



Issues And Challenge Of Women Domestic Workers: A Sociological Study

Dr. Shashikala.T

Assistant Professor,

Department of Sociology

Government Arts College Bangalore

Dr. B R Ambedkar Veedhi, Bangalore 560001

ABSTRACT

Women domestic workers are the most neglected group in the unorganised sector of India. They come under informal and unskilled job without any constitutional protection and guarantees. Domestic workers are vulnerable in terms of human rights, particularly their living conditions and working conditions are miserable. They are often paid very little despite working for long hours. Women in domestic sector struggle with the harsh realities of discrimination, exploitation and violence at work place. They are exploited, irrespective of sex, women suffer more by the fact of their gender. Women in domestic work are overrepresented, their work is invisible, unrecognized and unremunerated. It has been observed that a significant percentage women domestic workers are from lower caste and lower class women. Ignorance, tradition bound attitudes, illiteracy, lack of skills, heavy physical work of different types, long hours of work with limited payment, discrimination in wage, lack of guarantee of minimum wage, lack of job security, ill-treatment etc. are the characteristics of women domestic workers. This paper highlights the challenges and issues associated with women domestic workers in India.

KEY WORDS: Marginalized, Vulnerable, Domestic workers, Social inequalities, Workforce, Unorganised sector

I. INTRODUCTION

The predominance of informal employment has been one of the salient features of the labour market scenario in India. Unorganised sector contributes nearly half of the GDP of the country. As per the latest estimation of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS), the contribution of the unorganized sector to GDP is about 50% (NCEUS 2008). The workers in this sector have been highly exploited and generally excluded from the purview of labour legislation. Lack of quality data and authentic knowledge about these workers has often come in the way of governments in correcting the deficiencies and removing the bottlenecks. In the new global economic order, characterized by cosmopolitan cities, new patterns of division of labour and diversion in demographic composition, paid domestic work, mainly contributed by the poorer families, especially women, tends to substitute unpaid production activities and services within a family such as cooking, washing clothes, cleaning utensils, caring children and old aged and so on. This makes domestic work as a significant occupation in determining the linkage between family and the dynamics of open economy.

In the urban sector domestic work seems to be the destiny of significantly large number of women workers in India who seek employment opportunities. Domestic workers are often rendering an invisible workforce who are paid very less, and deprived of rights to decency in work. According to National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS, 2007), "Domestic workers are engaged in the unregulated domain of a private home, mostly without any protection of national labour legislation which allows for women domestic workers to be ill-treated by their employers with impunity. Women are often subjected to long working hours and excessively laborious tasks. They may be rigorously restricted to their places of work. The domestic workers are excluded from labour laws that look after important issues to related employment such as conditions of work, wages, social security, provident funds, old age pensions, and maternity leave."

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Across the globe, it has been seen that women whether educated or uneducated, there has been gradually change towards economic participation. But their works still remains limited. The domestic work is one of such work, where women are engaged with work within the homes of the employer either on part time or full time basis. International Labour Organization (ILO) defines “domestic work” as work performed in or for one or more households (womenalliance.org). Domestic workers are defined as all those people who are involved in domestic work within an employment relationship. Women domestic workers face diverse problems in their personal as well as occupational life. They toil for long hours and are poorly paid. They don't have job security. If a domestic worker takes leave even for genuine cause, they may be removed from their job. Some of them work in more than two or three houses and they become vulnerable to diseases. Women Domestic workers face lot of health issues like respiratory disease, body ache, stress, strain and skin disease, due to their occupational life. Their family life is marked by conflicts, poverty and debts. Due to the less educational status of the women worker, they are not aware of their rights and privileges. There are many unseen problems faced by domestic workers.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The middle class and upper middle class family system is heavily dependent on the Domestic Workers so much so that their absence for a day in a house creates a total mess in many families. The Domestic Workers have proved to be a necessity for non-working housewives also. In urban areas, they commonly engaged domestic workers to keep them in carrying out their household errands, partly due to physical incapability and partly due to lack of time. The new middle classes have adapted a life style which has escalated the demand for domestic workers. According to the Report on Working Condition of Domestic Servants in Delhi by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, nearly 90per cent of domestic workers are women. According to the National Survey conducted by the School of Social Work, women constituted 87.09 % of Domestic Workers in Karnataka,82.38 % in Ranchi,75 %in Kerala and 90.78 %in AndhraPradesh. The corresponding figures in many of the cities big or small are lacking. The present paper tries to assess the condition of a segment of Domestic Workers. Domestic Workers whose contribution in the development of the economy of the state has not yet been assessed.

