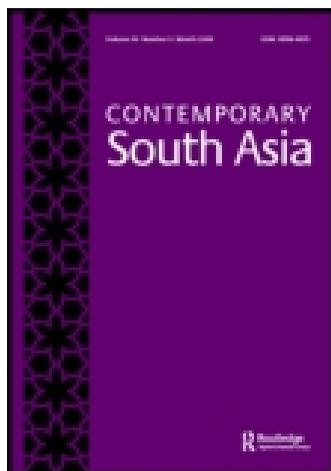


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## Women's 'double day' in middle-class homes in small-town India

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As middle-class Indian women become economically more active, it is worth exploring who is doing the housework. Are gender roles shifting within the household across the board in urban India? This paper shifts research attention away from the metropolitan cities to a small *mofussil* town, a relatively conservative urban centre where gender roles have so far been more resistant to transformation than in metropolitan cities that are undergoing radical changes about which much has been written. The methodological tool used in the study is a time-use survey, aimed primarily at extracting quantitative data, to make visible the unseen, unpaid and underpaid work and activities undertaken by women. Individual interviews were used to measure the actual workload of the women as a proxy indicator of gender disparities at the intra-household scale. The paper concludes that conventional sex segregation in household tasks has not changed significantly, and that women's various engagements in the public sphere have doubled the burden of responsibilities. The conceptual and methodological implications of the investigation lie in a reinterpretation of what constitutes 'work' for middle-class women, offering renewed understanding of the ways in which women (re)negotiate gendered responsibilities at home and outside of it in rapidly changing times.

**Keywords:** double burden; time-use statistics; unpaid work by women; gender relations in small-town India; middle-class women

### A 'double day' in India?

This paper investigates how women and men are (re)allocating their time, and how conventional gender roles are changing in response to the rapid economic changes that are currently sweeping across India. It peeps into middle-class homes<sup>1</sup> of small-town India, a less-researched subject than the contemporary metropolitan urban consumer society, where more and more women are getting involved in remunerative activities in or outside their households. The research question is pertinent because evidence from around the world presents a complicated picture of gender inequality and social change; Sevilla-Sanz and Gimenez (2010, 138) suggest that women's increased participation in economic activities does not necessarily mean a reduction in the burden of work that goes into maintaining the household. In the Global North, the symbolic meaning of unpaid work is shifting somewhat, as noted by Sayer (2005). However, in the temporal studies done by Bianchi et al. in the USA in 1965, 1975, 1985 and 1995 to assess trends

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in housework, it was found that the gender division of labour has become more equal primarily because women have dramatically decreased the time spent on these activities, without men increasing time spent commensurately (Bianchi et al. 2012, 55). This rigidity of men who are not engaging with household chores in face of women's active economic engagement has been described as the 'incomplete gender revolution' that 'pushed women into societally valued masculine activities and pulled men away from societally devalued "feminine activities" like care work' (Bianchi et al. 2012, 61). To avoid comparing apples with oranges, we look at post-reform China where women's involvement in urban activities has forcibly initiated a reduction in the performance of domestic chores due to the lack of flexibility in these activities. However, Chen (2005, 845) observes that overall, 'Chinese women are still subject to a heavy double burden', and that social support from extended family and even from neighbours still plays an important role. As we know, middle-class Indian nuclear families in urban India, despite the hired labour of paid domestic help, lack such familial support, raising the question (following Hochschild and Machung's influential book, *The Second Shift*, 1989): are Indian women experiencing a 'second shift'?

Some generalizations are unavoidable. Becker's (1981, 79) early commentary about women carrying a greater share of unpaid work within the household as their 'love labour' or 'solidary labour' is valid everywhere. Hochschild and Machung's 'second shift', irrespective of time, can be detected; for example, more recent studies by Lenon and Rosenfeld (1994) and Jacob and Gerson (2004) have found that the tasks in the home like cooking, washing, cleaning, taking care of the elderly and children, and such chores typically carried out by women are generally more time consuming and less flexible. Thus, men continue to benefit, directly or indirectly, from the gender division of labour ensured by patriarchy, as argued by socialist feminists (Becker 1981).

The continuing rise in women's employment demands a reorganization of personal lives at home. Bryson (2007) describes this extension of the time discipline of capitalism as a linear, goal-oriented commodified 'clock time'. Household division of labour also leads to the segregation of the private space within the home. Apart from the gender-based specialization of tasks, gender attitudes also explain the uneven distribution of household chores between women and men. The gender perspective argues that wives and husbands display their 'proper' gender roles by the amount of housework they perform, which is a symbolic enactment of gender relations (Brines 1994). Norms of behaviour, masculinity in particular, may keep men away from doing a lot of housework; for example, Bittman and Wajcman (2004) note that the more a husband depends on the wife, the less he works at home, possibly to reassert his masculinity. Sociologists explain this with the notion of 'doing' gender; that is, individuals performing the internalized gender-role expectations held by others. Consequently wives in dual and/or women-earning households tend to do more housework than men. This is most likely the case in urban middle-class homes in small-town India where, in spite of women stepping out of homes in recent years, gender ideologies have remained difficult to unsettle. This is the reason why Bhatia's (2002) study in India identified significant gender disparities, using time-use statistics as the tool.

