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**Status of Domestic Workers in India:
A Tale of Two Cities**

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Kingshuk Sarkar**



**Gujarat
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Gujarat Institute of Development Research
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Abstract

Domestic workers form an integral and critical part of informal sector labour diaspora. All the characteristics of informality exist in domestic labour. There is no written contract, no conventional method of wage determination, multiple household employers, total absence of social security, very little government intervention, a distress livelihood option, and lack of decent work environment. Using inferences from NSS 68th round unit level data on employment and unemployment (schedule no. 10) and data collected through primary survey in two cities namely Ahmedabad and Kolkata this paper makes an attempt to depict the status of domestic workers in India. Findings from the data from these two contrasting cities do validate the vulnerability of domestic work as an occupation and lack of legislative protection. There are little dissimilarities, but basic findings are in conformity with primary characteristics of domestic work in our country. Although this sector follows locally determined informal norms and practices, there are no formal terms of employment. Wage determination is based on local socio-economic milieu and extent of prevailing economic distress characterizing the labour market. There is complete absence of social security mechanism, lack of mobilization, state intervention and prevalence of indecent work-space.

Keywords : Domestic work, Labour legislation, Labour welfare, Informality, Compensation/Wages, Working Conditions, Workers' rights, Kolkata, Ahmedabad

JEL Codes : I3, J0, J330, J46, J47, J81, J83

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Status of Domestic Workers in India: A Tale of Two Cities

**Amrita Ghatak
Kingshuk Sarkar**

1. Introduction

Following the Convention No. 189 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) “domestic work” is defined ‘as the work performed in or for a household or households and “domestic worker” means any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship’¹. Unlike other works domestic works are not restricted to any particular set of tasks within a household. Therefore, this occupation is not defined by the type of task, but the place of work, which is the household. The understanding of domestic work as a potential sector of employment faces challenges arising from nuances in determination of status of workers, wages and ideas of decent work. The wide variations in nature and types of tasks not only pose challenges in understanding the status of workers, they also make the concepts of decent work difficult to be applied in this sector particularly in its operational sense.

While domestic workers across the country may soon have the right to equal and minimum wages, social security cover, skill development programme and forming unions at par with other workers under the existing labour laws, it is important to ascertain their economic status even within the informal set-up. Despite the recognition at policy level about the requirements of minimum wages for domestic workers, it is still pertinent to focus on the lack of other institutional supports, absence of job contracts and low level of education among the workers in this occupation.

Domestic workers are generally found to work for excessively long hours, with little pay, and with almost no access to social protections. It is evident

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¹ <http://www.ilo.org/ippec/areas/Childdomesticlabour/lang—en/index.htm>.

that on average, 30% are excluded from labour legislation, but a much greater number do not enjoy de facto minimum protection at work globally². Despite having ILO resolutions concerning the conditions of employment of domestic workers adopted in 1948, the domestic workers convention, 2011 (No. 189) and subsequent recommendation (No. 201) are yet to be ratified in India. Without having recognized the domestic work as a formal employment, it is difficult to implement the proposed draft policy that intends to set up an institutional mechanism to social security cover, fair terms of employment, grievance redressal and dispute resolution.

In this paper, we discuss the economic status of domestic workers as indicated by wages and expenditures. The economic status is discussed in order to address the question, whether and to what extent domestic workers in India are economically vulnerable. Some important parameters such as employer-worker relationship and the institutional factors such as availability of paid leave, awareness regarding union and its membership, and availability of social security benefits are also taken into consideration in the analyses.

This paper, in particular, focuses on the status of domestic workers in terms of two major aspects – working conditions and wages – within the larger operating environment of informality and resultant dearth in legal provisions. Using data from both secondary and primary sources through survey and focus group discussions in Ahmedabad and Kolkata, this paper tries to understand: a) the working conditions of domestic workers; and b) the economic well-being of them in both the cities. Further, it also makes attempts in drawing inferences from the legal provisions of social securities and other labour rights in India.

Given this background, the next section 2 describes how domestic workers are situated in the informal work-space in order to address their status conceptually. The methodology is discussed in section 3, followed by analyses on wages and hours of work (section 4). The contribution of domestic workers to the households' income implies the extent of households' dependence on domestic employment as a primary source of livelihood. Dependence on domestic employment in an extremely informal and unskilled set-up reasonably implies the economic poverty of such households. In this connection, the share of wages earned by domestic workers to their

² <http://www.ilo.org/travail/areasofwork/domestic-workers/lang—en/index.htm>

households' total expenditure is discussed section 5, followed by the work-employment relationship and dignity (section 6); institutional support (section 7); aspirations and collectives (section 8). The last section 9 draws the overall inference and presents the way forward to recognize the rights and well-being of domestic workers in India.

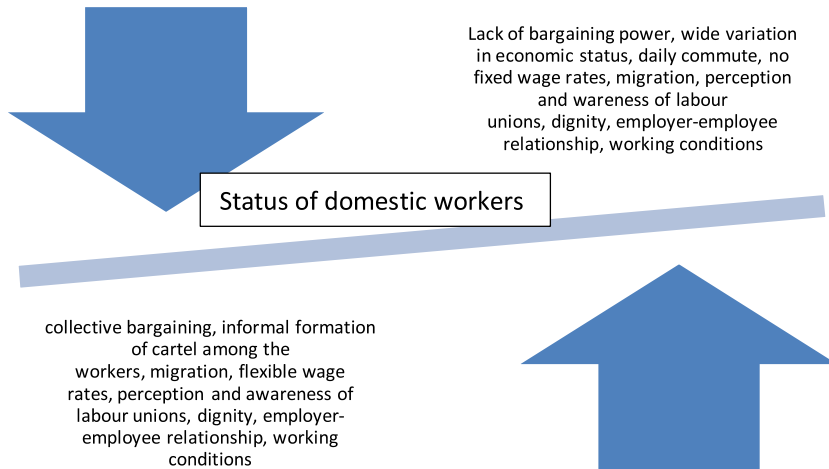
2. Conceptual framework

Unlike many other occupations such as plumbing, carpentry, masonry, and construction activities within the informal work-space, domestic work is one of the oldest and multifaceted occupations around the globe. It has evolved from the history of slavery, colonialism and various forms of contracts that are exploitative in nature. Despite carrying the indispensable value for the economy – as the economy outside the household depends a lot on the domestic work – it is still under-valued as an occupation, particularly in a South-Asian fast-developing country like India. Domestic workers are under-valued by both demand side and supply side agents. As women are traditionally expected to have innate capabilities of undertaking care-jobs at home, their skillful services developed by learning from other women as part of their growing-up process at home are perceived to be unskilled tasks by employers and workers themselves. As it is largely an unskilled occupation undertaken by women in most cases, it has been considered as a subsidiary source of income to support their household expenses by their families. As a result of these perceptions this sector still remains under-valued and poorly recognized under the modern labour legislation. The domestic work-space as an occupation remains largely unregulated.

However, the lack of formal recognition and legislative provisions does not necessarily mean that the domestic workers lack structure and regulatory control (Guha-Khasnobis, et. al., 2007). Rather, domestic works, in many cases, are found to be regulated heavily by the non-state or non-formal norms that substantially vary spatially and from one culture to the other. While these informal institutional factors as indicated by norms and culture play important role in regulating the domestic workspace, they also play role in marginalizing domestic workers.

The status of domestic workers depends on both monetary and non-monetary factors within the realms of their workplaces and the government or institutional arrangements. While the monetary factors include wages, bonus, etc., the non-monetary factors include the working conditions, occupational safety and health, dignity of workers, and relationship between employer and employee (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Factors influencing the status of domestic workers



Source: Developed by Authors.

3. Methodology

The analyses rely on the methods of description, understanding and reductions. All these methods are used with the help of NSS 68th round unit level data on employment and unemployment collected during the period from July 2011 to June 2012 and published in 2014 as well as the data and information collected through primary survey and focus group discussions among the domestic workers and other stake-holders in Ahmedabad and Kolkata during the period from 2017-18. While wages and institutional supports are partially understood with the help of secondary data (NSS 68th round), the working conditions are discussed largely using the data collected through field surveys in the selected locations in Kolkata and Ahmedabad.

Since there is no direct classification for domestic workers available in the Schedule No. 10 of NSS, we have identified them with the help of National Industrial Classification (NIC), National Classification of Occupation (NCO),

and enterprise types. The private households with employed persons are identified by using the enterprise type code (no. 8) in Schedule No. 10. We have considered the employer's households (i.e., private households employing maid servant, watchman, cook, etc.) in the analysis. The domestic workers outside the enterprise type code-8 are identified by using a combination of NIC and NCO codes with additional codes for location of work place and employment status. The analyses have been undertaken at all-India level along with States and Union Territories clubbed into six groups namely North, Center, South, West, East, and North-East. Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Uttaranchal and Rajasthan are included in "North" group; Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh are included in the "Center" group; Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana), Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Lakshadweep and Puducherry are included in the "South" group, Gujarat, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Maharashtra and Goa are clubbed in the "West" group; Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and Assam are included in the "East" group; and finally Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Meghalaya are included in the "North-East" group. In addition to these six categories of States and UTs, we have also analysed cases from West Bengal and Gujarat in particular keeping the main objective of the report in mind. This categorization helps in understanding and comparing various labour outcomes across the country.

The entire analysis of secondary data is undertaken for domestic workers and the rest of work force, who are engaged in sectors other than domestic works. We have considered the information on participation rate in the domestic works, current weekly status, wages per hour, daily hours of work, spell of unemployment, loss of wages due to absenteeism, entitlement to paid leaves and awareness about labour union.

As far as analysis on working conditions, wages, dignity and work-employment relationships are concerned; the paper depends on primary data. The respondents (domestic workers) have been identified from relatively older and newer settlements comprising of those who live in the vicinity of their workplaces for over generations, those who commute daily and those who are migrated from some other villages within past 10 years. While 518 domestic workers' households spread over two cities – Kolkata and Ahmedabad – have been approached as part of the survey, full interview has been possible with 511 of them. A total number of 524 respondents

have been interviewed (Table 1). Further, a number of FGDs have been undertaken in both the cities. In addition to socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the household and its members, a handful of data are collected on the topics including work and employment relationship, wages, sexual harassment at workplace, aspirations and collectives, domestic violence and family life, and economic status of the households. Based on the criterion of working for eight hours daily at least for five days a week and over 6 months in a year, there are 113 full-time domestic workers present in Ahmedabad in the primary data, whereas this figure is slightly higher in Kolkata (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of domestic workers in the sample by cities and duration of work

Criteria	Ahmedabad			Kolkata		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Total number of workers	113	150	263	223	38	261
Total number of households	106	144	250	223	38	261
Female headed households	2	22	24	175	23	198

Source: Authors' field survey.

4. Wages and Hours of work

As far as wages are concerned, many countries around the world have arrived at minimum wages for domestic workers. For instance, according to the figures set by the department of labour, South Africa, domestic workers must get paid a minimum of Rs. 1,641 up to Rs. 2,545, depending on the location of workplace within the city. This is a 5% increase from the rate in 2017. The reason for the lower wage is attributed to the large number of workers available in this sector resulting in higher risk of unemployment for domestic workers if the minimum wage is too high. In India, there exists no welfare legislation for domestic workers. Few States have included domestic work in the scheduled of employment and fixed minimum wages. However, implementation still remains an issue as conduct of inspection at domestic space remains ambiguous and household being the employer is yet to be legally defined. A holistic legislation encompassing different aspects of domestic labour needs to be enacted. While predominantly an unskilled

work-profile provides an opportunity for women to earn livelihood, lack of legislative protection and social security safety net make them vulnerable (Ghoshkar, 2013).

Unlike in South Africa, a low minimum wages for domestic workers in India is attributed more to the economic poverty and particularly for women since they participate more in number compared to their male counter-parts (Table 2.). As the NSS (68th round) data reveal, while at least four per thousand women in India take part in domestic works as full-time workers, the disaggregated figures at state level show that this number is much less in Gujarat (one per thousand women) compared to West Bengal (at least 13 women out of a thousand take part in this sector).

Table 2: Per-thousand distribution of respondents participated in domestic works by sex in West Bengal, Gujarat and India

Categories	Male	Female	Person
West Bengal	8.8	13.2	10.9
Gujarat	1.0	1.4	1.2
India	3.7	4.3	4.0

Source: Authors' calculation based on NSS 68th round unit level data

Note: Figures are in percentages and are weighted according to NSS instructions.

From the information on hours of work on weekly basis, it is evident that domestic workers work for at least 69 hours in a week, an hour more than the average hours of work in a week by workers in other sectors (Table 3). While there is not much difference between domestic workers and other workers in the hours worked, there is substantial difference evident in the wages earned by them (Table 4). For instance, in an economically developed state like Gujarat the average wages earned by a domestic worker is only Rs. 7/- per hour, whereas it is Rs. 23/- for other workers (Table 4). Since the wage rate is much lower in this sector compared to that in other sectors, the loss of wages due to absenteeism is also much lower (Table 5).

Table 3: Current Weekly Status (CWS) of domestic workers in West Bengal, Gujarat and India

Categories	Domestic Workers	Others
West Bengal	69.49	68.33
Gujarat	69.95	68.44
India	69.71	68.94

Source: Authors' calculation based on NSS 68th round unit level data

Note: Figures are weighted according to NSS instructions and they represent the average working hours in a week.

Table 4: Wages and Hours of Work by domestic workers and others across State-Groups, Gujarat, West Bengal and all India

Places	Average of wages (in Rs.) received per hour by domestic workers and others		Average number of hours worked daily by domestic workers and others	
	Domestic workers	Others	Domestic workers	Others
North	21.84	34.74	9.99	9.74
Center	4.41	19.42	9.64	9.93
South	11.63	29.09	9.95	9.94
West	20.75	30.91	9.99	9.85
East	11.45	25.42	9.94	9.81
North-east	11.58	40.50	9.83	9.91
West Bengal	11.34	23.81	9.93	9.76
Gujarat	6.93	22.69	9.99	9.78
India	14.99	29.13	9.96	9.85

Source: Authors' calculation based on NSS 68th round unit level data

Note: Figures are weighted according to NSS instructions.

Table 5: Spell of unemployment and loss of wages by domestic workers and others across State-Groups, Gujarat, West Bengal and all India

Places	Spell of unemployment (last episode) in days (average)		Loss of wages (Rs.) during the last spell of unemployment in last episode	
	Domestic workers	Others	Domestic workers	Others
North	NA	5.07	0	1715.97
Center	7.00	4.96	297.51	956.44
South	7.52	5.10	870.85	1475.01
West	2.06	4.59	426.58	1398.44
East	2.61	5.43	297.29	1355.08
North-east	7.95	7.68	904.91	3079.74
West Bengal	2.53	5.71	284.28	1326.98
Gujarat	NA	5.21	0	1156.34
India	5.30	5.15	790.79	1477.96

Source: Authors' calculation based on NSS68th round unit level data

Note: Figures are weighted according to NSS instructions.

