

*Solo Sojourns of Indian Women:*

*Narratives from Travel blogs*

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## **Abstract**

This research study focuses on the experiences of female travellers, specifically Indian women. Asian female travellers account for a sizable portion of the Asian travel market. Globalisation and the experience economy have recently driven an increase in the number of single Asian women seeking meaningful travel experiences. However, prior studies have largely reflected Western attitudes or generic views of Asian women, thereby creating a gap in the discussion of Indian women's solo travel experiences. India's distinct cultural and religious milieu sets it apart from other Asian countries. Unlike regions with large numbers of customers or distinct cultural influences, India's travel business is built on rich and diversified traditions. Despite this uniqueness, research into Indian women's solo travel experiences is sparse. Understanding the experiences of solo Indian women travellers through an Indian lens is, therefore, crucial to highlight the specific challenges and opportunities faced by these travellers. This research study aims to address that vacuum by providing valuable insights into the motivations, challenges, and experiences of Indian solo female travellers in India.

To address this gap, this research study conducted exploratory qualitative research to examine this specific group. The data gathering process comprised of an examination of the autonomous travel narratives supplied online by six Indian female bloggers, Thematic analysis was utilised to uncover the constraints and challenges they faced throughout their solo excursions, and the tactics they employed to overcome these obstacles. Furthermore, the research study investigated the significance of the travel experiences for these bloggers, specifically how they helped them to become more autonomous and empowered.

The findings show that these solitary excursions are not merely leisure activities, but also significant personal growth opportunities. The bloggers claimed increased self-confidence, resilience, and a more expansive worldview as a result of their travels. The research study emphasises the possible impact of these travel experiences on the cultural perceptions of these Indian women who defy conventional wisdom, by offering encouragement for women to embark on solo excursions. These findings can be used to inform policy and support services that focus on the provision of safe and rewarding travel experiences for women.

This study helps to deepen our understanding of the interaction of gender, culture, and travel in India, providing a nuanced perspective on the changing dynamics of female solo travel within India.

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I want to appreciate the brave Indian female travellers who reject traditional stereotypes and demands to comply. Their stories serve as an inspiration for other Indian women, empowering them to overcome difficulties and pursue their passions, attaining their own goals of success.

Lastly, I am grateful to my family for their financial and emotional support while I navigated this difficult process alone in a new country. Distance was never an issue because of all the love and support they gave me during my period away from home.

## List of Abbreviations

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organization
SLT	Solo Leisure Travel
CE	Common Era
BCE	Before Common Era
BSS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
PDI	Power Distance Index
SIM	Subscriber Identity Module

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Name: Sushmitha Dattatreya Hegde

Date: 31/07/2024

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Personal background

Growing up in India, I have always had a strong desire to travel and explore. The idea of travelling to new locations, learning about various cultures, and engaging with people from all walks of life has always appealed to me. My own domestic and international travels have had a significant impact on my perspective, deepening my appreciation for the complexity and beauty of our globe. I am fortunate to have a family who appreciates and actively supports my solo travels, knowing how important it is to view the world from various perspectives and to cherish cultural diversity. However, I am also fully aware that not every woman has the same level of familial support. Many women in India and other countries are prevented by social norms and family responsibilities from travelling alone.

Furthermore, having been alone myself, I am intimately familiar with the challenges and benefits of travelling alone in India. My aim in conducting this research is to illuminate the many experiences of solo Indian women travellers, to draw attention to the cultural, societal, and personal factors that shape these narratives. With hurdles such as sexual harassment, family pressure, and societal and cultural conventions, a sizable proportion of bold women travel alone, defying conventional norms, overcoming obstacles with grit and resolve. Acknowledging the possibility of bias in my perspective, I believe that my Indian ancestry provides me with insights into the cultural subtleties that impact the experiences of Indian women travellers. Their stories can provide evidence of the transformative power of travel and the resolute will of self-sufficient Indian female explorers.

This dissertation seeks to explore the experiences of solo female travellers in India by examining the accounts of Indian women bloggers who have travelled alone in the country. It will bring to light the difficulties they encounter and how they overcome them, and the effects of travelling alone on their personal development and empowerment. The purpose of this research study is to influence policies and activities that support safer and more inclusive travel experiences for women, by offering insightful information about the phenomena of solo female travel within India, using qualitative research methodologies.

## 1.2 Background to the study

The demand for tourism is notably shaped by various factors, including shifts in population demographics, environmental concerns, technological advancements, and evolving societal and lifestyle ideals (Sebova et al., 2021). Among these trends, solo tourism has emerged as a significant influence in the industry, reflecting a transformation from traditional paradigms to contemporary travel preferences (Pereira & Silva, 2018). In the past, chivalric ideas that portrayed women as gentle, fragile, and weaker discouraged or did not readily accept women travelling alone. Women's travel responsibilities were circumscribed by these traditional gender boundaries, frequently placing them in limited or secondary capacities (Gherardi, 1996). Throughout history, women's leisure activities have typically been associated with domestic pursuits, aligning with their traditional roles as caregivers and supporters. Taboos surrounding women's travel have persisted over time, as evidenced by statistics on gender-based tourism indicating that there is undoubtedly a gender disparity (Zub, 2024). Travel opportunities for women have unintentionally prompted conversations about individual autonomy, empowerment, independence, and resistance. However, there are many ways in which women's travel differs from men's, making it critical to comprehend the demands, interests, motivations, and behaviours of female travellers (Khoo-Lattimore & Wilson, 2017).

There is a significant shift, according to contemporary travel trends, namely that women are no longer confined to travelling exclusively with their partners or families (Kendle, 2023). Women are increasingly taking charge of their travel experiences. This paradigm shift is evidenced by the rising popularity of female-led travel, with women now comprising about two-thirds of all global travellers (Hamid et al., 2021). It is noteworthy that female solo travel is starting to carve out a profitable niche in the travel business. As highlighted by Pereira and Silva (2018), women embarking on solo journeys seek adventure, freedom, personal fulfilment, a sense of uniqueness, and an escape from the ordinary, defying stereotypes about female dependency and vulnerability when travelling. Across numerous countries, women choose to travel alone more frequently than men, signalling a profound change in travel behaviour Hamid et al. (2021) suggest that given favourable opportunities, women express a preference for exploring diverse destinations regularly.

International travel habits have been significantly impacted in recent years by the economic and social development currently occurring in Asia, namely the 'Asian wave' phenomenon. The Asia Pacific region has had the second highest number of visitors after European countries since 2005 (Seow, n.d.). The most prominent Asian tourism destinations are Hong Kong (China), Malaysia, Macao (China), and India. According to some industry surveys (Torres, 2024), there is a rising market for Asian female solo travellers. Yet, there are few studies about these Asian female travellers; instead, most studies focus on Western women's perspectives (Yang et al., 2018).

Indian tourism has grown significantly in recent years due to the country's varied landscapes, rich traditions, and historical sites. Women's mobility in ancient India were shaped by their social standing, the period, and the region. Several ancient Indian literary works show women travelling for a variety of reasons, such as diplomatic missions and pilgrimages. For instance, during the 15th century, when women were not permitted to travel alone without a male companion, the legend of the Hindu mystic poet and princess Meerabai from Rajasthan, who was married at a young age, recounts how she stepped out of the marital fort and travelled to answer the call of her devotion (Jain & Sharma, 2002). There are also accounts of women travelling, for numerous reasons, in the Jataka Tales, a collection of stories detailing the past lives of Gautama Buddha. For example, Queen Mallikā is shown embarking on diplomatic missions and visiting other realms to advance goodwill and peace. Gupta dynasty queen Prabhavati Gupta, who reigned in the fifth century CE, is well-known from her inscriptions found throughout India, recording her donations, administrative responsibilities, and travels (Arcane, 2024). However, these narratives frequently present romanticised images, which might not accurately represent the experiences of most women. Particularly during the medieval period of Islamic control, women's mobility was frequently restricted, and purdah (a veil covering women from head to toe, symbolising privacy and modesty) became common in several regions (Begum, 2015).

Victorian-era ideals that emphasised domesticity and female reliance were carried to India by European colonists, strengthening gender norms that prohibited women from travelling and participating in public life, and limiting their freedom and ability to travel independently (Larsen, 2017). Women activists participated in the Indian independence movement by travelling to protest marches and campaigns against social norms, and engaging in political activity. While traditional family dynamics and societal expectations have evolved,

granting Indian women greater autonomy and resources for solo recreational travel, it is important to recognise that they still face gendered risks, including sexual harassment and unwanted attention (Jordan & Gibson, 2005).

Despite the extensive historical background of Indian women travellers, there remains a gap in research regarding the ways in which women have overcome, and continue to overcome, obstacles to travel. Delving more deeply into the socio-cultural influences that shape gender roles and travel decisions within this market, therefore, becomes imperative. With the rising interest in women travelling alone, especially in places like India, there exists a knowledge gap in the experiences of Asian female solo travellers from patriarchal cultures. India's distinct cultural context has much visitor potential, but little is known about how women deal with the social constraints encountered there. A thorough awareness of the sociocultural elements impacting gender roles and decisions is necessary to properly comprehend this changing sector. The travel experiences of Asian women travelling alone, especially within India's expanding tourism industry, need to be thoroughly understood.

### 1.3 Indian tourism landscape

India, situated in South Asia, boasts a vibrant and diverse cultural tapestry, captivating travellers from around the globe. With a burgeoning population exceeding 1.4 billion (India Population (2024) - Worldometer, n.d.), India's tourism sector stands as a cornerstone of its economy. Recent data from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (2022) indicates that tourism contributed significantly to the nation's GDP, accounting for 9.8% in 2021, and provided employment opportunities for over 30 million people (India Tourism Statistics 2022, n.d.); the most recent update because post-COVID numbers have not yet been released.

**Figure 1**

*Map of India*



Map of India by Cacahuete (talk), Ravikiran Rao, Nichalp (base outline) (Cacahuete, 2009).

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_India.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_India.png)

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For Indian women travelling alone, India provides a wide range of activities to suit their interests and tastes. Solo women can experience hiking and spiritual retreats in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand in the magnificent Himalayas. Calm settings in Manali and Rishikesh provide an opportunity for introspection and meditation. Travellers are welcome to marvel at the Taj Mahal in the historic city of Agra, which offers a serene environment for learning about India's architectural legacy. With its opulent palaces and forts in cities like Jaipur, Udaipur, and Jodhpur, the energetic state of Rajasthan offers a regal experience for lone travellers. In Kerala, which is frequently referred to as "God's own country," women can unwind on houseboat excursions in Alleppey, tour spice plantations in Thekkady, and indulge in spa retreats providing Ayurveda in Kovalam. Moving south, Tamil Nadu, with its historic temples and folk arts in cities like Madurai and Mahabalipuram, presents a rich cultural heritage. Finally, Karnataka has a singular fusion of historical landmarks and scenic beauty, with the verdant Coorg landscapes and the ancient remains of Hampi providing rewarding experiences for lone travellers. These sites enable female lone travellers to investigate, contemplate, and actively participate in India's diverse experiences.

In this patriarchal society with a distinct set of cultural barriers, Indian women are increasingly eager to pursue solo travel, motivated by a desire to move beyond traditional bounds, regardless of safety concerns (Gurung, 2018). The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) states that women account for 40% of total overnight travel in India, with 37% in cities and 41% in rural areas. Punjab has the greatest proportion of single female travellers (66%), while southern states, except for Karnataka, have higher rates, indicating that they are viewed as safer for women. Women make about 60% of single-member journeys in Telangana, primarily for pleasure or health (Upreti, n.d.). Southern states lead in key socioeconomic indicators such as the gender ratio, average marriage age, and fertility rates. These variables significantly impact women's safety and well-being (Saha, 2016). To support this, observations of Saha (2016) between the years 2015 and 2016 reflect that despite India's reputation for being dangerous for female tourists, many women remain undeterred by such concerns. On average, 40% of single women in India travel independently, with a higher percentage from southern states compared to northern states of India.

Domestic tourism remains the driving force behind India's tourism industry, with domestic travellers comprising most of the tourist activity. In 2021, domestic tourist visits surged to over 2 billion, demonstrating the potential of India's domestic travel market (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India,

2022). Enhanced infrastructure development, including the expansion of road networks and the modernisation of regional airports, has facilitated easier access nationwide to popular destinations.

According to a recent survey conducted by Nielsen (2021), family recommendations and word-of-mouth referrals continue to play a pivotal role in shaping travel decisions by Indian travellers. Solo travel has been on the rise globally, and India is no exception. According to a report by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (2019), there has been a noticeable increase in the number of solo travellers visiting India in recent years.

Female-focused travel initiatives, enhanced safety measures, and changing social norms have all contributed to a notable increase in women's solo travel in India (Ghai & Chowdhri, 2022). While companies like Intrepid Travel and G Adventures cater to people seeking safe and empowering experiences, organisations like Women on Wanderlust and The Solo Women Travel Tribe give support and tools to solo female travellers. Although there is little accurate data on females travelling alone in India, anecdotal evidence points to a notable rise in the number of women choosing to travel alone, consistent with a growing trend in the nation. The solo travel market in India is quickly developing, fuelled by a growing middle class and a desire for distinctive travel experiences. As of 2023, 11% of all tourists travel alone, a tendency that has grown by roughly 131% since 2016 (SATTE, 2023). For many Indian women, solo travel represents empowerment, freedom, and self-discovery, allowing them to break from conventional standards, widen their ideas, and build resilience, altogether supporting personal growth and the building of identity.

## **1.4 Research aims and objectives**

The research study aims to explore the complex terrain of solo travel for Indian women, emphasising the social and cultural constraints they encounter and the ways they overcome them. It investigates how Indian women view the social restrictions of travelling alone, and how these views relate to concepts of empowerment and emancipation. The research study uses qualitative analysis of travel blogs to provide insights into the transformative potential of solo travel to build independence and self-confidence among Indian women. The research study further aims to provide recommendations for the advancement of gender equality and safety in travel spaces, by examining the role of supportive networks and policy implications; ultimately this leads to a more inclusive and empowered environment for women travellers in India. To reach this aim, the research answers the following questions:

RQ1: What gender-related social and cultural limitations do solo Indian women travellers face on their travels?

RQ2: How do Indian women travelling alone deal with these limitations?

RQ3: How do the experiences of solo travel influence the independence and empowerment of Indian women despite social and cultural limitations?

## **1.4 Importance of the study**

India's domestic tourism is experiencing significant growth, with accommodation brand Oyo reporting a rise in reservations for single travellers. Simultaneously, Google Trends data indicates that women make up roughly 50% of domestic travellers in India, highlighting how the changing demographics are influencing travel habits. New research suggests that India is becoming more than just a host country—it is evolving as a popular domestic tourism destination (Gurung, 2018). India is noteworthy in Asia for its varied geography, weather, and cultural legacy, providing travellers with a rich travel experience.

Within this broader trend, there is a notable divergence from conventional family-centric travel norms with the development of solo leisure travel (SLT) in India (Xess et al., 2021). This shift highlights the growing independence and empowerment of Indian women and their changing perceptions of traditional gender roles.

However, even with these improvements, women still face barriers to travel freedom, especially when it comes to leisure activities. Travelling alone presents several difficulties in a community where men predominate, including worries about safety and cultural norms (Malik, 2018a). Stories of robbery, sexual harassment, and dangerous public transit deter women from travelling alone. India has seen a rise in the number of sexual assault cases; recently, a Spanish couple touring the country on a motorcycle garnered significant media attention. They were threatened, robbed, and the woman was gang raped. The National Crime Records Bureau, Government of India, reports that in 2022, police reported 31,516 occurrences of rape, a 20% rise from 2021 (Sheikh, 2024). Regardless of these challenges, many Indian women are inspired by their Western counterparts' adventures, defying stereotypes.

I strongly agree with Yang's (2018) argument that we need to view Asian tourism in its own cultural context, free from Western stereotypes. I understand the importance of bringing attention to the distinctive experiences of Indian women who travel alone, based on my personal experiences with navigating the varied landscapes and cultural quirks throughout India. The Indian tourism industry offers a wealth of opportunities for exploration, rooted in the complex fabric of India's civilization; a civilization influenced by centuries of custom, many regional cultures, and colonial legacies (Pal, 2019). The aim here is to enhance the conversation about female empowerment and mobility in the Indian context, by helping Indian women gain a deeper understanding of the realities and potentials of travelling alone.

### **1.5 Structure of dissertation**

The dissertation is divided into six chapters, each with a specific function to address the research study's aims and key questions. The goals and objectives are outlined in the introduction, providing a succinct outline of the topic. In the second chapter, a thorough review of the literature on gender in tourism and Asian women travellers are conducted, with particular attention paid to the subtleties of Indian society, culture, challenges, and the changing patterns of Indian women travelling alone. The third chapter examines methodological issues and explores the qualitative and explanatory approaches that support the study. The philosophical investigation that opens this chapter includes an analysis of ontology and the use of interpretivism in the research; including an explanation of the qualitative research techniques used, along with a thematic analysis. In chapter four the experiences provided by the bloggers have been organised into

themes and sub-themes to present a more complete picture of their journeys. Each theme is enhanced with direct quotes from the bloggers, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of their experiences. Chapter five details a critical analysis, examining the implications of the findings, and a consideration of pre-existing theories and literature. The sixth and final chapter provides a thorough synthesis of the research, restating the study goals and purposes. Furthermore, the significance of the study's contribution to existing knowledge is emphasised, providing recommendations for additional lines of investigation.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter investigates the unique phenomenon of women who travel alone, examining the intricate interactions of gender, culture, and society affecting these excursions. Factors such as gender and ethnic identities significantly impact how travellers perceive the world and interact with others because they are intricately linked to these identities. The tourist industry has gained recognition in recent years as a multifaceted sociocultural phenomenon heavily impacted by variables such as gender. Gender norms and expectations are deeply entwined with the motivations, experiences, and limitations faced by travellers. The changing interpretation of women's travel experiences, as seen from historical and modern viewpoints, is indicative of larger cultural developments in perceptions of gender roles and leisure pursuits.

The literature review takes a journey through the history of tourism studies related to women, following the development of women's travel participation from marginalisation to empowerment. This chapter sheds light on the complex relationship between gender and tourism, and the transformative potential of travel. The overview includes major historical turning points and contemporary viewpoints on the resilience and life-changing consequences of travel, particularly among Indian women. It also considers the different experiences and scholarly methods of women travellers from Western and Asian countries. By highlighting these variations, the chapter emphasizes the importance of addressing the distinct cultural settings that impact the travel experiences of women from various backgrounds. This critical investigation broadens our understanding of how travel can promote empowerment and cross-cultural links while challenging existing gender stereotypes in multiple nations.

## **2.2 Women and travel**

Research underscores that travel has a positive correlation with happiness and well-being. Berdychevsky et al. (2013) stated that travel-related activities can enhance a person's general sense of well-being, providing a meaningful and positive impact. The World Tourism Organization predicts that by 2030 there will be 1.8 billion foreign visitor arrivals worldwide. Regarding women travellers, solo travelling has become one of the most popular sectors in the tourism industry (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). Women increasingly choose to travel alone or in all-women groups (Berdychevsky et al., 2013), driven by their unique preferences, needs, and motivations; these often differ from men's. The motivations behind women's solo or women-only travel are multifaceted. When it comes to making decisions about family vacations, women have generally been regarded as the primary decision-makers (Kang et al., 2003).

