INTERROGATING WORK: A FEMINIST INTERVENTION

Housework is what a woman does; but ironically, one notices when she does not do it.

A sceptical that has shogged the discourse of work, continues to be a protracted puzzle in reader's mind and has educed a slew of debates and writings is: why does our common understanding of work ignore housework? Or, to put it simply, do we ever reckon a homemaker's labour while making a formulation of work? In other words, while comprehending the notion of work, the conventional focus takes recourse to the public sphere, market-centric paid work. The definition of work mostly learnt from the dominant sociological discourses, has almost eschewed the unpaid and unrecorded dimensions of work that go on unrecognized in private spheres i.e. the family. Especially, it is perspicuous in the depiction of the former two chapters that whenever and wherever there is an attempt to make a sense of work, the usual tendency has been to portray it in terms of money or market and sequester all those important activities performed by a homemaker in private spheres of life. In essence, sociology as a discipline appears to be pauciloquent to the issue of 'women's work' while it tries to make formulations of any kind. This pauciloquence has educed a heap of serious questions from feminist scholars who argue that the discourse of work has been starkly 'unilateral' in recognizing only the paid-work as the sole focus of work. They propone that such unilateralism would only deny diversities or for that matter the diverse meanings/facets of work and weaken the bond among these facets. More importantly, there has been a tendency of viewing 'money' or 'payment' to be the sole defining criterion of 'work' and work sphere. Accordingly, not only the work of the 'homemaker' but also the private/domestic sphere itself remains invisible in the dominant literature of 'work'. In other words, what feminist scholars have tried to purport is that there has been a virtual absence of 'gender' question in such literature. In their view, it is not an easy task to unravel the causes and consequences of women's invisibility (in work discourse), as plausible explanations remain elusive for any naive reader. Thus, this chapter attempts to understand the inadequacy in the existing conceptualization of
work, to find out how the dominant formulation of work has neglected the domestic or private sphere as an important arena of work, to analyze how feminist scholars have characterized a homemaker's work in particular and that of a woman's work in general and to make a sense of the possible alternative meanings of work as suggested by such feminist scholars; in short, to explore the feminist interrogation of work.

SECTION-I
QUESTIONING PATRIARCHY

a. Housework: Debunking its Trivialization

One of the serious conundrums that have shrouded the common mind is whether housework should be treated as work. There are many surrounding perceptions that are at work which prevent us from terming it as a form of work. An important impression for which a woman's 'work' is trivialized is the perpetuating 'ideology' surrounding 'women'; that is the birth of a woman signals her association and identification with the hearth and that of a man with 'hunt'. Secondly, the whole-day work of housewife brooks no recognition because there has been an inveterate belief that women do not work and whatever they perform is just a task that is expected from them as their duty. In other words, 'housewifehood' is an ascriptive status for each woman and it does not matter whether one marries or not. Rather, social relations are organized in a way that expects every woman to be responsible for 'homemaking'. It appears, work is a synonym for men and antonym for women. As Nancy Bonvillain appropriately puts it,

Just as the worth of women's paid labour is systematically undervalued, the worth of labour contributed by wives and mothers is devalued. Trivialization of women's labour is reflected, for example, in the phrase 'just a housewife', which women themselves often use as a self-definition. But the work of social reproduction that such women perform is vital to society and to the economic system... Necessary tasks include obtaining and preparing food, maintaining the physical premise of home, purchasing clothing and other material goods, planning and supervising the education of children etc... Women therefore perform a great deal of socially necessary work but do not receive payment for it. Although non-employed wives are perceived as dependent on their husbands, husbands are, in actuality, also dependent on their wives. Just as
men contribute their wages to support their families, women contribute their unpaid labour to family survival... Devaluation of women's household work results, in part, from the social context in which it is performed. Housewives do the work of a social reproduction 'in the guise of familial responsibility' in contrast to paid employees, who have contractual relationships with their employers... Housework is also devalued, in part, because it is unpaid.¹

The point postulated by Bonvillain with regard to the invisibility of housework is quite unambiguous. Patriarchy is armed with a number of stereotypes that operate in public imagination to occult the significance of women's housework performed in domestic sphere. Thus, they need to be critically examined. Let us, for instance, consider the following points.

- First, housework is not simply cooking. It involves a number of activities. But the contradiction is that the same act if performed for one's own family is dubbed as no-work, whereas when performed for an employer, it is regarded as work. In the case of the former it goes unpaid and in the latter case, it is paid. Thus, such kind of arbitrary stigmatization is unsustainable.

- Another apparent reason for which women's household work does not get the status of 'work' is that a housewife performs it inside home. Men move freely to the public sphere, compete, work and earn money to support their family. Their activity is seen as work and therefore they are workers. But the paradoxical question remains, who restricts 'her' to the household sphere and why is she confined only to the status of a housewife? Moreover, why is her activity termed as her duty? On the other hand, one must admit implicitly at least in part, that men are able to operate freely in public sphere only because women make such operation possible by taking care of everything inside the house and even of house itself by being a full-time watcher.

- Third, housewives are indoctrinated with an impression that men work for more time outside home. In part, it is true that since the value of housework is not clear, unemployed women feel the pressure to spend long hours at it, to ensure

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¹ The reason why women's domestic work remains opaque in intellectual discourse and public psyche is two-fold. One, the metagrobolizing ideology surrounding the 'being' called woman. Two, the social context in which it is performed. For a feminist critique see, Nancy Bonvillain, *Women and Men: Cultural Constructions of Gender.* (Prentice Hall; New Jersey: 1995), pp. 169-70.
that an equal contribution is being made. On the contrary, it is both factually and methodologically wrong to argue that men work longer time than women. For instance:

- How many holidays does a housewife get in a year?
- Should a relationship in a particular sphere (be it public or private) be necessarily 'contractual'/cash-mediated in order for the activity performed in it to be called as 'work'?
- On the one hand, we honour a woman's motherhood, her childcare, recognize that she performs a number of activities such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, maintaining the household, taking note of household necessities; on the other hand, we hesitate to measure such activities and their economic value. Rather we tend to characterize all such activities as her 'duty' in the framework of patriarchally coloured cultural ideals of wifehood, motherhood and womanhood. We refuse to term her activities as work. This type of characterization is absolutely ridiculous. It is like saying 'I am a non-vegetarian because I love animals'. But, still the question remains, is it really impossible to term a homemaker's activity as work even without counting its economic worth?
- Thus, to devalue a homemaker's contribution is utterly preposterous and it exposes patriarchy's phoney design to squelch the entire activity performed by 'her' and garble the multiple meanings of the enigma called 'work'.

b. The Myth of The Male-Breadwinner

An inveterate myth that has pervaded the public psyche is that the husband is the breadwinner in every family. Of course, there are certain exceptions where female partners work outside and earn money for the family; but that does not attribute the status of breadwinner or 'shared-breadwinner' to them. Even though a woman has an employment in public sphere, her duty as a homemaker is assumed to be her primary obligation and everything including employment status is secondary to it. In other words, a wife is supposed to be submissive and sequacious to her

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husband and also 'relational' to him. Shrouded under the odious aspect of patriarchal value system, her contribution always remains de-recognized. The perpetuating perception has been that exposure to outer world, dealing with the public sphere and engaging in paid-employment are all the prerogatives of men that emanate naturally from their status of being 'men'. This stereotype of 'male breadwinner' is maintained as a camouflage to hush up all that is performed, worked and earned by women. As Jiping Zuo and Shengming Tang put it:

The term breadwinner can be defined as the extent to which a man provides financial support to the family. A good breadwinner is a man whose wife does not have to enter the labour force... This definition is relational... Because breadwinning ought to be understood as one's financial contribution in relation to his/her spouse's or partner's.3

It is luculent that breadwinner status not only ascribes to men but also it precludes even the possibility of women joining public employment. The very term 'labour' denotes a public sphere activity - a domain of men's endeavour. Again this public sphere connotation has been designed in relation and/or contradistinction to the private/domestic sphere. Correspondingly, the activity of work in such public domain spells out the idea that it is a sphere that is positively correlated or compatible to the characteristics of masculinity. This, in turn, has created the notion that home is a woman's place and it is womanly/feminine and it is a place of 'no-work' whereas public sphere is the man's place, it is masculine in nature, it is a work sphere and women are not made for it. In the words of Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp:

To mention manual or mental labor conjures up masculine associations of brawn and brain respectively... Spatial distinctions between public work places and the private spheres of the home - woman's place - has been a central part of the construction of women's social inferiority... The work that women do is undervalued for the very reason that it is women that do it.4

In a family, the husband preens himself to be the sole breadwinner and master of everything that goes in it. Even if his wife is an employed person, who earns from her job outside, still her status is attributed in relation to her husband's

3 Article by Jiping Zuo & Shengining Tang, "Breadwinner Status and Gender ideologies of Men and Women Regarding Family Roles" in Sociological Perspectives vol. 43, No.1, p. 31.
standing and his occupation. Again, it is not the discretion of the wife to join a job; rather it is purely the prerogative of the husband to determine whether his wife should be an earning member. Surprisingly, it would not be wrong to constate that many men feel humiliated if their female spouses come outside for job pursuits. Many men are engulfed with a stereotype that only they should engage in productive/monetary work, their earning should always supersede that of their female counterparts (in case the female spouses pursue job), they should be physically taller and stronger than their spouses and thus, the hierarchy should perennially be maintained. Because, any deviation in such hierarchy would signal a threat to their superiority. Barbara Rogers rightly states,

The work that women perform, regardless of its actual character, is seen as somehow 'non-work', or at best very light work... The social class and life style of a family are determined mainly by the husband’s occupation outside the family and he is expected to control what happens inside it, even to the extent of deciding whether or not 'his' wife should have a paid job outside. Any deviation from this is seen as threatening the man's very identity: for example, it is believed to be shameful for a husband to earn less than his wife; to be less tall; for the wife to have a stronger personality or greater intelligence... The home is presented to them as their primary occupation even if they take a second salaried job outside the home.\(^5\)

The question that emanates from such delineation is: are women naturally endowed with inferior traits in every aspect of life? On what basis can one devalue and stigmatize a woman’s contribution? Who gives the right to man to restrict woman’s future and her career? It is stelled that a woman’s primary occupation is that of a 'homemaker'. Then, why such 'occupation' is not regarded as a form of work? Why is there a tension in attributing this homemaker’s occupation the status of work? On the one hand we admit that this occupation of 'housewifery' presupposes a number of activities such as cooking, cleaning, child rearing, washing, maintaining the household things, keeping a watch on household needs. On the other hand, we ask her and the community not to perceive it as 'work'. It is like putting sweets/pickle on one's tongue and asking the person not to taste it.

\(^5\) Rogers postulates that patriarchy has always treated women as second-class beings. It rhetorizes that the relationship between man and woman should always be one of domination, hierarchy, subjection and segregation. For a detailed comprehension see, Barbara Rogers, *The Domestication of Women*, (Tavistock Publications; London: 1980/1983) pp. 14-20.
Chapter Three

It is true that most women combine marriage with paid jobs, and almost all women work: yet the 'breadwinner' stays a male term, still embodied in our social security system. The paradox is that when a man pursues a job in the market, it is called work and his primary occupation, but when the same job is pursued by his female counterpart, it is termed as secondary and her earning is construed as an additional or supplementary income for the family. The reason is obvious. A "job model" is applied to characterize men's work pattern (pertaining to employment) and a 'gender model' to explain women's occupation (primarily household chores). To quote Feldberg and Glenn:

It needs to be duly formulated so that the work people do can be located within the context of their whole lives. The development of the separate 'job model'... separates paid employment...as the only form of 'real' work. As a result other work tends to be treated as 'non-work' and women workers as non-workers.

Job, in conventional terminology, refers to a form of "men's work" that is performed in labour market and industrial structures. This form of terminological fixation precludes women from such labour and also shapes one's imagination to conclude that such women are non-workers. Moreover, the conventional understanding of work is quite ambiguous and while attempting an examination of the work of a 'homemaker', it leaves the learner in a quandary. For example, a housewife's cooking or washing activity is not seen as 'work' whereas the same activity when performed in market (in a hotel or in a laundry respectively) by the same or another woman is called work. Branding the same act as work when done in a market place/for a profit motive and changing the judgement topsy-turvy when it comes to one's own domestic chores, is nothing less than a non sequitur.

The very typification of 'job' versus 'gender' model evinces a distortion of the murkiest variety (based on sexist assumption) that vehemently garbles the very

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7 There is a tendency to ascertain the contribution of both men and women on sexist lines. Society's double standard is exposed in the following manner: men's performance is regarded as work just because it is men who do it; whereas women's work is trivialized as it women who do it. In short, a 'job model' is applied to honourably distinguish men's paid employment and a 'gender model' is used to isolate/ignore women's work. For a critical examination, read article by Feldberg and Glenn E.N., "Male and Female: Job Versus Gender Model in The Sociology of Work" in Women and The Public Sphere (ed.) by Siltanen J.&Stanworth M. (Hutchinson; London: 1984) p. 33.
essence and meaning of the phenomenon called work. The fact that a woman professional (or employed in any job sphere) is seen as a woman first and then an employed person, is sufficient enough to explain the kind of ambiguity that persists in the field of 'work' and the kind of imputation that one attributes while approaching the question of work through the prism of gender. The persisting typification is best reflected in the following analysis.

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\begin{align*}
\text{Man} &= \text{Public} = \text{Career oriented} = \text{Economic Provider/worker} = \text{Breadwinner} \\
\downarrow &\quad \downarrow &\quad \uparrow &\quad \downarrow &\quad \uparrow \\
\text{Woman} &= \text{Private} = \text{Care and Nurturing task oriented} = \text{Wife and/or mother} = \text{Homemaker}
\end{align*}
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c. The Impervious Ideology of Domestication

Domestication refers to the process of restricting woman to the domestic sphere, shaping her life more and more domestic and keeping herself away from outside work sphere. The fundamental assumption that creates a boundary between the domestic sphere and public sphere is that the former is considered to be woman's sphere and the latter, that of the man. In the opinion of Barbara Rogers, 'work' in domestic sphere is much more toiling than that of the outside world. Moreover, such domestic work brooks no holiday - optional or casual - and it is a timeless (neither part-time nor full-time) phenomenon as a woman has to carry it out till her death and thus there is no retirement in her life. In Rogers's view, women's domestic work is also subsistence work; but it is undervalued and dismissed as a form of work because of the very stigma of 'domestic'. Therefore there is a need to expunge such preposterous stigmatization. To quote Rogers:

Domestication is the process of confining woman to the domestic sphere making her life more and more domestic and detaching her from outside work... It is this separation out of the modern economy, with the central role of paid work from the unpaid 'domestic' or subsistence sector... If there is one generalization that one can make about rural women, it is that their non-farm

