

Public versus Private Space: Re-contextualizing the Role and Identity of Housewives

Dr. Kapou Malakar

Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Tezpur University, Sonitpur-784028, Assam India.

Email:m.kapou@yahoo.com, kapou@tezu.ernet.in, Phone No. 9401498071

Abstract

The article attempts to re contextualize women at home and work in the light of shifting nature of her identity that claims to accommodate her diverse roles at a time. Examining women as a subject from multiple perspectives involves different grains. The individual identity is projected in exercising independent decision with arrays of choices while collective identity could emerge and grow from one's belongingness to a group. The role and identity of women as housewives verses working women are resonated at many levels that are analyzed looking into it from gender perspective by drawing on the responses concerning accepted notion of housewives. The paper attempts to theorize the space that the third world women are living in, a space that is highly fluid with multiple identities, spaces of private and public, family and work. The feminist understanding of housewife has been central to their narration of Indian society from the moment it becomes a part of the global capitalist system and introduced to neoliberal trends. The article attempts to re contextualize housewife in feminist theorizing by embracing differences as the essential part of shared aims.

The article is based on some responses that are drawn from Sonitpur District of Assam, India after interviewing thirty housewives from rural urban spatial context. The article discusses the role and identity of women within the matrix of family, marriage and kinship by sparsely pointing out the implication of participation of housewives in local community organizations in order to de-center the existing dominant discourse and contribute to broaden the understanding of social relationships.

Keywords: *Identity of Housewives, Competing Identities and double burden, Community Organization, Feminization of labour force, Women Empowerment, Motherhood and fertility*

Introduction

The story of women's liberation has always been undividedly characterized by women's solitary disposition. Deeply busted double standard, hypocritical and stereotypical mindset of the society actuated by socio political belief and motives use to make women fall into unequal, unfavorable pomp and circumstances. Legislation only cannot establish equality until and unless a society thinks to remove all illusion against women.

Women have been the mainstay of care and nurture of home and household production. In the article '*Male Bias in the Development Process*' (1995), Diane Elson compared households in line with private firms and government by asserting that each of the three sectors includes both consumers and producers. In India like other developing countries, the trend is noticed over the years that increasing numbers of middleclass women are turned into consumerist housewives. The idea of housewifization gained prominence with capitalist exploitation of source of production, explicit gender based division of labour across work - household or private sphere and work or public sphere that is further divided into formal and informal sector (Oakley, 1974). The housewife is a construct that is gendered, socially contrived, more implicit in the sexual division of labour. McRobbie (2008) in his study equated housewife with drowsy consumerist self of women. Even in socialist societies, the gendered connotation goes with housewife which is yet to overcome despite large numbers of women participated in the extended production process. The purpose of the study is not to fight against housewifization, instead, it is an effort to find out the identity and status of housewife in intersection with working women. It is necessary to locate housewives in dichotomous situations and perspectives that make women to gain some power or agency and not to make them fall into acute powerlessness.

Urbanization and modernization demand fluidity and flexibility in family system that lead to gradual abolition of traditional hierarchal authority structure. In the face of such challenges, majority of households seem to have survived and modified, adjusted and adapted to changing social norms, values and structures. Modifications in the traditional Indian family system suggested adaptation to socio-economic and personal

circumstances on the part of housewives that are necessary for the survival of a family as a social unit in a patriarchal society.

Competing Identities of Housewives

In carrying out routine enactment of multiple roles, e.g. a wife, mothering or motherhood, caring elders, ahead of the self-imposed liabilities of backing family income, women find less time to think for themselves. Altruism is expected only from women. That has been carried out as a legacy since the colonial period in India when women were obliged to burn in the funeral pyre of her husband. During post-colonial era, it is quite usual for a woman to face constant defiance in smooth running of business when they assume a role to support family income and in case family commitments seem to clash with business hours. As and when women attempt to brood over financial independence, they are found to be caught in double burden in the intersection of work and home with little free time. The situation is blamable for distressing women with undesirable implications on health and psychology.

Another fact shows that women, at times, could able to identify the discrimination met, yet they feel hesitant to raise their voice in order to keep peace and stability in the household intact. In nuclear families as it is found during field survey that housewives use to take the decision on household budget, yet, it would be astute to give a pause before equating women administering family income and contributing to family decision to women empowerment in view of the scene where majority of women are performing multiple roles at a time: wife, mother, daughter, daughter in law, an employed person or self-employed, yet they are devoid of emotional support and financial backing when needed, at home.

