Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the study as a whole. It states and formulates the research problem, describes methodology and lays out the organization of the research study. These are being presented in the following pages.

I. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Domestic service is emerging as the largest segment of female employment in India's service sector. Yet, the exact number of domestic workers is difficult to estimate because many of these workers are often not captured by existent macro-data sources or are spread across fluid categories that are not well-defined (Neetha 2005). Not only is it one of the main employment avenues available to poor uneducated women but it also offers to the women from more upwardly- mobile and endowed socio-economic classes with services that assist, enable and further their work –life balance, and increase their leisure time and market engagement (Bhattacharya 2010). For women the domestic work has emerged as a key urban livelihood strategy to allow them to cope with their current economic scenario of agrarian decline, increase in commodity prices, and user-fees for essential infrastructure and services such as water and electricity (Sharma 2009). Thus, it becomes clear that the emerging economic and societal changes in India shall result into greater numbers of women joining the workforce. The significance of domestic work as a sector that unleashes the potential of the female labour force while providing income support to the working poor in the current economic landscape is paramount. While women represent 50 percent of the adult population and one third of labour force, they perform nearly two thirds of all working hours and receives only one-tenth of the world's income. Human Development Report for the year 2000 on the amount of time that women and men spend on market and non-market activities, considering 31, countries reveals that women work for longer hours than men in almost all countries. Women carry on average 53 percent of the total burden of

work in developing countries and 51 percent of that in industrial countries. Also, roughly two thirds of women's total work-time is spent in unpaid non-system of national accounts activities (Vimala. 2000). There is no exaggeration in saying that the backbone of Indian work-force is the unorganized sector. According to 1991 census, the total women-work force was of 87.77 million, their share in the organized sector was only 4.2 percent while the rest of 95.8 percent were in the unorganized sector where there are no legislative safeguards even to claim either minimum or equal wages along with their male counterparts. Thus, the unorganized sector in India is the women's sector (Singh Mor 2001). Domestic work is one of the main occupations of women worldwide. For many women it is one of the very few options for paid employment. Most of the women come from the poorer sections of society. Many are migrants from rural areas to towns and cities. There are many children engaged in this work and are too vulnerable to abuse. Many are at risk of extreme abuse. Domestic workers are not normally considered as workers and their working conditions remain unregulated. Their employment situation is considered not fit for the general framework of existing employment laws. This is so because most work done by them is generally invisible, done in houses (not considered as workplaces) of private persons (not considered as employers). Excluded from protection under the national labour codes, these workers have no benefits of work contracts, social security, security of employment, wage increment, paid leave or medical facilities. Domestic workers are employed for household chores like cooking, cleaning (dusting, sweeping and mopping the house), washing (clothes and utensils), ironing, shopping, running errands, childcare, care of the aged or disabled, etc. They are employed on a temporary, part time or full time basis. The terms of employment may be expressive or implicit. According to report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, of all the services in India, domestic work is the most unrecognized and disorganized, and often the most denigrating and humiliating. These workers who do the most menial arduous tasks, have impossibly long hours with no benefits of social security, security of employment, wage raises, paid leave or medical facilities etc. House workers play an important role in the social life of the community. The household

work done by the domestic workers is vital for the well-being of the family. In spite of the important role played by the domestic workers, they are the most neglected and vulnerable lot in a state of dependency, exploitation and quasi-bondage (Bharat 2008).

The biological fact of sex has created much difference between men and women in their aims and objectives, desires and aspirations, duties and responsibilities, dress styles and behavioral patterns, roles and status, even under the same way of life, culture and heritage. Nowhere in the history of humanity were men and women treated alike and assigned statuses alike. Women have not been able to lead a life exactly on par with men in spite of their urge for equality. Everywhere they were subjected to inequality, discrimination and exploitation. In some societies their position has been comparatively better than of their counterparts in some other societies. It has been changing in keeping with the changes in the general conditions of a society. It is hard to know exactly how many domestic workers are there around the world. There is a lack of accurate and comparable data because domestic work is often undeclared or under-reported, and because there are different definitions of domestic work in statistical surveys and/or domestic workers are not counted as a distinct category but are registered under headings such as "community, social and personal service activities". However, it is estimated that in 117 countries there are at least 52.6 million domestic workers around the world. This number represents a significant share of global wage employment--about 3.6 per cent. However, because this kind of work is often hidden and unregistered, the ILO considers that the total number of domestic workers may be as high as 100 million. Around 83 per cent of these workers are women or girls, and many are migrant workers (Kingston 2011).The reform movements and national movements such as in India did generate social consciousness among women. India is now passing through the processes of liberalization, privatization and globalization, which are going to affect social life of the country as a whole and women in particular. Woman in rural India is not usually consulted in serious social and family affairs, though she attends to all household affairs; looks after children and helps her husband in

agricultural activities which are not assessed in monetary terms. But in urban areas due to literacy and development women's status is considerably changing.

Since most domestic workers are women (and often migrant women) they are even less likely to be in a position to organize and demand their rights collectively. It is usually perceived as something less than regular work by both employers and the workers themselves, and contracts are usually determined bilaterally in conditions of unequal bargaining power without strong awareness of either labour market conditions or the legal rights of the workers. The relatively high proportion of child labour in this activity is also a reflection of the sheer difficulties of monitoring and regulation. For obvious reasons, it is extremely difficult to get accurate and reliable data on the extent of domestic work. Available surveys point to severe under-reporting of such work in official statistics, which is often compounded by the varying definitions used for categorizing domestic work and the fact that many official data collection agencies tend to lump such work along with other "social, community and personal services" (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh . 2012). The constitution of India provides equal rights and opportunities to women. It does not make any discrimination on the grounds of sex. Indian women are also responding positively to this changed socio-political situation. This does not mean that the women are completely free from problems. On the contrary, the changing situation is causing them new stresses and strains. Some of the major problems haunting the modern contemporary women are such as increasing violence against women within and outside family, neglect of health, unemployment, harassment at work place, etc. In the recent years there is seen an increase in number of women in India, working outside the family to get more income for the family. In India women workers constitute only one third of the total workforce in India.