The field work outcomes in Ahmedabad and Kolkata also reveal that despite having no remarkable difference in working hours among domestic workers in those two cities, it is slightly on the higher side among workers in Kolkata (Table 6). The average daily hours of work is at least one hour more in Kolkata than that in domestic work sector in Ahmedabad. In Kolkata, the maximum hours of work in a day can stretch upto 15 hours, which is much higher than the stipulated norms of working hours in labour legislations in general (Table 6). Further, the working-hour is not matched by the remuneration received (Table 7).

Table 6: Average number of hours worked daily by domestic workers in Kolkata and Ahmedabad

State	Type (based on hours of work)	Hours of work			Total number of workers in the sample
		Average hours	Minimum hours	Maximum hours	
Ahmedabad	Part-time	4:37	2:00	7:00	150
	Full-time	9:23	8:00	12:00	113
Kolkata	Part time	6:02	8:00	7:40	38
	Full-time	10:48	1:30	15:00	223

Source: Same as Table 1.

Note: At least 8 hrs a day for over 6 months a year continuously is be considered as full-time employment.

Table 7: Details of wages received

Cities	Do you get activity-specific wages? (percentages)			Monthly rate per task (Rs)			Does your salary get deducted due to absence from workplace? (percentages)				Is your salary increased every year? (percentages)			Total no. of respondents
	Yes	No	Don't	Mean	Min	Max	yes always	never	some times	can't say	Yes	No	Note Sure	
Kolkata	7.66	72.8	19.54	350	0	490	25.29	63.22	9.96	1.53	8.05	68.2	23.75	261
Ahmedabad	32	38.4	29.6	614	0	1000	14	45.6	26.4	14	36.4	15.6	48	263
Total	19.57	55.97	24.46	143.54	0	1000	19.77	54.6	18	7.63	21.92	42.47	35.62	524

Source: Authors' field survey.

Contracts in terms of determination of wages are not uniform in Ahmedabad and Kolkata. While wages are paid specifically for each activity in Ahmedabad, this practice is not widely common in Kolkata (Table 7). In Kolkata, only around seven percent of respondents are found to be familiar with payments against each activity such as cleaning utensils, washing clothes, mopping and sweeping house premise and cooking. The tasks vary from regular cleaning activities of the households to cooking, taking care of children or elderly, cleaning vehicles and massage in both the cities. The wage-rate for each task ranges between Rs. 0 and 1000 per month. While zero payment is reported by workers who are already in debt and paying back through their services on installment basis to the employers, Rs. 1000/- is found to be the amount only in Ahmedabad for some particular cases, which are from the newly developed western parts of the city. The average wages for each activity is at least Rs. 250 higher in Ahmedabad compared to that in Kolkata (Table 7).

However, wages to domestic workers are often deducted because of absenteeism. Around 40 percent of the respondents in Ahmedabad reported that they sometimes experienced loss of their wages because of absenteeism. The loss of wages due to absenteeism is much less in Kolkata. Over 63 percent of the respondents in the city never experienced any deduction of their salary because of absenteeism. Salary hike is a more common characteristic in the domestic work scenario in Ahmedabad than that in Kolkata. It is important to note that despite having rare occasions of deduction in salary, domestic workers in Kolkata do not get annual hike (Table 7).

The respondents in both Kolkata and Ahmedabad in the discussion revealed that even when the list of tasks is clearly mentioned, the additional tasks are often allotted by the employers. The work-load of such tasks increases in the presence of house-guests with no additional payment. The aspects

of increase in wages, minimum wages, overtime wages and bonus are not uniformly practiced particularly in Kolkata. Interestingly, particularly in case of Ahmedabad, while employer tries to get extra work against the same payment, the worker is likely to get interest-free loans and extra-paid leaves depending on the relationship with the employer. As it is highlighted in previous studies (Guha-Khasnobis, et. a., 2007; ILO, 2015) the evidences in Ahmedabad make a case wherein formalization of the domestic work may erode these relations.

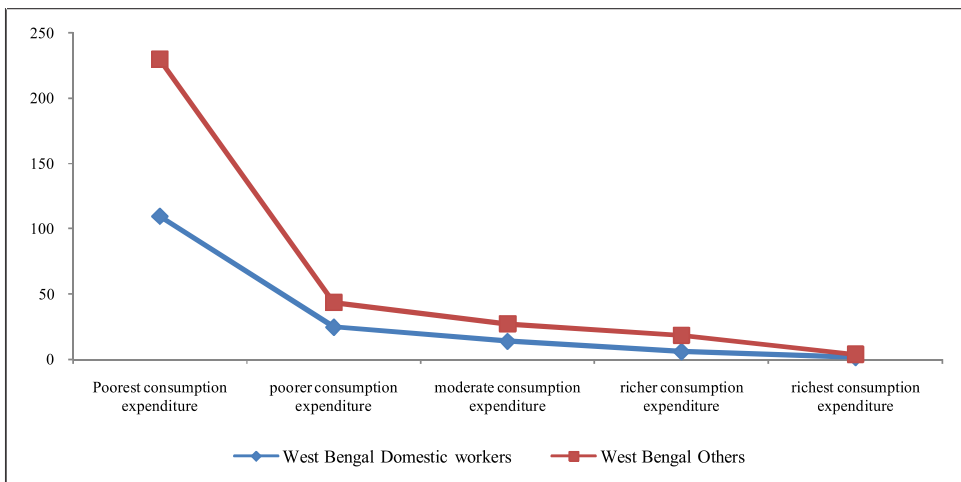
5. Contribution to households' income

In line with the findings of this paper, some earlier studies also suggest that despite working hard to earn their livelihood the earning of women domestic workers is shockingly low (Manohar and Shobha, 1983; Kundu, 2007). While an earlier study suggests that the average monthly earning of domestic workers is far below the minimum wages fixed for unskilled manual labourers, the economic status of the workers is also found to vary across age-groups, marital status and caste (Dar, 2014). The study (Dar, 2014) also has found that the average per capita monthly family earning is far below the respondents' (workers') own average monthly earning, which implies that the domestic workers not only belong to economically poorer sections of the society, they often play the role of sole bread earner of the family. The dependence of a household on domestic employment further reinforces the manifestation of economic poverty, which in turn, makes the workers feel grateful to their employers for whatever payment and benevolence they receive in exchange of domestic labour. Thus the colonial feudal practice of domestic servant is continued even in the post-colonial modern era.

Ideally, since domestic workers earn less wages compared to the workers in other sectors their contributions to the households' income should reasonably be less as compared that of workers in other sectors. The contribution to household's income is reasonably indicated by the percentage share of their wages to the household's monthly income proxied by the monthly consumption expenditure of the household. The share of wages to household's income implies the overall economic status of the households that depend on domestic works as the main source of income. Despite having the options of various occupations even within informal sector the poorest of the poor households still depend on domestic works; or in other words, households with main occupation as domestic workers are found

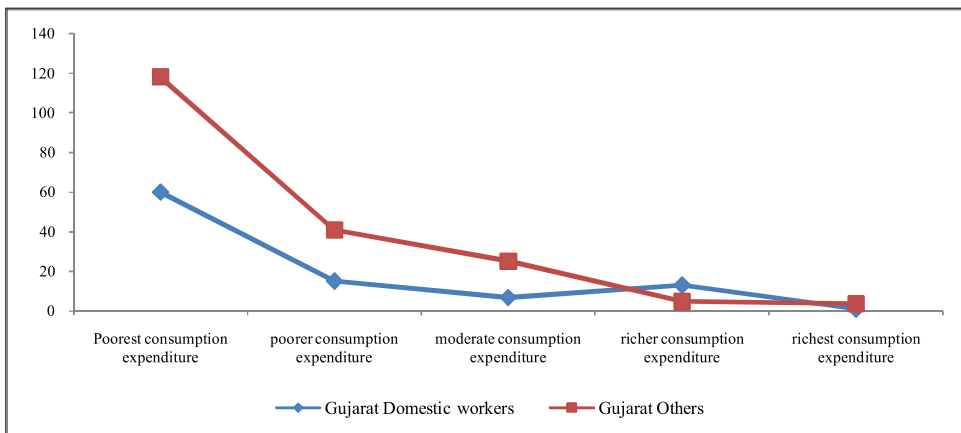
large in number among the poorer section of our society across places in India (Figures 2, 3, 4, 5).

