



Empowering Women Through Responsible Tourism Entrepreneurship: A Study on Socio-Economic and Environmental Perspective in Telangana

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Abstract:

This study explores the role of responsible tourism in empowering women entrepreneurs in Telangana, India, with a focus on socio-economic, environmental, and entrepreneurial satisfaction outcomes. Despite the tourism sector's potential to drive economic growth, women in rural and semi-urban areas face systemic barriers such as limited access to education, financial resources, and skill development programs. Using a quantitative approach, data from 345 women entrepreneurs engaged in tourism activities, such as handicrafts, eco-tourism, and cultural services, were analysed. The results demonstrate that social empowerment had the strongest influence on entrepreneurial satisfaction, followed by economic empowerment and environmental empowerment. Social empowerment, particularly women's increased participation in decision-making and enhanced social status, was found to significantly improve their satisfaction with entrepreneurship. Economic independence and environmental sustainability practices also played vital roles, though with slightly lesser impacts. The findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions, including skill development programs, financial support, and market linkages to foster women's entrepreneurial growth. Policies should prioritize gender-inclusive tourism strategies, promote leadership roles for women, and integrate environmental sustainability practices into tourism activities. The study concludes that responsible tourism offers a transformative platform for promoting gender equity, economic self-reliance, and environmental stewardship, with the potential for broader social and economic benefits. The research provides actionable insights for policymakers, NGOs, and tourism stakeholders aiming to harness the potential of women-led responsible tourism for sustainable development.

Keywords: Responsible Tourism, Women Entrepreneurs, Socio-Economic Empowerment, Entrepreneurial Satisfaction, and Environmental Empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism, as one of the fastest-growing sectors globally, plays a crucial role in driving economic growth, creating employment opportunities, and fostering cross-cultural understanding. In developing countries like India, tourism holds immense potential to stimulate inclusive development, especially when aligned with the principles of responsible tourism. Responsible tourism emphasizes ethical travel practices that minimize negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts while enhancing the well-being of host communities and preserving natural and cultural resources (Goodwin, 2011). When implemented effectively, it can serve as a catalyst for sustainable development and social transformation. In recent decades, women's entrepreneurship in tourism has gained recognition as a viable strategy to promote gender equality, alleviate poverty, and foster environmental stewardship. Women entrepreneurs are often engaged in various tourism-related enterprises, including homestays, eco-tourism, handicraft production, food services, and guiding services. Their involvement contributes not only to household incomes but also to broader community development. Empowering women in this sector leads to greater participation in decision-making processes, increased self-confidence, and the ability to influence policy and planning at the local level (Buttner and Moore, 1997; Scheyvens, 2000).

In India, the tourism sector contributes significantly to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment, yet the participation of women as entrepreneurs remains limited due to persistent gender inequalities, social constraints, lack of education, limited access to credit, and minimal exposure to skill development programs (Kant & Sharma, 2020). Despite these barriers, there is a growing number of women entering the tourism industry, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, seeking economic independence and community engagement through sustainable practices. In recent years, the Telangana government has taken initiatives to promote tourism as a key sector for economic development. However, the potential of responsible tourism as a means to empower women entrepreneurs and promote sustainable practices remains underexplored. Most tourism ventures are male-dominated, and the role of women, especially in leadership and entrepreneurial positions, is yet to be fully realized.

Telangana, a culturally rich and rapidly developing state in India, presents an ideal context for examining the intersection of responsible tourism and women's empowerment. The state's diverse heritage, handicrafts, and eco-tourism potential offer significant opportunities for women to engage in entrepreneurial activities. However, despite these prospects, women in rural and semi-urban Telangana often face systemic barriers, including limited access to financial resources, skill development, and market linkages. Responsible tourism, with its focus on inclusivity and sustainability, can serve as a transformative tool to overcome these challenges by fostering economic self-reliance, social recognition, and environmental consciousness among women entrepreneurs. This research is grounded in the understanding that empowering women through responsible tourism entrepreneurship has the potential to generate multi-dimensional benefits. Socio-economically, it can lead to increased household income, improved education and health for families, and greater social status for women. Environmentally, women entrepreneurs often demonstrate a deep-rooted commitment to eco-friendly practices, such as waste management, use of local materials, promotion of biodiversity, and conservation of cultural heritage (UNWTO, 2022). Their unique position within the household and community enables them to influence sustainable consumption and production patterns effectively.

