

Gender and Domestic Duties: Socio-Economic and Temporal Contexts of Work Invisibility in Haryana, India

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Abstract

The invisibility of domestic work exists worldwide and is kept outside the production boundary. Domestic work is highly gendered, disproportionately performed by women and limits their visibility in economic spaces. Since it is nationally unaccounted and traditionally undervalued, its misrecognition is deeply rooted in the perception and behaviour of individuals and societies. This perception, though, has been challenged by many feminists, and their contribution resulted in challenging traditional gender roles and androcentric writings. However, gender-blind theories and practices in research make women's economic contributions invisible. This paper attempts to understand and draw attention to women's role in social production and statistical invisibility in financial space. The paper seeks to explain the social and temporal contexts of the invisibility of women's work in the patriarchal set-up of the north Indian state of Haryana. The socio-economic contexts of gender roles have been explored to explain the intra-household dynamics with the help of household data from four rounds of NSSO relating to four time periods (1993-94, 2004-05, 2011-12 and 2017-18) spanning over three decades.

Keywords: domestic duties, invisible work, patriarchy, gender roles, economic space

Introduction

Women perform two types of work, which brings wages and is generally performed beyond the home and the other, which may not get direct wages and is majorly performed within the

house's boundary. In the neo-liberal paradigm of the Indian economy and view of increasing levels of education and falling fertility, the public imagination is that women's participation in economic space

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would increase with substantial alteration in gender roles and gender inequality. Paradoxically, the empirical evidence suggests that women's visibility in economic space has declined. Indian women's work participation rate (WWPR)- an indicator of participation in financial space, has reduced substantially (28.6 per cent in 1993-94 to 16.5 per cent in 2017-18). Their engagement in domestic activities, regarding time use and household tasks, shows traditional gender roles and large gender disparity (TUS, 2020).

WWPR is not considered a good indicator of women's participation in economic space, and rightly so, because it only finds women's market or 'productive' contribution. Many researchers have raised the idea that women's work remains largely invisible or inadequately captured because of how 'work' gets defined (Dixon, 1982; Raju, 2010). This is contested by the argument that the productive work of women is not just market-oriented but rather the whole range of social production activities, which forms the basis of production activities and often remain unpaid, uncounted, undervalued and socially unrecognised due to unequal power relations, particularly in a patriarchal social system (Boserup, 1970; Mies, 1982; Oberhauser, 1997 Palriwal & Neetha 2010). Though the Census of India and the National Sample Surveys have made efforts to recognise women's work (by asking probing questions that seek to establish women's involvement in economic activity), 'work' is still

defined to include only participation in the household farm or enterprise, and does not include housework, childcare, care of the sick and old, and related activities associated with social reproduction. Consequently, a sizeable proportion of women (45 per cent, as per GOI, 2019) in the working age- group are not counted as 'workers' even though such women are devoting most of their time to performing activities which sustain the economy and economic production.

What is domestic work or duty, and why is it not counted in GDP: 'Domestic duties' are those activities performed within a household for one's consumption and which do not generate direct income – non-SNA¹ These include all tasks related to the feeding, cleaning, nurturance, care work and daily maintenance of adults and children in the household. It must be mentioned here that the definition of 'work' in India broadly matches the internationally accepted definition, yet there are certain distinctions. While the UN System of National Accounts (SNA) considers activities like own account processing of primary products as 'economic activities' (though unpaid), the Indian System of National Accounts (INSA) excludes these from the ambit of production or economic activities. However, NSSO and the UN system exclude unpaid domestic work from economic activity. In the case of India, when all processing of primary products by women at home (for own or household consumption) is kept outside the ambit of production, then

