

Social and Political Economy of Paid and Unpaid Work: Work of Women Home Based Workers in National Capital Region (NCR), India

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Abstract : Women's work lives weave a complex fabric of myriad work relations and complex structures. Lives, when seen from the lens of work, is a saga of conjugated oppression by intertwined structures that are vertically and horizontally interwoven in a very complex manner. Women interact with multiple institutions through their work. The interactions and interplay of institutions shape their organization of work. They intersperse productive work with reproductive work, unpaid economic activities with unpaid care work, and all kinds of activities with leisure and self-care. The proposed paper intends to understand how women working as home-based workers in the National Capital Region (NCR) of India are organizing their everyday work, and how the organization of work is influenced by the interplay of structures. Situating itself in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework, this paper brings out how the gendering of work is playing out in the political, economic and social domain and shaping the work-life within the family, and in the paid workspace. The paper will use a primary data source, which is qualitative in nature. It will comprise 15 qualitative interviews of women home-based workers from the National Capital Region. The research uses a life history approach. The sampling was purposive using snowballing as a method. The dataset is part of the primary data (qualitative) collected for the ongoing Ph.D. work in Gender Studies at Ambedkar University Delhi. The home-based workers interviewed were in "non-factory" wage relations based on piece rates with flexible working hours. Their workplaces were their own homes with no spatial divide between living spaces and workspaces. Home-based workers were recognized as a group in the domain of labor economics in the 1980s. When menial work was cheaper than machine work, the capital owners preferred to outsource work as home-based work to women. These production spaces are fragmented and the identity of gender is created within labor processes to favor material accumulation. Both the employers and employees acknowledged the material gain of the capital owner when work was subcontracted to women at home. Simultaneously the market reinforced women's reproductive role by conforming to patriarchal ideology. The contractors played an important role in implementing localized control on workers and also in finding workers for fragmented, gendered production processes. Their presence helped the employers in bringing together multiple forms of oppression that ranged from creating a structure to flout laws by creating shadow employers. It created an intertwined social and economic structure as well as a workspace where the line between productive and reproductive work gets blurred. The state invisibilized itself either by keeping the sector out of the domain of laws or by not implementing its own laws regulating working conditions or social security. It allowed the local hierarchy to function and define localized working conditions. The productive reproductive continuum reveals a labor control that influenced both the productive and reproductive work of women.

Keywords : informal sector, paid work, women workers, labor processes

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