The unorganized sector in India has been hitherto a neglected segment. However, the passing of the Unorganized Sector Workers Social Security Bill 2008 can be hailed as a milestone in the economic history of the nation. National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector had recommended setting

up of a financial institution –national fund for unorganized sector called- NAFUS like NABARD so that loans can be made available to the unorganized sector at a comparatively lesser interest rates and more conveniently. The country needs to have a more generous policy towards them as they are contributing magnificently to the overall growth of the nation. Domestic workers as a part of unorganized work force in India remain the most exploited ones even after all these decades of the Independence in 1947. Many evidences indicate that over a period of time domestic work has become more feminized. It is reported that that 78% of domestic helpers in 12 cities were female (Pereira 1984) and there was an increase of 21.3% in the number of female workers in the Union Territory of Delhi from 1971 to 1981 (Dighe and Choudhury 1988). These women who are occupied in domestic work sector belong to the lowest stratum of society and are often considered as cheap labour. In the recent past the trend shows that all big cities of country have become the centers to recruit poor women as domestic workers. The non-availability of job in rural or tribal areas facilitates continuous supply of women workers to Delhi and other cities. A major reason for this is a sharp increase of middle class women in employment. These middle class employed women have shifted their household workload to the poor working women as their 'maids'. In some cases, in order to keep their upward mobility and status symbol, the middle and upper classes have withdrawn themselves from household duties. Most of the women who migrate to Delhi are from poor families and are illiterate. Their lack of education and skill make their choice very limited and when they come to big cities such as Delhi they have to face number of problems, and due to lack of skill and experience they become easy victims of exploitation.

Domestic work provides enormous economic and social value and makes huge contributions to our society. The demand for care work has increased all over the world. Families everywhere are facing challenges meeting the basic needs of their members. Women, who used to take on the bulk of care work at home, have joined the formal labour market in larger numbers; migration has split families from their networks of support; multi-generational families are on the decline and single parent-headed households are on the rise. Ageing and

health epidemics like HIV/AIDS have increased the care demands on families. These, and many other factors, are making it more difficult for households to meet the basic needs of their families. At the same time, most countries have not adopted the work-family policy measures to assist families such as leave and family- friendly hours, or public services such as childcare, elder services and health services. As a result, families have increasingly turned to domestic workers to help them meet basic household needs. Today, domestic workers make up a large portion of the workforce, especially in developing countries, and their number has been increasing everywhere. Domestic work provides economic and social value to individual households and society alike: it plays an essential role in securing the maintenance and functioning of households and the well-being of its members; it enables household members to enter and remain in the labour market, it stimulates consumption and consequently contributes to economic growth by generating income for the domestic worker and her or his family. Despite the great value of domestic work, it is generally held in low esteem and is badly paid, even when it is not seen as downright degrading. The bad image is associated in people's minds with the unpaid work performed by mothers and housewives' work that they perform throughout the day in their own homes in the form of housework and caring for other household members.

The geneses of domestic labour existed in the society since long, and the irony of the fact is that this segment of the society has been neglected to such an extent by all and from all points of view. They are looked down upon and their personhood is stolen by the rich in the society by meting out such a low status in the society and by not giving them a just place in the society. They are the most neglected ones in the labour laws. They are treated in a very inhumane way without any respect and human dignity. Nationwide campaigns are held by NDWM (National Domestic Workers' Movement) has made efforts to make the domestic workers realize their rights, and the oppressive structures of the society under which lives are oven that they need to demand for justice, proper wage and terms and condition of work. They are awakened from the deep slumber, and armed with courage to voice their demands to the Government to implement certain Acts which are already enacted and to enforce certain laws to protect their

lives from oppression. The need to work for upliftment of the domestic labouers is addressed by all people who have certain influence in the society. The responsibility of ensuring protection and dignity should be shouldered by intellectuals, social workers, the Government and community as a whole. Issues of the women domestic workers should be highlighted in the popular newspapers which are in wide circulation. Today we see the impact made by the NDWM in North Eastern states too. There has been created awareness by this NGO and the domestic workers' day is celebrated and their issues are discussed and memorandums are submitted to Government to draw their attention towards the most neglected sections of the society.

Patricia Mukhim, a member of the National Security Advisory Board, advised the North East Region Domestic Workers Movement, a workers' body, to set up a complaint cell for the benefit of its members. The workers' body enlisted certain demands for the protection of their rights. They also asked the government to ensure that domestic workers were brought under the Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill, 2010, and requested a comprehensive act to protect their rights. Women domestic workers were not included within the ambit of the Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment Bill, 2010, which was tabled in Parliament recently (Telegraph,Shillong Jan.10, 2011). Such issues of women domestic workers are highlighted by publishing in the local news papers in all the states.

Barak Valley of South Assam consists of three districts; namely, Cachar, Hailahandi and Karimganj. Silchar town in Cachar district of Assam is a major town of the valley far away from the large cities of India, but salience of the women domestic labour is perceptible. Hence, it commands one's attention for investigating the social aspects of women domestic labour in a town like Silchar to understand the scenario of the growing unorganized workforce. The specific focus of this study is on socio-economic conditions of maid servants who are working mostly in urban residences in Silchar. There was a time when a person's status was reflected through the number of servants s/he could employ. We have come a long way since then, but surprisingly, there has not been much change in

