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# Vandna Dubey Cooking Classes: A Community Participation Entrepreneurship

*Ramesh C. Devrath, Aditya Ranjan*

*If you have any interest in Indian food, visit Vandana.*  
–Kitten Shamrock, Melbourne, Australia (via Trip Advisor)

*Wonderful evening learning the basics of Indian cookery*  
– Shelly, Auckland, New Zealand (via Trip Advisor)

## Desi<sup>1</sup> Khana<sup>2</sup> for Videshi<sup>3</sup> Mehman<sup>4</sup>

Food is one of the necessity for human survival, and it's essence is more realized while one is on the tour. We all love to enjoy food as per our taste and preferences, but homemade have no comparison. But, is it possible in some foreign country, where only tour managers/guides could hardly able to understand the innate desires of tourists? Rest all God knows.

Vandana cooking classes is just a paradise for all such food lovers, who want desi taste in videshi khana. From food to beverage all are prepared and served in Indian style, but the taste as per the tourist desire.

The exquisiteness of attending Vandana cooking class is, to enjoy in a relaxed atmosphere, learn Indian tricks, secrets and cooking tips from chef to choose your ingredients, make delicious recipes and

prepare beautiful dishes and last but not the least tasting what is being demonstrated.

## Introduction

Vandna Dubey is the owner of *Vandna Cooking Classes*. Being an entrepreneur she believes in the customer service rather than earning profits. Her success story can be portrayed from the fact that a simple village girl is now a well known name in the international market. Starting from the *Heena Tattoo* (A temporary tattoo which Indian women carve on hand for some religious/festive purpose) fifteen years back in 2001, now she is successfully running few ventures, which attracts a lot of foreign tourists.

The idea of setup a tourism business, come to her mind when an Australian tour escort Debbie Kindness (Debbie), impressed by her *Heena Tattoo*, offered to carve it on the tourists accompanying the tour. The

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earning form designing the *Heena Tattoo* was more than expectation. This idea flicked her mind to start a business of carving *Heena Tattoo* to the foreign female tourists who comes to visit Orchha (A small village in district Tikamgarh in Madhya Pradesh province of India).

Another business she started, serving Indian Spice tea "*Masala Chai*" to the foreign tourist. It is a tradition in India to welcome the tourist and treat them as "GOD". Indians generally offers welcome drink to the guest in form of tea, butter milk and lime water. She tapped this idea and successfully implemented it.

Later on, she come up with the concept of serving Indian cuisine to the tourist and also make them learn how Indian cuisine are prepared. Thus, this way "Vandna cooking class" came into existence.

### **Why Orchha?**

Orchha means hidden places and famous for the Temples and Palaces in Tikamgarh district. During 2011, Orchha was visited by more than 29 lakh tourists, more than the total number visiting other major cities of the province Madhya Pradesh.

The famous attractions includes *Ram Raja Mandir* (Temple), *Raja Mahal* (King's Palace), *Chaturbhuj Mandir*, *Lakshmi Narayan Mandir*, *Phool Bagh* (Garden of Flowers), *Jehangir Mahal*, *Chhatris* (Cenotaphs) Which were build around 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> AD. Apart from these, there is a light and sound show organized by Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation Limited (MPTDCL) from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm in English and 8:45 pm to 9:45 pm in Hindi at these places during summers (March to October). And from 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm in English and and 7:45 to 8:45

pm in Hindi during the winters.

### **Early days of vandna dubey**

Vandna dubey was born in middle class family at Dinara village of Shivpuri District of Madhya Pradesh. Her father was a Postmaster and mother was housewife. At the age of 5 years, her mother passed away because of some disease. Her father remarried to support her family.

She was studying with her cousin since childhood. Unfortunately when they were about to write the secondary examination, her cousin died. Her death jolted Vandna inner sense and she secured very poor marks in secondary examination. As a result, at age of 16, she got married with Mr. Manmohan Dubey, who was a priest at nearby temple in Jatara village of district Tikamgarh in Madhya Pradesh province. After seeking her husband support, she completed her secondary and higher secondary education.

