



WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN URBAN SLUMS OF VIJAYAPURA

Dr. Ramesh M. Sonkamble

Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Akkamahadevi Women's University, Jnanshakti Campus Torvi, Vijayapura-586105, Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS:

Domestic, Women's, Slums, Gender, Problems

It has been already pointed out that a large number of studies have been conducted on slums which highlighted the problems of infrastructure, crime and mafia gangs. However, very few studies have focused their attention on the problems of slum women. Women react to the forces of modernization, urbanization, industrialization and especially, the schemes of development and welfare initiated by the Govt. of India. In the last few decades slum women are more exposed to modern forces like mass media, political parties, employment opportunities which to a long way in empowering women. One may ask what happens to slum women when they face to face with the challenges of modernization

INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have been conducted in India on slums (Desai & Pillai, 1996; Ranga Rao, 1998; Naidu, 1986; Siddiqui, 1988; Venkatarayappa 1998). They describe and analyze slum activities vividly. Their emphasis is more on economy and physical facilities available, social organization, crime and deviance etc. According to these studies, slums lack basic infrastructure and are alienated and isolated from the main city. This was true a couple of decades ago.

After Independence, the govt. of India, in conformity with the constitutional provisions of a welfare state has launched several programmes and schemes to improve the socio-economic conditions of the slum people by providing water, electricity, roads, housing, schools and health services, hereby integrating them with the main stream of urban life.

Besides, the Govt. has opened several health services schemes such as primary health centers etc. With the expansion of medical education, private doctors are rushing towards slums to earn a livelihood and establish permanent practice.

Paul D. wiebe (1997), in his thesis "Social Life In An Indian Slum", proceeded to study Channanagar in Madras with the assumptions that slum people are changing. To quote his words "Channanagar was in the process of becoming a relatively permanent and livable residential area, one where the people were in the process of making a way for themselves, not one that appeared either comparatively "hopeless" or especially blessed by particularly outside assistance programmes.

The above studies indicate that there have been far reaching changes in slums. They are no longer isolated and alienated. They are not part and parcel of the urban community.

Slum Women

It has been already pointed out that a large number of studies have been conducted on slums which highlighted the problems of infrastructure, crime and mafia gangs. However, very few studies have focused their attention on the problems of slum women. For example, how to slum Women react to the forces of modernization, urbanization, industrialization and especially, the schemes of development and welfare initiated by the Govt. of India. In the last few decades slum women are more exposed to modern forces like mass media, political parties, employment opportunities which to a long way in empowering women. One may ask what happens to slum women when they face to face with the challenges of modernization.

Domestic Workers

The concept of 'Domestic Worker' is a recent phenomenon. It is also an urban phenomenon. Prior to independence and in the early years after independence, women from lower castes did work as domestic workers. But since their number was very small, they did not form a significant group in urban society.

With the advent of Independence, a number of changes have taken place, the rapid growth of population and introduction of industries led to the growth and expansion of towns and cities with the development of urbanization and industrialization, expansion of higher education-liberal, technical and professional, white collar jobs became part of the occupational structure. The expansion of higher education, especially for women with a focus on their economic empowerment, created large scale employment opportunities for them. Consequently, education men and women began to seek employment in organized sectors.

The Emergence of Domestic workers as a District Category of Urban Work Force

Changes in the larger social structure in terms of education, employment, transport and communication, mass media, have affected the system of the urban family. Employed men and women due to want of time, could not discharge their domestic chores as efficiently as possible. As a result, domestic workers began to emerge as the essential support system to shoulder the domestic chores in the middle and upper class households. With the passing of time domestic servants have become an inevitable and integral part of the family system in urban areas.

Problems of Domestic Workers living in Slums

In the last few decades women's problems are being studied by sociologists, social workers and demographers. Women's struggle in India has been largely focusing on important issues like prostitution, domestic violence, and sexual discrimination at work place, dowry and issues pertaining to women's rights. One major issue which has not yet received the attention that it deserves is that of women domestic workers, which is a problem that concerns both adult women and young girls.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the thesis is the study the plight of women domestic workers in the slums of Vijayapura. The specific objectives are:

1. To know study the socioeconomic background of the respondents
2. Whether the respondents want to pursue domestic service as a long term job,
3. The impact of employment of their empowerment,
4. The pattern of exploitation at work place,
5. Whether there are any Govt., programmes to help them, and,
6. Whether any NGOs are working in the slums for the upliftment of the respondents.

HYPOTHESES

The hypothesis is that the women domestic workers are an exploited lot. However there are signs of change in their attitudes, values and patterns of the specific hypothesis are:

1. A majority of the respondents are from the lower castes and class
2. A majority of the respondents tend to pursue domestic service as a fulltime and lifelong job,
3. A majority of the respondents are being exploited by the employers.
4. There are no Govt. programmes to help them
5. There are no NGOs to help the respondents.

Meaning of "Women Domestic Workers"

The Phrase "Women domestic worker" in this thesis is understood as those women who are employed to discharge domestic chores such as cleaning utensils, sweeping the floor, washing clothes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Thornback (2000) studied the poor women in a slum on the outskirts of Colombo (Sri Lanka) and partly with the poor women in the largest slum of Bangkok (Thailand). The study dealt with the lives of the slum women, their relations with other people and their ways of thinking. She explains how urbanization intensifies the gender struggle.

