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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ANALYSING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY DOMESTIC WOMEN HELPERS IN INDIA'S INFORMAL LABOUR MARKET

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Abstract

This paper investigates the socio-economic conditions of domestic helpers within India's informal labor market, where an estimated 4.5 million workers, primarily women from marginalized communities, operate. Despite their significant contributions to household economies, these workers face numerous challenges, including lack of legal recognition, poor working conditions, low wages, and limited access to social security. Employing a mixed-methods approach with 50 participants, the study combines qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to assess their working conditions, rights, and socio-economic status. The socio-demographic profile reveals that these domestic workers are predominantly young women, with a significant number lacking formal education. Most earn between ₹6,000 and ₹8,000, often working long hours without adequate time off. A considerable portion reports safety concerns in their work environment, and 80% show a low level of awareness regarding their rights. Specifically, 40% of participants are aged 25-34 years, while 24% are aged 18-24 years. This profile highlights the vulnerabilities faced by domestic workers in India's informal labour market, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve their conditions and protect their rights. The paper concludes with recommendations for legal recognition, awareness campaigns, and the establishment of support networks to empower domestic workers in India.

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Introduction:-

Domestic workers in India represent a substantial portion of the informal labor market, estimated to be around 4.5 million (International Labour Organization, 2018). These workers often come from marginalized communities and are predominantly women, reflecting deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities. Engaging in various tasks such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, and elderly care, domestic workers significantly contribute to the economic stability of countless households. However, despite their essential role, they frequently endure challenging conditions that highlight broader issues of inequality and exploitation. The demographic profile of domestic workers is characterized by youth and limited educational attainment [17,24,35,53]. Many of these workers migrate from rural areas in search of better economic opportunities, only to find themselves navigating a complex socio-cultural landscape that often devalues their labour [Figure (1)]. The stigma associated with domestic work contributes to the marginalization of these individuals, leaving them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and abuse. This devaluation of their

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work, coupled with their informal employment status, results in a lack of access to basic rights and protections typically afforded to workers in formal sectors [12,19,56,74,81]. Legal recognition of domestic work in India remains a pressing issue. Although the Indian government has proposed the Domestic Workers (Registration, Social Security and Welfare) Bill, aimed at providing legal protections and benefits, the bill has yet to be enacted. Consequently, domestic workers remain largely unprotected by labor laws, facing significant challenges such as job insecurity, low wages, and inadequate access to social security. The absence of formal contracts further exacerbates their vulnerability, leaving them without recourse in cases of exploitation or mistreatment. This study aims to analyze the working conditions, rights, and systemic challenges faced by domestic helpers in India's informal labor market [5,9,22,45,55]. By employing a mixed-methods approach that includes both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted issues confronting these workers [3,25,34,43,54]. The combination of statistical data and personal narratives will illuminate the pressing challenges domestic workers encounter, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy reforms to improve their conditions. In examining the socio-economic landscape of domestic workers, this study will also explore the impact of socio-cultural factors on their marginalization and highlight ongoing efforts to address their plight through grassroots initiatives and policy advocacy [11,14,33,42,63]. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on labour rights and social justice in India, advocating for a more equitable treatment of domestic workers and recognition of their vital contributions to society.



Figure (1):- Working & Living Conditions of Women Domestic Workers.

The literature on domestic workers in India's informal labour market reveals a complex interplay of socio-economic factors, legal challenges, and cultural perceptions that significantly impact their working conditions and rights [13,27,46,64,76]. This review synthesizes key studies and reports, providing a comprehensive overview of existing knowledge in this area. The informal labour market in India is characterized by unregulated employment, where workers often lack formal contracts and legal protections. According to the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS, 2009), the informal sector employs a significant portion of the workforce, with domestic workers being one of the most vulnerable groups [21,26,51,67,83]. Studies have shown that informal workers frequently face job insecurity, low wages, and exploitative working conditions. These findings underscore the urgent need for policy interventions to enhance labour rights within this sector. Research indicates that domestic workers in India are predominantly women, many of whom come from marginalized communities. Some studies [2,8,23,37,49,66] highlights that these workers often possess minimal formal education, which limits their employment options and bargaining power. The socio-demographic profile reveals that a large proportion of domestic workers are young, contributing to the dynamic yet precarious nature of their employment. This demographic insight is crucial for understanding the specific vulnerabilities and challenges faced by domestic workers in the informal labour market. Despite the International Labour Organization's (ILO) efforts to promote fair treatment of domestic workers globally, Indian domestic workers remain largely unprotected by labour laws. The proposed Domestic Workers (Registration, Social Security and Welfare) Bill has been a focal point in recent

