

Chapter – III

WOMEN AS DOMESTIC WORKERS

It is found that among all categories in the informal sector, earnings of domestic servants are lowest and their problems are many. They are being employed generally for household tasks which include washing utensils and clothes, fetching water, sweeping and cleaning house along with a few outdoor tasks like irregular marketing, grocery shopping, ration drawing even childcare activity. Clearly, one of the main differences between paid and unpaid domestic work is that former involves following a work routine, which is imposed by the employer's order rather than evolved for oneself (Cock 1989). In fact, many of these women are looking after more than one household but spend more time and work far more for their employer's than work in their own household.

In many studies the focus has been on women's labour participation in agricultural and allied activities often erroneously considered to be only form of paid work available to the women of lower strata. In fact, in many rural areas female labourers work as domestic servant, often combining this employment with agricultural work on a seasonal and even daily wage basis (Kothari 1991). Hence domestic work contributes a substantive type of employment and generation of earnings for many women.

3.1 Paid Vs. Unpaid Domestic Work

Two types of domestic work can be found in practice namely, paid domestic work and unpaid domestic work. While a maid is employed for doing sundry household tasks on the basis of agreed wage payment, the daily activities performed by the maid in the respective employer's household may be termed as paid domestic work. On the other hand, the time spent by a male or female folk in different activities of own household may be termed as unpaid domestic work. Paid household work is always visible, but unpaid one is often invisible.

A United Nations (1991) report on women's work patterns based on surveys made across countries of the world gives a summary of women's devotion of time to both paid and unpaid economic activity. The findings are as under:

- i) Women spend more of their time working than men folk in all developed and developing regions except northern America and Australia where the working hours are almost equal.
- ii) In developing countries, women spend more time in the labour force than their household work. Men, by contrast, are spending less amount of time working in the labour force than before in all developed regions and slightly increasing amounts of time in housework in northern America, Australia and Western Europe.
- iii) In Africa, Asia and the Pacific, women work as on average 12 – 13 hours more than men per week.
- iv) Men in developing regions generally do less household chores than men in the developed regions.
- v) Women everywhere in the world have nearly total responsibility for housework. While men 'help out' women retain the responsibility of housework.

Since the unpaid domestic workers do not manage all household tasks, often they have to employ an additional paid domestic worker in their household. The demand for or dependency on paid domestic maids among middle class families is on the rise because of the following reasons:

- i) Men spend very little time on their daily indoor household activities and a slow increase in household work by men (Juster 1985, Ramu 1987, Spitze 1988, Thompson and Walker 1989). Hence it becomes impossible to do all necessary household tasks by an unpaid female folk.
- ii) While woman of a household is employed, her husband does not show any substantial increase in the amount of family work they do (Kammaeyer 1987). Obviously, dependency on paid domestic workers increases.

3.2 Problems Faced by Domestic Workers at Work Place

The general problems faced by the female domestic servants at work place are as under:

- i) The domestic workers are not satisfied with their present wages and they expect more. It is true that the wage levels of domestic maids are much less than not only what they need, but also lower than their male counterparts who often do almost comparable type of work.
- ii) The workers often express their grievances for imposing extra work burden by the employers while guests come. The extra money for that additional work is not sufficient. A lump sum amount is paid for extra work. Often, the employer does not pay anything.
- iii) Few employers have a tendency to deduct wage for absence in work.
- iv) The employers do not permit any extra leave. As a result, they have to attend work regularly leaving any urgent personal necessity.
- v) Many workers face sexual harassment by their male employers. Verbal sexual harassment by the male employers is some thing that is generally very common. This is one of those problems at work place that only women face and it is probably one of the few problems that may be perpetuated by male employer.
- vi) Most of the workers being less educated, the awareness to form a union is lacking among them. As there is no such domestic servants' unions formed across the country, they cannot raise their voice against employers negative attitude.

- vii) The real wages in the form of food, cloth etc. are not sufficient. Sometimes quality of food provided by the employer is inferior.
- viii) Often nature of work may vary from one day to another or volume of work rises day by day in the employers' house. Then the workers have to do all tasks with initial agreed wages. The employers do not offer any extra wages for increasing workload. On the other hand, workers do not protest because of getting fired.
- ix) So far as the annual increment of wages is concerned, a few domestic workers enjoy the benefit.

3.3 Work and Wages of Domestic Workers

More or less all middle and upper class people employ preferably female domestic servant in their households. The female domestic workers can be categorised as thika¹ workers, full time workers and residential workers. The thika workers serve for 3-4 hours a day in a household. They work in 2-3 houses daily. However, number of households to be served by thika workers largely depends on their efficiency and capability to work. On the other hand, the full time workers serve in a single household for maximum duration of 8 – 10 hours daily which includes a part of idle time. The employers normally provide them one time meal. Often, thika workers demand for one time meal while there is a heavy workload. The residential workers stay at employer's house and they are provided two time meal. The residential workers do all works of the employer's household. Apart from these three types of domestic maids, another type of domestic worker may be found. They are part time 'occasional or emergency' workers who serve for a few days on a purely temporary basis when any emergency arises in a household. They generally work in the present employer's neighbour's household for a very short duration.