Fernandes (2007) explains how urbanization affects women adversely and how women have internalized in themselves the ideology of subordination. She dealt with how women develop coping mechanisms to deal with insecurity that results from migration. Tandon and Niraj Kumar (2003) say that the conditions of women in slums in general, and of socially under privileged women in particular are most pathetic. Most of these women are engaged in activities which are amongst the poorest of the poor in the working class. Their jobs offer no attraction and require a great deal of physical ordeal. This study has shown that in spite of many developmental programmes most of the socially under privileged women are still suffering. Early marriages, having many children illiteracy etc., are very common among them. The study suggests that to improve the conditions of the socially under privileged slum women it is imperative to work upon the selected income generating activities and provide all sorts of help and information including training in the required areas. Rama Swamy (2000) studied the problems and future expectations of women workers in a submergible slum. Devasia's (2008) Book on "Empowering Women for Sustainable Development" elucidates the struggle of women in slum areas of Nagpur. They explain how slum women fought against all odds because they realized that there were no alternatives to sustainable development other than their own improvement.

Ramana (1998) in her study "women in slums" dealt with the socio-cultural aspects of slum women. Specific stress has been laid on women, as very few studies on women have been conducted. The thrust of the present study was to study women, their lives, their work and their struggles. Therefore, it was proposed to take up a micro level study of the women in slums, who are less privileged and to look at their lives, their travails and their struggles.

Studies on Domestic Workers

A large number of studies have been conducted on working women (Astige, 2006). C.P. Rai in his edited book "Working women and Children (2002)", published articles on "Women Sweepers", "Women Street Vendors", "Women construction Workers", Women in Readymade Garment Industry". Different authors brought out of working women in the semi-organized sectors.

Butler (1997) has pointed out that domestic service was unique, because the personal considerations involved were so all important and because the employer of such labour did not have it in order to produce goods for sale in a fiercely competitive market.

Mehts's (2002) work revealed that male domestic workers received Rs.50 per month and young workers who did not have anybody to take care of them were in much better position than the aged workers since they were provided food, clothing and shelter by their employers.

Gracious Thomas (1998) found that women domestic servants were being tortured, abused and assaulted by their drunkard husbands.

Udaya Mahadevan (1978) wrote an article on the "Plight of women domestic workers". The author analyzed the working conditions of women domestic workers. Nayak and Nayak (1995), in their study on "Women domestic workers in South India", narrated the way women domestic workers were exploited by mediators.

Ravichandran (1993) conducted a research project on "A study on the socioeconomic conditions of women domestic

workers residing in south Pudur slum". Ravichandran has brought out the deplorable socioeconomic conditions of women domestic workers. Women domestic workers were paid low wages and suffered health problems.

Miranda and Mahadevan (1995) have assessed the socioeconomic and health conditions of women in the Tank bund Road Slum, Madras. The findings indicated that more than 50 percent of the employed women were part-time domestic workers and most of them were employed in more than two houses.

In her article on "An appraisal of psycho-social problems of young and old female domestic workers", Nalini Devi (2005) attempted to study the socioeconomic and psychological problems of female domestic workers. The sample for the study consisted of 80 female workers, which was further divided into two equal groups of young and old workers comprising 40 in each group, selected randomly.

The results revealed significant differences between the young and old women workers with regard to aspects such as desertion, physical and mental health.

Varadharajan (2007) conducted a research project on "A study of the problems of women engaged in domestic work in the states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu". The objective of the study was to portray the exploitation of domestic women workers. The study revealed that a large proportion of them were exploited.

Kavita M. Huli (2012), made a study of "Attitudes of Domestic Servants towards Small Family Norms". The study was conducted in Gulbarga City, Karnataka.

The findings revealed that a majority of the respondents had favourable attitude towards family planning and the Small Family Norm.

An article under the title "The Female Domestic Servants and Social Change in Lima, Peru" appeared in the Encyclopedia of Women and Development" edited by Rajkumar (2010)

The article discusses about the poor socioeconomic background and how they are exploited by their employers. The article also discusses about unions and their effect on domestic servants.

S. Ranjani in his article, Economic Conditions of Urban Female Domestic Helpers: A Case Study" studied the economic status of urban female domestic helpers in

Tiruchirapalli: 2007. The study reported that the domestic workers have to work daily at least 10-12 hours. The monthly wages are never enough. They are used to eating state food. They are ignorant about insurance or PF (Provident Fund). They often fell ill. According to the author, "Talking about social security to these women, even the most vociferous trade unions, and political parties have ignored them"

Slums of Vijayapura

Slums have come to stay as an integral part of cities all over the world. A comprehensive definition of slums is difficult because the slum phenomenon manifests itself differently in different periods and times. Broadly a slum refers to areas, primarily residential, which are overcrowded with houses that are unfit for human habitation. A general lack of civic services and environmental hygiene, a pervasive squalor, and inadequate approach roads within or without, characteristic most of the slums.

