

## MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF INVISIBILIZATION AND EXCLUSION OF WOMEN'S WORK

*Aditi Narayani*

*Research Scholar, Center for the study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal  
Nehru University, New Delhi, India*

**Received: 19 Mar 2019**

**Accepted: 23 Mar 2019**

**Published: 31 Mar 2019**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The period post 1970's has begun to receive the attention of the social scientists, particularly in the west to focus on the global issues in regard to the causes, processes and the impact of the social exclusion and discrimination. However it is important to understand that the concepts of social exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, invisibilisation and inequality in social sciences have gone under transformation over the period of time and space and have varied with the changing socio-political realities. It is important to understand the multidimensionality of these concepts as well to understand the dialectic relationship to one another. The concern in this paper is to understand the multifaceted relationship between the structures and the processes of invisibilisation and exclusion.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Invisibilisation, Exclusion, Power, Exploitation*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The period post 1970's has begun to receive the attention of the social scientists, particularly in the west to focus on the global issues in regard to the causes, processes and the impact of the social exclusion and discrimination. However it is important to understand that the concepts of social exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, invisibilisation and inequality in social sciences have gone under transformation over the period of time and space and have varied with the changing socio-political realities. It is important to understand the multidimensionality of these concepts as well to understand the dialectic relationship to one another. The concern in this paper is to understand the multifaceted relationship between the structures and the processes of invisibilisation and exclusion. Historically it has been found that the problem in the studies of discrimination and exclusion had been in the identification and the recognition of the structures of the discrimination and the exclusion. This problem arises because the processes which cause them are often invisibilised. so the objective of this paper is to make an attempt to understand the dominant discourses which leads to the normalization and the legitimization of the very structures and the power and exploitation. And a further attempt has also been made to understand to as to how the older forms of discriminatory and the exclusionary structures and the processes get further manifested in newer forms despite of formulated policies meant for social justice, dignity and equality of life. The paper in order to understand the relationship between the structures and the processes of invisibilization and exclusion contextualizes the example of the invisibilization of women's work in both the private and the public sphere and the dynamics of the invisibilization as both the structure and the process of the social exclusion.

### **The Theoretical Apparatus of the Relationship between the Invisibilization and Exclusion**

In order to understand the imperative structure of the invisibilization and exclusion, in my paper I propose three hypothetical relationships between the processes of invisibilization and exclusion. These are as follows:-

- Invisibilization as an intricate process of the structure of exclusion
- Invisibilization as a residual of the process of exclusion
- Invisibilization itself as a process which is not visible in the studies of exclusion.

The above three hypotheses of the relationship of the invisibilization and exclusion have been tested and established with the examples of the women's work in particular in India, in particular in reference to India. In the field of social sciences though there are ample of theories and literature to understand the discourses on the power structure and exploitation, but there are however not ample of them to establish the relationship between invisibilization and exclusion. So, in this paper the theoretical understanding of the structure and the processes of the invisibilization and exclusion have been explained in terms of the theoretical discourse of power and the recognition. The visibility and the invisibility of the structures in the society is a result of the existing dominant power in the society and the recognition of the existing visible power leads to the understanding of the invisible component of the social space and its exploitation and exclusion. The understanding of the complex relationship of the processes of the invisibilization and exclusion in this paper has approached through the lens of the feminist discourse on invisibilization of women work in particular the approach of the Marxist feminist and the socialist feminist, and the understanding of the power has been approached through the Foucaultian lens whereby the micro-physics of power exists and the normalization of the exploitation. And the theoretical understanding of the social reproduction theory has also been attempted in order to unravel the understanding of the invisibilization of the women's work. The statistical discrimination theory would also help in understanding the theoretical proposition behind the exclusion of the women in the economic sphere.

The context in which the relationship between the processes of the invisibilization and exclusion would be explained in terms of the invisibilization of the women's work, in particular in reference to India in the following examples of women's work:-

- Women in the agricultural fields
- Women at home work
- Women at home base work
- Women as migrant domestic worker
- Women at call Centre
- Women at top managerial /administrative positions
- Women in self-employment

