

A man’s share in ‘women’s work’

Breaking gender stereotypes in the household

SM FARIDUL HAQUE

SOCIETY imposes different roles and responsibilities on men and women based on the gender of an individual which at times impede the development of individuals. For instance, cooking, collecting fuel (wood for fire in rural areas) and water, taking care of children, etc. are considered to be the primary responsibilities of women and girls. These activities are termed as “unpaid care work” as they are not financially compensated.

On an average, a Bangladeshi woman has to spend around 6.45 hours on unpaid care work every day in addition to her regular tasks, according to a 2017 report by *The Daily Star*. On the other hand, a Bangladeshi man spends only about 1.2 hours. This difference indicates that men have access to an average of 5.25 hours more than women which they can utilise by watching TV, chatting with friends or building new capacities for career development. Whereas, women are burdened solely with the above-mentioned household tasks. So how can we break the gender stereotypes imposed by society? The answer lies in what is known as a Gender Transformative Approach (GTA), which essentially changes the socially assigned roles of men and women. One of the most crucial functions of this approach is to evaluate women’s unpaid care work.

According to the Global Gender Inequality Index, Bangladesh ranks 119th out of 188 countries (UNDP, 2015). This indicates that Bangladesh has a long way to go to achieve gender equality. Women’s empowerment, especially their economic empowerment, could be boosted through access to, and control over, resources. Being engaged with paid productive activities is a primary condition for this process. Moreover,



The work that women do at home has immense value since it creates social capital.

SOURCE: WWW.ENERGYFORDEVELOPMENT.COM

empowerment requires skills, training, dedicated time, mobility, resources, networking and support from family. A woman’s involvement in economic activities will be hindered if the above conditions are not met. In this case, a break from household activities or task-sharing by someone else will be helpful for her. If the husband comes forward to share the tasks, it will not only add value to the career of the woman but also enhance the financial status of the family.

Bangladesh is a country where women have to shoulder the uneven burden of care work. This uneven and often unrecognised burden not only pushes women back to the private sphere but also limits their empowerment opportunities. In recent times, Bangladesh has achieved significant progress in the field of women’s empowerment. A large number of women are taking part in paid economic activities and contributing to the wellbeing of their

family as well as the GDP. Recent data shows that in Bangladesh, 34 percent of women are involved in the labour force whereas men’s participation is 82 percent (ADB, 2016). Women’s excessive burden of household tasks is one of the major reasons behind this unequal participation in the labour force. Over the course of time, it was found that women’s involvement has increased both in the public and private spheres, indicating that the gender role is in fact being changed, albeit slowly. On the other hand, men’s role as head of the family remains unchanged along with their share of household responsibilities of care work.

In order to ensure equal participation of women in income-generating activities and to enable them to access the benefit of equal opportunities, the Gender Transformative Approach could be an effective solution if household work is recognised as work instead of a “woman’s duty”, and if the workload is

redistributed among family members. In a conventional social setting, household activities are not considered as *work* in most cases, although the estimated value of unpaid household work is between USD 69.81 and 91.03 billion (Haque, 2016). Economists claim that our GDP could be doubled if this work were counted in terms of GDP. These statistics suggest the financial importance of recognising unpaid care work as *work*, and this recognition could be the first step towards a Gender Transformative Approach as this will remove the stereotyped notion that domestic tasks are exclusively women’s work.

On the other hand, redistribution aims to ensure that the burden of care work is more equitably distributed among men and women and different agencies including the family members. Thirdly, reduction of women’s workload is another tool of the transformative approach. Men, especially husbands, can come forward to share domestic responsibilities which will reduce the burden for women. Moreover, technologies can also be used in applicable sectors to lessen women’s workload. For example, rice cooker, electric oven, washing machine (depending on affordability) and so on could be used to minimise time and labour in household tasks. Even in rural areas, women are increasingly enjoying the benefits of these technological interventions. During my recent visit to a remote village near the Sundarbans, I found that a number of households are using rice cookers and such products are getting popular as they reduce women’s workload.

