
DOMESTIC WORKER'S INTERSECTION WITH CASTE REALITIES

LIZY M. THOMAS, DR. JACOB THUDIPARA

Abstract: From times immortal domestic work is intersectional with caste civilization. In India, with no exception the stigma linked to domestic work is also coloured by the caste culture. The tasks such as cleaning and sweeping are allied with the people belonging to the 'so-called' low castes. Hence Domestic Workers are normally coupled with low castes and therefore they are highly exploited because of under-powerness, result with denied just wages and humane working conditions.

Key Words : Intensive empowerment, domestic workers

Introduction: From times immortal domestic work is intersectional with caste civilization. In India, with no exception the stigma linked to domestic work is also coloured by the caste culture. The tasks such as cleaning and sweeping are allied with the people belonging to the 'so-called' low castes. Hence Domestic Workers are normally coupled with low castes and therefore they are highly exploited because of under-powerness, result with denied just wages and humane working conditions.

Consequently, it looks Indian society is still far from being caste freedom. Eventually most of the towns and communities are still plagued by casteism and feudalism. Lower-caste families continue to work as hidden bonded labour for some upper-caste hamlets. There the domestic workers get only food and shelter that too of low worth. The entire family is supposedly 'taken care of' by the feudal joint families those employ them. The children too are not spared-at a very young age, they are taught to serve and not to expect anything more.

A Brahmin family still largely employs a Brahmin cook. In contrast lower-caste woman is expected to clean the vessels, sweep and mop the floor, and wash clothes but when it comes to cooking, the upper-caste community still prefers to employ upper-caste cooks. Even in states that have high literacy, the majority of domestic workers are dalits or tribals and they are conveniently understood to 'prefer' certain jobs. However, 'preference' for a certain kind of work is not theirs to express. One has to hide one's caste identity, most of the time, to get a job of their choice. Skin complexion also plays major role in seeking the domestic work. A person with dark complexion are categorise as a lower caste. So it is difficult for individual to get work as a cook which is considered as prestigious one. In contrast fair complexion, therefore get work as a cook easily. With caste, language plays an important role in the lives of domestic workers. There is an existence of belief that the upper class has enough education to identify the caste of workers on the basis of the language used. Caste consciousness is not only with those who hire domestic maids; it also exists in the minds of the workers themselves. Generally, domestic workers

never clean the toilet, it is supposed to be undertaken by 'jamedar'. Caste defined the hierarchy-- lower castes performed the 'dirty' work of cleaning while higher caste cooked.

How so ever some changes have taken place in urban areas. It's fortunate enough that today increasing education does result in the understanding or realisation that the barrier of caste is something that needs to be done away with if we as a nation have to progress. Realising the notion in 2006, Indore Domestic Worker's Solidarity Movement came forward to empower Women Domestic Workers of Indore city. Till date there are around 8000 domestic workers who were enrolled as a member of the movement. Intensive empowerment activities conducted in order to aware towards their rights and to advocate for a legal act that can secure & protect the domestic work as a profession. In order to get the viability of movement a study was undertaken by researcher with 300 women domestic workers living in Indore. Few objectives of the study were; to understand the socio-economic status of respondent, to understand the changing condition & empowerment state among domestic workers. Following are the few facts which projected through study-

The table 1 is presenting the distribution that basically revealing that which caste of people in which slot of age group are working prominently as women domestic workers. The study pin-points that a large number (62 per cent) urban women of Schedule Caste category work as domestic workers and another all most One-third women are of General category. Thus the fact finds that majority (67.7 per cent) of women are taking up this employment in their middle age i.e. 30 to 50 yrs. among them 40 per cent are from Schedule Caste category and rest of the caste group women are also higher in this category as compare to other age bars. But sooner they left out as they enter in their "Quinqua-genarians" age (age between 50 to 60 yrs.) and above.

