

PASSAGE 3

Rarely have homemakers found a place in India's policy. But an innovative scheme in Goa's budget introducing a grant for them, thereby officially acknowledging their invaluable contribution, could change all that.

The scheme, likely to be rolled out by July, proposes to give Rs 1,000 per month to all homemakers with annual household income of below Rs 3 lakh, benefiting some 1.25 lakh families. "Homemakers are finding it difficult to manage households in these times of inflation. This is meant to empower them," says an official of the women and child development ministry.

Bicholim-based Nutan Sakalkar, a homemaker, is overjoyed at the prospect of getting some money of her own. "We get scant respect in our society," she says. "Working women are often absolved of household responsibilities, but no one gives a thought for the work we put in 24X7." She feels the grant will bring back her sense of independence. "Though he never refuses, I feel guilty asking my husband for money."

The role of homemakers has been a contentious issue since the '70s. Can their contribution be regarded as work? Does it warrant monetary compensation? While this is perhaps the first time a government scheme has directly targeted homemakers, the struggle to bring them true dignity is a long way off.

"The profits of society today are subsidized by the unpaid work of women all over the country. Not only do they form the care economy but they produce the workers of tomorrow," says economist Vibhuti Patel of Mumbai's SNDT Women's University. A grant, she believes, would merely help some of them move from starvation to subsistence. But what they should be given is a direct stake in their husbands' pay cheques, she feels.

Madhu Kishwar, editor of women's journal 'Manushi', too, doesn't believe doles can help empowerment. "Why should the government pay homemakers? I would consider it an insult. Women are the *gruha lakshmis* and should be treated as equals and given the charge of household finances," she says.

The struggle for gender equality is reflected in the National Family Health Survey III (2005-06). Not only are fewer women counted in the workforce as compared to men (some 43% of married women in the 15-49 age group were employed as compared to 99% men), but one in four didn't receive any payment as compared to 1 in 20 men.

The crisis of dignity isn't restricted to India alone. In April, there was an outcry against Democratic strategist Hillary Rosen's comments on Republican candidate Mitt Romney's wife when she questioned the latter's status as an ambassador on women's issues because she had "never worked a day in her life" . Romney is a stay-at-home mum of five children. Rosen's comments went viral with many on Twitter protesting, forcing an apology from her. Even Michelle Obama tweeted, "Every mother works hard, and every woman deserves to be respected."

The Goa model is one among many social experiments underway globally. Venezuela recognizes housework as 'work' under its Constitution and pays homemakers 80% of minimum wages.

Whether such initiatives will bring respect to housework waits to be seen.

Source : The Times of India

A. Questions

- (a) Which innovative scheme did Goa's budget introduce recently? 2
- (b) What does the scheme intend to? 2
- (c) What do the housewives like Bicholim think of working women? 2
- (d) What does Vibhuti Patel of SNDT women's university advocate for home makers? 2
- (e) What does Madhu Kishwar suggest? 1

B. Find out the words from the passage which means same as the following:

(1x3) = 3

- (a) new/changed (para 1)
- (b) declared from (Para 3)
- (c) money distributed in small amounts (Para 5)