

Feminist Economics and Policy: A Post-COVID Perspective

September 2020

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Introduction

Feminist economics pushes for an alternate economic framework centred on the concept of care. It focuses on equity and social justice as opposed to the neo-classical, free-market principles that form the basis of the current economy. The modelling of the theory on these lines finds motive in the fact that women are consistently pushed to the bottom rungs in the current economic set-up. This happens because;

Firstly, the economy, interlinked with societal structures, assigns gender roles to different fields of occupation. Women, in this case, are generally assigned the jobs of 'care-givers', secondary players in the economy while the men are 'providers', the primary players, model the 'Homo Oeconomicus', on whom basic economic theoretical concepts such as rational choice, resource allocation and efficiency are built. This model seldom accommodates women's roles in the economy and so;

The economy rewards tangible productivity, linking labour with output. Therefore, supporters of the capitalist economy such as healthcare, education and unpaid are generally underpaid and undervalued. Women engaged in these fields are neither financially re-imbursed for their roles in the economy and nor are adequate policy measures being taken to induce them into the formal job market.

While feminist economics is not a comprehensive field of study as much as it is an integration of different perspectives, their guiding principles reflect a need for gender-equality in economics. This principle, its manifestations in several different economic theories and its implications and needs in the Indian economy post-COVID in particular, will be scaled through the length of this paper.

This paper aims to establish the theories and rationale of feminist economic models in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the deepening of existing inequalities that ensued as a result of it. By way of examining the (albeit unconventional and broadly defined) feminist school of economic thought, the paper draws parallels with the background of traditional schools of economic thought, and critiques them. It aspires to identify the contribution and potential of a gender lens towards analysing responses to the pandemic, and further corroborates the need for gender sensitive economic, development, and public policy in order to emerge from the pandemic, to a better aligned socio-economic social structure. Lastly, the paper sets out to illuminate the potential of feminist economic thought for the re-development and fundamental revisiting of the concept and connotation of "the economy" and further de-patriarchalizing economic activities, growth, and decisions.

The findings of this paper are based on secondary data analysis and are a result of a blended approach of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The methods undertaken involve an exploratory, evidence-based literature review, examination of current trends, and inference from data-based observations. This in-depth study employs a contextual theoretical approach grounded by deconstruction of models, in order to identify and respond to the intersections of gender and other micro, meso, and macro-level economic issues with special emphasis to the COVID-19 pandemic.

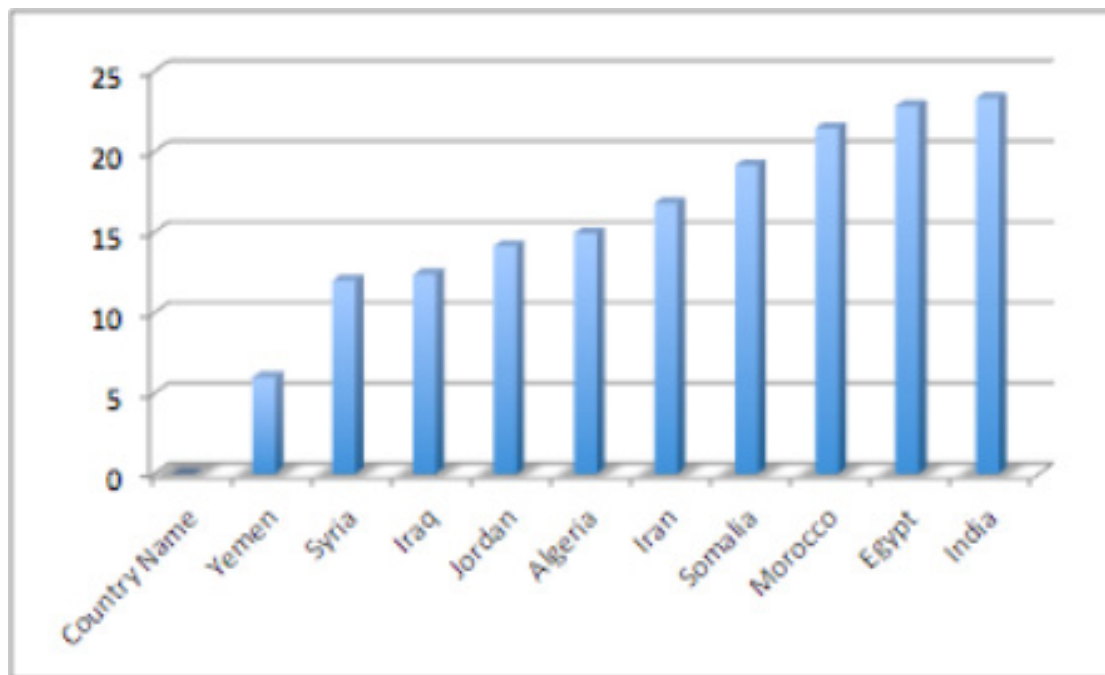
Our paper offers a critical review of the theoretical literature on the relationship between the production of scientific knowledge and its use in policy formulation and implementation -- extensive academic output, using a diversity of approaches and analytical frameworks. The purpose of this article is to offer a literature review on the subject of feminist economic and policy, based on selected authors, and to discuss their arguments and some of the main theoretical approaches to explain or back the relationship between the production of scientific knowledge and its use in policy formulation and implementation -- with the specific backdrop of the needs of a post-pandemic world in mind.

On the one hand, economic development alone is insufficient to ensure significant progress in important dimensions of women's empowerment, in particular, significant progress in decision-making ability in the face of pervasive stereotypes against women's ability. On the other hand, women's empowerment leads to improvement in some aspects of children's welfare (health and nutrition, in particular), but at the expense of some others (education). This suggests that neither economic development nor women's empowerment is the magic bullet it is sometimes made out to be. In order to bring about equality between men and women, in the view asserted by our conclusions, a very desirable goal in and of itself, it will be necessary to continue to take policy actions that favor women at the expense of men, and it may be necessary to continue doing so for a very long time. And especially in the context of the pandemic, the paper does not limit itself to calling for gender sensitive policies and initiatives, but also provides for a checklist for such policy-formation in terms of the main pillars backing the philosophy and rationale behind policy-making, going forward.