The above mentioned examples of the women's work have been taken as examples to unravel the relationship between the processes of the invisibilization and exclusion particularly in the globalized and informalized economy. Before proceeding to understand the existing reality or the illusion of the invisibilization of the women's work in the micro and the

macro economy, it is important to understand as to first as to why the “work” and in particular the women’s work had been taken to contextualize the understanding the relationship of invisibilization and exclusion. Work, in sociology, is defined as the carrying out of tasks, which involves the expenditure of mental and physical effort, and its objective is the production of goods and services that cater to human needs. An occupation, or job, is work that is done in exchange for a regular wage. Work is closely intertwined with social structures, social processes, and especially social inequality. Work defines the conditions of human existence in many ways. This may be even more true for women than for men, because the responsibility for social reproduction -- which largely devolves upon women in most societies -- ensures that the vast majority of women are inevitably involved in some kind of productive and/or reproductive activity. “In propertied classes. Women’s oppression flows from their role in the maintenance and inheritance of property...In subordinate classes. female oppression. Derives from women's involvement in processes that renew direct producers, as well as their involvement in production.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite this, the importance of women's work generally receives marginal treatment simply because so much of the work regularly performed is “invisible”, in terms of market criteria or even in terms of socially dominant perceptions of what constitutes “work”. This obviously matters, because it leads to the social underestimation of women's productive contribution. More importantly, as a result, inadequate attention is typically devoted to the conditions of women's work and their implications for the general material conditions and wellbeing of women. This is essentially the main argument of what Vogel and these other later Marxists call “social reproduction theory.” Social reproduction theory shows how the “production of goods and services and the production of life are part of one integrated process.”<sup>2</sup> This is particularly the case in India, where patterns of market integration and the relatively high proportion of goods and services that are not marketed have implied that female contributions to productive activity extend well beyond those that are socially recognized, and that the conditions under which many of these contributions are made entail significant pressure on women in a variety of ways. In almost all societies, and particularly in developing countries, there remain essential but usually unpaid activities (such as housework and childcare, and community-based activities), which are seen as the responsibility of the women of the household. Neil Thompson talked about the process of exclusion as “invisibilising relatively lesser powerful people, dominant social groups are able to maintain their hegemony relatively unchallenged.” This idea of a ‘third face of power’, or ‘invisible power’ has its roots partly, in Marxist thinking about the pervasive power of ideology of Gramsci where he highlights the role of hegemonic ideas and the “manufacture of consent” as the tool through which the power is being exercised in the society. “This idea of a ‘counter-hegemonic’ struggle – advancing alternatives to dominant ideas of what is normal and legitimate – has had broad appeal in social and political movements. It has also contributed to the idea that ‘knowledge’ is a social construct that serves to legitimate social structures”<sup>3</sup>. In practical terms, Gramsci’s insights about how power is constituted in the realm of ideas and knowledge – expressed through consent rather than force – have inspired the use of explicit strategies to contest hegemonic norms of legitimacy and this could be exemplified in the examples of the women’s work, whereby the work of the women doesn’t get recognition and value under the domination of the dominant male culture and economy in the society and in particular reference to India. The nature of the capitalist economy which feeds into the sexual division of the labour also the hegemonic nature of the economy dominated by the

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<sup>1</sup>Vogel, Lise(1983),Marxism and the Oppression of Women, p. 129

<sup>2</sup> Bhattacharya,Tithi,What is Social Production Theory?, International Socialist Organization.Socialistworker.org

<sup>3</sup>Heywood, Andrew (1994) Political Ideas and Concepts: An Introduction, London, Macmillan.

discourse of patriarchy and capitalism, which normalizes and legitimizes the invisibility of the women work, both in the public and the private sphere.

### **The Normation and the Legitimization of the Power and Exploitation**

The both micro physics of power and the macrophysics of the power can be understood as effects of a normalization process, the micro-power functions through “ a disciplinary, analytical-practical grid which classifies individuals, places, time, movements, actions, and operations; through this classification process, the micro-power identifies the optimal sequences or co-ordinations which eventually produce norms and models.”<sup>4</sup> Foucault specifically calls what is involved in these disciplinary techniques a “normation” compared with the general normalization, in the sense that norms establish the fundamental condition of subjectivity according to which normal and abnormal, capable and incapable, suitable and unsuitable individual subjects are produced. In the Foucauldian sense, normalization basically means the politics by and for norms and thus it implies that any form of norms can't be established without the dominant nature of the social structure. “Domination is in fact a general structure of power whose ramifications and consequences can sometimes be found descending to the most recalcitrant fibers of society. But at the same time it is a strategic situation more or less taken for granted and consolidated by means of a long-term confrontation between adversaries. It can certainly happen that the fact of domination may only be the transcription of a mechanism of power resulting from confrontation and its consequences...”<sup>5</sup> The invisibility of the women's work can also be understood as the normation of the invisibility and the misrecognition in the terms of the structure of the power whereby the dominant patriarchal structure of power establishes the norm of the exploitation of the women's work in micro as well as macro economy.

