

Women's Labor Market Participation and Bargaining Power over Domestic Division of Labor

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Abstract: In the early 1970's academics, researchers and working professionals in development agencies (mostly women) found that development interventions taken by the principal development organizations were male biased. The development process put women at a more subordinate position. Therefore, they created a demand for integrating women into the development process. At that time it was thought that bringing women into the productive labor force will increase their bargaining power within the households, their self-esteem and social status. However, participating in the workforce has not improved the lives of all women except who are highly skilled or have control over their own income etc. Therefore, for most women taking part in income earning activities has simply signified more work as it does not always ensure any alteration in their bargaining power in the household, hence, no change in their gendered role and status in the family. Therefore, this article will argue that participating in economic activities may widen options for women, it also increases their responsibilities and tasks without always increasing their bargaining power in the household.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970's, academics, researchers and working professionals in development agencies (mostly women) found that development interventions taken by the principal development organizations were male biased, hence, women were disadvantaged by the development process resulted in their subordinate position in the society (Koczberski,1998). Consequently, a demand for integration of women into the development process emerged from the first United Nations Conference on Women which was held in Mexico in 1975. At the time it was widely believed that women's secondary position originates from the elimination of them from the productive labor because of a lack of job opportunities as it makes women materially dependent on men. Therefore, provision for earning opportunities for women was seen not only as an essential way of integrating women into the development process (Elson and Pearson,1981) but also enhancing their bargaining power within households, self-esteem and social status of women (Peterson,2010).

However, the potentiality of women's earning opportunities for bringing positive change in their lives is not always realized. During the late 1970s as a result of the global integration of the world's economic boundaries, a steady rise in the women labor force participation has been observed in most regions of the world (Kabeer, 2013). It has been seen that the participation in the labor force has improved the lives of some women who have highly valued qualities, skills or control over their own income etc. Nevertheless, for most women who do not have those abilities, engaging in income earning activities has simply meant more work as it does not automatically ensure any change in their bargaining power in the household, hence, no change in their gendered role and responsibilities in the family (Peterson, 2010). Therefore, this article will argue that though involving in income earning activities may widen options for women, it also increases their amount of work and tasks without always increasing their bargaining power in the household. It will analyze why earning money does not necessarily increase women's household bargaining power by focusing on the debates relating to women's workforce participation and their bargaining power. Then it will discuss the process through which women have been integrated into the labor market to show the hidden economic and social discriminatory factors rooted within the process itself which prevent women to achieve the fallback position required for women's bargaining power in the household. Finally, by analyzing some case studies this paper will show how because of the absence of bargaining power earning opportunities intensify women's work burden though it extends women's options in some cases.

II. THE DEBATES AROUND WOMEN'S LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND BARGAINING POWER

During the first decade of development studies, employment was considered as fundamental to the processes by which the fruits of economic growth would trickle down to the mass of the population. Both supporters of economic growth like W. Arthur Lewis (1955) and their later critics like Dudley Seers (1969) not only shared this view but also believed that employment had particular gains to offer women, liberating them from the seclusion of the home and the tyranny of unpaid domestic drudgery (Kabeer, 2013).

This belief that earning opportunity can liberate women from their secondary position is also reflected among the Marxist and Liberal feminists. The classical Marxists feminists tended to see early division of labor between men and women in the hunting and gathering society was equal where women took care of the family and men provided the required subsistence. Later emergence of private property, monogamous marriage and patrilineal inheritance not only established an unequal and oppressive relationship between men and women but also prevented women to participate in the public life at the beginning of the capitalistic system, hence, shedding their reliant status. However, as working class women does not have any private wealth, so they would have fewer patriarchal constraint to enter into the labor market which would free them from the oppression of their dependent family status (Kabeer, 1994) by giving them more autonomy. Liberals have always inclined to see employment opportunities for women as leading to female autonomy by providing women with financial self-sufficiency; and have considered the lack of equal job opportunities, equal pay and equal working conditions for women in the capitalist economy as the result of outdated injustice and discrimination. Such viewpoints are expected to be progressively undermined as women show their abilities in the very visible area of wage work (Elson and Pearson, 1981).

However, only women's access to wage income does not necessarily ensure women's autonomy or bargaining power to bring an egalitarian change in gender relations at the household level by providing women the bargaining chips (Kibria, 1995), rather women's bargaining power depends of different factors. Scholars have identified these factors from different directions. As Blumberg (1988) states in her notable work on gender stratification that women's bargaining power in the family depends on the degree of control they have on key economic resources such as income, property and other means of production instead of merely participating in economic activities or having ownership of economic resources. On the other hand, Amartya Sen (1990) sees bargaining ability as perceived phenomena. According to Sen, women bargaining power in the family depends on how women's money contributions generated from employment outside home are perceived or valued in the household arena. As women's contributions in the family are typically undervalued hence, results in their less bargaining power in the family.

