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Division of Labour: A Contemporary Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to critically analyse the prevalent division of labour in contemporary times within households between man and wife backed by a structured personal interview. It will explore the nuances of the same in occupations and how it leads to greater efficiency. In addition to that, the paper will scrutinize the ideas given by Emile Durkheim. It seeks to understand how the institution of 'Division of Labour' leads to alienation of a worker from his creation, the society and his own existence in particular.

Keywords: Labour, Emile Durkheim, gender – roles, alienation, occupation, efficiency.

I. HOW THE RIGOUR OF LABOUR BINDS ONE AND ALL

A whole or entirety of an existence is derived from the parts of it. The beauty and value of the existence of a society is extracted from the diversities it encompasses from its components. The society is a myriad of numerous beliefs, ideologies and people from different walks of life and what they do. Only when every character performs their role well does the overall play namely the wellness of society stays intact. It is through such judicious performance and not transgression of one's roles do we set the wheel of labour into the right direction, one that is headed towards progress of the society and all its elements as a whole that determine it. Labour is the measure of mental, social, physical efforts that are put to manifest goods and services and in exchange of it they receive wages that can be used to buy the goods and services they do not directly bring into existence themselves.

Labour is the culmination of human efforts in the form of intellect or manual. "Need" is a very strong emotion for humankind and is a driving force to perform labour. In itself labour is not pleasurable and hedonistic as an ordinary being might favour hence the consequence of that labour is the driving force to invest those efforts. Not all individuals can perform all tasks and on the basis of that such labour is divided to ensure that weaknesses are eliminated from the system and the best qualities are extracted of all and put to best use to ensure maximum returns and growth of all.

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Review of Literature

1. Book: SOCIOLOGY by T.K. Oomen and C.N. Venugopal: National Law School of India University –

This book focuses on value orientation towards work through the passage of time. It talks about how division of labour has evolved from the yester years and how it exists today in the contemporary times. It emphasises on the division of labour today based on social status and caste and various perspectives on professions modern professions and Indian social reality.

2. Research paper: ‘Understanding Durkheim’s Division of Labour’ by Ashley Crossman -

This paper vividly explains Emile Durkheim’s ideas of Organic solidarity, Mechanical solidarity and social solidarity. It explains how the division of labour benefits the society by increasing the efficiency of the workers by introducing separation for specialisation of tasks. It included valid inputs from various sociologists and criticism of Durkheim’s views backed by alternate concepts that fit the contemporary societies better.

3. Research paper: ‘The Division of Labour within households: Men’s increased participation?’ by Tomi Oinas –

This excellent paper by Toni Oinas focuses on several aspects of unequal division of labour brought forth by gender inequality within households. It brings to light how men are rewarded for the commonly acceptable form of paid labour whereas women’s effort within the confines of the house are not appreciated equally. It explains how the total work time of an individual is a compilation of the paid and unpaid work.

4. Research paper: ‘The division of labour within the household: Is there any escape from traditional gender roles?’ by Sayyid Salman Rizavi and Catherine Sofer.

This excellently co-authored research paper discusses how gender is a social construct and how traditional roles are connected with it and any difference from the same is perceived as deviance. It explains how the society is still backwards in understanding that there has to be fluidity and room for room according to subjectivity pertaining to different conditions with different people. It gives reasonable reasons for the same and at the same time explains how a social revolution will come about to bring a significant change in these rigid beliefs and rigid occupation structures with respect to different genders.

5. Research article: ‘Alienation of Labour according to Marx’ by Rashmi Priya:

This brilliant research paper explains how a worker is alienated from the product he creates,

how he is alienated from himself and the social community he is a part of. It explains how in a capitalistic society the labour's division is not given birth by naturally existent and racial disparities but by the prevalent economic and bureaucratic system.

EXPLORING GENDER ROLES IN VIEW OF DIVISION OF LABOUR IN CONTEMPORARY HOUSEHOLDS INCLUDING A REAL-LIFE INTERVIEW:

There has been an arrangement in the society according to which certain tasks are to be performed by men and some by women in accordance with their masculinity and femininity respectively. The man was the sole bread-winner while the woman was responsible for child rearing and looking after the house. As per 'Socialist Feminism'² it was the patriarchy that was responsible for the said demarcation that aided men and curbed opportunities for women in the outside world. This not only determined the nature of their position in the labour market but their class position as well. Such division has been reiterated and enforced by 'social power relationships' that govern such intricacies of social involvement of both genders with the society. Different values assigned to socially acclaimed genders arise from the position of them in the social hierarchies which have been a long-bread result of deep-rooted stereotyped behaviour.

