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Q6(b)

What do you understand by gender-based domestic division of labour? Is it undergoing a change in the wake of increasing participation of women in formal employment? Clarify your answer with illustrations

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

Core demand of the question

- Define gender-based domestic division of labour
- **Show theoretical anchors:** Oakley, Hartmann, Hochschild, unpaid work
- **Ask whether women's formal employment is changing it:** dual burden, lagged male change, paid domestic outsourcing
- **Illustrate from India:** Time Use Survey, urban dual earners, rural persistence

Revision summary

Gender-based domestic division assigns unpaid household and care work mainly to women.

Oakley, Hartmann and Hochschild made that work theoretically central.

Women's formal employment has produced dual burdens more often than equal sharing.

Outsourcing to paid domestic workers relocates rather than ends gendered care.

India's Time Use Survey shows a large unpaid-work gap by sex.

Change is lagged and class-specific, not automatic with a salary slip.

Introduction

A gender-based domestic division of labour is the patterned assignment of unpaid household and care tasks according to sex, not according to taste alone. Cooking, cleaning, childcare, eldercare and the management of kin relations are still, in most societies, women's work in the last instance. The question is whether women's rising presence in formal employment is rewriting that script or merely adding a **second shift** to the first.

Body

The pattern and its theory

Ann Oakley made housework visible as work. Heidi Hartmann treated the domestic division as a pillar of patriarchy allied to capitalism: men as a group benefit from unpaid services that reproduce labour power. Arlie Hochschild's **The Second Shift** showed dual-earner couples in

which the woman's paid job did not equalise the evening. Sylvia Walby listed household production among the structures of patriarchy. The arrangement is moralised as love and nature, which is why it is so sticky.

Is it changing with formal employment?

It is changing **unevenly**. In urban dual-earner professional households some men cook, some couples hire a cook or a nanny, and some delay fertility. Outsourcing transfers the gendered burden onto poorer women, often migrant and informal, rather than abolishing it. "Help" from husbands is still framed as favour, not duty. **Time Use Survey 2019** in India found women spending several more hours a day on unpaid domestic work than men, a gap that employment status narrows only partly. Rural and small-town formal jobs for women, where they exist, often sit beside unchanged kin surveillance and the honour of a "good wife". Maternity, unsafe transport and the motherhood penalty push some women out of formal jobs, which then restores the old division.

- **Comparative research speaks of lagged adaptation:** fertility and women's employment move faster than men's unpaid hours. Nordic policy shows that public childcare and paternal leave can shift the pattern; their absence in much of India keeps the domestic gender contract intact. So formal employment is a necessary pressure for change, not a sufficient cause. Illustrations should include both the new urban kitchen and the continuing dawn routine of unpaid work that makes the office possible.

Flow diagram

Gendered domestic labour -> Unpaid care
 FE Women's formal employment -> Second shift dual burden
 FE -> Outsource to paid domestic workers
 FE -> Partial male sharing
 FE -> Gendered domestic labour

Conclusion

The domestic division of labour remains gendered even when women hold formal jobs. Change is real in some dual-earner settings and largely a dual burden or a shift onto poorer women in others. Employment without a reorganisation of care and male time will not complete the revolution at home.

Facts & figures

Second shift

Hochschild: paid work plus a continuing majority share of housework for many employed women.

Time Use Survey 2019

Indian official evidence of a wide gender gap in unpaid domestic and care minutes per day.

Hartmann on patriarchy and capitalism

Men's domestic privileges and capital's interest in cheap reproduction of labour power reinforce each other.

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