Table: 1 Age Group of Respondent with Caste of the Respondent

Age Group	Caste of the Respondent			Total
	SC	ST	General &OBC	
Up to 30 yrs.	46 15.3%	7 2.3%	12 4.0%	65 21.7%
30 to 50 yrs.	120 0.0%	23 7.7%	60 20.0%	203 67.7%
Above 50 yrs.	20 6.7%	2 0.7%	10 3.3%	32 10.7%
Total	186 62.0%	32 10.7%	82 27.3%	300 100.0%

TABLE: 2 Caste with Monthly Income of Women Domestic Workers

Caste	Monthly Income of Respondents			Total
	up to Rs. 2000/-	Rs. 2000 to 4000	Above Rs. 4000	
SC	61 32.8%	93 50.0%	32 17.2%	186 100.0%
ST	7 21.9%	19 59.4%	6 18.8%	32 100.0%
General & OBC	30 36.6%	35 42.7%	17 20.7%	82 100.0%
Total	98 32.7%	147 49.0%	55 18.3%	300 100.0%

The table 2 reveals the category of caste of Women Domestic Worker, accepted by Women employer for doing domestic work. The level of acceptance can be realized by monetary return by women employer in form of income given per month to them. The foremost issue need to be given attention is that almost half (49 per cent) of the women domestic workers are drawing just up to Rs. 4000 per month and even one-third limit them with just Rs. 2000/- or less. With that the central issues revert that more (36.6 per cent) General category of women domestic workers are in the lowest economic strata (up to Rs. 2000) than the rest of the caste category. This trend suggests that the General category of women domestic workers are more vulnerable and having less bargaining power as because of their cultural orientation of always giving bequest instead of receiving, while the other caste group women workers have empowered themselves with the age long persistent government assistances. But still the existing condition required radical change in all the caste categories with respect to economic rights.

The table 3 below is presenting the attitude of employers with respect to the promotion criteria (monitory increment) for caste based women domestic workers. The promotional criteria are indicated by changed of job like; from washing utensils to switch on to cooking work and for that gaining more money from previous one. The caste &

same job given by the employer from the beginning are considered as Independent variable and reasons for changing work as Dependent variable.

In study area the Schedule caste domestic workers are huge (62) in per cent amongst 95.1 per cent are still continuing with the work given at the beginning from their employers. Just 4.8 per cent cited that the nature of work have undergone changed amongst 4 women worker i.e. represented with 44 per cent got this opportunity because of the good quality of work they do another just 3 women (33 per cent) are regular and serious about the work they are assigned with and only 2 women from this category, because of the other reasons like their hygienic practices, loyalty, caring attitude, homely feeling and etc., got the reward.

Just 10 per cent women domestic workers are from Schedule tribes' category among them only 1 women promoted to do respectable house hold work like cooking and that too because of her high level of regularity that she maintained in past. Rest 96.8 per cent are continuing without any change.

All about 27 per cent are from General and Other Backward Class amongst 90 per cent is still doing what they are doing earlier while about to 10 per cent changed from what they were doing previously, within majority 75 per cent promoted for the quality of work they performed.

TABLE: 3 Distribution of Respondents by their Caste and Same Job Given by the Employer from the Beginning with Reasons for Changing work

Caste of the Respondent		Reasons for Changing Work				Total
		Good quality of work	Regularity	Other	NA	
SC	Same Job Given by the Employer from the Beginning	0 0.0%	0 0.0%		177 100%	177 100%
	No	4 44.4%	3 33.3%	2 22.2%	0 0.0%	9 100%
	Total	4 2.1%	3 1.6%		179 96.2%	186 100%
ST	Same Job Given by the Employer from the Beginning				31 100%	31 100%
	No		1 100%		0 0.0%	1 100%
	Total		1 3.1%		31 96.8%	32 100%
General & OBC	Same Job Given by the Employer from the Beginning	0 0.0%		0 0.0%	74 100%	74 100%
	No	6 75.0%		2 25.0%	0 0.0%	8 100%
	Total	6 7.3%		2 2.4%	74 90.2%	82 100%

In study area the Schedule caste domestic workers are huge (62) in per cent amongst 95.1 per cent are still continuing with the work given at the beginning from their employers. Just 4.8 per cent cited that the nature of work have undergone changed amongst 4 women worker i.e. represented with 44 per cent got this opportunity because of the good quality of work they do another just 3 women (33 per cent) are regular and serious about the work they are assigned with and only 2 women from this category, because of the other reasons like their hygienic practices, loyalty, caring attitude, homely feeling and etc., got the reward.

