

The gendered division of labor in transition to parenthood and its further consequences: a study on parenthood and gender

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Abstract - Parenthood entails meaning beyond child-care and child-rearing. This paper will try to look at the traditional meaning of parenthood that is the socially accepted and traditional notions of motherhood and fatherhood. This points towards the gendered division of labor between the father and the mother in transition to parenthood. Thus, it will engage upon the gendered divisions of labor in child-caring and parenting. Based on this gendered division of labor in parenting, this paper will try to unsettle the question of marital unhappiness. It will engage upon the question; Does this gendered differentiation in the division of labor in transition to parenthood leads to marital dissatisfaction and unhappiness? And, how this division of labor in parenting between the father and mother creates inequalities in the larger prospects i.e. in their respective positions in labor market employments?

Index terms – Parenthood, gendered division of labour, motherhood, fatherhood, child-care.

I. INTRODUCTION

Parenthood calls for a difficult life stage in a couple's life. The status of a parent can be acquired either biologically or by adoption. It is said that the life of a married couple before the birth of a child is completely different from that of life after a child is born. This paper mainly focused on the issues related to parenthood centering on heterosexual couples in that it will engage primarily on the intersection of gender and parenthood. Sociology as a discipline in particular and social sciences, in general, have extensively studied and analyzed the issue of gender-based inequalities in different aspects of life. While the concern on gender and parenthood, however, interests many contemporary sociologists as well as feminist scholars. The gender-based inequalities that are observed and perpetuated in transitioning to parenthood are acted by both "economical" and "cultural" forces (Barnes, 2015). The patterns of unequal distribution of paid and unpaid labor imply the former force. Though these pattern of distribution of paid and unpaid labor is shared equitably between the partners before they are parents, once they become parents these patterns get differentiated by gender. On the other hand, the "cultural forces" imply the traditional notions of identifying the division of labor between the father and the mother in terms of parenting, where the mother is considered as the "primary parent" and fathers as "secondary reinforce" (ibid.). However, before carrying an in-depth study on the consequences of the gendered division of labor in transition to parenthood, let's see the socially prevalent notions of motherhood and fatherhood covering mostly the different responsibilities taken up by the father and the mother while parenting the child.

II. IMAGES OF MOTHERHOOD AND FATHERHOOD

In the *Vedas* of Hindu religion, the concept of *Dharma* which entails the right course of action for a man pronounces the importance of the following life stages for man. According to this, a man is expected to take up the duties as a householder (*Grihastha*, which encompasses parenting) by getting married (*Grihastha dharma*). Along with these, there are some expected duties like begetting offspring, fulfilling the basic needs of family

members (Sriram, Navalkar, 2012). The shared ideals, expectations, and beliefs, etc of man and woman as parents are the prevalent notions of motherhood and fatherhood. Many scholars have engaged upon the images of motherhood and fatherhood (Boulton, 1983; Chodorow and Contratto, 1982; Daniels and Weingarten, 1988; Glenn, 1987). In a traditional patriarchal household in India, the male head is regarded as 'karata purush' that means 'male doer'. The role of the father is to provide, protect, discipline, teach, and be the moral guardian to the child while the mother's role is to be the physical caregiver (ibid.). Motherhood is entitled to "constant and exclusive responsibility" (Thompson and Walker, 1989). Traditionally, a mother is bound up to take care of the child, they are to fulfill every need of the child. Mothers are stereotypically seen as (a) primary caregivers, (b) teachers or role models, and (d) household workers or homemakers. On the contrary, a father is regarded as the breadwinner of the household. Fathers are stereotypically seen as (a) financial providers; (b) role models, guides, moral teachers, or educators; (c) protectors; and (d) disciplinarians (Tessier, Gosselin, 2018). He might or might not have the necessary desire to nurture the child. It is not traditionally imposed upon the image of fatherhood to nurture the child; rather a father usually keeps a distance from his child. Instead of becoming the primary parent in caregiving and parenting the child, the father is regarded as a "playmate" to the child. Fathers are considered as affectively distant and stern 'disciplinarians' (Kakar, 1981). This is the traditional notion of viewing parenthood which implies a gendered division of labor between the father and the mother in parenting the child. The "new parenthood" pattern however is based on an egalitarian principle where the father and the mother share an equitable role in doing the same.

III. WHO TAKES CARE?

While parenting the child both the partners are engaged in various activities. This traditional division of labor between the parents is still being observed as followed by contemporary couples. "The task of mothers is to show attentive love that preserves, fosters, and mold the child to an acceptable person" (Ruddick, 1982). Researchers have concluded that the father's role is nothing but a "playmate" to the child or as a "helping" (LaRossa and LaRossa, 1981) parent while the mother's role is the opposite. Mothers have to actively as well as attentively nurture the child; this is somewhat imperative for the mother while the same is just optional for the father ((Boulton, 1983; Daniels and Weingarten). Fathers are "novel, unpredictable, exciting, preferred playmates for the young child" (Bronstein, 1988; Clarke-Stewart, 1978; L. C. Jones, 1985) while mothers are the continuous support of the child, being the comfort givers. Their primary job is to take care of the child in comparison to fathers who just spend limited time with their children.

Fathers traditionally adopt the role of breadwinner; they believe that a good father fulfills the material needs of the child as well as the family. McKee suggested that fathers are necessary providers, they are usually involved in making decisions related to the child's education, they teach their children about morality and other disciplinary rules. However, with time, fathers become more directive and instructive (Bronstein, 1988) while mothers give emotional support and comfort to their children.

IV. HYPOTHESIS

Considering the above discussion, it can be identified that the traditional notion of motherhood and fatherhood pronounce a gendered division of labor between the father and the mother. The role expectations are completely different for the mother and the father. The mother as the primary caretaker of the child has to support and comfort the child even if they have other works to engage upon. They have to keep the task of parenting as their primary work while such a similar notion of image and role imposition is not seen among the fathers. From this the paper finds its first hypothesis- This gendered division of labor between the father and the mother leads to marital unhappiness especially among mothers and the second hypothesis; the gendered division of labor relatively affect the respective positions of the father and the mother in labor markets.

V. DISCUSSION

The gendered division of labor in parenting is being found to be practiced traditionally. Women perform the majority of household chores even if they work outside the home. The household responsibilities are traditionally bound up to women. According to Baxter, Hewitt, and Haynes, women spend more time carrying housework in comparison to men regardless of their marital or parenthood status (Koivunen, Susan, Rothaupt, 2009). While comparing mothers and fathers in their sharing of tasks in household work, Craig (2006) found out that mothering entails increased time commitment in housework and child-caring activity. She is a multi-tasker who has to do physical labor and take the major responsibility of taking care of her child. This implies following a rigid timetable and more time alone with her child. (ibid.). Even when women work full time, they carry the majority of housework and take responsibility for her child.

Most mothers found the task of child-caring as “unsettling” and “irritating” while many of them find meaning in such work. For them the tasks of child-caring and child-rearing are “fulfilling” and “purposeful” (Thompson and Walker, 1989). . However, it is undeniable that children confine mothers to home that keep them restricted towards confining to certain work (ibid.). However, the variation in measuring the level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among mothers depends upon their class status. More than working-class mothers, middle-class mothers view mothering as something that curtails their freedom and identity (Thompson and Walker, 1989). in contrast, working-class mothers find security in such gender-specialized tasks. However, parenting entails both positive and negative changes in the lives of the mothers than fathers. “There found a change of moods, change in daily routines, losing a sense of autonomy and competence among mothers” (Cowan et al., 1985; Feldman and Nash, 1984; Harriman, 1983).

Researchers have concluded that marital satisfaction decreases after a child is born. (Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, Rothman, & Bradbury, 2008; Veroff, Young, & Coon, 1997). One of the reasons for such growing dissatisfaction as reported by Veroff was due to an increase in responsibility and work after a child is born. While carrying out a study among 136 couples; Cox, Burchinal, Paley, and Payne in their work "Marital Perceptions and Interactions across the Transition to Parenthood" found out that incidence of depression increases as a result of additional stress and challenges of parenthood. According to Baruch, parenting claims a stressful period for women (Thompson and Walker, 1989). Though there arise marital dissatisfaction among couples after they become parents, it cannot be concluded that it hampers the mothers more than the fathers. Due to limitations in research works such an assumption cannot be verified. However, it has been found out in many studies that middle-class mothers sense a loss of identity and freedom after the birth of their child, while for some motherhood entails a "fulfilling" and "purposeful" activity.

To begin with, the second hypothesis that is "the gendered division of labor relatively affects the respective positions of the father and the mother in their respective positions in labor markets". It is known that the parenthood state brings certain changes in the lives of the married couple. Due to this traditional gendered division of labor between the father and the mother where the father adopts the role of provider while the mother has to adopt the role of primary caretaker, it is important to look at how it affects their respective positions in labor markets. That means, does this status of parenthood bring upon changes in their economic prospects.

When women become mothers they sometimes choose to stop working outside the home or manage their working hours by devoting more time to parenting, in contrast, men spend more time in wage work after they become a parent (Thompson and Walker, 1989). Mothers who work outside of the home have to adjust and are loaded with the double responsibility of parenting as well as maintaining their position in the labor market. While fathers can give excuses like wage work keep them from their child, mothers rarely can make such excuses (LaRossa and LaRossa, 1981).

While interviewing 60 college-educated childless young adults living in San Francisco Bay Area Bass and her colleague found in a study that men were not likely to carry mental work of anticipating parenthood; they

usually separate themselves from the emotional and behavioral consequences of the same. Women were more likely to down-shift their career goals in response to the changes brought about in the context of the preferences and responsibilities accompanied by parenthood. In a patriarchal family structure, the mothers earn less as compared to the fathers and this further sharpens the wage gap in India (Sarkhel, 2017). To understand the differential impact of parenthood within a family, the study showed how parenthood entails a more positive reward for the father, associated with a "bonus" in terms of higher wage premium, in contrast, motherhood entails wage "penalty" in the labor markets in India (ibid). However, this has been found out by many pieces of research that men following traditional gender ideologies usually spend more time in paid work by conforming themselves to the status of breadwinner; in contrast men following egalitarian ideologies spend less time in paid work. Another aspect concerning the motherhood penalty in labor markets is identified with the type of societies the mother belongs to. Mothers belonging to matrilineal societies are less likely to face the motherhood penalty than those who belong to patrilineal societies (Bedi, Majilla, Riegar, 2018). This implies how the position of mothers in labor markets is determined by cultural forces.

Thus, parenthood brings certain changes in the lives of the fathers and mothers however the negative changes in terms of labor market inequalities are extremely faced by the mothers. While mothers earn significantly less than childless mothers referred to as the motherhood penalty, fathers earn more than childless men referred to as fatherhood bonuses (Misra, Strader, 2013). These inequalities in the pay gap among the mothers are a consequence of the prevalent perceptions on the traditional gendered division of labor in responsibilities ascertained by the status of parenthood. The traditional way of conferring the sole caregiver responsibilities on the mother influence and even shape the employer's perceptions and hence these get reflected in the reinforcement of different legislation and policies that perpetuate these gendered divisions of labor more effectively. Furthermore, the public policies also contribute to the same. In India, the adoption of The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2006 bring both positive and negative impacts on male and female employees. According to this Bill, the paid maternity leave has been doubled up from 12 to 26 weeks however this has created both positive and negative consequences to the workers. While the positive impacts include well being of women's health and increased job security, the negative impacts outnumbered these. Since, this Bill put the entire cost of increased maternity leave on the employer; the employer is likely to hire male workers as it increases the cost of employing women workers. Another significant impact is that it solely imposes the task of child-care on the mother, thereby disregarding the concept of fatherhood. This contributes further to perpetuating the gendered division of labor in parenting the child (Nikore, 2017). In India, there found no parental or shared parental leave as found in the World Bank report. Even if men wanted to spend time with their children, family-unfriendly workplaces restrict them. Deutsch (1999) argued that women's workplaces are more aware and have a family-friendly environment. Employers usually expect that wife or another person is there to take care of the child. Hence, these further perpetuate the gendered-based differences in terms of conceptualizing and practicing parenthood.

VI. CONCLUSION

Parenthood thus entails a deeper meaning. The intersection of gender and parenthood signified the gendered division of labor. This division of labor is unequally divided where women as following the traditional notion of parenthood become the primary caretaker. Such traditional understanding of fatherhood and motherhood is deeply rooted in cultural, economic practices. For example- in India, the provisioning of maternity leave implicates indirectly upon the traditional gendered division in taking parenthood responsibilities. Thus, the second hypothesis is partially correct i.e. certain changes do take place in the respective positions of the fathers and mothers in labor markets. However, unequal distribution of responsibilities and certain negative impacts are largely seen to be implied on to the mother's side. In response to the first hypothesis, it is not only the womenfolk who have to suffer marital dissatisfaction due to increased responsibilities of child-care and parenting. Such a study will be more fruitful in the domain of Psychology hence it cannot be fully accepted.

Nevertheless, the gendered division of labor in transitioning to parenthood is perpetuated and these divisions are traditionally and culturally imposed. However, the coming of "new parenthood" would contribute to mitigating this unequal division of work which will then give new meanings to the same.

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