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Challenges of Women Domestic Workers at Work Places – With Special Reference to Srirangam – Tiruchirappalli

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ABSTRACT: Indian economy is characterised by unorganised sector. Almost 400 million people - more than 85% of the working population in India - work in the unorganised sector. Of these, at least 120 million are women. Unorganized sector contributed significantly and expanded rapidly in the Indian economy. The term 'unorganised' is often used in the Indian context to refer to the vast numbers of women and men engaged in different forms of employment. These forms include home-based work, self-employment, employment in household enterprises, small units, on land as agricultural workers, labour on construction sites, domestic work, and a myriad other forms of casual or temporary employment. Domestic work is one of the oldest and most important informal occupations for millions of women around the world. It is rooted in the global history of human slavery, colonialism and other form of servitude. Domestic work is essential for the economy outside the household to function and yet it is undervalued and unregulated. According to census report 2011, 41.3 lakhs were domestic labourers in India in which women were 27.9 lakhs. These women domestic labourers are from the marginalised section of the society and are migrants from rural area. These women are exploited by their employers and yet to find out strategies for the protection of these women. Lack of proper legislations and legal support has put these women domestic labourers into still more vulnerable condition. Even though the women domestic labourers work for more hours, they are paid very less. It affects their personal and social life. They are facing a lot of problems in their work place like harassments which includes psychological threats and physical and sexual harassments. The present study made an attempt to study the problems faced by the women domestic workers at their work places with special reference to the women domestic workers in the six wards of Srirangam. For the study 100 women domestic workers were contacted by using snow ball sampling method. Interview schedule was prepared for getting information from the respondents. By simple tabulation and analysis the collected data was classified and from the classification conclusions were arrived. The study concludes that problems like low wages, no fixed working hours, extension of working hours, ill treatment on the part of the employer, not permitted to enter into the house, no job security and psychological threats are found among most of the respondents who were interviewed. So the government has to take actions to include domestic workers in the unorganised sector and should publicise the welfare measures of the domestic workers. Then only they can make use of the welfare measures. Unionisation among the domestic workers may help them to protest against their rights.

I. INTRODUCTION

Right from the childhood days all over the world women were fed on the idea that their place is at home and great authorities have made pronouncements to strengthen this conviction. Political, economic and social changes have occurred in all parts of the world transforming this institutional framework. There have been changes in behaviour, attitudes, outlook and performance as may be discerned in many studies of development in each sphere of human activity. As a result, women's place is not now exclusively confined to the home and its activities. They have been slowly drawn into the economic arena in larger numbers compared to earlier times. Women have at all times and in all

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types of economy made contribution to the production and distribution of output. With the spread of literacy and social changes like declining birth rates and size of family, women cross the circumscribed frontiers of their homes and their number is becoming large and yet comparatively their labour force participation is always less than that of men.

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. With the decline in their status from the ancient to medieval times to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. The roles of women in the Indian society have been changing rapidly in recent years in response to the social change caused by the processes of industrialisation, modernisation and urbanisation all composed into one organic whole. Such a change is accompanied by the changing expectations of gender role performance in general. All these factors have influenced the perception of life of women in India. Changes brought in the educational system, societal setup and the legislations made a remarkable transformation in the position of women. This made women as economically independent and empowered which again lead to their all round personality development in the society. Women in India have been engaged in a variety of occupation in rural and urban areas. The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974, pointed out that the status of any given section of population in a society is ultimately connected with its economic positions which itself depends on the roles, rights and opportunities for participation in economic activities. The inequalities that are inherent in our traditional social structure based on caste, community, class and gender influence women's economic roles and opportunities.

Women workforce in the society is generally divided into two spheres, namely organised sector workers and unorganised sector workers. A large share of the global workforce, especially in developing countries, is engaged in informal employment either in traditional forms or in new forms associated with trade liberalisation and growing labour market informalisation. Almost 97% of the women workers are in the unorganized or informal sector which in turn makes the unorganised sector as women sector.

The term unorganised sector when used in Indian context is defined by National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised sector in their report on conditions of work and promotion of livelihoods in the unorganised sector as consisting of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale or production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers. This group of women workers include those who cannot be identified by a definition but could be described as those who have not been able to organise in pursuit of common objective because they are scattered, the nature of their job is casual or seasonal, workers are ignorant and illiterate, small size of establishments with low capital investment per person employed and superior strength of the employer operating single or in combination. The unorganised sector includes,

1. Contract labour including construction workers
2. Casual labour
3. Labour employed in small scale industry
4. Handloom/ power loom workers
5. Bidi and cigar workers
6. Domestic workers
7. Rag pickers
8. Small Entrepreneurs

Among all the unorganised workers domestic workers are very much in a deprived position without a worker status and without any privileges.

