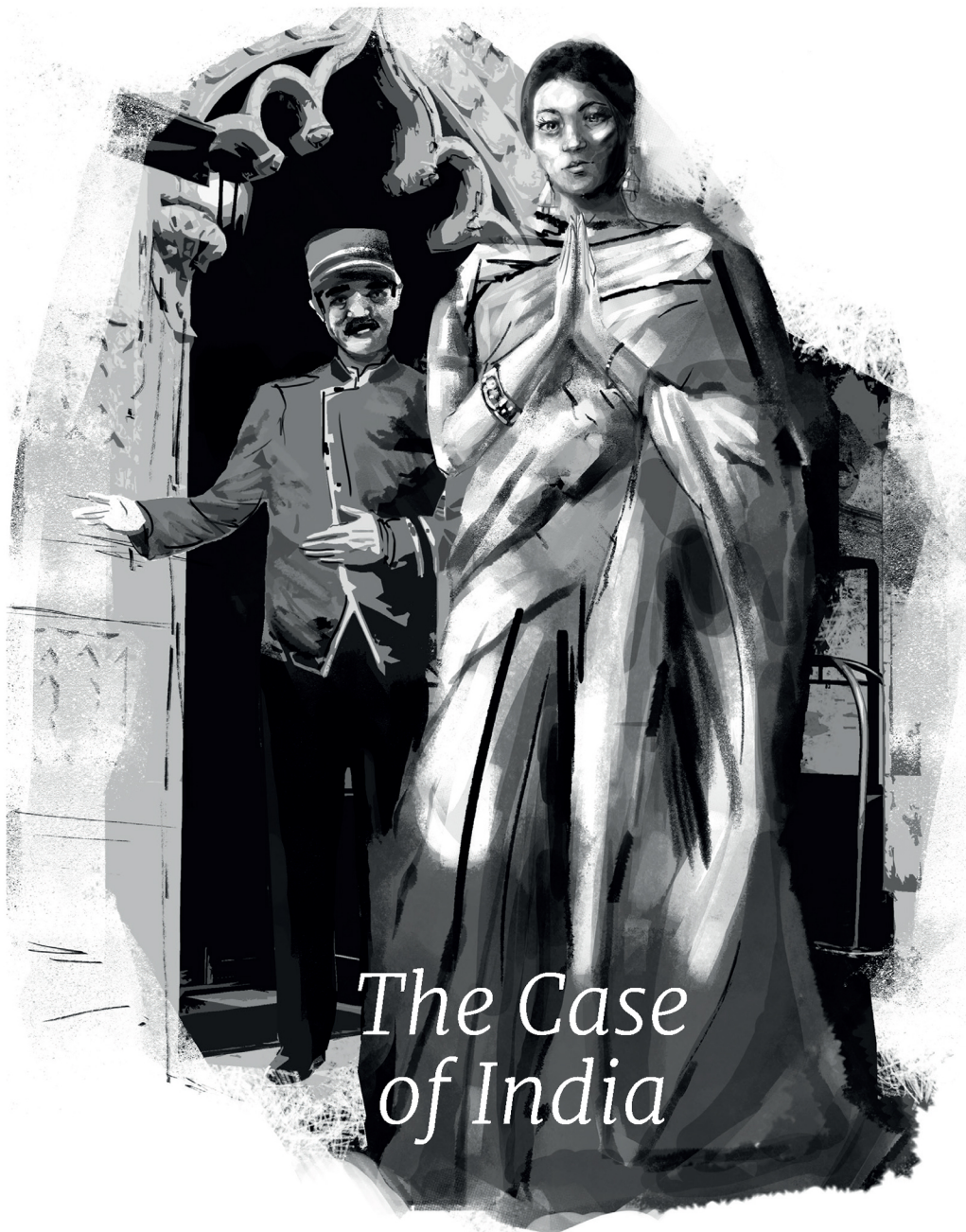# GENDER EQUITY IN HOSPITALITY

The Case of India

PAYAL KUMAR

Gender Equity in Hospitality

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Praise for *Gender Equity In Hospitality*

In this much-needed study of the hospitality industry in India, Dr Payal Kumar provides an in-depth analysis of the challenges, as well as solutions, to women's advancement in leadership. Based on thought-provoking data from interviews with senior- and mid-level leaders in this sector, as well as data on gendered leadership representation, this book adds to literature by contextualizing gender diversity and equity issues in India, while providing far-reaching HR solutions needed to catapult the hospitality industry forward.

Diana Bilimoria, Professor and Chair of Organizational Behavior and KeyBank Professor, Case Western Reserve University, USA

This rigorous study on India's hospitality industry from a gendered lens is a notable contribution to the literature on gender and leadership in the Global South. Congratulations are in order to the author Payal Kumar for this invaluable monograph.

