
EMPLOYERS PERSPECTIVE: ON DOMESTIC WORK

SNEHA S KACHHAP

Abstract: Life of domestic worker is contrary to the image of the urban space, which asserts development of life, ideologies, framing identities and providing opportunity to create a dignified life. But this very centre of hope for better life even captures the sight of domestic workers. They are the group of workers which becomes an essence of life to the busy city dwellers. On the contrary they are an unrecognized and unorganized set of workers who are ignored in the welfare schemes of the country hence exploited in the place of work. However when dealt with it closely the case of domestic workers are found to be intertwined with various features such as power, control, ideas, and belief. They are looked upon as secluded, downtrodden and a kind of stigma is attached to them. This gives the employer who is at a better position a power over their worker and this power is often exercised through physical mental and verbal abuse making the domestic worker at the receiving end. This paper identifies the notion of household work, and its relation to the problems faced by domestic workers.

Keywords: burden, commodity, favour, investment in domestic worker

Introduction: Domestic labour is one sphere of work that calls out the involvement of members of the family. It caters to the role of need fulfillment, as the basic needs of food shelter and clothing has no meaning until it is used, produced and maintained. The sphere of domestic labour is confined to the four walls of the household. Who does what and to what extent and how much is usually not measured. The sphere of work is such that it is undervalued, and goes unrecognized. As the society is transforming and the boundaries of private and public are eroding, women are entering the public domain, with a motive of income generation and better living. The private domain of household demands labour replacement as the household work is seen altogether a women's responsibility. For a working woman it becomes all the more difficult to manage the work load in office and managing the household work, for her it becomes a double day work. Therefore in order to reduce her work load at home, she tries to buy help from outside that are chiefly called the domestic workers.

Glenn(1991) outlines the role of capitalism besides addressing the role of separation of production of goods and services from the household lead to a sexual division of labour. "Division became prescribed in the mid -nineteenth century with the development of cult of domesticity, which idealized the women as the center of home and hearth" [1]. The division of labor lead to the subordination of women, it made them economically dependent on the male wage earner. Simultaneously 'the domestic code controlled women's behavior by threatening those who deviated from it with the loss of their feminine identity'[2] This loss of feminine identity as thought itself becomes a constraint for the women leading to further compartmentalizing of the roles and creating subordination in other spheres of life.

Besides it was Delphy and Leonard (1986) who points out the fact that women have been marginalized since the beginning therefore they continue to live in that position. Women were thus outside the domain of labor market even in the literature of labour studies, only men were considered in a class analysis. Consequently the oppression faced by the women outside the fold of capitalism has not been addressed adequately. This produced a notion that women to be partaker of the work in the domestic sphere child care and other activities. Regardless of whatever work women do it is the division of labour that brings an elevation to the role of men through their capacity of wage earning and their economic power [3].

However, Delphy and Leonard (1986) outline the role of organization in their explanation of the division of domestic work. "Domestic work is women's work in the sense that the status the conditions of doing it, the relations of productions of this work are now nearly specific to wives. What make it wives work are not the tasks or even the sum total of the tasks, but their particular organization"[4]. This includes the performance and remuneration status of the job and the organization. However the "actual attribution of who does what within a family is regulated by tradition, by external circumstances (which include men's privileged position in the labour market and hence greater earning of power) and by the head of the family. The head of the household is as the title implies the overall manager and decision- maker"[5]

With role of decision making comes the domain of power and authority and often in the patrilineal society it is confined to the patriarch. It holds a vital position of power relation in the society. The patriarchal society has created a male supremacy leading to the subordination of women within the four walls of the household. This was followed by the devaluing the work of women, which further created

a subordinate status of women. The devaluing of the household work within the family was magnified when this work became paid in the private homes, providing low income, no recognition and more than that attaching a stigma of dirt. This further leads to exploitation of domestic workers.

According to ILO "the term domestic work means the work performed in or for a household. The domestic worker is engaged in employment relationship. So a domestic worker is a person who carries out household work in private household in return of wages."

The NSSO report number 537 shows an increase in the number of women domestic workers from 1999-2000 to 2009-10 that is from 946497.028 to 1627310.628. Ghosh calls it a 75% of increase in a decade.

"The growing participation of women in labour work, changes in the organization of work and the intensification of work, as well as lack of policies reconciling work and family life, the decline in state provision of care services, the feminization of internal migration and the ageing of societies have all increased the demand of care work in recent years"[6]. This has led to a kind of undervaluing the work done by domestic workers. This undervaluing of work adds to the notion of earning profit, doing favour, hence making the employer at a better position to hold power and control over the domestic worker.

