

Housework

THE INVISIBLE LABOUR

3.1 "MY MOTHER DOES NOT WORK"

We are used to seeing women work around the house from early in the morning to late at night. They fetch and store water, clean the house and the surroundings, cook, wash everyone's clothes, take care of the children and the elderly, and attend to those who may be sick. All this back-breaking work is pulled together in what is called "housework."

Women seem "naturally" suited to housework. Others may "help" them, but housework is actually their responsibility. In our society, womanhood is defined through these activities. It is common to speak of women who are not good at these activities as un-womanly.

In fact we are shocked if all this is described as "work" because it is generally considered as an expression of women's love for the family. They are not expected to want appreciation, remuneration or even anything else in return. The more selfless and service-oriented a woman is, the better she is considered. So, even when women work outside the home and earn money for the family, they are expected to cook, take care of everyone, and also work around the house.

Read the poem in the box. Can you explain the lines: "The guilt that the speaker does not feel haunts the reply."

We all know that there are no such similar expectations of men. Girls in a family are required to help with housework, but not the boys. Men are

expected to earn for the family, not to share the work around the house, or to look after the people in the house. Of course some men and some boys help in the house and do cook. Their numbers may be growing, but even today, that is not generally true. The message that men get from society is that they should not do housework, so who help in the house may even be laughed at.

The teacher's question - "What does your mother do?"

The automatic answer - "Nothing, she's a housewife."

The guilt that the speaker does not feel haunts the reply.

The knowledge

That the one who wiped and polished the shoes on his feet -

Who washed and ironed the clothes on his body -

Who made the dosa he ate for breakfast -

Who packed the tiffin box in his bag -

The one who does these things every day

Does nothing . . . she is only a mother.

Source: Facebook

Points to discuss:

1. Do you think this method of dividing work is fair and just?
2. How does it make women's work around the house "invisible"?
3. Does it give women any choice? What do you think and why?
4. Do you think there will be more of a sense of sharing and joy in the house if everyone in the family works together at the household chores?

The funny thing is that men do all these activities for money. And when they work for pay, they specialize in doing only one thing. We all know Sanjeev Kapoor, the famous chef, don't we? In hotels, housekeeping is a postgraduate specialization. Male nurses, ward boys and doctors care for the elderly and sick. Washer people can be both men and women. Laundries are usually run by men. Men are tailors.

Let us think about these questions with the help of the following poem by Vimala, "Vantillu." Here, a woman tells the story of women's lives. It's the story of the poet's mother, and all "mothers' mothers." It is her story as well. History brings no change to women's lives. What was fun when children played together, turns into drudgery for the grown woman who slaves alone. We never learn the mother's name—or even the speaker's name. The mother is a ghost who haunts the poet's kitchen, her arms turned into spoons and spatulas. The poet remembers her as flaring up like a furnace sometimes. But her anger did not start any revolution. In fact, despite the lifetime that women have given to kitchens, the

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names engraved, even on the vessels, are those of their husbands.

Modernity (which, political theory tells us, promises freedom to all) brings the poet a fancy kitchen with modern gadgets. But she remains, like her mother, a slave to its demands. Even though some of the details of the poem may sound specific to some families and communities (the dalit poet Challapalli Swaroopa Rani, for instance, contrasts this kitchen with the three stones that her people cook on), it highlights the nature of compulsion and drudgery in everyday cooking.

Vantillu (The Kitchen)

I remember the kitchen's flavour upon flavour,
a mouthwatering treasury,
pungence of seasonings,
and the aroma of incense
from the prayer room
next door. Each morning
the kitchen awoke
to the swish of churning butter,
the scraping of scoured pots.
And in the centre, the stove,
fresh washed with mud, painted
and bedecked, all set to burn.

We saved secret money in the
seasoning box; hid sweets too,
and played at cooking with lentils and
Jaggery.

We played Mother and Father,
In the magic world of kitchen
that wrapped childhood in its spell.

