



COASTAL TOURISM AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT: A SPECIAL STUDY OF SINDHUDURG DISTRICT (MAHARASHTRA)

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ABSTRACT:

Coastal tourism has emerged as an important driver of regional economic development, particularly in coastal regions where natural attractions and cultural heritage attract large numbers of tourists. Sindhudurg district in Maharashtra is one such destination known for its scenic beaches, marine biodiversity, historical forts, and unique Malvani culture. In recent years, the rapid growth of tourism in this region has created various employment opportunities for the local population, especially for women.

The present study examines the relationship between coastal tourism development and women's employment opportunities in Sindhudurg district. Women are increasingly participating in tourism-related activities such as homestay management, food-based enterprises, Self-Help Group (SHG) product sales, handicrafts, and hospitality services. These activities not only generate income but also contribute to women's economic empowerment, skill development, and social recognition.

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature and is based mainly on secondary data collected from government reports, tourism statistics, research articles, and district statistical publications. Field observation in major tourism destinations such as Malvan, Tarkarli, Devgad, Vengurla, Achara, and Shiroda has also been considered to understand the nature of women's participation in tourism activities.

The study concludes that coastal tourism has significant potential to enhance women's employment and economic empowerment in Sindhudurg district. However, challenges such as seasonal employment, limited training opportunities, lack of financial support, and social barriers still restrict women's full participation. The paper suggests that appropriate policy support, skill development programs, and women-focused tourism initiatives can strengthen sustainable tourism development and improve women's economic opportunities in coastal regions.

Keywords: Coastal Tourism, Women Employment, Sindhudurg District, Homestay Tourism, SHGs, Sustainable Tourism, Seasonal employment.

INTRODUCTION:

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world and plays a crucial role in economic development, employment generation, and cultural exchange (UNWTO, 2022). In India, tourism is a key service-sector contributor and supports allied industries such as transport, food, handicrafts, hospitality, and retail (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2023). Over the last few

decades, India has seen rapid growth in different forms of tourism including cultural tourism, adventure tourism, eco-tourism, rural tourism, and coastal tourism.

Coastal tourism holds special importance because coastal regions offer beaches, water sports, marine ecology, seafood culture, and historical heritage. Maharashtra's Konkan coast, with its natural beauty and cultural richness, is increasingly becoming a major tourist destination (MTDC, 2023). Sindhudurg district is a leading coastal tourism region in Konkan. The district offers tourist attractions like Sindhudurg Fort, Tarkarli beach, Devgad fort, Vengurla beaches, Nivati rock, Redi beach, Malvani cuisine, and peaceful village life.

With the rise in tourism, local employment opportunities have expanded. Women, who traditionally had limited access to paid employment in rural areas, are now participating more in tourism-linked economic activities (UN Women, 2021). Tourism thus has potential not only for income generation but also for women's empowerment through skill development, confidence building, and social recognition.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of the study are:

- 1) To understand the growth and development of coastal tourism in Sindhudurg district.
- 2) To examine employment opportunities created for women through tourism-related activities.
- 3) To analyze the role of tourism in promoting women's economic empowerment.
- 4) To identify the major challenges faced by women in tourism-related employment.
- 5) To suggest suitable measures for improving women's participation in sustainable tourism development.

Need and Significance of the Study

Tourism growth in Sindhudurg has increased business opportunities and employment generation, but it is important to examine how far local women benefit from this development. Many large tourism businesses, such as resorts and hotels, are often owned or managed by external investors. Local women mostly remain confined to informal jobs such as housekeeping, cooking, food stalls, or seasonal work.

Women's employment in tourism has unique importance because it directly impacts household welfare. Women's income increases family spending on education, health, nutrition, and improved living standards. Moreover, when women participate in economic activities, their role in family decision-making improves, and they gain a stronger social identity. Therefore, studying coastal tourism and women's employment in Sindhudurg is essential for sustainable tourism planning and inclusive development.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tourism development has been widely studied as an important factor contributing to regional economic growth and employment generation. According to United Nations World Tourism Organization reports, tourism plays a significant role in supporting local economies, especially in coastal and rural regions where alternative employment opportunities are limited. Tourism activities create both direct and indirect employment in sectors such as hospitality, transport, food services, handicrafts, and local trade.

Several studies have examined the role of coastal tourism in the economic development of coastal regions. Research related to the Konkan region of Maharashtra highlights that tourism destinations such as beaches, forts, and marine attractions significantly contribute to local income generation and small-scale entrepreneurship. Reports of the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation indicate that destinations like Malvan, Tarkarli, and Vengurla have experienced steady tourism growth, which has increased demand for accommodation services, local food businesses, and tourism-related services.