the majority of their work is rendered invisible and of no economic significance (for detail, see NSSO, 2014; and GOI, 2012). Domestic work is highly gendered, and patriarchal norms dictate that women perform work within the home domain. McKinsey Global report (2015) reveals that while women spent 265 minutes in unpaid domestic work, men devoted just 83 minutes. The report documents that India has the largest gender disparity in time spent on unpaid household work. In India, women spent around 297 minutes, while men spent only 13 minutes in unpaid household work (TUS, 2020). This unequal distribution of household responsibilities is linked to discriminatory social institutions and a deep-seated connection between gender roles and how people spend their time. These responsibilities limit their access to new skills and opportunities for paid work, keeping them economically dependent and socially in a subordinate position. These factors' structure and restructure gender inequality in terms of their invisibility in economic space and the conditions in which they work, and the implications thereof do not get desirable attention. The full spectrum of their activities must be comprehended to contest entrenched gender inequality, gender stereotypes and their invisible contribution to the economy.

The undervaluation of women's work *per se* is familiar. The indifference of geographers to research women's sufferings, invisibility, and subordination and to

explore causes of women's secondary status has been raised way back in the early 1980s. (Monk and Hanson, 1982). Eventually, feminist geographers have constantly amplified the concerns in voicing the role of women in development - not alone as a focus on women but with a gendered perspective and by scripting the gender, space, development and work linkages (Townsend, 1991; Momsen, 1993; Hanson & Pratt, 1995; Raju, 2011; Datta, 2011). The present paper, therefore, needs to be viewed in this long tradition as a modest attempt to understand and draw attention to many contradictions regarding the participation of women in economic space. Women's engagement in domestic activities provides an interesting site to explore the subtle link between their being crucial contributors to the national economy and yet being statistically invisible in economic space. With twofold objectives, the study seeks to explain the social and temporal contexts of their domination in economic development and how their work has been rendered invisible in the patriarchal set-up of the north Indian state of Haryana.

Based on household data from three decades (1993-94 to 2017-18), the intersectionality of gender relations with other social and economic hierarchy structures, such as caste, education and income, have been explored. It also discusses how gender inequalities in economic space are maintained and by what means these have changed with time. The

study is organised into five sections. Following the introduction, the second section deals with the gender construct in the study region. Section three briefly describes women's activity status in India from 1993-94 to 2017-18. Section four discusses the gender roles in the study region. Since women are not a homogenous group and gender identities are constructed by the intersection of caste, age, class, ethnicity and other attributes, the section also includes socio-economic contexts of gender roles based on household data for four time periods (1993-94, 2004-05, 2011-12 and 2017-18). In section five, the authors explain the intra-household dynamics of gender roles.

Gender Construct in the Study Region

Gender is a social construct; in all societies, the common denominator of gender is female subordination. Therefore, the nature of their subordination and the basis of the structures that make for their subordination are quite substantive and relevant. The regional differences in gendered lives or regional 'gender shape' (a concept advanced by Datta, 2011) within the overarching system of patriarchy have been explored by many feminist researchers in the Indian context (Chakravarti, 1993, 2018; Chowdhry, 1993; 1994; 2019; Agarwal, 1997, 2008; Geetha, 2007; Palriwala and Neetha, 2010; Raju, 2010; Raju and Jatrana, 2016; Datta, 2021; Ghosh, 2016;). The commonalities and differences in women's lives signify the regional dimensions of kinship and local

gender roles. The manifestation of son preference, male-female literacy and education levels gaps, the degree to which women can access public spaces, participation in decision making and productive work suggests that gender relations must be located within hierarchical relations of dominations at macro and micro level analysis.

