

CONCLUSION

We have observed that the orthodox Marxist analysis has neglected what happens inside the family. Feminist literature discusses the interaction between the matters that happen inside and outside the family. Being a primary social institution, no one can ignore the relevance and influence of family on any individual's life. In fact, gender-based construction of an individual is largely a social construction, which age-old conservative patriarchy warrants.

Family and its profound influence upon the status of working women in modern society have been neglected in both mainstream neoclassical economic theories and in orthodox (deterministic) Marxist approach which believes in historical materialism that is in linear transformation in human civilizations over time and portrays a view of the world in terms of binary division of two homogeneous classes – bourgeoisie and proletariat. Our class-focused Marxist approach differs from these two types of approaches – one mainstream neoclassical theory and the other orthodox Marxist theories. The entry point of class-focused approach is the Marxian category surplus labour. It is developed following the logic of over-determination *a la* Althusser. We have applied this over-deterministic class-focus Marxist approach in this work to decipher the concrete real of the process of women's empowerment contextualized in terms of women-(labour) market interface in the present time. The study was carried out in terms of 20 focused group based discussions in the selected rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad.

The economic and other non-economic conditions that a working-woman generally faces when she takes entry into the labour market are different from the conditions that prevail within family. Our aim in the thesis has been to understand the liaison between the family and (labour) market in constituting diverse live forms for working women, which may have significant signifying influences on the dynamics of gender process and on the question of women's empowerment.

Our analysis focuses initially on family that has certain characteristics. It is imminent through the lens of our class-focused Marxist approach that different families may be characterized by different class processes (defined as performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour) and non-class processes including gender processes. Generally in the context of a hetero-sexual family space it is found that the

feudal class process characterizes most of the families where women are the performers and men are the appropriators of surplus labour and, hence, women faces an exploitative class process within her living space, an exploitative process secured through ideals of love, affection, companionship, care, commitment, obligation, etc. in Indian society. Similarly, the gender process may be of two types – oppressive and non-oppressive (for women). So, one may have following four possibilities as far as class and gender processes within the family are concerned:

- (1) An exploitative class process coupled with oppressive gender process for women.
- (2) A non-exploitative class process coupled with oppressive gender process for women.
- (3) An exploitative class process coupled with non-oppressive gender process for women.
- (4) A non-exploitative class process coupled with non-oppressive gender process for women.

It is highly probable that a woman within her living space is empowered if she faces the possibility (4) above. Also, it is likely (but less likely than (4) above) that a woman within her living space is empowered if she encounters the possibility (3) above. However, chances of women's empowerment are probably rare if she faces either possibility (1) or (2) above. In fact, if she faces possibility (1) above, it completely rules out the chance of women's empowerment.

As in the living space viz. family a working woman similarly may face four possibilities in the labour market as follows:

- (5) An exploitative class process coupled with oppressive gender process for women.
- (6) A non-exploitative class process coupled with oppressive gender process for women.
- (7) An exploitative class process coupled with non-oppressive gender process for women.
- (8) A non-exploitative class process coupled with non-oppressive gender process for women

Once again chances of women's empowerment is highest in possibility (8) followed by possibility (7) and chances for women's empowerment are quite rare in possibility (6) above and nil in the case of possibility (5) above.

Now, our study pertains to women's empowerment in terms of women-(labour) marker interface. So, if we now combine these eight possibilities together we would come across the following possibilities for any woman within and outside her family:

- (a) Possibility (1) for family and Possibility (5) for labour market – which rules out women's empowerment anyway.
- (b) Possibility (1) for family and Possibility (6) for labour market – in which the chance or probability of women's empowerment is quite low, if not zero at all.
- (c) Possibility (1) for family and Possibility (7) for labour market – in which also the chance or probability of women's empowerment is quite low, if not zero at all. However, the probability of women's empowerment in this combination may be little greater than (b) above.
- (d) Possibility (1) for family and Possibility (8) for labour market – in which chance or probability of women's empowerment, at least in the labour market, is very high which in turn may have some positive influence of her being empowered in her living space.
- (e) Possibility (2) for family and Possibility (5) for labour market – in which some chance of women's empowerment within family space may be there (although with a very low probability) but no way she will be empowered in the labour market.
- (f) Possibility (2) for family and Possibility (6) for labour market – in which probability of women's empowerment both within family and outside family is greater than (e) above, although the probability may not be very high.
- (g) Possibility (2) for family and Possibility (7) for labour market – in which similar chance or probability as in (f) above may exist for women's empowerment within and outside her family.
- (h) Possibility (2) for family and Possibility (8) for labour market – in which the probability of women's empowerment may be quite high in the labour market but not so in the family.

