

The Gendered Divide: Exploring the Public/Private Dichotomy in Contemporary India

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Abstract

The Public/Private divide forms the central core of feminist thought even today and its roots can be traced back to the origin of liberalism and divide between state and market forces. Feminist scholars, however, have laid bare the gendered basis of this dichotomy by arguing that the public sphere essentially belongs to men, whereas the private sphere is inhabited by women, but is controlled by men. The dominance over the public sphere has resulted in the control over the private sphere, crippling women's rights, and freedoms. It is important to de-gender this divide to ensure that women are given equal rights and freedom. Gender is a fluid category including a spectrum of genders; the primary focus of this study is to understand the dichotomy with respect to women, their position in the public-private context and de-gendering the divide to make the spheres more accessible and just for women. Various scholars have suggested measures to de-gender this dichotomy by either making the private sphere more just, increasing women's presence in the public sphere or refuting the dichotomy altogether. This paper seeks to analyze these suggestive measures in the context of Indian society and examine the extent to which the Indian society has been able to de-gender its public and private spaces to evolve gender neutral spheres of existence. The objective of the study is to examine the newer forms it takes to evade all possible measures to dismantle it to subjugate and dominate women in both spheres.

Keywords: Domination, Gender, Feminism, Public/Private Dichotomy, Social Sphere.

Introduction

The public/private divide is central to the feminist thought. As celebrated feminist thinker Carole Pateman has rightly pointed out, 'the public-private dichotomy is ultimately, what the feminist movement is all about' (1). Feminist scholarship has indulged vehemently in exploring and exposing the gendered basis of this dichotomy which is generally signified in terms of market and state in the liberal thought. While the liberal thought defines the Public/Private divide in terms of the spheres of market and state, the feminist scholars added the flavor of gender to lay bare the injustices and domination subsumed under the innocent state-market dichotomy. Jeff Weintraub on the other hand, characterizes public as the visible realm and sphere of collective action and calls the private sphere as the withdrawn sphere of individual action. He further uses the two underlying criteria as 'visibility (audibility being one component) and collectivity to define the public/private dichotomy (2). In general terms, public/private dichotomy is a division of social spheres of existence wherein the public sphere

includes the domain of political life, civic engagement and politics and the private sphere is composed of family life, personal engagements, and domesticity. However, the feminists argue that this divide manifests itself into watertight compartmentalization of gendered boundaries which relegates women to the private sphere, denies them entry into the public sphere and simultaneously allows men, to not only assume charge in the public sphere, but also, dominate the private sphere of existence. Men, thus, are offered visibility and women are pushed into invisible spheres thereby also barring the visibility of abuse and domination they face. Feminist scholars have theorized various reasons for the gendered divide and have also suggested measures to remove barriers to de-gender the public and private sphere. Being a fluid concept encompassing within itself a spectrum of sexualities, gender here is used in the sense of understanding the position of women vis-à-vis men. With the development of the feminist thought and women's movements, there has been considerable improvement in the

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position of women in some respects. While feminist movements have been able to grasp some autonomy for women, a complete overhaul of patriarchy is still a distant dream. Even in most developed societies, the erasure of public/private divide has been incomplete, thus, it must be closely examined in a patriarchal society like India. The paper thus seeks to examine the translation of feminist alternatives to reality in the process to de-gender the dichotomy in contemporary India. The paper shall first develop an understanding of public/private divide with the help of theories of scholars and then shall delve into the solutions offered by scholars to de-gender the dichotomy. Three measures to de-gender the public/private divide and their examination in the Indian context shall then follow.

Methodology

The paper shall follow a mixed method approach as it will engage in qualitative methods to develop a theoretical understanding of the public/private divide; whereas the paper shall also examine secondary data to understand the working of this divide in the context of India. While a descriptive approach shall be followed to describe the state of public/private dichotomy in India, data collected by government organizations shall be taken into consideration to back the theoretical underpinnings. Public/private dichotomy shall be understood with the help of theories of celebrated feminists like Carole Pateman, Susan Molar Okin, Jean Bethke Elshtain and Nancy Fraser. In the Indian context, theorizations by Partha Chatterjee, Leela Fernandez and Nivedia Menon shall form the basis of the understanding. To understatement the position of women in India, empirical data has been used from databases published by government bodies like National Crime Records Bureau, National Family Health Survey and National Commission for Women. Several other reports by independent organizations have also been used to empirically depict the position of women in India. The thrust of the paper shall be to investigate the extent of gender neutrality present in the public and private domain and the consequent opportunities and freedoms granted to women.