Feminist economists have been trying to measure the economic value of women's unpaid work more accurately. In India, demonstrating gender disparities and the value of women's work with quantitative data have proved to be difficult. Under the traditional methods of data collection, no systematic investigation had measured the contribution of women. Therefore, following the recommendation by the Fourth World Conference on Women and the guidelines given by the Statistics Division of the United Nations (UNSD), the Central Statistical Organisation of India led a fairly large pilot time-use

survey during July 1998–June 1999, covering six states. This study attempted to estimate the approximate monetary value of unpaid work done by women, and calculated that women contribute over US\$ 600 billion to the Indian economy every year (Rajivan 1999). The study included the participation of women and men in informal income-generating activities, and was crucial in making visible women's work at home whilst raising operational and methodological issues (Hirway 1999, 2000; Pandey 1999).

Although such large-scale time-use studies have been crucial in making women's work more visible in contemporary India, a gap has remained in our understanding of smaller towns which tend to get generalized within either the rural or the larger, metropolitan, urban centres. Such towns, located in an unspecified zone in the theoretical rural–urban continuum, symbolize the quintessential 'middle India', presenting urban chaos resulting from rapid population growth and failing service provision, and greater resistance to changes in prevailing gender ideologies due to their proximity to, and close interactions with, rural areas (Denis, Mukhopadhyay, and Zerah 2012). Smaller mofussil towns also lie at the lower end of scholarly attention. For example, Motiram and Osberg's (2010) study tends to generalize tasks and instruction opportunities in Indian families without a specific mention of the size and nature of the settlement. However, this contemporary middle India is also where gender ideologies are in a rapid flux, and where a sizeable middle-class is emerging. Yet, it is where most aspects of women's work remain non- or under-remunerated, and well beyond the purview of economic policy measures.

Of all the changes sweeping this middle India today, the most crucial is the emergence of middle-class housewives as income-earning citizen subjects (Dutta 1999). A host of reasons are responsible: many women are now better educated and exposed to changing ways of the world before their marriage; they are no longer content to stay at home, and can afford to pay for minimal domestic help. Their emergence as economic citizens is not only to supplement family incomes, which remains one of the pressures, but also to fulfil their desire to flourish as a person. Often, the incomes are treated as 'extra incomes' within the family, leaving the woman with greater control over the monies earned (Lahiri-Dutt and Sil 2004). Baviskar and Ray (2011) consider that the middle class would be the producer as well as the consumer driving the engine of economic growth and prosperity for India. Middle-class women are refusing to sit quietly in the back seat. The variety of income-generating work that women do these days, the ways they make use of family social networks to generate these economic opportunities and the fact that these clash with their daily routine work make it necessary to know more about how they harmonize the conflicting demands on their time.

Choice of a method poses a problem here. Kalpagam (1994, 572) warns us about the use of quantitative measurement precisely because of this harmonization, which makes it difficult to separate women's economic activities from those that are non-economic in nature. Moreover, many household tasks and chores are no longer explicitly physical or manual; most tend to be on the borderline between the kind of labour that was previously associated with household work (such as grinding spices on stone) and leisure activities (such as taking children to the park). The compelling social and cultural factors that circumscribe these activities by middle-class women make it difficult for researchers to tread through the grey area between household tasks that can easily be defined as work as it has been conventionally understood and those that are essentially household maintenance and related activities. In India, where the figure of the domestic help always hovers around the kitchen and the washing room, and middle-class norms and aspirations make women increasingly reluctant to engage in manual work, one might say that a housewife assumes the role more of a manager than a labourer. Indeed, the distinction between the two is largely getting blurred conceptually as

well as operationally. The two go hand-in-hand: investigating what constitutes women's economic activities should simultaneously focus on the development of methods of measurement to substantiate the demands on time and the extent of dual burdens. Appropriate and fine-grained statistics on the kind of work women do can help to identify gender disparities at home, and this is the aim of the present study.

In order to analyse women's work burdens at home and outside in paid and unpaid labour, this paper makes an exploratory effort to count the time spent by each woman and man in a range of activities within the household and also in their personal projects of self-improvement. The philosophy behind this time-use survey lies in the tacit recognition of time as a direct source of utility, a fact not often well understood or recognized as a gender issue in our society. From the survey results, we assess the kind of work these women generally do and how much time and energy they actually spend, as cooking meals or rearing children involves physical as well as emotional labour. Changes in time spent on personal care or learning, and social and cultural activities due to economic engagement have also been measured. Lastly, the gender disparity in unpaid work has been worked out to find the price women pay for the increased share of domestic labour. Before turning to an explanation of the methodology deployed and its analysis, the paper first outlines the specific locational context that formed the site of the study.