Background and Motivation

That the participation of women in the labour force is much less than that of men, is no unknown fact. Labour force participation (LFP rate) data released by the National Sample Survey Organisation of India (NSSO) shows that the rate has been in fact on a downward trend from 30.28% in 1990 to 20.53% in 2019, with the exception of the few years around 2005 when the rate hovered around 31%, as a result of which only nine countries of the world, including Syria and Iraq, currently have a lower proportion of working women than India. In India, among urban women who do work, domestic cleaning work is the second most common profession after textile-related jobs, the periodic labour force survey (PLFS) data published by

the NSSO shows. While some of the fall in women's workforce participation is explained by higher rates of higher education enrollment of women – as more than 50% representation was of women in Undergrad, M.Phil and Ph.D degrees in 2018-19, indicating that more young women are in higher education rather than working or looking for jobs, the data also points to a fall in working rates for older women. Among women in the prime working ages of 30-50, more than two in three women are not in the workforce, with the majority of them reporting that they are “attending to domestic duties only”.



Country wise data of Labour Force Participation Rate (in %) as of 2019
Source: World Bank Development Indicators

The final facet to the current problem has been posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic toll on women. As UN Women (2020)²² puts it, “For countless women in economies of every size, along with losing income, unpaid care and domestic work burden has exploded.” Globally, 70% of the frontline workers and healthcare workers, who are battling it out in the face of the pandemic, are women. And yet, they are nowhere close to being at par with their male counterparts. This calls for an immediate, urgent, targeted response to the socio-economic crisis in the wake of the pandemic, that is rooted in the principles of gender budgeting, female workforce participation, and feminist economic approaches to policy-making and implementation.



Men and Women Living in Poverty in 2020
Source: UN Women

This paper stems from an observation about the skewed narrative of relatively 'mainstream' discourse in the domain of Economics -- one that does not take into account the gendered aspect of theory and schools of thought. As aptly summarised by Dandekar (1982)³³, "Economic development is generally conceived and defined to mean growth in per capita Gross Domestic Product. It follows that, to contribute to economic development, women must engage themselves in what is called 'economic' or 'gainful' activity as distinct from 'household' or 'non-market' activity. In other words, for a full integration of women in economic development, women must enter the 'labour force' on an equal footing with men." Hence, deriving from all of the above motivations and observations, the objectives of this study are manifold:

- Providing some broad parameters to identify the status of women in the Indian economy, - Analysing the female labour force participation in India, and juxtaposing it with the gender-budgeting initiatives in order to evaluate the performance of the same, - Relooking at the parameters delineating the status of women in the Indian economy, by taking into account the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic,
- Establishing the theories and rationale of feminist economic models in light of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide for a checklist for such policy-formation in terms of the main pillars backing the philosophy and rationale behind policy-making, going forward.

Dimensions of the Issue

This study aims to establish a relationship between the theories and rationale of feminist economics models in the light of the pandemic, COVID -19 and the critical analysis of the existing inequalities that it has created. We understand how the pandemic is based on the deterioration of gender gap rates and worsen the parallels amongst the traditional school of thoughts.

To get into the thorough scrutiny of our model, we have emphasized our study on the threefold levels, considering the paradigm shifts in the economy.

1. Household level

This level of analysis deeply encourages the study of gender budgeting and its impact at the household level. It focuses on the microeconomic analyses at the grassroot level by defining the problems and the factors involved in the exploitation of women, in particular. The study aims to be covering societal issues – from caste or gender-based discrimination to negligence of the women participation in the workforce.

1. State level

Under this understanding, a scrutiny of the austerity politics of the nation, proposed public policy frameworks, and the performance of the gender-driven policies is undertaken in order to delineate the status of decision making that can positively impact women. Further, a scope and extent of intervention in light of the COVID-19 crisis is explored.

1. Macroeconomic level

This level analyses gender disparities and biases in workplaces, industries and other socio-macroeconomic dimensions. Here, factors such as a collective gender wage-gaps, occupational segregation and the shadowed care economy are discussed.

Methodology

The explorations of this paper depend on secondary data analysis and are a consequence of a mixed methodology of both subjective and quantitative examination strategies – by means of a descriptive framework. The strategies embraced include an exploratory assessment of current economic indicators, and derivation from contemporary policy decisions. This in-depth study employs a contextual theoretical approach grounded in the deconstruction of models, to recognize and react to the convergence of gender and development issues, and finally contextualise an ideal approach for India to address the same. The data analysed has been sourced from multiple United Nations entities, the World Bank Development Indicators and that released by the Ministries of Women and Child Development, and Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

Literature Review and Analysis

1. Household level

Women in India represent 29 percent of the labour force, down from 35 percent in 2004. More than half of the work done by women in India is unpaid, and almost all of it is informal and unprotected. Women are not well represented in most sectors, including business leaders. Though they comprise almost 40 percent of agricultural labour, they control only 9 percent of land in India. Women are also shut out of the formal financial system. Nearly half of India's women do not have a bank or savings accounts for their own use, and 60 percent of women have no valuable assets to their names.

Women participation in the labour force has always been underestimated. Due to the indicators that affect Feminist economics are immeasurable, it becomes really difficult for the economists to understand and analyse the criticalities of the same.

The disparities at the macroeconomic level have only grown. The economic opportunity gap has worsened, widening to 257 years, compared to 202 years last year. The greatest challenges to closing this gap is women's under-representation in emerging roles, such as cloud computing, engineering and data and Artificial Intelligence.

