

**Women in the Informal Sector Work: A Case Study of Paid
Domestic Workers in Chennai Urban Slum**

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

With the neo-liberal economic changes, women's entry into paid work has been phenomenal and this had led to a critical feminist scholarship on paid domestic work in the transnational and local contexts. This increasing labour force participation of women is captured through the debates on the feminisation of labour, though in India such an increase in women's work force participation had been visible only in the informal sector work. Scholars have observed that women's participation in low wage informal sector work in India has significantly gone up with the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies. Though overall women's entry into paid work has not seen an increase, there has been an increase in women's participation in low wage informal work of certain kind. It's interesting to note that during the same period when women's workforce participation has been low, women's entry into paid domestic work has seen a phenomenal increase with a large number of lower castes, class women taking to this work as their livelihood option. Though proliferation of this work category in urban centers (NCEUS, 2007, 2009) has been well established now, an enquiry into - why is this 'work' is emerging as the most preferred option by urban poor women, is the main concern for this study.

Literature on women's work in the informal sector is plenty and almost all of them focus on the contemporary problems of neo-liberalism and feminisation of labour either through details of micro-level working of informal sector or through accounts of socio-economic changes in the lives of women workers. Moving beyond this literature, in our study we have attempted to analyse women worker's priorities and choice of an informal work in a micro-level context of a Chennai urban slum. As others have pointed out our study too establishes that there is a complex web of social factors beyond the economic reasoning of neo-liberal politics that contribute to women's choice of the paid domestic work. For these reasons our study has departed from the explorations into economic dimensions of women's paid domestic work in terms of their contributions to production relations, labour rights and so on, to capture the multiple social and cultural factors that determine women's choice of work. My study also briefly discussed implications of such a choice for their wellbeing.

Feminists have long been concerned with the devaluation of women's work in the domestic sphere and the role of patriarchy in the sexual division of labour. Feminist economists for example, have critiqued the mainstream economics for marginalising

women's contributions to the production and reproduction both in the public and private sphere. Their earliest debates on this formed the basis for our understanding on women's contribution to the production relations as labourers and their invisibility in labour economics. While their scholarship enabled us to understand why and how women's work continues to be devalued, the social reproduction approach of the feminists have been very useful for our study. This approach is useful in that, the way in which women's unpaid domestic work has contributed to the subsidisation of wage labour or how it has enabled the wage worker to sustain her engagement with the productive work. In other words, women's domestic work, both the paid and unpaid work, has been an important site for theorising the complex linkages between gender relations and social reproduction in terms of how they have shaped the larger processes such as neo-liberal development policies and also how the latter has shaped women's work.

In chapter two, we have engaged with various debates on valuation of women's domestic labour starting with the classical economists' consideration of women's domestic labour as unproductive and so on. The neo-classical economists with their utilitarian approach have only rationalised the devaluation of women's unpaid work. Though Marxist feminists have highlighted the importance of women's unpaid work as reproductive labour, they have analysed women's reproductive work only in relation to production and generation of surplus. They were criticised by the Radical feminists for their lack of attention to patriarchy and its role in undermining women's contribution in the domestic sphere.

In addition to the social reproduction framework, our study has found the Fraser's arguments on the politics of recognition and redistribution extremely useful in understanding the problems of women workers in informal sector work and the approaches of the state. Tamil Nadu has carried out welfare measures for women under the agenda of social justice, but all under vain due to misrecognition of specific problems related to patriarchy and domesticity. We have explained how such a misrecognition had overburdened the paid domestic workers who choose to work in the 'invisible' private sphere of the home which has been marked out as outside the 'political' and public work sphere.

We have also found the scholarship of Doreen Massey on spatial politics and gender very useful for our study, given the large scale migration, growing informal sector economy and the massive incorporation of poor women into this work for which the geo-social locale of an urban poor settlement like Kallukuttai had provided adequate impetus. Precisely because the social reproductive framework is not adequate to cover a range of issues such as

spatial politics mainly the cultural and social dimensions of women's lived realities both in the slum as well as at their work place, we have looked into these issues to nuance arguments related to the social reproduction. The spatial dimensions along with the cultural aspects have helped us to understand the challenges women face and the choices they make with respect to paid employment.

