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Infinites of being a housewife

Kriti Sharma

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Why her 'job' is perhaps the most magnanimous one in the world

5 When my cousin was seven years old, my father, at a family gathering, put her on his lap and asked her, 'So little girl, what do you want to be when you grow up?' She put on a pensive face as she mulled over the question. Finally, her eyes brightened as she pointed a finger at her mother and squealed, 'A housewife!'

10 For a moment, every soul listening to that seemingly innocuous exchange was stunned into silence, which was broken only by the guttural laughter of my aunt's father-in-law, my cousin's paternal grandfather. 'Sweet child!'

15 That's not a profession. The job of a housewife is hardly a job. It's a duty.'

20 We live in the 21st century. As a country we proudly highlight our progress by citing the existence of a burgeoning female workforce, one that includes highly educated and skilled professionals. Yet, we cannot deny the fact that a majority of Indian women still do not go out to work. Instead, they work at home. Not *from* home as entrepreneurs or freelancers, but rather in their houses, as housewives.

25 At the core of every family, nuclear or joint, is the housewife. The importance of her physical presence is underscored by the stasis the household comes to when she is not around. She single-handedly runs it, juggling chores such as cooking, washing, cleaning and caretaking with great skill.

Emotionally, she holds the family together. She is a pillar of support for her husband, a guiding light for her child, and a harbour for the family's elderly. It's as though her existence is entirely selfless, always putting the interests of others over and above her own.



30 There is hardly any difference between the 'job' description of a housewife and that of the chief executive officer of a company. While the CEO steers a company forward, the housewife is at the helm of the household. The CEO may work 12 hours a day, taking important decisions in the field of production, sales, finance and human resources. The housewife is just as able an administrator. She, in fact, works round the clock. She also deals with physical, financial and human resources. Her decisions affect the lives of people and the well-being of the home.

35 However, the work she does is not quite considered a 'job'. A CEO gets paid in millions, while her work just goes unacknowledged. She rarely even receives gratitude; remuneration, then, seems like a ridiculous idea.

The patriarchal understanding of the role of a housewife is that her job is a duty. She has to perform these tasks on a daily basis, irrespective of whether she likes it or wants to do it at all.

40 Her job is thankless. But then again, her job is not a job. Her skills are not marketable; she is not the breadwinner of the house. In its blunt interpretation of this metaphor, our male chauvinistic society has failed to realise that while the man may bring home the bread, it is the woman, or the housewife, who actually makes the food that he eats out of that bread.

A housewife wants nothing more than to be treated with love, respect, gratefulness and dignity.

45 Her 'job' is perhaps the most magnanimous one in the world. It's time society woke up to her domestic significance, instead of taking her for granted. She deserves her due and it's up to us to change regressive mindsets, celebrate her place in the familial ecosystem and recognise her noble, yet silent, toil.

- How and to what effect is tone used to express the author's opinion in this column?
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