However, as more and more women are visibly participating in other forms of travel, their role is expanding beyond family travel (Malik, 2018b). Travelling alone is a path toward empowerment and personal development for many women. It fosters essential traits that cut across personal and professional domains, by providing chances for self-discovery, independence, and resilience. Research suggests that women—particularly those who travel alone—have a preference for adventure, ecotourism, and educational excursions arising from their need for new experiences, social interaction, and education. This demonstrates their self-assurance in navigating the world independently (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Independent travel enables women to question and reject traditional ideals of femininity, providing an opportunity to reinvent what it means to be a woman (Wilson & Harris, 2006).

However, in 21<sup>st</sup> century culture, some women overcome the societal expectations impacted by their gender and cultural background to undertake travel and adventure activities. Although feeling driven to choose safety and security, some individuals prefer to embark on risky ventures (Olstead, 2011), points which will be discussed in the following sections.

### ***2.2.1 Historical travel of women***

Western women have travelled alone for millennia, a point frequently neglected by male-dominated communities. The earliest recorded female travellers were mostly pilgrims to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, with famous characters like Helena in 327 CE and the abbess Egeria, who thoroughly chronicled her journey (Hamid et al., 2021). Following a historical gap, an upper-class Englishwoman named Celia Fiennes set off on her "Great Journey" in 1698, travelling alone and with servants through every county in England and Scotland (Elk, 2018). These trailblazing women took on solitary adventures that went against the expectations of their era's gender. The daughter of an earl, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is credited with creating the foundation for today's independent women travellers. She accompanied her husband, the British Ambassador, to Turkey in 1716, shocking the upper classes of London society. Despite becoming her husband's "accompanist" when she first arrived in Turkey, she quickly set out independently. A collection of her letters documenting her travels was eventually published after her passing (Wilson, 2016).

The colonial era saw women embark on exploratory missions, as settlers, or accompanying diplomats, navigating power dynamics, cultural encounters, and personal struggles. Female missionaries, while navigating and resisting the social pressures and expectations placed on women at the time, nonetheless, spread Western cultural norms and religious beliefs (Khoo-Lattimore & Wilson, 2017). While women faced social pressures and reputational damage if they went alone or wrote about their travels, travel in the 18th and 19th centuries was primarily associated with men, who were viewed as adventurers and explorers (Khoo-Lattimore & Wilson, 2017). The "golden age of travel" of the Victorian era was ushered in by women who negotiated their own modes of transportation by the mid-1800s. Wealthy women broke social norms and gender roles (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Several famous autobiographies, such as *"Around the World in Seventy-Two Days"* by Nellie Bly (1890) and *"Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands"* by Mary Seacole (1857), served as an inspiration for female travellers in later generations (Hamid et al., 2021).

Solo female travel increased in the early twentieth century, reflecting a shift in society's conceptions of female mobility. Evelyn Cheesman and Freya Stark were pioneers who travelled to distant locations, widening the scope of women's travel tales and opening the way for others such as Alexandra David-Néel, Ida Pfeiffer, Isabelle Eberhardt, and Aurora Bertrana (Melman, 2016). By the mid-1900s, a surge of young,

unmarried, middle- and upper-class English and European women travelled alone in quest of personal independence and cultural enrichment, indicating a desire to escape cultural constraints at home (Domosh, 1991). The initial academic tourism research concentrated on Western women, emphasising the needs, incentives, and challenges they encountered during their journey experiences.

### *2.2.2 Motivation for women to travel*

Travel has functioned as a means for women to liberate themselves from societal limitations and redefine the concept of femininity. A pivotal factor in this transformation has been the evolving societal norms and expectations concerning women's roles and freedoms. Historically, women were largely confined to domestic roles centred on caregiving, homemaking, and familial support (Henderson, 2003). However, by embarking on solitary journeys, women in previous eras could challenge established gender norms and reshape the definition of womanhood. Travel offered them a platform for self-discovery, empowerment, and the reconstruction of their own stories and identities (Juneck et al., 2006). Essentially, the growing inclination of women towards solo or women-exclusive travel not only reflects a craving for adventure and self-exploration but also signifies a bold assertion of independence and agency within a traditionally male-dominated domain.

Travel evolved as a potent tool for women to investigate three key elements of motivation—psychological, cultural, and personal—all of which contribute considerably to their desire for solo or women-only travel. The motivations of solo female tourists can change throughout their lives. As women advance through life stages, their motivations for embarking on solo excursions change, reflecting evolving objectives, aspirations, and circumstances (Ejupi & Medarić, 2022). Travelling allows women to immerse themselves in unfamiliar environments and engage with diverse people, a chance often seized after a significant event. Opting for solo travel grants women the autonomy to pursue their passions and craft their own schedules, fulfilling their individual needs, emotions, and desires (Stamm, 2000). Beyond the external journey, solo travel becomes a profound inward exploration as women seek fulfilment across physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The fact that many of the women saw autonomous travel as a means of self-improvement and a quest for self-identity was one way their desire for "meaningful travel" was expressed (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Travel is not merely about seeking attention or grooming techniques; it involves a

nuanced interplay between self-abandonment and self-exploration. Thus, travelling alone transcends the purely physical realm, encompassing psychological and spiritual facets that contribute to women's holistic growth and self-discovery (Hamid et al., 2021).

Women travel for various reasons, including learning and experiencing new things. A crucial component of travelling alone for women is learning about and experiencing different cultures and lifestyles. This involves attending events, taking in the views, and sampling the cuisine. One of the primary reasons people travel alone is to encounter different cultures because it gives them the opportunity to have individual experiences (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). The self-perception of female travellers is a significant driving force behind cultural solo travel, as the traveller-host relationship is vital and intimately connected to the traveller's sense of self. The independent woman traveller looks for new cultural frameworks that contrast with her familiar ones, in order to escape from everyday life (Wilson & Harris, 2006).

The urge to socialise and engage with other travellers and locals is an attribute shared by female travellers. Being away from the potential stresses of home makes it simpler to meet new people and form friendships on these types of travels. This enhances women's social skills and confidence. Therefore, autonomous travel allows women to grow personally and explore their identities. Women who travel solo not only gain independence and self-confidence, but also develop their social abilities (Phillips, 2019).

### ***2.2.3 Constraints faced by women***

Travel choices are intricate and multidimensional, impacted by factors such as gender, stage of life, and cultural traits. Before departing on a voyage, a woman must overcome various general inhibitions, such as obligations to care for sick, elderly, and young members of the household, as well as psychological obstacles. These restrictions are frequently viewed as insurmountable impediments that hinder a person's desire for recreation and participation (Diankenda, 2015). The idea that men and women perceive and feel constraints differently, and that women may encounter more particularised, distinctive, and limiting restrictions, is central to this discussion of women's leisure constraints. According to empirical research, women experience more significant barriers and frequently deal with more unique and restrictive situations and challenges (Heimtun, 2013) than males when participating in tourism activities.

Tourism activities are characterised by various constraints that impede involvement, prolonged engagement, and the achievement of desired rewards and satisfaction (Board, 2005). Although women are increasingly inclined to travel alone and explore independently, their travel habits are nevertheless shaped by ingrained anxieties and concerns. Due to social norms and historical conventions, women have historically been restricted to household responsibilities, having had few opportunities to achieve personal and financial independence (Wilson & Little, 2008).

Constraints are almost always considered "barriers," or immovable barriers that stand in the way of a person's desire for travel; and classified based on their nature and type. Several classification models for different types of travel constraints have been put forth, such as 'internal/external,' 'antecedent/intervening,' 'social-personal,' 'social-cultural,' 'physical,' and 'proscriptive/prescriptive' (Wilson, 2016). Constraints can be either temporary or permanent. Perhaps the most widely promulgated constraints classification model is that proposed by Crawford and Godbey (1987), who conceived of three overarching types of constraints, namely:

1. Interpersonal: limitations relating to a person's interactions with other people and the community.
2. Intrapersonal: limits are psychological and subjective beliefs or attitudes that a person possesses that can prevent them from engaging in desirable leisure activities (typically at the preference stage).
3. Structural: limitations resulting from prevailing demographic and physical variables impeding actual leisure activity engagement.

Women travelling alone face these types of constraints. Interpersonal restrictions result from social norms and safety worries voiced by friends, family, and communities; these factors frequently deter women from travelling alone because they perceive dangers. Intrapersonal restrictions, which originate from gendered expectations and societal conventions about women's autonomy in navigating unfamiliar surroundings, take the form of internalised worries, self-doubt, or lack of confidence (Yang & Tung, 2017). Structural limitations are the result of more extensive social structures and regulations. Examples include the lack of readily available safe transportation, lodging that favours male travellers, and institutionalised gender biases in the travel sector (Kozak & Kozak, 2016).

### **2.3 Asian solo female travellers**

The experiences of Asian female travellers weave another rich and complex story that highlights the interplay of culture, gender, and discovery. Asian women have taken on travels that cross national and cultural boundaries, from historic pilgrimages to contemporary excursions, moulding their identities and stories. Examining the experiences, struggles, and victories of Asian women travellers gives us a distinctive lens on the multitude of ways that travel may be a catalyst for self-actualisation, empowerment, and cross-cultural understanding in the Asian setting.

Studies on women travellers from diverse cultural backgrounds are lacking, and research about women, gender, and travel is still primarily authored by Western-based women. Due to cultural variations, Asian women's leisure experiences cannot be combined with those of Western women because women are not homogeneous in character. Certain conceptual stances taken for research in the West might not apply to the explanation of the values and social structure ingrained in non-Western nations (Seow, 2020). Asian and Western conceptions of leisure travel are not the same. People in Asia regard leisure travel more as a mindset than a physical activity. Asia's population is more likely to pursue leisure activities (quality over quantity) like travel as a means of finding enjoyment, happiness, life satisfaction, and gratification (Dattilo, 2016).

While some women travel for pleasure, others travel to further their education, assert their social standing, evade societal obligations, or seek sanctuary from their domestic situations. Women from marginalised or impoverished backgrounds face increased impediments to travel than their more fortunate peers (Teo & Leong, 2006). For example, while Indian women experience travel limits similar to those faced by women in the West, the nature of these challenges varies due to differences in opportunities and amenities. Exploring non-Western travel experiences calls into question Western-centric views on gender and leisure, emphasising the need for a more comprehensive knowledge of women's travel incentives and limits (Seow, 2020). Gender experts such as Henderson and Gibson (2013) advocate for a culturally sensitive research method that considers how cultural history and gender dynamics influence leisure experiences. Regardless of the incentive for travel, the patriarchal structures of traditional Asian nations continue to impede women's mobility and travel prospects more than in Western countries.

### ***2.3.1 Societal influences on Asian women***

A thorough analysis of the dynamics of tourism in the region requires an understanding of the evolution of Asian cultural values (Tan & Bakar, 2016). Asian societies are rich in cultural diversity, with distinct traditions, beliefs, and practices in each country and area, all influencing traveller behaviour and decision-making. Asian cultural values place a strong focus on communal peace and togetherness. Family relationships, social cohesiveness, and group-oriented conduct are highly valued (Tan & Bakar, 2016) in many Asian nations, including India, China, Japan, and South Korea. Given the wildly disparate traits of Asian societies, cultures, and populations, this is crucial information. Asian tourists may prioritise group travel or look for experiences that fortify interpersonal ties and social bonds because of this more collectivist worldview.

Culture offers a foundation for comprehending social interactions and forming identities and worldviews (Lopez Frias & Dattilo, 2021). Different societies have different cultural influences, affecting how people interact and follow social customs (Aitchison, 2003). Cultural and traditional ideas tremendously impact women's daily lives and leisure activities worldwide. The transfer of Western principles to Eastern cultures can be difficult, necessitating adaptation to local situations (Grewal, 1996). Considering these difficulties, Western culture has indeed influenced advances in women's rights and sexual equality, leading to calls for female empowerment in several Asian countries, including Taiwan and India (BBS, 2016). Cultural and religious values impact the social landscapes of Asian countries, which frequently maintain traditional gender norms in the face of modernisation. Countries such as China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan uphold patriarchal norms, and Islamic communities in Malaysia and Indonesia limit women's public participation. Cultural norms frequently reinforce gender inequality (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Understanding culture, history, and religious traditions is critical for the comprehension of changes in Asian women's leisure opportunities. Religion and culture are interrelated, with religious customs based on cultural norms (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003). Consequently, it is critical to recognise them as interdependent entities and understand the evolution of women's status in various cultural contexts, in order to better appreciate the roles that culture, tradition, and religious practices play in the evolution of Asian women's travel options in Asia (Beyers, 2017). Confucianism, Islam, and Hinduism have a significant impact on

cultural views and feminism in Asia. East and Southeast Asia (including China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Macau, Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia) are home to Confucianism; West Asia and some parts of Southeast Asia (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Malaysia) are home to Islam; and Central and South Asia, as well as some portions of West Asia, are home to Hinduism.

While efforts have been made to promote gender equality, patriarchal behaviours are still prominent in many communities. Gender disparity is based on Confucian ideas. Islamic cultural interpretations limit women's rights to promote spiritual parity between the sexes, as exemplified by the Saudi guardianship system. Hinduism's caste system exacerbates gender imbalance (Davar, 1999; Seow, 2020). Modern feminist movements, such as Hindu, Islamic, and Confucian fourth-wave feminism, challenge conventional standards amidst opposition (Klingorová & Havlíček, 2015). It is imperative to understand that it is impractical to attempt to include all of Asia in this review because of the wide range of ideologies, gender norms, and cultural values that exist throughout this enormous continent.

### ***2.3.2 Understanding Patriarchal Societies***

Gender frequently suggests a hierarchy, with one gender perceived as superior. Patriarchal civilizations have long maintained male domination by limiting women's rights and promoting gender inequities (Seow, 2020). "Patriarchy" refers to male authority, as observed in male-headed families where gender roles and patriarchy are inextricably linked, and men wield control over women through social interactions and hierarchical systems. This biologically deterministic structure places men as dominating and women as inferior, even in familial networks where men govern women. Being born as a woman frequently results in stigmas, taboos, and reduced social standing, particularly in developing nations where women are considered the 'weaker sex' who require protection and prefer to stay at home (Sharma, 2011). Many women, fearing social pressure, conform to gender norms, accepting subservience to men and limiting their lives to specified 'do's and don'ts.'

Male domination over women is neither "natural" nor biological, but rather the outcome of historical processes that date back to the ancient Near East. In human society, "patriarchy" can refer to either the classical concept based on Greek and Roman law or the modern definition of male rule over women in society and at home (Lerner & Lerner, 1986). Today, patriarchy refers to male dominance, especially in

homes where the man's function as a provider differs from the woman's role as a housewife (Khan, 2011). A feminist understanding of society centres on patriarchy, which is viewed as the primary cause of inequality, discrimination, and sexual harassment. Addressing patriarchy is critical for feminist movements that seek to tackle these challenges. With varied ideas, feminist organisations work together to demolish patriarchal systems and empower women to combat oppression (Buckley, 1986).

### ***2.3.3 Asian Women and the Complexities of Solo Travel***

In tourism spaces that predominantly prioritise men's experiences, women face gendered risks such as sexual harassment and unwanted attention, creating challenges for solo female travellers. This risk is particularly pronounced for Asian women due to cultural norms that dictate societal expectations of femininity and respectability. Influenced by religious and cultural factors like Confucianism and Islam, which uphold patriarchal gender standards, solo female travel in many Asian countries, including India, is still viewed as unconventional, leading to cultural stigmas and societal pressures.

The power distance index (PDI) assesses how unevenly power is dispersed in society. Lower PDI cultures value equality and women's empowerment, but higher PDI cultures tend to support male supremacy and reject gender equality. The high PDI in many Asian countries shows a cultural acceptance of hierarchical power structures, which impedes the growth of gender equality. Research by Seow (2020) shows that many Asian women are defying these cultural norms and choosing to pursue professional growth over more conventional responsibilities like marriage. This demonstrates how social progress, cultural interchange, and women's rights interact dynamically on a worldwide level (Seow, 2020). When contrasting the constraints faced by Asian women travelling solo with those in non-patriarchal societies, it becomes evident that patriarchal norms significantly amplify the challenges for women travellers in Asia. In non-patriarchal societies, women generally enjoy greater autonomy and freedom to explore independently without facing as many societal barriers (Tsai et al., 2006).

Women travelling alone in patriarchal societies confront unique challenges due to profoundly ingrained power structures and gender stereotypes. Strict moral standards and norms of conduct, particularly modesty and respectability, are enforced (Yang et al., 2018). Patriarchal ideologies promote male control over female autonomy, confining women to conventional duties and restricting their prospects for autonomous

endeavours (Guo, 2014). Women who travel alone face embarrassment, harassment, and sometimes violence, fostering a culture of fear and limiting discovery and adventure. Intersectional issues aggravate the difficulties. Women from impoverished or lower socioeconomic origins have limited access to resources and social networks that would help them travel (Seow & Brown, 2018). These women are disproportionately affected by patriarchal barriers to solo travel, which reinforces social norms of exclusion and inequality. In contrast, women in non-patriarchal communities have more autonomy and experience less societal limitations when travelling alone (Teo & Leong, 2006; Winter et al., 2009).

Racism is another significant hurdle that Asian women confront when travelling alone. Racial stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes can range from subtly hostile to outright aggressive. These situations can be especially tough for Asian women, who may encounter additional bias and scrutiny because of their race (Yang et al., 2018). Racist interactions with locals, visitors, and law enforcement can result in racial profiling, unfair treatment, or even verbal and physical assault (Archer, 2002). Such occurrences endanger the safety of lone female tourists and make travel less enjoyable. Overall, the complex web of restrictions imposed by patriarchal standards, cultural expectations, and racism makes solo travel a daunting proposition for many Asian women.

#### ***2.3.4 Asian Women Embracing Solo Travel***

Asian women are growing more aspirational, attempting to question traditional notions of femininity which depict women as weak, subservient, reliant, and limited to at-home pastimes. Asian women have discovered strategies to overcome their status in a patriarchal society. They have navigated and resisted these systems using various tactics (Tsai et al., 2006) and continue to travel alone even though it is considered improper (Seow & Brown, 2018). However, many Asian women continue to voluntarily tolerate their subjugation since it is believed to maintain social peace (Tsai et al., 2006). Since they frequently lack the time, money, and transportation to engage in leisure travel activities, it is evident that the exploitation of women at work and home limits their options, thereby affecting their mental health and perpetuating social subordination. Although being perceived as more vulnerable, many Asian women continue to travel for leisure, experiencing challenges from their perceived social standing (Teo & Leong, 2006). Other factors to consider

include ethnicity, race, religion, and class (or caste in India). Therefore, not all people from diverse cultural and demographic origins experience travelling in the same ways or with the same limits (Winter et al., 2009).

