Chapter 7
SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

In the foregoing discussion there have been analysed the data related to socio-economic conditions, nature of work and work conditions, impact of work and problems of the women domestic workers with reference to the Silchar town. In this chapter the discussion taken under this study titled “Women in Unorganised Sector of Economy: A Study of Women Domestic Workers in Silchar Town” is summarized. Therefore, the research problem, the methodology, the context, the findings and a conclusion of the study are given below.

I. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

A domestic worker is someone who works within the employer's household. Domestic workers perform a variety of household services for an individual or a family, from providing care for children and elderly dependents to cleaning and household-maintenance, known as housekeeping. Responsibilities may also include cooking, doing laundry and ironing, food shopping and other household errands. Some domestic workers live within the household where they work. Servant is an older English term for "domestic worker", though not all servants worked inside the home. Domestic service, or the employment of people for wages in their employer's residence, was sometimes simply called "service". It evolved into a hierarchical system in various countries at various times. Domestic work covers many different activities, situations and relationships, and so is not easy to categories. It includes many tasks such as cleaning, laundry and ironing; shopping, cooking and fetching water; caring for the sick, elderly and children; looking after pets; sweeping and garden-tidying. It involves workers in many different types of employment relationship: Most domestic work around the world, however, is done through private arrangements between individuals,
someone hired in or a family member, sometimes with a written contract but usually with none.

Domestic work is the largest sector of employment for urban women and an important source of regular employment. Socially discriminated and backward communities are usually highly represented in domestic work. Various studies and interactions with activists and workers’ organisations highlight that domestic workers are from backward communities, tribal villages or scheduled caste communities, who have been traditionally cast into a role of subordination and inferiority due to caste, class and gender hierarchies. Prejudice and bias related to social status are reflected very strongly at the workplace for many domestic workers. Domestic work is an important source of employment for poor women from socially discriminated communities with little or no education. For these women, domestic work is one of the few openings in the labour market for regular paid work. Considering domestic work as no-skilled work, and hence not real work, is one of the main reasons the work is poorly remunerated and regarded. The value attached to domestic work as a form of employment and in terms of remuneration is indicative of how the public – both men and women – perceives ‘care work’ of women’s invisible unpaid work (Tsushima Reiko.2010). Domestic service is well known to be poorly paid and often under harsh conditions, and is definitely not a ‘preferred ‘occupation signifying greater economic empowerment of women. The domestic service is an unorganized and unregulated form of work which has an individualistic nature. In urban areas, the demand for domestic servants has increased due to the lack of time and physical inability of the housewives and also due to the emerging modern life style among the city dwellers. Domestic workers are hired to work in a private sphere. Majority of them are women whose work is always unrecognized. These domestic workers often migrate from one area to another particularly from rural to urban areas, sometimes, urban to well-developed urban areas to upgrade their socio-economic conditions. The young married women who migrate from distant
places with higher number of children and low wages of other family members give preference to domestic work to support their families. A large number of these migrant women are often illiterate or lack other technical skills, so they find no alternative of domestic work for earning. Higher number of unemployed adult family members and higher expenditure upon medical and other needs, sometimes, compel them to work more than one house. Majority of FDW (Foreign Domestic Workers) are disadvantaged from overtime pay, local holiday and well-timed payment of salaries. Domestic work is a core activity rather than a subsidiary activity and mainly urban based occupation. Domestic work is a unique opportunity to earn in a socially acceptable manner and gain some control over economic resources. The sector attracts women that enter the labour market for the first time as well as women who return to work after child rearing. If treated humanely, the independence and exposure to other lifestyles that domestic work offers is often a source of empowerment for women. By introducing the exchange of services for a wage in the private household, domestic workers make visible the economic value of domestic tasks, traditionally considered as not having any value. However, domestic work is generally not included in the calculation of GNP as it is not considered productive. This is because its services are consumed directly within the unit in which they are produced and are not exchanged in the market. It is seen as being outside the monetary economy and is not reflected adequately in economic statistics or in the national accounts. Changes in the economy and developmental policies are pushing, more people into domestic work. With extended families being replaced by nuclear families, there is increasing demand for domestic workers. This ought to push up wages. But simultaneously, the increasing number of infrastructure projects and industries are displacing millions of people, particularly from tribal areas. These are the women, especially who are now joining the growing force of domestic workers in our cities. The list of domestic workers is a very long one. They are unprotected workers in the sense that while all the workers are yet to be identified
and hence do not get the protection of several legislative provisions. Thus Minimum Wages Act 1948, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, Interstate Migrant Work Men Act 1979, Bonded Labour System (Abolition & Regulation) Act 1970 etc. are, all, there, but do not cover all these workers. Secondly, implementation of these Acts is also a very big problem for want of adequate government machinery. Thirdly, even trade unions have not been able to look after these workers, to the extent necessary, through these protective measures. The life of the informal sector workers, particularly women, is filled with hardships and difficulties due to various reasons, especially in a country like India where there is little social security for the informal sector workers. Domestic workers are facing serious problem in both rural and urban sector. It is a matter of compulsion that they have to do the jobs that they have undertaken. The problems of women domestic workers have still not received adequate attention by researchers, members of voluntary organizations and other social activists as yet. Many researchers, social activists and voluntary organizations at different levels are studying the existing problems of domestic workers. But they have not succeeded in providing a feasible solution to the problem.