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To study working condition of women Domestic workers in Bangalore City.
- To find out the socio-economic problems faced by the women domestic workers

V. METHODOLOGY

The unit of analysis of the present study is the Women domestic workers. To analyse the key objectives of this paper exploratory and descriptive design has been adopted. Data was collected from secondary sources which composed of research articles published in journals, magazines, write-ups, gist of policy brief on women, NEWS papers, official documents were referred to determine the impact and provide policy suggestions.

VI. WORKING CONDITIONS OF WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS

According to a survey it is estimated that there are about four million domestic workers in India who still remain a part of an unorganised and unregulated sector with no policies and regulations to guide and protect them. Their wages are very low compared to other sectors and they have very limited social protections. They frequently suffer poor working conditions, ill treatment, abuse, exploitation and slavery. In India many domestic workers are migrants from other states and belong to the most marginalised and socially discriminated populations. Most of them either belong to Dalit community or come from the most disadvantaged castes and tribal minorities, many are landless and illiterate, which increase their vulnerability and susceptibility. Around the world, domestic workers are most vulnerable to human rights abuses with respect to their working conditions. They often work for unduly long hours, with little or no pay, and with almost no access to social safety and protections. Globally, on an average, 30% of the domestic workers are excluded from labour legislation. The working conditions of all the domestic workers are arbitrary, imperious and based on an individual, personalized relationships. Domestic workers can be broadly classified as full timers, part timers or residential domestic workers. This also includes those who are working in defence and government quarters. They can be further classified based on the basis of tasks that they do such as those who do only cooking, cleaning works, childcare or elderly care. In most cases, the tasks are not clearly defined by the employer which leads to abuse and exploitation.

Deplorable working conditions, labour exploitation, ill treatment and abuses of human rights are some of the major problems faced by the domestic workers. During the Convention conducted in the year 2011 uphold basic human rights and principles requires States to take array of measures to promote decent work for domestic workers. Major policies on wages, working time, migrant domestic workers and maternity benefit were highlighted. (Souza, 2010) It helps responses from self-help groups and NGO's by supporting domestic workers through capacity building, self-reliance development, national support and national policy. International Labour Organisation (ILO), carries out numerous policy advisory services to promote improved and sustainable

working conditions for domestic worker such as technical assistance projects at country-level, research and knowledge development, and policy advocacy and recommendation campaigns. Crucial areas addressed in this policy include policies, procedure and programs regarding working time of domestic workers, safeguarding their health and safety, family-work balance, adequate rest, wage protection including minimum wage and employment practices that frame terms and conditions of employment of domestic workers.

VII. SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS

7.1 PROBLEM OF CASTEISM: Domestic workers not face economic drudgery but they also come across social discrimination. They are caught in vicious circle of the caste conundrum. The inhuman treatment received by the domestic workers at the hands of their employers stem from casteism and classism, where people of low socio-economic class and caste do not get respect. Domestic workers are orally, physically and sexually abused by their employers and are provided with unsafe working environments. This lack of empathy is a direct result of the social hierarchy that determines what people are 'entitled' to. Casteist attitudes prevail in many of the employer's houses, where separate glass and plate is kept. They are not allowed to enter the pooja room, nor drink filter water, nor use the toilet, which they themselves clean. This outlook of pollution stems from the fact that most of the workers hail from the so called lower caste or Dalit community. The practice is such that in many homes after the domestic worker washes the vessels or clothes, the employer rinses them again with water as an act of purification.

