

## **Chapter VII**

### **Some Interesting Case Studies**

- **Introduction**
- **Case Study**
- **Conclusion**

## 7.1: Introduction

In this chapter we would like to represent some detailed descriptions and the daily life of seven women domestic workers giving special importance on the emotional side of them. During our conversations our motive was to know about the salient features of the daily life of all the 200 domestic workers to study minutely their socio economic conditions, standard of living, their common problems in their work place or in their own house. Through different questioners, their replies and direct conversation with them we were able to bring out the hidden facts of their life. Among all the domestic workers we selected only seven of them to represent their daily life as these cases have seemed to be important to us. From all the cases we came to know that all the domestic workers are not happy at all in their social and conjugal life. They have to face many problems during their entire life. Along with poverty, they are verbally, physically, and sexually abused by their household members or by employers. They are exhausted by over work and they have no respect in the society at all. Moreover they are not paid justifiably by their employers. Their wages are often below the minimum wages fixed through the Minimum Wages Act. Even when the demand for domestic workers is high they have no voice to raise their wages. In most of the cases women domestic workers are the primary earner of their respective families. Their respective husbands or other family members who are entitled to earn have no responsibility to run their family. In the following section, we will tell a story of some seven women domestic helps who have contributed a lot for their family and the society in which they live (at least indirectly), who have suffered persecution, undernourishment, and untold miseries throughout their life.

## 7.2: Case Study

Now we are representing only seven real stories of individual domestic workers as were narrated by them at the time of personal interviews with them.

### 7.2.1: Case study 1

Menoka is unaware of the three Rs. She is of 45 years. She is a grass widow. Though she has two earning sons and their wives but she has to work as domestic help for her

own sustenance. From her childhood she used to work as residential domestic help due to poverty. When she was around 14 or so she was married to a hodman (construction worker) by her parents. After entering into her in laws house she understood that her husband had an illegal affair with one of their neighbourly sister-in-law. From then, her unhappiness started. She tried to break that unlawful relationship but her husband did not care her. More so he used to batter her every night when he was protested by his wife. Her husband went to work with that woman as they both worked as construction workers. Menoka decided to join construction work but her husband did not allow her. So she stayed at their house but often she used to go to the site where her husband worked to shadow him and to watch their relationship. As a result, the degree of oppression was raised day by day. In the course of time, she gave birth two sons one after another. When they were of three and two years old, Menoka's husband eloped with that woman in question mentioned earlier. They came back home after some days but Menoka refused their entrance to their house. Then Menoka was bound to join construction work to maintain her family. Her children were looked after by her mother in law in her absence. At the work place she got an offer to become residential domestic help at Siliguri. As the job of construction work was hard for her she decided to join work as domestic help. One day she started her journey by train with two men towards Siliguri. But when they crossed Siliguri after a long time she realized that they were going to other place than that of Siliguri. At last they reached at a remote place in Ghaziabad and settled in a house. Then she could know that she was sold by those persons for Rs 3000 only. Finding no other alternatives she stayed there and worked more than thirteen hours a day. She could not understand their language also. After about two months she disclosed her wish to her house master that she wanted to go back to her own place. As her master was good minded he wrote a letter to the address of Menoka's parental house. Thereafter Menoka's father with one young relative, who worked in Delhi, rescued back her from there. In Ghaziabad, that house master made a physical relation with Menoka and Menoka also enjoyed that illegal relation. After reaching her in-laws house she found that her husband and his new wife started living there permanently. She had broken down at all seeing all this things. She started working as hod woman (construction labour) and one day when she was carrying a cement full bag upstairs at a house under construction she fell down and got hurt on her spinal cord. After some treatment she again started working as residential domestic

help, because their house is at remote area from town, it could not be possible for her to commute daily and work as a charwoman. She cannot perform her work properly with her indifferent health and so she is abused by her housemistress all the times. Her House master is not so cruel or heartless and so sometimes it is seen that they provide the house assistance with medicine for her delicate health. Always she becomes unmindful for visiting her own house but she has to refrain herself from going back to their house as it will be more miserable for her.