II. DOMESTIC WORKERS

Today that domestic work is increasingly becoming a part of the global division of labour, and inextricably integrated with it. As a result of the transformation in class relations and family restructuring, paid domestic work has become a necessity for a considerably large section of the urban population today. Employment of domestic workers is no longer restricted to the affluent but has become a necessity for the middle class, even lower middle-class families, given the disappearance of the social infrastructure of support in urban nuclear families. With the cost of living rising and

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educated women asserting their right to economic independence, many women from the middle and lower middle class families are choosing to seek employment either voluntarily or due to economic reasons, and the double burden of doing household chores is passed on to paid domestic workers without upsetting the patriarchal structure in any way. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), paid domestic work is an important source of employment, with an estimated 52.6 million workers in the sector across the world in 2010. Female domestic workers as a ratio of female paid employees in 2010 was 1.4 percent for developed countries, the corresponding ratio was 11.8 percent for the Asia-Pacific region excluding China; 13.6 percent for Africa; 26.6 percent for Latin America and the Caribbean; and 31.8 percent in the Middle East.

Under the ILO Convention 189, a domestic worker is “any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship”. A domestic worker may work on full-time or part-time basis; may be employed by a single household or by multiple employers; may be residing in the household of the employer (live-in worker) or may be living in his or her own residence (live-out). A domestic worker may be working in a country of which she/he is not a national. The Draft National Policy on Domestic Workers as recommended by the Taskforce on Domestic Workers provides a definition of a domestic worker as: “For the purpose of this policy, the “domestic worker” means, a person who is employed for remuneration whether in cash or kind, in any household through any agency or directly, either on a temporary or permanent, part time or full time basis to do the household work, but does not include any member of the family of an employer

Nearly 90% of domestic workers in India are women or children (especially girls), ranging from ages 12 to 75 and it is estimated that 25% among them are below the age of 14. The majority of domestic workers are illiterate. They are engaged in tasks such as cooking, washing, and cleaning, which are traditionally seen as women’s work and considered subservient in nature. In India, the stigma linked to domestic work is heightened by the caste system, since tasks such as cleaning and sweeping are associated with the people belonging to the ‘so-called’ low castes. Domestic workers are commonly referred to as ‘servants’ and ‘maids’ which has resulted in their feelings of insecurity and inferiority. This has further added to the undignified status awarded to the services provided by them. Domestic Workers are highly exploited and denied just wages and humane working conditions. They are paid well below the minimum wages for unskilled or semi-skilled workers.

Domestic workers are comprised of three main groups

- Live-in domestic workers: worker who works full time for a single employer and also stays on the premises of the employer or in a dwelling provided by the employer (which is close or next to the house of the employer) and does not return back to her/his home every day after work.”
- Part-time / Live-out domestic worker: worker who works for one or more employers for a specified number of hours per day or performs specific tasks for each of the multiple employers every day.
- Migrant Domestic Workers

The vast majority of live-in domestic workers work a minimum of 15 hours a day, seven days a week. A great number of live-in domestic workers are recruited from rural or tribal areas. They have to adapt to an alien environment, culture, and language. Domestic Workers experience a tremendous sense of loneliness because of the solitary nature of the work. This loneliness is compounded by the fact that most have no or very little time off and they are unable to communicate with distant friends and relatives. Often they are not allowed to use the telephone and are prohibited from socializing with friends and relatives who are living and working in the same city.

Part-time workers often work in 3-4 different houses for nearly 8-10 hours every day. The working hours of domestic workers can go from 8 to over 18 hours a day. Wages, leave facilities, medical benefits, and rest time are at the employer’s mercy.

Moreover, they are often victims of suspicion. If anything is missing in the house, they are the first to be accused with threats, physical violence, police interrogation, conviction, and even dismissal.

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III. ISSUES OF DOMESTIC WORK

These domestic workers face a lot of problems due to their work and the working environment. They are,

Unregulated and underpaid:

The nature of domestic work – including it being unpaid in many cases, the overwhelming female participation rate in this work, its location in the private space of a household and the low level of participation of women in formal employment – all resulted in the work being largely unregulated and underpaid.

Caste determined task division:

In India, caste categories continue to determine the division of labour and tasks among domestic workers. Employers often arbitrarily decide on the workers' caste on the basis of the workers' skin colour. Women from 'backward' castes are largely employed in cleaning tasks, while upper-caste women are employed in the kitchen as cooks and/ or for washing dishes.