Figure 2: Contribution to the household consumption across the quantiles of household expenditure in West Bengal



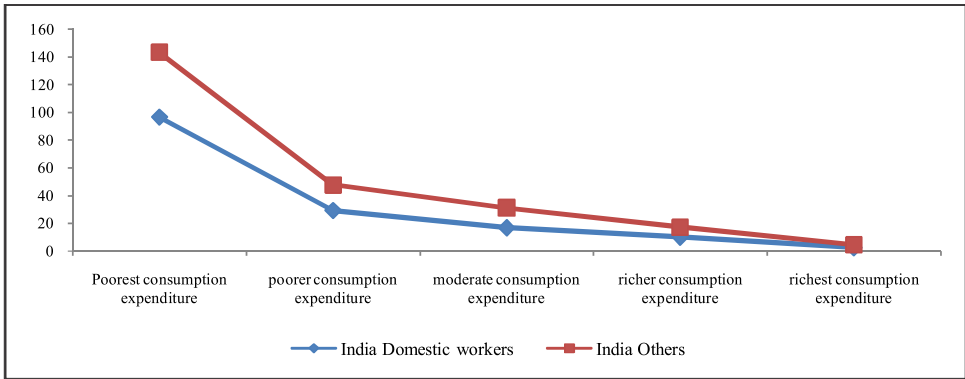
Source: NSS 68th round unit level data on employment and unemployment

Figure 3: Contribution to the household consumption across the quantiles of household expenditure in Gujarat



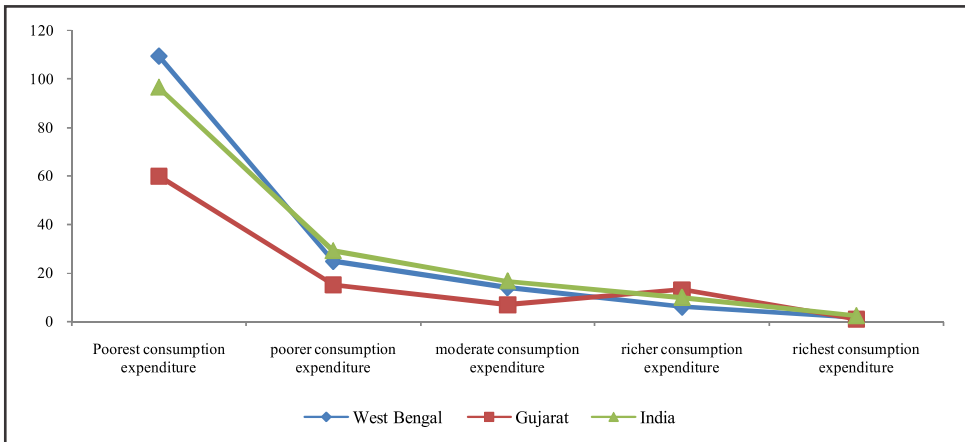
Source: NSS 68th round unit level data on employment and unemployment

Figure 4: Contribution to the household consumption across the quantiles of household expenditure in all India



Source: NSS 68th round unit level data on employment and unemployment

Figure 5: Contribution to the household consumption by domestic workers across the quantiles of household expenditure in Gujarat, West Bengal and all India



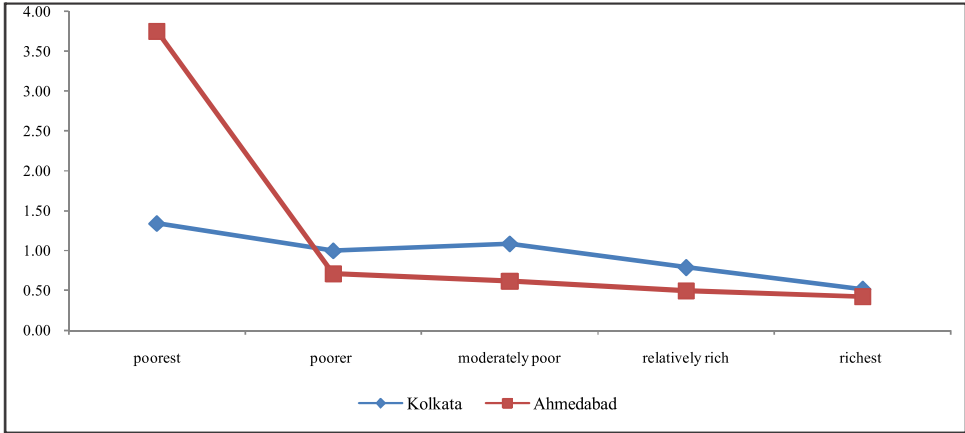
Source: NSS 68th round unit level data on employment and unemployment

While the workers in the informal sector in general are found to be bread-winners, especially among the economically poorer sections of the society, the magnitude of dependence of such poor households on domestic work is more among the poor in all India level and both in Gujarat and West Bengal (Figures 2, 3, 4). However, with a minor exception domestic workers in Gujarat are found to contribute more compared to the workers in other sectors even in the relatively rich section of the society. This finding is interesting as Gujarat is also found to be the State with much lower wage

rates per hour. A further investigation in the cases of Ahmedabad reveals that the asset-holding of the households and overall standard of living over the generation based on various self-employment activities such as sewing, stitching, knitting, animal husbandry, etc., along with the active presence of informal association based on mutual understanding among the domestic workers partially explain the contribution of domestic workers even among the relatively rich households. The overall existing economic condition, which is better off compared to that among domestic workers in West Bengal may explain the presence of domestic workers among the relatively rich households in Gujarat. Notwithstanding the history of unionism, the poorest of the poor group exhibits the largest number of domestic workers belongs West Bengal compared to that in all India level and in Gujarat (Figure 5).

Following the same pattern as exhibited by the NSS 2013 data set, the households dependent on domestic employment belong to economically poor section of the income distribution of the respondents. With the increase in dependence of a household on domestic employment the magnitude of economic poverty also increases, and that is represented by the poorest of the income group in both Ahmedabad and Kolkata (Figure 6). While the results from both NSS and primary data depict same pattern in drawing implications of domestic employment on households' economic poverty, the magnitude of it differs between what is evident in the NSS 2011-12 data set and what we can draw from the primary data collected during the period 2017-18 owing to the limitations of NSS (2011-12) data in the present contexts in terms of difficulties in identification of domestic workers and their representation in small number in the sample.

Figure 6: Share of domestic workers' wages to the household's monthly income



Source: Same as Table 1.

Interestingly, overall households are less dependent on domestic employment in Ahmedabad compared to that in Kolkata with an exception of the poorest income group. It is found that the households migrated from nearby districts in Gujarat and Rajasthan during the slack season of agriculture are mainly the ones belonging to the poorest income group and dependent on domestic employment to a large extent in Ahmedabad. There are a number of studies under the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM), which argue migration as a family strategy to cope up with the financial risks and uncertainties in mitigating the economic poverty of the households in the presence of limited availability of insurance and credit markets (Stark and Taylor, 1991; Stark and Levhari, 1982; Lucas and Stark, 1985; Taylor et. al., 2003). However, there is also a structuralist view that considers migration as an indicator of development failure (Hette, 1990; De Haas, 2010; Deshingkar, 2005) and the view that explains migration as a channel that enables poor female migrants coming from highly restrictive social background to exercise their agency (Kabeer, 2000). Although the paper doesn't focus on migrant domestic workers, the case of households in the poorest income group depending on domestic employment may further be explored in a city like Ahmedabad. Moreover, the patterns in India, Gujarat and West Bengal and particularly in the cities of Kolkata and Ahmedabad go in line with the findings from earlier studies, which observed that households depending on domestic employment are among the poorest in terms of economic status.