It is observed that role and identity of women is reserved as secondary, one that is always taken for granted despite the fact, woman help her husband in agricultural field, solving water problem of the household and of the fields with her traditional knowledge. Woman's contribution to the family income is crucial to the survival of the family exclusively for poor households. It is also women than men whose life world have spanned across both public and private spaces quite differently. In India, since late

1970s, women have been spending average fifteen hours a day on household chores (DasGupta, 1999). Gradually, the time spent in housework by women has reduced with the advent of technology in kitchen, female education and paid work. A so called housewife spends on average five to six hours per day or 35 to 48 hours per week on domestic chores (DasGupta, 1999). On the other hand, women in regular paid work spend average of eight hours per day or 56 to 60 hours per week in paid employment (NSS survey Report, 2013). Employed women are bound to spend fewer hours in care work on average three to four hours per day at household chores. Women engaged in paid work outside home adds to another some hours that made them enjoy less leisure time than their husband. Women are found continuing to shoulder responsibilities of housework, regardless to the extent to which they are occupied (full time or part time) in paid employment outside home.

The composition of households varies across villages in Assam. Yet, households in Assam are largely traditional, extended but less joint and conjugal. There are single-parent families, isolated from kin and 'female households', where mother is the only breadwinner with little support from friends and relatives. Households can expect likely support from the community and neighborhood.

The allocation of time spends in household activities by housewife or homemaker as probable is amount to 84 hours per week (12 hours a day). This band of time comprises caring, child rearing, house work or household maintenance, kinship maintenance including self-time.

Women who are in labour force spend around 28 hours per week (4 hours a day) in household whereas 56 hours (8 hours a day) spent on labor force/marketing/domestic work. Men do spent equal amount of time at work (56 hours per week), however, the amount of time spent on housework is less than 2 hours a day which counts less than 14 hours a week at home. In a household with a child aged three or younger, average time women give to child care is more in comparison to husband.

Marriage and children often play down the pressure of overwork for women as observed. The absence of leisure for women leads to a condition of triple burden in majority cases, instead of gaining paybacks and welfare of earning income. Because of this burden issue,

many women prefer to turn back to the idealized homemaker role. Certain narratives provide the spectacle of liability and load of women as married, mother and employed.

Hiranmayi, a woman who leaves her job taking to load and liabilities towards her family narrates the responsibilities of a working woman towards domestic chores, childcare and family care, in this process, she finds no time for herself. No individual time for her signifies limited agency for women to exercise available choices.

Surprisingly, most of those housewives who love to spend time in household belong to middle class families. Surely there are 'thin' class differences, certain generational gaps and other structural and personal characteristics to distinguish the opinion of housewives on domestic work and paid work. Professional housewives are not seen as a symbol of middle class families of Sonitpur District of Assam, India.

The study also found that some housewives of surveyed areas of Sonitpur District of Assam have a stronger feeling of household belongingness which is not consistent with her belongingness to neighborhood activities.

Rashmita from Sonitpur District says, "I love cooking, rearing and caring my children and doing all other household stuff. I am married to a businessman with two boys aged twelve and nine. I had to quit my job upon marriage. Since my childhood, I was told that men were always men while women should behave like women."

Madhavi (2005) argues that the Indian women are happy to assume subordinate roles of supplementary breadwinner and not to participate in family decisions. According to Madhavi (2005), social expectations such as marriage, motherhood and obligations related to home-making affect the career aspirations of Indian women.

As per the field survey, majority of middle class women prefer to choose the role of primary caregiver. Most of the women are found to preferably denounce higher career aspirations. They are reluctant to attend seminars and conferences to train themselves to develop further skills, as a result of which women are relegated to work at jobs beneath their potential. Most of the rural dwelling households embrace to live in an environment that lacks inspiration and importance of awareness for education, creates added pressure towards wage earning for children.

It becomes a normal scene in surveyed household when a woman submissively admits that she loves to stay at home, when she is asked to define her identity or status at home. On the other hand, her husband never gives a second thought to label his wife as “housewife” after ignoring her contribution to manage the household.

The surplus labour is another common aspect of many households in rural Sonitpur District. Many extended families share a single premise of household with separate kitchens. A housewife accompanying four to five brothers and sisters, parents and in laws tends to carry out overall household management and look after their kids. Women of rural dwelling households often engage themselves in helping their husband either in agricultural field or assisting others in the village as a part time domestic worker.