No longer playground for the grownup
girl
now trained into kitchenhood.

the kitchen,
she becomes woman right here.
Our kitchen is a mortuary.
Pans, tins, gunny bags
crowd it like cadavers
that hang amid clouds of damp wood
smoke.
Mother floats, a ghost here,
a floating kitchen herself,
her eyes melted in tears,
her hands worn to spoons,
her arms, spatulas that turn
into long frying pans, and
other kitchen tools.
Sometimes mother glows
like a blazing furnace
and burns through the kitchen,
pacing, restless, a caged tiger,
banging pots and pans.
How easy, they say,
the flick of the ladle and the cooking's
done.
No one visits now.
No one comes to the kitchen
except to eat.

My mother was queen of the kitchen,
but the name engraved on the pots and
pans
is Father's.

Luck, they say, landed me in my great
kitchen:
gas stove, grinder, sink, and tiles.
I make cakes and puddings,
not old-fashioned snacks as my mother
did.
But the name engraved on pots and
pans
is my husband's.

My kitchen wakes
to the whistle of the pressure cooker,
the whirl of the electric grinder.
I am a well-appointed kitchen myself,
turning round like a mechanical doll.
My kitchen is a workshop, a clattering,

In dreams, my kitchen haunts me
my artistic kitchen dreams,
the smell of seasonings even in jasmines
Damn all kitchens. May they burn
cinders,
the kitchens that steal our dreams
drain
our lives, eat our days--like enormous vulture.
Let us destroy those kitchens
that turned us into serving spoons
Let us remove the names engraved
pots and pans.
Come, let us tear out these private
stoves,
before our daughters must step
solitary into these kitchens.
For our children's sakes,
let us destroy these lonely kitchens.

Translated by B V L Narayana Row

Points to discuss:

1. How do you understand the line "she becomes woman right here"? Can you relate it to what was discussed in Unit 2 on Socialization?
2. Does the poem describe what happens in your own house also? If not, can you describe for the class what happens in your house?
3. The poet's mother sometimes flares up into a furnace. Does this happen with your mother? Why do you think this happens?
4. Is the kitchen shown in the poem always a place of drudgery? When is it not so?

Did you know?

In every country across the world, men spend less time on household work than women. If we compare different countries, in some (such as Norway and Finland) they spend more time compared to others (for example, Mexico, Turkey, India). But in India they spend the least amount of time on housework.

According to a survey done by the United Nations, Indian women spend five and a half hours each day on housework whereas men spend half an hour to forty five minutes!

Do you know the cost of the economy of care?

If the 35 crore Indian women were paid for all the work that they do in and around the household in India, it would amount to 29 trillion Indian rupees.

This is 61% of India's Gross Domestic Product!

3.2 "SHARE THE LOAD"

In this class, we will read an excerpt from a short essay by Judy Brady, an American writer, that humorously describes what it means to be a wife—to be in the service of the husband and children without expecting much in return. It shows that the roles of wife and husband are not equal and complementary. They are unequal because just by being a husband, a man has many privileges and personal services. The essay questions this male privilege in marriage and also the inequality in a husband-wife relationship. It forces us to think about new relationships that can be more equal and therefore better.

I want a wife!

I belong to that class of people known as wives. I am A Wife. And, not altogether incidentally, I am a mother.

Not too long ago a male friend of mine appeared on the scene fresh from a recent divorce. He had one child, who is, of course, with his ex-wife. He is looking for another wife. As I thought about him while I was ironing one evening, it suddenly occurred to me that I too would like to have a wife. Why do I want a wife?

I would like to join new courses (in college) which will improve my chances of promotion so that I can become economically independent, support myself, and, if need be, support those dependent upon me. I want a wife who will work, earn, and send me to these classes.

And while I am attending the classes, I want a wife to take care of my children. I want a wife to make sure my children eat properly and are kept clean. I want a wife who will wash the children's clothes and keep them

mended. I want a wife who is a good and nurturing attendant to my children, who arranges for their schooling, makes sure that they have an adequate social life with their peers, takes them to the park, the zoo, etc. I want a wife who takes care of the children when they are sick, a wife who arranges to be around when the children need special care, because, of course, I cannot miss classes. My wife must arrange to leave time at work and not lose the job would be good if my in-laws could look us and take care of the children while my wife is working.

I want a wife who will take care of my physical needs. I want a wife who will keep my house clean, a wife who will tidy up after my children, a wife who will tidy up after me. I want a wife who will keep my clothes clean, ironed, mended, replaced when need be, and who will see to it that my personal things are kept in their proper place so that I can find what I need the minute I need it.