Melissa Fisher, Author of *Wall Street Women and Cultural Anthropologist*, NYU Institute for Public Knowledge & School of Professional Studies, USA

Women continue to lag behind men in most measures of employment and income, but the inequities women face in hospitality are even more significant, given greater occupational segregation, unusual work hours, gender bias, work–family conflict, and barriers to leadership roles. The COVID-19 pandemic further contributed to widening the gaps between women and men. Dr Payal Kumar has conducted extensive research and captured the inequities women face in the hospitality industry in India. Her book offers us an insightful account of how a strong paternalistic culture persists in hindering the advancement of women in the Indian hospitality industry.

Eddy Ng, Smith Professor of Equity and Inclusion in Business, Queen's University, Canada

Professor Payal Kumar's book, *Gender Equity in Hospitality: The Case of India*, makes very timely and important contributions. It is a thoughtful book that must be read by every hospitality manager. I was particularly impressed by its coverage of both the pre- and post-COVID-19 pandemic landscape. Practitioners and policy makers will find the in-depth analysis of the barriers to woman leadership in hospitality very helpful. Understanding these roadblocks is critical in helping organizations overcome these challenges. Meaningful change demands a simultaneous focus on both individuals and systems. Professor Kumar's powerful change models are a highlight of the book.

Sukhbir Sandhu, Associate Professor and Executive Director, Centre for Workplace Excellence, UniSA Business, University of South Australia, Australia

The Indian hospitality industry has had a poor track record in regard to gender equality and Dr Payal Kumar's book *Gender Equity in Hospitality: The Case of*

India is a must-read for leaders who want to make a difference. With detailed verbatim comments, it is an insightful read that can help any hospitality company put together a clear roadmap towards achieving its environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals. I am hopeful that together we can all recalibrate the playing field and see many more women in hospitality board rooms.

Kanika Hasrat, Area Director UP, MP and Uttarakhand and General Manager at Taj Lakefront Bhopal at The Indian Hotel Company Limited, and President of Women Indian Chamber for Commerce and Industry (WICCI) for Hospitality and Tourism, India

Given the importance and pace of growth of the hospitality and tourism sector for the Indian economy, this is a timely study as it addresses the twin cultural issues of a lack of gender diversity and inequitable promotion practices in hospitality and tourism in India. The current undeniable domination of studies focused on Western contexts makes this a valuable contribution to the field.

Ruth Puhr, Head of Quality Assurance and Academic Development, Les Roches Global Hospitality Education, Switzerland

In *Gender Equity in Hospitality: The Case of India*, Prof Payal Kumar draws attention to how cultural nuances and other factors shape and impact careers in the hospitality industry in India. Drawn from extensive research and her own observations, the book contains practical recommendations for policy makers and industry leaders that would enable more women to be included, engaged and have successful stints in the hospitality industry. In a world where purpose and ways of working are being redefined, this is a highly relevant read.

Aarti Kelshikar, Founder, 3A Consulting, and Author of *How Women Work: Fitting In and Standing Out in Asia*

This much-needed book offers valuable insights into the barriers to woman leadership in the Indian hospitality sector, both on the individual and systemic level. It deals incisively with the gendered and gendering problems of the sector constructed at the level of individual identities and cultural expectations embedded into interaction, institutional opportunities, and constraints. This book will be valuable for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers who want to understand barriers to woman leadership in a patriarchal and high-power distance society and who strive for a systemic change in the sector. It will also enrich the lives of hospitality students who want to understand gender discrimination and make a difference in their lives and in the field.

Regine Bendl, Associate Professor, Institute for Gender and Diversity in Organizations, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

Gender Equity in Hospitality: The Case of India

BY

PAYAL KUMAR

Indian School of Hospitality, India

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PUBLISHING

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*I dedicate this book to my younger sister Leena Khurana,
who has taught me more than she will ever know.*

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About the Author

Dr Payal Kumar is Principal Academic Advisor at Indian School of Hospitality, India, the South Asian Ambassador for *Academy of Management Discoveries Journal,* and Emerald Publisher Brand Ambassador. She completed her Master of Arts from the School of Oriental and African Studies, UK, and PhD from XLRI, India. As a researcher, her accolades include the best symposium for the MED division, Academy of Management Conference, Seattle, USA, 2022 and the Andre Delbecq & Lee Robbins MSR (Academy of Management) Scholarship. She is an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Management*, *Spirituality and Religion*, and Senior Reviewer for top journals such as *Journal of Organization Behaviour*. She has published 17 books so far, including a 5-volume series on Leadership and Followership (Palgrave Macmillan). In an earlier avatar, she was Vice President of Editorial and Production at SAGE Publications Ltd.