The present study was aimed to investigate the socio-economic conditions and wage structure, impact of internal migration upon their lives and various other dimensions of this neglected segment of society. Women domestic workers are people who do cooking, care the children, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, cleaning and sweeping the houses in return for the payment of wages but are employed at one or more than one house to perform some definite duties and go away when the assigned work is over. It is understood that the domestic workers in Silchar town of Assam are not very different from the domestic workers in the rest of the country. Most of the women domestic workers leave their home to look after other people’s homes. Majority of domestic workers are illiterate, domestic workers are engaged in such tasks as cooking, washing and cleaning, which are traditionally seen as women’s work and are therefore looked down
upon and treated as less than humans. The maid servants employed in household labour are playing a significant role, especially in small towns of India. In the case of Cachar district a great number of domestic workers are migrants from Bangladesh. Domestic servants in Silchar town in the state of Assam do face the same fate in their work place as their counter parts in the rest of India. Some of the women take up part–time work, in order to work in 4-5 houses, which is very stressful to their health and they do this in order to meet both the ends. A question was posed: **What patterns of women domestic labour are perceived in urban areas of Assam specially Silchar town of South Assam?** The study had formulated four objectives; viz., to study the nature of women domestic labour; to understand the structural source of women domestic labour; to discuss the social implications of women domestic labour, including their self–image perception and to suggest measures for social work intervention for uplift of women domestic labour. The research question was attempted with reference to the women domestic workers in Silchar town.

II. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In Silchar municipal area there were found 43 slum pockets during a preliminary survey made in June 2011. Women work force in these slum pockets is mainly domestic labour, mostly as part time house maids, and in very rare cases full time domestic labour, both, falling outside the periphery of the organized sector. The whole population of the women domestic labourers in these slums constituted the universe of the study and individual maids constituted the units of the study. In the preliminary survey of the women domestic workers in the slum pockets having women domestic labourers’ concentration, a basic understanding about the problem of women domestic labour was derived through observations and informal interactions. Then, the pockets were divided into two religious categories; namely, Hindu (36) and Muslim-dominated (07) pockets. Out of these two groups of the pockets, a 20%
sample, each, comprising nine slum pockets (Hindu dominated-8 and Muslim-dominated-1), in all, was drawn by lottery technique of simple random sampling. Then, the nine pockets; namely, Malini Beel, Sarapally, Malugram, Chingkuri Road, Madhurbandh, Kalibari Char, Tarapur (New Colony), Bhakatpur, and Kanakpur were visited door-to-door to enlist the women domestic workers in each of the pockets. Madhurbandh & Kanakpur Slum Pocket is Muslim-dominated and the rest are Hindu-dominated. The enlisted workers were distributed into various age-groups (ranging from below 15 to above 50 years) in the respective pocket and 10 percent of the each age-group from each of the sampled slum pockets was selected again, by applying the lottery technique of random sampling, obtaining a main sample of 200 women respondents (175 Hindu & 25 Muslim). A structured interview schedule was constructed and administered during July 2011-March 2012 to collect primary data in the form of their oral responses from the sample of women domestic workers. The schedule consisted of questions seeking information on the aspects of their lives such as social background, living conditions, work and work conditions, health and food, financial affairs, their problems, self-perception, support from external agencies and social implications of their work.

III. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in nine slum pockets in the municipal area of Silchar town. The women work force of these slum pockets is mainly engaged in household work in the urban middle class and upper class people’s houses. The Silchar Municipal Board is one of the oldest municipalities in Assam. The Municipal area is divided in total 28nos. of wards. 43 slum pockets are situated in these wards of Municipality. The slum area though exists within urban area it remains under developed due to many reasons. It has all the ills of underdevelopment, i.e., unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, unhygienic environment, problem of sanitation, illiteracy etc. It is surprising fact that in the
midst of all round developed urban area, the slums remain, mostly underdeveloped. So, with a view to develop particularly the urban slum area, the Government initiated, ‘National Slum Development Programme’ in the year 1995-96. The thrust areas for development includes infrastructural development, employment generation, poverty alleviation programmes, health programmes etc. in the slum area. Some projects have been implemented also. But, later on, with the initiation of SJSRY (Swarna Jayanti Shahar Rojgar Yojana (SJSRY) initiated in 1997), the objectives of NSDP have been merged with it as it covers the whole urban area including the slum area. Since the slum areas fall within the municipal orbit, where most vulnerable section of people resides and, thus, these areas become the ideal areas for the implementation of SJSRY. It is revealed that the actual objective of the SJSRY, i.e., employment generation of urban poor is not being fulfilled in most of the projects. It is also to be noted that the development schemes are to be channelized through ward commissioners of Silchar Municipal Board. Area of selection of various schemes depends upon the proximity of the ward commissioners with the Chairperson of the board and political higher ups. Higher is the proximity, higher is the amount of fund for the wards. From the oral information gathered from the respondents it is learnt that in the process of execution of any scheme or work there is a great hindrance in the way of quality work. It is because of the vested interest of the officials of municipality board, middlemen in the name of contractors, ward commissioners etc. as a result there is hardly any development taken place. Even if the efforts are made, none is there to supervise the implementation.

During the field study it was noticed that in almost all the slums there is road connectivity and electricity, i.e., Jeevan Jyoti connection- single light connection scheme, PHE water supply, schools like LP schools and Aanganawadi supported by the municipal board. BPL cards have been issued to all the slum dwellers; people get sugar, rice, and other provisions. The need to obtain Ration Card is placed before the respective ward commissioner who places the matter
with concerned department. Ward Commissioners provide Kerosene Oil to all the slum dwellers. A Scheme called Mukhya Mantri Yojana is very effective, i.e., every month each household is given 35 kg. of rice at the rate of Rs.6/- Drains are constructed and in some slums pacca latrines are constructed. There are other schemes through which blankets, mosquito nets are distributed to the slum dwellers by the ward commissioners. Free medical camps are conducted, during which awareness is created among the people on health and hygienic conditions. However, all of this is not reflected to make any impact on their life.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

By analyzing the oral responses of the 200 women domestic workers the major findings of the study are as follows:

(i) **Socio–economic Background of the Women Domestic Workers**

Socio-economic background comprises two components; namely, the socio-economic anchorage and the living conditions of the respondents. These findings are presented under the following two components:

(a) **Socio-economic Anchorage of the Women domestic Workers**

1. Of the women domestic workers, 78 per cent were Scheduled Castes, 5% General Castes, 4% OBCs and 12.5% Muslim.
2. Of them, there were married (65.5%), unmarried (11.5%), widowed (18.5%) and divorced (4.5%) women. About (49.72%) of them married before the marriageable age, that is, under 18 years of age and the rest (50.28%) married after the 18 years of age. Out of 177 married respondents 157 were SC Hindus. Of 157 SC Hindu workers nearly half (47.13%) married before the marriageable age
3. Nearly one third of the workers (35.5%) were in the age group 26-35 years, followed by 32% in 36-50 age groups. Thus, over two thirds (67.5%) were from age bracket of 26-50 years. Those who were above 50 years of age constituted about one tenth (9.5%) of the workers. Young girls as domestic
workers form an insignificant portion (8.5%) of the workers. Also 35.5 percent of the workers were from the age group of 26-35 years.

4. Most (94.5%) of them lived in nuclear families and a very few (5.5%) lived in joint families. Of them 46 (33%) are heading their families as they are either widows (18.5%) or divorcees (4.5%) who took all responsibilities of their families, having no adult male member in their families. So far as family responsibility is concerned the situations of married women domestic workers is not different. In most of the cases, they have to carry entire family burden due to their irresponsible husbands.

5. Of the workers 46 (23%) who headed their families were either widows or divorcees, having much family responsibilities

6. The women who have school-going children do not have enough time to look after their children because of their work load in their own house and in the house of employers.

7. One fifth (20.5%) of the families of the workers had income between Rs. 4001/- and Rs. 5000/- a month; nearly one fifth (18%) of them had family income between Rs. 1001/- and Rs. 2000/- a month; of them 14% had family income between Rs. 5000/- and Rs. 6000/- a month and 13% had family income above Rs. 7000/- a month. Among the Hindu workers Scheduled Castes family income was higher than the General Caste and OBC workers. On the other hand, Muslim workers family income was lower than that of the Hindu workers family income. Thus, over a half of the women domestic workers are BPL and near about a half of them are precariously APL.

8. Of them 69.5 per cent were not able to read, write and comprehend things well. At the same time, 24.5 percent of them had their primary education as they are poor; their socio-economic background hindered them from attaining further education and compelled to accept any job. Though they are interested for further education, they had no money and time to spend on education. Small portions of the workers have education up to upper primary (4.5%) and a very small portion (1.5%) is educated up to high
school level. (they have discontinued their studies due to financial difficulties, failed in class 8 or 9, so feel shy to go to school, early marriage etc are reason that they have not pursued their studies and domestic labour is the only option they find very accessible to them.

9. Most (69.5%) of the workers are illiterate. About 14% of them had primary school education. One fifth (24.5%) of them had education up to primary level. A small portion (4.5%) of them had education up to Upper Primary level and a few (1.5%) are educated up to high school.

(b) *Living Conditions of the Women domestic Workers*

1. Majority of them faced lack of basic amenities like drinking water, electricity etc. About 90 percent of the households hadn’t any home appliances.

2. Near about three fifths (58.5%) of them lived in rented houses and over two fifths (41.5%) live in their own houses. (They live in rented houses because they do not own any land of their own). Nearly three fourths (72.65%) of them spend Rs.400-500, 17.09% spend Rs.300, and 10.26 % spend Rs.200 per month on house rent.

3. Most of them (87.5%) lived in the houses made of bamboo and mud walls with tin roof; 12% in bamboo walled and polythine roofed houses and only one family (0.5%) lived in half brick bamboo & mud plaster walled house with tin roof.

4. Of their 200 families 71.5% had only one room; nearly one fourth (23.5%) had two rooms and a very few had three rooms.

5. Tap water supply (PHE supply) was the predominant source of drinking water in slums for majority (68%) of the families, followed by river (14.5%), or pond (8.5%), tube wells (7.5%) or well (1.5%).
6. Majority (66%) of them and their families use kaccha latrines for defecation and over three fifths (32.5%) do not have even kaccha latrines and they defecate in open spaces/drains. A very insignificant number (1.5%) of them have pacca latrines in their houses.

7. Near about three fifths (58%) of them have kaccha bathrooms and the rest (42%) take bath in open place.

8. Near about three quarters (73%) of them do not have electricity in their homes and only 54 (27%) houses have electricity in their homes. Over three quarters (75.93%) of them have only light and about one fifth (24.07%) have the facilities for both light and fan.

9. Firewood, cow dung and kerosene are the fuels commonly used for cooking by most (92.5%) of them. A small fraction (7.5%) uses LPG for cooking but when they run short of LPG they use either cow dung or firewood for cooking.

10. Majority (91.5%) of them does not have a T.V. set and seldom watched television at the neighbor’s house or work place. Of them 8.5% had own T.V. and they regularly watched movies and serials; besides, their children watched all sorts of children’s programmes, advertisements etc.

11. Most (89%) of the families did not have mobile phones. Over one tenths (11%) of them have mobile phones in their families and the family members, specially children and adults, use it to speak to their friends, to listen songs and occasionally to speak to relatives, employers etc.

12. Only one family in Kanakpur slum owns a radio set. They generally listen to daily news, film songs, sports news etc.

13. Most of the women domestic workers had been leading a miserable life with poor financial background and they utilized their own income for subsistence of the whole family.
14. The situation of the married workers was also not different. In most of the cases, they had to carry entire family burden due to the irresponsible nature of their husbands. The workers, who had school going children hadn’t enough time to look after their children because of their workload in their own house and in work place.

15. The women domestic workers are part time workers who served in one or more households daily. Over 87.5% of the workers are Hindu and 12.5% are Muslim. They belong to the lowest class in both the religious groups.