However, in addition to adding both Blumberg and Sen's viewpoints regarding women's bargaining power, in her work on bargaining and intrahousehold gender relations, Bina Agarwal (1997) also focuses on women's having communal/external support system such as of patronage, kinship etc. and especially the role of having ability to challenge social norms and institutions. According to her, social norms set limits on what is bargained about and can work as a both determinant and constraint to bargaining power. Norms of a society define and the extent of voice a woman has within the household and impinge on the possibility of her exit, therefore, affect their bargaining power in the family. Having the ability to challenge those norms ensures women's autonomy in the family. Therefore, having controlling over these factors strengthens a woman 's fallback position –'the outside options which determine how well-off she would be if familial cooperation fails' (Agarwal, 1997:4)- for bargaining though not all factors affect women's bargaining power in equal extent in all social-cultural settings.

Studies that focuses on having women's bargaining power within the household decision making especially in terms of intra household gender division of labor, also emphasize the importance of having control over property ownership, wage income, strong kinship support system and improved self-perceptions. For example, women who work in the cut flower industry in Columbia challenged the patriarchal household culture by expressing their dissatisfaction with the unequal division household labor. They indicated that the unreciprocated supplemented physical and economic labor needed living with a man is like a job that needs a lot of labor. In the region where the flower industry is situated the gender gap in property possession is minimal and women have large kin network which indicates that having emotional and social support. Besides, these women workers have high perceptions about their self-worth and their work in the flower industry and they used their economical, social and emotional resources to bargain with men (Sanchez-Friedemann, 2006). Similarly, in sub-Saharan African societies where women and men have customarily conserved separate economic activities and resources; and women have full control over the fruits of their labor, they can negotiate openly the exchange of sexual and domestic labor and be paid by their husbands for giving "free labor" in on their husband's irrigated rice fields (Kandiyoti, 1988).

In the following sections of this essay, the context in which women are entering into the labor force and the problems rooted within the economic-cultural settings which inhibits to achieve women those factors required for their autonomy will be discussed.

III. WOMEN'S ENTRY INTO THE LABOR MARKET

Since the 1970s, the global labor market has experienced profound changes. These changes have modified employment patterns, requirements of skill, workforce's gender composition, wage hierarchies in companies and pay structures within and across countries. These changes have had unequal consequences, generating new livelihood sources in some places while intensifying insecurity of livelihoods elsewhere. In spite of having professional and elite-jobs, the neoliberal restructuring has fueled flexibilization of the process of production, increased precariousness of employment, corroding of labor rights, unemployment and underemployment (especially of men) incessant poverty, and the growing vulnerability of a great proportion of the working population (Beneria, et al., 2015). As a result, the bargaining power of labor has been weakened, hence, there has been a growth of very insecure and low wage employment, including jobs paying 'individual' rather than family wage, in some cases jobs without regular wages or benefits or protections (Standing, 1999).

The labor market structuring and the promotion of flexible production and employments arrangements by neo-liberal policies have generated new opportunities for multinational companies, as globalization and intensified market competition induce global capitalist firms to continually look for lower production costs. Therefore, because of the deregulation of labor markets worldwide along with technological advancement, offshoring, outsourcing and subcontracting have become the demand of the day for most capitalist firms. Making use of casual labor and a contingent labor force have become the 'new normal' tradition in terms of labor hiring (Beneria, et al., 2015). Multinational firms have relocated either their whole operation or a stage of production of certain kinds of manufacturing product across borders, mainly in Third World countries, seeking for cheaper labor (Elson and Pearson, 1981).

As the relocating industries of the multinational companies are mainly labor intensive and very conscious about wage costs, hence, have created a new interest in women who are comparatively cheaper than corresponding male workers as male are less interested to work for sub-family wage. The characteristics of job of these industries are also seen well matched with the needs- irregular work force participation and willing to work for low wage- and characteristics of women workers constrained by gender division of labor. Women's readily learned skills which needs manual dexterity and patience with monotonous and repetitive tasks along with their extensive experience with sewing, food processing and other domestic activities make them appropriate workers for the factories (Lim, 1990).

In addition to women's suitability as cheap labor, Structural Adjustment Policies, supported by neo-liberalism, provision to reduce governments expenditure, hence withdrawing public welfare provision has also pushed more women to join into the labor market. Due to the government budget cuts under the neoliberal macroeconomic policy, most of the public welfare services provided by the government have been disappeared (Standing, 1999). Therefore, on the one hand, the absence of state provided welfare services, on the other hand, men's reduced earning capacity by declining the real value of wages due to the informalization and flexibilization of the labor market, have endangered households and put pressure on women to fill the gap created from the reduction of monetized income and social services by joining in the labor force (Peterson, 2010). Therefore, as a result of the changing pattern of the labor market with a falling in men's employment as well as withdrawn of the state provided public services has led to a rise in female labor force participation.

