

# **Double Burden and the Forgotten Workforce: A Comparative Study of Women's Unpaid Labor in Indian Urban Novels and Films**

## **1.Introduction**

In contemporary Indian society, women frequently shoulder a dual responsibility: engaging in paid employment while simultaneously managing the lion's share of unpaid domestic labor [1]. This phenomenon, often referred to as the “double burden,” not only affects women's professional advancement but also has profound implications for their mental and physical well-being [2]. The portrayal of this duality in urban Indian narratives—both in literature and cinema—offers a nuanced understanding of women's lived experiences [3].

Lately, urban Indian novels and films have increasingly highlighted the predicament of women contending with career pursuits vis-a-vis traditional domesticity. A film such as *English Vinglish* (2012), set in metropolitan Mumbai and New York, presents the story of a homemaker who steps outside traditional gender roles by learning English and gaining confidence in herself. The film reflects how unpaid domestic labor is often undervalued, while the protagonist's attempt to balance familial expectations with newfound independence subtly highlights the double burden faced by many women. Likewise, literature such as *Meenakshi Bose's Valuing Women's Unpaid Work: Experiences from Odisha* provides empirical evidence of the undervalued domestic contribution made by women.



**Figure 1: A still from *English Vinglish*, portraying the protagonist managing household tasks while navigating her personal growth, encapsulating the silent struggles of women shouldering a double burden.**

The pervasive nature of the double burden is further underscored by studies that indicate that married Indian women spend much more of their time than men in domestic work that is unpaid [5]. This disparity not only restricts women's opportunities for leisure and personal development but also serves to reinforce gender inequalities in domestic and professional arenas. To home in on issues concerning the double burden, one must conduct a detailed investigation of all cultural, economic, and policy-related norms that sustain the gender-based division of labor [6]. A deeper investigation into women's unpaid labor, taking urban Indian novels and films as a lens, might present the study with a framework through which to interrogate unequal domestic labor distribution.

## **2.Statement of the Problem**

Despite increasing participation of women in the urban workforce in India, a significant proportion continue to bear the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic labor. This persistent "double burden" results in limited opportunities for personal development, increased stress, and diminished career progression. While governmental and institutional focus often centers on increasing women's labor force participation rates, there is insufficient attention paid

to the hidden economic value and emotional toll of unpaid household work. Urban Indian literature and cinema have recently emerged as influential platforms for portraying the complex realities of women navigating both spheres. However, the extent to which these cultural mediums accurately reflect and influence societal understanding of gendered labor divisions remains underexplored.

### **3. Research Gap**

Existing literature on gender inequality has extensively documented women's economic participation and domestic roles, yet very few studies have undertaken a comparative cultural analysis of how this "double burden" is depicted across both urban Indian novels and films. Moreover, while some research addresses sociological and psychological impacts of unpaid labor, limited attention is given to how these narratives shape public perception and reinforce or challenge gender norms in urban Indian contexts. This study fills that gap by offering a cross-medium exploration—analyzing both literary and cinematic portrayals—to uncover how cultural representations influence and mirror real-world societal attitudes towards women's unpaid labor and dual responsibilities.

### **4. Research Question**

How do urban Indian novels and films portray the “double burden” faced by women in balancing paid employment with unpaid domestic labor, and what impact do these portrayals have on societal perception of gender roles?

### **5. Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to critically analyze the portrayal of women's unpaid domestic labor in urban Indian novels and films, exploring how these representations reflect and influence societal attitudes toward gender roles.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

- ❖ To analyze the portrayal of women's unpaid domestic labor in urban Indian novels and films, focusing on how these mediums represent the challenges faced by women in managing both professional work and household duties.
- ❖ To examine the socio-cultural, economic, and policy factors that sustain the unequal division of labor between men and women in urban India, and how these factors are reflected in media representations.

- ❖ To assess the impacts of media portrayals of the double burden on societal attitudes towards gender roles, specifically in terms of how these portrayals influence public perceptions of women's roles in both the home and the workplace.

