

A STEP BACK IN GENDER EQUALITY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Women - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Picture for representation purpose only.

Is the electoral promise of paying women for carrying out domestic work and care work a progressive public policy? The proposal, put forth by Kamal Haasan's political party, Makkal Needhi Maiam, has generated curiosity and reopened the old but unsettled academic debate. On the face of it, the proposal might appear progressive. However, closer scrutiny suggests otherwise.

Women bear a disproportionately high burden of unpaid domestic work and care work in India. It would be instructive here to examine how Tamil Nadu, where the electoral promise is being made, fares vis-à-vis India. The all-India Time Use Survey (2019) says that 82% of females (six years and above) as against 24% of males from Tamil Nadu participate in unpaid domestic work. The huge disparity persists even if we look at the age group of 15-59 years: 90% of females and 24% of males participate in domestic work. A similar disparity prevails at the all-India level as well: 81% of females (six years and above) and 26% of males participate in unpaid domestic work. There is an equally huge disparity in the average time spent by participating males and females. While females (six years and above) in Tamil Nadu spend, on average, 261 minutes a day in unpaid domestic work, males spend only 91 minutes. The corresponding figures for females and males in India are 299 minutes and 97 minutes, respectively. The data suggest that females bear more than 83% of the burden of domestic and care work both in Tamil Nadu and India.

Can the proposed policy address the huge burden that women are forced to endure daily? Posed differently, what should a progressive policy proposal aim at: paying women a wage for domestic and care work or addressing the huge gender disparity? The insights offered by the feminist economist Diane Elson (2017) are pertinent. The gist of her argument is this: public policy should aim at closing the huge gender gap in unpaid domestic and care work through 'recognition, reduction and redistribution' (Triple-R).

The party's proposal only satisfies the first component of Triple-R, that is 'recognition'. Paying a wage is a formal recognition of the fact that unpaid domestic and care work are no less important than paid market work, as the latter is parasitic on the former. Since it is women who predominantly carry out unpaid domestic and care activities, often at the expense of their employment prospects and health, the monetary reward is a recognition of their contribution to the well-being of the household and the opportunities forgone by women. The proposal appears progressive, for this reason and to that measure.

If the broader aim of a progressive public policy is to close the gender gap in unpaid domestic and care work, how does the proposal measure up? Specifically, will paying women a wage for domestic and care work reduce their disproportionately huge daily burden? The proposal not only fails miserably in this aspect, but also has the potential to increase women's burden. This is because paying monetary benefits carries with it the possible danger of formally endorsing the social norm that domestic and care work are 'women's work', for which they are being paid. The purportedly progressive proposal thus has the risk of furthering the gender disparity in unpaid work within homes.

What's more, it also fails in the other crucial aspect of 'redistribution' of the burden of unpaid

work. In fact, it might give space for men to claim that women are bound to do these unpaid activities as they are being compensated for the time spent or income foregone, and that women can at best expect men only to help but not participate daily in carrying out these activities.

The fact that only 24% of men from Tamil Nadu participate in and spend less time than women on unpaid domestic work calls for a policy proposal that increases men's participation and the time they spend in unpaid work at home. Instead of incentivising men to participate more in household work and reducing women's burden by redistributing the responsibility, the current proposal might do the opposite.

Incentivising men, monetarily or otherwise, to participate more and spend longer hours in carrying out unpaid domestic work is one thing, but paying women a wage for shouldering the primary responsibility is another. At best, the latter might help meet what the academic Caroline Moser referred to as 'practical' gender needs. But it cannot possibly address the 'strategic' gender needs of reducing and redistributing women's burden. The electoral promise, therefore, lacks the transformative potential of achieving gender equality in sharing unpaid work.

Sunny Jose is RBI Chair Professor at the Council for Social Development, Southern Regional Centre, Hyderabad. Views are personal

This story is available exclusively to The Hindu subscribers only.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Start your 14 days free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading as many articles as you wish without any limitations.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper, crossword and print.

Dear reader,

We have been keeping you up-to-date with information on the developments in India and the world that have a bearing on our health and wellbeing, our lives and livelihoods, during these difficult times. To enable wide dissemination of news that is in public interest, we have increased the number of articles that can be read free, and extended free trial periods. However, we have a request for those who can afford to subscribe: please do. As we fight disinformation and misinformation, and keep apace with the happenings, we need to commit greater resources to news gathering operations. We promise to deliver quality journalism that stays away from vested interest and political propaganda.

Dear subscriber,

Thank you!

Your support for our journalism is invaluable. It's a support for truth and fairness in journalism. It has helped us keep apace with events and happenings.

The Hindu has always stood for journalism that is in the public interest. At this difficult time, it becomes even more important that we have access to information that has a bearing on our health and well-being, our lives, and livelihoods. As a subscriber, you are not only a beneficiary of our work but also its enabler.

We also reiterate here the promise that our team of reporters, copy editors, fact-checkers, designers, and photographers will deliver quality journalism that stays away from vested interest and political propaganda.

Suresh Nambath

Please enter a valid email address.

To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

You can support quality journalism by turning off ad blocker or purchase a subscription for unlimited access to The Hindu.

[Sign up for a 30 day free trial.](#)

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

CrackIAS