### **The context: a locale in middle India**

The study is contextualized in a medium-sized (population around 330,000 in the latest census) town, Burdwan, located in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. Ruled by a wealthy family of Punjabi Maharajas during the colonial period, the social culture in Burdwan is arguably distinctively conservative and tradition-bound (McLane 1993). Since the opening up of the Indian economy, however, waves of globalization have swept through Burdwan, which now boasts shopping malls and other such trappings of consumer culture. Fernandes (2011) notes that India's post-liberalization middle class is a highly visible and much-debated social group, retaining its identity through the maintenance of boundaries, often with an enduring rigidity. Burdwan's middle class might be expected to be particularly prone to this boundary maintenance, as it retains strong links to its rural environs and so is more firmly attached to traditional norms than those living in the large metropolises that have been under intense academic scrutiny lately (see Brosius 2010). It is this fluid combination of past and present that attributes a certain character and personality to the town. Paying attention to this complex mix and the local context is important for building a deeper understanding of what constitutes 'work' for middle-class women, how economic change is being negotiated, and to what extent (and direction) are gender roles and relations shifting in everyday lives.

Empirically, the focus on a medium-sized town like Burdwan shifts the scholarly attention towards certain aspects of change in women's lives that are not yet heavily debated in the discussions on 'the middle class' in India. For example, some middle-class families in Burdwan may still source part of their household sustenance from land that is located in a nearby village. Some families may have moved to the town solely because of the better amenities and services that the town provides – tapped water supply and better schools for children for example – but visit the *gamer bari* (home in the village) also described as *desh* (home) every month or even every week. Stronger rural ties such as these mean that middle-class women in Burdwan are different from their counterparts in metropolitan cities, taking advantage of malls and shopping complexes, for instance, most often to purchase luxury items rather than basic groceries.

Middle-class living in Burdwan and other small towns emphasizes the more conspicuous coexistence of old and new ways. Conventionally, women were expected to lead a cloistered life inside the household. That they are seeking new avenues of earning incomes is a recent phenomenon that has the potential to redefine and expand their social spaces, and their role within the family. Whether or not this initiative has resulted in a 'second shift' or a 'double day' is a significant research question in the context of these rapidly emerging changes.

### Approach to the research

The paper analyses the time-use data of a small sample of 25 women from middle-class families. The sample size is small due to certain imperatives, but care was taken to ensure that selected cases represent the wider population reasonably well and can at least offer a glimpse inside the black box of middle-class households. In studies of this nature, the sample size is quite impossible to systematically select following a given statistical method that the data represent a particular population (Darlington and Scott 2002, 8). As there is no statistical record of the various types of informal activities that middle-class women are engaged in, obtaining a fully representative sample was too difficult, leading us to choose the participants from our personal acquaintances using a 'snowballing method' (also called chain sampling, chain-referral sampling or referral sampling) in which one acquaintance led us to another and so on (see Morgan 2008). This technique is particularly useful, given the fact that in most large-scale time-use studies, the lack of response is significant which can mean extreme time poverty (Abraham 2006). The research participants present a wide enough range in age, within the working age group (between 30 and 55 years), live generally in small joint families with households that are usually headed by a male (excepting in one case) and have at least high-school level education. They are engaged in a number of self-initiated informal income-generating activities. These activities include both conventional options, such as private tuition, tailoring, and saree selling, and the less conventional ones, such as those thrown up by the recent opening up of the Indian economy – acting as agents in small, privately owned financial companies, running boutiques, beauty parlors, managing health clinics, or running computer-training centres, kindergartens and crèches.

The diversity of views, situations and experiences that these women represent has helped us to build our argument. Rather than expanding the number of individuals under study, our investigation intensively focused on the phenomenon of time use. From that perspective, the sample is *effectively* much larger than first appears to be the case. Amongst these 25 women, 15 are married, 6 unmarried and 4 are widows. We have compared these three categories of women to learn more about their differential positions at the *ghar* (home<sup>2</sup>) and the *Bahir* (outside world). The paper reports part of an ongoing study in which, in order to develop a comparative perspective, we have also surveyed the male partners through in-depth interviews, and another 25 women who are exclusively homemakers and not involved in any type of earning activity. Enriched through life-cycle analyses of each individual, we are hoping to develop a broad and comparative perspective to clearly understand the meanings of work in middle India.

As Kahneman et al. (2004, 1776) argue, there is 'no generally accepted method for collecting quantitative information about time use'. Some activity-based approaches are not even gender-sensitive (for example, see Bhat and Koppelman 1999). In the small time-use study reported here, we have used an applied quantitative approach in order to improve precision while measuring our participants' actual workload and gender disparities. Time is a basic human resource, and its allocation by individuals for undertaking different activities both inside and outside the household allows comparison. Time also provides a useful

dimension for examining differences between women and men (McGinnity and Russel 2008, 5). The United Nations (2003, 21) observes, 'Time use statistics are quantitative summaries of how women and men "spend" or allocate their time over a specified period.' Availability of large-scale time-use survey data is limited in India, the only source being the Central Statistical Organization that conducted a survey in six states in India in 1998–1999. This study paid attention to making women's unpaid productive work visible, rather than to the measurement of domestic reproductive labour (CSO 2000). In our study, household care and maintenance-related activities as well as income-generating activities were assessed in relation to time allocation, the principal objective being a measurement of the binary yoke.