Our detailed account of the spatial politics of an urban slum, Kallukuttai, in chapter three, offers us insight into the conditions and context in which the paid domestic work has become the single largest work, chosen by poor urban women. A critical review of various empirical literatures on paid domestic work shows that poor women's choice of paid domestic work is embedded in such geographies. The spatial location that we have studied is linked to neo-liberal economic and social developments and the political history of Tamil Nadu. A critical analysis, of the role of the state with respect to the recognition of paid domestic work, has thrown light on new aspects of mis-recognition and mal-distribution. Further, the complex ways in which any kind of distress migration –where migrants mainly from neighbouring rural areas are dispossessed of land and livelihood- that impacts women's lives and their work choice are better understood only when we view slums as 'zones of exclusion' whose residents are subjected to the logic of flexible citizenship (Ong, 2005). I have discussed how- the slum as residential place, which also acts as subaltern counter publics (Fraser, 1990), has influenced in informing the work choice of urban poor women. Massey's (1991a, 2005) perspective on viewing space in terms of social relation further helped in locating the study area, Kallukuttai which surrounded by the middle class residential areas, IT industrial hub and commercial centers which houses the underprivileged lower caste families and individuals working only in the informal sector..

The material and cultural burden on poor women to fulfil the responsibility of domesticity as one of the ideals of womanhood along with the pressures of consumption and dual earning under neo-liberal market economy makes the women not only to look for work closer to home but also choose a dually informalised work like paid domestic work, which is said to offer them 'flexibility' in work. These facts mostly gleaned through our survey and women worker's narratives, were contextualized by reviewing the social history of the evolution of concept of domesticity (Hancock, 2001), womanhood (Anandhi, 1991) in the colonial and post-colonial Tamil context. Additionally, we have attempted to capture the cultural and material realities of the dual earner family norm of neo-liberal era which has

actively strengthened the concept of domesticity and womanhood which in turn has influenced the slum women to choose the low paid domestic work for their survival.

The significance of women's paid and unpaid work cannot be captured without understanding the role of patriarchy within capitalism. Capitalism by incorporating patriarchy has devalued women's work and it has direct implication for paid domestic work. In this context, it is important to interrogate the devaluation of women's work as 'unpaid' work or as the 'work of love' which has led to invisibilisation of paid domestic work. Because, this 'unpaid' domestic work performed by women workers in their home has also legitimised the low pay and invisibility of women's contributions as workers, more so when it is performed as paid work by poor 'lower' caste women as this identity justifies the low pay for their manual labour. As we have argued in various chapters here, it is this mis-recognition of women's contribution both as unpaid and paid domestic workers which has led to the poor bargaining capacity of the workers who had to negotiate the abject working conditions and wages which are intricately linked with feminine ideals of Tamil society.

Along with these discussions we have also nuanced the discussion on the nature of informalisation that is specific to paid domestic work. Using women workers' narratives we have mapped the specificities of dual informality involved in paid domestic work. The insights offered by feminists in understanding not just paid domestic work but also the working of patriarchy in the context of caste and neo-liberal economy have been important here. From our detailed survey and analysis it is clear that it is not just gender that has been crucial in understanding why and how women mainly choose to work as paid domestic workers. Gender is also not the only factor for the prevalence of a layered inequality in this sector of work. There are also other aspects which continue to dominate the organisation of paid domestic work.

Paid domestic work brings to the surface not only social inequality in the global context and international division of labour but also racial division of labour. We have observed that this has been reflected in the form of gender, caste and class marginalisation within the context of India. To further go deeper into these dimensions to understand the issues of paid domestic worker and women's work choice, we have specifically looked into the caste question and other non-market forces such as the ideology of womanhood and Dravidian welfarism etc which have shaped women worker's perceptions of self-identity, work ethics as well as their politics of resistance.

