

## State, Marginality and Women's Empowerment

By Mamta Sharma<sup>[a]</sup>

### Abstract

***"Whatever the content and criteria of social membership, socially excluded groups and individuals lack capacity or access to social opportunity"***

If any society doesn't ensure equality and accessibility of opportunities for each and every member of it regardless of caste, creed, gender or religion, it can't consider itself an emancipated society. And state plays a vital role in not only ensuring equality but also eradicating hindrance on the path of its empowerment. Though state, marginality and empowerment are entirely three different entities but there's a strong bond between them. So the aim of my research paper is to study how empowerment of marginality is incorporated in the steps raised by a state and up to which extent they're helpful. Actually the welfare schemes and policies that are introduced for the women, the weaker section of our society, should ensure their equality which doesn't happen. Here I'd like to mention that women are women first and more or less they undergo the same kind of problems. Despite several efforts made by the government and the self-help groups, these women are juggling with their tough lives, responsibilities and societal norms. Forget about education; health issues, employability and better life style, fulfillment of their basic needs is also a major concern for such women. Though when we see around, we find that women's condition has changed drastically but we don't have to sit gladly to come across a few empowered women only. So we cannot exult till each and every woman is able to lead to a quality life.

**Key Words:** state, marginality, women's empowerment, incorporated, equality, efforts, quality, life

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### 1. Introduction

After having written several research papers on the empowerment of women, I still reckon that there's still lot more remaining to be discussed about. The news and instances about women exploitation and derogatory treatment compel me to delve more stories that narrate their pathetic tales. Though women everywhere are grappling with almost similar problems but women who belong to rural areas and illiterate are more vulnerable since they are unaware with schemes and plans being run by the government and they seldom respond to the injustice and atrocities happen to them. These women are even unaware and ignorant that they are excluded socially and are deprived of the rights that are meant for them. Initially it's very significant to understand the meaning of what social exclusion is.

## 2. Literature Review

Social exclusion is the process in which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically blocked from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group, and which are fundamental to social integration within that particular group (e.g., housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation, and due process). (1)

Hilary silver's statement gives out a clear meaning of social exclusion which our country is dealing with. As I'm referring to women especially those working as unskilled labours, which are socially excluded people here who are denied the opportunities, various rights related to their education, health care, right to take decision etc. The questions that I included in my study were education, basic facilities, and age of marriage, health, income or wages, government schemes for women, decision making rights and number of children.

The term 'Empower' means to give power or authority to; authorize. **'Empowerment is relevant at the individual and collective level, and can be economic, social, or political.'** (2) So empowerment is broad concept which includes many aspects related the development and progress of the marginalized people especially women. It is a mission that should be carried away at collective level.

## 3. Discussion

### 1. Role of State in Women empowerment:

State plays a crucial role in empowering women. A developing country like India should have a better growth rate of women's progress though innumerable schemes and plans have been launched yet it is still a mammoth task to reach to each and every woman of the country. While interviewing the unskilled female workers, I realized that they are yet to find their lion's share. On being asked about any information about the government schemes such as *Sabla*, *Stree Shakti* (launched in 2000-2001 to empower the rural women), *Balika Samiridhi Yojna* (launched in 1997 for the development of girls of BPL families), *Saakshar Bharat Mission* (launched in 2009 for female literacy), *Rashtriya Mahila Kosh* and several others, they expressed their ignorance since 18 of those 20 woman labourers were uneducated and entirely ignorant. Almost 16 women who were in their late 40's and were married off before they turned 17 and most of them conceived before 18. To support my point, I'd like to refer to a report published in The Times of India recently in which a 15 year old girl Rinki is getting married in a village of Uttar Pradesh, **"Rinki is among 8.32 crore girls across India who have got married before attaining legal age of 18. More than 16% of them conceived in the first year of their marriage itself and 7% of them or about 9.5 lakh succumbed to complications arising out of underage pregnancy. The problem is largely prevalent in 10 states including Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. UP alone accounts for 15% underage marriages, which highest in the country."** (3) This may seem a regular phenomenon in our villages, towns or even sometimes in the cities, but this is a warning bell. "Most girls are about 19.5 years by the time they deliver their baby which is almost two years short of ideal biological age for conception," said Dr Neera Jain, general manager, maternal health, UP. (4) Until girls are educated and matured, they won't be able to lead to healthy lives forget about decision

making rights, social and financial empowerment. So strict rules need to be made that ensure the right upbringing of girl children as better foundation will lay a strong future. In that case only policies and plans that are meant for the women of our country can be beneficial.