The tasks performed by all types of domestic workers are almost same. They perform a bunch of work such as cleaning utensils, sweeping and

cleaning rooms, washing clothes, fetching water etc. The cooking is generally delegated to the efficient workers. This skilled task is not assigned to lower class workers, because higher caste employers do not allow schedule caste or schedule tribe women to enter their kitchen. However, caste is not a matter for other household tasks. More-over, some allied tasks are to be carried out by the domestic maids namely, minding little children, daily marketing, looking after house etc., but their number is small.

Therefore, the activities performed by paid domestic workers are similar to those carried out within their own household, although specific tasks and ways of carrying them out may vary.

One domestic maid described her workday as under:

I come to Bowdi's ² house at 7 a.m daily. While I reach at Bowdi's house, she gives me a cup of tea and biscuit. Then I go to fetch water from nearby drinking water tap. The containers are heavy and often I have to make double trip. I can meet my friends at the tap and we interact until our return. Every day I have to stand in a long queue for fetching water. Sometimes Bowdi shouts at me do not waste so much time at tap, there is a lot of sundry work to do. After getting back from tap I have to assist Bowdi regarding breakfast and food preparation, because Dada ³ goes to office at 10 a.m. Then I clean house and wash clothes. I have to wash 6 – 10 clothes daily. Then I clean bathroom. After they have eaten, I wash dishes and utensils. In most of the days, I do not eat there. I go home at 12 noon with my food and cook for my family. I again come back at 3 p.m and again go to fetch water. After washing utensils and sweeping the rooms, I watch movie on the television at Bowdi's house. I go back my house at 5 p.m. On my way home, I collect firewood. I earn Rs. 300 per month, but the amount is insufficient for the survival of my family.

One domestic worker complained:

I have to wake up early in the morning to prepare food for my family. I leave my children unfed so that I can arrive at doctor's house to wash and dress his children.

Most of the domestic maids carry out all domestic tasks except cooking. It is generally thought that cooking involves some skill and expertise, moreover being a time consuming process, therefore can not be done efficiently by a domestic servant. In lieu of cooking in the employer's household, they can serve in more than two households at a time.

Domestic workers are often to do tasks for other members of their employers' guests, particularly during special occasions. During this time, domestic workers can carry out necessary preparations together with other workers. Although, this involves a lot of work but many workers enjoy the change from daily monotonous routine work that they are to perform and it is one of the few occasions while they can work together. However, one woman described the problems faced at such time:

I had to work for the whole day a week because of Didi's ⁴ wedding. All they gave me was little extra money and a sari ⁵. My children came with me, but they were simply neglected. The employer's extra money does not help with all that work.

Domestic workers carry out other tasks, which are not linked with domestic workers. Domestic maids are often sent as messenger from one woman to another. While for example, a neighbouring household requires a maid, the employers of the household already having worker sends her domestic servant to persuade her fellow friend to work for other. This role as messenger provides the workers with a degree of power as the employer may depend on her for additional need of worker in future.

Since domestic workers are required to work extra hours, they become unable to maintain their own domestic responsibilities. As a result, their husbands and other household members ask for negotiation against extra demand of the employers. The worker(s) addressed:

The employers want us to work more particularly during special occasions, but our husbands get angry. One day my employer wanted me to stay and work in the evening. Initially, I did not agree because I am to cook for my family. I required money for my child's education, so I did the work. Sometimes my husband gets angry because of serving extra hours for the

employers. While I work overtime, then I do not have enough hours for looking after my own household.

Thus, domestic workers have to combine different types of work in order to survive and must organise their time with a view to meeting all duties properly.

So far as the wage is concerned, it is based on the nature of work, number of members in employer's household, size of the house or number of rooms, time to be spent etc. Wages paid for performing allied activities is generally higher than usual household work. Among all types of domestic workers, thika servant is paid least. The residential workers get more wages in cash in addition to their daily real wages than a thika maid. The wages of full time and residential workers do not differ so, but latter enjoy more real wages than former. Besides, part time occasional or emergency workers always expect high wage from the employers and their total earnings at the end of the part time job become lucrative as compared to their average earnings. Apart from the cash wages, domestic maids received new clothes and festival grant in cash.

The wages of domestic servants may vary from one region to another. It is found that rate of wages in semi urban areas are comparatively lower than urban areas. This is because, supply of domestic servants in semi urban areas is often more than their demand and sometimes workers belonging to semi urban areas have no bargaining capacity. However, still the wages of domestic servants are low in comparison with other workers in the informal sector.

