
The Constructions of Familial Ideology, Patriarchy and Capitalism in Women's Labour Market

Sanghamitra Baladhikari

Abstract

Women's participation in the employment sector is determined by various factors. The gender gap in the employment sector is one of the major concerns rising from the private nature of women's care labour. This paper explores the various constructions of familial ideologies, interactions between capitalism and patriarchy which influences women's secondary position in the wage labour market. The paper also identifies how the definition work is inherently masculine and it controls the feminine space within the wage labour market. The author constructs a theoretical understanding of the productive labour and non-productive "care" labour of women within the domestic sphere. The final aim of the paper is to highlight the factors of women's poverty issues and suggest ways by which these issues can be addressed to.

Keywords: Women's Labour, Care Labour, Capitalism, Employment, Poverty, Feminism, Marxism

A. Defining 'Work'

The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly aims at ending the struggle of poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment across the world to ensure the restoration of the world in terms of economic and social scenario. The Sustainable Development

Goals recognizes the need for building economic growth and growth of social needs including equal employment opportunities for all, growth in the economic sector and rise in the environmental sustainability. Growth, employment, and poverty are three factors which depends upon the well-being of the individuals in a society and the empowerment of all sections of society including women is important for promoting gender equality in the economic sector. In the United Kingdom, by the year 2008, the gender difference or the 'gender gap' in the employment sector reduced and the economic inactivity also fell due to the changing patterns in men and women's participation in the employment sector. These reflections upon women's position in the employment sector across the world and the rising question of gender equality pertaining to labour (work) can be understood in the light of the division of the masculine labour (public) and feminine labour (private) in the family, the interactions between the forces of patriarchy and capitalism and the Marxist philosophy of biological reproduction. It reflects the historical and contemporary theories behind women's secondary position in the employment sector. In order to deliberate that understanding,

firstly, the idea of what is work and how work is gendered, must be theorised.¹

In *Defining Women: Social Institutions and Gender Divisions* ‘work’ is elaborated as –

*“Work is regarded as an area that is clearly demarcated from domestics or social lives, as something people are paid to do, usually for set hours each week. Work is often experienced as the opposite of home; it constitutes the ‘public’ side of our everyday life, as distinct from the ‘private’ or intimate side shared with family and friends.”*²

The above idea represents a public concept of the nature of work as perceived by the capitalist society. Work is symbolic of production where the time and labour given, manufactures something for consumption. The value of consumption of the production represents the value of the work in question and the monetary reward is the benefit of the labour power. Beyond this, feminists have interpreted work as a public or the masculine domain. It is perceived as dominantly masculine in the context of power. On the other hand, the feminine side of the work is perceived to be more private in nature, relegated only to the domestic household. However, this does not frame the idea that women are not present in the public work space. Rather, it highlights the fact that the public workspace is primarily related to the masculine identity. This could be further seen from the light

of the Marxian ideology and the sexual division of labour in the family.

B. Historicizing Women’s Care Labour

Feminist critics and historians have theorised many studies regarding the invisibility of the nature of work that women deliver in the labour market. The study of lack of access to labour opportunities and women’s historical positioning in the economic sector is owing to factors of domestic labour, which is often associated with the concept of care labour. The debate regarding domestic labour theorises the association between ‘house’ work and the rise of capitalism. In the feminist Marxian understanding, ‘house’ work is broadly understood as care work including household chores, reproductive labour, service to the family, child care and addressing to familial nurture, within the “private space” without any direct form of “wage”.³ In the capitalist market the understanding of growth and the employment capacities of women, historically did not hold an importance because the ‘care labour’ was considered to be important for the “productive” nature of work that the fathers and the husbands contributed or the “wage labour” in the capitalist market. Therefore, the traditional Marxist philosophy addresses to the question of the value of domestic labour; whether it is productive, unproductive, non-productive or of surplus value. The Marxist theory of Capitalism acknowledged the centrality of productive labour or the surplus value of labour in the workings of capitalism rather than the unproductive or non-productive labour.

¹ Millett, K. (2000). *Sexual Politics*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press

² McDowell, L., & Pringle, R. (1992). *Defining women: Social institutions and gender divisions*. Polity Press.

³ Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1919). *Wage-labor and capital*. Vancouver: Whitehead Estate.

Consequently, this debate was challenged by the feminist critics as they stated that Marxist theory needed a rightful acknowledgement of the significance of gender relations and understand the potential and political force of a woman's labour. The concept of domestic labour being marginal to capitalism is also understood as one of the significant reasons pertaining to the oppression of women, lack of opportunities in the economic sector and the overall growth of the economy. Apart from the recognition of "care labour" as "care work" within the private space, there is a need to explore and enhance women's role in employment that was hindered due to their historical positioning.