6. Work-employment relationship and dignity

The employer-employee relationship influences not only wages, working hours, provisions for other monetary and non-monetary benefits such as bonus, gifts, increments etc., but also the dignity and respect of domestic workers. The number of employers who treat the domestic workers with dignity particularly in cities such as Delhi and Mumbai is increasing (ILO, 2011). As the present study reveals, the norms and practices in terms of access to toilet, resting facilities, use of utensils, and sexual harassment at work-place are found to be overall satisfactory for domestic workers with slight variation between Kolkata and Ahmedabad. Although use of toilets is widely common among domestic workers in both the cities, the toilets are often not the same that are used by the employer. While 55 percent of the respondents is allowed to use separate toilets in Kolkata, in Ahmedabad the figure hovers around 20 percent. Domestic workers are also found to face discrimination in terms of space for sitting or resting and the use of utensils. It is found that a considerable number of workers are not allowed to use same utensils as those of their employers in both Kolkata and Ahmedabad. Also, some of them are not allowed to sit anywhere they want to. These channels of discrimination in a subtle but certain way as part of daily living are more prominent in Kolkata than those in Ahmedabad (Table 8).

Table 8: Access to basic amenities with human dignity at workplace

Cities	Use of toilet permitted?		If yes, is this the same toilet used by the employer?		Are there separate utensils for you at workplace?		Can sit anywhere they want to?
	Yes	No or not sure	Yes	No or not sure	Yes	No or not sure	Yes (rest says No)
Kolkata	90.42	9.58	44.61	55.16	24.9	75.1	15.33
Ahmedabad	96.8	3.2	79.2	19.84	12	88	66.16
Total	93.54	6.46	59.49	39.83	18.59	81.41	40.84

Source: Same as Table 1.

Note: All the figures are in percentages.

Domestic work, being typical informal in nature, depends more on the informal relationship with the employer and not on the legislative mandates. Hence, the provisions of paid leaves, monetary and other supports from

employer during the time of sickness and other emergencies assume importance in determining well-being of the workers. Evidently more number of workers is allowed to avail paid leaves in Ahmedabad. They also receive support from employer during sickness. However, a handful of workers do not receive any support from employers during sickness or other emergencies, nor they are entitled to paid leaves (Table 9). As deduction of salary due to absenteeism is common across the spaces in this sector, the availability of paid leave is also conditional, and depends on the reason and duration of leave as also on the inter-personal relationship between employer and the employee. The uncertainty in provision of paid leave and other support from employer may be the reason due to which many of the domestic workers never even ask for support from their employers (Table 9).

Table 9: Work and employment relationship

Cities	Do you get paid leaves when you are sick?			Support from employer during sickness			Support from employer during other emergencies			Total Number of respondents (N)
	Yes, always	It is conditional	Never	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Not sure/never asked for it	
Kolkata	34.48	45.59	19.92	14.17	70.88	14.94	21.84	68.58	9.58	261
Ahmedabad	61.6	24.8	9.6	48	42.2	9.2	33.2	28.8	38	263
Total	47.75	35.42	14.87	30.53	57.34	12.13	27.4	49.12	23.48	524

Source: Same as Table 1.

Note: All figures are in percentages.

The sense of well-being at a safe and secured work-space is often reflected in the way how a worker is treated by the employer and others at work-space. While sexual harassment at work-place is experienced by very few domestic workers, it is not absent in this sector. It is often argued that despite being prevalent many women consider it as a form of occupational hazard (Hennekam and Bennet, 2017). The study also finds that many women respondents, particularly in the city of Ahmedabad, believe that they should not protest against sexual harassment at workplaces. Few instances of sexual harassment at domestic workplaces reported as part of the survey did not result in filing complaints at police station (Table 10) since the victim did not want to report. This under-reporting of sexual misconduct across every sphere in our economy and society is also corroborated by the recent report which revealed that 70% women preferred not to report sexual harassment by superiors because the fear of adverse

repercussions. (Indian Bar Council, 2017). While most women think that they should not protest against sexual harassment, it is found that most of them are unaware of legal rights in order to take action against sexual harassment at workplaces (Table 10).

Table 10: Details about sexual harassment at domestic work-space

Cities	Experienced sexual harassment at workplace?		If yes, have you reported to police?	Do you think women should protest against sexual harassment at workplace?		Do you know that you can take legal action against sexual harassment at workplace?		Total number of respondents
	Yes	No or not sure		Yes	No or not sure	Yes	No or not sure	
Kolkata	2.68	97.32	No	84.29	15.71	41.76	58.24	261
Ahmedabad	0.8	99.2		34	66	30.4	69.6	250
Total	1.76	98.24		59.69	40.31	36.2	63.8	511

Source: Same as Table 1.

Note: Figures are in percentages.

In a predominantly low-skilled informal set-up like domestic space work-employment relationship is reasonably understood as the relation between the employer and worker, who is often termed as servant in practice. There are several schools of thought that refer to the relationship between employer and worker. As few studies in past have highlighted (Guha Khasnobis, et al., 2007; Ray, 2000) that the heavily unregulated domestic employment is often found to be regulated by informal rules, norms and practices in reality. As a result, the relationship between employer and worker ranges from benevolence to malevolence in terms of exploitation as well as care and affection. In any case, the relation is characterized by an asymmetry of power (Ray, 2000). As the existing knowledge suggests, the employment of a woman and/or her daughters as domestic workers itself seems to create such a feeling of benevolence that they develop a sense of obligation and gratitude toward the employer. This sense of gratitude on the part of a domestic worker and her family reflects a feudal relationship with the employer and leads to various forms of exploitation in the forms of over-work, low wages, sexual and other favours (ILO, 2004). The sense of gratitude among domestic workers is observed in both Kolkata and Ahmedabad, as the respondents depend on employer not only for earning livelihood but also for other supports such as borrowing money, receiving

help for children's marriage, and education. The essence of work and employment relationship, therefore, rests on the amalgamation of feudal and professional aspects between the employer and employee in the domestic work-space.

The domestic work-space is increasingly characterized by the simultaneous presence of informal and feudalistic relations within an increasingly modern post-colonial set-up of the society. Further, the culture of servitude as described by Ray and Qayum (2009) in a fast-growing globalized economy like India makes the understanding of domestic work-space a complex one, wherein the social transformations create a struggle between traditional notions of loyalty and duty among domestic workers and modern notions of impersonal work-relations and time-bound tasks that are often driven by market and professionalism. The absence of trade unions in this sector combined with presence of NGOs that train domestic workers to match with the modern day's requirement of a domestic servant reinforces an evolved form of feudal structure during this post-colonial globalized era in Indian cities, particularly in Ahmedabad. Although those NGOs do not include the entire sector of domestic workers, they certainly contribute to a section of it in bargaining and securing livelihood in the domestic work-space. The FGDs in Ahmedabad have revealed that the domestic works sector is heavily organized through mutual understanding and informal collective mobilization among the workers in each pocket of the city. However, wage determination through collective bargaining mechanism is more likely to sustain the bargaining processes between employers and employees in case of relatively low-skilled tasks such as cleaning utensils, mopping floor and washing the clothes compared to relatively high-skilled tasks such as cooking and taking care of elderly and children in the employer's household.