Theorizing the Public/Private Dichotomy

The underpinnings of the public/private dichotomy find its roots in liberal thought where

public was a sphere of governmental control, and the private sphere marked a space free from the control and legislation of government. Logically then, women and family, a part of the private sphere was also placed outside the purview of public gaze shielding it from any interference and regulation. This unregulated domain of existence was deliberately ignored by liberal theorization which in turn allowed the perpetuation of inequalities and injustices. Feminist scholars drew attention to the fact that, 'liberal theory nowhere explicitly theorizes the relation between these articulations of the public-private dichotomy' (1). Absence of theories on this dichotomy became a fresh ground for breeding abuse, domination, violence, and injustice. Nancy Fraser in her influential work, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', accepts the relevance and importance of a public sphere as a channel between the state and the people; she also realizes the potential the public sphere has in realization of rights and democracy, but at the same time highlights that this public sphere is constituted by exclusion of women. Her solution thus is that of creation of subaltern counter publics to bring forth the issues neglected and ignored by the public sphere (3). However, the hierarchy and power structures of the private sphere were never considered and no attempts were made to reorganize the power as were made to redistribute power and control in the public sphere. Thus, the liberal thought may boast about bringing about equality and justice in the public sphere, replacing hierarchy rule with equitable democratic structures, it is equally responsible for creating a lopsided private sphere ridden with hidden inequalities and dominations. Thus, the feminist theorists engage in creating a theory for the private sphere to explore and expose the patriarchy subsumed under the liberal dialogue of democracy. Carole Pateman is an influential theorist who has smashed the liberal social contract as a fraudulent contract which assumes a sexual contract that predates the liberal contract. This sexual contract has necessitated the confinement of women in the private sphere performing the duties of the household while men participate in the public sphere taking part in civic and political engagements. Liberals were obsessed with the public sphere and thus overlooked the private which negated their theory of liberty itself.

She also argues that the interdependence and power dynamic is such that the control of the public sphere by men not only marginalizes women in the public sphere but also translates into marginalization in decision making even in the private sphere. Thus, she believes, 'the separation between private and public is thus re-established as a division within civil society itself, within the world of men' (4). Domestic life thus forms a part of the forgotten sphere which does not need reform as the public sphere does. The private sphere is assumed to be devoid of any power structures thus shielding it from any political reforms for sharing power. Pateman further argues that 'precisely because liberalism conceptualizes civil society in abstraction from ascriptive domestic life, the latter remains "forgotten" in theoretical terms' (1). This forgotten apolitical sphere of family becomes the root of oppression for women. Therefore, feminist like Susan Molar Okin believe that 'feminists have turned their attention to the politics of what had previously been regarded as paradigmatically nonpolitical' (5). Family and the politics in domestic life have taken the front seat in feminist analysis. Family life, motherhood and marriage render women more vulnerable than men and are potential sites of injustices. Thus, Okin debunks the Public/Private dichotomy, arguing that the feminist adage of personal is political validates the non-existence of a clear boundary. She believes that both spheres are characterized by power structures and authoritarian structures. The state, although may assume its non-interference in the personal sphere to maintain a dichotomy, in many ways it continues to control and manage the deviances like women's right to their bodies, property etc. Moreover, most of our early socialization takes place in family life which in turn affects both our private and public lives. She thus states that, the personal is political is sometimes supplemented by the corollary of 'political is personal' (5). Both these statements indicate the unclear boundary of Public/Private divide and how these boundaries are superfluous. Agreeing to the concept of superfluous boundaries, Jean Bethke Elshtain argues that the public and private are mutually constitutive. In her seminal work, *Public Man and Private Woman*, she writes that, 'Feminists have long argued that the personal is political, demanding a re-examination of private