After two years, when the couple was devoid of any child, the in laws, started raising questions and neglecting them. Then her husband decided to find a new job away from home town. Vandna Father-in-law was a forest guard and was recently deputed to Orchha. So, he asked his son to come with him. Her father-in-law financially helped her husband to open a shop in Orchha.

Her husband was not a good businessman, so he was just only able to manage some earnings. So, she decided to come to Orchha and support her husband. Because of financial crisis they were not able to rent a house for them in Orchha, so they settled on to live in the same shop. Being a shop, it doesn't have any facility and the river Betwa was the lifeline for them.

She started teaching in one of the school, G. K. Convent in Orchha at the basic pay of Rs. 350/- per month. The amount was very less but it gave them some add on to total earning. She loved teaching and the students.

One day, Debbie kindness, an Australian lady and tour manager from Intrepid

Travels came to visit school with some Australian tourist. She met Vandna along with the children. The next day, fortunately, Debbie again come across Vandna on her husband shop and offered the job for carving Heena Tattoo to the tourists accompanying her. Vandna carved the *Heena tattoo* and also offered tea as a welcome drink to them.

### Women Tourism Entrepreneurship in India

Way back in 1955, First Planning Commission, which graded tourism 269<sup>th</sup> on their priority list of industries – poorer than even the development of light houses, tourism, in the twenty- first century, with its multi-sectoral spin-offs is believed to be the catalyst to bring about enhanced development and prosperity in India. But the fact is, India is a treasure trove for tourism development.

In India Tourism was declared as an industry in 1986 and became eligible for several incentives and facilities including tax incentives, subsidies and priorities in the sanctions of loans by the State Financial Institutions. In July 1991, tourism was also declared as priority sector for foreign investment.

Ever since the emergence of the concept of tourism, tourism development has taken place with a very satisfactory pace and rate in some of the countries.

By now, tourism has emerged as number one largest smokeless and fast growing industry in the world due to its ample promises and prospects. However, less attention has been paid to the unequal ways in which the benefits of tourism are distributed between men and women, particularly in the developing world. Tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Tourism offers a wide range of income generation opportunities for women in both formal and informal employment. Tourism jobs are often flexible and can be carried out at various different locations such as the workplace, community, and household. Additionally, tourism creates a wide range of opportunities for women through the complex value chains it creates in the destination economy.

There are also known to be challenges facing women in tourism.

Women are often concentrated in low status, low paid and precarious jobs in the tourism industry. Gender stereotyping and discrimination mean that women mainly tend to perform jobs such as cooking, cleaning and hospitality. Much tourism employment is seasonal and fluctuates according to the volatile nature of the industry. In some destinations links have been found between tourism and the sex industry which could make women more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

**Business Idea:**

The earning from carving *Heena* tattoo was Rs.500/-, more than the salary what she use to get from the teaching. Dabbie Kindness impressed by her tattoo promised next time revisit and gave her a business idea that she can have a good earning through carving *Heena* tattoo to the foreign tourist and serving the *Masala tea* to the tourist.

“Dabbie motivated me how best I can utilize my skills of carving *Heena tattoo* and offering *masala tea* to the foreign tourists and also generate some earning.”

The tourist while enjoying the *Masala tea*, always use to ask the recipe of *Masala Tea*. Thus, she thought of starting a cooking class in which she will make the tourist learn the recipe of Indian *Masala Tea* and serving the same.

“I studied in a Hindi medium school, and I had a little knowledge of English. The tour managers helped me a lot as they use to work as interpreter for us and also give suggestions how best I can improve my English and business skills. The suggestions by them motivated me to come up with new business ideas and best utilization of my skills like *Heena Tattoo*, *Cooking Classes*, and *Indian dressing classes*. These all were something of my interest and I was always excited to interact with tourists.”