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Foreword

Ashish Malik

It is critical that one develops an understanding of the western term 'hospitality' by contextualizing what the phenomenon of hospitality means as per rich and deep-seated Indian cultural beliefs. The notion of serving guests has immense historical, spiritual and cultural importance in the Indian Vedic scriptures, propagated through scriptures and the oral tradition in India. In popular press and wider cultural beliefs, the abridged Sanskrit mantra *Atithidevo Bhava,* which roughly translates to 'treat a Guest as a God' or 'A Guest is akin to God' captures the essence of service, welcoming and invocations that followers of the Hindu and Sanathan Dharam popularly practise. Other interpretations of the Hindu Vedic scriptures of the above Sanskrit Mantra focus on welcoming and serving the 'Brahamana', a person who has deep spiritual knowledge and comes without intimation as your guest. Given this background, if someone turns up uninvited at your place in India, it is common to greet them and serve them food. Many first-time visitors to India return home with stories of the great hospitality they experienced.

In fact, guests are welcomed in a God-like manner with offerings of *Dhupa* (fragrance), *Dipa* (Lamp), *Naidevya* (Food), *Akshata* (Rice) and *Pushpa* (flowers). The Department of Tourism's advertising also captures the *Atithidevo Bhava* ethos and aims to reinforce social awareness through its campaign as its citizens welcome guests into the country. Often women play a key role in welcoming guests.

The promotional campaign and observable cultural practices serve as a good reinforcement and differentiator for the Tourism Department's Incredible India campaign. The campaign helps attract tourists from all around the world, highlighting the differences in experiences of the cultural practices between the West and East, something which was aptly captured many years ago in Rudyard Kipling's composition, *The Ballad of East and West*: 'Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet; Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat' (https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_eastwest.htm).

India and the Western world's cultural diversity has been noted in several seminal cultural frameworks, such as those of Hofstede (2001) and House et al. (2007). Recent accounts of India's cultural singularities and social complexity by Laleman et al. (2014) and Malik and Pereira (2016) also further our understanding.

In addition to cultural influences, Indian societal attitudes towards women are also shaped by religious, social and institutional beliefs. India has been

characterized as a high power-distance and patriarchal society. Unfortunately, this affects the framing at multiple levels of what should be the professional role of women in India. Despite the promise of rapid growth in the hospitality industry in India, some systemic issues persist. For example, there is still a seeming preference for employing a more significant proportion of men in senior positions relative to women, who are employed more in junior positions (Chaudhary & Gupta, 2010). Among the common prejudices in the industry are that women cannot cope with long and late shifts and can also not maintain a healthy work–life balance (Doherty, 2004). Additional barriers to advancing women's senior leadership roles include developmental discrepancies and cultural discouragement (Patwardhan, Mayya, & Joshi, 2016).

There are several gendered issues relating to the success of women professionals working in the hospitality sector. Building on the cultural, religious and social complexities mentioned above, Professor Payal Kumar builds on her dedicated scholarship that focusses on gender studies in an Indian context and delivers yet another powerful and insightful account of gender equity in hospitality. This monograph is a sequel to her earlier Emerald book on *Gender Equity in the Boardroom: The Case of India* (2020), co-authored with Dr Ganesh Singh. Focussing on a complex range of professional identities and issues of gender-based inequality in Indian society, Professor Kumar picks up on the vital issue of gender and diversity. Such an account is relevant not only to diversity and inclusion scholars but also to critical management studies scholars.

This research is a rich addition to the existing literature, as it bridges our gaps in understanding the differences in the specific role stressors for men and women – including why women experience more significant role stagnation than men. The extant literature does not address this; thus, research on the antecedents for the lack of leadership opportunities for women in India's hospitality and tourism sectors is timely. Researching the state of gender equity in the hospitality industry in the post-pandemic era was preceded by a white paper by the author on the same topic and sponsored by the Women's Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (WICCI) and the Indian School of Hospitality.

Professor Kumar employs a two-staged methodology for her exploratory study on this vital topic. First, as a preliminary study, she examines the antecedents of low participation levels of women in leadership positions in the hospitality industry in India. Professor Kumar analysed the data from 23 in-depth interviews of senior- and mid-level leaders, both male and female. These interviews were coded, and then within-case and between-case themes were elicited to understand the barriers to women's leadership. Second, she collected data on the representation of women leaders in three-star to five-star luxury hotels, as currently, there is no such account of consolidated data on this topic.

The book covers the much-debated issues of gender equity or 'fairness of treatment' for women regarding their rights, benefits and opportunities in a society that expects the woman to be the primary caregiver at home. The book also offers comparisons with western trends in hospitality. The findings of this research have important insights for leaders in the hospitality industry. It unpacks the barriers to gender equity at three levels of analyses: at the individual level it

was found that women employees face more work–life pressure than their male counterparts; at the group level stereotyping by colleagues and paternalistic attitudes of bosses proves to be hindrance; and at the firm level there was found to be a lack of mentoring opportunities.