Within this framework, we would like to discuss the prevailing feminine gender roles in our study region-Haryana, one of India's economically developed states. The social set-up in the region represents the 'classic patriarchy' where "the patrilineage appropriates both women's labour and progeny and renders their work and contribution to production invisible' (Kandiyoti, 1988; as quoted by Datta, 2021, p.3). Regarding gender roles in the region, peculiar contradictory gender relations exist where one finds women in the high public gaze, working alongside men in all agricultural operations, yet lacking substantive economic worth and value. The existing gender norms in the region have historical contexts in the division of labour and system of farming, which suggests subsistence to capital-intensive cultivation discouraged women's involvement in agriculture and consequently resulted in women's subordination (Boserup, 1970). This proposition has been tested in many societies. Findings reveal that today's descendants of societies traditionally practising plough agriculture have less equal gender norms (Alesina et al., 2013). To understand the gender

relations and culture of the study region, we quote from 'Veiled women: shifting gender equations': "...its specific geo-economic needs carved out a special productive and reproductive role for women...determined and controlled by customs and attitudes of the dominant peasant caste groups, invariably landowning classes, which succeeded in imposing a fairly homogenised peasant culture and a hegemonic patriarchal ideology...". The dominant popular culture of the region is described as 'peasant culture' which is closely associated with dominant caste and class, yet dispersed among different social groups. The "peasant culture" simultaneously dominant and popular, with layers of subaltern cultures within its hegemonic fold...also distinctly different from the high caste Brahmanical culture ...does not work to the exclusion of other cultural strands and encompasses both the ritually higher as well as submerged lower classes." (Chowdhry, 1994, p.14). The dominant cultural norms did not consider female family labour working in the fields (own fields), lowering family prestige. However, working for others is considered to bring about a lowering of status. It is a fact that in the early phases of the green revolution in the state (the late 70s and early 80s), the demand for all kinds of labour increased irrespective of the size of the landholding and to maximise the output and to avoid the high labour cost, family women continued to work in almost all agricultural

operations except ploughing (a cultural taboo), cutting across caste and class division of landowners in the state. The high participation of women in agriculture work and the 'white revolution' in animal husbandry are the dominant cultural work ethics for women in the region. The strong cultural and ideological hold has conditioned them to internalise it so that women accept the burden as a 'moral duty' (Chowdhry, 1993). Research shows that livestock care is shared in many societies, with men looking after the larger animals and women the smaller ones. However, in our study region, women carry out a full range of livestock work, from collecting fodder to milking and dung work, which is culturally gendered. Despite all, their devaluation is manifested in a distorted sex ratio (missing females and declining female-male ratio) and the large male-female gap in literacy and levels of education, health outcome indicators of BMI and anaemia (access to food and nutrition), increasing crime against women and also with restricted choices in decision making frequently manifested in honour killings in case of inter-caste marriages (Rajeshwari, 2014). A patriarchal index based on 11 indicators in four domains- domination of men over women, domination of the older generation over the younger generation, patrilocality, and son preference also reveals Haryana with the highest level of patriarchy among all Indian states (Singh et al., 2021).

However, the region is economically vibrant, with a GDP growth of 7 to 8 per cent per annum during the pre-COVID-19 period (Economic Survey, 2019). In infrastructure, it is comparable with any European nation. One may presume that with economic development and the increasing material base, gender inequality reduces- as economic development is not just about technology and markets, and fundamentally, it is about human relations. Ester Boserup has raised the effect of development on women's subordinate position, emphasising that gender is a basic factor in the division of labour across countries. Economic development has affected men and women differently. The penetration of capital into the subsistence economy hurt women in the way of loosening their rights to land resources. The introduction of modern technology and cash crops benefitted men rather than women by creating a production gap, increasing women's dependent status and workload. (Boserup, 1970). Capital accumulation may weaken traditional patriarchal control over women and introduce new structures. Women's bargaining power may change due to intra-household gender dynamics as there is a link between extra household and intra-household bargaining power, and women may not be passive recipients of forces acting upon their lives but deploy their agency in a variety of ways (Agarwal, 1997, 2008; Datta, 2021). We need to remember that agency also does not exist in a vacuum, and

forces of modernity and institutions of democratic polity at times become subservient to the predominant sociocultural values of the traditional institutions (Sinha et al., 2021).

