Women's Unpaid Care Work:
Challenges for Women's Movement in Nepal

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Care work and feminism

Work is of fundamental significance for human life and society. Human worth and potential as well as social continuity are realized by means of work that we perform or fail to perform. The distribution of work and the rewards allocated for work across groups and members of a society, therefore, are of fundamental importance for realization of self-worth as well as social justice.

The widespread and traditional categorization of work as comprising of productive and unproductive work is rather narrow. In particular this categorization leaves out care work performed at home from the world of work and severely devalues it. Care work, on the other hand, and as all of us are aware, is much too important to be left out, devalued or be classified simply as a residual category. In fact, care work underlies the production of the capacity to perform 'productive' work. In this sense, it is care work that is the primal productive work; and without care work no 'productive' work would be possible.

Care work, sometimes, is paid work. As Duffy, Albelda and Hammonds, 2013 (2013:45) notes, "Care may be paid or unpaid, performed in institutions such as hospitals and schools or in private spaces, away from public view". However, far often the care work is unpaid and 'voluntary'. Further, most of the unpaid care work is performed within households and by women. Child care, care of the sick, care of the elderly and, probably most importantly, the daily chores of kitchen, cleaning and other house work are performed mostly or exclusively by women.

In fact, women across the world contribute two to ten times more on unpaid care work compared to men (Ferrant, Pesando and Nowacka 2014: 1). Relatively recent data from Nepal shows that two-fifths of women, compared to less than five percent of men, are engaged in care work (CBS, 2009). Thus, despite several positive changes in women's lives such as increasing access to education, employment outside-of-home, distinct political participation and representation during the past 25 years; gender equity remains a far cry particularly in relation to engagement in unpaid care work. As noted, care work is largely invisible, ignored and highly devalued.

Moreover, care work can be conceptualized as work that is primarily structured around social reproduction. Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner (1989in Duffy, Albelda and Hammonds, 2013:148) define social reproduction as, "various kinds of work—mental, manual, and emotional aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation". Care work has also been defined as any day-to-day provision of physical and emotional care that requires extreme

labor (Wong, 2012:40). The latter definition emphasizes the ceaseless, constant and unforgiving flow of such work whereupon care work involves 24-hour mental and emotional if not physical engagement.

The key feature of socially reproductive labor is it plays pivotal role in maintaining and reproducing the basic social and economic well-being of a society (Duffy, Albelda and Hammonds, 2013:148). As such work is preponderantly performed by women; care work must be regarded as a key problem in feminism. Thus, feminists and the feminist movement as such, should engage in the exploration and resolution of this problem. From valuing unpaid care work to advocating for women-friendly care work policies to awareness-raising and collectively organizing for regulating and paying for care work must be prioritized within feminist circles. Feminists could surely envision a '**caring society** where care, love and equality are embedded in our value system and it is noticeably reflected on the economic and social policies' (Murphy, 2011: 43).

Women are often engage in care work even at the expense of their own health as well as social life. Most 'working women' as they go home from the workplace continue to work, as if they are on a **'second shift'** devoted to care giving. For such women, the 'second shift' often becomes as or even more important than the first one. The 'second shift,' is performed not only day in and day out but is invisible and highly undervalued. As noted, however, care work is highly valuable (also see Mantilla and Pettine 2006: 39) and making care work visible is an first essential step toward change (Duffy, Albelda and Hammonds, 2013: 145).

Let us further explore the notion of care work as a 'feminist problem'. Many could ask why the feminist movement should focus upon and prioritize care work as a core issue? The respond is that care work must be regarded as a feminist issue including in Nepal because it is largely associated with (a) the construction of femininity and masculinity (b) women's subordination and oppression (c) women's employability and actual employment or underemployment, (d) unequal income and wealth of men and women, (e) women's health and self-care, and (f) women's political participation political status including at home. In other words, care work shapes the entire self-image as well as the image that men and society in general conjure up regarding women. As such, it shapes the life trajectory of women. It is little wonder that those who have worked on care work have consistently seen it as the key dimension of feminism (Acharya, 2014, Wong, 2012, Mantilla and Pettine, 2006).

