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Unpaid Domestic Labour of Women and their Lost Opportunities for Financial Independence

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Abstract

Hardly anyone considers mothers and wives toiling in the house and doing chores as labour. Labour as an area of study has developed over the last 200 years but the focus has mostly been on the free-wage labourers because commodity production in a capitalist system is undertaken by them. However, unpaid domestic labour is an essential part of this system as well. It remains unrecognized because no direct link to surplus-value produced or profit can be seen. It does not result in direct commodity production but is, in fact, an essential precondition for it. Domestic Labour remains the domain of women. This paper seeks to highlight how women have been forced into domestic labour and take up the role of primary caregivers in the family, taking on the bulk of household work and emotional labour which has been linked to them losing economic opportunities, reduced independence, especially financial, and other additional stressors. The paper also tries to locate the real-world consequences of such prejudices on women due to their social role as mother and wives and the discrimination they face in the workforce as well, which further limits their opportunities. Female labour force participation as a result has been decreasing in the past few decades and is inversely proportional to the workplace and domestic gender disparity.

Keywords: *Unpaid Domestic Labour, Capitalism, Labour-Power, Labour force participation, Gender Inequality, Motherhood Penalty*

1.0 Introduction

The study of Labour became important with the advent of the Capitalist mode of production. Conceptually, Labour focused on free wage labour which rested on a narrow definition where labour-power appeared as a commodity in the market and the individual, whose labour it was, offered it for sale or sold it as a commodity.¹ Thus, labour-power is exchanged for money, which in turn is used to buy necessities, required to replenish or reproduce this labour-power.² This definition alienated other forms of labour from its scope of analysis including slavery, self-employment, and the intermediate forms between them which fall in the informal sector of the economy.

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976). p. 271

² Marcel Van der Linden, in *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 28

This also excludes domestic labour that goes into making raw food into finished products that are consumed by the family, the food, in addition to multiple other small tasks performed daily that make the life of an individual possible and functional. This point has been highlighted by some scholars who argue that wage labour thus could not exist without this form of subsistence labour.

Economists are engaged in a debate about how to better integrate the informal economy with the formal sector and how to include it in the GDP. In this revision as well, however, the unpaid household work undertaken primarily by women is ignored. It is this ignored, invisible, and unpaid work, that this paper seeks to highlight upon. Why is domestic labour/household work not recognised as a part of the economic system or in a productive capacity? Identification of reasons for this is undertaken in this paper. We also look at why domestic labour became synonymous with women and how women were kept in the domestic sphere. The purpose of this paper is to show that domestic labour is essential and should be recognised and remunerated. This paper looks at how the unending cycle of domestic labour becomes fatal to the career of women and how they lose out on economic and financial opportunities. Policies and social measures to address these issues have also been recommended to usher into a society where unpaid domestic labour that is undertaken mostly by women is accounted for and reparations are made.

Labour-power, or the ability to work, is something that must continually be produced. In light of that, the invisibility of domestic production has to be taken into account since that becomes the mainstay of all other production capacities.

2.0 Locating Unpaid Domestic labour

Before we delve into the issue of unpaid domestic labour, it is important to understand why it is not considered a part of the economy, the reasons for its exclusion and why the focus is on free-wage labour. Traditionally, free wage labour took centre-stage as historians and economists believed it was the only form of labour compatible with the capitalist order. They based their arguments on the level of skill and concluded that slavery was too unskilled for the capitalist system. Technological advancement was quoted as a reason for the shift from slavery as a form of labour to free-wage labour.³

³ Ibid., pp. 48-49

Advancement in the field of sciences had made the production process complex which required skilled labourers. But slaves also participated as skilled labourers in the South American cotton plantations. American slave owners had bought skilled slaves from Africa proficient in weaving, wood carving, metal-working, etc.