3.4 Domestic Workers' Organisation in India

A good number of female has been absorbed in the households as domestic servants in India. They have been paid low wages and exploited from maltreatment to sexual harassment by their male employer. In India, a few organisations have been set up for looking after the interest of the domestic maids. The organisations dealing with problems faced by domestic servants are as follows: (Thakur et. al. 1994: 45-50)

1. *Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum*

A new phenomenon in the city life of Delhi is the formation of Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum. It had 1,500 members in 1994 and runs three centres in Delhi, members of which meet every Sunday to discuss problems faced by the member domestic servants. The forum has been able to arrange for a weekly holiday for the maids and only 8 hours of work every day. The forum also tells the maids what their rights are and what kind of legal action they can take in case of harassment by the employers.

2. *The Religions of Mary Immaculate, Delhi*

It is in fact a welfare organisation for the maids in Delhi. The institute acts as an employment agency. Besides stepping into resolve problems of sexual abuse or the maids not getting along with employers, the institute also negotiates wages for the maids and imparts them vocational training, classes in English conversation and typing to the domestic servants of Delhi.

3. *The Housemaids Service Home, Chennai*

This home at Chennai imparts three months training to its members before they are considered suitable employees. During this period, they are thought how to conduct themselves, how to deal with the employers and how to handle modern household gadgets. After training, they are employed with the 4,000 odd registered employers. The home negotiates the wages for the maids and for the first few months, they are asked to deposit their earnings with home, which in turn deposits their wages in bank accounts in the maids names. The home thus looks after the interest of both the workers and their employers.

4. *Helpful Hands, Calcutta*

Gaytri Chopra, a former airhostess is the organiser-cum-chairperson of the agency, Household Hands in Calcutta. It has 200 plus registered servants in its jurisdiction. A maidservant who wants to become a member is required to get some form of identification (ration card, landlord rent receipt etc.). The identities are verified by the local police and the person registered. They are then placed in various categories such as cooks, general maids, part time maids etc. and Helping Hand makes sure that they get employment in the areas,

which suit the individual servant's requirements and they are placed accordingly as per their ability and the budget of the employers.

5. *Pune Household Maid Servants Union*

All the four organisations stated earlier work for the betterment of the maids, but they are not the unions of their own. Pune Household Maid Servants Union is the only union of women domestic servants in the country. This was set up in 1991 and at present has 3,000 plus odd strong members. They had even organised two hartals, when one of their members was fired for being absent from work for one day. After the agitation, the maid was taken back by the employer. The union has worked out a charter of demand, which is being followed up by the employers in Pune. Their demands include an increase of Rs. 30 to Rs. 50 a year to neutralise the inflationary effect, a minimum wage of Rs. 20 for sweeping and mopping one room and Rs. 30 per person for washing clothes and utensils, besides a yearly bonus.

Although all these organisations have some common goals and objects, but these have separate entity. These organisations are playing a crucial role in mobilising the workingwomen of lower social strata by addressing economic needs and human right issues. As a result, they have built up appropriate leadership style and gathered self-confidence. With the increasing support of these organisations they are getting equitable wages along with incremental benefits, which turns into improvement of their standard of living.

Since there is a few unions in the service of domestic servants in India, their power to face collectively against wage exploitation and for better working condition is also too minimal. Still, the concept of unionism among the domestic servants has not developed properly. In fact, union movement in the informal sector is not easy to organise. The difficulties arise due to the following reasons (Chhetry 1999).

- i) There is not permanent work force in any particular occupation, the workers always try to switch over from a low paid occupation to high paid occupation in the informal sector.
- ii) Workers do not have common interest as the nature of work differs from one occupation to another.

- iii) Most of the workers are less educated, the awareness to set up a union is lacking among them.
- iv) The workers of the informal sector do not have spare time.
- v) Union in the formal sector have indulged in so much violence that the workers of informal sector, particularly the women, have a strong distaste for it.

Therefore, with a view to gaining the status of domestic servants and consider themselves as the economic agents of equal importance of their male counterparts, their mobilisation is almost desirable.

3.5 Findings of the Survey of Field Investigation

The field survey on 200 female domestic workers randomly selected from 200 households of Cooch Behar and Dinhata. The following is the general findings of the survey.

□ Age Wise Distribution of Female Domestic Workers

The main concentration of the domestic workers was in the age group of 25 to 34. It is interestingly found that percentage of girl child and old women workers were not significant. Their percentages were only 4 and 3 respectively. The survey reveals that the workers belonging to the age group 45 and above were 17.5%. The old servants were hired occasionally by the employers and they were generally employed for cooking. However, the demand of the young adults was on the rise among the employers.

Table 3.1

Age Wise Distribution of Domestic Workers

Age	Number of Workers	Percentage
Below 14	08	4.0
15-24	33	16.5
25-34	99	49.5
35-44	25	12.5
45-54	29	14.5
Above 54	06	3.0

❑ Religion Wise Distribution

The survey reveals that percentage of Hindus workers was far higher than Muslims. It is observed that only 7% of the workers belonged to Muslim community. Generally, the higher caste people did not employ Muslims workers.

