Domestic Sphere and Women empowerment

Mains: *GS I – Role of Women and Women's Organization*

Why in News?

Under the present regime, when a myriad socio-economic and political challenges confront the people of India, developments in the "domestic sphere" are often deprioritized in agendas of resistance.

What is domestic sphere?

- **Domestic sphere** – It refers to the private realm of home, family, and personal relationships, often contrasted with the public sphere of work, politics, and economics.
- **Key aspects** – The key aspects of domestic sphere are
  - Privacy and Intimacy
  - Home and Family
  - Caregiving
  - Personal Identity
- **Historical perspective** – Historically, this concept has been associated with the idea of separate spheres, where *women were relegated to the domestic sphere* for child-rearing and homemaking, while men operated in the public sphere.

What are the issues women face in domestic sphere?

- **Dowry deaths** – An average of 7,000 women have died every year, from 2017 to 2022, in horrendous cases where they are burnt legally known as dowry deaths.
- **Domestic violence** – The National Family Health Survey-5 noted that 30% of the women surveyed reported violence by an intimate partner but only 14% made a police complaint.
- A third of the over 4.45 lakh cases of registered crimes against women are of domestic violence.
- **Neglect of the issues** – People never say a word about any instance of violence within the home or within the community as this would not fit in with the majoritarian ideology.
- **Sacramental nature of marriages** – Cultures that pressurise women to stay in violent marriages, to adjust because of the sacramental nature of marriage.
- The so-called honour crimes in self-choice inter-caste marriages are intrinsic to the ideological platform of the Hindutva eco-system today.

B.R. Ambedkar *has been instrumental in the demolition of Hindu ideology by*

*his proposals in the **Hindu Reform Bills**.*

The bill was about granting women the right to divorce and abolishing caste as a requirement for a valid marriage.

- **Efforts to dilute laws** – There are efforts to dilute laws against domestic violence in the name of misuse.
- The official argument in the Supreme Court case opposing the demand to criminalise marital rape as being "against the institution of marriage and Indian culture.
- **Nature of work** – Another aspect of the "domestic sphere" - the work women do within and outside the home has been highlighted by the recent Time Use survey (TUS) 2024.

AVERAGE TIME SPENT IN A DAY PER PERSON

	2019		2024	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Self-care and maintenance	729	723	710	706
Employment and related activities	459	333	473	341
Learning	426	423	415	413
Unpaid domestic services for household members	97	299	88	289
Culture, leisure, mass media, sports	164	165	177	164
Socialising and communication, community participation and religious practice	147	139	138	139
Unpaid volunteer, trainee and other unpaid work	102	99	139	108
Unpaid caregiving services for household members	76	134	75	137
Production of goods for own final use	198	116	137	104

All units in minutes *Source: MoSPI*

- **Employment and related activities** – Taking the age group of 15-59 years
  - **Women** – 25% were in working an average of 5 hours.
  - **Men** – 75% men in the first category, working on an average of 8 hours a day.
- **Family enterprises** – The percentage of people working in family enterprises was
  - **Women** – 23% and they put in a little less than 2 hours of work.
  - **Men** – 14% and they work for an average of two 2 hours day.
- The work done in these two categories is recognised to be *economically productive* and is included in the System of National Accounts (SNA).

What are the burden of work of women?