### 7.2.2: Case study 2

Sumoti is a domestic help of 44. She is illiterate, married and comes of a scheduled caste family. She has two daughters and they are married also. They live at their in laws house. Before her marriage Sumoti did not do work as domestic help. But after marriage, she finds it difficult to run their family without her extra earning. Her husband is averse to do any work. His as a carpenter by profession, but he does not do any job regularly. Actually he is a lazy person and thus he wants to live on the income of his wife. So to maintain their family Sumoti works as a part-time domestic help in six families. In the morning after finishing her own household chores she has to sweep, swab, carry water, pestle spices, wash clothes, and wash smudged utensils all through the day in her masters' houses. But these are not the cause of her sorrow. Her unhappiness comes from her husband's character. His behaviour is like something of a ruffian. Everyone in their locality and their family is always afraid of him. He has also other elements in his quality. He is having sexual affair with other women keeping aside his own wife. When he desires he calls them in their house and stays with them together with the knowledge of his wife. At that time Sumoti has no alternative but to share the same bed with them. Her in laws also do not approve his activities. But they cannot protest strongly as because he is very much adamant. But when the case is such, even though she has an invisible attraction for her husband and always she remains restless to care for her husband. Otherwise, she does not have any major complain about her employers. However she has to put extra labour gratis when she is asked to do extra work. She cannot ask for extra payment for extra labour as she is not so out spoken but she always murmurs for this. Sometimes she absconds from her duty and visits her daughter's house when she is morbid because of her errant husband. But at that time her employers become annoyed with her for her absence without notice.

When she returns they grudge at her. She bears everything thinking of her husband's bad relation with her.

"All this for my unfortunate luck and for my sin in the previous life and I have to bear everything." She revealed her ill luck during our conversation. "I accept everything because my parents are dead and I have no place to turn to for solace". But she told that some of her employers are sympathetic and help her with money though their domestic works suffer for her absence at the time of her mentally and economically disturbance.

### 7.2.3: Case study 3

Rina is a girl of 18 years. Her father was dead when she was of 5 years old. From the next day her mother has been a domestic maid to cope with their family expenditure. One of their neighbours found out one family who wanted Rina to join their family as a residential domestic help. They agreed to keep her in their house only in exchange of food as she was not well aware of household works during that time. At that time they need that type of helping hand very much because her mother was helpless and she had to go to work leaving her daughter at home alone as most of the master's families did not like their maid with her daughter at the work place. Now Rina lives at her master's house. At first stage most willingly she learnt all the domestic jobs from the housemistress. Her housemistress is more or less good. They care for her as she is apart from her mother and they are sympathetic to her also. Now she has been quite apt at doing all the domestic chores. She starts her day at about 6 O' clock. After that, she sweeps the floor, dusts all the furniture, swabs all the floors, dresses vegetables, spreads bed, pestles spices one after another. Besides, she helps her house mistress in all her works like cooking, doing up all the things in order etc. She washes clothes sometimes. When it becomes necessary she does shopping for her master's family also. When she goes out of her master's house she feels the sense of liberty and so she likes to do shopping. She takes care of their youngest kid Rimpa very carefully. Her house mistress is very much dependent on her in respect of Rimpa. Rimpa also loves Rina very much as she has been seen there from her birth. Occasionally Rina takes leave of absence from her master's house and visits her mother and spends some days there. Her mother feels satisfaction and relief thinking that her daughter is in a safe custody.

But now-a-days Rina is facing a problem. When she bathes in the bath, she feels that Remap's elder brother, who is of 18, tries to see her through the slit of the door. He tries to find her in the nude. When she has detected that she is being watched secretly she is so puzzled that she was unable to decide what to do and not to do. At that moment she was out of her nerves and she was hesitating to disclose the incident to her mother. Now-a-days, whenever she comes in front of the boy she becomes shameful and hangs her head. She knows that if she will disclose everything to her house mistress immediately she will be discharged from this house for the allegation against their son and for the safeguard of the boy knowingly the fact. shelter.