Women's participation in tourism-related activities has also received increasing attention in development studies. According to UN Women, tourism is one of the sectors where women represent a large share of the workforce, particularly in small-scale enterprises, homestays, food services, and handicraft production. Tourism provides opportunities for women to earn income, develop entrepreneurial skills, and participate more actively in economic decision-making. Studies on Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in rural India show that tourism markets create additional opportunities for women to sell locally produced goods such as food products, handicrafts, and traditional items. These activities not only support household income but also promote community-based tourism and local cultural preservation.

Research on women's economic empowerment suggests that access to income-generating activities enhances women's financial independence, improves their role in household decision-making, and increases their social status within the community. However, several studies also point out that women's employment in tourism is often seasonal, informal, and characterized by low wages and limited job security.

Despite the growing literature on tourism and women empowerment, relatively few studies specifically examine the relationship between coastal tourism and women's employment in Sindhudurg district. Therefore, the present study attempts to analyze how tourism development in major coastal destinations such as Malvan, Tarkarli, Devgad, and Vengurla influences women's employment opportunities and economic empowerment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It aims to examine the relationship between coastal tourism development and women's employment opportunities in Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra.

Sources of Data

The study is primarily based on secondary data sources. Relevant data has been collected from:

- Reports of Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation
- Publications of the Ministry of Tourism
- District Statistical Handbook of Sindhudurg
- Research articles, journals, books, and government reports related to tourism and women empowerment
- Newspapers, official tourism websites, and online databases

Method of Data Collection

In addition to secondary data, field observation was conducted in selected tourism destinations such as Malvan, Tarkarli, Devgad, Vengurla, Achara, and Shiroda. Observations were made regarding women's participation in homestays, food stalls, SHG product markets, and tourism-related services.

Method of Analysis

Collected data has been analyzed using simple statistical techniques such as percentage analysis and tabular presentation. Charts and tables have been used to explain tourist flow, women's participation in tourism activities, and income generation from tourism-related employment.

Observation Method:

Field observation was carried out at Malvan-Tarkarli, Devgad, Vengurla, Achara, and Shiroda. Local homestays, food stalls, SHG product markets, and women's participation in tourism services were observed.

Limitations of the Study

The study is mainly based on secondary data. Tourism employment in the region is seasonal, therefore income and employment patterns may vary across seasons.

Sindhudurg District: Tourism Profile

Sindhudurg is one of the most important coastal districts of Maharashtra. It is rich in beaches, forts, temples, and local culture. Major tourism centers include:

- Malvan (Sindhudurg Fort, Malvani cuisine)
- Tarkarli (clean beach, scuba diving, snorkeling)
- Vengurla (Redi beach, Nivati rock)
- Devgad (Devgad fort, fish market)
- Achara/Shiroda (nature tourism, peaceful beaches)

Tourism development has expanded hotels, resorts, homestays, transport services, water sports, food businesses, and local markets.

Women's Employment Opportunities in Coastal Tourism

Tourism provides both direct and indirect employment to women. The key areas are:

Homestay and Accommodation Services

Homestay tourism has grown rapidly in Sindhudurg. Women manage homestays by handling guest hospitality, cooking, cleaning, room management, and communication. This provides women income from home and increases their social exposure.

Food-Based Tourism

Malvani cuisine is a major attraction. Women participate in:

- Local food stalls
- Catering and home-based food supply
- Preparation and sale of pickles, papads, sweets, and fish products

SHG Enterprises and Local Product Sales

Women SHGs produce and sell:

- Handicrafts
- Snacks and food products
- Coconut-based items
- Souvenirs

Tourism markets provide a strong customer base.

Employment in Resorts and Tourism Services

Women work in:

- Housekeeping
- Reception support
- Spa and wellness
- Cultural performances
- Tourist guiding (limited but increasing)

Small Practical Example

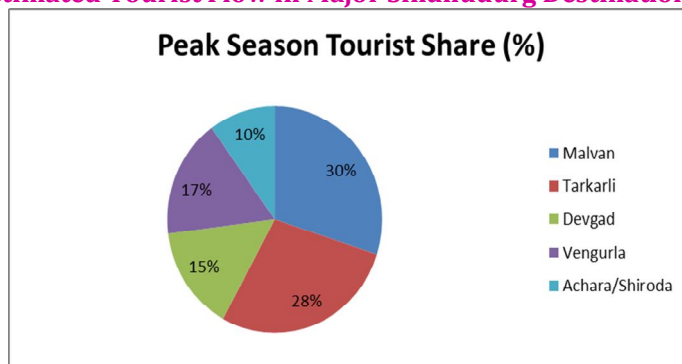
Example of Women Participation in Homestay Services

In Malvan and Tarkarli regions, many local women manage homestay facilities from their homes. They provide accommodation, prepare traditional Malvani food, and interact directly with tourists. This not only generates additional household income but also enhances women's confidence, communication skills, and social recognition in the community.