## **6. Research Methodology**

### **6.1. Research Design**

This study will adopt a qualitative research design, utilizing content analysis to explore and interpret the portrayal of women's unpaid domestic labor in urban Indian novels and films. The research will focus on analyzing specific narratives that depict the "double burden" faced by women.

### **6.2. Selection of Indian Novel and Films**

The selection of urban Indian novels and films for this study will be based on three criteria: relevance to the research topic, cultural representation, and impact. The chosen works must explore women's dual roles in professional and domestic spheres, reflect the socio-cultural realities of urban India, and be critically recognized. For this study, *Tumhari Sulu* will serve as the most significant film for this study as it shows how societal pressure falls upon women when they try to work while managing household duties. For literature, *The Sari Shop Widow* by Shobhan Bantwal will be selected for its insightful depiction of how women juggle career ambition with family obligations, while also providing a nuanced view of women's experiences in contemporary urban India.

### **6.3. Data Collection**

#### **❖ Textual Analysis of Novels:**

Relevant novels will be read and analyzed for how women's unpaid labor is depicted. Relevant key scenes, dialogues, and descriptions will be extracted from the novels in order to emphasize the impact of domestic work in women's lives. Thus, this will help understand how the narrative techniques are used to display the daily struggles of women, who juggle with both profession and household activities.

#### **❖ Film Analysis:**

The shortlisted films will be observed and analyzed in a similar procedure within textual analysis. Scenes depicting women's performing household chores, managing careers, and dealing with societal expectations will be specified for interpretation. Through this process, the study will investigate how these visual images tell the women's experiences of domestic

and professional work and how such representation couples exterior images against the gender roles defined.

#### ❖ **Secondary Data Review:**

Apart from the direct data sources, secondary data will also include literature; articles, interviews, and reports will be reviewed to understand the double burden phenomenon better in the urban context of India. The secondary data are an interpretation of various socio-cultural, economic, and policy factors sustaining the unequal division of labor between men and women, thus being useful in putting the findings of respective novels and films in context.

#### **6.4.Ethical Considerations**

The study will follow ethical principles that govern integrity, which ensures that participants detailed in secondary data sources remain confidential and anonymous. Copyright law will be upheld and all sources given appropriate credit.

#### **6.5.Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis will use NVivo or MAXQDA, among other tools, which will lead to the analysis of the data concerning the patterns found in gendered domestic work and work-life balance and societal perception of women's roles. It will then proceed in identifying key themes, interpreting them according to socio-cultural and economic factors, then estimating how such portrayals shape societal attitudes toward gender roles at home and work.

#### **7.Hypothesis**

- **H<sub>1</sub>:** Urban Indian novels and films portray women's unpaid domestic labor as a significant barrier to their professional growth and personal well-being, thereby reinforcing the concept of the "double burden."
- **H<sub>2</sub>:** Socio-cultural and policy-related factors contributing to the unequal division of labor between men and women are reflected in the narratives of urban Indian literature and cinema.
- **H<sub>3</sub>:** Media portrayals of the double burden significantly influence societal perceptions of gender roles, often normalizing or challenging the expectation that women should balance both paid work and household responsibilities.

#### **8.Review of Literature**

**Chusna, (2024)** analyzed the representation of urban woman in the Bollywood film *Crew*-from its flight attendants, who manage their tough careers while balancing their family obligations-under great pressures as an individual in today's time in Mumbai. The study aims to examine

how Crew contributes towards the gender discourse using a multimodal discourse analysis with Rick Iedema six-level tele-filmic analysis under qualitative framework. The findings highlight key themes, including women's role as primary family support, societal expectations of beauty and elegance, and the pressure to secure prestigious employment. The specific picture drawn by the film of flight attendant, according to the view given, unfolds the singular hardships for women in compliance with societal standards concerning optimum levels for work and family, thereby affording glimpses into the intersection between gender, work, and social expectations for contemporary India [7].