"Violence, forced marriage and discrimination in access to health remain pervasive. The situation and the trend are more positive in terms of gender gaps in education... But a large difference persists for literacy rate; only two-thirds of women are literate compared with 82 percent of men," the WEF has said. India ranks high on the political empowerment sub-index, largely because the country was headed by a

woman for 20 of the past 50 years. But, female political representation today is low as women make up only 14.4 per cent of Parliament (122nd rank globally) and 23 percent of the cabinet (69th), the report said. The factors that have led to the deterioration of the women participation in the labour force is ranging from domestic violence, social exclusion and other economic indicators which are immeasurable.

Despite the progress, women and girls continue to face multiple barriers based on gender and its intersections with other factors, such as age, ethnicity, poverty, and disability, in the equal enjoyment of the right to quality education. This includes barriers, at all levels, to access quality education and within education systems, institutions, and classrooms.

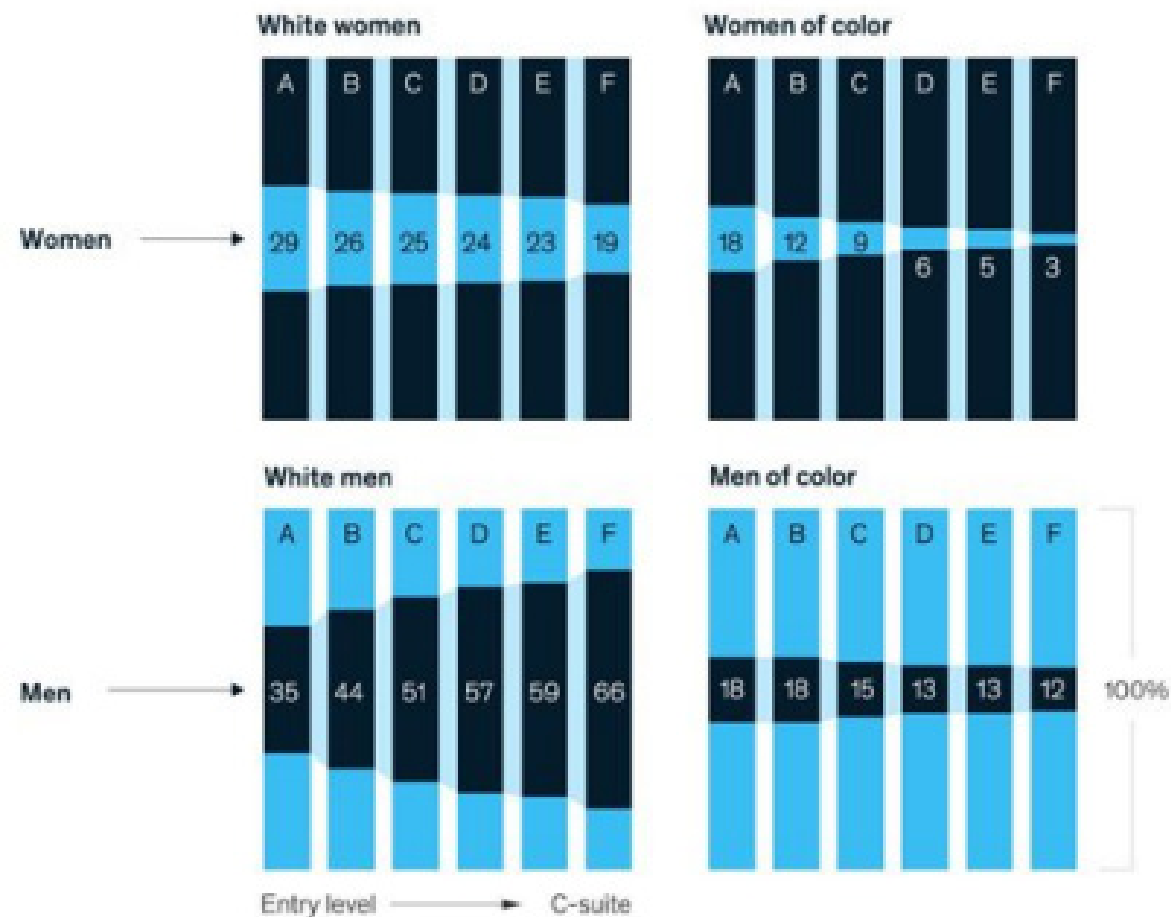
The other factors that decentralizes the gender inequality in the availability of resources and education include:

1. Harmful gender stereotypes and wrongful gender stereotyping
2. Child marriage and early and unintended pregnancy
3. Gender-based violence against women and girls
4. Lack of inclusive and quality learning environments and inadequate and unsafe education infrastructure, including sanitation
5. Poverty

For the sixth year in a row, the underrepresentation of women and women of color in senior management cannot be explained by attrition alone.

Representation by corporate role, by gender and race in 2020, % of employees

A = entry level B = manager C = senior manager/director D = vice president E = senior vice president F = C-suite



Source: Women in the Workplace 2020, LeanIn.Org and McKinsey, 2020

**McKinsey
& Company**

The above figure shows that at the beginning of 2020, the representation of women in the corporate world was trending in the right direction. This was most pronounced in senior management: between January 2015 and January 2020, representation of women in senior-vice-president positions grew from 23 to 28 percent, and representation in the C-suite grew from 17 to 21 percent. This highlights the fact that the progress towards gender parity still remains slow.

Furthermore, especially in the context of India, the COVID-19 pandemic has further augmented the issues faced by women in households. Another recent analysis by McKinsey Global Institute noted that women are more vulnerable to COVID-19-related economic effects because of the already existing gender inequalities -- it estimates that female job loss rates owing to COVID-19 are about 1.8 times higher than the male job loss rates globally, at 5.7% versus 3.1%, respectively. Earlier this year as well, UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted that "COVID-19 could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights". According to UN Women⁴⁴, an estimated 740 million women are employed in the informal economy. In developing nations, such work constitutes more than two-thirds of female employment – such as in India.