Yet women still work as a domestic worker despite the stigma of dirt attach to it. The act of care gives a deeper hard work from the point of the worker. Unlike other paid jobs, this act of care addresses something beyond what the labour requires when the domestic worker is taking care of the baby and old person. The reason behind the domination of women in this activity as a care giver is the result of socialization, where a child imbibes the role of mother. In this regards, Dawson and Surpin (2001) wrote, "women would always be willing to provide care and companionship for our loved ones"[7].

The characteristics of care and concern are a part of emotional labour. Arlie Hochschild (2002) defines emotional labour a labour that "requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others. So in this case the sense of being cared for with hospitality in the spaces creates a kind of labour which calls for the co-ordination of mind and feeling and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honour as deep and integral to our individuality"[8]. Though Hochschild mentions it in the context of the air hostess who as a part of work has to wear the smile on her face despite the pain or problems in life, she has to be humble and polite to the traveler so as a part of work, she tries to manage

and control her emotion. Similar is the case of domestic worker who cannot refuse to get up early in the morning. In the series of action involved in care, a domestic worker tries to manage her emotion, her uneasiness, tiredness so that the old person or child or family stays in the comfort zone.

Low Cost Investment in Care Market; Leisure Returns

The moment the employer buys a domestic worker they tend to think it as yet another commodity, a commodity of care, help labour, a sort of low cost investment. The domestic works market is often employer centric and the employer even calculates the expenses and the kind of work his employee needs to do. If we consider George Ritzer's idea of mcdonaldization and compare his four principles that of calculability, efficiency, control and predictability, it seems applicable even while hiring a domestic worker. An employer calculates the amount of work a domestic worker will do. Efficiency comes in when the employer seeks someone innocent, trust worthy who can manage the entire work in a given time if she is part time domestic worker and in case live-in domestic worker she available full time for work . Control is exercised by maintaining power and subordination relation. Predictability is seen with a huge market of domestic worker the salary is also pre-decided according to the locality.

Being so employer centric money becomes a matter of concern both ways, and holding a capitalist mentality, like buying a product the employer, becomes the owner of the product. In a similar manner the employer is buying a 'domestic work' instead pragmatically tends to buy the domestic worker itself. This becomes the problem of the live-in domestic workers. For it is the personhood rather than the labour that had been bought, an unbalance equation in the market[9]. The idea of buying the product that is the domestic worker entails a power over the domestic worker by the employer, thus the most common problem reported is being constantly at call. ' I just work from the time I wake to the time get in bed' [10].

Just as the notion that money begets more money (money-commodity-money and the other one as commodity- money-commodity), therefore while buying a worker the employer happens to invest money on her and when she does all the work of the household and other expenditures that would have been incurred are saved. So by paying the small amount as the salary of domestic worker the employer bought a commodity (the domestic worker & her services) that is inclusive of all the work and thus creating profit. Apart from savings and profit incurred by hiring the domestic worker the employer could afford to have a leisure time, so in one investment their free time is saved and they not engaged in doing household chores.

On the part of domestic worker she no longer has any leisure time for herself and her creativity is taken away, had she been in her house she might just be singing, dancing, do some stitching, etc. the domestic worker happens to get alienated from herself, her work. The alienation process begins from the very stage when she hired in a house where the unseen walls are erected even before she enters. The first and the foremost segregation begin with the kind of division of location of the domestic worker and the employer and the family. For instance for a live-in domestic worker to sit on the sofa will be not acceptable, her access to certain spaces is debarred when not working and she is allowed only while cleaning etc so she is not welcomed during dinner, leisure, family gatherings and like events. Though this segregation is maintained yet it is an unsaid boundary which is more porous in nature as far as exploitations are considered.

When the live-in domestic help enters the home she is trained to follow the decorum of the family. These hierarchy created by the employer creates a sense of inferiority among the live-in domestic worker, thus constantly hoping for a command to be followed. This creates a sense of alienation, where the domestic worker is so attentive to the command that she no longer trusts her own ideas considers it wrong or inferior for any consideration.

Supervision of the domestic worker is often considered important, in that process the employers gestures controls the domestic worker. Jensen points 'Foucauldian panoptican'[11] wherein the person like in jail is constantly under vigilance, in a similar manner the worker is under constant supervision of the employer. Thus, this thought of vigilance creates a kind of constrain, thereby making the domestic worker to be in control of the employer. This supervision of the employer takes the credit of the entire work done by the domestic worker. Hence for domestic worker it is like doing everything but seen idle person. Often when work is done and needs are fulfilled the domestic worker is seen as an extra expenditure, who stands out to be burden for the employer. In such case the employer consider them as marginalized person on whom they are doing favour, helping them sustain life therefore they does not recognize the labour or toil of the domestic worker. In such cases they tend to exercise power over their domestic workers, through means of controlling their movements, their interaction, their food etc in case of live in domestic worker. The way

and employer speaks , or calls the domestic worker, there are times they are time when they face verbal, physical, mental or sexual abuse but being on a lower position they tend to accept it and hence become victim of exploitation.