The FGDs in Kolkata revealed that there was substantial wage differential between southern and northern part of the city. Northern part comprises relatively older part of the city and residential areas still exhibit vestiges of living characteristics of earlier era where multi-storied apartment type living was not common. Individual houses and one-room community living still can be witnessed in the northern part, where dwelling units still retains the ethos of joint family structure to a certain extent. Domestic workers in northern part hail from nearby slums which dot the urban space and work relation is predominantly informal. A part of the wage is still paid in kind.

Wages are lower compared to southern part of the city. The issue of using common facilities like access to washrooms is not that relevant since domestic workers live in close proximity. Southern part of the city is relatively more inclined to prevailing modern living ethos where apartment buildings and nuclear families dominate. Wages are higher in this part of the city. Even though there is no written contract between household and domestic worker, verbal understandings with regards to terms of employment is rather explicit and specific. Most of the domestic workers are not local residents. They are day visitors in the city to do domestic work and use local trains to commute to the city from their villages in the district of South 24 Parganas. They start early in the morning and after doing work during the day at different households they return to their respective places in the evening. Wages are mostly paid in cash. They do use washrooms at the employers' space and sometimes have food from the same kitchen. Majority of domestic workers in Kolkata are associated with either trade unions or other civil society organizations and are aware of basic rights at work. However, during FGDs domestic workers reported that there exists substantial cross-cutting of wages to gain employment in an eco-system of over-supply of labour and poverty.

7. Institutional support

In the absence of any legislative framework to address such issues as protection of wages and salary of domestic workers in India, one can draw examples from the number of conventions that have been formulated globally by ILO. Among all the instruments such as maternity protection and employment protection, it is the Minimum Wage Convention, 1970 that becomes the most relevant for domestic workers (Table 11). Practices with respect to minimum wages vary considerably from nation to nation and even from region to region within a nation. Despite having recognized how crucial it is to have fixed minimum wages and legislation to protect wages in order to ensure decent working condition, India along with other south Asian countries is yet to determine the rate of minimum wage (Table 12). One way to bring such changes in law is through bargaining and forming effective collective organizations within the realm of policy making.

Table 11: Conventions allowing the exclusion of domestic workers

Convention	Flexibility clause	Declaration of exclusion of domestic workers
Holidays with Pay Convention (Revised), 1970 (No. 132)	Article 2, paragraph 2	Belgium, in its first report on the application of the Convention 1
Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)	Article 2, paragraph 2	None
Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158)	Article 2, paragraph 5	None
Night Work Convention, 1990 (No. 171)	Article 2, paragraph 2	Dominican Republic, in its first report on the application of the Convention 2
Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175)	Article 3, paragraph 1	Netherlands, in a declaration accompanying its instrument of ratification dated 5 October 2001 3
Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)	Article 2, paragraph 2	None
Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 [Schedule I amended in 1980] (No. 121)	Article 4, paragraph 2	None
Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Convention, 1969 (No. 130)	Article 5	Luxembourg, in its first report, excluding domestic workers employed for fewer than 16 hours per week.
Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131)	Article 1, paragraph 3	Several States, including Bolivia, Chile, Egypt, France, Guyana, Uruguay, Yemen and Zambia 4
Protection of Workers' Claims (Employer's Insolvency) Convention, 1992 (No. 173)	Article 4, paragraph 2	Spain, in its first report, excluding from the scope of Part III of the Convention persons who are parties to an employment relationship of a special nature at the service of a private household

Source: ILO (2010)

Notes: (1) The Government indicated that domestic workers are excluded from Royal Decree of 30 March 1967 determining the general modalities for the execution of the laws related to annual leave of salaried workers and Royal Decree of 28 June 1971 adapting and coordinating the legal provisions concerning annual leave of salaried workers; (2) See direct requests addressed to the Dominican Republic in 1997 and 1998. The Dominican Republic indicated that economic reasons and supervisory mechanisms currently prevented the rules on the period of night work from being extended to domestic workers in the Labour Code. It further confirmed that the exclusion had been discussed and agreed upon with the representative organizations of employers and workers during tripartite discussions at the time of adoption of the Labour Code; (3) The exclusion applied to domestic work in private households for less than three days a week. The Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV) has expressed concern that domestic workers with a full-time

work week for three different households would be excluded from the scope of the Convention; (4) NORMES indicates that Guatemala, Republic of Korea, Lebanon, the Netherlands and Sri Lanka seem to exclude domestic workers from the scope of the minimum wage legislation without a clear indication of fulfilment of procedural requirements under Art. 1, para.3, of Convention No. 131.

Table 12: Inclusion/exclusion of domestic workers from minimum wage provisions by country and region

Region	Not covered by minimum wage protection	Covered by minimum wage legislation	Covered by collective bargaining	Covered by other minimum wage fixing machinery
Industrialized countries	Canada; (a) Denmark; Finland; Japan; Switzerland (a)	Belgium; France; Ireland; Netherlands; Portugal; Spain; United Kingdom; United States (b)	Austria; Germany; Italy	
Central, Eastern and South- Eastern Europe	Croatia	Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Estonia; Romania; Turkey		
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)		Kazakhstan; Republic of Moldova; Russian Federation		
Asia	Bangladesh; Cambodia; China; India; (c) Indonesia; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Pakistan; Thailand	Philippines; Viet Nam		
Latin America	Peru	Bolivia; Brazil; Chile; Colombia; Costa Rica; Guatemala; Mexico; (d) Nicaragua; Panama; Paraguay	Uruguay (e)	Argentina (f)
Caribbean		Trinidad and Tobago	Barbados	
Middle East	Jordan; Lebanon; Saudi Arabia; Yemen	Israel		
Africa	Egypt; Mozambique; Senegal	Burkina Faso; Côte d'Ivoire; Mali; Niger; South Africa; Tunisia; Zimbabwe		

Source: ILO (2010).

Notes: (a) There is no minimum wage provision for domestic workers in Canada and Switzerland at the federal level but some Canadian provinces (Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec) and one Swiss canton (Geneva) have

minimum wages for domestic workers; (b) The Fair Labor Standards Act sets a federal minimum wage rate for employees in certain occupations, including household employees, but excludes “casual” workers such as babysitters and “companions” for the sick or the elderly; (c) The central Government sets minimum wages for 45 occupations from which domestic work is excluded. Nonetheless, central and regional governments are allowed to set minimum wage rates for additional occupations. The states of Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar and Rajasthan have set minimum wage rates for domestic work; (d) There is a specific minimum wage for domestic workers which is yet to come into force but the implementation process is still ongoing; (e) A wage board on domestic workers was established in August 2008. Negotiations to increase the minimum wage for this category of workers are under way. The ILO is monitoring the situation to see whether an agreement has been reached and signed; (f) The Ministry of Labour fixes the minimum wage rate for domestic workers, while for other categories of workers it is the responsibility of the Minimum Wage Board, a tripartite body.

The lack of legislative protection is also extended in other aspects of domestic work-space including the entitlements to paid leaves, social security benefits and job contracts. It is found that only few domestic workers are entitled to paid leaves. Since over 92 percent of India’s workforce is engaged in the informal sector the overall number of workers entitled to paid leave is small and within that the case for domestic workers is even worse (Table 13). The entitlement to paid leave for domestic workers is the lowest in north-eastern region of India while it is relatively better in central, southern and western India. Gujarat, compared to West Bengal has slightly more number of domestic workers with entitlement of paid leave (Table 13).