The other conditions that were identified for the transition to free-wage labour from slavery are the centralisation of states and an increase in the supply of labour.⁴ The former saw the fall of feudalism as a dominant order which translated into the loss of power for the landed elites and plantation owners, making it harder to maintain slavery, while the latter brought down the price of labour, as hiring free-wage labour became cheaper than acquiring slaves. **Marcel van der Linden** points out that while these conditions only make free-wage labour possible, they are not sufficient.⁵ Even in the modern world, these conditions did not guarantee that free-wage labour would be the only outcome. For example, in South America, slave-labour was dominant till 1860, abolished only after a civil war, and did not transition into free wage labour on its own. Even today, Slavery thrives in this capitalist setup and is a multi-billion dollar industry, generating 150 US billion dollars per year.⁶ Estimates from the Global Slavery Index show that roughly 40.3 million individuals are caught up in slavery in areas of agriculture, construction, prostitution, among others,⁷ with the highest concentration of slaves seen in India at 8 million people.⁸

The focus on free-wage labour is embodied by Marx's definition which rests on the concept of "commodification". **Marx** posited that labour-power can become a commodity in a "truly" capitalist sense through free-wage labour in which the worker "*as a free individual can dispose of his labour-power as his commodity*" and "*has no other commodity for sale*".⁹ According to him, "*labour-power can appear on market as a commodity only if, and so far as, its possessor, the individual whose labour-power it is, offers it for sale or sells it as a commodity*".

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⁴ Ibid., p. 48

⁵ Ibid., p. 51

⁶ "Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour" (International Labour Organization, 2014), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_243391.pdf, p. 13.

⁷ "Highlights: Global Slavery Index," Highlights | Global Slavery Index (The Minderoo Foundation Pty Ltd, 2018), <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/highlights/>.

⁸ Arantxa Underwood , "Which Countries Have the Highest Rates of Modern Slavery and Most Victims?," *Thomson Reuters Foundation* , July 30, 2018, <https://news.trust.org/item/20180730000101-aj7ui/>.

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976). p. 272

Marx's definition is narrow in its approach as it excludes many other forms of labour, including unpaid domestic labour. He assumes that labour-power is offered as a commodity by the worker who is a carrier, as well as the possessor of it, and sells nothing else but labour.¹⁰ There are many examples where the carrier of the labour-power (the one who embodies the labour-power) may not be the possessor. Wage labour was done by children, and wage labour by slaves fall in this category. In these cases, the possessor, or the one who controls the labour-power is the master/owner in slavery, and parents or someone else in case of wage labour done by children.

Marcel van der Linden showed that labour commodification takes many different forms. He distinguished 4 different types: "*autonomous commodification - in which the carrier is the possessor of labour-power, and heteronomous commodification - in which the carrier is not the possessor of labour-power, and in both cases, the carrier either sells his labour-power or someone else sells it for him.*"¹¹ Below are a few examples given by him:

	Autonomous (the carrier is the possessor)	Heteronomous (the carrier is not the possessor)
The carrier sells his or her labour-power	Free wage labour (Marx) Share-cropping Labour by self-employed artisans	Wage labour by slaves
The carrier does not sell his or her labour-power	Subcontracted wage labour	Labour by chattel slaves Wage labour by children

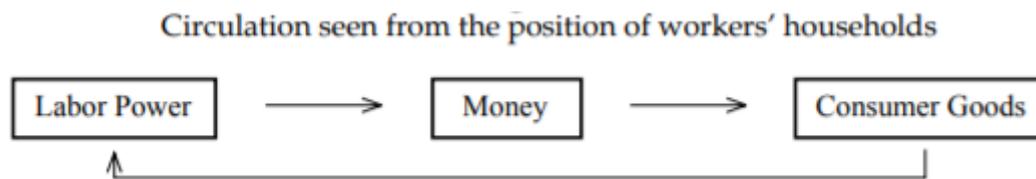
Source: Table 2.1 in *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History*¹²

The commodification of this labour-power results in it being exchanged for money, and then purchasing necessities with that money which are required to replenish the labour-power that is exhausted daily. This cyclical process is shown below:

¹⁰ Marcel Van der Linden, in *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 19

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 20



Source: *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History*¹³

These necessities, however, are not consumed directly, there is labour-power involved in making them fit for consumption. The effort or labour-power required (also called subsistence labour/unpaid domestic labour) to make these consumer items suitable for consumption are overlooked. It had no space or position in the narrow definition of labour forwarded by Marx. The framework propounded by Marcel Van der Linden allows one to look at unpaid domestic labour, not separate or “mutually exclusive” from the “market economy” of the capitalist system, but very much a part of it, which exists alongside commodity production, and is essential for the sustenance of the free-wage labour.