- (i) Possibility (3) for family and Possibility (5) for labour market – in which the probability for women's empowerment within her living space may be high but not so in the labour market.
- (j) Possibility (3) for family and Possibility (6) for labour market – in which the similar probability of women's empowerment within family as in (i) above may exist and also in the labour market although the probability of women's empowerment in labour market in this case may be lower than the probability of women's empowerment within family.
- (k) Possibility (3) for family and Possibility (7) for labour market – in which the probability of women's empowerment both within and outside family may be similar as the gender process remains non-oppressive for women both within and outside family. However, this probability may not be very high as she faces an exploitative class process both within and outside her family.
- (l) Possibility (3) for family and Possibility (8) for labour market – in which the probability of women's empowerment may be quite high in the labour market which may have some positive influence for her being empowered within her living space.
- (m) Possibility (4) for family and Possibility (5) for labour market – in which it is quite likely that a woman is highly empowered within her living space but not so in the labour market. However, her high degree of empowerment within family may sometimes help her to be empowered also in the labour market.
- (n) Possibility (4) for family and Possibility (6) for labour market – in which woman, as in (m) above, may remain highly empowered within her living space but in the labour she may or may not be so empowered as she faces oppressive gender process there although the class process is non-exploitative.
- (o) Possibility (4) for family and Possibility (7) for labour market – in which woman, as in (m and n) above, may remain highly empowered within her living space but in the labour she may or may not be so empowered as she faces non-oppressive gender process coupled with exploitative class process is non-exploitative.

- (p) Possibility (4) for family and Possibility (8) for labour market – in which both within her living space and working space she may be highly empowered.

Therefore, viewed in terms of our class-focused Marxist approach which is principled on the logic of over-determination, there are 16 different possibilities for understanding the question of women's empowerment from (a) to (p) above. Note that the mainstream neoclassical economics as well as the orthodox Marxist theory viewed the question of women's empowerment in the context of her participation in the labour market only. And it is held by both these types of deterministic or reductionist theories that increasing female participation would automatically imply increasing degree of women's empowerment, which is a kind of market-centric view propagated by neoliberalism whose basic aim is to promote free and unfettered competitive market economy and this view is quite akin to Adam Smith's optimistic view regarding market under capitalist system which envisages automatic harmony prevailing in the market, if it remains unfettered and unperturbed, in terms of some *delusory invisible hand*. And women's empowerment in this view is envisaged as *inclusiveness* of women and/or *mainstreaming* of women in the context of free competitive market. Women's empowerment is viewed at par with her efficiency as a rational economic agent in the labour market. However, this is problematic for us. As our class-focused rendition of women-empowerment in terms of women-market interface in the district of Murshidabad shows that women's empowerment is required to be portrayed both in terms of her being empowered within her living space and also in terms of her being empowered within her outside-family working space. The mainstream neoclassical theory as well as orthodox Marxist theory remained silent about women's empowerment within her living space. They only considered women's empowerment in the public domain despite recognizing the fact a working woman actually has to perform double burden of domestic chores and outside paid jobs. In our sample, we have found some women in the rural areas of the district (particularly those who belong to the low-income group of families) have to perform in fact triple burden of domestic chores, unpaid family labour in farming or related activities and paid labouring jobs outside their families.

Ours is an attempt to understand women's empowerment both in the private and public domain. A woman may be empowered in her private domain viz. within her family that is

her living space and also may be empowered in her public domain as well which is her working space outside family. In fact, in terms of our class-focused rendition of private versus public domain we can have four following possibilities of women's empowerment:

- (i) A woman is empowered both within private and public domain.
- (ii) A woman is empowered within her private domain only but not in public domain.
- (iii) A woman is not empowered within her private domain but empowered in her public domain.
- (iv) A woman is not empowered either in her private or in her public domain.

Now, the relevant question is whether women's empowerment in private domain has positive influence on women's empowerment in public domain or not? Similarly, if a woman is empowered in her public domain does it have any positive influence on her empowerment in the private domain or not? Following the logic of over-determination it can be inferred that women's empowerment in private and public domain mutually constitute each other. A woman who is empowered in her living space may attain some empowerment in her working space as she has some security at her family space in terms of her empowerment which may to a certain extent induce her to raise voice against any unfair or not-women friendly decisions in the labour market. Similarly, if a woman is empowered in her working space then it may have to a certain extent some positive impact on her empowerment at her living space. This is so because empowerment in public domain may garner some economic freedom to her, and thereby she may find it easier to raise her voices against any unfavourable decisions for her at the level of her family. However, there is no guarantee to this kind of empowerment because overdetermination comes with *contradiction* (in fact, Althusser's essay is titled *Overdetermination and Contradiction*).

From our field survey in the selected rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad we have found that in the urban areas some working women who can be dubbed as empowered (who mostly belong to the high and middle income group of families) in their public domain are also empowered in their private domain. However, this is generally not the case in the rural areas. In fact, as our empirical finding in this work indicates rural women irrespective of which income groups of family they belong to, are in general non-empowered within their private domain. Even if they are empowered in their public

domain that does not necessarily positively signify their empowerment in their private domain. However, the cases of women being empowered in the private domain due to her being empowered in the public domain are quite strong in the urban areas of the district. This also shows the complex relationship between overdetermination and contradiction.

What type of gender process will rule and define the identities and lifestyle of working women are determined by the level of significance that the family and labour market produce jointly as providers of economic and social security and love and affection to women at large. These gender processes may have some influence – positive or negative - on what class position a woman will hold inside the family and market. At the same time, gender processes inside the family and market are determined by the class processes therein. Hence, this work finally shows that one cannot talk about women's empowerment in the public domain without taking into account the position of women in their families – particularly whether they are also empowered within their families and vice versa.

