Chapter II

WOMEN'S LABOUR IN HISTORY

Feminist historians have advanced several theories regarding the invisibility of women. They have argued that women have been invisible in history both as a matter of fact and as a result of the narrative strategies used by a predominantly androcentric historiography. These theories are ranged from radical feminist to Marxist perspectives. Despite the variance in details and the differing perception regarding the origin of invisibility, all the theories are focused on one major contradiction that is, whereas men have nearly completely occupied the public domain in terms of politics, economy and culture, women have been almost exclusively confined to domesticity, that is they have been totally burdened with reproduction, child bearing and house-hold work. It is true that labouring classes from very early times included women, who participated in the labour process. But there is little evidence of the fact that they were disassociated from domestic work. This has prevented them from gaining the necessary space or leisure to engage themselves in public activities.

The social location of women’s labour can be better understood if viewed in the context of the family. In family, a clear sexual division of labour can be seen. This was one of the important issues pointed out by Marxists. The division of labour between men and women is justified on the basis of women’s child bearing function. For Marx, the reproductive labour
is necessary for the survival of individuals and species and this labour includes the energy expended to sustain the lives and labour power of workers. The effort involved in producing meals for workers is one example of reproductive labour. The reproduction of children and the rearing of children to become the next generation of workers are also included in reproductive labour.

Social life appears to be organized around two apparently equal poles, male authority at one end and women's labour power on the other. It also shows that the division of tasks on the basis of sex is not fixed; it varies regionally and also on the basis of the modes of production. The intervention of women in the labour process can be found more in agricultural economy. The labour pattern in this society clearly shows that women have the technique of combining household labour and productive labour. They were involved in procuring manure, collecting leaves and fire wood from the forest, bring water for household as well as for agricultural purposes. But even though they had to perform this as social labour to low wages, they were also subjected to sexual exploitation and differentiation in terms of social privileges. It should also be remembered that majority of women who entered the labour process come from the primary producing classes, who were socially and economically the most deprived section. They have to bear the double burden of household tasks and productive labour. Household task of women has to be considered as reproductive labour, and in an agrarian economy they acquire the characteristics of labour complimentary
to agricultural labour. In this sense, women’s labour in agrarian economy is not invisible in the labour process as such. Hence there is a need to analyse women’s labour within the agricultural field and outside. In this context the present chapter on women’s labour process tries to analyse the historical transformation on women’s labour on the basis of the important labour theories.

Labour is a necessary condition of human existence and which has existed in all forms of society. Besides this, labour mediates the relation between human beings and nature, and therefore makes human life itself. Secondly, any act of labour can be considered itself apart from its specific characteristics, as purely the expenditure of human labour power¹. Labour is not a passive object. Instead, it is an active one which continuously acts and reacts in order to satisfy its natural desire for new comforts, new pleasures and improved standard of living. Since, labour is constituted in all society, one should look at the specific social relations for analyzing concrete labour. Materialistic interpretation can clearly throw light on this problem in this context.

According to the materialist interpretation, the production and reproduction are the two important determining factors in history. The production is two fold: The production of means of consumption and the production of means of production. Production takes place through the

expenditure of labour power, that is the concrete labour is embodied in the product. Karl Marx was the first who thoroughly investigated the quality of value creation of labour. According to Marx, Labour is the worker’s own life activity; the manifestation of his own life. And this life activity he sells to another person in order to secure the necessary means of subsistence. For Marx, labour was not always wage labour, that is, free labour, for example the slave did not sell his labour power to the slave owner, any more than the ox sells its services to the peasant. In pre-capitalist societies, labourer does not sell his labour power but exchanges the product of his labour to the landlord for the so-called protection or right to cultivate the soil which essentially means appropriation of the surplus product by the landlord. In the case of capitalist societies, it is labour power that labourers sell to capitalists for a money wage. The category of labour power arises in the labour theory of value in the explanation of the source of surplus value. The value of commodities is determined by its cost of production. And the cost of production consists of raw materials and depreciation of instruments, that is of industrial products the production of which has cost a certain amount of labour days and which, therefore, represent a certain amount of labour time. Besides this the cost of production also consists of direct labour, the measure of which is precisely, time. Thus the price of labour will be determined by

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the cost of production, by the labour time necessary to produce this commodity and also be determined by the price of the necessary means of subsistence⁴.

