
WOMEN-LED TOURISM, GREEN TRANSPORT AND THE FUTURE OF BASTAR

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ABSTRACT

Bastar, with its forests, waterfalls, red-soil roads and living tribal traditions, represents one of the most meaningful possibilities for sustainable tourism in Chhattisgarh. However, the future of tourism in this region cannot be understood only through natural beauty or visitor numbers. It must also be seen through the lives of local communities, especially women, who carry deep knowledge of food, forests, crafts, culture and hospitality. This paper argues that women-led tourism can offer Bastar a more inclusive and sustainable path of development. By placing women at the centre of homestays, local food services, craft experiences, guiding, community markets and eco-tourism activities, tourism can become a source of dignity, ownership and local income rather than mere cultural display.

The paper also connects this idea with women-led transportation, such as pink e-rickshaws and women-driven tourist vehicles, which can improve mobility, safety and employment while linking tourists directly with community-based tourism services. Examples from North-Eastern states, including women-led homestays in Arunachal Pradesh, Eri silk tourism in Meghalaya and women-run markets in Manipur, show how women can become strong leaders in local tourism economies.

At the same time, the paper highlights the challenge of excessive mining in the Bastar region. Mining may bring revenue and infrastructure, but uncontrolled extraction can damage forests, water sources, cultural landscapes and the very ecological base on which tourism depends. Therefore, the paper suggests that Bastar's tourism future should be built on women's leadership, green mobility, community ownership and strict ecological responsibility.

KEYWORDS: Women-led tourism, Bastar, sustainable tourism, green mobility, pink e-rickshaw, mining, community-based tourism, Chhattisgarh.