C. The Familial Ideology and the Division of Labour

Kate Millett in her representational work in feminist studies titled *Sexual Politics* had first indicated the contribution of family as a whole in the workings of patriarchy and stated that family is the smallest unit of patriarchy.⁴ In this context, family is considered to be hegemonic that has powerful ideological force that portrays the features of a contemporary family in a profound idealised way. The role of the family in the oppression of women and their labour has been a contested site, as stated by the socialist feminist scholarship. There is a set of values within the household structures that determines women's child rearing and domestic labour. This is rooted

mostly in the material relations of capitalism which contributes to the sexual division of labour. Men becomes the wage earners and women in turn becomes victims of what is called their biological destiny or the 'reproductive labour'. This has been further reinforced by the public and the private distinction within the family. The private or the domestic space where women are relegated to, as the socialist feminists reveals that is a result of the two different manifestations of familial ideology. Firstly, moral regulation restricts women's identities as mothers, wives, daughters and familial ideology that shapes these identities of women informs the legal interventions in the family. Secondly, the economic regulation which aims at controlling women's contribution to only human reproduction.⁵ The sexual division of labour in the family is distinctly visible. Marxists, inspired by the Marx's theory has been very vocal about this. The labour division between men and women is rationalized in the context of women's "childbearing function".⁶ According to the Marxian ideology, the reproductive labour is significant for the development of the society as it contributes to the enhancement of the human labour in the generations to come. The entire existence of the society is based on the development of the power of the labour force.⁷

Women's work has always been associated with the informal cash economy. Their shift towards the formal economy in terms of their contribution to

⁴ Millett, K. (2000). *Sexual Politics*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press

⁵ Hadd, W. (1991). A womb with a view: Women as mothers and the discourse of the body. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 36, 165-175. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41035447>

⁶ Menon, Nivedita. (2012) *Seeing Like A Feminist*. New Delhi: Zubaan.

⁷ De Beauvoir, S. (1989). *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books.

work and being recognised as the part of official employees (statistical registration) generated slowly through various “movements of productive activities undertaken within the home or the community”. These productive activities were however not always supported by financial benefits. The feminists during 1970s and 1980s widened the perspective of work and included household work, child rearing, in the definition of work and further criticised the concepts of work that narrowly focuses on employment and productivity. In *Unequal Work*, Veronica Beechey argues that –

*“It is housework, rather than waged work, which preoccupied feminist writers in the early days of the new feminist movement. A central tenet of such thinking in the 1970s was the belief that the family lay at the heart of women’s oppression and a major theoretical breakthrough involved the recognition that housework, the ‘labour of love’ performed by the women in the home, was a form of work. This insight made feminist analysis of the 1970s and 1980s substantially different from that of previous periods, which mainly disregarded women’s work within the family.”*⁸

D. Capitalism and Patriarchy in Women’s Labour

The home, which is a part of the patriarchal ideology, initially was thought to be separate from capitalism. The arguments about the interactions

between the paid work and the unpaid labour generated further questions between “gender and class” and “capitalism and patriarchy”. Christine Delphy in *Close to Home: a materialist analysis of women’s oppression* developed an insight on patriarchy and the mode of production.⁹ The interactions between patriarchy and capitalism has developed in a way where the interests of both capitalism and patriarchy has framed women’s position in the secondary in the wage labour market. In *Defining Women: Social Institutions and Gender Divisions*, Heidi Hartmann’s argument is explored which was earlier developed in an article titled *The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: towards a more progressive union* about patriarchy and capitalism. It was argued that the operation of patriarchal gender relations in a capitalist environment around production becomes contributing forces behind women’s position in the labour market.¹⁰

E. Interactions Between Women and Poverty

Home is still considered to be the locus of women’s existence and over the years that became the reason why they were marginalised. The ideologies of the family, capitalism and patriarchy, as elaborated above, highlights a theoretical and historical understanding of women’s position in the labour market. In order to substantiate the theoretical understanding where women has only gained a secondary position in the labour market, it is important to look at poverty issues among women,

⁸ Beechey, V. (1987). *Unequal Work*. Verso Books.

⁹ Delphy, C. (1984). *Close to Home: a materialist analysis of women’s oppression*. Verso Books.

¹⁰ Sargent, L., & Hartmann, H. I. (1986). *The Unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: A debate of class and patriarchy*. London: Pluto Press.

which is, as a result of those ideologies. This puts forward a significant question about women's poverty issues. "World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends", a report published by International Labour Organization (ILO) in the year 2017 stated that women participate more within the private space and do unpaid work than men and consequently underemployment among women is a significant issue. It also detected significant gaps persisting in women's representation in leadership programmes and positions of decision making. Determining factors such as social and cultural factors frame limitations for women in the potential engagement in labour force in the labour market.¹¹ The limited democratic participation in employment due to gender roles among women is due to factors such as:

- a) Differential access to health care and issues in family planning
- b) Religious and cultural factors
- c) Weaker literacy rates
- d) Lack of opportunities in skill development
- e) Lack of gender-sensitive curriculum
- f) Gender division of labour in home
- g) Lack of women's influence governance and decision making
- h) Social ideologies hindering girl's education
- i) Early marriage and pregnancies
- j) Various forms of discrimination in employment and occupation
- k) Lack of training for women in non-traditional occupations.

