

## The Lifeworld of Women Domestic Workers: Some Case Studies

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### ABSTRACT

In the informal sector of metropolitan India, the participation of women domestic workers is steadily increasing. Women participate in domestic work to protect family interests and solve economic crises. Employers compel maximum work from domestic workers with the bare minimum of hospitality. If we consider domestic work on a global scale, it is a solution to the problem of women in the economic system. Domestic work is unorganized, unrewarding, and unrecognized for domestic workers. Women are migrating to domestic work in greater numbers every day, but there is a crucial need to consider their living conditions. Normally, most of the migrant population lives in slums. Migrants in domestic work and women are now a predominant research area for social sciences. This research aims to examine the lifeworld of women domestic workers.

**Keywords-** Informal sector, domestic work, metropolitan India, women, economic, unorganized, unrecognized, system, social science, lifeworld.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Women workers play an important role in the socio-economic development of our country. As women workers are the most vulnerable section in the community, they form a class, who are often harassed and shrouded with problems in one way or the other at the workplace or at home. Women have almost progressed beyond, have sought employment and career opportunities outside their homes for attaining financial independence, and are actively participating in the overall development of the nation-leading towards achieving economic empowerment.

One of the greatest groups of women in India is those who work as domestic workers. They also make up a sizable portion of the workforce in the nation's unofficial economy. However, domestic labour is still not given enough credit. Because most women have historically been seen as competent to do the task and because the talents taught by other women in the house are seen as innate, it is seen as unskilled work. Therefore, even when paid, the work is still undervalued and unregulated. A domestic worker is someone who is hired

to perform housework on a temporary or ongoing basis, either part-time or full-time, for pay or reward, whether or not there are explicit or implied terms of employment (Machado, 2000).

Domestic work was the most unregulated, unorganized, vulnerable, exploited, and the most undervalued and least paid type of work. The deplorably low wages of the domestic workers did not permit them to have a socially acceptable minimum standard of living. They did not own a decent house, suffered from food insecurity, were unable to provide nutritious and sufficient food, lacked basic facilities of safe drinking water and proper sanitation, and were unable to meet their children's educational needs (ILO 1990). With the meager salaries, they received they could not afford to buy adequate clothing to protect themselves from the rigors of the climate (Weiss 1987). Besides, the national or state social security or welfare measures provided to other workers did not apply to domestic workers, making their working and living conditions pathetic.

In India, female domestic workers face poor socioeconomic situations. In India, domestic employees encountered difficulties both at home and at work. In

quest of employment prospects, they move from rural to metropolitan locations. They work hard yet receive little praise or compensation. They put a lot of effort into giving their kids a brighter future. They lack access to institutional care facilities in their neighbourhoods that offer high-quality care at reasonable prices. Domestic servants are exposed to abuse and endure appalling living and working conditions. When people are mistreated, abused, and humiliated over an extended period of time, their self-esteem is severely damaged. They feel weak, helpless, and unworthy. They are not allowed to speak up or pursue a course of action before the competent organs.

If given the option, female domestic workers are more likely to use unhealthy coping mechanisms including leaving their kids alone at home, asking an older sister or younger relative for assistance, or even bringing them along to work. These practices negatively affect both the productivity and health and education of the kids and the worker.

In India, a sizable portion of the labour force is employed by the unorganised sector, which is essential. The women who work as domestic helpers are employed in the unorganised sector and reside in various sorts of slum communities.

For millions of women worldwide, domestic work is one of the most important non-wage jobs. In the absence of education, financial resources, and other chances, women have few choices and tend to labour at home. Since the responsibilities of domestic employees are not clearly defined, it is practically difficult to define the term "domestic service." Globally, domestic service is now recognised as a vital source of income.

