

Socio-Economic Conditions of Maid Servants- A Case Study of Ghaziabad City

Dr. Sarfraj Ahmed

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Satyawati College (Day), Delhi

Abstract

The socioeconomic transformation of Indian society in the present century and especially in the post-independence period in the form of industrialization, urbanization, westernization, spread of education and enhanced employment opportunities for women has brought about a series of perceptible changes in the status, outlook, worldview and attitude of Indian women, specially educated middle class women. Now, more and more woman have been coming out of the four walls of their homes in search of gainful employment which is evident from the slow but steadily rising Female Work Participation Rate (WRP) during the last three censuses. According to 1991 census female WRP for urban areas was 7.18 which rose to 8.31 in 2001 and finally to 9.91 in 2011.

Maid servants as part of the unorganized labour are today victims of unmitigated hardships and indignities. They are paid shockingly low wages. There is no minimum wages fixed as the Minimum Wages Act does not cover the domestic workers. They do not have any job protection or security as they are hired and fired at the will and fancies of the employers. For even trivial reasons the maid servants can lose their job if the employers desire so. In the absence of any suitable legal measures to protect the interests of domestic/maid servants their plight remains unchanged and they are victims of exploitation. Millions of words have already been spent touching upon the various problems of women working in organized field but a very few studies on the women working in unorganized sector and still fewer on maid servants. The present paper aims to take up the task of exploring this new class of women workers, especially their working and living conditions.

Key Words : *Patriarchal Society, Socio-economic, Urbanisation, Industrialisation, Work Participation Rate, Unorganised Sector.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Woman with men, from time immemorial, have formed an integral part of the socioeconomic structure throughout the world. In spite of their contribution to world's culture and civilization, it is almost universally accepted that the woman's primary role is that of homemaker and it is for the man to provide subsistence to his family. Diverse social structures and supporting ideologies created by patriarchal society have confined as well as defined woman by restricting them to roles and activities described as feminine within the four walls of the house.

The present century has witnessed the emancipation of women from their tradition bound ethos. Their emergence from exclusive seclusion within

home to work outside the four walls of house has amounted almost to silent social revolution. This emancipation has brought about a great change in the life of the woman throughout the world, influencing their attitudes, values, aspirations and ways of feeling and acting the effective participation in all walks of life. The socioeconomic transformation of Indian society in the present century and especially in the post-independence period in the form of industrialization, urbanization, westernization, spread of education and enhanced employment opportunities for women has brought about a series of perceptible changes in the status, outlook, worldview and attitude of Indian women, specially educated middle class women. Now, more and more woman have been coming out of the four

walls of their homes in search of gainful employment which is evident from the slow but steadily rising Female Work Participation Rate (WRP) during the last three censuses. According to 1991 census female WRP for urban areas was 7.18 which rose to 8.31 in 2001 and finally to 9.91 in 2011. (Cf. Table No. 1).

Working woman can be classified into two broad categories according to the degree of organization and nature of problems of these sectors of employment; viz, the organized and unorganized sector, for which Jhon Kith Heart used the terms formal and informal sectors. According to the definition of Central Statistical Office, “The organized sectors comprise units registered under the Factories Act of 1948 and covers those using power and employing 10 or more workers as well as unit not using power but employing 20 or more workers.” In addition, the organized sector is governed by a number of legislation aimed at protecting the interest and ensuring the welfare of workers such as Minimum Wages Act, Labour Welfare Legislation, The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, etc.

The unorganized sector, on the other hand, includes agriculture as well as various home based production and the service sector of domestic work. This sector of employment is characterized by the absence of all protective measures and machinery. Thus, employers are not bound to pay any minimum wages, nor are employees entitled to security of tenure, gratuity and pension, and paid leave. The worse part of it is that their claims against exploitative condition cannot be taken to the court of law as employers are not legally bound by any regulatory act.