In the case of women's labour, it is difficult to analyse their labour on the basis of necessary labour. They at the same time acted as direct producers and also acted an important role in the generational replacement of labour. Marx defines labour power as something latent in all persons and its potential is realized when labour power is put to use in a labour process. Thus labour power is inserted in determinate modes of production and it does not exist in isolation. Here, any production is, at one and the same time reproduction. When it produced the means of production, and replenishes human labour power. Therefore when viewed as a connected whole, and as flowing on with incessant renewal, every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction. Despite the linguistic similarity of the terms production and reproduction, the process that make up the reproduction of labour power and those that form part of a societies production are not comparable from a theoretical point of view. Reproduction of labour power is a condition of production for it repositis or replaces the labour power necessary for production. Necessary labour is that portion of the days work through which capital is reproduced. The remaining portion of the days work is surplus labour, appropriated by the

⁴ Ibid., p.45.
exploiting class as profit. For the reproduction of capital, the capitalist requires money wages to the labourers, which meets the subsistence, and hence the reproduction of the labourers. According to Lise Vogel, the three aspects of necessary labour is the maintenance of direct producers, maintenance of non labouring members of the subordinate class and generational replacement processes.

Evidence shows that the concept of separate spheres is sharp in capitalist society and was blurred in pre-capitalist society. In pre-capitalist society, since most productive activity was based on household, the labour activity often consist of the collective labour of both men, women and children. Besides this, the solidarity existed among the kin groups had also decrease the burden of labour. Thus we cannot see a sharp distinction of labour in pre-capitalist society. Here without much difficulty women labourers simultaneously acted as labourers and mothers. But when the centre of production was shifted from household to factory, the concept of separate sphere became strictly demarcated the capitalist society. This separation became more wide in the case of propertied class. For them the glorification of mothers became their main perception. And in the case of propertied class they had to work along with men for their subsistence. Thus it shows that the root of sexual division of labour lies in family labour.

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6 Ibid., p.143.
this situation, the roots of women's oppression had to be discussed seriously from family/household labour. And women's household labour has to be included in the discussion of labour.

The focus on women's labour in factory, agricultural field and domestic area that brought many thinkers to seek a deeper understanding of Marxism. It is Engels who comes to the fore in an early engagement with gender. Marx's treatment of the issue of gender is now widely regarded as scattered, scanty and unsatisfactory. Taking a broader look at Engels and Marx's treatment of gender issues, we can see that in their early writings Marx and Engels begin to distinguish their position on the question of women from the imprecision and utopianism of earlier socialist opinions. In the next decades both Marx and Engels sought to elaborate the theoretical as well as the programmatic aspect of their perspective. In so far as they continued their emphasis on the division of labour according to sex, on the oppression of proletarian women at work, and on the supposed dissolution of the working class family, they set the terms within which the so called woman question was to be discussed and acted upon by sociologists for the next hundred years. At the same time, they deepened their understanding of women's oppression as a structural element of the overall reproduction of the working class and of general reproduction.

The above statement was put forward by Lisevogel and for this Lisevogel had thoroughly examined the available works of Marx and Engels including some unpublished manuscripts.
Engel’s first examination of women’s position in society appears in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* published in 1845. In this work he insists that it is not the invention of machines but capitalism itself, with its drive for accumulation and profit, that makes the cheap labour of women and children attractive to employers. In this work Engels makes three genuine theoretical contributions to an understanding of the situation of women. First he implicitly recognizes that neither individual nor the family exists as a historical abstraction. He suggests that women’s oppression and the family must be conceptualized in terms of specific mode of production and classes. Second, he considered the determination and structure of the wage. He argues that two types of competition affect the level of the wage. Exceptionally in periods of full employment or even job surplus, employers must compete among themselves for labour and wages rise. Engels third theoretical insight concerns the overall relationship between population and capitalism.

Marx’s earliest comments on the question of women have a decidedly philosophical and symbolic tone. In *On the Jewish Question* published in 1843 when Marx was twenty five and in the unpublished *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* written in 1844, Marx discusses the relationship between man and woman as representatives of the level of social development. In *The Holy Family* published in 1845, Marx in a few relevant passages, significantly

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9 Ibid., p.46.
transforms his previous emphasis on the relation of man to women\textsuperscript{10}.

Thus it shows that even though there existed many interpretations and modifications of Marxian theory, Marxist literature contain several broad themes on the role of women in the economy.

Historical transformation of women’s labour has shown that there is an active interdependence between the development of modes of production and the evolution of family forms. According to Wally Seccombe, all human societies are necessarily involved in three interrelated forms of production. They are: the production of the means of production; the production of the means of consumption and the production of labour power\textsuperscript{11}. This, according to him, we take labour power as a productive force, obviously, the question of generational replacement of labour power emerges and this leads us to the family. Seccombe suggests a tripartite distinction between household, family and kinship, where the intermediate term the family- is assigned the restricted meaning of the core kin group which is normally co-resident through various phases of the domestic cycle. It is recognized that household, family, kinship relations may organize more than the third production of labour power outlined above. In many modes, they are

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p.41.

