's 75th 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' festivities as one of India's largest service industries. Tourism and hospitality are pivotal in the nation's growth.

The tourism and hospitality sector is integral to the 'Make in India' initiative. This sector is a significant economic catalyst, driving job creation and rapid development. India boasts geographical diversity, world heritage sites and niche tourism offerings such as adventure, medical, rural, and ecotourism. It has fuelled increased tourist arrivals and employment opportunities. The tourism industry is a leading employer of women. The government actively collaborates with industry stakeholders to employ strategies to create a conducive work environment for female employees.

Women account for 12.1 % of travel and tourism employment in India (WTTC, Travel and Tourism: Driving Women's Success, April 27 2021). Travel and tourism can provide women more workforce participation, leadership entrepreneurship and empowerment opportunities than other sectors, particularly in developing countries. As such, it can tremendously affect poverty reduction in rural communities. Tourism development must have a positive impact on women's lives and, in doing so, contribute to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is the fifth sustainable development target (UNWTO, 2023).

At the macro level, a more robust representation of women in travel tourism relative to other areas of the economy is due to the sector's unique characteristics: often less emphasis on formal education and training, a greater focus on personal and hospitality skills, flexible working opportunities, and increased options for entrepreneurship that do not require any heavy start-up plus financing.

According to research by WTTC (2021), travel and tourism employ nearly twice as many women as other industries. Women account for 46.4% of employment in travel and tourism in G20 compared to 43.3 % across the economy. It indicates that women's influence in tourism and hospitality is growing. Any form of tourism showcasing the rural life, art, culture, and heritage at rural locations, benefiting the local community economically and socially and facilitating communication between visitors and residents to provide a more engaging travel experience, is called rural tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

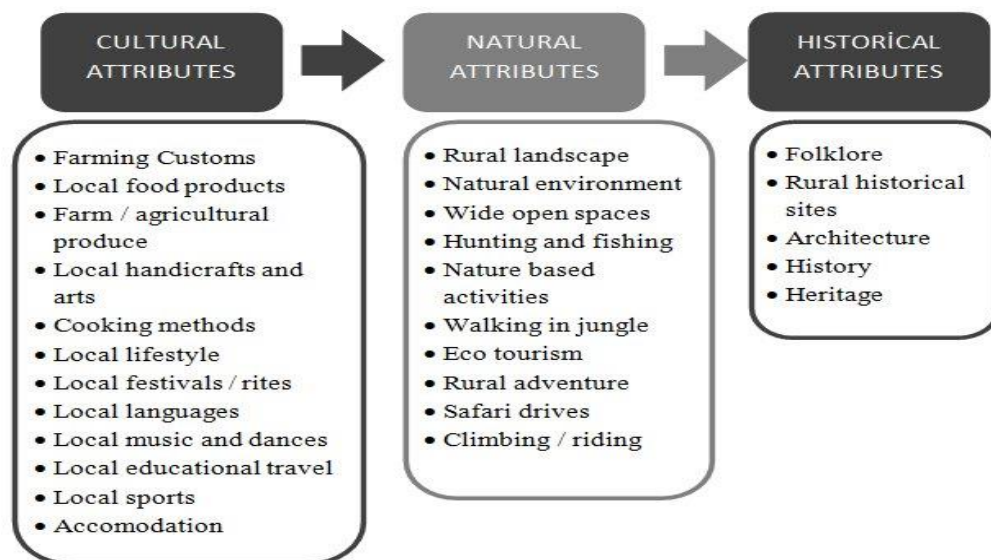
Rural Tourism

Today, rural tourism is recognised as a focus area of employment generation and sustainable livelihoods. (Manjoor & Milton, 2020). Tourism is an excellent tool for development, especially in rural areas (Jiuxia & Jigang 2007, Komppula 2014, Ryu et al., 2019). Accordingly, in a study by Ming Su et

al. (2019), both tourism and non-tourism participants acknowledge positive economic impacts, and most recognise positive environmental (79%) and sociocultural (63%) impacts. As a result, there is high support for tourism development (97%) and perceived positive prospects regarding its future growth (88%) among tourism and non-tourism participants. Rural tourism serves as a supplementary economic activity that contributes to the GDP and generates employment opportunities. It has a notable capacity to stimulate social change and enhance local economic well-being. Additionally, rural tourism has the potential to mitigate the concentration of demand during specific seasons and across a wider geographical area (UNWTO, 2021). The local community guarantees sociocultural authenticity, a stainless environment, and community well-being (Carrión & Vizcaino, 2021). Tourism is vital in the rural economy, and places with rich cultural impotence (Uduji, et al., 2021). Visitors are expected to be highly satisfied with untouched nature and ethnic culture during their visits (Nagy & Segui, 2019).