Therefore, the neoliberal globalization has contributed to labor force participation of women of all ages, married as well unmarried, in mainly the relocated labor-intensive manufactured and service industries from high to low wage economies and in some location -specific traded activities such as traditional and non-traditional agricultural exports and tourism etc. (Kabeer, 2013). In this changed employment landscape, female workers tend to dominate in the bottom levels, occupying the lowest-paying jobs, piece rated sub-contracted work and other different insecure types of self employment (Beneria, et al., 2015). As a result of this, most women workers are deprived of opportunities for social security and welfare. Therefore, though 'women's economic participation rates have increased as a result of globalization, employment has not offered women the non-wage benefits, entitlements and forms of social and political citizenship accessed by men' (Pearson, 2000:222).

However, married and unmarried women do not go through their participation in the labour market in uniform ways. The cultural acceptability of paid work, social context of where women live, local opportunity structures, and the different effects of individual life course all appear as important factors in terms of their participation in the workforce. By and large young unmarried women have found it comparatively easier than senior married women to accept the better job opportunities generated by the export economy as they do not have children and they have less responsibilities in domestic chores (Kabeer, 2007).

The process of participation of married women in the labor force is not always easy. Their endeavor to take up paid work faced a greater degree of familial resistance in comparison to unmarried women mainly from their husbands. The major causes of resistance originated from the traditional gender norms where men are seen as the primary breadwinner of the family whereas women are considered the homebound caregiver (Kabeer, 2013). As a result, the concern is that wives will neglect their unpaid household responsibilities and husband's adequacy as a family breadwinner. Therefore, 'the unfair distribution of domestic work appears to be the price that women are compelled to pay if they want to earn and stay married' (ibid:67). Whatever the economic conditions, women are still responsible for household activities and family wellbeing. Therefore, when men enter into the labor force as the breadwinner of the family, women's entrance is complicated by their culturally ascribed domestic roles which ensures that entering into the labor force is not always same for men and women.

IV. WOMEN'S BARGAINING POWER OVER THE DOMESTIC DIVISION OF LABOUR

It has been observed that in developing countries where neo-liberal globalization led to the rapid increase in women's participation in paid labor markets, there is still little evidence of a change in the gendered division of domestic work (Pearson, 1999). As women's income generating capacity does not automatically increase their control over material resources, perception regarding their contribution or capacity to challenge traditional gender norms or inequalities, these unregulated, unprotected, low wage jobs do not necessarily increase their bargaining power over the domestic division of labor (Peterson, 2010).

Studies of different contexts of women's household bargaining power or autonomy in relation to their participation in the labor market show limited change in terms domestic division of labor. In her study of female factory workers employed in multinational assembly plants along the US-Mexican border, Fernandez-Kelly (1983) revealed the way maquiladora women have been included into the capitalist system through a systematic economic exploitation. It has been seen that these US based plants do create access into the labor force to women who were previously not economically active. Therefore, due to their economic and socially vulnerable situation, these women have been hired at lower wages and inferior working environments than their male colleagues in similar industries. The maquiladora industries consist of workers, among them 85 percent are female and they were paid less than three dollars, a wage proportionate with the viewpoint that women did not really necessitate the money as they are not the primary breadwinner of the family. Women were hitherto jobless outside the home were working in countless numbers, exactly because the male breadwinner ability upon which they previously depended was undercut. Fernandez Kelly argues that the white supremacist feminist notion that earning opportunity leads to greater women's bargaining power by giving an independent wage is not applicable for the women who work in these factories. She points out that these female plant workers who worked outside the household did so as part of their family economic strategy. Women worked their for filling the income gap created from the reduction of men's earning capacity. Therefore, women income was perceived as supplementary to their husbands' income. As a result, women are still disproportionately responsible for the unpaid household labor. Often daughters worked in those plants for bringing a second income though their income was small.