Omvedt (1994) argued that “Pre Aryan Tribal Societies” and “Harappan Civilization” were matriarchies where women controlled the means of production retaining the ruling power in society. The development of herding and plough made agriculture an activity under the possession of male which endowed patrilineal clans to overthrow the ancient matriarchies and the remnants, thus, muscle clout trounced the cognitive clout.

The early radical feminists Shulaith Firestone and others endorsed the identity of women as the biological essentialism what Simone De Beauvoir cited in her book “the Second Sex” and looked for a solution in technological acceptance by women.

Indian writers, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande stress on the role of women as biological essentialism by opposing to locate her in history, said, “women are biological and not historical category.” That represents the suffering of manifold oppression by women. Women lack history of their intellectual and practical struggle.

Meanwhile, the advent and growth of technological aids for housework under capitalism and its subsequent acceptance lead to large number of middle class women be aspirant of joining the job market.

Working Women and Many Challenges

Feminization of labour force arrived into the locus of discussion among academicians and development practitioners during 2000 (Seth, 2001; McClean, 2000; McILwaine and Datta, 2003). Noticeably the bonus of this trend appears in the less restrictions for

women towards paid employment with opening of new job opportunities for women in the growing service sectors.

The economic restructuring has an indelible impact on feminization of labour, however, paid work opportunities for women have been highly uneven. Women share a historic separation of employment in organized versus unorganized sectors with a comparatively higher inflow in unorganized sector. Unlike West, feminization of labour force in India is seen among proletariat class. Mostly women labour force is absorbed into the unorganized sectors and majority are younger female workers. Moreover, feminization of labour force in India is mainly concentrated in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors of the informal economy. Ghosh (2005) stated that service industry in urban areas is categorized under organized sector economy and gradually getting feminized.

Deregulation of labour markets and fragmentation of production process have generated demand for casual (less secured), low skilled, informal contracts which put further implications on the adverse circumstances for female labour with meager pay for huge labour (Kundu, 1997; Chanda and Sahu, 2002).

The feminization of labour force is mostly characterized by lower aged, limited pay, double burden syndrome and so on. These factors could possibly place women at the high risk of poverty.

In Assam, a gradual shift in employment was seen after they experienced liberation dated during late 1980s and 1990s. From this period, for the first time, women started to enter into the so called 'masculine' (Sarma, 2008) employment. Yet, the radical shift in career opportunities to women did not match with the similar transformation of divisions of labour in household.

The question of balancing work and home amounts to be more complex than those who earn what income or travel away from home to work. In contemporary Assamese society, this issue hinges on ingrained ideological prejudices and other hidden socio-cultural values. The attitude of urban sections of housewives in Sonitpur District perpetuates the myth that the working women go out of their houses 'just for recreation' where the 'need' for outside employment is challenged and looked

down upon which contradicts the perceptions of other section of rural women of surveyed households.

There is an increasing tendency among Indian scholars to approve of housework as the central gender role of women (see Kanungo and Mishra, 1988; Ramu, 1989; Palanivel and Sinthiya 2012).

The discourse of 'double burden' (household chores, caring responsibilities of household and paid work) of women is the result of 'new economic policies' introduced in 1990 in India. The aftermath implications are not that favorable to women as those do not provide a liberating account to women in actual sense. Many studies highlight that the double burden of women is a pressing issue which is on the rise (Misra, 1998; Gulati, 1999; Triveni and Aminabhavi, 2002).

In 1996, in Australia, Duncan Ironmonger provided a discourse of resistance for women by arguing that the value of unpaid labor at home should approximately equal to goods and services manufactured for the market by paid workers. Dixon (1978) argued for an inclusion of these estimates of unpaid labor as Gross Household Product (GHP) which is reinforced by Raghuram (2001) and Verma (2005) in their work. The gendered roles and identities of women as mothers and housewives are signified by increasing caring responsibilities which represent only passivity and subordination of women. Some studies (Walker and Woods, 1976; Frost and Sullivan, 2006) show how adulthood, family and motherhood become a ground for conflict, struggle and subversion for women.

There is a growing numbers of day-care centers, nurseries and crèche facilities especially in urban areas that embrace the recent trend of neo-liberalism. However, the high cost and dubious quality have not let these facilities widely used. Narratives of many housewives expose that they consider these facilities reliable to keep their children, provided they are ensured that the onus of child care is in responsible hand. Organized child-care outside the extended family system is always reliable, however, rare in rural Assam.