I want a wife who will take care of my parents well. When they stay with us I want a wife who will take care of the everyday needs and food preferences. I want a wife who will serve them coffee the way they want it. I want a wife who will keep the house clean, will prepare special meals, serve them to me and my family. I want a wife who takes care of all the needs of my parents so that they feel comfortable and who makes sure that they have everything. I want a wife who welcomes my friends, cooks for them and serves them. An I want a wife who knows that sometimes I need a night out by myself.

I want a wife who is sensitive to my sexual needs, a wife who makes love passionately and eagerly when I feel like it, a wife who makes sure that

am satisfied. And, of course, I want a wife who will not demand sexual attention when I am not in the mood for it. I want a wife who assumes complete responsibility for birth control, because I do not want more children.

If, by chance, I find another person more suitable as a wife than the wife I already have, I want the liberty to replace my present wife with another one. Naturally, I will expect a fresh, new life; my wife will take the children and be solely responsible for them so that I am left free.

When I am through with my new course and have a job, I want my wife to quit working and remain at home so that my wife can more fully and completely take care of a wife's duties. My God, who wouldn't want a wife?

Points to discuss:

1. Why does Judy Brady exclaim "My God! Who wouldn't want a wife?"
2. Can you list three important aspects of being a good wife from the extract above?
3. Can you list three important aspects of being a good husband from the above extract?
4. Are your two lists above different, or the same? If they are not, why do you think they are or they are not?

Share the load

As you have seen in the earlier lesson as well as in the section above, there is an enormous amount of work that a wife and a mother do which most people generally do not consider as "work." Read, for instance, the lists of household work in the boxes that follow. Not all kinds of work may be relevant in our different contexts, but we do get a sense of the sheer volume of work that needs to get done to keep a house running smoothly. You may also have seen some recent advertisements that try to raise this issue in a thoughtful manner. Take a look, for example, at the series of advertisements for household products that Havells brought out on housework in 2014, titled "Respect for Women," on our website, or on www.youtube.com on your own. Similarly, see an advertisement for a washing powder titled "Is laundry only a woman's job? Share the Load." More importantly, we can see that housework, by nature, is not necessarily suited to women alone. Actually, we can see clearly that housework can be easily and equally well-handled by men, whether married or not. In fact, the Havells series of advertisements are telling us that marriage is not simply about living together but about friendship, companionship, and jointly sharing everything, including housework—we need to move ahead of earlier models of marriage where only women served their husbands and families.

Clean the yard/front portion and put kolam/muggu
 Pick up the milk packets and newspaper
 Clean the kitchen counters and mop
 Clear remains from last evening's dishes and put them for wash
 Cut vegetables, boil milk, prepare tea/coffee
 Cook breakfast and coffee and serve
 Cook lunch and pack boxes for children and adults
 Cook an extra meal for the children after they return from school
 Make up the beds - yours and children's
 Clean the dining table, reading tables and beds of litter, pencils, papers, books and gadgets
 Sort the clothes to be washed and soak them/put them in the machine
 Put the trash out to be picked up
 Water the plants
 Clean/wash bathrooms - yours and children's

Daily household chores - evening

Help children complete homework
 Drop them at the hobby class and pick them up
 Prepare dinner and serve
 Gather dried clothes, fold them, sort them for ironing
 Plan the next day's meals and make necessary preparations (soak, cut and preserve, set curd)
 Take out the washed dishes and put them away
 Clean kitchen (counter)

Bedrooms
 Strip beds & wash all bedding
 Clean all surfaces & dust ornaments & pictures
 Clean mirrors
 Dust light shades
 Vacuum clean mattress
 Vacuum clean window vents
 Vacuum clean skirting boards
 Vacuum clean floors
 Make beds with fresh clean bedding

Bathrooms
 Put towels and bathmats into the wash
 Clean toilet
 Clean sink, bath and shower
 Clean mirrors
 Wipe down tiles
 Vacuum clean window vents
 Vacuum clean skirting boards
 Vacuum clean floors
 Mop floor
 Put out fresh towels & bathmat

Stairs & Landings
 Dust pictures & ornaments
 Dust /wipe spindles & banisters
 Dust light shades
 Vacuum clean skirting boards
 Vacuum clean floors
 Vacuum clean stairs

