



Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods of Tribal Women's Involved in Homestay Tourism Industry in Darjeeling Himalayan Region of North Bengal through Sentiment Analysis: A case study of Post-COVID period.

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Abstract: The blooming Homestay tourism industry of Darjeeling Himalayan and Doors region has been collapsed massively due to uprising COVID-19 cases. Basically, this small scale tourism sector is providing a numerous jobs to the local native people of these remote hills; particularly the local tribal women who are associated with it. As tourism has a multiplier effect so, this sector is the main boosting factor of the livelihoods of locals; but amidst lockdown and catastrophic pandemic situation this local industry went through a horrible situation in its history. The tribal women's who are deeply involved with it have paralyzed socio-economically and have to change their tourism profession too. Even at the post COVID situation it cannot gain its prior momentum, as the back bone has been broken down of this sparkling tourism industry of North Bengal region.

Key words: rational involvement of tribal women's, Devastating impact of COVID-19 on local livelihoods, Sentiment analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

At present in the context of COVID-19 people are more interested in *Responsible Tourism* based on the concept of "making Better places for people to live in and better places to visit". Darjeeling Himalayan region is a premium tourist destination since past but in recent times the concept of *Homestay tourism* is emerging at a rapid pace against the concept of *Mass Tourism*. The homestays are emerged based on the hospitality of local *tribal community*; particularly the *tribal women's like Lepcha, Bhutia, Khampa, Gorkha etc* are playing major role for nourishment of this sector. On the other hand in the post-COVID world the craze of mass tourism declines against the offbeat tourism as the prior involves a huge mass of people moving towards a popular tourist destination, which enhances the scope of more outbreaks of COVID cases.

2. NEED OF THE STUDY

The Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) tourism has experienced continued growth and increasing diversification in its tourism sector, particularly after the World War- II and become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in India. North Bengal was hosting a numbers of tourists in Pre-COVID period but there is a massive decline of tourists as the pandemic hits. There was a massive decline in GDP share of tourism sector in India too. In 2019 it was 6.9% which declined to 4.07% in 2020. As the homestay tourism is in its initial stage at Darjeeling hills so, the operators in a very small scale particularly the local tribal women's who involved directly or indirectly faces a massive depression amid Lockdown and COVID-19 pandemic.

Across the globe "women's earns less, saves less and holds less secure jobs; mainly involves in low skilled informal sectors". But the tribal women's who belonged from more *backward section, having lower educational attainment, suffering from huge school dropout issues* are playing the role of *entrepreneurs* in this small homestay tourism sector. These homestays emerged as golden opportunities for them to achieve a better socio-economic status among their community by *investing a small amount of money, utilizing their properties, sharing their local and traditional culture, sprinkling their hospitality among the tourists*.

According to a data of *Centre of Monitoring Indian Economy* the female participation in work was 9.4% for the period between September-December 2021, which is lowest rate recorded since 2016 when the data first published. *Beaureau of Immigration* stated foreign tourist arrival in India decline 10.93 million to 0.42 million till July 2021.

So, at the context there is an immediate need to study how the catastrophic pandemic impacted the women's of tribal community who are always lagging behind in every aspects of the society of Darjeeling Himalayan region, involving in the homestay sector.

3. AREA OF THE STUDY

The study area is based on two small hill stations named *Kurseong* and *Tinchuley* of Darjeeling Himalayan region of North Bengal. The name of the 'Darjeeling' probably has Tibetan origin. This means where Indra's (the Hindu God) thunderbolt or scepter rested (*Dorje - the majestic thunderbolt, Ling - place, hence 'the place of the thunderbolt'*). This was also the name of a Buddhist monastery once situated on the top of the Observatory Hill in Darjeeling (*Mordecai and Agarwal, 1960*).