The following are some of the important findings of this study:

7.1 Informal Sector Work En/gendered

The analysis of the paid work done by women reveals a clear gender segregation in informal sector work. Female workers doing paid work are mostly employed as paid domestic workers (29 percent of total adult women), housekeepers (17 percent of total adult women), *Sithaal*, company work, etc. and male workers are employed in various jobs, like as Mason, *Periyaal*, and driver, etc. It is only in the company work category that we find both male and female working. There are a few women security guards as well but that is mainly for providing security to female co-workers in the various IT companies that they are employed. Otherwise we observed a clear gender based segregation of paid employment. Further, 3.5 percent, 2.7 percent, 1.6 percent, 2.22 percent and 1.4 percent of total adult women were working as tailor, low end IT related work, owning their own small shops, work in other shops as casual workers and security work in various companies respectively. Around 46 percent of adult women were not doing paid work but mainly taking care of home. They have been referred in this study as homemakers (HM). However, in the course of the interview some of these homemakers revealed that they either done some paid work in the past or planning to undertake one in future. Some of them even reported working part time as tailors at home or tea-makers to earn some extra money. In other words, poor women in Kallukuttai slum did not have the opinion of remaining permanently as homemakers and their earning was important for their families.

7.2 Spatial Factors Influencing Women's Choice of Work

In analysing the contextual and spatial dimensions of women's work choice, we had looked into the following aspects in details:

- Urban Expansion under Neo-liberalism
- Distance from workplace
- Residential Locality as Zones of Exclusion
- Spatial Politics: Role of State and Political Parties
- Living Space as Subaltern Counter Public Sphere

7.2.1 Urban Expansion under Neo-liberalism

The structural re-adjustment that the Indian economy is going through in the neo-liberal era, is leading to changes in rural and urban areas which have serious implications for women's work choices and for their lives in general especially in the urban slums from where a large number of women are recruited for informal sector work in the city. Though the situation in Tamil Nadu is different with many welfare provisions mainly for the lower caste poor families and for women, the neo-liberal economic policies with its stress on the service economy offers very little possibility for a decent formal sector work for the poor distress driven migrants. Especially for the women whose work is considered marginal to the production and market economy. This impacts women's lives and their work choice. Most of the residents of Kallukuttai are distress migrants who have come to Chennai primarily in search of job because of lack of livelihood or land or both in native place. In Chennai, poor men are not finding a decent job and being pushed into informal settlements, for their family's basic survival, women too have to take up any work that contributes to their family income. 53.5 percent of them in our survey stated that they migrated to Chennai only in search of jobs. It was also clear from survey that most of the migrants were either landless or small land holders owning one acre or less land. Only 33 households out of 250 households that we surveyed owned any land in their native place. With the decline of agriculture and the sudden boom in the service sector work in the neo-liberal period, these landless poor had shifted to the city in search of work.

7.2.2 Distance from Workplace

The near universal culture of women to take care of the household work along with their need to earn the family's livelihood has forced the Kallukuttai slum women to find work closer to their homes. Lack of public transport facilities, child care facilities, primary health centre and so on further added to their inability to cope up with the dual burden of work. For these reasons many of them chose paid domestic work as the best alternative to any other informal sector work as they could walk or cycle to their work place and could negotiate for better timing for work. The location of Kallukuttai slum, in the midst of IT companies, entertainment and commercial centers along with residential areas of relatively high income earners also helped the poor women in finding work like paid domestic work, housekeeping in the vicinity of their home.

7.2.3 Residential Locality as Zones of Exclusion

Kallukuttai being a de-notified slum are not provided with certain facilities, which have been made available by State to other citizens of Chennai, like piped drinking water and non-drinking water, paved roads, street lights etc. However, the State provides them with voter Id, ration card, electricity to their respective homes, water too transported through water tanks, etc. This dichotomy can be made sense through Ong's concept of *zones of exclusion* and *flexible citizenship*, whereby in aid of neo-liberal development process slums like Kallukuttai are treated like zones of exclusion and the slum dwellers here are subjected to the logic of flexible citizenship. Our study finds women are caught in such politics of exclusion and flexible citizenship with many unintended consequences for their work and lives. For instance, fetching water is mostly considered part of housework, which is done by women. Due to lack of pipe supply of water, the water tanker that supplies water to the slum comes twice a week at specific time of the day and atleast one adult woman of the household is expected to remain at home at that time to fetch water. Accordingly, many women either choose to remain at home as unemployed or choose to do paid domestic work so that they can be at home at the time of the arrival of water tanks to fetch water to their homes.