Labour is considered to be significant and rewarding when performed to gain monetary benefit in return. This is majorly linked to stepping outside the house to work in an organisation setting. On the other hand, households are considered to be spaces wherein tasks connected to "reproduction, consumption and private enjoyment" are carried out without any kind of remuneration. It is often forgotten that households too could be a place of economic activity, either formally or informally, and in some respects as an extension of the labour market than a different area altogether. Here the "forced division of labour" comes into play as when the flow of natural innate tendencies of an individual are broken so as to adhere to societal standards which results in involuntary labour.

Sociologists namely Kurdek and Blumstein and Schwartz³ looked into this division within homes of gay male and lesbian couples. This gave the result that although the division is not equal, greater number of these pairs maintain equal division of labour than heterosexual pairs.

²Oinas, T. (2018), *The division of labour within households: Men's increased participation?*

[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-76463-](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-76463-4_3#:~:text=Division%20of%20labor%20refers%20to,in%20paid%20and%20unpaid%20work.&text=Unpaid%20work%20is%20usually%20divided,so%2Dcalled%20total%20work%20time.)

[4_3#:~:text=Division%20of%20labor%20refers%20to,in%20paid%20and%20unpaid%20work.&text=Unpaid%20work%20is%20usually%20divided,so%2Dcalled%20total%20work%20time.](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-76463-4_3#:~:text=Division%20of%20labor%20refers%20to,in%20paid%20and%20unpaid%20work.&text=Unpaid%20work%20is%20usually%20divided,so%2Dcalled%20total%20work%20time.)

³ Rizavi S, Sofer C. (2009), *The division of labour within the household: Is there any escape from traditional gender roles?*

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238116018_The_Division_of_Labour_within_the_Household_Is_The_re_any_Escape_from_Traditional_Gender_Roles

In addition to this, there also “relational dynamics at work” pertaining to the relation between gender and marital status to the housework time.

II. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER ROLES

In contemporary times, certain fluidity has been reached in terms of understanding of work division at home. The rigidity of the idea that cooking, cleaning, rearing of caring is a feminine responsibility is slowly fading. In nuclear families, the concept of “joint responsibility” has gained momentum and parents divide their time to be devoted to their off springs in order to fulfil their parental responsibilities and find time to work and relax themselves. The idea that household chores are a burden and find no appreciation often no longer holds relevance. The dependence on a single member to complete the economic needs doesn't exist anymore due to more than reason. Primarily, mothers and females with increase in levels of education are eligible and qualified to work and have financial independence, also, with increasing general levels of prices in the market, individual stake up work to support themselves and the needs of their families.

With the Covid-19 pandemic befallen on all our heads, everyone has been confined to the limits of their houses and have understood to be able to perform basic tasks themselves. With absence of house help during lockdowns, individuals irrespective of genders have risen to the occasion to bridge the necessary gaps.

As a result, it is no hidden wonder anymore that division of labour within households are subject to “reasonability.” That no working individual, man or woman should have to perform house chores alone but share that work reasonably to ensure better utilisation of time and ensure smooth work and good mental and physical health. But the opposite is also true, which is in rural areas still massive burden lies on the females of the house, in that arena lots of awareness is being spread yet there is a long way to go. Thus, this is a long battle but a winning one to ensure equitable distribution at home between genders to ensure quality work and optimum health of individuals.

Interview

In times of the pandemic, I decided to have a structured interview with my parents and understand how the division of work at home has evolved between them since the pandemic and our transfer from Bhopal to Delhi. My mother joined a management university as a professor and hence her burden at work keeps increasing, with no house help available now, my father has taken up the duty to cook meals thrice a week and do cleaning and moping. The rest of the days are distributed sensibly between my mother, my sister and myself. In

conclusion, without external help and support we have modified by behaviour to rise to the gap and step up to reduce burden on any one individual of the house. We believe that all of us are equally a part of the house and hence play our small part in ensuring its wellness to not hamper any member's school, college or office work either.

