

Indira Gandhi
National Open University
School of Social Sciences

Block

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GENDER AND WORK

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Expert Committee

Prof. Patricia Uberoi
Formerly Professor of Sociology
Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi

Professor Rekha Pande
Professor of History, SOSS and
Head, Centre for Women's Studies
University of Hyderabad
Andhra Pradesh

Prof. Karuna Chanana (Retired)
Zakir Hussain Centre for Educational
Studies, School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Dr. Nita Mathur
Associate Professor
Faculty of Sociology
SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. C. J. Sonowal
Centre for Study of Social Exclusion &
Inclusive Policies
School of Social Sciences
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Faculty of Anthropology SOSS, IGNOU

Dr. Rashmi Sinha, Reader
Discipline of Anthropology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. Mitoo Das
Assistant Professor
Discipline of Anthropology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. Rukshana Zaman
Assistant Professor
Discipline of Anthropology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. P. Venkatramana
Assistant Professor
Discipline of Anthropology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. K. Anil Kumar
Assistant Professor
Discipline of Anthropology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Academic assistance provided by Dr. N.K. Mungreiphy, Research Associate (DBT) for the Expert Committee Meeting.

Programme Coordinator: Dr. Rashmi Sinha, SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

Course Coordinator: Dr. Mitoo Das, SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

Content Editor

Prof. Debal K. Singharoy
Faculty of Sociology, School of Social Sciences
IGNOU, New Delhi

Blocks Preparation Team

Unit Writers

Dr. Vavsha Ayyar (Unit 1, 2 & 3)
Assistant Professor
Centre for Labour Studies
School of Management and Labour Studies
Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Mumbai

Block Introduction

Dr. Mitoo Das
Assistant Professor
Department of Anthropology
SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

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Print Production

Mr. Manjit Singh
Section Officer (Pub.), SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

Cover Design

Dr. Mitoo Das, Asstt. Professor
Discipline of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU

November, 2012

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ISBN-978-81-266-

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Further information on Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University's office at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110 068.

Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi by the Director, School of Social Sciences.

Laser Typeset by : Tessa Media & Computers, C-206, A.F.E.-II, Okhla, New Delhi

Printed at :

BLOCK 5 GENDER AND WORK

Introduction

This block on Gender and Work tries to tackle the economic aspect of people's lives which are socially linked due to the existence of gender roles. In anthropology we have always given the economic system in a society immense credibility as it forms a major part of how a society works and survives. The varied equations created in the lives of men and women is extended to this sphere and how so. The division of men and women into gendered roles is seriously seen in the economic sphere both at home and outside. Men and women have defined duties in different societies and mostly the women are placed in a disparaging position. We have divided the block into three units. The first unit is called *Gender and Work Participation*. In this unit we try to provide a general outline of what work is and how work is distributed among men and women both in the domestic and public spaces. As gendered meanings and outcomes are always real it is interesting to note the portrayal of men and women's distinction in work. The first unit looks into the debate between paid/unpaid work, sexual division of labour, segmented/dual labour markets, gender roles, gender stereotypes and impact that these factors have on women and their work. Under the practice of the patriarchal system the discrimination faced by women in terms of work is absolute. Women also face biases in work also due to the presence of caste and capitalism. Women have been culturally defined as being the giver, nurturer, care taker etc. and these have created distinct work rules which do not let them be equal to men. Such situations result in exploitation and women do not get the chances to do better in life for themselves. Sadly enough at most times women are not even aware about the subordination that they face. The unit explores these areas and points out that the established roles in family, economy, state and the like need to be relooked and they should work on themselves to remove gender discrepancies.

Unit 2 is called *Domestic Labour and Gender*. This unit discusses sexual division of labour, women's work, gender stereotype, and how gender roles impact women and their lives while working in the domestic sphere. Since historical times women's work has not received any credit in the domestic sphere. It still remains in the margins. Moreover they are intertwined with areas of caste, race, gender, ethnicity, nationality etc. Women's movements in various forms have tried to bring forth the idea where they have contested sexist forms, i.e. women as caretakers at home and men as breadwinners. Such notions have been countered by feminist movements who have tried to make the world understand and re-examine the domestic labour that women perform. These movements also suggested that these labour within the private spheres be observed in linkage to women's oppression, domination, subjugation, and exploitation. All these aspects mentioned above have been taken up in this unit.

The last unit, Unit 3 is called *Gender and Politics in the Work Space*. This unit looks into the fact that women workers tend to be defenseless in the unequal power relations observed between the sexes in the work space. The unit shows that this vulnerability is present all over the world in almost all work places. Moreover the areas of caste, class, ethnicity, region, tribe etc. make it more complex. The complexities are seen in wage differences, unequal opportunity to progress, job segregation like jobs which are specifically assigned to women or

to men, harassment in the work place etc. The lesson tries to point out that there is still a long way for women even with their commitments to their workplace to get the respect, dignity and honour that men receive by the virtue of being a man.

It is hoped that after reading these blocks the learners will be able to understand critically how an everyday factor like work also has strong influence in the creation of unequal gendered differences socially.



UNIT 1 GENDER AND WORK PARTICIPATION

Contents

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Revisiting the Debate of Unpaid Labour
- 1.3 Understanding Housework
- 1.4 Her-story of Work Participation
- 1.5 Exceptions of Gender Roles
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- 1.9 Summary
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Learning Objectives



After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss and understand the concept of unpaid work and paid work;
- review historical view of work participation from the perspective of gender; and
- examine gender roles and intersections with socio-political categories such as class, caste, rural-urban and its impact on women and work.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Lourdes Beneria (1999) a feminist economist in her classic paper on ‘unpaid labour’ have underlined the role of “conceptual and theoretical norms of statistical biases” that have resulted in devaluing, dismissing, and excluding women’s contribution (Beneria, 1999, p.287). An illustration to her point is the below definition of unpaid work by Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which says: “work that produces good and services but is unremunerated. It includes domestic labour, subsistence production and the unpaid production of items for market” (OECD, 2000).

By the logic and articulation of the above definition and using Beneria’s point of view, it is implied that women’s sexual reproduction particularly associated with child rearing, and cultural stereotyping, besides her work where she is responsible for cooking, cleaning will be deemed as “unpaid” because it is unremunerated and performed for domestic purposes. In addition, this definition not only implies “sexist biasness” but assumes and deems women’s unpaid work as natural, inferior, unreal and unworthy.

In contrast to these definitions, according to United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), ‘unpaid work of women is the foundation of human experience’ (UNIFEM, 2010) yet women’s work that is carried out in private domain, inside her household, both in production and sexual reproduction for the family and society is consistently devalued, unacknowledged and marginalised.

The above assessment of unpaid work done by women themselves establishes a fact that women in spite of being prime contributors to society through their sexual reproduction and household work, women’s work were regarded as chronically insignificant because of the presumption that “work” essentially means something that is undertaken outside the private domain, it has worthiness because it is done outside the house, it is not for pleasure but drudgery, there are fixed wages for the work and there are specific timings when work is undertaken, therefore “work” is understood narrowly.

These biased assumptions that largely shaped such exclusive conceptualisations were challenged by feminists who demanded and made several efforts to get the governments understand not only women’s work but all work that is performed by women, children, and even men should be accounted in “unpaid work”.

It is through the efforts of these feminist economists and activists that such conceptualisation of understanding unpaid work became to be broader and sensitive. Surprisingly, these operational definitions of work continue to devalue and sideline women’s contribution not only in third world countries but across all parts of the world. In fact in all modern societies the idea of work was mainly understood as spatially divorced from the family/ residence. That is why even sociologists assume that “workplace” and “residence” become spaces that are “spatially segregated” (Silver, 1993). Therefore the powerful imagery associated with work and idea of breadwinner is always masculine and men’s work essentially means ideas of income/work that is carried outside the private domain is ‘real’ work.

Very peculiar to the above biasness is the definition of employment, which is again narrowly defined as “activity distinguished from unpaid work” by the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2009). To determine what constitutes an employment, applying “third person criterion” is used. This essentially means that any activity that can be done by a third person without diminishing its utility would determine the distinction between unpaid/paid labour. With the above framework, activities undertaken for leisure such as gardening, cleaning, or for domestic consumption, or voluntary work undertaken for charity or community service (usually unpaid) are classified as activities or forms of unpaid work.