the attitude of the employers towards their servants/helpers. Servants as an economic group or an industry form a major chunk of the informal or unorganized sector. Yet they suffer utter neglect in society. A very large number of these servants are women. Many people prefer maidservants to male servants because they do not unionise or protest. Another term used to denote this group is-"domestic help" which appears soothing to the ears of the employers who can go on with their exploitation in the cover of sweet terminology. Today, a lot of activity is going on in the fields of feminism, neo-feminism, human rights activism, protests against child labour etc. It is, however, very sad that it is extremely difficult even to obtain data regarding the exact number of women domestic workers all over the country, specifically in Silchar town where this attempt is made to study their socio–economic background, their work and living conditions etc. in this work.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Recent years have witnessed a plethora of literature on the role of gender and women's studies. The studies concerning the educated working women are abundant, while those on illiterate women engaged in various low- prestige occupations such as agricultural labour, construction workers, domestic labour and such other similarly- situated workers are comparatively less. It is this area of research which attracted the particular attention of the members at the National Conference on Women's Studies in 1981 (Mazumdar 1981). Various studies have focused on the trends in female labour force participation and the factors accounting for it (Gadgil 1965; Dasgupta, 1977; Sandhu and Dhesi 1977; Singh 1980; Mahapatra 2002; Singh 2005). Some of the studies emphasized the problematic aspects of female labour force participation. A large section of the rural women are found to perform agriculture related activities in addition to their household tasks and contribute significantly to household income but many of these activities that women perform remain unacknowledged as work and, hence, they remained 'invisible' in formal agricultural operations. This has created the problem of informalisation of women labour force participation. The estimates of work participation rates of women based on the Census and the

NSSO data are subject to the changing concept and definition of 'work'. The concept of work used by the Census does not include 'domestic work' and considers only productive activity outside the home as economic participation 'in the labour force'. The sudden phenomenal drop in the female labour population during 1961-71 has attracted the attention of social scientists for the accurate measurement of work in this sector. The review of the literature is broadly divided into two classes; namely, (i) the studies on women workers in unorganized sector and (ii) the studies on women domestic workers.

(i) The Studies on Women Workers in Unorganized Sector

These studies point out here that (i) Indian women have been participating in various economic activities all through the ages and taking up new tasks of burden but their work firstly lacked recognition; secondly , carried a dual responsibility – productive work on farm/ factory and reproductive work in family; thirdly, pertained to the tasks of burden unrelieved by mechanization and lastly her status is determined by the macho-mindset of Indian society; (ii) nevertheless, there are shifts in women's works from unrecognized/ unorganized to recognized/ organized sector, (iii) yet, the unrecognized / unorganized sector will for long occupy a majority of the women in view of the existing conditions of male dominance in occupations and attitudes in society. These are being discussed below.

(a) Studies on Status of Women

Abbott and Wallace (1990), Agrawal (1986), Kalpagam (1986), Lockwood(1986) and Moore, R. Wallace (1990) consider that women studies is a new branch in sociology becoming important only after 1975 and it concentrates on gender as a category of analyses like the categories of caste, religion, class and status. Their view is that women studies must include action or rising of women in the interest of justice and equality. The women's movement of 1970s and the International Women's Year 1975 gave a great impetus to the studies with specific focus on women's lives all over the world. Women's studies in India have been a complex task for researchers because of the heterogeneity of

tradition, caste, class and community. They do not constitute a homogeneous group and, therefore, the problems they faced in development process varied in degree and kind along the variation in class and community background (Mukhopadhyaya 2007). A more adequate understanding of women's status is derived from their life- experience in the sphere of household and the economic production (Patel 2000:224). In a situation of very low participation in employment, education and other development processes rural women can play a role in rural development by increasing their farm production and family income and by transforming the attitudes of individuals (Heggade 2000:238). Though the position of women in India is not unique as compared to women from other developing countries, it still presents certain distinct features on account of traditions, economic backwardness and a long history of their exploitation in various aspects of social life (Manohar et al. 2000:328). The impact of social change indicates that neither sufficient awareness nor participation of women as social values, attitudes and customs hold them back to be tradition- oriented. What is possible for women in theory is seldom within their reach in fact (Khan and Ayesha 2000:234-35).

Caroline Marak (2002) speaking on the status of Garo women's status says that the modernization has resulted in erosion of the little power that the woman had in her society. There is a need for women to create a situation in favour of gender equity in their society and economy. According to Wadhera (1976) Women in our society have so far had only a secondary status. It is well known that the economic dependence of women upon men is one of the primary reasons which has pushed them into the background and resulted in a secondary status within and outside the family. Tripathy (1991) report that the economic status of women in India is low as reflected by the census data itself that present a distorted picture of women particularly of those who are engaged in the informal sector of urban economy.

(b) Studies on Participation of Women

An appraisal of women's economic role and their opportunities for participation in economic activities cannot be done in isolation from the society's

stage of development. The socio-economic attitudes towards the women's role in family, social ideology of development and capacity to work are the important determinants of their status. Though the Indian women are no more limited to the walls of the house and, gradually, their socio-economic conditions are improving after Independence with equality before law, voting rights, equal pay for equal work and others (Chauhan 1999), their work participation is not at all remarkable as compared to Sweden and U.S.A. as the states like Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have less female participation in agricultural activities (Ghatraskar and Kaushik 1980. Bardhan 1997). The conditions of rural women in India are not satisfactory, though they are participating in farm, physical work and agricultural activities (Singh and Singh1992).