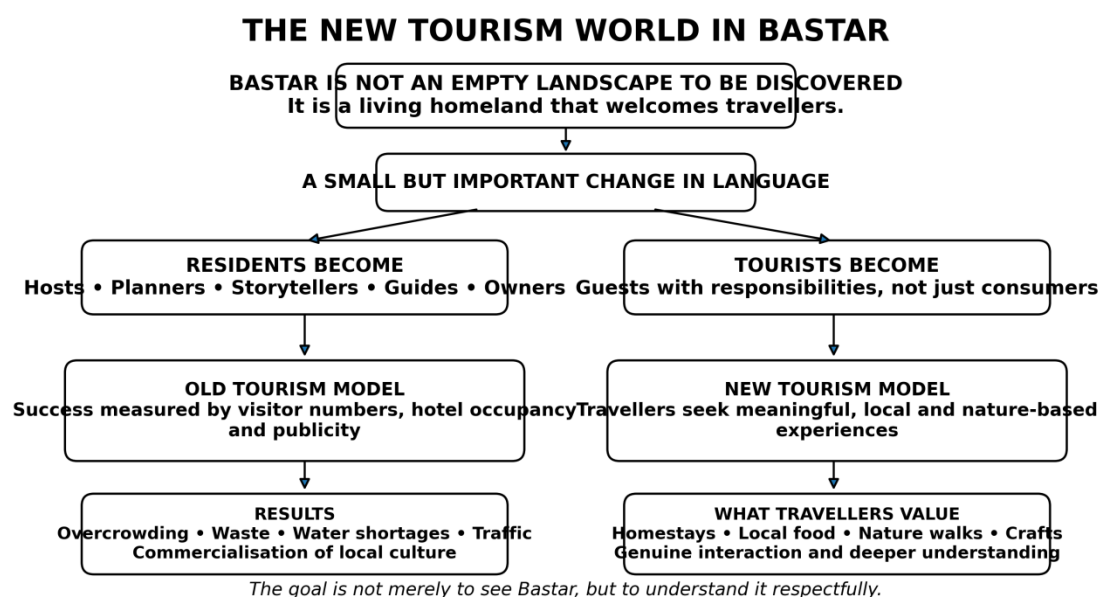
INTRODUCTION

As you travel to Bastar you will notice that the road to get there is very special. The traffic gets less the air feels cooler. You start to see red soil under the trees. Sunlight filters through the trees. There are waterfalls behind the green hills. You will also see village markets along the road. In one of these markets you might see a woman sitting behind baskets of tamarind, mahua products and other things that come from the forest. Many tourists take pictures of her. Buy things from her but she is more than just a pretty picture. She has a lot of knowledge that can help make tourism in Bastar, Women knows which paths in the forest are safe during the season, which foods are special to certain times of the year and which plants have special uses. She also knows the stories about the hills, rivers, festivals and gods of the village. She might already be cooking for visitors selling crafts guiding people through the forest or helping travelers find their way. What she often lacks is not knowledge or ability. Formal recognition, ownership and a say in how tourism is developed. The roads in Chhattisgarh are famous for going through forests, valleys and red soil landscapes. The roads connect communities, markets, festivals and natural attractions.

However the road also raises a question: what kind of development will come with it? Will it just take minerals and resources out of Bastar. Can it also bring women entrepreneurs, local guides, tourists and community-owned prosperity into the villages? Bastar is at a crossroads between two ideas of development. One is based on taking things out of the land. The other is based on making new things while keeping the land, culture and community alive. Women-led tourism, combined with women-led transportation can help Bastar choose the path. It is often introduced with places like Chitrakote Waterfall, Tirathgarh Waterfall and Kanger Valley National Park. These places deserve to be recognized. Bastar is more than just a collection of sights to see.

Its forests are where people live remember things and worship. The rivers are not beautiful backgrounds for pictures; they support farms, households and local ecosystems. The weekly markets are not just for tourists; they are where people exchange food, tools, news and relationships. Tourism becomes shallow when culture is separated from the people who made it. A visitor might take a picture of a woman selling forest produce without asking her permission. A tourist might bargain aggressively that the craftswoman gets almost no value for her work. In these cases tourism might bring visitors but it does not bring more dignity or income to the local people.

The new tourism world must start with an understanding: Bastar is not an empty landscape waiting to be discovered. It is a living homeland that welcomes travelers. This small change in language is important. It turns residents from objects of tourism into hosts, planners, storytellers, guides and owners. It also turns the tourist from a consumer into a guest who has responsibilities. For years tourism success was measured by how many visitors came how many hotel rooms were filled and how much publicity was generated. This model created income in places but it also created overcrowding, waste, water shortages, traffic and the commercialization of local culture. A different model of tourism is now becoming more important. Travelers are looking for homestays, local food, nature walks, craft experiences and genuine interactions. They want to understand a place than just stand in front of it for a picture.



This change creates an opportunity for Bastar. Bastar does not need to copy hill stations or build large resorts beside every waterfall. Its strength lies in more meaningful experiences: walking through a forest with a trained local guide learning how a bell-metal object is made eating seasonal food in a village home visiting a weekly market with respect or listening to stories connected to the landscape. This can be described as value, low-impact tourism. High value does not mean tourism; it means that more of the visitors spending stays in the local economy. Low impact means that tourism does not create construction, pollution, noise, waste or cultural disturbance. Women can become the leaders of this model because they are already involved in local food, farming, forest produce, handicrafts, weaving, hospitality and community care. However women-led tourism must mean more than employing women as

cooks, cleaners or performers. Women must have ownership of enterprises control over income access to bank accounts, participation in pricing and authority over what tourists may or may not experience.

The North-Eastern states provide examples for Bastar. Tourism there is also closely connected to forests, hills, indigenous communities, crafts and village life. Women-led homestays in Arunachal Pradesh have created opportunities for women. A study found 110 homestays, of which 62 were led by women. These women reported benefits like income, social recognition and wider networks.

The lesson for Bastar is significant. A homestay is not a room with a bed; it is a place where a woman host can introduce visitors to local architecture, food, farming methods, festivals, clothing and community values. When women manage homestays household knowledge becomes recognized as knowledge.

Bastar could develop women-managed homestay clusters near Jagdalpur, Chitrakote, Tirathgarh and selected villages but only where communities are willing and ecological conditions permit. Women and Eri silk tourism in Meghalaya provide another example. In the Eri Silk Village experience women are involved in stages of production including silkworm rearing, spinning, dyeing, weaving and marketing.