\textsuperscript{11} For this argument, see Wally Seccombe’s \textit{A Millennium of Family Change}, Verso, London, 1992. also see Wally Seccombe’s ‘Marxism and Demography’ \textit{New Left Review}, No. 142, pp.22-47, 1983.
integral to the production of the means of subsistence as well\textsuperscript{12}. Here, Seccombe has argued that household, family, kinship relations do organize the primary production of labour power in all societies.

In order to rectify the problem of not including family in the studies of mode of production, Seccombe has tried to expand the mode of production concept by including Marx's 'reproduction of species' as a form of production with the same ontological status as goods production. Marx's theory of Alienation has four main aspects regarding labour: (a) man is alienated from nature (b) he is alienated from himself (c) he is alienated from his species- (d) man is alienated from man. The first of these four characteristics of alienated labour expresses the relation of the labourer to the product of his labour, which is at the same time, according to Marx, his relation to the sensuous external world, to the objects of nature. The second on the other hand, is the expression of labourers relation to the act of production within the labour process, that is to say the labourers relation to his own activity as alien activity which does not offer satisfaction to him in and by itself, but only by the act of selling it to someone else. The third aspect is related to the conception according to which the object of labour is the objectification of man's species life, for man 'duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created'. In the fourth he is

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 'Marxism and ...Op. Cit., p.29.
considering them as regard's man's relationship to other men. Infact, the proposition that man's species nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature\(^5\). But it shows that this process of alienation can never take place in pre-capitalist society in which women labourers acted as the active participants in the production relation. In that society they were at the same time acted as active labourers and mothers. But this situation transform in the capitalist society. In the capitalist society, she is being treated as domestic labourer, consumer, victims or as a sexual thing. The glorification of mothering is an embodied form in this society thus her perception infact alienates her from the social process.

\[\text{The studies of modes of productions have shown that the labour status of women varies according to the production relations. In pre-capitalist economies, both the labour of men and women was not always wage labour, some times it may be free labour. In most cases the surplus labour goes to the landlord. Women labourers play an important role in pre-capitalist society and in this economy she has to perform both the productive and unproductive activities. But along with her, the male members also performed labour and thus in this society there existed certain type of collective labour. But in the case of capitalist economy the surplus goes to the capitalist and here the labourers work for wages. The wages of the male labourers can be distributed for consumption of family and leisure. In the}\]

case of women labourers her labour was distributed in public production and household production. Thus in the capitalist economy though her burden of labour is increased, only her public labour is calculated as wage labour.

Frederick Engels in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* held a naturalistic view of gender relations and assumed women's responsibility regarding home and family. In this work he had argued that 'the overthrow of mother's right was the world historic defeat of the female sex'\(^{14}\). In this work what Engels was seeking to theorize was the relationship between the division of society into classes and the subordination of women to men. His main empirical anthropological source was Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society*\(^{15}\). Engels views the shift to the patrilineal clan system as a turning point in gender relations. It was to create the conditions for the emergence of private property and the development of class society. Thus through this work he develops an explanation concerning the way in which the family is connected to the process of production under capitalism. But modern studies do not sustain his belief that the origin of women's subordination lay in the rise of class-state formations.

Besides Engels, anthropologists have made some speculations about the origin of family. According to Kathleen Gough, the evidence about the

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origin of the family comes from three sources. One is the social and physical lives of non-human primates- especially the new and old world monkeys and still more, the great apes, humanity's closest relative. The second source is tools and home sites of pre-historic humans and protohumans. The third is the family lives of hunters and gatherers who have been studied in modern times\textsuperscript{16}. It shows that, inequality between men and women is linked to complex historical process and it varies according to the given social and cultural conditions of society. According to the Anthropologists, a division of labour based on gender is already found in primate society between a female role of prolonged child care and male role of defense. Collective hunting and tool use involved group co-operation and helped to foster the growth of language. It greatly increased foresight, memory, planning and division of tasks. With the growth of hunting, group territories became much larger. But because their infants were helpless, nursing women could hunt only small game close to home. This produced the sexual division of labour in which the human family was since been founded. Out of the sexual division of labour came for the first time home life as well as group co-operation\textsuperscript{17}. Later fire came into use for protection against wild animals, for lighting and eventually for cooking.

The sociologist view of division of labour is composed of the relations


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., P.60.
among individuals as psycho-biological entities, is grounded in dependence on others for the satisfaction of organic needs, and its operation is mainly a matter of some kind of overt exchanges which occur among the specialized producers and which contribute to the satisfaction of each. But the basic difficulty of this approach has to do with marking off the boundaries of the economy as a distinct part of society and integrating the different parts of the economy. Division of labour provides no help in resolving the problem of distinguishing economic matters from non-economic matters. The second difficulty regarding this view of the economy is connected with the problem of re-uniting divided labour. The division of labour theory typically surmounts this problem of integration by invoking the concept of exchange so that specialized individuals form a unity through the multiplicity of imputed exchange relations among them.