The above frameworks continue to interpret women’s work inside the house such as cooking, cleaning and caring as unpaid. Besides, since the work is performed for domestic consumption and is without remuneration, the work is unaccounted in records and statistics. Ironically, the same work when done by the third person becomes a “paid work”. This implies contributions of housewives who remain inside the house and carry domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, and caring or engaging in reproductive work such as bearing children or looking after the old and sick can be deemed as “unpaid”. As pointed out rightly by Selma James (2012: 219), this adds insult to injury, the woman anywhere who doesn’t secure a wage may enter statistics as “economically inactive.”

1.2 REVISITING THE DEBATE OF UNPAID LABOUR

The debate of unpaid labour is not new but a historical one. In fact, the due recognition to women's work may be regarded as an *ongoing* struggle of feminists, women's movement and progressives to include women's (both production and sexual reproduction) in statistics/labour records besides valuing women's work, which so far has been systematically excluded and deemed insignificant. This demonstration of undervaluing women's work in labour records, statistics, government records, etc is symbolic of undervaluation and dismissal of women's work and contributions therefore, it is extremely important to underscore this as an "*enduring debate* of human history" that is argued by Beneria Lourdes (1999) who traces this genealogy in her remarkable article on unpaid labour.

In this thread of history, contributions of feminists need to be taken into account. It is important to revisit the classical work of Margaret Reid (1934, as Cited in Lourdes, 1999) who radically articulated about the systematic exclusion of domestic production (from national income accounts. She also developed an alternative by designing a method to estimate the value of home-based work. Interestingly, there have been viewpoints that were sympathetic to women's work and viewed women's work from "time-allocation" to "market goods" besides activities undertaken by women which fell under subsistence sector (see Lourdes Beneria) "market values" but they essentially eliminated the visibility to women's unpaid work unlike the way it was articulated in Reid's assessment. Therefore, it is important to note that *accounting* women's unpaid work is symbolic of a long struggle that women have been engaged in.

1.3 UNDERSTANDING HOUSEWORK

Mackie and Pattulo (1977) point out that historically there is very less data about women's housework with few exceptions of upper class women and their lives which came to be documented through biographies and autobiographies. Lesser privileged women and their lives were poorly documented. However, what is known is women were given certain prescriptions and in a matrimony pamphlet in 1543, it mentioned that ideal wife duties were to '*serve him (husband) in subjection, be modest in speech and apparel, to have charge of the house and its management*' (Mackie and Pattulo, 1977: 9).

The Victorian traditions in Great Britain propagated the ideas that "home" was the ideal place for women and it also valued virtues such as "domesticity" and "soberness" as favourable in order to be good, homely and domestic wives. Interestingly, these Victorian values spread in almost all colonies and were used to influence colonised women (Jane Haggis, 2000, p. 108-126). This is not to suggest there was no prevalence of sexual division of labour within the household in India and other third world countries, in fact there were stricter codes of conduct for women on caste lines due to concepts of retaining caste purity. However, external colonisation must have reinforced strict caste-patriarchal codes in context of upper caste Indian women and their lives. The idea of women's biological and sexual role therefore becomes important. The ideal woman therefore creates roles, responsibilities and functions for women, and any transgression is proscribed and deemed deviant.

The unit of family is the basic and the most important to allocate roles to women, children and men. It is a role within family that impacts women's life chances and work participation rate in the labour market and at a household level. According to radical feminist view, family is represented as the micro unit of class and relations within the family are unequal and exploitative based on sex. Women are almost like dispossessed workers and members of proletariat class, property-less without resources, and they engage in labour that is used for domestic consumption and reproduction under compulsions. Their labour is therefore undervalued. In this analysis, husband in this sense is analogous and member of the exploitative class exploiting, oppressing and expropriating his wife's labour. Thus women (housewives) are proletariats and men (husbands) are capitalists. In this analogy, the exploitative relations are grounded and women's labour is clearly devalued, unremunerated, and unrecognised (Dex, 1985).

It is no surprise that historically women's work both housework and ability to sexually reproduce has been blatantly dismissed, and incessantly devalued. A renowned feminist Simone de Beauvoir rightly called women as 'second sex'; connoting women were always of inferior status in patriarchal societies.

Before we begin to unravel complexities of intersections such as class, race, caste, rural-urban divide as factors complicating the monolithic and universal views on understanding women and their work, we begin by examining some of the historical views on women and work participation.

1.4 HER-STORY OF WORK PARTICIPATION

The sexual division of labour has been one of the most important themes in the feminist scholarships. Significant to this is the dominant views of looking at women as closer to the nature, sensitive and nurturer. Also, biological role of reproduction was considered as something that made women powerful. In the metaphysical sense this ability was regarded as magical yet their labour besides sexual reproduction was considered as innate to their lives, their responsibility. It is not surprising that some of these constructions were used to justify women's domestic work and care they had to incessantly offer to their children, husband, and elderly. Furthermore, prevalence of sexual division of labour was known amongst all known societies and because this has being a prehistoric phenomenon, this division of labour was deviously regarded as 'natural' (DN& GK, 1989).

Although women's work history ideally and predominantly should have been understood from the reproductive role she undertook, besides that of nurturing children, old, sick in the family; yet we do not see the role and labour of women being sensitively addressed.

Before the advent of industrial societies of the west, women were destined to be at home and carry out domestic chores in addition to the social production carried out at a family level. Records suggest in the barter system, family as the unit was self sufficient and autonomous. The local and small economies or exchange essentially was based on family. Family was not only the basic social institution but also a site of first unit of home production. Women, children and men in the family participated in labour. Women carried the traditional gender roles in supplement to the labour she contributed at family level. This has been documented in the family and shop account registers in North Eastern states of USA.

This simple, agrarian, barter economy when entered into a phase of more complex industrial and urban economy it greatly altered not only the economic structures and work but also the very fabric of everyday socio-cultural life. In this stage, “home” was a site of private sphere, disconnected from the modern workplaces. Nonetheless women who entered the workforce had to share the “*dual labour*” of home workers and workers. It was also assumed that the domestic sphere was a spatial space disconnected from the public and the daily chores were unpaid, unremunerated because they were domestically carried out, innate and intrinsic to women’s life. Conversely, the site of factory or an industry was the site of employment, paid work.

Bridget Hill (1989) gives a historical mapping of women’s work history in 18th century England. She draws from the Industrial revolution in western countries which had radically altered women and their work life. Transportation, technology and modes of communication facilitated and enabled men and women to migrate in search of jobs to industrial cities. Records of young women moving to cities such as Manchester, Massachusetts came to be extensively documented. The dependency on family labour declined thereby making working woman as an independent and autonomous woman.

Ironically the sexual divisions of labour remained intact even in impersonal and complex industries of capitalist economies as women were stuck in stereotype roles and worked predominantly in the areas of housekeeping, food industry exceptions being in opportunities available textile industry. Besides the factory labour, women worked in ‘other’ industries such as confectionaries, candy manufacturing, rope making, and carpet weaving and so on (Hill, 1989).

Contradicting aspect of these developments were that in spite of these opportunities, women were treated as unequal, they were paid low wages in comparison to men and their work was considered as replaceable. Also, “the capitalist and industrialist also outsourced work by distributing materials to be processed to be in the homes of women. This way there was always surplus labour available. In fact, this aspect of distributing work outside the factory was a notable phenomenon and women participated in this labour informally. This form of work was where factory owners mostly notably in shoe and textile industries distributed the materials to be processed in the homes and women themselves sought such kind of work. This was known as ‘*outwork*’. Women toiled and worked hard and these incomes were regarded as supplementary income to support the family” (Women, Enterprise, and Society, 2012).

In countries and contexts such as India, myths and ideal women role models were reinforced through religious texts. Stereotypes and defined boundaries for women were prescribed. For instance in ancient and mythical accounts of mythical women in Hindu literature women were predominantly portrayed as loyal, faithful, subservient, obedient, religious housewives. Central to their identity was the celebrated role of motherhood. These ancient texts broadly indicate status conferred on women and clearly place women in the role of housewives, mothers and sisters, and under the control of patriarch. Their life was almost defined and biological reproduction was an important and integral aspect of their lives. In addition, women provided their labour to raise the family and were relegated inside the four walls of the house.

1.5 EXCEPTIONS OF GENDER ROLES

There are some exceptions to these above discussed constructions where women subverted the prescribed “gender roles.” Archeological evidences suggest women and men lived in families, led a communal life and there was clear division of labour yet it did not mean that women were not involved in doing other activities that men carried out. In fact, studies on tribes suggest that women carried out activities such as hunting and food gathering.