While research on Asian tourism is expanding, studies on Asian female tourists are still limited in international discourse, underlining the need for more attention to their distinct cultural contexts (Yang et al., 2017). Ignoring societal constraints and risks, many Asian women increasingly prefer solo travel for personal development and adventure (Pereira & Silva, 2018a). This resilience and determination highlight the agency and empowerment of women to shape their own travel experiences, and consequently their contribution to the broader narrative of gender equality and inclusivity in the tourism industry (Yang et al., 2018). Most academic research has focused on European and North American perspectives, creating a gap in understanding the Asian tourist dynamics (Correia & Dolnicar, 2021). Scholars call for more critical assessment of Asian travel experiences, especially solo female travellers from India, where patriarchal ideologies heavily influence women's behaviours and choices (Yang et al., 2018). Asian women face heightened concerns about preserving the family reputation and adhering to societal norms, thus impacting their willingness to travel alone (Seow & Brown, 2018). Furthermore, stereotypes portraying Asian women as timid and dependent further perpetuate barriers to solo travel (Jeffrey, 2019).

Amid these challenges, the growing number of female travellers demonstrates their tenacity to dismantle gender stereotypes and create lasting bonds. This review underscores women's resistance to social constraints and gender expectations, particularly among Asian women who travel solo. Their search for empowerment, escape from oppression, and transformative adventures highlights a significant area for further research.

#### **2.4 Indian female travellers**

As discussed earlier, solo female travel in India is a growing trend that reflects shifting societal standards and personal desires. As more Indian women embrace the opportunity to experience the globe on their own terms, the phenomenon of solo female travel has grown significantly (Nguyen & Hsu, 2022a). This transformation is more than just visiting new locations; it is a powerful expression of independence, self-discovery, and empowerment. Traditionally, India's cultural fabric has been knitted with familial and community bonds, with a strong emphasis on group travel. However, as educational prospects, economic

freedom, and digital access improve, more Indian women are venturing out on their own to travel. This movement is also encouraged by the increasing presence of female solo travellers in the general media, social media, and travel books, which provide both inspiration and practical advice (Neluhena et al., 2023). Solo female travel in India offers a unique combination of obstacles and opportunities. Safety is a top priority, influencing destination selection, travel times, and lodgings. Indian solo female travellers frequently use risk-mitigation methods, such as staying in women-only lodgings, using travel apps for secure transportation, and seeking advice and support from other female travellers. Though facing these limitations, solitary travel provides exceptional opportunities for cultural immersion, personal growth, and a greater understanding of one's personality (Singh & Sharma, 2023).

#### ***2.4.1 Indian women and their historical status in society***

The intricate web of traditions, practices, and values developed over thousands of years forms the foundation of Indian society, where the worth of a civilisation can be judged by the place given to women. During the Rig Vedic period (1500 BCE–1000 BCE), women had significant authority in family matters; their involvement in every sociocultural activity of early Indian culture served to honour women. The freedom of women to engage in sports, war, gymnastics, archery, horseback riding, public events, education, making decisions, and choosing male mates has reflected the social fabric of the Rig Vedic era (University et al., 2018). Women were valued and respected for more than just being the mistress of the home; instead, women showed enormous potential for making significant contributions to human civilization (Pal, 2019). Persistent gender equity was observed during Jainism and Buddhism (600 BCE–200 BCE).

The proverb where women are honoured, there reside the gods (Singh, 1998) reflects India's ancient culture's long-standing cultural respect for women. Ancient Hindu writings, such as the Manusmriti, emphasise women's essential responsibilities in religious rites and home affairs, showing them as equals to males and essential to community harmony. The text emphasises the link between how families are treated and how happy they are as a unit; mistreatment or disregarding women eventually leads to the disintegration of the family. These teachings shed light on prior cultural viewpoints about gender relations in Hindu society, even though they adhere to outmoded patriarchal traditions (Sarmah, 2020). The status of women in India has changed dramatically over the centuries, due to different cultural and historical forces.

During the Medieval period (500 CE to 1500 CE), dubbed the “Dark Ages,” women's societal status lowered significantly; and influenced by foreign conquerors like Muslims who viewed women as property and consequently imposed restrictive norms such as the purdah (veil) (Singh, 1998). Women were frequently seen as the property of their fathers, brothers, or spouses, with little autonomy. Indigenous Indians adopted similar practices to protect their women from the Muslim invaders, who practised polygamy and took women for their harems (reserved space in the house for females only). Muslim women in India faced even greater restrictions, being subjected to easy divorce laws (Kumar & Studies, 2002). Women's autonomy and freedom declined throughout this period, especially in Northern India.

In contrast, women in Southern India enjoyed a higher status and, consequently, were more involved in numerous sectors, including administration and education. The emergence of Christianity and British colonial control in the 16th century brought in new reforms that benefited women's rights. Missionaries supported women's education, while social reformers such as Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, and Annie Besant fought for women's empowerment, based on the ancient Vedic ideas of equality and dignity (Alam, 2015; Pradeep, 2018). Gandhi stressed women's protection and empowerment, connecting societal progress to women's freedom and security.

The modern notion of Indian women travelling alone is, therefore, consistent with the goals of these liberation fighters. Travelling securely and confidently reflects women's increasing autonomy and independence, thereby advancing gender equality and female empowerment. By adopting the Vedic ideals of respect, equality, and dignity for women, India may continue to create an atmosphere where women can flourish and contribute to the growth and development of the country without fear or discrimination.

#### ***2.4.2 Modern Indian Women***

In contemporary India, women's status is paradoxical. Women may achieve great success, but they frequently experience violence from family members. With tremendous advancement compared to previous eras (Chakrapani & Kumar, 1994), women are frequently relegated to household responsibilities such as supplying fuel, food, and water, consequently restricting their participation in India's development. Preferential treatment and concern for this underprivileged group of women is, therefore, critical.

Over the past fifty years, Indian women have achieved significant progress, but they continue to face barriers and cultural inequities in a male-dominated country. Contemporary Indian women face issues such as deeply rooted gender inequity, rampant violence, restricted access to healthcare and education, economic imbalance, cultural norms, and insufficient legal protections (Singh, 1998; Punam & Sharma, 2017). While progressing in several areas, women still face challenges in decision-making, healthcare, employment, and education. Domestic abuse and sexual harassment are still prevalent, compounded by societal stigma and inadequate support networks. Economic empowerment and worker engagement are hampered by unequal opportunities, low wages, and limited access to formal employment, particularly in leadership positions. Cultural norms perpetuate gender stereotypes, and legislative protections frequently fail to appropriately address the violations of women's rights.

Understanding women's historical evolution and status in Indian society is essential when considering the realities of women travelling alone in India. Throughout history, gender conventions, colonial legacies, women's movements, and the fight for independence have all influenced societal attitudes about women's autonomy and mobility. Examining these impacts helps to understand the problems women may encounter when travelling alone and informs all attempts to establish supportive settings for safe and confident travel. This historical viewpoint deepens any discourses about women travelling alone, by emphasising the complexities of gender dynamics and societal customs that continue to influence women's experiences today.

### ***2.4.3 Gendered Constraints Faced in India***

Due to the shifting circumstances (changing social, economic and cultural conditions), women are becoming more interested in tourism-related activities, seeking out opportunities to travel for their own enjoyment. Given that women make up a sizable portion of the tourism industry, these issues and constraints must be carefully considered (Heimtun, 2013). In Indian society, it is an unwritten law that women are the responsibility of their parents up until marriage, at which point they become the husband's obligation. In Indian culture, gender roles are influenced by religious and cultural customs, which set the rules for socially acceptable behaviour (Selamat & Ratthinan, 2022). Although many Indian women are highly educated, societal expectations and gender norms often limit their economic opportunities, with ambitious women facing criticism and stereotypes (Pande & Moore, 2015; Sudarshan & Bhattacharya, 2008). Financial

dependence affects women's travel choices, and this reliance leads to cautious travel practices and limits trip variety and experiences. Gender dynamics, cultural norms, and financial considerations all affect decision-making, particularly for women from marginalised backgrounds who face additional challenges from restricted access to resources, education, and social networks. Intersectionality exacerbates these obstacles, limiting these women's travel prospects (Selamat & Ratthinan, 2022).

India's vast regional diversity presents challenges for female solo travellers. With nearly 1.3 billion people speaking thousands of languages, communication barriers arise, and alongside considerable variation in transportation infrastructure, these issues affect women's mobility and safety (Aadil Ahmad Shairgojri, 2022). Although Hindi is the Indian Union's official language, many states have their own official languages, creating communication hurdles that reflect on culture and identity (Patel, 2023). Another significant barrier is India's transportation network, which varies greatly, with well-developed infrastructure in major cities and popular tourist destinations but few or unreliable options in rural areas and remote villages (Singh, 2005). This discrepancy limits women's mobility, particularly when they travel alone.

Their freedom of mobility is further restricted by a lack of safe and reliable public transportation and insufficient safety measures. Access to transportation hubs is frequently problematic, necessitating long journeys, which raises extra safety concerns, especially for solitary female travellers (Gahlot et al., 2013). Gender issues in transportation policies have received little attention, with women in South and Southeast Asia, notably India, facing persistent mobility impediments (Sil et al., 2024). The National Crime Records Bureau shows a steady increase in offenses against women utilising public transit, with societal and patriarchal norms limiting their independence and safety (Joshi et al., 2022). Strong views about solo travel and entrenched gender norms impact women's perceptions of safety, leading them to make cautious travel selections or avoid public transportation entirely (Shirgaokar, 2019). Women's travel prospects are further limited by factors such as transportation expense, availability, and reliability, as well as a culture of victim-blaming for women who suffer harassment (Mahambare & Dhanaraj, 2022).

Household responsibilities and the desire for companionship significantly impact women's travel decisions. Many women feel guilty about leaving family behind for leisure travel (Wilson, 2002, 2004). Psychological needs like escape and social interaction, including meeting new people or reconnecting with relatives, are

also influential. Intangible factors, including the reputation of a destination and the quality of services, can increase feelings of vulnerability (Jordan & Gibson, 2005). Addressing these obstacles is crucial for effective destination marketing and development, especially for solo female travellers (Doran, 2016).

Travelling in India presents significant interpersonal challenges for women, primarily because of societal views and cultural traditions. The most typical way these limitations appear is through verbal and physical abuse, called "eve teasing." Women often feel uneasy and unsafe, especially in public spaces like markets, tourist destinations, and public transportation (Natarajan, 2016). With a population of 490 million in cities, only 3,100 cases of eve teasing were reported in Indian cities, reflecting a patriarchal mindset that devalues women, thereby making women feel uneasy and unsafe; especially so when combined with offensive comments or actions (Sharma, 2011). This mindset limits women's freedom and ability to explore.

Additionally, India is often seen as dangerous for women due to high rates of sexual harassment, assault, and theft, all of which discourage solo or group travel (Malik, 2018a).

These elements combine to create a complicated environment that limits women's freedom of movement and mobility. To overcome these obstacles, coordinated initiatives are needed to question patriarchal beliefs, improve public safety protocols, and give women more access to safe and dependable transit choices.

#### ***2.4.4 Navigating Constraints in India***

When women travel with challenges such as safety concerns, cultural norms, or budget constraints, their destination choices are influenced by several factors. Women prioritise safety, opting for destinations with lower crime rates, reliable public transportation, and a reputation for being friendly to solo female travellers (Kour & Manhas, 2020). Cultural considerations also play a significant role because women choose places where they feel comfortable with navigating social expectations (Apostolopoulos et al., 2001). Women's safety, independence, and travel experiences depend on being able to successfully navigate these limitations. Women can regain control of their travel experiences and decision-making processes by effectively overcoming societal and cultural constraints. Solo travellers who overcome challenges and hurdles tend to feel more empowered and confident, exhibiting adaptation, creativity, and tenacity in unexpected situations (Seacole, 1857).

There are four phases in which perceived danger in travel can be studied: (1) prior to choosing a destination; (2) pre-departure to the chosen destination; (3) during travelling; and (4) after travelling. Risk reduction can also happen at all of these four consumption stages. Indian women travelling alone in India must carefully examine factors such as accessibility, cultural norms, and safety. They seek assistance from fellow travellers, online forums, and women-only travel organisations. They use crime statistics, safety measures, and support networks to make informed judgments. A smooth and comfortable travel experience is ensured by considering language difficulties, transportation options, and ease of navigating in the desired destination. Respectable travel agencies like Go Travel cater to female tourists' safety, offering tailored trips with group tours, knowledgeable guides, and extensive precautions for women who are willing to travel alone (Chhajer et al., 2022). Women thoroughly research destinations, favouring places like South Indian states over Uttar Pradesh due to lower crime rates, better infrastructure, and a reputation for being friendly to female tourists. South India is often preferred for its strong community ties, hospitality, efficient governance, and well-developed tourism infrastructure, enhancing the sense of safety and promoting responsible tourism activities (Churumuri, 2012). Furthermore, South India's well-developed tourism infrastructure and emphasis on encouraging responsible tourism activities may further improve the sense of safety for some visitors.

Before travelling, women check vacation arrangements, including itineraries, lodging reservations, and emergency contacts. They familiarise themselves with local cultural norms and practices to navigate their destination respectfully (Cosmopoulos, 2023). Staying alert and following gut feelings, they avoid busy or dimly lit areas and illegal vehicles, opting for trusted transportation like ridesharing apps or registered taxis (Nomads, 2015). To decrease the chance of harassment and to prevent unwanted attention, they dress modestly, choosing clothing that hides skin (Dara, 2017). In addition, Arora (2020), advises women to keep their distance from outsiders and avoid circumstances or people who unnerve or threaten them; choose reputable accommodations and evaluate hotel rooms for security concerns, including basics such as a first aid kit, a local SIM card, and any prescriptions you may require. It is recommended to carry pepper spray, rubber door stoppers, and electro stabbers, as well as safety apps that provide location sharing and emergency assistance. Moderation or abstinence from drinking helps to retain consciousness.

## **2.5 Conceptual framework of Indian solo women travellers**

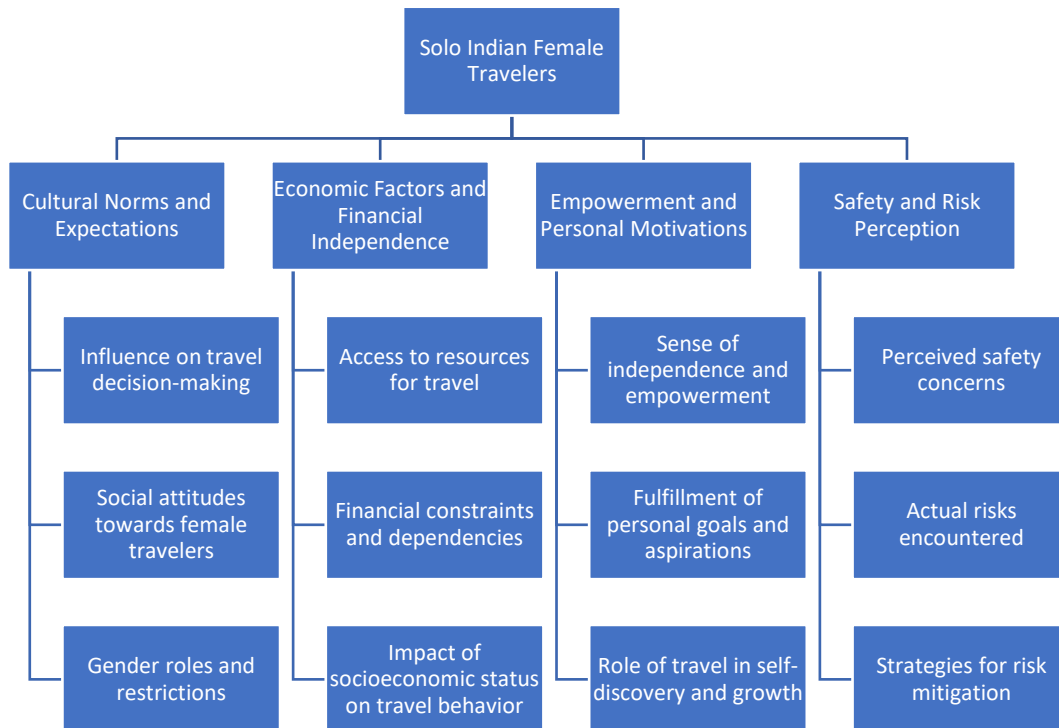
A conceptual framework is a network of related ideas that offer a thorough explanation of an event or phenomenon (Tamene, 2016). It evolves from the literature review and accurately represents the ideas informing this research project.

This conceptual framework (Figure 2) is essential to comprehend the complex aspects of Indian women's solo travel. Through a thorough analysis of the interactions between cultural norms and expectations, financial and economic factors, safety and risk perception, empowerment, and personal motives, this framework offers an all-encompassing perspective on the reasons, obstacles, and results of Indian women's solo travel. It is possible to gain insight into the social context in which women make travel decisions by recognising the impact of cultural norms and societal expectations. This context includes family dynamics, gender roles, and societal views about female autonomy. Analysing financial and economic aspects also sheds light on the opportunities and practical limitations that affect women's capacity for solo travel, such as budgetary restraints, resource accessibility, and financial independence.

Furthermore, examining safety and risk perception reveals the difficulties women encounter when acclimating to new situations and tackling issues like harassment, personal safety, and risk-reduction tactics. The transforming potential of solo travel for Indian women is finally shown by examining empowerment and personal motives, emphasising elements like self-discovery, independence, and personal improvement. This conceptual framework offers a road map for comprehending the intricate dynamics of female solo travel and its consequences for women's autonomy and mobility in the Indian context by combining these fundamental ideas.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Solo Female Travellers in India*



Note. This is a framework with concepts that influence women when they choose to travel alone. Own work.

## 2.6 Chapter conclusion

The study draws attention to the difficulties Asian women encounter when travelling alone in a tourist environment that frequently favours Western and male-oriented experiences. Asian women face problems that are not just gendered but also racially charged as they traverse environments where their identities collide with societal norms surrounding femininity and ethnicity. With these challenges, the research indicates that Asian women might feel empowered if they successfully manage these risks and power relationships. Asian women encounter transformative processes that reshape their gender identities, from choosing to defy social conventions and exercising agency over their travel experiences. The review highlights the marginalised aspects of the realities of Indian women on solitary travel.

Even though there is research that documents the reasons behind, and challenges encountered by, Indian women travelling alone, much is still unknown about their actual experiences and how their travels have affected them. Researchers can find the complex narratives of empowerment, resilience, and self-discovery

that arise from the solo travels of Indian women travellers, by exploring the lived experiences of these women travellers. Indian women travellers frequently experience profound metamorphoses from their in-depth engagement with various cultures, environments, and individuals. They challenge social conventions and exert agency over their travel experiences as they negotiate gendered and racially specific hazards in the tourist industry. Through their travels, these women not only empower women personally but also help to transform the societal norms regarding Indian womanhood and independence. This greater comprehension, along with the conceptual framework developed from the literature, allows me to relate this to the experiences of solo Indian travellers in this research project which is crucial to the interpretations.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter continues the critical literature review, which identified a gap in the existing research on the social and cultural constraints that Indian women face when travelling alone, and how their solo travel experiences might contribute to their sense of empowerment and emancipation. The present chapter outlines the research goals intended to investigate these neglected fields. The governing philosophical precepts of the study—such as the ontological and epistemological underpinnings—are also covered. It then explores the qualitative approaches used to provide a detailed knowledge of how Indian women solo travellers navigate societal and cultural barriers and how solo travel affects their sense of empowerment; these methodologies were selected to extensively study the lived experiences of these women.