According to Wally Seccombe, the separation of food production from consumption gives rise to a specific labour of food preparation in the domestic setting. This consistency is based on a socially determined division of labour and is not the inevitable by-product of women’s natural responsibility for child bearing and breast feeding. Since food preparation, house work and child care are by their very nature integral to the renewal of our capacity for labour, their joint assignment to women places them, much

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more than men, at the center of labour power's on going production. Thus, the historical transformation of women's labour had shown that division of labour is not the inevitable by product of women's natural responsibility of child bearing and rearing. On the other hand, it is based on a socially determined division of labour. Gradually, the responsibility for providing a livelihood for family rested on women. In The German Ideology, Marx and Engels focus on social division of labour. According to them, the conception of the family is rooted in the social division of labour. In this work they go on to make the general theoretical claim that 'the production of life' both the one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a two fold relation. On the one hand as a natural and on the other as a social relation.

Margaret Mead's work questions the naturalistic assumptions about sexual division of labour. Mead's anthropological study of three New Guinea Societies, which she saw as representing very different ideas about the sexual division. The first of these societies, the Arapesh, she characterized as relatively androgynous in temperament, with both men and women exhibiting the nurturant, caring qualities which, in Western cultures

20 Ronaldo Munck, Marxism@2000; Late Marxist Perspectives, Macmillian Press, London, 2000, p.80.
are regarded as feminine. The second society, the Mundugamor, were equally androgynous, but here, by western standards, both men and women were masculine, in that both were very aggressive. Mead claimed that the third society which she studied, the Tchambuli, reversed our ideas about masculinity and feminity, with the women being the practical doers and the men being largely pre-occupied with idle gossip and self adornment. Mead sought to establish that feminine and masculine attributes and roles were largely cultural rather than natural\textsuperscript{22}.

The role of women in an economy differs according to the mode of production. Some writers argue that the earliest development of agriculture and the settlement around which it was pursued were women's special work\textsuperscript{23}. They further argue that, women were the first who tried to tame animals and started cultivation, and in order to improve cultivation, women discovered new varieties of seeds and they also invented agricultural implements\textsuperscript{24}. Besides this other studies also show that it was the labour needs of the household which defined the work roles of men, women and children. Since the household was the center of production in this economy, the need for women's labour was comparatively high and women played


\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, p.98.
quite as important role as men\textsuperscript{25}. Thus in a household based economy, the
demand for women as labourers can be defined as part of larger household
in which everybody is a part of this.

With the growth of capitalist mode of production, the labour was
shifted to factories and urban areas. The migration of labour led to the
breakdown of the kin based feudal households. This resulted in the
nuclearisation of the family and household became private. This has
occurred in industrial capitalism, where a deep antagonism has developed
between child bearing on the one hand and wage work on the other which
undermines women's bargaining power in the labour market. Marx had
discussed two aspects regarding this in his \textit{Das Capital}. For Marx,
manufacture and modern industry are two forms of organization of the
labour process, which is defined in \textit{Das Capital} as a relationship between the
labourer, the object of labour and the instruments of labour\textsuperscript{26}. It shows that
the labour process in any period is a product of the development of the
forces of production, and embraces both the forces and relations of
production. In the actual organization of labour process, there developed
division of labour based upon co-operation among the manufactures. Later
these functions are arranged according to a hierarchy of concrete labourers

\textsuperscript{25} Louise A. Tilly and J.W. Scott, \textit{Women Work and Family}, Holt, New York, 1978,
p.12.

\textsuperscript{26} Quoted from Veronica Beechey, ‘Critical analysis of some sociological theories of
women’s work’, in Annette Kuhn et.al, (eds), \textit{Feminism and Materialism; Women and
with a corresponding scale of wages. Marx argues that since manufacture adapts detail operation to varying degrees of maturity, strength and development of labour power, it is conducive to the employment of women and children, at least theoretically\textsuperscript{27}.

Marx further argues that there exists a tendency in modern industry towards the substitution of unskilled labour for skilled, female labour for male, and young labour for mature. Besides this, the excessive employment of women and children serves to breakdown the resistance which male operatives had to the development machinery in the manufacturing period; and the modern industry gives rise to intensified production outside factories, in the form of outsourcing, sweat shops and so on, a new form of domestic industry in which women and children are extensively employed. Finally the more extensive employment of women and children gave rise to a new form of family and relations between the sexes\textsuperscript{28}.