1. Macroeconomic level

It will be prudent to analyse gender biases in the workplace as a mirror and consequence of the hegemonic patriarchal narrative that Indian society largely supports. While progress in the development of the status of women has been exponential, especially in terms of higher education (ERIC, 2016) unacceptable gender disparities and stereotypes continue to largely prevail in India. The most obvious of this is the labour-force participation of women in India, which dropped to 21.36% in 2016 from an already low 25.68% in 2010 (World Bank data).

Resulting in significant wage gaps, a lack of promotions and high-level jobs for women, many sources identify gender bias in the workplace as spills from structural gender roles. For example, in leadership roles in the workplace, suitable characteristics are often assumed to be aggressiveness, confidence and decisiveness, or characteristics people associate with 'masculinity'. Women, in contrast, are assumed to be too emotional and weak to assume leadership responsibilities. Women are also expected to primarily devote their talents to 'care-giving' duties in the household. The findings of a research conducted amongst construction workers in Tamil Nadu (Barnabas, Anbarasu D, Pauls S, 2009) finds that men earn within the range of Rs. 71 to 250 while women earn in the range of Rs. 51 to 160 per day. Amongst the workers it was found that both men and women subscribed to seemingly untrue and baseless stereotypes about women being 'afraid of heights' and physically incapable of handling construction work.

Another aspect to gender bias in the economy is occupational segregation. This refers to an inherent differentiation between the occupations of men and women in the economy, leading to a differentiation in opportunities and rewards available to them (Prasad, Pratap, 2017). This occurs as horizontal and vertical occupational segregation (World Bank), where horizontal refers to a differentiation of sectors of occupation between the two sexes in the economy and vertical refers to the differentiation in positions held by men and women in the same sector. The ORF summarises reasons for the 'skills gap', which ultimately leads to a disparate occupational segregation.

1. Sociocultural – Factors that shape aspirations and ambitions based off of biased expectations and stereotyping of a woman’s ability and responsibility.

2. Informational – There is a considerable gap in the accessibility of information and opportunities provided to men and women in education and jobs. For example, there is evidence of a systematic lack of investment in the education and skill développement of female children in India (Barcellos, Leandro S. Carvalho, Lleras-Muney, 2014).

3. Institutional – Institutional factors such as the safety, mobility and time restraints on women hamper their abilities to perform at par with men based on the market scale of efficiency.

There is also evidence that points to negotiation failures and a lack of bargaining power as a prevailing reason for a significant wage gap between men and women. Menzel and Woodruff (2019) allude to the ‘monopsony power’ of employers in the labour markets in Bangladesh’s garment sector. Hirsch provides an overview of this argument, explaining that a lack of women’s mobility and a general limitation in geographical job searches give women a significant disadvantage in bargaining, making female labour supply ‘less elastic’ to wage cuts. This lack of mobility pertains to women’s domestic responsibilities towards the dependant members of the households such as children and the elderly. On the other hand, in ‘Women Don’t Ask’, Linda Babcock draws attention to the internalization of socio-cultural oppression among women that prevent women from attaining top spots in the formal workspace.

Many experts claim that the selective traits required to advance in the corporate set-up of the economy have been designed to reward the dominant of the two sexes, as the primary ‘resource holder’ (B. Coric, 2018) (Cabeza, Johnson and Tyner). The Global Human Capital Gender Advisory Council report (2008) refers to this as a ‘mini-me’ syndrome amongst the men who occupy high-level positions in the economy creating structural segregation through succession planning. For example, according to Manning, there is a bias in the workplace against women as they often remove themselves from the workforce at the peak of their careers to provide for their families. Moreover, a majority of these women later have difficulties getting inducted back into the workplace (ILO,2018). “Our labour market severely punishes those who at any point in their lives sacrifice career for family”, Manning adds. The economy, chained to modern society continues to be, as Coric puts it, designed ‘for men by men’, skewed in performance appraisal and expectations.