Just 10 per cent women domestic workers are from Schedule tribes' category among them only 1 women promoted to do respectable house hold work like cooking and that too because of her high level of regularity that she maintained in past. Rest 96.8 per cent are continuing without any change.

All about 27 per cent are from General and Other Backward Class amongst 90 per cent is still doing what they are doing earlier while about 10 per cent changed from what they were doing previously,

within majority 75 per cent promoted for the quality of work they performed.

The table 4 is showing the status of caste discrimination experienced by the women domestic workers in their work place and their personal opinion regarding the change in percentage of caste discrimination. Under the category of Schedule caste domestic workers 33.3 per cent faced caste based discrimination in their work place amongst majority (46.7 per cent) feels that partial change have occurred. In the category of Scheduled tribe domestic worker maximum (87.5 per cent) denied regarding their personal experience of caste discrimination, but who so ever have faced today realized that either it is partially existing or immense improvement have taken place. At the most 27 per cent of General & Other Backward Caste workers have faced personal level discrimination in the house hold they work in among them majority 47.4 per cent still viewed that there is no changes in discrimination level so they rated it as '80-100%'. In General category, 78 per cent's of women domestic worker's find that there is all most no caste discrimination in the work place.

TABLE: 4 Distribution by their Caste and Facing Caste Based Discrimination with Opinion towards Rate of Changes in Discrimination Per cent

Caste of the Respondent		Rate of Changes in %				Total
		80-100%	50-60%	20-30%	0%	
SC	Facing Caste Based Yes Discrimination of the Respondent	12 20.0%	28 46.7%	17 28.3%	3 5.0%	60 100.0%
	No	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	126 100.0%	126 100.0%
	Total	12 6.5%	28 15.1%	17 9.1%	129 69.4%	186 100.0%
ST	Facing Caste Based Yes Discrimination of the Respondent		2 50.0%	2 50.0%	0 0.0%	4 100.0%
	No		0 0.0%	0 0.0%	28 100.0%	28 100.0%
	Total		2 6.2%	2 6.2%	28 87.5%	32 100.0%
General & OBC	Facing Caste Based Yes Discrimination of the Respondent	9 47.4%	7 36.8%	2 10.5%	1 5.3%	19 100.0%
	No	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	63 100.0%	63 100.0%
	Total	9 11.0%	7 8.5%	2 2.4%	64 78.0%	82 100.0%

The table 4 is showing the status of caste discrimination experienced by the women domestic workers in their work place and their personal opinion regarding the change in percentage of caste discrimination. Under the category of Schedule caste domestic workers 33.3 per cent faced caste based discrimination in their work place amongst majority (46.7 per cent) feels that partial change have occurred. In the category of Scheduled tribe domestic worker maximum (87.5 per cent) denied regarding their personal experience of caste discrimination, but who so ever have faced today realized that either it is partially existing or immense improvement have taken place. At the most 27 per cent of General & Other Backward Caste workers have faced personal level discrimination in the house hold they work in among them majority 47.4 per cent still viewed that there is no changes in discrimination level so they rated it as '80-100%'. In General category, 78 per

cent's of women domestic worker's find that there is all most no caste discrimination in the work place.

The table 5 is presenting the accusation status of domestic workers. To understand their work place trouble caste wise data distribution is preferred.