The method broadly follows the instructions noted in the Human Development Report (UNDP 1995) and Rajivan's study (1999), which used the interview method as the basis of data collection. These primary data include information as to how the 25 participants and their male partners spend their time throughout the course of a day. For the purpose of this study, we created an open-interval diary that recorded the beginning and ending points in time of the activities during interviews with the respondents. For individual women and men, covering 24 hours of the day, we recorded the starting and ending times, as well as the total time spent on a particular activity. Time is measured in hours and minutes per day, out of a total of seven days in one week, which was our reference period for collecting the data. While recording simultaneous activities, only that activity has been taken into account to which the respondent accorded higher priority. Recording of activities is targeted for a typical/normal day, not for a weekly variant<sup>3</sup> or abnormal<sup>4</sup> day. This is because we have tried to record time-use statistics on the respondents' economic as well as household activities.

We also followed the classification of activities recommended by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1995. The trial international classification for time-use activities differentiates activities on the basis of whether an activity is within the system of national accounts (SNA) production boundary or within the general production boundary outside the SNA boundary, or non-productive. Totally, 154 activities have been grouped into a 9-fold classification and these 9 groups of major activities have been classified into 3 broad divisions by the United Nations: (A) the SNA [(I) primary, (II) secondary and (III) tertiary activities which are paid works]; (B) the extended-SNA activities [(IV) household maintenance, management and shopping for own household, (V) care for children, the sick, elderly and disabled for own household and (VI) community services and help to other households]; and (C) non-SNA activities [(VII) learning, (VIII) social and cultural activities, mass media and (IX) personal care and self-maintenance]. Our respondents' activities have been divided into these three activity classes. A comparative analysis on time-use in SNA, extended-SNA and non-SNA activities between these women and their male partners has been done with the objective of making the women's economic contribution statistically more visible and revealing any gender bias prevailing in the middle-class families with regard to the performance of household duties.

### **Understanding household work and its gendered division**

Before evaluating time use in different activities, let us identify the range of household care, income-generating and self-fulfilment activities. Census definition of what comprises 'work' is restricted to *economically productive activities*. That concept of work needs broadening; work is a defining force not only in women's (and men's) everyday lives, but it also helps to maintain the everyday rhythm within households, and acts as a vital ingredient in the psychological, socio-cultural and economic well-being of those who live within these households.

Indeed, household work is seen as the social obligation of most middle-class women in Burdwan, traditionally placed on their shoulders by the patriarchal system. Women, despite their economic engagements, carry the responsibility of home and family care. In most cases, they prioritize their home over their work. Hence, we will first try to explore the types of household activities. Following the example of Shimray (2004), who studied the household responsibilities of Naga women, we throw light on the variety of domestic activities in middle-class families in Burdwan. The household chores of Burdwan's middle-class families generally are of two types: household-related work and activities performed *within* the homes, and household-related work and activities performed *outside*.

Household chores inside the homes include fetching and/or organizing a steady supply of water for the household, cooking and/or managing cooking, serving meals, cleaning and washing or supervising these activities, and drying and putting away washed clothes, taking care of children, the sick and the elderly, teaching children or supervising their studies, preparing children for school, dusting and other decoration work for beautifying the interior, feeding domestic pets, supervising and tending to the kitchen, making beds and mending family members' clothes.

Household work and related activities that are performed outside the homes can be classified into *regular* and *occasional*. Regular household work performed outside the home includes buying groceries, dropping children to school and coaching classes, and to cultural activities. Occasional household work performed outside the home includes shopping for household items including clothes for children, visiting the doctor for medical treatment of family members, collecting groceries from ration shops, carrying out banking transactions, and paying telephone and electricity bills. Thus, household duties have actually expanded and diversified for middle-class women, creating an almost ceaseless everyday cycle through which they must struggle so as to be able to handle a range of tasks and responsibilities. A similar conclusion was drawn by Choudhary, Tripathy, and George (2009) from their 250-person survey in another part of India.

Now we turn to whether the most basic division – gender division of labour – exists in these middle-class families. Although sex-based division of labour and the inequality between women and men's roles have been hotly debated in recent years, culturally determined gender roles still more or less prevail in our societies. Among middle-class families of Burdwan, as a medium-sized town, the inequality in gender roles results from socially constructed power relationships. Here also we see the relevance of Nashat and Tucker's (1999, 52) finding that the gender division of labour associates women with family maintenance. Gender segregation and domestic work also characterize the lives of women in Burdwan. As we shall see, their participation in economic activities has not brought any significant changes in their sharing of household duties and also is only very slowly eroding the gender division of labour in the outer working world.

Figure 1 outlines the basis of the study. It presents the division of labour in middle-class families and it also depicts the domestic burden of middle-class women who are also involved in income-generating informal activities. Almost all chores inside the home are performed solely by women. To some extent this burden is less so in the case of our unmarried respondents, who depend on other women in their homes, such as mothers or sisters-in-law, to accomplish these.

