

Status of Tribal Domestic Workers in Jharkhand

SUNITA KUMARI

The status of the tribal domestic workers in Jharkhand is explored. It is evident that large numbers of tribal women are engaged as domestic workers inside and outside of the state, and the sector provides a large chunk of employment apart from the cultivation and agricultural sector. The data show differential engagement in the sector by age, urban–rural location, gender, and tribe.

Industrialisation and urbanisation encourage the demand of domestic services, with a servant-employing middle class and a surplus of unskilled workers (Neetha 2008). The growth of domestic service often increases inequality both in the rural and urban areas (ILO and IHD 2017; Wadhawan 2013). The rise of the nuclear family and dual-career couples has also increased the demand for domestic work. A study done by the Indian Social Institute (ISI) in 1993 had revealed that employers showed a preference for young women, especially young tribal girls, as they were seen as more reliable, obedient, and efficient in domestic work, especially in taking care of babies and the elderly. Further, they would also stick with the job for more extended periods, agree to work for lower wages, and could be controlled more easily (ISI 1993). The perception for the tribal woman as a better domestic worker on a cheaper wage is still prevalent.

The data on domestic workers show the feminisation of the service with the share of female workers having increased sharply over the period covered by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) 61st (2004–05) and 66th (2009–10) rounds. There is also a wage gap between male and female domestic workers due to men engaging in more skilled work, like driving and gardening, compared to the women working (cleaning and cooking) in the same household. This gendered division of labour is the product of the patriarchal nature of the society (ILO and IHD 2017). The work done by women domestic workers is considered unskilled, and, therefore, it attracts mostly uneducated or less educated tribal women. Domestic work occurs in an isolated, largely non-regulated, and privatised environment, and most domestic workers negotiate job terms and pay on an individual basis. There is no provision of social security in terms of provident fund,

health insurance, or pension. The conditions of work and poor socio-economic conditions of the workers expose the workers to physical and sexual violence, which remains mostly under-reported (Gupta 2019). The tribal pockets of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are recruitment hubs for women tribal domestic workers, picked up by recruitment agencies (Neetha 2008). These women often work in large cities. In Jharkhand, the majority of migrants are young women, some even below the age of 16, who leave home mainly because of lack of work opportunities locally and for mere survival (ILO 2015). According to a study by the ISI (1993), there is a preference for young girls as they are easier to control and they also obey their employers.

Several legislations such as the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and Minimum Wages Act, 1948 notified in various states refer to domestic workers. However, there remains an absence of a comprehensive, uniformly applicable, national legislation that guarantees fair terms of employment and decent working conditions across Indian states (United Nations in India nd).

Under the "Occupational classification of main workers and marginal workers other than cultivators and agricultural labourers by age and sex (for each tribe separately)" in the Census of India 2011, there are two categories of domestic workers: domestic and related helpers, cleaners and launderers; and domestic helpers and cleaners (based on National Classification of Occupations [NCO] 2004).¹ In 2011, there were 2,150 tribal women engaged in the former category as main workers in Jharkhand and 821 were marginal workers, while 2,026 women workers in the state were engaged in the latter category as main workers, and 799 as marginal workers. Out of total main female tribal workers engaged in work other than in the cultivation and agriculture sector, domestic workers constitute 3% of the workers, while around 1.5% were engaged as marginal workers in the sector. Further, the NSSO 68th round also studied the status of tribal women in India and Jharkhand (NSSO 2015).²

Sunita Kumari (sunita22jnu@gmail.com) teaches at the Department of Geography, Central University of Jharkhand.

Against this backdrop, this article explores the gender-tribe interplay among domestic workers. It also examines the age-specific distribution of women tribal domestic workers. The nature of work and the wage rate notified by the state government have also been studied. Along with the differential nature of work among tribal women and their marital status. Furthermore, lack of choice of work because of unavailability of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) job card, which is a significant source of employment in rural areas, also reveals their conditions. The NSSO 68th round data reveals that none of the workers had MGNREGA job cards and they were not eligible for provident fund/pension (that is, Global Philanthropy Forum [GPF], Central Provident Fund [CPF], Public Provident Fund [PPF], pension, etc), gratuity, and healthcare and maternity benefits. This aggravates the vulnerability of the workers. While absence of MGNREGA job cards reduces choice of work, absence of social security for the workers pushes them into vulnerability in their old age. Their work thus keeps them in a hand-to-mouth situation, and does not sustain them in the long term.

