

Invisible Labour Recognizing Unpaid Work and its Impact on Women's Human Rights in India

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Unpaid domestic labour is a crucial component of productive endeavors and an essential element that supports the economy and well-being of households. Unpaid and frequently unappreciated work, mostly performed by women, that supports households and communities but is not included in economic measurements is referred to as invisible labor. In India, where societal structures are greatly influenced by conventional gender roles, women carry out a large portion of the labor force through caring for others, farming, and household chores. It draws attention to the ways that the weight of invisible labor impacts women's emotional and physical well-being, limits their educational opportunities, hinders their ability to enter the workforce, and feeds the cycles of inequality and poverty. The study advocates for policies that acknowledge and recompense unpaid labor by using data from a variety of areas, such as household surveys and agriculture. It also promotes changes to labor legislation, social protection programs, and educational initiatives to dispel long-standing prejudices. In addition to having the capacity to change India's economic and social dynamics, addressing invisible labor is crucial for achieving gender equality and women's rights.

Keywords: invisible labour, unpaid work, women's empowerment, women's human right

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1. Introduction

The well-being of people, households, and the economy at large depends on unpaid labor, which is a significant component of economic activity. Despite being vital to the operation of households, societies, and economies, invisible labor is defined as work that is frequently unappreciated, unacknowledged, or underappreciated. This kind of work might involve a variety of tasks, such as caring for others, organizing the community, and providing emotional support. These duties are often overlooked or ascribed to natural roles, despite the fact that they are essential for upholding social institutions. It is believed that women are the "natural" caregivers (Tasnim, 2020) and are not allowed to use paid care services. Women in underdeveloped nations are unable to pay for maids. Furthermore, public provision of essentials is far from improved. Due to limited access to paid employment, women in developing nations often provide unpaid caregiving (Indira Hirway, 2010). The burden on women and girls is growing as a result of this vicious cycle. The most significant aspect of care is the unpaid labor that households provide since it maintains family unity and fosters social and human values. Empirical research have demonstrated that the amount of time spent on unpaid labor does not decrease with economic development (Folbre and Yoon, 2008). Unpaid care services are crucial in eliminating what Amartya Sen refers to as "un-freedoms," especially in nations with inadequate public services and basic infrastructure.

Women are typically expected to fulfill care giving responsibilities linked with parenthood and gender norms, invisible work can be exploitative for them. Additionally, the incompatibility of maternity and academics, which hinders women's career advancement and forces them to "solve" work-life balances, frequently makes this exploitation worse (Ginther and Hayes, 2003). Working moms are therefore required to perform two additional "second shifts" in addition to their regular professional responsibilities as faculty members. These shifts include taking care of their families at home and taking care of the "academic family" (Guarino and Borden 2017). As a result, women bear additional invisible work duties in both personal and professional contexts that are ignored, undervalued, and uncredited.

However, whether it takes the form of economic production of items for one's own consumption or services enjoyed by others in the household, unpaid labour has been overlooked in economic analysis and policy prescriptions. However, feminist economists began attempting to examine women's domestic work as a type of work similar to paid work in the late 1960s and bring it into the field of economics (Mincer, 1962; Gardiner et al., 1975). These analyses have several different goals, such as recognizing and appreciating the domestic work that women do in the home, explaining that women's lack of participation in the workforce is not a result of their own preference but rather of their economic disadvantage and low opportunity cost, and so forth (Folbre and Yoon, 2008). All of these have the same goal, which is to appreciate and highlight the unpaid domestic work that women do in the home by acknowledging their efforts as labour. Feminists note that Indian women play a crucial part in upholding the status quo of the traditional family by providing care and attempting to make up for the inadequacies of males who may not be able to provide for their families. It is noted that the amount of time spent on unpaid care labour by Indian women is almost constant across all educational levels (Vyas, 2022).