The method for collecting data is explained in depth, including how research sites were chosen and how blogs provided valuable, contextualised insights. The last section of the chapter addresses the ethical limitations and ramifications of the study, ensuring that the research was carried out responsibly and sensitively. Using this multi-layered qualitative technique, the researcher hopes to address the gap found in previous research, by shedding light on the little-known topic of Indian women's solo travel experiences and how they relate to their empowerment.

#### *3.1.1 Aims and Objectives*

The number of women travelling alone has been rising significantly (Ejupi & Medarić, 2022). Western women and specific Asian women's groups have been the focus of much research in this field. Research on the experiences of Southeast Asian and East Asian women travelling alone has highlighted the associated driving forces, their empowerment, and obstacles (Nguyen & Hsu, 2022b). However, there is a research vacuum concerning Indian women who travel independently. Considering the socio-cultural setting and distinctive experiences of Indian women, this disparity is significant. Indian women's travel decisions and experiences are influenced by societal expectations, safety concerns, and cultural standards, among other factors (George, 2021). The lack of research on solo travel has hampered a complete understanding of Indian women travellers' perspectives, coping methods, and empowerment through solo travel. Thus, to address the

gap, the main aim of this research is to explore the solo travel experiences of Indian women. The objectives of this study are as follows:

RQ1: What social and cultural limitations related to gender do Indian women travelling alone face on their travels?

RQ2. How do Indian women travelling alone deal with these limitations?

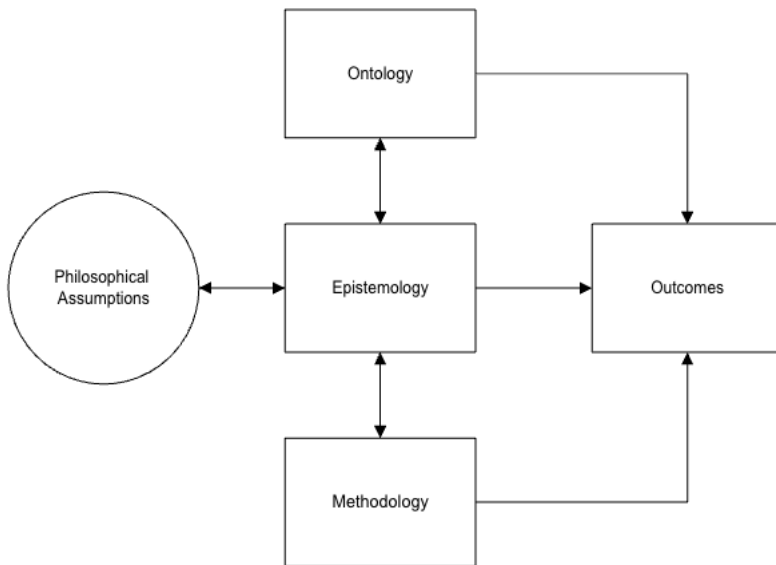
RQ3. How do the experiences of solo travel influence the empowerment of Indian women despite social and cultural limitations?

### **3.2 Research philosophy**

Research philosophy refers to the overarching framework that guides researchers in how to collect and analyse data related to a specific phenomenon. It serves as a theory that informs various aspects of the research process, including research design, strategies, and sampling techniques (Harrison & Reilly, 2011). Additionally, research philosophy is recognised as an essential factor to enhance and refine the research methods, thereby leading to improved data collection and a better ability to address the research questions. It is crucial to first and foremost consider the appropriate ontology and epistemology (Alele & Malau-Aduli, 2023).

**Figure 3**

*Research Framework*



Note. This framework was adapted from Schlegel (2015)

Research is a process that begins with ontological and epistemological assumptions. However, this is not a phenomenon-focused process; instead, it is a complex process because the results of a specific methodology might have an unfavourable effect on philosophical assumptions, and methodology itself is influenced by ontology and epistemology (Durberry, 2018). The research framework for examining Indian women who travel alone includes ontology, epistemology, methodology, philosophical assumptions, and outcomes. Ontology investigates the truth of people's travel experiences within societal and cultural frameworks. Epistemology emphasises the acquisition of knowledge through human narratives. The methodology involves qualitative techniques for data collection. Philosophical ideas regarding female equality and empowerment guide the research. The findings show that solo travel boosts self-confidence and independence and disrupts established gender norms, adding to women's empowerment despite societal and cultural constraints.

**3.2.1 Ontology**

The philosophical study of 'being' and the nature of reality is known as ontology. In a research context, ontology refers to the researcher's assumptions about the characteristics of the physical or social world and the entities that inhabit it (Gray, 2014). It focuses on understanding the nature of these entities, what

constitutes reality, and how they relate to one another. A researcher's ontological perspectives influence their conceptualisation and investigation of phenomena, as well as the methods and strategies they employ (Smith, 2012). Therefore, it asks the question: What is reality?

Within ontology, two contrasting philosophical stances are relativism and realism. Realism asserts the existence of an objective, mind-independent reality that can be examined and understood through rational inquiry or empirical methods (Jenkins, 2010). Conversely, relativism holds that morality, knowledge, and truth are subjective and variable, dependent on the individual, culture, or context. Relativism emphasises diverse perspectives and cultural differences in forming truth claims and moral judgments, rejecting the possibility of universal or absolute truths (Rassokha, 2022).

This research project adopts a relativistic methodology to investigate the gender-related social and cultural constraints faced by Indian women when travelling alone, adhering to the notion that meanings that are socially formed constitute reality (Ritchie, 2013); coping strategies are also considered along with the way in which solo travel enhances their feelings of empowerment and liberation. The research aims to provide a nuanced analysis that respects the diversity of perspectives and illuminates how Indian women navigate and find empowerment through solo travel; while also acknowledging the subjective and context-dependent nature of these experiences. By considering the specific sociocultural context and challenges faced by Indian women, this study seeks to contribute to the significant knowledge gap in this area.

### ***3.2.2 Epistemology***

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that examines the nature and process of knowledge acquisition. It investigates questions such as how knowledge is obtained, what standards are used to justify beliefs, and the relationship between truth and belief (Steup & Neta, 2005). Epistemology distinguishes between rationalism, which emphasises reason, and empiricism, which focuses on sensory experience. It also considers various justification theories, such as reliability, coherence, and foundationalism. Epistemology asks fundamental questions like: What is reality, and how can I know it? What knowledge can I trust?

Within epistemology, there are several key perspectives, including scepticism and the influence of social and cultural contexts on knowledge (Hofer, 2001). Importantly, epistemology provides a framework to analyse

the social and cultural constraints faced by Indian women when travelling alone, their coping strategies, and the ways in which solo travel empowers them. The epistemological theory of constructivism holds that individuals actively create their own knowledge through subjective experiences, mental models, and social interactions. It emphasises how knowledge is shaped by cultural factors and individual interpretation rather than being discovered or transmitted (Mogashoa, 2014). In contrast, Ratner (2002) explains that objectivism maintains that there are objective truths that exist independently of personal viewpoints and worldviews. Objectivists argue that knowledge can be based on empirical data and reasoning to comprehend an external reality.

As an epistemological stance, subjectivism emphasises the subjectivity of truth and knowing. It asserts that knowledge is grounded in personal experiences, emotions, and convictions, and there are no universal or objective truths because everyone's perception of reality is shaped by their subjective interpretations (Bumbuc, 2016). In the context of this research project, subjectivism helps to recognise and honour the diverse subjective experiences and interpretations of Indian women travelling alone. It acknowledges the impact of cultural context on personal experiences and the construction of subjective meaning. Rather than striving for strict objectivity, the researcher aims for a stance of sympathetic neutrality, constantly evaluating how data is gathered and interpreted while being mindful of any preconceptions or biases.

### ***3.2.3 Paradigm***

Within the realm of research and scientific philosophy, a paradigm is a structure or model that directs investigators in their exploration and comprehension of a particular topic or area of inquiry. It includes the standard ideas, presumptions, techniques, and theories that underpin scientific research within a field or society. The conceptualisation of the researcher's problem, data collection and analytic techniques, interpretation of findings, and research communication are all influenced by paradigms (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). They serve as a prism through which researchers see the world, determine what constitutes genuine knowledge, and thereby direct their methods. Research within a field can change path because paradigms are not set in stone and can change over time as fresh viewpoints and data become available. The question here is: What approach can I use to acquire legitimate knowledge?

The interpretivist paradigm was selected for this research project because it values human interpretation. This theoretical viewpoint emerged to comprehend and elucidate social and human reality. Its primary foci are historically situated and culturally derived interpretations of the social life-world. By utilising online blogs written by Indian women, the interpretivist paradigm provides a valuable framework to understand and analyse their experiences. By adopting an interpretivist perspective, I can recognise the subjective nature of their narratives and focus on the meanings and interpretations they assign to their solo travel experiences (Chowdhury, 2014). This paradigm allows me to go beyond the surface-level data and delve into the social backgrounds of these travellers, to understand how their unique contexts shape their decision to travel alone and influence their encounters and interpretations of challenges. Through the interpretivist lens, I can fully engage with their stories, acknowledge my pre-conceived assumptions, and construct meaningful interpretations that capture the richness and diversity of their solo travel experiences that potentially lead to their sense of empowerment.

Different interpretations of their reality result from considering other factors, including gender, religion, and personal views. In this interpretivist paradigm, assumptions are expected yet welcomed, which motivates the researcher to immerse themselves entirely in their subject. Although I entered this research with preconceived notions, I was able to identify early on which areas needed more investigation and which were based on my subjective experiences. I can identify with the experiences these Indian travellers had because I have also travelled alone, and their stories have meaningful significance for me.

#### ***3.2.4 Qualitative Research Approach***

I chose qualitative research as my primary methodology because it allows me to look at the tourism aspirations and challenges of the subjects, how they interpret their experiences, and what meanings they attribute to those experiences. Qualitative research methods are becoming more widely recognized in tourism studies, expanding beyond practical issues (Ren, 2014). Qualitative research is a good fit for my study on Indian women travellers who travel alone. Using this scientific approach enables me to explore the subtleties and personal elements of their experiences. I can fully immerse myself in the richness of their narratives and understand their motives, struggles, and personal development by analysing written blogs. Through

qualitative research, I can delve further into the personal narratives and individualised perspectives shared by these travellers, surpassing the boundaries of quantitative data (Hancock, 2018).

This qualitative method thoroughly examines their experiences, illuminating the elements that affect their choice to travel alone and how they make their way through their expeditions. Following the collection of information from the travel bloggers' narratives, thematic analysis was applied. Each section is crucial to my research, and later in this chapter, I explore in greater detail how the data were gathered, the ethical guidelines the study was required to follow, and the limitations of the approach. It answers the question: What procedures can I use to acquire legitimate knowledge?

### ***3.2.5 Narrative Inquiry of Blogs***

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research approach that studies human experiences through storytelling. The earliest method human experiences have used to make sense of the world is through narratives or storytelling. Narratives are a common source of data for qualitative research in tourism (Volo, 2010).

Researchers can collect a series of blog narratives written by individual bloggers, treating each post as a story that reveals the blogger's experiences, perspectives, and sense-making processes (Wells, 2011). By closely reading and interpreting the structure, language, plot development, and emotional expressions within these blog narratives researchers can identify common themes, patterns, and underlying meanings that emerge across multiple posts. Most narratives emerge in the post-trip phase when travellers reflect on their trip. From the narrative format of the blog entries scholars can better comprehend how bloggers shape their identities and interpret their personal experiences. Moreover, narrative inquiry necessitates reflexivity on the researcher's part, acknowledging that the analysis and interpretation of the blog narratives rely heavily on the researcher's own positionality and interpretations.

The narrative inquiry method offers a rich and contextualised perspective for examining the individual experiences and processes of meaning-making recorded in blog posts (Aasetre & Gundersen, 2012). By applying the qualitative approach, I can be selective and deliberate in my selection of blog posts for my data collection. The bloggers discuss how solo travel has helped them to become independent, and they share the experiences they have gained through travel; this aligns with my key research questions. I spent an extensive amount of time reading their narratives to determine whether they were appropriate for the study.

### *3.2.6 Netnography method*

Netnography is a valuable resource for learning, and moments throughout a traveller's journey have particular significance for them. Blogging research provides rich insights into how travellers communicate the ways in which their experiences have transformed them for the better (Kim, 2008). This is beneficial for Indian women travellers who are travelling alone for some time, sharing their experiences on publicly accessible travel blogs (Azariah, 2016). Blogs are a phenomenon of expression that, when properly interpreted, can be utilised to generate insightful knowledge about the individual and society (Schmidt, 2007). My chosen methodology, therefore, allows me to be very particular about the sample I used to acquire the data.

Technological advancements have led to travellers' increased use of the internet for communication, planning, and guidance, thus facilitated the development of netnography. A research method using ethnographic methodologies to explore online groups and digital spaces, netnography is used in tourist research to examine online communities. Combining "net" (internet) and "ethnography", netnography refers to the study of online communities, cultures, and social interactions. By immersing oneself in online platforms like forums and social media it is possible to understand the culture, dynamics, and social behaviours of these virtual communities (Whalen, 2018). Unlike traditional ethnography, participant observation is not always necessary for netnography. Using publicly available blogs as a data source has the advantage of being non-intrusive, because researchers can gather insights from travellers' personal experiences without their direct involvement. This allows the researcher to access information shared while the travel events were still fresh in the bloggers' minds (Kozinets, 2002).

I used the "lurker method" in the context of netnography. This qualitative research method examines online communities by passively observing interactions. By monitoring postings, comments, and other digital traces, researchers can collect data without interfering with the natural activity of the community (Sun et al., 2014). This method offers naturalistic observation and an accurate portrayal of the dynamics and culture of the community. In this way, I could ensure that my presence did not affect the dynamics of the community, thereby enabling the capture of real behaviours and interactions as they happen. This non-intrusive and

ethical approach respects permission and privacy, offering a genuine representation of the community's culture and evolution throughout time (Takahashi et al., 2002).

The lurker method improves the authenticity and depth of my netnographic research. The lurker approach functions as a fundamental data collection strategy when paired with netnography, the anthropological study of online communities. Using the lurker technique, researchers can obtain genuine, covert insights into the dynamics, customs, and practices of the community, thereby enhancing their overall comprehension of the virtual world. Blogging provides rich insights into how tourists express the transformational effects of their experiences. This is particularly beneficial for understanding the growing market of solo Indian travellers; many have shared their journeys and experiences on publicly accessible travel blogs. Analysing these digital narratives can provide meaningful knowledge about the self and society. Through their digital narratives, the bloggers shared insights from their travels that revealed the subtleties of being a native Indian, which was crucial to the findings, even though occasionally challenging to obtain the most appropriate answers for the research study questions.

### **3.3 Data collection**

Blog sites, a type of social media, have gained popularity due to their interactive nature, allowing readers to engage with content by leaving comments and connecting with other reviewers. Blogs have become an integral part of the modern travel experience, providing a platform for travellers to share their inner experiences and stories openly (Volo, 2010). Bloggers use their writing as a form of self-reflection, exploring themselves by sharing personal details and creating their identity through storytelling. This process allows bloggers to express their feelings and relive their travel experiences through introspection (Bosangit et al., 2009). Additionally, blogs have provided women with a space to break traditional gender norms and discover radical variations of self-expression through personalised writing. By analysing travel blogs, researchers can gain valuable insights into traveller behaviour, psychology, preferences for activities and destinations, and even cultural and gender dynamics (Okazaki & Hirose, 2009). Travel service operators often use blog research to better understand consumer needs and develop more tailored products and services.

However, it is worth noting that while blogs offer a unique opportunity to understand the experiences and perceptions of independent Indian female travellers, there is limited research on this specific demographic regarding market segmentation and gender studies. Further exploration of Asian women as travellers and tourists could provide valuable insights into the preferences, motivations, and unique challenges they may face (Bates, 2014). By delving more deeply into the blog narratives of Asian female travellers, researchers and travel service operators can gain a more comprehensive understanding of this market segment and develop strategies to cater to their specific needs and desires.

Building interest in internet ethnography can be facilitated by reading various travel blogs on social networking sites. This social science and viewpoint, known as netnography or virtual ethnography, involves conducting fieldwork on the blogosphere. Qualitative interpretivist and non-intrusive data collection approaches were used to obtain pertinent travel blog data. The data analysis procedure used thematic analysis. This research project examines how Indian female travellers who travel alone conceptualise their experiences and how independent travel has impacted them, going beyond the popular perception of the economic worth of female tourists.

### **3.4 Data sources**

Google search engine was used with the main keywords, "Solo Indian Female Travel Bloggers" to find relevant blogs. The initial results displayed famous Indian travel bloggers who had travelled worldwide, including bloggers from other countries who had travelled in India. These blogs primarily focused on providing tips and concerns about safety while travelling in India, rather than sharing personal experiences. To narrow down the search and maintain a focus on Indian women who had travelled within India, a website was discovered that inspired Indian solo female travellers. The website, with the heading, "For that Conservative and Scared Mind: Get your Dose of Inspiration from these Indian Solo Female Travelers", featured a list of women who had travelled in India and several other countries (<https://www.travelhippies.in/indian-solo-female-travelers/>).

To ensure the relevance of the research, the listed blogs were examined individually, with a preference for those that featured written blogs rather than social media pages. Approximately 20 blogs were initially listed, but the majority had links to their social media pages and required a different approach. Therefore, I chose

travellers who had written blogs only. After further filtering, six blogs were selected. The second phase involved reading one or two articles from each selected blog and using the blog search systems or tags to determine to what extent their written content focussed on solo travel experiences. The blog samples were selected based on two criteria. Firstly, they needed to be relevant, specifically the content should include comprehensive travel narratives that describe in detail the blogger's travel experiences and reflections. Secondly, the blogs needed to be rich in content, providing sufficient and descriptive information about the travel. This reduced the list to the six blogs listed below:

<https://the-shooting-star.com/blog>

<https://www.renuka-voyagerforlife.com>

<https://www.ravenouslegs.com>

<http://thesologlobetrotter.com>

<https://blog.sheswanderful.com/>

<https://swatijain.com/>

These blogs were written by individual Indian travel bloggers, both professional and semi-professional. Most Indians speak English well; therefore, all the blog writing was in English. Table one shows the identifying details of the travel bloggers chosen for the research. Pseudonyms were used to protect the bloggers' privacy. The bloggers' age range was between the late 20s and early 40s.

**Table 1.***Solo Indian Female Blogger's Profile*

Name	Age	Status	State of Origin	States visited in India
<b>Lakshmi</b>	30's	Single	Dehradun	20+
<b>Rashmi</b>	Late 20's	Single	Uttar Pradesh	6
<b>Banu</b>	30's	Married	Delhi	21
<b>Devi</b>	30's	Single	Gujrat	13
<b>Rasika</b>	42	Married	Mumbai	10+
<b>Sukanya</b>	39	Single	Mumbai	20

Note. This table contains the information for six bloggers whose blogs were used in this research.