While existing literature acknowledges the role of tourism in women's empowerment, there remains a research gap in understanding how responsible tourism specifically influences socio-economic and environmental empowerment in the context of Telangana. Most studies have focused on generic tourism impacts, with limited empirical evidence on the relationship between RT-driven entrepreneurship and women's satisfaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Socio-Economic Empowerment

Responsible tourism (RT) has increasingly been recognized as a mechanism for promoting inclusive development by generating employment, reducing poverty, and encouraging equitable participation. In particular, it offers a pathway for women's socio-economic empowerment in developing regions (Scheyvens, 2000). Empowerment in this context includes increased income, enhanced decision-making ability, improved social status, and greater access to education and health services. Women entrepreneurs engaged in RT-related enterprises such as homestays, local cuisine services, and handicraft production often experience a transformation in economic independence and community involvement (Kant & Sharma, 2020). These ventures not only support household income but also enhance women's visibility in public spaces, thereby challenging traditional gender norms. Despite the potential, multiple structural barriers limit women's full participation. These include restricted access to capital, lack of business education, mobility constraints, and entrenched social norms (UNWTO, 2022). As a result, while tourism opens doors for economic opportunity, the extent of empowerment depends on supportive ecosystems that offer training, financing, and policy-level inclusion (UN Women, 2019).

2.2. Environmental Empowerment

Environmental empowerment refers to the capacity of individuals particularly women to actively contribute to an advocate for sustainable environmental practices. Women entrepreneurs in RT often lead by example in promoting ecological consciousness through the use of local materials, organic products, eco-friendly packaging, biodiversity conservation, and waste management initiatives (Goodwin, 2011). Because women are traditionally involved in household management and community-level activities, they tend to have a deep-seated relationship with the environment, making them well-positioned to promote sustainable practices (UNEP, 2011). Studies show that women are more likely than men to integrate long-term environmental stewardship into their business models, especially when rooted in cultural or indigenous knowledge systems (Scheyvens, 2000). However, environmental empowerment remains underrepresented in mainstream tourism literature. Women's ecological contributions are often informal and overlooked in policy-making and resource allocation (UNWTO, 2022). Enhancing this form of empowerment requires visibility, recognition, and institutional support to scale women-led sustainability efforts.

2.3. Entrepreneurial Satisfaction

Entrepreneurial satisfaction refers to the subjective sense of fulfilment, purpose, and well-being that entrepreneurs derive from their business endeavours. It encompasses financial stability, autonomy, social recognition, and alignment with personal values (Walker & Brown, 2004). In the RT context, many women report higher satisfaction not just due to income, but because their work allows them to preserve cultural heritage, serve their community, and contribute to environmental sustainability (UNWTO, 2020). Women entrepreneurs often cite non-economic motivations for starting RT businesses, such as preserving local culture, supporting fellow women,

or acting as community leaders (Kirkwood, 2009). These intrinsic motivations enhance emotional well-being and contribute to resilience in the face of challenges like limited market access or seasonal income fluctuations. Nonetheless, structural challenges gender biases, lack of mentorship, and policy exclusion can undermine entrepreneurial satisfaction, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions (Kant & Sharma, 2020). In contexts like Telangana, where tourism is still emerging as a developmental strategy, understanding the quality of women's entrepreneurial experiences is essential for building more supportive and inclusive ecosystems (Gorgievski et al., 2011).

In summary, while the existing body of research affirms the potential of tourism as a tool for development and empowerment, more focused inquiry is needed to understand its gendered dimensions, particularly in regions like Telangana. This study aims to address this gap by empirically examining the socio-economic and environmental outcomes of responsible tourism entrepreneurship among women and exploring the factors that influence their participation and satisfaction within the sector.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the influence of responsible tourism (RT) on women's socio-economic empowerment, environmental empowerment, and entrepreneurial satisfaction in Telangana, India. A structured survey was used as the primary tool to collect measurable data from women entrepreneurs actively engaged in RT-related ventures. The research focuses on identifying the demographic, economic, and environmental factors that contribute to empowerment and overall satisfaction in entrepreneurship. The research was conducted across various rural and semi-urban districts of Telangana, known for their tourism potential such as Warangal, Nalgonda, Ranga Reddy, Nizamabad, and Mahabubnagar. These regions were selected based on the presence of eco-tourism sites, handicraft clusters, and cultural tourism initiatives where women are notably engaged. A total of 345 women entrepreneurs were selected using random sampling. All responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. First, the questionnaire is tested for its reliability results and, Cronbach's alpha calculated for several statements within the form show higher consistency 0.809 ($>.70$) as for all section dependability score is bigger than 0.70.

