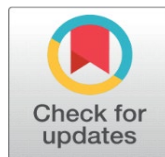
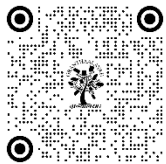


DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC WORKS IN INDIA: AN ANALYTICAL VIEW ON WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION

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ABSTRACT

The dynamics of domestic work are multifaceted and debates on women's undervalued domestic works in the last six decades remain inconclusive at policy level as majority of Indian women are still engaging in the unorganized sectors. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 4.75 million people in India are employed as domestic workers, of which over 80 per cent are women. Even if women's contribution is acknowledged in some aspects, they are still largely excluded from formal economic analysis globally. In this backdrop, this paper attempted to review the relevant literature critically and explores the dynamics of women's paid and unpaid work in domestic services by comparing their critical role in maintaining households and contributing to the economy. Further, the paper discusses the live experiences of Manipuri women's contribution in domestic services. The findings underscore the necessity of recognizing and valuing domestic labour to promote gender equity and social justice.

Keywords: Pay or Salary, Paid and Unpaid Works, Domestic Services, Women, Manipur, Etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women historically played an essential role for functioning their household and society as a whole all over the world, but, denied their rights for long in decision-making, political system, formal socio-economic set up, higher educational institutions, etc. Concerning over women-work issues has been an enduring preoccupation of researchers across disciplines for over five decades, particularly since the submission of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1975. Academic interest in women and work matter has arisen on account of changes in the way in which work has been conceptualized and increasing numbers of women in paid works, whether in formal institutions or as workers in others' households. Both represent a significant portion of formal or informal labour economies and recognized or unrecognized sectors. Problems of unemployment, poverty, and destitution have long been the stated concerns of development policy in most Third World countries and there is as yet not enough recognition that these problems are also gender-specific (Agarwal 1985 and Krishnaraj 2008). These problems are not exception to north-eastern states of India, instead, there are more issues like insurgencies, mob violence, ethnic conflict and inter/

intra border issues along with natural calamities and regional variations in most NE states. Some studies show the impact of such problems is more on the vulnerable sections of the society including women and children. Women of northeast India are highly visible as far as their economic contribution in unorganized sectors is concerned (Lilee 2019a & Singh 2013). However, there is a lack of systematic formal documentation on such issues and thereby it is severely impaired by the undercounting of women, both as workers and those available for work.

2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

In the above backdrop, this paper attempted to review the relevant literature critically. Secondly, it explores the dynamics of women's paid and unpaid work in domestic services by highlighting their critical role in maintaining households and contributing to the economy. Furthermore, the paper addresses the challenges faced by domestic workers unlike salaried employees, including job insecurity, lack of benefits, and exposure to exploitation, while emphasizing the need for improved labour rights and protections. Methodologically, this paper is relied on the secondary sources and field experiences of the researcher as it can provide insights into the experiences of women engaged in both paid and unpaid domestic work, revealing the intersectionality of class, region and gender in shaping their experiences. Before we start to discuss the major findings, let us explore the conceptual understanding of work and pay related terminologies in various official data or reports.

3. CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING ABOUT 'WORK, DOMESTIC SERVICES, PAY/ SALARY, PAID AND UNPAID WORKS'

Work: According to United States Census Bureau, work is defined as 'any activity performed by people of any sex and age to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for own use' (USCB, 2002:1). International Labour Organization (ILO) looks at 'work' by developing the concept of decent work, which is defined as being productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. This ILO's definition is endorsed by international community. The works performed by any individual will come one or another economic activity. Here, the United Nation Statistics Division (UNSD) system of national account revised in 1993 stated that there are three categories of individual's activities (i) economic activities; (ii) non-economic activities/ care work; and (iii) leisure and personal care activities (Neetha, 2010: 74-75). In case of India, Census 2011 defined 'work' as participation of individual in any economically productive activity with or without compensation, wage or profit and a worker is a person whose main work is participation in any economically productive activity. Census was the primary sources of data on employment in the country till NSSO started carrying out nationwide survey in 1990s (Srivastava, 2017). Though NSSO defined work as any market activity and any non-market activity relating to the agricultural sector, it ignored women's domestic works. The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is defined as the percentage of persons in the labour force among the persons in the population (NSSO, 2024a: 5). Therefore, both census and NSSO do not include attending to household chores as work or gainful activity (Singh, 2013: 75). Despite having changes in the definition of work/ workers in Censuses, pay wages or salary is being fixed or decided depending on the type or nature of formal or informal works.