We have already shown that among the various class processes the feudal class process is predominant at the household level production process in general. The story of rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad is no exception in this regard. And in a feudal household class process it is quite difficult for a woman (particularly those women who belong to the low and middle income groups of families in urban areas) to be empowered at her living space/domain. As we have already said, in rural societies no question women's empowerment in terms of some freedom in decision making processes at the household level arises and hence, rural working women in general remain not so empowered at the household level. Even at their working spaces in the rural society the probability of women's empowerment is less when compared with urban societies. This is so because conservatism guided by patriarchal principles dominates a woman's life both within and outside her family in the rural areas. However, the situation is much more diverse and heterogeneous when one tries to probe women's empowerment in urban societies. And over time the meanings and significance of women's empowerment (both within family and labour market) are continuously under change in urban societies. It is not that such change is not taking shape in the rural areas also. However, the rural society as far as women's empowerment is concerned is less heterogeneous when compared with urban society and the changes which are taking place in rural societies are relatively much

slow than in the urban societies which we have observed from our focused group based discussions both in rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad..

National sample survey of 68th round has stated the same truth that our study has explored. 38th round of NSSO Survey stated that share of rural women who are searching jobs or were already working was 34.2%. In the recent round (68th) of 2011-12 we have observed that this percentage has fallen to 25.3%. Experts have given different reasons for the falling trend. Some have argued that as rural girls are going to schools in large number than in the past, so their share of participation in the labour market has fallen. Another view holds that women are less willing to join the labour market as their income of family was on the rise in real terms. From 1983-84 to 2011-12, female participation in rural areas in education has increased from 7.6% to 25%. And hence, they are not included in the labour market – especially those in age group of 15-24 years. But what happens with higher age group (25-59 years)? There is no clue for that in the official survey conducted by NSSO from time to time. However, as we have noticed during our field survey in rural areas most of the women in the age group of 25- 59 years are actually performing unpaid family labour and hence, they are not counted in the official data of female participation in labour force. In urban areas we have noticed that women participation in work force went down slightly from 15.9% to 15.5% in spite of significant increase in female education from 18% to 26%.

There are changes in recent time as far as female participation in labour force in both rural and urban areas are concerned. First of all, in our society the jobs which are specifically meant for women are low paid (vis-à-vis the payment to a male for performing the same job), time consuming, and mostly unskilled manual jobs, which a woman generally does not like to do unless forced to do so due to the pressure from their families. A woman's work is devalued both within and outside her family in rural areas vis-à-vis a man's work. and this undermines the social status of working women in the rural society. As a result, when family is able to provide economic security, they usually leave their jobs and devote themselves whole heartedly for their families. Putting women back into the private sphere is considered a sign of prosperity – “amader barir meyera aar bairer baire kaaj kore naa” [the women of our family do not need to (go for) work in the outside world]. The picture of urban society is different in this regard and it is a mixed picture where some women

could obtain higher social status through their struggles within and outside families and some could not.

As our class-focused Marxist lens has envisaged the mere participation in labour force cannot change/alter in favour of women the feudal family structure. However, to what extent female participation outside her family and in the labour market changes feudal class form and also oppressive gender process depends on multi-faceted and mutually overdetermined and also contradictory economic, political, cultural and natural factors. So, women's empowerment in terms of her mere involvement in labour market or the public domain cannot make a woman necessarily empowered. The empowerment of women as process has heterogeneous (por)traits and also is over-determined by various class and non-class processes – the gender process being just one among the many non-class processes which are in vogue.

Our study does not have enough evidence to draw the conclusion that the feudal structure of the family in the near future will disappear. Women today live virtually in an array of contradictions both inside the family and within the labour market. But gender processes which are supported by cultural, political and legal processes also hold that the female is intellectually and morally inferior to the male. It is hard for women to disobey the men inside and outside her family – especially in rural areas. However, it must be admitted at this point that the level of family income and female education do play a major role in shaping and altering continuously (and may be sometimes in contradictory ways) the idea of womanhood in general and the notion of women's empowerment thereby. Some women who do not get the minimum economic and non-economic support from their parental/marital families now of late have started thinking otherwise as far as their loyalty and caring for their family members are concerned. Experiences of struggle within labour market did assist them to raise their voices inside the family. On the other side, women who are well protected by their family and have hardly stepped outside to enter the labour market could not reap the autonomy that a working woman can reap, somehow, to some extent. These women are pressed simultaneously to stay at home to take care of their families and sometimes, also are pressurized to earn outside to supplement their family income. They remain still more obliged to their parental/marital families. The rights and obligations of women in marriage - the political and cultural processes inside the family serve in some ways to support the feudal class structure of the family. But today's working

women of all categories are not the same as the ones say half a century back. With socio-economic transition the concept and degree of women's empowerment have been also changing persistently and as a process women's empowerment remains an over-determined process characterized by its multi-faceted heterogeneity.