Unpaid domestic labour or subsistence labour is done mostly by women and involves “processing and preparation of food, clothing, making a home, cleaning” to replenish the labour-power exhausted by free-wage labour.¹⁴ Since humans have a life-span, “reproduction of life” is a “precondition to production” and is fulfilled by women as a part of subsistence labour- “pregnancy, the birth of children and their upbringing”, and “satisfaction of emotional as well as sexual needs”.¹⁵ Thus, unpaid domestic labour includes - “sustenance of the workers during periods of employment (i.e. reconstitution of immediate labour-power); maintenance during periods of unemployment (due to stoppages, ill-health, etc.); replacement by the breeding of offspring.”¹⁶ Without unpaid domestic labour, the capitalist system that runs on free-wage labour is bound to collapse.

Patriarchy has been the norm for centuries, and not much has improved even in current times, especially in regions that were colonized- Asia, Africa, and South America. The decisions and the control of the household fall in the realm of the patriarch.

¹³ Ibid., p. 28

¹⁴ Maria Mies, Capitalist Development and Subsistence Reproduction: Rural Women in India,” in: Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Claudia von Werlhof, *Women: The Last Colony* (London: Zed, 1988), pp. 27-28.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 27-28

¹⁶ Claude Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 100.

In this sense, unpaid domestic labour by women falls under heteronomous commodification where labour-power is possessed by the patriarch. In urban spaces, mostly upper-class women possess complete or some degree of autonomy. The domestic labour performed by women gets appropriated by men to fulfil their consumption needs to replenish their labour-power. Domestic labour does not directly result in commodity production, but becomes an essential precondition for it, as it continuously replenishes/reproduces free wage labour-power without which it won't take place. This free-wage labour-power is itself sold as a commodity to capital which allows for surplus value to be produced. The domestic labour itself is involved in the production (private or concrete production) of use-values (things that can't be exchanged for money but satisfy human requirements, eg. cooked food). This production involves the consumption of housewives' unpaid domestic labour in "*production and reproduction of people*".¹⁷ This is what keeps the capitalist system operational, but this labour is still not recognized in economic terms and debates about the remuneration of this unpaid domestic labour haven't translated into reality.

Recently an ILO body namely the **International Conference of Labour Statisticians** (ICLS) in its 19th conference put forward a new terminology which explains the use-value produced by unpaid domestic work under the umbrella category of "**own use production work**" defined as "*all inputs of labour involved in the production of goods and services for own final use. This concept captures the type of work that (is) commonly accepted as unpaid production work, within which the provision of services is also known as unpaid care work. Unpaid production workers are defined as individuals of working age who conducted at least one hour of work (in a day) in producing goods or providing services for (their) own final use.*"¹⁸

3.0 Capitalism and the change in household systems

The mode of production in earlier times, before capitalism arrived, was of subsistence, with the entire family working and producing for direct consumption, primarily in agriculture, with small amounts of surplus production which was then traded in for other necessities.

¹⁷ Susan Himmelweit and Simon Mohun. "Domestic Labour and Capital." *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 1, no. 1 (1977): 15-31., p. 28. Accessed January 29, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23596457>.

¹⁸ Copyright © International Labour Organization 2020

With the advent of the capital mode of production, the labour-power itself became a commodity, and we see that men increasingly began to depend on the labour of their wife in the domestic sphere to be able to work outside. This trend hybridised to a point, that even when women had to step out of the house and into the factories, their primary responsibility at their homes remained that of a caregiver and household worker.¹⁹

Amartya Sen argues that production capacities and arrangements are seen from the lens of systematic biases, where gendered dichotomies then add on to the division of labour in a domestic capacity, keeping this domain as the exclusive responsibility of the woman alone.²⁰ **Barbara Caine** traces this gendered division back to the process of industrialization while analysing its impact on European society and notes how the idea of ‘work’²¹ itself began to assume a masculine identity. In contrast, a “*complementary development*” took place which relegated the women to the household, and the identity of a woman became centred on her role as a housewife. The home, therefore, became a private, and feminine space, in contrast to the masculine industrial worker, she goes so far as to argue that the idea of masculinity itself began to be realised by a man’s ability to work and provide for and maintain dependents, i.e his family. She argues that “*For the most part, industrialisation served to emphasise and to make more rigid the sexual division of labour.*”²² Her argument also highlights that the home was not just a physical space but encompassed moral ideals as well, and was therefore regulated accordingly.