Living Rooms - Lounge / Dining / Conservatory
 Wash all cushion covers / throws
 Dust all surfaces, pictures & ornaments
 Dust lamps & light shades
 Clean coffee & side-tables
 Recycle unwanted magazines & newspapers
 Vacuum clean sofa
 Vacuum clean window vents
 Vacuum clean underneath sofa
 Vacuum clean floor & rugs

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Hallway
 Dust pictures & ornaments
 Dust light shades
 Vacuum skirting boards
 Vacuum floors
 Mop floors

Kitchen
 Wipe down work surfaces & cupboard/ drawer fronts
 Clean kitchen windowsill
 Clean hob & wipe down the oven
 Empty toaster tray & clean toaster
 Clean microwave inside & out
 Clean bread bin inside & out
 Wipe down & clean small appliances on kitchen work tops
 Scrub kitchen sink
 Wipe down large appliances
 Clean kitchen table & chairs
 Wipe down kitchen bin
 Vacuum clean light shades

Vacuum clean window vents
 Vacuum clean skirting boards
 Vacuum clean floor
 Mop floor

Toilet
 Put towels into the wash
 Clean toilet
 Clean sink
 Dust light shades
 Wipe down tiles
 Vacuum clean window vents
 Vacuum clean skirting boards
 Vacuum clean floors
 Mop floors
 Put out fresh towels

Other
 Check food stocks
 Check household stocks
 Plan menu
 Write shopping lists

Read the incident narrated in the following box. Do you think things are different for women from different socio-economic, caste, class and community backgrounds? Why?

Go to our website and read Abburi Chaya Devi's "Srimathi - Udyogini" there. Discuss with your classmates how this story compares with the stories shown in the advertisements mentioned above.

Women's Work

ITS POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

7.1 FACT AND FICTION

In the world today, security and social respect are closely related to jobs and income. Most of us enter college hoping to get a good job when we pass out with a degree. But women and men get very different messages about work. Society tells a man that he must work, earn and support his family. (This is a big pressure on a boy.) It is generally felt that women may consider taking up a job, but only if they can make sure that the household work does not suffer. Economic security and social respect do not seem relevant for women. The general impression is that women's work is not serious work. Also, that their income is "supplementary" to the main income of the family.

But do you think such perceptions are actually true? Do women not work? Does this work not have economic value? Do women only supplement the family economy? Or, is their contribution as "primary" and as essential as any other?

In what follows, we shall discuss
 A. Why such perceptions arise
 B. Why these perceptions are not true
 C. How we need to think about women's work

A. Why such perceptions arise: Seeing and not seeing women work

Have you ever wondered about the women in television advertisements and films? Almost all these women are always fresh, smiling, beautifully dressed. They worry about their children's and family's health; they make sure they buy only the right,

healthy and nutritious products. They keep their houses miraculously clean and lovingly and dedicatedly feed smiling sons.

What we generally do NOT see on TV is:

- a) Household work never ends. Homemakers (a new term for housewives) are constantly on their feet, working non-stop, even when they are ill, to take care of their family.
- b) In addition, in both rural and urban areas, what is termed household work includes many income-generating activities.
- c) A large number of women also work outside the home, and they do many different jobs. Women who are working for an income can be vegetable vendors, beauticians, corner-shop assistants and owners, domestic workers, television anchors, film actresses, lab technicians, doctors, accountants and clerks—to list only some of the fields in which they are found.

Thanks to the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution of India that provided reservations for women in the elected bodies of municipal corporations and gram panchayats, women are now in decision-making roles in politics. Similarly, we also have women politicians in our legislative assemblies and parliament.

Of late, we also find women heading important banks such as the ICICI, SBI etc. as well as becoming CEO's of multinational companies such as Pepsico.

If we look around us, our everyday life is teeming with examples of both kinds of women: women who are engaged full-time in taking care of the family; and women who work to earn an income and also do the housework. The women in your family may also be doing this. The funny thing is that what we actually see does not change the image in our minds.