Figure 1

Classification of Rural Tourism Activities



Source. Nair et al., 2015, p.330

Women in Rural Tourism

Women play a crucial role in the development and operation of small tourism accommodations and restaurants. There are several factors that influence the level of women's involvement in the tourism and hospitality industry and this has been gaining popularity among researchers around the globe such as in Brazil (Duarte & Pereira, 2018), India (Mohanty et al., 2018), Serbia (Cvijanović & Gajić, 2020; Milicaa, Gordanaa et al., 2021), Turkey (Aytuğ & Mikaeili, 2017; Hafçi, 2018), Georgia (Khartishvili. Muhar, Dax, et al. 2019), Greece (Koutsou, Schmidgall et al., 2009), Nepal (Palikhe, 2018), Sri Lanka (Aslam & Awang, 2015) and Emerging countries (Chant, 2005; Rinaldi & Salerno, 2020). The literature shows a consensus, indicating that both women and men generally hold favorable attitudes towards rural tourism. Duarte and Pereira (2018) argued that women in rural tourism are not merely supplementary, but rather complementary, as they play a crucial role in the industry. Despite experiencing lower or no financial compensation, female managers perceived rural tourism

development as a viable business prospect for themselves (Milicaa et al., 2021), in contrast to the findings of Mohanty et al. (2018).

Several studies have been conducted on employment-related issues in the tourism and hospitality sector, these included issues in staff training or labour force (formal training and informal training), internships, and turnover (Wang, 2013; et al., 2013; Zahari et al., 2010; Yusoff et al., 2013; Gibbs & Slevitch, 2019). These aspects have been studied based on gender perspectives as well. It was suggested that glass ceilings exist for women to engage in this sector (Maxwell et al., 2010). Though this was true for most other sectors, the existing glass ceilings were much more significant in the hospitality industry (Janta, 2011; Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999). Koutsou et al. (2009) discussed the issues of women's age, experience, and education shaping rural tourism engagements and risk-taking. Aged, experienced, and educated women tend to start their businesses rather than joining cooperatives, as they can handle the issues faced by the industry. However, the literature has yet to pay attention to personal and environment-related factors.

Rural Tourism and India

The majority of the country's population is predominantly found in rural areas, and "Honest India" can be located in the rural regions of India. Hence, the "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" initiative must focus on strengthening the rural economy and generating employment and opportunities in those areas. The villages function as repositories for the nation's heritage, crafts, culture, and agricultural techniques. Creating and promoting these regional goods through tourism boosts local economies, creates jobs, and empowers women, youth, and local communities. It supports sustainable development, reduces poverty and migration from rural areas. Since 74% of Indians reside in the country's million villages, rural tourism has the potential to spur economic growth in these areas. The individuals involved will benefit socioeconomically, and visitors will have a more fulfilling experience. This niche tourism showcases visitors the way of life of the populace, artistic and craft features, culture, customs, folklore, cuisines, heritage, and other aspects of rural communities. The Indian Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and North-Eastern states have introduced innovative policy, financial and capacity-building measures to boost sustainable rural tourism for local area development and cultural preservation details of government rural tourism schemes. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India started the scheme to promote Rural Tourism to popularize not only another form of tourism that will attract both domestic and foreign visitors alike but also to provide opportunities to the rural populace to improve their socioeconomic condition (ACNielsen ORG-MARG,2020)

The government prioritizes women's empowerment, safety, and security, especially those from the rural areas. The government has implemented comprehensive rural women's empowerment programs to address various aspects of women's lives, including education, society, the economy, and politics. The goal is to ensure that women become equal partners in the nation's rapid development and sustainability.

Figure 2

National Policy for Women's Empowerment for Socioeconomic Development



Source. Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Grameen Yojana (PMAGY)' (2009-10)

Rural Tourism and Women in Study Area

Socioeconomic backwardness, almost non-existent communication infrastructure, and low remuneration for agricultural products nearly handicapped the rural ethnic tradition, dominating and attracting the rural Hill region of Bengal towards Outmigration and urban life. On the other hand, the folk culture, peaceful virgin nature, tradition, and organic vegetation attract the hectic urban life (Bhutia,2016). Rural Tourism has emerged as a new phenomenon, which has been developing and flourishing for decades and connecting urban tourists with rural areas of Darjeeling hills. Rural tourism empowers rural areas socially, culturally, and economically (Kannegieser, 2015; Rawat, Khyat, 2020).