life as a critical site of political struggle' (6). Rather than having rigid boundaries, the Public/Private divide transgresses boundaries often impugning women's position. Power in the public sphere accords men power in the private sphere as well. Thus, while tracing women's position in the social and political thought from Plato to Marx, she has critiqued western political thought's exclusion of women. She opines that, 'For Plato, the pursuit of justice within the polis is the highest calling, a pursuit inherently linked to the rational capabilities of men' (6). Similarly, the liberal order upheld individual liberties and rights, while paradoxically confining women to the private sphere, assuming them to be incapable of rationality. She also calls for rethinking the divide in a more equitable way to assimilate women's roles and achievements in the public sphere. In the Indian context, Partha Chatterjee's theorization of the material spiritual dichotomy offers an interesting insight into the public/private divide in India. While analyzing the nationalist movement and the subsequent response to the gender question, Chatterjee argues that while formal education for women became popular as a result of colonial influences by the British, the nationalist leaders too agreed to modernize India and open the gates of education for women. This was a path breaking move allowing women to transgress the boundaries of the private sphere, thereby breaking the dichotomy. However, the education was so designed that women would be taught 'proper feminine curriculum' in order to instill feminine values of managing the household (7). So while certain modern notions were accepted, say, formal education, by controlling the content of the formal education, the dichotomy was maintained as it was clearly specified that even through education women were trained to attend to household chores. This also helped maintain a distinct Indian identity which was under the threat of colonial influence. So while it was accepted that the colonial masters excelled in the material field, it was firmly believed that the spiritual field (which meant the private sphere) was still a sphere of Indian excellence. Similar changes when presented themselves during the process of globalization and liberalization, the threat to Indian identity was put away by once again securing the private sphere by controlling women. Thus, while women appropriated the opportunities of formal

employment, making a departure from their historical counterparts, they were now to manage both the household and the job. As Leela Fernandes points out in her work, the 'modern Indian woman' is 'urban, contemporary, travels, but the framework still exists' (8). This framework is the public/private divide which necessitates the presence of women in the private sphere even if they have their hands full by their participation in the public sphere. Celebrated Indian feminist Nivedita Menon, argues that feminism is not to protect women from attack, but it is a mechanism of redressal and granting of equal rights to women to access public sphere (9). Scholars have, in multiple ways, assessed the Public/Private divide. While Pateman believes it to be a predecessor of the social contract ensuring dominance over women, Okin thinks of the Public/Private dichotomy as a mythical measure to achieve illiberal ends of patriarchy; Elshtain examines the dichotomy through a philosophical lens; Chatterjee on the other hands sees it as a mechanism to solve the gender question and protecting the identity of the nation and Fernandes also extends the argument in the context of globalization. The argument that binds these scholars together is that the dichotomy of Public/Private has been devastating for women's rights and freedoms. Thereby, they suggest various mechanisms to either destruct the divide completely or de-gender its operations. The next part of the paper shall assess the success of these alternatives in contemporary Indian society.

Results and Discussion

India has been a land of culture, religion, customs, and practices. As a result of the patriarchal set up of the society, the majority of these practices have either victimized women or have used them to further some or the other end. The subcontinent has also been infamous for Sati pratha, child marriages and female foeticide and infanticide. The ancient Indian text, 'Manusmriti, depicts women as having a libidinous disposition in need of regulation by men who are their protectors and guardians' (10). It mandates the control over women and only assigns the task of childbearing and household management to women. The Indian society strictly adhered to the Public/private division and followed the gendered binaries in dividing the presence in these divisions. With the progress of time and subsequent foreign invasions,

