HOMESTAY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN MANAGED TOURISM PRODUCT IN KASAR DEVI, UTTARAKHAND, INDIA

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Abstract

Introduction: Homestays have become a popular mode of stay in India where tourism activities are considered to be important tools in achieving poverty reduction, job opportunity and sustained livelihood.

Methodology: This paper will discuss the case of Kasar Devi, India, employment opportunities to 90% of local women in the households. Primary data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observations of the residents on that destination.

Findings: This paper highlights the achievement of sustainable development, women's empowerment and environmental conservation.

Research Implications: These ventures can be utilized for the benefit of local communities, grassroots development and local women to supporting to preserve their culture and traditions in terms of development.

Originality: This analysis reveals that the involvement of the local community in the initial development process while utilizing the bottom-up approach was the key to create successful tourism businesses.

Key Words: *homestay, economic development, women empowerment, Kasar Devi, employment opportunity*
JEL classification: *Z32*

Introduction

"Athithi Devo Bhava" is a very famous concept in India which means "The Guest is God". It is an honor and privilege for an Indian to have guest in their home and do every possible thing to please them. There's nothing like Indian hospitality. But unfortunately, tourists who come to

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India prefer stay in hotels. The best part is this trend is changing as a result of popularity of the homestay in India.

A homestay is kind of similar concept of a bed and breakfast. In homestay guests are accommodated in either the host's family home, or in a separate room nearby to the host's place. Nowadays, most of the homestays have modern amenities providing as much comfort as a standard hotel. Having said that, homestay tourism has become a successful choice and approach in many developing countries where tourism has considered to be an important aspect in achieving poverty reduction sustainable livelihood and job generation.

Homestay as a community based tourism is famous in many developing countries. To preserve the environment and rural development, community based tourism is being promoted as a low-impact - environmentally sensitive way to travel (Martha, 1999; Kiss, 2004; Jones, 2005; Nelson, 2007). The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-India) mentioned that a community based ecotourism project can protect, preserve and conserve many fragile destinations in India. Establishment of responsible tourism was a tough challenge especially in the fragile high-altitude Himalayan region.

However, tourism is an effective and efficient way to create new job opportunities that to help reducing poverty from the communities in the remote and resource-scarce region. Homestay tourism can also prevent land abandonment and subsequent rural–urban migration by providing supplementary income in rural community.

Tourism may be regarded as an industry consisting of tourists, a business and an environment or community for operation (Williams & Lawson, 2001). The interrelationships of multiple elements in the tourism system are studied wisely and in-depth, especially the host community's feedback on the impacts of tourism in their life and community. It has been recognized that communities' perception and attitude towards the impact of tourism are crucial and necessary for providing valuable inputs in dealing with the strategic managerial decisions, marketing and operation of existing and future programs and projects (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Liu & Var, 1986; Allen, et. al., 1988; Ap, 1992; Lankford 2001). Additionally, the views of the host community should consider very seriously if the industry needs to be sustained in the long-term (Williams & Lawson, 2001).

Until the late 1970s, a considerable magnitude of impact on residents' perception has been carried out (Rothman, 1978; Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Brougham & Butler 1981; Murphy, 1981; Sheldon & Var, 1984; Pizam & Milman 1986; Liu & Var, 1986). Among all the outputs, (Williams T. A., 1976) three categories of impact are significant: economic, social and environmental/physical. Economic impacts largely identified by researchers (McIntosh & Goeldner, 1986; Allen, et. al., 1988; Davis, et. al., 1988) include personal and regional benefits that contribute to income and standard of living (Young, 1973; Belisle & Hoy, 1980); increased employment opportunities (Rothman, 1978; Ross, 1992) increases in tax revenues (Brougham & Butler 1981; Milman & Pizam, 1988); and increases in real estate prices (Pizam, 1978).

In addition, (Pizam & Milman, 1986) there are six major categories which have been identified of social and cultural impacts: impact on population structure, transformation of forms and types of occupations, transformation of values, the influence on traditional lifestyle, modification of consumption patterns, and benefits to tourists. Social consequences include the impact on recreation opportunities, crime, social instability (Travis, 1984), changes in law and social order, prostitution or child-begging (Hong, 1985), commercialized host–visitor relationship changes in the prevailing local norms, customs and traditions, improved public health, education and conservation and political modifications. Finally, perceived impacts on the natural environment are also identified.