Here it is important to note that women were regarded as magical and powerful due to her abilities to conceive and she came to be respected for her role in this biological reproduction or as long as she contributed through sexual reproduction. But even this adulation of women declined over a period of time and history suggests that this celebration and adulation of women did not continue for long.

Nonetheless, in the primary pastoral stages of life, the main task for women and men was to obtain food. It has been widely debated what role women played in this society and were they restricted inside their homes. It appears although the role of men was that of the hunter, women too participated in hunting.

Several studies on tribes such as Oraon, Munda, Santhal, and Ho show a ritual known as “*janishikhar*” associated with women who participated in hunting (DN and GK, 1989). This illustrates women participated in activities such as hunting that were not only outside the house but were mainly carried out by men. In addition, the authors cite studies on Agata tribe from Philippines where women have often cited how they participated in hunting and reproduction and were not detrimental in any way. The above exceptions from the tribes suggest that in the tribal way of life there were no strict boundaries of sexual division of labour and perhaps women’s status was that of equal with men if not inferior.

However, this sexual division of labour was more widespread than few exceptional instances as found in tribal society. This is brilliantly illustrated by Nancy Osterud (1977), who reflects on the hosiery industry which was divided between mechanised and workshops in England. She points out that men were predominantly engaged in mechanised jobs whereas women did intensive “*out-work*” inside their home/household –based sector.

This continuous and consistent sexual division of labour had most profound effects on domestic economy of working class families- where women found themselves stuck inside their homes working for wages and this sexual division of labour was now visible even at a factory level, where men dominated mechanised and well-paid jobs (Osterud, 1977: 242)

It is also important to note historically women have been considered as ‘cheap labour’ in the industrial times and this has resulted from the social and sexual division of labour (Raphael Samuel, 1977, p. 243). It is also not a surprising when it is said that “women’s work is never done: it is never or hardly ever, done by men’ (Kate Osborne, 1991: 3). Therefore, we see a pattern of women being pushed into jobs that are ‘gendered’ and women end up in professions such as domestic/food related industries, teaching, caring etc. In addition, her work which is done at home, housework and mothering remain unpaid work, a non-work. These circumstances clearly places women at several disadvantages and

1.6 SITUATING WOMEN WORKERS IN INDIA

Often voluminous of literature on women and work has emerged from the industrially advanced countries. The implications to this are often the essence, dynamics and differences that are present in countries, and contexts are not enunciated. Furthermore, the concepts, theories and explanations that are not native have their own limitations. These patterns are evidenced in social sciences and feminist writings. Understanding women in Indian society, her role, work, status, caste are some of the important features that play a significant role in shaping her work and social life. Karin Kapadia (1992) calls our attention towards 'social blindness' where she points out that often social scientists and feminists overlook 'Asia' over Africa. She reminds us that Asia as a continent also has a large proportion of women in the informal sector where they are in major in key economic activities and yet they are invisible, therefore it is important to situate and articulate women and work in these contexts.

Kapadia (1992) through her fieldwork on Pallar, ex-untouchable women in Tamil Nadu, explains that sexual division among the agricultural workers like the sexual division of work is a cultural construction. It is therefore cautiously and consistently designed and constructed in that way. In her field study on Pallar from Aruloor of Tamil Nadu, she notes that 'sexual division of agricultural work here is successful because it has been assumed that this division of work is natural and god given, besides being ordained by the human biology' (Kapadia, 1992: 228).

Sexual division of labour in India across the castes, class and language groups are blindly accepted both by men and women as something that is inherent and natural. Women are expected to perform activities of cooking, cleaning, caring, mothering etc. as they are innate to her nature. Besides, women also undermine their own labour and contribution because they think it is intrinsic to their biological roles.

Besides, the sexual division of work, 'dual burden' is equally an important site to understand women's exploitation. Culturally, women are expected to be "good women" by taking care of her family members, cooking, cleaning, and looking after kinship and community relations. This is in addition to other active economic life where she toils and labours for wages. This dual responsibility of performing and balancing paid and unpaid labour classically captures the essence of double burden that women have to bear in a culturally constructed society where gender roles dictate every aspect of life.

1.7 SEGMENTED LABOUR MARKETS

Segmented labour markets are also known as dual labour markets, which consist of various sub groups that are divided into water tight compartments. In this viewpoint, labour markets are divided into two sectors, primary and secondary. The primary sector is male dominated, and enjoys high income, safe and secure working conditions, robust social security system and better terms of work and

employment relations and ensured mobility to grow. On the contrary, secondary sector is low skilled sector, with irregular, ambivalent employer-employee relations, marked by exploitative and poor working conditions and ill paid wages. This sector is often dominated by women. This simplistic view of segmented labour market pinpoint on how women are relegated inferior and low-skill and low-paid jobs. Men often are winners who find themselves working in primary sector. Although this conceptualisation is important it is extremely important to note that there are further asymmetries that move beyond the binary of male/female, or gender lens in a complex society like India, where caste is one of the central features of social stratification.

Therefore, besides the gender roles and sexual division of work, caste, tribe, class, region, ethnicity and geography are some of the essential features that produce complex segmented labour markets as such evidenced in Indian labour market. National Commission For Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS, 2009) also known as *Arjun Sengupta Report* point out that majority of the Indians are poor and about 77 per cent of Indians are stuck in life where expenditure on average is Rs 20 per day, per capita and categorised as poor and vulnerable. The remaining 23 per cent of them were middle class and higher income group who reaped the benefits of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation. Within the 77 per cent of poor and vulnerable, the characteristics of social aspects were stark and highlighted by the commission. It points out almost 88 per cent of SC/ST, 80 per cent of OBCs, and 85 per cent of Muslims in this country were extremely poor and vulnerable. Most of them were further without education, malnourished and socially discriminated (NCEUS, 2009: 3). Therefore it is extremely important to foreground and understand that Indian labour markets are not segmented along gender lines alone but along caste, tribe, and religion.

1.8 WORK AND GENDER ROLES, GENDER STEREOTYPE AND GENDER IMPLICATIONS

It is now already noted that women have double burden of work, paid and unpaid. In addition, the cultural and sociological stereotyping of women's role translates into job market segregation and thereby limiting women's opportunities to grow and excel. There are several sociological and anthropological studies undertaken in India which have pointed out there are several discriminations at play that impact women adversely and hinder overall progress of human society. There is sexual division of labour almost in all sectors of employment. Karin Kapadia (1992) in her same excellent study on Pallar women of Tamil Nadu points out that the agricultural labour is centrally divided between masculine and feminine. Ploughing, sowing, etc. were considered as "male/men's activities" whereas, women's activities included weeding. Women's activities were considered as inferior or lighter and men's activities considered as tough and important (Kapadia, 1992, p.228). Another interesting anthropological explanation that Kapadia offers is the attribution and meanings of men's vs. women's work in agricultural related activities. It was considered that men's work that is breaking of the soil (in local language, *mumbti*) was associated with imagery of sexual intercourse, where the male sperm, or seed was seen as invasive, a tough act, hyper masculine that enters into the womb of women (referred as field). These acts, sexual intercourse and "sowing of seed" in agriculture are seen as

“quintessentially male activity” (ibid, p. 229). Furthermore, women are the passive ones, who will nurture the seed and care for it besides doing female tasks of looking after both the crop/child and raise them. This analogy is interesting and significant considering similar patterns and imageries are observed in construction industry, mining, office work, education sector and so on. These role sets and constructions deeply impact the opportunities and jobs that women are assigned. Several studies conducted by Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) have pointed out this in construction industry where women are often barred from seeking skill based activities. They simply are the “carriers” of the materials, as pointed out by Kapadia earlier. Women are often the ones to pick and carry the material on the heads, and separating the fine sand with the coarse, as they would do in the kitchen related work. These segregated spaces that women are relegated create and reproduce gender stereotyping which impact their economic outcomes greatly.

1.9 SUMMARY

Gender although may be a construction, its outcomes are real. In this unit we have discussed the classic debate between paid/unpaid work, sexual division of labour, segmented/dual labour markets, gender roles, gender stereotypes and impact that these factors have on women and their work. It is clear that women are the victims of discrimination under the system of patriarchy, caste and capitalism. The cultural construction and notions of women being sensitive, nurturer, and homemaker have been the means through which women’s labour has been expropriated. Women have been exploited systematically and deprived of opportunities to excel and grow. These societal inequalities have created and reinforced gender inequalities. Therefore, it is extremely important to reconsider the role of social institutions such as family, economy, and state and its role in promoting and reinforcing these gender inequalities.