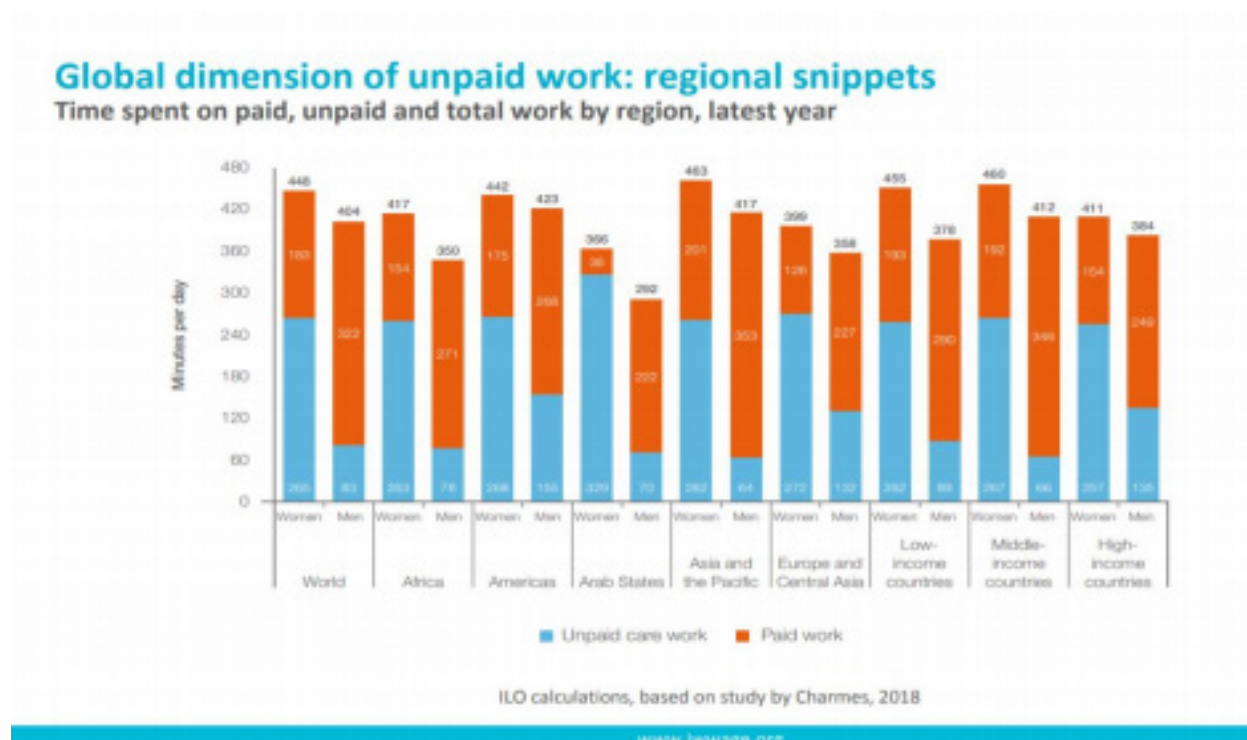
The Care Economy

A common thread that runs through the analysis of gender inequality in the formal economy is a systemic lack of representation of women in these sectors. Whilst analysing widespread issues such as occupational segregation and 'the pipeline problem', labour markets were found to be un-accommodative towards women, mainly owing to implicit insuperabilities from unpaid housework, care work and reproductive responsibilities, leading to a lack of mobility, societal resistance and occupational segregation.

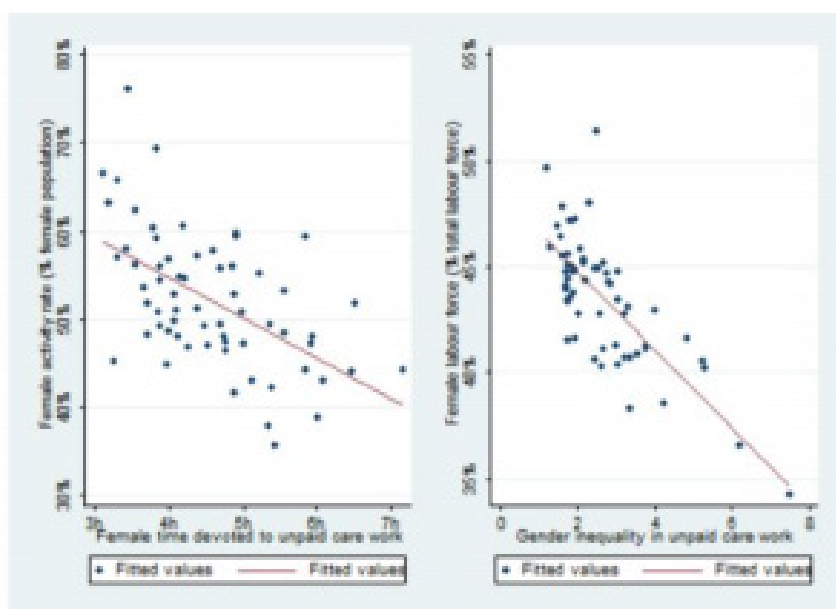
A separate lens, however, must compel us to argue against the consistent overlooking of female centred economic sectors instead of pushing for female representation in male designed and dominated areas. Here, paid and unpaid care work emerges as a major point of contention.

Folbre (2011) defines Care work by its functionality: activities that are personal or activities that benefit those "lacking political voice" such as children, the elderly and the disabled. Care work thus encompasses activities that are domestic and unpaid as well as those that are underpaid extensions of the formal economy.

In 2018, 8.9 billion hours were spent by individuals in unpaid care work (ILO, 2018) in Asia and the Pacific. About 80% of this unpaid care work is done by women. Reports by ILO (2018) show that women in India, specifically spend 297 minutes per day engaged in care work, as opposed to the 31 minutes spent on such activities by men. The same report shows that the nature of the care work that engages women is more time consuming and physically strenuous as compared to those performed by men.



The statistics on unpaid care work explain some of the extensive gender-based disparities in the Indian economy. For example, there is a negative causal relationship between the amount of unpaid care work performed by the female population of a region and the female labour participation rates there.



Note: The left graph presents the predicted value of female activity rates as a percentage of total women in the working-age population by time devoted to unpaid care work by women, controlling for GDP per capita, fertility rate, female unemployment rate, female years of schooling, urbanisation rate, maternity leave and regional dummies. The right-hand graph presents the estimated female share of the labour force by the female-to-male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care activities, controlling for GDP per capita, fertility rate, urbanisation rate, maternity leave and gender inequality in unemployment and education.

Source: World Bank (2014), *World Development Indicators* and OECD (2014), *Gender, Institutions and Development Database*.

This explains several of the most severe problems with women in the economy in India. The expectation for women to take up care work and domestic work hampers their ability to participate in the labor force because of the 'double burden', in which they must engage in domestic work as well as participate in the market. This takes a toll on the women's mental and physical health and well-being (Sengupta and Sachdeva, 2017). Moreover, this limits women to engage in primarily vulnerable and unstable jobs that are usually undervalued and under-paid.

This section of women include daily wage workers, rural agricultural laborers and urban domestic workers. Domestic workers in India may be a prime example of lack of safety mechanisms available to women in an 'unskilled' occupation (Chandramouli, Kodandarama). Domestic workers, who are predominantly women, are usually uneducated and migrants from rural agricultural sectors relocated to urban labor markets.

These women are often uneducated and poor. These women do not have access to formal mechanisms such as labor unions and legislations or complete market information, as a result, they are generally underpaid, denied safe work spaces and made to work long hours. Domestic workers also often face violence, harassment and sexual abuse (WEIGO).

Owing to occupational segregation and over-arching patriarchal conditioning, paid care work is also predominantly constituted by women. Paid care work consists of paid services such as teaching and healthcare services. Even though, with India's fast predicted aging population, care work is essential, it is poorly remunerated and formalised in the economy. India care workers grapple with poor infrastructure, pay and regulation in their jobs.