In the present study a slum is understood as recognized by the slum board of Karnataka as such according to the slum Board of Karnataka, a compact area of at least 300 population or about 60-70 households of poorly built congested tenements, unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure and lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water conditions. A distinguishing feature of the slums is that a majority of the able bodied women are engaged in part time/full work both in the organized and unorganized sectors.

UNIVERSE AND METHODOLOGY

The study would be conducted in the Khaja slum located on the periphery of Vijayapura city. Women of Khaja colony engaged in domestic service constitute the units of study, a list of slums was obtained from the Assistant Executive Engineer, Karnataka Slum Clearance Board, No-3 Sub-division, Vijayapura.

According to the Board, there were 107 slums identified by NGOs. Out of the 107 Khaja slums which are close to the city was purposively selected. The reasons are: 1) A majority of the slum women are engaged in one or the other earning job in Vijayapura, and 2) the investigator is familiar with the Khaja colony.

The population composition of the Khaja colony is given in table-1

Table-1 Respondents by Sex and Religion

Religion	Male	Female	Total
Hindus	510 (64)	560 (72)	1070 (63)
Muslims	284 (36)	216 (28)	500 (37)
Total	794 (50)	776 (50)	1570 (100)

Source : Slum Clearance Board, Vijayapura

* It is reported that an NGO by name FEDINA for the last 10 years with the slums in Vijayapura. According to it there are about 752 domestic workers (women) in the Khaja Colony. Out of 752, ¼ or 2015 respondents studied.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is important in the sense that the Govt. of India, in conformity with the constitutional provisions, is striving towards the uplift and development of the poor and disadvantaged.

The proposed survey acquires more significance and relevance in view of the memorandum submitted by the

domestic servants to the Govt., on the Celebration of Domestic Workers Day on Jan 9, 2016. Their demands include recognition of enactment of the Unorganized Workers Bill in the State, constitution of a separate Board for Domestic Servants and Social Security Fund, enforcing minimum wages notification effectively and to have properly weekly offs, maternity leaves and grants for medical expenses, halt

trafficking of workers and control the placements agencies through a system of license and to provide timely police assistance to protect them from the harassment and ill-treatment by their employees.

It is reported that the government, would soon constitute a welfare Board for Domestic workers soon. It would ensure protection of rights and social security for them (Deccan Herald, 10.01.2015).

It could be observed from table-1 that an overwhelming majority of the sample consisted of Hindus (63%) while the remaining (37%) were Muslims. Data further show that a majority of the males and females from among the Hindus constituted the sample. In short, the population in the universe viz., Khaja Colony consisted of more Hindus than Muslims.

CONCLUSION

Slums have come to stay as an integral part of cities all over the world. A comprehensive definition of slums is difficult because the slum phenomenon manifests itself differently in different periods and times. Broadly a slum refers to areas, primarily residential, which are overcrowded with houses that are unfit for human habitation. A general lack of civic services and environmental hygiene, a pervasive squalor, and inadequate approach roads within or without, characteristic most of the slums.

REFERENCES

1. Astige, S. (2006). *Role and status of working women*, New Delhi: Anmol.
2. Butler, C.V. (1916): *Domestic Services*
3. Desai A.R., and Pillai SD (1970), "Slums and Urbanization" University of Bombay, Bombay.
4. Fernandez, W. (1991). "Urbanization, coping mechanism and slum women's status", *Social Status*, Vol. 41, Oct-Dec. pp. 382-39
5. Gracious Thomas (1992): "Status of Female Domestic Workers", *Social Welfare*, May.
6. Holt, T.F. (1969): *The Dictionary of Modern Sociology*, Totowa NJ, Littlefield Adams.
7. Stewart E.W. (1978): *Sociology*, McGraw Hills, Book Company, New Delhi.
8. Tandon and Niraf Kumar (1994): "A Study of Employment Status in Income Generating Activities of Socially underprivileged slum women" *Social Action*, Vol. April-June, pp.69-76.
9. Tellis Nayak and Jessie, Tellis-Nayak: "Women Domestic Workers in South India, the paradox of bonding and bondage", *Social Action*, ISI, Delhi Oct-Dec. Vol.34, No.4, 1984.
10. Thorbek, S. (1994), "Gender and Slum Culture in Urban Asia", New Delhi, Vistar.
11. Uday Mahadevan (1989): "Plight of Women Domestic Workers", in (Ed) R.K.Sapru: *Women and Development*, New Delhi: Ashish.
12. Varadharajan, D. (1988): "A study of the problems of women engaged in domestic work in the states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu" Unpublished Report Madras, Madras School of Social Work.
13. MacIver (1965): *Society*, McGraw-Hill, London.14.
- Mirand, A and Udaya Madhavan (1988): *Socioeconomic survey of families in Tank Road Slum*. Unpublished Report Loyala Institute, Madras.
14. Nalani Devi, (2002): "An appraisal of psycho-social problems of young and old female domestic workers", *Journal of Community Guidance and Research*, Vol. 19, No.1, pp. 101-106.
15. Rai, C.P. (Ed.) 2002: "Women construction workers" *Working Women and Children*, Vol. 2, New Delhi, Anmol.