Elizabeth Wong (2012: 40-41) provides three reasons to prove that care work is a key problem that feminism has to tackle. Firstly, domestic and care work are considered feminine and ultimately it becomes women's work. Men who are considered masculine are strongly discouraged to perform care work. This combine of practice, ideology and structure, in turn, ensures women's life-long economic and social dependency on men. Secondly, care work, which is mostly performed by mothers, is 'voluntary' and unpaid. Thirdly, care work has come to be structured, norm and perceived as intrinsic or natural to women. Wong's arguments also draw in other issues related to women and unpaid care work. He illustrates that care work is not only considered women's work, it is devalued as well (also see Mead 1935, Sandberg, 2013). The household as well as the larger society provide low value to care work even as they much more highly value work performed by men in the public world. In

fact, many women themselves devalue domesticity and child care, which actually provide them with their daily staple of work. It is largely because most women are in subordinate position. They comply with patriarchy even at ideological level (Lerner, 1987) where men are not only discouraged to engage in care work by the larger society; the men shy away from such works because of the devaluation the larger society attaches to such work. In every known society, prestige is associated with men and men's activities (Rosaldo, 1974). The social division of labor often reinforces the public-private dichotomy. Dichotomization of the domains creates and sustains gender inequality (Rosaldo, 1974). Jaggar (1983) takes Rosaldo's (1974) argument further to emphasize that such dichotomization leads men and women to forcefully conform to some of the attributes associated to masculinity and femininity. It thus ensures women's life- long economic and social dependency on men (Beauvoir 1953) as well as women's compliance to patriarchy (Chakravarti, 2004). Nancy Chodorow (1978) notes that it is the society which is structured in a manner; that it demands women's and not men's labor to rear children. She also notes that it is the self-perpetuating structure that reproduces motherhood.

Globally and in Nepal, women earn far less than men as there is huge gender gap in pay. Goldin (2017) notes that gender gap in wage continue to persist. She emphasizes that it is *women's care work* at home that is the major contributing factor for the persisting gender gap in wages. She elaborates further that choosing a job has long been a gendered phenomenon. Women choose job, even full-time job that are compatible with household responsibility. If women continue to earn less than men, and one of the key reasons of earning less is unpaid care work at home, thus care work must be regarded as a feminist issue.

However, the question is not limited about women earning less than men. The fact is that many women do not even wish to climb the ladder as they are conscious that they might not be able to balance the work and family on one go (Sandberg, 2013). Sandberg notes that young women in the US who are highly educated and as competent as men are often reluctant to accept a job promotion that demands more hours and energy from them. They tend to think about and value marriage before actually getting married and about the child care before actually having a child. In other words, marriage and child care begins to wear heavy upon the working women beforehand. As a consequence, number of them do not push hard enough or 'lean enough' to get ahead in jobs. Many young women in Japan also fail to find a balance between the work and the family; they either choose a job or a family (Boling, 2008). As young women are avoiding being promoted in job or even leave a job of theirs due to care work, the issue is definitely under the feminist issue and to be dealt accordingly.

Given the social and household structures the women inhabitants are unable to make a choice. Samjhana Wagle (Kantipur Daily Newspaper, November 11, 2017) was forced to quit the job as she could not exercise her choice. Wagle is an educated and employed Nepali woman living in a dual-earning household. Both she and her husband performed paid work. They have a three-year-old son who was under the care of his grandmother for time being. However as she had to leave as Samjhana's brother had had his child and her mother could not shirk the duty of taking care of both the grandbabies at once. With her mother's leave, Samjhana had massive problem of child care, an unresolved problem that demanded either one of them, her or her husband to quit the job. There was no other viable option. With no child care center

around her home or workplace, her extended family, including her mother and sister insisted that she quit her job. No one gave any thought to the possibility that her husband too could possibly quit his job in order to care for the baby. Even her husband proposed her to leave the job as being a mother she was a better care provider than himself to the child. He expressed or rather explained his views directly and indirectly. Ultimately she had no choice than to leave the job respites her wish to continue it. She continuously discussed about rearing a child jointly with her husband and even wanted her husband to take responsibility for caring the baby and thus continue her job. However, easier thought and said than done; she decided to quit her job in order to care of the child. If young women like Samjhana cannot continue with their job because of care work, such work cannot but be regarded as key problem that confronts feminism on its face.