7.2.4 Spatial Politics: Role of State and Political Parties

Only in the recent years few women workers from this slum have begun to organise themselves as workers in trade unions. However, most of them being part of informal sector work have not been organised into such collectives. Further, the de-notified status of Kallukuttai make them vulnerable to possible eviction, whereby they are mostly subservient to the 'patronage politics' of two dominant parties in Tamil Nadu, whom they rely upon for their protection from such eviction and for their basic infrastructure facilities in the slum. For instance, women workers are mostly organised under Self-help groups, which acts as a platform for them to access credit as well as negotiate with the Dravidian parties seeking their favour instead of resorting to agitational politics.

7.2.5 Living Space as Subaltern Counter Public Sphere

Many of the women workers shared the view that their living in Kallukuttai enabled them to find job closer to their homes, negotiate better wage, and make choices among various informal works. The slum has enabled them to build alternative social network beyond caste and extended families. They choose to stay in Kallukuttai not only because of cheap land available to own a house or rent within their means, but also because it socially

helps them to get a foothold in the city without worrying much about the interference or supervision by dominant castes or class. In this sense, Kallukuttai acts like subaltern counter publics. The working classes, even though dependent from time to time on patronage politics of Dravidian parties, are able to create a public sphere of their own.

7.3 Other Factors Influencing Women's Choice of Work

Moving beyond the spatial politics, we have also analysed how other economic and social factors have influenced women's choice of paid domestic work as well as other informal sector works. As our analysis has shown the social and economic factors that influence women's choice of paid work are basically an interplay between their educational status, condition of their place of living and patriarchal gender norms at home and at work, and economic vulnerability. It was found that though economic factors play a role in pushing the women towards paid work its influence has been overweighed in the literature on women's work, at the cost of other factors such as the spatio-social and cultural factors. Our field survey indicate that factors like migration, caste, religion, educational aspirations and certain economic conditions together have influenced women's perceptions and choice of work and therefore, we have explored in chapter five the world of women workers through profiling their lives and responsibilities vis-a-vis men in their families through the prism of caste and work to understand the intersectional nature of inequality and its impact on women's work.

7.3 1. Economic Factors

As it is evident from our sample of Ambedkar Puratchi Nagar (APN), Kallukuttai, the work participation rate (WPR) among women is 40 percent which is close to double of WPR of urban females in Tamil Nadu at 21.8 percent (Census, 2011). In order to understand the role that the economic compulsion may play in pushing women to take up low paid informal jobs, we have taken husbands' income stability (defined in terms of monthly income) and stable earning capacity as proxy of household's economic position.

Husband's income stability: The analysis of sample survey data clearly shows that there is direct relation between husband's income stability and women's choice to become a homemaker. We have shown in these data that only 19 percent of the partners of PDW and 39 percent of the partners of other working women have stable monthly income, while 47.5 percent partners of HM are having stable monthly income. Though 50 percent of

husbands of HK also have stable monthly income, most of them are into various kinds of low end informal work. Further, around 81 percent of domestic workers' husbands earn only weekly or daily wage.

These data also show that the homemaker's husbands are in stable monthly jobs and have higher earnings than the husbands of PDW, HK and OW. 41 percent of all those who have high income (as per the situation in Kallukuttai) of Rs. 10,000 and above are husbands of HM even though HM constitute only 20 percent of total sample of 250. On the other hand, only 20 percent of husband of PDW, which constitute 40 percent of total sample of 250, have a stable monthly income of Rs. 10,000 and above.

The economic compulsion becomes more evident when we look at the reason for their migration to Kallukuttai. 73 percent of all reasons given for migrating to Kallukuttai is housing - availability of cheap land and house at cheap rent or access to them because of the presence of their relatives in the area. Among the low paid domestic workers, 34.7 percent were able to purchase land for housing in an area which was surrounded by IT industry and high end residential area. It is interesting to note in this context that HM households constitute 56 percent of all households which have settled in Kallukuttai in last 10 years or less though their proportion in overall sample is 20 percent. Also among respondent of households who have resided for more than 10 years in Kallukuttai around 76 percent are working as either PDW (39 percent) or HK (37 percent).

7.3.2 Social Factors

This study shows that apart from economic reasons there are several other social factors behind women's work choice especially if they choose to work outside home. It is clear that patriarchal norms do play a role in shaping their choices. However, these are not evident and are not directly observable. But when we analyse the education level of women workers and that of their husbands', apart from its direct bearing on their choice of work, we do find patriarchal norms and middle class sensibilities playing a role in such differences.