Although vegetable and grocery shopping are done predominantly by the male partners of these women, some of the researched women have to do it as well. Other household activities performed outside the home such as visiting doctors' clinics or banking transactions are carried out by these women and sometimes also other members of their families. Except for a few, all others share these tasks with their husbands and other male members of

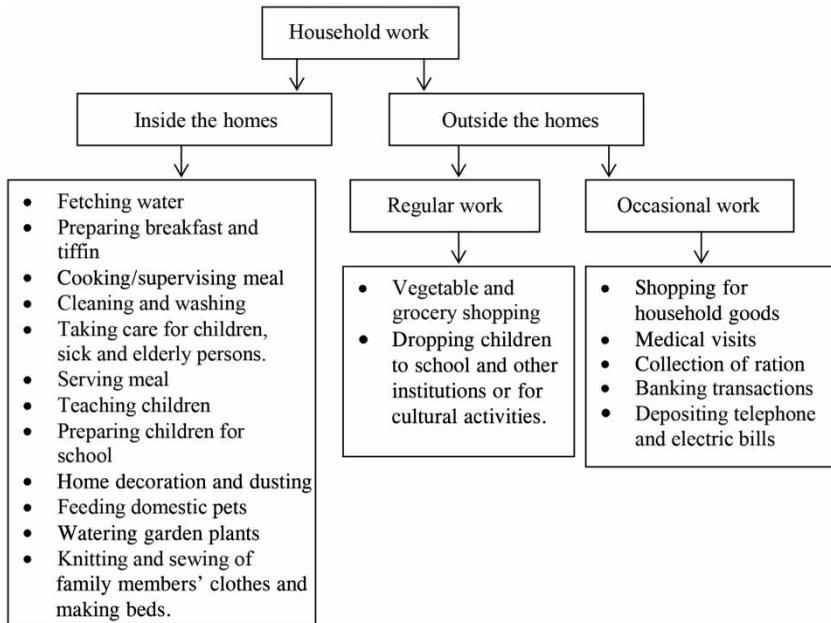


Figure 1. Household work of middle-class women in Burdwan.

their families. For 7 out of 25 informants, the occasional household activities performed outside the homes are predominantly their responsibility, as either their male members are busy in their professions or are physically disabled.

### Time use in three main activity classes

A detailed individual time-use survey of 25 participants provides a comparative picture of the relative contribution of middle-class women and men in three different types of activities. A close observation of their diary of time use reveals that many of these women spend more or less equal amounts of time in SNA and extended-SNA activities. Some women participants bear an equal burden of economic and household work (ranging between average 42 and 58 hours a week) while some other women spend more time (average 48–79 hours a week) in extended-SNA activities than in SNA activities. There is another group of women, who have to spend less time in extended-SNA activities (ranging between average 17 and 35 hours in a week). Most of these women are unmarried, and thus their domestic burden is not as large as that of married women. However, some older informants, although now less burdened with household activities, had to carry out the dual burden of their chores and economic activities simultaneously in the early phase of their married life. They are now relieved to some extent as their grown-up children, or in some cases, their domestic help, share their work burden.

The male partners of these women spend most of their time in SNA and non-SNA activities. Their involvement in extended-SNA activities is minimal, ranging between 3 and 28 hours in a week. Even if there is a reduction in time spent on SNA activities, it does not result in an increase in the time spent on extended-SNA activities, but results in a corresponding or greater increase in the time spent on non-SNA activities (ranging between 81 and 155 hours in a week).

Table 1. Weekly average time (in hours) spent on SNA, extended-SNA and non-SNA activities.

Activities	Working women		Male partners or grown-up sons
	Married	Single	
SNA	45.98	56.87	47.67
Extended-SNA	52.97	24.54	11.42
Non-SNA	68.99	86.59	108.91
Total	167.94	168.00	168.00

Source: Field survey.

Note: The figure of total time for each may not be exactly equal to 168 due to the rounding effect.

Now, we may compare women and men of middle-class families regarding the weekly average and percentage of weekly average time spent on SNA, extended-SNA and non-SNA activities.

Tables 1 and 2 clearly depict the greater workload of middle-class women in Burdwan in comparison to that of their male partners or grown-up sons. Married/widowed women spend an average of about 46 hours, while single women spend about 57 hours a week on SNA activities; together with extended-SNA activities they jointly consume around 99 hours of married women's total activity time in a week. On the other hand, men spend an average of about 48 hours a week on SNA but less than 15 hours on extended-SNA activities. For single women, these two activities take up about 81 hours of the week. Thus, the married working women spend significantly more time on household activities as compared to that spent by single women, or male partners or grown-up sons. They spend about 41 hours more on average in a week on extended-SNA activities as compared to their male partners or grown-up sons. Single women spend about 28 hours less on average in a week on extended-SNA activities as compared to married women. Thus, married working women get less time to spend on SNA activities due to their involvement in extended-SNA activities.