#### 7.2.4: Case study 4

Basona is a literate domestic help. She studied up to class viii. Now she is of 52. Her husband was dead 14 years ago. He was a service holder in police department. But when he expired from heart failure he was a retired person. Basona got married to him by her parents. But at that time they were not aware that he was a previously married man. She narrated her miserable story to us. There was an arranged marriage. Most of the time his first wife stayed at her paternal house at Raigunj for an unknown reason. Probably for this reason he needed a second wife who would stay with him. Parents of Basona were very happy thinking that they got a service holder son-in-law and their daughter's future is more or less assured. During the time of second delivery, Basona became aware of her husband's past affair. Some of the mid-wives were whispering that this person had two wives and two were admitted into hospital at the same time for their separate delivery. "I was stunned hearing this fact. He hoaxed me and my parents." Said Basona. Being angry she left her husband and took shelter at her paternal house. But after some days she came back to her husband with her child. It was not possible for her to stay with her siblings and their wives at her paternal house. Thereafter her husband was staying with Basona most of the time. Basona gave birth to four more children one after another at the interval about one year. She was passing more or less good days with him. After retirement suddenly he expired from heart attack putting his head on the lap of one of their daughters. After his death his first wife claimed his pension and other grants as she was his first and legal wife and she received all money sanctioned by the government. Basona consulted with a lawyer and he promised her that he would arrange for Rs 200 per month. She did not agree to

receive this scanty money and she denied this proposal. Now she thinks that she did wrong not receiving it .If she had received this proposal then that money would be a hefty amount now. Therefore, after her husband's death she was obliged to do work for their bread. From then onward she has been run her big family indigently. She tried her best to educate her children .Her three daughters were literate up to class ix, x and xi. They get married also .Her remaining two children studied up to class vi and viii. Now she has an acute pain in her stomach and her waist. For this reason she has been admitted to hospital for her treatment. When she takes medicine she comes round but after stopping her medicine the disease comes back. For her poor economic condition she cannot take proper treatment .Now she works in three houses. When she was in hospital for one month, one of her housemasters deducted money out of her wages. As she is of ill health she cannot do all types of housework .She only washes smudged utensils in three houses .One of her daughters also works as domestic help in two other houses. Now she is in the hope that her only son who is studying in class viii will be educated properly and will relief them from poverty.

#### 7.2.5: Case study 5

Sudharani Barman, a domestic help of fifty years old, lives in a slum area popularly known as Saheb Coloni.She is a widow. She has two sons and one daughter. She has been working as a domestic help for the last five years or so after the death of her husband. Her husband used to earn money as a hod man (construction worker) .Sudharani kept herself busy in kitchen work and other household jobs. After her husband's death Sudharani was bound to earn money for their sustenance. As she was unskilled and illiterate, she obliged to become a domestic help which requires a general skill of housekeeping .She started earning and meeting their family expenditure somehow. Her two sons also started working as carpenter and plumber respectively. Her first son was married. But two years ago he eloped with a married woman from their neighborhood .His first wife is staying at her paternal house now. Sudharani's second son also eloped with another married women and their whereabouts are not known to her.Sudharani put her daughter into marriage two years back. After marriage she with her husband is staying at her paternal house i.e. in Sudharani's house. From then Sudharani and her daughter's family are living separately in the same house. So now Sudharani is alone and she works in two houses as domestic help. She gets two-