## II. HISTORY OF DOMESTIC WORKERS IN INDIA

The Aryan invasion, which took place approximately 3000 B.C., when the indigenous population was conquered, is believed to be the beginning of domestic slave labour in India. The Sudras, who made up the service class in the caste system, provided services and helped keep the higher varnas' ritual purity. As a result of their lowly and defiling profession, they were thus deemed perpetually unclean. On the one hand, the idea of Karma and rebirth was used to excuse their pitiful situation, and on the other, it was used to explain the upper castes' predatory actions. The well-known historian Ram Sharan Sharma writes about the horrendous living conditions of domestic employees in his book "Ancient India. "They received inferior food, were punished physically, and were removed when they reached old age because they were useless (Asian Human Rights Commission, 2003).

Even while domestic work is not a recent development in India, it cannot be seen as merely a continuation of the wealthy classes' past use of servants under the feudal system. The nature of labour and workers

have been rapidly altering in both urban and rural situations. The majority of domestic workers nowadays are women, who are not treated as employees and whose job is undervalued. This is partly due to the gendered perception of housekeeping; value is not assigned to women's domestic labour, and hence, even paid labour performed in another person's home is not valued or recognised as employment. Because it is frequently conducted by underprivileged immigrant women from lower castes, it is also underappreciated. All of these factors both in their thinking and in society lead to the poor quality of their job.

### ***Female Participation Rate in Rajasthan-***

The informal sector, in India, mostly called the unorganized sector, is very large, but the statistical data on this sector is quite inadequate. Women are more likely than men to suffer from multiple discrimination in the workplace. This may relate to gender, age, ethnic background, disability, and sexual orientation, while migrant women also face discrimination based on their origin or class. Women workers in Rajasthan constitute a very high percentage of the workforce engaged in the unorganized sector. Almost 97% of female workers are engaged in the unorganized sector, including many forms of employment, per the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER). These include home-based work (such as rolling papads and beedis, stitching, beautician work, jewellery creation, traditional painting, etc.), self-employment (such as selling vegetables), employment in household businesses, small units, labour on construction sites, domestic work, mining activities, and numerous other forms of contract, casual, part-time, and temporary employment. Rajasthan is a state where mining, building, gem and jewellery production, the hotel industry, and other related businesses are highly prevalent. When the working conditions of the state are examined in greater detail, it is discovered that a large portion of the population works informally in the mining, construction, jewellery, and hotel industries. According to the Census of 2011, there are 29.9 million people employed in the state, with 18.3 million men and 11.6 million women. It is very important to highlight that out of 11.6 females 10.6 million females are working in rural areas while merely 0.98 million females are engaged in urban areas of Rajasthan. Almost 77 percent of rural female workers are engaged in cultivation and as agriculture laborers where wages are too low and, working conditions are exploitative. Lack of employment opportunities, social constraints, and poverty force the rural women in Rajasthan to work as marginal laborers at very low wages and under pathetic working conditions, especially in the construction sites and mines.

This kind of participation of the female workforce also leads to various problems and challenges, particularly in the unorganised sector, so the researcher would like to address the issues faced by female workers in unorganised sector of Rajasthan.

### ***The impact of COVID-19 on domestic workers***

The gradual declaration of the lockdown had an impact on the entire nation as well as the Indian economy. However, there are concerns about how the lockdown will affect female domestic workers, who are crucial to the efficient operation of homes. Other employers are counting on them to keep going even though some have asked them to stop reporting to work out of concern for COVID-19. When they fail to show up for work, it is viewed as a forced holiday that results in a reduction in pay or cancellation from the job.

Their social security and protection are in danger because they work in an unorganized sector. Sometimes they continued working out of fear of losing their jobs. Moreover, they cannot access huge social networks. The workload for live-in domestic help has significantly increased. All household members are either at home or working from home, which significantly increases the workload and, as a result, the time allotted for household duties like cooking, cleaning, washing, and caring for children. Because they get so little quality sleep, this in turn has a direct impact on their well-being. However, the government-imposed mobility restrictions during the lockdown have made it difficult for live-out domestic workers to commute to and from their place of employment.

Their capacity to make a living has also been negatively impacted by this. Domestic helpers who were both live-in and live-out sometimes worked throughout the lockdown but were not paid on time. All domestic workers have been very concerned about their job security because they do not have a formal contract with their employers.