A very high women's participation rate (66.66 per cent) at the society of women run by the Lijjat Papad Kendra of Warana Co-operative Complex in 1978 (Haldikar 1992), shoulder to shoulder participation with men in all the occupations (Roy 1997), contribution to horticulture, sericulture, kitchen garden productions and mushroom production impacting positively on the income level and status of family (Hegade 1997) and increasing shift of their participation from unorganized to organized sector (Roy 1997), raises hopes for improving their status, but the dual responsibility of working women comprising productive and reproductive activities is still a fact (Ghosh 1996). In spite of many development programmes implemented, so far, women are still suffering from early marriage, illiteracy and other problems, particularly in the slums (Tandan and Kumar 1998). There are migrations of the young tribal girls in economic distress from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Ranchi and Gumla to Delhi, who are working with no fixed wages and hours and also suffering from sexual harassment and beating in some cases (Nikore 1992). Women are treated as the object of pleasure or merely machines to serve and reproduce like voiceless puppets (Siddiqui 1990). The social injustice is inherent in our customs and religion which prevented the women from participating in outward activities and some corrective steps are needed to be taken to improve their lot (Roy 1997). Dhemat, Hate and Desai and Kulinism (ICSSR 1975) have, each, expressed that women are suppressed thoroughly in the Indian history and positive measures

were initiated only during the British period. The schemes like Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) had 40 per cent reservation for women. The scheme, Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), laid emphasis on the formation of groups of 15-20 women from poor households at the village level for delivering services like credit and skill training, cash and infrastructural support for self –employment. Despite these and several other schemes, the National Commission for Women reported (1994) the exploitation of women agricultural workers and discrimination in wages. These schemes were merged into a comprehensive scheme-Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojna (SGSY) in 1999 which provided a new approach, Self-Help Groups, to poor sections and women. Then in 2006 NREGS was launched to help the poor people, including women. Yet, the women's situation persists. Mechanization of agriculture also alleviates burden of the tasks traditionally undertaken by men whereas women continue to suffer with their marginalization. Pravin Sinha (2002) in his paper meticulously discusses total employment scenario of women in India. He mentions many reasons of urban migration, most important being the mass poverty and high level of illiteracy. He also suggests 'empowerment of domestic women' and 'skill development as two important remedial measures to deal with the problem'.

(c) Studies on Issues of Women Labour in Unorganized Sector

According to Kiran Moghe (2000) almost 400 million people - more than 85% of the working population in India - work in the unorganized sector. Of these, at least 120 million are women. The Arjun Sengupta Committee Report (2006) is a stark reminder of the huge size and poor conditions in this sector. A subsequent draft Bill to provide security to workers, which bypasses regulatory measures and budgetary provisions, has generated intense debate. Workers engaged in the unorganized sector do not have the benefit of several laws such as the Minimum Wages Act or the Factories Act. They are also not covered by statutory welfare measures such as maternity benefits, provident fund, gratuity, etc, all of which were put in place after intense struggles by the Indian working

class in the pre- and post-Independence period. Two National Labour Commissions, along with several other international and national commissions, committees and conferences in the last 50 years have documented the socio-economic conditions of workers in the unorganized sector in India. The latest is the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS), also known as the Arjun Sengupta Committee, which submitted its report to the Government of India in 2006. According to the 1989 Shramshakti report there were at that time 16.8 lakh female domestic workers in the country where the presence of male domestic workers was negligible. The same picture is also observed in Kolkata (Banerjee 1985) though no proper study has been done recently on female domestic workers.

Shramshakti Report(1988) by the Government of India highlights that in spite of the existence of various Constitutional and legal provisions, safeguarding women's employment, a large number of women workers , particularly in the unorganized sector suffer from various disadvantages relating to their working lives as well as at their homes. The coverage of labour laws has not benefited these women workers in many crucial areas, especially health, maternal and social security…Government of India feels that it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive study of self-employed women workers, as it is in this area that the lack of access to credit marketing, health and social security is the most discernible. It was therefore decided to constitute a Commission on Self-employment Women. These terms of reference of the commission also covered all unprotected women labour in the country and extended to women in the informal sector (GOI 1988:332-33).

By and large, there are three types of issues of unorganized sector workers that need to be addressed. One is the regulation of their working conditions; the second is provisioning for conditions in which they are unable to continue to work, such as old age and disability and the third is measures to help them overcome situations of insecurity, such as major illnesses and the liability of losing employment or being laid off at the will of the employer, for which they have no legal remedy.

The first National Commission on Labour (1966-69) defined unorganized labour as those who have not been able to organize themselves in pursuit of common objectives on account of constraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, small and scattered size of establishments and position of power enjoyed by employers because of the nature of industry etc. Nearly 20 years later the National Commission on Rural Labour (NCRL: 1987-91) visualized the same scenario and the same contributory factors leading to the present status of unorganized rural labour in India. The unorganized / informal employment consists of casual and contributing family workers; self employed persons in un-organized sector and private households; and other employed in organized and unorganized enterprises that are not eligible either for paid, sick or annual leave or for any social security benefits given by the employer. The bulk of the working population is in the unorganized sector (i.e., 91% of the total population) and this workforce is as yet not actively unionized. The organized sector, which is generally extant around urban settlements, accounts for only 9% of the total work force. The contribution of the unorganized workforce to the economic health of Indian society has largely remained neglected. In India, this sector accounts for 60% of Net Domestic Product, 68% of income, 60% of savings, 31% of agricultural exports, and 41% of manufactured exports (Dutta 2009).

The unorganized sector is divided into institutionalized and non-institutionalized sectors. The non-institutionalized unorganized sector comprises workers doing casual work like domestic workers, sweepers, scavengers etc. A key factor in the growth of informal activity in most developing regions has been the plummeting value of wages. The informal sector has not only offered the possibility of work to the unemployed, but has permitted survival of many households with wage earners. Some division of labour exists between formal and informal sectors on the basis of gender. It has been suggested that women tend to stay within the informal sector because of the flexibility of working arrangements and diversity of opportunities (Susan 1994).

Leela Gulati (undated) has made an attempt to study the women in the unorganized sector in Kerala on the basis of micro-level observations. It appeared that women go to work because of the irregular nature of employment that their men are involved in and the low incomes they make. Regarding the kind of work opportunity open to women in the unorganized sector, very often they choose the type of work that their parents or relatives are involved in. Also, they prefer sticking on the same kind of work as they are familiar with and pick closer by locations.