**Need Gap:**

“Earlier, when tourists praise me for tattoos and tea, I always felt surprised, these are the basic things which an Indian lady use to do. Even I had learned these things from my mother and friends. In Indian tradition, ladies always have the

*Heena Tattoo* on their hand on special occasions and we always offer tea to guests. What special I have done which has given them such a special satisfaction”.

The tour manager knows the fact that most of the tourist who visits India come through the tour operators and remain confined to the luxurious holiday having fixed itineraries. They were mostly confined to the forts, palace, history of kings, Mughals and British invasions and Indian independence. They rarely get chance to interact with the local people and thus couldn't enjoy the cultural diversity of the country. The tourism prospects are changing day by day and now, the tourist want to learn the different prospects of Indian culture. The tourists are willing to interact with local community and also wants to spend time by learning while tourism.

So, the need of such tourism product in the market, compel them to come up with the new ideas how to fulfill the demand-supply gap. Orchha is one of the desirable destinations among the tourist because of its historical as well as religious synergy. But, there were no centre for community participation. So, they were willing to have some activity, where the tourist can spend time with the locals, while learning some Indian culture. Dabbie Kindness, when offered Vandna to carve *Heena Tattoos*, this gave the tourists, a way to interact with the local and also had some beautiful carving of *Heena Tattoo* with a cup of nice *Masala Tea*, a part of Indian culture.

After this interaction the tourist find themselves very rejuvenated, and had a pleased smiling faces indicating that this was something they were missing in the tour. They also thanked tour manager and Vandna for a short but healthy interaction.

"I was very happy to have an interaction with the foreigners for the first time and seeing them satisfied I can surely say that they also enjoyed the moments with me."

Dabbie, The tour manager decided to bring all her tourist while on the trip of Orchha to Vandna and asked her to carve the Heena tattoo on the tourist hands and serve them the Masala Tea for the next visits.

### *Taking a Decision?*

Vandna was also pleased with this interaction, as she for the first time interacted with the foreign tourists and also because of the earning. This few hours earning was more than what she has ever in a month from teaching. She was very eager to have the next visit of Dabbie, with another group of tourist. But, this also left Vandna unhinged.

Vandna had completed her schooling in Hindi and she doesn't have the knowledge of English language. While carving the Tattoo and serving the tea, foreigners use to ask many things, but she was unable to answer. The tour manager helped her regarding communication, but she couldn't understand whether proper message were exchanged or not. Thus, various doubts were staining her,

Should she trust Dabbie, a foreigner lady?

If Yes, Another group of tourist will be also from different country and she knows only Hindi, how she will be able to communicate with them?

Will tour manager help her another time?

Will she be able to please another group also?

But the most critical question was,

should she continue with teaching or indulge in this activity as suggested by Dabbie?

### *Market Research:*

Orchha is a popular tourist destination all round the world. Tourist visit Orchha throughout the year from different parts from globe. Hence, the tourist needs and demand are different. So, it is not possible to trap the needs of all tourists at a time. So it's become necessary for Vandna to understand consumer behaviour to grab market share and generate maximum revenue.

"Not all the tourist always liked the *Masala Tea* in the same way. For some, it was a wonderful experience, for others it was not. I couldn't understand the logic behind that. How can the same tea is giving a splendid flavor to someone and a normal experience to other? They all are foreigner and they all use to say it as a unique experience, but different views about the product."

For Vandna, it was a complete new experience. So, in initial days she continued with the instructions given by the tour managers. This gave her a brief idea who is her prospective customers. She found that most of the tourists were from English speaking countries. She started learning English through reading newspaper, watching English news channel and also interacting with the tourists.

For few years, she was unable to differentiate the tourist. Gradually she began to realize that tourists are coming from different countries and their taste and preferences also varied. They also varied in nomenclature for example, Brinjal (*Baingan*) is known as Egg plant for Americans and Aubergine for French.