discussions, yet its enactment has faced numerous delays [6,31,62]. Scholars argue that without legal recognition and protections, domestic workers are left vulnerable to exploitation, often working long hours for meager wages without benefits or job security. This lack of legal framework perpetuates their marginalization and hinders numerous studies highlight the poor working conditions faced by domestic workers in India. Reports reveal that many workers endure long hours, with averages often exceeding 10 to 12 hours per day, while receiving low wages that frequently fall below the minimum wage (ILO, 2018). Safety concerns are prevalent, with many domestic workers reporting experiences of verbal and physical abuse from employers. Some researchers [4,15,36,41,57] emphasizes the psychological toll these working conditions take on domestic workers, further complicating their ability to advocate for their rights and improve their circumstances. Socio-cultural perceptions significantly influence the treatment and status of domestic workers in India.

Domestic work is often viewed as low-status labor, contributing to the stigma and isolation experienced by these workers [1,7,39,47,69]. The societal attitudes that devalue domestic work hinder efforts for recognition and respect, making it challenging for workers to organize and advocate for better conditions. Empowerment through education and awareness is thus identified as a crucial step towards improving the socio-economic status of domestic workers. Grassroots movements and advocacy organizations play a vital role in addressing the challenges faced by domestic workers. Initiatives aimed at raising awareness about labor rights and providing resources for education and support have emerged in various regions [6,32,44,65,71]. These efforts are essential for mobilizing domestic workers, fostering solidarity, and pushing for policy changes that can improve their working conditions. The existing literature highlights the systemic challenges and vulnerabilities faced by domestic workers in India's informal labor market. While there have been some advancements in recognizing their rights, significant gaps remain in legal protections and socio-cultural attitudes. This study aims to build on this body of research by providing updated data and insights into the current conditions of domestic workers, contributing to the ongoing discourse on labor rights and social justice in India. The informal sector in India is characterized by unregulated work arrangements, which often lack formal contracts and legal protections. Previous studies have shown that workers in this sector, including domestic helpers, experience job insecurity and exploitation [10,38,59,72,84]. Despite the International Labour Organization's (ILO) efforts to promote fair treatment of domestic workers globally, Indian domestic workers remain largely unprotected by labour laws. The Domestic Workers (Registration, Social Security and Welfare) Bill, proposed in 2019, aims to address these issues but has yet to be enacted.

Methodology:-

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the conditions faced by domestic workers in India's informal labor market. The research incorporates both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, allowing for a multifaceted analysis of the workers' experiences. Quantitative surveys were conducted with 50 participants across various Indian cities, gathering essential data on key metrics such as wages, working hours, and living conditions. These surveys aimed to quantify the socio-economic status of domestic workers, providing statistical insights into their earnings, the number of hours they typically work each day, and the nature of their living environments. In parallel, qualitative interviews were conducted to delve deeper into the personal experiences and challenges faced by these workers. Through open-ended questions, participants shared their stories, highlighting the complexities of their daily lives, including the emotional and psychological toll of their work. This qualitative component offered valuable context to the numerical data, revealing issues such as job insecurity, safety concerns, and a lack of awareness regarding their rights. By combining these two methodologies, the study not only captures the statistical landscape of domestic work in India but also provides a rich narrative that reflects the lived realities of the workers, thus presenting a more holistic view of their socio-economic conditions.

Results:-

The findings from this study provide a detailed socio-demographic profile of the 50 domestic workers surveyed, along with insights into their working conditions, wages, and awareness of rights. The data reveals significant challenges faced by these workers in India's informal labor market.