The Himalayan region of Bengal is famous for tea and tourism. The highest number of women workforces is noticed in the tea garden in this region. Many researchers point out that women have been victims of sexual abuse for a long in this profession. On the other hand, though women workers are an asset, they have been socially and economically left behind (Gurung & Mkhharjee,2018). Tea and tourism integration could enhance the livelihood sustainability of rural destination communities (Sua,Wallb and.Wangc, 2019). The mountain's natural beauty, dense green forest, waterfall, river, and cave are a pull factor for tourist attractions. The tea garden enhances the beauty in unique ways.

Today, Hill's women of Northern Bengal have started framing their kitchen, living room, and one or two bedrooms to meet tourist demands (S. Paul,2014). Many female members are involved compared to males in the Himalayan region of the West Bengal tourism sector. According to P.K Das (2021), among the total homestays, 28.57% are under the proprietorship of the female in one of the remote villages of Darjeeling. It is an encouraging picture of women's empowerment in a remote village. The female participation rate in this sector is higher than that of males. Among the total engaged persons in

this hospitality business, 54.28% are female. The index of dissimilarity of female workers in this occupation is only 11.29. A positive correlation exists between total family members and female members engaged in homestays, indicating that females are more associated with this occupation. Tourism plays an essential role in the process of regional development.

Gaps in the Research

It has been determined from the literature review that rural tourism has gained popularity in established, developing, and developing countries alike. However, rural tourism's character, purpose, and means differ from location to location. Both rurality and rural tourism have different meanings in different areas. The study discovered that much rural tourism research has been done on the state of Sikkim, but Darjeeling shares the border of Sikkim and has a more or less similar landscape as well as a trendy tourist destination as British India, less research and data are found on specialized rural travel in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal. Most research on rural tourism focuses on the environment and ecotourism perspective rather than the local people, directly and indirectly participating women, and especially their motivations to participate in rural tourism. This study aims to fill this gap through three objectives as follows:

1. To examine the demographic factors which are influencing women to participate in rural tourism
2. To investigate the economic factors that influence women to participate in rural tourism
3. To investigate the psychological factors that influence women to participate in rural tourism

METHODOLOGY

The study observed a sample of 200 women in Darjeeling and collected data using a pre-tested questionnaire administered by an interviewer. Out of these women, 50 were employed in the Rural tourism sector, either directly or indirectly. This stratification would enhance the comprehension of the driving factors that motivate these women to participate in rural tourism. The questionnaire comprised three sections, two of which contained Likert scale questions. The survey will include a section on the socio-demographic background, consisting of direct questions. This will be followed by an examination of the push factors within the local women's demography that motivate their involvement in rural tourism. The survey also encompassed a comprehensive examination of the participants' views on economic and psychological factors, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1, indicating strong disagreement, to 5, indicating strong agreement). The responses provided insights into the women's reactions from a different perspective and were utilized to authenticate and elucidate the answers in the questionnaire. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 21 software. The analysis employed descriptive analysis and mean comparisons to examine selected variables and perceptions regarding the factors influencing women's involvement in rural tourism in Darjeeling Hills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic factors that influence women participation in rural tourism in Darjeeling are as follows:

Age Distribution

20-25 years: 10 participants (5%), 25-30 years: 30 participants (15%), 35-40 years: 68 participants (34%), 40-45 years: 90 participants (45%), 45 and above: 2 participants (1%). This indicates that most women participating in rural tourism are 35-45 years old (79%). It suggests that middle-aged women are more involved in this sector due to their stability and experience, which are critical for rural tourism's hospitality and management aspects.

Marital Status

Married: 130 participants (65%), Unmarried: 70 participants (35%). It shows that many women involved in rural tourism are married. It could be due to the need for additional household income or a greater sense of responsibility to contribute economically to the family.

Educational Qualification

Less than secondary: 50 participants (25%), Secondary: 88 participants (44%), Higher Secondary: 32 participants (16%), Graduate: 18 participants (9%), More than graduate: 12 participants (6%). The majority of women hold a secondary education or lower (69%). The study indicates that rural tourism presents prospects for women with lower educational credentials, emphasizing its significance in offering economic opportunities to individuals with restricted entry to advanced education.