Bastar has potential. Its bell-metal work, bamboo products, weaving, terracotta, traditional jewelry, forest foods and natural colors can become women-led learning experiences. Visitors could spend time with artisans observe stages of production and pay a proper fee for the experience.

Ima Keithel in Manipur is one of the examples of womens collective economic leadership. Than 3,000 women operate stalls selling vegetables, fish, groceries, handloom products and household items. Men are not permitted to sell goods in the market. Ima Keithel was not created as a tourist attraction; it serves the local population first. This provides a lesson for Bastars weekly markets. Tourism should not change a functioning market into a staged cultural show. Instead women vendors can be supported through facilities, fair pricing, sanitation, storage, digital payments and designated spaces for authentic local products.

Women market cooperatives could also create fixed-price sections for visitors. This would protect artisans from bargaining and help tourists identify genuine local products. The North-Eastern examples show that women-led tourism does not have one fixed form. It can be a

homestay in Arunachal Pradesh, a weaving experience in Meghalaya or a women-controlled market in Manipur.

In Bastar it may take the form of village kitchens, craft studios, forest interpretation walks, homestays, farm visits, local cafes, eco-camps, tourism information centers or community booking offices. From e-rickshaws to women-led transportation tourism begins before a traveler reaches a waterfall, cave, forest or village. It begins with movement.

Who drives the tourist from the railway station? Who decides the fare? Who provides information about the route? Who earns from the journey between the bus stand, hotel, market, homestay and tourist attraction? Women-led transportation can become a missing link, in Bastars tourism economy. Chhattisgarh already has a foundation on which this idea can grow.

The state of Chhattisgarh has a scheme to help women get e-rickshaws. This scheme has helped women in the state. For example in one district 263 women got e-rickshaws because of this scheme. One woman who drives an e-rickshaw is making more than ₹20,000 per month.

You can find information about this on the Chhattisgarh government website, dprcg.gov.in.

The town of Dantewada has also done something with a program called Danteshwari Sewa. Women from self-help groups were trained to drive e-rickshaws. This created. Helped with transportation in the area. You can read about it in The New Indian Express.

These programs show that women in Chhattisgarh are willing to become drivers if they have the right tools and support.

However the next step should be bigger than a small service for women.

The color pink may make a program for women more visible. It does not really help women. What really helps is when women own their vehicles have passengers get fair pay and have control over their money.

Women drivers should not just be limited to driving women passengers or driving on routes. They should be trained to drive all kinds of vehicles like e-rickshaws, autos, taxis, electric cars, vans and small buses. They should be able to drive for women, men, families, locals and tourists.

A program for women-led transportation could start at the Jagdalpur train station, bus stop and airport. Visitors could book a car driven by a woman through a counter, app, website or phone service.

The driver would not just learn how to drive. Also how to communicate with tourists give first aid and know the local history.

She could take visitors to a homestay run by women recommend a place to buy crafts explain the rules for taking pictures and give information about the roads and weather.

In this way the journey becomes part of the tourism experience.

Pink e-rickshaws could take people on trips within Jagdalpur and other towns. They could connect train stations, bus stops, markets, museums, hotels, hospitals and tourism centers.

For trips women could own taxis and electric vehicles to take people to places like Chitrakote, Tirathgarh, Kanger Valley, Dantewada and other rural areas.

Women from self-help groups could work together to manage bookings take care of vehicles and help each other in case of emergencies.

A system for booking cars could show which drivers are verified what the fares are and which routes are approved. This would make tourists feel safer and drivers would get work.

However just giving out vehicles is not enough.

Women need to learn how to drive get licenses and get permission to drive on routes. They need loans that're easy to pay back places to charge their vehicles and insurance. Some women may also need help with their families, childcare and dealing with harassment.

Loans for vehicles should be based on how much women can earn. A woman should not get a vehicle. Then be left to pay back a big loan without having a steady income.

Hotels, tourism departments, universities, government offices and tour operators could reserve some of their transportation needs for women-led groups. This would give women an income instead of just occasional work.

Women drivers should be treated like professionals, not people who are getting help.