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Sample Questions

- 1) What is the difference between paid and unpaid work?
- 2) What is gender role and gender stereotyping?
- 3) Are women inherently sensitive, nurturers and caretakers and more suited in jobs of nursing and care taking?

UNIT 2 DOMESTIC LABOUR AND GENDER

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 What is Gender?
- 2.3 Re-imagining Women's Work
- 2.4 Revisiting Unwaged Domestic Labour
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Learning Objectives



After going through this unit you will be able to:

- discuss broader themes related to gender and domestic labour;
- examine embedded concepts such as what is the difference between sex and gender, sexual division of labour, gender stereotypes and its impact on women; and
- discuss and contextualise some of the concepts associated with domestic labour from gender perspective.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines work as “supply of physical, mental, and emotional efforts undertaken in order to produce goods and services for either own consumption or for consumption of others” (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 2009). In spite of this comprehensive definition of work, women's work has been historically unvalued and neglected. Women's work remains unaccounted in the official statistics of the governments, is statically rendered invisibility and their work unwaged and unregistered. This implies critical dimensions associated with work are contextual and gendered. Clearly, women and their work are not only rendered invisibility but they remain systematically discounted of their valuation, recognition and contribution. It is intrinsic to this discussion to understand sexual division of labour, nature of women's work and their circumstances and the multiple meanings associated with work such as paid/unpaid work, however this aspect remain under-emphasised. Therefore deliberation of “subjective meanings” associated with work become central in order to understand the historical, sociological and specific context of work besides understanding the overarching structural conditions under which women continue to undertake both paid and unpaid work.

Evidently, the idea of work is contested and has several meanings. From a feminist perspective, the concept of work needs to be revisited both conceptually and

historically. This can begin by asking central questions such as, what is so unique about women's work? What comprises women's work and how different is it from that of men's work? What is the politics of housework? Is child rearing, cooking and caring for spouse, sick in the family and kin, looking after elderly is form of work? Is sexual reproduction an unwaged work?

Before we begin to answer the above questions it is imperative to understand that work in broader and in general sense is mainly understood and divided into three divisions such as work performed as an economic activity, work done as unpaid domestic leisure and activity, and work done for community service.

Feminist movement has consistently challenged these narrower definitions of work, pointing to the linkages between domestic labour, reproduction and paid work. Explicit to this is the understanding that housework is unaccounted, unpaid (household labour) and "reproduction" is taken for granted and a matter of destiny, predetermined biologically. In the sense, questions such as work done by women is it of any value and worth, if yes, how do we measure this work and acknowledge their contributions? These have been already discussed in the earlier unit using Berneria Lourdes's classic essay on this debate.

Besides these critical questions, are other subset of radical and imperative questions to know if reproductive/domestic labour are choices available to women in order to engage/disengage in the unpaid domestic labour or they performed under coercive, forced conditions and compulsions? The ideal women be in under the Victorian Era or under caste system as envisaged by Manu, does reaffirm that the ideal woman has to engage in this labour of sexual reproduction and serve men/patriarchs. The idea to question some of the basic assumptions will help us navigate through some of the significant and critical themes that have emerged in the area of feminist and gender studies.

It is not surprising that all over the world history of women's work remains poorly documented. It was only in the 1960s there was an interest generated to understand women and the work they performed. Erstwhile, women and their economic life were considered unimportant. Women were assumed homemakers fulfilling natural duties of women, housekeeping, child rearing; they remained inside the houses were idle, unproductive who contributed less to the economy.

Although this circumstance changed during the Second World War as pointed out by many scholars, a large number of women entered into the labour market and women carried out "dual work", inside the household and outside the house. It was not difficult to assess and understand how sexual inequalities seen in everyday life at household level transmitted even in modern workplaces such as factories, hospitals, universities and corporations. Subsequently, studies undertaken by feminists raised questions about the nature of work women did, patterns of employment, discrimination faced by women, work conditions, and changing structural economic conditions and its impact on women. Women although have contributed immensely to humanity yet most of it has remained on the fringe. It is only through these efforts undertaken by women's movements and Marxist-feminist economists, activists, scholars we see how these articulations forced governments and scholars to examine the underlying assumptions of understanding nature of work itself and its consequences to women and society.

According to several feminist scholars, women's work is radically different from the work performed by men. Feminist scholars point out, all over the world women's work is often less valued, women workers are paid less than men, women are often stuck in occupations and at low levels typically associated with their gender roles as that of caretakers or as nurturers. In addition, women often engage in part-time work, is low- skilled, they are less in powerful administrative, managerial or professional positions bringing multiple disadvantages to women (Mackie and Patullo, 1977). The cumulative effect is women are stuck or caught up in cyclical poverty, end up with worst jobs that are low paid, without any social security and they continue to face multi-thronged discrimination.

Now, before we embark on understanding the plight of women workers in the following units we must attempt to revisit the history of women's work, it is imperative to acquaint ourselves with the classic debate over sexual division of labour and the domestic labour debate. Also it is imperative to foreground the distinction between sex and gender.

2.2 WHAT IS GENDER?

Unlike sex, gender is not a biologically determined category. Ann Oakley first introduced the concept of gender in sociology. She explained, "sex" refers to a biological division that we know of dividing them into female and male, whereas gender refers to a set of social divisions, unequal, mostly, with a binary of femininity and masculinity and other gender and a range of social meanings are associated with it. Therefore, gender is a socially constructed category prescribing certain expectations of performing masculinity or femininity unlike "sex" which is solely a biological category, based on biological division between female and male.

Several basic discourses on gender analysis suggests that although the concept of gender has potential of unfolding relations between sexes, power dynamics amongst the sexes, constructions around femininity and masculinity, social status and position of women in society yet the concept of gender came to be heavily criticised on two grounds.

At the foremost, was the re-examination of the concept of understanding sex as biological and whether it was really isolated and divorced from the social. This approach essentially points out "body" is not a neutral concept rather it should be understood as an "object of social analysis", therefore, in Foucauldian analysis "body" is understood as an object that has a social meaning and "sex" is not a neutral term or just biological, most importantly it is not divorced from sociological analysis. Therefore body and sex are just not biological abstracts rather they fall within the ambit of the sociological analysis (Foucault, 1980). Judith Butler, a renowned social theorist also tried to question the body, sexuality and even the fluidity of biological constructions.

Secondly, the essentialisation and homogenisation of the concept of masculinity and femininity was criticised particularly by Connel and Messerschmidt (2005) through the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" where they draw attention to sex role frameworks, workings of patriarchal power and factors such as social change. They also discuss implications for those who fall out of these frameworks and its grave consequences on their lives and other outcomes.

In spite of these critical limitations, gender as a concept can be used productively particularly to understand some of the key issues that affect women and their lives. This framework of gender is invaluable particularly to understand women's lives and oppressions. Gender is a process and it is intertwined with social structures such as race, caste, class, and ethnicity.

A remarkable introduction on understanding gender as a framework to understand race, class and women's work, feminist scholars Amott and Matthaei (1996) elucidates, "Gender is rooted in societies' beliefs that men and women as sexes are assigned distinct and opposed social beings by nature. These beliefs are converted and turned into self-fulfilling prophecies through sex-role socialization; the biological sexes are assigned distinct and often unequal work and political positions, and turned into socially distinct genders" (1996: 13).

They further elaborate that in almost all human societies women's work was almost defined. This is also corroborated in several studies of anthropologists who found that most societies have tended to assign females with infant care, raising children, whereas men looked after interfamilial activities, worked towards earning political dominance inside and outside the family (ibid: 14). However, there were some exceptions noted. For instance certain American Indian tribes allowed individuals to choose among gender roles wherein a female could choose men's work, man's role and even marry another female who performed out a woman's role (ibid: 14). This suggests women throughout history have attempted to subvert assigned roles yet each economic system has countered their subversions and reinforced them to continue to work that are devalued consistently.

Feminists have consistently pointed out that it was marriage and family that served as foundations to women's exploitation, oppression and expropriation of women's labour. This is reflected in modern workplaces too where one can see shadows of home groomed inequality reproduced in the so called impersonal modern organisations.