- **Two categories of work** – The TUS lists two other work-related categories
  - Unpaid domestic services.
  - Unpaid caregiving services.
- **Unpaid domestic services** – This includes cooking, cleaning, washing, etc.
  - **Women** – 93% of all women put in an average of seven hours a day
  - **Men** – Only 30% of men and they put in less than one and a half hours a day.
  - 70% of men do not do any domestic work.
- **Unpaid caregiving services** – This includes tasks, primarily in homes and communities, like childcare, elder care, and assistance for sick or disabled individuals, that are performed without monetary compensation.
  - **Women** – 41% of women put in more than 2 hours in unpaid domestic care.
  - **Men** – 21% who do, put in an average of an hour and 14 minutes a day.
  - In the unpaid caregiving category, 79% of men do no unpaid caregiving.
- **Less time for self-care** – The total working hours put in by women are more than men, and that women spend less time in eating, sleeping, and leisure than men.
- **Class and caste differences** – Further analysis will show the division of work in different income groups, especially for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste men and women.
- Women of the labouring classes shouldering a disproportionately higher share of work than men.
- **Misguiding interpretation** – The Press Information Bureau, in its press release dated February 25, 2025 with a summary of the survey headlined it as: *"More acknowledgement of care-giving activities regardless of gender in Indian families*".
  - **Glorifying the inequalities** – The inequalities in time use were sought to be glorified with the line, "*This corroborates the Indian social fabric wherein most of the care-giving responsibilities for household members are borne by the females of the household."*
  - According to the government's viewpoint men give any time at all for care-giving, even if *it is for an average of just 15 minutes, shows the greatness of the "Indian family".*
  - But women do 3 times the work in domestic and care-giving as men is something to be proud of the Indian social fabric.
- **Unrecognised works** – The millions of women who take on the responsibility of child-care services in anganwadi, mid-day meal services and as Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), are *considered to be social volunteers and not workers.*
  - They are given a measly amount as an honorarium and not as a minimum wage.
  - They are not recognised as government employees.

The work that is considered to be a natural task *for women in the domestic sphere gets translated into low-wage work in care services in the public sphere.*

- **Hidden potential** – The State Bank of India, in a survey in 2023, showed that *if unpaid work done by women was monetised it would amount to over 7% of the country's GDP or ₹22.5 lakh crore a year*.

- It also points to the *undervaluation of the essential role* played by a woman's unpaid domestic work in the social reproduction of labour.
- Her work is not considered when a minimum wage is fixed.
- Typically, such a wage covers the bare subsistence needs of a worker and family, to keep him healthy enough to work the next day too.
- This subsistence level is actually subsidised by the woman's unaccounted for and invisibilised domestic and care-giving work.
- The invisible component of a woman's domestic work is what keeps the cost of subsistence and wages low.
- Thus, the struggle for a fair minimum wage has a direct relation to recognition of the invisible work that women do.

How the policies of the government have a direct impact on the domestic sphere?

- **Legislative and Social Action – Measures should be taken against Domestic Violence**, and to
  - Criminalize **marital rape**.
  - Ensure swift, sensitive, and victim-centric mechanisms for **domestic violence redressed**.
- **Recognition of Unpaid Work** – Include **unpaid domestic labour** in national economic accounts.
  - Design **wage support schemes** for care workers.
- **Universal Public Services** – State-funded **childcare, eldercare**, and healthcare to be promoted to reduce burden on women.
- **Cultural Transformation** – There is a need to promote **gender-sensitive education**.
  - Encourage **equal domestic responsibility** through media, curriculum, and community action.
- **Labour Rights for Scheme Workers** – Recognize **ASHA, anganwadi, and mid-day meal workers** as government employees.
  - Provide **minimum wages, social security, and job security**.
- **Equal Economic Participation** – Enforce **equal pay** for equal work.
  - Encourage **female workforce participation** through flexible work policies and safety provisions.

Quick facts

Time Use Survey (TUS)
• **Published by** – The National Statistical Office (NSO) in India has conducted TUS surveys, with the most recent being in 2024, to inform policy and understand societal trends. • **Measures** – How individuals spend their time on various paid, unpaid, learning, and leisure activities. • **Provide detailed data** – On daily life, including activities like paid employment, unpaid caregiving, domestic chores, and personal care. • It offers insights into the distribution of work and leisure across different population groups, especially for gender-related analysis.

References

1. The Hindu| The Domestic Sphere in a New India

2. PIB| Time Use Survey