Gender Roles – All India Scenario

The activity status of Indian women has changed during the past 25 years. Their work participation, both in principal and subsidiary status² (similar to main and marginal workers of the Indian Census), has declined (GOI,2019). For low and declining WWPR, several reasons are attributed, such as increased enrolment in education, income effect, social restrictions, maternity penalty, low employment opportunities, low opportunity cost and methodological issues, all of which continue to remain open for scrutiny (Kingdon & Unni, 2001; Kanan & Raveendran, 2009; Antonopoulos & Hirway, 2010; Chowdhury, 2011; Kapsos et al, 2014; Chatterjee et al., 2015; Ghosh, 2016; Fletcher et al., 2017; Deshpande & Kabeer, 2019). The missing link is that many women are engaged in domestic duties (44.22 per cent), which remain 'invisible' due to their categorisation as non-SNA. While it is true that there has been a substantial rise of women attending educational institutions (about 7 per cent points) from 1993-94 to 2017-18, the practical commitment to girls' education does not seem very strong, as TUS of 2019 reveals the same gendered division of labour. Not only this, but the care work has also increased their domestic burden

disproportionately in recent decades due to low opportunity costs (Parliwala, 2019). This is further manifested in the significant increase in the number of women in exclusive domestic duties (by 14 per cent points). This increase suggests the naturalisation of gender norms, which have historical and spatial contexts.

Gender Roles (Women in Domestic Activities) in Study Region (1993-94 to 2017-18)

Like the picture of India, in Haryana, a large proportion of women (46 per cent) are engaged in domestic duties (Table 1). Boserup's proposition of social relations acquired by a particular mode of production in developing gender identities (Boserup, 1970) has been empirically tested across countries, districts, and ethnicities within districts. The findings suggest that societies characterised by plough agriculture and the resulting gender-based division of labour developed specific gender identities that believed the natural place for women was within the home. These cultural beliefs

persisted even if the economy moved out of agriculture, affecting the participation of women in activities performed outside the home, such as market employment (Alesina et al., 2013). In the case of Haryana, it is intriguing to find that unequal gender roles are not only persisting but increasing and are manifested in shrinking workforce participation rates and rising involvement in domestic duties/activities (Table 1). The masculinisation of spaces in rural Haryana, which overwhelmingly strengthens the patriarchy, is the best explanation (see Chowdhry, 2019). Another reason may be related to state policies in the wake of economic liberalisation, which squeezed various types of government expenditure. A typical example is cutbacks in per capita health expenditure, and the increase in user charges for such services typically reduced the utilisation of such facilities by the poor and elderly (Rajeshwari & Himanshi, 2021), which increased the burden of caring for the sick and consequently women in 'domestic activities.'

Table 1

WWPR and Women in Domestic Activities in Haryana (1993-94 to 2017-18)

Years	Rural			Urban			Total (R+U)	
	Women workers	Exclusive domestic duties (i)	Domestic & allied duties (ii)	Women workers	Exclusive domestic duties (i)	Domestic & allied duties (ii)	Women workers	Domestic activities (i+ii)
1993-94	27.4	4.85	24.13	15.3	16.80	23.70	24.1	31.87
2004-05	31.7	10.04	15.22	26.9	26.85	16.43	26.9	29.93
2011-12	16.2	16.84	28.64	13.9	34.63	15.61	14.1	46.97
2017-18	9.60	27.12	17.81	9.50	40.11	8.04	9.50	46.03

Source: Calculated from unit-level data of NSSO (1993-94, 2004-05, 2011-12, & 2017-18), MOSPI, New Delhi.

