INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS A GENDERED SOCIOLOGY OF WORK

As members of society, we have diverse perspectives on the world around us, which is in a state of perpetual flux. It is through constant alteration that the world evolves, renews and innovates itself. While the attempt of all (social) sciences remains to understand as well as interpret such evolution, renewals and innovations, yet often the world stays mysterious and confusing. And it is in the very act of unearthing its mystery and resolving the confusion that (social) scientists contribute immensely to the production of knowledge. It is hoped that a sociological perspective will help us understand more fully the complexity of the social world and in doing so we become more aware of ourselves. We know that our society is highly complex, rapidly changing, at times, ambiguous. Over the years, there have been profound changes in the social, cultural, economic, sexual, valuational and interpersonal aspects of life.

Birth in a particular milieu implies an initiation into the world of work. As a member of society, every individual is tied to some kind of responsibility, duty, assignment, contribution or activity which he performs throughout his life. As we all know, activities of these kinds are essential to the individual for his existence as a physical and social being. The point that one wishes to assert is that some kind of work is a sine qua non for every member of society. It is through work that he keeps himself alive, earns his/her livelihood, contributes to others in need, produces goods and renders services, satisfies his/her multiple requirements, identifies himself/herself, secures his/her space, constructs his/her identity and creates history. In short, work denotes individuals' modus vivendi. To study work implies to know our society and ourselves.

When one begins with such fundamental postulates of work and approaches to delineate the reality, one's discovery is thought provoking. That is, work is not always a neutral category. Often, it is discriminated on the basis of sex. A society may have its own patriarchal conventions that dictate the definition and allocation of
work among its members. Not surprisingly, the history of the hitherto existing definition and allocation of work is replete with facts that indicate hegemony of patriarchy, subjection of women, compartmentalization of life-world (into public and private sphere) domesticization of women, and masculinization of work in public domain (that is, confinement of women to private sphere and designation of public sphere as men’s sphere). No doubt, the very enterprise of work, to an immense extent, is governed by the milieu in which it exists and operates. Thus, the very panaesthesia of work cannot be grasped in isolation; it needs to be integrally observed in association with its spatial-temporal context. It is a truism that the very phenomenon of work till recent past had been dictated by, segregated on the basis of and hijacked by a compartmentalizing ideology revolving around sex-based discrimination. The preponderance of such sexist ideology is deeply embedded into the societal fabric to such an extent that our social structure has not still completely succeeded in expunging its shadow. This explains the mystery behind the phenomenon of gendered segregation of work in social reality. One discovers that the very pursuit of work is inseparably intermixed with the ideology of gender. And this ideology, which is shaped by patriarchal shibboleths that privilege men and disprivilege women, rules the imagination of individuals who take comfort in the existence of dual interpretation of work in society for men and women. The ideology of gender is manifest in the following scenario: (i) private sphere as a woman’s domain; (ii) woman as a domestic being; (iii) housework as woman’s duty; (iv) public work domain as a men’s domain and the like. To reiterate further the history of the pursuit and allocation of work has so far been an attribution and allocation of activities on sexist lines; that is, women are indoctrinated to perform tasks in private realms of life (i.e., family) and men are awarded unconditional freedom to work in public world. In short, the ideological slant divides the world into two spheres (i.e. private and the public) on gender lines and consequently ingeminates the idea that men are naturally predisposed to be a part of public work domain. Not only does it prevent women’s access/exposure to public domains of work, it also reduces their life-world to the four walls of their family. There is no dearth of ideological justifications to sacralize and vindicate the compartmentalization of public-private domains of work and the consequent hierarchy between men and women on sexist
lines that confines women to family, trammels their ambition and seeks to ensure that the public-private division is perpetuated and regarded continually sacrosanct.