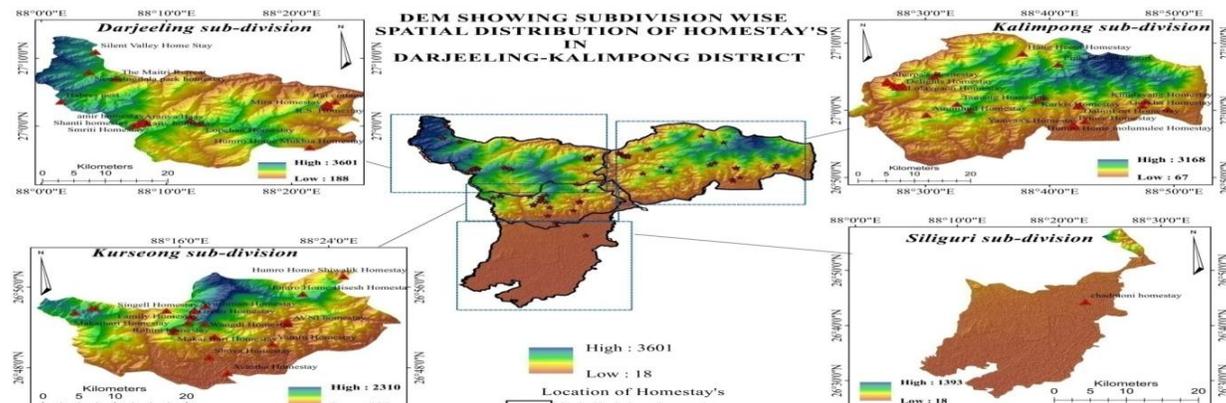


Fig: 1.1 Digital elevation model (DEM) showing location of homestay's along with altitude of Darjeeling-Kalimpong district. The map also represents sub-division wise location of homestay's and maximum-minimum altitude.

SOURCE: Secondary data

4. OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 To determine how the native tribal women's involved particularly in this field with their rational thinking
- 4.2 To examine till which extent pandemic COVID-19 affected the Sentiments of these tribal women's associated with this small scale industry
- 4.3 To identify the effective measures for the policy makers to cope the devastating impact of COVID- 19 on this local hospitality sector

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

- 5.1 A paper titled "*A home in the hills: examining socio-economic benefits of Homestay tourism on rural women and communities in Darjeeling District*" by Isabel Kannegieser (2015) stated that homestay concept is blooming in Darjeeling hills benefitting rural women's by utilizing their properties, providing consistent income to the tribal women's, increases their social upliftment.
- 5.2 "*Women's participation on tourism villages in the Deing Pandawa tourism awareness group*" by Tuti Widiastuti et.al (2014) says in Indonesia how tourist village concept helps to huge women empowerment and gives them a scope of future enhancement.
- 5.3 An article named "*Role of Homestays for rural development in Coorg*" by Mamatha Nellamakkada depicts how internal problems within locals and external problem with state government can hinder the growth of this small scale industry.
- 5.4 Article named "*Eco tourism and sustainable community development: A case study of Sillery Gaon of West Bengal*" by Pranab kr. Das (2021) reveals the symbiotic relationship between ecotourism and sustainable development and 30% homestays are female operated at the study area; which shows the domination of females.
- 5.5 Paper titled "*Challenges and opportunities of eco tourism at Lepchakha Hill hamlet in West Bengal*" by Sourav kr. Roy et.al finds out how tourism able to yield the economic stability among *Dukpa Tribes* for providing livelihoods. It show the ways of community development.
- 5.6 An article on "*Tourism dependent economies are among those harmed the most by the pandemic*" by Adam Bhsudi stated COVID -19 has shifted the focus of travellers to domestic trip or nature. Though there was a sharp decline of Mass tourism the homestays are among the choices of *Young tourist breed* at pos- COVID scenario.
- 5.7 *Abha Lkshmi Singh et.al* in the paper "*Impact assessment of Lockdown amid COVID-19 pandemic on tourism industry of Kashmir Valley in India*" (2021) reveals unprecedented socio-cultural and economic impact on Tribal community of the COVID-19. It brings significant change in tourism profession. The stakeholders changed their means of livelihoods from tourism to something else.