Moreover, in the case of men, a reduction in time spent on SNA activities results in a corresponding or greater increase in the time spent on non-SNA activities, but in the case of women, some part of this reduction in time spent on SNA activities goes into extended-SNA work and there is less than a corresponding increase in the time spent on non-SNA activities.

Hence, from Table 1, we can observe that the weekly average time spent by married women on non-SNA activities (69 hours) is much less than that spent by their male counterparts (109 hours). Single women spend a higher weekly average time (86 hours) on non-SNA activities than married women. Thus, it can be pointed out that married

Table 2. Percentage of weekly average time spent on SNA, extended-SNA and non-SNA activities.

Activities	Working women		Male partners or grown-up sons
	Married	Single	
SNA	27.38	33.85	28.38
Extended-SNA	31.55	14.61	6.80
Non-SNA	41.07	51.54	64.82
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Field survey.

women are sacrificing their own economic, cultural and psychological development for the sake of their family chores.

Clearly, our researched women not only spend a large portion of their time (32%) on extended-SNA activities, but their contribution in SNA activities is also quite significant (27%). On the other hand, their male partners spend a slightly larger percentage of their time on SNA activities (28%) as compared to women. Men's contribution to extended-SNA activities is much less (6.8%) than that of women. A close look at Table 2 reveals that although women are spending time in economic activities, they still have to shoulder the responsibility of home and family care, consequently sacrificing their leisure and personal care time (41%). Rarely do men take the initiative in sharing the responsibilities of household maintenance and caring for children. As a result, they have far more time to spend on personal development (65%). This might have some implications, as Bittman and Wajman (2004) observed, for the quality of life, since those who have most committed time (employment + caring + housework + travel for employment) and least free time are subject to greater time pressure and lower life satisfaction. It is plausible that in middle India, where there has been a recent rise in women's work participation both in formal and informal economic activities, domestic attitudes and practices have been somewhat more resistant to change.

### Time use in household work

From the previous discussion, it is clear that middle-class women of Burdwan, like in other parts of the developing world, work more than men. In this section, we examine the time allocation in household work inside the homes and outside the homes distinctively by both our researched women and their male partners.

We also undertook a comparative estimation of the relative contribution of our 25 middle-class respondents and their husbands in terms of hours spent on household work. The comparison of the weekly average time spent on housework indicates that married women shoulder the heaviest burden of domestic chores. Seven out of 25 women bear tremendous pressure of household work, both inside and outside the home. Time spent on household work and related activities *inside* the home ranges between, on average, 31 and 57 hours a week. For household work and related activities *outside* the home, the average ranges between 18 and 28 hours a week. Thus, almost all the household responsibilities, both inside and outside the home, are carried out by these women even though they are also engaged in income-generating activities.

Some women spend more time in housework inside the home than outside. Their time spent on housework inside the home ranges between 23 and 58 hours a week while in work performed outside the home ranges between 5 and 16 hours a week.

From Tables 3 and 4 it can be seen that women's contribution to household activities performed inside the home is about 22% (average 37 hours in a week), whereas their

Table 3. Weekly average time (in hours) spent on household activities.

Activities	Women participants		Male partners or grown-up sons
	Married and widows	Unmarried	
Inside the homes	37.14	14.72	3.59
Outside the homes	15.83	9.82	7.83

Source: Field survey.

Table 4. Percentage of weekly average time spent on household activities.

Activities	Women participants		Male partners or grown-up sons
	Married and widows	Unmarried	
Inside the homes	22.11	8.76	2.14
Outside the homes	9.42	5.85	4.66

Source: Field survey.

male partners' contribution is only about 2% (average 3 hours in a week). The contribution of these women in household activities performed outside the homes (~9%) is also higher than their partners' contribution (~5%). The contribution of male members in housework performed outside the home is higher (5% – weekly average of 8 hours) than their contribution in housework performed inside the home (2% – weekly average of 3 hours).

This is due to the fact that sometimes husbands, grown-up sons or other male family members do the vegetable and grocery shopping, banking transactions, depositing electricity and telephone bills and so on. Nevertheless, women also have to perform certain tasks outside the household, such as buying clothes and other necessary household goods, accompanying sick family members on doctors' visits or dropping children at schools, and for other cultural activities.

Table 4 also shows that even single women are less burdened with household work both inside and outside the home. Eight unmarried women spend 6–29 hours a week (weekly average of 15 hours or 9%) on household work inside the home and 7–13 hours a week (weekly average of 10 hours or 6%) on household work outside.

Hence, middle-class women in Burdwan spend a significant time on household activities in addition to their engagement in income-generating activities. This shows reluctance on the part of their male partners to share the responsibilities of household maintenance and caring for children. Thus, about 31% of married women's contribution simply goes unpaid and remains unrecognized.

### Measuring gender disparity within middle-class families

The previous discussion reveals that a great disparity among women and men of middle-class families in Burdwan regarding time spent on extended-SNA and non-SNA activities. Let us now measure gender disparity using the time-use statistics. In particular, the absolute difference in the time spent by women and men on three different categories of activities (SNA, extended-SNA and non-SNA) has been used to measure disparity. Here the difference in the amount of time spent on SNA activities by women and men represents the disparity in the economic process. The absolute difference in time spent on extended-SNA activities will represent the disparity in the involvement of the two genders in household activities. The third variable – the absolute difference in the amount of time spent on non-SNA activities – will describe the disparity in the amount of time available to a woman and a man for activities such as personal care and self-maintenance, learning and other social and cultural activities, which are important for overall development.