The Indian tradition of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' which means that the guest is God, replicates the highest place of guest as an honor in the house. This was the main foundation for the concept of Homestays in India and also an emerging trend in the hospitality business in the country. Homestays can be explained as a form of tourism where host gives their accommodation to the travelers as guests for a fee. Travelers get the room with facilities like attached bathrooms and home-cooked local cuisine, and experience the real essence and the unique culture of the destination, which the traveler might unknowingly miss out this authentic experience while staying in conventional accommodation like hotels/resort.

History of Kasar Devi

Kasardevi is a hidden jewel in the crown of Uttarakhand, it has everything that makes it a perfect destination for tourist especially for back packers.

Kasardevi is situated on Kashyap Hills and is known for its ancient temple that dates back to 2nd century CE. On the occasion of Kartik Poornima, many people come here to worship and attend the Kasar Devi Fair every year. But that is not the only reason why people are crazy about this place, it is mainly renowned for the hippie trail that attracts travelers to this quiet village. Having said that, many western travelers and mystics visited and chose to be settled down at Kasar Devi. Amongst them were the famous Danish mystic Sunyata Baba, Tibetan Buddhist Anagarika Govinda, American poet Allen Ginsberg, American singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, English musician George Harrison to name a few.

Kasar Devi first came to the lime light when in the 1890s Swami Vivekananda visited and meditated there and has mentioned his experience in his diaries. The famous Walter Evans-Wentz, a pioneer in the study of Tibetan Buddhism, who later translated The Tibetan Book of the Dead, stayed here for some time.

Danish mystic Sunyata Baba (Alfred Sorensen) came here in the year of 1930 and lived here the over three decades, as same like him Ernst Hoffman, who became Tibetan Buddhist Lama Anagarika Govinda. This led to a series of spiritual seekers from the west, who are visiting this place. Govinda was visited by Beat poets, Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky and Gary Snyderin 1961. In later on, at the peak of the Hippie movement, the area also became a part of the Hippie trail. Crank's Ridge, colloquially known as Hippie Hill, which lies ahead of Kasar Devi became a popular destination. It became home to several bohemian artists, writers and western Tibetan Buddhists, and even visited by mystic-saint Anandamayi Ma.

The destination got its name amongst hippy circles, after American psychologist Timothy Leary visited here in the 1960s. Leary had written majority of his 'psychedelic prayers' here. Thus, through the 1960 and 1970s, the area was visited by personalities of the counter-culture, Bob Dylan, George Harrison and Cat Stevens, Western Buddhist Robert Thurman, and writer D. H. Lawrence, who spent two summers here. Today, the village (known back in the day as Crank's Ridge) is a low-key backpacker destination, with a mellow vibe and clear-day Himalayan views. Although there are not many activities to do here, it is a great place to chill.

Homestay in Kasar Devi

Homestays are becoming one of the main sources of income in Kasar Devi. Having said that, the largest number of the homestays are managed by the woman of the respective house. Men are mainly focused into agriculture. Right from the dealing with guest to hospitality is taking care by females of this place. Active involvement of women in homestay business makes it successful and valuable. The main touch point of the tourist for staying in homestay is host community's docile, humble, caring nature.

Figure 1: *Tourist accommodation occupancy*
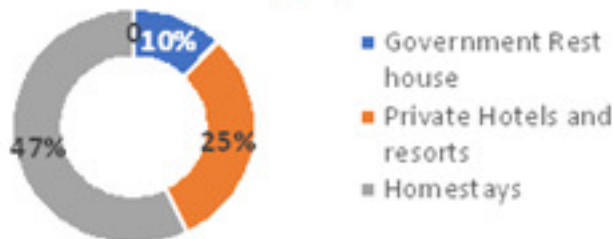
Source: *self-collected data*

Interaction with the tourist in Kasar Devi made précises and clear about the thought - why tourists have chosen to stay at homestay rather spending money on luxurious hotel. There are several reasons why staying at a homestay can be preferable to get the best experience about that place. The benefits include:

a. **Distinctive and Characterful Accommodation** -- Homestays offer an immense opportunity to experience the authentic flavor of the destination. It is a pleasure to stay in a local home with the local people for it gives maximum information about the place as well as the ultimate experience of local culture.