Feminist economists push for more recognition of the shadowed care economy. They believe care work produces one of the most essential resource bases of the formal capitalist economy: social reproduction. Social reproduction refers to the act of caring for oneself and for others. It refers to the activities that enable persons to contribute to the workplace such as education, nursing, emotional support and nutrition. However, current economic hierarchies push care work and social reproduction to the bottom rungs, rewarding these activities the least. In India, owing to strong patriarchal traditions, care work is almost fully unpaid and unrecognised. This is a primary reason for inequality in the economy, with special reference to gender inequality. In India, however, this may prove to be more of a challenge than with other nations of similar demographics. Patriarchal norms in India continue to be strongly held by households and society, showing minimal demand for care work to be given monetary acknowledgement. (Choudhary, Tripathy and George, ESAF, 2009)

However, it must be noted that care work and social reproduction is intrinsically linked to the formal economy. For example, 'The crisis of social reproduction', essentially the lack of proper remuneration and infrastructure in care sectors, shows direct links to the 'crisis of work' and the rise of automotive industries that may extensively cut back employment. India is a preeminent target of the work crisis (Hester, 2018). With automotive industries pushing people out of employment, care work is one of the largest employing sectors in India (ORF, 2020). To raise standards of living of the people within the country, it may be essential to re-centre economic structures around the care economy. According to estimates, the amount of unpaid care work undertaken by women in India could measure up to the creation of 11 million potential jobs. This could be leveraged by policy makers to make more care-centred transitions in the Indian economy (ORF, 2020).

3. Statelevel

Gender equality is a basic, albeit imperative sociological indicator for any society. Its standard is additionally found in the SDG 2030 Agenda where the signatories, including India, reaffirmed their responsibility to mainstreaming gender improvement and guaranteeing equivalent portrayal of women in political and economic dynamics. Strengthening, expanding and encouraging the gender budgeting standards for asset distributions as a basic essential for India to accomplish progress towards the SDG-5 on gender equality. In view of a survey of the principles of financial devolution and central government budget reports, it is obvious that gender-sensitive concerns remain a dismissed part of India's financial strategy. Gender planning ought to get sufficient concentration and be concurred high need by the fifteenth Finance Commission of India, in order for better indicators and results to be realised in the grassroots level.

According to Rudra (2018)⁵⁵, "gender budgeting has both intrinsic and instrumental relevance. GRB is critical for eliminating gender inequalities with significant improvements in social, educational, health and economic indicators of a country." Furthermore, it translates into a "systematic gender-differentiated impact of fiscal provisions, programmes and policies". However, the implementation of gender budgeting is yet to be made 'mainstream' in the context of India - no more than seventeen Indian states have gender budgets, the horizontal and vertical devolution of the states' share of fiscal transfers (by the Centre, as mandated by the Finance Commission) has no mention or factoring in of the gender lens, as well as, gender inequalities are yet to be tackled by the intergovernmental fiscal mechanisms. These issues have been highlighted in the recent past by researchers such as Lahiri (2019)⁶⁶ and Rudra (2018).

SEQUENTIAL PHASES OF GENDER BUDGETING

GENDER BUDGETING HANDBOOK, MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND
CHILD DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, 2015



It is not unknown that Indian society has been grappling with magnitudinal disadvantages to women in all walks of life for many years now. With more than 60 percent of women getting married before 25 years of age in India, the UNDP Gender Development Index ranks India among the lowest. In the Gender Inequality Index, meanwhile, India is ranked at a dismal 125th place out of 159 countries in 2018-19.

Indicator	Rural India		Urban India		All India	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Labour force participation rate, 2015-16	77.3%	26.7%	69.1%	16.2%	75.0%	23.7%
Life expectancy at birth, 2009-13	64.6 years	68.1 years	69.6 years	73.0 years	65.8 years	69.3 years
Infant Mortality Rate, 2016	37	40	22	25	33	36
Maternal Mortality Rate, 2017				174 per 100,000 live births		
Illiteracy	22.9%	42.1%	11.2%	20.9%	19.1%	35.4%
Literacy	77.1%	57.9%	88.8%	79.1%	80.9%	64.6%
Matriculate	13.5%	8.2%	17.7%	14.5%	14.9%	10.3%

Gender Differentials in India's Key Development Indicators

Source: Rudra (2018)

The GII is an inequality index released by UNDP that measures gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development:

1. Reproductive Health, measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates;
2. Empowerment, measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; and
3. Economic status, expressed as labour market participation and measured by labour force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15 years and older.

In the Gender Inequality Index (GII), India is at 122 out of 162 countries. The report of 2019 forecasts that it may take 202 years to close the gender gap in economic opportunity. These observations highlight not

only the dire issues related with state level policies in addressal of gender issues through the lenses of development and economic policy, but also the exclusionary nature of the measurement of our 'welfare' indicators – the most prominent example being that of GDP. According to the World Economic Forum (2016)⁷⁷, "Women do a majority of this unpaid work (on average in the OECD countries women do about twice as much, 150 minutes a day more, as men in the home). Because it is not measured, it is generally overlooked by economic policy. The omission of housework and caring (part of "home production" in the technical language) is so familiar now that few people realise there was a vigorous debate about whether or not to include it in GDP when the modern system of national income accounts was created in the 1940s." In a 2011 study⁸⁸, the OECD concluded that the inclusion of women's contribution in terms of "home production would add between 20% and 50% to the GDP of its member countries."