We find a reference in her argument about multiple books²³ that were published in the mid-1800s onwards that focused on the moral policing and education of women to become good housewives, all in an attempt to imbue within them ideals of ‘civility’ and ‘virtue.’ In such publications, and the society by extension, maternity and unpaid domestic work began to be manufactured as the true duty of a woman in life.

¹⁹ Barbara Caine and Glenda Sluga, *Gendering European History 1780 - 1920* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000).

²⁰ Sen, Amartya. “Gender and Cooperative Conflicts.” Essay. In *Persistent Inequalities*, edited by Irene Tinker. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

²¹ Implication being industrial work primarily

²² Caine, p. 32

²³ Caine, p. 37, books such as *Hausfrau*, Woman’s mission, among many others were in wide circulation

All these developments further sought to constrain the movement and independence of women, especially from the latter half of the 18th century,²⁴ where we find more and more women of the middle and upper-middle class losing out on their financial autonomy, and losing their say in matters of the household and beyond. She argues that the domestic sphere was under the strict control of the patriarch, or the men of the house. “*While the ideal home was presided over by a woman and seen as her ‘natural’ sphere, she did not own it. Women, like the children they bore and the house in which they lived, all belonged to their husbands.*”²⁵ **Ruth Perry** likens this to the “*colonization of the female body for domestic life*”, comparing it to Imperialism and land enclosures, and she argues that motherhood and the “*invention of childhood*”²⁶ were the parameters upon which the identity of a woman began to be constructed.

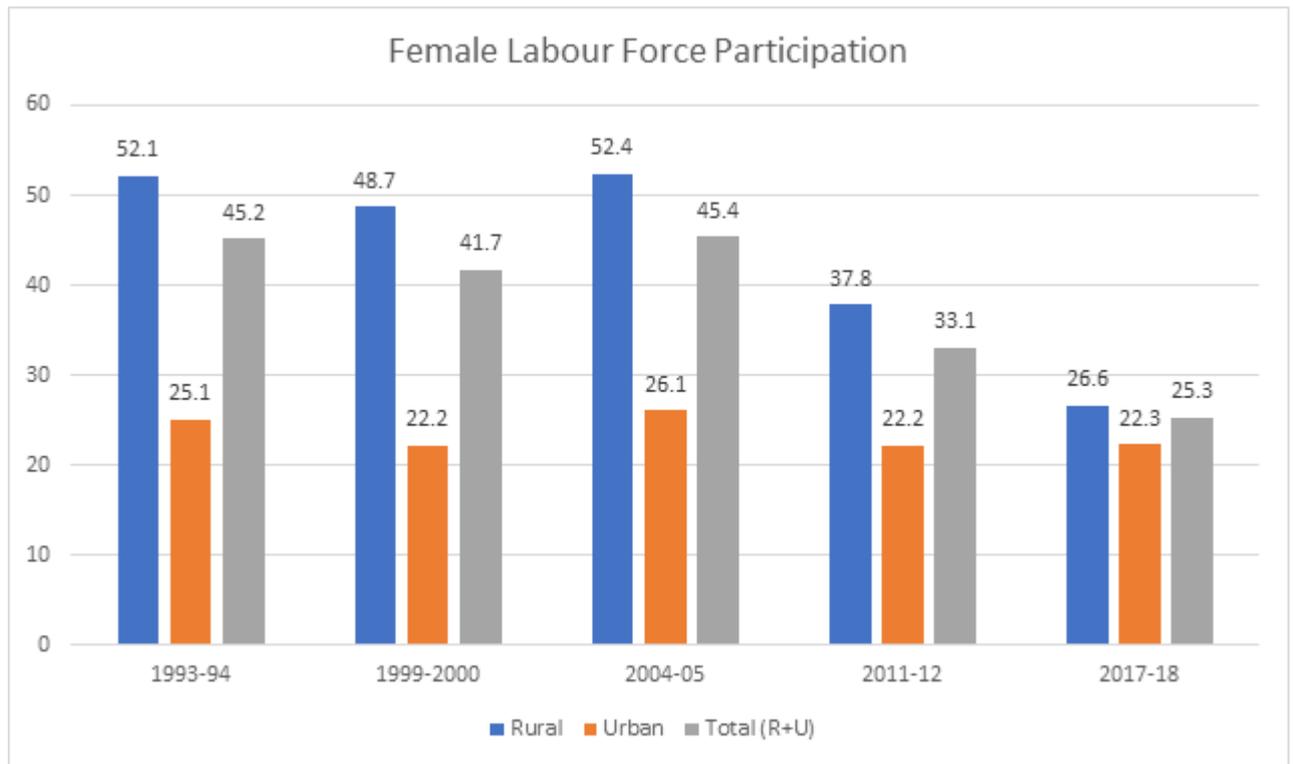
4.0 Women's participation in the paid labour force: Societal juxtapositions and ethical conundrums

