

Women Domestic Workers and their Problems: A Sociological study of Women Workers of Narayanpur town in Lakhimpur district of Assam

Reetamoni Kakati¹, Dr. Priyanka Tamuli²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Madhabdev University

Abstract

The evidence of human history shows that women were treated as weak and dependent on men and related to domestic issues. As the time passes, as far as their economic activities were concerned some of educated women were mostly employed in various activities and jobs both in formal and informal sectors. On the hand, some of the women worker used to engage with work in any unorganized sectors. Women domestic worker are those who work at the home of the employers. Most of the women domestic worker works at low wages due to illiteracy, lack of skill and ignorance. As a result, domestic women worker has to face some problems both in the workplace and personal life as well as home life forever. Considering the importance of the issue, this paper is an attempt to analyze the problems faced by the domestic women worker in Narayanpur town of Lakhimpur district. The present study is qualitative in nature. An ethnographic field study was conducted to collect data from domestic women workers through interview schedule. 10 respondents were selected purposive for the study. Secondary data were selected from different books, journals and websites.

Keywords: weak, economic activities, women domestic worker, informal sector

Introduction

The term “domestic worker” is a widely used concept and mostly used to indicate unorganized work. The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines “domestic work” as work performed in or for one or more households(womenalliance.org). “Domestic workers” are defined as all people engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship(ibid). Across the globe, it has been seen that those women whether educated or not, there has been gradually headed toward economic participation. But their works are still limited. The domestic work is one of such work, where women are engaged with work within the homes of the employers. It may be part time or full time. The ILO mention that domestic work includes task like cooking, cleaning, washing, gardening and driving family, nourishing children and elderly person etc. Mostly, poor and illiterate or semi-illiterate female member are engaged with domestic work (Sandhya,2019). Due to the less educational status of the women worker, they are not aware of their rights and privileges. There are many unseen and hidden minor and major problems faced by domestic workers. So,

this study is trying to find out some of the problems faced by domestic workers of Narayanpur town in Lakhimpur district of Assam.

Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to examine the problems of women domestic workers at the workplace and at home or in their personal problems.

Field and methodology

The study has been conducted in Narayanpur town of Lakhimpur district of Assam. Narayanpur is a sub-district and town of Lakhimpur district of Assam. It falls under Bihpuria constituency. Narayanpur is the birthplace of Vaishnavite scholar Mahapurush Madhabdeva. The people of Narayanpur town are engaged with agriculture and various businesses. In addition to that they are doing jobs in the government or private service sector.

The study is qualitative in nature. Ethnographic field study was conducted to collect data. In order to collect the data of domestic workers, especially women, we selected an interview schedule that was used as tools to collect the information related to several issues. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents. The domestic workers who narrated their daily stories and their struggles are sought as findings of the study.

Findings

Majority of the respondents (women) were from the nuclear family and their age was between 20-50 years. All the respondents are part time workers from which the researcher collects primary data. It was observed by the investigator that the majority of workers were followers of Hindu religion and belonged to weaker section/ lower caste/ low class, i.e. *Kaibaritta, Hari* of Assam and some from Bihari and Bengali community. The economic conditions of the workers are below the poverty line and mostly illiterate. Despite being in the below poverty line category they do not possess a Ration Card and are not a beneficiary of any Self-Help Groups. The Government of Assam has introduced many plans and schemes for the widowed and for aged unmarried women entitled as Assam Widow Pension Scheme and Assam Arunodoi Scheme. It was noteworthy that these women workers are not aware of such a type of plan and policy given by the Government.

Women domestic workers have a number of risks and problems in their day-to-day lives. They have a risk of their survival as well as physical and mental health. Women domestic workers are poorly paid and they have a heavy workload. In many cases, those problems become a double burden for them. The researcher found that in Naryanpur area only three respondents are found who acquire education up to high school, and majority of them acquire education up to primary school. It has also found that the majority of the respondents are widows, hence they are the bread earner of their families. A small portion of them engaged in unregularized jobs which are poorly paid. Therefore, it has proved that the lives of the domestic worker are really

pathetic. Researcher has found so many problems after collected data have been analyzed and according to objective of the study those problems are divided in two parts which is enumerated in the following heading:

1. Problems related to workplace and
2. Problems related to personal affairs

1. Problem related to workplace

There are so many problems faced by domestic workers in the workplace. The problems found out by the researcher are as follows:

Problems of Job satisfaction: Job satisfaction acts as a motivating factor toward any job. Simply, it is an inner feeling of individuals towards their job. In the Narayanpur area, most of the domestic workers said that they are not satisfied with their work. According to them, the reason for their dissatisfaction is like no regular and fixed duty, long working hours, not getting proper time to serve their own family and low and stable payment etc.