Socio-economic contexts and women in domestic activities - insights from household data

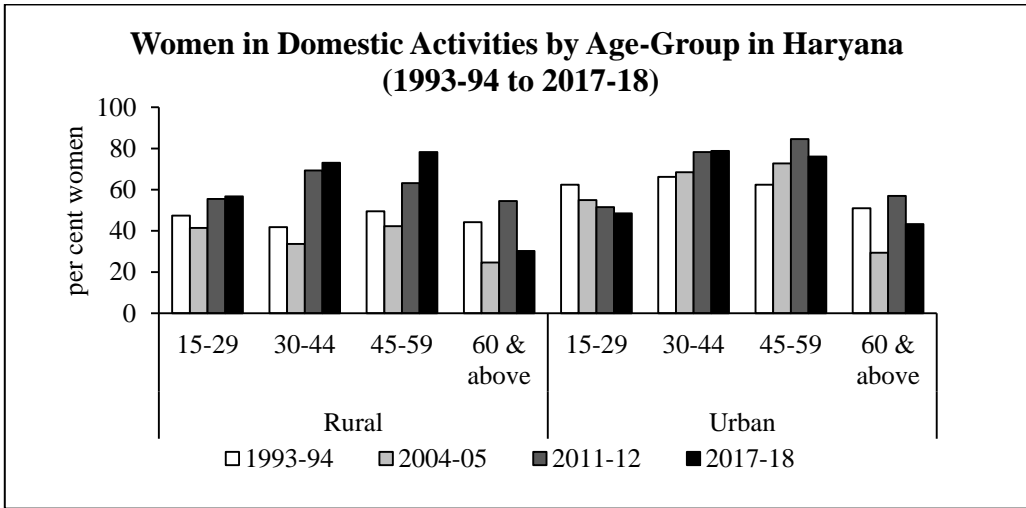
Feminist theory also reminds us that women are not a monolithic category; rather, gender identities are constructed by intersection of age, caste, class and many other attributes. Hence, in this section, socio-spatial and economic contexts of women who devote most of their time to domestic activities (exclusive domestic duties and domestic and allied duties) have been discussed with household data from four time periods (1993-94, 2004-05, 2011-12 and 2017-18). Spatial context relates to rural-urban differentials, while social contexts refer to age group, caste affiliation and educational characteristics of women. The economic class variation is presented through monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE) - a proxy of household income. Though the authors know that intra-household entitlements vary, MPCE variations indicate gender role variation across economic classes.

The first dimension is the age group. Patriarchal norms shape and reshape Women's spatial mobility, resulting in varying opportunities. The superiority of older family members is institutionalised relative to younger ones. Under 'classical patriarchy', married women are subordinate to more senior women, especially mothers-in-law (Kandiyoti, 1988). The low engagement of aged women (60) in domestic duties in

rural and urban Haryana testify to this pattern where older women exert authority over younger ones. Hence, the younger ones are majorly involved in domestic activities (Fig. 1). The continuous increase of women in household activities, particularly from 2011-12 to 2017-18, suggests that the region's social environment and cultural practices for gender roles have not changed. Rather, the burden of domestic activities has almost doubled in the prime working ages in rural areas.