### **III. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS**

- The absence of fair pay and working conditions.
- Inconsistency in receiving various financial and non-financial perks, such as vacations, etc.
- Abuse, violence, and sexual harassment at work, or at the employer's home.
- Placement companies abusing their position. Domestic workers hired through placement services are frequently exploited. People are also apprehended in incidents of trafficking.
- Because they are not considered "workers," they are not entitled to social security benefits like health insurance, maternity protection, old age security, etc. that are available to other workers. Domestic workers can therefore experience horizontal mobility (i.e., a change in the location of their domestic employment), but they are unable to experience upward mobility due to a lack of access to education and skill development.

#### ***Case 1***

X woman 33 years old. She has been a domestic worker for the past four years. She migrated from Uttar

Pradesh. As they were unable to fulfill their needs, the children's education problem is why they migrated from Uttar Pradesh to Jaipur. Her husband works as an auto driver.

They live in a slum area. She has three children who go to a government school. She must get up around six in the morning, otherwise, she will be late for work. Firstly, she finishes her homework cooks food for her family, sends the children to school, and then she went to her work. she works in 4 houses as a part-time worker when she reaches in employer's house they give him a cup of tea, then she continues doing her work like cleaning, washing utensils, wash clothes, she has to wash 6 - 10 clothes daily. Then she cleans the bathroom. After they have eaten, she washes dishes and utensils. On most days, she does eat there. She goes home at 2 noon. Sometimes employers give her food to eat. She watches movies on television after completing her work at her employer's home. She earns. 5000 per month. But the amount is insufficient for the survival of her family. The employer did not give any extra money for extra work like purchasing vegetables, folding clothes, throwing dustbins, dusting, and some other work done by domestic workers do not get extra money for that. Employers sometimes give old clothes to their children and a saree for them. some medicine when she is ill. When there are guests in the employer's home the workload increases. Employers deduct money when she takes leaves.

#### ***Case 2***

X (26), a fair-complexioned Muslim lady with a smiling face is the mother of three children. She has been working as a servant before her marriage. She has no education at all. The poor socio-economic condition of the family compelled her to join the workforce. Her husband is a rickshaw puller and often returns home late in the evening. Her two children go to school. X is working in two households as a part-time servant and she has to face some personal problems in the workplace.

X wakes up early in the morning and prepares breakfast for her family. Her daily working time is from 8 am to 1 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. In between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., she has to cook for her own family and do her household tasks. As her husband is lazy-bones, X has to do all the work in her household. After returning home, she has to wash clothes and prepare food for the family. After getting married, she had to be further involved in the workforce because of her husband's insufficient and irregular income they were not able to fulfill their family needs. She earns 4000 a month. Sometimes employers give extra money for extra work.

She contributes fifty percent of her earnings for household consumption and the rest amount kept aside for her child's education. She was not able to save her money due to the expenditure of her family. X wants to educate her children and she is ready to take extra workload for more earnings if her children like to go for higher education in the future as she does not want her children to suffer as she has done.

**Case 3**

Y (39), an unfortunate woman, is working in doctors' houses. She lost her husband while her child's age was only twenty days. Hence, she started working. Sixteen years back under very pathetic conditions. She was forced to take up a job as a domestic maid due to economic compulsions. Y got married at the age of 17 years. She never thought that she has to join the workforce. Her husband was the driver of the doctor's car. As a result, the economic condition of her family was not good. Y always tried to educate her son, but her son dropped out after completing primary education. Her son does no work. further decided to marry her son while he was only 22 years old. Accordingly, her son got married and started drinking alcohol. But Y son does not want to work at all and prefers to spend time without working. Her son seems quite an irresponsible member of the family. As a result, her daughter-in-law had no alternative other than to work to earn their livelihood. Her daughter-in-law also works as a domestic worker.

Y gets up at 5 a.m. and does the necessary household work. She starts her journey on foot at 9 a.m. commuting 2 km daily for attending to the workplace. She is working in two doctors' houses with a monthly wage of Rs. 3000 each. Now a day, Y is happy and she told, "My daughter-in-law looks after my family and she at least understands me". and helping in fulfilling her family's needs.