7.2 PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE: Domestic workers are also sexually harassed and abused in their workplace by male co-workers or men of the household. When the domestic workers are abused by men of the household, they feel helpless since they are likely to lose their job. They are forced to continue to work in an unsafe environment until they can find other employment. According to the Human Rights, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013 that was passed to protect all women workers, including domestic workers, has been very poorly enforced. Cases of sexual harassment also happen, but many are silent about it and employers ignore and often blame the women. The domestic workers are sometimes treated as criminals and accused for any theft in the employer's house. The above predicament of domestic workers prevails all over the country, with discrepancy according to area, locality, region, class and caste of employers.

7.3 LACK OF PERSONAL FREEDOM: Most of the women domestic workers are still not self-dependent especially in financial matters. The primary burden of domestic responsibilities curb the financial independence of women, their financial contribution to the family doesn't come with financial independence. Often, their hard-earned money is taken away by male member of their family either father, husband or brother who then decide how it will be spent. So women domestic workers lack financial and personal freedom.

7.4 LACK OF SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS: Domestic workers belong to an extremely vulnerable section of the population and the law is limited. There is no social security of benefits like minimum wage, maternity leave, safe work environment, stability or security, Health insurance, pension, provident fund since domestic workers can be hired and fired at the whims and fancies of an employer. Domestic workers do not receive hike in their salary over many years, despite there is inflation in prices.

7.5 LACK OF CHILD CARE FACILITIES: According to ILO, Globally women workers shoulder more childcare responsibilities compared to men due to the existing gender norms across the world. Women is the centre of the economy, their labour and enterprise creates the wealth of the nation, and their hard work leads to national growth. A working mother is often overloaded, drained and exhausted and are very anxious and stressed about the welfare of the child. The challenge of earning an income and raising a child is made more difficult by the inadequate labour protection that characterize in the formal economy. Without access to quality childcare services, domestic women workers in the informal economy risk losing out on much needed income by reducing their working hours. Adequate child care facilities are to be provided to them.

7.6 LACK MATERNITY CARE: The repeated negligence of women's health during her pregnancy has made her physically and mentally more vulnerable during the period of childbirth plunging her into a crisis of borrowing and high interest expenses. Often she does not take adequate rest and starts working soon after childbirth which adversely affect her health. It has led to lot of high childbirth manifests with a high mortality rate and poor health conditions of these women domestic workers.

7.7 LONG WORKING HOURS: Income security is one of the factor that majorly forces women to work for long hours to support her family in economic and supportive crisis is only one aspect, she is often forced to work for long hours even when her age does not permit it. However, old age not only mean loss or diminution of her income, it also means loss of her health and rise in the cost of medical care

7.8 LESS WAGES: Wages are determined by the number of hours worked, the tasks performed by the domestic worker. Domestic work is considered to be 'unskilled' by most households in India. Average remuneration for working ten hours is around Rs325 to Rs350 daily. Cooks and other skilled workers may earn a bit more. However the bitter truth is that most of the domestic workers earn very little and do not even get monthly leave.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

- Domestic workers should be provided with some degree of flexibility in working hours.
- Providing extra wages for extra workload due to arrival of guest in the employer's house on holidays and festivals.
- Domestic workers should be paid minimum wages for the amount of work done by them and also enjoy the privileges and benefits that all other form of workers receive without discrimination such as pension, maternity leave, paid leave, bonus, incentives etc.
- A proper regulatory measure is to be implemented for domestic workers through a legislative mechanism as they migrate from one place to another in search to living.
- Domestic workers should be made aware of state regulation specific policies and legislations for the protection of their rights and duties.
- Medical and Health benefits such as maternity benefit, ESI, Sick allowances, are to be provided as these women come from lower class society.
- Strict penalty and punishment is to be imposed for those who exploit women sexually Trafficking of women and other young household workers is to be tracked and record is to be maintained to prevent from kidnapping, exporting to other countries and such other crimes
- Various women empowerment websites and wings are open to access and seek support in terms of emergency situations where they provide financial assistance and moral strength to deal with the situation.
- Under policy for domestic workers they should have right to register as workers with the state labour department, in order to facilitate their access to rights and benefits accruing to them as workers. They also be provided the right to form their own associations, trade unions, protection from abuse, harassment and violence