The myth that men are the providers and protectors has largely been falsified by the experience of contemporary rural Nepal. A significant proportion of households are run by women including the subsistence and other income and labor from various sources. The subsistence component is mainly worked upon and procured by women. Several other sources of income, e.g. small business, are also run at least as often by women as men. Remittance—mostly earned by men - has been a significant but not adequate source for many households. Data shows that more than 80 percent migrants are males (CBS, 2012) and they are mostly young and married. In addition, it is woman who spends her emotions and labor to run such household. Running a household inevitably includes care work, which are performed mostly by women. The duties that women perform are multifarious, intense and in most cases burdensome. All women's work, certainly care work, therefore, constitute are key issues for feminism and the feminist movement everywhere in the world including Nepal.

Patriarchal interpretation of unpaid care work

Even as women should attempt to analyze and comprehend women's care work at home and in the community as an issue that is intrinsic to feminism, it is equally important to grasp the patriarchal interpretations on care work. Patriarchal interpretations on care work would largely reflect on norms, values and social structures including family structure.

From the evolutionary-biological and essentialist Darwinian perspective to Freudian psychoanalysis and from there to Parsonian functionalism and Beckerian classical economics - all famous schools of thought and all famous men of their times – have argued that the home is the women's primary place and women's major role is to shoulder household responsibility including child care. Talcott Parsons, a functionalist, posits that although the caring role of women is not rooted in biology as such, care work had become second-nature for women as it had become functional for the society (also see Renzetti and Curran, 2003: 167). He tends to dichotomize gender roles as expressive and instrumental and put women into the former category. The expressive role, nonetheless and by means of some mysterious substantive logic, came to include, for Parsons, the house-holding as well as care work. Both the categories of work, of course, could as well be considered as instrumental roles. Thus, there is surely nothing expressive about house-holding as such.

Similarly, Gary Becker (1981: 30-7), a renowned economist, noted that the division of labor among family members is determined partly by biological differences and partly by different experiences and different investments in human capital. Household time should be allocated, he argued, in such a way that human skills could be enhanced in order to maximize household utility and income. Illustratively, women could spend more time at home in household chores such that she would continually upgrade the skills required to run a household as efficiently as possible. He claimed that it is due to women's biological capacity to bear and rear children that they specialized in domestic domain whereas men, being biologically different, cannot earn such skill. He further emphasized a sexualized division of labor and the presumed 'comparative advantage' there. He claimed that the sharply sex-based division of labor in almost all societies is partly due to the gains to the household from sex-specialized work regimes, which is partly due to 'inherent differences' between the sexes. He even warned that if women were to attempt to work outside home, they probably would not be successful. He maintained that a single person could not divide oneself in two spheres at the same time.

The overall point, of course, is that feminism has to unload these various received 'wisdoms,' including those propounded by many renowned biological, social and psychological scientists in order to create and disseminate constructive gender equality friendly knowledge. Most of the wisest person we had known had all been men, presence of wise women being few far across and in between the history and not all having gender equality friendly ideas in particular. There is, as such, much unlearning to be done before we can fully explore the relation between gender, feminism and unpaid care work.

Feminist gaze and unpaid care work

Feminism is not a unified political ideology (Bhasin and Khan, 1999, Delmer,1986, Gohan, 1993, Freedman, 2002); as feminism is diverse, the feminist views on women's care work are also diverse. While liberal feminists conceptualize domesticity and child care primarily as women's work, they often advocate for men's engagement in house-holding and child care work within households in order to offer the women time to engage in the public sphere (Friedan, 1963). Radical feminists, on the other hand, visualize women's oppression of mothers and wives as being within patriarchal households, including the relation to care work. Beauvoir (1953) grasps women's lifelong dependency on men as being due to their role as mothers. In Beauvoir's words, child care leads women to life-long economic and social dependency on men and women, under these circumstances, cannot function as an independent being. Traditional Marxist feminists, on their part, have remained almost silent on this issue. In contrary, they were heavily criticized by socialist feminists for being gender blind on housework. Thus, due to these various reasons, and for a long time, the issue of care work never occurred to feminists' thinking and discussion in a pronounced manner. In essence, (and expect for radical feminists) a severely gendered care work regime was so fundamental to the functioning of households and husband-wife relations that feminism successfully evaded the issue of care work for a long time.