Non-recognition of skills:

Domestic work is considered "unskilled" work, and hence is usually the first kind of employment for women, especially migrant and young women, entering the job market through local networks. The prevalence of the patriarchal notion that women's work is inherently unskilled underlies this assumption. Thus, a domestic worker cooking at home is considered 'unskilled' work and hence underpaid, but a chef working at a hotel is 'highly skilled' and earns a salary that is several times higher than that of the former.

No fixed working hours, over stretching of work without extra pay, no regular wage hike, harassments at the work places by the employers and their family members, no job security, ill treatment and so on are the problems that the women domestic workers face in their work place. This paper tries to find out the problems they face in their work places, with special reference to the domestic workers of the six wards of Srirangam, Tiruchirappalli.

In order to solve the problems of the domestic workers recently the Government of India has introduced a bill **Bill No. 21 of 2015** As Introduced In Lok Sabha "The Domestic Workers (Welfare And Regulation Of Employment) Bill, 2015"

This bill aims to provide for the welfare of domestic workers, regulation of conditions of their employment and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

It was enacted by Parliament in the Sixty-sixth Year of the Republic of India as follows:—

1. (1) This Act may be called the Domestic Workers (Welfare and Regulation of Employment) Act, 2015.

(2) It extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

(3) It shall come into force on such date as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint.

This act also gives the guidelines for the domestic workers recruitment and their salary fixation etc. If this act is properly reached the domestic workers it may benefit them a lot.

This study was conducted with the following objectives:

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper aims to find out the problems of women domestic workers in their work places like

- Problem of wage
- Problem of leave
- Problem of treatment
- Problem of harassments

V. METHODOLOGY

In the unorganised sector there is considerable movement of individuals between categories, as well as into and out of the unorganised sector. So there is no definite data for deciding the total number of domestic workers in the study area.

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The required number of respondents for the study is 100 and they were contacted using snow ball sampling method from the six wards of Srirangam. Descriptive research design is used and a well structured interview schedule is used to collect information, since the respondents are illiterate.

VI. THE STUDY AREA

Tiruchirappalli is the oldest inhabited cities located in the centre of the State of Tamil Nadu. It is a place of historic, cultural and economic importance. The district has a rich and varied cultural heritage. It is also known for its exquisite handicrafts, castings and South Indian musical instruments. The economy is mainly agrarian. The agriculture practice is sustained by a network of irrigation sources and improved methods of cultivation. Tiruchirappalli is administered by Municipal Corporation established as per the Tiruchirappalli City Municipal corporation act 1994. The total population of Tiruchirappalli as per 2011 census is 2,713,858.

The civic administration of the city is divided into four zones – Abhishekapuram, Ariyamanglam, Golden Rock and Srirangam.

Zone	wards	Total number of wards
Abhishekapuram	40, 41, 45-60	17
Ariyamangalam	7, 14, 15, 19-29, 33, 61, 62, 64.	19
Golden Rock	30-32, 34-39, 42-44, 46, 48	17
Srirangam	1-6, 8-13, 16-18	15

Source: website of Tiruchirappalli Corporation.

Srirangam is the foremost of the eight self-manifested shrines (Swayam Vyakta Kshetras) of Lord Vishnu. It is also considered the first, foremost and the most important of the 108 main Vishnu temples (Divyadesams). This temple is also known as Thiruvaramba Tirupati, Periyakoil, Bhoologa Vaikundam, Bhogamandabam. In the Vaishnava parlance the term “KOIL” signifies this temple only. Constructed in the Tamil style of architecture, this temple is glorified in the Divya Prabandha, the early medieval Tamil literature canon of the Alvar saints from the 6th to 9th centuries AD and is counted among the 108 Divya Desams dedicated to Vishnu. The temple follows Thenkalai tradition of worship. The temple is enormous in size. The temple complex is 156 acres in extent. It has seven prakaras or enclosures. These enclosures are formed by thick and huge rampart walls which run round the sanctum. There are 21 magnificent towers in all prakaras providing a unique sight to any visitor. This temple lies on an islet formed by the Twin Rivers Cauvery and Coleroon. Its location, on an island in Cauvery river, has rendered its vulnerable to natural disasters as well as the rampaging of invading armies – Muslim and European – which repeatedly commandeered the site for military encampment. The main entrance, known as the Rajagopuram (the royal temple tower), rises from the base area of around 13 cents (around 5720 sq ft) and goes up to 239.501 feet (73.000 m), moving up in eleven progressively smaller tiers. The annual 21-day festival conducted during the Tamil month of Margazhi (December–January) attracts 1 million visitors. Srirangam temple is often listed as the largest functioning Hindu temple in the world, the still larger Angkor Wat being the largest existing temple

The temple of Sri Ranganathaswami at Srirangam boasts an historic past of great kingdom and a civilization thousands of years old. The reign of the Pallavas was marked by the creation of a solid religious foundation, for example the encouragement given by the dynasty appears to have contributed to the growth of Aryan institutions in Southern India more particularly in the Carnatic. Cholas reigned for about three hundred years over the Coromandel Coast and the greater part of Eastern Deccan, where they helped an advanced Hindu Culture to flourish.

