

ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE OF THE RIGHTS OF A HOUSEWIFE IN INDIA: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstracts:

The Human Development Report 1995 suggested that the System of National Accounts (SNA) should become more inclusive and encompassing in the criteria of defining the economic activities; for the reason that the people performing work for societies remain invisible. The type of tasks and conditions under which the tasks are performed by the women at the household level differ widely. The burden of unpaid work and paid work respectively are distributed unequally among men and women. Most of women's work remains unrecognized and underestimated; which are often unpaid. A few research studies have tried to analyze and quantify the valuation of the household works. Issues identified are lack of knowledge on economic value of tasks performed by housewives leading to deprivation of human rights amongst women and increase in vulnerabilities among this segment viz. social insecurity, financial insecurity, lack of recognition, domestic violence and other psychological problems.

The history of sexual division of labour affirms men as hunters and women as gatherers. Women contribute substantially to economic welfare through large amounts of unpaid work, such as child-rearing and household tasks, which often remains unseen and unaccounted for in the GDP (Katrín Elborth-Woytek et al. 2013). Women's ability to participate in the labor market is constrained by their higher allocation of time to unpaid reproductive work. On average, women spend twice as much time on household work as men and four times as much time on childcare (Duflo, 2012).

One of the major segments of women was those who belong to the groups of the homemakers or the housewives. The average housewives don't seek employment outside because of family responsibilities and hence are termed to be '*unproductive*' or '*economically inactive*' and '*the household is not a productive enterprise*'; according to the national accounting system at global level.

Therefore, it must be noted that neither the government; nor the social scientist or the economist are interested to know the contribution of labour made by the women at household level which remain to be unrecorded, unpaid and often remain unacknowledged. This had lead to the severe gender inequality in distribution of economic power. Ever since 1960's the period of Second Wave of Feminism where patriarchy system was questioned highlighting the neglect of women and dominance of male oriented society. The struggle for gender equality had its early origin at the inception of the United Nations in 1945. The UN Women's Conference (1980), at Copenhagen in New York revealed the myth of the 'non-working' women. Based on the insights of the conference Marilyn Waring had prepared a theoretical paper on UN System of National Accounts for the Women and Food Conference in Sydney, Australia in February 1982.



Some research studies have shown that there are structural limitations to illustrate the importance of keeping accountability of domestic household work for labour to be valued in particular ways. The predominance of unpaid work can become a constraint on economic development as well as on poverty reduction. (Catherine Hoskyns & Shirin M. Rai, 2007). Amartya Sen in 1987 had established 'bargaining models', which stressed that have advantage over standard models of 'household production', or 'family allocation' or 'equivalence scales' designed to capture the household conflict and cooperation.

Women still face discrimination on several issues related to intra-family bargaining power¹ for subsistence within the family which also included resources even land property (Bina Agarwal, 1994). Mutual cooperation is one of the determinants of well-being related to gender relations; the other factors influencing the person's fall-back position. There are several levels of fall-back position of women in the household bargaining power; the notion of legitimacy needs to be broader than as captured by Sen's 'perceived contribution response'.

Most United Nations publications use the term Gender, Empowerment, and the Care Economy "unpaid care work" quite broadly, synonymously with terms such as "nonmarket work" or the work of "social reproduction." While it is tempting to call attention to the importance of social reproduction as a process of meeting the needs of individuals and

families, it is difficult to think of any activities that do not indirectly fall under this general rubric. Unaccountability of unpaid domestic work by women had been a subject of debate at different levels by the UN Statistical Commission, by the authors of the World Bank Living Standard Measurement Series, by researchers at Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and by conferences of International Labor Organization (ILO).

Furthermore, Waring suggested that the national income statistician must decide how far the imputation process of national income which includes rate of growth of national income and GNP. The rate of growth of national income and GNP is significantly influenced by social habits, working hours, retirement ages and unemployment change.