Women workers in the unorganized sector – the farm workers, vendors, casual construction labour, domestic help, home-based workers –are even far more neglected and unaccounted-form part of the informal economy. This is so, since the self-employed women work from homes and their contribution is mostly not calculated into the national economic data. However, according to the National Sample Survey 2005, one-third of the informal sector workforce (about 120mn) comprises women. Collectively, they accounted for 96% of the female workforce in the country, and contribute to about 20% GDP of India. But this is a largely docile, silent and submissive work force more preoccupied with making two ends meet and putting a meal in the stomachs of their families every evening, they don't hunch in front of computers writing blogs and signing on line petitions. Their cause championed only by an increasingly irrelevant Left. (Dutta 2009).

The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector brought out a 394 page report inspired by the CMP (Common Minimum Programme) of the UPA Government which said that was "firmly committed to ensure the welfare and well-being of all workers, particularly those in the unorganized sector who constitute 93% of our workforce". This report, titled "Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganized Sector", and submitted in September 2007, reveals some facts about the condition of both agricultural and non-agricultural workers of unorganized sectors in rural and urban areas. Poornima Mohan (2002: 242-43) argues that the pursuit of structural adjustment policies, in the short run, is likely to affect adversely not only the

nature of female employment, but also their job access in the emerging complex labour processes. Women are likely to be exploited much more in the near future than in the past and may be forced to devise diverse survival strategies. To reduce the adverse impact in the short run, there is a need to understand the emerging job processes since these processes would control female labour force participation. These understandings would go a long way in taking steps that could reduce women's exploitation in the labour market if not eliminating it altogether. It is said that the emerging female labour market indicated clearly that women working therein would be victims of discrimination and unfair labour practices to a greater extent than in the past. But despite the precariousness of the work, with its instability, insecurity and social and economic vulnerability, the women given their poverty and lack of skills would have very little option but to tolerate exploitation. The meager incomes they get would be precious for their own and for their family's survival since they form substantial proportions of their equally low family/household incomes. More importantly as the future labour market would offer wage work to woman, certain complex labour processes could be expected to emerge which would control both women's participation and their job access (Majumdar 2005). Jaya Arunachalam (1997) is of the opinion that the issues of informal sector are common to the developing countries, but have to be understood in the context where informal systems of work are promoted and encouraged among the working poor. The character of this sector is connected to highly exploitative irregular working conditions and wage discriminations.

Ghosh (2000) echoes a gloomy scenario for unorganized sector and holds that globalization of Indian economy would mean cheaper imported substitutes for indigenously manufactured goods. The unorganized sector is the biggest source of female employment. The threat posed by foreign capital as well as trade liberalization will seriously affect availability of employment opportunities for women in this sector. Jeemol Unni and Uma Rani (1999) have made an attempt to study the informal sector in the light of structural adjustment programme. With steady decline in the growth of the formal sector in India following the introduction of the SAP, a large section of the growing labour force is being

absorbed in agriculture and the unorganized informal structure resulting in a progressive increase in employment in the informal sector.

Women's economic tasks in India can be divided into three categories; viz.,as an entrepreneur, as a participant and as a contributor to the family's real income. There is no uniform official policy as to whether or not all these three categories of tasks are to be accounted for measuring women's employment. Nirmala Banerjee (1985) has made an enquiry about women workers in the unorganized sector of Calcutta's economy. She found that the employment was regular for working women and their wage rate was significantly lower as compared to those for men with equal qualifications. The working women in the informal sector included a significant number of children and old people and over 60 percent of them were illiterate.

(ii) Studies on Women Domestic Workers

There are many studies on labour in organized sector. The term 'unorganized' is often used in the Indian context to refer to the vast numbers of women and men engaged in different forms of employment. These forms include home-based work (e. g., rolling papads and beedis), self-employment (e. g., selling vegetables), employment in household enterprises, small units, labour on land as agricultural workers, labour on construction sites, domestic work, and a myriad other forms of casual or temporary employment. The existing problems of domestic workers have been reflected upon by many researchers, social activists and voluntary organizations at different levels. But they have not succeeded in providing a feasible solution to their problems. Perhaps, lack of a common perspective in this area is a main cause for it. Since the problems of women domestic workers are multifaceted, it should be studied holistically covering economic, legal, social, physical and psychological aspects. For this, it is immensely needed to have an integrated approach to understand the issue and it is also important to develop a collective programme to improve their social status and working condition. Various studies under these categories are further divided into the following sub-categories for the purpose of review:

(a) Migration and Women Domestic Workers

Neetha's paper (2002) talks about two important aspects –'social networking' and 'identity formation'. Social Networking takes place both before and after the migration. After the migration social networking plays a major role in overcoming their social and psychological insecurities and low socio-economic status.

Alex Ekka's (2008) paper focuses mainly on the migration of tribal women to the urban centers. The paper mentions various problems faced by these women in Delhi. He suggests ameliorative measures in the interest of domestic workers and action plan for the future.

Leela Kasturi (2008) in her paper discusses the issue of migration related to female domestic workers of Delhi. She has argued that migration among the poor domestic workers is sought as a 'coping strategy' for the survival of the families. The paper highlights the social economic and psychological problems in a detailed and effective manner.

Sanjay Kumar (2008) discussed basic issue involved in this whole problem and suggests four focal points to deal with the problem; namely, (i) provision of registration, (ii) inclusion of the minimum wages, (iii) collaboration and networking and (iv) collective bargaining.

Two other papers by Smita Snehi (2008) and representatives of ANKUR (2002) respectively discuss various problems being faced by women domestic workers who are displaced to the new resettlement colonies of Delhi. The real life experience of some women domestic workers quoted in these two papers makes it easier to comprehend their difficulties. It also gives a deeper understanding of their lives.

(b) Legal Rights for Improving Women Domestic Workers' Conditions

According to Sathya Sundaram (1996) the workers in unorganized sector remain unprotected by law. They are the most vulnerable section of the society and they enjoy no job or income security with little bargaining power.