A changed mindset is required for a successful utilisation of all these mechanisms of Gender Transformative Approach and the family should be at the centre of this change. According to the existing

socialisation process, girl children are trained for household activities, including cooking food, carrying water and fuel, taking care of children and the elderly and washing clothes of the family members. On the other hand, boys are given freedom to gain skills associated with income generation such as agricultural work, carpentry, driving, formal education, etc. This is how society distinguishes the role of boys and girls. Instead of this existing practice, children could be taught that a boy can easily cook food and a girl can be trained up in a way that she can also be the earning member of the family.

In addition to family, academic institutions also have a role to play to create a society based on gender equality by following the Gender Transformative Approach. Schools have a great impact on the development of children. So if the schools can come up with changes like revising the existing gender-biased curriculum, treating male and female students equally and promoting extra-curricular activities for boys and girls alike, it would significantly boost up the gender transformative changes. Though the Gender Transformative Approach is needed to address gender inequality in all spheres of life, here the focus has been only on the unpaid care work and the socialisation process as these are the foundations of all other forms of inequality. A proper use of the tools and strategies linked with pursuing the Gender Transformative Approach in other areas of gender inequality—including gender-based violence, girls’ education, natural resources management, etc.—would be an effective way to promote gender equality in Bangladesh which can bring enormous benefits to society.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Is Trump right about Middle-East peace?



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two national interests in the Middle East: containment of Iran and Israel’s security.

Regarding the former, the United States recently sent more troops to Saudi Arabia, Iran’s main regional adversary. As for the latter, Trump has repeatedly said that he will present a plan for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Because such an initiative could become a factor in the 2020 US presidential election campaign, Trump will have to decide soon whether to fulfil this commitment once a new Israeli government takes office following the country’s parliamentary election held last month.

Trump has tasked his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, with developing a detailed peace plan. While that represents a departure from previous US diplomatic efforts, which had always aimed to lead Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate a peace treaty between themselves under American auspices, this new approach is not necessarily a bad idea, because both sides seem incapable of moving forward on their own. The Palestinian Authority—disavowed at the ballot box in Gaza in 2006, run by aging leaders, and undermined by corruption—has lost the legitimacy that it would need to make concessions. Israel, meanwhile, has drifted so far to the right that no

government could propose to the Knesset a peace plan acceptable to both sides.

An arbitrator could, in theory, overcome these obstacles. Moreover, Kushner’s close ties to Israel may paradoxically be a further asset.

History shows that winners of geopolitical confrontations almost never voluntarily give up the fruits of their victory. Israel, a regional superpower with a post-industrial economy, nuclear weapons, and an unwavering alliance with the US, clearly has the means to impose its will on a weak Palestinian adversary.

No Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement could fail to reflect this power imbalance. Moreover, no external party, whether the major European powers or even Arab governments, will affect that balance: the Europeans are divided on the subject, and the Arab Gulf states have largely become *de facto* allies of Israel against Iran.

Israel, therefore, holds the key to resolving the conflict. But that means persuading the Israeli public to accept the establishment of a foreign country, possibly an enemy, just 15 kilometres (9.3 miles) from its capital.

These considerations help to explain the Trump administration’s numerous recent favours to Israel, including the transfer of the US embassy in the country from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and US recognition of Israel’s annexation of the Golan Heights. Kushner’s goal is to show the Israelis that they can trust Trump when he puts peace proposals on the table. To the extent that Trump is now more popular in Israel than Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, the US approach has clearly worked.

Kushner’s plan is now ready. It is 50 pages long, he told me a few months



PHOTO: REUTERS/CARLOS BARRIA

White House senior advisor Jared Kushner smiles while listening to US President Donald Trump talk as the president meets with Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House in Washington, US, on March 25, 2019.

ago. Although the plan’s contents are a well-kept secret, they are likely to be close to Israel’s position. The US proposal might, therefore, offer the Palestinians a large degree of autonomy rather than a full-fledged state, and maintain most of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Is the Kushner plan, therefore, doomed to fail? That is arguably the safest bet, given the inability of previous US presidents to bring peace to the region over the last 20 years.