- 5.8 A news article in *The Telegraph* named "**COVID crisis: over 2 crore people associated with tourism sector lost jobs, says state**" by Avijit Sinha (2021) stated in pre-COVID time there were 34.8 million jobs available in the tourism sector of India. While 21.5 million jobs were lost during the whole pandemic situation. In North Bengal the peoples of grass root level like guides, cab driver, homestay operators suffered most.
- 5.9 An article of *International Labour Organization* on "**Massive COVID-19 impact on Tourism employment in Asia Pacific**" highlights recovery will take time, pandemic has invited a *rethink of medium and long term tourism strategy*.
- 5.10A report on *Aljazeera* Titled "**COVID likely to lock India's women out of job market for years**" by Sajjad Hussain (2021) finds most of the Indian women's are employed in *informal sector as most of them are unskilled*. Those who are in rural tourism sector have lost their gains of last decades.

6. DATABASE

6.1 Primary data

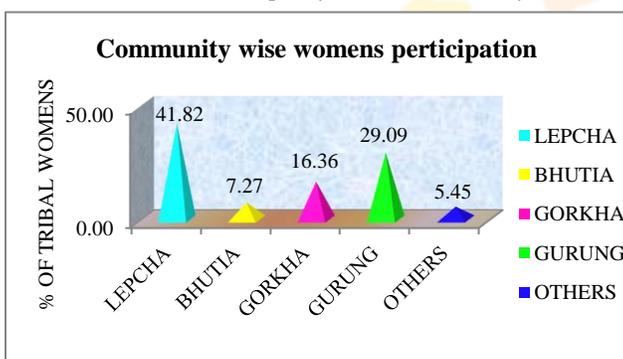
Data mainly generated through field survey which includes homestay visits, filling of questioner, focused group discussions, interviews, preparing schedules.

6.2 Secondary data

Secondary data is basically used to *observe the current scenario of Homestay sector* in the study area, but the *study is purely based on primary data*. For observing secondary data I have used the following sites-

- 6.2.1 *West Bengal state development report-* for understanding West Bengals experience and burning issues
- 6.2.2 *Tribal Development Department of Govt. Of WB-* for getting an overview about Tribal groups like literacy, work participation, sex ratio, household etc.
- 6.2.3 *Dept. of Tourism Govt. of WB-* for getting a generalized view about WB tourism, Homestay tourism policies, Budget publication, different e-services etc.

- 6.2.4 *Census department of Darjeeling Govt. of WB-* gives details about tourism in the study area, different schemes, facilities etc.



7. METHODOLOGY

Data collection- As the present study deals with *Social Science* so, *Inductive approach* is adopted where a general conclusion will be drawn from some specific observations. For *primary data* collection both *qualitative* and *quantitative* methods will be adopted. Among *quantitative methods* field surveys, *structured* and *semi-structured* questioners, *schedules* is used. Among *qualitative methods* Interviews, *focused group discussion*, *grounded studies*, *observation* etc is adopted. In the case of

sampling the *Simple Random Sampling technique* of *Probability sampling group* is used as the study demands particularly tribal women's only. For *secondary data's* research article, news articles, documentations, data from different *govt. offices*, *local homestay organizations*, *local govt. body*, *NGOs* etc. is used. In the data collection process *field survey* is done in 2 phases; *first in peak season* and *second in lean season* of 2021 for understanding operators sentiments associated with tourists; where women homestay operators, guides etc. all are involved both directly or indirectly are interviewed.

Data analysis- In this stage for *preparing tables and diagrams MS excel 2007*; to perform *sentiment analysis MS excel 2019 Azure machine Learning* and for preparation of Word cloud *WordClouds.com* a free software available on Google search engine is basically used.

8. RESEARCH GAP

There is some research gap identified. Some articles which are available on internet majority of them are published in Pre-COVID 19 period and those article which are published after 2020 those are based on old data.

Besides this, there are some relevant topics on tourism of Darjeeling Himalayas of North Bengal but not much study done on the tribal women empowerment in homestay tourism sector. Basically they deal with women empowerment in a very general way. Data analysis is one of the major gaps in this topic because whatever data have been available from several sources directly not relevant to this research work. So, an enormous research gap is available in this work, so proper research could be justified.

