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A STUDY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF FEMALE DOMESTIC WORKERS

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ABSTRACT

Socioeconomic condition of domestic women workers is important to formulate policies regarding human resource development and women empowerment. the gross state domestic product per capita, and is rich in culture and tradition. Informal sector constitutes a pivotal part in Punjab economy. Current study aims at understanding the socioeconomic condition of domestic women workers to fulfill the objective a sample of 160 domestic women workers collected from different areas.

KEYWORD: Socio-Economic, Women Empowerment, Female Domestic Workers,

INTRODUCTION

women explores the issues like discrimination and violence against women, sexism, dowry, etc., and also the issues pertaining to women rights and problems of women working in organised sector and to some extent of those who are working in unorganized sector. However, one major issue has received a very little attention in India and especially in Punjab, of women domestic workers, which is a problem that concerns both adult women and young girls. In fact, in Punjab, there has been found only a single study which was conducted nearly three decades back in 1976-77 by Balqis Begum. In that study, the author had focused exclusively on the socio-economic problems of female

domestic workers in Nabha town of Punjab state. Though many years have passed away, but these women workers are still prone to similar type of problems. The state has shown complete indifference towards their vows. Hence, it becomes an important subject to examine the economic conditions of female domestic workers. Since the domestic service is considered as a tedious job, most of the women workers involved in this work come from economically poor families. As there is no minimum wage fixed and as the Minimum Wages Act does not cover the domestic workers, the employers are free to pay what they want, irrespective of quantum and hours of work. The female domestic workers do not have any claim to any privileges as women workers in offices,

schools and other establishments can claim. Further, these women domestic workers do not enjoy any job security, as these matters depend on the moods and fancies of the employer. Similarly, any increment in the pay of the female domestic workers again depends upon the mood of employers. In fact, there are several female domestic workers who have been working for long years under the same employer, without receiving any hike in pay. Hence, there is immense scope for exploitation of these workers, as there is no written contract between the employer and domestic worker. This scope for exploitation further expands with the fact that the bargaining power of these domestic workers is almost zero. They do not have any organisation of their own which can protect their rights. Hence; it is really an important issue to study the economic conditions of female domestic workers.

A bill presented in Rajya Sabha, entitled 'The Housemaids and Domestic Servants (Conditions of Services and Welfare) Bill, 2004', has defined domestic worker as (a) "domestic servant means any person who earns his livelihood by working in household of his employer and doing household chores", and (b) "housemaid means a woman servant who performs household chores for wages" (GOI, 2004). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) broadly defines a domestic worker as "someone who carries out household work in private households in return for wages" (Kundu, 2007). Unorganised Non-Agricultural Workers' Conditions of Work and Social Security Bill, 2007, has included the domestic servants into the category of

wage workers. According to the bill "Wage worker means a person employed for a remuneration as an unorganised nonagricultural worker, directly by an employer or through any agency or contractor, whether exclusively for one employer or more employers, whether simultaneously or otherwise, whether in cash and/or in kind, whether as a temporary or casual worker, or as a migrant worker, or workers employed by households including domestic workers" (GOI, 2007a).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Domestic work, in India, was largely performed by "serfs" who generally belong to lower castes and denied to access education (Gothoskar, 2005). However, employing women as domestic servants is a characteristic of a feudal society. Domestic maid servants, better known in the feudal ages as "Dasis", are not new to the country (Mahadevan, 1989). Under feudal society, the situation of women domestic workers was quite miserable. Although many centuries have passed away, yet there has seen a very little change in the economic conditions of female domestic workers.

The trend shows that all big cities of India have become centres to recruit poor women as domestic workers. The non-availability of jobs in rural or tribal areas facilitates continuous supply of women workers to these cities. A major reason for this is being a sharp increase of middle class women in employment (Deshkal and FES, 2002). These middle class employed women have shifted their household workload to the poor working women as