At the state level, it is also essential to bear in mind workplace policies, especially at a time marked by crisis and uncertainty, the choices companies and institutions make today in terms of their policies, will have consequences on gender equality for decades to come. According to McKinsey's Women in Workplace report of 2020, "if companies make significant investments in building a more flexible and empathetic workplace—and there are signs that this is starting to happen—they can retain the employees most affected by today's crises and nurture a culture in which women have equal opportunity to achieve their potential over the long term." However, due to the challenges created by the COVID-19 crisis, as many as two million women are considering leaving the workforce, only in the United States. This response is expected to be further augmented in informal and unregulated workplaces, especially in the Indian context where women's participation is determined by societal and familial constructs. In order to create better and more inclusive workplaces, both men and women should be offered flexi-time, job-sharing opportunities, and work-from-home options as much as possible, in order to be able to take on the 'new normal' better and share workloads in homes and communities as well as workspaces. Organizations should additionally try to incorporate onsite childcare facilities wherever possible. Lastly and most importantly, organizations need to deploy systems and policies to facilitate women's navigation through a system designed for men by encouraging the need to raise concerns and ensure they are being addressed throughout organisational frameworks and networks. Maternity leaves and other government workplace policies have done little to correct these biases and hence, have been unable to successfully raise the FLP (Pande, 2017). Moreover, rather than empowering women, many gender sensitive workplace policies firmly place the exclusive responsibility of shouldering the 'double burden' onto women.

According to research by Pande (2017), policymaking has not been successful in bringing about the improvement in gender indicators as expected, especially in public institutions. Most of all, policy changes despite decades of interventions and policy catalysis have been unable to bring about changes in the deep-rooted regressive behavioural and social norms. Hence, for the effective implementation of a robust

gender budgeting or gender lens expenditure ideal, India needs broader support along the constitutional principles and institutional mechanisms to steer policymaking and coordination at all levels of federal governance.

Lastly, a paper by Griffin (2015)⁹⁹, “ -- adopting a discursive approach to gender and governance that situates gender centrally in understanding governance discourses and their reproduction of common sense (about what people do, how they labour, where they invest and so on), -- argues that the governance of crisis in the contemporary era, in particular the various actors, institutions, policies and ideas that have sought to describe and ‘contain’ the global financial crisis, are gendered,” further reinforcing the rationale for looking at crises and austerity through a gendered lens.

Interlude

A COVID-19 Perspective

Emphasizing the issues ranging from healthcare, domestic violence to female education, we can draw conclusions how the pandemic has affected the female population within these domains.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put some health systems under immense pressure and stretched others beyond their capacity. As such, responding to this public health emergency and successfully minimizing its impact requires every health resource to be leveraged. Failure to protect health care in this rapidly changing context exposes health systems to critical gaps in services when they are most needed, and can have a long-lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of populations. Care sectors such as nursing, healthcare and old age care need greater investment now that the magnitude of epidemic and disease spread is projected to rise.

There is a need for extra efforts to strengthen the public health system and increase health budgets to optimise service delivery and health facilities ensuring women safety and security.

According to the FICCI-EY study on the economic impact of the pandemic on the healthcare sector, virus outbreak had resulted in a 70-80 per cent drop in footfall, test volumes, and a 50-70 per cent drop in revenues at the end of March. The study also revealed that the sector is expected to witness short-term operating losses. The maximum impact of the pandemic has been felt by the women. Therefore, it is said that we still have a long way to go.

There are clear links between COVID-19 and domestic violence, which also impact on the economic and social crisis. Multiple reports, however, suggest that such measures are increasing the incidence

of domestic violence and not only in number but also in severity. We find that layoffs, loss of income, extended domestic stays, and exposure to habits due to stay-at-home orders are driving up the incidence of domestic violence. Moreover, these domestic violence increases are driving economic and social crises due to the form and severity of the violence, the burden placed on government, a crisis of resources, and decreases in the productivity of workforces. Domestic violence increase resulting from Covid-19 is an indirect driver of economic and social crisis. The social isolation has led the abusers to take more advantage of it.

Poverty is one of the most important factors for determining whether a girl can access and complete her education. Studies consistently reinforce that girls who face multiple disadvantages — such as low family income, living in remote or underserved locations or who have a disability or belong to a minority ethno-linguistic group — are farthest behind in terms of access to and completion of education.

Violence also prevents girls from accessing and completing education — often girls are forced to walk long distances to school placing them at an increased risk of violence and many experience violence while at school. Most recent data estimates that approximately 60 million girls are sexually assaulted on their way to or at school every year. This often has serious consequences for their mental and physical health and overall well-being while also leading to lower attendance and higher dropout rates. An estimated 246 million children experience violence in and around school every year, ending school-related gender-based violence is critical. Adolescent pregnancies can be a result of sexual violence or sexual exploitation. Girls who become pregnant often face strong stigma, and even discrimination, from their communities.

Feminist Economic Theories and Models

Feminist economics provides a consolidation of various theories and proposals with a central motive: to provide an economic framework that centres on equality, sustainability and care. Some pivotal transformational theories suggested in feminist economics are as follows:

The Care Diamond

According to the UNDP, women's labor force participation rate is "M-shaped": it drops when they are in their late 20s and early 30s and are typically caring for preschool children. The reason for the M-shaped curve is quite clear. Women tend to quit work first at marriage, and then after the birth of their first child. Nearly half of the women who have had full-time permanent jobs leave work after marriage, and again, nearly half of those who retained full-time work quit the labor force after the birth of their first child. Thus, the percentage of non-working women increases after the birth of their first child. At the same time, many also raised the difficulty of balancing work and family obligations.

This suggests that even if childcare arrangements are available, the job makes it impossible for women to choose to raise children while working. These expectations include long working hours, long commuting time, and uninterrupted work (no maternity leave). There are also concerns about the quality of work. However, small corporations are exempt from these regulations. Also, there is considerable pressure on women, and especially men, not to take the full year off. The take-up rate of paternity leave is abysmally low at 1.56 per cent, while that of maternity leave is 89.7 per cent of those eligible. Some suggest that this is because enforcement of these family-friendly policies is weak, and that the government uses “administrative guidance”, rather than sanctions and punishments, to encourage employers. n, the tax and social security systems reinforce women’s secondary role in the labor market by setting a limit on how much they can earn before losing their status as a dependent spouse and therewith their exemption from paying tax and social security contributions. As a result, the forces that bind women to the caregiver role are multiple and reinforce each other. They are further reinforced by the state’s expectations that a woman will be a housewife, a caregiver and a low-wage worker.