The selected blogs were from six Indian female travellers. I have not focused on when the blogs were written because the date was irrelevant to this research; my research focused on the stories of solo traveller experiences. All bloggers had travelled both domestically and internationally. Most travellers originated their journeys from within India, while a smaller proportion opted to venture beyond the country's borders to expand their travel experiences. Some of these travellers relocated abroad, primarily to pursue educational opportunities, while others remained in India but travelled extensively across different states in a nomadic fashion. As travel bloggers, their home addresses were not permanent, and some indicated their current location using phrases like "currently in \_\_\_," implying that their whereabouts changed frequently. Due to the nature of the lurker netnography approach, I had no interaction with the bloggers. I had to rely solely on the blogs written and posted by these travellers.

Additionally, I have used the publicly available interviews of six of the bloggers. Because the blogger comments in these interviews addressed my research topic, I considered them for my study. For example,

they provided accurate and pertinent answers when asked how they dealt with societal conventions. The interviews used for the research are mentioned below:

<https://www.adventurouskate.com/viewpoints-travelling-indian-woman-shivya-nath/>

<https://blog.sheswanderful.com/invisible-boundaries-between-indian-women-and-travel/>

<https://www.travelandleisureasia.com/in/people/interview-with-solo-traveler-and-climate-activist-shivya-nath/>

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/10/23/shivya-nath-a-bold-solo-traveler-who-is-breaking-gender-stereotypes/>

<https://f5escapes.com/medhavi-davda-ravenous-legs/>

### **3.5 Data analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) explained thematic analysis, which was utilised to produce the findings and determine the responses to the study questions. It was possible to move back and forth between the six iterative and recursive phases of thematic analysis whenever a new discovery or modification was required. Because most of the data was text, I could understand the significance of my findings through the repeating themes. Therefore, I used this analysis approach.

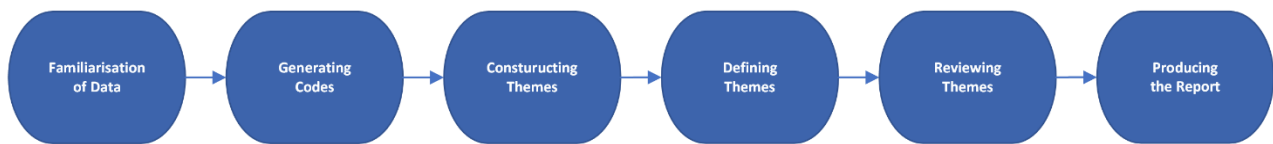
#### **3.5.1 Thematic analysis**

A popular technique in qualitative research for capturing the richness of meaning in text databases is thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2011). It goes beyond straightforward word or phrase computations and instead concentrates on finding and characterising themes in the data. Implicit and explicit ideas contained in the data can be interpreted using thematic analysis, and common codes are created to symbolise the themes that are found. By examining meaning patterns throughout a dataset, this technique aims to address particular research issues (Walters, 2016). Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight six phases for correctly analysing data into themes. The procedure entails firstly becoming acquainted with the data, generating preliminary codes,

recognizing themes and analysing and clarifying them, and ultimately generating the final report (Figure 4). To facilitate the reader's understanding of how text is interpreted and reported, a network-like diagram is used to provide valuable topical graphical representations and their relationships (Christou, 2022). Based on the research topic and the conceptual framework used, I decided to use a theoretical thematic analysis because this allowed me to code for specific questions and simultaneously allow deeper analysis of the themes. I actively looked at themes related to my conceptual framework; however, I am aware these can lead to bias.

#### **Figure 4**

##### *Six-phase Thematic Analysis Process*



Note. This image depicts the six stages of the thematic analysis approach adopted by Walters (2016).

##### ***Stage 1 Familiarisation of data***

To identify themes that meaningfully reflect the essence of the research phenomena, familiarisation ensures that the researcher has a firm grasp of the nuances and contextual aspects within the data. This paves the way for the future phases of thematic analysis (Willig & Rogers, 2017). As I went through the blogs a second time, I became even more acquainted with the nature of the trips the writers have taken and how they have chronicled their adventures. One of the first things I looked at was their "About" page, which usually includes information about their life before they started travelling and the reason they started travelling. This helps me understand why they started blogging. I perused roughly four to five pieces from every blog, emphasising details that directly addressed the research issue or raised questions that had not been considered before.

##### ***Stage 2 Generating codes***

After developing a general understanding of the data collection, the next step was to generate codes. While familiarisation involves taking casual notes, generating codes is methodical and provides meaningful labels

for the data. Coding helps to develop insights and provides a foundation for the analysis; it also helps in the modification of the research questions (Saldaña, 2013). I enumerated recurring terms or phrases pertinent to the study topics. Themes like ‘freedom,’ ‘passion,’ ‘male gaze,’ ‘exploring,’ ‘culture,’ ‘society,’ or “stereotypes” were actively sorted. Reviewing the similarities and differences with coded material continued until no more pertinent new data could be added to the data set.

### ***Stage 3 Constructing themes***

This phase entails the grouping of many codes into possible themes, emphasising a more general theme. Themes capture the expanded and fundamental significance of the data. Themes typically interpret most data sets with fewer units of meaning, albeit they may incorporate diverse data or emerge in different situations. The result of theme creation is thematic mapping. Every clustering code is treated as a potential (Jason & Glenwick, 2016).

For instance, I developed a subject of constraints that includes codes for cultural and societal norms, gendered stereotypes, financial insecurity, and safety and facility concerns. Subsequent discussions will clarify all the topics and codes with the aid of the table produced by the thematic analysis.

### ***Stage 4 Defining themes***

A crucial stage in the thematic analysis is the review of the data, which entails the researcher carefully reviewing the entire dataset again. This enables the consideration of different interpretations and ensures the underlying data adequately supports the selected themes. The alignment of the themes with the coded data extracts enables the assessment of the prominence and frequency of the themes and retains the thematic structure for revision or rearranging. This accurate data assessment process highlights the importance of the reliability and dependability of the final analysis (Jason & Glenwick, 2016). The initial step was to determine whether the collected extracts for every theme produced coherent patterns. When I observed the logical patterns within the themes, I recorded the data; any apparent themes that may not fit the remaining data in that theme, I also recorded that data. In this way, re-coding became a continuous process that allowed me to change my themes whenever it seemed appropriate.

### ***Stage 5 Reviewing theme***

The topics were further refined when the data was mapped out thematically. It is crucial to find the main idea in each theme and give it a succinct and accurate name. Sub-themes that encapsulate the dimensions of a theme can be identified. The thematic network table displays the relationships between codes, basic themes, and themes after stage five (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Three overarching themes emerged from the refining process: limitations, coping mechanisms, and transformational journey. As will be discussed further in chapter four i.e., Findings chapter, each of these four global themes included significant components that contributed to the emergence of the experiences of Indian travellers.

### ***Stage 6 Producing the report***

The research report is the final product of the thematic analysis, in which the investigator persuasively and thoroughly substantiates their results. This entails logically organising the report, thoroughly explaining the chosen themes, and linking the themes to the initial research questions. Reflecting on the research process facilitates enhancing the transparency and credibility of the theme study.

## **3.6 Ethics**

The moral precepts that direct the conduct of research are included in research ethics. Many international bodies supervise research ethics in their domains (Bell & Wray-Bliss, 2009). The AUT Ethics Committee at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) assesses research ideas and decides whether to approve or disapprove them. A participant's privacy must be honoured, the research purpose must be fully explained, and they must give informed consent. Other ethical guidelines in research include not harming subjects and not deceiving participants (Gray, 2014). A netnography technique was used for this study, meaning that participants were not in direct contact with the researcher. The blogs were publicly available, and pseudonyms were used to anonymise any personally identifiable information, including names, to preserve the bloggers' anonymity inside the dataset. Ethics approval was not needed for this research, according to the rules set forth by the AUT Ethics Committee. However, using direct quotes from the bloggers required permission under copyright; an example copyright permission letter is included in Appendix A. I contacted

six of the bloggers by mailing them letters to seek copyright authorisation. Two of the bloggers responded and granted permission; I am waiting for responses from the remaining four.

### **3.7 Limitations**

This study sought to address a gap in tourism academia by focusing on Indian solo travellers, an underserved segment of the Asian female market. However, a few limitations must be recognised (Durbarry, 2018).

Firstly, the use of a qualitative methodology introduces the possibility of bias. As an Indian researcher, I believe subconscious biases may influence the interpretation of the Indian bloggers' data. However, my cultural background and personal experience as a female solo traveller also contribute to a deeper understanding of the findings.

Secondly, the small sample size of travel bloggers, which included both semi-professional and professional bloggers, may impact the study. Their incentives may include curating content to attract more views, and their cultural origins may not entirely represent other Indian women; most participants were from non-urban locations with fewer restraints. Despite this, the small sample yielded extensive and exciting data, with each blogger presenting a distinct tale, confirming the notion that bloggers' narratives are diverse and subject to interpretation (Wright, 2010).

Additionally, because this study used netnography as the method of data collection and depended on secondary sources, there were limits to the correlation of the data gathered. Netnography raises questions regarding the relevancy and authenticity of the findings, even though it does offer a rapid and straightforward method of gathering data using search engines such as Google. Choosing the right keywords becomes essential, and in-depth research methods need to be used to acquire a deeper comprehension (Bowler, 2010).

Lastly, the credibility of online content posted by bloggers has been a subject of discussion, because some sites allow bloggers to rate their visitors and sort posts and comments by date and rating. This makes it challenging to identify false individuals with vested interests in promoting specific products or services (Mack et al., 2008). While this research addresses the knowledge gap regarding Indian solo travellers within the Asian female market, it is important to consider the limitations associated with biases, the small sample

size, the data collection approach, the potential for curated content aimed at attracting more viewers and readers, and the reliability of online content.

### **3.8 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter outlines the various research goals met through data collection from travel blogs written by Indian women solo travellers. Investigating the experiences of these women's travels is made possible by using a qualitative research approach to obtain a thorough knowledge of their perceptions regarding their participation in solo travel. Data was primarily gathered from the online travel blogs and interviews of the selected bloggers; publicly available data using the netnography technique, a method of secondary research. However, a disadvantage of this research is the uncertainty concerning the validity and correctness of the data collection procedure. Because most travel bloggers blog for a living, there are questions about the veracity of their tales. However, their accounts provided rich material and important insights when applied to thematic analysis. Thematic analysis accurately identifies, investigates, and catalogues topics in the study database during the data analysis phase. The results of the travel experiences and emotions in the chosen blogs were analysed and interpreted. The next chapter details the global themes and sub-themes identified in the research.

## **Chapter 4 Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

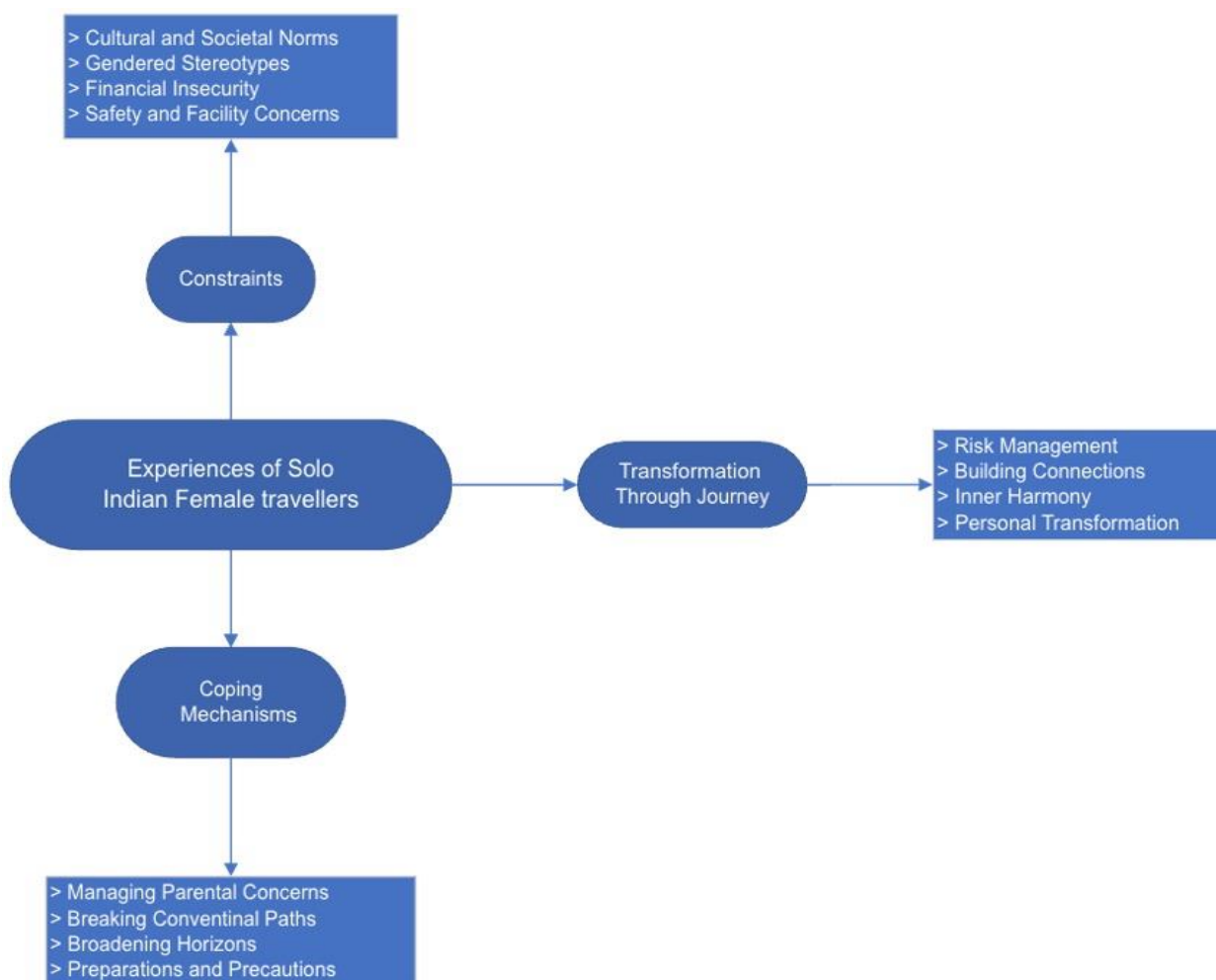
This chapter presents the thematic analysis results from the collected data. In addition, the thematic framework (Figure 5) introduces the revealing and novel results in a graph. Using a thematic analysis of the blogger interviews, the research study presents the global themes derived from the narratives of six Indian travel blogs. Three overarching themes and 12 sub-themes were generated, all based on the accounts of Indian women who have travelled alone through India and encountered challenges and learnings along the way.

### **4.2 Explanation of Thematic Framework**

The study delves into the experiences of Indian women travellers using three primary themes: constraints, coping methods, and transformation through journey (Figure 5). The theme of constraints discusses issues such as cultural and societal standards, gendered stereotypes, financial difficulties, and safety concerns, all of which impact or limit women's decisions to travel alone. The topic of coping techniques emphasises how these women deal with parental concerns, deviate from traditional courses, widen their horizons, and take care of the challenges of overcoming travel problems. Finally, transformation through journeying examines how these women manage risks, develop connections, find inner peace, and achieve personal growth while travelling. Each study participant demonstrates how gender and sociocultural identity impact the travellers' experiences, displaying their resilience and the deep inner growth that solo travel promotes.

**Figure 5**

*Thematic Framework of Solo Female Travellers and their Experiences*



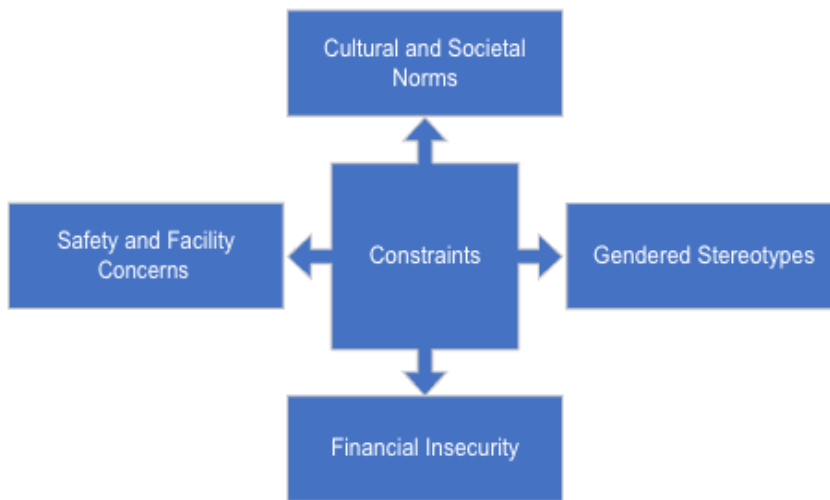
Note. This thematic framework illustrates the experiences of solo Indian female travellers divided into themes and sub-themes. Own work.

### 4.3 Constraints

Constraints, which result from gendered stereotypes, cultural and societal conventions, financial uncertainty, and safety concerns, prevent Indian women travellers from realising their full potential (Figure 6). These constraints lead to disparities that impede women's independence, well-being, and capacity to participate fully in society. They also obstruct women's ability to travel and make life decisions. Through the analysis of these limitations, the coping mechanisms employed by female solo travellers were discovered. These strategies produced experiences that transformed their lives and created safer environments for the women. The visual image represents four sub-themes of constraints.

**Figure 6**

*Sub-themes of Constraints*



Note. This figure illustrates the theme of "Constraints," which is further broken down into four sub-themes.

Own work.

**4.3.1 Cultural and societal norms**

Conventional cultural and socioeconomic standards severely restrict women's freedom of travel and movement in India. While worries about honour and reputation discourage solo travel, deeply ingrained gender conventions place a higher priority on family responsibilities than personal aspirations. As bloggers in this study have explained, these customs create a setting that significantly restricts women's travel alternatives.

*"Particularly in our Indian upbringing, travel is often looked upon as just a holiday to visit relatives or places of worship, making it a notch harder to change perspectives, and the challenge even more thrilling."*

*Lakshmi*

Lakshmi describes the mindset of many Indian families, who view travel as a customary opportunity rather than a means of exploration, recreation, or personal development. This conservative perspective prohibits going beyond these established objectives and restricts the possibilities of travel.

*"Coming from an Indian family, I know how our families mold us and condition us to live a life in a certain way which suits the society norms."* – Devi

Most families have established constraints for their female members. All Indian solo women bloggers mention this as a challenge for their family because women are obligated to this setup. 'Ladies' must prioritise their schooling, have a steady career, get married at a particular age, and have children, all labelled as a settled life. Once married, women are expected to take responsibility for the family, leaving no time for personal interests.

*“Although a lot of Indian women have begun to travel alone, many of us find ourselves to be easy targets — not necessarily of crimes, but of narrow-minded social beliefs.” - Rasika*

Even if women have been travelling more in recent years, society still views them as impolite, entitled, and self-centred because they do not spend time with their loved ones. Instead, going out and enjoying a lavish time is demanding, for which women must be psychologically ready. Two bloggers, Lakshmi and Reshma, describe how their aunt threatened to tell their family about how immoral they were by travelling, and a family member spread a rumour that they would never get married because no man would ever want to marry a woman who would merely walk around without commitments.

*“In those days, I still relied on my family’s approval to make such decisions, and luckily, they agreed on the condition that I would stay with some family friends” - Lakshmi*

As a consequence of conservative Indian culture and the protective upbringing of girls, Lakshmi's parents severely restricted her travels when she initially started. Every action she made required her parents' approval and providing them with updates. She was eventually permitted to travel, but only if she remained with a family cousin at the destination, despite her parents' initial opposition and anguish.

