

## **DIVISION OF HOUSEWORK AND GENDER INEQUALITY IN ASSAM**

Mousumi Borah

PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, Dibrugarh University, Assam

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the family, people functioned different work based on gender. Men performed an instrumental role while women performed an expressive role in the family. In Assamese households, most of the women involve themselves in housework. It needs no explanation that housework is a major burden for them. Most of the time career-oriented women and girl students bear the double work burden in the household. At present in Assamese society, household work is considered a part of the female role which remains extremely unequal. Like the backward state of Assam, most of the housework is done by women, and men are involved in economic responsibilities to survive the family, and because of this reason, most of the women are economically dependent on family male members. This study explores the concept of gender inequality in the context of housework in Assamese society through the existing literature, book, paper, article, and the internet. The study argues that unequal gender division of housework is still prevalent in society.

**Keywords:** Assamese society, Discrimination, Gender, Housework, Inequality

### **Introduction**

Household work is defined in a variety of ways and it varies from study to study. It hardly depends on social practices. Established practices of society create a familiar model of behavior which lends moral authority to people performing their work. As a part of Indian civilization Assamese culture follows Indian norms and traditions. With a rich cultural heritage, one of the northeastern states Assam occupies 78,438 square km with 31,205,576 populations (2011 census). Worth to mention that the state belongs to various ethnic groups, tribes, castes, and races with a form of unity. When it comes to household practices then it is visible that in contrast to various groups of people, most of the housework is done only by women in the state. Of course, men also do housework but their work is not frequent as women's housework. Ironmonger (1989) states that housework is different from other kinds of work by the fact that it is done within the household, usually unpaid, done by women most times, invisible, repetitive,

undervalued, often undone shortly after being completed, and likely to expand to fit the time available, oddly difficult to pass on to others and resistant to change. Housework has long been portrayed as women's work across the world. Gender differences are observed in the type of tasks divided between men and women, while women perform most of the daily repetitive routine and indoor tasks then men are more likely to perform infrequent household tasks (Hochschild, 1989).

Related to Masculinity and Femininity, housework can be distinguished into two types. The feminine routine works are cooking, cleaning and laundry, and taking care of the family members. Which are the most time-consuming and ongoing daily activities. The masculine non-routine works are mainly home maintenance, repairs, grocery shopping, and other family-related official works which are not need to perform on regular basis. From the two divisions of housework, inequality begins from there where routine tasks are on women's shoulders. The significance of the housework division is that routine housework is the main component of housework which is strongly gendered in nature and a central component of the continued existence of gender stratification. The performance of roles by married working women at home and workplace is not an essay task (Borthakur, 2000).

According to West and Zimmerman (1987), the concept of doing gender reflects that we are not simply born into a sex or gender identity or merely functioning in a gender role, rather gender is a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment. By doing gender we reflect the social structure as well as derive relative power consequences of gender category membership. It is a set of social practices which impact the lives of men and women in society. People think gender div in housework is common and simple but it hides a different reality. It is constructed and maintained by both the dominants and the oppressed because it ascribes values to personality and identity formation and inappropriate masculine and feminine behavior (Davis, Evans & Lorber, 2006).

As a result, women always faced obstacles in the household for better liftmen in society. In this regard, a question arises why housework is not gendered equal. So, for a better understanding of the unequal distribution of gendered housework, the proposed work attempted to study gendered divisions of housework in Assamese society. It can be said that the unequal distribution of household work creates inequality and discrimination between men and women. Within the discourse of gendered household work, focus on practices of gender politics in everyday family life as constituting significant drawbacks to women's inequality. Gender inequalities and discrimination exist in family and societal institutions because of socio-cultural and religious norms which perpetuate practices, beliefs, and stereotypes that are detrimental to women. These are practices of repression including both overt and covert gendered practices. Therefore the

study tried to interrogate the experience of gendered household work differences in the domestic sphere.