Respondent's education and work choice: It is clear that lack of education directly play a role in their work choice. For instance, the proportion of PDW, HK and OW who have never attended school is 42 percent, 30 percent and 27 percent respectively. However, among the HM their proportion is 20 percent. Further, as the education level of respondents go up, we find them withdrawing from PDW and HK work, as it is considered demeaning unclean work, and working either in some socially 'better' considered OW or as HM doing

housework. Only 10 and 17 percent of PDW and HK respectively have studied beyond high school.

Husband's education and work choice: Apart from direct role that education seems to have in influencing work choice of women, we also found some women, neither better educated nor economically well off, who were unwilling to do any paid work outside home even though they were spending a lot on children's education in private school. On enquiring further we found them to be emulating middle class or upper caste sensibilities, one of the ways this manifested itself was through their husband's education. Most of the homemaker's husbands were comparatively better educated than all other paid working women's husband. The proportion of husbands, who had not attended school, was 7 percent for HM as compared to 26 percent for OW, 31 percent for PDW and 40 percent for HK. Further, the proportion of husbands with education level of 6 and above were 72 percent for HM respondent household as compared to 48.5 percent, 52 percent and 61 percent for PDW, HK and OW respondent respectively. It is also worth noting that some of the comparatively better educated other workers in non-menial and non-manual work so their husband's do not seem to have much problem in accepting their work. However, husbands with no education and lower level education prefer women staying home rather than engaging in PDW or HK, which according to middle class or upper caste sensibilities is considered demeaning jobs.

7.3.3 Unpaid Domestic Work as a Constraint on Paid Women Workers

In addition, we have also explored the gendered dimensions of basic amenities and welfare within the slum that affect women's choice as well as the patriarchal culture of the worker's household that demands women's extensive time and labour for the maintenance and sustenance of the family. The gender and generational variations of such choices are also analysed here.

It is clear from our survey data that if the household work, including child care or elderly care work, intensity is high then there is higher chance of women choosing to remain confined only to home i.e. be a HM. In our survey in Ambedkar Puratchi Nagar we found that 90-95 percent of HM respondents carried out all the main household chores – like cooking, washing utensils, washing clothes, fetching water, sweeping and mopping – themselves. For this reason, if there is a small baby at home and there is no alternative help at home to take care of the baby then mostly women withdrew from doing any paid work outside home until the child grows up to atleast school going age. However, even in the earning women

household, majority of the household works are done by respondents themselves with a help from another woman in the household. This is the dual burden for the women workers and for the women homemakers as its is about patriarchal constraint to take care of children and household chores that militate against their accessing paid work until they are partially freed from such responsibilities.

Further, analysing the data, it became evident that PDW are doing much more household work compared to HK and OW respondents. For instance, if we take cooking 89 percent of PDW, 83 percent of HK and 74 percent of OW women do cooking at their homes. Likewise for washing clothes and washing vessels it is been seen that 88 and 84 percent by PDW; 70 and 63 by HK and 76 and 77 percent by OW. Infact, it seems that burdened with enormous work in the household, they are left with no choice but to take up works like paid domestic work (part- time) so that they are able manage their household work along with paid as unlike rich household they cannot hire another. Conforming to the patriarchal norms also require that they cannot demand men of the family to share household work.

7.3.4 Life-Cycle and Age of Workers

When we mapped the life-cycle and age of (respondent) worker on the kind of work – HM, PDW, HK and OW – they are doing, we have found a pattern. If unmarried, women are doing paid work and they are mostly in regular salaried or non-menial OW like company work. Once they get married and give birth to children (which mostly happens immediately after marriage) they withdraw from all paid work and become HM until their children have grown up to school going age. Women then rejoin paid work but mostly in paid domestic work (PDW) as it offers them ‘flexibility’ to manage unpaid household work along with paid work. In their mid-life, some of them take up Housekeeping (HK) or other works like *Sithaal* if it offers them higher income. In slightly older age they tend to get back to PDW or HM. Thus, informal sector low paid women worker seems to have a life cycle oriented work choices, which helps them to manage both the household responsibilities as well as the compulsion to earn income for the poor household. It is in this context we had analysed the data on children’s age across work category – HM, PDW, HK and OW - to understand how child bearing, rearing and schooling them had influenced women’s choice of work. This also brought to the fore the lack of subsidised child care provisions of the State which used to have Anganwadis (State run child care centers) working efficiently few years ago. A close analysis has also reveal that HM and PDW households have more babies or children in play school or children in class 1, compared to HK and OW household.

