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**Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Women Empowerment: A Case
Study of Women Domestic Workers in Prayagraj**

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Abstract

This study examines how women working as domestic helpers in Prayagraj feel empowered through both psychological strength and spirituality. It is important because it explores how these women cope with challenging work conditions and gain self-worth, despite facing social and economic limitations. Most past studies focus on financial or social aspects, leaving a gap in understanding the impact of spirituality and mental resilience on their empowerment. The study aims to uncover the role of spirituality, and challenges in their sense of empowerment, as well as how these factors affect their life and job satisfaction. This research paper is an explanatory case study of three domestic workers, with data collected through interviews and supplemented by secondary sources. Results show that low self-esteem, high stress, and limited control over work hinder psychological empowerment, while spirituality provides emotional strength and a positive perspective on hardships. These findings suggest that support programs combining mental health resources with spiritual practices could better meet the needs of these women, helping them build resilience and feel more empowered in their lives.

Keywords: *domestic worker, spirituality, psychological strength, women empowerment.*

1. Introduction

Domestic workers in India, particularly women, represent a

marginalized and vulnerable segment of society. These women are often subjected to poor working conditions, low wages, a

lack of job security, and, most significantly, a pervasive lack of respect and dignity. Their daily lives are shaped by structural inequalities that stem from gender, caste, and class hierarchies. Despite these challenges, many domestic workers turn to spiritual practices to find strength and cope with their circumstances. There are different types workers, in India who operate within an informal and unregulated sector hidden within private residences and often referred to as 'informal help' rather, than recognized as formal employees. (*India: Domestic Workers*, n.d.)

India has approximately 4.75 million domestic workers, with 75% of them being women (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2019). These women perform essential services in households, yet their work is often devalued and invisible in the formal labor market. While studies on women's empowerment frequently focus on financial independence and access to education, this paper highlights the importance of psychological empowerment and spiritual resilience, dimensions that are often overlooked but critical to understanding how marginalized women like domestic workers navigate their lives.

Through this case study, we aim to uncover how these women perceive their own empowerment, the role spirituality

plays in their resilience, and how their psychological well-being is impacted by their lack of social recognition and benefits. The paper will show that while they experience significant barriers to psychological empowerment, spirituality provides them with a sense of emotional strength that allows them to endure their difficult circumstances. Spirituality has been identified as a key coping mechanism for individuals in marginalized and low-status roles (Pargament, 1997). It provides emotional support and fosters resilience, which can enhance one's sense of empowerment despite external challenges. This study draws from these insights, seeking to understand how spirituality and mental resilience contribute to the empowerment of domestic workers in Prayagraj.

2. Background on Domestic Workers with respect to psychological & spiritual dimension of empowerment in India

Domestic workers in India are among the most vulnerable and least protected groups in the workforce. The informal nature of their employment often leaves them without access to labor protections such as minimum wage, health benefits, or pension schemes. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), many domestic workers are excluded from national labor laws and

social protection schemes, leading to exploitative working conditions. In India, domestic workers are not governed by a specific law or policy that addresses their rights and working conditions. Existing labor laws do not comprehensively cover domestic workers due to restrictive interpretations of terms like "workman," "employer," or "establishment." The ambiguity arises from the private nature of the home, which is not typically recognized as a formal workplace under labor legislation. As a result, domestic workers, many of whom live with the families they work for, often remain excluded from the protections afforded to other categories of workers. (Kalia, 2023)

The United Nations has defined women's empowerment as 'the process through which women gain ownership of and control over their lives by expanding their options.' To understand the interconnection between spirituality and women's empowerment, the researcher defined what spirituality is and how it differs from religion. 'Although the terms spirituality and religion are frequently used interchangeably, they are not the same. Some writers assert that although religion comprises a structured organization with rituals and practices centered on a higher force or God, spirituality involves a personal search for meaning in life.' (Tanyi RA, 2002)

Even after these challenges, many domestic workers rely on spirituality as a coping mechanism. In the Indian context, spirituality is deeply intertwined with everyday life and can serve as a source of emotional strength, hope, and resilience for women facing adverse conditions. This study examines how spirituality aids in psychological empowerment for domestic workers who are otherwise excluded from many traditional forms of empowerment.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative case study approach, focusing on interviews with four women domestic workers in Prayagraj. The participants were selected based on their occupation in domestic work and their willingness to discuss their spiritual practices and personal experiences. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Hindi, and the data was later transcribed and analyzed thematically.

The interviews focused on key aspects of their daily lives, including their feelings of self-worth, their spiritual practices, and their concerns about their children's education and future. Questions were designed to explore both psychological and spiritual dimensions of their lives, with particular emphasis on how these women perceive respect in their

workplaces and how they use spirituality to cope with challenges.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Psychological Disempowerment: Lack of Respect and Low Self-Esteem

The interviews revealed that the women domestic workers in Prayagraj consistently experience a lack of respect in their work. One participant, who works as a dish washer, remarked, “I don’t feel respected, and I do not enjoy doing this. It’s my compulsion. I have to do it for my family’s survival.” This sentiment reflects the widespread lack of dignity that these women encounter, as their work is often seen as menial and unimportant by their employers.

