FOR WOMEN BY WOMEN: A STUDY ON TAXI SERVICE AGGREGATORS' INITIATIVE TO EMPOWER WOMEN IN INDIA

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Abstract- In the recent past there has been an increasing demand for woman drivers, especially in metropolitan cities. The number of sexual harassment and horrific rapes which women encounter when they travel alone seem to be the main reason for such a demand. It has made the Taxi aggregators such as Ola and Uber to rethink the safety measures for their women passengers apart from having a SOS button installed in the app or even providing provision to share the ride details and facility to track the ride too. The launch of Ola pink, She Taxi, Gcabs, Viira and Priyadharshini seem to have both women safety and women empowerment as their main motive. Cabs that are driven 'for women by women' have introduced women drivers in the driver ecosystem. Ola Pink has facilitated micro entrepreneurship by not just creating women cab drivers but Ola Women entrepreneurs. The idea behind this is to develop a sustainable model and create livelihood opportunities for more women. By doing so these taxi aggregates have also earned their lost reputation and embraced livelihood options for women thus creating a win-win solution. However not all of the above mentioned taxi services 'for women by women' have been successful. Though it assures safety of women and contributes largely towards woman empowerment, there still seem to be hurdles in making this venture successful. The focus of this research is to find out the success stories of these Taxi aggregates in creating livelihood opportunities for women and the drawbacks and challenges faced in this venture, taking Ola Pink and M Auto as comparative case study.

Key Words: Inclusive Development, Livelihood Opportunities, Micro Entrepreneurship, Technology for Development, Women Empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Annette Dixon, World Bank South Asia Vice President remarked that India can accelerate its growth by encouraging more women to contribute to the country's economy. She opined that in the past twenty years more than hundred million people have crossed the poverty line in India and this achievement is something remarkable but also felt that if more women were involved in contribution towards economic development then the number would have been more. The number of women who had quit job in India was almost close to 20 million in the past few years. When 79 percent of male population were actively seeking job in India, only 27 percent of women had a job in hand. This ratio seems to be a situation of concern especially in India, who's GDP is promised to increase by empowering more women in work force. Unfortunately the swift urbanization in India has not encouraged women into the job market until recently where we find more women coming forward to empower themselves through self help groups and civil societies. This change has taken place with initiatives from civil societies and government schemes which have helped many women to be successful entrepreneurs. Safety measures for women which include safe working environment and safe transportation are important considerations and orienting women about their rights and legal punishment for offenders through awareness programmes have encouraged women to become empowered. Still there is a wide gap which seeks many changes to be made at the policy decisions level. Women have contributed to economic growth by doing works which were assigned to them traditionally, like tailoring, nursing, housekeeping etc, a change or shift in gender roles have taken place recently where women come forward to take up roles that were once believed to be done only by men. It is estimated that the Indian economy can rise from 1.5 percent to 9 percent per year if just half of the women population in India are employed. Poverty can be greatly reduced if women in India are empowered economically as women make wise investments for future of their children and also for the society.

Though the collective efforts of government and civil societies have brought in significant change in women empowerment, sustainable development through women empowerment calls for innovative ideas keeping both the issues and concerns of women in mind. Any inclusive model of women empowerment should frame their mission and vision by focusing on making a change at a macro level, where women are not assigned stereotypical jobs. This also involves bringing a change in traditional beliefs and norms around marriage, house hold chores and parenting. It involves making women believe what they are capable of and that no role is gender specific. The potential power of more than 97 percent of women in India is active in the informal sector and increasing the quality of work with increased pay packages can

add to women empowerment. It is important to note that India is showing considerable improvement in engaging and creating women entrepreneurs when compared to its neighbours but still behind of other countries in Asia when it addresses gender equality.

Women have been successful in breaking stereotypical gender roles when given the opportunity and examples include women cab drivers and auto drivers across the country. To felicitate their growth and skills, many taxi aggregators and civil societies have offered help. They not only enhance their skill and provide job opportunities but also help women in becoming successful entrepreneurs. In a country like India where safety of women is a major concern, cabs driven for women by women was always considered a welcoming initiative. There were many such initiatives throughout the country like She Taxi, Gcabs, Viira, Priyadarshini, Ola Pink , Pink autos, Mauto etc. though the motive behind these initiatives was to empower women as well as providing them a safe travel, they are not successful in obtaining their objective. This paper aims to study what was the failure behind these models and what changes in the policy decision level has to be taken to create success stories. The researcher has taken Ola Pink as a comparative case study with Mauto. In-depth interviews from civil society offering the desired skill for women drivers are also included in this research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

– To analyse the role of women as successful entrepreneurs and employees in taxi aggregates using the social relations framework for gender analysis.