## 2. Girls' Education:

**"...In India, the number of women in education has increased from 4.9% in 2005 to 7.2% in 2010 and 8.7% in 2012..." (5)**

I feel proud and quite contended to see girl students rushing, running towards their schools since this shows a drastic change in the people's mindset but when I started my work as a researcher, I was startled to find several girls still out of schools. No doubt situation has smoothed in the urban areas or the villages that are adjacent to the cities but girls' condition is beyond pathetic in the remote areas. Only 2 out of 20 members of my target group had completed their school education up to 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> and after that they had to quit their education because of certain reasons. Interview of those few unskilled labourers gave me a picture of women's progress of our country which is grim and superficial and represents the whole India.

**"It is a crime that there are over a million girls still out of school in India. On October 11, more than any other day, I hope the government recognises the importance of investing in education for these children. Not only is investing in girls' education a moral obligation, but it is also essential if the country wants to break free of its high child and maternal mortality rates and find true prosperity in the future." (Pauline Rose, director of the EFA Global Monitoring Report, [Unesco](#))**

7<sup>th</sup> October 2013

**"A girl child who is even a little bit educated is more conscious of family planning, health care and, in turn, her children's own education." (6)**

We can see positive changes taking place to some extent in our society but the pace of these changes is quite slow yet it's pleasant to see people from different strata of our society are more concerned for educating their children but there are certain barriers that they encounter. **"I have never let my schooling interfere with my education."**

— [Mark Twain](#) (7) Here, I'd like to mention the difference between educations and schooling which are intertwined in such a way that it becomes very difficult to comprehend them separately or as two different entities. In this context, I should clear the air that education should not be referred as studying in school only since it won't solve the purpose. Education which broadens the perception which liberates us from the bondage as it is stated by our former Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. So the youth especially girls and women need the sort of education which is clubbed with over all personality development. State governments can really play a pivotal role in the standardization of education. Mere writing and passing the exam can never help the women to be the participants and doer in the societal changes. Skills development training clubbed with the basic education can truly and really lead to the great evolution in terms of empowerment of marginalized women of our society. Not only this some NGO's or Self-help Groups that are working for this cause can provide these unskilled workers some skill development training or can help them to set up some small scale industry.

### **3. Financial Emancipation:**

*“Women who have undertaken an educational path are more likely to send their children to school... They can work and contribute to the family income, sharing with their husband the burden of sustaining, economically, the family and improving the quality of their life ...”* – Zarmina Malalai, senior officer in education, Womanity Foundation Afghanistan. (8)

Though the above statement is said in a different context but reveals how education can guide and train women in various aspects. Educated and skilled women can help their husbands and families to increase their income and living standard.