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work is strenuous, takes enormous amounts of time, and is absolutely essential to the survival of the family concerned... Men are able to take a day off on Sundays, and have very slack periods of certain times of the year, whereas women's work continues unwaveringly with little variation... It would appear that in many if not all areas, if their work is properly measured, it will be seen that women are spending over ten hours a day in essential activities relating to family subsistence, especially in the provision of food... They suffer the myopia of labeling women's subsistence work 'domestic' and therefore to be dismissed as trivial. 9

Marriage is considered to be a cultural-cum-existential necessity for Indian women and more so it is sanctioned as an ideal to be internalized as something peremptory. The ideology of 'domestication' operates as a form of bulwark in favour of all phoney stereotypes and against all those who oppose such shibboleths. It goes without saying that a woman's status or identity is always contingent upon her man's. It is not astonishing that motherhood constitutes the highest hierurgy for every Indian woman and without it the whole contribution made by a woman in terms of her 'wifehood' or womanhood becomes acarpous. A woman without accomplishing the duty of motherhood is like the sun rising without its rays. In other words, as the sun would be de-recognized without its rays, the woman is devalued without her 'mothering'. Wifehood is assumed to be the cultural and natural role that every woman ought to take. Accordingly, her performance as a 'homemaker' comes as a corollary and thus it is not seen as a form of work. The statements of Joy Paulson are worth-mentioning:

To write of the Indian housewife is to write of every woman. Virtually every Indian woman marries... How can this over-whelming penchant for marriage (and house-wifery) be explained? There is positive appeal in the feminine role model as reflected in the mother image. Because marriage is an imperative for women, the fear of remaining single acts as a negative force, impelling women to marry... Women's work in the home - food preparation, cleaning, child rearing etc. - is shaped by cultural traditions... Obedience to and dependence upon men characterized women's traditional role in the family. 10

There operates an inveterate cultural 'construct' that justifies such division of roles, separates the spheres of activity, typifies and ascribes the breadwinner status

9 Ibid. pp. 152-70.
of men and domestic status of women. It is this construct that ideologizes the whole typification as peremptory. Moreover, it rationalizes that the world of competition is a natural space for men and that of domesticity is a woman's world. Nancy Bonvillain aptly reiterates:

A cultural construct developed as an ideological justification for separation of the genders and for the relegation of women to the domestic sphere... Men are assigned responsibility for providing material support for the families; women are suited to perform domestic tasks... The separation of spheres of activity was seen as a God-given mandate... The cult of domesticity provided explanations for men's place at work and women's place at home. It justified... competition in the work place as stemming innately from men's nature... Women had no natural place in the competitive work environment. 11

The central purport that emanates from the discussion is that the ideology of domestication spells out two connotations: firstly, 'domestic' sphere is regarded as the natural place for women; secondly, a section of the work activities also gets domesticated and continues to remain invisible in the vesture of 'domestic'. In the words of C.T.Mohanty,

It is domestication of work because of the persistence and legitimacy of the ideology of the housewife, which defines women in terms of their place within the home, conjugal marriage and heterosexuality. 12

With the sacralization of the ideologies of domestication, wifehood, motherhood and the like remaining preponderant, the stomach and the attempts for gauging the economic worth of a 'domestic' woman have always remained unattempted, elusive or uninitiated. It is also said that for an economist, it is very difficult to gauge a homemaker's contribution in exact quantifiable terms. Moreover, it is maintained that the domestic sphere is an inaccessible sphere for an economist. This sort of impression stimulates several arguments. To begin with, if a woman's identity is defined in terms of and confined to a cultural ideal/tradition, an economist

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11 An inveterate shibboleth that permeates all our imagination is that public work domain is a natural space for men. That, men are naturally predisposed to join the world of competition, labour and employment. Public domain is a men's prerogative and women are not naturally fit for it. For details see, Nancy Bonvillain, Women and Men: Cultural Constructions of Gender (Prentice Hall; New Jersey: 1995) pp. 154-55.

is not quintessential to quantify her 'work'. The measurement and the economic value of her domestic work should never remain unmeasured and incomplete in the absence of an economist. Unlike the market-paid work, it is possible to gauge and translate her so-called 'duty' in the same language of culture, ideology and tradition. At least, it can be assessed, valued, phenomenized through the prism of cultural traditions or the ideology itself. One does not require any professional economist in order to make a sense of the economics of domestic work. Even a normal common sense would be sufficient to understand the phenomenon of work in domestic sphere; but the first requirement for this, is that one should have an unbiased stomach for such understanding. One cannot say that a housewife's work does not carry any economic value simply because it is unpaid/informal and done within domestic sphere. It would be like saying Vedas, Bhagvat Geeta or similar religious tomes bear no relevant message/knowledge simply because of the fact that are not formally taught in School, College or University class-rooms or because neither any Newton nor any Einstein has written these tomes.

d. Feminization of Home Sphere and Masculinization of Outer Sphere: The Invisibility of Home-Based Work

With the ideology of domesticity being entrenched quite deeply, not only the activity of a homemaker but also all those activities and products that a woman creates for market-selling purposes get unrecognized and unreported. Moreover, although she creates certain products staying at home and her husband extracts profits by selling them in market, still she is not termed as a worker or her production as work; ironically the breadwinner status goes solely to the husband. This phenomenon has sharply been demonstrated by Maria Mies. She conducted a study of the lace-makers of Narsapur. Mies found that women worked six to eight hours a day. Men sold women's products and lived on profits from women's labour. Mies explains that although a woman produces an article that is sold/paid in market, still it is regarded as her 'leisure time activity'. The reason is obvious. She is performing an activity in a private sphere where her primary duty is something else. Secondly, the ideology of housewife makes it impossible to term her (economic) activity 'work' and prevents her from seeking a direct access to market to sell the product of her labour. This ensures her dependence upon her husband and transfers unequivocally the 'breadwinner' status to man. C.T.Mohanty aptly puts it,
The polarization between men's and women's work where men actually defined themselves as exporters and businessmen who invested in women's labour, bolstered the social and ideological definition of women as housewives and their work as 'leisure time activity'. In other words, work, in this context, was grounded in sexual identity, in concrete definitions of femininity, masculinity and heterosexuality. It means masculinization of all non-production (trade) jobs and a total feminization of the production process... Not only are the lace-makers invisible in census figure (after all, their work is leisure), but their definition as housewives makes possible the definition of men as 'breadwinners.\(^{13}\)

Such home-based women workers are invisible in two senses: first, they operate in a private sphere; second, they do not come out directly with their products for commercial or contractual purposes. To use the phrase given by Ela Bhatt, piece-rate home-based women workers perform two types of work simultaneously. They perform their routine household 'duties' on the one hand; and carry on certain income-generating work within the confines of their home. But the paradox is that these piece rate women workers are not perceived as serious or competent workers, rather they are seen as 'easily-available' or dispensable pool of workers who can be recruited or dismissed by employers whenever desired. Bhatt further elaborates:

Home-based women workers are invisible to society, literally, in that they work within their homes; and officially, in that they do not appear in Census or other official statistics... Piece rate home-based workers are generally women who combine their household tasks with income generating work... Home based piece rate workers are not included as workers in the Factories Act and so are not covered by most labour laws... Home-based producers form a dispensable pool of workers for the employer. He employs them whenever and, as frequently he needs them and dismisses them when he no longer requires their services.\(^{14}\)

Zarina Bhatty's study of the women beedi workers in Allahabad explains a similar scenario. Women beedi workers perform such productive work along with their domestic functions. By doing the former assignment, they contribute to their


family economically. But ironically, all that they contribute or perform go on un­
evaluated. Bhatty explains:

The invisibility of women's work continues to be an obstacle in understanding
their economic role in the household and in society. One reason for this is the
elusive definition of 'work' given by economists and Census commissioners.
Another reason for non-recognition of women's economic contribution has
been the neglect of the household economy and the unorganized sector, in
which women play an overwhelming role. ¹⁵

In many families women seldom have the right to 'work' outside. They live in
a make-believe world that continually inculcates the feeling that it is their 'primary'
obligation to perform the task (that of a homemaker) that they are traditionally
destined for and supposed to do. Even though a woman works outside, she is made
to believe that she is ‘primarily’ made to be a homemaker. Thus this primacy should
not be procrastinated. As Nancy Bonvillain rightly reiterates:

Women who are compelled by economic necessity to join the labour force are
continually reminded that by working outside the home they are neglecting
their proper duty to nurture their husband and children. ¹⁶

It is quite luculent that the very phenomenon of 'work' has been largely
enveloped and occulted by certain primordial patriarchal shibboleths. These
shibboleths play frequently to indoctrinate women, define their identity and space,
shape their sphere of everyday activities and ensure their inescapable dependence
upon men. The natural corollary is that a woman's (work) place revolves around the
domestic sphere and that of a man around public sphere of work. The point we wish
to asseverate is that the very location of men and women is dictated in terms of
sexist lines. This stells the unfortunate but logical and perpetuating fact that even the
notion of work is not free from sexuality. Mohanty rightly avers:

¹⁵ For extensive reference see, Zarina Bhatty, "Economic Contribution of Women to the

¹⁶ The argument that Bonvillain postulates is quite apodictic. That is, despite our frequent rhetoric
of women's empowerment in public life, in reality we hardly encourage women to join
employment. Even if a woman pursues job in public work domain by manipulating opportunities
and dodging constraints, she is continually reminded of her primary responsibility, that is,
family. For an illuminating discussion see, Op.cit. Nancy Bonvillain, Cultural Constructions of
Gender. p. 169.
But the definition of women as housewives also suggests the heterosexuality of women's work - women are always defined in relation to men and conjugal marriage... There are heterosexual ideologies based on the normative definition of women as wives, sisters and mothers - always in relation to conjugal marriage and family.17

Patriarchal relations are said to predominate where men, who retain a considerable proportion, if not all of the income from them, sell the products of women’s unpaid work.18 Access to occupation is determined by patriarchal relations, which involve men's control over women's labour resulting in continued dependence upon men and greater unpaid work within the household.

Though women's space in bureaucracy, judiciary, legislature, police and many other professions is mushrooming very fast, yet it is puerile and premature to say that it confers on them the same kind of liberty, choice, standing, kudos or flexibility as enjoyed by their male counterparts. Rather, very often, it appears that such employment of women implies merely an assimilation of women into the exploitative/patriarchal/male-stream discourse rather than their real personal or economic freedom and empowerment. To use Mary Daly's phrase, such women turn out be 'token' women and the phenomenon is known as 'tokenism'. Mary Daly's articulation in this context is really interesting:

Women professionals who work within the establishment are 'token women' who simply mask male power; the reforms won by women's movements are merely examples of 'tokenism' because reforms create the illusion but not the reality.19

The ongoing discussion immaculately reveals the fact that the division of work is starkly tilted in men's favour. For example, due to the stereotyped notions of work and work sphere, the pairing of 'women and manager' is seen as incompatible, whereas that of 'man and manager' is considered to be compatible.20 Such type of arbitrary allocation of work and work sphere spells out the extreme form of

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sexualized division and differentiation of labour. Whether a woman is to be a 'working' or a 'non-working' woman still remains the prerogative of man. Although one is a 'working' woman, she is not perceived as a 'shared-breadwinner-partner; rather, she is the one used as her husband's cat's paw to fulfil or meet some sort of need/function - latent or manifest.

e. Is Home A No-Work Paradise?

In conventional parlance, the insight that is widely intromitted in public imagination is that 'home' refers to a place where one enters after finishing his workload. Entry into home implies a release from work or duty. It is a place, which relieves and mitigates. Home signifies the removal of burden, discomfort, pressure and stress. To many others, home is a private, natural space where an individual gives expression to his volition and individual idiosyncrasies. It is a place for the manifestation of his personal 'apolaustic' and peculiar feelings. Home is an arena that is said to comfort the individual in order to realize his inner freedom and express his inner self. In short, it is a place for rest, respite, relief and recreation. Reaching home implies joining a world of leisure. That means, home is regarded as a sphere of no-work. With the advent of feminist discourse over the notion of work, the hitherto perceived meaning of home stands controverted. It is also a place where one cooks, cleans, reproduces, rears, teaches, nurses, manages, designs, decorates and performs many other domestic and productive tasks. But it is owing to the obsession with the conventional meaning of home, that one is not able to unearth fully the continual 'work' of a homemaker. The paradox is that while a homemaker performs a variety of activities inside home which may be greater than that of her male counterpart both qualitatively and quantitatively, ironically, the public perception of 'home' always remains nonchalant and degage to such activities which, in turn, vizards the toiling work performed by a housewife. To borrow the words of Nancy Bonvillain:

Notion of the 'home' as a respite from the world is popularized. Home is assumed a place where we shall be free to act out personal and individual tastes, as we cannot do before the wide world. Thus, as like the conventional connotation of 'leisure', home is seen as a place of relief from every 'work' burden. So this sort of perception is also a reason to have a taken for granted
attitude and ignore the productive contribution of the housewife. As it is seen as a space for non-work, thus the 'work' element in it is de-recognized.21

Women perform many activities such as cooking, reproduction, maintenance, mending clothes, teaching and nursing their own children etc. Once we conclude that home is a no-work sphere, we directly portray the message that all such activities of a housewife are non-work. That means women do not work. A.V.Jose rightly points out:

These are activities usually performed by women in the precincts of their homes. Their exclusion from the gainful employment effectively pre-empts the enumeration of home-based women workers... Women are reckoned primarily as housewives and any economic activity they may perform along with their domestic chores tend to remain under-reported even by women themselves... These cognitive problems are perpetuated by religious taboos and cultural biases prevalent in traditional societies.22

If we are swayed by such smattering preconceptions, we should not forget to remind us the fact that by agreeing to these prejudiced connotations, we are, on the other hand, giving legitimacy to the unfortunate stereotype that homemaker is a sobriquet for the housewife. This also logically portrays the idea that the task of a homemaker is non-work. Again by doing so, we are essentially trapped in the same patriarchal typification - we are segregating the class of women from the class of men, the home from the class of men, non-work sphere from the work sphere, the class of women from the world of work, and the homemaker (housewife) from the breadwinner (husband). Therefore, Susan Hanson etal have rightly said that the occupational segregation begins at home.23 The very typification of home as a sphere of 'no-work' is quite sex-blind. It may be a 'relief' for the man who works outside but the same is not true of a homemaker. But what is satirizing is that 'her' labour is viewed as cheap labour and thus considered non-work. The breadwinner status goes inevitably to the husband, but paradoxically, the wife is not simply encouraged to expose herself to the public sphere to raise her economic or political resources. To quote Patricia Fernadez-Kelly,

Women have become the preferred providers of cheap labour in the age of globalization for reasons akin to those for their subordination in earlier times. Dependent on men, devoid of resources or true political standing and charged with domestic responsibilities that often clashed with work outside the home, women have few alternatives but to accept jobs that are repetitive, poorly paid and dangerous.\(^{24}\)