In India, unpaid labour refers to a broad range of unpaid tasks that are necessary for the well-being of households and the overall economy. These include caring (taking care of children, the elderly, and the ill), household duties (cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and laundry), and other non-market activities. Compared to their male counterparts, women in India perform a disproportionate amount of this unpaid labor, frequently putting in several hours a day. Inequality between men and women exists globally, and this is reflected in the gender difference in unpaid care work. Unpaid caregiving is becoming a greater burden for women from marginalized groups (Suman Tripathi, Fuhua Zhai, 2023). Because it restricts women's access to paid work, educational opportunities, and political participation, this unequal allocation of labor is a major contributing factor to gender inequities in India. It's important to comprehend the extent of unpaid labor for a number of reasons and draws attention to the unseen but crucial roles that women play in families and society, roles that are not represented in national economic indicators such as GDP.

It also emphasizes how gendered labor divisions still exist, limiting women's social and economic mobility and upholding traditional gender norms. It highlights the significant effects on women's opportunities, time, and health, especially in underprivileged areas where the cost of unpaid labor is much higher women's economic, social reproductive, and political rights are violated by the unequal amount of unpaid labor they must perform: Economic Rights: Due to their unpaid domestic and care giving responsibilities, women are barred from the formal labor market, which results in income inequality, a reliance on male family members for financial support, and economic instability. The under recognition of unpaid labor in national economic accounts exacerbates this marginalization. It highlights the significant effects on women's time, health, and possibilities, especially in underprivileged areas where the cost of unpaid labor is much higher women's economic, social, reproductive and political rights are violated by the unequal amount of unpaid labor they must perform: Women's access to healthcare, education, skill development, and social engagement is restricted by the amount of time they spend working for free, which feeds poverty, illiteracy, and social exclusion. Women's rights to social security, nondiscrimination, and equal chances are also violated by this lopsided distribution. Women's access to health, family planning, and rest services is restricted by the focus on their caring responsibilities. Women have little control over their reproductive rights and are at risk of exploitation in the absence of sufficient public assistance, such as paid leave or childcare.

The discussion of women's empowerment revolves around the idea of unpaid caring work. One of the biggest obstacles to women entering the workforce has been unpaid care work (Samantroy, 2022). The discussion of women's empowerment revolves around the acknowledgment of unpaid care giving. Women's economic and social agency can be improved by recognizing and appreciating unpaid labor. Policies that encourage women to enter the workforce, such as paid family leave, flexible work schedules, and reasonably priced daycare, can be created once unpaid labor is acknowledged. Women are nonetheless ensnared in cycles of unpaid domestic work in the absence of such legislation, which restricts their economic mobility and empowerment addressing the disproportionate distribution of unpaid labour.

By encouraging shared responsibility between men and women, changing social perceptions of caregiving and household chores might lessen traditional gender roles and encourage greater equality. Gender equality can be further supported by legal reforms that safeguard women's rights, such as improved labor rights for women working in the unorganized sector and more robust maternity and paternal benefits. Sustainable economic growth and broader human development depend on acknowledging the importance of unpaid labor. According to Hirway's (2010) research, poor people, especially impoverished women, have little time left over for self-improvement, education or skill development, social networking, or even relaxation because of the time stress brought on by both paid and unpaid labor. They therefore have little chance of escaping the poverty trap. Women can contribute to household income by more evenly dispersing unpaid labor, which will lower poverty and raise living standards. In addition to promoting economic stability and progress, a more equitable distribution of unpaid labor benefits society at large. In conclusion, enhancing gender equality, human rights, and sustainable economic development in India requires acknowledging and resolving the effects of unpaid labor on women.

2. Objectives

- To analyze the implications of unpaid work on women's human rights in India and propose measures for recognition and support.
- To Examine the historical context of Women's Engagement in Unpaid Work:
- To Assess the Economic Impact of Unpaid Work on Women's Employment and Financial Independence:
- To Propose Policy Measures for Recognition and Support of Unpaid Work in India:
- To assess the Labor and work participation in terms of women-men disparity in India

3. Materials and Methods

Data were mainly collected from secondary sources. Academic articles, research papers, and related reports were used.