Salary/ Pay: A salary is a set amount of money paid to an employee each year/ month and salaried employees often receive benefits and bonuses. More precisely, it is a fixed amount of money agreed every year as pay for an employee, usually paid directly into his or her bank account every month (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). In contrast, pay is general term for the money an employee receives from their employer. Hourly/ overtime pay system to an employee is the main feature of so called 'pay'. However, pay wages denotes an amount paid on the basis of hours worked on a daily or weekly basis depending on the time an employee spends on task. For this research, respondents are came under the category of 'pay wages', though they were treated as employees in the private registered service providing center. NSSO categorizes Indian workforce into three categories of employment and/ or activity status as (i) self employed; (ii) regular salaried; and (iii) casual labour. Within the 'self employed' category, there are three sub categories, namely, 'owned account worker', 'employer' and people who are working as 'helpers' in household enterprise and are not paid. From these categorizations, it is clear that women's domestic works is yet to be fully evaluated or enumerated though a higher proportion of the female workforce is always found to be concentrated in the 'self employed' category.

Domestic Works/ Services: All household based daily activities like cleaning, cooking, washing, gardening; child-rearing, elders caring, etc. are included in domestic works. Domestic services could be divided into paid and unpaid domestic works. The domestic activities performed at own respective houses without any payment for oneself or other

family members, that is known as unpaid domestic works, while paid domestic work refers to activities such as cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, elder care, and other household responsibilities, typically performed by individual outside their own homes with some agreed payment on hourly or weekly or monthly basis. However, Kothari (2015: 244) explained domestic work does not fit neatly into the conceptual categories or dichotomies between paid and unpaid work, and productive and reproductive activities. It is due to much work is extremely poorly paid and takes place outside the organized agricultural labor market. As far as definitional biases are concerned, Agarwal (1985: 158) said that 'in different Third World countries, census definitions tend to vary between two extremes, depending on the inclusion or exclusion of unpaid female family labour'. And these definitional differences had a huge impact of structural changes in the economy on female participation rates across the region. In these lines, many scholars debated the lack of clarification in defining 'work' and its allied terminologies in different official data/ reports/ documentations etc. across the country (Singh 2013, Srivastava 2017, etc.).

Despite having such differences at conceptual levels, it is universally accepted that all the household activities were dominantly performed by women historically. In other words, women's work is confined to domestic service encompasses both paid employment, such as housekeepers and caregivers, cleaner, washer, cooks, gardeners, etc. in others' household through registered Service Centre and unpaid household works in their respective families.

4. CRITICAL REVIEW OF WOMEN'S PAID AND UNPAID WORKS IN DOMESTIC SERVICES

Debates on the linkages between 'women and domestic works' is decades old concerned among the academicians, social activists, policy-makers and business minded people across the globe. Many studies on women's work patterns and its low evaluation are widely analyzed from multi-disciplinary perspectives since after World War-II. In other words, the linkages of women's lives and household chores are unavoidably connected and therefore it could be viewed from two dimensions within which they work – within own households without pay wages and outside their households with pay wages. In these lines, the following scholarly works are cited and analyzed:

Across the global and national contexts, unpaid domestic work remains undervalued in economic systems. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 4.75 million people in India are employed as domestic workers, of which over 80 per cent are women (ILO, 2013). Sen, Ahmed, Iqbal, & Mohammad (2022) emphasize the economic invisibility of women's unpaid work by highlighting the case of Bangladesh where it accounted for nearly 15% of the country's GDP in 2021. Similarly in India domestic labour is largely undertaken by women and it is systematically devalued, reinforcing gender inequities (Neetha, 2010; and Sankaran, 2013). Basu and Thomas (2009) extend similar analysis to women's roles in informal labour markets in Mumbai where they were found to be facing precarious employment conditions and significant gender-based disparities. They argue that globalization has exacerbated vulnerabilities, particularly for women in the informal sector, such as domestic workers and street vendors. The Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2023-24 (Government of India, 2024) reinforces these findings by illustrating persistent gender gaps in labour force participation and employment rates where women are found to be disproportionately engaged in unpaid or low-paid work. The report reveals that women's participation in formal employment remains significantly lower than men's, particularly in urban areas. The work of Bird and Ross (1993) highlights how unpaid domestic labour diminishes personal autonomy and control compared to paid work which further marginalized women. Likewise, Kothari (2015) said the necessity of women's domestic paid work is increasing for the sake of changing labour market and the overall Indian economy, but, studies on domestic servant continues to be neglected as the major focus is on women's labour participation in agricultural productions in rural India. Singh's (2013: 138) survey shows that the entire North Eastern India has as much as 60 per cent women workers and in the case of Assam alone 45 per cent are employed in tea plantations, the largest area of tea cultivation in the world. However, she found lack of education, poverty, backwardness, lack of awareness, underemployment and other evil still haunt the women labourers in Assam tea plantations. In a global perspective, Lan (2003) critiques the dichotomy between paid and unpaid domestic labour emphasizing its fluidity and structural continuities across public and private spheres. The amplified challenges faced by women in balancing paid and unpaid labour has been also emphasized in some studies. Glazer (1988) discusses the institutional reliance on women's unpaid labour in healthcare services in Pacific Northwest and Cookson's (2018) study in Cajamarca City highlighted state welfare programs showcasing how systemic frameworks exploit and undervalue domestic contributions.

The review of existing literature highlights that there is limited focus on intersectionality of the issue with caste, class, gender, and rural-urban divides influencing unpaid work burdens among the women. Secondly, previous studies

often overlook the economic valuation of unpaid care work, which hinders its integration into national income accounts. Thirdly, the impact of emerging factors like technological change and globalization on the division of domestic labour remains underexplored. Most importantly, policy-focused research is scarce in previous studies (Neetha, 2010; Sankaran, 2013; Basu & Thomas, 2009). Last but not the least, gendered nature of domestic services and labours were widely studied (Glenn, 1992) and acknowledged the urgent needs of valuing and scaling their works formally. These research gaps and findings of earlier research studies in national and international contexts can be crosschecked in Northeast India's Manipur state where socio-cultural norms are different. Altogether, despite growing recognition of the economic and social significance of unpaid work, gaps persist in integrating such labour into policy frameworks. Current literature under explores the regional and cultural specificities of unpaid labour within indigenous communities in Manipur, North-East India. This highlights the need for focused research on localized strategies to balance paid and unpaid labour while addressing broader structural inequities. In these backdrops, the following sections are reported from the relevant research on Manipuri women's contribution in shaping socio-economic development in the state.

5. LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN MANIPUR:

The above review of literature has shown a comparison of paid and unpaid domestic work reveals several commonalities, particularly in terms of the undervaluation of women's labor and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Both types of work are often seen as 'natural' extensions of women's care giving roles, which lead to their marginalization in economic and social policy. The low wages and poor conditions of paid domestic workers reflect broader societal attitudes toward domestic work as unskilled as or less valuable than other forms of labor, even though it is essential to the functioning of households and economies for their own home or other's household. Therefore, there are also important differences between paid and unpaid domestic work. Unpaid domestic work is often performed within one's own household, without direct financial compensation, while paid domestic workers are typically employed in other people's homes. The former is driven by familial and societal expectations, while the latter is shaped by labor market dynamics and economic necessity. Yet, in both cases, women bear the brunt of the labor burden, often at the expense of their own economic and personal development. In these contexts, Surdu & Surdu (2006) studied the participation of Romani women in the labour force as majorities (68 per cent) of them are not part of the labour market and described themselves as housewives.