*“Indian society still has this strange mindset that — no matter our age — women are our parents’ responsibility until we are married. (And we have to live with them, too, if we’re in India.) After that? We’re our husband’s responsibility.” - Rasika*

The mindset in almost every Indian home state that having a girl child is a burden or major responsibility to bear until her parents can find a suitable man to marry her. This is why she is not allowed to embark on any adventures. Girls typically dream of having a good husband and fulfilling their dreams with him, but the sad reality is that she has to live her entire life to suit her husband's needs.

### 4.3.2 Gendered Stereotypes

The prevailing patriarchy limits women's autonomy and decision-making by elevating men to the position of primary caregivers and decision-makers. Women's educational and professional prospects are restricted by traditional gender norms, which demand them to put family responsibilities ahead of their ambitions. Men are discouraged from taking on family responsibilities because of gender inequity, while women find it challenging to overcome prejudices.

*“In a majorly patriarchal Indian society, female solo travellers are still considered an anomaly in some parts of India.”- Lakshmi*

The patriarchal structure of India considers that female travellers who travel alone are strange or aberrant. Due to cultural expectations and gender standards, travelling alone is typically forbidden, originating from the idea that women should constantly be accompanied by male family members for safety. Lakshmi's experiences in the countryside shows how this mentality endures and how women in modern-day India are treated.

*“Certain lecherous men believe that women are objects of sex or servitude. Some Indian cultures still dictate that women serve their husbands, fathers, and sons on hand and foot. Even while eating, women can only eat food after the men have finished. This tradition is still carried out in some modern households as well.”-*

*Rasika*

Rasika draws attention to the continued dominance of men in Indian society, where women are viewed primarily as caregivers with few rights. Women are often required to cover their faces, unable to leave the house without a male chaperone. Because many women feel it is their fault for not living up to men's expectations—a belief reinforced by Rashmi's experiences—domestic abuse is widespread and frequently goes unreported.

*“The silent emotional abuse by men (husbands, brothers, fathers, boyfriends) cleverly masked as being protective or taking care of their women never comes to daylight because, well, women have to swallow it all”- Rashmi*

*“A mother teaches her daughter the chores and cooking while she lets her son grow up without stepping into the kitchen or doing chores.”- Rashmi*

Rashmi also discusses how gender roles have been established by society over generations and how women have never attempted to challenge these stereotypes, instead choosing to conform. For example, a mother-in-law treats her daughter-in-law as she herself was treated in the past, in order to satisfy men's demands rather than defy them.

### **4.3.3 Financial Insecurity**

Women's travel experiences and choices can be significantly influenced by the financial limitations they confront in a patriarchal society, where men hold a disproportionate degree of power over their ability to move around and explore the world outside the boundaries of their homes. Many Indian women, whether it be their husbands or fathers, are frequently financially dependent on their male counterparts due to these conventional gender conventions. Women's chances to work and save money on their own are often restricted by this patriarchal system.

*“Travel writing hardly pays well or on time, so you can forget about a steady income or much income at all”  
– Lakshmi*

Lakshmi faced financial struggles when she decided to pursue a career in travel, which concerned her parents. Initially, she worked multiple jobs to save money for her adventures. Eventually, she chose a nomadic lifestyle and gave up her luxurious life. She explains that women often avoid taking money from their families to sidestep the feeling of obligation and having to provide constant updates; however, it leads many to lack the funds to pursue their passions.

*“If you ask them to finance your travels, however, well-budgeted or extravagant they might be, they are bound to demand control over where you go, who with, how often, and rightly so.”- Lakshmi*

*“The only savings I had when I quit my job were my Tax-Saver FDs that had started maturing and my PF that I'd gathered over the years”- Devi*

Devi experienced the same circumstances as Lakshmi, but she could travel because she had savings, she was willing to take. However, she confessed her fear of running out of money when she returned from her trip. She must find another source of income to pursue her interest and save money for her upcoming travels.

#### ***4.3.4 Safety and Facility Concerns***

Worries about safety and facilities frequently impede women's solo travel in India. Solo travel can be difficult due to the possibility of harassment, poor safety precautions in public transportation, and a shortage of welcoming lodgings. The limited availability of hygienic and safe spaces can discourage women from exploring.

*“The truth is, life on the road is just like real life. You have to work hard and smart to sustain it financially and emotionally.”- Lakshmi*

Social and personal expectations provide significant obstacles for women who travel alone in India. This discouragement, and the absence of encouragement from friends and family, can result in self-doubt and a lack of confidence. Negative public perceptions can cause anxiety and a persistent sense of being watched, all of which can be detrimental to their emotional health. These demands have a substantially adverse influence on their overall travel experience by preventing individuals from thoroughly appreciating and profiting from their trips.

*“It is usually immoral men who are responsible for so many of the crimes against women that we hear of in news reports in different parts of India.”- Rasika*

This problem may arise from cultural perceptions in some places, where women who travel alone may be seen as strange or weak. Banu shares an incident she faced when she was travelling in a village:

*“A couple of local men, riding on a bike, said a mischievous ‘Hi baby’ to me and touched my bicycle as they passed by”- Banu*

*“In foreign land, it is difficult to get help for directions from people on the road due to language barrier” -  
Devi*

Language limitations can be a significant problem for women visiting India alone. Communication can be challenging due to the country's linguistic diversity, particularly in remote or underdeveloped areas where

Hindi or English may not be widely spoken. This makes it more difficult for women to navigate safely and confidently, thereby hindering fundamental interactions like asking for help or directions. It also exacerbates safety issues.

*“Yes, travelling in groups can beat having to ask a stranger to watch your bag while you run to the loo at Birmingham Station, or dragging your bags with you to a stinking loo.” - Rasika*

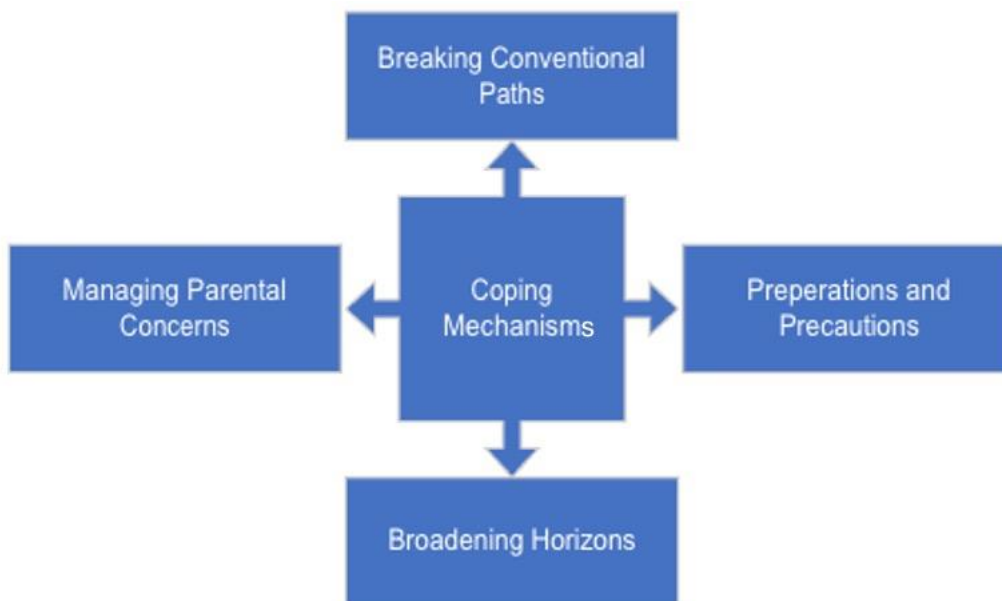
Locating hygienic and secure lodging, adequate transportation, and accessible healthcare services in rural or underdeveloped places might be challenging. The concern is increased because certain areas have unreliable network coverage, which hinders access to emergency services and communication. Bloggers explain the challenges faced by these hindrances while they are travelling solo.

#### **4.4 Coping Mechanisms**

When travelling alone, women often develop coping strategies to overcome obstacles like increased safety concerns and social criticism. This section will explain these strategies by looking at the experiences of female bloggers to understand how they used them to overcome challenging circumstances. This section is divided into four sub-themes, as demonstrated below (Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

Sub-themes of Coping Mechanisms



Note. This figure illustrates the theme of "Coping Mechanisms," which is further broken down into four sub-themes. Own work.

#### ***4.4.1 Managing Parental Concerns***

When women in India want to travel alone, the close relationship between parents frequently becomes a significant obstacle. To overcome this obstacle, the first critical step is to persuade and address parental concerns. Indian parents have strong protective instincts and ingrained cultural expectations, so it is essential to communicate openly with them, share specific travel schedules, and provide frequent updates to allay their fears. This method not only helps to win parental confidence and approval, but it also gives women the confidence and peace of mind they need to go out on their own.

*“So, I have reached a point where I don’t feel annoyed or pressurized anymore. In fact, I have my answers ready depending on who asks me the question.” – Rashmi*

As a single female traveller, Rashmi suggests that mental and emotional preparation is essential in order to handle the questions and anxieties that will unavoidably arise. Being mentally ready to answer these questions fortifies your resolve and contributes to a less stressful and more pleasurable solo travel experience.

*“The more you build your confidence to make conversations with strangers, navigate a new place by yourself, and make sound decisions, the more your parents will grow accustomed to the idea that you can travel without landing into too much trouble.”- Lakshmi*

It can be challenging to convince parents to support you when you go alone the first time. Lakshmi and other solo Indian women travellers apply this strategy to achieve success by beginning with short excursions which, over time, enabled their parents to be more accepting of the concept. This strategy starts with short, local travels so parents can see the capacity to handle safe solo travel. According to Lakshmi, this gradual approach helps introduce the idea of frequent, solitary travel, making parents feel more comfortable.

*“This isn’t about lying, not really. This is about being practical. Sitting halfway across the globe (or even halfway across the country), your parents will only be panicking knowing that you are alone in an unknown town.”-Lakshmi*

Managing parental fears regarding solo travel frequently requires practical methods to alleviate their worries. One way is to understand the fear of their daughter being alone in an unknown environment. To avoid pre-trip worry, travellers may share trip information only after returning, falsely claim to be travelling with a group, or to postpone departure from home altogether.

*“Let your people at home be aware of your whereabouts and itinerary. Make sure at least someone in your family knows where you are staying, what you are up to, and other details of your trip”- Banu*

Most bloggers advise to frequently inform parents about their movements and safety, in order to assuage their concerns.

#### **4.4.2 Breaking Conventions**

For independent female travellers in India, pursuing one's passion frequently entails defying social conventions and expectations. The best method to follow this passion is to reject conventional norms and embrace a rebellious spirit. By doing this, women can deny any limiting cultural standards and encourage others to bravely pursue their aspirations. Solo travelling women have expressed these feelings by the following quotes:

*“I’ve been quite a rebel from the start, so I must admit that my methods have been ruthlessly aggressive sometimes.”- Lakshmi*

By not being constrained by cultural and societal stereotypes, Lakshmi and the other women have achieved milestones by defying convention and maintaining a thick skin to the opinions of society. In a space where everyone unthinkingly follows the conventional path, this blogger raises a voice: Why can we not challenge patriarchal culture and help women defy gender stereotypes? Rashmi wonders here:

*“How about mothers and aunts supporting younger girls in their houses for empowerment? How about fathers nurturing their daughters to be what makes them happy, as one of the first signs of respect?”-*

*Rashmi*

*“I stopped living in a big city, gave up having a home to go back to, rebelled against the idea of marriage, and refused to have children on an overpopulated earth.”- Lakshmi*

Lakshmi quit her corporate job and chose to live a nomadic life, breaking all the stereotypes and, in the process, inspiring many women. She mustered the bravery to defy convention and embrace her true desires rather than conform to these social norms.

*“I gave up my career to follow my passion to travel. I come from a background where solo travelling had been unheard of.” -Sukanya*

Sukanya discusses how she decided to pursue a career in travel and believes that young people should be given the opportunity to choose careers in different areas, rather than in traditional occupations (as discussed in the previous section), in which they are not emotionally connected.

#### **4.4.3 Broadening Horizons**

Education empowers Indian women to question traditional marriage and family roles by providing opportunities for personal growth and autonomy. They can challenge gender norms, investigate novel concepts, and become financially independent through their academic and professional endeavours; all of which enables them to negotiate family expectations and perceive alternative possibilities. Numerous women have employed comparable tactics because their society tends to begin to inquire about marital status after the arrival of a particular age.

*“The biggest thing I did to change their minds was to take a break from my job and move to Wales to get my master’s degree.” – Rasika*

Rasika describes her strategy, which involves moving away from her family to further her education and return to India with the means to go, unquestioned.

*“Think about other skills you may have that can be propagated in the online space and try to increase your income sources. As long as you don’t need to be physically present in one place to get your work done, you can take it with you wherever you go. Many places in India and around the world offer easy access to WIFI. And from personal experience, I can promise that a digitally nomadic lifestyle is as exciting as it sounds” –*

*Lakshmi*

Lakshmi suggests the strategic and transformative aspects of forging an unconventional, location-independent career path. She demonstrates how individuals can actively broaden their horizons by leveraging digital tools and skills to sustain a life of freedom and exploration, which she applied by quitting a conventional corporate job.

#### **4.4.4 Preparations and Precautions**

Solo female travellers must strike a careful balance between thorough preparation and prudent precaution, to confidently navigate the potential challenges, they may face, while also embracing the freedom and adventure of exploring the world on their own terms.

*“Now that I’m already here, let me make the most of it”-Devi*

Solo travellers must often cultivate a resilient and adaptable mindset to tackle their unique challenges. They must be willing to step out of their comfort zones, embrace uncertainty, and develop a spirit of openness and flexibility. Devi wants to convey that this mental preparation allows them to navigate unfamiliar situations, overcome feelings of isolation, and remain calm in the face of unexpected hurdles.

*“I simply do what feels right and don’t do that doesn’t feel right. The basic thing is to follow your instinct – if something doesn’t feel right, don’t do it.”- Banu*

Banu discussed how wise it is to assess the circumstances and take appropriate action, and how unwise it would be to ignore anything that could get them into trouble. For solo female travellers, to cultivate and trust their intuition is a safety precaution and a vital skill.

*“The other half is about travelling smart. I realized the moment I stepped out that being smart on the road will be as important as being bold at home if I were to do this ever again.”- Lakshmi*

*“I believe a girl or a woman should never stay at a place just because it’s cheap. You never know what kind of people are staying there”- Banu*

When deciding to visit or choose a destination, research is essential for women travelling alone in a nation like India, where there is significant diversity from one region to another. Comprehensive research also helps with logistical planning, to guarantee dependable lodging and transportation—all of which add to a more seamless and secure travel experience.

*“What region I’d like to visit, the costs involved to estimate my budget, and learning some phrases in the local language to get by”- Lakshmi*

Travelling can be made easier and more pleasurable by having a basic understanding of the region, including the local language. Ultimately, planning makes travel safer and more seamless by assisting with the overcoming of possible language obstacles, guaranteeing clear communication, and honouring local customs, says Lakshmi.

*“It is best to attract less attention. One of the rules of thumb while travelling alone is to blend and not stand out.”- Rashmi*

Rashmi writes that the basic strategy is to avoid unwanted attention and potential risks, ensuring that the travel experience is safer. She also mentions the dress code, which Devi explains the importance of dressing to remain inconspicuous. Female solo travellers also share how unsafe it is in the desolate places and nightlife regions of India. To ensure that no one tries to take advantage of you, these blogs advise limited alcohol usage. Lastly, these women discussed several safety items, such as pepper spray and electric taser, to ensure their safety in emergencies.

## 4.5 Transformation through Journey

Solo travel in India can be a transformative experience for women. Facing social pressures and personal worries, they develop confidence and self-reliance in the navigation of new situations, interacting with diverse cultures, and making independent decisions. Each encounter, whether hiking the Himalayas, exploring historical sites, or engaging with locals, advances their personal growth. This experience empowers them to redefine their identity beyond conventional gender boundaries, fostering inner strength and a sense of independence that transcends societal norms. Ultimately, solo travel enables women to emerge stronger, more confident, and more self-sufficient. This section is divided into four sub-themes, which are demonstrated accordingly (Figure 8).

**Figure 8**

*Sub-themes of Transformation through Journey*



Note. This figure illustrates the theme of "Transformation through Journey," which is further broken down into four sub-themes. Own work.

### 4.5.1 Risk management

Indian women can show their independence and strength by successfully handling risks and defying cultural norms and stereotypes. Building assertiveness and self-confidence by facing challenges through solo travelling experience is crucial in a world where women's autonomy is frequently restricted. They are empowered to explore their identities and break from traditional roles as they navigate language hurdles,

safety issues, and unfamiliar locales. This promotes a progressive view among their communities and enhances their sense of self-worth.

*"To be honest, they don't hold much significance for me. I find routines and structures uninspiring. I've begun to thrive in the chaos and unpredictability of this life. It all feels like one big adventure, and I've learned not to take my troubles too seriously."* - Lakshmi

Lakshmi started her solo travel experience cautiously before bravely leaving her corporate job and using her money for an unforgettable tour. This experience strengthened her resilience and confidence, enabling her to accept the unfamiliar and flourish in novel settings. Her experience gave rise to a strong sense of self-worth and a progressive outlook.

*"Each time I took my car off on long road trips in the mountains, I felt intensely empowered. The feeling of being able to do something that every female is stopped from made me bolder with each drive of mine."*

*Devi*

Devi's family discouraged her from buying a car because of gender norms, even though she had always wanted one. Her resolve was strengthened by the frequent ego battles with men who insisted they were better drivers. She used her savings to purchase a car and bravely decided to go to the Himalayas alone without telling her family. She broke free from co-dependency and experienced a deep sense of liberation when facing the most challenging terrain, demonstrating the transformational potential of conquering obstacles and gendered constraints.

*"Many of us lack the courage or tend to step back from following our heart because we fear what the society might think."* - Sukanya

Sukanya took a chance to face these social constraints and broke the conventions to set off on an adventure. She emphasises how women shy away from challenging the expectation of fitting into societal norms. Many Indian women tend to refrain from pursuing their passions out of fear of how society would judge them.

*"I have travelled solo, covering the border villages and in the states which are considered unsafe, majorly using local transportation. And I had a smooth transition in almost every state without much difficulty."*

*Sukanya*

Women are not allowed to travel alone because India is seen as unsafe due to harassment, indecent behaviour, and a lack of facilities. However, independent female travellers like Sukanya have taken the risk to travel alone because they believe there are people who value women, are willing to lend a helping hand, and are welcoming to them. Women who are intuitive and cautious enough can explore this amazing world and reap the rewards.

#### **4.5.2 Building Connections**

Women who travel alone in India can form meaningful relationships beyond the ordinary tourist encounter. They have the chance to fully interact with the customs and traditions of the places they visit, developing relationships that offer both emotional and practical assistance. Through these varied exchanges, solo female travellers might undergo significant personal transformation; this can help to dispel preconceptions within society.