Table 3.2

Religion Wise Distribution of Domestic Workers

Religion	Number of Workers	Percentage
Hindu	186	93.0
Muslims	14	7.0

❑ Caste Wise Distribution

Another feature that had been noticed in the domestic service was that 88.5% of the workers belonged to schedule caste category and only 11.5% belonged to general category. No worker belonging to other caste was found. Schedule caste women were mainly 'Rajbanshi' ⁶ and among the general category, few of them immigrated from Bangladesh.

Table 3.3

Caste Wise Distribution of Domestic Workers

Caste	Number of Workers	Percentage
Schedule Caste	177	88.5
Schedule Tribe	0	0
General	23	11.5

❑ Proportion of Immigrants and Natives

It is surprising to note that few of the domestic servants immigrated from Bangladesh. Although the reported percentage was not significant, but their number is on the rise. The number of native domestic workers was 183. Therefore, domestic servants and maids have tended to focus on the international migration of women labourers (Heyzer 1994).

Table 3.4

Nature of Domestic Workers

Nature of Workers	Number of Workers	Percentage
Immigrants	17	8.5
Natives	183	91.5

□ Educational Level of Female Domestic Workers

The general educational standard of the female domestic servants was very low. The table 3.5 shows that 89% of the workers were illiterate. Only 11% of the workers had schooling experience. Out of 11%, 9.5% had primary education and 1.5% had education beyond the primary level. Only one woman had passed class VIII standard.

Table 3.5

Educational Level of Domestic Workers

Educational Level	Number of Workers	Percentage
No Education	178	89.0
Upto Primary	19	9.5
Class V to Class VIII	03	1.5

□ Marital Status

The female domestic servants after getting married continue to remain in the labour market unless they are married in an economically solvent family. Generally, it is found that female maids get married persons who work in the same sector. As a result, with a view to supplementing husband's income, they have again to involve in pre-marriage occupation. Table 3.6 discloses that percentage of married workers in the survey was 68. Out of 136 married workers, 108 workers worked as domestic maids since before marriage. Only 7% widow and 6% separated women workers were observed from the survey.

Table 3.6

Marital Status of Domestic Workers

Marital Status	Number of Workers	Percentage
Unmarried	38	19.9
Married	136	68.0
Widow	14	7.0
Separated	12	6.0

□ Nature of Employment

The nature of employment of all domestic servants did not identical. Someone preferred to work as thika maid, but other might like to serve as residential or full time worker. It is found that majority of the domestic workers preferred to work as thika servants on the assumption of more earnings. Table 3.7 shows that 81% of the workers served as thika labour, while 6% of the workers stayed in the employers' households. Thika and full time domestic maids lived in nearby locality, but most of the residential maids migrated from other districts or villages. Out of 12 residential maids, 7 were from different regions of North Bengal. A good number of employers preferred to employ adolescent maids, because they could easily be directed and motivated for household work. Their probability to leave the employer's household was also minimal.

Table 3.7

Nature of Employment of Domestic Workers

Nature of Employment	Number of Workers	Percentage
Thika	162	81.0
Full Time	26	13.0
Residential	12	6.0

□ Mode of Recruitment

The recruitment of the domestic workers may be done either through employers' own effort or through workers' own effort. Sometimes would be employers' neighbour's effort as well as fellow workers' effort play a vital role in recruitment of domestic workers. In fact, direct recruitment through employers' own effort constituted 36.5%. Table 3.8 shows that as far as the recruitment of domestic maids was concerned workers' own effort and their fellows' effort constituted 49%. While would be employers' neighbour's effort was only 14.5%. Generally part time maids were employed with the help of neighbour.

Table 3.8

Mode of Recruitment of Domestic Workers

Recruitment Through	Number of Workers	Percentage
Employers' Own Effort	73	36.5
Workers' Own Effort	36	18.0
Employers' Neighbour's Effort	29	14.5
Fellow Workers' Effort	62	31.0

□ Rationale for Choosing the Job

Two types of domestic maids can be identified from the survey. One group of workers was not breadwinners of their family, but willing to serve as domestic servants for income supplementation. On the other hand, most of the domestic maids were working to earn their livelihood.

The first group of workers started working mainly after giving birth of first child. According to them, they preferred and enjoyed the work. But most of the respondents were forced to do this job to feed their family. According to them, there was no alternative way to earn money with such a little education.

Economic compulsion was the main reason behind taking the job as domestic maids (91.5%). 5.5% of the workers reported that they had chosen the job for supporting their husband. A few percent of workers served for independent income (3%). There was no worker in the findings who worked for passing out idle time.

Table 3.9

Reasons for Choosing the job by Domestic Workers

Rationale	Number of Workers	Percentage
Economic Compulsion	183	91.5
Income Supplementation	11	5.5
Independent Income	06	3.0
Passing out Idle Time	0	0

□ Daily Distance Commuted by Female Domestic Workers

Domestic servants were found to commute daily to work place. Normally, they were seen to come from nearby villages or locality. The daily commuting distance of the domestic servants has been shown in the following table.