Problems of working condition: Working condition has also significant indicator to examine workers problems. The Domestic Workers Convention 2011 adopted by International Labour Organization (ILO) sets minimum standards for domestic workers and specifies working conditions such as hour of work, overtime, salary increases, deductions, annual and sick leave, social security and access to benefits, in totality "a decent working condition." So, the investigator wants to reflect such a point to show the working conditions of the respondents. In this particular area, women workers face problems like no relaxation hours, no proper food, do not get proper respect from the employers and they are often exploited by employers and so on. They even do not get proper time to eat their meals also. Moreover, the investigator found that the women domestic workers in Narayanpur town face problems in terms of freedom to raise their voice against payment issues. Some of them said that sometimes their employers interfere in their private matters. In case of any delay in their work they are verbally abused by their employers. Therefore, their working conditions are surrounded by domination, inequality, harassment, etc.

1. Problems related to personal affairs

Women domestic workers have so many problems in their home place and personal life.

Their personal life starts from their mother's womb and it remains till death. Indebtedness is another noticeable problem found by the researcher in the time of conversation with respondents. As a whole, the investigator tried to reflect some of their endless problems as like-

Low economic status: Low economic status of the domestic worker is considered as one of the major problems of India. The International Labour Organization mentioned that among 67 million domestic workers across the globe, 80% are women. In small town like Narayanpur, most of the widow and independent women of backward classes move toward economic participation. Some of them want to work in the hotels and in any domestic places. They used to go to paddy fields as wage labor in the season. Some of them choose to weave clothes in handlooms on the basis of *adhiyar* system and sell their products that they get in their part to earn money. They are also engaged in rearing goats, pigs, chickens and ducks in such a system. In the study the investigator found that most of the domestic workers are low paid though they are overloaded with work. In some cases, their work is not regularized. Meanwhile, women workers face problems for their survival. Even they are unable to fulfill their daily needs. Almost half of the respondents said that their employer unexpectedly does not want to provide their salary in advance. In the festival season also, they do not get any bonus from their employer. As a result, workers become uninterested in their work.

Work-home conflicts: The domestic workers have a double burden of work. They always struggle with work at home and work at workplace. They even face problems like lack of proper sleep, mental and physical issues, fear of job loss, stress related headache etc. The domestic workers of that particular area said that, they do not get proper time to spend with their children. After daily heavy work, they become tired and their children could not get proper nourishment from their mother. In some cases, the researcher found that women workers who live with their parents-in-law face more problems as she has to satisfy them.

Lack of social security: Women domestic workers neither have social security nor have job security. Insecurity in terms of job is the

part and parcel of their everyday stress. On the other hand, they do not have future security like other organized sectors. Some of the respondents have their own savings to secure their future but most of them do not have any savings to secure their future. They do not have any medical insurance, medical facilities and pension facilities, etc. Hence, anxiety and stress are part of their livelihood.

Disintegration of social life: Lack of holiday is another stressful situation for women domestic workers. The domestic worker has no holiday even on Sunday. They have to work around the clock all the time. The fear is seen in their day-to-day lives such as losing a job and losing payment. In the festival season also, they are bound to come to the workplace. The respondents said that the employers do not allow giving them leave for a long time, if she takes leave for a long time their employers discharge her from the work. The worker has to bear the responsibilities any time. So, she never feels free from mental pressure. On the other hand, their tight working hours does not allow them to contact their neighbors and relatives. Therefore, they feel that they are socially disintegrated. The study shows that the concept of Marxian perspectives is still prevalent in our society. The concept of social class, exploitation and alienation are related to this social situation.

Conclusion

Domestic workers are part of our nation. Development of a nation is not possible without the development of them. On the other hand, a society cannot run smoothly without the help of them. People who want to live in a bed of roses and when both spouses have services are bound to take the help of domestic workers for their household activities and for nurturing their children and elderly person. Domestic workers serve them as per 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, fear of job loss etc. On the other hand, they have to face problems in their home and also in some social settings. The researcher reflected all these problems through 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.

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