4. Analysis and Discussion

By referring to housekeeping as "work," feminism has historically exemplified various phases in the dissolution of the sexual division of labour. The division of social and economic activity between the sexes is known as the sexual division of labor. Three stages "gender polarization," "gender freedom" and "gender integration" can be used to describe the process of the breakdown of the sexual division of labour (Matthaei, 2001). The division of labor is inflexible during the gender polarization stage, with males assigned to paid work and women to unpaid domestic work (Gilman, 1998; Cott, 1997; Hartmann, 1976; Dubbert, 1979; Cooper et al., 2013). Women start doing both paid and unpaid employment in the second stage of gender emancipation. Feminists in the early 1970s criticized strict gender norms and argued that since men and women are equally capable, they ought to have equal access to paid jobs that were previously only available to men (Kessler-Harris, 1987; Williams, 2001). Men and women start working to integrate paid and unpaid labor in the third stage, known as gender integration. These phases are connected to one another in this integrative process. Each stage's ascent and decline are influenced by intricate dynamics. Due to the influence of factors like race, class, ethnicity, technological transfer, capitalist competition, etc., the timetable movement of this gendered division of labor from one stage to another would differ for different economies. (Matthaei and Amott, 1996).

A gendered division of labour in India was maintained during the colonial era, when men were expected to perform paid public duties while women were supposed to work mostly in the home without compensation. This system maintained the notion that unpaid labor, particularly care giving and home duties, was a "natural" role for women, laying the groundwork for the unequal distribution of unpaid labor that persists to this day. Care giving and household duties have always been viewed as essential to women's roles in Indian society due to cultural views that are firmly ingrained in religious and societal customs. Throughout the Hindu, Muslim, and other groups, religious teachings and customs have reinforced the expectation that women should be the primary caregivers and their expected contributions to the home.

After India gained its independence in 1947, economic policies placed a higher priority on agricultural and industrial development than on the responsibilities of women outside of reproductive and family-centered work. Even though a huge number of women made substantial contributions to the informal labor and agricultural sectors, institutional policy frameworks mostly ignored these contributions. The lack of social guarantees for unpaid care and household labor made women's labor even more invisible in economic analyses. The undervaluation and removal of women's contributions from official labor statistics thus perpetuated cycles of economic marginalization and gender inequality in the workforce. Women's employment in India increased as a result of economic liberalization in the 1990s, particularly in low-paying, informal, and part-time positions. Despite this change, women were still responsible for a large amount of unpaid household labor, which they balanced with paid jobs. Women were drawn to informal occupations by the need for inexpensive labor in industries like textiles, electronics, and agriculture, but their domestic work went unappreciated and unpaid. Due to this combined load, women were unable to take full advantage of economic opportunities, which kept many of them in low-paying, unstable professions and reinforced traditional gender roles in the home and in the market.

4.1. Types of Unpaid Work:

- **Domestic Labour:** Tasks like cleaning, cooking, childcare, and eldercare, which, despite being foundational to the smooth functioning of families and households, are often unacknowledged or dismissed as part of "natural" gender roles.
- **Emotional Labour:** The management of emotions in oneself and others, often in service-oriented jobs or within personal relationships. This includes providing emotional support, conflict resolution, and maintaining positive social dynamics, particularly in caregiving roles.
- **Care Work:** Providing physical, emotional, and psychological care to children, the elderly, or disabled individuals. While this work is critical to human well-being, it is often undervalued and disproportionately performed by women and lower-income groups.

- **Community and Activist Work:** Volunteer or unpaid work that supports social causes or enhances community well-being. This could include organizing events, supporting mutual aid networks, or advocating for social justice, and is often undervalued in economic terms despite its societal importance.
- **Knowledge Work:** Tasks related to organizing, researching, and maintaining information, whether in professional environments or personal contexts (like managing household logistics, planning, or coordinating events). This can often be invisible because it is typically assumed to be secondary to physical labor or formal work.