Table 3.10

Daily Commuting Distance of Domestic Workers

Commuting Distance	Number of Workers	Percentage
0-1 km	122	64.90
2-4 km	48	25.53
5-7 km	11	5.85
8-10km	07	3.72

It appears from the table 3.10 that 64.9% of the workers excluding 12 residential maids resided in nearby locality. 25.53% of the workers had to travel 2 k.m to 4 k.m and 9.57% of the workers had to travel 5 k.m to 10 k.m twice a day.

Mode of Transportation

A majority percentage of workers had to travel on foot to reach at work place (78.72%). 14.36% of domestic maids reported that they availed their husband's rickshaw ⁷ to arrive at work place. Only 6.92% of the workers used other mode of transpiration like bus or train.

Table 3.11

Mode of Transportation of Domestic Workers

Mode	Number of Workers	Percentage
Foot	148	78.72
Rickshaw	27	14.36
Other	13	6.92

Family Size

Most of the servants came from the family having more than four members (91%). With the increase in family size, earnings of the husband became insufficient, as a result female moved out in search of job.

Table 3.12

Family Size of Domestic Workers

Size	Number of Workers	Percentage
1-4	13	6.5
5-8	182	91.0
Above 8	05	2.5

❑ Number of Children

So far as number of children was concerned, it is found that majority of the workers had more than two children (62.18%). 17.95% of workers had more than four children. While the workers were asked for family planning programme, they did not show any interest.

Table 3.13

Number of Children of Domestic Workers

Number of Children	Number of Workers	Percentage
1-2	31	19.87
3-4	97	62.18
Above 4	28	17.95

❑ Educational Level of Children

Many workers were conscious about their child education. Most of the workers having school going children employed a private tutor with a remuneration of Rs. 100 to Rs. 150 per month. Domestic maids did not want their children to join the labour force. They wanted to educate their children, although some of the workers did not think about their higher education. If children want to continue study, their mother will provide financial assistance to them by working extra hours. It is reported that 27.56% of the workers' children went to primary school.

The presence of illiterate children was 33.34%. Three children were found to have passed secondary examination and only eight children were below the age of formal education.

Table 3.14

Educational Level of Children of Domestic Workers

Level of Education	Number of Workers' Children	Percentage
Illiterate	52	33.34
Below the Age of Formal Education	08	5.13
Up to Class IV	43	27.56
Class V to VIII	42	26.92
Above Class VIII	11	7.05

Note: Maximum educational level of a child of each worker was considered.

❑ Expenditure on Child Education

A major portion of total earnings of female domestic maids was spent on their child education. Most of them informed that they joined the work force to educate their children. 42.71% of the female workers incurred expenditure up to Rs. 100 per month on child education, while 44.79% of the workers incurred of Rs. 101 to Rs. 150 per month for the child education.

Table 3.15

Expenditure on Child Education of Domestic Workers

Monthly Expenditure	Number of Workers	Percentage
Up to Rs. 50	16	16.67
Rs. 51 - Rs. 100	25	26.04
Rs. 101 - Rs. 150	43	44.79
Above Rs. 150	12	12.50

❑ Level of Participation in Own Household Task

The workers had to serve for their own household also. The thika and full time maids had to simultaneously manage their own family. The following table shows the level of participation of domestic maids in own household work.

Table 3.16

Level of Participation in Own Household Task by Domestic Workers

Household Tasks	Self	Husband/Other Members	Jointly
Washing Clothes and Utensils	176(93.62)	02 (1.06)	10 (5.32)
Water Collection	185(98.40)	01 (0.54)	02 (1.06)
Fuel Collection	105(55.85)	60 (31.91)	23 (12.24)
Food Preparation	188(100.00)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Maintenance of House	57(30.32)	71 (37.77)	60 (31.91)
Childcare	176 (93.62)	08 (4.26)	04 (2.12)

Figures in the parentheses are percentages.

Only thika and full time workers were considered.

It is found that apart from the employer' sundry household works, maids had to do a lot of tasks for their own family. The domestic servants had nearly total responsibility for own housework. It is also noticed that their

husbands spent a little time on the large bulk of daily indoor activities like washing clothes and utensils, water collection and cooking. Hence, majority of the household work was to be carried out by the maid herself.

❑ Amenities Possessed by Female Domestic Workers

It is reported that 98.5% of the workers owned a house. The workers living in a rented house was 1.5% and they had to pay monthly rent of Rs 100 to Rs. 150. Majority of the workers were unable to purchase anything extra for the family. Most of them had no additional amenities except minimal requirements. It is also found that even women who had been working for more than ten years failed to save sufficient amount of money to buy durable. Not more than 18 women possessed a radio set. Only two women owned watch.

Table 3.17

Amenities Possessed by Domestic Workers

Type of Amenities Owned	Number of Workers
Radio	18 (9.0)
Watch	02 (1.0)

Figures in the parentheses are percentages.

❑ Occupation of Husbands of Female Domestic Workers

The occupation of the husbands of the workers was mainly concentrated in the informal sector. They engaged in work as casual labour or rickshaw puller. 4.73% of the workers' husbands did not work at all. Majority of the men folk (56.08%) pulled rickshaw and their earnings were irregular. 4.73% of the workers' husbands were good for nothing and they often spent time in playing cards or taking hard drinks.