According to Tilly and Scott the history of women's labour does not conform to a simple evolutionary model. The pattern evident by 1900 continued with some variation during 1920's and 1930's. But after the second world war, demand for female workers increased. Tilly and Scott argue that the historical records show a U-shaped pattern of female productive activity, i.e., from relatively high in the pre-industrial household economy, to a lower

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid p.182.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p.182.
level in industrial economies, to a higher level with the development of the modern tertiary sector\textsuperscript{29}.

The fact that married as well as single women work in the household economy and work today in the consumer economy helps to raise the level of female productive activity in these two periods\textsuperscript{30}. In order to analyse their argument, Tilly and Scott were primarily concerned with the classes in England and France. Regarding this, Marx's industrial reserve army labour thesis can provide a starting point. Marx had divided the reserve army of labour into different categories. The floating reserve consists of those unemployed workers who have some experiences of work but who are now unemployed, perhaps temporarily, because of a drop in demand, technical change, or the availability of cheap workers. The latent reserve refers to potential workers who have not yet entered the capitalists workforce. Originally this latent reserve was the agricultural work force, but it can also be interpreted to include women who are not currently in the labour force. The stagnant reserve is a residual of the poorest groups in society with the worst employment prospects, where again women are disproportionately, highly represented. Even if they do find work, these workers are usually employed in low paid insecure jobs without any prospects\textsuperscript{31}.

\textsuperscript{29} Louise, Tilly, A. et. al, Women work...Op. Cit., p.229.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 229.
Following Marx, a large number of historians had developed new concepts in this area. Braverman in *Labour and Monopoly Capital* had applied Marx's theory in order to analyse the organization and structure of the changing nature of work in modern capitalist societies. Likewise Irene Bruegel has attempted to render the industrial reserve army of labour thesis open to empirical verification. She defines the industrial reserve army thesis as a labour force which is brought into production when required and disposed of when conditions change and it is no longer needed.

Historical transformation of women's labour has shown that till the emergence of industrial revolution, most of the labour was concentrated around the household in which their labour played an important role. In pre-modern societies all family members had contributed to the productive process and women had important responsibility. Here, it is she who manages the household and allocates the resources. In this system kinship plays an important role in determining their labour. But at the same time there exists sexual division of labour, but this division was not the by product of women's natural responsibility of child care. Thus, on the question of why women are in a relatively inferior economic position to men, several theories are put forward. One of the important theories regarding this is the dual system theory.

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Under dual system theory the concept of patriarchy is taken as the main concept to explain the domination of women by men. The implications of holding on to a dual notion of patriarchy as, first, the control of women's fertility and sexuality in monogamous marriage and second, the economic subordination of women through the sexual division of labour and property means that women's procreative function, or rather its relations are not subsumed, under the sexual division of labour. Hence patriarchy should be understood as more than the mere sexual division of labour. Like the exchange of women, the sexual division of labour requires explanation. It is not itself a cause.34

Thus in the dual system theory control of women's sexuality becomes an important topic of discussion and besides this, sexual division of labour and lack of property rights also become the point of discussion. Several studies have shown that the crucial differentiation that led to the subordination of women was the private property. But Engels' work was the pioneering work among these. Juliet Mitchell's work is an attempt to show how Freud's science of psychoanalysis provides the basis by which an understanding of mechanisms of women's oppression can be achieved.35 For Mitchell, it is the operation of ideology and the laws of the human order, within the individual lives of men and women which Freud's work

illuminates. She stressed the need for a theory which provides a structural analysis of the ways in which ideology and the cultural construction of sexuality are rooted not only within our consciousness but crucially within our conscious. According to Mitchell, for Freud, the entry into civilization is the entry into patriarchy. There is a homologous relationship between ontogeny and phylogeny and one does not come before the other. For Mitchell, psychoanalysis is the way to understand ideology and sexuality. Psychoanalysis gives us the concepts which enable us to understand the functioning and mechanisms of ideology and of the place and meaning of sexuality and gender differences within society.

Sheila Rowbotham in *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* emphasises patriarchy as a labour relation. The sexual division of labour and the possession of women by men predates capitalism. Likewise the control of property is another question. Engels' main argument i.e., 'the world historic defeat of female sex came about with the development of private property' had important implications in further studies regarding property. In his work, Engels argues that the power of men to exploit women systematically springs from the existence of surplus wealth and more directly from the state, social stratification and the control of property by men. Besides this,

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the study of Stephani Coontz also shows that the crucial differentiation that led to the subordination of women was the development of private property and emergence of men as property owners, whereas, production and exchange was primarily women's work either within the household or agricultural field\textsuperscript{39}. Anthropological studies have also shown how with the growth of agrarian societies, the position of women declined, and a male dominated economy which subjugated women economically and sexually developed.