Tables 5 and 6 indicate certain 'obvious' results. In SNA activities, there is very little difference between women and men. The absolute difference and the percentage difference favour men slightly.

Table 5. Measure of gender disparity.

Activities	Weekly average time spent (in hours)		Absolute difference
	Women (Married)	Male partners or grown-up son	
SNA	45.93	47.67	1.69
Extended-SNA	52.97	11.42	41.55
Non-SNA	68.99	108.91	39.92

Source: Field survey.

Table 6. Proportional share of work to total work.

Activities	Proportion of work to total work (in per cent)		Women's work burden compared with men's (per cent difference)
	Women (married)	Male partners or grown-up son	
SNA	49.10	50.90	-1.80
Extended-SNA	82.26	17.74	64.52
Non-SNA	38.78	61.22	-22.44

Source: Field survey.

As expected, there is significant gender disparity in household work such as cooking, caring for children, sewing and knitting, teaching, carrying out chores like banking transactions, with women shouldering the major part of the burden.

A high gender disparity is observed in certain non-SNA activities, namely socio-cultural activities, leisure and idling (such as watching the TV), and the value strongly favours men. This shows that men enjoy more spare time than women. As expected, time spent on personal care and self-maintenance is lower in the case of women.

### Comparison between working women and non-earning housewives

Middle-class women who are involved in income-generating activities are not necessarily less burdened with household chores than those who are exclusively homemakers. Although they are not the primary providers for their families, they do supplement the families' incomes, yet there is no concomitant and significant reduction in their burden of household chores. We can estimate the relative contribution to household work made by women who are engaged in income-generating activities vis-à-vis women who are exclusively homemakers.

To make this comparative analysis, we have also studied 25 middle-class housewives who are not engaged in income-generating activities. Time-use statistics will help us to understand whether there is any difference in workload between those housewives who earn an income and those who do not.

Table 7 shows that although non-earning housewives spend more time on extended-SNA activities, they also enjoy more personal time than married and single working women. The non-earning housewives spend, on average, 68 hours a week on household activities such as cooking, washing and cleaning, teaching children, serving food, taking care of sick family members and so on. On the other hand, the figure for married and single working women is 53 hours and 25 hours in a week, respectively. There is not

Table 7. Weekly average time (in hours) spent on extended-SNA and non-SNA activities.

Activities	Working women		Non-working housewives
	Married and widow	Unmarried	
Extended-SNA	52.97	24.54	68.23
Non-SNA	68.99	86.59	99.70

Source: Field survey.

much significant difference in time spent on household activities between married working women and housewives. This may be explained by the prevalence of domestic help – indeed it has recently been noted by United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) (2005) that to enable each middle-class woman in developing countries to work outside of home, a poorer class woman is engaged in order to attend to household chores. Gender roles do not change quickly in response to the additional incomes that jobs or businesses bring. The household remains the last bastion of patriarchy, and in the case of Burdwan, the same pattern is being repeated.

However, the difference is more prominent in the case of time spent on non-SNA activities by the married working women and non-earning housewives. Apart from their engagement in household duties, housewives have more time for learning, social and cultural activities, engaging with mass media, personal care and self-maintenance. Married working women remain involved in income-generating activities at the cost of their leisure and personal care. Unlike housewives who find the time to watch the television, visit relatives or socialize with friends, married working women tend to place a greater premium on utilizing time in ways that ensure that their domestic responsibilities are never compromised.

### Summing up

A society moves by utilizing the basic aspects of improved health, knowledge and skills of its people for productive purposes, for leisure or for greater activity in cultural, social and political affairs (UNDP 1995, 93). How men and women spend their time and on what is a crucial indicator of gender relations (Bhatia 2002, 3469), and thus the allocation of housework reflects power relations between women and men at the smallest scale. Significant differences in the amount of time spent on particular types of work and activities indicate the existence of gross disparities, and poor bargaining power gained by women through economic participation. More specifically, the measurement of time use by middle-class women is crucial for two reasons: to further explore the unprecedented and radical changes that are affecting India's middle classes generally, and to monitor the manner in which gender roles in particular are being performed and potentially transformed in the private domain of the household. It is true that many women actively act as 'maternal gatekeepers' (Allen and Hawkins 1999, 199); they consider this as a feminine domain and do not allow men to get easy access to this domain. Unlike Brines' (1994) findings, economic dependency is also not at the heart of the excessive work burdens of Indian middle-class women, and for many contemporary middle-class women, Humphries' (2009) Marxist ideas of the household economy being solely dependent on the male head earner would not be fully applicable.