B. Why these perceptions are not true: More information about working women

The 2011 Census gives a figure of 35 crore women who are in the working age group (15-65 years). According to the 2010 National Sample Survey (NSS 2010) only 11.2 crore women declared themselves to be working for an income. A large number of these women are in:

- agriculture (transplanting, weeding, ploughing and allied activities) : **7.7 crore**
- tobacco-related work (collecting and drying tendu leaves; rolling beedis, textile work, traditional weavers and dyers or mill workers): **1.2 crore**
- construction: **57 lakh**

60% women in India are literate. 6.5% have passed out of high school. But illiteracy among rural women workers is still 66%. Compared to the 1990s, opportunities for women with education have increased in urban areas. India now has:

- **25 lakh** women school-teachers
- **23 lakh** saleswomen
- **17 lakh** women offering personal services such as beauticians
- **12 lakh** nurses and other hospital staff, and
- **11 lakh** women in government service.

These figures are impressive. But the sad part is that many women are unable

to make use of expanding opportunities. They do not have the skills required by the market. This is the reason why as many as 19 lakh women have been thrown out of agricultural employment due to mechanization, who now work as domestic servants in urban areas.

Did you know?

• Cricket Champ: Gauhar Sultana is a cricket player from Hyderabad; she is a left arm orthodox spinner. She is the Vice Captain of the Hyderabad Senior Women's Team and is a member of the Indian women's cricket team. She has played 23 international matches and as many T-20 matches.

• Bus Driver: Vanadarath Saritha of Nalgonda became the first woman driver in the Delhi Transport Corporation in April 2015. Saritha began as an autorickshaw driver. Before she got the DTC job, she worked as a taxi driver in Delhi.

• TV Star: Ramya Krishna, better known as Raccha Ramulamma, was a third-year physiotherapy student from Sitaphalmandi, Hyderabad. With her natural style and accent she became a very popular television anchor within a short time.

• Architect: Anuradha Naik is a trained conservation architect and architectural historian based in Hyderabad. She redesigned the City Museum in Purani Haveli. She is currently involved in the conservation of heritage buildings and in architectural history research projects.

Watch the film *Babai* made by Kavita Datir and Amit Sonawale in class.

Babai is an 81-year-old woman in a Pune wholesale market who transports goods on a handcart.

Points to discuss:

1. Count the number of different occupations and professions that you can find women in.
2. Which are the occupations and professions that you do NOT find women in?
3. How many women students in the class want to work after they complete their education?

ASSIGNMENT

Do you know of any other women doing unusual jobs? Select two.

One person can be someone like Kalpana Chawla—a famous person whose name appears in the newspapers and the web. Download or copy 50-100 words describing her. The other person should be someone in or near your home. (Near my home, for example, I can think of: a woman who repairs shoes; a woman who sits by the roadside and sells baby tortoises as pets; a woman who goes around on a bicycle sharpening knives; a woman who makes stick brooms from dry coconut branches and hawks them in the colony; a woman who teaches yoga in people's homes; a woman who is a physics tutor; a woman who runs an all-women fish shop; the women who cut fish in her shop.) Talk to this person when she is not busy and tell her about what you learnt about women in this class. Ask her about her work.

Take a picture of her that shows her working. Next, take a selfie with her. Write a short report based on this research.

Three to five students should be chosen (or can volunteer) to present their findings at the beginning of the next class. These and the other pictures and write-ups can be sent to us to upload on the website.

7.2 UNRECOGNIZED AND UNACCOUNTED WORK

C. How we need to think about women's work

Why is women's work invisible, undervalued, and poorly appreciated? There are several reasons for this. For instance, when looking at women's work, we tend to focus on the work that is remunerative, i.e., work which gives an income. If a woman does not earn money, she is considered a *non-worker* or *unproductive*. Using this definition, the 2011 Census of India categorized most of the working age women in India as non-workers. But women's work, unlike men's work, is not limited to activities that earn personal income. A large portion of women's work goes into the income-generating activities of their families. They also work to maintain the family. All this does not give them an income. But it does prevent them from taking on a job that will earn them an income. Let us see how this happens.

Definition of a worker:

One who works continuously for eight to ten hours outside the home for money.

large part of the responsibility and work. However this work does not give the woman any control over the family's disposable income, including the share she has earned. Such work is invisible and is not recognized. It is seen as "supporting the family" and not as work that produces an income.