Table 13: Percentage distribution of respondents reported to have entitlement of paid leave across the State-Groups, Gujarat, West Bengal and all India

Places	Domestic workers	Others
North	9.72	28.79
Center	18.29	29.18
South	13.25	33.18
West	12.56	36.70
East	10.24	32.19
North-east	4.27	46.40
West Bengal	12.71	35.11
Gujarat	15.37	27.19
India	11.78	32.32

Source: NSS 68th round unit level data on employment and unemployment

Note: Figures are weighted according to NSS instructions.

In case of availability of social security benefits domestic workers are lagging far behind the workers in other sectors. While in northern region of India including States and UTs such as Jammu & Kashmir, Delhi, Haryana, Chandigarh, Punjab, Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan no domestic worker was found to have access to of any kind of social security benefits including PF/pension (i.e., GPF, CPF, PPF, pension, etc), gratuity, health care and maternity benefits. The numbers of domestic workers with access to such social security benefits are very small in other regions and slightly large albeit very small compared to workers in other sectors in north-eastern part of the country (Table 14). Written job contracts for one year or more is evidently very limited for workers in informal sector in general and much worse for domestic workers (Table 15).

Table 14: Percentage distribution of domestic workers and others with availability of social security benefits across the State & UT regions, Gujarat, West Bengal and all India

Places	Domestic workers	Others
North	0	25.28
Center	0.32	22.21
South	0.32	28.36
West	4.14	34.33
East	0.79	26.85
North-east	2.13	43.9
West Bengal	0.87	27.92
Gujarat	0.58	23.11
India	1.5	28.06

Source: NSS 68th round unit level data on employment and unemployment

Note: Figures are weighted according to NSS instructions.

Table 15: Percentage distribution of domestic workers and others with written job contracts across the State & UT regions, Gujarat, West Bengal and all India

Places	Domestic workers	Others
North	1.11	3.04
Center	2.08	2.12
South	0.11	2.89
West	3.21	5.06
East	0.98	3.01
North-east	1.81	4.72
West Bengal	1.03	3.54
Gujarat	1.42	3.34
India	1.38	3.18

Source: NSS 68th round unit level data on employment and unemployment

Note: Figures are weighted according to NSS instructions.

While lack of social security benefits, paid leaves and written job contracts are attributed to the informality in the labour market in India and most corners within the country, a part of non-entitlement can also be attributed to lack of collective mobilization. This is reflected not in the number of workers registered as member of union/association (Table 16), but in their awareness about those unions/associations (Table 16). Despite having a large number of workers as member of trade-unions or associations, very small number of them is actually aware

of it. The poor level of awareness among domestic workers is a combined outcome of lack of education and effectiveness of trade-unions and civic society institutions. Along with formation of unions and/or associations, the active spread of micro-finance institutions may contribute further to the socio-economic well-being of domestic workers if they are regulated through registration (UNDP, 2012).

Table 16: Percentage distribution of domestic workers and others aware of union/association and having membership with unions associations across the States and UTs, Gujarat, West Bengal and all India

Places	Aware of union/association		Member of union/association	
	Domestic workers	Others	Domestic workers	Others
North	5.43	14.35	77.09	64.58
Center	0.62	11.63	15.90	63.38
South	11.05	27.9	31.05	60.38
West	3.66	19.04	70.24	72.45
East	8.75	18.56	67.14	80.41
North-east	59.12	42.29	76.15	76.4
West Bengal	9.77	22.27	76.95	80.89
Gujarat	17.09	14.48	0.00	70.9
India	8.1	18.97	54.55	67.06

Source: NSS 68th round unit level data on employment and unemployment

Note: Figures are weighted according to NSS instructions.

8. Aspirations and collectives

In the context of an informal and casual work-space in India wherein the regulations are lax, collective actions have the potential to open possibilities for articulating interests and agendas, expressing grievances and claiming rights. It also creates opportunities for the collective articulation of alternative discourses on the informal economy. Collective organizing, in its various forms and orientations, is here seen as an important component of the contemporary politics of informality (Pieterse, 2008).

But, because the fact that domestic work still is not seen as real work, it has remained out of the discussion of labour rights and labour market dynamics for long. As it is widely discussed in the literature (ILO, 2015;

Reghuram, 2001; Kaur, 2006; Mehrotra and Bharti, 2008; Deshingkar and Akter, 2009), domestic workers are often found to be invisible, due to which they are often excluded from the labour laws and other protective measures (Palriwala and Neetha, 2011). The concern in practice pertains to two major aspects: a) whether domestic workers can be organized or unionized; and b) how to address the complex challenges that this sector faces. The breakdown of the obstacles to move the individual voice of a domestic worker to a collective one may include several steps such as: formation of collective of workers and/or employers; collective decision on certain standards; negotiation of standards with the counterparts and ensuring the compliance with those standards by employers. Since, domestic work has never been seen as real work, it is hard to conceptualize this sector like any other sector in the informal work-space. However, domestic workers in some contexts such as in USA, Brazil, Chile, South Africa and Uruguay have been found to be successful in forming trade unions or other organizations since 1800s. They even participated in advocating international labour standards on the rights of domestic workers during the 2000s leading to the adoption of ILO Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189) in 2011.

As the earlier discussion pens the institutional supports for domestic workers, evidently abysmal and poorly formulated – more poorly than those in many other occupations even within the informal work-space – the awareness about the importance of collectives may assume importance. It is also observed that even at the global level, the coverage of domestic workers under various components of social security such as occupational safety and health, workers' compensation for work-place injuries, general health care, retirement pension and unemployment insurance doesn't apply to a fast-developing South Asian country like India (Table 17).

Table 17: Explicit coverage of domestic workers by social security legislation by category, region and country, in selected countries

Region	Category of social security				
	Occupational safety and health	Workers' compensation for employment injuries	General health care	Retirement pension	Unemployment insurance
Industrialized countries	Finland, Portugal	Austria, 1 Belgium, 2 Canada, 3 Denmark, France, Germany, 4 Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland (Canton of Geneva) 5, United States (California and New York) 6	Belgium, France, Germany, 7 Greece, 8 Italy, Netherlands, 9 Portugal, Spain, Switzerland (Canton of Geneva) 10	Belgium, France, Germany, 11 Greece, 12 Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland (Canton of Geneva) 13	Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland (Canton of Geneva) 14
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	Russian Federation 15	Russian Federation 16	Russian Federation 17	Russian Federation 18	Russian Federation 19
Asia		Cambodia, 20 Philippines, 21 Viet Nam 22	Pakistan, 23 Philippines, 24 Viet Nam 25	Philippines, 26 Viet Nam 27	
Latin America	Mexico	Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, 28 Nicaragua	Argentina, 29 Bolivia, 30 Brazil, Colombia, 31 Nicaragua, Panama, 32 Paraguay, 33 Peru, 34 Uruguay	Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Panama, 35 Peru 36	Brazil, 37 Uruguay
Caribbean		Trinidad and Tobago 38	Trinidad and Tobago 39	Trinidad and Tobago 40	
Middle East Africa	South Africa	Mali, 41 Senegal, Tunisia	Mali, South Africa, 42 Tunisia, Zimbabwe 43	Egypt Mali, Senegal	South Africa

Source: ILO, 2010

Notes: (1) In Austria, the social security general regime applies to all wage earners and salaried employees and, implicitly, also to domestic workers in general. However, there is an exception for non-qualified part-time workers in private households below the marginal earnings threshold of €478.10 per month. In this case, the Service Cheque Act can be applied. Payment by service cheque only includes insurance against employment injuries and occupational diseases (section 4, para. 3, Service Cheque Act and section 7, Nr. 3 General Social Security Act). Only in the case of insurance against employment injuries and occupational diseases is coverage compulsory; (2) According to section 112 of the Act of 3 July 1978, in case of incapacity due to professional diseases or occupational injuries, the employer of the domestic worker must pay 100 per cent of the salary during seven days. Thereafter, the worker is reimbursed by the insurance, which is mandatory, for the sum paid. After the 30th day of incapacity, the employee receives benefits directly from the insurance; (3) Employment injury benefits for domestic workers are regulated at the provincial level. In British Columbia (with limitations), Manitoba and Ontario, domestic workers are explicitly included by legislation regulating workers' compensation.