3.1. Objectives

1. To examine the impact of demographics on women empowerment in relation to responsible tourism entrepreneurship.
2. To examine the influence of responsible tourism entrepreneurship on Socio-economic, and environmental empowerment of women in Telangana.
3. To examine the relationship between women empowerment (Socio-economic, environmental empowerment) and entrepreneurial satisfaction among women entrepreneurs in responsible tourism.

3.2. Hypotheses

- H01: There is no significant relationship between social empowerment and Entrepreneurial satisfaction of women entrepreneurs
- H02: There is no significant relationship between economic empowerment and Entrepreneurial satisfaction of women entrepreneurs

- H03: There is no significant relationship between environmental empowerment and Entrepreneurial satisfaction of women entrepreneurs

3.3. Conceptual framework



4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Demographical analysis

The demographic profile of the 345 women entrepreneurs engaged in responsible tourism activities in Telangana reveals diverse characteristics that reflect both the opportunities and challenges within this sector. A significant proportion of the respondents, 73.1%, are between the ages of 31–50 years, with the 41–50 age group being the most prominent. This suggests that middle-aged women are actively seeking entrepreneurship as a means of financial independence. The majority of participants are married (74.8%), highlighting that many women engage in responsible tourism as a supplementary income source to support their households. In terms of educational background, most respondents are relatively well-educated, with 42.3% holding a degree or higher, and 39.1% having completed intermediate education. However, despite this educational qualification, only 27.5% of the respondents have received formal training in tourism, indicating a gap in professional skills that could be addressed through capacity-building programs. The entrepreneurial activities of the women are predominantly based in rural areas (69.9%), which is in line with the objectives of responsible tourism to promote local development and preserve cultural heritage. Regarding initial investments, the majority of women (63.2%) began their ventures with modest sums between ₹5,001–15,000, and a significant portion started with little to no initial investment. This highlights the low capital requirements of responsible tourism businesses, making them accessible to women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The types of entrepreneurial activities vary, with handicrafts (33.9%) and art/culture (25.8%) being the most common, followed by smaller groups in cuisine/food services, coir making, and homestays. These activities reflect the local skills and resources available to the entrepreneurs. In terms of income, the majority of women earn between ₹5,001–10,000 per month from their responsible tourism ventures, which demonstrates that while the sector contributes to household incomes, the earnings remain modest. Overall, the findings suggest that responsible tourism is an important avenue for

women's empowerment in Telangana (Table 1), with substantial potential for growth through enhanced training, better market access, and greater financial support.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample respondent's demographic profile.

Demographic Profile		Frequency	Percent
Age	21-30 yrs.	71	20.6
	31-40 yrs	122	35.4
	41-50 yrs.	130	37.7
	50 yrs. or above	22	6.4
	Total	345	100.0
Marital Status	Married	258	74.8
	Single	87	25.2
	Total	345	100.0
Qualification	SSC	48	13.9
	Intermediate	135	39.1
	Diploma	16	4.6
	Degree or above	146	42.3
	Total	345	100.0
Have you done any course in tourism.	Yes	95	27.5
	No	250	72.5
	Total	345	100.0
Area of your entrepreneurship activity.	Rural area	241	69.9
	Urban area	104	30.1
	Total	345	100.0
Initial investment made (in Rupees)	No investment	41	11.9
	5001-15000	218	63.2
	15001-25000	63	18.3
	Above 25001	23	6.7
	Total	345	100.0
What kind of entrepreneurial activity are you doing.	Handicraft	117	33.9
	Art/Culture	89	25.8
	Cuisine/Food	54	15.7
	Screw pine weaving/Coir making	38	11.0
	Homestay	6	1.7
	Cloth/Paper bag making	41	11.9
	Total	345	100.0

What is your average monthly income (in Rupees) from the Responsible Tourism activity.	5001 -10000	175	50.7
	10001-15000	78	22.6
	15001-20000	66	19.1
	Above 20000	26	7.5
	Total	345	100.0