### Cross-Cultural Intelligence

In order to live within a specific culture, the individual is supposed to adapt with the differences in that culture. According to Peterson (2004), Cultural Intelligence is the aptitude to exhibit definite behaviors, including skills and persona, which are culturally refrained to the attitudes and ethics of others. Cultural Intelligence covers other vicinities (Chaney & Martin, 2011) such as:

1. Linguistic Intelligence: It is helpful to learn about the costumers' native language and using international business. English can increase effectiveness when communicating with persons of other cultures.
2. Spatial Intelligence: It involves the space used during meetings and introductions.
3. Intrapersonal Intelligence: It involves awareness of one's own cultural style in order to make adjustments to international counterparts.
4. Interpersonal Intelligence: It includes the ability to understand other people and their motivations. In simple words, when dealing with people from another culture, one may know something about their language, the space to use while dealing with people, awareness about your culture and how to apply one's cultural behavior with that of the other culture.

Thus, tourism entrepreneurs through cultural intelligence especially rural and ethnic communities are push motivator for the development tourism and responsible for the sustainable tourism development. Their involvement in sustainable tourism development helps using natural resources more efficiently in the region.

The foreign tourist while having cup of *Masala Tea* with Vandna always ask how it was prepared. She realized that the foreign tourists are also interested in knowing the recipe of the *Masala Chai*, as they never got a chance to learn Indian recipes on tour. They come to India, stay in the hotels, had lunch in the restaurants where they are served with Indian dishes but never come to know about the ingredients and how it was prepared. They just use to enjoy the taste of Indian dishes.

### Market Segmentation:

Orchha is one of the prime destination for the tourists from Oceania, Far east Asia, USA( United States of America) and UK (United Kingdom). They generally travel through the tour operators, which

give them real life experience in the tourism. These countries varied from each other in terms of climatic condition, customs and traditions and also the culture.

Thus, the behaviour of tourists from these countries is also different. So, the same product would not satisfy the needs all the tourists at a same time. The same product can satisfy the tourists in different ways. For example, Some tourists can be satisfied by the taste of the tea, but at the same time some may be satisfied because they are involved in community participation. Whatever the reason be, but one thing was common that is the time what Vandna and tourists spend together with a cup of *Masala Chai*.

She started segmenting the tourists as per

their requirements. She use to make them learn the recipe of *Masala Tea*, serve them hot. If there is any lady in the group, she use to offer her *Heena Tattoo* carving, and thus, indulging different tourists in different activities in a given scheduled time. She also started having variations in the Spices (*Masala*) as per the customer demand, so that the best can be delivered.

She also started offering breakfast and lunch to the tourist as well as to the tour manager free of cost to show her gratitude towards them. The tourists and tour manager enjoyed the food being served by Vandna. If something went wrong, the tour manager would suggest the proper ingredients and quantity so that it would be as per the requirement of the tourists.

"I usually cook food in traditional Indian style, using lots of oil and species. But, later on I get to know that the foreigner tourist doesn't use lots of spices and oil for cooking. Even I also found that some of them are allergic to certain spices. The tour leader always helped me to know how best I can cook for them."

Later on, she finds that the cooking class can be one option to make tourists learn about Indian recipe along with the *Masala tea*. The tourists are much interested in learning Indian recipes and through this cooking class she can spend more time with tourists as well as can generate good revenue.

But few things were restricting her,

- Will the tour manager agree to increase the time slot?
- Will the tourist be ready to spend more time in learning than other touristic activities?
- Will she be able to deliver the recipes as per tourists taste and flavor?

### Business Plan:

"The cooking classes, was a new concept and I find the tourist are ready to pay for such services. These activities made them feel the real sense of tourism as well as community participation. They come to know about Indian style of cooking and also how an Indian family enjoys the meals at their home. The time duration for such classes was 2-3 hours depending on the group, but tourist always felt that they are at their home, learning new recipe from some master chef."

Different tour managers suggested Vandna to start "Cooking Classes". They also suggested that the cooking classes must be meant in such a way that it can trap concentration of all the tourists. To break the ice, she has to start her class introduction of the tourists, serving them *Masala tea*, giving time to relax and feel comfortable with her and preparing and serving the food to them.