It is agreed by all the above authors like Sanjay Kumar, Leela Kasturi, Pravin Sinha, Alex Ekka, Neetha N. Smita Snehi who wrote in 2008 that a major hurdle in providing a solution to the problem is because of absence of a legal protection system. Seema Durrani's paper (2008) is useful to know the legal rights available to the women domestic workers. Taken together the views of the above mentioned authors represent a modest beginning of efforts to understand the major problems of domestic workers.

Domestic work is emerging and is likely to remain an important activity for women workers in several developing countries, including in urban India. This makes the task of improving labour conditions in such work a difficult but urgent imperative. Paid domestic work is not only one of the oldest occupations, but also one of the "emerging" activities that account for the work of increasing numbers of women workers in many developing and developed countries. Despite its growing importance, domestic work in most countries remains largely unrecognised, generally undervalued, and almost always poorly regulated. Lack of regulation and extension of basic forms of worker protection to domestic work is to a significant extent the result of its very nature, since it is typically performed in individual households by workers without external monitoring of the terms and conditions of employment or easy possibilities for association. For various reasons domestic workers are often excluded from labour force surveys.

According to ILO (2010), of total domestic workers in the country in 2009-10, more than two thirds lived in urban India and 57 per cent of them were women. This is a lower rate of female involvement in this type of employment than in many other countries, and reflects the combination of several forces: the long history in India of the affluent employing domestic servants, which created aspirations of such hiring patterns also among the newly affluent; low employment generation in other activities as well as uncertain household income generation prospects that have increased the supply of such workers and changes in income distribution and GDP growth patterns that have created a new middle class that is able to afford to demand such workers. Not only is this activity becoming more feminised, but it is becoming more important in the total

employment of women, especially in urban India where domestic work accounts for a growing and increasingly significant share of the total employment of women (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2012).

(c) Studies on Work Conditions of Women Domestic Workers

Banerjee Nirmala (1985) states that sex discrimination in the wage rate are a common feature despite the constitutional provisions of equal work for men and women under the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. This is all the more so because women employed in the unorganized sector belongs to families on the brink of subsistence. There is a close link between women's decision to seek employment in manual work and the shortfall in the family. A study conducted in Calcutta revealed that even though they worked for unusually long hours outside home, a few of them could not afford to buy any gadgets to reduce drudgery of house-work, nor could their work enable them to give their children a significantly better life. Children were often found helping their mothers regularly in order to enable the latter to keep on going with their work both at home and outside, and were also compelled to take up regular paid work themselves.

Ilina Sen (2002) views globalization as the unification of global markets that has resulted in the displacement of women workers, increased demand for cash crops, replacement of local goods and the growth of fascism. A large number of industrial workers are first- time migrants who live in deplorable conditions. Women have to look after their households in these congested conditions and with no income other than their low salary. A few women get jobs at low wages, particularly in the Export Promotion Zones where they lack job security, their working conditions are poor and wages are low. Globalization of agriculture involves commercial crops getting priority over staple food that affects food security. Besides, as they move away from traditional systems it renders women's knowledge and role in agriculture useless. That affects both their economic and social status.

Sundaram (1996) found that among all categories in the informal sector, domestic servants' income is the lowest and the problems are many. Gathia (1983), reports that they are engaged in household tasks, which include washing utensils, floor cleaning, washing of clothes, cooking and outdoor tasks such as purchase of vegetables etc. Most of them live in slums, lead a monotonous life without any colour, struggle every day for their survival and face a numerous problems in their day-to-day life like long hours of work, insecurity of jobs, low status at home and outside.

Dolly Phukon (2002) while speaking on the present status of women in Assam argues that economic independence of women has hardly improved the condition of women as they are now doubly urban for they have to look after the unpaid and unrecognized domestic work as well as the work in the public sphere. Moreover, in the industrial sectors of Assam such as OIL, tea-gardens, and handloom industries and in the private firms a large number of women workers are employed as casual workers. Besides, many women also work in the informal sector, where their labour remained unacknowledged, under-paid and sometimes even unpaid. These sections of women face many problems at their work place and majority of them are deprived of the privileges like maternity leave, pension etc.

Haque (1993) has analysed the concentration of women in low paid occupations. He argued that the socio- economic conditions of women workers in South Asia are poor because they are concentrated in low paid occupations. This is primarily because the society has discriminated against women by not allowing them to act as major players in economic activities.

Nirmala Banerjee (1999) argues that the emerging labour market is likely to prove even more problematic in the case of women workers than for the rest of Indian workers.

Atanu Thakar (1999) has made an enquiry into women's workforce participation and she concluded that the proposal for participating in the workforce made by feminist literature and the gender empowerment measure

(proposed by UNDP) may not empower the women; rather it will burden the women more and more.

Sandra Rothboeck and Surthi Acharya (1999) argue that the gender segregation of jobs has two distinct elements. One refers to bunching of workers in jobs and the other, to the social and occupational hierarchy that permeates it.

Domestic services have been, and, still are, an important field of employment for many women. Yet, the ways in which it is organized have changed considerably throughout history and these changes have followed different trajectories. CLARA workshop on Domestic Services and mobility involving scholars from Europe, Asia and America, brought a rich contribution to studies about domestic workers. The increased economic and political interconnectedness of different parts of the world has enabled a rapid increase in the number of labour migrants amongst domestic workers. The status of domestic workers and the statistical categories under which they fall have a direct impact on different state regulations and their status as citizens. The conditions under which domestic workers are defined as citizens are often linked to the larger political context such as fascism, religion and colonialism (Annelies Moors and Ratna 2002).

Balgovind Baboo and Laxmi Panwar (1984) studied the maid servants in Hariyana. The study emphasizes that they are leading a miserable life. They suffer from low wage, long hours of work, shift in nature of job, lack of freedom and low prestige due to inferior status of the job. Due to lack of coordination their children are neglected and familial relations become tense. The fragmented nature of their job, lack of education and low bargaining capacity refrain them from organizing collectively.