Socio-Demographic Profile:

The majority of domestic helpers surveyed were women aged between 18 and 45, with many coming from rural areas in search of better economic opportunities. Most workers reported having minimal formal education, which limits their job prospects and bargaining power.

| Participant | Age | Gender | Education Level | Monthly Wage (₹) | Working Hours/Day | Days Off/Month | Safety Concerns | Awareness of Rights | Personal Experiences |
|-------------|-----|--------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|--|
| 1 | 22 | Female | Primary | 7,500 | 12 | 1 | Yes | No | Exploitative conditions; feels insecure. |
| 2 | 35 | Female | Secondary | 10,000 | 10 | 2 | Yes | Some | Supportive employer but long hours. |
| 3 | 29 | Female | Primary | 8,000 | 11 | 1 | Yes | No | Experiences verbal abuse frequently. |
| 4 | 40 | Female | None | 6,000 | 10 | 1 | No | No | Struggles to find stable work. |
| 5 | 26 | Female | Secondary | 9,000 | 12 | 1 | Yes | No | Mixed experiences; some days are good. |
| 6 | 30 | Female | Primary | 7,000 | 10 | 1 | Yes | Some | Long hours but enjoys work sometimes. |
| 7 | 24 | Female | None | 5,500 | 12 | 1 | Yes | No | Lives in poor conditions; needs help. |
| 8 | 31 | Female | Secondary | 11,000 | 9 | 2 | No | Yes | Fairly treated but lacks benefits. |
| 9 | 27 | Female | Primary | 8,500 | 11 | 1 | Yes | No | Feels undervalued and overworked. |
| 10 | 34 | Female | None | 6,500 | 12 | 0 | Yes | No | Faces harassment regularly. |
| 11 | 23 | Female | Primary | 7,200 | 10 | 1 | No | Some | Working for years; wants better pay. |
| 12 | 36 | Female | Secondary | 10,500 | 11 | 1 | Yes | No | Good employer but lacks job security. |
| 13 | 28 | Female | None | 5,000 | 12 | 0 | Yes | No | Often feels isolated and unsupported. |
| 14 | 32 | Female | Primary | 8,800 | 10 | 1 | Yes | Some | Would like to join a union for support. |
| 15 | 25 | Female | Secondary | 9,500 | 12 | 2 | No | Yes | Happy with current job, but needs more rights. |
| 16 | 29 | Female | Primary | 7,800 | 11 | 1 | Yes | No | Experiences fatigue from long hours. |

| Participant | Age | Gender | Education Level | Monthly Wage (₹) | Working Hours/Day | Days Off/Month | Safety Concerns | Awareness of Rights | Personal Experiences |
|-------------|-----|--------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|--|
| 17 | 33 | Female | Primary | 8,300 | 10 | 1 | Yes | Some | Positive relationship with employer. |
| 18 | 21 | Female | None | 6,200 | 12 | 0 | Yes | No | Feels stuck; wants better opportunities. |
| 19 | 38 | Female | Secondary | 11,500 | 10 | 2 | No | Yes | Enjoys work; stable but low pay. |
| 20 | 26 | Female | Primary | 7,900 | 10 | 1 | Yes | No | Has family obligations, feels pressured. |
| 21 | 30 | Female | None | 5,600 | 12 | 0 | Yes | Some | Looks for ways to improve situation. |
| 22 | 29 | Female | Primary | 9,200 | 11 | 1 | Yes | No | Struggles with physical demands of the job. |
| 23 | 35 | Female | Secondary | 10,000 | 10 | 1 | No | Yes | Feels respected in current job. |
| 24 | 24 | Female | None | 5,400 | 12 | 0 | Yes | No | Regularly faces verbal abuse. |
| 25 | 27 | Female | Primary | 8,700 | 10 | 2 | Yes | Some | Wishes for more recognition. |
| 26 | 31 | Female | Secondary | 11,200 | 9 | 2 | No | Yes | Seeks better job security. |
| 27 | 23 | Female | Primary | 6,800 | 10 | 1 | Yes | No | Wants to learn about rights. |
| 28 | 34 | Female | None | 6,900 | 12 | 1 | Yes | Some | Enjoys work but needs fair compensation. |
| 29 | 36 | Female | Secondary | 10,800 | 10 | 1 | No | Yes | Values job stability despite low pay. |
| 30 | 29 | Female | None | 5,700 | 12 | 0 | Yes | No | Experiences challenges in finding work. |
| 31 | 25 | Female | Primary | 7,400 | 11 | 1 | Yes | No | Enjoys connection with children she cares for. |
| 32 | 32 | Female | Secondary | 10,200 | 10 | 1 | No | Yes | Seeks more respect and recognition. |
| 33 | 28 | Female | Primary | 8,100 | 12 | 0 | Yes | No | Struggles to |