b. **Personalized Service** --. The family who resides there runs it, and acts as host. So in contrast to a hotel, a homestay usually only has a few rooms. This guarantees that guests receive plenty of individual attention from the hosts. You can spend time with the host family as per your convenience. Some guests choose only to dine with them, while others spend hours chatting to them and few stays over a week. Nevrtheless, staying with an Indian family is the easiest way of finding out about Indian culture. Many guests and hosts find that they bond with each other so much, they keep in touch long after the vacation is over.

c. **Safety** -- If you are visiting India for the first time to get acquainted with Indian culture, religion, heritage or are simply concerned about staying safely, you will have a family who looks after you at a homestay. They will provide you with advice and may even help you to explore the destination.

d. **Local Knowledge** -- The wealth of information that the hosts have about their local area makes deciding what to see and do a breeze. Such local knowledge is extremely helpful in getting the most from your visit. Many hosts are delighted to show their guests around their local area, providing them with invaluable insights that simply are not available from a guide book. Hosts usually have reputable contacts and can assist in making travel bookings too.

e. **Home Cooked Food** -- There is a huge difference between the Indian food which is cooked in an Indian home and food served in restaurants. It is a lot lighter and has more variation and flavor than restaurant food. By staying at a homestay, you will be able to taste authentic Indian home cooked food, made to order. Some homestays even welcome their guests into their kitchen and let them watch and participate in the cooking process.

f. **Unique Activities** -- As a guest at a homestay, the focus is on you, and your likes and preferences. The hosts are really very hospitable and will put a great deal of effort into arranging activities that are of interest to you. These activities will vary depending on location. Guests are often invited to attend weddings as well.

g. **Celebrating Festivals** -- The ideal way to celebrate India's many festivals is with an Indian family. You will gain a deep appreciation and understanding of what the festival is about, as well as get to participate in the rituals associated with it.

h. **Getting Off the Tourist Trail** -- Homestays are commonly located in residential neighborhood, rather than tourist areas. This means you will be away from all the tourist traps, touts, scams and other hassles, so it is a quite peaceful and good place to relax.

Theoretical framework and conceptual model of homestay management

Nowadays, it is broadly accepted that there is a relationship among community-based resources, participation and tourism satisfactory. This paper synthesizes the theories which have been developed to explain the causal chain of process management brought about by homestay owners can deliver more sustainable to benefit the local and rural economies. The

key elements of the core theoretical perspective on the management process and measurement of sustainable are derived from the core theories on homestay business of many disciplines.

Figure 2: *Theoretical Framework of Homestay Management*
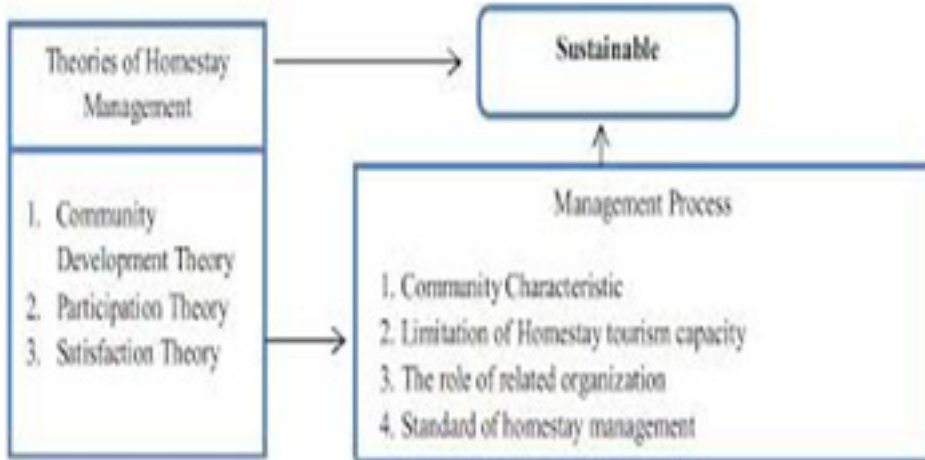
Source: *Binnui & Iamsa-ard, 2016*

Community Development Theory: The concept of community development theory is closely associated with social capital and community capacity. Social capital is viewed as a main component of social cohesion. Community-based development can lead to sustainable development because it generates from the local to the regional level. Normally, the tourism aspects are known as main wheels to preserve the cultural and natural heritage of a community, while presenting special features to visitors' enjoyment. Moreover, tourists can learn culture aspects by participating in cultural activities, at the same time, other the benefit of this activity is to promote economically profitable and environmentally sustainable activities which will generate employment opportunities. Hence, the major advantage of tourist destinations should not be the tourists or the developers, but the members of the community.