(ii) Work and Work Conditions of the Women Domestic Workers

1. The women domestic workers did almost all works in the houses of their employers like sweeping, mopping, dusting, washing of clothes as well as utensils some of them cooked food or helped in food preparation. Sweeping/mopping, cleaning utensils, washing clothes made the usual tasks of them (67.5%) and about one third (32.5%) of them helped matrons in cooking also, besides sweeping/mopping, cleaning utensils, washing clothes.

2. Lack of skill (47%) and need to earn for family survival (47%) are the major reasons for their working as domestic workers. Over 90% of them had no job prior to the present occupation. Of them 5% were engaged as the wage labourers before working as domestic workers.

3. The workers were both part timers and full timers; however, most of them were part timers and live-out workers. None of them was live-in worker. Most (89%) of them worked as part timers and only 11% were full time workers. The full time workers completely depend on their matrons for food and the quality of the food received is not the same as that of the house owners. They get stale or leftover food and some time fresh food but not the same food that they eat.
4. Of the women about 10.5 percent had a long experience of more than 21 years and 35 percent had below 5 years’ experience. But there was found no relationship between their experience and wages.

The wage rate had no in sync with their age or education. Over one third (35%) of them have been working as domestic maid servants for about 5 years, 30% for 5 – 10 years, 16.5% for over 10 – 15 years, 8% of them for 16-20 years and 10.5% are over 20 years.

5. The daily working hours of full time servants varied from 6 to 10 hours. The part time workers had to do almost all cleaning and washing works in the houses excluding kitchen work. On an average they worked for 5-6 hours a day. Of them 60.5% are working for more than 5 hours and the rest for less than 5 hours.

6. They worked in more than one house daily: 12 per cent of them worked in 4 to 5 houses daily and 44 percent worked in two or three houses. Their daily working hours varied from 4 to 10 hours. Usually they worked for more than one family. Over a half of them work for 2 – 4 families same locality. However, over two fifths (44%) of them work for a single family. The families, served are found located usually in one settlement as reported by 90% of them.

7. The wage rate of the domestic workers ranged from Rs. 501/- to Rs. 3000/.

Of the women domestic workers 47% earned between Rs. 1001% and Rs. 2000/-. The Muslim women workers earned very little in terms of cash ranging from Rs. 501% to Rs. 200%. But they were happier and their attitude towards the employer seemed well in the sense that they showed a sense of satisfaction that they were cared well, all their needs were met, and majority of them received breakfast, two full meals of the same kind as eaten by their employers. Few of them took two meals at the work place.

8. The full time workers exclusively depended upon their house matrons for food which was the same as the house owners had. While the most of the
part time workers received only some light food, only tea and biscuits, no nutritious items, and sometimes left over food (stale food).

9. Very few of the women domestic labourers were satisfied with the behaviour of house matrons to them. A few part time workers felt that they were free to choose their work place, however majority of the women domestic laborers were frequently threatened of wages-cut if they absented from work, and in very few cases the wage was cut despite the fact that they had genuine reasons for absence from work. At the same time, the workload in the houses had increased on certain occasions but their wage did not.

10. The women domestic labourers weren’t the members of any political party or workers’ union. They were not aware of their rights and were not united. They lived inside their small world of difficulties and silently bore the exploitation in work place. The health condition of 5.5 percent of the servants was more or less problematic. They suffered from back pain, headache, high pressure etc., but, only a few of them underwent regular treatment.

11. The income generated by the women domestic labourers contributed a considerable share to their family income while the factors like age, education, marital status, and experience and health status had little significance in determining their income. Twenty seven (13.5%) women domestic workers had taken loans from Bandhan. (It is a financial scheme from which women folk can take loan with minimum interest for any particular purpose. Terms and conditions are: a fixed amount of money has to be paid back on weekly basis on the fixed day in a fixed place to the person who lends the loan). The loan is taken for various reasons such as for marrying the daughter/son, purchase of rickshaw or thela (hand cart), to build or to repair the existing house, treatment of any member of the family etc.
12. Nearly half (47%) of them had a monthly earning between Rs. 1001/- and Rs. 2000/- a month. Over one fifth (22%) of them earned a very little amount, i.e., less than Rs. 500/- per month. Nearly three fifths of the respondents earned between Rs. 501/- and Rs. 1000/- per month. Only 4% of them earned between Rs. 2001/- and Rs. 3000/- per month. Of 25 Muslim workers 16 earned less than 500 rupees a month.

13. Of them, 87% were given meal by the employers and 13% did not take meal at the work place due to their personal reasons. Out of those who take meals at 45% take one meal, 37% take two meals and 5% take all the three meals, as full timers who cooked meal in the employers’ houses.

14. Of them, 86% received payment regularly at the end of the month and the rest reported occasional irregularity in wage payment. Most (67%) of the domestic women workers whose family income is Rs.5000 and below feel that the family income is not sufficient to meet their basic needs. As there is price hike in all the basic commodities they cannot afford to have nutritious food for themselves as well as give to their growing children.

15. During festivals, the employers usually give gifts in cash or kind as reported by 40% of workers. Clothes (32%), food (7%) etc. are various gift items usually received during fairs and festivals.

16. The employers are usually hospitable. Out of every 10 workers, 9 received some kind of refreshment such as tea, coffee, etc. from their employers on regular basis. In need sympathy and support are usually extended by the employers as reported by over 50% of them.

17. Of them 7% left their employers on their own. Low payment (47%), irregular payment (11%), no annual increment (13%) is the usual reasons for leaving the work.

18. Of them 40% reported maltreatment by their employers. However, most of them reported that the mistreatment meted out to them was very infrequent.
and occasional. None of them surveyed reported of any physical assault by their employers.

19. Of them 90% expressed a view to continue with their present job of domestic services while 7% were indecisive about their future job plan.