Feminist scholars and activists in the 1970s staked a claim for socially and politically recognizing and valorizing domestic activities as a category of labor worthy of social valorization and even economic reward(Duffy, Albelda and Hammonds, 2013:147). Socialist

feminists, in particular, in the 1970s utilized the concept of socially reproductive labor to emphasize the role of unpaid household work as a key site within the larger economic system. Undoubtedly, Friedrich Engels had first introduced the concept of reproductive labor during late 19th century in his celebrated book *Family, Private Property and State* in order to valorize labor; the fact that he did not visualize the link between wage work and housework. Gayle Rubin (1975: 62-3) was among a few feminists who attempted to link together women's domestic reproductive labor and productive activities outside the home. She argued that although Marxist analysis of class oppression was the best analysis that attempted to comprehend social oppression, it could not quite do so because it failed to focus on women's oppression. Karl Marx also addressed the *'Women's Question'* in trying to establish a link between accumulation of wealth in capitalism on the one hand and women's labor on the other. He further noted that women had been limited in capitalist society as consumer, cheap laborer and a reserve labor force. However, Marx did not go beyond this. He failed to realize that it was women's domestic care work that regenerated labor power which prepared a laborer to 'man' the capitalist factory. As Rubin notes, Marx's analysis ignores and even devalues women's biological and social responsibilities at home and women's significance as a care worker in her role as a mother and wife – as also women's significance as an unpaid aid laborer. Similarly, (Hartmann, 1997: 98-100) flags the flaws in Marxist analysis of reproductive labor for failing to notice the connection between capitalism and patriarchy. To liberate a proletariat household, one should not limit its struggle to production. Classical Marxists, she notes, failed to see that capitalist exploitation is not limited to workers who work long hours in the factories for low wages. In addition, it also failed to notice that capitalism exploited women's role in producing unpaid but socially reproductive labor.

However, feminist economists across the world who were well informed about the theoretical discussion on unpaid care work of women did take the discussion forward. The debate and discussion on care work, care economy and valuation of women's work gained currency particularly after the 1990s along with the entry of a significant number of feminist economists into this field. The 'gender lens' employed to analyze those work that enabled them to identify measure and explain women's subordination and exploitation as care workers. Many feminist economists argued for the valuation of women's unpaid care work. Sen (1987:11) dictated that the so-called "productive work" was linked with the so-called "unproductive work" done at home, e.g. housework and food preparation, child care and bringing food from to the field, etc. But such works are not considered productive work and passes off as unvalued despite the fact that such works prepare workers to work outside their homes. Sen also argued that the recent voice that such works should be valued is rightfully raised (Sen, 1987). Some feminists, on the other hand, cautioned that the efforts for valuation of women's unpaid care work might limit women within the private sphere and help to sustain patriarchy.

In Nepal, the efforts of feminist economists during late-70s to bring to light women's economic contribution to the national economy in general and household economy in particular forced policy makers to look into the household not only as a unit of consumption but also as a unit of production (Acharya and Bennett, 1981). *The Status of Women's Report* revealed that food processing activities by women, which was not considered economic activities then, contributed more than 15 percent of the total household income (Acharya and

Bennett, 1981). The study geared up at the time when few believed that women actually contributed to the household economy. Henceforth, the study deconstructed women's image as a dependent daughter, wife and mother and, from among all the bundle of roles; it brought forth the productive role of women that had been hidden all along. The study clarified that a large proportion of women are in fact engaged in producing and processing the subsistence economy in addition to engaging in several other productive roles; this ought to be recognized and valued thereupon forcing policy makers to consider women as economically active persons. Henceforth, the definition of the economically active person has been broadened to include the subsistence activities conducted at home as well as economic activities. The two consecutive censuses of 2001 and 2011 acknowledged such contributions by women as economically productive work.

Furthermore, Acharya (2014) has maintained that care-related activities at home such as cooking, caring for children and community works, despite their productive nature have not yet been included in GDP accounting. She argues that the classification of such work as non-productive contributes to the image of women as economically inactive and dependent persistently. She (Acharya, 2014: 125-6) has cautioned that should feminists not take it seriously, it would not only hamper those women who work at home, but also those who work in the market and those who have to perform such duties at home. Similarly, Acharya (2003: 14) recognizes women's unpaid - and unfinished - work at home and questions the ubiquitous development projects in Nepal that increased the demand for women's labor. She commends that rural women in Nepal were already overburdened by household duties.