“Not only can a man not stop without degrading himself to certain tasks that are socially defined as inferior (not least because it is unthinkable that a man should perform them), but the same tasks may be noble and difficult, when performed by men, or insignificant and imperceptible, easy and futile, when performed by women. As is seen in the difference between the chef and the cook, the couturier and the seamstress, a reputedly female task only has to be taken over by a man and performed outside the private sphere in order for it to be thereby ennobled and transfigured: 'Work', as Margaret Maruani observes, 'is always different depending on whether it is performed by men or by women.' If the statistics establish that so-called skilled (qualifies) jobs are more often held by men whereas the work assigned to women is more often 'unqualified', this is partly because every job, whatever it may be, is in a sense qualified by being performed by men (who, in this respect, are all, by definition, of 'quality')”. Bourdieu's concept “Anamnesis of the Hidden constant” also helps in the understanding of the invisibility of the women's work, where based on the sexual division of labour, “naturally” some jobs are meant for women and the other are meant for “men” and as to how there are certain jobs which are not meant for women. Bourdieu also mentions about the “learned helplessness of the women”, whereby the women and her agency fails to exert their power in order to denormalise the existing social structure.

### **Household Work of the Women and Invisibility**

The feminist challenge to the national accounts definition and measure of the economy springs originally from the fact that the production boundary excludes, and thus renders invisible, much of the work and production done in subsistence production and the household. Because the goods and services produced there do not find their way into the market they

<sup>4</sup>Foucault, M. (1975), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the prison*, Vintage, New York.

<sup>5</sup>Foucault, M. (1982), *The subject and Power*, *The university of Chicago Press*, pp. 777-795

are not included in contemporary national accounts, a fact of particular concern for feminists because the majority of work in those spheres is done by women. It has not always been the case that non-market activities have been excluded from the definition of the economy. While classical political economy did not consider non-market production, wives and mothers were at least regarded as productive workers in official English censuses at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nancy Folbre has traced the evolution of census categories in England and the US during that century showing how wives and mothers (sometimes as a separate category, at other times included with paid domestic workers) became first “unoccupied” and eventually “dependent”. While this process reflects Victorian family ideology, Folbre argued that the reasons were “a mélange of theoretical, political, and practical concerns”.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of the unproductive housewife was a by-product of a new definition of productive labour that valorised participation in the market and devalorised the nonmarket work central to many women's lives.

### **Recognition of the Work of the Women as a Matter of Status**

Nancy Fraser viewed “recognition as a matter of status means examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors. If and when such patterns constitute actors as peers, capable of participating on a par with one another in social life, then we can speak of reciprocal recognition and status equality. When, in contrast, they constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible—in other words, as less than full partners in social interaction—then we can speak of misrecognition and status subordination. From this perspective, misrecognition is neither a psychic deformation nor a free-standing cultural harm but an institutionalized relation of social subordination. To be misrecognized, accordingly, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down upon or devalued in others' attitudes, beliefs or representations.”<sup>7</sup> It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. Naila Kabeer has argued that the gender inequalities thus interact with global inequalities to create an increasingly international labour force that is highly segmented by gender, nationality, race and legal status. While undocumented – and many documented – migrant workers are most likely to be found in the most hidden and exploitative forms of informal activity, most women from poor households continue to be concentrated in informal work generated by sub-contracting and outworking arrangements, often from the home.

### **The Theory of Statistical Discrimination and the Women's Work**

Statistical discrimination occurs when distinctions between demographic groups are made on the basis of real or imagined statistical distinctions between the groups. While such discrimination is legal in some cases (e.g., insurance markets), it is illegal and/or controversial in others (e.g., racial profiling and gender-based labor market discrimination). “First-moment” statistical discrimination occurs when, for example, female workers are offered lower wages because females are perceived to be less productive, on average, than male workers. “Second-moment” discrimination would occur when risk-averse employers offer female workers lower wages based not on lower average productivity but on a higher variance in their productivity. This paper reports results from controlled laboratory experiments designed to study second-moment statistical discrimination in a labor market setting.