2.3 RE-IMAGINING WOMEN'S WORK

In almost all known societies work has been central to human beings. Work although performed by individuals and being subjective, the predominant idea of work is associated with it being performed "outside the realm of the house" and it being "paid." These two important aspects of understanding work unfolds the classic debate on sexual division of labour and the politics of housework.

The above understanding implies work performed by women is largely domestic as it is performed inside the house and it is subsumed to be unvalued therefore it is unpaid. This axis of understanding housework is "sexist" as pointed out by several feminist scholars. This understanding necessarily means women's work inside the house is not counted, unnoticed and her contributions are not only ignored but also consistently devalued.

Sociologically sexual division of labour is understood as division of labour based on sex and associated with specialised gender roles of women as mothers, wives, nurturers and caretakers, whereas men are central authority and breadwinners. This also foregrounds sexual roles ascribed to both women and men as nurturer

2.4 REVISITING UNWAGED DOMESTIC LABOUR

For the first time, at the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women in Nairobi, an NGO “Housewives in Dialogue” forced a paradigmatic shift in understanding domestic labour of women as unwaged work. This dialogue pushed government delegates to consider and account women’s “unwaged”, “unaccounted”, “unpaid” and “unremunerated” work done in household activities, reproduction, food production and agriculture to be accounted in the Gross National Product (James, 1994, p.173). Yet this is not incorporated in most of the countries in spite of the estimates that this unwaged work of women produce as much as 50 per cent of the GNP, as pointed by James (ibid: 173)

This was brilliantly summarised by James, (1994: 174) who noted, “unwaged housework is the heart of every economic sector, formal, informal, waged or unwaged, not merely presenting commerce and industry with a new generation of workers, but each day reproducing human mind and muscles which have been exhausted and consumed by day’s work. Overwhelmingly, the burden of reproductive work has been carried by the female half of humanity, consuming our time- which happens to be our life. And yet this work is hidden from history, politics and economic statistics.”

The above views essentially bring out attention to understand women, as half of humanity, are engaged into housework that is unwaged, unremunerated and not recognised. Women are involved in reproductive work, thereby continuity of humanity is not only dependent on women but she provides food for the minds and the muscles that end up in waged labour market. Women carry out this work, almost spending half of their life in cooking, cleaning, caring and reproducing. It is essentially this work of women that is not documented in history, politics and economic statistics.

One may wonder if women ever protested, did they try to rebel and subvert against such gender roles? Did they refuse to do the housework? Anthropological studies have suggested that there have been several African tribes where women have refused to work and there are reports documented about wives who refused to do the chores, agricultural work, production of cash crops unless they were paid for their work (James, 1994: 175). There are also evidences where women challenged patriarchal practices that controlled women’s sexuality, forced them to do housework and reproduction. In spite of these articulations and challenges, women’s work continues to be devalued and is rendered invisibility. Although women have continued to perform this work under almost all economic systems it is only recently that women challenged to re-imagine their domestic labour and unwaged labour from a gender perspective.

At the forefront were women’s movement and academia who are instrumental in bringing out these views on understanding women’s unwaged labour. This perspective essentially underscored women’s work as unwaged labour and contributions of women in social production, reproduction remained unremunerated or unrecognised. These aspects became foci of many Marxist-feminist analyses that attempted to understand women’s work sociologically and from a gender and class perspective.

The classical view of Marxist analysis on understanding women's work begins with emphasis on social institution i.e. emergence of family. According to Marx and Engels family served as one of the first institutions where property relations emerged. Engels gave more detailed analysis of the process by which women were pulled into the wage-labour process or social production but reckoned it as an emancipatory for women. He suggested that one way male domination can be ended through women becoming economically independent, participating in wage labour (Dex, 1985: 106).

In both the above views of Marx and Engels, both of them ignored the role of family, and position of women in proletariat households. They also systematically ignored whether domestic labour is of any value and why proletariats have continued with a system that marginalises, and oppresses women. This view was critiqued by Beechey (1977) and Humphries (1977). They foregrounded the necessity of examining women's labour in proletariat families besides as examined under the capitalist system.

According to Beechey and Humphries (as cited in Dex, 1985) both of them suggested the analysis of domestic labour is vital to understand and explore the continued existence of working class family and thereby unfolding women's oppression in a capitalist society (ibid, p.106).

In addition, Dex (1985) revisits and opens the debate with a philosophical and central question of examining women's domestic labour. She posits whether women's domestic labour is of any value at all, is it a "productive labour" at all? (ibid: 107).

Marxian analysis of sexual division of labour have their own limitation however it is imperative to foreground perspectives that aim to deepen our understanding of domestic labour of women. In this line is the view of Gardiner who suggests understanding sexism in relation between working class men and women and women's economic independence (Dex, 1985: 108). This view underscored understanding the place of women's domestic labour under capitalism and questioned why has this work continued under the yokes of all the systems. In addition, Coulson, et al. (1975) point out although there is necessity of recognising nature of women's labour under capitalism however it is also vital to understand the fact that "*women are both domestic and wage labourers*" (ibid: 108).

Moving ahead in this debate was a discussion around the dichotomy of understanding domestic labour. Dex points out the premise of understanding domestic labour on the notion of private/public sphere; both though are independent of each other. Women are thus considered as involved in domestic, carrying out domesticity and thus active in a private sphere and the public is disconnected, isolated and divorced from her private life.

The above assumption considers home, kitchen, bedroom, as sites of the private sphere. Therefore the sexist view presumes women's domestic labour is essentially private and it is natural for women to engage in that labour. Domestic labour is deemed as an activity private in nature. The public or outside the house domain is manly, and belongs to men. The relationship between private and public although has been examined by radical feminists it will be appropriate to bring Sylvia Walby's (1984) classic work on understanding patriarchy. She argues if

one has to understand devaluation of women and their life, it is important to reconsider housewives and husbands as classes. She pushes us to imagine a household not as a site of private but as a microcosm of patriarchal mode of production at play in which women are direct producers toiling and working whereas men are non-producers and a member of the exploiting-class (Dex, 1985: 108).

These discussions and debates open a critical examination of family as a social institution, the role of women within the family and the nature of labour performed by women within the so-called private sphere. It is not surprising that sexual division of labour continues and even the so called (liberal, who do not have Bourgeoisies concepts of shame, morality, sexism) proletariat families also continue to divide the work and render invisibility to women's work. Intrinsic to this is another concept i.e., of understanding *gender stereotype*.

2.5 GENDER STEREOTYPE

Historically, women have faced multiple levels of discrimination and gender stereotype is one of the examples of how women are systematically discriminated, excluded or limited to opportunities because of gender stereotyping. Dex provides an evidence of gender stereotyping by discussing how studies undertaken in modern industrial capitalism showed that even researchers upheld sexist assumptions. Feldberg and Glenn (1979, cited in Dex, 1985: 36) who came up with “gender model” and “job model” to explain different orientations that women and men respectively have towards their work, were the most influential in this area of work. Elucidating variables of job model, Dex points out the job model is premised to understand attitudes that workers have towards their work, whereas the gender model attempts to explain workers behaviour in terms of their personal characteristics or their family situation (ibid: 36). Men came to be analysed as workers fitting the job model and women came to be examined using the gender model. Dex concludes this approach as “sex segregated model” typically corroborating the perception of men as breadwinners, cardinal to protection and the sustenance of family and women in supportive roles as housewives.

Some of the very explicit and significant gender stereotyping has been enlisted by Dex (1985: 37). Interestingly, these types of stereotype were reported and upheld in the modern countries such as UK and America. Some of them reported are as follows:

- 1) “women find it hard to resist that their primary role was to serve the family and they should be servicing, whereas men should be the breadwinners,
- 2) women work for pin money,
- 3) women do not mind and at times prefer boring work,
- 4) women have certain purposes for working, younger women work in order to find a husband through work, whereas older women work to finance home improvements,
- 5) women do not show any initiative in their work and they are least interested in applying for promotions or working against challenges.”

These stereotypes have affected women severely depriving them of life chances, growth, and opportunities. Besides, women are at a disadvantage because of their gender roles and sexist mindsets that deprive them of equal opportunities. The cumulative effect of such factors on women's lives and development are immense and they need to be highlighted. Overall, the patriarchal and sexist practice of sexual division of labour continues to devalue women and their labour both inside and outside the house.