(iii) Social Implications of the Women’s Domestic Work

(a) Self-image Perception among the Women Domestic Workers

1. Of the workers 93% will continue with their present job of domestic services and 7% are not sure whether to continue or discontinue with their present job. This indicates how much hapless they are. They find no other way out to earn their living for they are un-skilled of any trade to look for any other alternative occupation.

2. Women domestic workers have a poor self –image, therefore they lack confidence to exercise their freedom of speech, freedom to express, freedom to come together to form association etc. unless and until they build up their confidence and accept their woman hood and value it they cannot fight for their rights and equal opportunities and demand for equal treatment and equal wages etc.

3. There prevails a natural tendency among the women domestic workers to perceive themselves as domestic workers because they have seen their mothers, neighbours going to people’s houses to work so they think there is no other option than to get into this known and familiar work than look for something different.

4. Women consider themselves inferior to men with regard to their physical energy and lack in courage to make any decisions. Thus, live their life subordinate to men.

5. They consider themselves powerless and remain silent whenever they have an opportunity to speak out their opinion. They also have the tendency to walk in the footsteps of their mothers, who used to bow down to the dominant nature of their counter parts.
6. Since these women are illiterate or less educated they perceive themselves/consider themselves as persons who have to follow the dictates of others, therefore they hardly express their mind either in front of the employer or in the presence of their husbands and in-laws.

7. It is also observed that the age old concept of master–servant relation is upheld by quite many women. The work relation is not friendly or familiar. It is because the employer’s wives do want to maintain status symbol. In the present day society, persons are not given importance they are considered/treated as things; there is disintegration of human values in the society. Present day generation do not have time to interact with those who provide service of any kind, be it a driver or domestic worker or anybody for that matter; they hardly bother to speak to them.

8. It is also observed that women are reluctant to speak freely to the mistress of their difficulties, for the fear that she may not like it, or being scolded or shouted at. They feel that being a woman, the mistress does not understand them but demands only work nothing else.

9. They have the habit of seeing things and opportunities as problems and thus anticipate the consequences before anything to have taken place. To cite an example, one of the slum domestic workers (unmarried) from Kalibari Char, has studied up to class seven was asked to join Ram Nagar Bosco Tech for tailoring class free of cost. She was supposed to get free hostel accommodation. Only condition was that she had to stay in the hostel either for three months or for six months depending upon the availability of the seat in each of the project. Initially parents of the girl (domestic worker) agreed, the girl was not ready. Later on even the parents did not agree just because they thought it will be a great problem for her to adjust and to stay in the hostel. Parents preferred domestic work to sewing skill, to be domestic worker than seek some alternate occupation in life.

10. Aspiration about Children: Mothers who are working as domestic maid servant did not want their daughters to join their jobs. They wanted to educate their girls. Some of them did think even about higher education for
their children. However, they were very much concerned about the increasing cost of education and their inability to educate their children in their given financial situation.

11. Their self perception about themselves is to carry on perpetually the traditional occupation or family trade just because they have taken birth in such family and live in such a place. Just because they are born in a poor family, live in poor background in slum area, they cannot think of anything to substitute domestic work (for women). If they make up their mind, assert their rights, they can improve their standard of living, change their life style, and look for some other alternatives. Just to cite one example; Bethany Jagrati Center is an extension of Holy Cross social service center. Women of Tarapur slum are trained in tailoring, and are helped to find job in towns where they can earn decent wages. But they do not persevere in doing this job because it requires discipline, concentration, hard work, mastery over the skill and so on. The skill does not come easily unless one works hard at it. Since they lack confidence to do something different, to make a difference in life they get back to the same old job/work, of washing, cleaning, cooking etc in other people’s houses rather than pursuing a new trade in life.

12. It all depends upon the individual to change one’s mind set if one wishes to find joy in doing any work. If one has a good self-image s/he can and aspires to achieve great things in life s/he can do it. We need to take inspiration from the life of our Ex-President Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. Had he ever thought that he would one day become the President of India? Therefore, these women domestic workers need to dream big so that they can find fulfillment even if they work as domestic workers. They have to learn to value their work, if they have no other option.

**Health Implications of the Women’s Domestic Work**

1. Women domestic workers work affects them tremendously on their health. Their health is their wealth. It is only when they enjoy good health will they
be able to go for work and earn their living. The physical conditions at work place and timing of work are very important for them to enjoy good health. The physical conditions of work place would include space, ventilation, illumination, temperature, hygiene and so on. All of these will assure the safety of the women domestic workers. Women domestic workers of Silchar town are free from hazardous situation as most of them work in middle class and upper class people who own good apartments or houses with all types of modern comforts and facilities. Their health problems will be due to the fact that they (WDWs) reside in the slum areas where they have to face poor housing conditions, exposure to excessive heat or cold, diseases, air and water pollution in other words poor hygienic surrounding. It is observed that they lack proper health education; there is gender discrimination in their own houses, which makes them women more vulnerable to various diseases.

2. Due to their poor economic condition they do not go to the doctors and get best of treatment available today. They are afraid of the huge medical expenditure. Due to inferior environment of their residential places they have to face different types of health hazards.

3. Married women and mothers in general whether widows or divorcees have grater health risk than the unmarried young girls. It is because no proper care was given, no proper rest was taken by the married women both during pregnancy and post pregnancy period. It is because they often had to play dual role in the family as mothers who provide for their children and mothers who earned to support their family through their meager earnings. Married women whose husbands are addicted to alcohol and who torture their wives, widows and divorcees are prone to get sick very quickly and easily as they manage both home responsibilities as well as meet the demands of their employer. They can hardly think of their well being and take proper care of their health.
1. The women domestic workers are contributing to the survival of their families. Most of the domestic women workers started to support the family income which is not sufficient to meet their basic needs. In a way, their labour is essential to survival of their poor families. The income earned by the women domestic labourers contributed a considerable share to their family income. However, lot of the women domestic workers is deplorable. Most of them are living a miserable life with poor economic conditions and use their income for sustenance of their families. The factors like age, education, marital status, and experience and health status are not much significant in determining their income. The wage given to them is not based on any criterion. Even if women domestic workers have long years of experience they are not paid more and on the other hand if they are literate or illiterate, sick or fit makes no difference to the employer. The only thing the employer wants is that the given work should be carried out as per the need.