Majority of surveyed women are found to accept the social norm towards family management and child care by appreciating tradition. Women perform the management of child care and nurture children better in an extended family support system or by employing a domestic worker. Overall analysis of different childcare strategies adopted by women suggest that those who manage their household chores and childcare responsibilities through family support experience have less psychological stress than those managing it through employing domestic workers and through private crèche facilities. The analysis of narrative of a few working women irrespective of rural urban Sonitpur District of Assam allows to understand the contradictions and complexities, they face in their daily lives in respect to housework and childcare. Arguably, the trouble that women face are the result of 'perverse and twisted networks' of family expectations, social expectations, intersections and tales of stranded routine.

Looking at the situation from the perspective of socialism in line with finding a suitable solution to work-home balance for women and realization of role and identity for housewives, women could join wage work whereas household and caring work is taken by public provisioning.

Female Obligation as Home Makers: Role and Identity of Housewives

Wasbir Hussain (2006) stresses on the notion, homemaker instead of gender and sexuality of women. He argues that homemaking role of women has made women move out of the traditional confinement of household into a broader space with larger concerns such as survival, development and life itself. The notion of homemaker is found deeply ingrained into the minds of many rural women of Assam who denounce to label themselves as housewives. Even those women who are engaged in paid work outside home want to see themselves as homemaker or paid worker by simply reason out their engagement into paid work only to manage home and make their home as a place for peace, nurturance, and enrichment.

However, the sex role orientation remains so deep-seated in Indian culture that the notion of homemaker will not challenge the gender oriented concept of 'housewife' if both men and women will not involve and participate in homemaking tasks. I argue that women who mostly prefer only to be homemakers cannot think differently from the patriarchal prejudices. Hence, it can be argued that the notion of homemaker would be corroborated

if women are made informed about injustice and discriminations they meet in private and public spaces. More so, it can be relatable when women can extend a helping hand to women in distress in neighborhood and support them to fight for the cause.

The patriarchal construction of gender requires daughter-in-law to show a greater degree of loyalty and obedience to her in-laws. Daughter-in-laws are expected to show the degree of respect and abide by the habits, rhythms and practices of her husband's family, even when these practices significantly differ from those of her natal family. The cultural practices of Assamese society do not vary from the national character. Empirical field survey of Sonitpur District of Assam has shown that for the sizeable majority, especially those in rural areas, the gender stereotyping still predominates through a general consensus that girls and boys develop differently. Survey finding reveals that both educated and uneducated women are morally and legally bound to the institutions of marriage, motherhood and the powerful cultural expectations of the society. The competing identities of women as wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in law, sister-in-law are reinforced by the persistent disparities at home, with respect to housework and childcare practices; then with respect to expectations of marriage and the emotional ties of motherhood; and finally with respect to the expressions of male domination (including violence and abuse) in both private and public sphere.

There are diverse communities reside in Sonitpur District of Assam. Irrespective of religion, caste, class, tribes, rural, urban, there are similarities in the role that women play and their position in the family and society. Majority of women, either as homemaker or as housewife have been engaged in cooking, cleaning, washing, rearing children and looking after the comfort of members of their households.

Women, Motherhood and Theory of Fertility

In 1970s, motherhood was central to the emergence of feminism in the west that represented women with reproductive power. Identifying women with reproduction could be tolled as power or powerlessness. Subordination of women by men could be translated into the binary of reproductive and productive, fraught with social significance. In the nuclear family, maternity seems to be frighteningly isolated affairs, when motherhood is conferred as women's biological destiny that eliminates all other aspects of the young aspiring life of a woman. Social feminist, therefore, considers the

phase of motherhood as complete confinement of women into the four walls of household without any opportunities to become mobile or join the public sphere. Women who are illiterate and uninformed, unaware of their agency and rights acted in private four walls of the household become the object of continuous oppressive male dominance.

In Indian society, the sexuality of women is nothing but a means to reproduction, preferably of sons. The technology to eliminate female child is widely practiced with cultural preferences for male offspring, so rooted in civil society that family planning which should have been a means to liberation has been turned into a tool for enslavement. Within these cultural preferences, motherhood is deeply ingrained. The foundation of patriarchy is still secured in caste, family, marriages; female sexuality has been curbed, women are being violated on issues of honor or revenge or caste vengeance. This leads to a constrained agency as pointed out by Bagchi (2017).

Both maternity and child birth are painful process for women. The infant care takes a toll on mother's time and energy. All the more, breast feeding imposes extra demands both on her body and her energy. Unless provisions of public health facilities are available to all, women from poorer classes undergo greater privation. Those employed women whose earnings are crucial to family survival have to get back to work without adequate rest, deprive the child of breast milk after a few months. Problem arises when motherhood or caring and rearing of children are treated as women's responsibility alone. Hardly 10 percent of women in India receive maternity benefits in terms of leave from work and resources to sustain a child. Maternity benefits are absent for most Indian women. Socialism in its heyday understood this and asked for adequate care and rest for mothers.

The traditional patriarchal society decides on the role of women that ought to be restricted to private sphere. Many male prefer to decide private sphere as the ideal space for women considering the fact that women can be identified as living with herself in private sphere. Feminist discourse relates private sphere as a regime of male hegemony and surveillance. Marriage and motherhood won't give an authority to women, rather in previously discussed cases, marriage and motherhood proves to be double edge bondage that make women more vulnerable. Most women avail the position of authority at old age which is often equated with possession of property. In the twenty first century, it has

become admissible among many educated women to reject motherhood in order to live freely without responsibility.

Motherhood may be read as a major form of male dominance but one still has to understand the specific processes in which this relationship between male dominance and motherhood actually works out.

The conventional theory of fertility (Schultz, 1990) on account of the decision to have children stresses on the earning capacity of the (male) bread-winner and enlargement of opportunity cost of motherhood in relation to their potential lifetime earnings. More the opportunity cost of motherhood by means of earning, less the number of children as women get an engagement to become busy, active and independent. It is observed that there is a probability of having fewer children than previous generation when a mother gives the first childbirth at a higher age. It is observed that more women with an occupation are getting married late in their life.

Women's attaining motherhood and having children have been traditionally affected women's choice to stay employed. The burden of child nurturing or informal care work falls predominantly on women, who work longer and harder roles than men. This affects their ability to hold other jobs, the hours they can work, their decision to give up work and so on. While the motherhood or child effects have significantly decreased since the 1970s, the employment circumstances of women have not really improved. Women employment have less to do with child-rearing and more to do with poor job market which only remains for all women, mothers and non-mothers alike. Although women with an university degree or other forms of higher learning could cheer them to stay in jobs even with caring responsibilities. This suggests that the human capital taking to women grounds an impression for losing opportunity costs when they lose their employment.

In third world countries, fertility continues to be much higher among the low income and less educated households (Deka,1996). However, any theoretical formulation falls short of such evidence even in contemporary society.

Cross-national statistics (Ahn and Mira, 2002; India Stats,2014) show that the employment-fertility correlation is now positive. There are women from surveyed fields

who no longer believe that they have to give birth a child to stretch on motherly love and care.

According to Geeta from Namonigaon Village of Sonitpur District, “I have nephews and nieces around to take care of and I don’t miss having a child of my own.”

In a highly communitarian set up in India, having a child has not traditionally been a matter of choice for women and protecting their careers often comes later in the list of reasons for staying childless. However, to varying degrees, there is still shame, stigma, awkwardness or silence around the issue of remaining child-free irrespective of rural urban regions of India.

However, in a society with more numbers of nuclear families, the decision to have children is no longer made by the extended family, but by the couple. A survey report published in India Today (2013) “No Baby, We Are Happy”, expresses a declining tendencies towards marriage and motherhood among upwardly mobile urban women, specially from metropolitan city, i.e. Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata, compared to those of rural India. It is also found out from the survey of town areas of Sonitpur District (Assam) that few women have already considered motherhood to be the secondary choice similar to their contemporaries in metros of Delhi and Mumbai.

Pushpa, from Majgaon ward of Sonitpur District who is a Delhi based graphic designer prefers to live a self-professed ‘tomboy’ lifestyle even after marriage and feels that motherhood is a form of bondage for her. She feels that she might lose the logical self after she becomes a mother. However, marriage does not stop her from finishing everyday work assignment.

Moreover, field survey also demonstrates how women have started exercising their freedom in the choice of groom in terms of marriage. This has been a recent trend among few women regarding their preferences over marriage and children.

“I myself a manly woman with no long hair and I look for a man preferably bearded, who is passionate about seeing the world. I no longer want a family guy, instead one who can earn for himself.”