their maids. In some cases, it has been seen that the middle and upper class in order to keep their upward mobility and status symbol have withdrawn themselves from household duties (Gothoskar, 2005). Moreover, employing woman worker also does not cost In India, there is absence of any reliable data about female domestic workers. Although a great deal of literature on women is available, but it does not cover a complete crosssection. A very little information is available on women workers engaged in domestic services, agriculture and construction and also the women workers doing other sundry and piece-meal jobs (Tripathi, 1991). Despite special provisions in the constitution and various legal and administrative measures to improve the status of women, there has been a little change in the socio-economic attitudinal life of the women domestic workers in India. However, few state governments have taken some steps to improve the socio-economic status of women domestic workers. For example, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu states have introduced minimum wages for domestic workers. Karnatkabecame the first state to fix a minimum living wage for domestic workers in 2004 so as to establish some kind of fairness in wages. It was fixed at Rs. 1600 per month for an eight-hour day of domestic work (Hamid, 2006). In Maharashtra, the State Labour Board issued guidelines regulating the services of domestic workers in 2000. The service rules included paid leave, travel allowance, fairer wages, etc. Similarly, in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, domestic workers are recognised as part of unorganised sector and can also form worker unions (Sharma, 2003). But, these efforts remain

half hearted because the most daunting problem for domestic workers still remains that of fair wages, followed by provisions for holidays, a pension or some kind of security after work (Hamid, 2006).

Women from low income backgrounds find domestic work to be an attractive form of employment because it provides both income and, sometimes, shelter in the case of migrant domestic workers who live with their employers (Mkandawire-Valhmu et al., 2009).

the nature of domestic work, revealing the exploitation of domestic workers, gender, class and racial inequalities between domestic workers and their employers (Clark, 2002; Cohen, 1991; Cock 1981; Cock, 2011; Mkandawaire-Valhmu et al., 2009; Mkandawire-Valhmu, 2010).

WORK LIFE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

There are two distinct categories of domestic work; a) Live- out and b) Live-in. Live-out workers are further of two types: 1) those who work in one house for the whole day and go back to their homes in the evening and; 2) those who work in different houses during the day, performing one or more tasks in each household and go back home in the evening or night. Such workers come under part-time domestic work as they go back home at the end of the day. There is another form of part-time in the category of live-out workers i.e., in terms of piece-rate. It is generally applied to washing clothes and utensils. The wages for such work are calculated on the basis of family size. The placement agencies or domestic

service providers are not homogenous entities. They differ drastically in almost all the states in the aspects such as size, nature of operations, objectives and the services offered to employers as well as workers. Most of the agencies rely on middlemen or agents. It is documented that each agency has up to 10-12 agents attached to them, who make visits to village areas each month or once in two months and look for possible families/individuals who can be persuaded to send their girls to work as domestic workers. (Neetha, N. 2009).

While the Indian Middle to upper classes are vague and internally fragmented, they constitute a common class through their use of maids. The “new middle class” is new merely in its outward appearance and lifestyle, and is built on “old” class privilege. To understand the importance given to the handling of maids, one needs to understand the class anxiety. In Bourdieusian thinking, the middle class is the class most dependent on the reproduction of social capital. In India too, the well off are dependent on “professional capital as a means of advancement” and “must put [their] children through a rigorous training and educational process” ‘Managing’ maids and making sure everything goes smoothly in the household is still their responsibility. For a number of employers it is less important how well a maid cleans than that she performs the symbolic act of cleaning.

The Domestic Workers Convention 2011 adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) sets minimum standards for domestic workers and specifies working conditions such as hours

of work, overtime pay, salary increases, deductions, annual and sick leave social security and access to benefits, in totality “a decent working condition.” Many countries have pursued new legislative and policy reforms through the ratification process. However, not much progress has been made in India to regulate the sector. The primary reason given is the relationship between the location of work “private household” and the informal employment.

CONCLUSION

Economic conditions of the female domestic workers are quite vulnerable. The analysis of economic conditions of the respondents on the basis of their monthly earnings shows that monthly earnings of majority of the respondents in the age groups of up to 14 years and above 44 years are relatively lower than that of the respondents in the age groups of 15-29 years and 30-44 years. Monthly earnings of the lower caste respondents and Sikh respondents are also found to be lower than that of others. The monthly earnings of the migrant respondents are found to be relatively higher than non-migrant respondents because the former prefer to work for longer hours. Due to the heavy economic responsibility, widow/separated respondents and those who have rented houses have to work for more hours and in more number of houses and, thus, they earn more. Similarly, the per capita monthly family earnings of the respondents show that the economic condition of these women workers is very weak.

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