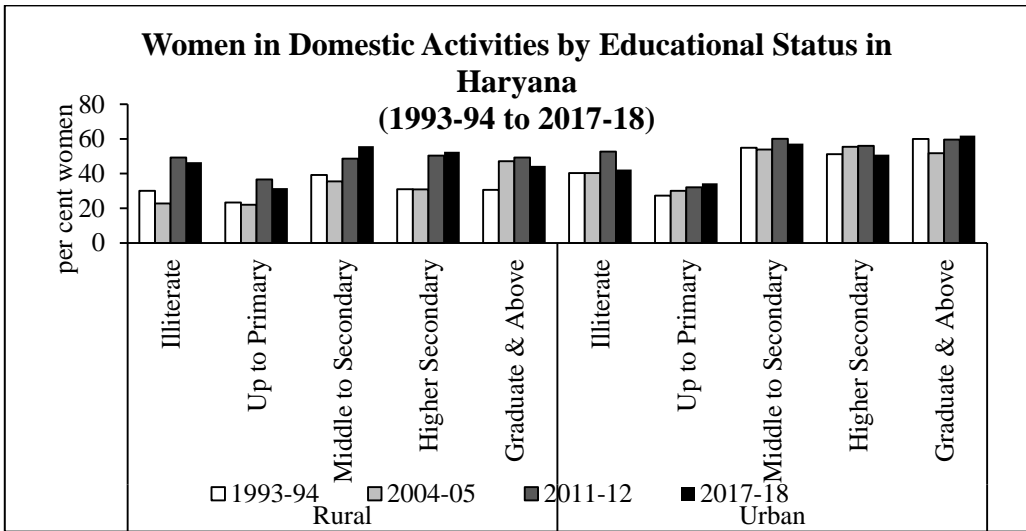
The second dimension is education levels, and the data shows that women's engagement in domestic activities is least among those educated up to primary levels in both rural and urban areas as compared to better-educated women (Fig. 2). Boserups' work expressed considerable hope that education and training of women would enable them to prosper by attaining more equitable participation in development (quoted from (Kelly, 1981, p. 270). Unfortunately, three decades of experience failed to validate this optimism in the case of Haryana largely due to three links: (i) the fact that gender division of labour tends to reduce the perceived benefit of women's education. (ii) patrilocality and (iii) dowry and hypergamous marriage undermine the economic value of girls' education.

Figure 1



Source: Calculated from unit-level data of NSSO (1993-94, 2004-05, 2011-12, & 2017-18) MOSPI, New Delhi

Figure 2



Source: Calculated from unit-level data of NSSO (1993-94, 2004-05, 2011-12, & 2017-18), MOSPI, New Delhi

The social identity is strongly influenced by sociological explanations of women’s labour market behaviour (Chakravarti,1993; Agarwal, 1997; Deshpande, 2007). The survival of caste continues to structure production, property and labour, especially in rural India.

Women from upper castes in India lived in domestic isolation, while lower-caste women typically engaged in livelihood and income-generating activities. Since social groups correspond significantly with income/wealth groups, it has been reported that in India, women from

the lowest-ranked social group, particularly Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs), have the highest work participation rates among all social groups (Desai, 2017; Deshpande & Kabeer, 2019). The observations made by Boserup in the 1970s about caste still exist in the patriarchal heartland of India. However, in the case of the study region, since the dominant culture of the region is 'peasant culture' distinctly different from 'Brahmanical culture' but with an overarching patriarchal set-up, one does not find many variations across social groups (Fig. 3). This is a pointer to the fact the social norms and practices which tie the honour and status of household with their ability to keep female family members within the home, leading to strict controls over women's mobility in the public domain is applied to all women cutting across social groups in both rural and urban areas in Haryana. The engagement has increased in three decades, but this is similar for women of all social groups.

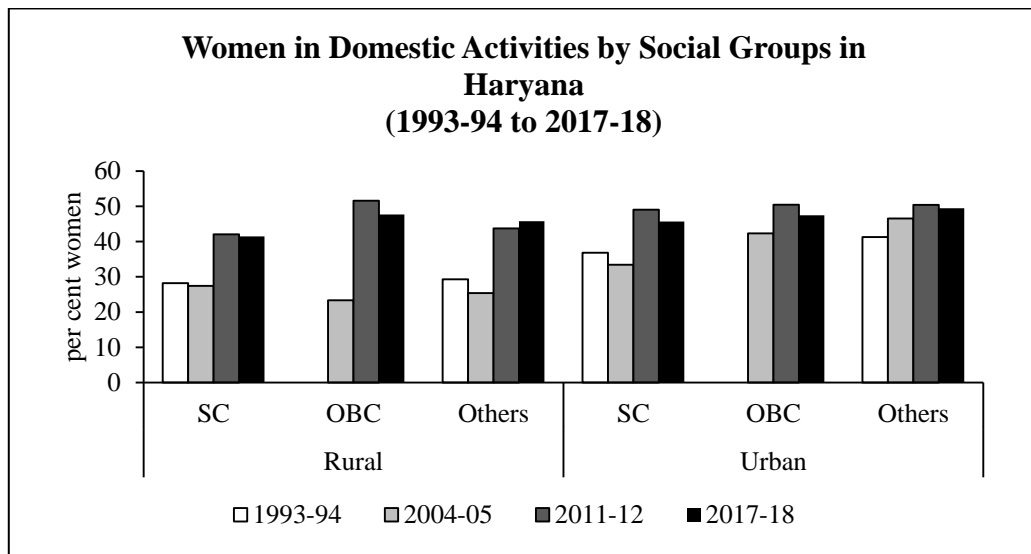
The fourth dimension is wealth and gender roles. Poverty is a major factor behind women's economic activity, and women from poor households report the highest WWPR. Studies have revealed that in north India, as household per capita income rises, an 'income' effect comes into play, resulting in the withdrawal of women from the labour force (Kapsos et al., 2014; Srivastava & Srivastava, 2010). In the case of the present study, a low proportion of women in household activities among

