



Removing the creases in housework valuation

Issues: Unpaid household work and gender equality, National Income and Household work (GSI, GSII)

News: One party who recently promised salaries for housewives as a part of the party's election manifesto, has revived the debate on the recognition of domestic work as work.

The burden on women: Inequality in Household responsibilities and non-recognition

1. As in the 2011 Census, while 159.85 million women stated household work as their main occupation, a mere 5.79 million men referred to it as their main occupation.
2. The Supreme Court in its crisp and authoritative concurring judgment in *Kirti and Another v. Oriental Insurance Company* has said that the conception that house makers do not "work" or that they do not add economic value to the household is a problematic idea.
3. The Court referred to the 'Time Use in India-2019 Report' of the National Statistical Office, Government of India which says that on an average, while Indian women spend 299 minutes a day on unpaid domestic services for household members, men spend just 97 minutes. Women also spend 134 minutes a day on unpaid caregiving services for household members.
4. A report entitled 'Women's Economic Contribution through their Unpaid Work: A Case Study of India' (2009) had estimated the economic value of services by women to be to the tune of a whopping \$612.8 billion annually.

Separate spheres Doctrine

Home and market for centuries were considered as two distinct spheres. The market was a male sphere of selfish competitiveness, but the home was celebrated as a female sphere, a site of spiritual uplift that offered relief from the vicissitudes of market struggle. American feminist economist Nancy Folbre rightly remarked, "the moral elevation of the home was accompanied by the economic evaluation of the work performed there".

Subsequently, women demanded a right to own themselves, their earnings, their genius. Since the economy of the household is generally as much the source of family wealth as the labour and enterprise of man, therefore the wife should, during life, have the same control over the joint earnings as per husband, and the right to dispose at her death of the same proportion of it as he.



Uneasy Suggestion: rather a blow to women's dignity

The party should understand that the term 'salary' as the monthly payment is indeed problematic as it indicates an employer-employee relationship, i.e., a relationship of subordination with the employer having disciplinary control over the employee. Wives are equal partners in marriage and do not come under a master-servant relationship.

Way Forward

1. The United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, in 1991, had recommended measurement and quantification of unremunerated domestic activities of women and their recognition in GDP so that the de facto economic contribution of women is highlighted.
2. The recognition of a wife's right in her husband's income during the subsistence of marriage.
3. The equal rights of wives in the matrimonial property need to be recognised.
4. Payment of wages for the household work must be preceded by promoting equality in unpaid household work and responsibility. The government can start with providing equal parental leave for both the partners.
5. Market sphere outside must be aligned to household responsibilities and routine to facilitate equal treatment.

Mains:

“Household Work is no mean feat and fixing notional income for a non-earning homemaker is a step towards the constitutional vision of social equality and ensuring the dignity of life to all individuals”. Elaborate