With the above inveterate ideological slants in mind, as one begins to explore the phenomenon of work in hodiernal reality, one unravels a metamorphic shift. Such *metamorphosis* has been omnipresent in character. That is, it has cut across the boundary of public-private division. In other words, it has rocked both the spheres, which have so far been impervious to change. To begin with, public work domain, which had so far continued to be a men’s world, has been witnessing a gradual entry of women who join this sphere with a view to pursue independent occupational pursuit. With the field of education becoming a *free access space* more and more women join the *space* and excel in equal terms as males. Considering the competitive excellence scaled by women reaching new heights, the public work domain no longer affords to be closed, masculine and exclusivist; rather it has turned to be adaptive, resilient and accommodative of both the sexes. Not just teaching, women are increasingly entering almost all sites of work in public domain: be it police, administration, medicine, engineering, industry, software, communications, media or modeling. Their continual entry has changed the very arithmetic of work sphere. Similarly, work in private domain has not remained insouciant to the forces of change. The very tendency of patriarchy to derecognize the activities performed by a woman in the garb of a homemaker has evoked serious flak from feminist scholars and rational intellectuals. Not only is there a growing assertion by women’s groups to urge the need for a genuine recognition of household work but also there is a surge in academic and political discourse that call for an honest appreciation of women’s domestic activities as a form of work. What is noteworthy to observe is that the contemporary social reality is witnessing a transformation of ‘work’ in two respects: one, transformation in the very definition/meaning of work as an activity; two, transformation in the character of work in public work domain in terms of its access, operation composition and openness. The prime category that is absolutely required to understand and make a sense of such *transformation* is gender. What is significant to comprehend is that a conflation of a sociological and a gender perspective is a fundamental prerequisite to understand, describe and schematize the kind of transformation that the phenomenon of work is currently undergoing, the
kind of alterations occurring in public work domain and most importantly, the kind of changes happening in women’s life. It is in the context of understanding such transformation associated with ‘women and work’ that this thesis assumes its importance.

The thesis broadly initiates an edeavour to delineate and reflect on the notion of work, make a sense of the hitherto perceived meaning of ‘work’ both in the constructs of social sciences and in public imagination and most importantly, to perpend the phenomenon of work through the prism of gender. With the growing presence and participation of women in work domain becoming an irreversible process, the academic piece seeks to examine how women’s presence in public work sphere affects/influences the character of work – that is, the changes that it effects in the very nature, connotation, location, ethos as well as culture of work. What it especially wishes to find out is the way employment influences/changes women’s lives.

One might argue that the proportion of women as compared to that of men in the sphere of employment is very small; although their entry into the sphere of paid work is gradually increasing, the rate of such increase is very slow. True, this contention is not unfounded. Table no.4.1 cited in chapter-4 stands testimony to this fact. Yes, statistically speaking their numerical presence is comparatively low. On the contrary, it is also true that their statistical number is steadily increasing. Notwithstanding such slow but steady increase, what is important for a sociological observer is not the statistical facet of their employment, rather what is most important for him is to comprehend and conceptualize is the ‘sociological’ meaning of women’s intervention in public employment: the way they relate themselves to paid work, the way they are perceived by their male co-workers, the way they experience themselves as workers, the way they relate themselves to male-co-workers, the way they (re)definite work, the kind of challenges they encounter, the strategies they adopt to balance home and paid work, the constraints/strains they face, the kind of impact that employment casts on their lives, the way they adapt to circumstances, the kind of changes occurring in public work domain and so on. Thus, although women’s presence in public work domain appears ‘insignificant’
from a layman's perspective, the issues arising out of their intervention are quite 'significant' from a sociological perspective and hence are worth exploring. What stimulates the social observer is to understand the plethora of issues emerging out of the metamorphic shift that the public work domain is currently experiencing: the changing meaning of work and the alterations witnessed by the domain of work itself. Hence, it is methodologically imperative to understand the metamorphosis in public work domain from the perspectives of sociology and women's studies.

Thus the treatise seeks to ferret out - both theoretically and empirically - how the notion of work has been phenomenized in our academic discipline, schematized in people's imagination and more specifically, to understand the changes in work sphere; its implication on the notion of work, the way the work domain responds to the changes, the impact it casts on men and women and their demeanour towards each other.