Second, there are the women who work for wages, but from home. They are engaged in beedi/papad/agarbatti/bangle-making, tailoring, embroidery or any number of activities that gives them some income. They work between seven to nine hours on such jobs. This is called **home-based work**. Compared to unpaid family workers these women do have more control over their income. But much, if not all, of it goes into supporting the family. As they work from home, and think of themselves only as "supplementing" family income, such women tend to not think of themselves as workers. The census also does not count them as workers!

Since Sunday is a holiday for everyone, should mothers also not have a holiday? Yes or no? Please give reasons.

For one, many women currently categorized as non-workers actually work for family or household enterprises. To list some of them: agriculture, animal husbandry, weaving and dyeing, pottery, petty trading, small hotels, kirana shops, catering, family-run businesses such as textile or jewellery, food and beverage hawking, and many small enterprises both in rural and urban areas. This is called **unpaid family work**. None of these family enterprises can run unless the women of the household shoulder a

Third, the most prevalent category of women is home-makers or house-wives. This labour is the most invisible and the most difficult to account for. Many of us know that this is important for our family's survival and our well-being. But we should also know that it is equally important for the functioning of the economy. If the mothers and wives did not do this work, we would all be coming to college or going to work hungry and in unwashed clothes. Schools, factories, construction sites, fields, colleges and offices would fail to run as efficiently if the mothers/wives/daughters did not wash clothes, cook and pack food for us, look after

us when we are sick and so on. All this, as you now know, is called housework.

A day in the life of a non-worker

Sayamma is a 45-year-old housewife from a village near Vikarabad. Born in a lower middle-class family, she was educated up to the 5th grade. She got married at 16. Her husband runs an autorickshaw in Hyderabad. They have two sons.

Sayamma's day is hectic. She wakes up at five in the morning. First she sweeps and cleans the house and then the yard. Then she milks the family's cows and sends the milk to the co-operative. After that, she takes a bath and starts preparing the morning breakfast. Next, she washes the dishes, cleans the kitchen, washes clothes, prepares feed for the cattle, and then cleans the cattle-shed. She is fortunate that the family has a borewell, which makes it easier for her to collect water. By this time, it is almost late morning. Sayamma has to begin making lunch. She has to ensure that her family gets lunch at the right time, as her son needs to get back to his work in the field.

Sayamma also works on the farm. In the afternoons, she takes the buffalos out, sometimes with the help of her two sons. If she has some time, she takes up beedi-making. Before evening, she finishes her cooking. The family eats and goes to bed early as their day starts before sunrise. Sayamma does the cooking and serves the family herself, though sometimes her second son helps her. Sayamma rarely has any free time for recreation and prefers to rest or sleep whenever she gets time off from her work.

There is a strong myth that what women earn is supportive to the family income while what men earn is the main income. In India, it originated in the 1930s when the first Wage Board proposed that a man should be recognized as the head of the family and therefore should be paid a family wage. This is calculated as payment for a man's labour plus what is needed for the maintenance of his family. In contrast, the female wage or what women earn was seen as **only supplementary or supportive wage**. So she would be paid only for her labour. This myth is still strong. Even when women earn equal salary or wages, or prefers to see it as supplementary, society extra, to the husband's income. The man may, in fact, spend his income on himself and the family runs on her income; she is nonetheless paid as if it is an additional or supplementary income. Worse still, this is also true when she is the only income-earning member of the family (woman-headed household). It is true that after 1947 this concept of family wage was revised. In some sectors, the principle of "equal pay for equal work" is being implemented. But such equal wages are limited to an extremely small portion of the economy. The usual practice in large parts of the economy is of unequal wages. A ray of hope in recent times has been the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which implements the equal pay for equal work principle.

In nearly 40% of Indian households women are the primary breadwinners for the family. Even though a few of these households have land and other assets, a majority of them, known as woman-headed households, rank among the poorest of the poor.

7.3 FURTHER READING: WAGES AND CONDITIONS OF WORK

We all know that the Constitution of India guarantees equality for men and women in all dimensions, including wages. But some of us also know that the reality is very different. In many contexts, women are paid less than men. We should not miss this issue of unequal valuation of women's work. For example, statistics compiled by the National Service Scheme reveal that in agriculture, women are paid 50 to 75% lower than men. A similar situation prevails in the private sector, such as the software industry. A recent study found that women software professionals earn 29% less than their male counterparts. After a great deal of struggle, the principle of equal pay for equal work is now practiced in government employment. However, only a minuscule percentage of women are employed in this sector.