*"Travel has brought me much closer to my loved ones, and to my surprise, I hear the same people appreciating me when I sit with them to tell my stories."- Sukanya*

Sukanya explains that physical separation during travel can strengthen emotional and interpersonal ties. Sharing her adventure stories upon returning home often regained her loved ones' respect and affection. These tales of obstacles overcome, and cultural insights helped to bridge gaps and clear misconceptions, fostering a deeper understanding of her journey. This admiration confirms that solo travel can indeed lead to a richer, more meaningful life by validating the traveller's experiences and cementing bonds with loved ones.

*"Solo travel introduced me to so many families – I mostly stayed at homestays run by the Sikkimese and Nepalese people (in Sikkim and West Bengal). I discovered their way of life, and they discovered mine. All I got from these homes were respect, care, and warmth. So, it all depends on what choices you make."- Banu*

One perk that all travel bloggers reported experiencing was making new contacts. The conversations with locals gave Banu a great experience and an appreciation for life. She also went on hikes, met people in the hilltop communities, shared food with them, had meaningful conversations, and spent priceless time with them, all of which helped her gain a profound awareness of the reality that everyone's viewpoints on life differs.

### 4.5.3 Inner Harmony

Solo travellers often gravitate towards wellness activities like yoga and exercise, in order to maintain mental and physical well-being amidst the uncertainties of exploration. Practiced in diverse, frequently breath-taking surroundings, these regimens foster focus and grounding for lone adventurers. The solitary nature of these activities complements the reflective journey of solo travel, enabling deep connections with both the environment and oneself. The flexibility of solo travel also facilitates personalised health routines, enabling a much easier integration of yoga and fitness into daily adventures. This focus on holistic wellness enhances the travel experience, equipping solo travellers with the resilience to overcome challenges and savour the joys of their journeys.

*"I found myself to be amongst the very few people on the planet who have deeply experienced the pristine beauty of nature; I felt content. When I started feeling one with nature, I connected with my higher self."*-

*Devi*

Devi, who is energetic, discovered inner peace while travelling alone. She became adaptable and resilient, seeing failures as opportunities for personal development. Genuine talks and digital detoxes enriched her understanding and friendships. She experienced a spiritual awakening where she learned to embrace herself, appreciate the little things in life, and live in the now. Her perspective was altered by this inner serenity, which allowed her to live fully and honestly.

*"I met travellers who are constantly on the lookout for transformation and personal upliftment. For them, travel is an ultimate release, a healing that not only allows them to get at par with the past, accept the present but shows them the path to a better future. And that is what meditation does to our mind: to help us find a way towards absolute nothingness, where everything ceases to exist, and only peace prevails."*-

*Sukanya*

Sukanya found inner peace through her travels, which she likened to meditation. Immersing herself in nature and diverse cultures helped her to live in the present, embrace flexibility, and let go of social conditioning. Each adventure brought new perspectives, enhancing her gratitude and resilience. This deep sense of peace and contentment enriched her life, affirming her belief that *"Travelling is a new-age meditation."* (Sukanya)

*"Slow travel has changed my travel philosophy; no longer a fleeting crush on a gorgeous place, travelling to me is about a deeper relationship with a place, its people, its food, and the memories it leaves me with."*

*Lakshmi*

Lakshmi explains how gradual travel changed her perspective and gave her contentment and tranquillity. She spends around three days taking in the various cultures and living in the moment as bustling Goa rushes around her. By immersing herself in the local customs and lifestyles, slow travel allowed her to find her abilities, trust her instincts, and build inner harmony. Slow travel also offered her a sense of strength and self-discovery.

#### **4.5.4 Personal transformation**

For Indian women, travelling alone can be a transformative process that leads to empowerment and independence. Women who travel alone can transcend social and cultural norms and develop confidence and self-reliance. It helps women identify their assets, reach their own conclusions, and overcome obstacles. These trips broaden their viewpoints and strengthen confidence in their instincts and inner self. Indian women who travel alone discover more about themselves and their potential by pushing themselves beyond their comfort zones. This results in a profound sense of empowerment and personal development.

*"Travelling is probably the best medium for personal transformation, which not only gives us a chance to get accustomed with our inner self but also helps us in bridging a gap with the real world."* - Sukanya

Through solo travel, Sukanya underwent a profound personal transformation. She developed an inner connection and sense of selflessness, appreciating life's small pleasures and embracing the unknown. Her openness and spirit of adventure cultivated deeper cultural understanding and curiosity. Travelling also taught her humility, gratitude, and the witnessing of human resilience. Ultimately, Sukanya's journeys empowered her to challenge social norms, rebuild relationships, and shift her worldview. Her experiences demonstrate the remarkable ability of solo travel to facilitate personal growth, self-discovery, and a renewed perspective on life.

*"I kept evolving with my travels, and this is a serious addiction! My travels have opened up my mind in many different directions, and I know I've a lot more to learn."* - Devi

Through solo travel, Devi learned to find satisfaction within herself rather than rely on co-dependent relationships. She developed a profound respect for diverse perspectives and backgrounds, cultivating humility through interactions with locals and experienced travellers. Travel taught her to gracefully accept setbacks and relinquish control, living in the present with an adaptable, spontaneous mindset that enhanced her happiness and personal growth. Devi's journey of self-discovery and self-reliance profoundly transformed her life and facilitated remarkable personal development.

*“Travelling solo has made me build a strong relationship with my own self. It has made me realise so many of my own attributes and strengths, which I wouldn't have known otherwise.”- Banu*

Through solo travel, Banu learned self-reliance and found joy in her own company, no longer needing others for happiness. Gaining confidence in strangers and their inherent goodness led to a more accepting and expansive worldview. Banu developed independence as she managed finances, navigated new environments, and overcame challenges independently. Solo travel also allowed her adventurous spirit to emerge, helping her rediscover and reaffirm her true self without fear of judgment. Ultimately, these experiences strengthened her connections with others and deepened her respect for diverse cultures and communities.

## 4.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter examined the challenges encountered by women who travelled alone, and their approaches to resolving them. The testimonies of six travel bloggers who backpacked through India alone were analysed, and the data from their interviews were considered, to develop global themes and sub-themes. Despite considerable challenges, solo travel may indeed be a potent tool for personal development, independence, and self-discovery, as the tenacity and adaptability of these bloggers show. Solo female travellers turn their encounters into chances for self-actualisation and empowerment through meticulous planning, cultural immersion, and introspection. Addressing and managing parental worries is particularly crucial in India because of the country's strong familial ties. The research study results show that travelling alone in India can be a meaningful experience that promotes self-empowerment, cultural awareness, and personal growth, rather than simply an exploratory trip.

The narratives of bloggers have the potential to extend horizons, refute stereotypes, and build the groundwork for future female travellers to be accepted more widely. As I read through the bloggers' narratives, I realised that I could relate to the stories of the Indian solitary female bloggers on a deeper level. Like the bloggers I, too, have travelled a path of escape, leaving my family behind to pursue an education to escape the strict routines and expectations that society placed on me. Their stories of audacious travel and personal development resonated with my own pursuit of liberty and self-awareness.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the findings are linked with the relevant literature covered in earlier chapters. This study analyses Indian women travelling alone in India. It is based on a qualitative and explanatory analysis of women's solo trip experiences. The discussion is based on the thematic framework (Figure 4). To address the research questions of this study, this chapter examines the travel bloggers' accounts discussed in the preceding chapter and contrasts them with the literature review. This chapter brings together women's autonomous travel writing to provide fresh perspectives on this developing topic. The three categories that address each research topic are: "Constraints faced by Indian women"; "Coping mechanisms used by solo Indian women travellers"; and "Transformation through journey for Indian Women." A further in-depth analysis of the results and how they relate to previous research is covered in each section.

### **5.2 Constraints faced by Indian women**

Indian women travel bloggers are aware of the pressure from society to get married and establish a family. Many of these bloggers say they are facing a struggle due to their decision to travel alone. This section explores the causes of these negative experiences, which include deeply rooted cultural standards, expectations from family, societal pressures, and safety concerns. The bloggers' accounts of their experiences are consistent with the literature in their reflections on constraints.

India's traditional cultural and socio-economic norms provide severe barriers to women's freedom of travel and movement. Gender standards are highly engrained, and women are generally expected to put family responsibilities before personal interests. Women's freedom is limited by social pressure and stigma, which perpetuate the notion that they belong in the house. Travelling alone or with friends is much more discouraged for women regarding concerns about honour and reputation. Numerous bloggers have shared their experiences of being inappropriately questioned and misinterpreted by relatives who believe that single Indian women should not travel alone. This aligns with research by Joshi et al. (2022), which found that when Indian women disclose their travel plans, they frequently encounter unfavourable responses such as surprise, fear, disapproval, and concern. Familial beliefs significantly shape these judgments. Family

members may unintentionally cause dread by expressing tensions or worries about individual trip plans (Guo, 2014). As a result, strict gender norms ingrained in Indian culture for generations have ensnared Indian women and are indeed challenging to break. The experiences of the Indian bloggers are similar to those of other female travellers throughout Asia, highlighting similar limitations and gender norms. This is the case even though a large portion of the literature (e.g., Nguyen & Hsu, 2022; Seow & Brown, 2018, 2018; Winter et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2018) details the cultural and societal backdrops in a generic Asian setting.

Men and women are treated differently in India because patriarchy is engrained in the country's social structure (Pande & Moore, 2015). Women's freedom and capacity for making decisions are curtailed, while men are accorded preference, and their power is maintained. Men are viewed as the primary breadwinners and decision-makers, and women are expected to put their families and household responsibilities above their own aspirations. Lakshmi and Rasika are two bloggers who talk about growing up in this patriarchal environment. According to Lakshmi, Indian girls are brought up in a guarded atmosphere, and their parents frequently forbid them from travelling unless they are with friends or family. Rasika draws attention to the cultural belief that women are the responsibility of their parents up until marriage, when they become the duty of their husbands. Women's freedom and capacity for making decisions are severely limited by this patriarchal paradigm, which sees female solo travellers as oddities (Selamat & Ratthinan, 2022).

A further significant barrier for these women is financial instability. Bloggers who emphasise the way in which traditional gender norms leave women financially dependent on male counterparts, such as Lakshmi and Devi, highlight the problems they encounter in achieving financial independence. Indian women are becoming financially more educated and self-sufficient, yet many still consult their families before making big decisions, especially regarding travel. The persistence of patriarchal ideals is seen in the societal conventions and traditional gender roles that frequently force women to pursue family acceptance (Heimtun, 2013). Fears about safety make it difficult for women to travel alone in India. Writers such as Banu and Rasika detail instances of harassment, such as unwanted touching and catcalling, underscoring the widespread danger of sexual harassment in public areas. These safety concerns are made worse by poor travel infrastructure, such as erratic public transportation and dim lighting (Gahlot et al., 2013). The scarcity of clean, safe lodging options makes it challenging for women to find safe places to stay.

Many women are discouraged from travelling alone due to harassment incidents that damage their feelings of independence and self-worth (Higgs & Jeffries, 2018). Language hurdles also provide difficulties, especially in less tourist-friendly or rural areas where Hindi or English may not be widely spoken. The actions of locals can differ between regions, impacting how women are treated (Patel, n.d.). The emotional toll of dealing with uncertainties and rejection from society is indeed a significant barrier for Indian women who wish to travel alone. Bloggers like Lakshmi highlight the feeling of being condemned or unsupported by their communities, thus posing substantial obstacles. This aligns with the findings of Sudarshan and Bhattacharya, (2008) who discuss how societal attitudes often negatively impact women travellers rather than offering them support, adding further pressure to solo female travellers.

Indian women who travel alone face various difficulties, including ingrained cultural standards, patriarchal systems, financial reliance, and safety worries. These barriers not only impede women's mobility but also maintain gender inequality. A multidimensional strategy is needed to address these problems, including societal changes, added safety precautions, and greater financial independence for women. Indian women can then fully exercise their right to safe and unrestricted travel.

### **5.3 Coping Mechanisms used by solo Indian Women Travellers**

The literature and findings thoroughly examine the various hurdles women travellers in India encounter and the tactics they use to overcome them. This conversation highlights the intricate interactions among safety, cultural norms, and empowerment that influence how women travel in India. Even if there are many difficulties, the tenacity and resourcefulness of lone female travellers show that they are capable of navigating and overcoming these barriers. These women empower themselves and open doors for others to follow by sharing their experiences and success stories. The knowledge acquired from their experiences emphasises how critical it is to keep working toward enabling safer and more supportive travel for women.

The study found that lone female travellers in India manage their freedom by violating family and societal norms while maintaining their Indian identity (Yang et al., 2018). By deviating from established positions, they question the current status quo and open new avenues for future generations. Strategies such as progressively exposing parents to solo travel and rigorous planning address safety issues, while managing societal expectations and creating family support. Bloggers express initial criticism and concern about

cultural norms that place higher value on women's home roles and regard solo travel as inappropriate (Wilson & Little, 2008). These women address these expectations head on, frequently having painful conversations with their families to express their desire for independence and personal improvement through travel. Devi, for example, violated gender stereotypes by purchasing her own automobile and driving safely throughout India, winning respect and consequently challenging the assumption that male-dominant interests sustain female fear (Pereira & Silva, 2018a).

One way to understand Indian women's independent travel is through education. Indian women also utilise education as a way to travel the world and leave the comforts of home. These women can go to different cities or countries by pursuing higher education, which gives them a degree of independence and mobility that would be otherwise impossible to achieve. Through education, people can access new experiences, broader perspectives, and financial freedom, which then empowers individuals to defy social norms and established roles and begin their own journeys toward personal and professional development. This also leads the way to employment and may indeed be the driving force behind their decision to choose a non-traditional path (Singh, 2019). Through education, Indian women can see beyond the limitations of conventional marriage and family arrangements. These women can enter new fields, gain personal autonomy, and delay traditional timetables by pursuing their academic and professional goals. On college campuses and in the workplace, they discover safe havens to challenge gender norms, investigate concepts, and envision alternative futures.

Many structural limitations that affect women's capacity to travel independently and safely are prevalent in India. Safety worries are of utmost importance because of the high crime rate and widespread gender-based violence. These safety issues are made worse by shoddy public areas, inadequate street illumination, and uneven police enforcement, resulting in travelling alone being an intimidating experience for many women. These safety considerations give rise to a generalised air of caution, and women must be more aware of potential threats and prepare accordingly. To address these safety concerns, bloggers employ various strategies to minimise risks and ensure personal security; again, this aligns with the literature (e.g., Arora, 2020; Chhajer et al., 2022; Churumuri, 2012; Cosmopoulos, 2023; Nomads, 2015). Practical measures include meticulous planning of travel itineraries, opting for destinations with lower crime rates, and using trusted transportation services (Nomads, 2015). Additionally, technology plays a crucial role, with women

utilizing safety apps for real-time location tracking, carrying safety devices like pepper spray, and staying connected with trusted contacts during their travels. These proactive approaches empower women to assert control over their safety and navigate the complexities of solo travel in India (Malik, 2018a).

Many women talk of being the target of unwanted physical contact, continuous staring, and catcalling, which not only endangers their safety but also weakens their sense of self-worth and independence. These harassing experiences foster a climate of caution and worry, which forces women to employ a variety of coping mechanisms, including the avoidance of particular locations at night, dressing modestly, and maintaining continual awareness of their surroundings (Schänzel & Porter, 2023). Even with these precautions, many Indian women still find it challenging to travel alone because of the persistent threat of gender-based violence (Sharma, 2011). Bloggers also share the importance of exhibiting cultural sensitivity and knowledge by wearing conservatively and adjusting to local customs. By adjusting to different cultural norms, they can better negotiate social expectations and minimise the possibility of miscommunication or conflict while travelling. They improve their overall travel experiences and cultivate favourable interactions with local populations by adhering to local standards.

Indian women travelling alone negotiate their freedom through a complex process of disobedience, adaptability, and empowerment. These women traverse and overcome significant cultural barriers by defying expectations, exhibiting fundamental values, utilising education and financial independence, and applying realistic solutions. Not only do their tenacity and resourcefulness empower them, but they also inspire and generate fresh opportunities for upcoming generations of Indian women.

#### **5.4 Transformation through Journey for Indian women**

Travelling alone can be a life-changing experience for Indian women who seek freedom and independence. It can be a voyage of self-discovery and personal development. Women challenge social norms and have a deep sense of autonomy when they travel alone into uncharted territory. There is a conviction that autonomous travel allows for profound introspection and personal growth and provides a life-changing perspective. Being apart from spouses, families, or friends gives women the opportunity to reflect on their decisions, gain empowerment, and boost their self-esteem—all of which are consistent with the idea of

travelling as a transformation (Junek et al., 2006). Studies on backpackers and lone female Western travellers have noted this sense of self-improvement (Wilson & Harris, 2006).

However, Indian women's transformational trips are different from Western travellers. Indian women frequently have particular difficulties when travelling alone, such as negotiating firmly ingrained gender conventions and social expectations. The bloggers in this study show how difficult it may be to become independent in the face of family expectations and societal pressures. Their aspirations and the conventional roles that society has thrust upon them are at odds, as their experiences demonstrate. This is consistent with findings from earlier research, such as Yang et al. (2018), which highlights that racial and gender dynamics play a role in Asian women's fight for empowerment and independence.

For many Indian women, solo travel offers a respite from societal pressures and norms that dictate their behaviour and choices. It enables them to step outside their comfort zones, make decisions independently, and navigate unfamiliar environments on their own terms. This newfound autonomy fosters a sense of empowerment and self-reliance as they learn to trust their instincts and capabilities in managing various challenges and uncertainties. Indian women have a transformative opportunity to temporarily escape societal norms and expectations, allowing them to explore their identities and aspirations freely. In a society where women often face traditional gender roles and restrictions, solo travel becomes a liberating experience that allows them to break away from these constraints (Seow & Brown, 2018).

Women in India, however, take specific precautions to protect themselves by altering their travel habits to lower risk (Wilson & Little, 2008). Indian women use the techniques, discussed in the previous section, to overcome societal barriers related to gender and culture to pursue their independent travel plans. These women emphasise the significance of defying cultural conventions in their own travel choices, highlighting that tourism has reached a point where women can challenge gender stereotypes and gain a sense of agency. The study backs up this claim but also emphasises the difficulty of getting beyond other people's reservations. Yang et al. (2018) state that Asians, including Indians, embrace the idea of empowerment more than Westerners do because they feel compelled to challenge the stereotype that Asian women are unable to travel alone. The environment of female solo travel is characterised by Wilson and Harris (2006) as a possible area for women to negotiate and resist. The outcome emphasises how important resistance is to

Asian women's decisions to embark on independent travel. Additionally, researchers offer an alternative viewpoint from which to analyse the world of female lone travellers. These authors discovered that limitations do indeed affect people's opportunities, choices, and behaviours. However, these limitations may be required for people to establish structure in their lives; in such a framework, women are inspired and driven to overcome life's obstacles, resulting in a sense of empowerment.

The bloggers' experiences when meeting new individuals on solo excursions in India are consistent with research on the transformative power of such travel. Sukanya recounts how talks and stories helped her to expand her travel and cultural knowledge. Inspired by Rashmi's solo excursions, Lakshmi encountered women limited by traditional roles who voiced a need for friendship while travelling. These exchanges demonstrate how solitary travel can challenge societal norms, spur personal growth, and promote shared experiences. Hamid (2021) states that travel is a technique for self-discovery and personal progress, also shared by Indian solo women travel bloggers. Despite potential criticism, solo travel allows women to pursue their hobbies, discover hidden abilities, and reinvent themselves, thereby increasing their self-esteem and aligning their lives with their desires.