4.2. Cultural and Social Norms: Women's employment status is greatly influenced by societal standards, which also lower involvement in paid work (Elson, 1999; Das, 2006). Caste and religion also play a part in this (Eswaran et al., 2013). According to recent surveys and studies, women in India perform a significant amount of unpaid labour that is influenced by economic systems and social conventions. Indian women perform unpaid domestic work for an average of 243 minutes every day, while men only do so for 25 minutes (NSO, 2019). Furthermore, women devote a disproportionate amount of their time to care giving duties, suggesting a highly gendered distribution of unpaid labor. Many women take care of the home, provide care, and work in family enterprises, yet their services are usually not valued financially. Unpaid labor has a significant economic impact, as demonstrated by efforts to measure it. Unpaid labor restricts women's access to paid work, skill development, and financial independence despite its economic worth. This unpaid labor is mostly the result of cultural norms that associate women with household duties and care giving, which are frequently supported by conventional views on gender roles. Policies to rectify this discrepancy are being demanded by the Indian government and a number of groups. In order to achieve gender equality and support economic growth, it is believed that boosting access to paid employment, encouraging shared domestic responsibilities, and including unpaid labor in GDP measures are essential measures. By addressing these norms, India's GDP may rise significantly and women's labor force participation could expand.

Current research and policy proposals are looking into this topic, and its applicability to international efforts to promote gender equality, such the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 5, is still crucial to establishing fair and encouraging work environments for women through public services, infrastructure, social protection laws, and shared home responsibilities, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) acknowledge the value of unpaid care and domestic work (Target 5.4). Women thus subsidize the market and lessen the cost on the State by carrying out these unpaid tasks (Hirway, 2015).

Since it is socially expected of women in Indian households to care for their family, the majority of married women take on home care as a permanent, unpaid employment. Moreover, it is a patriarchal inclination for Indian households to label women housewives (Dube, 1998), which limits their options for engaging in economic activities in the labor market and hence validates unpaid domestic work as the inevitable fate (Chakravarti, 1993). Consequently, education is crucial in changing societal gendered norms that have a big influence on women's employment status (Marphatia and Moussié, 2013). Accordingly, 60.6 percent of illiterate women performed unpaid household work in 2011–12. The unfair customs, conventions, and practices of some religious groups, such as Muslims and Hindus, establish a clear division of labor between men and women and further propagate the idea that women are unpaid domestic workers. Nonetheless, it has been noted that a woman's membership in particular social groups has an impact on her capacity to engage in the workforce.

Women from marginalized communities, such as those from scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) are expected to earn less than women from other groups (Singh and Pattanaik 2020),. This has a detrimental impact on women's labor market participation when compared to other backward classes (OBC) or others. Because women perform small-scale subsistence farming and occasionally paid agricultural labor in addition to home duties, they are not subjected to discrimination in ST and SC groups based on the division of labour (Neetha, 2010). The relationships between living standards and unpaid labour

4.3. Women-Men Disparity in Labour Force Participation Rate and Worker Population Ratio in India:

Despite some respectable economic growth and increased levels of education among Indian women, the country's female labour force participation rate has unexpectedly decreased. The low percentage of women in the workforce may be caused by a number of causes, including the lack of job development in formal sectors, social norms, the gender gap in education and skills, a lack of safety, and the inability to make decisions on one's own (Verick 2014, Chapman and Mishra 2019). Alternative explanations for the increased family and child-care obligations of women have also been offered by the literature (Kapsos et al., 2014; Luis et al., 2017; Chaudhary and Verrick, 2014; Desai and Joshi, 2019). Significant disparities between men and women, as well as between rural and urban areas, are revealed by women's engagement in the workforce in India. These discrepancies still exist despite advancements in some sectors because of a number of structural, cultural, and socioeconomic variables.

Survey period	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	male	female	person	male	female	person	male	female	Person
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
2023-24	80.2	47.6	63.7	75.6	28.0	52.0	78.8	41.7	60.1
2022-23	80.2	41.5	60.8	74.5	25.4	50.4	78.5	37.0	57.9
2021-22	78.2	36.6	57.5	74.7	23.8	49.7	77.2	32.8	55.2
2020-21	78.1	36.5	57.4	74.6	23.2	49.1	77.0	32.5	54.9
2019-20	77.9	33.0	55.5	74.6	23.3	49.3	76.8	30.0	53.5
2018-19	76.4	26.4	51.5	73.7	20.4	47.5	75.5	24.5	50.2
2017-18	76.4	24.6	50.7	74.5	20.4	47.6	75.8	23.3	49.8