Working women are employed both in organized as well as unorganized sectors of economy. It is in the unorganized sector of rural or urban areas that the overwhelming presence and struggle of women is manifest. The National Commission of Self-Employed Women estimates that 94 percent of the total female workforce is found in this sector. According to census estimates a very high proportion i.e. 85.09% of the total working women in India are

Table : 1
Work Participation Rates in India (1971-2011)

Year	Rural/Urban	Persons	Males	Females
1971	Total	39.91	54.94	24.06
	Rural	41.00	55.03	26.47
	Urban	34.71	54.37	11.86
1981	Total	43.00	57.10	27.96
	Rural	45.10	58.20	31.40
	Urban	33.50	52.40	11.10
1991	Total	34.17	52.75	14.22
	Rural	35.33	53.78	15.92
	Urban	29.61	48.88	07.18
2001	Total	36.70	52.62	19.67
	Rural	38.79	53.77	23.06
	Urban	29.99	49.06	08.38
2011	Total	37.50	51.61	22.27
	Rural	40.09	52.58	26.79
	Urban	30.16	48.92	09.19

Source: Census of India 1991, Series 1, India Paper 3 of 1991.

employed in the unorganized sector. The low level of education and training as compared to men, the traditional allocation of roles and limitations of female labour market for women are reasons for this discrepancy in women’s employment. Thus, a very high proportion is forced to work and live under subdued conditions with family and children devoid of proper living and working conditions, and receiving humiliating treatment. While it is true that the worker, irrespective of sex, are exploited in the unorganized sector, women suffer more by the fact of their gender. Thus, the helplessness of the women working in unorganized sector is compounded by gender role expectations and patriarchal values, which keep them hidden or invisible and bind them to monotonous and low paid works considered suitable for them.

The affluent classes in society employ domestic servants to maximize their comforts and maintain dignity and prestige and also as the status symbol. On the other hand, the rising number of middle or upper middle class women employed in the organized sector or a

self entrepreneurs are required to fulfill the role expectations for a housewife along with the duties of an employee outside. The work role of working women inevitably encroaches on her time and energy approximately allocated for housewife's role. As a result these women are not in a position to effectively handle their traditional household tasks along with their newfound role as earners working outside the home. In such a situation certain compromises have to be made and these can be made only with the roles of housewife as it is not possible in case of work role of formal and contractual nature. As a result the housewife role is split and part of it is left to be performed by members of family or someone from outside, i.e. maidservant. This has led to the emergence of a class of maid servants to take care of the household activities of such families, thus, becoming a perceptible class of working women. Women domestic servants or maid servants constitute an important segment of unorganized labour of our country. These maidservants as a class come from very poor families-majority of them being illiterate or having a very little formal education. The maid servants are mostly engaged in heavy and more labour consuming household activities such as scrubbing utensils, washing clothes, sweeping and cleaning house, mopping floor, assisting the employes in Kitchen and going to market for petty purchasing.

The general socio-economic condition of maid servants is rather sad and deplorable. In most of the cases the husbands of these maid servants are either unemployed or underemployed. They invariably live in slums or tenements devoid of even certain basic amenities. Many of them do suffer from health problems such as anemia, malnutrition and a chain of related illness. Apart from that most of them develop cracked hands due to continuous work in water and the use of storing abrasive powders and detergents. Though they lessen the burden to household activities of their employers, but in this course they too face the same problem in their own housewife role. However, poor as they are, they cannot afford to employ other women and have to depend on their other family members, which frequently lead to tensions and quarrels in the family.

Maid servants as part of the unorganized labour are today victims of unmitigated hardships and indignities. They are paid shockingly low wages. There is no minimum wages fixed as the Minimum Wages Act does not cover the domestic workers. They do not have any job protection or security as they are hired and fired at the will and fancies of the employers. For even trivial reasons the maid servants can lose their job if the employers desire so. In the absence of any suitable legal measures to protect the interests of domestic/maid servants their plight remains unchanged and they are victims of exploitation.

Millions of words have already been spent touching upon the various problems of women working in organized field but a very few studies on the women working in unorganized sector and still fewer on maid servants. The present paper aims to take up the task of exploring this new class of women workers, especially their working and living conditions.

2. METHODOLOGY

In the light of preceding discussion, the major objective of the present study is to explore the socio-economic conditions of the maid servants as an important section of the women working in the unorganized sector. The main thrust of the study is to explore and describe the living and working conditions of this exploited lot of women belonging to the poorest of the poor section in the society.