**Case 4**

Y (35) year old woman. she has been working for the past 5 years. she has migrated from Uttar Pradesh as they were not able to fulfill their family needs so they migrated up to Rajasthan.

She worked in 3 houses but during the time of covid 19, she was fired from her job when she left the household to see the family of a dead friend. "I had left for just one hour," she says. "When I came back, they said they don't need me anymore." At the time of covid 19 pandemic, she suffers a lot. Her employer's behavior was not so good she was not allowed to use her phone while working and was also forced to provide care to her COVID-positive employers. When my employer came positive my husband asks them to give her leave but they denied they said they had brought me medicines when I had a fever and I would be selfish to leave them during their difficult times. So, she stayed. "I am so scared that I cannot even sneeze in front of them. I must rush to the bathroom. If they hear it, they might think I am sick and remove me from the job." During the peak time of the pandemic, many workers were "sanitized" using chemical sprays and pipes. She says that she had developed an allergy and dark spots on her hands as a result of the chemical exposure. She said it was a very bad time at the time of covid 19 pandemic now she is happy and her condition is much better.

**Case 5**

X (48) years, is educated up to the tenth standard, could not study further due to lack of money. Though she

had training in jute and handloom weaving, her parents married an unemployed and alcoholic youth from a nearby village. The story of discrimination and exploitation starts from here. she gave birth to two children, a boy, and a girl, at a very young age. Her health condition was not good as she could not eat a nutritious diet during her pregnancy. She immediately resumed her domestic work without giving rest to her body. She was doubly burdened because she had to feed three mouths and her ailing mother in the family. She and her children were at risk of health problems because neither she could give them good food nor quality time.

The initial months (the first wave of COVID-19) were a little peaceful because she received her salary even without going out to work. She was with her children, and her mother and tried to make harmony in the family. Her husband was happy to see her at home from morning to evening since she took care of them. Gradually, as months passed by, she did not receive her salary and she completely stopped going out to work. she was gradually becoming a frustrated lady. She would throw tantrums at her mother and her husband. In return, she has hurled abuses and physical violence; the marks and inflictions on her body were enough to speak her story.

She was breaking down physically and mentally day by day those days. It was so difficult for her to manage her family and children without money at the time of covid 19. but after the pandemic was over the condition became normal day by day she started going to work and her condition became better.

**Case 6**

Y (49) years. She had two sons who never went to school, though they were always pampered by their alcoholic father, who never bothered to work and contribute to the household. One day her husband passed away, and hell broke on her head. The two sons were engaged in vandalism, making it difficult for their mother to lead a peaceful life. she decided to move out and started cooking, washing clothes, and started working as a domestic worker. s. People at times paid her and mostly she was left unpaid, but it was worse when the pandemic hit Jaipur.

They would call her to work every alternate day but never bothered to pay any money. It was difficult for her to arrange food and pay rent; whatever little money she saved pre-pandemic, she had to take it out from the bank. She was not able to buy her medicines and do health check-ups. For her, food for her family members was more important than her medicine. She has tensed; no work meant no pay. Her sons would ask for money now and she has nothing to give and would beat her up when she could not give them money. She was hardly bothered about the consequences of the pandemic. The story would not end there; she was regularly tortured for money and alcohol etc., during these difficult times. After the pandemic was over, she started working again as a domestic worker and the condition slowly improved and she could fulfill her family's needs.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Domestic work is not only an important source of livelihood for a huge section of uneducated and unskilled women in urban areas but has also become an important part of the urban lifestyle. The socio-economic status, as well as the issues faced by the women domestic workers, are found to be like that of the other urban areas of India. COVID-19 has created an atmosphere of anxiety and stress among the human population. The pandemic has become a serious threat to human development. Irrespective of sex, class, caste, and gender, the COVID-19 crisis has affected everyone. Women are more and disproportionately subjugated in patriarchal violence, social situations, and power imbalances. Societies look down upon attitudes making them socially weak and politically disadvantaged sections of society.

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