the lowest fractile (20 per cent MPCE group) reflects class inequality as high-income class women can hire poor women to do the household jobs. This pattern exists in both rural and urban areas, which indicates that domestic arrangements are the outcome of both micro-level family circumstances and larger cultural practices (Fig. 4).

Domestic activities - compulsion or an option

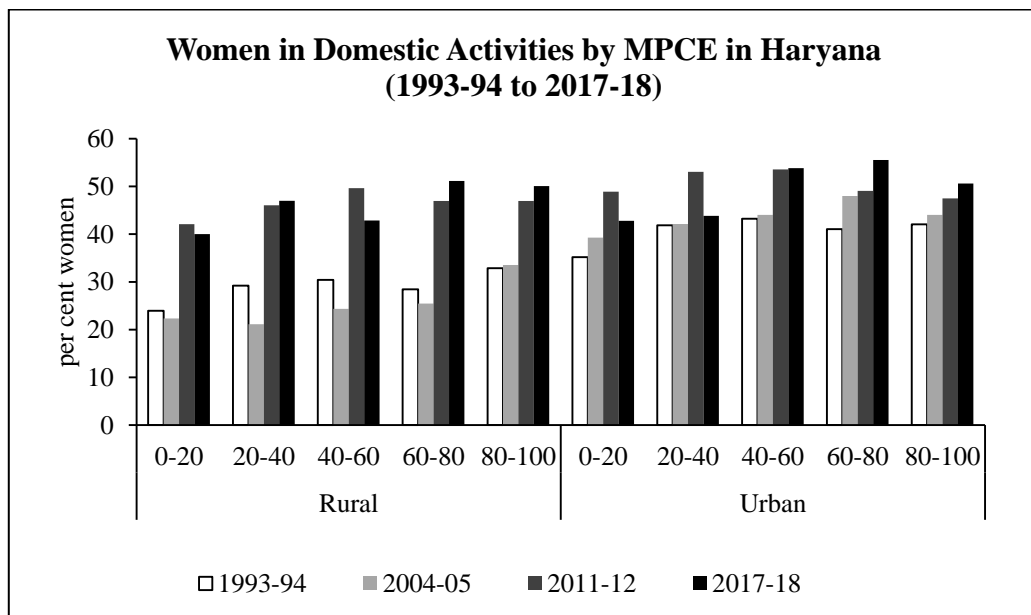
The reasons for women's engagement in domestic activities provide crucial insights into patriarchal power dynamics and intra-household gender relations. Domestic activities are not optional for women in Haryana but rather a gender role performance (Table 2). It is bewildering to find that gender roles have not changed much even after two decades, as 49.6 per cent of women during 2011-12 (47 per cent rural and 54 per cent urban) had no one to share 'their' traditional workload. Further, in 2011-12, another 18 per cent of rural and 20 per cent of urban women could not hire the services of others for 'their' work due to financial constraints, while this proportion was only 2 per cent during 1993-94. It implies that even with rising per capita income in the region, women have less control over resources and decision-making and are on a fast track to pauperisation. The social compliance showed remarkable fluctuations in urban Haryana, which indicates fluctuating women's bargains in the context of nature and specificities of social norms.