But we must not rule anything out. In June, the Trump administration put forward a separate proposal for massive economic aid to the West Bank and

Gaza, including some USD 50 billion in investments over ten years. Such a package may well appeal to people in dire economic need. Moreover, it is “five to midnight” in the West Bank: the continued expansion of Israeli settlements will soon render impossible the territorial compromise necessary to establish a viable Palestinian state.

The Palestinians, therefore, face a choice between an unsatisfactory compromise and a continuous (and soon irreversible) deterioration of their situation. Perhaps they will conclude that taking a deal will be a good first step. That, at least, is the calculation of Kushner, who repeatedly says that his

plan will be “better for the Palestinians than they think.”

At the same time, both sides would be relieved not to have to answer to US pressure. The Palestinians fear having a quasi-Israeli diktat imposed on them. And Israel knows that Trump, who has a purely transactional view of diplomacy, expects it to repay his generosity by making concessions toward a peace deal.

Above all, the *status quo* favours Israel, which can keep the West Bank without having to decide whether to make Palestinians Israeli citizens or foreigners on their own land. Moreover, Israel may conclude that its overwhelming regional military superiority ensures its security at least as well as any peace agreement would—if not better.

Everything now depends on Trump, who has publicly promised to transmit his son-in-law’s peace plan to both parties. But whatever Trump decides, and whoever wins the 2020 US presidential election, one thing is clear: Israel and the Palestinians are unable to reach a peace agreement by themselves, as even Israel’s most ardent US supporters now acknowledge. Any subsequent attempt to mediate the conflict will have to be based on recognition of that reality.

Like US presidents before him, Trump may well fail to secure an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. But by proposing an agreement instead of merely trying to broker one between the two sides, he could yet establish a model for his successors to follow.

Gérard Araud is a former French ambassador to the United States.

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(Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



October 27, 1978

Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin awarded Nobel Peace Prize

On this day in 1978, Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Menachem Begin of Israel were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace for negotiations that resulted first in the Camp David Accords, then in a peace treaty between their countries.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Commotions
- 5 Madison or Monroe
- 10 Of the kidneys
- 12 Earlier, quaintly
- 13 It deserves another
- 15 Lend a hand
- 16 Take to court
- 17 – Vegas
- 18 Feel contrite
- 20 Excellent
- 21 Take care of
- 22 Concludes
- 23 Until now
- 25 Stance
- 28 Chaplin persona
- 31 Fighting

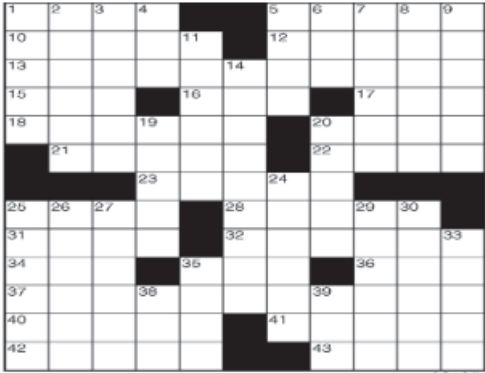
- 32 German vowel
- topper
- 34 Sock part
- 35 Lingerie buy
- 36 Uno plus due
- 37 Have trouble sleeping
- 40 Rocker John
- 41 Ventilated
- 42 Peruses
- 43 Pills, in slang

DOWN

- 1 Cheering wildly
- 2 Refuses
- 3 Nervous
- 4 Slump
- 5 Green stone
- 6 Toward the stern

- 7 “—Rouge”
- 8 Gofer’s work
- 9 Detects
- 11 Get defeated by
- 14 Inappropriately
- 19 Stopwatch button
- 20 Wild
- 24 Spanish fleet
- 25 Glib talk
- 26 Peter of “Troy”
- 27 Midday break
- 29 Full grown
- 30 Sounded content
- 33 Takes care of
- 35 Outlaws
- 38 Lawn material
- 39 Director Burton

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