



IAS PARLIAMENT

Information is Empowering
A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative

Women and invisible work

Questions that we need to ask ourselves:

\n\n

- \n
 - Can we consider household work or what is called as unpaid care work performed by women/girls, as an optional service? And which could be forsaken at will, without having an alternative in place?
 - \n
 - Can we have **women's liberation without questioning the fundamental division of labour** that drives patriarchy?
 - \n
 - The threat is that in the guise of breaking the public/private binary, the resistance against a male-dominated world is co-opted by women being offered a slice of the pie.
 - \n
 - In this process, what is problematic is not women losing "feminine" traits of long hair, but the erasure of female labour, and contribution to sustaining human life.
 - \n

\n\n

What is 'invisible labour'?

\n\n

- \n
 - This labour is looked down upon in the world, and is **not part of national accounting or GDP**. But ironically, it is what sustains the economy.
 - \n
 - In material terms, women's unpaid care work is huge. It is estimated that women perform 75% of the world's unpaid care work. In India, women perform 10 to 12 times the unpaid care work of men.
 - \n
 - It is because women cannot give up unpaid care work that their access to paid work is severely limited, leading to a vicious cycle.

\n

- **Even when they find paid work, it does not necessarily liberate women** for often they are now saddled with both paid and unpaid work, leading to what is called as “double burden”.

\n

\n\n

What are some of often overlooked facts?

\n\n

\n

- In the developing world, women constitute nearly half of the agricultural labour force — 60% in Asia and Africa. Despite this, women own less than 20% of the world’s agricultural land.
- Women and girls also constitute 60% of the world’s chronically hungry. The FAO estimates that if women farmers had the same resources as men, it would have led to 150 million fewer hungry people.

\n

\n\n

On what ‘women’s liberation’ must be based on?

\n\n

\n

- Women need to access all arenas, including sport. **Participating in sport, especially in gender iniquitous societies, is liberating for women.** Further, it overturns established gender norms, particularly when women enter hitherto male-dominated sports.
- But it is also not a straightforward story of women’s liberation. As sports researchers tell us, women are faced with the female/athlete paradox - Even when they become athletes, they are forced to conform to dominant notions of femininity.
- This is because the larger society is still perfused with patriarchal values, and sport, while liberating for women, still operates within this larger culture.
- That is why **women’s liberation has to be based on concrete material foundations.** It is women’s unpaid care work which makes work and sport outside the home possible.

\n

- Even when some women break out of the private sphere and enter the public sphere, the unpaid care work falls upon lowly-paid women domestic help from the most marginalised backgrounds.

\n

\n\n

Concluding remarks:

\n\n

\n

- Women's empowerment is not merely about women becoming wrestlers or fighter pilots, which are, of course, important symbolic gestures.

\n

- But for real equality, it is imperative that women's care work be given its due material recognition. It would also mean a thorough reordering of gender norms, not by a few women entering the men's turf, but by men entering women's turf, and taking on "feminine" unpaid care work.

\n

- Ironically, despite economic and educational growth, **female participation in the labour force of India fell to 24% in 2011, from 31% in 2004.** India is 11th from the bottom in the world in women's labour-force participation rates.

\n

- For the real equality for women, along with the Mahavir Phogats, we need the likes of **Arunachalam Muruganantham**, the man who revolutionised women's health by inventing cheap sanitary napkins.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Category: Mains | GS - II | Social Justice

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n



IAS PARLIAMENT

Information is Empowering

A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative