



MODERNISM *AND* **POSTMODERNISM**

REFLECTIONS AND SPECULATIONS

VOLUME-I

EDITORS

DR. ABUL FOYES MD MALIK

DR. DIPAK KUMAR DOLEY

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Women, Home and Pandemic

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Nobody would have ever imagined a situation as grave and as fatal as the insurgence of Covid-19 this year. The world is wrapped up in a sinister foil of this pandemic, with consequences of unprecedented crisis and mounting devastation. It has affected people in diverse ways and at different levels. Every nation, despite its wide variations in terms of power and development have made all possible attempts to control this overpowering damage caused by it. But the implementation of these decisions are not shared equally leading to overburdening of responsibilities on one sex over the other. In a situation like this, when all educational institutions are closed, children in the house are inflicted with boredom and physical stagnancy. A major share of child's care is from the paid economy like schools, creche and so on. This shift from paid to unpaid economy has triggered extra burden on the already existing household imbalance. The bargain of sharing child's care and the household is a very sensitive issue. When there are different levels of uncertainty looming into families, this arena of the household and gender seem to be undermined and, in many families, unsolicited. But the need for maverick voices is ever-more pressing in times of such devastation.

This moment of dire crisis has seamlessly watered seeds of exploitation amidst the throes of social and economic collapse. All efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of this virus on public health and economy has not yielded satisfactory outcomes. It has, however, generated a multitude of unintended adverse consequences for all of us but has affected women and girls in a more acute regressive manner. So, in times of such an extended global crisis, it is in fact a greater challenge to live and fight against gender inequalities prevailing worldwide.

In the early period of this insurgence and lockdown, many of us were happy about working from home and having time to be at home. But the situation got worse with waves of contention surmounting in most of the families. Though living through a moment of public health and economic crisis is a challenge for everyone, it is likely to magnify the existing oppression of the masses in general and women in particular. The layer surfacing the pandemic has however veiled the obvious gender issues to the greater cause of encountering this phase of health crisis. The challenges and issues are not highly visible in all societies, though permeating throughout at various levels. They differ in severity depending on factors that intersect with age, class, sexual, cultural and mental orientation and even religion. But one core issue of domination and extended physical labour is prevalent in all societies at different levels. Women are not only burdened with extended physical labour and caring responsibilities but are also scrapped out of their "privacy" and "solitude". The issues again may vary because the challenges meted out to women are highly complex and interrelated. It depends on a variety of conditions right from her financial status to the scarce decision-making power. There is no denying of the fact that we are still living in a society that acknowledges the unequal distribution of domestic chores with pride. Today, most women are working at both the sectors- unpaid household and care labour and paid labour outside. The financial independency has accessorised her with much confidence but it has also drenched her of many other creative possibilities. In most families, they are

compensated with a subsidy in the form of some allowances that they receive from their counterparts and family members. These allowances are occasional and is not a shared responsibility that is steady and permanent. During this period, when work from home, care from home and food from home becomes a priority, the burden of all these drains her physically scraping away all the leisure and private space for most women.

The domestic space which is the microcosm of all societies, actually displays the arrangement of the members of both the gender. It acts as a site for the complex interplay of social relations and power and creates different meanings to the individuals who dwell in it in terms of gender. These existing differences has grounded the power equations very strong by rendering one sex as subordinate. The very issue of power equation has been dealt deeply in the theories transgressed by Michel Foucault. He is of the opinion that "power is mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts on their actions" (Foucault. 1982). The very existence of repressive relations of power has pushed women towards a bog of extreme physical burden. It is exercised pertinently in almost all households and is something that effect on the spatial positioning of all the members within the family.

This pandemic has damaged drastically all chores of everyday life. Like other historical periods of acute crisis, even this will end sooner or later, but the impact that it fosters on women is in fact a matter of great concern. The primary objective of the steps undertaken is to level up measures to ensure security of our lives first. The whole enterprise seemingly ignores the gender issues creeping in almost all families. This may lead to decaying of gender concerns that women have been struggling through years. But at the same time, this period of inactivity or least activity, when all of us irrespective of sex are dumped into the four walls of our homes, there is a growing consciousness and attention towards the household management. Men, who were proudly relegated from the caring tasks could now inevitably view the difficult situation women tussles with every day. The social media has highlighted the boredom and stress of lockdown life both seriously and amusingly. It is perhaps for the first time that most men were also imprisoned together with women in their houses. This is a time for realising the ardent tasks that most women are entrusted with. This may have aided in creating a positive attitude and awareness towards the disproportionate distribution of physical labour and caring responsibilities in some families. It has sensitized this imbalance exposing explicitly women's abject situation. There are chances that all this may again be decimated once life takes on with normalcy. So, let this period of solitude and lockdown unlock the existing biased inequalities to bethink on these issues of women in a more gender sensitive way.

Feminist theories across cultures have been both combated or accepted in various ways. Literature is one such powerful medium through which these issues have been dealt with in a prolific manner. Indian women writers such as Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Manju Kapoor and others have expressed their voices of concern. These concerns should now be oozed out of the pages of their works to a virtual world bringing together a potent mix of voices and strategies. Now, this is a time perhaps never before or after in history most appropriate to disseminate these ideas of gender and feminism in a resourceful manner. Though the crisis of health and finance have added many other serious concerns of life and survival, these issues too demand attention. Let our home be the first place to disseminate ideas of equality, freedom and shared care responsibilities. To execute this, a well framed tactics is to be formulated based on the diverse needs and conditions of the

families. Women's role in managing the formal and informal care economy is both extensive and intensive. Let us design provisions to ensure that both men and women together share their domestic and care work. The present situation however in some ways has actually pushed such progressive designs into many household chores. At the same time, there is a very large section of society where this oppression has fuelled many other issues of gender imbalance and exploitation. Even in public sector, the inclusion of female voice would help reinstate these issues. It is important to avert these gender imbalances and keep both the personal and civic society strong and healthy. The support systems must also remain intact by virtually remaining proactive in offering services. At the individual level, identification of gaps between and amongst ourselves with a gender lens may abate this increased gender-based violence. These metrics to identify, inform and understand the gender imbalance may eventually bring favourable outcomes towards women's emancipation and development. The limited resources maybe redesigned to seek better peaceful household existence. This will lead to a shift in our everyday attitude and ways of working and living.

Throughout history, there is always a clever mounting strategy to divert our attention towards the priorities of any given period. Even this pandemic has hundreds of stories of arrogance, stories of domination and stories of untold depression. There is always an attempt to look into such critical moments through a gender-neutral approach. But such endeavours have and will resist to exert any attention towards the inevitable gendered impact of the same. They see the pandemic as the only real crisis to be combated, pushing aside the issue of gender and its consequences. All these episodes will definitely leave deep, long lasting effects on human psyche. There is every possibility that all the prime privileges available during and post pandemic will be given to males. These discourses relating to the pandemic directly or indirectly will definitely influence women's position and her condition. The virus of gender has and is dehydrating the lives of women in a substantial manner. As we hunker down for the long-haul of combating this pandemic, the need for addressing women's issues is ever-more pressing. Because the pandemic of coronavirus and the pandemic of gender – both are equally dangerous.

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