The drop in the fertility rate over the past three decades across the countries leads to the declining of average household size. The fallen birth rate and increased life expectancy lead to alter the family formation with more grandparents and fewer children in households than before (DasGupta, 1999). In rural India, the fertility rate is found to be dropped from 6.4 to 5.8 as per census report of 2011 which is still higher than the fertility rate in urban areas which has been declined from 5.8 to 3.5 (Fertility and mortality indicators, 2012, Census Data, India). Woman's preference to marry at higher age has affected the fertility level of women as well as the reproductive span of woman's life. While declining of fertility has been seen prior to neoliberalism, it is specifically neoliberal mechanisms that increase social risk and create a downward pressure on fertility (Kiestler, 2011).

Conjugal, for long, determines the status of women in Assamese Society. The introduction of western education and values of neo-liberalism that are imitated, brought sweeping deviations in the traditional conjugal relationship in the Assamese society. These changes are apparent irrespective of rural and urban areas of Sonitpur District. Although, hindu faith reinforces marriage to be a sacred, which once performed could never be undone, then, the same is no longer pursued by many hindu families in Assam. On the other hand, the minority ghettos of the village areas of Assam are predominated by large scale influx of migrated population of Bangladesh which present a rugged, unhygienic, highly crime prone picture. Women from these areas are excluded from the development priorities that further impoverish their condition by reducing them to an object in the household without having enjoying the basic rights. These minority women with unmet needs, work day and night only to satiate the need of the male head of the husband and their children. The increasing volume of burden that is weighed on women causes the early death of many of such women.

Transformative Capacity of Women and Alternative Strategies

The public space for women can be defined by a space that results a break with traditional patterns of responsibilities of women towards health, welfare and future of the family. It is a space, a source of action which permits women to pass from protest to proposal and become active participants in proposing social policies that could bring instrumental change for better living, thus, contribute to make them empowered. This

transformative space could be realized through the mobilization of women through community organizations and SHGs (self-help group) where women could get the opportunity to interact with experts, feminists, respected and successful personnel of the society.

Within the contextual framework of women in SHG in India, third wave feminism considers women as homogenous (Gills et al, 2004) in the sense that they belong to same geographical locality and backgrounds, despite their differences in caste, class and religion.

This reproduction of homogeneity does not allow to ignore differences in female subjectivities and internal contradictions 'within women'. Postmodern feminist considers women as situated in diverse spaces of marginality in respect to gender, ethnicity, race, religion, caste and creed relating to their distinct experiences and unique glitches. These two paradigms, third wave feminism and postmodern feminism could offer a set of alternative ways to approach the question of 'difference' among women and address the problem related to their identities.

Third world feminism appeared from the involvements of feminist theorists and scholars of the South in attempting an alternative theorizing on questions of power and difference. Third world feminism is deviated from the western feminism due to its preoccupation with the questions of specificities of regions, race, religion, age with the unequal gender relations unlike western feminism. The impact of colonialism, imperialism, various access barriers and global inequalities reduce them into a marginalized, vulnerable condition that suggest the locus of claims of third world feminism. While western feminist considers equality between men and women as the center of their struggles, third world feminism, rather, emphasizes on satisfaction of basic needs of women as a pressing issue in the context of disadvantageous international economic order.

Arguably, Third Wave Feminism promotes young women, a doctrine that is developed by a group of young feminists coming from diverse families of class, culture, sexuality and gender (Heywood and Drake, 2002). The unique agenda of the third wavers is the transformational capacity of young alongside their fresh culture (Garrison, 2004). Third wave feminism when applied to Indian context, third world milieu of the very country

highlights the unique agenda of third wavers that is rooted in development dynamics of transformational capacity of rural women.

Western feminist discourse considers 'Third World' women as a 'single monolithic subject' (or object) of knowledge (Mohanty, 1991). Western feminist assumes that 'Third World' women are passively accepting traditions (Mohanty, 1991). It is irrefutable that the ideological forces of Indian culture do play a guiding role in the reconstruction of the identities of women (Gulati, 1995; Mudumuri, 2007). It is evident from the study that majority of rural women have grown up with certain values of tradition, morals, beliefs that incorporate an ideology of compliance and worship. Women retain certain elements of custom and uphold certain forms of femininity as a part of their daily lives. Narratives of women (from Sonitpur Town) reveal that pursuance of selective tradition and custom act powerfully in the reconstruction of 'having it all' identities e.g. career, marriage and motherhood which reinforces what Sarma (2008) argued in his work on 'Young Women in Contemporary Society of Assam'.