In this analysis, paid services were confined with limited types of household activities like cooking, cleaning, washing, kids and elderly cares whereas unpaid domestic work at their respective homes, including all chores like cooking, cleaning, caregiving, kitchen-gardening and emotional labor, remains overwhelmingly the responsibility of women. Time-use surveys conducted in various countries consistently show that women spend significantly more time than men on household chores and caregiving activities, even when they also engage in paid employment (Lilee, 2019a). This 'second shift' dynamic, where women come home from paid jobs only to begin another round of unpaid domestic work, exacerbates gendered inequalities in time, health, and economic opportunities. Paid domestic labor, on the other hand, is often seen as a formal extension of the same household responsibilities women traditionally fulfill without compensation. Women, who work as domestic workers, whether as maids, nannies, or caregivers, are typically engaged in tasks that mirror their unpaid roles at home. Yet, despite being paid for their labor, domestic workers frequently experience poor working conditions, low wages, and limited legal protections, especially in informal employment settings. The low status of domestic work is tied to the broader societal perception that caregiving and household management are less valuable than other forms of labour. Many studies vividly showed the tight schedule and lengthy hours of women's invisible and undervalued contributions, but it is a never ending domestic works (Lilee 2019a, 2019b, 2019c., etc.). Additionally, one of the major challenges among working women is time management and how they keep balance between household responsibilities and duties at workplace.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the above gaps in recognizing domestic works as formal labour or valued works, some policies changes must be brought in to make paradigm shift in building a just, inclusive, and gender-equal India. Several policy measures must be implemented through a comprehensive and rights-based approach that can ensure the protection and empowerment of domestic workers in India. First and foremost, domestic workers should be legally recognized under national labor laws with guaranteed entitlements such as minimum wages, fixed working hours, paid leave, and access

to social security, etc. The ratification of ILO Convention No. 189 would align India with international standards and affirm its commitment to decent work for domestic workers. A national policy or a dedicated legislation specifically tailored to the sector must be enacted by incorporating gender-sensitive provisions. Employer-employee relationship should be formalized through written contracts clearly stating the clauses pertaining to wages, work conditions, and benefits so that arbitrariness and exploitation of the employees can be minimized. Placement agencies must be regulated through mandatory licensing and monitoring to prevent trafficking and abuse of the domestic workers. Access to social security must be expanded with schemes offering pension, maternity benefits, healthcare, and affordable housing, etc. Public awareness campaigns should be launched to educate both employers and domestic workers about labor rights, dignity of work, and the importance of contractual employment. Furthermore, policies should actively support unionization and collective bargaining and it will enable domestic workers to negotiate better terms and seek redress. Lastly, educational efforts at all levels should promote gender equality and equity to dismantle the societal stigma surrounding domestic work and affirm the essential contribution of domestic workers.

7. CONCLUSION

Historically, women have been associated with domestic and caregiving roles, often seen as extensions of their biological and social functions. This gendered division of labor is rooted in patriarchal systems, where men are typically positioned as breadwinners, while women are expected to manage the household and care for children, the elderly, and other dependents. Over time, this traditional arrangement has become institutionalized, with women's labor, particularly in the domestic sphere, rendered invisible and undervalued in both economic and social frameworks. This dual role, combining paid domestic work outside the home and unpaid responsibilities within it, highlights the deep-seated gender biases that continue to limit women's economic opportunities and social mobility. In other words, it is clear that the recognition or formalizing women's invisible and poorly evaluated household works has long way to go if the policy-makers or other concerned authority delay to intervene or pay attention. It may lead gender disparity in labour economy across the country. The findings underscore the necessity of recognizing and valuing domestic labour to promote gender equity and social justice. There is need for further extensive research on the relationship between paid and unpaid domestic work, how they reinforce one another, and the broader implications for gender equality and their labor rights.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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