Why is it that a full-time homemaker (necessarily a women) confined to her wifely/motherly responsibilities (ostracized from the outside public sphere) is termed just a housewife, and a woman working \(1/4\)th of a day's time in public sphere is called a working woman? The most suscitating fact is that even the work of many women who are engaged in home-based production (beedi-making, lace-makers and so many earning activities) do not get due recognition in terms of merit/efficiency simply because of the reason that the task is performed by a homemaker. The very notion of home offers an impressive vizard to the perpetuating stereotypes and hegemonic patriarchal ideologies that comfortably conceal the entire gamut of 'work' performed by a housewife. Krishnamurthy strongly propone:

> Women's work largely remains invisible and goes unrecorded because they perform both the productive and unproductive works simultaneously or intermittently and these two components of their time are indivisible.\(^{25}\)

Home is said to be a natural sobriquet for rest, respite, relief and recreation. Is this understanding sex-neutral? Does a housewife exercise the same kind of 'relief' or 'recreation' as her male counterpart? Where does she return to after finishing her domestic activity? Do the activities like cooking, cleaning, taking care of the household, teaching and nursing own children, mending etc come under the sphere of rest, leisure, relief or recreation? While it is important to perpend these questions surrounding the meaning of home and the associated domestic activities done inside it, it is also equally significant to agree to the fact that with the emergence of feminist debate, the very characterization of home remains a conjecture and the usual understanding of the opposition between 'work' and non-work stands discepted. As it is appropriately urged, housework is a work that must be valued on

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\(^{24}\) Article by Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, "Reading The Signs: The Economics of Gender Twenty-Five Years Latter" in SIGNS Vol. 25, No.4. Summer 2000, p.1109.

its own merit and not in comparison to any other sphere. It remains apodictic that a homemaker executes dynamic roles in the same static home: she is a housekeeper, maid, laundress, cook, nurse, primary school teacher, sempstress, managing assistant and so on. She dons many avatars in one birth. Thus it can be announced that a housewife's work is greater than that of a market job pursued by her male counterpart, in term of its nature, quantity, labour, patience and diversity. But the very act of remaining indifferent and reticent to the magnitude of a homemaker's work questions the very semantics of 'home' and 'work'.

f. Is Work masculine?

At a cognitive level, the belief that one bears willy-nilly is that housewife and a labourer are diametrical opposites. In other words, housewife and labour/work are exclusive to each other. Thus, the corollary that follows from this idea is that since labour and housewife are defined in relation to their separation, exclusion and opposition, the homemaker is usually viewed as a non-worker. As household activities are not viewed as work, the housewife turns out to be a non-worker or a non-labourer. 'Breadwinner' is defined in opposition and in contradistinction to the 'homemaker'. The former relates to 'work' and the latter to 'duty'/obligation or non-work. This sort of impression has ideologically institutionalized the stereotype that work is masculine. The question that willy-nilly comes to one's mind is, who makes this 'breadwinner' practicable? The answer is a 'woman'. As a woman, she accomplishes all the assignments of a 'homemaker' thereby leaving her male partner free and enabling him to 'work' outside. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty rightly observes it:

The opposition between definitions of the 'labourer' and of the 'housewife' anchors the invisibility...of work; in effect, it defines women as non-workers. By definition, housewives cannot be workers or labourers; housewives make male breadwinners and consumers possible... But their definition as housewives makes possible the definition of men as 'breadwinners. 26

By monopolizing the public sphere, men try to legitimize three characters in relation to their identity: (i) they are workers, (ii) they are anti-feminine men and

(iii) work is masculine. Like Marx who evinces that only economy dominates the rest, so also in this context, men assume their unquestionable importance and they dominate over their family sphere by virtue of their 'market-earning' or breadwinning role. The message that ultroneously comes out is that the 'purview' of labour or for that matter, work, lies outside the sphere of home, and that purview is the world of cash remuneration, recognition or the market. And this world is naturally considered the men's world. Thus the phenomenon of labour speaks only one language - that is manliness or the masculinity. Family is taken for granted as a natural and integral complement to the 'public' world. Thus the 'purview' of family is not perpended in perseity; whatever activity (economic/non-economic) is performed by a homemaker, is always perceived, perpetuated and propagated through the prism of culture and ideology. Housework is perceived to be 'non-work' not simply because women do it, but more because it is done inside the home. Conversely, public sphere activity is considered 'work' not simply because men do it, but more because they do it in market that is a men's world and which lies outside the domestic sphere. To quote Gregory L.Kaster:

Through it they could publicly signify themselves as not simply workers but men; from it they could derive both self-esteem and assurance that their cause will prevail... Labour's language is manliness... Private family life is seen as an indispensable complement to public economic and political sphere. Thus it is a perceptual distortion... Their (economic) performance is culturally/ideologically coloured and repeated.28

The preceding discussion offers the reader a series of puzzles. To begin with, why are a homemaker and a labourer/worker perceived as opposites? Why is family viewed to be an indispensable complement and subordinate to the outer public sphere? The discussion that is cited reveals a persistent, complex, problematic language of 'manliness' central to the activism and delineation of work. In its (work) broad contours and basic meaning, this language of 'manliness' is remarkably persistent across time and space. It prescribes an idealized, invincible masculinity whose essence is male workers' resolute, heroic and respectable free agency.

28 Ibid. p.52.
Ironically, this ideal is considered 'honourable' and is maintained through ideological inculcation and internalization.

Why is there a perception that housework is not only non-work but also inferior and subordinate to the work in public sphere? One cannot afford to shun his/her attention to the diverse and swinking activities of a homemaker. It is the comprehensive performance of housework by a housewife that makes possible for the husband to articulate his skills and career in market even at the expense of his spouse's career and performance. This explains the monopsony of the husband over his housewife. But the irony is that when a paid 'domestic help' performs homework, one terms his/her performance as work. But when the same activity is carried on by one's wife, it is said to be her natural obligation/duty and thus, non-work. This, sort of selectivity is nothing but a non sequitur. To pirlicue that women do not 'work' and cannot be workers because they 'perform' inside the family, they are invisible, do not appear to be 'working' and they are not paid, is like arguing that all attractively-dressed/smart-looking people are super-intelligent/cosmopolitan and metro-based elites whereas all the simple-dressed and innocent-looking fellows are hicks, poor and conservatives. The problem is that work continues to be viewed as something that is pursued 'outside' home and it is always located in relation to certain formal and specific market rules and institutions. Thus, 'public sphere' work masculinizes men and 'domestic' activity feminizes women.

SECTION-II

WORK AND THE WORK DOMAIN: DISCOVERING THE EMERGING TRENDS

a. Public-Private: Dissolving The Symbolic Hyphen

As evident from the previous discussion, it is a pan-cultural fact that not only 'work' but also the sphere of work is governed by, ascribed in terms of and compartmentalized/discriminated on the basis of sex. On the one hand men have an unstinted penchant for monopolizing and masulinizing 'public sphere' as well as the phenomenon of 'work'; on the other hand, they make women remain confined to the 'domestic sphere' thereby ascribing it the image of a feminine world. As Michelle Rosaldo sincerely puts it,
Sexual asymmetry is grounded in the tendency for men to occupy the public sphere of social life, while women tend to operate largely within the domestic sphere.\(^{29}\)