7.4 Conditions and Status of Paid Domestic Workers

Women who choose paid domestic work initially did so because this work helped them to manage their household unpaid work. Most of the paid domestic workers in Kallukuttai did paid domestic work on a 'part-time' basis. With the lack of stable income from their husbands, they are dependent on their paid domestic work and therefore they do adhere to all kinds of informal working conditions. The workers do believe that they do paid work with dedication (labour of love) and the wage offered by the employers is also counted as a favour or as the generosity of the employers by many of these workers. We have discussed how many of these workers consider it an honour and that there is a sense of pride in receiving wages for their work because this work feeds their children. Paid domestic workers did not consider it below their dignity to do household work as long as they were paid for it. Some of them said that such works provided them an autonomy and freedom to decide on family expenditures.

It was also expressed by the workers that this work is the most monotonous/routinised and tiresome. Most of the women do the same kind of work like washing clothes, vessels, cleaning, mobbing, dusting and all kinds of work required to maintain a household. They felt that they are doing same kind of work not just the whole day, but for their whole life, and at various places. This is not the case with other informal sector work like company work or construction work. Paid domestic workers are also under conditions of various kinds of exploitation due to indefinite work nature. The worker is also under vulnerable situation as the work place is the employers' home which is totally controlled and regulated by the employers social system which puts the worker in a disadvantage position.

7.4.1. Caste in Work

The study has indicated that the lower caste status of the worker did not affect their entrenchment in the paid domestic work. In the post1990s Chennai seems to have overcome the caste aspect of purity and pollution in recruiting women workers for both cooking as well as for cleaning work. This was clearly brought out in our quantitative survey. But my study was able to capture the nuances of various other forms of discriminations which subtly reminded the caste differences as one of the important factors in discrimination of women workers. A large section of paid domestic workers in Kallukuttai do only the cleaning work rather than cooking which is associated with skilled work as well as with some purity aspect of caste. Workers of Kallukuttai belonging to OBC and Dalit castes (a majority of them)

generally appear to inhibit the employers to ask these women to undertake the cooking work. This clearly adds to the racial otherness of the domestic workers.

The Dalit women workers were aware of the subtle discriminations at the work place when the employers demanded cleanliness and barred the workers from entering the ritual spaces in their homes. Here, Caste was not overtly talked about and evidently did not form a basis for such discriminations, partly this is how it was presented to us since the workers themselves rationalised it by alluding to employer's practices of hygiene and purity. Some workers considered it as part and parcel of the employer and worker hierarchies and that they had to accept them to survive in this work.

Embodying feminine virtues and demonstrating them in their work is of utmost important for the workers to earn a good reputation for themselves and for their work. With the lack of work security, the only means to sustain the work is to earn a 'good' name from the employer. Most of the workers strongly believed that, this would guarantee them a secured job at the same house for a longer period of time. They also said that obedience yields better result since the employers take note of such behaviour and reward the worker. Contrary to the above 'qualifications' of the good workers the bad ones are defined by their non-diligence in keeping with proper timing for work, taking leave often, answering back the employers, refusing to carry out extra work and so on. Some women workers do resist these moral codes through various means. We have elaborated some of their strategies of resistance in chapter six. However, the generosity of the employers was highly valued by the workers and so also their kindness towards the working class. The response of the workers towards sexual harassment at work place is important to understand how in the absence of effective law women workers have to use available social norms as strategies to protect themselves against such vulnerabilities at work.

Women workers in general, though work in several households to earn their minimum wages, have internalised the idea of 'flexibility' at work to legitimise their choice of this work but their narratives do reveal that they were aware of the drudgery of this work. However, through their narratives of ideal workers and ideal womanhood it becomes clear that accept the hegemonic values of domesticity and feminisation of household labour. For instance, women domestic workers often do not perceive themselves as workers but as 'servants' at the service of their employers. Second many of them perceive this work mainly as extension of their own household work thus legitimising the moral embeddedness of choosing this work. This work allows the woman to earn without being seen as not violating

the traditional patriarchal notions of Ideal womanhood like domesticity, motherhood and so on.