4.2. Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 2, provide insights into the levels of empowerment and satisfaction experienced by women entrepreneurs engaged in responsible tourism in Telangana. Among the four variables assessed, Social Empowerment (SE) recorded the highest mean score of 3.93 (SD = 0.469), indicating that most participants felt socially empowered through their involvement in tourism-related entrepreneurship. This suggests increased confidence, community participation, and a sense of recognition among women. Environmental Empowerment (EnE) also showed a relatively high mean of 3.87 (SD = 0.507), reflecting the participants' awareness and adoption of eco-friendly practices such as waste management, use of local materials, and conservation of natural and cultural resources. Entrepreneurial Satisfaction (ES) had a mean of 3.84 (SD = 0.674), suggesting that a majority of the respondents were satisfied with their entrepreneurial roles, despite challenges like limited financial resources and training opportunities. Economic Empowerment (EcE), while still above average, had the lowest mean score at 3.65 (SD = 0.536), indicating relatively lower but still positive perceptions of financial independence, income stability, and control over economic decisions. Overall, the standard deviations across all variables remain moderate, suggesting a reasonable level of consistency in responses. These findings emphasize the multidimensional benefits of responsible tourism for women, particularly in enhancing their social standing, environmental consciousness, and entrepreneurial fulfilment.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Empowerment (SE)	345	3	5	3.93	.469
Economic Empowerment (EcE)	345	2	5	3.65	.536
Environmental Empowerment (EnE)	345	2	5	3.87	.507
Entrepreneurial Satisfaction (ES)	345	2	5	3.84	.674
Valid N (listwise)	345				

4.3. Regression analysis

The regression analysis reveals the predictive strength of Social Empowerment (SE), Economic Empowerment (EcE), and Environmental Empowerment (EnE) on the dependent variable, Entrepreneurial Satisfaction (ES), among women entrepreneurs in responsible tourism. The multiple correlation coefficient (R) values show moderate positive relationships between the predictors and ES, with Social Empowerment (R = 0.441) having the strongest association, followed by Economic Empowerment (R = 0.413) and Environmental Empowerment

($R = 0.358$). The R Square values indicate the proportion of variance in entrepreneurial satisfaction explained by each independent variable: SE accounts for 19.5%, EcE for 17.0%, and EnE for 12.8%. These results suggest that while all three forms of empowerment contribute positively to entrepreneurial satisfaction, social empowerment plays a particularly significant role. The adjusted R Square values, which correct for the number of predictors in the model, remain close to the original R Square figures, indicating the models' stability. Furthermore, the significance values (Sig. F Change = .000) for all three models confirm that these relationships are statistically significant. This implies that enhancements in social, economic, and environmental empowerment significantly and positively influence women's satisfaction in their entrepreneurial endeavors within the responsible tourism sector (Table 3).

Table 3. Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Sig. F Change
SE	.441	.195	.187	.000
EcE	.413	.170	.161	.000
EnE	.358	.128	.121	.000
Dependent Variable: Entrepreneurial Satisfaction				
Predictor (constant): (SE, EcE, and EnE)				

The ANOVA results in Table 4 provide further confirmation of the statistical significance of the regression models examining the influence of Social Empowerment (SE), Economic Empowerment (EcE), and Environmental Empowerment (EnE) on Entrepreneurial Satisfaction (ES) among women involved in responsible tourism. For the SE model, the F-value is 27.459 with a significance level of $p = .000$, indicating that the model significantly predicts entrepreneurial satisfaction. Similarly, the EcE model yielded an F-value of 17.463 ($p = .000$), and the EnE model produced an F-value of 16.711 ($p = .000$). These high F-values and low significance levels (< 0.001) across all three models suggest that the predictors (SE, EcE, EnE) reliably explain variation in the dependent variable, entrepreneurial satisfaction. The relatively large regression sums of squares compared to the residual sums of squares in each model reinforce the explanatory power of the independent variables. Overall, the ANOVA results confirm that the proposed models are statistically significant, and that social, economic, and environmental empowerment each contribute meaningfully to shaping the satisfaction levels of women entrepreneurs in the responsible tourism sector.

Table 4. Anova

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
SE	Regression	67.127	3	22.376	27.459	.000
	Residual	277.873	341	.815		
	Total	345.000	344			

EcE	Regression	58.800	4	14.700	17.463	.000
	Residual	286.200	340	.842		
	Total	345.000	344			
EnE	Regression	44.220	3	14.740	16.711	.000
	Residual	300.780	341	.882		
	Total	345.000	344			
Dependent Variable: Entrepreneurial Satisfaction						
Predictor (constant): (SE, EcE, and EnE)						