A key aspect of all the mentioned arguments has been that women, by and large, have been pushed to perform manual and emotional labour in the households, but here one has to bring into attention some of the consequences of such decisions. Government bodies and international organizations have published multiple reports in the last few decades that throw light on the fall of female labour participation. By now it has been firmly established that for a very long time, women have been pushed to give up their economic independence and provide the bulk of unpaid domestic labour in its stead, functioning as dependents on their fathers and husbands with little scope of control or autonomy within that domestic sphere. This trend has continued in present times, with women forced out of their jobs, many a time because of familial and societal pressures to produce offspring for families. The following chart underlines this trend further:

²⁴ 1780s onwards, by the 1850s this manufactured segregation of the domestic and public became more highlighted in society

²⁵ Caine, p. 38

²⁶ Ruth Perry p. 205, 1991



Source: Economic Survey published in January 2020

Female Labour Force Participation Rate (ps+ss, 15-59 ages) by Location (per cent)²⁷

(Reproduced)

From a cursory glance at official statistics regarding labour force participation by men and women, we see that there has been a steady decline in female participation. According to the Economic Survey of 2019-20²⁸, we find that the female labour force participation rate for the age group of 15-59 years (termed the productive age) shows a downward trend- from 33.1 per cent to 25.3 per cent for the years 2011-12 and 2017-18 respectively. We also see that rural women made up a larger percentage of the workforce in previous decades, and their subsequent decline in the workforce is acute. The participation of urban women in the labour workforce on the other hand has seen minor fluctuations and has been steadily on the lower end.

²⁷ Rep. *Economic Survey 2019-20*. Economic Division, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, January 2020. p. 288

²⁸ Ibid

One reason for the low participation rate by urban women can be due to the family structures in the urban areas which are shifting towards a nuclear setup, which further reiterates the question in the household about who will take care of the child at home when the mother rejoins at her job.²⁹ This can be seen in the context of the decline in female labour force participation, in not just urban but also some of the rural areas with smaller families. However, we need to acknowledge that education also might play a role in this trend, as women who are actively engaged in higher education are naturally not working and the demographic patterns can be a reflection of that as well. An International Labour Organisation (ILO) report of 2014 argues that the decreased labour force participation in India can be due to “*educational attainment, fertility rates and the age of marriage, economic growth/cyclical effects, and urbanization.*” Also, they take into cognisance the social norms which determine “*the role of women in the public domain (which) continue to affect outcomes.*”³⁰

A report by International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2020 further corroborates this argument, and reveals that 187 million hours are spent daily on unpaid production labour, of which approximately 60 per cent is undertaken by women alone, they account for this data by analysing five developing countries of the Asia-Pacific region,³¹ and this work includes food produced for immediate consumption and taking care of dependents (children and elderly).³² An NSO report of 2019 with similar conclusions about India states that a woman devotes on average 293 minutes daily in the urban areas, and 301 minutes daily in the rural areas to unpaid domestic production.³³ Men in the same capacity spend about 94 minutes in urban, and 98 minutes in rural areas in unpaid domestic work. Additionally, in terms of unpaid caregiving services, women in urban areas devote 138 minutes in a day, while women in the rural areas devote 132 minutes, daily. To highlight this discrepancy, the following chart about unpaid domestic work is given below:

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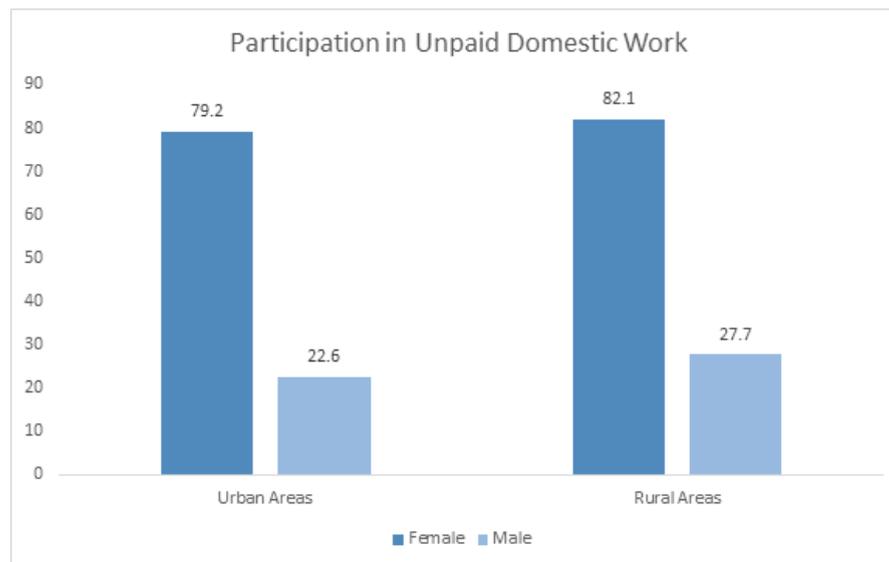
²⁹ These questions are common at the time of the interview, inquiring prospective women applying for jobs when they have kids, about how they’ll manage with the kids and who exactly in their absence would look after them. Nancy Folbre in her article also raises this question, this point is added in the article in the following pages.

³⁰ Copyright © International Labour Organization 2014

³¹ The countries analysed included Tonga, Nepal, Mongolia, Cook Island, and Lao PDR. This highlights that the problem of discrepancy of domestic labour division is experienced across the globe, and is most profound in developing countries. Similar studies in India also corroborate this.

³² Copyright © International Labour Organization 2014

³³ “Time Use in India-2019” (National Statistical Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, December 2020), http://mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Report_TUS_2019_0.pdf, pg iv.



Source: Time Use in India report published in 2019 (NSO)

*Participation in unpaid domestic services for household members and time spent per participant of age 6 years and above in these activities in a day*³⁴ (Reproduced)

Considering that family setups in urban areas, in India, are becoming predominantly nuclear, one has to consider the constraints the family dynamics place on a woman's movement and the option to continue to work.

The law surrounding maternity leave has been changed with the **Maternity (Amendment) Act 2017**. Previously it was The **Maternity Benefits Act, 1961**, according to whose guidelines companies functioned, however with the amendment the following changes have been brought, the most important one being that the leave has now been extended from 12 weeks to 26 weeks (paid). Post their paid leave, women would also have the option to apply for work from home, dependent on the employer's discretion, also, the workplace is liable to provide creche service to the mothers once they resume in-office work. While the law is a positive step in the realm of social welfare and development, bringing about a positive step in a woman's health, financial security, and job security, it has also drawn some criticism. Some opine that the law does not cover women working in the informal sector and does not extend these benefits to them (90 per cent of women), whose position in terms of employment and financial security is already precarious.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid, pg iv

³⁵ Dipa Sinha and Sudeshna Sengupta, "The Wire," *The Wire*, February 6, 2019, <https://thewire.in/women/how-maternity-benefits-can-be-extended-to-informal-women-workers>.

While others argue that this will lead to a further decline in women's labour force participation rate as the terms and conditions would lead to employers discriminating against prospective female employees of childbearing age,³⁶ since the companies would see this as an additional liability on them.

On the other hand, currently, men are eligible for 15 days of paternity leave³⁷ within six months from the date of delivery if they work in the government sector, but no such law exists which grants this same leave in the private sector. Childcare as has been assumed by the majority of Indians is not the sole responsibility of women alone. 15 days in the government sector is a paltry farce in the name of gender equality, such measures seem like mere tokenism in the larger scheme of things. Not only should the number of days of paternity leave increase for government employees, but India also needs to enact laws that grant similar leaves in the private sector as well.