Note: (ps+ss) determined considering both principal activity status and subsidiary economic activity status 2023-24 refers to the period July 2023-June 2024 and likewise for 2022-23, 2021-22, 2020-21, 2019-20, 2018-19 and 2017-18

4.4. Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPR):

Women's labour force participation remains substantially lower than men's. According to recent data, women's LFPR in rural is 47.6 percent compared to 80.2 for men and women's LFPR in urban is 28 percent compared to 75.6 percent for men in 2023-24 This gap is one of the largest globally and highlights the barriers women face in entering and remaining in the workforce (table 1).

Table 2: Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in usual status (ps+ss) for persons of age 15 years and above all-India

Indicator	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	male	female	person	male	female	person	male	female	Person
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
2023-24	78.1	46.5	62.1	72.3	26.0	49.4	76.3	40.3	58.2
2022-23	78.0	40.7	59.4	71.0	23.5	47.7	76.0	35.9	56.0
2021-22	75.3	35.8	55.6	70.4	21.9	46.6	73.8	31.7	52.9
2020-21	75.1	35.8	55.5	70.0	21.2	45.8	73.5	31.4	52.6
2019-20	74.4	32.2	53.3	69.9	21.3	45.8	73.0	28.7	50.9
2018-19	72.2	25.5	48.9	68.6	18.4	43.9	71.0	23.3	47.3
2017-18	72.0	23.7	48.1	69.3	18.2	43.9	71.2	22.0	46.8

Note:(ps+ss) determined considering both principal activity status and subsidiary economic activity status
2023-24 refers to the period July 2023-June 2024 and likewise for 2022-23, 2021-22, 2020-21, 2019-20, 2018-19 and 2017-18

4.5. Worker Population Ratio in India:

Women's worker population ratio (WPR) remains substantially lower than men's. According to recent data, women's WPR in rural is 46.5 percent compared to 78.1 for men and women's WPR in urban is 26 percent compared to 72.3 percent for men in 2023-24 (table 2). This gap is one of the largest globally and highlights the barriers women face in entering and remaining in the workforce. Reduced Formal Employment but Increased Rural Participation: Due in major part to the fact that rural women frequently work in small-scale, home-based jobs, informal labor, and agriculture and related fields, their labor force participation is typically higher in rural areas than in urban areas. However, the majority of this involvement is in seasonal, lower-paying, and informal jobs that offer little or no social security benefit. Even though a variety of work options are available in urban regions, women's participation is still lower. It might be difficult to balance the increased expense of living in cities with the need for more credentials. Additionally, urban women's participation in the labor is frequently limited by the absence of reasonably priced daycare and secures transportation choices in urban areas.

4.6. Unpaid Work and Human Rights Framework:

Unpaid care giving takes up a significantly larger portion of the time spent by women and girls worldwide than by men (Debbie Budlender & Marzia Fontana, 2010). Women's increased participation in the labor market is hampered by this significant and unequal burden of unpaid care, which has an impact on economic growth, productivity, and the fight against poverty.

But more significantly, the unequal distribution, severity, and lack of recognition of unpaid care work compromises women caregivers' dignity, prevents them from enjoying a number of human rights on an equal footing with men, impedes the advancement of gender equality, and solidifies their disproportionate susceptibility to poverty throughout their lives. In human rights frameworks, women's unpaid labor is becoming more and more acknowledged, especially as it relates to social justice, economic independence, and gender equality. This topic is covered by a number of national and international human rights instruments:

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a significant international agreement aimed at eradicating discrimination against women, CEDAW was ratified by the UN General Assembly in 1979. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)-India has ratified the ICESCR, which addresses challenges brought on by gendered labor divisions and recognizes the right to work, fair remuneration, and equal pay for equal work. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)-, Policy for the Empowerment of Women explicitly acknowledges the effects of unpaid labor on women. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is in line with larger initiatives to guarantee equitable economic recognition and lessen gender disparity in unpaid labour. Labour standards, particularly International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions like Convention No. 156 on workers with family responsibilities, Convention No. 183 on maternity protection, and Convention No. 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers, further enhance the international human rights framework. In order to eradicate prejudice and gender inequality as well as to identify and redistribute unpaid care labor, compliance with all of these duties is crucial.