The dual system theory points out the importance of women's property and also about the segregation in labour process. The distinction between women as labourers and men as property owners became very crucial as since in both feudal and capitalist societies, property had been concentrated in the hands of men and the then prevalent laws of property and inheritance ensured that men acquired property as if by right and women who came to hold property, found themselves being supervised by men. Thus there was glaring inequality in property rights and it is only recently that right of women to landed property had been recognized.

Later, the concept of a unified capitalist patriarchy was developed by Zillah Eisenstein, for whom capitalism and patriarchy are so interwoven as to make their analytical separation impracticable\textsuperscript{40}. Thus as the


understanding of capitalism and gendered reproduction advanced, attention naturally turned and focused on domestic economy, of which the household labour debate was one result. A number of articles have appeared as contributions to this important debate. One group considers household labour primarily as labour directed towards the production and reproduction of the commodities and labour power. While the other considers it as labour directed towards the production of use values.

In Marx's social reproduction theory, we can see this. But to situate women's oppression in terms of social reproduction and the reproduction of labour power, several concepts need to be specified. Marx, in his first volume of *Das Capital*, had discussed the reproduction of labour power as follows. Since capitalism requires a constant supply of labour, it must be reproduced in two senses. First the worker must be kept fit enough to work each day and thus must be fed, clothed and sheltered; second, the working class must reproduce itself through producing and rearing the next generation of workers. In the former sense the working class is reproduced through the workers consumption of food, clothing and so on through which the means of subsistence given by capital are converted into fresh labour power. The entire household labour of women, irrespective of the character of labour is unproductive labour, as the capitalist is only concerned with the production of commodities as exchange value, for which the labourer is provided with wages. The household labour performed by women is

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equated with wages, and hence is not the concern of the capitalist, as wages are meant for the self-preservation of the labourer, no matter how the labourer obtains it.

Thus according to social reproduction theory, in order to cope with periods of expansion, capitalism needs a supply of new labourers or a pool of unemployed to draw on. The sex of the labourers is immaterial. When mechanization eliminates the heaviest physical tasks, and new works could come from a shrinking agricultural sector, immigration, or through natural population growth. If women are to bear children then somehow they must receive means of subsistence while they are unable to engage in paid work, and this is usually managed through the family. For the capitalist this causes a contradiction. Because men were paid enough to support their wives when they could not work as they were bearing children. This difference persisted at other times, as it is difficult to pay different wages to workers doing the same work according to whether or not their wives can work. It was easy, though to pay a lower wage to all female workers as none were expected to support their husbands since men did not have to stop work to have children.

The initial contributions focussed on the family unit and household labour was the work of Juliet Mitchell. Mitchell begins with an intelligent critique of the classical Marxist literature on the question of women. Mitchell

analysed the biological differentiation of sexes and the division of labour which she said had seemed an interlocked necessity through history in terms of the division between four structures like production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization. She recognized the importance of the sexual division of labour in the paid labour force. Likewise, Jean Gardiner and Paul Smith have also pointed to the ways in which women's household labour can lower the value of labour power by producing use values which contribute to the reproduction of labour power in the home43. Besides these, John Harison, argues that household labour constitutes a mode of production quite distinct from the capitalist mode.44 He has described it as a client mode created or co-opted by the dominant mode to fulfill certain functions within the economic system.

The Marxist analysis of the economic importance of household labour has led some feminists to demand wages for household labour. The demand for wages for household labour was first raised as part of a series of demands in a paper written by Selma James for the National Women's Liberation conference in Manchester in March 197245. Selma James and


Maria Rosa Dalla Costa argued that women's oppression is based on the material character of unpaid household labour. Thus those campaigning for wages for household labour argued that the housewife was producing a commodity for capital via her men and her children.

But there are three crucial objections to the idea of individual women being paid wages to care for their individual families. First as Shulamith Fire Stone pointed out, it does not challenge the sexual division of labour, especially since it is now put forward within the women's movement as a demand for women primarily, the bisexual implications of a guaranteed income for all, having been dropped from the campaign as it developed, and it therefore does little to challenge the low paid status of women's labour or the conditions which give rise to the special oppression of women the assumption that her primary role is that of wife and mother. Secondly wages, however generous, would not end the isolation, the twenty-four-hour responsibility of the housewife with children or of a woman caring for sick or aged relatives, nor would they create a situation in the long run whereby, those burdens would be lightened. Thirdly no society, whether capitalist, socialist or anarchist, utopian, could afford to pay a proper wage for the labour, because in terms of the hours spent and functions carried out, the burden would be enormous.