According to the UNSNA, the unpaid work performed by women within the households is not employed. Income saved within the household is invisible as both production and consumption i.e. a woman baking cake at home rather than purchasing.

The two major reasons cited by economists and statisticians for global invisibility of the housewives as follows:

1. Conceptual difficulties
2. The difficulties in collecting data

Worldwide the society is undergoing a period of transition which is under the situation of turmoil across the globe where the entire world is pondering and debating on equal economic right of housewives for rendering the selfless unpaid care works. Despite a recent flurry of attention, no clear consensus has emerged regarding accounting conventions for the care economy. Even definitions of care work vary widely (Nancy Folbre, 2006). While some countries like Ukraine and Venezuelan government began paying stay-at-home housewives, recognizing their work at the home as valuable economic activity (Sakuntala Narasimhan, 2008). The society is undergoing a period of transition

¹ The bargaining power of an individual depends on a range of factors which influences the person's fall-back position. Bina Agarwal (1997), stressed upon the critical aspects for intra-household dynamics from a gender perspective which was missed out by the existing household models. Also tried to analytically explain how household models get constructed and point out the complexity and historic variability of gender relations not only at intra-household level but also at extra-household level. As a consequence of undervaluing of the household works performed by women and leading to deprivation from the human rights and increase in hostility against women including social insecurity, financial insecurity, lack of recognition, domestic violence and other psychological problems.



which is under the situation of turmoil across the globe where the entire world is pondering and debating on equal economic right of housewives for rendering the selfless unpaid care works.

In 1982 the International Labour Organization (ILO) identified the total labour force, or currently active population, comprising all persons who fulfill the requirements for inclusion among the employed or the unemployed during a specified brief reference period. Therefore we can conclude that labour market influences economic growth of the country which has its reflection on the Human Development Index (HDI), Gender Development Index (GDI), and Human Poverty Index (HPI) etc. A major chunk of these populations belong to 'unpaid labour' contributed by the homemakers or the housewives a population of the society. But still the efforts made by housewives towards household often go unrecognized.

Mynul Islam (2012); described household work time means how much time a person doing household work. Most of the household works are done by women no matter what her position is; whether it is employed or unemployed. Cultural construction of our patriarchal society makes housework as women's work and outside work as men's work. He further elaborated that women contribute a lion share towards household work, but since these works remain invisible, even though they spend a longer time to household work and yet their works go unrecognized.

The contributions made by the housewives towards the household economy are generally considered under care economy. The concept of care work also encompasses work within the paid economy, particularly jobs that provide market substitutes for services women once provided in the home (Nancy Folbre, 2006). Care work is labor that contributes to the well-being or development of other people that is often face-to-face and requires skills in interaction and communication (England 1992). Ever since

the ancient period of human civilization; housewives are often considered as agent of reproduction and growth of family. Women as housewives are laden with both the sexual and non-sexual components as duties. The sex component of housewife's duties and her attractiveness may be considered as important components needed for the job (Barbara R Bergmann, 1981).

The tasks performed by housewives are standard unpaid and quite often unrecognized and unpraised. As a consequence of this non-recognition of the household works results to deprivation of their rights leading to scarcity and poverty.

Therefore Marilyn Waring (1997); stressed upon concrete steps should be taken to quantify the unremunerated contributions of women to agriculture, food production, reproduction, and household activities. The UN Women's Conference (1980), at Copenhagen in New York has exploded the myth of the 'non-working' women, and also referred to the conditions under which large numbers of women were living in the rural areas of developing countries. In India though women are being considered as the wealth and the glory of the house or the family yet the irony lie in the fact that out of 136 countries India ranks 124th position on the criteria of economic empowerment to women and 120th on educational attainment of women according to *Global Gender Gap Index 2013*.