– To examine how digital technology has helped women in improving their livelihood.

– To check whether the concerns and issues of women are addressed in empowering ventures using the social relations framework for gender analysis.

– To study the corrective and preventive actions taken by successors who want to promote the same idea.

– To review the Policy decisions needed for sustainable inclusive development in the society.

II.   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature is done with reference to studies that are related to women empowerment and gender analysis framework. It is worthy to note that using gender analysis frame work can contribute highly towards gender equality and women empowerment (Candida March, Ines Smyth, and Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, 1999). The subject of gender empowerment is often considered a subject of evolution in the field of development where policies and planning have stemmed from any developmental or welfare approach. Usually it is the one which has equality as its priority followed by efficiency which eventually leads to women empowerment as its ultimate goal (Moser 1993). These approaches often act singly or in association with other policies of the government or other organizations with similar motive, in hope that they can function fully towards development. Irrespective of its objectives the main difference between the development policies are those which caters to Women in Development and Gender and Development. The women in development projects aims at making women more efficient by providing them the necessary skills while the gender and development approaches talks about the social inequality in gender roles of men and women with respect to development (Elson 1995 and Kabeer 1994). It is important to note that Gender and Development has within itself a conjugation of a variety of perspectives.

As a society, collectively everyone has understood that the attitudes of a society are pervasive when it comes to any change related to gender roles. Thus development projects seeking change in gender roles can be clearly influential to the historical accounts which offer different perspectives and interpretations of women and gender roles in the society (Buvinic 1984). So when the focus was more towards Gender and Development rather than Women in Development, major institutions from where policy making has to stem from started behaving gender inclined towards roles which were traditionally acceptable and paid no heed to anything that was against their custom. When a society supports patriarchal views it cannot accept anything that modelled female values and attitudes.

III.   GENDER ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Gender analysts have remarked that achieving gender equality by bringing organizational culture requires understanding the goal and methods to achieve them (Buvinic 1984, Andersen 1992). From the policy makers a need for tools to measure gender equality was sought by those who initiate development programmes. Moser (1993) expressed that those who come up with development projects lack the ability and skill to plan the necessary tools to measure the effectiveness of the projects. According to Maya Buvinic (1984), gender mainstreaming can be done if the members of political processes of a development organization or those with whom the work of including gender issues in the project design are involved by

accessing measurement of growth through proper tools. Gender analysis involves analysis of gender based division of labour keeping in mind the resources available for both the gender. Hence according to Kabeer (1994) gender analysis in a society is done by analysing the work done by the members of the society, the possession of resources by them and so on. It cannot be concluded that gender analysis is stopped with analysing the availability of resources and work. It is also done through social relations where the interaction between members of a group is considered as tools of evaluation. It analyses the power capacity of individuals when they make decision for others and their autonomy in decision making.

The main difference between Harvard analytical framework and social relations frame work is in how they analyse gender roles and relations. The analytical framework talks about gender roles with the difference that make users think of men and women as separate groups and such an assumption results in conflicting roles of men and women even in places they are seen to cooperate with each other. This in turns can result in gender relations instead of analysing gender roles. Naila Kabeer (1992) remarked that a gender role does not calculate power in a society and with whom it is centred. Hence the social relations framework tries to analyse the relationship between people with respect to class, age, race, gender etc.

The ultimate goal of a gender analysis framework is to concentrate on certain factors from the lives of men and women which can focus on the type of development interventions selected for any study. These frameworks have made everyone aware that it is difficult to achieve development through women empowerment by excluding women in the decision making process of any development plans. Even in availability of resources and its distribution, the role of women and their stand in the society has to be analysed to measure development. Finally it has to be understood that empowerment is not something that can be taken and given to women like a commodity but it is something that has to be felt by the woman. It is enabling autonomy to women equally like men. It requires transformation of the woman and acceptance of that transformation by the society. What the gender development policies can do is to make the resources freely and equally available for men and women and determine their relations in the society and finally bring innovative ideas to make women truly empowered (Kabeer, 1994).

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study involves comparative case study where the similarities, differences and patterns across two taxi aggregators namely Ola Pink which was an experimental initiative by Ola one of the biggest taxi aggregate in India and M Auto the first largest fleet ever to employ women drivers for auto rickshaw are analyzed. In depth interview from Anew (Association for Non Traditional Employment of Women), a civil society imparting the skills and techniques required to create successful women drivers was also conducted to substantiate the findings of the study using the social relations framework for gender analysis and planning. The framework offers the possibility for institutional analysis which is important for sustainable inclusive development. It also explains how institutions bring in biases in the planning process and thus making clear why a project is a failure or success. It also has time as a variable and hence the changes over time are also taken into consideration while planning projects. So when compared to other frameworks for gender analysis the Social Relations framework was found more suitable for the study.

V. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Based on the concepts mentioned in the social relations framework for gender analysis, a comparative case study of the pilot project Ola Pink , and M Auto was made to find out how effectively inclusive development was done. Though the aim of both the taxi aggregates was to empower women and create more women entrepreneurs, the approaches that each followed was different. The results are presented here in logical coherence by discussing each concepts of social relations framework separately from the collected data.

Concept 1 - Development for human well being:
Social relations framework sees development as human well being and any project which focus on economic growth or more productivity without considering factors like autonomy, survival or security will not contribute fully to women empowerment. The concept suggests that development interventions must be assessed based on how the ideas contribute to survival, security and human dignity. In this context, both Ola Pink and M Auto have taken up human development for human well being as their goal, but Ola Pink did not have any scope for woman autonomy. The project did not have any woman representative who can voice out the concerns and real issues of women when Ola Pink was executed on an experimental run. M Auto on the other hand had the co founder Ms. Yasmeen Jawahar Ali, a woman who was involved in all decision making right from the conception of the idea to its execution. The concept

of production according to this framework is not necessarily market production, but also any service provided to the society with human dignity. It also caters to those services which people perform to enhance their livelihood at the same time caring for the nature.

When analyzing this aspect, Ola Pink and M Auto have human dignity of women chauffeurs in their business plan, while M Auto went a step ahead by calling their chauffeurs as woman pilots, adding more dignity to them and making them feel proud of their job. M Auto has also launched electric autos driven by women 'pilots' which assures their concern towards preserving nature and at the same time enhancing the livelihood of others along with them. Ola Pink on the other hand did not have such initiatives and stopped with just welcoming women to be chauffeurs in their Taxi aggregation. When asked about the reason for failure of Ola Pink, The Marketing head Mr. Anand Subramanian and PR Mr. Amogh opined that women generally do not prefer to work as chauffeurs in odd hours due to their family situations, but still Ola has many women working as Ola operators in their platform. Since being an operator is easy compared to being a chauffeur which involves long time work in the field, and also achieving targets, Ola had the opinion that women prefer to be operators than chauffeurs. Ola also said that they have no such demand from the passengers where they prefer only women cab drivers, and since there was no supply demand Ola Pink initiative was dropped.

However M Auto had a different strategy where their mobile application has an option to choose Female Pilots which is functional for 24 hrs with the option 'Women's pride'. There are also options to ride with a transgender Chauffeur under the Option 'Gender Pride'. Apart from providing training to drive the vehicle women chauffeurs here are also given counseling sessions to improve their confidence since most of them stem from exploitative background. The Co-founder Yasmeen Jaffer Ali also remarked that most of the passengers including men, women and transgenders preferred women pilots as they are sincere and do not cancel trips and arrive on time to the location. This clearly indicates that there is a supply demand for women drivers. It also makes clear that M Auto have broader goals of survival, security and human dignity compared to Ola Pink.

Concept 2 –Social Relationships:

Kabeer (1994) defines relationships as an important factor towards woman empowerment as they reciprocate the difference shown in positioning of different groups. These structural relationships determine the rights and control a person has on their lives and others. So there is every chance of these relationships producing cross cutting inequalities since every individual is given a position in the society like caste, race, gender etc. Social relations change over time and must be considered an important element to measure empowerment. Destitute women often rely on this social hierarchy as they are often excluded from formal allocation of resources which makes them look for resources from their social relations to offer them help in their routine. This is an important factor as it takes a tribe to bring up a child. Women cannot easily manage things on their own all alone and help is sought from the society. When underprivileged and unemployed women depend on their social relations their autonomy is lost. So any development planning which aims to empower women should also provide supporting relationships so that women do not lose their autonomy.