Did you know?

- In 2007, Catalyst, an organization that works for inclusive workplaces in corporations and firms began tracking 10,000 MBA graduates from top business schools in the US and found that women start out earning an average \$4,300 less than men at their very first job. The gap keeps growing over time, and after only two to three years, Catalyst has found it surpasses \$40,000. It concluded that gender gaps begin on day one and women do not start out on equal footing.

- In India, actresses get paid, on an average, 10% of what the actors get paid!

- The inequality of earnings between men and women is the highest in health care, arts, management, recreation and entertainment industries. Software industry has the lowest level of inequality. Usually, as an individual moves higher, inequality also increases.

Why are women paid less than men? Some of the usual reasons we hear include:

- A. Men and women do different kinds of work.
- B. Women do lighter work, men take on the heavier tasks.
- C. Men need to support a family.
- D. Men are more efficient, and
- E. Men are more skilled.

But if we think carefully, much of this reasoning falls apart. Carrying bricks on the head is not any lighter than laying them. Neither is laying bricks very skilled work. Most people can learn how to do it. As women get more access to training, and as employment opportunities increase, women are moving into many jobs that earlier were reserved for men. As you know and can see from the examples in the boxes, women now drive tractors, buses, trains and aeroplanes; they run farms and they work with heavy machinery. In an age of mechanization, physical strength is irrelevant in many sectors. It is also not relevant in "white collar" sectors such as medicine, or software, or accounting, or management, or teaching.

Actually, men are paid more because of the idea of "family wage" discussed earlier. They are also paid more because of social (or, in other words, patriarchal) beliefs and practices that have nothing to do with strength or efficiency. We will read some more strange facts about this inequality in the following paragraph.

Women's work, caste and conditions at work

A hundred years ago it was considered inappropriate and disrespectful for women from propertied classes to step out of the household to work for an income. They were only expected to slog in the kitchen. But modernity and education have made working for an income respectable. Now the majority of women who hold good jobs belong to these communities. They also have high levels of higher education. To an extent, these women have eased themselves from the housework burden by employing domestic workers.

For the women of landless families and communities, work was a compulsion, and drudgery. In addition to working for an income they were forced to work in the households of landlords without pay. It was known as vetti/begar or bonded labour. After many protests over several decades this was legally abolished (Bonded Labour Act, 1976). Now many women are free of such vetti and work for wages. However, lack of education, skills and training compel them to work in irregular, insecure and low-paying jobs. Even in the government sector they are concentrated in the class IV employee category—sweepers, attendants and cleaners. Despite these enormous obstacles, some of them have entered regular full-time employment. The constitutional provision of reservations in education and employment has largely facilitated their entry into higher education and secure, regular and well-paying jobs—teaching and bureaucracy—in the government sector.

We may imagine workplaces to be gender neutral and that employees are the ones who have to adjust and work.

It is not true. For many women, maternity and child care becomes a huge obstacle in their ability to continue work as they require time off before, during and after pregnancy. In countries where these have been implemented a greater number of women remain in the workforce who stay on and are able to earn an income. But in a great many countries including India such protections are unavailable to a large number of women. Many women across the employment spectrum (be it domestic workers or software employees) drop out of paying work once they have children as they do not have adequate support for child care. This situation prevails even in the fast growing software industry or management or other corporate sectors where educated women are entering in greater numbers. Once women drop out of the work-force it is difficult for them to re-join the same position and get a firm footing. Women in informal sector largely turn into home-based workers or part-time workers.

Did you know?

Savitribai Phule, the well-known reformer from Pune, Maharashtra, is the first woman teacher in modern Indian history.

When she walked to school where she taught "low" caste girls, she was pelted with stones because she violated three societal norms: women should not step out, women from "low" castes should not study, and, women from "low" castes should not be educated.

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district. She holds an MA and M.Phil in Telugu Literature from Kakatiya University. She was one of the founders of Secretariat Women Employees Association in 1992 and is currently its President. She says, "Dalit officers are generally put in charge of social welfare or panchayat raj—the 'low-

caste' areas. The work is demanding, we are on tour most of the time. Also, I may hold the rank of joint secretary, but I have been assigned a shabby office and given a car that other officers have rejected. The attitude is that the job itself is a favour done to us."

