



Wages for Housework

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Why in News

Recently, a political party of Tamil Nadu has promised salaries to housewives as a part of its electoral campaign.

A report by the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** in 2018 shows that, globally, women perform 76.2% of total hours of unpaid care work, more than three times as much as men. In Asia and the Pacific, this figure rises to 80%.

Key Points

- **Background:**

- **Wages for Housework Movement:**

- The **International Wages for Housework Campaign** started in **Italy in 1972** as a feminist movement that **highlighted the role of gendered labour in the home and its connection to the production of surplus value under capitalism**. The movement further spread to Britain and America.
 - Alongside other demands for **social and political equality**, women's rights campaigners made visible and also politicised **women's everyday experience of housework and child care** in the 'private' realm of the household.

- **Scenario in India:**

- **In 2010**, an application by the **National Housewives Association**, seeking recognition as a trade union was rejected by the deputy registrar of trade unions on the ground that housework is not a trade or an industry.
 - **In 2012**, the then minister for Women and Child development announced that the **government was considering mandating a salary for housework to wives, from husbands**. The purpose was to **empower women financially and help them live with dignity**.

The proposal never materialised and with the change in the government in 2014, **the idea was put to rest**.

- **Issue:**

- Housework demands effort and sacrifice, **365 days a year, 24/7**. Despite this, a huge proportion of **Indian women are not treated equal to men**.
- A large number of women live with **domestic violence and cruelty because they are economically dependent on others**, mainly their husbands.
- Time-use data from 2019 gathered by the **National Sample Survey Organisation** revealed that only about a quarter of men and boys above six years engaged in unpaid household chores, compared to over four-fifths of women.

Every day, an average **Indian male spends 1.5 hours per day** in unpaid domestic work, compared to about **five hours by a female**.

- **Arguments in Favour of Household Wage:**

- **More Accurate National Income Accounting:** Domestic labour of women is not accounted for in either the **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** or the employment metrics. Neglecting to include it would thus mean underestimating GDP of the economy.
- **Makes Woman Autonomous and Controls Domestic Violence:** The wage that the state ought to pay women would make them autonomous of the men on whom they were dependent.

Most women continue in an abusive relationship because they don't have a way out, as they are financially dependent on their partner.

- **Redefines the Role of Women:** More fundamentally, the very demand for a wage was a repudiation of housework as an expression of women's nature. It was a revolt against the assigned social role of women.
- **Welfare of a large Segment of Population:** According to the **Census in 2011**, people engaged in household duties have been treated as non-workers, even when **159.9 million women stated that "household work" was their main occupation.**
- **Recognition as the first step to Equality:** Recognition of household work is one of the most central processes in empowerment. It gives them a claim to equality within the patriarchal Indian household that only recognises the work done by men.

Once recognised as work, this arena of unpaid domestic labour that is dominated almost entirely by women can become one where **women can demand some degree of parity in terms of the time and energy expended on it.**
- **Time Poverty:** Combining paid work commitments with a mountain of menial, domestic labour at home means **poor women are more likely to suffer from 'time poverty'.**

Time poverty fundamentally **undermines women's human rights** since it undermines women's agency and ability to make choices. The immense burden of work therefore **prevents women from pursuing further education, employment opportunities, raising their skill-level and tending to their own well-being.**

- **Against Household Wage:**

- **Increased Responsibility:** Asking men to pay for wives' domestic work could further enhance their sense of entitlement. It may also put the additional onus on women to perform.
- **Strengthen the Position of Men:** Buying domestic labour from wife poses a serious risk of formalising the patriarchal Indian family where the position of men stems from their being "providers" in the relationship.
- **Acceptance and application:** Despite a legal provision, equal inheritance rights continue to be elusive for a majority of women.
- **Burden on Government:** There are still debates on who would pay for the housework done by women, if it is to be done by the State then this will put additional fiscal burden on government finances.

Way Forward

- We need to **strengthen awareness, implementation and utilisation of other existing provisions.** Starting from the right to reside in the **marital home, to streedhan and haq meher, to coparcenary and inheritance rights as daughters and to basic services, free legal aid and maintenance** in instances of violence and divorce.
- Women should be **encouraged and helped to reach their full potential** through **quality education, access and opportunities of work**, gender-sensitive and harassment-free workplaces and attitudinal and behaviour change within families to make household chores more participative.

Source:IE