At a theoretical level, the thesis begins with the following questions. How does sociology as a discipline respond to, conceptualize and construct the phenomenon of work in public life? In other words, how has the notion of work been delineated in sociological traditions, both classical and modern? With the employment of women in public domain assuming an irreversible trend, it is imperative to enquire whether sociology as a discipline has remained sensitive to the metamorphic process. That is, has sociology updated itself with its conceptual-cum-methodological tools sufficient enough to explicate the changing facets of work; its ethos, character and dynamics? In addition, why is there a surfeit of feminist debates challenging the notion of work? Moreover, how has the notion of work been explained as well as interrogated in feminist epistemology?

Of course inductive method is no less important in knowledge construction than the deductive. This is where the importance of empirical research assumes it relevance. Thus at an empirical level, the research is given to address the following questions. The intervention of women in public work domain signals an ongoing metamorphosis. What does it point to? Does it merely mean an increase in the statistical percentage of women in work sphere? Does it exclusively mean that some women are getting economic independence? Or, does it mean something more: de-
masculinization, de-segregation and feminization of work sphere? Does it mean that the public work domain which had hitherto spelt the language of manliness has squabashed this language and has developed flexible, adaptive and female-like characteristics that offer a liberal as well as competitive space to women in order to resplend in the domain?

Over the years, the public work domain, which is usually presumed to be a men's den, has been experiencing a sharp increase in the employment of women. Not only do women engage themselves in economic pursuits, but also they contribute to their professional career like their male counterparts. The question here is not simply one of employment; rather what is most challenging to enquire and interrogate is how a woman who has so far been viewed as a ‘domestic’ housewife coapts with an outside work sphere? Is this coaptation a simple and an assimilative affair? How does the work domain (i.e., male colleagues, inter-colleague interaction, ambience of the work place) respond to her intervention, persistence, performance, excellence and so on? The issues that have become pertinent as the key concerns of investigation are women’s perception of work, their adaptability to work/work spheres, comparable worth, re-orienting to working environment, relationship with significant others (superordinates, colleagues, subordinates, clients, public and the professional), viewing oneself through the looking glass-self of surrounding others, increasing professionalization and consequently, the growing feminization of work sphere.

How does a woman, whose primary location is traditionally meant for a domestic sphere, perceive herself as a ‘worker’ as she joins employment? The conventional understanding that continues in public psyche runs in the following manner: a workingwoman is first a woman, then a worker. Thus, it is important to test how such understanding holds its roots in ground realities. That is, how does a woman worker value/feel herself in relation to her male co-workers? Does she perceive herself as a purely formal, fully equipped and competent worker in contrast to her male colleagues? Or does she rank them as superior to her by virtue of their being males? In other words, how does she evaluate her performance with reference to men?
A woman is conventionally seen as a homemaker, and not a worker. The notion of worker is viewed to be a sobriquet for men. The phrase ‘women and work’ does not appear compatible in people’s imagination. Thus, it is significant to find out some probable explanations to the following queries. For instance, how does a woman make sense of the phenomenon called work in the public domain? Does work appear something alien, which she finds fashery? Or, does she simply get assimilated in the work culture thereby making her a puppet/cat’s paw and acting in terms of the diktats of male co-workers? Or, does she make a difference in the culture of work in terms of her relationship with the professional audience, male co-workers and the public at large? It is perceptually presumed that men and work appear quite compatible. What naturally emanates from the presumption is that women are not suited for work. Then the question emerges, whether ‘being woman’ extenuates her prospects of coping with work? Or, whether it helps her to redefine her work?

The ideology of public-private dichotomy still haunts people’s perception which again ingeminates the belief that public sphere masculinizes men and private domain feminizes women. This explains why the food and beverage department at home is considered a woman’s domain. Whether she is a lecturer, police officer, an administrative officer or a software executive; her headquarter is never considered far from the kitchen. Thus the question that ultroneously emanates is how a woman worker reconciles, blends and harmonizes the two spheres of work: public and the private. Is this balancing act a simple affair? In other words, does she face any constraint or stress in the process of harmonizing the two? Moreover, how do male employees perceive their lady counterparts at workplace? Are women workers seen as assertive, competent, sincere professionals like men? Or, are they viewed as casual, non-serious, non-committed, free and easy, salary-minded employees who join work only for monetary gain merely with a lackadaisical attitude? Public work sphere is usually thought to be a masculine enterprise. The moot question is, do women professionals confront male chauvinism as a phenomenon at work place?

