Women`s work

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| IN her funny and groundbreaking book Who Cooked Adam Smith`s Dinner? A Story of Women and Economics, Katrine Marçal explains how women`s work is grossly undervalued and often ignored. An 18th-century Scottish philosopher, Adam Smith is considered the father of modern economics and responsible for the spread of capitalism across the world. One of his most famous quotes is, `It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest`. Marçal explains that Smith had forgotten to add the most important factor responsible for bringing dinner to his table: his mother, Margaret Douglas, widowed at 28, who never remarried and spent her life looking after her son. Despite his total dependence upon her, Smith`s economic philosophy excludes her altogether.  Over the centuries, a free-market economy with its dogma of self-interest has shaped our world. It has brought about invasions, fought wars, created global powers and concentrated wealth in the hands of a few. But almost all of this game-changing process is based on the perceived economic prowess of men.  While a man`s work is valued and counted and the GDP of countries measured on this basis, women`s work is invisible, although it is essential for the economy. It is taken for granted and remains unmeasured. Women spend considerable time in care of children and relatives, as well as looking after the home, even if they work outside. Men come home after work and relax. In Asia, women spend four times the amount of unpaid work as men: an underestimated figure. The value of the billions of hours spent on unpaid care work globally is about $10.8 trillion a year, or between one-third and one-half of a country`s GDP.  Of 189 economies assessed in 2018 by the UN, 104 have laws that restrict women from working in specific jobs, and in 18 economies, husbands can prevent their wives from working. While women are employed in informal and unpaid work, their labour force participation is far less than men. For the same type of job, they are paid less.  More women are illiterate than men, although women`s education and subsequent involvement in economic work can boost a country`s GDP dramatically. Women are more socially vulnerable and bear the brunt of poverty and lack of social services the most. Women`s participation in the labour force increases economic productivity, as is evident from the economies of East Asia where the gender gap is only 15 per cent. South Asia, which way behind in development, has a gender gap of 50pc.  When analysing the economic opportuni-ties and systems in the country, questions about balancing a career and home responsibilities are raised inevitably for women. It is the woman who must either give up her job or work part-time in order to look after her home. It is also the woman who must cook, clean, wipe the noses of her children, wash them and help them with their homework. Women are deemed fit only for some careers, and their ultimate happiness lies in marriage and raising children.  Poor people tend to have large families.  One oft-cited reason is that many children die and frequent pregnancies are an `investment` for the future (provided that most offspring are not girls). Even in this, the woman suffers the burden of bearing and rearing children. Large families will result in poorer health of the family as a whole as well as of the mother in particular and an increased probability of uneducated families, poor productivity and loss of economic growth.  Many will argue that the order of the world is based on division of responsibilitiesfor women and men.  Women are born to remain unseen and uncounted, sacrifice and tend to the men, while men work outside, buy and sell and provide for the fam11y. The fact is that differences of work based on gender has led to increased inequalities and a deeprooted system of patriarchy that consistently bars women from being able to make decisions that impact their lives, including about their physicalselves.  The results are for all to see: an increasingly divisive and unequal world in which a few people (men) own as much wealth as the rest of the world. An economically and socially just and sustainable world calls for a system that responds to human values, feelings and aspirations, focusing equally on realising the potential within both women and men. Gender biases and prejudices need to be removed from our minds and a reformed system needs to be put into place that deals with all worl(, whether visible or invisible, done by woman or man, in a neutral and equal manner.  As Marçal says, both halves of economics need to be addressed. Adam Smith had mentioned only the half that enables the animal to be slaughtered and marketed. He had forgotten the other half his mother cleaning the meat, cooking it and putting it on the table. The writer is a freelance contributor. |