4.7. Impact on Women's Human Rights:

Women, especially women living in poverty, face multiple, overlapping and Variable obstacles to their enjoyment of rights due to care responsibilities they carry throughout their life cycle. Pregnant or early childcare women are more likely to experience job loss or labor insecurity; older women find themselves with lower levels of retirement savings due to caring responsibilities;

and girls may be pulled out of school or unable to reach their full potential due to care work in the home, limiting their future opportunities. Both the intergenerational transfer of poverty and the enjoyment of their rights are significantly impacted by these life-cycle risks. There is no doubt that a human right is being violated if women are not able to exercise it on an equal footing with men. The fulfillment of other human rights by caregivers, such as the freedoms of speech, association, and assembly, may be threatened by excessive demands of unpaid care work. Furthermore, women are frequently unable to enjoy their right to leisure and rest since unpaid care work is so time-consuming and difficult, particularly for those living in poverty. Structural disparities that restrict women's full involvement and freedom are reflected in the impact on their human rights in areas including economic, social, and political rights.

Economic Right Gender Wage Gap: Women frequently receive lower pay than males for equivalent labor, which hinders their capacity to achieve financial stability and independence.

Employment Restrictions: The Female Labour Force Participation Rate, i.e., the share of working women (who report either being employed or being available for work) has fallen to a historic low of 23.3% in 2017-18. There is also a fall in work participation rates among rural women by 7 percentage points from 24.8% to 17.5%. (PLFS data for 2017-18). Due to prejudice, discrimination, and restricted access to professional networks, many women encounter obstacles in their pursuit of high-paying employment and leadership roles.

Access to Financial Resources: Women in some areas face barriers to credit, loans, and property rights, which limit the capacity to own real estate, invest in companies, or better their financial situation.

Social impediments prevent women from obtaining jobs, healthcare, and education, which affects their opportunities and general well-being: India has separate legislations relating to marriage for different religions. The age of marriage for bride is 18 years and bridegroom is 21 years (The Special Marriage Act, 1954) as the condition prescribing the age of marriage has not been uniformly provided in all legislations.

Educational Inequality: Because of things like poverty, cultural norms, and familial demands, girls in many regions of the world obtain less schooling than boys. Economic independence and employment prospects may be restricted as a result as per 2020, only around 66% of women are literate in India as compared to 82% of men. Considering the grass-root realities regarding the literacy of women, especially adult women, legislatures, need to be more sensitive in imposing disqualifying criteria on women in public life for lack of educational qualification till particular level of literacy of women is achieved.

Healthcare Access: Maternal health, reproductive rights, and overall healthcare quality are all impacted by the gender-based discrimination that women frequently experience in the healthcare system. It is a prevalent practice in private sector organisations to terminate pregnant women to avoid giving maternity benefits to them. The Maternity Benefits Act should be uniformly and effectively implemented in both public and private sectors.

Employment Opportunity Disparity: Social norms and stereotypes often limit women to lower-paying professions, which makes it more difficult for them to succeed in their careers and achieve financial independence.

Political Rights: Women are less able to influence laws and policies that directly affect them because they are underrepresented in governance and decision making processes; Given the socio-cultural realities of India, only a few women get a chance to represent India at international levels or to work for international organisations. The number of women representing the State at international level, including in delegations, postings, assignments, committees, commissions, multilateral agencies is also very low.

4.8. Intersectional in the Indian Context: In India, women's experiences with unpaid labor, economic prospects, and human rights are significantly impacted by intersectional variables such as caste, class, and regional inequities. Each element influences women's socioeconomic standing and quality of life by influencing the nature, worth, and recognition of their labor. Unpaid labor and caste In India, caste-based disparities are still pervasive and affect women's unpaid and underappreciated work in a variety of communities.