Considering that the public domain is seen as a male-compatible domain, even if more and more women continue to intervene and excel, in spite of the fact
that they strive to prosper in their respective jobs through active negotiation as well as confrontation by articulating and utilizing opportunities thereby dodging/pushing back the constraints, serious scepticism is bound to emerge on the score. Does work change their personalities? Do they feel any sort of transformation in their everyday living? Do they lose femininity while confronting and negotiating with a world, which has so far been alien to them? Or, do they become more complete, more perfect, more balanced, more creative, more skilled, competent, calculative and more accomplished?

With the above fundamental questions in mind, Orissa has been taken as the field for empirical exploration. In the empirical exercise, the researcher focuses on four particular sites of work, namely, the teaching profession, medical profession, police and administration. This is purely an exploratory kind of research. The field worker has adopted twenty-five respondents from each category (of professions); that is, data have been collected from hundred women professionals. Needless to mention, the focus is purely on women professionals of the gazetted variety who serve in the organized sector. Respondents have been chosen exclusively through non-probability means; that is, with the use of snowball sampling, purposive and convenience (accidental) sampling. As the present research is a kind of detailed ethnographic study of select women professionals, the type of interaction held with respondents goes beyond the restrictions of formal interviews. Interview with the informants includes (i) a thorough, detailed, face to face, in-depth interaction on the broad theme, (ii) a study of the work place/work place ambience and (iii) visit to informants' residence and neighbourhood. Interview guide has been adopted as the tool to elicit information from the interviewees. A systematic account of the entire methodology resorted to by the field worker in the pursuit of his field research has been elaborately explicated in chapter four of the thesis. Orissa has been selected for empirical research for the following reasons:

- Orissa is one of the few states in India that have accorded 33% reservation to women in work sphere.
It is intellectually as well sociologically stimulating to explore a place that has not been much visited, re-visited or investigated as an empirical site for the pursuit and construction of knowledge.

More particularly, the researcher also belongs to the same region. Being a native he is a privy to the socio-cultural ethos of the life-world in which his respondents are operating.

The researcher's semantic memory of the region has facilitated to a great extent in terms of making contacts with the respondents, ensuring their availability/accessibility, establishing an informal/extensive rapport and eluding rich response.

Professions like academics, medicine, police and administration have been chosen for the following reasons:

Firstly, teaching. Usually, it is not surprising to find a woman serving in a clerical/secretarial job or as a schoolteacher. Moreover, she is preferred for such jobs. But our hodiernal experience spells out a metamorphic message: that is, women are increasingly intervening in the upper echelons of teaching/research professions i.e., in colleges, universities, other allied research institutes and centres for higher excellence. Thus, it is methodologically important to make a sense of such metamorphosis in academics.

Second, the medical profession. Every Indian housewife serves as a natural nurse to her children, which she accomplishes during her engagement with child rearing practices. Moreover, nursing is conventionally seen as a desirable profession for women. But to find women as doctors in modern hospitals is a new trend. Hence, it is sociologically important to phenomenize the trend in medical profession.

Thirdly, the police. The job of a police is usually associated with notions of force, order, authority, violence, beating, brutality, cruelty and the like. In essence, it is viewed and valued as an exclusively masculine job. On the
other hand, women in India are perceived to be docile, submissive, sequacious, complaisant, nurturant, caring, tolerant and so on. In contrast, in recent times there has been a gradual entry of women in the profession in all its echelons. In fact, one witnesses a gradual emergence of separate women police stations within the profession. Thus, it is imperative and impelling to make a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from diverse angles.

• Lastly, the professions in administration. Usually, breadwinner is viewed to be a natural sobriquet for men and that of homemaker for women. In short, the outside office work has so far been perceived to be a men’s domain. Within office, office-work was earlier segregated: women were assigned clerical/secretarial jobs, and men continued to monopolize the upper/middle echelons of the job hierarchy. In other words, the posts of manager, officers or executives were purely the preserves of men. On the contrary, it is amazing to discover that such upper/middle echelons have been de-masculinized as more and more women are joining the domain which has staved off the phenomenon of segregation in job hierarchy. Thus, it is essential to sociologically comprehend the new trend and make a sense of its consequent changes in work place and also in the life of women.