### **Conceptualizing gendered divisions of housework-**

Housework and gender are two sides of the coin. It plays a very important role in determining the type of work that is handed over to males and females. According to gender, the way work is defined, understood, recognized, valued, and distributed between men and women is usually referred to as the gender division of labor. By engaging in housework men and women do gender by enacting the normative standards of what it means to be a man or a woman. There are various debates among social thinkers on gendered work divisions. Gender theory investigates the social institute of sexual differences. It is necessary to explain theoretical perspectives for a better understanding of gender issues. Furthermore, applying a structural perspective to the gendered division of household work can teach us a valuable lesson about how the public sphere may affect individual behavior in the private sphere (Cooke, 2010).

Functionalists posit that gendered work specialization is important for the functional necessity of society while the Marxist or conflict perspective explained that housework is unpaid and associated with a lack of power and it has an effect on occupation which is linked with the gender gap in earning. Therefore bargaining takes place between women and men and generally, the less economically powerful partner (woman) does most of the unpaid household work and the powerful spouse (man) does the least amount of household work.

Feminist sociologist conceptualizes gender as a system of relationships across age, race, class, and institutional boundaries. It refers to cultural and social interpretations that turn sexual differences into more than biological differences. Marxian feminism pointed out that women's subordination is not biological or natural rather is social gender perspectives claims that socialization is the main reason for gender div of labor. In point of different feminism, it is notable that Liberal feminism shows gender role expectations for men and women lead to discrimination against women. They opined that women are discriminated against through traditional gender roles and if women are not conscious of their rights then they will suffer badly. Radical feminists focus on the patriarchal family as the key site of domination and oppression. They complained of women's exploitation as housewives, mothers, and sex partners, they looked at marriage as a formalization of women's persecution. Radical feminists stand against all existing social structures. They consider that personal is political. They believed that men create everything for their benefit. One of the radical feminists Kate Millet mentioned that gender or the patriarchal system is the main reason for women's oppression. Socialist feminism sees women's oppression as increasing from their work in the family and the economy. They

wish to remove class and gender. They believed that class-based capitalism is the reason for women's subordination.

### **Inequality within housework divisions in Assam**

Inequality generally means unequal perceptions or treatment of an individual based on their gender. Household division of labor can be considered a key variable in the analysis of women's subordination. Sylvia Walby (1990) says that a housewife is involved in an unequal exchange of relationships. The sexual division of labor is often used as a justification for dubbing women's work as low-skilled. The consequence of this sex-typing job is twofold even women with requisite skills find it difficult to get into the so-called male jobs and the ones in which the women are concentrated are categorized as low-skilled and receive lower wages.

The gender division of work is a central feature of gender inequality. Men's lack of involvement in routine housework is a sign of continued gender inequality because men selectively invest their time in more rewarding tasks, leaving women to do less pleasant routine chores. Even when women are employed full-time they spend more hours doing housework than their husbands. Compared with husband's wives are more likely to scale back their careers to prioritize family demands. Fletcher's (1978) research highlighted that between two working parents in a household wives mostly adjusted their household work around employment, not their husbands. Women face the main challenges in making a balance between their working life and personal life which challenges are much more compared to men (Nelson and Burke, 2000).

All over the world, the amount of work performed by women in the household is greater compared to men (Greenstein 1996). Assamese society is not exceptional too with the principle of housework division according to gender. In Assamese households, most household work still largely falls on the woman's head. Marriage and children increased women's housework time while decreasing men's housework time. Women are double victims in their position as non-productive or domestic workers and as exploited members of the workforce. Therefore it can be said that housework is one of the last bastions of gender inequality. The gender division of labor in the home is a central component of the continued existence of gender stratification.

In Assamese society, housework is considered easy, highly repetitive, unskilled, or less skilled. Therefore the work is considered secondary and unrecognized. Assamese social expectations are associated with gender expression. Children's housework behaviors are complete with daughter to mother and son to father. In Assamese society culture fundamentally is the root cause of inequality in the context of housework which significantly affects women's lives in the overall sphere.