9. LIMITATIONS

1. Primary data reliability sometimes suffered from erroneous responses and biased opinions
2. Insufficient Secondary database at local levels

10. PERCEPTION STUDY ON WOMEN HOMESTAY OPERATORS BASED ON PRIMARY DATA 2021:

10.1 Involvement of tribal women's with their rational thinking:

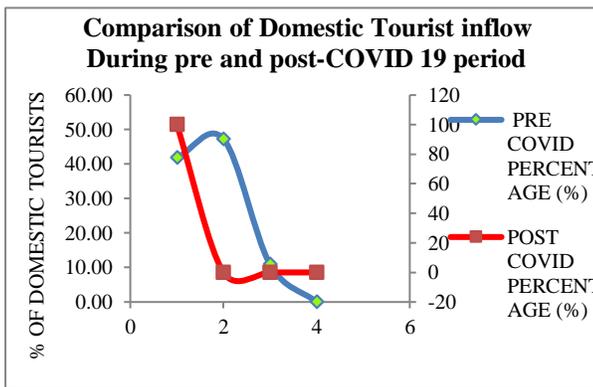
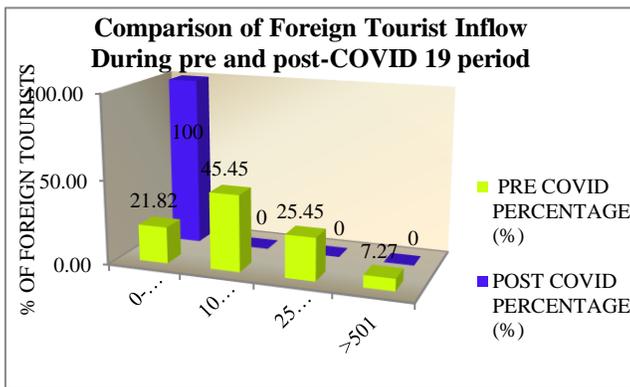


Fig: 10.1.1

Fig: 10.1.2

Source: Primary Data, 2021

Fig 10.1.1 shows in the study area among the Lepcha community the women involvement is highest (41.82%) followed by Gurung (29.09%), Gorkha (16.36%) and so on. It is an indication of secure future of these tribal women's which a highly encouraging fact is. The Homestay Tourism industry is providing a greater opportunity to earn better livelihoods among the local women's. Basically their highest share is in the role of Homestay operators (Fig 10.1.2) as it is purely based on gentle hospitality of these natives. But it seems that there is a lack of marketing skill among them as approx 19% women's are handling the marketing sector. From Fig: 10.1.3 it is observed as the homestay tourism is in its initial stage in the study area so, numerous homestays were opened up in pre-COVID period (69.09%), where others homestay success was the biggest motivation behind that. The other reason for flourishing of this was a greater scope for property utilization of the locals. As the concept of Homestay is based on the Home of the natives or host community.

Fig: 10.1.3

Source: Primary Data, 2021

10.2 Devastating impact of COVID-19 pandemic on local livelihoods:

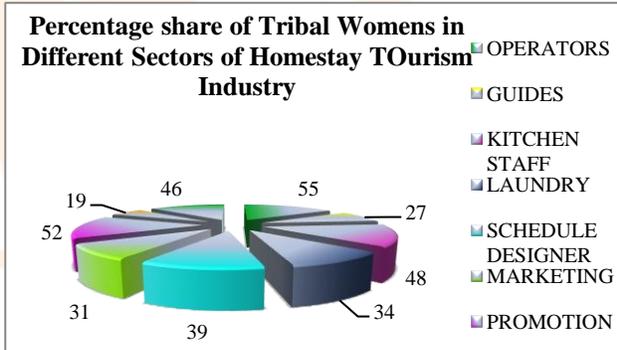
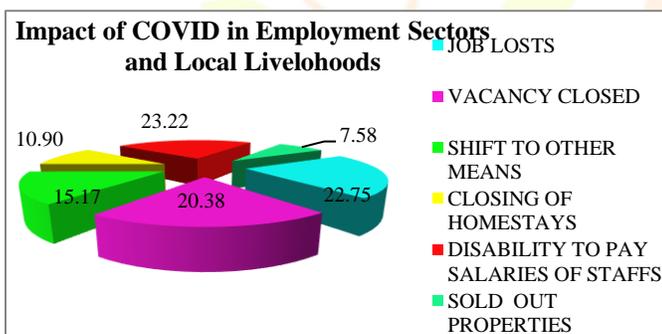


Fig: 10.2.1

Fig: 10.2.2

Source: Primary Data, 2021

There is a massive decline in both the foreign and domestic tourist inflow in the study area between pre and post-COVID period. In the post COVID seasons in spite of removing restrictions this depressing industry fails to bring back its old momentum. Though a breed of young tourists are interested to visiting these offbeat places of North Bengal at present. It creates a massive tension among the local tribal women's who are basically deeply involved in it.