7.5 Legislating for Paid Domestic Worker's Rights

Though India has several labour legislations, the domestic labour has been kept outside the ambit of such legislations. In recent times some of the States in India - Kerala, Punjab, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha - have taken policy initiatives in the form of welfare boards and inclusion of domestic work under existing minimum wage law and so on. One of the biggest hurdles in this effort to recognise paid domestic work is the obsession with the idea of home and family as private sphere and women's work in this sphere being misrecognised as 'labour of love'. This has not only invisibilised domestic work – both the paid or unpaid ones– but has helped in devaluing the work. Thus, with respect to paid domestic work, the impact of such a non recognition and subsequent devaluation of women's work need to be addressed together and not as separate processes. The invisibilisation also leads to perpetuating informality attached to this work. One of the important implications of this is that it becomes a compulsion on part of workers to accommodate extra work demanded by the employer.

I have analysed the State policy documents to demonstrate how different State governments in India have reluctantly made few efforts towards addressing the domestic worker's poor working conditions - by fixing minimum wages and through some other welfare measures. I have argued in this study that these state policies are mis-recognition of domestic work and the state measures have only led to mal-distributions. They do not recognise the specificities of paid domestic work and rights of the domestic workers but have merely extended certain patronage just as the employers. The first step towards recognition of this work and the rights of these workers would be to adopt proper definition of paid domestic work and then move towards addressing different redistributive rights of the workers according to the 'nature' of their work.

7.6 Contributions, Limitations of the Study

This study has attempted to nuance the concept of 'feminisation of work'. Feminisation of work as we have argued, is not just accounting for the inclusion of more number of women in such works but of analysing the nature of work for the way in which they have incorporated available patriarchal norms and values of womanhood into those work to justify exploitation of women workers. The complexity of the process of feminisation of

labour that is specific to the case of the paid domestic work, as we have discussed in chapter six, is related not just to the fact of large number of women are accessing this work, in what is known as informal sector work, but that women workers perform the same work in their own homes as well as in the employers homes that leads to specific problems of monotony, boredom and legitimisation of domestic work as solely women's work, irrespective of whether it is performed as paid work or as unpaid work.

It is in this context, I have argued that the paid domestic work performed by a large section of urban poor women is actually a 'dual informalised' work. Therefore the study has explored in detail (chapter six) the coping mechanism of women workers in dealing with the dual responsibility through the narratives of women workers.

While the study has extensively analysed women workers' perspectives, the researcher has not been able to interview the employers or capture their perspectives on the issues of work relations and so on. This lacuna is mainly because the researcher was advised by women worker as to not contact the employers as they feared that this might jeopardise their work and their relationships with the employers. Therefore the study has not collected the work place details of the workers, but for the general references to the middle class neighbourhood where these women worked as paid domestic workers. All the details of the work place have been captured and analysed only from the narratives of the women workers.

7.7 Future Scope of the Study

This study has elaborated and critically engaged with the complexities' of paid domestic work performed by poor women from lower castes living in the Chennai urban slum. Through a critical analysis of policy framework related to women worker's well being and through the review of literature of women domestic workers, we have accounted for how and why this work has remained mainly as women's work and the nature of engendering of this work in the neo-liberal economic context. In order to offer a nuanced understanding on the nature and complexities' of this work and the lived reality of these workers I have elaborated on the spatiality and gendered nature of this work and women workers' perceptions on this to understand the sudden proliferation of paid domestic work in the urban context of Chennai.

All the above issues bring out the need to introspect and analyse paid domestic work in the context of contemporary politics of urbanisation and changing caste relations in urban settlements. The consolidation of caste and manual work as something to be performed by the

OBC and Dalit caste groups are very visible in the manner in which caste based segregation take place in the service sector economy. The clustering of lower caste, mainly of women and at the same, their assimilation into dominant caste consumption values create enormous contradictions in their lives and that leads to women workers seeking consensus with dominant caste culture even as they resist 'extra work' and demand more wages. The future possibility of being organised as workers to fight for their fundamental labour rights, for these women workers, is contingent upon the critical distance that they maintain with State populism and with the dominant caste urban cultural values. Finally, it is only with the State recognition of paid women domestic workers' rights and upholding of their demands for equal wage for equal work through means of reformulation of labour laws and so on, the women workers in this sector might get a reprieve from the systemic oppression at work.