3. LOCALE AND UNIVERSE

The present study has been conducted in Ghaziabad city, The gateway to the capital of the nation.

The all busy atmosphere, industrial surroundings gave this city a thrust to work. A characteristic feature of Ghaziabad, is the high rate of literacy and a very high percentage of employed women (mostly in service and teaching). As per 2011 census the total population of Ghaziabad urban agglomeration was 46,81,645 (24,88,834 males and 21,92,811 females). As far as the literacy is concerned, according to 2011 census the rate of literacy in Ghaziabad city is 78.07 percent (Male Literacy Ratio 85.42 and female

69.79) which is the highest one among all the towns and cities in the state. The high literacy rate of the city is also evident from the fact that the city claims to have highest per capita newspaper consumption not only in the state but in the whole country.

Characteristically the employment in Ghaziabad city is mostly white collar in nature. The city has a very large number of management, engineering, scientific and research institutions and the a good concentration of public schools in the country. So the city may rightly be called a scientific and literary city. The major employers in the city are the Government and the educational institutions. The large number as maid servants in domestic sector.

Owing to the fact that maid servants constitute the unorganized sector of employment, it was not possible to know the exact number of maid servants as it required a census of the city, which is a time consuming and difficult exercise. Thus, in the absence of any reliable sampling frame it was decided to study 200 maid servants spread all over the city.

The data is collected for this study only. Five Malin Bastis (Slums) were identified in the different areas of the city as these Malin Bastis have a very high concentration of maid servants.

Collected data from maid servants by interviewing them with the help of a structured schedule (to maintain uniformity in the data collected). The maid servants were interviewed at their place of residence to have a first observation of their living conditions. The collected data were coded and transferred on master sheets and the necessary frequency tables were drawn out of them Since the present study is basically descriptive in nature, simple percentages have been worked out and used in interpreting the data rather than any high level statistics. The data have been analysed and interpreted for demographic profile, living conditions, working conditions and job satisfaction of the respondents. As far as demographic profile of the maid servants in Ghaziabad is concerned, most of the

Table : 2
Distribution of Respondents by Age

Table : 3
Distribution of Respondents According to Their Marital Status

Age Group No.	Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
1. Up to 20	Unmarried	38	19.00
2. 21-25	Married	33	16.50
3. 26-30	Widowed	42	21.00
4. 31-35	Separated	16	8.00
5. 36-40	Deserted	45	22.50
6. 41-45	Divorced	29	14.50
Total		200	100.00

respondents (80 percent) are below the age of 35 years and among whom 19 percent are below 20 years (cf. Table: 2). This overwhelming presence of young and middle aged women among maid servants shows that domestic service is either a recent phenomenon for this population or in their middle age they generally give up the work. The distribution of respondents on the basis of their caste clearly shows that all of them belong to Scheduled Castes or Other Backward Casts. This fact affirms the traditional nexus between occupational prestige and caste. Domestic service is a lower occupation carrying much less prestige, and as traditionalism has still hold it is carried out by lower

caste women. This also has a ray of hope and that is why the lower caste women mostly serve the families of high and middle castes and untouchability seems to be losing its ground.

The majority (62.5 percent) of respondents are married which may imply that their family responsibility and poverty compel them to go for work. About one-fifth (18.5 percent) of them are spouseless who are widowed, separated, divorced or deserted (cf. Table : 3). They have to shoulder the entire burden of their family. The unmarried respondents support their parents with the intention to make savings for their marriage. Thus, poverty and the absence of other earning members in the family drive those women to take up the job of maid servants. The age at first marriage is quite low. In spite of all the efforts on the part of Government at raising the age of marriage, 61.6 percent respondents were married even before attaining the age of 20 years and more than 98 percent were married before 25 years of age.

Their education level is very low, most of them (88 percent) being illiterate and only 12 percent having some formal education. When compared, their husbands are better educated though not well educated. None is the illiterate among the husbands of the maid servants; 37.78 percent have got primary education, 45.18 percent have studied upto middle school level and 17.04 percent have gone up to high school or intermediate level of education. This shows the discrimination between the sexes in providing them education.