From fig 10.2.3 it is depicting that due to this pandemic situation the operators are suffered due to disability to pay the salary of their staffs (23.22%). While 22.75% women's lost their jobs and in 20.38% cases the vacancies have closed. This is very disappointing ground reality of the study area. But still the rate of homestay closings and property selling is low which is just 10.90% and 7.58% only, which provides a keen relief. At the local level the Govt. should take immediate action to sustain this economic sector.

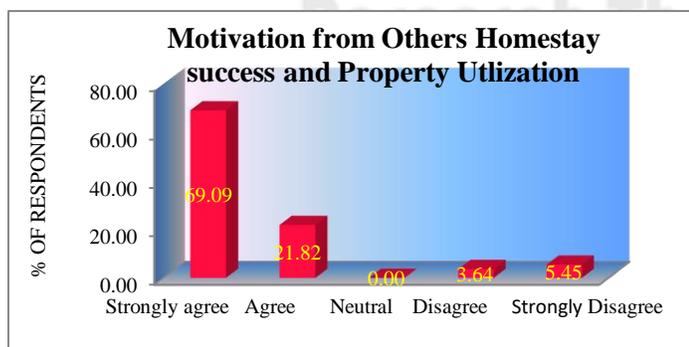


Fig: 10.2.3

Source: Primary Data, 2021

11.1 Analyzing the Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of tribal women's through sentiment analysis:**Table 11.1.1: Showing sentiment values and status of tribal women's**

Feed back of the tribal women's involved in homestay tourism Industry in the study area	Sentiment	Score	Status
1. Have to change means of livelihoods	negative	0.393043369	negative
2. Have lost job	negative	0.379947752	negative
3. Many things have changed since COVID-19 hit	neutral	0.485763967	neutral
4. Have dropped future plans	negative	0.432606578	negative
5. Closed homestay	negative	0.35429129	negative
6. Became a part time vendor	positive	0.75199604	positive
7. have lost the job of guide	negative	0.271567494	negative
8. Added new norms in homestay	positive	0.819767654	positive
9. Have modified homestay with COVID norms	positive	0.703175306	positive
10. Have lost all the earnings	negative	0.339550406	negative
11. Unable to pay the staffs	negative	0.414862573	negative
12. Govt. cannot give any relief	positive	0.647748828	positive
13. Have changed tourism profession	neutral	0.553052127	neutral
14. Faced very poor financial situations	neutral	0.561335027	neutral
15. Children have to leave their schooling	negative	0.349323124	negative
16. The backbone is broken socio-economically	negative	0.361697078	negative
17. After 2021 a few tourists are coming	positive	0.699172616	positive
18. Unable to gain previous momentum	negative	0.32807973	negative
19. Expenses are too high	neutral	0.579097688	neutral
20. some training programme should be needed	positive	0.839147806	positive
21. Some NGOs helped us	positive	0.779441893	positive
22. Maintaining social distancing	positive	0.74315685	positive
23. Modifying our management system	positive	0.664186299	positive
24. Promoting more in social media	negative	0.393043369	negative
25. Govt. should be more empathetic	negative	0.379947752	negative
26. Relief is that people are liking off beat tourism	neutral	0.485763967	neutral
27. Giving offers to attract tourists	negative	0.432606578	negative
28. COVID ruined our lives	negative	0.35429129	negative
29. There are some conflicts with local Govt.	positive	0.75199604	positive
30. Govt. need to be more humble to us	negative	0.271567494	negative
31. Should promote our homestays	positive	0.819767654	positive
32. COVID is a dark phase of our lives	positive	0.703175306	positive
33. There are some uncertainties about homestays	negative	0.339550406	negative
34. Some young tourists are visiting here after COVID	negative	0.414862573	negative
35. There is a massive decline of tourists inflow	positive	0.647748828	positive
36. Some positive vibes we are hoping for next	neutral	0.553052127	neutral
37. COVID impacted so scarcely	neutral	0.561335027	neutral
38. We need some relief packages	negative	0.349323124	negative
39. Many of us lost jobs	negative	0.361697078	negative
40. Just able to earn my meal only	positive	0.699172616	positive
41. My backbone broken due to lockdown	negative	0.32807973	negative
42. Having fear if COVID comes again	neutral	0.579097688	neutral
43. Nothing is going right	positive	0.839147806	positive
44. Lost our prior momentum	positive	0.779441893	positive
45. Many job vacancies have been lost	positive	0.74315685	positive
46. Economically so weak	positive	0.664186299	positive
47. Suffering so worst cannot be able to renew license	negative	0.393043369	negative
48. During new year conditions were better	negative	0.379947752	negative
49. Rooms are left empty since 2020	neutral	0.485763967	neutral
50. Cannot be able to express in words	negative	0.432606578	negative
51. I cannot be able to bear the expenses of my household	negative	0.35429129	negative
52. Our homestay owner is so supportive	positive	0.75199604	positive
53. Please come and visit our places	negative	0.271567494	negative
54. People are more interested in responsible tourism in post COVID phase	positive	0.819767654	positive
55. Hoping for a better tomorrow and COVID free future	positive	0.703175306	positive