Nature of Work and Wage Rate

The wage rate of the domestic worker is the combination of both the nature of work and time spent on work. In many cases, domestic workers do pot washing twice in day in one household, in the morning as well as in the evening, but this excess of time spent on work does not reflect in their wages. There is often need to negotiate wages, but that is not always not possible. Tribal workers are unable to negotiate because of the language barrier and fear of loss of work.

Table 1: Nature of Work and Minimum Wage Rate

| Nature of Work | (Basic rates as of October 2019) | |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Daily Wage (For One Hour) | Monthly Wage (For One Hour) |
| Pot washing | 34.02 | 804.32 |
| Cloth washing/pot washing | 34.02 | 804.32 |
| Cloth washing/pot washing/blooming work of 1,000 sq feet | 34.02 | 884.32 |
| Cloth washing/pot washing/blooming work and to look after children (for 8 hours) | 274.81 per day (for 8 hours) | 7,145.06 (for 8 hours) |
| Cloth washing/pot washing/blooming work and to look after children/taking children to school and back and other miscellaneous domestic work (for 8 hours) | 274.81 per day (for 8 hours) | 7,145.06 (for 8 hours) |

Source: Department of Labour, Employment, Training and Skill Development, Government of Jharkhand, <https://shramadhan.jharkhand.gov.in/ftp/WebAdmin/documents/VDA-Pice%20Rate%20Notification-01-04-2020.pdf>.

Table 1 shows that Jharkhand government has notified five categories of work and their daily and monthly wage rates. For working on a full range of household responsibilities over an eight-hour day, they only receive a little more than ₹7,000 per month without any social security.

The NSSO (68th round) has collected data about activities of households as employers of domestic personnel under Division 97 of the National Industrial Classification, 2008. It includes subcategories and nature of work like housemaid/servant, cook, gardener, gatekeeper/chowkidar/watchman, governess/babysitter, tutor, driver and "others" (waiter, valets butlers, laundresses, chauffeurs, caretakers, secretaries, etc) (Table 2). According to it, around 85% of tribal women under Division 97 were working as housemaids, out of which 61% worked in rural areas and 39% in urban areas. The proportion of cooks to total domestic workers was 8% and they only worked in urban areas. Hardly any tribal women worked as governess/babysitter in rural areas. Around 6% were engaged in other work, out of which, 51% were working in rural areas and the rest in urban areas. The sector-wise distribution of work reflects that 56% of tribal women under Division 97 were engaged in work in rural areas and 44% in urban areas.

Table 3 shows the engagement of tribal women in different types of work in Jharkhand. Around 55% female tribal

Table 2: Nature of the Work and Female Tribal Domestic Workers in India in 2011-12

| Domestic Work | Female Tribal Domestic Workers | | Total |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|--------|-------|
| | Rural | Urban | |
| Housemaid | 61.12 | 38.88 | 85.53 |
| Cook | 0.00 | 100.00 | 7.75 |
| Governess/babysitter | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.33 |
| Others | 51.26 | 48.72 | 6.39 |
| Total | 55.88 | 44.12 | 100 |

Source: NSSO 68th round, Unit Level Analysis.

domestic workers were working as housemaids in the state, and 15% were working as cooks and the remaining 30% were engaged in other domestic work. Remarkably, according to NSSO 68th round data, none of the female tribal domestic workers in Jharkhand were working as cooks in the rural areas. Furthermore, none were working as babysitters in the urban areas of Jharkhand.

Table 3: Nature of the Work and Female Tribal Domestic Workers in Jharkhand in 2011-12

| Domestic Worker | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------|
| Housemaid | 55 |
| Cook | 15 |
| Other | 30 |

Source: NSSO 68th round, unit-level analysis.

The NSSO 68th round also reveals that all housemaids were married and all cooks were widowed, while 9% of tribal women workers who were engaged in other work were never married and 91% were currently married. It reflects the usual set up in society, where widowed and divorcee women work as cooks.³

Demographic Status of Workers

The data reflects that fewer tribal men are engaged in the work of domestic-related helpers, cleaners, and launderers than tribal women. For instance, there were 1,982 main male workers in the sector while the corresponding figure for women was 2,136, though the gap between men and women is not too large. There were 369 marginal male domestic workers, and the equivalent figure for the women was 813. A lack of work opportunities forces tribal women to opt for marginal work at a cheaper rate compared to tribal men. A similar pattern has been observed in the case of domestic helpers and cleaners in the state, with 2,026 main female workers engaged in this sector while the corresponding figure for men was 437. It shows the feminisation of this occupation in the tribal community.