From this study, a clear gender bias emerges in the amount of time spent on two categories of activities – extended-SNA and non-SNA activities. It is also notable that

middle-class women have started performing economic activities, leading to a reduction of male dominance in SNA activities. In spite of this, extended-SNA activities appear to be the sole responsibility of women. It appears that middle-class women, particularly those who are married, have curtailed their time to perform non-SNA activities – which include leisure, learning, personal care and social and cultural activities – in order to retain a balance between their work and domestic chores. Their male counterparts usually have more time than them to spend on non-SNA activities. Needless to say, time spent on household chores by these women is not valued and not recognized as productive, and remains unpaid. However, as Neetha (2010) observed, the burden of unpaid work on women at home results in the inferior status of women in the labour market, which is the reason why these women's productive labours are concentrated in informal activities. In our survey, additional remunerative employment has created within the women an enhanced sense of time pressure.

Changes initiated by the opening up of the Indian economy are reconfiguring almost every aspect of women and men's lives, fundamentally reshaping intimate relationships as well as contractual institutions such as the family and marriage. Yet, the transformations seem to have stopped at the threshold of the home, as we see that gender roles, particularly those of men, are not changing adequately or rapidly enough. In the local context of Burdwan, waves of globalization are creating locally constructed, class-based practices and identities; but as Donner (2008, 179) observes, 'new subjectivities found in public discourse ... build upon earlier reformulations of patriarchal regimes ... and ideologies of the family'. In Burdwan, these gendered ideologies are in flux: the complex element of 'tradition' is being (re)interpreted as part of a volatile mix, with unforeseen demands on everyday family life leading to a reconfiguration of women's roles. Thus, not only is 'work' being redefined by (and for) middle-class women as they negotiate economic and social change, but the boundaries of apparently concrete gender roles and relations are also being stretched and challenged. Exploring these issues in the medium-sized town of Burdwan offers a glimpse into the dark terrain of middle India, helping to widen a number of debates on the changing lives of middle-class women in contemporary India.

To contextualize the results of surveys such as the one reported here, there is now a need to explore why many middle-class men in urban India have been unable to change gender roles in order to devote more time to household chores. Another need would be to clearly distinguish, preferably in quantitative terms, chores identified as *work* and *activities*, as middle-class women are often sweepingly presented as women of leisure due to the prevalence of domestic help in India. The contemporary and gendered experience of time poverty is not simply a matter of the total number of hours worked but also has to do with the need to coordinate a host of fragmented activities. As evident from this study, most women identify activities related to their reproductive roles as work, primarily because of the social culture of responsibility allocation. Therefore, even when they are not using physical labour in cooking or cleaning or childcare, the supervision responsibility is on them, and they are directly involved in the management of such tasks, making them ultimately answerable for the smooth functioning of the household. Further studies on different dimensions of time for women and men may move more firmly into a methodological domain that combines the qualitative and the experiential, with large-scale time-use surveys that generate quantitative data brought into conversation with studies of the emergent time culture in urban Indian homes, which show, for example, how women's approach to time use leads to behavioural change amongst men (see Margsiglio et al. 2000; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Hook 2006). We can at present only conjecture about the outcomes if traditional considerations of household chores as a woman's prerogative are modified in India. Such a shift

would present opportunities to middle-class women to spend more time on productive activities or leisure, or to be culturally, socially and politically more active.

Our results correspond with those of other studies employing time-use survey techniques in India (see for example, Rajivan 1999; Choudhary, Tripathy, and George 2009). This observation points to the need to assess more realistically the contributions of women towards the well-being of households and in income-generating work. A fuller understanding of the gendered nature of the domestic sphere in one specific context can indicate that it is through work – both paid and unpaid, for household sustenance and for income generation – that women continue to play a key function in their families. Their work is of a wide range and is not limited to specific places such as within the home. Sex-based division of labour within families has created, over many years of patriarchal dominance, specific gender roles ascribing specific chores to men and women, although these boundaries are in flux and changing in the labour market in post-liberalization India. Women in smaller urban centres in India are experiencing a ‘second shift’, as there seems to be no increase in men’s family time, with little or no change in domestic attitudes and practices.

## Notes

1. The middle class is defined broadly as a ‘social’ category emphasizing education and style of life as two important dimensions in the context of Indian urban communities, but with great internal heterogeneity (Varma 1998). This group has benefited from interactions with modernist values and the trappings of globalization (Scrase and Scrase 2009), and carries a significant political weight of its own. In the fluid social and economic context of globalizing India, the aspirations of this middle class are being heightened by increasing exposure to lifestyles that were hitherto beyond its reach. In medium-sized towns like Burdwan, this consuming class has now begun to replicate certain aspects of metropolitan consumer cultures filtering from the West.
2. *Ghar* and *bahir*: The concept of *ghar* (inner/women’s quarters) and *bahir* (the public/the outside world) was closely associated with the nineteenth-century separation of private and public spheres in Bengal, giving rise to a genteel class of *bhadramahilas* who were selectively able to enter public life.
3. Weekly variant day allows for a general day off.
4. Abnormal day is a day in which all usual functions of the household may be altered for a special reason, such as due to the arrival of an unexpected guest, illness or even a local festival.

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