In many Western countries, surveys and reports reveal what has been termed by sociologists as the “**Motherhood Penalty**”, where research finds that new mothers or working mothers lose out on promotions and career opportunities, “*The laboratory experiment found that mothers were penalized on a host of measures, including perceived competence and recommended starting salary. Men were not penalized for and sometimes benefited from, being a parent. The audit study showed that actual employers discriminate against mothers, but not against fathers.*”³⁸ This gender disparity in terms of equal opportunity is not the problem of Western countries alone, but is faced by women in developing countries as well. Sociologists have found that while men as working parents find advantage in terms of “*perceived competence*”, women for the same role, with the same qualification, face additional disadvantages in their career, they further argue that this might also account for the pay gap and income disparity between men and women.³⁹

³⁶ Aparna Mathur, “Mint,” Mint, August 8, 2018, <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/XXInpbtQzgRWwe28GBr9aM/Opinion-Indias-wrong-approach-to-paid-maternity-leave.html>.

³⁷ Ayushi Agarwal, “The Indian Express,” *The Indian Express*, November 8, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/a-fatherhood-more-fulfilling-7013342/#:~:text=While%20there%20is%20no%20provision,the%20delivery%20of%20the%20child>.

³⁸ Shelley J. Correll, Stephen Benard, and In Paik, “Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?,” *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 5 (2007): pp. 1297-1339, <https://doi.org/10.1086/511799>, p. 1297.

³⁹ Ibid

All this not only points towards the biased existence a woman has to face but also highlights the underutilised potential of women in the workforce. Such biases affect not just women who do have children and their families but also impact women who might not currently have children but face this discrimination based on their gender alone.⁴⁰ Such actions further instil and reinforce biases and lead to internalized patriarchy, which might lead them to accept and comply with such discrimination, and inevitably by withdrawing (either of their own volition or due to familial pressure) from the workforce and by giving up their financial independence, they get trapped in a cycle of dependence, a reality for many that have been shockingly normalised in society.

Women, who inevitably become responsible for the caregiving activities in their families and have to provide emotional as well as physical nurture to their dependents (especially children), find themselves placed under multiple constraints and many, **Nancy Folbre** argues, become “*reluctant to pursue gender equality if they fear for the well-being of children and other dependents.*”⁴¹ Additionally, she argues, that in an attempt to counter such restraints, increasingly women have sought to break away from the norm by postponing marriages and remaining childless, a trend has been noticed in many developed countries that have a higher standard of living, and if we take the example of Asia itself, we see this trend most apparent in South Korea. Folbre further argues that despite increased market participation by women, their income brings with it some complimentary financial obligation towards their dependents.

Citing studies done in the USA she argues that many women experience a double shift in their daily life, working their paid job, followed by unpaid domestic work.⁴² This trend is seen in India as well, and the decreasing participation of women, especially in the urban labour market, can then be linked to this twin development.

⁴⁰ Shelley Zalis, “The Motherhood Penalty: Why We’re Losing Our Best Talent To Caregiving,” *Forbes*, February 22, 2019,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/shelleyzalis/2019/02/22/the-motherhood-penalty-why-were-losing-our-best-talent-to-caregiving/?sh=772fe21446e5>.

⁴¹ Nancy Folbre, “Measuring Care: Gender, Empowerment, and the Care Economy,” *Journal of Human Development* 7, no. 2 (2006): pp. 183-199, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649880600768512>, p. 184.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 184

For example, if we look at household labour patterns and divisions in India, the working woman has to perform her household duties of cooking, cleaning, and preparing the rest of the family for the day before she goes for her job, and at the end of the day when she returns, she has no personal space or leisure time to herself but has to perform household duties once again in the evening. Further in many developing countries, even if a woman is a part of the labour market and is earning, we cannot accurately account for how much control she exerts on her income. The roles and control also differ according to social standing and community relations, and what is true for one, isn't for the other. Any policy or recommendation then has to be formulated according to these nuances.

Consequently, many women in India as well, especially those who belong to the younger generations (Millenials and after) have in recent years shown an inclination towards postponing marriage, despite mounting pressure from families, while some have decided to opt-out of it entirely. This trend is similar to other countries as pointed out above, where women, to exert their financial independence and dignity of labour, have either postponed marriages or remained single. This development has to take education level and social standing into account in addition to rising standards of living. The majority of these women come from urban areas, who have a college degree at the least.⁴³ Marriage and childcare (borne by women alone mostly) is inevitably seen as a burden especially taking into account the time and monetary investment that goes into building their skills and career.⁴⁴

4.0 Recommendations

Recently, in India, Kamal Hasan's political party promised salary (remuneration) to housewives as a part of their proposed policy in their election campaign/manifesto.⁴⁵ This predictably led to fierce debates on national television with people stating their opinion and arguing for and against such a step, and the requirement of such a step, and its feasibility.

