

CHAPTER V

DIVISION OF LABOUR AND SUPPRESSION OF WOMEN

Even after seven decades of independence approximately 48%³⁹ of total population are living a life full of hardships and restraints. These hardships are not natural rather the result of the dynamics of the society. The other approximate 52%⁴⁰ of the population, created this restraining structure in order to have the control of how society functions. The prime reason which could be stated behind this structure is that we as a society are still oscillating between two competing values, i.e. traditional values and western values. The dominance of our traditional values is much more than their western counterpart and as a result we as a society try to preserve the existing structures. Division in the society in terms of gender is the result of this reserving culture. However, there are some degree of dominance of western ideas too in our society and this is the reason why there is a continuing demand to end those ills of the society which creates unnecessary hurdles in the growth of society as a whole.

If we look at the institutions in our society we clearly see they are hierarchal in their arrangement. In this hierarchy the status of women are at the lowest position. This hierarchy flourishes on socially constructed systems. The division between sex and gender is at the centre of these systems. Very often it is being argued that men and women differ in their capability and the need to be treated differently. The roles assigned and the expected behaviours are different for the two gender. Any deviations from the prescribed societal norms are not appreciated. Those who are the beneficiary

³⁹ Women population of India
Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India
Retrieved from http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/gender_composition.aspx

⁴⁰ Male Population of India
Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India
Retrieved from http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/gender_composition.aspx

of this structure try to justify these structures and consider them as natural. However for me it is not natural as the roles men and women play are not constant. It differs from society to society and culture to culture. The role and the expected behaviour of a woman living in Assam is different from the role a woman living in Delhi plays. So to justify the hardships that the existing system creates and term it as natural is completely thoughtless.

There are various schools of thought which try to understand the differential status of women in the society through different lenses. One of the most prominent of these schools is the Marxist school of thought. Marxist feminist categorically mentions that it is the absence of economic power in the hands of women which is the main reason behind their oppression (Walby, 1991). There are two ways in which differential economic treatment comes into play in the dynamics of society, 1) less wage for same work and 2) undervaluing the work done by women.

Marxist feminists argue that women earn less for doing the same amount of work as that of men. It is the lack of economic power in the hands of women which keeps them at the back foot. However, my research experience is contrary to what Marxist scholars argue. In Chabua tea estate both men and women are given the same wage for the same work. The economic power in terms of wage is the same for both men and women. Despite being economically privileged, women in Chabua tea estate have to face various types of discrimination. While talking to one of my respondents, I asked her *you and your husband both are the earning members of the family and despite of this it is you, who have to do all the household works. Why is it so?* Lalita (name changed) argued that *Ma'am I have seen my mother doing everything for my father and other members of the family. When I got married I saw my mother-in-law doing the same and gradually*

I started taking care of all the works in the family. She further added I am following the footsteps of my ancestors. When she was asked what her husband do after returning home from work. She replied, *Ma'am my husband generally visits his friends house or watch television.* Kamala Bhasin(2005) statement fits here, "Men are regarded as the head of the family, they take all the important decisions in the family, but on the other hand women are guided and taught to take care of children and all the house hold chores". Here it can also be argued that without the co-operation of women patriarchy as a system could not function (Lerner, 1986)

In most of the cases the women work in the garden earning the minimum wage and the men go out for work as the wages are higher for jobs outside the tea sector. Since at least one of the family member working for the company, they continue getting the basic housing facility but in case of medical facility except husband the entire family would avail the facility. When asked why is it so. Rupa brilliantly replied *Our Company is working according to the conventional dominant ideology of patriarchy. Therefore, when the husband work for the company the entire family enjoy the medical facility but when only the wife is working for the company the children enjoy the medical facility excluding the husband.* Further there is also a division of labour within the family (Bhasin, 2005). This creates a structure where the tasks performed by women are undervalued. The division of labour in family is considered as a cheap way of the sustenance of the capitalist idea of production. This is considered cheap as they provide day to day care to workers in form of food, clothes etc. It also helps in the reproduction of second generation workers (Walby, 1991). In this way women play an important role, though not active, in the overall functioning of the structure but they do not get anything in result. Rather they have to go through various types of discrimination, violence etc.

Table No: 25: Is Plucking Women Dominated Task?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	18	60.0	60.0	60.0
No	5	16.7	16.7	76.7
May be	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Work

The above mentioned table shows that the majority of the women workers consider plucking to be women dominated task, as more than half of the workforce that is engaged in plucking are women.

Table No: 26: Household chores

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Done by women	28	93.3	93.3	93.3
shared by men	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field work

When respondents were asked about who take care of the household chores. Rashmi (name changed) said *Ma'am it is women's responsibility to take care of the household chores. We must keep proper calculations about the household essentials like*

groceries, rations and so on, for weekly shopping. The women workers earn as well as take care of all the household chores but still they are considered substandard.

The above discussion clearly shows that women play both an active as well as a passive role in the sustenance of overall economic structure. And even after this they have to face oppression and discrimination. So to say men’s dominance over women is the by product of the capital’s dominance over labour (Ibid, 1991) is mistaken. We need to understand that merely giving economic power to women is not going to give us the desired result. The problem is in the very idea which creates different structures in our society. Women workers in Chabua tea estate have economic power in their command but even after that they have to face all types of problems daily. The idea of difference i.e. men and women are different are so deeply rooted in our society that it is very hard to break those chains. The things are normalized in such a way that we tend to consider it natural. We do not question the given reality and as a result we make things difficult. What is needed is that the economic power needs to be well supplemented by the changes in the very structure of the society. My research experience showed that there are various factors which are inter-wined with each other and needs to be tackled as a whole.

Table No: 27: Creche Facility.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
YES	30	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Work

As per the rules along with the Crèche house there need to be Crèche-in-charge to take care of the children and also to increase women’s participation in production

process. As per my respondents, the Crèche house does not play satisfactory role, as the workers have to bear the double load of taking care of the children and work as well.

The Assam Plantations Labour Rules 1956 reported that

“The employer shall appoint trained women as Crèche- in- charge to look after children during the absence of their mothers” (P-803). But the reality says something else, on ground crèche-in-charge is not noticeable but there is crèche house in the tea garden and the mothers have to bear the load of looking after the Child and garden work as well. Doba (name changed) said *initially there was a lady working as a crèche-in-charge. Later, when the manager noticed that she has minimum task to carry, engaged her in the plucking task.* Such pathetic situations results in mother’s failure to report for the work daily.

5.1 Harassment and Molestation

It was found that women are working and giving financial support to their family. But, they were not free from domestic violence. When asked about the reason of the domestic violence they came out various reasons, Sunita (name changed) said *my husband physically and mentally harasses me whenever I fail to serve him food on time.* She further added *I am a working woman. I leave home at 6 A.M for work in the morning and after working for the entire day, I get back home at around 5 P.M in the evening. Generally, without resting for a while I get busy with by household chores after getting back home from work. Sometimes, I do want to take rest, and cook food late and if I do so my husband becomes intolerant because it makes him wait for the food.* Bina Agarwals argument could be placed here that, anyone who visits a village can see women working everywhere. Quite apart from cooking and childcare, they

take care of cattle, fetch firewood and fodder, and keep poultry and much else. Yet, all this productive work remains invisible, unpaid and largely excluded from labour force statistics.⁴¹

Table No. 28: Cross Tabulation of Domestic Violence faced and Marital Status

		Marital Status			Total
		Married	Unmarried	Widow	
Domestic Violence	Yes	14	0	0	14
	No	10	3	3	16
Total		24	3	3	30

Source: Field work

Married women experience more domestic violence compared to unmarried and widow workers in Chabua Tea Estate. Throughout the interview, it was found that women are submissive towards their husbands and lacks bargaining power in the family

Table no: 29. Cross Tabulation of Domestic Violence with Alcoholism

		Alcoholism		Total
		Yes	No	
Domestic Violence	Yes	14	0	14
	No	3	13	16

⁴¹ Malhotra, S. (2016, January 18). Bina Agarwal, Prof at Manchester University, on undercounting of women in workforce. *Business Today*
Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/amp/s/m.buinesstoday.in/lite/story/undercounting-of-women-in-workforce-is-not-just-a-statistical-artefact/1/228271.html>

Table no: 29. Cross Tabulation of Domestic Violence with Alcoholism

		Alcoholism		Total
		Yes	No	
Domestic Violence	Yes	14	0	14
	No	3	13	16
Total		17	13	30

It can be said that the women face domestic violence more from their alcoholic husbands. They experiences both physical violence and verbal abuse. Women workers persistently serve their family. The men would generally grab a glass of alcohol at the local store after returning from work and knock at their doors at the time for food. While, women had to return home, cook food and do other household activities, to see her family happy.

Table No.30 Type of Violence faced by the Workers

Sexual Abuse	Mental Violence	Verbal abuse	Both Physical and Verbal
1	3	3	7

Source: Field work

The above mentioned table reflects the sad reality of the today's society. Women have huge contribution towards both household activities and earning for livelihood, but they happen to be victim of domestic violence.

Following chapter deals with conclusion.