The research can be located in the broader sociological tradition – classical as well as modern – that relates to the delineation of work as an activity and as a pursuit. It can also be fitted in the ambit of gender studies and in the discourse relating to social change. Most importantly, the thesis itself represents a concise discourse on ‘sociology of work’ a discourse that is yet to be widely ‘shared’ as a formal branch of the larger empire called sociology.

Apart from proffering a rich foundation of theoretical as well as epistemological postulates of ‘work’ from the perspectives of sociology and gender, the conspectus offers a panoptic empirical analysis of women’s experience as workers in public work domain: their impression and agony, challenges and expectation, approach and approbation, performance and harassment, conflicts and competency, odyssey and ordeal, stress and strain, performance and professionalism.
A thesis of this kind notches several distinctions. First, it systematically
delineates the portrayal of ‘work’ in classical sociology, contemporary sociology
and in feminist epistemology, that too, in an all-encompassing manner. In short, the
study is rooted in rich theoretical foundations. Second, for the first time a
sociological research based on gender has made an endeavour to study women
professionals in four professions and delineate it in a single volume, that too, in a
panoptic way. Third, at an empirical level, the research is not confined to any
particular issue concerning ‘gender and work’; rather, it addresses a wide range of
issues confronting women professionals in their everyday experiences. Fourth, with
its rich epistemological as well as empirical insights, the thesis represents a
conflation of theory and empiricism. That makes the creative work methodologically
compact. Fifth, the piece portrays itself as the first extensive work of its kind, which
has gone beyond the boundaries of formal interview/interview schedule/survey. It is
rooted in intense, in-depth, face-to-face interaction between the field worker and the
informant. The idea is to have a detailed ethnographic study of women professionals
and of issues surrounding them. Sixth, the thesis not only analyses both theoretically
and empirically various issues relating to the theme of the study, but also postulates
its own field-work-based epistemological generalizations pertaining to the meaning
of work. A combination of all these features makes this intellectual work *numero
uno*.

However, despite its richness, the thesis is not devoid of its limitations. First,
the storehouse of articles, books and allied intellectual resources, pertaining to the
ambit of ‘women and work’ is colossal. But the researcher does not claim to have
gone through all of them that may be available. It is pragmatically impossible to
cover each and every resource for a single study in a stipulated time period. With
due respect to the entire storehouse of resources, the researcher has read, utilized and
acknowledged a great deal of books, articles and reports - classical as well as
contemporary - which he has felt immensely important. Second, the study is
confined to women workers in organized sector, that too, in four sites of work; it
may disappoint those who are more interested to ferret out issues confronting
women workers in unorganized sector. Third, even while trawling issues concerning
women professionals in organized sector, the study is restricted to lady professionals
of the gazetted variety only. Fourth, although the present research can be situated in the broader discourse of 'gender and work', data have been obtained from women professionals only, not from men.

In order to develop a systematic body of knowledge, and not merely a collection of conceptual categories, the researcher begins the endeavour with certain theoretical as well as epistemological postulates about the portrayal of 'work' in classical sociology, modern sociology and feminist scholarship. These, in turn, serve as a sort of foundation for a series of more specific propositions that facilitate the researcher to initiate and analyse his empirical exercise/insights. Hence, the themes of the respective chapters are in the following order.

The first chapter titled "The sociology of work: Its Portrayal in Classical Sociological Tradition" initiates an endeavour to delineate and interrogate the meaning of work as has been portrayed in classical sociological literature. In this, the researcher has gleaned and gone through the writings/tomes of four classical thinkers: Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer. All through the chapter, the principal thrust has been to examine the central query: how classical sociology has responded to the phenomenon of work in social reality.

After visiting the classical treasure of sociology, the ultronous imperative that impels the researcher is to switch over to the contemporary sociological literature. Thus, the second chapter titled "Work: Its Exercitation in Contemporary Sociology" explicates how the enigma of work has been debated in modern sociology. For this, the author has made an attempt to glean the idea relating to work from the dominant literature of seventeen modern social thinkers: David Lockwood, William H. Whyte, Ralph Dahrendorf, John H. Goldthothe, Talcott Parsons, S.M. Lipset, R. Bendix, Raymond Aron, H.L. Wilensky, Robert T. Dubin, C. Wright Mills, Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas, Anthony Giddens, J.E. Goldthoe, Daniel Bell and Manuel Castells.