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⁴³ Jayashree Narayanan, "Young and Single: Why Many Women Are Not Thinking Marriage," *The Indian Express*, July 17, 2019,

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/feelings/happily-unmarried-women-single-by-choice-rather-than-by-chance-kalpana-sharma-sharda-ugra-5831660/>.

⁴⁴ Surbhi Bhatia and Sriharsha Devulapalli, "Are India's Youth Giving up on Marriage?," *Mint*, June 1, 2020, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/are-india-s-youth-giving-up-on-marriage-11590763737075.html>.

⁴⁵ "Salary for Housewives! Time Has Come Says Kamal Haasan," *Mint*, February 28, 2020, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/salary-for-housewives-time-has-come-says-kamal-haasan-11582899963108.html>.

Some stated that 50 per cent of a husband's salary should be put in his wife's account directly as remuneration for domestic labour. Since the private production done by house-wives replenishes her husband's labour-power daily among other aforementioned chores, which he is then able to sell as a commodity for a wage, remuneration in this vein is a completely valid demand. Many Economists have ignored this parameter because domestic labour does not directly add to capital production. In India, housework is romanticized, put on a pedestal, and equated with religious duty - an argument that inevitably states that such duties need not be compensated or remunerated. A point then also has to be raised regarding how much control the woman would exert on the money transferred to her as even if this unpaid domestic labour gets transformed into a paid one, men exercise complete control over the expenditure of money in most households. Even if direct transfers of 50% of a husband's salary are made into his wife's account, she would not have any financial control in most cases. But at least it will go a long way in helping recognize the importance of this labour.

Another objection to remuneration comes in the form that this will strengthen the idea of domestic labour as the domain of women as they will be paid for it. However, it has been their domain for a long time now. Remuneration should be seen as reparations for all the labour they have exhausted to replenish the labour-power of other family members. The only remuneration won't address this issue, socialisation of domestic labour (building of creches, laundries, public kitchens etc. by govt.) will also help women eventually get out of the domestic sphere and pursue their career paths.⁴⁶

Changes need to be introduced in the education system in India. Gender sensitization should be made mandatory and the curriculum needs to be designed in such a way that it enables un-gendering of the division of labour. Boys need to be encouraged to think of household work as a survival skill and not mooch off the labour of their mothers and sisters.

Paternity leave needs to be introduced in the private sector. Even though men can avail of paternity leave in the government sector, the maximum number of days needs to be bumped up so that it becomes equal to that of maternity leave. This will help to lighten the load placed on women in the domestic labour sector and will also help offset the motherhood penalty.

⁴⁶ Jagisha Arora, "LiveWire," *LiveWire*, January 29, 2021, <https://livewire.thewire.in/gender-and-sexuality/women-unpaid-labour/>.

Since both men and women would be at the same disadvantage, in terms of missing out on productive workforce days in the market, women would not have to lose out on economic opportunities because of this particular form of discrimination, i.e. being a mother or their ability to become a mother.

5.0 Conclusion

While India's economy has seen a positive trend in the past decade (though the GDP during COVID had seen a sharp decline, recent projections by the IMF⁴⁷ estimate the growth rate to be at 11.5%), its growth has not been gender inclusive. Women are not directly benefiting in this scenario, and seem to be losing out on an opportunity to increase their standard of living and a chance at exerting their independence owing to their financial capabilities. A women's participation in the domestic sphere as a contributor to the family, in addition to their labour force participation are certain important parameters that have to be taken into account when looking at gender equality and consequent sustainable development. Not only should this unpaid domestic labour be given its due, but there also has to be some serious effort on the part of the government and society at large to give women an equal opportunity to work and grow in life. India also has to understand the dignity of labour with regards to unpaid domestic labour, as, without that, this narrative of subjugating women into the households will continue to derail the life of women.

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⁴⁷ "World Economic Outlook Update" (International Monetary Fund, January 2021), <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/01/26/2021-world-economic-outlook-update>.

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