Housewives work for approximately 15 unpaid working hours a day. These over-worked and unpaid women neither have the money to spend, nor the time to spend. As a result of this leading to dual deprivations resulting to neglect, injustice and even injury in form of domestic violence. Gender discrimination – the theme of HDR 1995 – gave special illumination, an enlargement of the issue of inequality through the gender-lens (Devaki Jain, 2012). In spite of the fact that the UN Charter of Human Rights and the provisions of the Indian Constitution, women continue to be victims of exploitation. Gender inequality was defined by Amartya Sen (2001)



as not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and inter-linked problems. According to NCRB report 2012, there has been an increase in cases against cruelty by husbands or relatives has doubled itself from 49237 during 2002 to 99135 during 2011. In Odisha context 2638 cases and 178 cases in Khordha have been filed against cruelty by husband or his relatives (Sec. 498A IPC). One of the basic reasons behind this state of crime is assumed to be financial and social insecurity attached with the household works performed by the housewives (female homemakers).

The paper at hand is based on empirical research conducted in the district of Khordha of Odisha in India. The main objective of this study was to measure economic contribution of the unpaid tasks performed by housewives to the household economy. This research was an exploratory empirical study. The study was piloted in the different locations including urban state capital Bhubaneswar and areas within the proximity to urban vicinity from Bhubaneswar; one village Padanpur in Jatni block which is located near to the state capital Bhubaneswar 23km and Ratanpurpatna in Tangi block which is 40 km away from the city in Khordha district of Odisha state.

According to the Census 2011, the sex ratio of Odisha is 978 per 1000 male population. The literacy rate of Odisha is 73.45% which is lower the national average 74.04 %. For the present study it is assumed that the literacy rate, proximity from the urban location and economic status of the family has a strong influence on the value of the unpaid care works of housewives.

Multi-stage sampling was incorporated in this research study; where the samples were selected based on different strata to collect information from both rural and urban localities equally so as to avoid any biasness in the sample collection.

The study was an attempt to understand the status of housewives in context

of both rural and urban localities. Out of total sample of 160; 50 percent of the representative sample was covered from the three different strata of high, middle and low income groups in the urban locality of Bhubaneswar the state capital of Odisha. Around 25 percent of the rest was interviewed from Ratanpur is a village with high literacy primarily inhabited by Brahmins; whereas Nuagaon is low literacy village which is inhabited by scheduled caste community in Tangi block.

Time-use studies typically have a single focus: to study the frequency and duration of human activities (Linda L. Stinson, 1999). Therefore, time use survey technique was used to collect empirical data to estimate the total working hours of housewives in each category of tasks identified such as:

1. Child care Cleaning, decorating and provision of clothing
2. Eldercare
3. Food-related Health care and companionship
4. Keeping up with finances, daily household items, and expenses

Economic status of the household plays a significant influence the social status of the women particularly the housewives. Nuagaon a village in Tangi block which was far away from the capital city was economically more backward and predominantly inhabited by the people belonging to the scheduled caste community. Supplementing to their vulnerable condition; the literacy rate of Nuagaon village is as low as 56.1 % much below the literacy rate of Tangi block 68.6%; which is one of blocks with lowest literacy rate even lower than the literacy rate of the Odisha state 72.9%. As a consequence of which housewives have low social status due to lack of education and social taboo.

As an outcome of this study it was found that a major share of housewives, themselves don't know the economic value of the tasks performed by them. As she (*referred to housewives*) herself is not able to see her



work as value-producing work, she subscribes to devaluation of this work as non-work, as purely supplementary to her husband's work, she is not able to bargain for just a wage Maria Mies (1982). The percentage distribution of the head of the family reveals that 96.7 percentage of the households were male headed; whereas only 3.3 percentage households were headed by female.

Subsequently, most of housewives (respondents of the study) had a common response that their financial dependence is one of major cause of social insecurity and social taboo. It is worth mentioning that housewives belonging to the middle and low income groups; are more of common consensus that their livelihood dependence on their husband and in-laws results to financial and social deprivation.