**Sukumuran et al., (2024)** explores the dual roles of women in Kerala, India, focusing on the balance between professional responsibilities and traditional household duties through the lens of Work-Family Conflict theory. In spite of Kerala's progress in education and a higher gender ratio, the cultural expectations weigh heavily on women, creating self-doubt, anxiety, and mental fatigue. The research indicates that even when some women do receive spousal support, the unequal burden of sharing household chores leads to working-family conflict. A descriptive research design has been chosen for the study with a convenience sample; Chi-square tests were employed to test gender-related influence regarding beliefs in societal norms causing emotional and mental conflicts. Pearson's Correlation was used to analyze spousal support and job pressure among women. The results indicate that traditional biases against women continue to block their career advancement and well-being, despite joint economic contributions. The outcome of the study is that the enactment of anti-discrimination policies in the workplace and a shift in societal attitudes is crucial to alleviating women of a double burden, enhancing gender equality, and improving mental health [8].

**Chen et al., (2019)** determine how far women in Cebu experience the double burden of work and family responsibilities, especially during mid-life and beyond. It used data from the Cebu Longitudinal Health and Nutrition Survey from 1994 to 2012 to realize this aim. Latent Class Analysis (LCA) is employed to develop time-use class membership to identify patterns relating to work and household responsibilities over eighteen years. About one-third of the sample seemed to engage in paid work with great vigor, be it from home or otherwise, while taking care of heavy household chores at the same time with not much time at all for themselves. On the other hand, LTA has shown that the entrance of grandchildren into the household transfers some women from one time-use class membership to another, some transitioning into high-intensity

caregiving roles or leaving work altogether while others remain trapped in both work and family burdens. The dual burden continues to be a very significant issue for many women, with family structure changes triggering major shifts in responsibility [9].

**John et al., (2013)** examines the long-standing issue of the nature and value of women's labor in modern India, advocating for an intersectional framework that considers gender, class, caste, and sexuality. The first section presents a theoretical overview of the challenges involved, including the prominence of the domestic sphere, the stigma associated with public labor, and the abjection of sex work. The second section relies on women's life narratives (or autobiographies) from the likes of Rashsundari Debi, Binodini Dasi, Baby Kamble, Baby Haldar, and Nalini Jameela, to explore the ways in which labor has influenced narratives about women's lives. The last part of the study reflects on the insights gained, concentrating on the conflicts that structure women's relationships within the labor sphere and perhaps further questions those raise for feminist analysis. The conclusion is that a multifaceted view of women's labor gives access to critical issues and complexities urging better interpretation of their roles in private and public labor contexts [10].

## **9. Chapter Plan**

To ensure a coherent and systematic exploration of the topic, the study is divided into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction:** This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, research gap, research question, aim and objectives, significance of the study, and hypothesis. It also includes an overview of the double burden phenomenon contextualized within Indian urban literature and film.
- **Chapter 2: Review of Literature:** This chapter provides a detailed review of existing literature on unpaid domestic labor, work-family conflict, and gender roles in India and other global contexts. It draws from theoretical frameworks and previous studies to establish a scholarly context for the present research.
- **Chapter 3: Research Methodology:** This chapter outlines the qualitative research design adopted for the study. It details the selection criteria of texts and films, data collection methods (textual and film analysis), tools used for data analysis (e.g., NVivo), and ethical considerations involved.

- **Chapter 4: Analysis and Interpretation:** This chapter presents the thematic analysis of selected Indian urban novels and films. Key themes such as unpaid domestic labor, gender expectations, work-life conflict, and societal perceptions are identified and interpreted with examples and references.
- **Chapter 5: Discussion:** This chapter discusses the findings in relation to existing research. It critically examines how media narratives reinforce or challenge societal norms regarding gender roles and unpaid labor, and how such portrayals impact public discourse and policy perspectives.
- **Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations:** This concluding chapter summarizes key insights, answers the research question, reflects on the hypotheses, and offers policy and media-related recommendations for addressing the double burden. Suggestions for further research are also provided.

## 10. Limitations

- As a qualitative content analysis, the interpretation of narratives is influenced by the researcher's perspective, potentially introducing bias despite the application of structured analytical frameworks.
- The exclusive focus on urban contexts limits the generalizability of the findings, as the dynamics of unpaid labor and gender roles may differ significantly in rural or semi-urban environments.
- While the study investigates how media representations may influence societal perceptions, it does not empirically measure audience reception or behavioral change, which would require quantitative or mixed-method approaches.

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