Thus 62.3 per cent respondents belong to Schedule caste category among them 2 per cent experienced accusation and they are accused for cash, jewelry or thing's theft. About 10.6 per cent respondents belong to Scheduled tribes category and all responded that they are not falsely accused by their employers any time. Around 27.3 per cent women domestic workers are in General & Other Backward Class Category among them 7 per cent open up to false accusation against them. Approximately 66.7 per cent revealed that they were charged with thieving of jewelry and other things while 33 per cent are blamed for cash stealing.

TABLE: 5 Distribution of Respondents by their Caste and False Accusation on them with Nature of False Accusation of the Respondent

Caste		Nature of False Accusation			Total
		Cash Theft	Things/Jewelry theft	NA	
SC	False Accusation of Yes the Respondent	2 50.0%	2 50.0%	0 .0%	4 100.0%
	No	0 .0%	0 .0%	182 100.0%	182 100.0%
	Total	2 1.1%	2 1.1%	182 97.8%	186 100.0%
ST	False Accusation of No the Respondent			32 100.0%	32 100.0%
	Total			32 100.0%	32 100.0%
General & OBC	False Accusation of Yes the Respondent	2 33.3%	4 66.7%	0 .0%	6 100.0%
	No	0 .0%	0 .0%	76 100.0%	76 100.0%
	Total	2 2.4%	4 4.9%	76 92.7%	82 100.0%

The table 5 is presenting the accusation status of domestic workers. To understand their work place trouble caste wise data distribution is preferred.

Thus 62.3 per cent respondents belong to Schedule caste category among them 2 per cent experienced accusation and they are accused for cash, jewelry or thing's theft. About 10.6 per cent respondents belong to Scheduled tribes category and all responded that they are not falsely accused by their employers any time. Around 27.3 per cent women domestic workers are in General & Other Backward Class Category among them 7 per cent open up to false accusation against them. Approximately 66.7 per cent revealed that they were charged with thieving of jewelry and other things while 33 per cent are blamed for cash stealing.

Conclusion: The study concludes that majority are not put any time in immoral allegation but those so ever are charged in are mostly for jewellery or things basis. In other words these women domestic workers are very loyal & trustworthy for their employers. The reality from this facts projects that broadly domestic workers are highly discriminated with the kind of house hold work they were assign with. All the types of house hold work are not handed over to them. Right from the beginning they are contracted for

some set of work which could be considered as least valued for the house hold purpose. Howsoever a very few per cent of domestic workers got the privilege to change the eminence by putting exceptional efforts in doing so. Among them General & Other Backward class are privileged from the category of Schedule caste & Schedule tribes worker. This brings the fact that the poor women even not in position to realize their worth today and feels that it's right based, trendy & authority of owner to treat in any manner with them as it is their house, they have certain tradition to follow, they better know what is right & what is wrong in their house, they need to maintain certain standards ultimately they are paying them so they are powerful one. To overcome the situation Strengthen the union of domestic workers by continuous training program to enhance unity among them. Organize them and expose the problems of domestic workers on a nation-wide in a larger level. Preparation of work contracts for all the domestic workers when they initiate their work. The statement of conditions of work should be written in black and white such as zero discrimination condition, working hours, wages, holidays, leave, overtime payment, salary increment and conditions of terminating the service etc.

References:

1. Kirbat Preeti, Bringing Change to the Employer-Employee Relationship in Domestic Work: Astitva, Labour File, Volume 8 No.1-3, January-June 2010.
2. Mahapatra Nibedita, Role of Education in Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, Odisha Review, September – 2012.
3. National Domestic Workers Movement, Domestic Workers' Link, Vol. 23 No.2- July – December 2014.
4. Papachan Suguna, 2007, Manual for Domestic Workers, Organising For A Better Future, Committee for Asian Women (CAW), Bangkok, Thailand.
5. http://www.inclusivecities.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Papachan_CAW_Manual_Domestic_Workers.pdf.

Lizy M. Thomas, Research Scholar, DAVV, Indore
Dr. Jacob Thudipara, Professor and Reader, DAVV Indore.