III. UNDERSTANDING EMILE DURKHEIM'S THEORY OF DIVISION OF LABOUR RELATING TO OCCUPATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

The revered '*Gita*'⁴ as quoted by Mahatma Gandhi as well mentions that, 'to perform tasks and work given to one but not in anticipation of the fruits it bears, to be detached from work, to have no desire for and reward and work.' Yajna or sacrifice as worship. Mankind has lived by sacrifice and all ages have their given yajnas. The tragedy of the contemporary Indian Society was the tendency to denounce manual labour and legitimising it through the institution of caste. Thus, Gandhi in order to remove this distinction that existed between manual and intellectual work cited this often. Thus, the importance of putting in efforts came to light removing the anticipation of fruit which shall be borne anyway.

The ancient Greeks and Romans felt work to be a burden. They found it antagonising and brutal. Early Christians following Jewish traditions considered work to be punishment but considered it important to sustain themselves. With the emergence of Christian socialism, labour was declared the foundational base of progress of humankind. Work was perceived as duty imposed by divine and human laws. Thus, work or labour has had different connotations through the passage of time but today in the contemporary society, it is a relatively routinised activity undertaken to earn a livelihood and maintain a definite social status. It consists of three components: Technical that is specific manual and mental operations, Economic that is income received which sustains livelihood, and Social prestige that one receives by being connected to a certain occupation.

Traditionally although occupations were hereditary, it was thought to be of great importance to work and it was massively valued. Living on charity was considered shameful. However, in contemporary times and welfare states as such, one can opt out of work and "live at state-defined level of subsistence" getting charity from the impersonal state without loss of dignity.

In contemporary times, the distinct features of modern occupations are that work is performed as a separate activity apart from the others. There is a massive shift from agricultural to non-agricultural or service sectors of work. The proportion of service works is increasing and that of manual labour is falling. Work is increasingly being carried out in

⁴ Oomen, Venugopal. (2010), *Social Sciences for law students series: Sociology for law students. (Book)*

organisational and planned settings to gain pre-decided outcomes with calculated efforts of collaborated human potential.

Emile Durkheim⁵ was a renowned French sociologist who had formally established the intellectual disciple of Sociology. He brought forth the idea of “solidarity” which explains “social differentiation” in society. It was laid down how persons become dependent on one another. He emphasised on “separation and specialisation of work” among people. Durkheim studied division of labour as a social institution and not as an economic institution as it is widely known to be. He took it to be an institution which produces morality in and of itself by subjecting individuals to the duties of their specialized existence. His major focus was on “mechanical solidarity” which had basis in solidarity of resemblance that is members of the same group, performing the same kind of work share their emotions and values.

On the other hand, in modern industrial societies, “organic solidarity” emerges with the growth of division of labour. In this case, persons are not similar anymore. They may be different in terms of their way of thinking, values and emotions. There is an absence of a collective conscience. It is moreover characterised by “specialisation and individualism.”

IV. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EMILE DURKHEIM’S IDEAS

Durkheim was of the belief that such categorised division aided the society as it increases the reproductive capacity of a process and the skill set of the work force. This is commendable as it took notice of how important it was to improve the efficiency of work and how the collective consciousness could bind people. However, this concept given by the sociologist failed to acknowledge the vast range of “non-industrialised societies” instead industrialisation was taken as a base. It fails to encompass the variety of individuals that do not come under the radar of organised and routine sectors.

Furthermore, as even pointed by American scholar Eliot Freidson, Durkheim based his definitions of labour in terms of the material society on production and technology. Such divisions are created by administrative authority without taking into importance the social interaction between the individuals. Not all social order can be confined and regulated under the spectrum of generation of labour or production solely on the basis of consciousness generation from common occupations. Also, Durkheim’s thoughts had a gender issue as he used ‘individuals’ only to refer to males in the society which as a result failed to take into consideration the female fraternity as they majorly performed unpaid labour only. Human

⁵Crossman, A. (2019), *Understanding Durkheim’s Division of Labour*. <https://www.thoughtco.com/division-of-labor-definition-3026259>

relations extend way further than such commonalities and do not follow such a rigid pre-determined pattern. Thus, he failed to take into account all individuals in the society in a fair and just manner.

Furthermore, it is a myth that individuals work simply to maintain a bank balance. While money may be the driving force to choose certain occupations for some, it is definitely not the only factor and for all. People are also driven by single minded devotion and an amazing passion to work simply for the love of doing something as it gives them pleasure as nothing else does.