2.6 SUMMARY

This unit has attempted to discuss some of the most important concepts such as the classical debate of sexual division of labour, women's work, gender stereotype, and how gender roles impact women and their lives. It is important to note women's work has historically remained on the margins. Women are yet to receive attention in this domain. Although feminist scholars particularly of the Marxist school of thought have attempted to reveal the modes of production and relations of sexes within the class framework, these are not enough to understand intersections that emerge from multiple locations such as caste, race, gender, ethnicity, nationality and so on. Nonetheless feminist lenses and women's movements have contested the sexist ideas where women are deemed merely as idle, housewives, nurturers, caretakers and men as breadwinners. Such assumptions and notions about women and men were challenged by women's movements and feminists who have also insisted to revisit and re-examine domestic labour performed by women in the private sphere and its linkages with women's oppression, domination, subjugation, and exploitation.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Discuss the concept of gender stereotype with some examples.
- 2) Describe the difference between sex and gender and how they influence women's work.
- 3) Can domestic labour of women performed inside the premise of home/private if accounted or remunerated, destruct the social institution of family?
- 4) How is family and marriage related to oppression of women from the Marxian perspective?



UNIT 3 GENDER AND POLITICS IN THE WORKPLACE

Contents

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Background
- 3.3 Theoretical Lenses to Understand Gender and Politics of Discrimination
- 3.4 Situating the Indian Context
- 3.5 Summary
- References
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- know about topics related to women and their marginalisation at the workplace;
- learn about sex role theory, sexual discrimination at workplace, sexual harassment, gender disparity and gender bias;
- learn about other several intersections of sexuality, class, caste that often feature in complex segmented labour markets; and
- finally know how these contribute in playing a central role leading to discrimination of women and other minorities at workplace.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

History of women's oppression and discrimination is not new; it has been an unassailable feature throughout human history. In other words, all over the world, oppression faced by women under patriarchal domination has remained central and a consistent element of society. Even in our modern times and evolved democratic states deploying strong human rights framework, women often continue to face discrimination and oppressions either blatantly or tacitly. While the degree and intensity of oppression, levels of indignities and discrimination may vary subjectively nonetheless there are universal and common forms of oppressions, discrimination that women face as a collective.

This unit broadly examines some of the core aspects related to discrimination faced by women in modern workplaces besides underscoring nuances of complex discriminations faced by women of diverse social locations that work in varied contexts such as informal sector, rural/urban setting and so on.

3.2 BACKGROUND

India as a nation and a society has been no different to women's collective experiences of subordination and oppression. Though on hindsight, there are some rare positive instances when Indian women were fairly treated, even had superior status but these were very few exceptions. It has been said that women relatively held high positions in pre-vedic and Buddhist times, however as the caste system became more rigid women not only lost their equal status but also became subordinates and thereby enslaved.

Today, women in India continue to be counted as unequal and they are subordinated and marginalised in almost every walk of life. Besides, structural conditions embedded in social institutions such as religion, family and economy has been instrumental in strengthening and acceleration of persistence and reproduction of caste and gender inequalities. Another unique aspect of Indian society is the heinous practice of untouchability that remains a social embarrassment for India as a nation and a blot on humanity. Ironically, in spite of the abolition of practices of untouchability by the Constitution of India, caste and untouchability has remained as recurring and unique elements of Indian society. Caste continues to act as instruments of oppression, exploitation, domination and discrimination of women, untouchables and lower castes. The worst victims of caste are untouchable women who face triple burden of caste, class and patriarchy. All of these aspects play a key role in creating and sustaining structural inequalities that are translated in creation of hierarchical and segmented labour markets (Harris-White, 2004).

Furthermore, caste hierarchy has essentially created different kind of binds for women. These caste hierarchies have culminated into creating varied kinds of experiences, subordinations and oppressions particularly for women of lower castes, and untouchable communities, as they suffer "triple jeopardy" under caste, gender and class. This unholy trinity of caste, class and patriarchy continues to affect women of lower caste and untouchable castes in more damaging ways in comparison to upper caste women who have relative privilege of caste and negotiate their social status.

It will not be stupendous or a new claim to suggest that under this old patriarchal system, caste has continued to survive and entrench due to regressive practices of endogamy, controlled sexuality of women and restrictions on social intercourse. Women were relegated inferior status for maintaining caste superiority and it is women who came to be controlled through practice of endogamy with other several restrictions such as enforced widowhood, sati (self-immolation, sacrifice associated with widowhood) and child marriage, to name a few. All of these factors have led to creation of strong and deep foundation of sex inequalities where women are not only deemed but are considered as inferiors, subordinates and expendable. The pyramid of caste inequality is based on women's subordination. Therefore in order to examine and understand sex discrimination at workplace or labour market discrimination in India, whether in the formal/informal sector, one needs to understand them from this embedded, historical discourse point of view.

It is at this background one needs to map out several kinds of complex and multidimensional experiences of discrimination that women workers continue to face in India's stratified, segmented labor markets.

At the foremost, it is worthwhile noting and evident that in spite of numerous socio-cultural barriers, women have come a long way in terms of entering male dominated areas of work. Also, women's contribution to the lesser known "informal sector" which has remained mainly as peripheral, invisible sector is overdue.

Although it may appear there are new work opportunities made available by globalisation, it is extremely important to examine quality and the dynamics of such employments, challenges and vulnerabilities that women are likely to face in the new integrated global labour markets. Therefore, it is not only important to quantify employment of women but examine quality of women's employment critically. It is equally important to understand how several historical and cultural contexts influence women and their work and shape their experience.

It may be worthwhile to consider historical periods such as women working under colonial empire or under feudalism and how caste, class, tribe, and other aspects has shaped and influenced women's work history. This would be a unique and nuanced way of tracing Indian women's work history and experiences. By examining these genealogies and work histories of women it would certainly provide a perspective and help us understand and map new trends, emerging patterns, and histories of modern workplace. However, in this unit we will restrict our discussion to some common and universal challenges faced by Indian women workers.

3.3 THEORETICAL LENSES TO UNDERSTAND GENDER AND POLITICS OF DISCRIMINATION

Inequalities are one of the most basic and common features to all known human societies. Modern civilisations have been trying to undo some of the inequalities. However, most of these inequalities are so pervasive and rooted that it is extremely arduous to annihilate them. Besides, one has to understand that modern societies, organisations, and social institutions are not immune to these fundamental inequalities such as those based on sex, colour, race, caste, class, disability, and so on. There are new sophisticated ways to conceal some of the most violent and regressive practices of discrimination, which are usually hidden in the closet. Therefore, it is furthermore difficult to weed out such horrors of discrimination. Consequentially, most of these subtle and stark forms of sex-based discrimination remain hidden but sporadically resurfaces in modern organisations.

Although there are state initiatives to advocate and strengthen change, protect minorities, and encourage and foster diversity at modern workplaces, yet there are several discrimination that are at place, which are managed by manipulation, using indirect pressure techniques, and abuse of law to carry out discrimination. We are here concerned about women and the specific discrimination they face at the workplace.

Discrimination faced by women is highly known especially in terms of unequal pay, gendered jobs, women being victims of sexual harassment and so on. Also, women are often trapped in secondary labour markets, where they work under exploitative working conditions and on ill paid wages, remain redundant with

lower skill sets and have no opportunities for growth and mobility. These are some of the most common forms of discrimination that women face in labour markets across the world.

In spite of the anti-discriminatory laws such as Affirmative Action Policies in USA, or the Reservation Policies in India, women from these minority backgrounds are less often recruited and even in case they are in many exceptional cases, they continue to face several forms of discrimination. Overall, it is largely women who remain severely underrepresented in organised/protected sector.

This is particularly seen in several industries and work sectors that women are lagging behind men and are rarely in authoritative positions. One of the main reasons why women are left behind is also because women are considered inherently as burdensome due to their biological/reproductive roles, which are considered as “invasive” for the workplace. Women are regarded as “naturally inferiors” due to prevailing sexist attitudes and therefore women are often blocked from opportunities to grow and excel.

Evidently, discrimination plays a central role in keeping women behind in comparison to male counterparts. On top of that, women are at multiple disadvantages because of the gender roles, gendered division of labour and so on. One of the most serious concerns are, in spite of the fact that women have entered formal and informal workforce yet women have not made a great headway and still remain a minority in leadership roles. Contemporary labour markets are therefore an important site to understand and locate how women as workers are subjected to discrimination, exploitation, and subordination.