Srirangam is another important cultural heritage monument that speaks the architectural skill of early Tamils. The study area comprises the six wards of Srirangam.

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VII. WARD WISE DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION

Among the 15 wards Srirangam constitute 6 wards namely 1-6 wards. Total number of population and households in each ward is shown in the following table:

Ward Number	Total Population	Males	Females	Total Number of Households
1	18543	9193	9350	5272
2	14085	6974	7111	3979
3	13780	6632	7148	3781
4	18600	9315	9285	4913
5	20868	10271	10597	5809
6	16372	8180	8192	4223
Total	105248			27977

Source: Srirangam 2011 – 12

From the six wards 100 respondents were contacted and the collected data were analysed, classified and tabulated for coming to a valid conclusion.

VIII. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The required data for the study is collected using the interview schedule and the collected data is classified and analysed.

Table 1: Personal information of the respondents

Sl. No.	Particulars	Total number	Percentage	
1.	Religion	Hindus	84	84
		Christians	11	11
		Muslims	5	5
2.	Caste	General	0	0
		BC	62	62
		MBC	31	31
		SC	5	5
		ST	2	2
3.	Marital status	Married	75	75
		Unmarried	7	7
		Widow	18	18
4.	Age of the Respondents	18 – 25	18	18
		25 – 40	47	47
		40 and above	35	35
5.	Educational status	Illiterate	51	51
		Primary	30	30
		Secondary	15	15
		Higher secondary and above	4	4

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The personal information of the respondents shows that most of the women domestic workers in the study are in a deprived condition only. They are socially, economically and educationally very backward. Their educational status was very low more than three fourth of the respondents did not finish their primary education. This shows their backwardness since education is the key to development.

Table 2: Years of experience

Sl. No.	Years of Experience	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	1 – 5 Years	8	8
2	5 – 10 years	60	60
3	10 years and above	32	32

Above half of the respondents involved in this work for about 5 to 10 years, 32 domestic workers said that they are doing it above 10 years and 8 of them are started doing it within five years. The number of years of experience shows their continued deprived condition.

Table 3: Reasons for going to job

Sl. No.	Reasons for going to job	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Poverty	45	45
2	Supporting family income	38	38
3	Large size family	17	17

The main reason for going to job is poverty; in spite of governmental efforts many of the people are not able to get even a single meal per day. So it became a main reason for women going for job outside their family, this was shown in the study 38% of them are going to this to support their family income because the existing income is not sufficient for them to look after their family and remaining respondents said that because of the large size of the family they are going for jobs to full fill the needs of all the family members.

Table 4: Number of houses working

Sl. No.	Number of Houses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	1	7	7
2	2	23	23
3	3	42	42
4	4 and above	28	28

Nearly half of the respondents (42%) are working in three houses daily, 28 % of them are working in more than four houses, 23% percentage of them are working in two houses and seven percentage of the respondents are working in only one house. More number of respondents were working in more than three houses and it reveals their economic necessity and their economic backwardness.

Table 5: Working hours

Sl. No.	Working hours	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	2 hours	15	15
2	3 to 4 hours	23	23
3	4 hours and above	48	48
4	Depending upon the work	14	14

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Since the number of houses is more in number their working hours also more that is nearly half of the respondents that is 48% of them are working more than four hours daily, 23 of them are working 3 to 4 hours daily. This shows their unlimited working hours.

Table 6: Type of work

Sl. No.	Type of work	Number of Respondents	
		Yes	No
1	Vessel cleaning	95	5
2	Washing clothes	88	22
3	Mobbing and cleaning floor	96	4
4	Cooking	32	68

This table shows that majority of the respondents are doing vessel cleaning, washing clothes and mobbing and cleaning the floor regularly and very small percentage of women domestic workers only involved in cooking.