The perspective of third world woman is implicit in the pursuit of finding out transformative space for housewives specially rural women who are found to be at the intersection of manifold oppression, repeatedly identified more with poverty, ignorance, superstition, lack of awareness and information of her rights.

Conclusion

Transformative capacity of women is realized by compelling quest for more autonomy and claim for equality at home and work, with swelling statistics of female in paid work. It is further bolstered by growing awareness about woman's rights, welfare based measures at the workplace in terms of hours worked, suitable working conditions and so on. To achieve gender-equality, it claims certain necessities, and those are respectively i) to embrace new behavioral change with the willingness to share care obligations by men along with women, ii) women's readiness to be economically independent and iii) quest for knowledge and learning.

Women have been opting for alternative survival strategies in order to increase household's production by means of selling labour, voluntary labour exchange and other cooperative activities.

The term feminism is frightful for many housewives specially of rural dwelling households as they think that feminism will break their house by putting them into fight against men. Surveyed housewives are found to prefer community based gender neutral equilibrium.

The author argues for gradual makeover of women with new liabilities, the roles that women play have not changed; rather the space they are living becomes more chaotic with competing identities.

The need of the time calls for nurturing a family by apprising the essence of communitarian values of Indian society, by making certain services, i.e. child care, elderly care accessible and affordable for all sections of the society. If women are to remain locked into family care obligations, then, families and society would dismiss of a potentially huge source of income. Thus, it would make empowerment of women merely theoretical and impracticable.

Recourse to 'Feminization' of the male life course could be made indispensable by taking some therapeutic measures, e.g. counseling, inspiring workshops for men. Patriarchal bindings won't let men allowing to shrink obstacles. It could be perceived as a norm of the household, as an institution, the right way to share the burden equally.

Two tasks that could transcend the boundary between public and private space for women, which are to be taken on the part of civil society and state level institutions : 1) to accept and give due credence to worth and self-esteem of women, 2) to harness resources to develop capacity of women.

There is a requirement for advocacy for more stories of women by men, more women centric training to improve the capabilities of women and make women realize their worth in line with the notion that if a woman could think of another woman irrespective of position, power, and worth.

The public space for women communism could be transformed to a space to realize secular humanism by stressing more on creating awareness among men of feminism and women's right, further, by emphasizing on the behavioral change of men.

It is necessary to dissolve the boundaries for creating more space within feminist theorizing where housewives can be located considering the dichotomous situations and perspectives which made women to gain at least some power or agency and not to fall into acute powerlessness.

Footnotes

Assam: The geographical area of Assam is 78353 Square km (2.4% of the area of country). It is surrounded by the other six North East States of India viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. It also shares a boundary with Bhutan and Bangladesh in the North and East. There are 33 districts and 153 Sub-Districts/Blocks, 214 towns and 26395 villages in the State. As per census 2011, population is recorded 31205576 with 14.08% urban population. The population density of Assam is 397 persons per Sq Km.

Locational Overview of Sonitpur District: With 37 million people and an area of 945,000 square km, Sonitpur remains one of the most urbanized districts of Assam. There are villages in peripheral surrounding of the District dominated by the ethnic communities such as Bodos, Mishing, Nepali and Aadijasi Community. Most of the inhabitants, despite having their own local language, adore the Assamese language as their own and speak in Assamese. Assamese is the lingua franca of the region.

References

1. Ahn, N. and Mira, P. (2002). A note on the changing relationship between female employment and fertility rates in developed countries. *Journal of population Economics*.
2. Bagchi Jasodhara, (2017). *Interrogating Motherhood*. In the Book, *Theorizing Feminism* ed. Maithreyi Krishnaraj, Sage Publication, New Delhi.
3. Batliwala, S. (2007). Taking the Power out of Empowerment - an Experiential Account. *Development in Practice* ,17 (4).