women were further pushed behind the walls of domesticity to safeguard the identity of the nation. The colonial era witnessed a new transformation with the raging social reforms by our own reformers as well as by the colonial masters. During the nationalist movement, parallel demands for women's freedom and their upliftment were made. Reformers like Savitri Phule, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Raja Ram Mohan Roy became the pioneers of women's issues. Formal education and other rights often were seen as mimicking the western culture and questions were raised to protect the Indian identity from being corroded. Therefore, the nationalists constructed a spiritual material dichotomy much like the Public/Private dichotomy to maintain this distinctive Indian identity. This dichotomy posited the colonial masters as superior in the material domain and articulated a pride of the superiority of the colonized in the spiritual domain. The nationalist resolution was thus to modernize India in the material domain solely as it already excelled in the spiritual domain. Logically, the material domain was a male's sphere, and the spiritual domain was regarded as a female's sphere of existence. It was the spiritual or the inner domain which upheld the distinct identity of the country and thus, maximum caution was exercised to prevent it from falling prey to outside encroachments. The 'home' and its representative, the woman, must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world (7). Thus, while women were allowed formal education, the content was controlled thereby maintaining the divide. Yet again, the private sphere was shielded from any significant changes and was protected from any outside influence. However, to say that no considerable improvement has been made with respect to women's position in the society would be a faulty statement. Governmental policies, feminist movement, social reform movements and other factors have worked positively to ensure the betterment of the position of women in the society. Adoption of neo-liberal policies and subsequent privatization also started a flow of newer influences in Indian society, once again trying to dismantle the public/private dichotomy by offering women formal employment opportunities. Fernandes argues that 'gender in this context serves as the socio-symbolic site which attempts to manage the destabilizing

contradictions which globalization produces in the Indian nation' (8). The erasure of boundaries and identities attempted by globalization is once again re-territorialized by juxtaposing a newer form of public/private divide. The woman of globalized India is 'Indian as well as new' (8). While we see the contemporary times may dilute the public/private divide by the presence of women in the public sphere, continued references to Indian values, system or framework is nothing but a reference to attend to household duties reiterating the existence of the dichotomy. However, the dichotomy has taken a newer form and created newer issues for women in India. The Public/Private dichotomy as it exists in India today is the central issue the paper seeks to explore. Considering various measures suggested by scholars to de-gender the divide, the next section shall posit the Indian realities against these measures to paint a larger picture of women in contemporary India.

Breaking the Walls of Domesticity: Increasing the Presence of Women in Public Sphere

Betty Friedan has been credited for ushering in the second wave of feminism through her celebrated writing, *The Feminine Mystique*. In her seminal work, she argues that the persona and mystique created around women does not allow them to fulfill their basic needs. Their development is stunted, identity is threatened, and potentials are forfeited. Her solution was a complete rejection of feminine mystique and opting a new career plan. She believes that 'identity is based on personal achievement through career' (11). In opposition to the image painted by the then media, that women only get degrees to get a husband, she argued that women should engage in paid work which would give value to their education. She further states that women should engage in civic dialogues and enter the sphere of professional employment giving up their role as housewives. Her ideas galvanized many women to pursue goals to reassert their identities in American society. Clearly, such assertion is based not only on women's entry in the public sphere but their participation and equal vocalization in the public sphere. Sylvia made an interesting statement that, 'patriarchy is a dynamic system. If women do win a victory, then patriarchal forces will regroup and regain control over them in a different way' (12).

While women feature in the public sphere in the contemporary Indian society, they are subjugated in the public sphere in a manner which further perpetuates inequality and injustice. Women appear to be free once they enter the public sphere, but the new restrictions imposed on women further exacerbate the gender inequalities. Camila Stivers argues that although various laws for inclusion of women and their safety are put in place to ensure their representation in the public sphere, cultural attitudes and prejudices negate the effectiveness of these laws. Either women must follow a double bind, 'look like a lady, act like a man', by completely erasing her sexuality, or if they retain their sexuality, which is very much a part of their identity, they are concentrated in specific areas of community development, care, and nursing (13). Moreover, women are trapped in 'glass walls' instead of domestic walls where they are unable to escape the areas which are traditionally associated with women like teaching nursing etc. and are kept away from traditionally masculine areas of heavy industry, science, and technology. Along with glass walls, they are also confined in glass ceilings, wherein 'the presence of women in top managerial ranks threatens the males and they steer women to non-careers track jobs in personnel and public relations' (13). There are reports which further reiterate the issue in India. Women in India are majorly concentrated in areas of healthcare, administration, support services and most importantly, education. As per LinkedIn's Economic Graph, women are poorly employed in manufacturing, oil and gas industries and construction works (14). In addition to that, women still face cultural and religious barriers when they try to attain leadership positions at work. In 2024, overall women present across the workforce as 26.8% only and even less when it came to women in leadership positions, 18.3% (14). The same report also says that the mandate of the Companies Act to have women directors on company boards is also seldom followed by companies. Similarly, Vishakha guidelines of sexual harassment at workplace were a celebrated judgment in India. It was regarded as a path breaking judgment to usher in women safety at the workplace. However, women continue to face harassment issues till date and the number of reported cases are still low owing to the social and cultural pressures. As per the data released by