This concept of autonomy with respect to social relations was analysed in both the cases taken for the study. M Auto started initially with 400 women chauffeurs and presently has 1000 women auto drivers while Ola, though started 5 years before has few hundreds of women drivers throughout the country. Though Ola Pink was a failure these women drivers have enrolled themselves with Ola cabs to earn their livelihood. M Auto offer training and knowledge to their pilots and builds their confidence level and motivates them to achieve success. Grooming is also part of the training offered free of cost. Apart from this they also help their trainees in getting their driving license. M Auto also offer grooming sessions as well for their chauffeurs apart from providing them training to use android mobile phones and using Google maps to find routes. To increase the number of women drivers, M Auto have tie up with many civil societies and women empowerment groups to find out the underprivileged women, who include widows or uneducated or needy women. They periodically do it every quarter and impart the training along with self development skills too. It is run currently in various parts of Tamil Nadu and base works are in for Bangalore and Mumbai. M Auto fleet has extended their service in Bangladesh, Armenia and Cambodia where pilot runs are already on. This clearly indicates that women taxi or auto drivers are definitely in demand and so every step has to be taken by empowering agencies such as civil societies and the government to empower women with autonomy. According to the social relations frame work, the under privileged women are offered the necessary help they need from the taxi aggregates like providing free training and necessary help to obtain driving license, financial help to buy autos in loan and in some cases offering free autos.

Though the number of women chauffeurs is increasing it is hypothesized that a large number of destitute women are not able to use this free service given to them owing to their family situations which demands

them to take care of their children or old parents at home. Civil societies and women empowerment groups have no solution to this problem which questions the autonomy of women in spite of such facilities given to them, unless a change in policy level is made. The researcher suggests that day care arrangements for children of such destitute women must be made available to them by the concerned state governments with good hygienic facilities of water and food and this has to be offered to them at a minimal rate. There are many existing day care centers like the 'Anganwadi' centers in Tamil Nadu which takes care of children, but they do so only for a limited period of time. If the hours of service of these day care centers are extended then more women chauffeurs can be benefited out of the facilities offered to them to empower themselves.

Concept 3 – Institutional Analysis:
The third concept of Social Relations believes that inequality is not confined to house hold alone but is also present in larger institutions who are supposed to endorse change. Unless changes happen in the international community, the state and the market place, empowerment of women will still be a question of concern. Here Institution is defined as a framework of rules aimed at achieving social and economic goals whereas Organizations, are defined as the structural forms that institutions take. This approach states that rules, power, resources, people and distribution of resources are the factors which determine inequality. So analyzing institutions based on these factors will give an understanding of any empowerment programmes planned for women. Each factor is discussed below.

Rules: Rules talk about 'what is done' and 'how it is done' and 'who will do it' and 'who will benefit out of it'. These rules can be written, oral, official, formal or informal in a society which allow us to think that it is quite natural and cannot be changed. When applying to the cases taken for study, all the questions remain clear except the fourth one where the ultimate benefactor of the project was viewed as only the women chauffeurs. Ola Pink clearly states that there is no such demand where women passengers prefer women drivers and there is no supply need, whereas M Auto clearly makes provisions for selecting gender of the chauffeur and also says that they are more in demand than male pilots. So any empowerment project should not act as if they are favoring women by taking a huge risk in their business but it must be a mutual win – win scenario where the supplier, the worker and the consumer are benefited.

Activities: Often institutions try to achieve goals by focusing on their rules. The important parameters here are productive and distributive. This leads to stereotyping of jobs as certain jobs are deemed fit for only a particular group. Both Ola Pink and M Auto have taken great initiatives to break the stereotyping of jobs and bring forward women chauffeurs in the drivers' eco system. However if the number of target rides per day for women chauffeurs is reduced then it might be an encouraging factor for many beginners to sustain in the ecosystem and also be a motivation for others.

Resources: Institutions provide resources varying from human, material and intangible resources. Thus the gender which is able to provide the provisions for the family enjoys more privileges. Here in both the case studies, under privileged women who are providing provisions for their family and have more control over resources. This in turn offers the M Auto autonomy leading to empowerment.

People: This is an important factor which talks about who does what in an institution. Often it deals with the position of an individual and the tasks assigned to them. Being a chauffeur does not require driving skills alone but also other tasks like changing tyres, minimum knowledge about the vehicle and how to handle emergency situations and repairs. While M Auto provide their female chauffeurs with such training, Ola Pink have not taken any such initiatives. Empowerment can take place when women are ready to handle any situation in a given place or work and any projects towards empowerment must cater to these basic needs to be successful.

Power: This talks about 'who is the deciding authority' and 'whose interests are served'. Empowerment of women is always accompanied with empowerment of the society and any other inclusion to this is always considered a welcoming initiative. As stated earlier, Ola Pink did not have any women in the decision making level though it was an initiative for women, by women, whereas M Auto had its co founder Yasmeen Jaffer Ali, a woman who contributes equally in decision making. It serves not only to the interest of women but also to the society by providing electric autos which do not cause pollution. This initiative also had environmental care along with personal growth and women empowerment and thus fulfills the power factor of social relations framework. However, even when women are not in the decision making authority should keep in mind that to safeguard their privileged position they must not keep quiet to positive changes in the society, which is viewed as a serious threat to equality and empowerment.