2. Their work affects the future of their children. Because of meager resources and the slum culture their children also join the same or such other jobs and ruin their childhood and life as a whole outside school. Due to all socio-economic constraints the same life perpetuates generation after generation. The life is mostly casual and insecure.

3. Domestic workers often make extraordinary personal sacrifices to support their families. They have routinely been denied basic protections guaranteed to other workers in formal sectors. They are among the most exploited workers in the world. None of Governmental policies or legislation covers domestic workers, thus there is loophole or gaps in legal protections. They are isolated in private homes and live a life of seclusion unaware of the world outside of them. The social norms exploits this section of the society and thus gives rise to abuses, ranging from endemic labor exploitation, in
which workers toil round the clock for little or no pay, to trafficking into domestic servitude and slavery.

(d) Implications of the Women’s Domestic Work for the Community

Women Domestic Workers who work for middle class and upper class people remain busy whole day long maintaining their mistress'/employer’s family and their own family. They can hardly manage time to keep social/community bindings. Often women domestic workers are single parents, widowed, estranged or with alcohol husbands and so they are under compulsion or the situation compels them to work for the survival of their children. Since they do not have a day off from their work they fail to attend any social functions of their near relatives or friends in faraway places. Recreation, fun leisure time etc meant only for the rich. They fail in their community/social responsibilities. Even when they come to know of someone’s ill-health and hospitalized, or someone has died they do not go and be with the bereaved family to give comfort and solace, physical presence and mental support to their loved ones. Since they hardly have any holiday to be with the family, friends and relatives and work like machines, it affects them mentally. They fail in their social responsibility to such an extent that some of the women domestic workers have not introduced their children to the grandparents and other family members. Thus, their work becomes one of heavy burden to all concerned i.e. to themselves, to the society, to the family in which they live and belong to. Thus they fail in their duty and responsibility towards their family in which they live and the community of which they are members. But the reality is that they have no other option and therefore they live a life of poverty, neglect, hunger and so on.

(e) Implications of the Women’s Domestic Work for National Economy

1. As the women domestic labour is available, middle class women may have more time to involve in out of home activities and jobs. It is observed that many of them are working outside home even for meager amount or giving more time for studies of children or helping males in their occupations.
2. As such, domestic workers play a critical economic role. They help in the households to manage responsibilities of child care, cooking, washing, shopping, cleaning etc. They also free up their employers to participate in various recreational activities, club activities, to attend social functions, to join the workforce by taking up jobs as teachers, or any such jobs outside of their home since they can afford to shift their home affairs to women domestic workers who are at their beck and call to meet their needs.

3. The respondents (women domestic workers) who work in Silchar town have a poor self image and perceive themselves as a social menace. In the course of interaction, while administering the structured interview they were quite hesitant to reveal their world of work, wage, working conditions, living conditions, treatment that they receive from the employer as well as the children of the employer. They revealed that they have no other option than to go for work. Often they are not aware of the real things taking place in the society / state/ country. They are tied up to their work both at home and their employer’s house. They even ask themselves when will they be relieved of this dungeon .They consider themselves as most unfortunate people. They feel national issues, politics or any sort entertainment is not meant for them and it is not to their taste. Even if some sorts of relief material like blankets, mosquito nets etc is distributed to them they are not happy about it because they have realized, these things will never salvage from their difficulties, poverty and neglect in the society. They have no hope for better tomorrow. They said that they have a sincere wish /dream that their children should have a better future; gradually their hope is fading away when they see the state of life in the society ruled by corrupt politicians and men with money and muscle power. Some time they feel that their dreams will remain as mere dream and that their children’s future is bleak.
(iv) Uplift Efforts for the Women Domestic Workers

In 2010, the National Commission for Women drafted the Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act to address various problems faced by domestic workers. Taking cognizance of the issues particular to domestic work, the Act notes, “…Only a Comprehensive Central Legislation specifically designed to meet the working condition of the domestic workers…can ensure the end of the exploitation of these domestic workers.” Another important step towards the protection of domestic workers is the inclusion of domestic work under the schedule of protective statutes applicable to other categories of workers. The Final Report of the Task Force on Domestic Workers, commissioned by the Ministry of Labor and Employment and the ILO calls for domestic work as a category to be included in the Central List of Scheduled Employment. Doing so would enable the setting up of standard measures for domestic workers that are applicable across all Indian states. This is especially useful for states that do not currently specify minimum wage levels for domestic workers. This recommendation could prove to be crucial to reforms, but is yet to be implemented. On a global level; the ILO’s Congress passed the Convention for Domestic Work in 2010. The document outlines a desirable, basic minimum standard in terms of employment, wages, minimum hours, occupational safety, social health and social security for domestic workers. The Indian government’s non-ratification of the convention despite the huge presence of domestic workers in the country and the many problems compounding them is indicative of the fact that the rights of domestic workers in India is simply not seen as a political priority. The lack of adequate alternative means of employment available in the labour market is worsened by the largely informal, and therefore unobservable, nature of most domestic work arrangements. Many times, poor women are left with no choice but to take up employment in unprotected, demeaning conditions. Given that all work is performed within the largely private space of a household, domestic workers are vulnerable to abuse and harassment. Sexual abuse, in particular, has become widespread: sexual abuse of domestic workers has become
so rife that it took protests by the National Domestic Workers’ Movement before the Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Bill was updated in 2012 to include domestic workers as a category of employees under its protection. Domestic service is distinct from other wage-earning occupations, in terms of wage payments, working conditions and work relations, with informality being a dominant feature of domestic work. As per the data available from the NSS for 2004-05, 99.9 per cent of the workers engaged in private households are informal workers, based on the definition employed by the National Commission of Enterprises in the unorganised Sector (NCEuS).

