

Women of Darjeeling Hills moving towards Self Employment Generation

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ABSTRACT

The age of old farming system is no longer a sustainable profession in Darjeeling hills. Many women of Darjeeling used to leave their hometown to find work in other cities and foreign lands. With booming tourism business and increase in literacy rates today's educated women are choosing to return 'home' to share their knowledge and experience to work towards development of the community to provide a sustainable livelihood solutions for their family. Homestay business being one of the fastest growing self-employment businesses. Darjeeling is known as "Queen of Hills" worldwide attracts every year a large number of tourists i.e international, national and local due to its beautiful mountain scenery and world-renowned tea gardens. During peak tourist seasons the number of hotels and guest houses becomes insufficient to accommodate the tourists. To overcome this crisis recently a popular trend called Home Stay Tourism has emerged in Darjeeling hills. Local people give their part of the premises in cash where tourists can explore the cultural heritages, lifestyles, and traditions of hill communities during their stay. The essence of such Home Stays is due to the homely atmosphere experienced by the tourists. The outcome of homestays has provided numerous benefits for unemployed women like financial stability, employment generation, social and cultural upliftments. The paper will focus on the three-dimensional views of the economic, social and cultural impact of Home Stay enterprise on unemployed women of Darjeeling Hills.

1. Introduction

On 15th June 2016, the Government of West Bengal announced to promote Home-stay through organic farming. It is a place or area of the house where the owner offers to the tourist in exchange of money. This is an experience which is completely different from a hotel. Home-stay offers both fooding and lodging making the tourists as part of the family which is a huge drawback in hotel. This business has become very famous among the tourist and the same time as source of income for the unemployed people especially women of Darjeeling Hills. Home-stay is now -a-days the most booming business in the Darjeeling Hills. With huge success the government of West Bengal again revised the West Bengal Homestay Tourism policy on 2019 (26.12.2019) making it more convenient by involving more people so that employment generation can be created among unemployed people.

2. Essential Necessities & Need for Home-stay:

- ✓ **Site:** The position of home-stay must be located in the area with natural scenery and easy accessibility of transportation. The area must be pollution free.
- ✓ **Safety & security:** The safety and security measures must be taken with utmost importance as the tourists are new to the place. For emergency tagging with good hospitals, police station etc are must for safety and security purpose.
- ✓ **Hospitality:** The guest are welcomed with warm heart and compassion and treated as god. They are treated as their family members.
- ✓ **Minimum Charge:** As compared to hotel charges, home-stay charge is relatively low with homely atmosphere and comforts.

- ✓ **Growth of Women entrepreneurs:** It provides new opportunities of job for unemployed women by using their local resources.
- ✓ **Revenue generation:** With increasing number of tourists revenue are generated for these home-stay owners leading to financial stability.
- ✓ **Capacity building:** Capacity building process is very much required for efficient functioning of home-stay operations.
- ✓ **Community involvement:** The success or goal of home-stay will be achieved if community as a large is involved. The owners of home-stay gets power and ability to grow from sound community support.

3. Objectives of the study:

- i) To study the economic impact on financial stability among unemployed women.
- ii) To find out the social upliftments among unemployed women.
- iii) To find out cultural impact to the visitors.

4. Methodology:

This article is based on both primary and secondary information. 100 women homestay owners were randomly selected for interview and questionnaires were supplied. These women owners are from Darjeeling town areas since maximum homestays are located here. The secondary data was obtained from journals, articles, government records, and websites.

5. Literature Review:

Chaiyatorn, et al., (2010) stated that Home-stay business can guarantee economic, social, and cultural boon for local communities with all-round sustainable development.

Bhan & Singh (2014) opined that the Indian tourism market is huge it is not explored as per the demand and resources. In this tourism market, an emerging concept of Home-Stay has been identified as micro tourism entrepreneurship in India. This idea may help the Government to remove unemployment in rural areas which is one of the concerned problems in our country. But the government lacks a clear vision, plan, policy, strategy, and program in this area. Good planning of Home-Stay enterprises can be an important instrument of poverty eradication.

Kannegieser (2015) stated that female-owned and managed homestays in Darjeeling district had huge socio-economic benefits for the women. Results showed that increased financial opportunities improved their standard of living and greater access to resources. Their increased income was utilized for paying their children's higher education and covering household expenses. The article also found that socially, the women's levels of self-confidence and pride increased drastically from owning and running a homestay. In spite of their increased financial conditions, they are unable to keep not even a petty margin of profit for its own saving in the majority of the cases.

