



A nod to recognising the value of housework

The party of Kamal Hasan has promised to recognise housework as a salaried profession by paying homemakers 'hitherto unrecognized and unmonetized' for their work at home.

Origins of the demand

1. The demand for 'wages for housework' arose in the context of struggle and consciousness-raising associated with the Second Wave of the women's movement in North America and Europe.
2. Alongside other demands for social and political equality, women's rights campaigners made visible and also politicised women's everyday experience of housework and child care in the 'private' realm of the household.
3. As Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James wrote in their seminal piece in 1972, the woman working at home produced 'the living human being — the labourer himself.'
4. By providing free services in the home, women made possible the survival of working-class households at subsistence-level wages, with obvious benefits for industry and capital.

Nature of Housework

1. Housework had come to define the very nature of a woman. This disallowed women from seeing it as 'real work' or as a social contract.
2. For the advocates of 'wages for housework', the wage that the state ought to pay women would make them autonomous of the men on whom they were dependent.
3. More fundamentally, the very demand for a wage was a repudiation of housework as an expression of women's nature.
4. It was a revolt against the assigned social role of women. Therein lay the radical nature of the demand for wages, not in the money itself.
5. However, the underlying issue, which is the disproportionate share of women's responsibility for the work that sustains human life and reproduces labour-power, remains as pressing as ever.



6. A report published by the International Labour Organization in 2018 shows that, globally, women perform 76.2% of total hours of unpaid care work, more than three times as much as men. In Asia and the Pacific, this figure rises to 80%.

Conclusion:

This is an agenda that all parties could incorporate in their election manifestos, should they take seriously the mandate of 'recognizing and monetizing' housework. If domestic workers emerge as a strong force that succeeds in asserting the dignity of housework and making it a visible and valued form of labour, this can only be a good thing for all women performing housework in the long run.

Quality gigs, a solution to urban unemployment

More recent data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy point to a gradual slowdown in employment recovery from the month of July, with the latest numbers pointing to a sharp rise in the national unemployment rate from 6.51% in November to 9.06% for the month of December.

NREGA outlay

For labour flocking back to rural India, employment support came in the form of an increased outlay for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGA), which witnessed a 243% increase in in-person workdays.

Gig Economy

In several Indian cities, however, shuttered businesses have meant that millions of workers have either had to leave or have had to take up new forms of work, with some finding the burgeoning gig economy to be their only source of employment.

Need for reform in Gig work

With no urban equivalent to the NREGA on the horizon, there must be an increased impetus on evaluating, regulating and supporting new forms of employment that may currently be serving as an informal safety net for those desperately in search of work.



1. The first and most critical task at hand remains evaluation. Our current understanding of gig work and workers remains constrained to the limited disclosures made by the platforms themselves.
2. As of now, there exists no authoritative estimate of the total number of gig workers in India.

Difficult to regulate

1. The next step is significantly more sensitive and involves regulation. The reason for the sensitivity primarily revolves around the varied nature of gig work. While some workers use these platforms as a “side hustle”, for others it continues to serve as a primary source of employment.
2. This dynamic is further complicated by the risk of a one-size-fits-all regulatory strategy unintentionally hurting the similar, yet distinct, market for highly skilled (and highly paid) freelancers, that continues its rapid growth due to pandemic related full-time staff layoffs.

Outstanding Example

1. Perhaps a more viable strategy then would involve conditional government partnerships with platforms under some of its flagship schemes.
2. Here, the successful pilot of Swiggy’s Street Food Vendors programme under the PM SVANidhi, or PM Street Vendor’s Atma Nirbhar Nidhi scheme, may prove to be an illustrative example.
3. While Swiggy has announced the onboarding of 36,000 street food vendors onto the platform under the scheme this month, it has also looked to ensure that each vendor is registered and certified by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India.
4. The simultaneous creation of jobs, alongside the voluntary adoption of quality standards, is an example of a mutually beneficial partnership between the state and a platform that creates jobs while incentivising greater levels of compliance.

Urban employment

Similar collaborations on urban employment, that require labour platforms to comply with disclosure norms and worker compensation standards to access



government support, could be one way for the government to kill two birds with one stone.

Symbiotic ties

As the new year rolls in, and India looks to convince the world that it has turned the corner on its economic woes, it must look to step outside the box to tackle the challenge of urban unemployment. Limited fiscal space and a growing need to fuel the country's consumption base, must push the government to build symbiotic relationships with new partners.

Maximum Governor

Governors should not exceed constitutional duties to serve as agents of the Centre

The misuse of the Governor's office to undermine duly elected State governments is a particularly mischievous disruption of federalism.

Highlights:

1. Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan's frequent use of his powerful oratory to defend the Centre and question the State on sensitive topics makes him partisan and undermines democratic processes.
2. His refusal to convene a special session of the Kerala Assembly on December 23, as initially requested by the government, yet again proved this.
3. He questioned the urgency of the special session and thought the Assembly lacked "the jurisdiction to offer a solution" to the farmers' protest, an issue which the Assembly wanted to discuss.
4. This is an encroachment upon the powers of the legislature and the elected government and an abuse of his authority as a nominal head under the Constitution.
5. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan wrote to Mr Khan stating the Governor had no discretionary powers in the matter and that his actions were unconstitutional. Such conduct by a Governor can weaken federalism.



Embracing energy efficiency

The Government recently announced the Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020. The rules lay down uniform performance standards for power distribution companies (discoms) and make them liable to compensate consumers in case of violations.

Condition of Discoms

The well-intentioned rules come at a time when Indian discoms are struggling to manage their finances. This is partly linked to drop in payment rates, as consumers are struggling to pay their bills amid rising consumption and tight finances. The Indian government has sanctioned liquidity relief to help discoms tide over this crisis, but these are just short-term fixes.

The need for Energy Efficiency

India's residential electricity consumption is expected to at least double by 2030. As households buy more electric appliances to satisfy their domestic needs, concerns about the ability of discoms to provide reliable supply at affordable rates will also rise. Embracing energy efficiency can be a win-win solution as this can bring down household energy bills and reduce discoms' financial stress.

Tryst with energy efficiency

In recent years, India has seen significant adoption of energy-efficient appliances, especially those covered under the mandatory labelling programme, according to the India Residential Energy Survey conducted by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water and the Initiative for Sustainable Energy Policy. The survey, covering nearly 15,000 households across 21 States, found that more than 75% of air-conditioners and 60% of refrigerators used in Indian homes were star-labelled. Further, nearly 90% of Indian homes used LED lamps or tubes.

However, there has been limited uptake of energy-efficient ceiling fans and televisions. While 90% of homes use fans, only 3% have efficient fans. Similarly, 60% of our television stock comprises the big old energy-guzzling CRT (cathode ray tube) models. Desert coolers, used by 15% homes, are not even covered under the labelling programme. Significant efficiency gains are also possible for other appliances like water pumps and induction cookstoves.



The way forward

1. First, we need to improve the availability and affordability of energy-efficient appliances.
2. Second, India needs a nationwide consumer awareness campaign on energy efficiency. Only a fourth of Indian households are currently aware of BEE's star labels.
3. Finally, we need to monitor supply quality and changing consumption patterns on a real-time basis. As discoms in India deploy smart meters, these must be used to measure actual savings and demonstrate the benefits of energy-efficient devices to build consumer confidence.

Conclusion:

India has tasted success in recent years by embracing energy efficiency. The government's UJALA scheme transformed the market for LED bulbs, while also helping India reduce its annual carbon emissions by nearly 82 million tonnes. A similar focus towards other energy-efficient appliances would allow India to ensure 24x7 power for all.