

Chapter 4

Doing Solo: Travel Experience and Revisit Intention of Tribal Women Solo Travellers From Northeast India

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ABSTRACT

There has been constant growth in female solo travellers across the globe along with India. But any possible discussion on solo women travellers in India cannot go without debates on safety and security concerns of travellers, as India is often mentioned as a dangerous and risky destination, mainly for women. And then there are indigenous women from Northeast India, who are often reported to be harassed during their stay in mainstream India, due to their Mongoloid looks. As such, this chapter is a qualitative approach to investigate experience of female solo travellers from Northeast India when they travel to Mainland India. In the study, the authors have used reflexive thematic analysis to examine the interview data. One overarching theme—being an Indian from the Northeast India—encapsulates four themes: (a) the ignorance among Indians, (b) Northeastern Indians are considered easy, (c) harassment is real, (d) safety is a genuine concern.

INTRODUCTION

Travelling has a long back history, but before the mid-twentieth century only men and a few women who came from upper class had the privilege of leisure travelling (Harris and Wilson, 2007). A woman travelling alone was considered inappropriate in those days (Craik, 1997). Traditional feminine role of women associated with being domestic, being a keeper, or a caretaker of the husband and children always restricted their accessibility to leisure participation. It is only after World war II, that a massive

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social transformation took place, which led to changed socio-cultural environment for women in most parts of the world (Yang et al., 2016). Nowadays, modern women have much more travel opportunities as they are educated and financially independent, capable of taking their own decisions (Malik, 2018). As female involvement in leisure tourist activities has increased in last few years, solo female travel has become more prominent and most favored type of travelling (Chian and Jogartnam, 2006). Moreover, women are believed to have a dominance over adventure travel and backpacking travel market as well (Kim, 2014; Wilson and Harris, 2006).

A recent report provided by Lonely Planet have indicated that solo travel for both, men as well as women is going up but women booked 67% of the 62,656 holidays as solo travelers (Smith, 2018). The same is indicated by few researchers, where they identified women as bigger segment within solo traveler's market in comparison to men (Cann, 2016, Hostelworld, 2018). Another survey reported that solo travel in Asia is on rise, where 79% of women were from Southeast Asia who showed interest in travelling solo (TripAdvisor, 2015).

Solo female travelers are characterized as those women travelers who reach to their tourist destination all alone (Foo, 1999) and chose not to travel as part of package or group tour (Chai, 1996). In literature, the term 'solo traveler' is believed to be most common word used for these kind of tourists (Jordan and Aitchison, 2008). Some other less common terms are 'independent travelers' (Sanitmatcharo, 2006), 'unaccompanied travelers' (Ashwell, 2015) and 'alone visitors' (Navare and Zagade, 2015). Much of the motivation behind all these labels comes from their search of adventure, identity, freedom, self-transformation and personal development (O'Reilly, 2005).

In response to the increasing trend of solo women travellers, it is no surprise that the topic has caught attention of a number of scholars in the field, since the late 1990s (Chiang and Jogaratnam, 2006, Seow and Brown, 2018, and Thomas and Mura, 2019). Nevertheless, the available literature has been recently criticized (Yang et al., 2018), mostly because the given literature is western centric and has failed to give much voice to Asian solo travellers. The paper aims to contribute to the growing knowledge on solo women travellers, in context to an Asian country, namely India. But any possible discussion on solo women travellers in India cannot go without debates on safety and security concern of travellers, as India is often mentioned as a dangerous and risky destination, mainly for women (foreigner as well as local). (Charlton, 2014). It is indicated that in comparison to other Indian women, women from Northeast India is more vulnerable to discrimination and abuse by local people (especially outside northeast), when they are travelling within the country. (Bardalai, 2019). Therefore, the aim of the article is to examine the domestic travel experiences of indigenous solo women travellers from northeast.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Every year, travellers embark as backpackers and solo travellers with a belief that this will help them to understand different cultures and people and at times will lead to self-transformation (Chen et al., 2019 and Pung et al., 2020). Most people travel to escape mundane regular tasks of the day, and this separation from ordinary life gives them time to understand themselves as a person which leads to self-transformation (Nikjoo et al., 2021). Women increasingly travel solo to wild territories to prove their power to themselves and get it acknowledged by others, to shatter traditional stereotypes and age-old boundaries (Weatherby and Vidon, 2018).

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