Assam is a state where have not so much discrimination against women. But in the context of the gendered division of housework, the people of the society are also not free from traditional normative behavior according to gender identity. The basic idea of society is that it is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family. The housework division in Assamese society remains extremely unequal, largely as a consequence of labor-intensive standards of feminized domestic practices. Rural women of Assam keep themselves busy with endless household work, from most of the day to till night. Preparing breakfast to cooking lunch are inseparable duties for women in their day-to-day life. It is very common in Assamese society that before going to a job and after coming from the job women have to do their housework. But significant thing is that male members of the family are not even helped once to cook a day except in some unavoidable circumstances.

The fact is that women spend substantially more time on housework even in households in which the partners appear to have equal economic power. In Assamese society, housework is the main reason for remarriage for some men after the demise of their first wives. When one spouse dies, the surviving spouse must carry out all the necessary works of household management including those tasks that were once performed by their deceased spouse.

Gender division of household work is seen among every ethnic, social, religious, and elite group in Assam. Housework division is not a big deal in Assamese society. When women start to enter the labor market the conflict between work and family demands arises. Conflict in marriage and family is the best example of this situation. In the Assamese household domestic role is mainly based on power relations. For most women marriage is the best alternative for them. Therefore they always ignored individual satisfaction over family satisfaction for survival in marital relationships. They feel insecure about what they do after they break the marriage. It is common in Assam, that many girls enter into marriage soon and become young mothers and take on household responsibilities before they fulfill or complete their higher education. Assamese society treated education for married women as unimportant and needless. Because the first question arises that-who will do the housework?. When boys are allowed to get high-quality schooling around the world then most time girls are educated to prepare for household tasks and trained how to be excellent mothers and housewives.

Assamese society is an agriculture-based society. The various tasks involved in cultivation are sex-specific in society. During cultivation, the pesticide dusting, spadework during field irrigation, plowing, sowing, manure, fertilizer application, uprooting of seedlings, and marketing of grains were exclusively performed by men. In the field of agriculture transplanting and storage of foods is the exclusive domain of women. But neglecting women's help, all credit goes to men. While men are called farmers and cultivators women are only called housewives. Hazarika and Das (2020) mentioned that in any situation, only women sacrifice their prior work.

Men don't want to leave the public domain and enter the kitchen. Though Brara (2017) in her study observed that social sanctions are not conservative nature in North-East India. The sexual division of labor within the households is a hallmark of northeast societies. Household works specifically divided between men and women, like cutting a tree is not women's work while fetching water is not men's work. Because of society's glass ceiling concept, they are told to maintain their limits as men or as women which come from the customary laws.

### **Conclusion**

The gender division of labor within the household is influenced by 'power that plays an important role within a social association that influences women's position in their household and society as well. Unpaid household work is not a matter of choice for women, rather it is a constraint by society and patriarchal norms through which women are expected to carry the responsibility for work at home. Everyone is talking about gender equality but what about common and everyday gender biases in households? In most of society, there are known gaps when it comes to gender equality in household work. With time women proved their capabilities in different roles but at present, they are entrusted with household responsibilities and which significantly affects their life. In recent years gender studies have attracted the attention of a considerable number of social scientists. At the grass level and institutional level gender division of work has the potential to make an original contribution to research in sociological studies, through which traditional social norms exploit women and make them subordinate. Family is the primary producer of human beings. Therefore knowing and study about gendered housework practices may play a vital role in creating awareness of gender discrimination in primary institutions which can help in uprooting social evils that have still existed in our society. To make a society successful there has to be removed unequal gender division of household work from the society. Without removing the grassroots inequality it may not be possible to removed inequality from the whole social system in a real sense. Unequal gender division of household work is visible in every household in Assamese society. When it comes to household work there has no significant awareness gap between many educated people and illiterate ones. So we just noticed gendered micro unequal practices which can help us to understand the broader inequality in our society which can ensure a way to remove gender discrimination in human society. Without studying all aspects of gendering practices we can't imagine an equal society between men and women. Without rationalization of work must not possible to ensure the importance of housework. Through the study of the gender division of housework in Assam, we can find out a whole Indian reflection because Assam is called mini India. Therefore it is important to study gendered divisions of housework in Assam is very useful to the whole of India.

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