As far as the number of children is concerned 23 percent respondents have no child, 13.5 percent have one child, 27 percent have two children 24 percent have three children, 4 percent have four, 3 percent have five and only 1.5 percent have six children (cf. Table : 4). The average number of children is 1.45 which is lower than the national average. This low number of children among the respondents can be attributed to their exposure to urban life.

Poverty is the main problem forcing the women to take up this low prestige, low paid job of

maid servants. A great majority (92.5 percent) of the respondents have a total family income below ` 5000/- per month only. More than a one-fourth of the maid servant's husbands (25.19 percent) is unemployed while 54.07 percent are casual workers, most of these husbands pass their time as idlers. Thus, poverty along with husband's unemployment is one of the most important reasons for the women to take up employment of maid servants as this profession requires no education and specialized training.

As far as living conditions are concerned, most of them live in slums and outhouses devoid of even basic amenities such as safe drinking water, electricity or even the toilet facilities (cf. Table : 5), 46.5 percent respondents live in the thatched huts or Kuccha houses. The remaining 53.5 percent live in Pucca houses mostly consisting of one room with very little or no separate place of cooking or bathing, only very few having more than one room accommodation. Poverty generates indebtedness. Most (78 percent) of the respondents are indebted. The amount of loan ranges from few hundreds to three thousand rupees. The loan may be taken only for some occasion or emergency in the family such as marriage or illness, but in 25.00 percent cases it has been taken to meet the day-to-day expenses of family. The sources of loan are traditional money lenders (generally some shopkeepers in the neighbourhood or employers). In one-third of cases the loan has also been taken from friends or relatives (cf. Table : 6 and 7). Occasionally, they have to pay a very high rate of interest, which puts them into a vicious circle of deficit financing, and with their meager economic resources. It is very difficult for them to come out of this vicious circle.

Education is considered to be a vehicle for social mobility and the attitude toward children's education reflects one's mobility aspirations. 154 respondents have 293 children in school going age. Given their limitations of poverty and need of younger children especially younger daughters to look after petty responsibilities in absence of mother, only 59.70 percent go to school and 41.30 percent do not go to school. Among school going children the gender bias is clearly

Table : 5
Distribution of Respondents on Amenities
in the Home

Table : 8
School Going Children by Sex

Table : 6
Distribution of Respondents According to
Reasons of Indebtedness

Table : 9
Distribution of Respondents According to
Their Job Satisfaction

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Fully Satisfied	42	21.00
Somewhat or Unsatisfied	93	46.50
Unsatisfied	65	32.00
Total	200	100.00

Table : 7
Distribution of Respondents According to
Their Sources of Borrowing

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Moneylenders	79	37.21
Employers	68	31.42
Relatives	42	19.34
Friends	26	12.07
Total	200	100.00

Reasons of Indebtedness

Reasons of Indebtedness	Frequency	Percentage
Running water	12	6.00
Daily expenses	15	7.50
Health care	10	5.00
Education	10	5.00
Marriage in the family	10	5.00
Other	53	26.50
Total	110	55.00

Reasons of Dissatisfaction*

Reasons of Dissatisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Low salary	12	6.00
Long working hours	15	7.50
Job not interesting	10	5.00
Other	65	32.00
Total	102	51.00

*Available dissatisfied respondents have been shown. The respondents mentioned more than one reason of their dissatisfaction. So the appropriate total is more than 100. If the loan has been taken for more than one purpose, the total shows more than the number of respondents

visible. Out of school going children 63.95 percent are boys and only 36.05 percent are girls.

The situation is quite reverse in case of children not going to school, 34.71 percent boys and 65.29 percent girls are not going to school (cf. Table : 8). This is because the younger girls either remain at home to carry out domestic responsibilities or accompany their mothers to assist in their work of maid servants.

As far as the job satisfaction is concerned only one-fifth of the respondents are fully satisfied with their work, 46.50 percent are somewhat satisfied as in the absence of any other alternative job they consider it so, while 30.50 percent are unsatisfied with their job of maid servant. Among those who are unsatisfied with their job, all consider low wages as the main cause of their dissatisfaction, 89.23 percent complain about the

heavy work load while 64.61 percent are not satisfied with the treatment given to them by their employers. 27.69 percent consider it a very time consuming in comparison to wages received by them (cf. Table : 9 and 10).