Sample Numerical Data (Tourism & Women Employment Estimates)

(Note: These are indicative sample tables for academic presentation. Real figures may vary.)

Chart 1 - Estimated Tourist Flow in Major Sindhudurg Destinations (Seasonal)



Pie chart shows that Malvan (30%) and Tarkarli (28%) account for the highest tourist share during peak season, indicating their dominance in coastal tourism activities. Devgad, Vengurla, and Achara/Shiroda also attract a significant number of tourists, though comparatively lower. During the off-season, tourist flow declines considerably in all destinations, which highlights the seasonal nature of coastal tourism in Sindhudurg district.

Table 1 - Women Participation in Tourism-Related Activities (Approx.)

Sector	Estimated Women Participation (%)
Homestay management	60-70
Food stalls / catering	55-65
SHG product selling	50-60
Resort housekeeping	30-40
Tourist guiding	10-15

Table 1 indicates that women's participation is highest in homestay management (60-70%) and food-related activities (55-65%). This shows that women are actively involved in home-based and small-scale tourism enterprises. Participation in resort jobs is moderate (30-40%), while tourist guiding remains low (10-15%), possibly due to limited training and social barriers.

Table 2 - Estimated Monthly Income from Tourism Activities (Women)

Activity	Peak Season (₹ /month)	Off-Season (₹ /month)
Homestay services	15,000 – 30,000	5,000 – 10,000
Food stalls/catering	10,000 – 25,000	3,000 – 8,000
SHG product sales	5,000 – 15,000	2,000 – 6,000
Resort jobs	8,000 – 12,000	8,000 – 12,000

Table 2 reflects the seasonal income variation in tourism-based activities. Women engaged in homestay and food businesses earn significantly higher income during peak season compared to off-season months. Resort jobs provide relatively stable income throughout the year. The data clearly shows that tourism income is seasonal and fluctuating, which affects women's financial stability.

Impact of Tourism on Women Empowerment Economic Empowerment

Tourism-based income helps women improve household financial stability. It increases capacity to spend on children's education and improves family health and nutrition.

Skill Development

Women gain:

- Communication skills
- Customer service
- Language skills
- Digital payments
- Management skills

Social Recognition and Confidence

Tourism involvement increases women's confidence and gives them social identity and recognition.

Challenges Faced by Women

Seasonal Employment

Tourism is high in winter and summer but low in monsoon, causing unstable employment.

Low Wages and Informal Work

Women face lack of fixed wages, no social security, no formal contracts, and long working hours.

Lack of Training

Limited access to hospitality training, food safety, language training, and digital marketing.

Social Barriers

Traditional norms and household responsibilities restrict women's participation.

Safety Issues

Safety concerns exist for women at tourist locations.

Suggestions for Improvement

Training and Skill Development

- Hospitality training programs
- Food safety certification
- Spoken English and Hindi training
- Digital marketing and online booking support

Financial Support

1. Low-interest loans for women entrepreneurs
2. SHG support for production and marketing
3. Homestay development subsidies

Safety Measures

Tourist destinations should provide:

- Women help desks
- CCTV
- Complaint systems
- Police patrolling

Local Women's Markets

Separate "local markets" should be created for women's products.

Promoting Women Leadership

Women should be included in tourism committees, guiding services, and Gram Panchayat tourism planning.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights that coastal tourism in Sindhudurg district plays an important role in generating employment opportunities for women, particularly in homestay services, food-based

enterprises, SHGs, and resort-related jobs. Tourism income contributes to household financial stability, improves women's participation in decision-making, and enhances skill development.

However, employment remains seasonal and largely informal, with limited training, financial support, and social security benefits. Addressing these challenges through structured training programs, financial assistance, safety measures, and women-focused tourism planning can strengthen women's economic empowerment.

Thus, coastal tourism has strong potential to contribute to sustainable and inclusive rural development in Sindhudurg district if supported by proper policy implementation and community participation.

REFERENCES

- Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) (2023) – Annual Reports
- District Statistical Department, Sindhudurg (2023) – Statistical Handbook
- Published articles on Konkan tourism development
- Journals on women empowerment and Self-Help Groups
- Research literature on SDGs and sustainable tourism