According to Rudra (2018)⁵⁵, “gender budgeting has both intrinsic and instrumental relevance. GRB is critical for eliminating gender inequalities with significant improvements in social, educational, health and economic indicators of a country.” Furthermore, it translates into a “systematic gender-differentiated impact of fiscal provisions, programmes and policies”. However, the implementation of gender budgeting is yet to be made ‘mainstream’ in the context of India – no more than seventeen Indian states have gender budgets, the horizontal and vertical devolution of the states’ share of fiscal transfers (by the Centre, as mandated by the Finance Commission) has no mention or factoring in of the gender lens, as well as, gender inequalities are yet to be tackled by the intergovernmental fiscal mechanisms. These issues have been highlighted in the recent past by researchers such as Lahiri (2019)⁶⁶ and Rudra (2018).

Multi-Sector Model

A multisector model is used in principle, “to study the allocation of resources across different economic activities”. As any country and its economy grows, its production, economic activities and employment structure transition from agriculture to industry and services, with services eventually claiming the vast majority of the country’s employment engagement. “One class of institution-based multi-sector models is motivated by the fact that official statistics only report formal market activities”. However, there are plenty of studies that show that a large fraction of resources in any economy are allocated to activities in the informal sector and activities at home. These studies are based on the time-use surveys conducted by individual countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, and on a cross-country survey conducted by the World Bank in 2000. Home production is substantial in most of the time-use surveys.

The production activities at home and in the informal sector can all potentially be accounted for so that they can enter the official statistics and formally contribute to the value of economic development, which becomes even more important for developing countries. The multisector model by Stephen Parente, Richard Rogerson, and Randall Wright (2000), is one that fits the bill aptly, and says that goods can be produced in the nonmarket sector or in the market sector. They show that distortionary policy that affects capital accumulation has a larger impact on measured GDP in their multisector model than in the usual one-sector model. Hence, these models add to the understanding of the dynamics of women's participation in the economy and their true contribution to economic development.

Recommendations

1. Integration of gender lens in the Local Self Government Bodies of the nation, under the Panchayati Raj system, in order to call for greater independence and involvement of women in financial and political decision-making. Further, put in place unions for domestic workers and other paid care workers in all areas.
2. Put in place an independent central and state level mechanism for increased investment in the care economy.
3. Exploring gender-sensitive resource transfers by way of integrating gender in the horizontal and vertical devolution of the states' share of fiscal transfers.
4. Calling for multi-stakeholder involvement towards gender lens fiscal decisions – budgeting and investing in particular, on both government policy and private engagement ends.
5. Applying gender mainstreaming across national and local policies that rely on the creation of capital infrastructure. Ensure government welfare schemes such as safety, public transportation, old age care and healthcare that reduces women's unpaid care burdens and furthers women's skill development and career prospects.
6. Offering gender-sensitive training to key city stakeholders (police, transport operatives, urban planners, and national and local government officials).
7. Conducting gender-lens data collection and analysis across relevant campaigns, policies, projects, and organisations.

CHECKLIST

Gender-Sensitive Policy Pillars Post-COVID

Integration of gender lens in the Local Self Government Bodies of the nation in order to call for greater involvement of women in financial and political decision-making. Further, put in place unions for domestic workers and other paid care workers in all areas.

Put in place an independent central and state level mechanism for increased investment in the care economy.

Exploring gender-sensitive resource transfers in the horizontal and vertical devolution of the states' share of fiscal transfers.

Calling for multi-stakeholder involvement towards gender lens fiscal decisions on both government policy and private engagement ends.

Mainstreaming policies that rely on the creation of infrastructure, increase welfare schemes that reduce women's burden of care work.

Offering gender-sensitive training to key stakeholders (police, transport operatives, urban planners, and national and local government officials).

Conducting gender-lens data collection and analysis across relevant campaigns, policies, projects, and organisations for better evaluation.

AIM

This model is aimed towards providing a framework for policy principles that should be encouraged and inculcated into policy-making to make it gender-sensitive, especially in the face of the disparities created due to the pandemic.

Conclusion

As the ongoing pandemic rages on globally and brings economies, cultures, and governments to their knees – the changes being discerned during this historic time are bound to impact the threads of the social fabric of the world as we know it. The decision of the government of India of extending assistance to women Jan Dhan account holders with direct cash benefit transfers, encouraging credit-lending to self help groups in rural areas, and some state governments leading the distribution of period products in their districts through community collectives are a few of the many ways in which our country is pooling in its resources to help the women and girls of the last mile.

Historically, crises have been instrumental in bringing about societal changes – be it women taking up jobs in factories when men had to fight during the second World War or the increasing number of women breadwinners post the Great Recession. However, during the current pandemic, the shift towards more equitable caregiving wouldn't come as a systemic or natural change, albeit it will need an intentional push to come about.

Limitations of this Paper

1. Since the models we suggested are extracted from the other countries, it is extremely difficult to forecast their application and implementation in the long run. It is quite unfeasible to implement them in such a manner that it leads to gender equality providing women with better access to resources and more power.
2. The contribution by the women involved in the unpaid care work also gets negligent in the measurement of the economic indicators. This makes the analysis models proposed quite ambiguous and makes the policy makers rethink the gender budgeting plans.
3. The figures derived are from secondary sources. This doesn't validate the fact that the analysis is perfectly accurate and reliable. Also, it makes the makeup of the gender budgeting plans irrelevant for the indicators whose figures stand unknown to us.
4. Since not all the indicators are measurable and known to us for the computation of the gender budgeting, we still can't rely completely on the models proposed by us.

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