However, it is important to recognize that Acharya's (1981, 2003, 2013, 2014) interventions, even as they have consistently highlighted the importance of women's unpaid care work, are largely limited to women's work in a specific category of production that are constructed to have **'direct economic value'**. Her initial work does not encompass unpaid care work that women performed on a day-to-day basis within a highly gendered regime. She might have taken such a stance because patriarchy was even stronger during the early 1980s that made it almost impossible to generate information and disseminate the knowledge, and to impede into private sphere. Nevertheless, Acharya's later works (2003, 2013, 2014) do address several issues related to women's unpaid care work.

Only handful of I/NGOs have been working on unpaid care work by women for quite some time. However, their focus is largely limited to raising awareness. Action Aid International Nepal (AAIN) is among the handful organization that has engaged with this issue for almost a decade. The AAIN has engaged at consciousness-raising initiatives among rural women about their contributions at home and in the community through REFLECT educational exercises and encouraged each women participant to owe a diary to list their daily domestic activities. The significance of women's care work has also more recently been owned by educational institutions. For example, care work is a key theme in the course of study in the graduate program in Gender Studies at Tribhuvan University, Nepal. Notwithstanding, care work has not yet been mainstreamed into the feminist intellectual and political agenda in Nepal. It clearly depicts that it is imperative to do so now.

Feminist movement in Nepal and unpaid care work

Nepal has fairly long history of feminist movement (Tumbahangfe, 2002). After 1990, with the rise of a democratic polity, feminist consciousness and organizing has been uplifted (Acharya, 2012) and women have benefitted from a more vocal and organized feminism. Illustrating an example, women's conditional rights to abortion and a daughter's right to ancestral property by birth have been ensured following the 11th amendment of the new Civil Code 2063 in 2002. Access of girls and women to schooling and education has become more equal to that of boys and men.

The liberal variety of feminism has continued to be viewed as the mainstream feminist movement in Nepal. One key reason for this is that Nepal's liberal democratic polity, particularly after 1990, helped to flourish liberal issues, women's equal rights being one of them. Similarly, post-1990 democratic processes have helped the feminist movement immensely to broaden its thinking and expand its issues, interests and concerns. For example, incorporation of newer issues such as diversity among women, sexual minorities among women and violence against women continued to feed to a growing feminist movement despite the fact that these issues have not yet become a fully integral part of the feminist movement (Tamang, 2009). It is not that the issue of unpaid care work of women has not been raised; some feminists have dedicatedly continued to raise the issue (Acharya, 2013, 2003, 2014, Bhadra 2016). In addition, Nepal's new constitution of 2015, to some extent centralized the stages from socialist feminist perspective; it has tried to address women's unpaid care work, i.e. in the section on the fundamental rights of women. The constitutional provisions for 'special treatment' to women in regard to rights to education, employment, health, social security and reproductive health (GON, 2015) are remarkable achievement. If implemented, such provisions are likely to enhance both the productive and reproductive lives of women. Nonetheless, the feminist movement has remained weak in recognizing women's unpaid care work, its significance for gender equality and women's empowerment as well as in accommodating the issues within the movement.

The stated reasons for this affair can be explained through few arguments. Firstly, the debate on women's unpaid care work both in the feminist movement has remained severely limited as the movement has concentrated profoundly on achieving gender equality in the public sphere .In fact; there has been remarkable progress in achieving gender equality in education and ensuring women's representation in legislative bodies. Debate on care work, on the other hand, has languished. However, the directive principles of the constitution (Article 51-J-4) addresses specific issue related to unpaid care work by directing the state to formulate policies that would economically valuate such work and make public provisions for the maintenance of children and care of families. Secondly, a prolonged silence among feminists has resulted in a severe dearth of information on care work with handful of feminists talking on the issue. Feminists, it may be said, have normalized than procuring the problem of care work. Even at present it is uncertain whether most feminists would prefer to classify care work to be as important as other 'so called' productive work or not. A specific social and gender ideology, which is itself the offshoot of broad social norms and values including gendered socialization, continues to resist an intrusion of the public gaze upon **'private matters'**. Care work falls within this 'private matters', thus even feminist resists and criticizes an insistent public gaze upon care work. In addition, domestic activities are regarded to be less valuable for the society