It is often argued that men's abilities and capacities in the wage labour market are interlinked to their understanding of machines. There is a connection built between machines and masculine aspects. Huge machinery and its handling is seemed to be conventionally appropriate for men. Therefore, there is a huge death of the feminine space in industries and factories that constitutes of the 'masculine machineries'. There is a lack of women's participation not only due to this ideology but also because of the lack of training among women regarding these machines. This further contributes to women's interactions with poverty. According to a report published by the International Labour Office, Geneva for the International Labour Conference (98th Session) in the year 2009 titled "Gender equality at the heart of decent work" (Report VI) stated that –

"In absolute numbers, Asia has the largest population living below the poverty line: out of a total population of 3.7 billion, about 913 million people live in poverty. Yet the overall rate – about 25 per cent – is far lower than in Africa, even if it is five times the poverty rate of the Americas. And female poverty is far greater than in the Americas or

¹¹ International Labour Office. (2017). World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends. International Labour Office

Africa, as the female share of poverty represents 63 per cent of all persons in Asia living below the poverty line.”¹²

F. Region-wise and Sex-wise Unemployment Rate (International Labour Office)

Table A5
Youth unemployment rate, by sex and region, 1998, 2008 and 2009

	Total (%)			Male (%)			Female (%)		
	1998	2008	2009	1998	2008	2009	1998	2008	2009
WORLD	12.4	12.1	13.0	12.3	11.9	12.9	12.6	12.3	13.2
Developed Economies & European Union	14.0	13.1	17.7	14.1	13.8	19.5	13.9	12.2	15.6
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	23.0	17.3	20.8	22.5	16.8	20.6	23.7	17.9	21.1
East Asia	9.1	8.6	8.9	10.6	10.0	10.3	7.6	7.2	7.4
South-East Asia & the Pacific	12.2	14.5	14.7	12.1	13.9	14.0	12.4	15.2	15.7
South Asia	8.9	10.0	10.3	8.9	9.7	10.1	8.9	10.6	10.9
Latin America & the Caribbean	15.6	14.3	16.1	12.9	11.7	13.2	20.1	18.2	20.4
Middle East	22.9	23.3	23.4	20.6	20.3	20.4	29.1	30.8	30.9
North Africa	26.5	23.3	23.7	23.7	20.2	20.3	32.6	30.3	31.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	13.5	11.9	11.9	12.7	11.5	11.6	14.5	12.3	12.4

Source: *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (Geneva, 2010), table A5, p. 63.¹³

Analysis: The above table represents the youth unemployment rate, by sex and region in the years 1998, 2008 and 2009. We can see that there is constant increase in the unemployment rate among the female percentage across the world in between 1998 – 2009. For example, in the South Asian regions, if we compare the unemployment rate among the male population and the unemployment rate among the female percentage, we witness that by 2009, the unemployment rate among the female percentage is much higher (10.9) than the unemployment rate among the male percentage (10.1). The table is an empirical evidence of women’s lack of space in the work space or the employment sector. The theoretical understanding discussed in the first part of the article is substantiated by this report, published by the ILO.

¹² International Labour Conference. (2009). Gender equality at the heart of decent work (VI). International Labour Office.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Therefore, increase in the number of females receiving higher education has raised the number of graduates. Consequentially women’s presence in the professional space enhanced by occupying positions of responsibility and power. These enhancements were facilitated by institutional demands of second wave feminists in the discourse equal pay legislation, employments opportunities and gender equity. Various public bodies have encouraged gender equality along with other dimensions of social identity including the growth of race, economic background, and disability. The various suggestions as per the ILO policies and programmes include steps to widen women’s participation in the labour market (the employment sector) so that poverty and discrimination is slowly reduced and mitigated. This will not only curb gender inequality prevailing in the labour market but also widen the scope of women’s in the public spere and change the masculine definition of work, as discussed in the beginning of the chapter. Some of these strategies to involve women in the ‘productive’ labour market includes:

- a. To develop income generation actions, especially for women who are mothers is necessary because it has more impact in enrolling girls in school.
- b. To realise the various kinds of barriers to women’s participation in education and develop incentives to enrol girls in school.

¹³ International Labour Office. (2010). *Global Employment Trends for Youth*. International Labour Office.

- c. To incorporate corrections regarding any sort of gender stereotypes in schools by developing new roles for boys and girls. Any form of learning which portrays women's role as care labourers only, as unproductive.
 - d. To develop qualitative formal and non-formal modes of education. This would include vocational training, enhancing the women's opportunities for decent work in future and empowerment.
 - e. To develop equal preference for female as well as male recruits in formal economy employments.
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