Table 7: Problems in the work place

Sl. No.	Problems	Yes	No	
1.	Salary	Inadequate salary	82	18
		Delay in the payment of salary	48	52
		Regular hike in the salary	43	57
2.	Bonus	For every one year	78	22
		One month salary	68	32
		Things	32	68
3.	Working hours	No fixed working hours	72	28
		Stretching of working hours	67	33
		No pay for extra work	53	47
4.	Treatment	Equal treatment	33	67
		Friendly type treatment	56	44
		Authoritative treatment	11	89
5	Leave provision	Wage cut for leave	84	16
		Arranging alternate person	67	33

The women domestic workers face a lot of problems in their work places regarding salary, bonus, working hours, treatment and leave matters. Inadequate salary that is very meagre salary is given to the domestic workers, some workers face the problem of delay in getting their salary and there is no regular hike in their salary, they get salary hike according to the wish of the employer and some of said that they get it regularly for every year. The hike also not a descent one only 100 or 200 rupees is given as hike to them. There is no extra pay for extra work, during festival occasions they were asked to do house cleaning etc for that they are not paid extra. Most of them said that in average 3 days are allowed as leave for them, if they took above three days wage will be cut for the extra taken leave. Otherwise they have to arrange an alternate person for the leave days. Most of them said that they are treated in a friendly manner and some of the employers only treated the domestic workers as subordinates.

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Table 8: Permission to enter into the house

Sl. No.	Nature of restrictions	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	No restrictions	5	5
2	During menstrual cycle	61	61
3	Not to the Puja room	15	15
4	Not to the Kitchen	19	19

Majority of the respondents said that during menstrual cycle they are not allowed to enter into the house. Only some of them namely 19% of them said that they are not allowed to enter into the kitchen, they wash the vessels either in the bathroom or outside the house. Some of them said that they are not allowed to enter into the puja room. Only few of them said that there are no restrictions in entering into the house.

Table 9: Harassments

Sl. No.	Nature of harassment	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Physical assault	8	8
2	Sexual harassment	2	2
3	Suspicion of theft	16	16
4	No harassment	74	74

Majority of the respondents are of the opinion that no harassments in their working places in the form of physical assault, sexual harassment and suspicion of theft. Only few respondents said that they have faced these harassments in their working place. Many of the workers said that they were often scolded for coming to work late or taking a leave. "Sometimes they ask us to wash clothes that we have already washed. I am even asked to wipe the floor with a cloth after mopping, if the employer feels that it is not clean enough". This sentiment is not uncommon, as revealed by workers at all the FGDs. Another complaint expressed was that "employers are always finding fault. You will never hear anything positive about our work".

IX. CONCLUSION

Domestic service is becoming a major and growing informal sector activity in the urban areas, especially in big cities. The increased importance of domestic service has been seen as a result of transformations in class relations and the development of new life style combined with unprecedented mobility of labour. For a large proportion of such workers domestic work is the only option available. While domestic workers enjoy both money wages and real wages, they also face various problems at the work place, which include over-work load, low wage, minimal pay or no pay for extra work, absence of leave facility, etc. While the problems of domestic workers are multifaceted, the endeavour by the State has been very minimal.

Problems of domestic workers in the working place concentrated on the problems they face on their wages, bonus, leaves, treatment, permission to enter into their house and other type of harassments. As far as the study area is concerned there is no much physical assault and sexual harassments. The problems of women domestic workers are mainly in the area of wage, bonus, extra work, stretching of working hours, bonus, not permitted to take leave, not allowed to enter into the house freely and restriction on their entry are some of the problems they face in the working places. And this has been confirmed by the study undertaken in the six wards of Srirangam, Tiruchirappalli. There is an underlying assumption that wages for domestic work can be kept low since power to strike of domestic workers is low.

There is an urgent need to address the issues **suggested** below:

- The Government should notify minimum wages for domestic workers and issues such as wage structure, working conditions, leave and absenteeism need to be addressed through legislation.

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- The domestic workers' right to „decent work: inclusion in labour laws, trade union rights and employment contracts to achieve good working conditions and access to social benefits including pensions etc should be enforced. The suggestion for overcoming this problem is that government should efficiently enact the legislative provisions regarding fixation of minimum wages, fixation of working hours, extra wage for extra work, no stretching working hours and they have to be recognised as workers. Workers status has to be given to them and they have to be included in all the welfare measures of the unorganised workers. In spite of “The Domestic Workers (Welfare and Regulation of Employment) Bill, 2015” even now the women domestic workers are deprived of the privileges of the government. So the government has to take step to include these sector workers into the unorganised workers group and should make a wide propaganda about the programmes available to these sector workers and made aware of them about all the provisions.

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Interview with 100 domestic workers in six wards of Srirangam

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