Present Occupation

Farming & Homestay: 100 participants (50%), Homestay & Service: 10 participants (5%), Homestay & Shopkeeping: 34 participants (17%), Homestay & Travels: 5 participants (2.5%), Homestay & Restaurant: 39 participants (19.5%), Farming & Food and Beverage: 12 participants (6%). This data indicates that the most common occupations involve farming and homestay services (50%), proving that agriculture remains a primary source of livelihood, supplemented by tourism-related activities. The diversification of occupations reflects the adaptive strategies women employ to enhance their income.

Monthly Income in Indian Rupees

20000-30000(INR): 50 participants (25%), 30000-40000(INR): 100 participants (50%), 40000-50000(INR): 30 participants (15%), Above 50000(INR): 20 participants (10%). Half of the participants earn between 30000-and and 40000 INR per month, showing that rural tourism can provide a moderate income, which is substantial for rural areas. However, only a tiny percentage earns above 50000 INR, indicating potential for income growth in this sector.

Push Factors to Join Rural Tourism

Infrastructure, including education, roads, health services, internet access, and other related facilities, was reported by 11 participants, accounting for 5.5% of the total. Economic reliance: 15 participants (7.5%), Significant workload due to inadequate modern equipment: 23 participants (11.5%), 38 participants (19%) lacked the authority to make decisions concerning family matters, children, and other related issues. Domestic violence resulting from poverty was reported by 20 participants, accounting for 10% of the total. In addition, 35 participants, or 17.5%, mentioned that poverty caused inconvenience in their children's education. Outmigration resulting from limited employment prospects: 40 individuals (20%), Particularly noteworthy: 18 individuals (9%) The main driving factors for migration are the limited job prospects leading to outmigration (20%), the absence of decision-making authority (19%), and the inconvenience in providing education for children (17.5%). These factors highlight the socioeconomic pressures that drive women towards seeking employment in rural tourism to secure better opportunities and improve their quality of life.

Several demographic factors influence women's participation in rural tourism in Darjeeling. Middle-aged, married women with secondary or less education dominate the sector, often combining tourism with agriculture to sustain their livelihoods. The primary motivations are economic need, better educational opportunities for their children, and escaping socioeconomic challenges. Rural tourism thus plays a crucial role in providing employment and empowerment opportunities to women in this region. However, there is a potential for improving income levels and addressing their underlying socioeconomic issues.

Table 1

The Demographic Factors Influencing Women to Participate in Rural Tourism

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage %
Age	1. 20-25	10	5
	2. 25-30	30	15
	3. 35-40	68	34
	4. 40-45	90	45
	5. 45 above	2	1
Marital status	1. Married	130	65
	2. Unmarried	70	35
Educational Qualification	1. Less than secondary	50	25
	2. Secondary	88	44
	3. Higher Secondary	32	16
	4. Graduate	18	9
	5. More than it	12	6
Present occupation	1. Farming & Homestay	100	50
	2. Homestay & service	10	5
	3. Homestay & shopkeeping	34	17
	4. Homestay & Travels	5	2.5
	5. Homestay & Restaurant	39	19.5
	6. Farming & Food and Beverage	12	6
Monthly income in Indian Rs.	1. 20000-30000	50	25
	2. 30000-40000	100	50
	3. 40000-50000	30	15
	4. above	20	10
Push factors to join rural tourism.	1. Infrastructure (education, road, health, internet etc.)	11	5.5
	2. Economic dependency	15	7.5
	3. High work burden due to the lack of modern machinery in the home	23	11.5
	4. No right to make decisions regarding family, children, etc.	38	19
	5. Domestic violence due to poverty	20	10
	6. Inconvenience in Children's Education	35	17.5
	7. Outmigration due to low employment opportunity	40	20
	8. Above all	18	9

Influence of Economic and Psychological Factors on Women's Participation in Rural Tourism in Darjeeling

Economic Factors

The mean scores for economic factors indicate a high level of agreement among the women regarding the importance of economic motivations for participating in rural tourism. The factor "To be a partner in the family business" has the highest mean (3.92), suggesting that many women see their involvement in rural tourism as a way to contribute to and support their family's economic ventures. It is closely followed by "Increase family income" (3.8), highlighting the critical role of additional income in their decision. The relatively low standard deviation indicates a consistent agreement among the participants, suggesting that these economic motivations are widely shared.

Psychological Factors

The psychological factors present a more varied picture. The highest means are found in "Incorporate the modern facility in the home to reduce the work burden" (3.58) and "Want future security through self-dependent life" (3.53). These results suggest that women are motivated to improve their living conditions and secure their futures through self-sufficiency. The relatively low standard deviations for these factors indicate a strong consensus. Conversely, factors like "Want a leading position in business and family" (2.22) and "Want a decision-maker for children and family" (2.22) have lower means and higher standard deviations, indicating more mixed feelings and less overall importance. It could reflect cultural or societal norms that still influence women's roles in family decision-making and leadership positions.