Concept 4- Institutional Gender Policies:
Depending on how they address gender issues, policies are classified as gender blind and gender aware. The gender blind policies see no difference between the genders and existing biases prevail, whereas gender aware policies recognize women and men as potential participants who can contribute to the economy in their own way. A project initiative towards women empowerment has to be gender aware so

that it encourages other women to be empowered. In the case study, Ola has gender blind policies with the same target for both men and women whereas in M Auto the pilots are rated depending on the feedback given by the customer. Another important factor where women find it difficult to perform as a chauffeur is the poor toilet facilities in the city. Women face menstrual problems and also have no place to answer nature's call which makes it quite challenging physically and mentally for them to continue driving for long hours. Here it is the duty of the government to provide Public toilets that are clean and safe to use for women in every periodic intervals of specific kilometers so that women chauffeurs major concern is answered. The practical needs of both men and women have to be kept in mind when any new initiatives that help in economic growth and empowerment are introduced.

Concept 5 – Immediate, Underlying and Structural causes:

This framework talks about the factors which might cause problems immediately or intermediately or in the long term, to people involved in a project. They include problems at house hold level, community level, market level and state level. The problems that women chauffeurs face immediately are that they need:

– On Road Training to get commercial license
– Training to use smart phones and access the app
– Training to use maps to find routes
– Grooming skills
– Knowledge about the vehicle and how to act in case of emergency
– Self defense skills for safety
– Proper day care facilities for their children
– Clean and safe Toilets at regular intervals of kilometers

While the first six points are provided by M Auto, the last two points need the intervention of the state governments to provide the necessary facility for women chauffeurs. When these problems are properly addressed the long term effect will be equal number of male and female chauffeurs and riding an auto rickshaw or a car by a female driver will be looked upon as a labour with inclusive development contributing to Indian economy with human dignity. Ola Pink was a failure because it did not understand the supply demand of the market and did not address the real concerns or issues of women in places where they could have done so. On the other hand M Auto used a wise business model to empower women not only as chauffures but also as electric technicians for electric autos. They also care for the environment by promoting electric autos which in turn caters to their self growth.

VI. MAJOR FINDINGS

o There is always a supply demand for women chauffeurs and it is the responsibility of the service providers, government and society as a whole to accept changes and also to frame development models in such a way that it has to be long term.

o Ola did not have any women representative in the decision making level and hence may be a reason for failure to analyse the concerns and issues of women, while M Auto have clear representation of gender empowerment in their service.

o M Auto also had interest towards the environment along with women empowerment thus fulfilling the parameters for effective development process.

o Though women are given commercial license by the government after their training, still some corporate and taxi aggregates insist that they prefer male chauffeurs or women chauffeurs who have two years experience. This gap in time period can be discouraging to women drivers.

o The concerned state governments should provide necessary toilet facilities and child care centers to women so that they can work freely even in late hour. These two main concerns and issues of women were found out in the study which prevents female drivers from using this opportunity to get empowered.

o The digital platform has given confidence to women chauffeurs to earn their livelihood as they need not search for their income. Both Ola Pink and M Auto have many such success stories where women have been successful using digital technology.

o Ola Pink was a failure because it did not know the correct way to encourage both passengers and women drivers to accept their approach, while M Auto was successful because it provided options from their end to make passengers choose drivers and also called them as pilots. Their rating was based on customer feedback and this approach also endorses human dignity.

o Anew, an NGO works for women empowerment remarked that women drivers are very successful and they have not any single drop out from training or even after placements, while the only concern was the poor toilet facilities in the city.

o Anew also opined that taxi aggregates should not fix the same targets for men and women chauffeurs as this might help in encouraging more number of women to join the programme.

o   The NGO also felt that women should encourage and support women drivers as development can take place only if women respect other women.

VII.   CONCLUSION

It is time to revisit and rewrite any policy which acts as a barrier for employability of women. Many women are now the breadwinners of their family and have developed as successful entrepreneurs through the help of civil societies and government schemes which offer them the necessary skills and education for empowerment. With 25 percent of working women and women entrepreneurs who contribute to 18 percent of India's GDP it is said to have the second largest potential in the Asia pacific region if India improves gender equality. The McKinsey report says that cultural norms in India are still a hindrance towards equality. So when any new policies are made, it has to be framed in such a way that it bridges the gap between gender parity at the same time addressing the concerns and issues of women. It is believed that empowerment through gender equality can be manifested through key parameters like equal job opportunities for men and women, equality in access to services, safety of women and equal rights in representation both politically and legally.

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