According to the Report on Working Condition of Domestic Servants, in Delhi by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, nearly 90 per cent of domestic workers are women (1988). According to the National Survey conducted by the School of Social Work15, women constituted 87.09 per cent of domestic workers in Karnataka, 82.38 per cent in Ranchi, 75 per cent in Kerala and 90.78 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. The domestic workers face various

problems and one of them is deplorable wage level. The wages of domestic workers have not kept pace with the spiraling price rise. Every price rise cuts their real wage and further nutritional deficiency for them. The studies ("Workers' Rights", Legal Education Series No.8, 1992) conducted in Bombay and Pune indicate that women domestic workers are often the sole supporters of their family.

According to National Survey conducted by the School of Social Work (1980), in Calcutta only 6 per cent of the workers had made some contract with the employers, while, in other regions, it is a mere 1 to 2 per cent. The contract is made with a third party of agent and so the exploitation runs beyond the employer-employee relationship. According to the survey, in domestic service rest is considered a luxury by the employers and this problem has serious consequences on their health. The National Survey (1980), comments that though hours of work were regularized in Kerala, 76 per cent of its workers did not enjoy any holidays. A study of women domestic workers in Delhi (Das Guptha, Aparna 1980) indicates that women do not go to hospital due to fear of the hospital and long delays there. Most of the women hold a number of jobs and time is of great value to them.

Dhanalakshmi (1988) pointed out some general issues concerning women in labour market. The issues include the segregation of women into certain occupations, wage differentials between men and women for the same job, low and falling work participation rates of women etc. She made an attempt to study the domestic servants in Thiruvanathapuram city. The socio-economic conditions of domestic servants and the need of servants in the city have been studied.

According to Padmini (1960), of all services in India there is not a more unregulated or disorganized form of work than the domestic service. There are no regulated hours of work for women in domestic service, nor have laws been passed to protect them. Murugaiah (2002) has analyzed occupational risk of domestic servants in Tirupathi selection grade municipality in Andhra Pradesh. The risk areas include high level of insecurity, deplorable wages, long working hours etc.

From the survey of literature it seems that the various studies conducted on women labour in India throw light on different issues – social , political and economic status and the role that women have played and continue to play in the society and in the nation at large. In spite of the various Government policies, NGOs' awareness programmes, research studies, contribution of women in various fields, the disparity between male and female remains the major question and a problem to be addressed and solved. Women contribute a lion's share to the development of the society through their dedicated services, yet they are considered to be weak, fragile and low in comparison of their counterparts and exploited in the society.

Women domestic labour is a growing workforce, which signifies worsening conditions and insecurity of vulnerable sections in the society. Yet, the phenomenon has been addressed in the context of the large cities only. It varies from region to region and city to city. North-Eastern region dominated by tribal and rural populations has a huge number of women domestic workers whereas few studies have been carried out so far related to it. A question arises: **What patterns of women domestic labour are emerging in South Assam, especially in Silchar town?** The question is being attempted with reference to Silchar town in south Assam.

III. OBJECTIVES

The study had formulated the following objectives:

1) To study the nature of women domestic labour
2) To understand the structural source of women domestic labour
3) To discuss the social implications of women domestic labour, including their self–image perception
4) To suggest measures for social work intervention for uplift of women domestic labour.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For investigation the following questions were formed:

1. What patterns of work and work conditions are found among the women domestic workers in Silchar town?
2. What social conditions are responsible for the genesis of the women domestic labour in Silchar town?
3. What are social implications of the women domestic labour in Silchar town?
4. What are the possibilities for social work intervention for the women domestic labour in Silchar town?

V. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

(i) Sources and Types of Data

The data have been collected from primary sources. These are oral responses gathered from respondents in the field of the study. The respondents are women domestic workers from various slum pockets in Silchar own.

(ii) Universe and Units

Totality of the women domestic labourers from various slum pockets in the Silchar Municipal area constitutes the universe and individual women constitute the units of the study. In Silchar Municipal Board there are in all 28 wards, at present. The total area of Silchar town (Municipality area) is 15.75 sq. km., but the master plan area is 49.65 sq. km; thereby, adding another 33.90 sq. km. area to the municipal area. In all, there are 43 slum pockets in the municipal area of the 28 wards. Units for data collection were drawn from the slum pockets.

(iii) Selection of the Units

For collection of data (responses) from the units (respondents), a sample of 200 respondents was drawn through multi- stage sampling. In Silchar municipal area there were 43 slum pockets in June 2011 and the women work force of 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. All the women domestic workers in these slums constituted the universe of the study and individual maids as the units of the study. Before drawing a sample, preliminary survey of the women domestic workers was done in the slum pockets having women domestic labourers' concentration and a basic understanding of the problem of the 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 (7) pockets. Out of the two groups of the pockets, a 20% sample, each, comprising nine slum pockets, in all, was selected by lottery technique of simple random sampling. The nine pockets; namely, Malini Beel, Sarat Pally, Malugram, Chingkuri Road, Madhur Bandh, Kalibari Char, Tarapur (new colony), Bhakatpur, and Kanakpur were visited for a door-to-door survey to enlist the women domestic workers in each of the pockets. 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 each age group from each of the selected slum pockets was selected again by applying the lottery technique of random sampling, obtaining a main sample of 200 women (Hindu-175 and Muslim-25).

(iv) Tool for Data Collection

A structured interview schedule was constructed and administered during July 2011-March 2012 to the sample of women domestic workers to collect primary data in the form of their oral responses. 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.