Table 3.18

Occupation of Husbands of Domestic Workers

Occupations	Number of Workers' Husbands	Percentage
No Work	07	4.73
Casual Labour	58	39.19
Rickshaw Puller	83	56.08

❑ Mode of Torture by Husbands

Often torture of the husbands became unbearable. They tortured either physically or mentally. The workers were forced to earn more by their husbands. This is a special kind of mental harassment. 32.43% of the maids reported that torture of the husbands started in their life for more income. Sometimes workers were beaten by their respective husband on account of negligence of own household tasks (12.84%).

Table 3.19

Mode of Torture by Husbands of Domestic Workers

Mode	Number of Workers	Percentage
No Torture	81	54.73
Physical Torture	19	12.84
Mental Torture	48	32.43

❑ Causes of Torture by Husbands

The torture of the husbands was generally for more earnings and irregular attention to children and other family work. 67.2% of workers complained that their husbands tortured them because of irregular attention to children and other family work. Besides, 32.8% reported that their husbands always shouted at them for more earnings. As a result, they had to work for more than a single household.

Table 3.20

Causes of Torture by Husbands of Domestic Workers

Causes	Number of Workers	Percentage
More Earnings	22	32.8%
Irregular Attention to Children and Other Household Work	45	67.2%

❑ Availability of Refreshment and Food at Work Place

It is rational that maids should get refreshment like tea, bread etc. and minimum one time food at work place irrespective of their nature of work. Among the respondent workers, 50.5% enjoyed refreshment only and 36.5% got food either once or twice a day depending upon their nature of

employment. 13% of the workers did not get any type of refreshment and food at work place.

Table 3.21

Refreshment and Food Provided by Employers of Domestic Workers

Availability	Number of Workers	Percentage
No Availability	26	13.0
Only Refreshment	101	50.5
Refreshment & Food	73	36.5

Employers Attitude toward Workers

The domestic servants had grievances against the employers. 18% of the workers reported that they were considered as chakrani⁸ in the employers' households. However, many employers treated their domestic maids as a family member (65.5%). A few employers also commanded excessively over the workers (5%). Besides, The maids faced other type of gender specific forms of discrimination and oppressions at their work place. A severe problem women workers faced was that of sexual harassment by the male employers (11.5%).

Table 3.22

Attitude of Employers toward Domestic Workers

Attitude	Number of Workers	Percentage
As Family Member	131	65.5
As Chakrani	36	18.0
Excessive Command	10	5.0
Sexual Harassment	23	11.5

Trust Worthiness of Employer and its Extent

The extent of trustworthiness of employers was not always satisfactory. 51% of the maids reported that their employers trusted on them moderately. The high trustworthiness among the employers was only 4.5%. Some employers had no trustworthiness at all (6%).

Table 3.23

Level of Trustworthiness of Employers of Domestic Workers

Level	Number of Workers	Percentage
No Trustworthiness	12	6.0
Low Trustworthiness	77	38.5
Moderate Trustworthiness	102	51.0
High Trustworthiness	09	4.5

❑ Workers' Participation in Allied Activities of Employers' Household

Sometimes the workers had to participate in doing allied activities in the employer's household. These were in addition to the regular household tasks. Daily marketing, ration drawing, childcare activity etc. were often found to be performed by the domestic maids where in general husband and wife both were employed. The percentage of the workers involved in such activities is 16.5. The workers complained that they had not been paid enough for doing these allied tasks. Often they had been provided a lump sum amount at the end of every month. Instead of doing such activities, they preferred to earn by serving another households. They did not really like such activities. This is why 83.5% of the workers did not take participation in such activities.

Table 3.24

Participation in Allied Activities of Employers' Household by Domestic Workers

Mode of Participation	Number of Workers	Percentage
No Participation	167	83.5
Daily Marketing/Ration Drawing	07	3.5
Acting as Messenger	11	5.5
Childcare Activity	15	7.5

❑ Number of Households Served

The number of the household to be served by the workers largely depends on the physical capability of the individual servant. It is found that young adults served in more than two households at a time (52%), while old aged maids served in a single household. The middle aged maids preferred to work

as thika worker and old ones like to serve as full time maid. It is found that 13% of the workers served in more than three households daily.

Table 3.25

Number of Households Served by Domestic Workers

Number of Households Served	Number of Workers	Percentage
Less than 2	69	34.5
2-3	104	52.0
Above 3	27	13.5

□ Work Experiences of Domestic Workers

The table 3.26 shows that 51% of the domestic maids had work experiences of 7 – 11 years, while 30.5% of the workers had been working for 12 – 16 years. 14% of the women had more than 16 years experiences.