Academically speaking, the most significant theoretical lenses to understand politics around women, their work is discussed in different traditional theories emerging in the traditions of neo-classical theory, labour market segmentation, radical/feminist/gender theory, and postmodernist theories. This chapter further discusses few important traditions.

The three lenses that are deliberated by Sharma and Singh (1993) give an overview of how women and her participation in the labour market are understood. At the forefront is the neo-classical theory in which the basic tenet is to balancing factors of demand and supply. It is understood that workers are paid according to their value of their marginal product (Sharma and Singh, 1993: 3). The tenets of this theory also hold that women and men are rational and that all labour markets are free from imperfection. The employer is considered as someone looking for maximising the profits. Employees are paid according to their skills and often they are low consequence of a competitive market. Women in this case are paid lower wages because of their low levels of skills, education, and training. Therefore the differences in the wages that women draw in comparison to men are lower and justifiable because of their inadequate competency. The neo-classical theory also assumes that women’s ability to participate in labour market is “discontinuous because of several reasons, childrearing, and child bearing being the most fundamental one” (Sharma & Singh, 1993: 3).

Ironically, this kind of sexist construction can be severely smashed with the help of several anthropological studies and the noteworthy of them is the evidence provided by Mukhopadhyaya and Higgins (1988, cited in DN and GK, 1989:

1949) who pointed out that, a tribe, in Philippines, known as Agta tribe, biological cycle (be it menstruation or pregnancy) or age, were not factors that were regarded as hindrance or blockades for women to participate in hunting. This clearly suggests that men and women in this tribe hardly ever regarded biological cycle of women as a hindrance. Furthermore, the general idea that hunting is regarded as an activity that is associated with men and masculinity, is smashed by this evidence which refutes the myth of hyper masculinity that only men are hunters and women are nurturers and food gatherers. But contrary to these egalitarian practices of tribal society, Sharma & Singh (1993) succinctly points out, what eco-classical theory interprets and assumes women's incompetency due to her innate and biological nature that propels all kinds of labour market discriminations to which the employers are not responsible (Sharma and Singh, 1992: 3-5). A reformed version of the neo-classical approach is echoed in the theory of "labour market segmentation". This theory is regarded as one of the most influential and hence a widely accepted theoretical approach. As Sharma and Singh (1992) put it correctly, this paradigm is "essentially a refinement of neo-classical theory which views the labour market as segmented by institutional barriers" (Sharma and Singh, 1992: 5). The analogy used in this approach differentiates the labour market into twofold. The first is the primary sector and the second is the secondary sector. The primary sector offers wide array of opportunities, better pay, perks, promotions, career advancement, exposure, good working conditions, and so on whereas the secondary sector is ill-paid, unfair, low paying jobs, lower skills, poor working conditions, lack of opportunities for career growth and so on. The reason for the stagnancy in the secondary sector is due to its traditional set up and inability to catch up with progressive and modern sectors. This segmentation also culminates into unequal work opportunities for labour. Differently referred as "economic dualism" or as "dual market theory" (Doeringer and Piorie, 1975) or as the "static and progressive jobs" (Standing, 1976). These distinctions and caveats produce and manifest inequalities and stratification of numerous kinds, sex inequality being the prime ones.

Women workers are segmented and find themselves working in low paying jobs. These workplaces lack basic hygienic and safe working conditions, women workers are poorly paid, overworked, and exploited. The labour markets for women are saturated, whereas male occupations fall under the progressive category where jobs are better paid, competition is not so intense and good working conditions prevail as inherent. A noteworthy aspect is the role of institutional barriers of society, namely economic, social, institutional (political) that shape and influence these sectors and employment patterns and discourage women to take up employment. Huffington Post (2012) recently discussed an important study by Sreedhari Desai in USA. This study conducted in USA revealed that men were in "traditional marriage" which meant wives who were not working in paid jobs, such men felt less positive about the presence of women in the workplace, they were negative about female-dominated organisations and found it discomfoting to work under women in leadership roles. The study also underscored that such male employees, and their type of marriage acted as a factor that was to play a role in discriminating women colleagues (Huffington Post, 17th May, 2012).

Evidently, sex discrimination is one of the leading discriminations that keep women trapped in lower levels of labour market. Therefore, it is not a coincidence to witness "feminisation of poverty", "overcrowding of women in saturated and

insecure labour markets” and “overwhelming number of women in informal sector”. In fact it is an indication of structural inequalities that are at work. In spite of the powerful lens offered by segmented labour market theory, it is still incapable of explaining why “sex is such a persistent and important dimension of labour market segregation” (Sharma and Singh, 1993: 6).

To advance an understanding of segmented labour markets, feminists/radical/ gender theory seeks to understand discrimination of women not only as a labour market problem but rather contests that discrimination against women is pervasive, and family/home is the primal site of these inequalities and women’s subjugation. It is this subordination at the level of family which is translated into the labour markets. Some strands in this theory have determined “patriarchy” as the primary cause of sex based inequality under which women and children are enslaved and made private property of the patriarch (male authority in form of father/husband/brother). Besides, the gender stereotype that man is the breadwinner of the family and women is the care taker/ home maker have clearly played a role therefore women end up in occupations such as domestic work, service industry, hospitality, care work and much of the mental and technical jobs that are close to her. Intrinsic to this theory is also interrelationship of sexual exploitation and harassment of women at workplace. In all stratified societies be it feudal, caste, and modern societies, women from lower classes/castes were forced to work outside their house. Besides that they had lower social status, which reinforced the idea that these women were of “loose character” “available” and “sexually promiscuous.” Such pathological understanding of assuming women who work outside the house as loose, immoral, cheap and promiscuous are instrumental in men trying to make sexual advances against women colleagues. This is a global and common feature in all countries and contexts. Even the workplaces associated with jurisprudence are not immune to such instances. A famous American case in this context is that of Anita Hill vs Clarence Thomas, where Anita Hill alleged Clarence Thomas, an attorney of Supreme Court of the United States of America of “sexual harassment” (Walker, 2007). Sexual harassment at the workplace remains one of the most important sites of understanding unequal, regimented gender relations and women’s continuous devaluation.

There are some other feminist perspectives such as post structuralism, critical theory to understand labour processes, workplaces, and women’s experience which maps fluidity of identity, race, class, and other intersections. The idea here was to discuss the most predominant central perspectives that have been used widely in this area of understanding women and discrimination at workplace.

Before we begin to discuss the widely predominant and idiosyncratic experiences of women and discrimination it is important to set the Indian context of workplace.

3.4 SITUATING THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Indian society is one of the most stratified societies in the world. Caste, tribe, religion, region, language, class are some of the intrinsic features that shape socio-cultural life of Indian society. Endogamy, i.e. marriage within one’s own caste to maintain caste purity has been one of the most paradoxical features of modern Indian society. Besides, patriarchy rooted in archaic and backward looking religion has successfully set the discourse of treating and equating women as dependents, subordinates, and inferiors.

In addition, women are sexually oppressed and repressed. The concept of “Brahmanical patriarchy” (Chakravathy, 1995) brilliantly reveals how upper caste women were treated and controlled by repressive regimes of kitchen-household- cultural practices that were operated through control over women’s sexuality. Ironically, on one hand, upper caste women were sexually repressed whereas on the other hand, lower, and untouchable caste women were sexually exploited and their labour was expropriated under the heinous caste system. This was ordained in texts such as Manusmriti and mythical texts of Ramayana and Mahabharata. It is through these inter-sectional aspects of caste, religion, tribe, language, class, we will be able to expand our understanding the complex nature of women’s discrimination in the labour market or at workplaces.

To begin with, we will begin with our assessment of women and labour market discrimination in the following areas of

- 1) Labour market entry and workforce participation
- 2) Unequal pay for women (sex difference in earnings)
- 3) Job segregation or feminisation of occupations (sex roles theory)
- 4) Sexual harassment in the workplace
- 5) Glass ceiling- opportunities to advancement (sex differences in promotions, authorities, glass ceiling)
- 6) Issues regarding maternity leave

For the sake of brevity we will only briefly touch upon the intersections of caste, class, rural/urban labour markets and exploitation of women workers in the formal and informal sector. The larger discussion attempts to unfold forms and types of discrimination women face in carrying out paid work.