VI. ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Introduction mainly deals with the problem, objectives, methodology and organization of the study. Chapter 2: Unorganized Women Workers in India makes an overview of studies on women in unorganized sector

of India's economy. Chapter 3: Field of the Study deals with the field of study and its historical, structural, cultural and demographic features. Chapter 4: Social Conditions of the Women Domestic Workers depicts the socio-economic background of the women domestic labour. Chapter 5: Work and Work Conditions of the Women Domestic Workers discusses the work and work conditions of the women domestic labour. Chapter 6: Social Implications of the Women Domestic Work brings out the social problems and other consequences of the women domestic labour. Chapter 7: Summary, Findings and Conclusion summarizes the study, present its findings and concludes it.

REFERENCES

Arunachalam, Jaya and Azad, Nandini. 1985. 'Role of women and children in the informal sector'. *Productivity*. Vol. 26. No.3.

Baboo, Balgovind and Panwar Laxmi. 1984. 'Maid servants: A case study in Haryana', *Mainstream*, Vol.23 (1).

Bannerji, N. 1985. *Women workers in the unorganized sector: The Calcutta experience.* Hyderabad: Sangham Book Pvt. Limited.

Banerjee,Nirmal. 1999. 'Women in emerging labour market', *Indian journal of labour economics*, Vol.42 (4).

Bhattacharya, Shrayana.2010. 'Need for domestic workers in households in the current economic scenario'. *Labour file.* Vol. 8 No.1-3, January-June, pp.31-34.

Bharat, Jyoti. 2008. *Repot on Socio-economic status women domestic workers-A diagnostic study in five major townships: Cuttack, Rourkella of Orissa*. India: Ministry of WCD Government of India.

Chandrashekhar, C. P. and Jayathi Ghosh. 2007. *Women workers in urban India*. http://www.macroscan.com/fet/feb07/fet060207Women_Workers.htm.

Dhanalakshmi, S.1988.*Women in the informal labour market –A case study of domestic Servants in Thiruvananthapurm city.* M.Phil. Dissertation, Kerala University.

Dutta, Shantanu. 2009. 'Silent labour', http://fifthwiseman. blogspot.com /2009_ 01_ archive.html.

Gadgil, D.R. 1965. *Women in the working force in India*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House.

Gangrade, K.D. and Gathia, Joseph A. 1893. *Women and child workers in the unorganised sector.* New Delhi: Concept Publishers.

Ghore, M.S.2000. Third survey of research in sociology and social anthropology. Indian Council of social sciences and Manak Publication.

Govt. of India. 2001. 'An overview of unorganised labour', http://pib.nic.in/archive/lreleng/lyr2001/resep2001/18092001/r1809200113.html.

Haque.T .1993. 'Labour employment and human development in South Asia', in Asoka Chanda, Horst Mund, Tripuri Sharan and C.P. Thakur (eds.): *Issues concerning employment of women in South Asia*. B.R.Publishing Corporation for Institute for Human Development. (Place unknown)

Kalpagam, U. 1987. 'Women workers in the urorganised sector in India', *Social scientist*, Vol.15, No.6

Kasturi, Leela. 1990. 'Poverty, migration and women's status', in Vina Mazumder (ed.) *Women workers in India: Studies on employment status*. New Delhi: Chanakya Publications.

Kingston. 2011. 'Domestic care workers at the interface of migration and development in the Caribbean: Action to expand good practice', http://www.gfmd.org/documents/ switzerland/jamaica/gfmd_swiss11_jamaica-programme.pdf.

Majumdar Maya 2005. *Encyclopaedia of gender equality through Women Empowerment.* New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.

Mazumdar, Veena .1981. 'Women studies: Challenge to educational system', Economic and political weekly, Vol.XVI, No.20, May.

Marak, Caroline. 2002. 'Matriliny and education among the Garos', in Fernandes Walter & Barbora Sanjay (eds): *Changing women's status in India: Focus on the North East*, Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Center.

Mohan, Poornima. 2000. *Encyclopedia of women in India*. Delhi: Publishers Distributors.

Mor, D.P. Singh. 2001. 'Women and unorganized sector', *Social welfare*, Vol.48, No. 9.

Mukhopadhaya (eds.).2007.*Gender justice, citizenship and development*. New Delhi: Zubaan, an imprint of Kali for Women.

Murugaiah, T. 2002. 'Women domestic workers', *Social Welfare*, Vol.49, No. 2.

M.Vimala. 2000. 'Socio-economic status of domestic women servants-A case study of Thrissur Corporation corporation', www.cds.ac.in/ krpcds/ reports/ vimala.pdf.

Neetha.2010. Workers: Profile and emerging concerns, *Labour file-A biomonthly journal of labour and economic affairs*.

Phukon, Dolly.2002. 'Status of women in Assam- Continuity and change', Lalneihzove (ed): *Changing status of women in North –Eastern States*, New Delhi: Mittal Publication.

Rothboeck, Sandra and Sarathi, Acharya. 1999. 'Gender -based segregation in the Indian labour market', *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*. Vol. 42, No. 4.

Sandhu, H.K. and J.K. Dhesi .1977. 'The economic contribution of women to agricultural development', Journal of research, Vol.XIV, No.1.

Sen, Ilina. 2002. 'The impact of globalization on women', in Fernandes Walter & Barbora Sanjay (eds): *Changing women's Status in India: Focus on the North- East*, Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Center.

Sengupta, Arjun. (2007). Report on conditions of work and promotion of livelihoods in the unorganised sector. India: National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, Government of India.

Singh, K.P. 1980. 'Economic development and female labour force participation: The case study of Punjab, *Journal of Social Action*, Vol. 30, No. 2, April-June.

Sundaram, Sathya (ed).1996. *Unorganized women labour in India*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.

Susan, Abraham. 2007. 'A lawless Sector', www.infochangeindia.org.

Thakar Atanu.1999. 'A post modernist enquiry into women's work force participation'. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol.42 (4).

Unni, Jeemol and Rani Uma. 1999. 'Informal sector women in the emerging labour market'. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol.42 (4)