IX. CONCLUSION

Development of a nation is not possible without the development of informal sector. Domestic workers are the unprotected workers as they do not get any protection from the government. Though there are some Acts to protect their interest such as Minimum Wages Act (1948), Interstate Migrants workmen Act (1979), Bonded Labour system Act (1979) etc., they do not cover these domestic workers. They serve tirelessly as per the directions given by the employers. In such a situation uneasiness comes from both the employers and the workers. Moreover, domestic workers have to face some problems like poor working conditions, stressful life, job insecurity and sometimes treated as criminals and accused for any theft in the employer's house. On the other hand, they have to face problems in their home and also in some social settings. The problems of the women domestic workers are reflected in this paper. It is found that due to lack of education they do not know their rights and opportunities assigned to them. It is our moral duty to create awareness among them to achieve benefits of different plans and policies provided by the government. The role of NGOs and semi-govt. organization is of utmost importance in this sphere. As a human being, we should respect them, we should cooperate with them to do their duty smoothly and we should give them freedom to enjoy their life.

REFERENCES

- Amar Nath Singh, 2001, "Women domestic workers, socio-economic life", Shipra Publications.
- Bannerji, N. 1985. Women workers in the unorganized sector: The Calcutta experience. Hyderabad: Sangham Book Pvt. Limited.
- Bari, Yogita. (2020). A study on female domestic worker in India. JICR. vol-xii, issue-vi, 1394-1403
- Bhatt, Ela (1989), Shramshakti Report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, SEWA, Ahmedabad.
- Bino Paul, (August 2011), "Working and Living Conditions of Women Domestic Workers: Evidences from Mumbai"
- Gangrade, K.D. and Gathia, Joseph A. 1983. Women and child workers in the unorganised sector. New Delhi: Concept Publishers.
- Geeta Menon (2005) "Domestic Workers and Demand for Living Wages" Stree Jagruti Samiti, May June 2005.
- Gothoskar, Sujata (2005). New initiatives in organizing strategy in the informal economy– Case study of domestic workers' organizing. Bangkok: Committee for Asian Women July 2005.
- J., S., Smt. Sandhya. (2019). A study on Socio-Economic status of housemaid workers in Karnataka: a sociological study. IJAMR. Vol-3, 7-12
- Kothari, U. 1997. "Women's Paid Domestic Work & Rural Transformation: A Study of South Gujarat", Economic and Political Weekly, XXXII, 17, 26 April - 2 May, pp WS.5 WS.12
- Moghe, Kiran. 2007. 'Understanding the unorganised sector', www.infochange.com

- Padma. 2002. Women workers in India in the 21st century-Unemployment and underemployment.
- Raghuram, Parvati (2005). Global maid trade: Indian domestic workers in the global market, in Shirlena Huang,
- Rao, P. Shanmukha and N.V. S. Suryanarayana. 2013. 'Issues and challenges of female labour migration',<http://www.globalrp.org/issues-and-challenges-offemale-labour-migration.html>
- Ray, Raka and Qayum, Seemin (2009). Cultures of Servitude. Modernity, Domesticity, and Class in India. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Unni, Jeemol and Rani, Uma (1999), "Informal Sector Women in the Emerging Labour Market",The Indian Journal of Labour Economics, Vol. 42, No.4.
- womenalliance.org.