The Oraon Dhangar, Santhal and Munda Patar tribes account for the highest numbers of women engaged as domestic and related helpers, cleaners and launderers. However, Table 4 (p 22) shows that the number of women from the Lohra tribe working as domestic and related helpers, cleaners and launderers was the highest in proportion to its total

population, followed by the Mohli, Gond, generic tribes, and Oraon Dhangar communities. The Parhaiya and Kawar tribes did not engage in this work, while a large proportion of women from the Lohra and Mahli communities were engaged as main workers in the occupation.

Again, a large number of women from the Oraon, Santhal, and Munda tribes were engaged as domestic helpers and cleaners in the state. However, Table 5 shows that the number of women from the Lohra tribe working as domestic helpers and cleaners was the highest in proportion to its population, followed by the Mahli and Gond tribes. The Parhaiya and Kawar tribes again did not report as working in this sector in the state, while Asur, Agaria, and Chero⁴ work as marginal workers. The reasons for the larger engagement of a particular tribe in domestic work cannot be concluded by this study, for which field survey would

be further required. However, it shows the occupational diversification among tribal men and women, that they are coming out from their traditional set up⁵ for their livelihood.

Table 6 shows that in the 5–14 age group among the main workers, the proportion of female child labour is almost three times higher than male child labour. In the case of the marginal workers, again, the proportion of female child labour is eight times higher than its counterpart. The demand for female child labour as domestic workers is on

Table 6: Distribution of Domestic and Related Helpers, Cleaners and Launderers by Gender in 2011 (%)

| Age Group | Main Worker | | Marginal Worker | |
|-----------|-------------|--------|-----------------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 5–14 | 25 | 75 | 10 | 90 |
| 15–34 | 15 | 85 | 20 | 80 |
| 35–59 | 20 | 80 | 16 | 84 |
| 60+ | 17 | 83 | 12 | 88 |

Source: Census of India (2011).

Table 4: Percentage to Total Population, Occupation of the Tribal Women as Domestic and Related Helpers, Cleaners and Launderers

| Tribe | Domestic and Related Helpers, Cleaners and Launderers | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------|---------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| | Population of Women (2) | Main Worker (3) | Marginal Worker (4) | Total (5) | Total (Col 5 as % of Col 2) (6) |
| (1) | | | | | |
| Oraon, Dhangar (Oraon) | 8,61,408 | 739 | 219 | 958 | 0.11 |
| Munda, Patar | 6,15,022 | 444 | 128 | 572 | 0.09 |
| Santal | 13,83,555 | 135 | 133 | 268 | 0.02 |
| Lohra | 1,06,843 | 225 | 79 | 304 | 0.28 |
| Ho | 4,69,080 | 154 | 92 | 246 | 0.05 |
| Mahli | 76,032 | 114 | 31 | 145 | 0.19 |
| Generic tribes, etc | 86,358 | 82 | 19 | 101 | 0.12 |
| Kharia, Dhelki Kharia, Dudh Kharia, Hill Kharia | 98,996 | 52 | 20 | 72 | 0.07 |
| Bhumij | 1,04,538 | 46 | 14 | 60 | 0.06 |
| Gond | 26,751 | 25 | 6 | 31 | 0.12 |
| Others | 4,56,231 | 134 | 80 | 214 | 0.05 |
| Total | 42,84,814 | 2,150 | 821 | 2,971 | 0.07 |

Source: Census of India (2011), B Series.

Table 5: Percentage to Total Population, Occupation of Tribal Women as Domestic Helpers and Cleaners in Jharkhand in 2011

