



A Call for Systemic Engagement with Women Issues in Tourism!

EQUATIONS

June 2014

To,
Shri Shripad Yesso Naik,
The Minister of State (Independent Charge),
Ministry of Tourism,
New Delhi

Subject – A call for systemic engagement on women issues in tourism!

Tourism development is often rationalised on economic grounds in terms of employment generation, especially for women. Focus only on employment generation without taking into consideration social, cultural, economic and political power relations has resulted in tourism development being divorced from ground realities. This has significant consequences for women living and/or working in and around tourism destinations as well as women tourists.

Key concerns we would like to raise are summarised below:

Patriarchal norms, caste and gender find centrality to the nature of participation of women in tourism. However, the social and cultural context of women's participation is not paid attention by the Ministry of Tourism in its initiatives. The Endogenous Tourism Project is such an example where interplay between caste and gender has resulted in women being absent from decision making spaces like Village Tourism Committee.

Living and working conditions of women at tourism destinations needs dire attention. Increase in forced sex work and trafficking are reported in media which has largely remained ignored by the sector. Conditions of women working in informal sector as street vendors, artisans and construction workers are even worse due to the trend that is increasingly being seen in tourist destinations as a process of 'clearing out the unwanted' and creating a façade of beauty.

The gross violation of human rights due to sex tourism and trafficking of women are the shadow side of the booming tourism industry. Flourishing of sex tourism was reported in media in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. However reports of this extreme nature of crime have not received any response from either the MoT or from the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) and National Commission for Women (NCW).

Safety and security of women travellers and those living in and around tourism destinations has been demanding rigorous attention for long. In the wake of a series of harassment faced by foreign women tourists, MoT has launched a sensitisation campaign called "I respect women". However, much more engagement is required to make a dent on the outlook of society towards women.

Implementing existing mechanisms meant to ensure safety of women at tourism destinations like Tourist Police and Safe and Honourable Code of Conduct without acknowledging the gaps in implementation is another area of concern. These mechanisms are yet to be institutionalised by the stakeholders in tourism industry due to lack of awareness about these mechanisms among state tourism officials. Further, implementation of the code has been limited only to the issue of children. There is a need to mull over the integration of women issues in an appropriate way as they are different from that of the child and each one is serious enough that it needs individual attention.

Coordination between concerned ministries is very much required for development of tourism that cuts across several sectors, depending on the uniqueness and issues at the destination. Lack of co-ordination among the ministries/mission has resulted in lack of gender perspective in the initiatives by the MoT taken to develop and

promote tourism. Silence of National Commission for Women (NCW) on the issue of violation of women's rights at tourism destination has seen almost negligible implementation of the Constitutional and other legal provisions. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) has a mandate to strengthen inter-sector convergence but MoT is absent in the list of partner ministries / departments related to empowerment of women.

Following these, we call upon the ministries to recognise tourism as a site for blatant and inhuman exploitation of women in tourism. We urge the ministries to ensure achieving the objective in the respective policies and work towards them in spirit, engaging in more systemic ways with the challenge of women's empowerment in tourism and adopting cross sectoral approach and inter-weave the initiatives taken by the Ministries for women safety.

Taking cognizance of the fact, we demand the ministries / mission:

- To examine the status of the initiatives taken by the Ministry of Tourism from a gender perspective
- To examine initiatives taken by other Ministries focusing on women from a tourism perspective
- To conduct sensitisation programmes for tourism service providers as part of the sensitisation campaign
- To monitor the implementation of the Sexual Harassment at Work Place Act in tourism industry and initiatives taken by the employers following the provision of Duties of Employer in the Act
- To ensure women specific issues as part of the Safe and Honourable Code of Conduct
- To ensure inter-departmental collaboration between various Departments and ministries / mission including NMEW in view of tourism as a complex and inter-disciplinary subject
- Regulate tourism such that women do not pay the price of another person's holiday!

Copy to:

- Secretary, Ministry of Tourism
- Minister, Ministry of Women and Child Development
- Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development
- Chairperson, National Commission for Women
- Member Secretary, National Commission for Women
- Additional Secretary, National Mission for Empowerment of Women
- Executive Director, National Mission for Empowerment of Women

We the undersigned:

1. EQUATIONS, Bangalore
2. CRT-Goa and Badayl-Alternatives, Goa
3. ECPAT International, Thailand
4. Gender Responsible Tourism, Italy
5. Equality in Tourism: Creating Change for Women
6. Vimochna, Bangalore
7. A. Lajwanti Naidu, Asst. Professor, Amity Institute of Travel and Tourism, Noida
8. Anibel Ferus-Comelo, Goa
9. Anuradha Pati, Development Professional
10. Aruna Gnanadason, Chennai
11. Asad R. Rahmani, Director, Bombay Natural History Society
12. Freya HIGGINS-DESBIOLLES, Australia
13. Himmat Singh, NIMR, New Delhi
14. Judith Siqueira
15. Kiran Gupta
16. Krishna Ranga Rao Gujjari, Tourism Consultant, Hyderabad
17. Nina Rao, Delhi
18. Nirmal John

19. Pradeep Esteves, Context India, Bangalore, Karnataka, India
20. Pushpa Achanta, writer, Bangalore
21. Pooja Kute, (AAI-organisation), Attempt to Accept Individual
22. Roopashri Sinha
23. Seema Bhatt, Independent Consultant, Climate Change*Conservation*Ecotourism
24. Shalini Mulackal
25. Soumya Dutta. Convenor. Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha
26. Suvarna Jain
27. Virginia Saldanha, Indian Christian Women's Movement, Mumbai
28. Vrushali Patil

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