There are implications also for HR practitioners, and learners can gain insights from success stories of what HR practitioners did in terms of 'good HR policies' for women, such as including flexitime, which leaders in this industry can emulate. The study findings are likely to be useful as a stepping-stone for policy makers, government and industry leaders to rebound from the pandemic to transform India into one of the top 20 tourist destinations in the world.

The book is timely as the hospitality and tourism industries globally, not just in India, were reeling under pressures imposed by the pandemic and are now on a turbo-charged growth path in the post-pandemic world. The tourism industry is predicted to grow rapidly until the end of 2023, fuelled by the expected expansion of the e-visa scheme by the Government of India. Such rapid growth necessitates addressing several workforce issues such as employee attrition, equitable and fair compensation, and opening up diverse workforce opportunities. These issues are critical as they strongly affect the firm's success and industry growth as an economic driver for the nation.

All in all, this book offers a rich case study account of a contextual understanding of the barriers to leadership that women in India face in light of a patriarchal and high-power distance society. My congratulations to Professor Payal Kumar for such insightful research.

Ashish Malik
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Preface

Together with an enthusiastic research team, I began to deep dive into trying to understand the barriers and potential opportunities for women leaders in the hospitality industry. What could be the reasons for so few women making it to top leadership positions in the Indian context? And that too when in other sectors women have done remarkably well in breaking the glass ceiling. For example, India has the highest number of female pilots in the world at 12.4% which is twice the global average, even though this is a profession that involves 100% travelling and also shift work. Financial services and the banking sector is another area where women have stormed the male bastion. In both these examples, women have managed to soar to leadership positions in spite of the gender stereotypes that 'women can't read maps' and that 'women are not good with numbers.' So why is it that women in hospitality can't fly as high, in an industry that one would imagine that women are naturally attuned to?

That this industry is male dominated is pretty much a global phenomenon. Dr Maria Gebbels, senior lecturer in hospitality management at the University of Greenwich, said: 'In comparison to other sectors, the hospitality industry has a long-standing history of being male-dominated, traditional, and paternalistic, resulting in conflicts of power and gender inequality' (https://www.thecaterer. com/news/surrey-greenwich-university-report-gender-equality-hospitality). But I was curious about what were the specific barriers and opportunities for women in the hospitality industry in India?

The results of this study suggest that what perhaps stands out in India at the entry-level as a barrier is the strong stereotype that this is not a suitable industry for women. Long working hours and also the social taboo of women working in bars are distinct entry barriers. One can only conjecture about the 'missing women' – in other words, those that want to join the industry, but who are discouraged from doing so by their family. There is no way to quantify the number of these potential hires. It is worthy to point out that post-liberalization in other industries such as information technology, women have been entering in large droves.

This study also notes that at the mid-management level, many women drop out because juggling the pressures of both family and work becomes too much, thus creating a 'leaky pipeline problem' – where there are not enough female candidates to recommend for more senior positions. And for mid-managers in this industry, upward growth becomes next to impossible unless candidates are up for geographical relocation. I must add that this monograph is not all about doom

and gloom, but also about hope! There is one chapter dedicated to stories of exceptional individual success, and also path-breaking gender-friendly initiatives at the firm level.

One recommendation for overcoming the bias of 'think manager, think male' is for industry leaders to reflect on whether a leader necessarily has to be an agentic male, simply because this has been the precedent in the industry so far. They may want to move from this auto-pilot mode, introspect, and rethink the leadership qualities required in the industry, using a different lens, for example, contemplating a style of leadership that may be more androgynous in nature.

This study adds to the literature of the Global South, and in doing so showcases the importance of the national and cultural contextualization of a phenomenon. It is hoped that our pain-staking research on the India story will not only provide conceptual richness to the study on gender equity, by providing insights into how women navigate a patriarchal and at times paternalistic work terrain, but also that the recommendations at the end of the monograph will be useful for global readers too (both policy makers and scholars).

To sum up, in the context of an ever-expanding industry that is seeing tectonic shifts, it is anticipated that this monograph will provide a deeper understanding for the reader of the existing scenario by penetrating the surface of everyday practices and discourses, to reveal deeply embedded practices, viewpoints and biases.

Payal Kumar

Author of the following related titles:

- *Gender Equity in the Boardroom: The Case of India*. Emerald Group Publishing, 2020 (Co-author Dr Ganesh Singh)
- *Mentorship-driven Talent Management: The Asian Experience*. Emerald Group Publishing, 2020 (Co-author Prof. Pawan Budhwar)
- *Exploring Dynamic Mentoring Models in India*. Springer International Publishing, 2018.
- *Indian Women as Entrepreneurs: An Exploration of Self-identity*. Springer International Publishing, 2016.
- *Unveiling Women's Leadership: Identity and Meaning of Leadership in India*. Springer International Publishing, 2015.

Acknowledgements