Dalit and Adivasi Women: Dalit women's struggle for equality and basic human rights will continue to remain flawed (Rao, 2010; Kumar, 2020). Discriminated against and exploited, women from underprivileged castes, particularly Dalits and Adivasis, frequently carry out the most taxing and underappreciated types of unpaid labor, including caregiving, household duties, and agricultural work. **Occupational Segregation:** Women's employment opportunities are often restricted by caste-based constraints. Dalit women, for example, are frequently forced into low-paying and exploitative professions, which prevent them from achieving economic independence and higher-paying positions.

Invisibility of Labour: Because caste shapes how society views labour, women from lower castes who perform unpaid labor are not recognized or compensated because they are perceived as playing traditional roles in their communities. In India, class relations have an impact on women's economic prospects and human rights, with lower-income women frequently taking the weight of unpaid labour and restricted mobility: **Economic Pressures on Low-Income Women:** With few or no support networks, women in lower-income households may be burdened with both paid work (often in low-wage industries) and unpaid domestic labor **Limited Access to Resources:** Women from lower socioeconomic classes are frequently confined to low-wage occupations with few rights or protections or unpaid domestic labor due to limited access to healthcare, education, and social mobility.

Gender Economic Expectations: Regardless of status, women are frequently expected to put domestic duties ahead of their own personal or professional development, which restricts their financial independence and strengthens their reliance on others. **Regional Disparities and Women's Rights-Regional differences** in infrastructure, social norms, and development also significantly influence women's rights and labour.

Rural-Urban Divide: Compared to their urban counterparts, women in rural areas typically face more obstacles to healthcare and education as well as less economic prospects. Additionally, they are more prone to engage in hard, unpaid agricultural labor, frequently without financial or ownership control.

Differences in Legal Protections: Due to variations in social attitudes, local governance, and resource allocation, women's rights protections vary between states and regions. These variations impact women's access to support services, employment opportunities, and healthcare.

Access to Government Schemes: Women's access to government programs that promote employment, health, and education is impacted by regional differences. Women may not receive benefits or encounter difficulties navigating bureaucratic procedures in underdeveloped areas.

4.9. The Care Economy in India:

Unpaid Care Work: This category covers domestic duties, child care, elder care, and other types of unpaid labor that are primarily carried out by women in households. This labor is frequently overlooked, underappreciated, and left out of official economic metrics like GDP. This ruling brings into focus the often overlooked issue of unpaid care work performed disproportionately by women. In India, women shoulder a staggering 84% of the total time devoted to unpaid care work. This colossal burden of invisible, uncompensated, undervalued and unrecognised labour is the backbone of the nation's care economy. The Female Labour Force Participation Rate in India was 37% in 2023, according to PLFS 2022-23. Despite this improvement, it remains below the desired level. Many women are forced to prioritize care giving over paid employment, leading to a lower representation of women in formal sectors and decision-making roles. Presently, India's public spending on the care economy is less than 1% of GDP, relatively low in comparison with other nations. For India, direct public investment equivalent to 2% of GDP can potentially generate 11 million jobs, nearly 70% of which will go to women. India can also learn from Japan's 'womenomics' reforms.

Technology and Innovation: Making use of technology to develop online materials and support services for caregivers. These websites could provide details on training courses, senior care facilities, or childcare possibilities

Public-Private Partnerships: Encouraging partnerships between the government, private sector, and NGOs to develop innovative solutions for affordable and accessible care services.

This could involve tax breaks for companies that offer childcare facilities for employees or support for social enterprises working in the care sector. Promote corporate social responsibility initiatives that support the care economy. This could involve companies sponsoring childcare centers in low-income communities or offering flexible work arrangements for employees with caregiving responsibilities.

4.10. Policy Responses and Recognition: Policy changes that address gender inequality and support caregivers are necessary to value unpaid labour. Cultural norms and institutional biases undervalue unpaid labor globally, especially in India, where it mostly consists of caring and household duties. Since women perform the majority of this labour, policies that grant social security benefits or workplace flexibility could give them financial stability and support. The obscurity of unpaid labor is maintained by societal perceptions of caregiving as "non-productive" and women's "natural" obligation, which lowers its perceived value and excludes it from economic measures like GDP. Progress is further hampered by institutional impediments, such as the absence of social benefits and legal protections for caretakers, as well as opposition to change brought on by cultural norms and financial anxieties. Changes to established gender roles, public awareness campaigns, and legislation reforms will all be necessary to address these issues.