Table 11.1.2: Pivot table

sentiments	Frequency of sentiments	Percentage(%) of frequencies
negative	25	45.45
neutral	21	38.18
positive	9	16.36
Grand Total	55	100

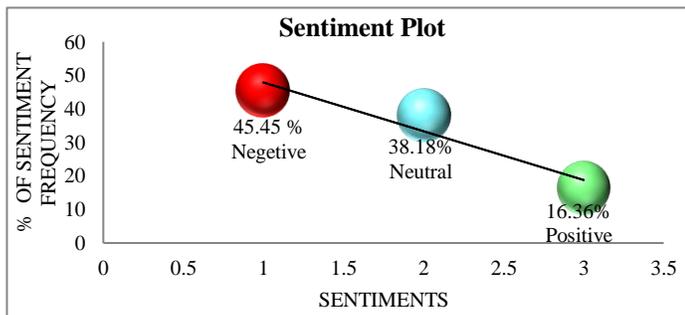
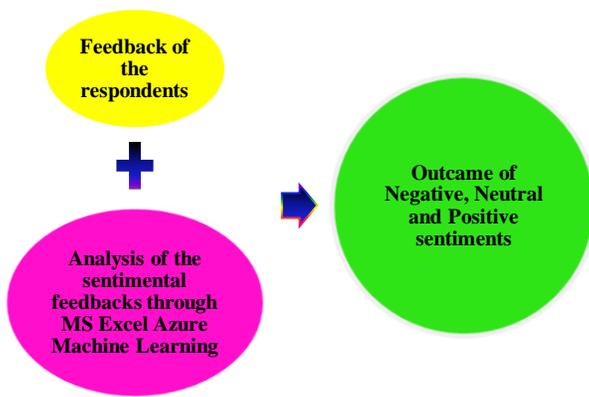