The Silchar Municipal Board has been mandated with certain functional areas of its working as given below:

(1) Social security of the town dwellers, supply of drinking water to the people, cleanliness of the town, lighting arrangements on municipal roads (street lighting), health care etc. within the municipal boundary, covering all the slum pockets.

(2) The roads in existence within municipal limits are maintained by the municipal board. The lanes, by-lanes and all the major drains belonging to municipality are also maintained by the municipality.

(3) Board meeting is held every month in which the commissioners of the different wards forward the existing problems and developmental issues in their respective wards in front of the board and possible solutions are sorted out.

However, the present style of development in Silchar town is haphazard and unplanned, leading to serious problems. Recently, it has been noticed that in Silchar civil society has started to gear up to influence those higher ups to solve the manifold problems of citizens to ensure better service delivery on the part of the Silchar Municipality Board. The present scenario is the worst of all times, having broken roads, unplanned drainage system, weak civic service delivery mechanism, i.e., water supply and other civic amenities. In a democratic set up
these are basic human rights of the citizens, on the one hand, and basic duties binding on the Govt. at all levels, on the other. The need of the hour is that the Silchar Municipality Board is to tighten its functions, clearly define its limits of functions and ensure better civic services delivery democratically. The civil society is to create pressure on the Government authorities to ensure a balanced development of the slum area and to improve the underdeveloped condition of Silchar.

As far as women domestic workers’ issues are concerned nothing has been heard or said by the local bodies like municipal board or any NGOs. As per the information gathered women workers do not display their unity among themselves in order to form any association. It is not that they are not interested in unionizing themselves but it is their ignorance. They are not aware of the activities they can launch in order to get their rights. Right now what is noticed is that their main and only concern is to earn their living. So, it is evident that someone should take the lead like the messiah to motivate, organize, and thus form women domestic workers’ union so that like the women of big cities they too can raise their voice and make the policy makers to hear their cry for better life, better wage and better living conditions to live a dignified and humane life.

IV. SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the Supreme Court of India’s interpretations ‘the sweep of the right to life conferred by Article 21 of the Indian Constitution is wide and far reaching …the right to livelihood because no person can live without the means of livelihood……The “right to life includes the right to live with human dignity and all that goes with it”. This means the “right to livelihood, better standards of living, hygienic conditions in the work-place” and the satisfaction of basic needs. The right to life “implies the right to food, clothing, wear, decent environment, education, medical care and shelter. These are the basic human rights known to any civilized society” (Singh, Jasvir 213-4)”. The Constitution of India and the SC judgments thus clearly recognize the rights of those who live in poverty.
State is constitutionally and legally bound to ‘remove economic inequalities and to provide facilities and opportunities for a decent standard of living and to protect the economic interests of the weaker segments of society’ (ibid 214, quoted from SC). The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 was enacted with the object of doing social justice to workmen……..Classes”. This has been clearly stated by the SC in 1972. The object of the Act is further supported by the Directive Principles of State Policy” (Mathew 2002:1). According to SC judgments in 1962 and 1972, the capacity of the employer to pay is irrelevant: minimum wages must be paid. The SC even specified in 1982 that the failure to pay minimum wages is a violation of the fundamental rights contained in Article 23 of the Constitution, which forbids forced labour. The court indeed interpreted “force” as including economic necessity, the force arising from the compulsion of economic circumstances which leaves no choice of alternatives to a person in want and compels him to provide labour or service even though the remuneration received for it is less than the minimum wages”(ibid:6-7&10-11; John Desrochers csc 2003). As it appears from the above discussion that the problems of domestic workers are multifaceted, and the endeavor by the State has been very minimal to help them, there is an urgent need to address their issues. The Indian Constitution and other subsequent Acts do suggest improving the condition of the domestic workers. Just pay scales and service conditions for domestic workers by John Desrochers csc highlights the activities and success stories of the DWC (Domestic workers campaign) in creating awareness among the WDW of their rights and demand to include domestic workers in the schedule of states Manuel Labour Act gives assurance that another world is possible for Domestic workers. Here, drawing insights from the study of the women domestic workers in Silchar town the following suggestions are made so that NGOs which are already active in North-Eastern Region of India may come forward to launch campaigns and help the WDW movement to demand for their rights:

1. The domestic work is also a work and those who do it are workers. So, their rights as workers should be recognized by creating awareness among the
WDWs by launching campaign. To create awareness WDWs should be called for a meeting and their issues should be discussed. They should be addressed by domestic workers themselves who alone can boost up their confidence. NGOs or social workers while addressing issues they should bring along with them ex-domestic worker(s) as motivator(s), as it is done in Maharashtra so as to inspire the domestic workers.

2. The government and society at large should recognize the economic and social contributions that domestic workers make by giving social advertisements in the local, regional and nationwide circulated newspapers about the contribution of this section of the society does for the smooth running of family life and urban life.

3. The domestic workers’ right to decent work and its inclusion in labour laws, trade union rights and employment contracts to achieve good working conditions and access to social benefits including pensions etc should be enforced. It can be done through signature campaign and presenting the memorandum to the concerned Government department, to be tabled in the assembly as well as in the Parliament.

In order to do this public should be motivated by the NGOs or social workers through speeches, newspapers, media etc. They should be shown NDWMs activities in different parts of our Nation, the manner in which the rallies are held, with the banners in their hands, walking on the busy streets of the towns and cities, shouting slogans/or peaceful march, public speeches, and a good coverage of the entire programme by media, which is telecasted in different channels in different languages of the region’s, the methods adopted to pressurize the Government by WDWs themselves. When they watch/see such scenes on the screens there will be spontaneous reaction to work for their rights and demands.