Participation Theory: Regarding to (McIntyre, et. al., 1993) quoted in Farsari and Prastacos, says that community participation in tourism can have positive impacts. While, Fennell noted the participation is ability of local communities to support the outcome of tourism development projects that have impact on them. Community participation in tourism planning can also influence the knowledge, insights and capabilities among the different members with the potential of the sharing of ideas

among them resulting in a richer understanding of issues and possibly more innovative policies and practice.

The Theory of Tourist Satisfaction: (Bramwell & Sharman, 2003) defined satisfaction theory as the feeling or attitude of person towards other things. She said that attitude shares impact of the person's feeling which might be in both positive and negative aspects. In the same consensus by (Sudjai, 2002), it is the effect to some things that probably response to the need in either positive or negative ways, however if that person receive a positive outcome, it will lead to the positive feeling, on the other hand, if that person have got the opposed feedback, it appear to produce a negative attitude in their personal feeling. Thus, if we receive the pleasant response, the positive attitude for that outcome will be immediately reflected.

Conceptual framework of the homestay model

Tourism industry has become one of the leading industries of the world and is still growing at an increasing pace (Chakraborty & Agarwal, 2018). The main and basic factors of Homestay management and sustainability, we consider the content that homestay management process factors are associated with sustainable community-based Tourism.

Figure 3: *Conceptual Model of Homestay Management*

Source: *Binnui & Iamsa-ard, 2016*

This model replicates the relationship among different levels and configurations of the supportive inputs from the related organizations through tourism resources accumulation, capacity and satisfaction with cooperated from the community-based participation. The figure below

presents how the homestay business embarks on the path that leads from resource inputs to the sustainable of community-based tourism in the form of management for the quality outcome of both tourists and homestay services.

Research methodology

In this study interviews, observations and secondary sources were used as methods of data collection. To selecting the respondents, purposive sampling methods were used which consists of homestay entrepreneurs that participate in the homestay program in Kasardevi area. The homestay entrepreneurs have been selected because they are familiar with problem in the homestay industries. Initially literature review has been done and selected the relevant documents which involved in the background to the case study. The research process was divided into 2 segments. The first phase is qualitative approach; in-depth interview with the main players of homestay business owners with the key information and observation were employed. Eleven interviewees were purposively selected with the help of mediators (in few cases) and with a snowballing approach to conduct the interviews at the study site. Mediators helped the researcher to access local participants and key informants. Among eleven participants, five in-depth interviews were conducted: a local tourism management committee (n=1), a local protected area authority (n=1), homestay owners (n=3). These interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 60 minutes. With remaining six interviewees, semi-structured interviews were conducted; the participants were: homestay owners/operators (n=4) and local people (n=2). These interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 45 minutes. Among the interview participants, nine were females and two were males. All interviews were conducted at the place of participants' work/home. The second phase was quantitative approach, questionnaires survey with satisfaction by using the Likert scale based on standard of homestay in that particular area. In-depth interview is used to interview the Village Headman and Head of Homestay group. This interview is a qualitative efficiency to receive the people to people to talk about their personal feeling's opinions and experiences.

Specifically, primary in- depth interview can help researcher to provide much more detailed information than any other data collection method, Direct Observation of people in their own homestay location. It can indicate how people behave within the real situations with showing their interests; it is a common utility method of collecting information and to

see the real place of homestay. Moreover, to record observations and informal talk while discussing situation, a recorder was used. For ethical reasons, the researcher informed the informants before recording. Thus, a survey was used in this study to provide supplementary information. Data in the quantitative part was gathered from both Village Headman and the Head of homestay group who were chosen as the sample population for this study because they could represent 'the voice of the people of concern. These people are able to speak for the community as they have special knowledge of the community because of their roles in the community. The questionnaire was structured around the Likert scale, while nominal measurement was also used for some factors. The Likert scale is the most commonly used because it is easy for the researcher to construct as well as for respondents to understand. Aref (2009) also recommended the use of a Likert scale in tourism research due to its high validity.

