UNDERSTANDING OF “WAGES AGAINST HOUSEWORK” WITH THE HELP OF “FIVE FACES OF OPPRESSION”

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we are going to study various oppressions faced by women with the help of “Five Faces of Oppression” by Iris Marion Young and “Wages Against Housework” by Silvia Federici. We will also see how capitalism makes housework the second characteristic of women and how society oppresses women.

INTRODUCTION

"Whenever you ask a girl, what does she want to become? she never says a HOUSEWIFE."

In this manifesto review, we will be connecting Silvia Federici's "Wages Against Housework" with Iris Marion Young's essay "Five Faces of Oppression." The book 'Wages Against Housework' was written by a scholar, teacher, and activist Silvia Federici in 1975, which focused on the issue of making domestic labor synonym to women's work. This book was published in the time when women's movement challenging capitalism, sexism, oppression made a headline. "Five Faces of Oppression" was written by political theorist and social feminist Iris Marion Young, which was first published in Justice and the Politics of Difference in 1990.

The primary concern of the essay "Wages Against Housework" is how capitalism convinced everyone that domestic work had been transformed into a natural attribute of women, and they do it not because they can do it, but they love to do it, therefore giving wages for domestic work is not necessary. It also briefly talks about how capitalism disciplined women to be dependent on their husbands and how it is the destiny of women to get married and serve their husbands no matter how qualified and competent they are. This benefits the capitalist society as women create the environment, which boosts the male ego of their husbands, and they work more efficiently in the factories.

The essay also talks about what all changes can be brought by demanding wages for their domestic work and how every work which women do, whether in the house or the office, is related to serving a man. On reading both the essays, i.e., Wages Against Housework and Five Faces of Oppression, in my opinion, women mainly face four types of oppression that are Exploitation, Marginalisation, Cultural Imperialism, Violence.

Exploitation – Here, exploitation means when a person is benefited from the other person's work. Oppression on women consists because of a lack of mutual reciprocal of transfer of power, status, and wealth from women to men. Oppression exists in the first place because women work for men without demanding anything. Women do not demand anything for their housework as capitalism has convinced them it is a fulfilling activity to do so. Women do all the chores as well as getting the man ready, bringing all the required things at his hands or doing something even before he asks. "Women's oppression consists not merely in inequality of status, power, and wealth resulting from men excluding them from privileged activities. Freedom, power, status, and self-realization of men are possible precisely because women work for them. Gender exploitation..."
has two aspects, transfer of the fruits of material labor to men and transfer of nurturing and sexual energies to men\(^1\). Christine Delphy (1984), describes marriage as a class relation in which women's labor benefits men as they perform tasks for someone who they are dependent on and not for themselves. Women take care of the children, in-laws, chores, get the thing in a way that is desired by the husband. By doing all this, women are being exploited by their family members, mainly by their husband, as they do not even get the recognition for their work; they act as pillars which the world never gets to see and provides the support for their husband, which they tend to forget over time. Generally, a woman's work is considered as a menial work - additional support to others' work where those others get benefited from it. For example – mothers getting all the stationery for the child, getting the grocery so that the family can eat, keeping the house clean when husband’s colleague or boss comes or removing the expired food from the refrigerator, keeping all the appliances in the working condition. All this work is time-consuming and straining in nature but considered as menial as they do not bring it in the notice of others, the job tends to be overlooked.

**Cultural Imperialism** – "To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of society render the particular perspective of one's group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other. Cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm\(^2\) the best example of cultural imperialism is that "Men can accept our services and take pleasure in them because they presume that housework is easy for us, that we enjoy it because we do it for their love\(^3\). Here the popular belief of Capitalist society has convinced everyone that women do not need remuneration for their housework as it is an act of love, and they do it because they like it, and they are good at it. By not giving remunerations for domestic work, it is not even considered as work. It acts as a perfect example that shows how a dominant group forces its thinking and beliefs on another group.

**Violence** – Iris Young describes violence as "Members of some groups live with the knowledge that they must fear random, unprovoked attacks on their persons or property, which have no motive but to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person\(^4\). In the Wages against Housework, the members can be referred to women from the working-class family. Silvia Federici in her essay shows violence by giving examples like - "the poorer the family, the higher the enslavement of the woman\(^5\) and "the more blows the man gets at work, the more his wife must be trained to absorb them, the more he is allowed to recover his ego at her expense. They beat their wife and vent their rage against her when they are frustrated or overtired by work or when they are defeated in a struggle\(^6\). These two examples show the fact that violence towards women has become so common that women are being trained to bear this.

**Marginalization** – Iris Young defines marginalization as a system in which the labor of a particular group cannot and will not be used. Marginalized people are those people who are not allowed to participate in society and therefore make them dependent on others for their needs. Here dependency means the person loses all the right to privacy, respect, and individual choices. In other words, the dependent person is considered as the personal property of the other person and not an individual person. Silvia Federici explains this by giving an example of women in her manifesto. She says that capitalist society has created a structure that makes a woman dependent on a man in her life at a given point of time; it can be a father or a brother, or after marriage, it is her husband. She is expected to make the man feel good about himself even if it is at the cost of her being treated as a second-class citizen. Women are expected to satisfy the man sexually, emotionally and physically, raise children, keep the house clean so that the when the man comes from the work, he feels comfortable, she even has to boost his ego and make him feel good about himself. The society is structured in such a way that it makes it impossible for a woman to have her independent identity different from the man in her life; there is room to have her own choice, make a decision for herself, thinking our themselves over their husband. This results in making the women not use their labor to earn a wage and utterly dependent on the man in their life.

To conclude, in today's time, oppression faced by women is different from the oppression faced by women 30 years ago. As time has progressed, women are not marginalized to that extent, and the violence has also reduced as both the partners are more educated. The problems faced by women today are that 1. they do not have enough representation in the workplace, politics, college, etc. 2. They do not have access to equal opportunity and, last but not least, 3. Lack of women in the position of power. These are not the only problems faced by women in today's time, but it is a good start to work on it, and it can be done through effective changes in policies, education, and teachings given to young boys.

**Reference**

1. Wages Against Housework by Silvia Federici  
2. Five Faces of Oppressions by Iris Morion Young.

\(^1\)*Five Faces of Oppression* by Iris Young, page number 50, third paragraph  
\(^2\)*Five Faces of Oppression* by Iris young, page number 58  
\(^3\)*Wages Against Housework* by Silvia Federici, page number 85  
\(^4\)*Five Faces of Oppression* by Iris young, page number 61  
\(^5\)*Wages Against Housework* by Silvia Federici, page number 79  
\(^6\)Ibid 5