than the public activities that particularly lead to income. It is precisely this broad and deep notion that leads to a lower valuation of the private sphere that is comprised of domesticity, child and elderly care as well as women who are often the central actors of the private sphere. Therefore, for feminism to take a leap, it is necessary for most feminists to deconstruct their prior belief and to value the high social significance of home, homemakers and care work. A culture of more intense debate on care work and its social significance may help such deconstruction. Thirdly there is salient division among the feminist themselves; CBS 2012 report suggests that neither women nor feminists of Nepal constitute a homogenous group. They are rather divided among themselves prior to various extents as ethnicity, class, religion, region as well as political ideology.

Fourthly, Nepali feminist movement in general has remained weak or failed to visualize the interconnection between women's care work and the feminist movement despite the fact that the movement has long been advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment in the domains of girls and women's education, women's representation in politics, violence against women, and women's economic empowerment. Nevertheless, the movement has failed to see that all of the four domains are closely linked with the care work that women perform. For example, the scale of household chores is tied up with whether or not girls and women continue with schooling, engage in politics or engage in wage income. Well-schooled women enjoy a better chance of independent earning and upgrading bargaining power (Agrawal, 1994). Similarly, were men to engage in care work and other household chores, the public-private dichotomy would weaken , thus gender ideology would change and gender equality would be ensured (Rosaldo, 1974). Furthermore, the provision of public child and elderly care centers in the community or workplace would reduce the scale of domestic care work for women and open up the public world for women. The broad notion supported by the famous men of their times that those who bear should rear would ultimately be falsified. This, in turn, would change the existential conditions and mental construction of women as well. In essence, unpaid care work is so bound up with women's condition in Nepal and elsewhere that any relaxation in the regime would help women to become more independent. Independence among women, of course, is a fundamental cornerstone of feminism.

Feminism and unpaid care work: Challenges

Feminism in Nepal should attempt to approach forward to confront and resolve several challenges in relation to care work. The *first* challenge has to do with resolving the question of whether or not women are essentially different than men biologically, 'maternally' and, most importantly, in relation to nurturance. While only women can become biological mothers whether or not or the extent to which this specific physiological difference social differences among men and women remains a matter of debate. Those who uphold a 'women as nurturer' position tend to advocate for special treatment for women who give birth. Those who hold such perspective argue that 'women are not men' (Sylvia Ann Hewlett, 1986 in Landsman, 1995: 35) and raised demands for family allowance, tax reduction, 'family wage' or mother's endowment, and longer maternity leave. On the other hand, those who believe that women, except for the reproductive capacity, are similar and equal to men are much more concerned with work-family balance (Mantilla and Peltine, 2006). They advocate for institutional options such as state-led child and elderly care facilities as well as paid maternity and paternity leave

such that women could work as paid worker with ease and without severe constraints imposed by care work. It should be noted that this approach criticizes the 'maternalist' approach because if women claim special treatment based on their sex, they would be likely to be confined to home with care work. Further this would reinforce traditional gender roles that have so far under scored the feminist struggle to bring women out of the four walls precisely to gain equality with men. (Mantilla and Peltine, 2006, Hartmann, 1997).

Some feminists are much concerned about the 'dichotomous framing of equality and difference between the two genders' (Mantilla and Peltine, 2006). The 'equality' vantage point tells us that women and men are equal and, therefore, need equal treatment. The 'difference' vantage point, on the other hand, tells us that women and men are biologically different and, therefore, women deserve special treatment. 'These two policy positions are often termed as natural rights versus natural roles' positions (Landsman, 1995: 34). There is third position as well. The two earlier positions, despite their divergence are similar as they are framed with reference to men, i.e. regardless of whether we speak of equality or difference (Mantilla and Peltine, 2006). The third position, on the other hand, differentiates among women themselves and makes sharper policy positions possible.