It appears, the very schematization of work is sex-biased. The language of work is conceptualized, structured, translated and spoken in the grammar of manliness and masculinity. The task before the researcher is to transcend and dissect this 'biasness', disentangle the 'language' of work from the perplexing and corruptive influence of 'manliness' and ordain the phenomenon of 'work' free from its surrounding profound, fixed and rigid stereotypes. Thus, the first functional-cum-methodological prerequisite is to deconstruct and obliterate the 'rigidity' of the public-private sphere regimentation, dissolve the 'symbolic' hyphen that lies between men and women, construct a re-defined schematization of 'work' that leaves not a single facet of 'work' opaque and that pays due heed and respect to all its facets. Work is to be contextualized not in terms of sex, sphere, ideology or stereotype, but in relation to one's savoir-faire, talent, interest and performance. This would result in the disappearance and devaluation of the primordial distinctions of men's world of work and women's world of obligation (or work?). In the language of Susan Visvanathan, the, resultant era would be known as the epoch of 'androgyny' that would signal open-competition, exercise of one's volition in matters of work and employment and elimination all sex-linked stigmatizations. Visvanathan vividly puts it:

One of the greatest problems of understanding work is in the terms, which neutralize gender... Androgyny means overcoming the cultural parameters of what it means to be a man or a woman, but it raises the problem of common humanity. Work then is defined in terms of ability and interest, and the distinctions between men's work and women's work would at once be devalued. Androgyny, then, is about fearlessness and role choices, which are not biologically defined.\(^{30}\)

The biggest challenge that confronts society is to squelch the division of labour on the basis of ideology (often sex-linked). This calls for an interrogation and re-examination of the public-private opposition. No woman should any longer suffer

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from the very stigma of being a 'womb-man'. Society has a tendency to recognize the goods and services that carry concrete monetary value. But then, what happens to the services offered by a homemaker? Are they not worth-valuing? The work of a homemaker has to be gauged in terms of its use value. Mednick has justifiably advocated that the work of women must be viewed in the context of its function for society and for the individual.\(^{31}\) To recall the words of Ranjana Kumari,

Further, the activities are quite porous in terms of time, space and participatory functions... When fully recognized, it will radically alter our perception of women's role and their contribution to the household economy... There is a need for abolition of sexual division of labour, alleviation of double work burden, equal access to productive resources, control over products of labour, recognition of the use value of their work, contribution in monetary terms.\(^{32}\)

Any negotiation of the question of work necessitates an extensive understanding of and an honest sensitivity to the phenomenon of gender. Before attempting at a discovery of the enigma of work in the case of a housewife in particular and that of a woman in general, it becomes methodologically, ethically, and valuationally essential for the researcher to expunge from his/her acquired mental schema that something called 'second-sex' does/ should exist in mankind. Thus the first prerequisite for the purpose is knowledge of gender equity, which intromits the message that both the sexes are equal in almost all respects. Moreover, there is also an urgent need to interrogate the stereotypes of domestication and housewifehood. It is also imperative to question cultural beliefs that occult the (economic) contribution of women in particular and trammel their upliftment and empowerment in general in the vizard of ideology. Thus, the entire household dimensions of women's activity, their role, place, space etc. need to be sensitized and evaluated from a woman-centred standpoint. In other words, this calls for a genderization of all the activities that women do and that ought to be regarded as work, which have hitherto been vizarded in the cloak of ideological stereotypes. As Cherian Joseph and K.V.Eswara Prasad appropriately observe:


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To respond to women as labour in terms of gender equity requires a reworking of the role, place and space of women at home and the extension of this to the world of work and community.\(^{33}\)

The food and beverage department of the home is considered a woman's domain and whether she is a corporate CEO, teacher, a police officer or a welfare officer, her headquarter is never considered far from the kitchen. How does our sociology account for this double-work burden? In fact, the tendency of social science to remain nonchalant to the swinking tasks performed by a woman has been severely impugned by feminist scholars. They have started re-negotiating and reconstructing the phenomenon of work and have come forward to term the unpaid, caring and emotional tasks of a woman as different forms of work. Feminist scholarship has repugned the conventional characterization of work for being degenderized and it has offered concepts of 'toiling', 'caring', 'emotional' and sexual' in order to grasp, fit and delineate the diverse forms of activities that come under the purview of (house) work. In the case of working women, society "evades" the responsibility of phenomenizing the ways in which they balance their time between family and job sphere. This evasion is a part of the patriarchal male-stream politics that intends to keep women as complaisant cogs. Thus, there is a need to expose the politics behind the ideological chasm that foments the hierarchy between man and woman, and that causes the invisibility and/or ignorance of private sphere in common parlance. This urges us to delineate the gendered aspect of a woman's time to cook, time to work, time to bear, time to rear, time to look after and so on. As Anne Witz puts it:

Feminists have also redefined the concept of work to include unpaid domestic work and caring tasks as well as paid work, developing, concepts such as 'caring' 'emotional' and 'sexual' work to grasp and analyze gender-specific qualities that are loaded into tasks performed by women in the household and the labour market... Women balance their time and energy between household work and paid work in complex ways and there is an urgent need to renegotiate the gendered politics of time to care, time to work, and time to oneself.\(^{34}\)


\(^{34}\) There is a sociological imperative to redefine the gender dimension of women's household work; that is, the diverse responsibilities they perform in the garb of homemaker. For extensive delineation see, article by Anne Witz, "Women and Work" in Victoria Robinson & Diana Richardson, Introducing Women's Studies, (ed.) (Macmillan; London: 1997), p. 240.
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The problem that revolves around the (re) working of the phenomenon of work in terms of gender is that our mental schema has been ingrained with a rigid regimentation of the 'division' of work between men and women (men for public sphere, women for kitchen) like sky and the ocean or sun and the earth. It appears as if dissolution of such division or a re-working of the question of work is impossible. Are family and market two separate, contradictory and irreconcilable territories? Are they really so as they appear? Is there any scope to visualize where both family and market interplay upon one another? Is it really impossible to sense them in concinnity? It would not be wrong to advocate that the ideological schema of public-private division is nothing but a perceptual 'distortion'. The very symbolic hyphen that remains between the 'public' and the 'private' is symptomatic of such distortion and hence, it has to be dissolved not only symbolically but also schematically, methodologically and semantically. As Linda Nicholson would boldly posit:

Many feminists have correctly intuited... societal divisions that have been central to the structuring of gender in at least modern Western societies. This is expressed in the opposition between 'domestic' and 'private'... Rosalind Petchesky illustrates, (A) further analytical insight [was] that 'production' and 'reproduction' work and family, far from being separate territories like the moon and the sun or the kitchen and the shop, are really intimately related modes that reverberate upon one another and frequently occur in the same social, physical and even psychic spaces. This point bears emphasizing, since many of us are still stuck in the model of 'separate spheres' (dividing off 'women's place' 'reproduction', 'private life', 'the home', etc from' the world of men, 'production' 'public life', 'the office', etc.). We are now learning that this model of separate spheres distorts reality, that it is every bit as much an ideological construct as are the notions of 'male' and 'female' themselves... By ontologizing the separation of family and economy, we also lose sight of the kind of connections that have existed between the separated spheres, connections that have occurred on the very process of their separation. 35

b. Increasing Feminization in Work Place

Over the years, the job market which had hitherto been hijacked by the corruptive influence of 'manliness'/'masculinity', has been witnessing a gradual entry of women who join this domain with a view to carry an independent economic

pursuit. Of course, the reasons are simple. The prepollence of the murky, obscurantist, rigid, riddling and ideological stereotypes has started losing its profundity and make-believe effect. With the field of education becoming a 'free access space', more and more women join this sphere and excel in equal terms vis-à-vis their male counterparts. This showers its positive and beneficial reverberations in 'work' organizations. With the 'competitive excellence' scaled by women reaching new heights, the public work sphere no longer affords to be closed or 'masculine'; rather, it is getting flexible enough to be accommodative of the dialectics of sexes - the so-called fairer sex and the 'second sex'. This signals the beginning of a new process in work sphere, that is, 'feminization' that has transcended the primordial notion of 'work' and its relative stereotypes that have hitherto refused to be sensitive to such 'dialectics'. As Sylvia Walby succinctly summarizes:

The entry of women into the public sphere is most marked in areas of employment and education, where there has been both a considerable increase in women's presence and major changes in the patterns of inequality... It is rather a long-term restructuring of the gender composition of the work place. The removal of many overt and covert forms of patriarchal closure in the labour market is a major structural change... The continuing entry of women into paid employment is part of the change in the form of gender regime from a private to a more public form.