But, biggest challenge was deciding the fee and menu for the cooking class. She consulted *Mr. Parvat Lal Kewat*, owner of *Ram Raja Restaurant* in *Orchha*, and enquired about the quantity and dishes which is being served in the restaurant

In 2005, The fixed Indian *Thali* (platter of Indian food) costs around INR 60/- which includes two seasonal vegetables, either lentil or yoghurt as per the season, *Vegetable Pulao* (Mix vegetable rice), 6 *Chapati* (Indian Bread), Salad and one sweet dish (as per the availability). She also get to know that the tourists likes *Brinjal*(*Egg plant/Aubergine*) the most.

Now she carked by options,

- Will she continue with the same menu?
- If yes, Will she able to deliver all the recipes mentioned in the menu?
- What if some inclusion or delusion is made in the recipe?

- What should she charge from the tourist as she was also demonstrating the cooking to the tourists?

She ideated to continue with the same menu as any change in the menu will affect the customer taste and moreover she doesn't know what can be the best alternative for the given menu. Also, any change in menu would cost her more than restaurant's cost. And also she has to continue with her main business, that is demonstrating and serving *Masala Chai* and carving *Heena Tattoo*.

Vandna's distant brother *Mr. Nitin Dami*, a tour guide in Himachal Pradesh, helped her out in preparing varieties of *Masala Tea* that were liked by tourist. He also cognized her the recipe of *Vegetable Pulao*.

She decided to charge INR 100/- from each tourist for the cooking classes. But the tour manager, *Dabbie Kindness* suggested that it is not justifiable, So she revised the fee to INR 150/- which makes her earn more profit. This cost include the demonstration, ingredients and serving of *Masala Chai*, Carving *Heena Tattoo* and demonstration, ingredients and serving food to the tourists. This was also decided, fluctuation in the prices of ingredients will not be reflected in the fee.

### Operation Plan

Until 2005, Vandna stayed in the shop only. So space was a major problem as only few people can sit inside the shop. She doesn't have enough funds to rent a new space and purchase utensils to meet the demand of large group of tourists. It was also a bulk investment. So, she decided to cater small groups or individual tourists. Since, clientele was fixed, she was alone able to cater the small groups as she had

a practice of cooking for 6-7 persons in her in laws house.

It was assured that the tour manager will inform her about number of tourists few days prior to the arrival. She could not afford bulk purchasing, so the purchasing would be done as per the number of tourists. The purchasing would be done by her husband. And if required he will help her. The power facility will also be taken into consideration, as Orchha is a small village, there was the problem of power crisis.

The timing for the tourist arrival will also be taken care of, as the tourist must be demonstrated and served on the time, so that they can properly enjoy the other activities or get back to the hotels.

The tour managers also make tourists aware of the facts that the place they are going to visit is a small shop and they have limited facilities to avail, but this would give them a lifetime unique experience.

The foreign tourists are very much concerned about the health and hygiene factor. Keeping this in mind, hygiene of the shop and the surrounding areas will be taken care of. There must be proper availability of the basic thing like hand sanitizer, Napkins, proper cleanliness of the shop.

The feedback should be taken care of, as it will improve the quality of the food being served and inclusion/delusion of new recipe if there is more demand or any alternative of current recipe.

### Marketing Plan

Tourism is a labor intensive industry. With the advancement of technology, especially mobile handsets, it has become necessary

to build contacts and loyalty with the people involved in it.

She ideated that her client base is not in India, so the promotional strategy would not work in India. Even she was unaware, how market base is developed. She received through Intrepid tour managers.

So, she left it on the Intrepid travel and decided to follow their instructions. Intrepid travel added "Vandna Cooking Classes" in their itinerary and also provided assistance for the full fledged setting for the classes. Even later, she used only a banner to display her shop.

### **Relationship Marketing**

Relational marketing involves the creation, maintenance and strengthening of the relations with buyers and the other business partners of an enterprise, aiming at long-term actions. Ensuring the best relations with buyers and – based on that – making them as loyal as possible are the essential end of all attempts typical of relational marketing.