4.11. Challenges in Recognizing Unpaid Work: Due to institutional prejudices and traditional gender roles, unpaid labor—mainly in caregiving, household chores, and community services—is essential to society and the economy but is seldom acknowledged in India. The majority of this job is done by women, and because it is not visible in economic metrics like GDP, its perceived value is reduced and it is not taken into account when formulating policy. Caregiving is positioned as women's "natural" function by cultural standards, which also make it "non-productive" and impose expectations of self-sacrifice. Gender inequality is maintained and women's economic empowerment is restricted by society's undervaluation of these jobs. A number of obstacles stand in the way of efforts to change these attitudes, including misunderstandings about the financial implications of acknowledging unpaid labor, societal preconceptions such as the "male breadwinner" ideal, and a lack of legislative backing.

The undervaluation of unpaid labor is further exacerbated by institutional barriers, such as legal loopholes and a lack of social benefits, which further reinforces financial dependence and psychological stress for many women. Public awareness campaigns, economic indicators that take into account unpaid labor, and legislative changes that support caregivers and acknowledge the importance of unpaid labor to society are all necessary to address these issues.

4.12. Recommendation for Policy and Advocacy: Advocacy and targeted policy changes are crucial to acknowledging and promoting unpaid labor in India, especially that performed by women. The economic value of unpaid labor, providing caregivers with legal rights and social benefits, investing in care infrastructure, workplace reforms, and encouraging gender equality in caregiving roles are some of the policy ideas. Public awareness-building, research, coalition building, lobbying legislators, and promoting legislative changes are all components of advocacy tactics. NGOs are essential because they raise public awareness, push for legislative changes, carry out research, assist caregivers, and form partnerships with other organizations. Through these initiatives, NGOs can support gender equality, empower caregivers, and advance structural change that acknowledges unpaid labor as an essential component of India's social and economic structure

5. Conclusion

Women endure the majority of the burden of unpaid labor, which is mostly domestic and caregiving work and is still a significant but generally unacknowledged aspect of India's economy. Particularly in low-income, rural, and marginalized groups, this exacerbates economic uncertainty, social marginalization, and women's lack of political representation. Key findings show that unpaid labor fosters gender inequality, prevents access to education and work, and prolongs financial dependency; Obstacles include ingrained cultural beliefs, institutional impediments, and opposition to legislative changes that value unpaid labor. Caste, class, and geography are examples of intersectional variables that exacerbate the pressures on marginalized women, who frequently endure more discrimination and perform more unpaid labour than others. The focus of the recommendations is on advocacy and policy reform.

Legislators ought to increase legal protections, offer social security benefits, and incorporate unpaid labor into economic measures. NGOs are essential because they challenge gender conventions, support caregivers, advocate for legislative reforms, and raise awareness. In order to promote shared caregiving obligations, community involvement is crucial, and by analyzing the intersectional effects of unpaid labor, academic research may bolster evidence-based policy recommendations. Collectively, these initiatives seek to elevate and acknowledge unpaid labor as a vital component of India's social and economic structure.

One of the main problems affecting women's human rights, maintaining gender inequality, and impeding social and economic advancement in India is the invisible nature of unpaid labor. Women are left economically insecure, socially marginalized, and politically disempowered when unpaid labor is not acknowledged and compensated. A comprehensive strategy is needed to address these inequities, one that includes educating the public, carrying out in-depth research, promoting legislative changes, and encouraging institutional and societal shifts that respect unpaid labor. Caregiving and unpaid labor will be respected, acknowledged, and compensated in a more equal society thanks to the work of NGOs, women's organizations, legislators, and grassroots movements. India may make significant progress toward economic justice, gender equality, and the full realization of women's human rights by bringing attention to invisible labor

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