time meals at her masters' houses. Her monthly cash income is Rs 300 only. She does not have to cook meals for her own. So with this small amount she can manage her other expenditure. At night she takes puffed rice or bitten paddy with molasses. She works for about seven hours in these two houses. She goes there one time a day as her masters' houses are far away from her own house. She has to go to her place of work on foot and has to cover three to four kms. to reach her work place. She is suffering from a severe leg pain. So she has to walk with much hardship. Besides, very often she is prone to vertigo. Occasionally she sees a doctor at hospital for her own treatment. But most of the time she avoids doctors because of the high rate of rickshaw fare. Moreover, if she is absent from her working houses, her house masters become annoyed with her. "I was absent from one of my working houses for three days in last month. They kept all the smudged utensils for me to wash. When I entered into their house after three days, the house mistress started abusing me. I thought I would be discharged from my duty. So I finished all the leftover work which were undone for these three days with my ill health without any grudge," Said Sudharani. She has no bank account. She used to think that when her two sons would be able to earn they will run their family and look after their mother. So she did never think of savings. Now after meeting her own expenditure she has nothing to save. Presently, she has none to look after her and therefore she feels very lone and insecure.

#### 7.2.6: Case study 6

Women are the victims of violence and oppression. They bear the brunt in almost all the places in our country. We get one case where the female domestic worker experienced burning by her co-wife (allegedly said that).

Kamalini Roy, a domestic help of 25, lives in a slum at Hazrapara which is raised alongside the embankment of the river Torsha of Cooch Behar district. She narrated her miserable story of her life to us. When she was about 18 or 19 she fell in love with her would be husband who was a hawker at the new Cooch Behar railway station. But she was totally unaware of the fact that her would be husband was married. However she eloped with him and was married by him at a temple before the Goddess Kali. After marriage she was staying at her husband's house. They and her co-wife used to live together with a partition in the same room. The co-wife could not accept Kamalini

whole-heartedly. When Kamalini was pregnant one day at dawn, her bed got fire as stated. She was confident that it was committed by her co-wife. Upper portion of her waist were almost burnt by fire. She was admitted to hospital by her husband and some neighbours. She lost the hope of her survival. The police came to the hospital to enquire about the incident. She did not blame anyone as she thought that she would be dead and all might be in happiness. But she was survived. She was lying in the hospital bed long for six months. She gave birth to a girl child and it would die. After her recovery her appearance became deformed. Her chin and breast stuck together and as a result her throat could not be seen. Doctor advised her husband to take her to Siliguri for her better treatment. The cost of her treatment would be more or less Rs 10,000. But the question was where they would get the money from? After releasing from hospital she had to go back to her paternal house where her step mother stayed at. Her father was ailing and aged. Most often her husband used to come there. Thereafter when she became pregnant again her husband took her to this slum with her God parents. After that she could not keep contact with her husband as he was trying to avoid her. Now her son is about seven years old. His father does not provide any expenditure for his son. When Kamalini was trying to get in touch with her husband he flatly denied their relations. He expressed that there is no proof of their marriage. She went to Panchayet for a right judgment. But in vain. The Panchayet also did not believe their relationship. Now she is very much upset and indisposed also. She is suffering from acute anemia. Her periods are not regular for the lack of blood. Doctor prescribed her some medicines and advised her rest. But how that would be possible for her? For the sake of her child she works as a domestic help in two houses. Due to her ill health she cannot work in more houses. Her son also does not have a good health. He is suffering from asthma. He was admitted to hospital more or less six times during his acute suffering. Kamalini had to stay at the hospital with him and could not able to attend to her works during those times. Moreover doctor told her that this kind of disease would be continued for another four or five years. Kamalini has a pain in her chest. For this she sees doctor in hospital. She does not know how many days she has to continue this type of condition. She has no grievance against her masters' families. During the puja festival she gets two saris as gala dresses and some cast-off garments are given to her son. As her health does not permit she feels insecure least she will be discharged during their illness.