- 1) *Labour market entry and workforce participation:* To begin with, much of India’s labour forces are employed in a sector that is largely identified as “informal” or “unorganised sector”. This massive sector employs between 83 and 93 per cent of the workforce (Harris-White, 2004: 17). The character of unorganised/informal employment workforce is lack of any protection from the state or employer, social security provisions, employment security, and overall deprivation of rights at workplace. In addition, this sector is expanding which means more number of workers are being sucked into insecure livelihoods. The skewed sex ratio is overwhelming in this sector. According to Deshpande and Deshpande (1997) almost 96 per cent of working women are engaged in “unorganised” and “informal economic activities” and only 4 per cent of women work in protected organised sector (Deshpande and Deshpande 1997: 546). Inevitably this means millions of working women in India have no access to labour protection, social security or income security, leave aside better opportunities to develop, progress, and vertically move in the job ladder.

The aspect of “gender gap” at the workplace in terms of wages is almost like a record. Women not only earn less in comparison to men, women also work for longer hours. Some of these low-paid jobs positively recruit women. Jayati Ghosh (2008) argues that “feminization of employment has resulted from the so called ‘labour market flexibility’ which operates on casualization

of labour, part-time/subcontracting/piece-rate contracts, and hire/fire policy” (Jayati Ghosh, 2008, p.11, Standing, 1999). Existence of this area of dual market for women exemplifies that women have disadvantage in the labour market.

- 2) *Unequal pay for women (sex difference in earnings)*: Practice of wage discrimination against women is extensive and evidenced in almost all labour markets of the world. This aspect of wage discrimination or sex difference in payments/wages particularly in developing countries are understood as emerging as “pre and post discrimination” (Ozcan, Yusuf, et al., 2003: 3) Pre-discrimination is typically a condition where certain groups are blocked from entering the labour markets, whereas post-discrimination occurs on entering the labour market, where cultural aspects of society work against the individuals against mobility and growth. It is thus predominant in developing countries where women as a social group are often discouraged to enter labour market and even if they do enter they face post-discrimination forms, noticeably in terms of differences of wages. This is clearly enunciated in several labour reports in India, where it is shown that women in rural and urban markets are paid fewer wage in comparison to men. A famous case seen in this context was that of Mackinnon and Mackenzie vs Audrey D’costa [AIR 1987 SC 1281] (cited in Gothaskar, 1992: 16).
- 3) *Job segregation or feminisation of occupations*: This is one of the most striking features where “gender roles” rule the job markets. The whole of industrial employment is considered as the prerogative of a man. It is not surprising that “within the industrial employment or other wage-work, there is segregation of men and women into different types of jobs-women in packing and assembling, whereas men were in engineering jobs” (Gothaskar, 1992:7). As discussed in other units’ patterns of feminisation of occupations is already discussed as evidenced in Indian labour markets.
- 4) *Sexual harassment in the workplace*: This has been one of the enduring aspects of women’s work experiences yet approached and regarded as a taboo. Women refrain from talking about their harassment, particularly sexual harassments because of the cultural norms, which are not in favour of working women. Women are sexually harassed in almost all work settings and it cuts across, industries, job profiles. Factors such as education, employment status are not factors that hinder experiences of sexual harassment. Therefore, it is important to note that women workers be it in corporate sector or working on *nakas* or street corners are both vulnerable to sexual harassment. In industrial west there is zero tolerance towards sexual harassment but in developing countries, legal measures are yet to fully evolve and develop in regards to securing women employees. Due to cultural contexts, it is very difficult to define what exactly does sexual harassment entail and several scholars have left it open as a matter of subjective interpretation, therefore sexual harassment is very fluid and has been a difficult concept to be defined. However, there are certain aspects that are defined as part of violation of conduct and considered as sexual harassment. In 2012 Government of India passed a bill on Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment at Workplace to implement the Article 14,15, 21 of Constitution of India and Vishaka vs. State of Rajasthan, 1997 guidelines. The Bill defines, ‘sexual harassment’ includes such unwelcome sexually determined behavior (whether

directly or by implication) as—(i) physical contact and advances; or(ii) a demand or request for sexual favours; or(iii) sexually coloured remarks; or(iv) showing pornography; or(v) any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature” (Loksabha, 2012: 3). This bill makes provision for a mechanism for redressal of complaints and provides safeguards against false or malicious charges. According to Indian Penal Code Section 354 sexual harassment is also recognised as criminalising behaviour that is intended to intimidate, oppress, degrade and violate women’s rights and dignity. There have been several studies done to assess causes of sexual harassment. Stockdale (1991) has reviewed several studies to understand the causes of sexual harassment. She begins with her study on understanding key motives behind sexual harassment. She attributed “sexual desire” “power-play” and “gaining and asserting or maintaining power and status.” (Stockdale, 1991: 55). Stockdale discusses Gutek’s three models of understanding sexual harassment at workplace (Stockdale, 1991: 56). They are classified as follows:

- a) Natural/biological interpretation: considers sexual harassment merely as something that is natural, inevitable and something that is harmless. It also clearly holds that there is an element of sexual harassment but it is merely natural, harmless and unintended, implying that it is pardonable and not to be taken seriously.
- b) Organisational/Structural institutional perspective: This approach underlines elements of power structures, hierarchy, authoritarian and unequal power relations as prime reasons that results in the outcomes in forms of sexual harassment. This approach holds the structures itself as responsible that creates vulnerabilities for women who are often the victims and opportunities for authorities to use that against women.
- c) Socio-cultural/sex role models: This approach focuses on understanding sexual harassment as maintaining men’s domination over women. It implies that these role plays encourage the power variances between the sexes, reinforcing men’s dominance over women and subordination of women in the female sex role ideals.

The above theorisation and assessment of sexual harassment explain different aspects and complexities that are involved in instances of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is thus one of the important sites to understand unequal power relations among the sexes.

- 5) *Glass ceiling*: Discrimination against women in labour market is so rampant that we see a large number of women end up in informal/secondary labour markets. Even if women make a breakthrough by entering into primary sectors of employment, opportunities don’t seem to come to women. Women face discrimination in regards to their upward mobility and have lack of opportunities to be at the top. No wonder even in USA, which boasts of having highest percentage of women in the labour markets, wage gaps persists and in spite of the record number of women working in the private sector, only 3.6 per cent of women have made it on top positions and in the roles of Chief Executive Officer, reported Huffington post. (17th May, 2012). The article also points out that besides the classical “Glass Ceiling” there is “the

Marzipan layer –a corporate hierarchy in which women find themselves stuck with jobs that are just below senior management” (Huffington Post, 2012). This clearly explains why so many women employees in so-called competitive, private sector never reach the top.

- 6) *Issues regarding maternity*: Maternity or women’s sexual reproduction has been regarded as a matter of hindrance in most of the work settings. Maternity for long was considered as a burden on employers. It took several struggles for women to get the Maternity Benefit Act in India. Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 was introduced to protect the dignity of motherhood by providing for the health of the new mother (women employee) and her child. This act of 1961 came as a demand through a strike of 1921 in Jamshedpur which was not accepted then (Radha Kumar, 1993: 67). Thereby, in 1929, Bombay Maternity Benefit Act was passed in 1929. However, this long struggle to recognise and accord dignity to women workers is impaired as a large number of working women in India are now working in the informal sector and it is challenging to protect them under the ambit of this act. It is also important to note that even women workers in the formal sectors struggle in spite of this progressive legislation. Women workers are routinely taunted for their maternity leaves and even discouraged from using their rights.

3.5 SUMMARY

This unit has attempted to discuss some of the most important aspects related to gender and politics in the workplace. Women workers are vulnerable workers due to unequal power relations between the sexes. Worldwide it is evidenced that women workers in labour markets are discriminated. Furthermore, intersections of caste, class, ethnicity, region, tribe and so on, inter-mesh and play a role to create complex realities for women workers subjectively. Nevertheless, women as workers face vulnerabilities in several areas that are common and universal. This is evidenced in wage differentials, unequal opportunity to advance, job segregation/feminisation of employment, sexual harassment and in access to protections such as maternity benefits and so on. Overall, it appears that in spite of women working across the globe are yet to receive deserving attention, i.e. recognition, dignity and honour in comparison with her male colleagues and counterparts that are inadvertently accorded great respect and dignity. For women workers all over the world it is a long way ahead and in spite of their enduring contributions to human society they are yet to receive recognition.

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Suggested Reading

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- 1) Are women discriminated in the emerging labour markets? If yes, support your answer with relevant examples.
- 2) Discuss some theoretical lenses to understand gender discrimination in labour markets?
- 3) Elucidate the dimensions of workplace discrimination faced by women workers.