Three of the four women stated that they feel invisible in the households where they work. They spoke of how their employers often treated them with indifference, rarely acknowledging their contributions. This sense of invisibility contributes to low self-esteem and a diminished sense of self-worth, which are critical components of psychological disempowerment. The cook was the one who felt respected in her work and enjoyed preparing meals. It makes her happy that her food can bring joy to others. She has completed her 12th grade and is knowledgeable about LIC policies and recurring deposits, which makes her savvy

in managing her finances. The other workers, however, were not as involved in saving money.

4.2 Spirituality as a Source of Strength

Despite the psychological challenges they face, all four women reported that their spiritual practices provide them with a sense of strength and peace. Spirituality, for these women, is not merely a set of religious rituals but a deeply personal and emotional resource that helps them endure the difficulties of their lives.

One worker, who performs multiple household chores, said, “When I feel like everything is going wrong, I sit for half an hour and pray. It helps me calm down and remember that God will fix everything.” This belief in divine intervention offers her a sense of comfort and control over her circumstances, even when external conditions seem insurmountable.

The spiritual practices described by the workers ranged from daily prayer to moments of quiet meditation. One woman shared how she began crying during one of the interviews, overwhelmed by her struggles, but then remembered, “God will take care of everything in the end.” This spiritual reliance acts as a psychological buffer, helping the women reframe their

hardships in a way that reduces stress and fosters emotional resilience.

4.3 Prioritizing Children's Education Over Personal Empowerment

A significant theme that emerged from the interviews was the prioritization of their children's education over their own well-being. The women expressed a deep desire to ensure that their children, particularly their daughters, receive an education that can break the cycle of poverty and domestic work.

"My only concern is that my children should get a good education," one worker said. "I don't care about anything else as long as they study and have a better life than I do." This focus on their children's future reflects a form of indirect empowerment, where the women see themselves as agents of change through their children's success.

This finding aligns with broader research on women's empowerment, which suggests that many women in marginalized positions view their children's advancement as their own form of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). For these domestic workers, the act of prioritizing their children's education is an assertion of agency, even when their own opportunities for personal advancement are limited.

4.4 Absence of Social Benefits and Structural Support

None of the women reported receiving any social benefits, such as healthcare, pensions, or insurance. This lack of formal support compounds their sense of disempowerment. One woman commented, "We do everything for our families, but no one looks after us. We get no help, no benefits." The absence of social security leaves these women vulnerable to exploitation and reinforces their reliance on spiritual practices for emotional support. No work-life balance is observed in this study as they had to come to work at the day of festival such as Diwali too. one worker who dishes is a white ration card holder. White ration cards are given to families whose combined annual income is Rs 1 lakh or more or any person in the family owns a four-wheeler mechanical vehicle or owns four hectares of perennial horticultural land in the names of all members of the family. (*Ration Card | Controller of Rationing and Director Civil Supplies Mumbai, Government of Maharashtra | India*, 2024)

The lack of governmental and employer-based support systems for domestic workers in India is a pressing issue. Domestic workers often fall outside the purview of labor laws, leaving them without access to minimum wage

protections, health insurance, or retirement benefits. This structural exclusion perpetuates their disempowerment and forces them to rely on personal resilience rather than institutional safeguards.

5. Conclusion

The psychological and spiritual dimensions of women's empowerment are critical yet often overlooked aspects of domestic workers' lives in India. This study reveals that while women domestic workers in Prayagraj face significant psychological challenges—such as disrespect, low self-esteem, and a lack of control over their work—spirituality provides them with emotional resilience. Their spiritual practices help them cope with the daily indignities of their work, offering them a sense of peace and hope amidst difficult circumstances.

Despite their struggles, these women continue to prioritize their children's education, viewing it as their pathway to empowerment. However, the lack of social protections for domestic workers exacerbates their vulnerability, suggesting a need for policy interventions that provide both economic and psychological support. Ten methods that religion might enhance mental health were suggested by Koenig are as follows- 1 Spread a positive point of view. 2 Assist in making sense of challenging

circumstances. 3. Provide direction and meaning. 4. Encourage healthy coping methods. 5 Increase your social network. 6 Encourage 'other-directedness'. 7 Assist in letting go of the demand for control. 8 Offer and promote forgiveness. 9 Encourage feeling grateful. 10 Give hope. (Cook, C., & Powell, A., 2022). High levels of spirituality and religiosity have reportedly been shown to aid HIV/AIDS patients in managing their condition by changing their behavior and lowering anxiety and other mental issues that could develop as a result of their HIV positivity. (Abu-Raiya H, 2013). If it can help even a sick people then it can be deduced that it would be immensely helpful in playing a huge role in empowerment of women.

Programs that integrate mental health resources and spiritual guidance could play a significant role in empowering domestic workers. Furthermore, labor policies should be reformed to ensure that domestic workers receive fair wages, access to healthcare, and social security benefits. By addressing both the psychological and spiritual dimensions of empowerment, policymakers can help these women achieve greater agency and control over their lives.

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