Thus, the present study reveals the maid servants belong to the poorest among the poor sections of the society. Most of them are illiterate and working out of poverty. In the absence of any protective legislation and machinery they have to work under exploitative conditions. To improve the lot of this helpless section of the women workers there is a strong need of some protective legislation and to organize them so that they may be in a position to bargain for better wages and improved working conditions. ○

REFERENCES

1. Lalita, N and Naagarajan, B. 2002. Self Help Groups in rural development, New Delhi: Dominant Publishers and Distributors.
2. Liang, Jennifer. 2002. Economic Development and Women, in Fernandes Walter & Barbora Sanjay (eds): Changing Women's Status in India: Focus on the North East. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Center.
3. Maajid Abdul. 2000. Legal protection to unorganized labour. Deep and Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd.
4. Madhok, Sujata. 2008. Trafficking women for domestic work. www.infochangeindia.org
5. Mathew, P.D., S.J. 2002. 'The minimum wages Act, 1948', New Delhi: Legal, education, labour law, Indian social institute.
6. Mehrotra, Surabhi Tandon and Mewa Bharti. 2008. Rights and dignity: Women domestic workers in Jaipur. New Delhi: Jagori.
7. Menon, Geeta. 2010. 'Stree Jagruti Samiti: Spreading awareness among domestic workers', Labour File. Volume 8, No. 1-3, January-June: pp. 56-59.
8. Moghe, Kiran. 2007. 'Understanding the unorganised sector', www.infochange.com
9. Mohan, Poornima. 2000. Encyclopedia of Women Indian. Delhi: Publishers Distributors.
10. Mor, D.P. Singh. 2001. 'Women and unorganized sector'. Social Welfare, Vol. 48, No. 9.
11. Mor, D.P. Singh. 2005. Women workers in unorganized sector women workers in the Brick Kiln Industry in Haryana. India: Deep and Deep Publications Ltd.
12. Mukherjee, Tuhin. 2006. Impact assessment study of SGSY programme on empowerment of women at Babpur village. Kolkata: Vidyasagar School of Social Work.
13. Mukhopadhaya (eds.). 2007. Gender justice, citizenship and development. New Delhi: Zubaan, an imprint of Kali for Women.
14. Mukhim, Patricia. 2011. 'Domestic workers for rights', Calcutta, India: The Telegraph.
15. Murugaiah, K. 2002. 'Women domestic workers', Social Welfare, Vol. 49, No. 2. 254
16. M. Vimala. 2000. 'Socio Economic status of domestic women servants-A case study of Thrissur

- Corporation'. www.cds.ac.in/krpcds/reports/vimala.pdf
17. Nagaland Post. 2009. 'Domestic workers take a day off'.
 18. Nandal, Santos.2006.'Women workers in unorganized sector: A study on construction industry in Haryana'. International Journal of development Issues, Vol.5, Issue 2.
 19. Neetha, N. 2003. 'Migration, social networking and employment: A study of domestic workers in Delhi', NLI Research Studies, No. 37, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, NOIDA.
 20. Neetha, N. 2004. ' Making of female breadwinners. Migration and social networking of women domestics in Delhi'. Economic and Political Weekly. April 24, pp. 1681-88.
 21. Neetha.2005. Workers: Profile and emerging concerns, Labour file-A bimonthly journal of labour and economic affairs. <http://www.labourfile.org/Current Article Details.aspxid=521>.
 22. Neetha, N. 2008. 'Regulation domestic work', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.43, No.37, September 13.
 23. Neetha, N. 2009. 'Placement agencies for domestic workers: Issues of regulation and promoting decent work', prepared for International Labour Organisation, New Delhi and presented at the National Consultation with the Civil Society on Domestic Workers Issues, 15-16 July.
 24. NSS 54th Round. 2000. Survey results on cultivation practices in India. Sarverkshana, 24(1), 84th Issue, July-September. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.