A sociological study of work with subsequent empirical reference to women professionals remains half-complete if it is not accompanied by a feminist discourse pertaining to the topos. It is in this context that the third chapter titled "Interrogating
Work: A Feminist Intervention" assumes significance. It succinctly portrays a feminist critique of the phenomenon called work. While doing so, the chapter investigates how the notion of work has been represented in feminist scholarship. Moreover, it attempts to find out the possible alternative conceptualization of work, if any, as advocated by feminist scholars.

After learning rich theoretical insights concerning the notion of work, the next step is directed at discovering its real meaning in empirical settings from a gender perspective. The fourth chapter titled “A Panoptic Study of Women in Police, Medicine, Academics and Administration: An Analytic Understanding” aims at studying the following: the way women relate themselves to work sphere/male co-workers/assignments; the way they approach to/influence their work; the way they perform, excel and maintain; the way they experience work in everyday life; the constraints they encounter; the adversities they face; the way they, as professionals, perceive themselves and are perceived by others; the influence/effect of paid work in their social life; the way they juggle home and job; the way they prioritize, hierarchize and harmonize their manifold commitments; the way they evaluate themselves. In short, the way they experience, encounter and negotiate with work in their everyday life. Although chapter four deals in these issues, its discourse goes much beyond them. As has already been made clear that the study is based on four categories of women professionals (i.e., policewomen, lady doctors, academic women and women administrators), this chapter devotes one special section to each category of lady professional for the analysis of the entire issue. In short, each category has been studied independently.

Among the women respondents interviewed by the researcher, there are some women whose life history is quite flabbergasting and has kept him spellbound. They stand distinguished by virtue of their extraordinary life histories. And their life history is replete with uncommon struggle, inspiring activism, marvelous creativity, sterling contribution to public life and unimaginable dedication to sacrifice in personal life. Their life represents their message to others. Thus, the researcher has attempted to selectively document the life histories of eight women professionals (two from each profession), which are most appealing in nature. It is in
In this context that the chapter five of the thesis entitled “Select Life Histories” claims its importance.

In contrast, chapter six titled “Women in the Domain of Work: An Integrated Approach” seeks to undertake a panoptic/holistic study of women in all professions. This is an all-encompassing analysis across the four professions, which enables us to discover the point of convergence of well as divergence. The experience of women professionals working in the four sites of work ‘vary’ on some respects and ‘resemble’ on the other. This chapter is a systematic initiative to ascertain the degree of such variations and resemblances. It also examines the findings in the light of the ideas obtained from the theoretical chapters and other contemporary studies relating to the rubric.

While the theoretical postulates envisaged in the first three chapters of the thesis assume universal validity throughout the discourse of sociology and gender, the empirical findings postulated in last two chapters have to be primarily visualized in the context of Orissa in particular. This is not to propose that the findings of the present fieldwork do not hold ground in other empirical contexts/realities. Rather, they do bear tremendous relevance to situations in other parts of the country/world. However, the generalizations drawn in this treatise have to be cautiously as well as sparingly applied while understanding other field situations.

Moreover, the conclusions extracted from empirical observations pertaining to ‘women and work’ have to be located in their spatial-temporal context. They do not proclaim to stay persistently apodictic for all times to come. Rather, the thesis primarily sensitizes one to current trends and developments relating to the topos; provides a basis for anticipating the future ones. It invites one’s attention to the recent trends in the field of feminist research. The empirical insights discovered in the study can at least be seen as trends for further examination. A thesis of this kind that delves deeper into the issues concerning ‘gender and work’ and that methodologically dovetails theory and empiricism, not only lays the groundwork for further research on the theme, but also retains the potential for inspiring those women who are ignited to pioneer the path of women’s empowerment. Lastly, this thesis bears the potential to excite every reader: neophytes as well as professionals.