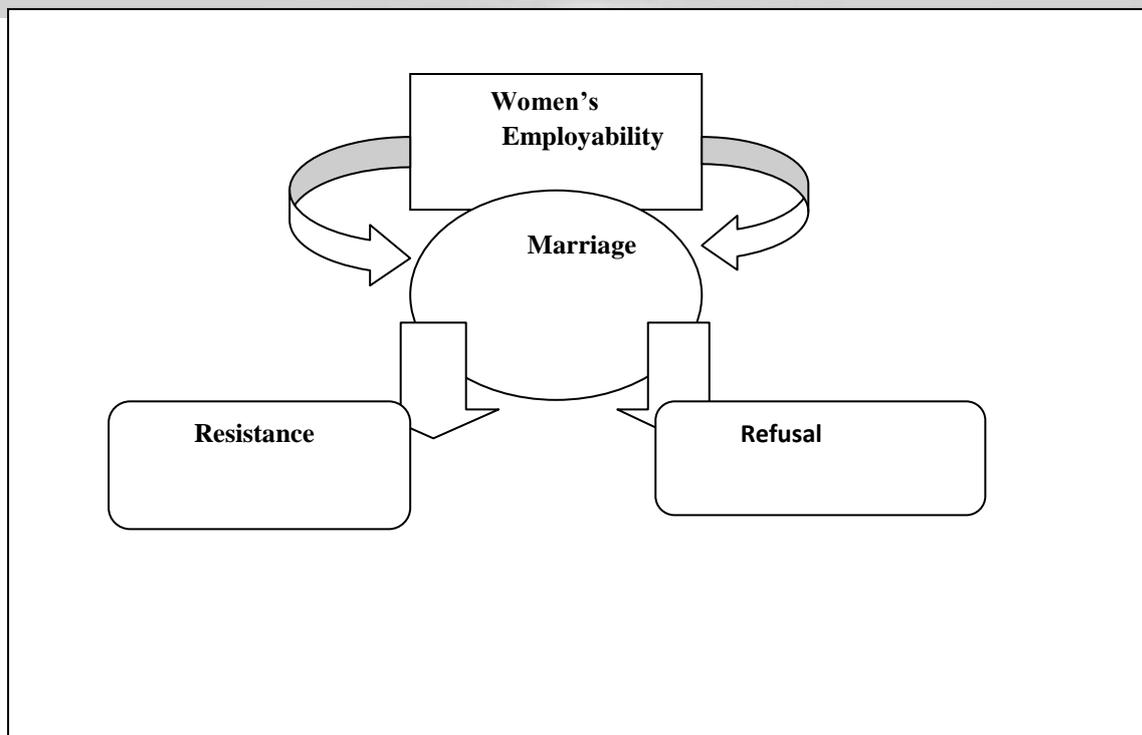
### **4. Equality and Security to be Ensured by the State**

On being asked the questions about right to make decision, almost all the women interviewees gave me the bewildered looks as they were not familiar with this term. They expressed their surprise over how they could be the decision makers! So after education, the state will have to ensure equality in the society. Moreover everybody is familiar with this urgent need of our society yet I would like to focus on this fierce issue. Till women are considered the commodities or sexual objects only, no changes could be expected for. Why our news papers are crammed with the stories related to physical abuse and sexual exploitation? Are women subject to such brutality and atrocities? How can we consider our society an advanced and progressed and ourselves the civilized people? Where are we heading to? Where are we lacking: if it's the problem with the society, people's mind set or lack of strict laws. Here I would applaud the state government of Uttar Pradesh for initiating 1090 power helpline for the safety and security of the women of UP which allows the victims to get the help from the police at the condition of anonymity. This facility may give the women of urban area a reason to smile but women from rural areas are yet to understand what this helpline is all about. My target groups that included women only and who commute daily from their villages to the city by bicycles or public transport have perhaps become habitual of their vulnerability. So here the intention of government is to make our society safe and secured for the women but this step only cannot be adequate and several other strict actions to be taken against the hoodlums who are free to do whatever they wish without any fear of law, police and punishment. All the other dreams for women would remain unfulfilled if state is unable to ensure security to its women.

### **5. Employability:**

“Women work is complex and important because their engagement in both productive activities and domestic duties are necessary. In developing economies, workers combine multiple activities over different part of the year (Srivastva & Srivastva, 2010) and participation in those activities is restricted by the caste and class category, education level and biasness of male about female working. In India, especially in U.P., caste category plays an important role in participation of female workers in specific activity.” (9) There might be two major reasons why women are unemployed. One is lack of opportunity and other which is very significant to know about is the socio-cultural beliefs that I'll discuss in the later part of my research paper. If we believe the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual-employment Survey (2013-14), Labour Bureau published in the Times of India on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2015, we come across the percentage of

skilled but unemployed workers in our country which really is an awakening call. Presently when skill development has become a very decisive issue and our governments in center and states are united to include and promote it for the better future of our youth, inadequate job opportunities are very discouraging. On the one hand, women have to fight with various socio-cultural beliefs and on the other hand sparse job opportunities multiply their woes. According to Jayan Jose Thomas who is from IIT Delhi and has also researched the Indian employment scenario states that unless new jobs especially manufacturing sector, are created, imparting new skills to millions will not solve the problem and if government take concrete actions regardless of caste, creed, religion and gender, creating jobs is not a mammoth task. The socio-cultural beliefs present an entirely different scenario since our society has double standard for its woman members.