National Commission for Women, there has been a significant rise in the number of cases of sexual harassment at workplace. By July 20, 2023, around 700 cases were reported out of which 139 were of sexual harassment at workplace (15). Thus, we may say that women have all the freedom to enter the public sphere and claim their rights there. Such daunting realities and incidents not only discourage women from participating in the public sphere, but also raises serious questions of the safety of the public sphere. Other than the cases of blatant gender inequality and sexual crimes, women's appearance and their bodies are also places under scrutiny in the public sphere. The cultural reverberations allow women's bodies and appearances to be controlled once they have broken free of the walls of domesticity and entered the public sphere. Under the garb of national identity and culture, practices are promoted to curtail women's freedoms and choices. Oza, for instance, in her work describes the accepted behavior of modern Indian women, where the society wants them 'to become IAS, IPS, officers and ministers. But we don't want them to smoke, drink and adopt western styles of living' (16). In the political arena as well, the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian constitution reserved seats for women in local bodies, granting them representation and rights of decision making. However studies have shown the 'proxy candidature' and almost little or no political power possessed by women (17). At the central level, the bill for reserving one-third seats for women in the center and state legislatures has finally been passed by both the houses after it was first introduced in 1996. However, the implementation is based on the decennial census and delimitation which has already been postponed a number of times, thereby labeling this empowerment as 'delayed' (18). These amendments aimed at increasing the presence of women in the public sphere, often defeat the very purpose and create a newer domination where men dictate the political power in the façade of women holding it. Therefore, on one hand, there are claims to make the public sphere more accessible to women, at the same time such realities defeat the entire purpose of accessibility and raise concerns on the availability of real freedom to women.

Reforming the Private: Extension of Justice to the Private Sphere

Susan Molar Okin, however, suggested another measure to de-gender the Public/Private dichotomy. She agrees with liberal principles of justice, liberty and equality and demands that these principles be extended to the private sphere which they have very covertly excluded. In her work, *Justice, Gender, and Family*, she advocates granting women the rights of negative liberty within the private sphere already claimed by men (1). She argues for a reform of private sphere which traditionally impacted women negatively. Somewhat measures have been taken from time to time in India as well. Based on feminist movement and social reform demands, laws were made to regulate the unregulated familial sphere. Legislation on dowry and domestic violence entailed stricter punishments for offenders and their families, the act related to Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques also disallows sex determination and therefore limiting female infanticide. Laws have also been made to prevent which hunting and other acts which discriminated against women on account of their social position. Property rights have also been extended to women, although not to women across religions and cultural boundaries. The Indian legal system is replete with acts to accord safety and security to women in the private arena. However, this legal system comes in direct collision with culture and social norms while its application in the society. The legal system doesn't exist in a vacuum; rather the judges, lawyers and other people are the embodiments of law in society. Thus, the gender neutrality of the laws has largely been unable to protect women from the whims and fancies of their male counterparts and at times, from the family and society. The stark reality is that women are not even safe in their safe spaces. As per the data released by National Crime Record Bureau in 2022, the rate of crime against women stood at 6.64 at per lakh population, out of which a whopping 31.4% crimes have been committed by either husbands or his relatives (19). These cases, however, are only a fraction of real crime numbers since many of these cases go unreported due to familial and other pressures. The traditional wall of domesticity or the private sphere, which was supposed to 'shield women' from the atrocities of the unsafe public sphere becomes a site of violence.