47 Ellen Malos (ed.), Ibid., p.33.
Even though a lot of articles had appeared on the household labour debate, it was Wally Seccombe in his article on ‘The housewife and her Labour under capitalism’ who spelt out rigorously and in some details about this topic. Seccombe argued that household labour produces value but is unproductive labour and labour performed within the family is an essential component of the material process of reproduction of capital⁴⁸. Seccombe develops his argument in four stages, first the housewife’s labour is a necessary labour, given that, the commodities which the wages purchase are not themselves in a finally consumable form at the point of purchase. Secondly, in the course of this the housewife creates value, because, all labour produces value when it produces any part of a commodity that achieves equivalence in the market place with other commodities. Thirdly, it matters not all that the concrete conditions of household labour are privatized. Fourthly, household labour creates value equivalent to the production costs of its maintenance. But Seccombe’s view on household labour under capitalism is open to criticism. According to Margaret Coulson et. al, it is not true that household labour creates value, and the arguments put forward by Seccombe to show that it does are fallacious⁴⁹.

Thus the household labour debates show that the maintenance of the

domestic sphere as the main site of biological reproduction under capitalism is economically possible only where the value of labour power is sufficiently high for wages to cover the cost of the family's reproduction. Otherwise it is possible only through socialization of household labour.

The position of women's labour process have been particularly popular among sociologists as dual role. For this the sociologists had focussed upon the families and women's position. Talcott Parsons work *Essays in Sociological Theory* belongs to this\(^{50}\). In his work Parsons examines the relationship between the kinship system and wider society. Following this there has emerged in post-war Britain a fairly coherent body of sociological studies which have been concerned with married women working, and with the implications of this for relationships within the family\(^{51}\). These works recognizing the shortage of labour which existed during the post-war period in Britain and have shared the assumption that married women are an important source of labour at all levels of the occupational structure and have investigated the social characteristics of women labourers and their problems. These studies have accepted elements of Parson's functionalist frame work, but since they are formulated as empirical studies, their functionalist assumptions are not always explicit. But they ignore some important questions concerned with the structuring of


women's labour. Sociologists have stressed the role conflicts that a working wife may experience, the importance of the household structure and the stage of the life cycle.

In economics, the main theoretical approach which has been used to analyse women's labour is human capital theory and dual and segmented labour market theory. According to the human capital theory, difference in earnings can be explained by seeing them as the return obtained on capital invested in acquiring certain skills and levels of education. Further, wages or economic rewards for labour are determined by individual decisions and by innate ability.\textsuperscript{52} Thus in terms of this theory, the key fact which explains people's choice of labour and payment is the difference in individual human capital investment i.e., the time and money the individuals spend for education and training. This theory makes two important assumptions which have been questioned. Firstly, all individuals are seen to have the same opportunities and are therefore, at similar starting points. It has already been suggested that, social hierarchies severely restrict the freedom of opportunity of some people. A second assumption is that earnings are determined by economic forces. This suggests that differences in earnings should reflect only the differential required to compensate for the training undergone\textsuperscript{53}. In reality, the equation between earnings and the level of skill have been shown to be misleading. They can be easily confounded by factors


\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p.6.
such as sexual and racial discrimination.

As a part of a critique of human capital theory, the dual labour market theory was put forward. Exponents of dual labour market theory tend to pay more attention to the role played by the demand for labour in determining wages than to the supply of labour. There are a number of theories that fall into this category, of which the dual labour market is one among them. According to the dual labour market, the allocation of labour opportunities has to be understood in terms of a division of the labour market into a primary and secondary sector. First stage of dual labour market theory was proposed by Doeringer and Piore. The primary sector contains good jobs which offer relatively high wages, good working conditions, substantial job security, chances of career advancement and a fair deal in the administration of work rules. The secondary sector has poor jobs which offer inferior social status, low wages and poor working conditions. Particular groups such as women and ethnic minorities could find themselves in this sector. Thus according to this framework, labour market is subdivided into primary and secondary sectors. Applying this model to Britain, Barron and Norris and a number of other writers have argued that the secondary labour market in

54 Ibid., p.7.
Britain is pre-eminently female\textsuperscript{57}. The description of these two sectors does not answer the question of why they arose or developed in the first place, although a view of how the labour market works is implicit in the internal labour market theory. Under these circumstances, labour and market segmentation is one of the ways of dividing the workforce\textsuperscript{58}.