| Tribe | Domestic Helpers and Cleaners | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| | Population of Women (2) | Main Worker (3) | Marginal Worker (4) | Total (5) | Total (Col 5 as % of Col 2) (6) |
| (1) | | | | | |
| Oraon, Dhangar (Oraon) | 8,61,408 | 711 | 215 | 926 | 0.11 |
| Santal | 13,83,555 | 103 | 133 | 236 | 0.02 |
| Munda, Patar | 6,15,022 | 428 | 125 | 553 | 0.09 |
| Ho | 4,69,080 | 138 | 92 | 230 | 0.05 |
| Lohra | 1,06,843 | 219 | 79 | 298 | 0.28 |
| Mahli | 76,032 | 114 | 31 | 145 | 0.19 |
| Kharia, Dhelki Kharia, Dudh Kharia, Hill Kharia | 98,996 | 51 | 20 | 71 | 0.07 |
| Generic tribes, etc | 86,358 | 80 | 18 | 98 | 0.11 |
| Bhumij | 1,04,538 | 42 | 14 | 56 | 0.05 |
| Gond | 26,751 | 25 | 4 | 29 | 0.11 |
| Others | 4,56,231 | 115 | 68 | 183 | 0.04 |
| Total | 42,84,814 | 2,026 | 799 | 2,825 | 0.07 |

Source: Census of India (2011), B Series.

the rise due to many reasons, including their ability to play with and look after the kids of the employers in metropolitan cities. The proportion of the main female workers in the 15–34 age group was 85%, while the equivalent figure for the male workers was 15%; a similar pattern has been found in the case of marginal workers as well. From the supply side, poverty and unemployment can be the cause behind the engagement of young tribal women as domestic workers, while on the demand side, their hard work and cheaper wage are one of the reasons for their engagement. Even across all age groups, including 60 plus, the proportion of the female domestic workers is higher than the male workers. It reflects the patriarchal nature of the society where the household chores are usually confined to women. The highest number of children working as domestic and related helpers, cleaners and launderers were from the Munda, Patar communities. The children of the Chero, Gond, Gorait, Karmli, Kharia, Dhelki Kharia, Dudh Kharia, Hill Kharia, Kisan, Nagesia, Lohra, Mahali, and generic tribes,⁶ etc, also engaged in domestic work in the state.

Table 7 shows that in the 5–14 age group, the proportion of the female domestic helpers and cleaners as a percentage of total main workers was 69% and marginal workers was 78%. While, in the case of the 15–34 age group, the gap between the main male and female domestic helpers and cleaners is not much. A similar pattern has been observed in the case of the 35–59 age group for the main workers, whereas in the case of marginal workers, the gap between men and women is wider. The proportion of 60+ main and marginal workers as domestic helpers and cleaners is also higher in female workers. The highest number of domestic workers in the 5–14 age group hailed from among the Oraon, Dhangar (Oraon) followed by

Table 7: Distribution of Domestic Helpers and Cleaners by Gender in 2011 (%)

| Age Group | Main Worker | | Marginal Worker | |
|-----------|-------------|--------|-----------------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 5–14 | 31 | 69 | 22 | 78 |
| 15–34 | 48 | 52 | 39 | 61 |
| 35–59 | 53 | 47 | 24 | 76 |
| 60+ | 28 | 72 | 12 | 88 |

Source: Census of India (2011).

Table 8: Sector-wise Distribution of Domestic Workers in Jharkhand in 2011

| | Main Worker | | | Marginal Worker | | |
|---|-------------|--------|-------|-----------------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| Domestic helpers and cleaners | | | | | | |
| Urban | 159 | 1,637 | 1,796 | 33 | 462 | 495 |
| Rural | 278 | 389 | 667 | 132 | 337 | 469 |
| Total | 437 | 2,026 | 2,463 | 165 | 799 | 964 |
| Domestic related and helpers, cleaners and launderers | | | | | | |
| Urban | 936 | 1,715 | 2,651 | 107 | 469 | 576 |
| Rural | 1,046 | 421 | 1,467 | 262 | 344 | 606 |
| Total | 1,982 | 2,136 | 4,118 | 369 | 813 | 1,182 |

Source: Census of India (2011).

Munda, Patar. Apart from them, the children of the Gond, Gorait, Ho, Kharia, Dhelki Kharia, Dudh Kharia, Hill Kharia, Kisan, Nagesia, Lohra, Mahli, Munda, Patar, Santal and generic tribes, etc, were also engaged as domestic workers.

Urban–Rural Distribution

Table 8 shows the differential picture of the rural–urban distribution of the domestic helpers and cleaners. In the urban areas, the number of main male domestic helpers and cleaners was almost four to five times lesser than the female workers. It reflects that women prefer this work more along with own household responsibilities, while men prefer other work. In rural areas, there were only 667 domestic workers, while in the urban areas, the equivalent figure was 1,796. This reflects higher demand for domestic workers in urban areas. In the case of the marginal workers, there is no sharp difference observed between the two sectors. In the case of the domestic-related helpers, cleaners and launderers, there is not much of a gap reported between main male workers of the rural and urban areas, while the corresponding figure for women has reported a significant gap, with 1,715 female workers in urban areas and only 421 in rural areas.