Implications of the study

The findings of this study are important for theoretical and practical implications, to both scholars and practitioners, especially towards the entrepreneurial success of the homestay business in India. The result of the study will help Homestay Program function as a community development tool that manages tourism resources. Thus, it also helps the community to improve the local economy and create job opportunities in the rural area. The results of the study on management of homestay service showed that the community residents have established their own homestay by offering various tourism activities related to their heritage, culture and customs.

Based on observations made in this case study, homestays appear to be a tourism product that will be helpful in addressing socio-economic, political, ethnic and gender disparities.

Several factors appear to have contributed to positive outcomes arising from the introduction of homestays in Kasar. Firstly, the success of the homestay programd hinged upon constant collaboration amongst the partners, including local community members, line agencies, and various levels of government. This collaboration-built relationship, understanding and trust, and provided an environment where action and dialogue were constantly available. Similar findings were observed in studies by (Beritelli, 2011; Jamal & Stronza, 2009; Wong, et. al., 2011). Secondly,

transparency in the development of the program, including selection and designation of approved homestay facilities, was important for building a sense of fairness. Thirdly, clear guidelines on what was necessary to operate a homestay, as well as how and who did this evaluation, clarified what standards were needed to participate in the homestay program and also fostered, in most cases, the sense of an equitable operating environment. Fourthly, hospitality training and on-going monitoring of tourism environment conditions were essential in fostering local capacity to host visitors and maintain an appealing and safe environment for guests. Fifthly, the initiative was driven by a "bottom-up" request by Kesar devi's women community; this likely enhanced the project's chances for success because locals felt a sense of ownership and control of its evolution. Government support in the form of training was essential, but local direction of the initiative provided stability, commitment and enthusiasm. Several other studies have observed the importance of bottom-up action (Chiabai, et. al., 2013). In the future, several factors will need to be addressed to ensure that ongoing improvements for local people arise from the homestay programe. Mechanisms that support the inclusion of lower educated, economically disadvantaged, lower castes and minorities will need to be further explored. For example, in addition to hospitality training, small financial loans may be necessary to facilitate the development of additional homestays in the region, to enable the inclusion of lower socio-economic families in this enterprise opportunity. The women entrepreneurs involved in the program will need to continue to be strategic in their partnerships with the government, and increasingly with the private sector (e.g. inbound tour operators) to tap into new tourism opportunities. They will also need to be strategic in their partnerships with local officials, elders and other elites. The Kasar Devi homestay program has achieved program successes in the past because of their consultation with these power brokers; these individuals must understand that opportunities for themselves and the community will arise through the success of local business development such as the homestay program. Related to this is an awareness that the inclusion of men within the homestay program needs to be explored further, as India is still a patriarchal society. A careful awareness of the impacts and opportunities represented by gender roles and the revision of these roles needs to be attended to. Also at the local level, caution also needs to be taken when considering the potential negative impacts that tourism can bring (e.g. loss of cultural identity) and the possible co-option of successful rural tourism development by local elites.

Finally, at a more regional and national level, for homestays to be considered a vehicle for the emancipation of women and low socio-economic groups, the existing tourism agenda of India needs to be revamped to address government management (accountability, duplication) and local governance (inclusion of all classes, castes and genders). A community-based project has multiple stakeholders such as businesses, NGOs, public/private agencies, besides diverse peoples residing in the vicinity. Tourism development is difficult without increased collaboration (Jamal & Getz, 1995) between different institutions and resource users. Developing countries, especially in a post-insurgency and war period, demand strong bonding amongst multiple players in this regard. The exploration of factors that encourage collaborators to be involved constantly in an initiative, upholding their motivations, might be one of many desirable areas for further research. A further study could also be done to explore the experiential perceptions of the guests of the homestays. A visitor survey would determine how well homestays have been able to comply with the expectations of the tourists and what measures could be adopted to improve the business. This will provide important information for verifying the aspects that the homestay communities that appeal and need adjustment as homestays in Kasar Devi or other parts of India are adopted further.

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