Organizing a strong and sustained feminist movement is the *second* challenge. Studies suggest that feminist movements have a significant impact on policies affecting women's care work (Boling, 2008; Ma, Kim and Lee, 2016). A strong feminist movement is a necessary and not an optional condition for gazing critically at public policies. Joya Misra has shed light on the important linkage between women's movements and the value given to women's paid and unpaid labor. She notes, 'woman-friendly state policy requires an active women's movement and ideologies valuing women's paid and unpaid labor' (1998: 376). However, she also cautions that a strong feminist movement is not a sufficient condition for the valorization of women's work (Misra, 1998). How feminists visualize care work and how they value it is more influential in developing women friendly policies rather than a movement which does not seriously uphold the issue (Misra, 1998). It is equally important to become aware of 'how responsive the policy making process is to feminist and women's groups' (Boling, 2008)The great challenge of the movement is to make the state own the feminist agendas. If the state owns the feminist agenda including in relation to women's care work, the state itself becomes a bearer of feminism. That does not, however, imply that the state, in the absence of a feminist movement would continue to carry on with a feminist agenda. That is why in South Korea, where most women work for pay, there is a strong women-friendly care work policy as well as a vibrant women's movement. It bears notice, however, that state policies geared at balancing work and family stemmed more from the imperative to address the challenges of a sharp decline in fertility rate than from adopting a feminist agenda as such (Ma, Kim and Lee, 2016).

The third challenge for feminism in relation to care work is to find a common ground among feminists of various hues. As noted, feminism and the feminist movements are largely divided. Delmar (1986: 11), in this context, notes that 'What has been most difficult for the women's movement to cope with has been the plethora of differences between women which have emerged from the context of feminism'. It has been difficult to bring diverse feminists together to create a common ground on care work. It is the case, however, that care work

cannot be a powerful platform of the feminist movement unless a broad feminist coalition supports it. Feminists in Nepal have come together on a variety of issues such as women's right to ancestral property, equal access to education, women's political representation, etc. This shared engagement can provide lessons for the formation of a feminist coalition around care work. But such a coalition is germane to make women-friendly claims regarding care work.

Feminism and unpaid care work in Nepal: A way forward

Feminists could play a significant role in mitigating the challenges in a number of ways. First, feminists in Nepal could initiate a discussion on state policy on women. One key initiative could be to assess the responsiveness of the constitution to the nature, scale and dynamics of unpaid care work by women. An important question in this context, (Acharya, 2013:39) is 'which system of thought and associated political system provides the best scope for women's liberation'. If there is a sharp division among feminists by political ideology, it would be difficult to seek common ground on women's unpaid care work. Acharya (2013) brings out the overarching differences between the two dominant political ideologies– the liberal free market ideology and the socialist ideology - in contemporary Nepal and goes on to explain that this overarching ideological divergence leads to multiple and fairly deep differences in the imaging of the positions of women and care work. It is in this context that Acharya (2013) identifies the social democratic agenda as the political economic common ground including in relation to the positioning of women and care work.

Second, it is necessary to create, sustain and strengthen a feminist discussion forum. **S**ustained discussion on care work is necessary among feminists and actors in other significant forces including the state regarding the positioning of women in general and care work in particular. Care work, as noted is tied up with all major aspects of life and society. The discussion therefore should identify all key themes that impinge on women and care work and bring together diverse actors to the discussion; it should lead to the formulation of concrete platforms for action.

Third, it is necessary to create a cultural as well as policy settings to invite and support men's engagement with domesticity and child care. Various studies suggest that men's engagement in domesticity and child care help men, women, children and the community to grow socially and professionally (Rosaldo, 1974, Sandberg2013, Chodorow, 1978). The Nepal government has already taken certain initiatives, paid paternal leave being one. By providing a 15-day paid leave for a new father, in addition to some cash for child support, the state has marked a beginning in motivating men and making them responsible toward child care. This measure suggests that the state is gradually moving away from its earlier 'special treatment' position for women to a position that promotes equal treatment to women and men. Other initiatives such as 'He-for-She Campaign' introduced by the UN in 2014 for gender equality help men to become educated about importance of housework as well as child and elderly care for the benefit of the family and the society as a whole.