The continual entry of women into public work domain has changed the arithmetic of the work place. Not only do women accomplish their professional tasks successfully which are ironically termed as males' preserve, but also they aim to strive and thrive in their respective professions. This relates to the issue of one's mobility, that is, one's professional growth. In other words, women also wish to prove their best, flourish and excel amidst job challenges like their male counterparts. Thus, the Spencer's phrases of 'struggle', 'being fittest', 'survival', or 'competition' are no more the preserve, prerogative and/or natural 'properties' of man. Looking at the ongoing scenario, it would be wrong to constate that women as individuals are bereft of such properties. Again, it has to be kept in mind that all those women who pursue their occupations in public sphere are also 'homemakers' in their respective families. Thus, it would be presumptuous to propose that all these

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37 Ibid. p. 78.
'working' women are spinsters. The idea that we intend to convey is that women continue to pervade occupational sphere despite their double-work burden. In other words, family or for that matter, 'wifehood', per se, does not render the job sphere an impervious terrain for women. The persistence of women in 'occupational' sphere is symbolic of the fact it is possible to maintain both the tasks/commitments together - the familial and occupational - and commitment to one sphere does not necessarily pulverize one's commitment to the other. To recall Firestone's assertion:

Women's commitment to paid work is getting stronger and the very consolidation of such commitment makes the connection between home and market more compatible.38

c. From Segregation to De-Segregation: A Trend Towards Feminization.

Segregation as a phenomenon holds its ideological-cum-empirical roots in job spheres. It refers to a situation where a group of people is prevented from getting employment in certain occupations. It also means preponderance of a section of people in a particular occupation thereby excluding another section from joining that occupation. Certain jobs are left for women with the ideological justification that those are best match for them. For example, women are preferred to be clerks, primary schoolteachers, nurses, personal secretaries and the like. Clerical work is idealized as women's work. Women and clerical work are seen as good match for each other because of women's patience, docility, attention, and their better manner. On the contrary, the stereotypical vision of work and work sphere renders the concept of 'female manager' an untenable proposition while the notion of male manager is seen as perfect combination of gender and occupation. The positions of manager, bureaucrat, administrator and similar other middle and upper class jobs are considered to be the prerogatives of men. Thus, there are two facets of segregation: in the first instance, women are found in 'clerical' occupations, they are preferred only for such jobs; in the second, men monopolize the upper/middle echelons of the occupational hierarchy that lie above the rank of the 'clerical'. In other words women are excluded from such echelons. To use Anne Witz's phrase, the former is called as horizontal segregation and the latter as vertical segregation. The entire analysis of the phenomenon of segregation by Witz is quite convincing:

Gender segregation refers to concentration of women and men into different occupation, jobs and places of work... Women are concentrated in a narrower range of occupations than men, namely, catering, cleaning, hairdressing, and other personal services; clerical and related occupations; and professional and related occupations in education, welfare and health. This relates to horizontal segregation... In case of vertical segregation, men tend to predominate in his/her-level occupations i.e., middle and upper echelons of managerial/professional forms of work.39

But then, our hodiernal work place has been witnessing a tremendous metamorphosis. Women have started joining public work sphere, of course, through active negotiation and confrontation by articulating the opportunities and dodging or pushing back the constraints. More and more women are increasingly intervening in this sphere thereby exerting a challenge to its static image of being a masculine world. The active presence of women in almost all levels of occupation cutting across the 'hierarchical 'fixity' of the work sphere has revolutionized the structure and processes in contemporary work settings. Their 'recruitment' to 'top dog' positions has transcended the phenomenon of 'segregation' in job sphere. In other words, the usual phenomenon of segregation - both horizontal and vertical - is rapidly getting redundant and it has given way to a process of de-segregation, which spells out that the job-allocation is no more being monopolized, controlled or segregated on the basis of sex/ideology. Women and managers no longer seem to be incompatible. The metagrobolizing stereotype that propagates that women lack natural dispositions to execute the tasks of managers/bureaucrats/administrators now stands null and void. Women are increasingly vaulting to the top of every competitive and professional examination in recent years. Golding etal. have rightly advocated that women in male-dominated occupations tend to be more satisfied with their work than women employed in female dominated occupations. 40 To put it otherwise, the top dog positions like those of managers, bureaucrats and similar other professionals, which were earlier considered to be the monopoly of men, have started metamorphosing and are increasingly getting 'feminized'. Hence, 'feminization' conveys many connotations. Firstly, it may mean increasing presence of women in certain occupations, which were traditionally, considered to be the preserves of men. It enounces that the entire occupational sphere has neutrally and


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liberally been accommodative of candidates from both the sexes. Thus, the hierarchical segregation of yesteryears has been superseded by 'integration'. In other words, the contemporary work domain is increasingly becoming integrative of both the sexes. Secondly, feminization might imply greater concentration of women in certain 'specialties', pursuits or departments. It can also mean that men leave certain occupations, which then become the field of women. To put it in the words of Anne Witz,

There has been an emerging process of de-segregation...women moving into traditionally male spheres of employment, where they earn more than in traditionally females job... That the occupations are becoming more 'feminized' and less 'masculinized'... Feminization can mean many connotations... genuine occupational integration, ghettoisation of women in particular specialties/jobs within an occupation, re-segregation as men exit an occupation and leave it to women.41

The hodiernal trend that has been delineated by Anne Witz through the notions of integration, de-segregation, ghettoisation and re-segregation is indicative of the fact that the contemporary work sphere and the phenomenon of work itself are getting de-conventionalized, de-ideologized, de-monopolized and de-controlled.

d. De-Sexualization of Work

It is true that women were earlier preferred for clerical and secretarial jobs in office; the managerial, administrative, professional or bureaucratic professions were reserved for men. Women clerks used to bolster the image and esteem of their male officers, managers or bosses. What is educed from such scenario is that 'typing' was phenomenized and stigmatized as a 'feminized' occupation. Women were found passim in this rank and it led to a process of feminization of clerical work.

With the advent of 'information society', 'typing' has become the 'only' medium for getting access to, being in touch with and being a part of this 'society'. Being at home, a person can avail information about every corner of the world with the help of a 'key board' and a mouse that command the modern computer as well as the Internet. With little ambiguity, it can be said that computer is increasingly becoming a part of our modern work sphere or office work. It doe not matter who 'types' on the 'key board' (it may be woman or a man). What is important is that