Khan & Mitra (2017) found that to create effective positioning strategies for products and services in the home-stay business. The article also has focused on conducting timely training and sensitization programs for home-stay operators for identifying the needs and demands of tourists for home-stay businesses to prosper.

Pradhan, S. (2017) stated that home stay has become a source of livelihoods for the rural people as it generates additional income to the local communities. It was found that the tourists after the stay finds the intentions of revisit and recommends other known people.

6. Findings:

6.1. Reasons behind the success of Home-Stay:

The given reasons were found by interview how Home-stay enterprise is rapidly emerging in Darjeeling Hills:

- ✓ The village area of in and around Darjeeling gives the mesmerizing panoramic view of the third highest peak of the world Mt. Kanchenjunga.
- ✓ The area is surrounded by interesting tourist attraction like historical places way back to British rule.
- ✓ The area is also rich in natural varieties of flora like Cardamom, Broomstick, pine trees and demanding flowers like Orchids to name one of them.
- ✓ Availability of different varieties of fauna like deer, bear, leopards and different varieties of birds like pheasants, cuckoos, flycatchers, owls, partridges, sunbirds, swallows, swifts and woodpeckers.
- ✓ Good trekking routes to many destinations, Tiger hill being one of them.
- ✓ Beautiful and unexplored natural environment.
- ✓ According to some tourist they prefer this place instead of overcrowded Darjeeling town areas because of its quiet and peaceful nature.

6.2 Home Stay as economic mechanism:

After the launch of Home-stay new business opportunities for unemployed people, especially women have been generated. These unemployed women earn financial benefits

from their home itself whose major portions are used for their day to day expenditure, children education and part are being saved for the future. It is not only the owners of the homestay but even local vendors, taxi owners, unemployed people also gain economically.

CASE STUDY - ONE

Name : Dolma Bhutia (Name has been changed for confidentiality)

Yang originally was from Terai region of north Bengal but got married

in Darjeeling. Though her husband was from well to do family he had no secured government job. Initially, things were good but later on with family conflicts the property was divided. They got a house and with microloans converted a part of it into home-stay in 2017. Since both of them were educated they took the help of the internet to advertise their home-stay with minimum charge and homely atmosphere. Luck turned in their favor and now she is the owner of one of the most demanding home-stay. Her husband takes care of all other outside affairs like transportation, groceries, etc. Now both her children are studying in one of the best school of Darjeeling along with some future savings kept aside as Darjeeling sometimes face political disturbances.

This is the case of total economical transformation after the home-stay business was taken up.

6.3. Home Stay as a social mechanism:

From the record of personal interviews of 80 women home-stay owners, almost everyone agreed on their social upliftments. They gained social recognition and confidence with a sense of pride. They are even recognized in society as role models for youths and they no longer feel as marginalized sections in society.

CASE STUDY - TWO

Name: Sarita Devi (Name has been changed for confidentiality)

Before she started the home-stay business she was known by very fewer people of her village. With profit in her business, she used to contribute a part of the profit as donations in schools, old age homes. While giving an interview she disclosed that various organization has made her as chief guest. All the credit goes to her home-stay business and she loves to be part of social upliftments in the future ahead.

6.4. Home Stay as a cultural mechanism:

The experience of staying in a home-stay is completely different from a hotel since the tourists are made as to the part of the family-like sharing the same living area, cooking together, etc. When these types of time are spent together tourists come to know about the culture and traditions of the local people festivals, foods, clothing, habits, etc. It also helps to protect the local culture and natural heritage from extinguishing.

CASE STUDY - THREE

Name: Ganesh Arora (Name has been changed for confidentiality)

Ganesh visited Darjeeling in the year 2018 with two more people. They preferred home-stay rather than a hotel. A Buddhist monastery was very close to the home-stay where he

stayed. Ganesh at first visited the monastery just to see, later with interaction he became so inclined to Buddhist teaching that after one year he opted for Buddhism.

7. Conclusion:

In conclusion, it can be said that home-stay enterprise has become a **source of self-employment generation for Darjeeling hills women**. The local people are becoming aware of the positive impacts of the home-stay enterprise. To a great extent, it has been able to create employment opportunities for many unemployed people of the hills especially women. Before a few options were left for employment therefore they had to

migrate to other parts of the country or world in search of jobs. The home-stay business has a great future perspective in the rural areas of Darjeeling hills and can surely be an alternative option for income generation business. It is a micro tourism entrepreneurship and totally a new concept adopted. Though the Government is taking good initiative for its sustainability when plan, policy, strategy, and program are introduced must be people-friendly. All the owners, stakeholders should work on and progress on 3 keys of sustainable development: making it more economically viable, socially equitable and culturally rich to preserve its heritage.

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