Even after decades of passage of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, the National Family Health Survey Data 2019-2021 shows that, '29.3 per cent of married Indian women between the ages of 18 and 49 have experienced domestic/sexual violence; 3.1 per cent of pregnant women aged 18 to 49 have suffered physical violence during their pregnancy (20). The presence of legal remedies and punitive measures has also failed to deter violence against women. Sometimes, taking the legal course itself is a barrier for women who are deprived of any autonomy and independence. Depending on their male counterparts, deters them to file complaints, so much so that, 87% of married women do not seek legal help in case of marital violence (20). As a measure to provide liberty and equality to women in the private sphere, acts like female infanticide and foeticide also must be ended. The Indian society and its obsession with a male child and heir have resulted in distorted sex ratios across the country. Preference to male child often results in either female infanticide or foeticide or complete neglect of the girl child in the family. The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, disallows sex detection to thwart the practice of female feticides. However, the act continues to be evasive and there have been only 617 convictions since last 25 years as per a report (21). It is a well-known fact that the low conviction rate does not signify lower crime rates rather reflects under-reporting of cases. Various governmental schemes and programs are being run to create awareness about the rights of the girl child, promotion of education of girls and specific opportunities for higher education. Despite that, the preoccupation with the production of an heir continues to disadvantage girl child and this has been signified in the high school dropout ratio of girls at the 13.7% at the secondary level (22). This suggests early marriage, early conception and often preoccupation with household work which impacts their chances of getting formal education. Therefore, Okin's suggestion to reform the private sphere, but the private sphere in India continues to reek of gender inequality and violence; it also fails to create a safe space for women at a place they were supposed to be the safest.

Deconstructing the Dichotomy: No Public/Private Distinction

Nancy Chodorow's celebrated work; 'Reproduction of Mothering' is known for establishing the psychoanalytic branch of feminism. She argued that the gendered meanings are not only shaped by culture but also defined by our own self-which we form throughout our life cycle. Children often associate with mothers differently as we all have our own femininities and masculinities (23). While male children associate more with their fathers, female children associate more with their mothers thereby reproducing mothering instincts in them. This process goes and the process of caregiving and nurturing disadvantages women. Chodorow believes in shared parenting and equal households. Dual parenting shall prevent the male child from, 'rejecting the feminine feeling of nurturance considered unworthy of real men' (24). Thus, in a way she advocates breaking the dichotomy of public and private and allowing free movement of people in both the spheres. The division should not exist at all and should be fluid which would allow women to participate in formal employment and encourage men to shoulder the responsibilities of childcare and household. However, the world as we see today, does represent women in formal employment, but does not feature them in the household. The process of globalization in India created a 'new middle class' which reaped various benefits of the state's neo liberal policies. Urbanization and employment opportunities transformed the household, women started going out for work and the family became nuclear instead of joint ones (25). While women have started acquiring major roles and positions in the public sphere, the mindset that household responsibility belongs to women has continued to stay and has created a 'double burden' on women. The modern Indian woman as portrayed by Leela Fernandes, 'must attend her national identity as well as her modernity' (8). She must be present and excelling in both the spheres is seldom excused for any omissions anywhere. The underscoring gap (as per ILO) between 70% of women desiring employment outside their home and the reality of 45% women employed speaks for the consequence of this double burden. In the report of 'A quantum leap for gender equality' 21.7% of women of working age are engaged in unpaid care work (26).

All this speaks of our psychological acceptance of women in the public sphere but non-acceptance of their absence in the private sphere. The dichotomy thus, continues to exist and it has several disadvantages for women. At the workplace, having a child or raising a child becomes a penalty for mothers, where they are penalized by denying promotions and pay hike. Whereas fathers are rewarded for fatherhood and are seen as more stable and reliable employees giving them the same benefits which are denied to women (26). While motherhood becomes a penalty for women, it also at the same time reiterates the fact that the primary responsibilities of childcare and other household chores are to be borne by women and if at all men participate in it, it is an exception and must be rewarded and acknowledged. In case of working women, it is often regarded that 'they are paid to work outside and they pay other women to do their work because they are unable to do their real work', says Menon (9). Studies have also pointed out that these issues related to domestic help are commonly seen as 'socially second-rate women's issues' (27). This not only recapitulates that women's 'real work' is household work but also frees men from the entire household work to the extent that they are not even involved in managing or delegating it. Moreover, the fact that the work that is being delegated is a 'woman's work' itself re-establishes the Public/Private dichotomy. Jayati Ghosh in her work argues that, 'where there is a large amount of unpaid work that is performed in a society, and where the bulk of that is performed by women, the participation of women even in paid activities tends to be much more disadvantaged' (28). Moreover, employment of paid help to complete the household chores is seen as diverting their work to someone else, ultimately, 'the helper women's own household responsibilities back home must be fulfilled by other women, as the gender division of labor at both ends of the migratory spectrum still leaves women primarily responsible for doing the domestic work' (28). Although hiring paid help has helped women reach newer heights in their careers, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent lockdown, yet again pushed them back to household work. The lockdown and the unavailability of help, 'pushed back into gendered domesticity, proving the inadequacy of paid domestic services as a solution to mundane, back-