Another study of Mexican female export factories workers shows that even when women join in the labor force by negotiating with their husband or father, they cannot achieve the bargaining power within the household. A study by Gates found that (2002) wives and daughters who faced opposition from husbands and fathers to their desire to work in export factories in Mexico, employed strategies of offers and threats to get consent from them to join in paid work. They gave offer to contribute financially to the household, to continue the responsibility for domestic work and in the case of daughters the offer was made to look after their parents. Threats given by wives included the threat of withdrawing themselves from doing household work and threat of exit (Kabeer, 2007). A contradictory picture has been seen here. By making offers and threats these women stated their desire for new rights including the rights to be employed. They expressed their desire for treating them with respect by their husband. By making threat of withdrawing services as negotiating strategies they challenged their traditional gender identity. They saw earning opportunities as gaining rights which increased their life choices and gave them more opportunity to establish their identity as mothers by making financial contributions to their children. Nevertheless, none of these Mexican women stated their desire to negotiate their burden of domestic work rather they made sure that they would do all the housework to obtain the permission of work. The offers they made for getting the permission take up paid work maintained their primary gender identity and ensured their less control over the financial resources. In reality, a negotiating strategy which conforms to women's gender identity, contribute to sustain the traditional secondary position even though they used it for pursuing an interest that challenge gender norms.

Studies on Women's participation in the homebased paid work also show that women's access to income generating activities alone is not necessarily sufficient to ensure women's control over income and their autonomy in the family. Home-based work is one of the least perceptible types of women's paid work. This kind of work, therefore, are less empowering than other sources of paid work outside of the home that tenders more

independent and visible locations of work. A study of home-based production in the garment sector of Ahmedabad, India, shows that this type of work done by women is not always considered as a value producing work that contributes to the family rather seen it as a way to pass time. Because of the closeness of garment stitching to domestic work done by women and the very low remuneration, this work makes a little difference in household bargaining. Moreover, due to the pervasiveness of female seclusion norms in India, particularly those of middle and the lower middle classes, women are to remain dependent on the male members of the family for different aspects of the work, especially for the marketing which give the male members a sense of right over the women's earnings. As a result, this decreases women's capacity to hold back some of her earnings for their own use and married women usually have less control over their income than the unmarried women. Married women usually spend their money for buying foods and other household items and to the health of children whereas unmarried women keep their income to put aside for a dowry or for her individual spending. (Kantor, 2003). Women do not obtain that much benefit from their work though their products are sold in the world market as it is deemed to be more compatible with, and therefore, easily incorporated within the unpaid domestic task, hence, it is just some more work for women.

Women also always do not get much benefit by taking part in informal sector activities as entrepreneurs if they do not have control over other bargaining factors for strengthening their fallback position. Vyas, Mbwambo & Heise (2015) found that despite getting involved in monetary activities, Tanzanian women were not able to bargain with their violent and abusive partners or leave the except those who had strong natal network or control over their own income. During the late 1980s, due to the neo-liberal structuring the Tanzanian government decreased states welfare services led to cutbacks in household incomes. On the other hand, augmented prices of exportable cash crops and the reduced price of maize resulted in reducing the land made available to women which forced women to get involved in low paying informal casual or cottage industries which had become their main source of independent income. However, despite women's involvement in earning activities, they maintained the traditional gender norms that man is the head of the household and hence should be responsible for all important decision making and identified themselves with mainly domestic responsibility and had no voice in household major decision making. Women were only able to make decision related to small household needs, buying food or securing education for children and if the matter was the 'woman's concern'. Moreover, many of these women had experienced regular severe physical abuse from their husbands or partners. In that case, their access to paid work did not necessarily make stronger their fallback position to negotiate or even to leave the violent relationship. Only women who had strong social especially natal support were able to escape the relationship either permanently or temporarily by involving their own family; and who's independent income 'introduced a stabilizing component both to household needs and to aspects of women's relationship with their partners' (p.53).

V. CONCLUSION

It is evident from the preceding discussion that earning opportunity gives women some abilities such as spending money for buying food and other household items, securing children's education, making decisions about small household things and enhancing their sense of self-importance etc. Nevertheless, it does not throw any challenges to the traditional gender norm or women's internalized gender subordination which keep intact the men's status as the primary breadwinner and their control over economic resources. In the neo-liberal globalized economy, job opportunities for women are mainly created from the motive of increasing profit and reducing labor costs. Therefore, women generally are get involved with the lowest-paying and insecure gender segregated jobs in the labor market. As perceived economic contribution to the family income is related to the size of direct money earning (Sen,1990), therefore, women's low monetary contributions are not seen as valuable by themselves and by other members of the family to the economic fortunes of the family. They are perceived supplementary to the income of the male members of the family which weaken their capacity to exercise voice in household matters and ability to challenge the traditional gender norms regarding gender division of labor. Therefore, the rise in the women's labor participation force has ensured limited change in women's bargaining power and status within the household. Their participation in the formal-informal labor force just intensify their work burden and responsibilities. This article concludes that earning money alone is not enough to directly ensure women's autonomy within the household. Earning money is not insignificant but women's autonomy is linked with other factors like social norms, women's control over economic and material resources, perceptions regarding women's income and so on.

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