The labour market segmentation attempts to place the dual labour market theory in historical and ideological frame work. This was done by looking at the historical and institutional causes of segmentation. This theory has to be associated with two schools of thought, David Gordon and his colleagues in the United States and Labour Studies Group at the Cambridge University\textsuperscript{59}. According to them a multiplicity of segments like mode of production, social division of labour, capital accumulation, institutions in society, state etc had effected the status of labour. Among these segments, institutions such as the family have created role for men and women which directly affect their labour opportunities. Free of household labour, male labour is preferable to employers and female labour is available at lower wages because domestic responsibilities limit their availability and flexibility both geographically and in time. This theory argues that changes in family and other social institutions could have an important effect on the supply of


\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, p.10.
labour and on expectations of reward and self value.

Here we can see that the Dual and labour segmentation theory has focused on the division of labour market and important institutions like family. The institution of family has created roles for men and women and this was the main reason for the secondary labour status of men and women. Since the household labour places an extra burden on women that naturally decreases their labour status in the public. Here, economics of gender offers an approach to the broad question of how and why men and women are different? Why do women earn less than men? Why is there so much occupational segregation? How does segregation relate to the earning difference? And do changes in female labour force participation lead to changes in the home environment or vice versa?60.

Thus the gender economists are challenging the status quo in economics in a number of ways. They have suggested that the dualistic hierarchical and value-laden way of thinking has became a fundamental principle in economics. One attempt is made by Julie Nelson. Nelson’s starting point is that the central programme of economics is metaphorically linked with the hierarchical dualistic conception of gender and a privileging of a particular conception of masculinity61. Their concentration on the economic policy for family was a great shift in this field.

Historical transformation of women's labour has shown that from the food gathering society to this global era, women's labour is seen as central to the development of society. In the earlier societies, the absence of private property made the productive labour of men and women equal. Since the productive resources were made communally, comparatively women enjoyed freedom. But gradually, with the separation of food production from consumption, it gives rise to a specific labour of food preparation in the domestic setting. History shows that this separation was based on socially determined division of labour and not the byproduct of women's natural responsibility for child bearing and breast feeding. Anthropological studies have proved this. Slowly different spheres for men and women had emerged. When different spheres for men and women had strengthened, men were mainly engaged on food production and women was concentrated on child caring and rearing and food preparation. Besides this the main responsibility of the renewal of new generations of labour also rests on women. And when private property emerges the relations between men and women changed and men began to control the process of production and exchange within and outside the household in general and women were reduced to the domestic cores. Here, it was the emergence of private property which changes women's position. It is through the mediation of property that reproduction, as reproduction of social labour or beings, becomes invested as the perpetuation of a property through the women's family. But since women were the protectors of the next generations labour
they had in a limited way enjoyed some status in the family and had also enjoyed decision power.

Before industrial revolution, most of the economy was mainly based on household mode of production in which the labour was centered around household and there women’s labour had played an important role. Thus both in an agricultural economy and in a craft based economy the labour of all family members had contributed to the productive process, and women had an important responsibility. In the domestic mode of production, it was she who managed the household and allocated the resources. It shows that, control over resources had given them an extra power. It also shows that in the pre-industrial economy, it was the labour needs of the household which defined the labour roles of men, women and children in which kinship also plays an important role in determining their labour. But with the growth of capitalist mode of production, the migration of labour led to the break down of the kin-based feudal households. Besides these, a deep antagonism had developed between child bearing on the one hand and wage labour on the other which undermines women’s bargaining power in the labour market.

The sociologists position of women’s labour have to be looked on women’s dual role. On the basis of women’s dual role, they had analysed women’s attitude towards labour and had assumed that a women’s primary role is that of wife and mother. They had also points out the role conflict of women labourers in public and private spheres. They had suggested that women can combine public and private labour with the help of part time
labour. Here, they are ignoring women’s basic right to labour and thus by indirectly supports the existing stereotypes about women’s attitude towards labour. The most common views are women are uncommitted and even uninterested in working outside house, or that they work only for pin money\textsuperscript{62}.

Thus the existing theories about women’s labour shows that it can be better understood if viewed from the materialist conception of history. Further in order to understand the economic subordination of women, one should look at the gendered experience and relation as a dynamic aspect. It was only through the gendered aspect that one should trace the changing character of women’s labour on the background of the introduction of new technologies and strategies.

The above presentations of labour theories raise a number of questions. Firstly, it shows that most of the labour theories were concentrated on public labour. Because of that women’s family labour and reproduction labour had no place in labour history. Secondly, it shows that women labourers had played an important role in pre-capitalist society. Thirdly, it also shows that the introduction of capitalism had break the collective labour process in the pre-capitalist economy. In this context, the present study will examine the role of women labourers as collective labourers in pre-capitalist society, and will also examine how process of

\textsuperscript{62} Pin money is some times used to mean money earned by a married women to buy luxuries for herself or her family
capitalism had broken this labour process. The above hypothesis about women's labour will be tested in the next chapter by taking the experience of North Malabar.