breaking household work', says John (29). The age of the internet and the increasing pace of digitization have further blurred the boundaries of the public/private divide. It has become possible to be a public figure from your private space thereby decreasing the difference between the two spheres. The digital world has opened up a host of opportunities of career, business and expression. However, for women, the digital world has become a site of oppression and inequality. In 2021, the gender gap in internet usage in India was the highest among Asia-Pacific as per a report (30). As per a report by the Asian Development Bank and LinkedIn, the gap also manifests itself in loss of opportunities in the digital work which demand digital skills (31). This not only keeps women from achieving heights and newer opportunities but the increasing cybercrime against women make them unsafe and vulnerable. As per the National Crime Record Bureau, cybercrimes against women in India went up by 28% in 2019 (32). Unprecedented rise of cybercrimes against women results in two consequences, firstly, it leads to stricter controls over women's presence and activities in the digital world and secondly, it discourages their participation in the digital sphere and pushes them back to their being in the private sphere. Unequal access, threat of violence and control discourage women's participation in the digital World making their freedoms and opportunities lopsided. Thus, the double burden of work, inequalities faced by women due to motherhood, the issue of the domestic help, subjugation and limited access to the digital world, reiterate the societal assumption of a woman's undesired presence in the public sphere and also a woman's undesired absence in the private sphere. Due to responsibilities of the household and caregiving; unsafe public sphere, the society inevitably reaffirms the public/private divide stating where women should belong.

Conclusion

While some scholars may argue that the Public/Private dichotomy is mutually constituted as the power in one sphere translates to dominance in another sphere, the reality is that this dichotomy is both mutually constitutive and mutually exclusive. Mutual constitution of the Public/Private dichotomy suggests that since women are absent and powerless in the public sphere, their position in the private sphere shall

also be that of powerlessness. While the power dynamics of the Public/Private dichotomy is mutually constitutive, it becomes mutually exclusive when the concern is related to responsibilities and duties. Men are thus, allowed to move between private and public sphere, women are seldom allowed to sever their ties with the private sphere and continue to be the primary caregivers in the private sphere. The historical dichotomy of Public/Private, thus, continues to exist even today in the Indian society. Several changes have also been made to de-gender the dichotomy, but the division has continued to stay and has also evolved in newer forms and ways to subjugate women. On one hand it has become easier for women to navigate and participate in the public sphere, on the other hand, the continued male dominance in the public sphere has resulted in an unequal public reaction and incomplete project of female liberation. Kandiyoti has argued that, '20th century has witnessed a major shift from private to public patriarchy' (33). Therefore, women are freed to enter the public sphere but are subordinated there. Moreover, the private sphere, as we have seen also has not proven to be as haven for women. The garb of women safety and security behind relegating them to the private sphere has also proved to be a sham and is just another mechanism of propagation of patriarchy. Distressing statistics continue to show how women bear the brunt of violence, subjugation, and discrimination. Therefore, the first two alternatives to de-gender the dichotomy have not done much favor to women. De-gendering the dichotomy would be more successful if we take the third route of deconstructing the dichotomy itself. As Chodorow has suggested, women should distance themselves from being the primary caregivers and smash the patriarchy. The future belongs to households which are driven with equality, respect, and justice for both the genders. The Indian society needs to make fundamental psychological changes of their definitions of feminine and masculine to achieve a society which is equal and just in its outlook. Equal and co-parenting should also be normalized in a society where women form a major part not only of the workforce, but also the society. Thus, we need identities which are more fluid and less dependent on the anachronism of the Public/Private dichotomy.

Abbreviation

Nil.

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