Table 3.26

Work Experiences of Domestic Workers

Years of Work Experience	Number of Workers	Percentage
2-6	09	4.5
7-11	102	51.0
12-16	61	30.5

□ Income Contribution to Family

Very often the contribution that a female servant makes to the family determines her status in the household. The earnings of the workers are considered to be right fully at disposal of the household. But there is no or a very little concept of women's autonomy to control over their own earnings. The table 3.27 shows that most of the female domestic servants contributed to their household in the range of Rs. 200 and Rs. 300 per month (82%). 5.5% of the respondents had a contribution of Rs. 300 to Rs. 400, while 3% of them did not contribute at all.

Table 3.27

Income Contribution of Domestic Workers

Monthly Contribution	Number of Workers	Percentage
No Contribution	06	3.0
Up to Rs. 200	19	9.5
Rs. 201 – Rs. 300	164	82.0
Rs. 301 – Rs. 400	11	5.5

❑ Saving Potentials

Few workers were very much concerned about the potentiality of savings. They saved a part of their earnings either at post office or at home. It is interestingly found that a few employers convinced the workers to go for saving. A few maids deposited a certain amount in the post office every month thinking for the future (2.0%). However, majority of the workers had no any saving potentiality (86.5%) although they were eager to save, but a limited fund did not permit.

Table 3.28

Saving Potentials of Domestic Workers

Mode of Saving	Number of Workers	Percentage
No Saving	175	87.5
Post Office Saving	4	2.0
Home Saving	21	10.5

❑ Daily Work Profile of Domestic Workers

Table 3.29 shows daily work profile of female domestic maids of various age groups. The table is arranged taking into account of average activities performed by them. Column 2 reveals activities of an adolescent girl. Column 3 shows activities of a maid in middle age group and column 4 discloses a day of a woman in the old age group. The daily tight schedule of the domestic servants has been presented as under:

Table 3.29

Daily Work Profile of Domestic Workers

Time	Young Age Group	Middle Age Group	Old Age Group
5.00 a.m	----	Rises	Rises
5.30 a.m	----	Fetches water and cleans own house	Fetches water for family
6.00 a.m	Rises	Feeds children	Prepares breakfast for family
6.30 a.m	Takes breakfast	Prepares breakfast for family	Attends work place-1 and takes breakfast
7.00 a.m	Goes to work place and does domestic tasks	Goes to work place-1 and washes utensils, clothes, cleans rooms	Does domestic work at work place
8.00 a.m	Helps in cooking at work place	Takes breakfast at work place	Prepares food at work place
10.00 a.m	Does other work at work place	Goes to work place-2 and does work	Goes to work place-2 and prepares food
12.00 noon	Returns home	Attends work place-3 and does work	Returns home
1.30 p.m	Helps mother at home	Returns home and cooks for the family	Takes rest
2.30 p.m	Takes food at work place	Takes rest	Takes food at work place
3.30 p.m	Washes utensils and sweeps rooms	Washes utensils and sweeps rooms	Returns home
5.00 p.m	Returns home	Returns home and washes clothes	Interacts with neighbour
7.00 p.m	Helps mother at home	Prepares food and feeds the children	Takes food
8.00 p.m	Takes food	Takes food	Goes to bed
9.00 p.m	Goes to bed	Goes to bed	----

3.6. Few Typical Case Studies of Female Domestic Workers

A few cases of female domestic workers were studied thoroughly. This section deals with these case studies.

Case I: Manju (26), a fair complexioned Muslim lady with a smiling face is the mother of three children. She has been working as a maidservant before her marriage. She has no education at all. The poor socio-economic condition of the family compelled her to join the workforce. Her husband being a rickshaw puller often returns home late in evening. Her two children go to school. Manju is working in two households as thika servant and she has to face some community problems in the work place.

Manju wakes up early in the morning and prepares breakfast for her family. Her daily working time is from 8 a.m to 1 p.m and from 3 p.m to 6 p.m. In between 1 p.m and 3 p.m, she has to cook for her own family and do own household tasks. As her husband is lazy-bones, Manju has to do all work in her household. After returning home, she has to wash clothes and prepare food for the family. After getting married, Manju had to further involve in the workforce because of her husband's insufficient and irregular income. She contributes fifty percent of her earnings for household consumption and rest amount kept aside for her child education. Her total monthly emolument is only Rs. 300. She has employed a private tutor for her children with a monthly remuneration of Rs. 100. Manju wants to educate her children and she is ready to take extra workload for more earning if her children like to go for higher education in future.

Case II: Shima (42), belonging to a middle class family, has been working as a domestic maid during last three years. She is a fortunate mother of an educated daughter. Shima arranged marriage for her daughter after her passing secondary examination with a person having agriculture farmhouse. Of late, her daughter has been employed as nurse in a private nursing home. Shima is very much happy for her daughter's achievement.

Shima addressed her life story as follows:

Three years ago Shima was happy in her family. Her husband is a homoeopathist and Shima acted in a theatre group in her village. One day while her husband remarried, Shima did not mind. She tried to adjust with her co-wife but slowly her husband started torturing and neglecting her. In early 1999, she left her native village for seeking a job in the town and joined the informal labour force as domestic maid. Recently, Shima lives in a rented house. She is serving in two houses daily. Occasionally, Shima cooks in wedding ceremony. Often, she has to receive advance money from the employers for paying house rent. According to her, 'I entered the labour force for mere survival and I never thought that I have to take such kind of job instead of serving for my own family'.