Fourth, feminists should support claims of women to top and executive positions within political parties and the political parties' 'sister organizations' including the trade unions. The

feminist emphasis for ensuring women's representation in legislative bodies of the country has yielded highly positive results. The claim now should be focused on women's representation and secluded in the top positions of all political parties. Such placement can be expected to substantially influence state policy on care work. Ravenswood and Kennedy (2012: 203) pins that in New Zealand, women in leadership positions in various political parties and unions worked together with the feminist movement to bring changes in regulations on parental leave.

Fifth**, f**eminists should support and help strengthen educational institutions which produce graduates who are well versed on gender issues and feminism and are also likely to engage intensively on reframing gender relations. Furthermore there must be NGOs and CBOs that have been helping rural women to raise awareness about the importance of unpaid care work.

Sixth**,** feminists must explore the constraints for and against support systems – including from the state and community – for establishing affordable and accessible child care facilities, including for sick children, in the community or workplace for all women. Serious and high quality work and attentive child care, which is profusely the right of all children, cannot go together. Neither is child care sole nor the first responsibility of the mother.

Seventh, the proportion of the aged population is growing in Nepal. Looking after the aged will become a task that increasingly demands more attention from women – that is, unless, new strategies and systems are put into place to care for the elderly. Given the largely patrilineal and patrilocal rules of post-marital residence, the prime care worker of the elderly will be the wife and the daughter-in-law. This will be further compounded by male out migration for labor. It may be noted that 87 percent of the labor migrants are men (CBS, 2012) who cannot be expected to take care of the elderly. Anecdotal evidence tells us that, during recent years, caring for the elderly as well as the sick is taking more time and efforts from women. This cuts into the time the women for study, work, social and political engagement, self-care as well as leisure. As it is, a significant proportion of the elderly remains lonely and uncared for. It is incumbent upon feminists, together with other analysts and activists, to design systems that both provide good care to the elderly and also render the task a social responsibility for many more stakeholders, including the state and the community, than women. In fact, one could imagine a system in which child care and elderly care could be carried out fairly synergistically.

Eighth, the provision of maternity leave is singularly important. In addition, instead of long maternity leave, paternity leave should be provisioned for. Once again, and before taking a particular analytical and advocacy position on this. Feminists should sit down and build a common understanding on the role of women in nurturing a child. Clearly, those who uphold the 'women as nurturer' perspective would seek an extended maternity leave rather than paternity leave. It is equally important to reflect upon and come up with measures that address child care policies for women informal sectors given their large numbers.

Ninth, **f**lexible work hours help balance work and the family. For working women, it provides some leeway to carry on with work, which gives both income and self-respect to working women, even during periods of intense care work and other household chores. In all

households, there are occasions and periods where such responsibilities hit a peak. Such peaks must not be allowed to block women from work. Slaughter (2012) notes that long working hours often make women unable to find a balance between work and the family. Flexible work policy can come to help in such instances. On the other hand, this policy could contribute to further 'engender' work inasmuch as women and not men are forced to seek flexible hours. A policy of flexible hours, therefore, does not structurally change women's lives and works. As such, employers could be urged to make a provision of flexible hours for men as well.

Finally**,** the Nepal has for some time recognized and accommodated the reproductive labor of women as care takers. I am referring here to the pension that widows and widowers receive in the event of the death of a civil servant. A wife or a husband receives pension upon the death of the civil servant precisely because she or he took care of the civil servant through the period of her or his service to the government. Following this principal, it would surely make sense for the care taker spouse to receive a part of the spouse's salary not post mortem but on a periodic or monthly basis even as the spouse remains in tenure (see Rubin, 1975). A full-time spouse spends her or his time and energy in support and care work or the continual reproduction of the conditions that enable the spouse to go about her or his work on a daily basis. In Rubin's (1975) words, the wife prepares her husband to earn (1975). In other words, the earnings that a husband makes, owes not only to his own labor but that of his wife as well. A few other countries such as India and Italy have also begun discussions on this issue.

To conclude, women continue to engage in care work at home and in the community more than men do in Nepal and across the world. Women's contributions, however, have largely remained invisible and unvalued. Care work is necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation and so on. It is socially reproductive labor and care work, which is mostly performed by women that makes the regeneration of labor power of men and makes the world of work, employment, income and livelihood possible. Such work must be valued and rewarded. Feminists should engage in serious reflections and draw policy sketches that can make that happen.

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