4. Systematic mobilization and organizational skills, training to help domestic workers build their own associations and unions for common solidarity and
leadership building should be organized. NGOs /Government can create women cell to register all the women domestic workers and this cell can function as registering the grievances of the WDWs and address their issues in public Forums.

5. There should be domestic workers' union to represent them at various levels and to secure the support of the wider labour movement. The domestic workers should be registered with issue of identity cards.

One may have to follow the system introduced in the states of Maharashtra and of Karnataka. Initiatives should be taken by the NGOs or the trade unions to organize rallies where the women domestic workers issues should be addressed in public, media and reporters should be invited to give good coverage to these public gatherings. WDW should be conscientized with regard to their rights; better working conditions, other terms and conditions of their work in private houses, etc. Finally memorandum should be submitted to the State Government and local civic body.

6. The national day for domestic workers’ rights should be observed each year to highlight the contribution that domestic workers make to the society and economy. It is done mostly by the NGOS with help of the WDWs themselves. In order to achieve the outcome and Government intervention one of the Government official like MLA or MP should be invited to speak on such occasion and speech of these public figure should have good coverage by the media, news paper etc.

7. The government should notify minimum wages for domestic workers and issues such as wage structure, working conditions, leave and absenteeism need to address through legislation. NGOs and social activists or social workers, trade unions etc should take active role in it. The NGOs, social activists or social workers or trade unions should take initiative to hold meetings with the grass root level Government officials like Ward
Commissioner, Chair person of Municipality/ Gao Punchayats , local MLAs, etc.

8. Wage should be fixed to keep pace with other paid work in the informal sector. It can be done as it is done in all the church-related institutions of India. In Maharashtra (Mumbai) in order to get a maid servant the employer has to sign a contract in which the terms and conditions of specific work, wages, leave, bonus and week end offs etc clearly mentioned. Only then any one can get a domestic women worker.

9. To provide support service like day meal to all domestic workers irrespective of their nature of work. It should also be included it in the above mentioned contract.

10. To provide the workers with some degree of flexibility in working hours. It means that say for example an agreement is done for eight hours of work with specified work and the WDW has completed it before time and she wants to leave a bit early occasionally for various reasons like taking the child to the doctor, to attend a social function, to pay a visit to the relative or parents or in-laws/ or she herself is unwell etc. For various reasons one may wanting to leave the work place little early than usual time then she should be allowed to leave early. Sometimes off-day may be in- between the week like Wednesday. Then there may be some urgent need to shift it to Saturday here again one should be (employer ) flexible to make this necessary arrangements once in a while.

11. To provide annual increment to all workers should be included in the contract and NGOs will monitor. To monitor it Government office should be set up. There should be women domestic workers association and should function effectively, hold regular meetings, note down the concerns of the WDW and submit the same to the Government department. By doing this to some extent WDW will get fair and just treatment.
12. To provide minimum leave facilities to the workers should be included in the contract and NGOs will monitor.

13. Steps should be taken to ensure job security and safe working conditions of domestic workers and stringent laws enacted to prevent their exploitation and sexual abuse should be included in the contract and NGOs will monitor.

14. Improvement at their home front. Since these Women Domestic Workers do not have a good and peaceful home atmosphere, social workers should address their concern by visiting and giving some spiritual, moral and psychological awakening, particularly to the men folk who are responsible for the existing disrupted family atmosphere.

V. CONCLUSION

In sum, socio-economic condition of the women domestic workers is not good. They face problems both at home and work place. At home they do not get the pleasant atmosphere which they want and at work place they have a very heavy work load with less remuneration. Women domestic workers belonged to the economically disadvantaged group and they live in urban slums. There is no uniformity in their wage structure and their wage level is very low. However, they are compelled to do this job because of lower education or poor financial background. They are exploited at their working place and in some cases, even at their own homes by their own husbands or in–laws. It is necessary to make them aware about the exploitation and inspire them to organize themselves for protecting their rights and also to work for implementation of laws by the government. Then only, they can live with status and dignity equal to that of other members of the society. The women workers in the informal sectors also face a number of difficulties in particular. First of all, in many cases, they are not considered as workers which make their income very low when compared to the earning of the male workers. Often, they are considered as traditional and low-skilled workers according to the requirement of the market. This again lowers
their wage. They also have to take care of their children at home and at the same
time they have to work to support their families. In fact, they are doing double
the amount of work and paid less than half when compared with their male
counterparts. The women engaged in domestic work face such difficulties such as
sexual harassment and abusive language. Domestic workers have to work in three
to five houses daily without any offs or bonus or overtime wages to earn a
meager income. One of the most important and urgent giant steps to be taken is to
build a database (through the national census) of domestic workers in our
country, which will enable us to ascertain the magnitude of the domestic work
sector. Stree Jagruti Samiti insists during its regular work or in public sittings that
domestic workers share all their workplace details, so that it is documented. The
second task is to draft a comprehensive legislation, or at least push for a reference
point of action, for example, a code of practice for both employers and
employees. Third, a lot of time, money and energy have to be spent to sensitize
the many stakeholders in this sector-the employers, employees, resident welfare
associations, police, media, youth, and general public. The importance of the
domestic workers and the need to treat them with respect is the consistent
message (Geeeta Menon 2010). It is important to recognize that women workers
who are forced to work in the unorganized sector are often from the poorest
sections. Poverty traps them into working in the least protected and most low
paid jobs. Maternity benefits and childcare, which are crucial for their mental and
physical well being, are denied, because of which they often lose their jobs.
Pension and a minimum insurance cover for unorganized sector workers remain
pipe dreams. The real challenge is to ensure that the labour laws and social
security schemes that exists (on paper) for the diminishing number of workers in
the organized sector are extended to the 90% workers in the unorganized sector-
and then actually implemented. We urgently need social policy to protect the
rights of women workers in the newer as well as older forms of work in the
unorganized sector.