The regression coefficient analysis in Table 5 reveals the individual contributions of social, economic, and environmental empowerment to entrepreneurial satisfaction among women in responsible tourism. All three independent variables exhibit statistically significant positive effects on entrepreneurial satisfaction, as indicated by p-values of .000 for each. The standardized beta coefficient for Social Empowerment ($\beta = .441$) is the highest among the three, indicating that SE has the strongest influence on ES. This suggests that women's sense of recognition, participation in community decisions, and improved social status significantly enhance their overall satisfaction as entrepreneurs. Economic Empowerment ($\beta = .413$) also shows a strong positive effect, emphasizing the role of financial independence, control over income, and access to economic resources in shaping satisfaction levels. Environmental Empowerment ($\beta = .358$), while slightly lower, still has a substantial impact, reflecting how women's involvement in sustainable practices and ecological awareness contributes to a sense of fulfillment in their entrepreneurial journey. The relatively low standard errors across all three predictors indicate a high level of precision in the estimates. Collectively, these results underscore the multidimensional nature of empowerment in fostering entrepreneurial satisfaction, with social empowerment emerging as the most influential factor in the context of responsible tourism among women in Telangana.

Table 5. Coefficients

Model	Standardized Coefficients		F	Sig.
	Beta	Std. Error		
SE	.441	.039	124.860	.000
EcE	.413	.046	80.503	.000
EnE	.358	.048	56.326	.000
Dependent Variable: Entrepreneurial Satisfaction				
Predictor (constant): (SE, EcE, and EnE)				

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that responsible tourism can play in empowering women entrepreneurs' socio-economically and environmentally, while also contributing to their overall entrepreneurial satisfaction. The demographic profile indicates that the majority of women engaged in tourism entrepreneurship in Telangana are middle-aged, married, and relatively well-educated, with many residing in rural areas. Despite the limited access to formal training in tourism, these women have established enterprises with modest

investments, primarily in handicrafts, cultural services, and eco-friendly products activities closely aligned with the principles of responsible tourism. Descriptive statistics reveal that among the three forms of empowerment assessed, social empowerment had the highest mean score, suggesting that women's involvement in tourism-related activities fosters community participation, recognition, and self-confidence. Environmental empowerment followed closely, indicating a strong commitment to eco-friendly practices and sustainability, while economic empowerment, although positive, was the lowest, pointing to persistent financial challenges and limited economic returns for many women.

The regression analysis further confirms that all three forms of empowerment social, economic, and environmental have statistically significant and positive impacts on women's entrepreneurial satisfaction. Among these, social empowerment emerged as the strongest predictor, highlighting that beyond financial gains, women value their enhanced social status, community involvement, and voice in decision-making. The ANOVA and model summary results strengthen these findings, demonstrating that the empowerment variables reliably explain variations in entrepreneurial satisfaction, with significant F-values and consistent R^2 values. The standardized coefficients show that each domain of empowerment independently contributes to entrepreneurial satisfaction, supporting the idea that empowerment is multidimensional and interlinked with broader outcomes such as gender equity, sustainable livelihoods, and local development. The slightly lower influence of environmental empowerment, though still significant, suggests that while women engage in sustainable practices, greater support and awareness could further strengthen this domain.

In conclusion, this study affirms that responsible tourism serves as a transformative platform for promoting women's empowerment in Telangana, particularly in underserved rural and semi-urban communities. The integration of socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable practices not only enhances women's satisfaction as entrepreneurs but also contributes to community development and cultural preservation. To maximize the potential of responsible tourism, policy interventions should focus on improving women's access to training, financial resources, and market linkages. Additionally, recognizing and amplifying women's leadership in tourism can foster more equitable and resilient tourism ecosystems. Ultimately, responsible tourism is not just an economic activity but a powerful tool for social transformation, gender empowerment, and sustainable development.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively empower women through responsible tourism in Telangana, a multifaceted approach is essential. First, there is a pressing need to provide localized skill development programs focused on tourism, sustainability, and digital literacy, enabling women to build confidence and operate their businesses more effectively. Access to financial resources should be improved through microfinance, low-interest loans, and simplified credit procedures tailored for women entrepreneurs. Establishing market linkages via e-commerce platforms, tourism fairs, and collaborations with travel agencies will help expand the reach of women's products and services. Tourism policies must include a clear gender perspective, ensuring that women are actively involved in planning and decision-making processes. Efforts to promote social empowerment and leadership through women's networks, cooperatives, and peer learning platforms are also critical. Given the importance of environmental sustainability, women should be supported with training and tools to adopt eco-friendly practices such as waste

management and biodiversity conservation. Finally, implementing systems for monitoring and evaluation will ensure programs are responsive, measurable, and continuously improved based on outcomes and feedback. These integrated strategies can significantly enhance women's roles in responsible tourism, contributing to broader goals of gender equity, sustainable livelihoods, and inclusive development.

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