Also, Durkheim says that division of labour increases efficiency however the satisfaction that comes a consequence is uncertain which may dwindle human motivation. For example, take a production assembly line in a factory manufacturing shirt wherein every worker has a specialised task that they perform with great speed and skill. Person A merely attaches a button on the shirt whereas B cuts the cloth in required measurements and C packs the entire shirt ready to be sent to the retailer. The amounts of satisfaction they felt from the contribution they have made will vary tremendously and hence even though the work will happen quickly with lack of satisfaction the quality of work cannot be guaranteed a cent percent.

V. ALIENATION CAUSED BY DIVISION OF LABOUR IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

The ethos of nature of humans as explained by Karl Marx⁶ elucidates how humans are different due to their ability to take command over their own surroundings using their creativity. Humans showcase their humanity in and through the work performed by them, it can be the statement of human prodigy and creative ability if not done merely for existence or as a burden. If the above conditions are ensured, the issue of alienated labour can be kept at an arm's length. This alienation however has base in the institution and social relations of production under capitalism.

An individual may experience feelings of estrangement as he does not receive contentment from his work not does he get the entire result or product of his labour. Such alienation comes from lack of feeling of sway over the social world. In such a condition, the individual would be a victim of exploitation in the world of capitalism.

Labour is an investment of efforts, capabilities of a worker into producing an end-result. That is the manifestation of the fruit of that said labour but when the worker realises that the

⁶Priya, R. (2012), *Alienation of Labour according to Marx*.
<https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/sociology/alienation-of-labour-according-to-marx/43767>

product produced by him is independent of the power, he may exercise over it, he feels alienated from his own creation. This happens not only with respect to the end result but also in the “process of production” within the area of productivity. Being estranged from his creation in which he put in his sweat and time, man is also alienated from his own self.

Furthermore, an alienated individual is also alienated from the social community of other humans. The relationship between a man with his work, to its end result, impacts his relationship to other fellow men. Hence, each of them is alienated from human life in their own unique ways.

VI. ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ALIENATION

Ideas put forth by Marx are often critiqued as he quite overestimated the probability and expanse of alienation of a standard worker. He assumed these said workers to individually hold much more responsibility and share in production than they actually did which devalues Marx’s theories.

In addition to that, workers are not only dependent on their workforces to gain a sense of identity, but also other different cultural, social, ethnic, local, religious groups they are involved in. This however does not suggest that there is complete absence of alienation in modern capitalist workplaces. Rather it may be acclaimed that not so much from an economic exploitation point of view but workers are alienated from the institutionalised bureaucracy and mass of society.

Human relationships are complicated and do not require an organised structure as such, they may be formed directly or indirectly through formal and informal means of occupations or beyond. Hence, there may be partial or situational alienation of an individual in certain situations due to some reasons but human beings are social beings that can never exist in complete vacuum in a society.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper focuses majorly on three aspects: it explores the gender roles with respect to division of labour within households backed by an interview conducted by the author. Next it understands and explains Emile Durkheim’s theory of Division of Labour pertaining to occupations in contemporary times. Lastly, it explains how Division of labour in contemporary times has led to Alienation of man, from himself, the product created by him and the social community around him. Every aspect has been explained with relevant examples and various viewpoints, followed by logical and analytical critical analysis that

helps understand every aspect from both sides.

Human beings are extremely talented and able however different beings may perform different tasks in their unique way and better. Hence, a society strives on these differences and it is logical to extract the best out of each to ensure maximum benefit of all. Division of Labour is a concept ensures specialising and separation in order to ensure better smooth functioning and greater benefits. As put forth by Adam Smith, in a fairly large market where due to increasing the division of labour is contribution to economic growth and the “wealth of nations” such division is viable.

In households, there is much more fluidity with evolving times pertaining to gender roles and working inside and outside the house. It is being understood that no job is gender specific and hence should be treated that way in actuality as well. Emile Durkheim elucidated and stressed on the importance of specialisation to get better and more efficient results.

Labour is an institution and activity whether paid or unpaid is such that it cannot ever exist in insolation. Thus, it has a connection with caste, race, cultures, genders. Such relationships have evolved through the passage of time. How it is perceived in the society is governed by social relationships that determine their existence and importance in the society.

For our world with ever growing population, we strive to maximise output. The only viable way to achieve that is through high Division of Labour in which all the persons work in unison for common good actualised in the joint conscience brought about by mechanical solidarity in absence of differentiation to further bring out happiness and contentment from work done.