This study had taken reference from the work of Ann Chadeau (1985); and had tried to analyze and estimate the value of the tasks performed by housewives if outsourced. Different tasks performed were assigned with estimated market costs of getting the service delivered and an effort was made to estimate the economical value of the tasks performed by the housewives and contributing to the household economy in Indian context. In other words it was tried to find the contribution of housewives towards the economy. Putting a money value on unpaid household work is a way of showing its economic importance, and also of expressing this part of human activity in terms which enable comparison with market activities (Ann Chadeau. 1985).

Attempt was made to investigate the influence of female education and economic status of the family on the valuing the works performed by housewives. It was found that the economic contribution made by the housewives subsequently increased with the increase in their educational status. With the social development the women strata of the society have been empowered and have excelled in different fields of life. The study proves that educated housewives are more adoptable and adaptable to multi-situations at a given point

of time and education makes them more competent to be better decision makers. The multi-tasks handled by these housewives include taking care of both indoors vis-à-vis maintaining of quality family life; social cohesion and outdoors activities vis-à-vis shopping, bank related tasks. Subsequently looking after the household budget care and household savings; contributing towards the household economy.

Around 89 percent of the housewives responded that in a day the maximum number of hours they spend on child care around 3 hours a day; followed by the housekeeping activities average 4 hours and health care average 2 hours a day. However the time taken to perform these tasks may overlap each other. Therefore it was estimated that the working hours of these housewives is much more than the maximum work for any labour after reduction of the time spent on leisure and personal care activities. Still the paradox is that the contributions made by housewives are not accounted into System of National Accounts (SNA) activities. These unrecorded economic activities which essentially generate goods and services produced and consumed by the households without undergoing monetary transactions and which are not recorded in labour statistics and in national accounts. These activities could be termed as 'non SNA activities (A.C. Kulshreshtha & Gulab Singh 1999).

Since every individual of aged 18-40 years is considered as potential labour; therefore housewives belonging to that age group could be considered as "Concealed Employment"; as person is engaged in tasks or employment having economic value without any valid appointment, remuneration and employment agreement; with special reference to unpaid care works. In order to estimate the value of tasks performed by housewives; important to calculate the output per hour or productivity of labour contributed by housewives. The real GDP is the product of total hours of work in the economy times the amount of output produced per hour; which is



known as labor productivity (output per unit of labour).

Further these housewives do add value to household savings by undertaking the household duties which if outsourced would

More to the point it was very shocking to find that even the housewives belonging to high income groups and having educational attainment of post graduate level were not aware of their value contribution and furthermore consider the tasks performed by them of no economic value.

A number of labour laws have been enacted catering to different aspects of labour. Both the Central and State Governments have recognized labour as a subject competent to enact legislations by Constitution of India. The Constitution of India accepts the responsibility of the State to create an economic order in which every citizen finds employment and receives a 'fair wage'. This made it necessary to quantify or lay down clear criteria to identify a fair wage. However, it did not take into consideration the household works performed by the housewives; which on the other still question the economic contribution made by the household duties performed by the housewives and their social security.

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augment the household budget. During this study a small exercise was tried out to estimate the approximate value of the household savings contributed by the housewives (respondents of the study).

There is dearth of research that focuses on 'unpaid care work' evident from the review on research provides a strong case for new research to be conducted on this issue (Lopita Huq, 2013). Research plays a vital role in generating evidence to change the perception and understanding of policymakers regarding 'unpaid care work'. This study has been an empirical evidence of the fact that this is the call of the hour to address the need of recognizing the tasks performed by the housewives and should account in the System of National Account (SNA). Recognition of the household labour by women in economic terms may stand as a catalyst in better bargaining power position and ensured the deliverance of the human rights to women; more specially the segment of housewives. Nevertheless, UNDP during 2008 responded to the urgency of addressing unpaid care work. There is a need for the government and civil societies to intervene and help to empower those housewives who are predominantly engaged in household chores



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