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without this 'typing' the modern professional becomes crippled in his work sphere and his work itself comes to a standstill. Thus it is not surprising to note that the so-called task of 'typing' is turning to be de-feminized and de-sexualized. In addition, work itself is getting de-masculinized. With the phenomena of telecommunication and computerization permeating every aspect of modern life, 'typing' is no longer a stigma. Pressing the button is/remains no more to be a 'feminine' act. 'Typing' is no longer associated only with the typist; rather, it has come to be an essential practice that is carried out by every member of the modern office - from top brass to the bottom. In a sense, it would not be improper to argue that without such typing act, David Lyon's vision of 'surveillance Society'42 or Daniel Bell's 'post-industrial society' or John Allen's 'information society' would inevitably come to a halt. All that is meant here is reflective of the fact that the character of modern work in terms of its conventional segregation - both horizontal and vertical - has undergone a historical transition. With the advent of 'information society', the gendered boundary between the 'secretarial' and the 'managerial' growingly gets blurred and disrupted. This, in turn, garbles the ideological chasm between the 'masculine' and the feminine, between 'manager' and 'clerk', between women's specialty and men's specialty and between male workers and female workers. Clerical jobs have started losing their 'feminine' label; on the other hand, managerial/administrative jobs have lost their masculine exclusivity. Hence the conventional 'sexualized' segregation - horizontal and vertical - has rendered itself obsolescent and work sphere is increasingly turning to be de-sexualized. As the so-called 'masculine' job has lost its masculine 'exclusivity' and members from either sex can enter that sphere, the altering process strongly slams a question mark to such exclusivism: can the notion of 'male-breadwinner' afford to remain masculine in an age where the very definition of work itself is increasingly getting de-sexualized? As Anne Witz puts it,

That the feminization of shorthand and typing, and the 'masculinization of managerial work', were processes which served to satisfy a particular time and space in the history of the West is perhaps revealed in the late twentieth century, as typing is now becoming defeminized. Since typing is the means of access to the 'Information Age', it is now part of almost all-modern work and much modern life. In exchange, secretarial work itself is becoming more 'self-directed' and responsible work, like the work that had once been that of low level managers or supervisors, while explicitly managerial work is also losing

42 Surveillance society is that society which depends on information technology and electronic devices for administrative control and political processes. See David Lyon, Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life. (Open University Press; Buckingham: 2001).
its masculine exclusivity. These modern alterations in the intersection of secretarial and managerial work coincide with alternations, in society at large, of the boundaries defining who will be a breadwinner.43

Not bureaucracy alone; most of the occupations in public work domain are losing their traditional gender tag. In practice the boundary between the so-called men’s work and women’s work is increasing fast getting opaque. Take for instance cooking. Though it has been traditionally a woman’s arena, invariably the chef at any five-star hotel turns out to be a man. It is another matter, women chefs are also found in such places. It is nothing extraordinary if a daughter of a family is seen taking interest in the kitchen. But when it comes to cooking for profession, somehow it is increasingly been preponderated by males.

Earlier, though women had been doing stitching and tailoring, the one to open a tailoring shop was always a man. But, look at the change today. Not only do women run tailoring shops, they have opened boutiques as well. Cooking, too, is a similar area. More and more women are seen pursuing hotel management, MBA or Media. This is not to annunciate that men’s presence in such domains is dwindling gradually. Rather, this is merely an initiative to make a candid sense of the historic metamorphosis pervading the spheres of education and employment.

*Pirlicuing Points*

The central telos of such a feminist discourse is quite unambiguous: to point out the methodological inadequacy that is prevalent in sociology of work which has a unilateral tendency of delineating the notion of 'work' that is male-centric as well as masculine; to examine how the traditional notion of work has been exclusivistic in taking note of the activities that men do and ignoring most of the tasks that are done by women; to examine, schematize and conceptualize the invisible phenomenon of house work and interrogate whether it can be regarded as a form of work; to perpend and interrogate the sexualized boundary between public-private that certifies work in one sphere (public) and garbles work in the other (private

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sphere) and finally, to expose and question the ideological/make-believe stereotypes that tend to hierarchize job-allocation on the basis of sex.

The disceptation forwarded by feminist scholarship appears quite plauditory. Its accusation towards male-stream sociology for remaining nonchalant to the issue of women's work stands methodologically well placed. In fact the dominant discourse of work in sociology has tried to eschew the women's question en masse. For that matter, sociology of work cannot evade such criticism with the excuse that this branch lacked feminist scholars during its emergence and build-up. Such an argument would be akin to the parents waiting for the consent of their child as to whether he/she is willing to be enrolled in primary education after he/she has reached the age of five years.

However, there is a fundamental error in delineating women's work (mostly domestic) as 'unpaid'. It is the error of applying market's contractual/profit making concepts to the non-market work. It has to be well understood that housework is carried out within the domestic economy and not that of market economy. It appears, whenever and wherever feminist scholars have made attempts to brand household activities as 'work', they are more inclined to borrow or take the help of the market-paid employment as the model in their mind. In a sense, this sort of comparison is methodologically malapropos. Family is a social institution. It does not need the formal stamp of 'economics' for housework to be termed as 'work'. Again, just because housework lacks the official label of 'work' in an economist's sketch, it must not and, indeed, cannot be relegated to the status of a non-work. It would be like stigmatizing the fields of witchcraft, magic, tantricism, astrology or palmistry as baseless and superstitious simply they lack the insignia of modern scientists like Newtons and Einsteins.

Thus, the message of feminist epistemology is loud and clear: that the economic value of a woman's contribution can be phenomenized only when it is perpended in perseity and not through the prism of ideological/sexualized stereotypes. Moreover, it propones that there is a need to rescue the field of 'sociology of work' from the corruptive influence of sex-linked connotations that seek to justify the patriarchal distinction between the public and the private. The feminist flak to such distinction appears quite apodictic. It goes without saying that
any comprehensive conceptualization of work is bound to turn out to be a waffle if it bypasses/ignores the unpaid/private facets/sexualized connotations/sex-linked hierarchical manifestations of work that mostly go unquestioned.

Such a feminist scholarship has notched several "firsts" in academia. First, it is the first academic branch to unearth the chasm as well as the inadequacy in the conceptualization of 'work' in modern sociology. Second, it is the first discourse to systematically interrogate the conventional characterization of work in social science discourse. Third, it is the first to advocate that the hitherto worked out formulation of work should not be accepted peremptorily as it is one-sided, hegemonic, masculine, male-centric, anti-women and thus, gender-insensitive. Finally, it is the first disciplinary move that infuses a critical dimension into the notion and connotations of work and exhorts the social scientist to develop, reconstruct and re-negotiate a new construction of work. It will not be an exaggeration to reiterate that this reconstruction of the notion of work has seen the daylight due to the methodological insights induced by the critical comments of feminist scholars. Moreover, feminist scholarship is the first to urge the discourse of work to squelch its language of 'manliness' and masculinity, to be accommodative of diverse facets of 'work' and remain gender-sensitive as well as gender-neutral. It is the first theoretical endeavour to urge the existing discourse of work to transcend and trash its hierarchical and hegemonic fixity and be open, democratic, flexible as well as fluid enough to perpend the truths - both hidden and manifests - that lie in the emerging heretic as well as dissenting academic literature; and finally to conflate these truths for a meaningful reconstruction of the notion of work.

For the first time, 'sociology of work' has got new prospects in particular for its methodology and cardinal principles in order to deal with the long-festering disputes surrounding the notion of work that has hitherto staved off divergent views. For the first time, sociology of work has got a favourable intellectual environment to find out a reasonable solution, to the question of 'invisibility of work' within the notion of work. 'Sociology of work' needs to be armed with the requisite zeal, flexibility, empathy and hermeneutics to blend feminist intervention with the broader sociological discourse, festinate the debate and ultimately, reconstruct a panoptic concept of work that is integrative of diverse facets. Sociology must
incorporate feminist insights pertaining to the issue of work so that the discourse of 'work' will emerge as an accrescent one.

In fact, sociology of work cannot afford to remain indifferent to the 'propositions' trotted out by feminist intellectuals. There is an urgent need to perpend this serious issue with utmost sensitivity and one should not jettison their proposition simply because it appears to be a potential heretic in the field of hitherto comprehended notion of work. Otherwise, the entire brand of feminism would remain an academic oxymoron.