Fig: 11.1.2.1

Source: Primary data

Table 11.1.3: showing sentiments categorically

	Score	Key Words expressing sentiments	Remarks
Negative 😞			
1. Have to change means of livelihoods	0.393043369	Lost, Unable, left, broken down, Unable, ruin, uncertainty, lost, Suffer in, worst, Closed, COVID-19 pandemic	Here, all the values are ranging from 0 to 4.4; showing strong negative sentiments of the respondents.
10. Have lost all the earnings	0.339550406		
11. Unable to pay the staffs	0.414862573		
15. Childs have to left their schooling	0.349323124		
16. The back bone is broken socio-economically	0.361697078		
18. Unable to gain previous momentum	0.32807973		
2. Have lost job	0.379947752		
24. Promoting more in social media	0.393043369		
25. Govt. should more empathetic	0.379947752		
27. Giving offers to attract tourists	0.432606578		
28. COVID ruined our lives	0.35429129		
30. Govt. need to be more humble to us	0.271567494		
33. There are some uncertainty about homestays	0.339550406		
34. Some young tourists are visiting here after COVID	0.414862573		
38. We need some relief packages	0.349323124		
39. Many of us lost jobs	0.361697078		
4. Have dropped future plans	0.432606578		
41. My back bone broken due to lockdown	0.32807973		
47. Suffering so worst cannot able to renew license	0.393043369		
48. During new-year conditions were better	0.379947752		
5. Closed homestay	0.35429129		
50. Cannot able to express in words	0.432606578		
51. I cannot able to bear the expenses of my household	0.35429129		
53. Please come and visit or places	0.271567494		
7. have lost the job of guide	0.271567494		
Neutral 😊			
13. Have changed tourism profession	0.553052127	Changed, too high, Relief, changed, again	In this category, the values lie in the rage of 0.45-0.63; showing a moderate outcome of sentiments.
14. Faced very poor financial situations	0.561335027		
19. Expenses are too high	0.579097688		
26. Relief is that people are liking off best tourism	0.485763967		
3. Many things have changed since COVID hitted	0.485763967		
36. Some positive vibes we are hoping next	0.553052127		
37. COVID impacted so scarily	0.561335027		
42. Having fear if COVID comes again	0.579097688		
49. Rooms a left empty since 2020	0.485763967		



Positive 😊			
12. Govt. cannot gave any relief	0.647748828		
17. After 2021 a few tourists are coming	0.699172616		
20. some training programme should needed	0.839147806		
21. Some NGOs helped us	0.779441893		
22. Maintaining social distancing	0.74315685		
23. Modifying our management system	0.664186299		
29. There are some conflict with local Govt.	0.75199604		
31. Should promote our homestays	0.819767654		
32. COVID is a dark phase of our lives	0.703175306		
35. There is a massive decline of tourists inflow	0.647748828		
40. Just able to earn my meal only	0.699172616		
43. Nothing is going right	0.839147806		
44. Lost our prior momentum	0.779441893	Relief, coming, training programme, helped, social distancing, massive, able, right, momentum, job vacancies, so supportive, more interested, responsible tourism in, new norms, modified	In the case of positive sentiments the values ranges between 0.64-1.00. It is depicting a strong positive sentiments just only 16.36% among the respondents of the study area.
45. Many job vacancies have lost	0.74315685		
46. Economically so weak	0.664186299		
52. Our homestay owner is so supportive	0.75199604		
54. People are more interested in responsible tourism in post COVID phase	0.819767654		
55. Hoping for better tomorrow and COVID free future	0.703175306		
6. Became a part time vendor			
8. Added new norms in homestay	0.819767654		
9. Have modified homestay with COVID norms	0.703175306		

Source: Primary data

SSentiment analysis is a technique for language or text processing to determine that if the data is positive, negative or neutral. The value ranges from 0 to 1; where value near to 0 indicates negative sentiment and values near to 1 indicates positive sentiments while values around 0.5 says about neutral sentiments. Here this method is adopted to derstand the sentiments related to COVID-19 and its influence on the lives of the local women’s involved in Homestay tourism industry of Darjeeling Himalayan region of North Bengal.

From the above analysis it is found that COVID-19 pandemic have created a very much negative impact (45.45% cases) on the mind of these small scale entrepreneurs. Where the positivity level is very keen just only 16.36% and a mixed neutral feedback is obtained among 38.18% women’s. Basically the words "uncertainty", "Unable", "left", "broken down", "ruin", "COVID-19", "doom", "dark phase", "lost jobs", "shutters down", "left schools", "paralyzed" etc. are saying how deeply are the negative thoughts rooted down in the minds of these women’s. Against the negative words we can only found only certain words expressing positive vibes like "Relief", "helped", "social distancing", "momentum", "responsible tourism"

So, it may be said that there is a need to rejuvenate The Homestay sector as COVID have not only ruined it but also doomed the lives both mentally, socio-economically of all the persons associated with it.

tourists will definitely come back to explore rural hills of North Bengal. But still then what do you think the impact of COVID-19 pandemic is limited to the present or it will deeply ruin the future too of these deprived women's?

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