The field work outcomes in Ahmedabad reveal that very few members take part in such collectives in Ahmedabad. Despite having awareness about the collectives and having taken part in such organizations, the lower wages in Kolkata may be owing to the nature of collectives, (when the collective bargaining system is narrow or taking place at the company or workplace level the effect is restricted to wage inequality within these enterprises) (ILO, 2017). Most of the respondents, therefore, believe that their problems could not be resolved through collectives (Table 18). Evidently domestic workers in Kolkata are found to be extremely needy and/or have no other alternative source of livelihood (Table 18).

Table 18: Participation in and perception of collectives by domestic workers

Cities	Are you member of any collective /group?		Do you believe that your problems can be resolved through collectives?		Do you think that your job is respectable one?		Why did you choose this occupation?					Total no. of respondents
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No alternative	Extreme need	Easily accessible and doable	Having good network to pursue	Others	
Kolkata	28.35	71.65	39.85	60.15	49.43	50.57	31.03	51.72	11.49	1.92	3.83	261
Ahmedabad	2	98	22.8	77.2	0.8	99.2	41.2	20.4	16.8	5.2	16.4	250
Total	15.46	84.54	31.51	68.49	25.64	74.36	36.01	36.4	14.09	3.52	9.81	511

Source: Same as Table 1.

Note: All the figures are in percentages

It is interesting to observe that the informal institutional factors such as local practices and organized behaviour of domestic workers in Ahmedabad help in keeping their wage rates relatively on the higher side and regularizing some specific practices of leave with pay. The practice of lending large amount of money to the workers in expectation of dutiful services in future is also observed. Undoubtedly there are some efforts in organizing domestic workers by the civil society organizations such as SEWA and SATH who have evolved over time in supporting the domestic workers and their rights in Ahmedabad. While they play roles in bargaining for the wages and terms of work for the workers, they also make effort in skill upgradation and training for them to match with the modern requirements of domestic help in a fast growing city like Ahmedabad. Although their influence helps in gaining bargaining power within the informal system of

domestic work-space, in other words, it also reinstates a feudal system keeping the need of post-colonial modern urban households. Therefore, bargaining and collective voices are not found to have any remarkable influence on the policy formulation as far as domestic labour market is concerned.

In Kolkata, even though unionization/collectivization is greater among domestic workers, basic entitlements remain poor. Cross-cutting of wages is common. Facilities like sickness leave, leave with wages, maternity benefits and bonus are mostly negotiated on an individual basis. Compared to Ahmedabad, grant of advances are rather uncommon in Kolkata. On certain occasions, domestic workers do seek advances to tide over urgent financial requirements but quantum of such advances are rather small (maximum two-three months' wages). Also, collectivization in Kolkata did not result in any explicit skill formation mechanism so far. Mostly, domestic workers learn while doing the work through trial and error method.

9. Conclusion

It is evident that despite having worked for longer hours the workers in Kolkata earn less wages compared to those in Ahmedabad. Wages are not only higher in Ahmedabad, they are also relatively more uniform compared to what is observed in Kolkata. Domestic workers in Ahmedabad are found to be either the residents of the same locality or seasonal migrants from nearby districts of Ahmedabad. Contrary to the scenario in Ahmedabad, wages in Kolkata are found to vary considerably across cities with northern parts having lower wages than that in the southern parts. Majority of the domestic workers in Kolkata are not usually residents of the same locality, as they usually commute daily from near-by districts by local trains and bus/auto-rickshaw.

Since there is no uniformity with regard to payment of wages, it varies from locality to locality within the city itself depending on labour market dynamics as well as relative bargaining power of employers and domestic workers. Even local demography has an impact on the wages. Socio-economic conditions of the domestic workers also are an important determining factor. When workers in Ahmedabad are found to be more organized informally in terms of fixing the wage rates, ensuring the entitlement to paid leaves and annual increments/bonus, there is no practice found in standardizing

the time and intensity of the tasks performed accurately. The broad categories of tasks such as sweeping and cleaning, washing utensils, cooking, dusting etc, depending on the number of family members and floor area of the house/flat are therefore the important criteria for setting wages. Most of the domestic workers are not aware about the concept of minimum wages and inclusion thereof. They perceive their wages as inadequate in a context of overwhelming insecure work environment.

Workers are found to be devoid of various formal protective mandates such as paid leaves and annual increments. Monetary and non-monetary supports during sickness and emergencies are also not universally available as it depends on the benevolence of the employers and the workers' relationship with them.

As there is a handful of NGOs that help in training the domestic workers and their bargaining with the employers, even within informal set-up the domestic work-space, as reflected in various tasks and wage rates, seem to be more standardized in Ahmedabad whereas variation in wage rates and tasks is abysmal and informality within the domestic work-space is more visible in Kolkata. Worker turnover rate is also higher in Kolkata. Even though informality is higher among domestic workers' in Kolkata, extent of unionization is also higher. There are voluntary organizations, self-help groups who work among the domestic workers in Kolkata. Unlike in Ahmedabad, domestic Workers in Kolkata could garner trade union rights in recent times. However in absence of legal welfare provisions the effectiveness of trade unions and civil society organizations are evidently not effective in addressing the concern of a large section of domestic workers in both the cities.

The access to various basic amenities at work-places and human dignity is at stake to a considerable extent owing to cultural practices, norms and conventions for domestic workers. While the workers are subjected to such difficulties and abuses, even if sexually harassed, many of them do not prefer to report it to police, largely because of their lack of awareness about legislative provisions. One of the ways to address the situation of workers could be through ratifying the conventions that are being adopted at the global level from time to time. The extension of collective agreements by governments to all workers within the domestic work-space may reinforce the well-being and rights of domestic workers. Domestic workers are usually

allowed to use restrooms at homes where they work and certain households also provide food. However, there are instances where such facilities are not available.

State intervention in the sphere of domestic work is almost non-existence in both the cities and it remains unregulated. Domestic work remains a low-paid distress livelihood option which does not guarantee a basic minimum sustenance. It is a supplementary livelihood option engaging almost 100 per cent female workforce without job and income security. Skill component is also low and inadequate. At present, most of domestic workers do not receive any social security benefits. The most desired benefit is pension at old-age as after a certain age they are unable to continue work.

Despite having any formal association/trade union the collective voice of domestic workers has found an informal institutional arrangement through the norms and practices of task-specific payments, annual bonus during Diwali (Hindu new-year) and annual increments in Ahmedabad. Although NGOs seem to have a role in bargaining the wages and terms of employment, their coverage in terms of including the domestic workers is limited. Since domestic workers have been able to formalize a trade-union in Kolkata, the process of gaining the visible status of employment seems to be forthcoming for them. While the formalization, on one hand may erode the present benevolent behaviour of employers toward their employees particularly in cities like Ahmedabad, wherein the functioning of trade-unions has been limited or disappeared, it would certainly initiate the process of addressing various exploitations and violation of human dignity that take place within the domestic work-space. With the formal recognition of their 'real work' domestic workers are expected to bargain further with the help of unions in future. Moreover, given the changing demand for care works from the cities and urban areas, the legislative provisions will certainly be able to streamline this sector that is in the process of evolving from a post-colonial feudal system of operation to a liberal system of services.

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