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<sup>6</sup> Nancy Folbre (1991) “The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution in Nineteenth-Century Economic Thought” *Signs*, Vol No. 16, p 482.

<sup>7</sup> Fraser, Nancy (1998), “From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a “post-socialist” age”, in Willett, Cynthia, *Theorizing multiculturalism: a guide to the current debate*, Malden, Massachusetts: John Wiley & Sons

### Globalization and the Invisibility of the Women's Work

The literatures on the globalization and the women's work shows that the process of Globalisation has increased the patriarchal control over women's sexuality, fertility and labour by imposing commercial values on the conventional values throughout the world. Globalisation has accentuated survival struggles of households managed by single, widowed, divorced, separated and deserted women. The poor women particularly in the rural areas with no property rights are most adversely affected by globalization as traditional support systems of kinship and extended family networks have been eroded.

Now based on the theoretical grounding of the understanding of the invisibility of the women work in the economy it is important now to relate as to how the material deprivations affect the non-material deprivations and this could be explained in the terms of the "social exclusion", as "a rupturing of the social bond. It is a process of declining participation, access, and solidarity. At the societal level, it reflects inadequate social cohesion or integration. At the individual level, it refers to the incapacity to participate in normatively expected social activities and to build meaningful social relations."<sup>8</sup> The invisible participation of the women's work in the economy affects the social bond and based on the superstructure of the societal processes, this leads to the social exclusion.

The example of the invisibility of the women's work in the agricultural field shows the multitudes of the invisibilisation and the exclusion of the work, where it is found as to how the statistical invisibility of the women work could be felt at the very beginning where the enumerators are biased towards misrecognition of the women's work and in particular in the case of India it is found as to how despite of devoting more hours and more energy in the agricultural fields, no women are considered as "farmers", and therefore they are neglected and deprived from basic social welfare schemes and further the other material deprivations are realized upon the women in the agricultural fields. The narratives from the literature gives the picture that the intersectionalities of the caste, class and gender leads to the exclusion of the women from the social status as a result of the misrecognition of the work done by them. The example of the women work at home and its invisibilisation has been the most discussed and debatable in the field of the exclusion of the women in the socio-economic sphere, the home work which is considered the "unproductive" and "unpaid" work leads to the understanding of the nature of the invisibilisation of the women work and its exclusion. The invisibilisation and the exclusion of the women's work in particular in the informal economy shows how the work of the women based at home are under-paid as compared to the work done by the men and it is also found through the literature that the absence of the labour laws and the trade unions in regard to the women work leads to the further invisibilisation of the exploitation of the women work and how the work done by the work is not only underpaid, but it is also misrecognized as "work". In India over the past decades, the rural to urban migration and in particular the migration of the women from the poor household shows as to how the women from the villages come to the urban areas and when they are hired to work as domestic workers, then their exploitation is invisibilised in the name of the "domestic help", whereby we find that the terminology changes, but nothing change in the terms of the exploitation. When the example of the women working at the call-centre is taken in the context of the nature of invisibilisation and exclusion of the women work in the nature of the globalization and sub-contract and outsourcing, then it is found that the nature of the exploitation does not diminishes in the name of

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<sup>8</sup>Hillary Silver(1994),Social solidarity and social Exclusion: Three paradigms, Discussion paper series,No.69,Geneva.

the liberty and freedom of working hours rather it manifests itself into the exploitation of various kinds. the exploitation at the work place apart from the physical and verbal abuse in the terms of the gender stereotypical nuances of exploitation and these case could also be found in the nature of the invisibilisation of the exploitation of the women's work in the name of high pay and favorable conditions, where the nature of the exploitation at the work-place is manifested in multifaceted forms. The unique case of the exploitation of the women's work, in particular the work of the women in self-employment, which is in true nature, the nature of self-exploitation, but its more beyond that where the structures of the dominant patriarchal and the capitalist discourses reinforces the nature of the exploitation of the women's work.

## CONCLUSIONS

The complex relationship of the nature of the invisibilisation and exclusion is hard to establish in any one form. However the relationship between them in respect to the women's work has been explained at various levels and in various forms. But the real purpose behind the understanding of the relationship between the understanding of the invisibilisation and the exclusion lies in the formulation of the inclusive policies and programmes. so it is important to understand as to how these dimensions of the invisibilisation and exclusion could be incorporated in the formulation of policies for social justice. As these are the processes and structure which are not visible, so it becomes very hard to incorporate their dimensionality in the inclusive policies.

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