Travelling alone has the potential to change the lives of Indian women by extending their perspective on society through interactions with diverse cultures. This encourages empathy, tolerance, and a more inclusive mindset. Solo travel may indeed inspire women to pursue new options, such as furthering their education or starting a new job. The skills and resilience gained, such as navigating public transportation and overcoming language challenges, increase confidence and personal growth. However, public scrutiny and impediments may cause frustration and despondency when travelling alone.

## 5.5 Chapter conclusion

The three research objectives were addressed by contrasting several topics from the body of current literature. Despite the literature's primary focus on Western and generalised Asian nations, it is evident that the accounts of Indian women travelling alone share many parallels. The findings demonstrate that these lone travellers are not alone; rather, being solo enhances the chance to engage with locals and other tourists, leading to more social ties and broadened life perspectives. The results showed commonalities between Indian bloggers and other Asian travellers in their quest for empowerment, independence, and escape.

Indian women discover that travelling alone may be a transformative experience, providing them with a powerful route to self-determination and empowerment. These women navigate and challenge traditional gender stereotypes through their experiences despite significant social and cultural barriers. Solo travel encourages freedom, reflection, and personal growth, allowing people to stray from traditional norms. By conquering hurdles and connecting with individuals from diverse cultures, they gain resilience, confidence, and a more expansive view of life. This path not only provides them with the self-assurance to envisage and accomplish their objectives, but it also inspires other women to defy restrictive social norms, thereby promoting a more equal and inclusive society (Seow & Brown, 2018).

This chapter examined the transformative experiences of Indian women travelling alone through the qualitative analysis of six travel bloggers' accounts and juxtaposing them with relevant literature. Solo travel empowers women by encouraging independence, resilience, and personal development. It disrupts societal conventions and provides new opportunities for future generations. By managing these challenges and sharing their tales, bloggers demonstrate their independence and encourage cultural change toward more gender equality and inclusivity in travel and beyond. The following final chapter will synthesise the findings and explore the limitations and implications of the research study.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This study adds to the literature by examining the understudied subject of Indian women's experiences travelling alone. This study aimed to investigate how Indian women used travel as a means to defy societal expectations and assert their independence. The study includes the experiences of six female Indian bloggers and five of their interviews, which were utilised to comprehend the circumstances of female solo travellers in India. Furthermore, web-based data gathering, and thematic analysis helped to clarify the various aspects of the actual and imagined representations of the trip patterns. This chapter reviews the original goals and objectives of the study, discusses the limitations, presents theoretical and practical ramifications, and offers an overall conclusion. It offers recommendations for future research and related subjects in greater detail. My reflection is also included in the chapter because it can help future academics to understand my perspective on the subject and spark additional discussions regarding diversity and gender in the travel industry.

### **6.2 Aim and Objectives Review**

The purpose of this study is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Indian women lone travellers, including the obstacles they face, the strategies they employ to overcome them, and the importance of travelling alone in their lives. Based on the experiences of Indian travel bloggers, the following insights were revealed:

- For Indian travellers, the community's sociocultural beliefs and customs—particularly the priority placed on and the ties that bind families—create significant obstacles.
- Indian women have been able to explore solo travel in recent years due to increased mobility and financial independence. Compared to previous generations, these developments highlight the progress and opportunities that contemporary women are experiencing.
- Indian women use travel to escape the constraints of their families and society while simultaneously connecting with themselves on a deeper level.
- Indian women employ various strategies to overcome gender-based prejudice and long-established societal norms.

After analysing the travel blogs of six Indian solo women travellers, the research study has found some revealing responses to the following goals and objectives:

RQ1: What social and cultural limitations related to gender do Indian women travelling alone face on their travels?

The expectations and gender stereotypes of a patriarchal society place numerous restrictions on Indian women travelling alone, which they must contend with from friends and relatives. Their families and communities typically question and resist them because they are women, not men. These constraints include the feelings that travelling alone as a woman is rebellious, safety worries, and the social expectations to adhere to established roles. The research study explores thoroughly the unique obstacles encountered by Indian women in Indian society. A significant portion of scholarly literature has broadly contextualised these issues within a larger Asian framework.

The experiences of Indian women travelling alone share many characteristics with other Asian travellers discussed in the literature, including the motivational factors and limitations that result from cultural and religious beliefs (Yang et al., 2017) The desire to break free from a lifestyle imposed by family and societal norms drives the actions of many Indian women. Due to the impact of their patriarchal culture, gender plays a significant role in limiting Indian women travellers; nonetheless, families typically want their daughters to complete a particular level of school, obtain a steady job, get married, and have a family. Rural women are subject to much greater restrictions; they are frequently prevented from obtaining an education and being married off at a young age. This means that women's travel limitations in India are stricter than in most other countries. Understanding the cultural and societal limits is, therefore, critical for the examination of the obstacles that Indian women confront in the achievement of independence, mobility, and the freedom to explore the world on their own terms.

Online travel blogs report that sexual risk is seen as a significant barrier, consistent with findings from earlier research on lone Western tourists. One considerable barrier that restricts women's travel enjoyment and mobility is sexual harassment. Because it is not regarded as safe to explore unfamiliar regions. Indian families frequently discourage women from travelling alone due to the perceived increased risk. Women are

frequently seen as the weaker sex in the male-dominated society (Khan, 2011). The varied cultural landscape of India also affects the choice of holiday locations because different local communities have different attitudes and behaviours toward single female visitors, depending on their cultural background. By recognising the unique social and cultural constraints that Indian women experience, we may help foster a more welcoming and encouraging atmosphere, empowering them to follow their dreams and gain more autonomy and self-determination through travel.

RQ2: How do Indian women travelling alone deal with these limitations?

Indian women who travel alone use a variety of coping methods to handle social and cultural barriers. This research study analysed the experiences of Indian female bloggers who have effectively surmounted these challenges, demonstrating practical and psychological solutions for dealing with gender preconceptions and societal restraints. One popular technique is to gradually introduce solo travel to family members while carefully organising trips to meet safety concerns and win family support. This strategy promotes trust and alleviates familial anxieties. Another strategy is to actively challenge social and familial conventions, in which women proclaim their desire for freedom and exploration while balancing family commitments and personal liberty. Education and financial independence are critical factors in allowing these women to travel alone. Higher education and solid positions provide the resources and confidence required for solo travel and the opportunity to escape established roles. These women's adventures challenge social norms, open new opportunities, and allow them to explore identities outside traditional gender roles. Their stories demonstrate how education and financial freedom enable women to overcome cultural hurdles and seek solo travel, resulting in more autonomy and personal growth.

GPS trackers and pepper spray are vital for women who travel alone, providing additional security and confidence. Solo travel can become a means of personal development and empowerment in India, as women fight gender stereotypes and seek independence. These experiences increase their self-esteem and motivate others to question societal norms and pursue their own aspirations. By overcoming cultural and societal barriers, Indian women show that solo travel may be a transformative and liberating experience. Their acts contribute to a wider movement for gender equality and societal change, allowing future generations to explore the world independently and safely.

RQ3: How do the experiences of solo travel influence the independence and empowerment of Indian women, despite social and cultural limitations?

Despite the social and cultural constraints placed on them by a patriarchal society, the idea of travelling alone has a significant impact on Indian women's independence. This research study demonstrates how Indian women's solo travel can defy gender conventions, promote self-reliance, and promote personal development. Women can pursue their interests, meet new people, and gain fresh perspectives when they are not under the close supervision of their families or society's expectations. Consequently, women who pursue their dreams with more assertiveness tend to have more resilient identities and greater self-confidence.

Women who travel alone must be willing to push themselves beyond their comfort zones, accept uncertainty, and find their own solutions to problems. Women who undergo this process gain confidence and resilience, gaining the tools to deal with various circumstances. The trust in one's power and abilities is strengthened by the capacity to handle challenges and navigate new surroundings. Travelling alone is strongly associated with financial freedom. Women who can afford to travel alone usually feel more in charge of their lives and choices. Being financially independent allows women to make decisions that align with their preferences rather than those of society, a crucial component of empowerment. Their horizons are expanded by exposure to various surroundings and cultures, which improves their educational opportunities and increases their marketability. This exposure may further strengthen their autonomy and empowerment, improving job possibilities and more professional accomplishments.

The idea of travelling alone significantly impacts Indian women's freedom and self-determination. Solo travel allows Indian women to break free from societal limitations and achieve their aspirations by challenging traditional gender conventions; encouraging self-discovery; building resilience; inspiring social change; overcoming cultural hurdles; and boosting economic and educational chances. This change benefits women as individuals and aids society in becoming more equitable and inclusive.

## **6.3. Implications**

### ***6.3.1. Theoretical Implications***

This study offers insightful information about the experiences of independent Indian women travellers. The Indian tourism industry has experienced enormous expansion, including a notable rise in the number of female solo tourists. Indian women are challenging traditional gender conventions and stereotypes that portray women as innately dependent and helpless, as travel becomes an increasingly important means of achieving independence and empowerment. It highlights the crucial realisation that empowerment is a dynamic process and not simply an outcome, involving taking risks, facing anxieties, and developing resilience. This research contributes to the knowledge of feminist geography, by demonstrating the potent catalyst that solo travel has the potential to be for social and personal emancipation and resistance to established gender norms among Indian women. This is consistent with the idea of heterotopia (Pritchard, 2007), in which travel creates venues other than traditional ones where women can explore their identities and capacities without being constrained by society.

By emphasising how travel helps Indian women to develop self-reliance, confidence, and agency, this research study advances empowerment. By contrasting Indian women's experiences with those of their Asian and Western counterparts, it addresses several gaps in cross-cultural research and provides a nuanced view of how cultural circumstances affect the process of empowerment through travel. The research study also focuses attention on the significance of intersectionality by considering how socioeconomic class, educational attainment, and cultural background influence Indian women's travel experiences. This research study adds to travel and tourism theories through a gendered perspective, by offering a more profound knowledge of how Indian women navigate and negotiate their solo travel experiences. It highlights the necessity of a more inclusive and varied tourism studies theory that considers the unique difficulties and coping mechanisms faced by female tourists from various cultural backgrounds. This focus will assist in addressing the concerns about the oversimplification of the Asian market, by highlighting the diversity and distinctive characteristics of Asian nations, which, set them apart from Western travel viewpoints (Yang et al., 2019).

### **6.3.2. Practical Implications**

Several practical implications are revealed by examining how Indian women use travel as a catalyst for empowerment. First and foremost, educational programmes designed to encourage travel among Indian women could indeed concentrate on offering secure and encouraging surroundings to foster self-reliance and exploration. Travel experiences can be used in educational programmes to promote global understanding and cultural exchange, while also strengthening resilience and personal growth. Advocating for gender-sensitive travel legislation and infrastructure upgrades is crucial to guarantee women's safety and fair access. For example, Kerala's emphasis on polite behaviour has made it the safest state for female travellers in India, while Pondicherry overlooks tourist safety and local government intervention (*Is Kerala Safe for Solo Female Travelers?*, n.d.) Additionally, encouraging women to engage in tourism-related entrepreneurship may boost their economic empowerment and support the growth of their communities. By acknowledging travel as a potent instrument for questioning established conventions and promoting individual development, interested parties may assist in facilitating Indian women's progress toward increased autonomy and self-determination.

### **6.4. Personal Reflection**

Reflecting on my own solo travel experiences as an Indian woman, I chose this topic because my cultural background offers a unique perspective on the subject. My supervisor encouraged me to delve into how my personal experiences can enrich the research study, focusing on solo Indian women travellers with similar backgrounds. This research study explores travel blogs from women who, like me, ventured out independently, revealing how they navigated cultural and societal expectations to discover their identities.

The culture of India places a strong emphasis on family and community and, consequently, reveals how particularly remarkable these women's journeys are. Their stories of defying societal norms resonate with my own experiences of facing obstacles and seeking independence while maintaining my cultural identity. By analysing these blogs, I draw parallels between their challenges and those reported in scholarly research on female travellers from various backgrounds. Travel offers a fresh perspective on life, and domestic travel within India can be as impactful as international trips. Many Indian women, especially those from lower-

class backgrounds, face significant hurdles to travel, including societal judgment and limited resources. I relate to these challenges from my own experiences, such as dealing with unwelcome attention and societal questioning, common themes in the blogs I studied.

The experiences shared in these blogs highlight the immense courage of modern Indian women who break free from traditional roles and confront external dangers and internal conflicts. Instead of focusing on the negative aspects of travel, my research emphasises the resilience and determination of these women to overcome barriers and assert their independence. Whether domestic or international, travel provides valuable insights and fosters personal growth. This research study not only reflects on the cultural and social obstacles faced by Indian women travellers but also underscores their strength in navigating these challenges. By examining both historical and contemporary experiences, the research sheds light on the broader quest for independence and empowerment among Indian women, illustrating how travel serves as a transformative force in their lives.

## **6.5 Limitations**

This study has limitations, even though it offers insightful information about the experiences of Indian women who travel alone. Firstly, because all the bloggers in the sample have published their stories online, the sample size may not accurately reflect the variety of experiences of all Indian women who travel alone. Another limitation of the research study is the dependence on self-reported data, which is prone to bias and cannot always precisely reflect the reality of the scenarios described.

Furthermore, due to their profession, middle-class and urban women tend to be more outspoken and visible, which may cause them to overlook the unique challenges faced by women from lower socioeconomic levels or rural areas. The geographical scope is further limited because most of the travel experiences recounted take place in safer destinations; as a result, the variety of solo travel experiences throughout India's various areas is not adequately captured. The experiences of lone female travellers can, therefore, differ significantly due to the diversity of regions and cultures within India; nevertheless, women in less documented places are underrepresented, which leaves a gap in our understanding of the range of cultural and regional issues these women encounter. Moreover, the emphasis on professional or semi-professional bloggers does not encompass all Indian women travellers. Their experiences and viewpoints may differ greatly from those

travellers who do not blog because they may, encounter different challenges and have different resources and objectives.

## **6.6. Overall Conclusion and Future Research**

The attitudes of Indian solo female bloggers reflect how women's status is changing in the contemporary world. Indian women solo bloggers demonstrate a great desire for self-reliance and empowerment through travel and use travel as a powerful tool to challenge social norms and traditional duties of domesticity, unlike in Western countries where travel often emphasises individual freedom from societal constraints. Travel offers a heterotopic environment in which Indian women can challenge sociocultural and gender stereotypes, claim their independence, and pursue their happiness (Pritchard, 2007). Inversely, travel makes it easier for women to reconnect with themselves and their families, enhance their lives by giving a sense of personal growth, confidence and help them to appreciate the qualities of the local culture (Tan & Bakar, 2016).

Indian women are increasingly inspired by travel to push the boundaries of gender norms and reinvent their identities. These women develop a greater awareness of their own potential and goals by interacting with others from different cultural backgrounds (Yang et al., 2017). They gain resilience and a sense of agency as a result of this exposure, which gives them the confidence to stand out in both their personal and professional lives (Fullagar et al., 2012). Indian women who travel solo can gain a broader perspective on global concerns and the ability to adapt and flourish in various contexts, by encountering diverse societal norms and practices. Their increased awareness of the world not only advances their development but also puts them in a position to advocate for social justice and gender equality in their communities and act as change agents (Rangwala et al., 2020).

Travel benefits these Indian women through their exposure to a variety of cultures and perspectives, promoting independence and personal growth (Bui et al., 2014). As women negotiate unfamiliar situations and conquer obstacles, they build self-confidence and improve their communication abilities, thus allowing them to break free from established gender roles and stereotypes. This transformative experience frees them from societal restraints while simultaneously providing opportunities for self-discovery and cultural appreciation (Rojek, 1991).

Future research should extend the scope and diversity of study populations to better understand lone women travellers' experiences. Enlarging the sample to include people from rural areas, diverse socioeconomic levels, and different regions of India would give a more complete picture of solo travel experiences.

Furthermore, the investigation of the viewpoints of non-blogging travellers may uncover new obstacles and ambitions and provide a more complete picture of the Indian female solo travel experience. Future research should investigate the long-term impacts of solo travel on professional and personal development, and how digital platforms and social media shape these experiences. Finally, comparing Indian women travellers with those from different cultural backgrounds may shed light on both the universal and culturally unique features of solo travel, thereby helping us to better comprehend women's empowerment and mobility through travel.

Globally, female travellers face a common challenge: gendered risk. The findings of the study concerning the unwelcoming and unequal treatment Indian bloggers received underscore the current state of affairs, namely that Indian women travelling alone are frequently viewed by their home societies as abnormal or rebellious. Through their embrace of solitary travel, they question and defy gender stereotypes. The travel literature geared toward Western travellers rarely addresses these dangers and difficulties. Consequently, this affects Indian women's perceptions of, and their experiences with, independent travel even more significantly.

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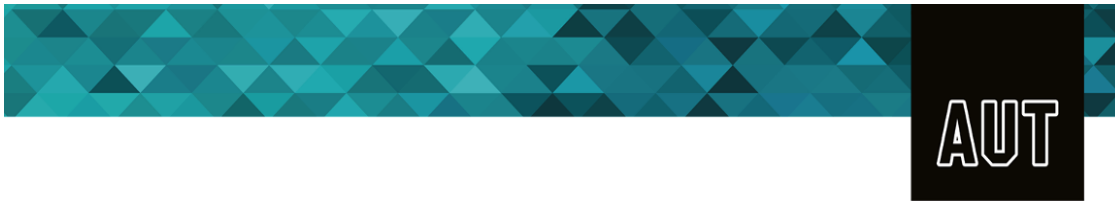
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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Copyright for Research Permission Form



Sushmitha Dattatreya Hegde  
72 Nelson street, Auckland 1010  
01/07/2024

(Blogger's Name)

(Blogger's Email)

Dear (Blogger),

I am a Masters student at Auckland University of Technology and am writing a Dissertation on "Solo Sojourns of Indian women: Narratives from travel blogs." Topic is about the obstacles Indian women encounter when they choose to travel alone and how they overcome these obstacles to grow into strong, independent women for my Masters in International Tourism Management

I am writing to request permission for the following work, for which I believe you hold the copyright, to be included in my dissertation:

(Name of the website)

I will be gathering information and quotes from the below mentioned articles from your blogs:

(Links to specific blog post used for research)

I will also be using the information you wrote on your "About Me" page as a part of the research's overall profile of subjects. Please note, I will be replacing your real name with pseudonym to protect privacy issues, but your website URL will be used for reference purpose.

A digital copy will be made available online via the University's digital repository [Tuwhera](#). This is an open access research repository for scholarly work, intended to make research accessible to as wide an audience as possible.

I am seeking from you a non-exclusive licence to include these materials in my thesis. The materials will be fully and correctly referenced.

If you agree, I should be very grateful if you would reply to me via email, or alternatively sign the form below and return a copy to me.

If you do not agree, or if you do not hold the copyright in this work, would you please let me know.

I can most quickly be reached by email at [Sushmithahegde19@gmail.com](mailto:Sushmithahegde19@gmail.com) Thank you for your assistance. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Sushmitha Dattatreya Hegde

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