### 5.1 Socio-cultural Belief

The above picture gives a brief idea how girls sometimes give in to the social beliefs that consider that girls should be married off at the right age otherwise it will become very difficult for them to survive and cope with their surroundings. A number of young women are imbibed with the thoughts of marriage since their tender age and they are convinced that marriage is their first priority. I've already given the instance of how marriage at early age mars the entire life of young girls. In this context, more awareness should be spread in the nook and corner of our villages apart from making the law stricter. The other point which I've mentioned above is reluctance which shows sometimes women themselves don't want to come out of their comfort zone and lead to pathetic lives as they are dependent on their spouses completely. So we need to reframe the social structure that makes women to live within the threshold of their houses, though it is a very long and time taking process but we will have to change the mindset of the people.

## 6. Domestic Violence:

**“It has also been seen that victims of gender based violence seldom wish to report the incidences of violence to the other family members. Reporting of such cases is even more difficult when some family members are involved in it.” (10)**

**Ms. Madhu Garg, State Secretary, AIDWA (Hindustan Times, Lko Edition)**

The study conducted on 3,000 women across the 10 districts of UP by Lucknow University. According to the findings published Hindustan Times, elderly women face more violence than the adolescent girls. 56% Adolescent girls experience sexual violence in comparison to the elderly women. Adolescent girls face restrictions on mobility. Rate of gender discrimination is high among the women of all the ages. “Women who are engaged in farming and small businesses reported higher prevalence of violence. Those with lowest incomes reported highest prevalence of violence.” Apart from these findings, I’d like to mention the result of my conversation with my target groups in which 5 out of 20 women revealed that they often go through physical torture even for the petty reasons that proves how hard life they are leading to. Prof. Rakesh Chandra, (Lucknow University, the project coordinator) said,” We have noticed that better education of spouse and girls leads to less violence. Transformative education can help change the situation.” So one of the best panaceas is educating the masses that will certainly help the women to improve their status regarding which state has a major role to play. Since this is not a social concern only, the progress of our entire nation depends on the half of its population.

## 4. Suggestions:

- 1) ‘*Beti Bachao Beti Parao*’ campaign by the Indian Government has drawn everyone’s attention towards the fetus killing, better upbringing and proper education of our girl children. For that we need to come out of our comfort zone to reach each and every village of our country to spread this awareness. Not only government but also NGO’s, academicians and researchers should work more in this area and they should be provided with the proper aid by state to ensure concrete work.
- 2) Government has decided to include skill development training in the school curriculum to equip our youth with employment skills. This can create wonders if there’s a good co-ordination between the central government and the state governments.
- 3) As I mentioned above, skill development training alone cannot be effective until more and more job opportunities are created for each everyone.
- 4) Emancipation of women can be ensured if they are educated well and for this, schools need to be made equipped with the basic requirements. We’ve plethora of talent in our villages but because of indifference of administration and socio-cultural beliefs, girls are not getting the opportunities that they should have access to.
- 5) While talking to those respondents, I came to know that only two out of 20 women have toilets built in their house which is really unbelievable and this presents the bleak reality of our villages which are situated at the outskirts of the city. So it is clear that health issues cannot be overlooked as a healthy woman will have the healthy children.
- 6) Vidya Balan is the brand ambassador of the rural development ministry to spread awareness about sanitation among the villagers and this has created a revolution even

in the remote areas of Uttar Pradesh since several girls have denied marrying the boys who don't have toilets in their houses. So our government can train out rural masses about such issues that are launched for the betterment of our society and marginalised people.

- 7) The LU findings show that women with low incomes are subject to domestic violence so if people living under below poverty line have sufficient job opportunities, there will be less such occurrences.
- 8) Sensitization of police is one of the toughest roles of the state only. Until and unless police and politicians understand how significant women's better position in our society is, nothing can be done in this regard. If we have big dreams such as promoting tourism, foreign investment and strong national policy, our government must ensure a safe and secured environment to each and every member of our society since humanity is beyond gender, caste, creed, class and religion.

### 5. Conclusion:

Several seminars and conferences about how to empower women are conducted everywhere and every year and now people from all over the world have started considering women empowerment seriously and severely. This gives me immense pleasure and gratification that not only women themselves but a number of men also have come forward to emancipate them. Center and state governments have always been keen to regulate plans and schemes for the betterment of this marginalized section of our society but more efforts and well knitted strategies are required for the better implementation. In nut shell, I wish to say that there are five Es that our government must concentrate on for the betterment of women and our society: Education, Equality, Exploitation, Employability, and Eradication of poverty.

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