4. Belliappa, J. (2013). Gender, class and reflexive modernity in India, Palgrave Macmillian.
5. Calman, L. (1992). Toward Empowerment: Women and Movement Politics in India .Westview, Colorado
6. Carr. Marilyn, Martha.Alter, Chen., Renana, Jhabvala.(1996). Women's Economic Empowerment in South Asia. Aga Khan Foundation Canada, United Nations Development Fund for Women , IT Publications, The University of Michigan.
7. Census of India. (2011).Retrieved on 15 Feb. 2016 from <http://censusindia.gov.in>
8. Census of India. (2011).House listing and Housing Census Data Highlights – 2011. Retrieved on 15 Feb. 2016 from http://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/hlo/hlo_highlights.html
9. Daines, V., and Seddon, D. (1994). Confronting austerity: women's responses to economic reform. ZED press , London.
10. Deka, N.K. (1996). Women's Status and Fertility. In Medhi, K., editor, Status of Women and Social Change. Women's Studies Research Centre, Gauhati University.
11. DasGupta, I. (1999). Women's Employment, Intra-Household Bargaining and Distribution: A Two- Sector Analysis Centre for Research in Economic Development and International Trade, School of Economics, University of Nottingham
12. Elson, Diane. (1995). Male Bias in the Development Process, Contemporary Issues in Development Studies. Manchester University Press.
13. Flichy, P. (1995). Dynamics of modern Communication: The shaping and impact of New Communication Technologies .Sage, London.
14. Frost, and Sullivan. (2006). Social Impact of Mobile Telephony in Latin America. Retrieved on 7 Aug. 2015 from <http://www.gsmlaa.org/files/content/0/94/Social%20Impact%20of%20Mobile%20Telephony%20in%20Latin%20America.pdf> Mc
15. Gupta. (2005). Liberalisation and Globalisation of Indian Economy, Atlantic, New Delhi.
16. Ghosh, J.(2005). "Is India a Success Story of Economic Liberalisation?"
Christian Aid policy discussion paper

<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/indepth/505india/CA%20policy%20discussion%20001.pdf> December, 27, 2005

17. Hussain Wasbir. (2006). Homemakers without the Men. Indialog Publications New Delhi
18. India Stat, India labour and employment report, 2014, institute for human development
19. Kiester, Elizabeth Anne, (2011). For Love or Money: Has Neoliberalism Impacted Fertility? A Historical Comparison . All Graduate Theses and Dissertations. 843. <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/843>
20. Livingstone, D.W. (1997). The Limits of Human Capital Theory: Expanding Knowledge, Informal Learning and Underemployment” Policy Options . Retrieved on 16 Jun. 2015 from <http://www.irpp.org/po/archive/jul97/livingst.pdf>
21. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.(2013). Employment and Unemployment Situation Among Social Groups in India . NSS Survey Reports, NSS 68th Round (July 2011 - June 2012). Retrieved on 12 Mar. 2016 from http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/site/inner.aspx?status=3&menu_id=31
22. Madhavi, V. C. (2005). Invisible At the Top , The Hindu The Online Edition of India’s National Newspaper, Sunday, 11th December. Retrieved on 11 Jan. 2015 from <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2005/12/11/stories/2005121100310400.htm>
23. Malakar Kapou, (2015) Redefining the Role of Altruism in Shaping Household Development. in International Journal of English Language Literature and Humanities (IJELLH), March 2015, Volume III, Issue I, March 2015, ISSN: 2321-7065
24. Nightingale, A.J. (2005). The Experts Taught Us All We Know: Professionalization and Knowledge in Nepalese Community Forestry. Antipode, 37 (3).
25. Oakley, A. (1974). Housewife. Allen Lane, London

26. Omvedt Gail . (1994). Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India, SAGE Publications India
27. Raghuram, P., Madge, C., Skelton, T., Willis, K., and Williams, J. (1997). Methods and Methodologies in Feminist Geographies: Politics, Practice and Power. In *Feminist Geographies: Explorations in Diversity and Difference*, pages 86-111. Women and Geography Study , Group of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute Of British Geographers. Addison Wesley Longman, England.
28. Roy, K. T., and Niranjana, S. (2004). Indicators of Women's Empowerment in India. *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* ,19 (3): 23-38.
29. Sridevi, T.O. (2005). *Empowerment of Women: A Systematic Analysis*. India Development
30. Shukla, O.P. (2005). *Economic Liberalization and Poverty Alleviation in India: An Analysis*. In Gupta, K.R., editor, *Liberalization and Globalisation of Indian Economy*. Atlantic, New Delhi.
31. Sreeramulu, G. (2006). *Empowerment of Women through Self Help Groups*, ISBN: 8178355019, 9788178355016. Gyan Books.
32. Schultz, Theodore. (1974). *Economics of the family: Marriage, Children and Human Capital: a Conference Report of the National Bureau of Economic Research*. The university of Chicago press, Chicago.
33. Walker, K., and Woods, M. (1976). *Time Use: A Measure of Household Production of Family Goods and Services*. American Home Economics Association, Washington