Case III: Sobha (36), an unfortunate woman, is working in doctors' houses. She lost her husband while her child's age was only twenty days. Hence she started working sixteen years back under very pathetic condition. She was forced to take up job as domestic maid due to the economic compulsions.

Sobha got married at the age of 17 years. She never thought that she has to join the workforce. Her husband was a driver of doctor's car. As a result, economic condition of her family was more or less sound. Sobha always tried to educate her son, but her son dropped out after completion of primary education. Sobha decided to send her son to work in a garage. But few days later, her beloved son left the garage and become a vagabond. Sobha further decided to marry her son while he was only 15 years old. Accordingly, her son got married. But, Sobha's son does not want to work at all and prefers to spend time without working. Her son seems a quite irresponsible member of the family. As a result, her daughter-in-law had no alternative other than to work in order to earn their livelihood.

Sobha gets up at 4 a.m and does the necessary household work. She starts her journey on foot at 6 a.m commuting 4 k.m daily for attending workplace. She is working in two doctors' houses with a monthly wages of Rs. 200 each.

Now a day, Sobha is happy and she told, “my daughter-in-law looks after my family and she at least understands me”.

Case IV: Alea (53), proud mother of a son, had joined the labour force twenty years back while her husband was very sick. The family was in need for money for the medical treatment of her husband and Alea had to search for work. Alea’s husband was a handloom weaver. They had some agricultural land in the village, which was sold out for the treatment of her husband, but her husband was not completely cure. At last, Alea lost her husband. Initially, Alea used to cook in a hotel for ten years. She left the hotel because of tight schedule and heavy workload and consequently joined as domestic maid.

Recently, Alea is a grandmother of two grandchildren. Her son is a petty trader and her daughter-in-law is working as bidi labour. According to her, “majority of the employers do not prefer to employ an old aged maid. Since, I am working for more than five years in a household, they do not assign me a lot of work rather tells me to work as per my capacity. I think I just want to work, because it gives certain amount of independence too. I really enjoy the work”.

Class V: Jamuna (17), a smart, good looking, unmarried girl used to work as residential maid three years back under very tragic condition. She was forced to take a job while she lost her mother and her father remarried. Her father and stepmother were not looking after Jamuna and her brother. She was severely beaten by her stepmother who scolded her, “do not waste time at study, there is a lot of household tasks to be carried out”. She discontinued study and took shelter in a house as residential maid. Her younger brother permanently left the house.

Initially Jamuna worked for six months in a household. She had to work from 6 a.m to 10 a.m daily with a monthly wages of Rs 300. The quality of food provided in employer’s household was inferior. Her daily work started from fetching water and ended with cleaning and preparing bed. According to her, “Kaku⁹ and Kakima¹⁰ went office, but Kaku took food at home in the

lunch break. One day, I was sexually harassed by Kaku and decided to leave the house". Recently, Jamuna is working in a businessman's house who at least realise her problems. They love Jamuna like a daughter and never treat as a maid. The present employer gives two-time heavy food daily apart from a cash wage of Rs 400 per month. Jamuna has purchased a golden ring for her and she saves her earnings into the post office.

3.7 Summary

The demand for women domestic servants among middle and upper strata people in the Cooch Behar district is generally fulfilled from native women and often domestic service contributes a substantive form of employment and generation of earnings for many poor women in the district.

The domestic tasks can be classified as paid domestic work and unpaid domestic work. The paid domestic workers generally perform a series of household tasks such as cleaning utensils, sweeping and cleaning rooms, washing clothes, fetching water etc. However, the cooking is assigned to the expert workers. The wages of the female domestic workers are very low compared to other workers in the informal sector. The domestic servants enjoy both money wages as well as real wages.

The female domestic servants have to face a lot of problems at the work place which include low level of wage, a minimal pay or no pay for extra work, absence of leave facility, sexual harassment by male employer etc. These problems can never be overcome until the concept of unionism is developed among the female domestic workers.

The economic compulsion is the main hardship for taking the job as domestic servants. The general educational status of the female domestic workers in the district is not satisfactory. A major proportion of the domestic servants have to travel on foot to reach at work place. A good number of domestic servants in the district are conscious about their child education. The workers contribute a lion part of their earnings to the family and few of them have saving potentials too. Since wages of the female domestic servants are very low, they have been worst exploited.

Notes

1. Thika is used to denote piece rate.
2. The term Bowdi means wife of elder brother.
3. Dada means elder brother.
4. Didi implies elder sister.
5. A piece of cloth worn round the loins by Indian women.
6. A lowly Hindu caste chiefly of North Bengal.
7. A three-wheel cart driven by human being.
8. A derogatory local term to indicate the maidservant.
9. Kaku means uncle.
10. Kakima stands for aunt.