A girl who worked as live-in domestic worker narrates "My employer would thrash me so severely that I could not eat anything for days together. I had nothing to comfort myself in the chilly month of December when my employer locked me in a room." Seema was tortured for over four years. She shudders when she recalls the trauma. "There was not a single day when I did not get beaten by my employer and his family members. All of them were equally cruel. They would just find an excuse to thrash me any time they wanted." The study reveals that Seema received only a sum of 400 Rs and her parents were given a sum of 2000 Rs for the four years of work.[12]

The domestic workers interviewed by NGO Jagori shares experiences of employers using foul languages and often scold them and the employer would not liked to be answered back[13].

Regardless of the ill treatment faced by domestic worker for the families keeping domestic help for child care, parents had the reassurance knowing that the child is with someone. They had more time for enjoyment on weekends a day that less fortunate families had spent doing the laundry and cleaning[14]. Despite the fact feminist claiming domestic work as a work yet the roots of capitalism does not convince the employer at large to consider domestic work as work. As household works has always been a woman's work hence it's underrated when the aspect of payment comes in. The reason is not just domestic workers are low paid but also the perception that the employer and employee follows defines the system of work. Once a group of kids were playing in the play school and each had their own rules and the game ended in cry. One fine day the group leader announces in the very beginning 'if you are out accept it you are out'. There are often unspoken layers in the society that exists and the domestic worker tends to accept the lower status and follow the unsaid rule. This comes with lower status assigned to the household works. So by acceptance of lower position makes domestic workers the victims where their care and concern are commodified, their position is subordinated and they live alienated. The domestic work market does not just sell the work of domestic worker but also sells labor, emotions, care and leisure,

References:

1. Borris & Klen: (2007:179)
2. Glenn, E.N: (1991:173)
3. Delphy leonard 1986:63
4. Delphy & leonard 1896:63
5. Adelle Blackett, 2011: 780.
6. Horschild., 2002:194

7. Anderson(2000:2,39&40)
8. Griffin (2011:90)
9. Jensen, Kari. B., 2013: 8
10. Toppo 2013
11. Tandon 2010:40
12. Davin, D., 2007:13
13. B. Anderson, *Doing The Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*. London. Zed Books, 2000,pp.1-208
14. S Archer, "Buying the Maid Ricoffy': Domestic Workers, Employers and Food." *South African Review of Sociology*, Vol. 42.2,(2011) pp.66-82
15. A Blackett, "The Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention
16. and Recommendation." *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 106, No. 4,(2011): pp 778-794.
17. Borris & Klen, "We are the Invisible Work Force: Unionizing Home Care," in "The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labour, D S Cable, Ed. Ithaca & London: ILR Press,2007, pp.177-193.
18. D. Davin , 'Country Maids in the City: Domestic Service as an Agent of Modernity in China,' *CWDS*, CD717.7. No.1. 1-20.
19. C. Delphy & D. Leonard, D, "Class Analysis, Gender Analysis and the Family, in *Gender and Stratification*, R. Crompton & M . Mann, Ed, Cambridge: Polity press,1986, Ch5
20. J.Ghosh, "Uncovering Women's Work" in<<http://infochangeindia.org/agenda/women-a-work/uncovering-womens-work.html>>;.
21. J.Ghosh, "The time to recognize Domestic Work as legitimate Work is now," *United Nation Press Release* dated March 1, 2014.
22. E.N.Glenn, "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor the Intersection of Race, Gender and Class Oppression," in *Gender, Family and Economy: The Triple Overlap*, R.L Blumberge, Ed. New Delhi: Sage,(1991):pp.173-201.
23. L.Griffin "Unravelling Rights: 'Illegal' Migrant Domestic Workers in South Africa," *South African Review of Sociology*, Vol.No 42:2, (2011) p.83-101.
24. Hirschfeld, 2002, 'Emotional Labour,' in *Gender: A Sociological Reader*, Jackson, S. and S. Scott Ed London,2002: Routledge, pp.192-196
25. B.K.Jensen, "Space-Time Geography of Female Live-In Child Domestic Workers in Dhaka," *Children's Geographies*, London: Routledge,(2013) p.1-16.
26. Marx, Karl, "Alienation and Social Class", in, *Social Stratification: Class Race and Gender in Sociological Perspective*, D.Bgrusky, Boulder: Westview Press, 1994,pp65-69 .
27. J Toppo, " Women and Work" *Labour File* Vol 8.1&3(2013):pp 37-39
28. S T Mehrotara , *A Report On Domestic Workers: Condition Rights and Responsibility A Study Of Part-Time Domestic Workers In Delhi*. Delhi, Jagori, 2010,1-58

* * *

Sneha S Kachhap/ 439 MIG Flats (L&T) Sector 18B/ New Delhi /Research Scholar/JNU/