In Conclusion

The large numbers of tribal women working in the domestic work sector reflect the feminisation of the work. The participation of the Oran tribe was found to be the highest in numbers and that of the Lohra tribe the highest in proportion to their population in this sector. The socio-economic conditions of these tribes in the state can contribute to the reasons for their taking up domestic

work. The prevailing poor economic conditions of the tribe pushes their children towards working in this sector too. A large number of girl children are engaged as domestic workers, raising a number of issues, such as school drop-outs, and the fear of security and violence at the workplace. A large chunk of the domestic workers are in the urban areas, showing how urbanisation has increased the demand for domestic workers inside and outside the state. The absence of social security and choice of work further pushes them to work in this sector. However, there is a need for the protection of tribal women from exploitation.

NOTES

- 1 “Occupational classification of main workers and marginal workers other than cultivators and agricultural labourers by age and sex (for each tribe separately),” Census of India 2011, <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/SCST-Series/STo6.html>.
- 2 Refer to the Economic Survey of Jharkhand 2017–18 (https://finance.jharkhand.gov.in/pdf/budget2018_19/Jharkhand_Economic_Survey_2017_18.pdf) and the Economic Survey of Jharkhand 2018–19 (https://finance.jharkhand.gov.in/pdf/JES_2018_19_ebook.pdf) for more information on the status of tribes in Jharkhand.
- 3 Divorced or widowed women are financially most vulnerable after the divorce from or death of the male breadwinner in the household. Thus, for supporting their families they

work as domestic workers or cooks. Getting domestic work or cooking jobs is relatively easy for them compared to other work.

- 4 Sample size with 10 and more than 10 as main workers have taken for the data analysis in this study while sample of these tribes in this sector is less than 10. So, it has mentioned separately.
- 5 The tribes would generally rely on agriculture, hunting, collecting forest products, etc.
- 6 Generic tribes include those who returned themselves merely as Schedule Tribe, and in whose case the enumerator did not record the actual name of the tribe.

REFERENCES

- Gupta, R (2019): “Workplace Sexual Harassment of Women Domestic Workers: Issues and Challenges in the Legal Framework in India,” *Recognition of the Rights of Domestic Workers in India*, U Mahanta and I Gupta (eds), Singapore: Springer, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-5764-0_5.
- ILO (2015): “Indispensable Yet Unprotected: Working Conditions of Indian Domestic Workers at Home and Abroad,” Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch, International Labor Organization, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_378058.pdf.
- ILO and IHD (2017): “Persisting Servitude and Gradual Shifts towards Recognition and Dignity of Labour: A Study of Employers of Domestic Workers in Delhi and Mumbai,” ILO Decent Work Team for South Asia and Country Office for India, International Labor Organization and Institute of Human Development, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/--ro-bangkok/---sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_622812.pdf.
- ISI (1993): “The Tribal Domestic Workers at the Cross Road: A Search for Alternatives—A Report on the Status of Domestic Working Women in India,” Indian Social Institute, Delhi.
- Neetha, N (2008): “Regulating Domestic Work,” *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 43, No 37, pp 26–28.
- NSSO (2015): “Employment and Unemployment in India,” National Sample Survey 68th Round 2011–12, National Sample Survey Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, Delhi.
- United Nations in India (nd): “Rights for Domestic Workers,” viewed on 5 April 2019, <http://in.one.un.org/page/rights-for-domestic-workers/>.
- Wadhawan, Neha (2013): “Living in Domestic-City: Women and Migration for Domestic Work from Jharkhand,” *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 48, No 43, pp 47–54.

Licensing by EPW

EPW has licensed its material for non-exclusive use to only the following content aggregators—Contify, Factiva and Jstor.

Contify currently disseminates EPW content to LexisNexis, Thomson Reuters, Securities.com, Gale Cengage, Acquiremedia News Bank and ProQuest.

Factiva and Jstor have EPW content on their databases for their registered users.

EPW does not have licensing arrangements with any other aggregators.

EPW requests readers to let it know if they see EPW material on any unlicensed aggregator.

EPW needs the support of its readers to remain financially viable.