Economic and psychological factors strongly influence women in Darjeeling's decision to participate in rural tourism, but economic motivations appear more uniformly important. The primary drivers are the desire to contribute to family businesses, increase household income, and achieve economic self-dependency. Psychologically, while there is a significant desire for future security and reducing household work burdens through modern facilities, ambitions related to leading roles in business and family decision-making are less pronounced, likely due to prevailing social structures. It suggests that while economic empowerment is a clear goal, psychological empowerment in leadership and decision-making is still an evolving area for these women. Financial factors are the primary drivers for women's participation in rural tourism in Darjeeling, with psychological factors also playing a role in improving living conditions and securing future stability. These insights highlight the importance of addressing economic and psychological needs to foster a supportive environment for women in rural tourism. Enhancing their leadership roles and decision-making power within families could further strengthen their participation and empowerment in this sector.

Table 2

Influence of Economic and Psychological Factors on Women's Participation in Rural Tourism

Variable	Questions	Mean	SD
Economic factors	To be self-employed.	3.76	0.55
	To be economically self-dependent	3.74	0.54
	To be a partner in the Family business.	3.92	0.44
	Increase family income	3.8	0.49
Psychological factors	Want a leading position in business and family	2.22	0.92
	Want a decision-maker for children and family	2.22	1.07
	Want future security through self-dependent life	3.53	0.29
	Want to withdraw from voluntary service in family farming or business	2.79	0.77
	Incorporate the modern facility in the home to reduce the work burden	3.58	0.26

CONCLUSION

Women mainly involve themselves in non-professional and non-managerial self-employment activities to balance work and family demands (Budig, 2006). Engaging in higher levels of activities may require individuals to allocate more time, while maintaining a proper balance would enable them to do so. As the responsibilities increase, there will be a greater demand for increased focus on the job. Family factors contribute little to explaining women's entrance into professional and managerial self-employment in the hospitality industry. Many studies have dealt with women's employment issues in tourism and hospitality. They have dealt with why women are lacking in the tourism sector (Nayomi & Gnanapala, 2015; Nyataya & Ma, 2016) and some specifically on the context of rural women (Malkanthi et al., 2015). What factors lead to these differences in gender disparity? In agriculture, it has been found that women's contribution to the family is noticeable (Gamhewage et al., 2015; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000). Thus, in rural areas, women can contribute to the family through tourism activities. These barriers have been manifolds for women. Therefore, very few women have climbed the career ladder in this industry. An ample amount of flexibility is available for workers in this industry, as formal education is not a barrier. Thus, even rural people with less education, including women, can get involved and decide on their time allocation (Budig, 2006). Some studies have even looked at opportunities for physically impaired people in the industry (Yusoff et al., 2013; Zahari et al., 2010).

The main objectives of this research were to understand the critical factors influencing and pushing rural women's participation in tourism in Darjeeling hills and to examine the impact of demographic variables like age, education level, marital status, income, occupation, and push factors to join tourism on their involvement in such activities. Furthermore, the study measures socioeconomic and psychological factors that affect women's participation in rural tourism activities. Based on a descriptive analysis, three objectives were tested. Several demographic factors influence women's involvement in rural tourism in Darjeeling. The majority of the workforce consists of middle-aged married women with a secondary level of education or lower. These women often engage in a combination of tourism and agriculture to sustain their livelihoods. The primary motivations behind their decision are to evade socioeconomic challenges, enhance educational opportunities for their children, and fulfil their financial requirements.

Rural tourism is crucial for the employment and empowerment of these women. However, it is feasible to increase income levels and address the root socioeconomic issues.

The research concludes that economic and psychological factors strongly influence women's participation in rural tourism in Darjeeling. The main incentives are economic motivations, which involve contributing to family businesses and attaining financial autonomy. Psychological motivations, including improving living conditions and securing future stability, also play a significant role. Rural tourism provides vital employment and empowerment opportunities for women in Darjeeling, particularly those with limited educational backgrounds. Efforts should address economic and psychological needs to further enhance their participation and empowerment. This includes improving income levels, providing better support for leadership roles, and fostering an environment that encourages greater decision-making power within families. Despite the solid economic motivation, psychological empowerment in leadership and decision-making remains under researched. Cultural and societal norms still influence women's roles in these aspects.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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