### 7.2.7: Case study 7

The case study of Puja Rabidas, a 17 years old girl of Kalabagan Slum area in Cooch Behar depict the extreme sexual harassment of domestic helps by their house master or so. They are two brothers and one sister and are living with their parents in a hovel. Her mother was also a domestic help and worked in three houses. Her father Ramdas was almost unemployed .Seldom he worked in a shoe factory and got Rs.25 only for that day. So to run their family Puja started working as a domestic help when she was in class VI. Gradually she left her study and at last dropped her education .Her brothers were younger than her and they were reading in class IV and V then. Her father was ailing very much. His liver became larger and water was gradually settling in his stomach. So he was admitted to the M.J.N hospital. Doctor advised to undergo a surgical operation .But they did not dare. This was their family condition. Her mother is a worldly woman and tries to cope with their family expenditure desperately. Puja started working for the first time in a doctor's house. She used to get Rs. 900 from that family in lieu of all types of domestic chores like sweeping, swabbing, washing clothes, cleaning utensils, dressing vegetables, dusting furniture, fetching water from hydrant, pestling spices and what not. Even she has to press their hands, legs or body when situation demands. The ill motivation of her house master was not understood by Puja at the beginning. Her house master used to change her garments in front of her. Puja thought that he considered her very close to their family and she is like his daughter and so he did not mind. But Puja used to feel embarrassed and became ashamed of his behaviour. But she could not disclose anything to her house mistress or her mother as they might think her guilty. Thereafter the house master started raping her in the absence of the house mistress day after day and used to threaten her life if in case she would disclose this fact to anybody. When she became pregnant she could not realize her conception .As she was feeling uneasy her mother took her to a doctor for her treatment .After testing her urine it was revealed that she was carrying. Everybody became at their wit's end. Her mother decided to abort her child. But her relatives and neighbors advised them to file a case against the house master and she should not abort the child to prove guilty of her house master. During that time the situation was so hazardous that they did not decide their own what to do and what not to do. They

did everything being tempted by their neighbours and relatives. At last the baby was born and that house master surrendered. He was in lock up long for three months. Now the case is going on and he is released on bail. Now-a-day, her child and she is living with her parents and working in two other houses. Their neighbours joke with them and abuse them indicating that child. Puja has the belief that her house master will not be punished as they are rich and has influence over high rank officers. She will have to spend her days with an utter shame and her child will be suffering from being an illegal child though the baby is totally innocent.

### 7.3: Conclusion

From the detailed descriptions of the seven women domestic workers' daily life it is felt that they are oppressed in their masters' houses as well as in their own houses day after day by their conscienceless husbands. Some way or other they may be considered as oppressors. Keeping aside their wife they hoax other women, cheat their wife and keep illegal relationships. they consumes liquors, they do not bear any responsibilities of their family members, they are devious about their wives' activities more so they gamble at cards with their wives money without caring their protest. In the name of advice or instruction domestic workers have to bear beating, abusing, kicking almost all the days. Sometimes they suffer being their legal wife and sometimes they suffer being a paramour. In one of our case studies it was seen that one domestic worker experiences burning by her husband and his legal wife jointly. Not only husband even their able sons do not take the responsibility of their ailing mother. Besides they face problems in their masters house also. Sexually assaultment is a common phenomenon for most of the domestic workers. Many house masters wait for this kind of opportunity to avail. The maid cannot protest as it is a shameful affair and they are being oppressed almost every day. One of the case studies shows the experience of the domestic workers being sold. So becoming a selling object is not uncommon to the domestic helps. If luck favours, they can come back to their own house. Some domestic workers start working in their childhood owing to their fathers' death or parents' small income and some are obliged to be domestic helps after their marriage to maintain their family. They have to take much workload in their masters' house as well as in their own houses. Their ailing health do not permit them to work more but alas! Who will look after their family in her place? Different types of insecurities attack them and they burn

in themselves. Whether they can continue their profession till death, whether they continue their conjugal life till the last days of their life, how long they can have a safe custody are the main burning questions in their life. So the fear of losing their jobs, malnutrition, separation from family, loneliness, exploitation by their family and house masters affect the mental health of the women domestic helps to a great extent.