Figure 3



Source: Calculated from unit-level data of NSSO (1993-94, 2004-05, 2011-12, & 2017-18), MOSPI, New Delhi.

Figure 4



Source: Calculated from unit-level data of NSSO (1993-94, 2004-05, 2011-12, & 2017-18), MOSPI, New Delhi

Table 2

Reasons for Spending Most of the Time on Domestic Duties by Women in Haryana (1993-94 to 2011-12)

Years	Rural			
	No other member to carry out the domestic duty	Cannot afford hired help	For social and religious constraints	Others
1993-94	50.20	1.76	24.55	23.49
2004-05	39.14	5.40	41.26	14.20
2011-12	47.60	18.17	19.27	14.96
	Urban			
1993-94	62.79	1.29	20.61	15.31
2004-05	36.05	3.47	49.86	10.61
2011-12	54.25	20.70	11.67	13.38
	Total			
1993-94	53.37	1.64	23.56	21.43
2004-05	38.25	4.85	43.74	13.16
2011-12	49.47	18.88	17.14	14.51

Source: Calculated from unit-level data of NSSO (1993-94, 2004-05 & 2011-12), MOSPI, New Delhi.

Conclusion

The study indicates that gender roles do not change automatically with the region's economic development. Despite being in high public gaze in Haryana (working with males in fields and doing all livestock work), women remain statistically invisible in economic space. Despite economic and material gains, the region's patriarchal set-up has mostly stayed the same for women. The nature of the patriarchal structure has adjusted itself where it frees women for education but, at the same time, does not give any respite to the gendered division of labour. The masculinisation of space in rural Haryana (Chowdhry, 2019) gender socialisation, which condones gender hierarchies and devalues women and their work, is a significant reason for

continuing unequal gender roles. The outcome of the structuring of gendered personalities and gender socialisation has been that women internalise the work performed in the domain of the household as their 'moral duty'. The low engagement of the bottom 20 per cent income group women in domestic activities also reflects class inequality wherein top-income group women can hire poor women for such work. It suggests and supports the earlier findings that gender roles are the outcome of both micro-level family circumstances and macro-level cultural and structural forces. The increasing engagement of women in domestic activities validates the argument that capitalist rationalism and sociocultural norms reinforce each other. The classification of reasons clearly shows

women's low intra-household bargaining power and the persistence of traditional gender relations. The everyday patriarchies are complex, gendered social norms crisscrossed, and no relaxation is offered to better-educated women. Since both domestic and working environments shape gender relations and employment, the state should develop a crucial element in determining social hierarchies and equal opportunity policies to correct this entrenched gender inequality. Though the law is also not gender neutral, the authors agree with Walby (1999) that state employment policies may hugely impact women's lives in the struggle for equal gender roles.

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Endnotes

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- ¹ United Nations Statistical Division classified all human activities into (i) economic production, (ii) general production and (iii) non-economic production boundary. Economic production is market production known as SNA activities, while non-market or general production activities are called '**extended SNA**'. Non-economic production activities are non-SNA, also known as 'personal development' activities. In 2012, exclusive Domestic activities and domestic and allied activities were classified as extended SNA activities. In **TUS, 2020**, all domestic duties and domestic and allied duties are classified as non-SNA activities instead of extended SNA, meaning thereby that both (exclusive domestic and domestic and allied) are not assigned any economic significance; rather are uneconomic and non-productive, similar to personal development activities.
- ² The principal and subsidiary status of NSSO is similar to that of the main and marginal workers of the Indian Census. Main workers work more than six months a year, while marginal workers work less than six months.