CONNECTING TRANSPORTATION WITH THE ENTIRE TOURISM ECONOMY

A strong program for women-led tourism would connect services.

A visitor could come to the area in a car driven by a woman stay in a homestay run by women eat at a kitchen run by women go on a walk led by a woman guide and buy crafts from a womens collective.

Each part of the journey would help a household.

The driver would earn money from transportation. The host would earn money from accommodation. Farmers and collectors would supply food. Artisans would sell their crafts directly to visitors. Guides and storytellers would get paid for their work.

This is better than a tourism model where most of the money goes to companies.

Womens groups could also create tourism calendars based on seasons and what the community wants. They could decide when a festival is open to visitors how guests a village can receive and which places should remain private.

They could make rules for taking pictures set prices for crafts and create codes of behavior for tourists.

Some of the tourism money could go into a village fund for things like waste management, water conservation, trail maintenance, health emergencies and girls education.

MINING PRESSURE AND THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROAD

Any honest talk about the future of tourism in Bastar has to include mining.

Bastar and the Bailadila region have a lot of iron ore. Mining helps with production, jobs, public revenue and infrastructure. Local communities also need roads, hospitals, schools, communication and economic opportunities.

The argument is not that development should stop.

The concern is that much mining or mining that is not well regulated can hurt the natural and cultural foundations of community life and tourism.

Recent official documents show how much mining is going on in South Bastar. For example a 2026 document talked about expanding a mining project in the Bailadila Reserve Forest. Another document talked about an iron ore project near Bhansi and Bacheli. You can find information on the Parivesh website.

Open-pit mining can hurt the environment change the landscape create dust and noise and affect the water systems. A study on iron ore mining in Bailadila found that it caused deforestation, water contamination, dust and noise. You can read about it on the Umweltbundesamt website.

Tourism and mining are different because they use the landscape in ways.

Mining makes money by taking things out of the earth. Nature-based tourism makes money because the forests, rivers, waterfalls, hills and cultural landscapes are still alive and attractive.

A mineral deposit can only be used once. A protected forest and a respected culture can support livelihoods for generations.

The conflict is visible on the road.

One vehicle may be taking visitors to a waterfall to see the beauty and peace of nature. Another vehicle may be carrying mineral ore through the area causing dust, noise and danger on the road.

If there are many trucks, on the road if the streams are polluted or if the forest hills are damaged Bastar may lose both its ecological security and its tourism.

Women often see the effects of changes firsthand.

When a water source becomes weak or polluted women have to travel to get water.

This affects the food and income of their households.

When dust settles on crops, water or houses women usually take care of the problems that come with it.

When it comes to talking about land, mining and other important issues men are often the ones in charge.

Women who run homestays gather forest produce and operate tourism businesses should also have a say in these matters.

They should be able to decide what happens to the land and the environment.

For example they should be able to say that a certain hill or forest is too important to be used for mining.

A WAY FOR BASTAR

Bastar does not have to choose between staying the same and accepting every new project that comes along.

The people of Bastar deserve healthcare, education and jobs.

Development should not hurt the natural and cultural environment of the area.

Women-led tourism is a way to move forward because it helps people make a living conserves the environment and preserves the local culture.

We can see from places that women can run homestays preserve traditional crafts and show visitors around with dignity. In Chhattisgarh women are already driving rickshaws. The next step is to bring these two ideas

Women should not just welcome tourists when they arrive.

They should also transport them guide them host them feed them and sell them products. They should have a say in how tourism grows. The woman selling forest produce by the side of the road should not just be a picture in someones travel book.

She can be a part of a cooperative own a homestay be a guide drive a tourist vehicle and plan tourist destinations. Her daughter can learn to drive a vehicle manage bookings and talk to

visitors while still being connected to her community. When this happens the road will not just pass through Bastar it will belong to the people who live there.

The best future for Bastar will not be the one with the trucks, hotels or tourists. It will be the one where the forests are still alive, mining is controlled, visitors behave well and women have the power to decide what happens. Women-led tourism can make this happen. Women of Bastar can make sure that the environment is protected and that they have a say in what happens to their land.

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