American Marketing Association (AMA) has defined , relational marketing as "marketing made real by the planning and execution of activities to set up, assess, promote and distribute ideas, goods and services with the purpose to achieve exchanges meant to meet various individual and organizational goals".

In the contemporary conditions of doing business at the tourist market, characterized by strong competition and sophisticated demand, implementation of relationship marketing concept with focus at development of high quality relationships with consumers and stakeholders is becoming imperative of gaining mutual benefits and satisfaction. Thus there are lots of advantages in the shift of traditional transactions marketing approach toward relationship marketing.

The main benefits of relationship marketing are related to higher degree of consumers' satisfaction with social and financial effects. In marketing practice companies are mostly focused at providing higher level of quality than expected, organizing more intensive contacts and more effective communication with consumers and shifting to more personalized treatment of individual consumer.

Successful implementation of relationship marketing is based on principles of modern management of products/services, tourist destinations and Consumer's demand.

Now- a -days, Consumers are getting status of partners of tourist companies which must build long term relations of mutual respect in order to keep mutual relations based on adequate quality and service innovation. Goal of relationship marketing is to deliver long term value to consumers, and level of success is long term satisfaction of consumers.

Thus, relationship marketing is business philosophy assume that both individual consumers and companies prefer to keep long term relations with actual organization instead of searching continually for new offers. With this assumption and with the fact that usually it is more cost effective to keep actual consumers than to attract new consumers, successful marketers join their efforts on developing effective strategies to keep loyal consumers.

Vandna come to know that the tour manager shifts the companies for increments or other reasons. So, she remained in contacts with the tour managers, guides, etc. whoever can generate the tourist. This helped her to get tourists from other tour operators apart from Intrepid. Even today Intrepid is the maximum tourist provider company. The marketing plan and pricing strategy is decided by them. The other tour manager who are working with different companies or has opened up new tour and travel Companies, also brings the tourists for cooking classes and also they are suggesting other manager to have inclusion of "Vandna Cooking Classes" in the itinerary.

She has adopted the simplest and best possible marketing strategy for the cooking classes. Vandna very well knew that, she doesn't have enough funds to promote her cooking classes in the international market. She is highly dependent on the tour operators and tour manager for its customers. Hence, to maintain the business relations she offers some gifts to the tour manager and tries to be touch with them as if they shift their companies or set up new business, her clientele would not get disturbed.

The tourists were fond of the cooking classes, even when they get back to their countries, helped in the marketing through word of mouth publicity. That has generated a curiosity among the different tourist who is planning for India tour. Even she has got repeated customers from all round the globe, indicating the success of the cooking classes and they are also helping in generating the customers for the cooking classes at their native places.

### ***Future plan***

Vandna cooking classes is now a renowned name in the international tourism market. She wants to continue the business as it is.

"Whoever and whatever I am today is because of the cooking class. I will never change the profession and continue to serve the tourists in the Orchha. My life is incomplete without cooking classes. Yes, being a lady I will always look forward for woman empowerment and employment generation. I never want to expand my cooking classes business, as I am self satisfied with it and wants to thank God for giving me such opportunity. The tourism is a vast industry and there is lots of areas which are being untapped, so, I want more people to indulge in such type of activities and grab the opportunities."

She has some future goals which she wishes if, would be possible can come into reality.

- She wants to open a restaurant, fully managed by women in the Orchha, where tourists will be facilitated with the different Indian recipes along with the demonstration.
- She wants to train women in Orchha, to run different small scale business or cottage industry like embroidery, painting, arts and crafts, cooking, etc.

### **Brain Quest:**

1. Vandana cooking classes is an endogenous entrepreneurial approach. Should such business adopt exogenous approach for profit maximization?
2. "Serve what is being demanded" is a right business approach. So is it a necessity for small entrepreneurs to undergo changes?
3. Cooking classes are generally run by women, but, men are known for best cooking. Should such ventures be more successful if it would run by men?