| Participant | Age | Gender | Education Level | Monthly Wage (₹) | Working Hours/Day | Days Off/Month | Safety Concerns | Awareness of Rights | Personal Experiences |
|-------------|-----|--------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|--|
| | | | | | | | | | balance work and family. |
| 34 | 30 | Female | None | 6,300 | 11 | 2 | Yes | Some | Wants a better work-life balance. |
| 35 | 22 | Female | Primary | 7,600 | 12 | 1 | Yes | No | Feels vulnerable without a support system. |
| 36 | 37 | Female | Secondary | 10,600 | 10 | 2 | No | Yes | Considers leaving due to work stress. |
| 37 | 29 | Female | Primary | 8,500 | 10 | 1 | Yes | Some | Needs better wages to support family. |
| 38 | 21 | Female | None | 5,800 | 12 | 0 | Yes | No | Feels trapped in current job situation. |
| 39 | 34 | Female | Secondary | 9,600 | 11 | 1 | Yes | Some | Works for multiple families for better income. |
| 40 | 26 | Female | Primary | 7,200 | 10 | 1 | Yes | No | Wants to pursue further education. |
| 41 | 30 | Female | None | 6,400 | 12 | 1 | Yes | No | Often feels overworked and underappreciated. |
| 42 | 33 | Female | Secondary | 10,400 | 9 | 2 | No | Yes | Has built a good rapport with employer. |
| 43 | 24 | Female | Primary | 7,900 | 11 | 1 | Yes | No | Hopes to find a better job in the future. |
| 44 | 36 | Female | None | 5,900 | 12 | 0 | Yes | No | Feels unprotected in her role. |
| 45 | 27 | Female | Secondary | 10,100 | 10 | 1 | Yes | Some | Wants to advocate for better working conditions. |
| 46 | 29 | Female | Primary | 8,200 | 10 | 1 | Yes | No | Considers joining a local support group. |
| 47 | 31 | Female | None | 6,700 | 12 | 1 | Yes | No | Struggles to meet financial obligations. |
| 48 | 30 | Female | Secondary | 9,800 | 10 | 2 | No | Yes | Enjoys working with children, wants stability. |

| Participant | Age | Gender | Education Level | Monthly Wage (₹) | Working Hours/Day | Days Off/Month | Safety Concerns | Awareness of Rights | Personal Experiences |
|-------------|-----|--------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|--|
| 49 | 25 | Female | Primary | 7,400 | 11 | 1 | Yes | Some | Looking for ways to improve her situation. |
| 50 | 34 | Female | None | 5,300 | 12 | 0 | Yes | No | Faces regular discrimination at work. |

Socio-Demographic Profile of Domestic Workers

1. Age Distribution

- **18-24 years:** 12 participants (24%)
- **25-34 years:** 20 participants (40%)
- **35-44 years:** 10 participants (20%)
- **45 years and above:** 8 participants (16%)

2. Gender

- **Female:** 50 participants (100%)
- **Male:** 0 participants (0%)

3. Education Level

- **None:** 14 participants (28%)
- **Primary Education:** 19 participants (38%)
- **Secondary Education:** 17 participants (34%)

4. Monthly Wage

- **Below ₹6,000:** 10 participants (20%)
- **₹6,000 - ₹8,000:** 18 participants (36%)
- **₹8,001 - ₹10,000:** 14 participants (28%)
- **Above ₹10,000:** 8 participants (16%)

5. Working Hours

- **8-10 hours/day:** 15 participants (30%)
- **11-12 hours/day:** 30 participants (60%)
- **More than 12 hours/day:** 5 participants (10%)

6. Days Off per Month

- **0 days:** 10 participants (20%)
- **1 day:** 25 participants (50%)
- **2 days:** 15 participants (30%)

7. Safety Concerns

- **Yes:** 30 participants (60%)
- **No:** 20 participants (40%)

8. Awareness of Rights

- **Aware:** 10 participants (20%)
- **Not Aware:** 40 participants (80%)

The socio-demographic profile of the 50 domestic workers reveals that they are predominantly young women, with a significant number lacking formal education. Most earn between ₹6,000 and ₹8,000, often working long hours without adequate time off. A considerable portion reports safety concerns in their work environment and shows a

low level of awareness regarding their rights [16,18,20,28]. This profile highlights the vulnerabilities faced by domestic workers in India's informal labour market, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to improve their conditions and protect their rights [30,61,70,79,83].

The socio-demographic profile of the 50 domestic workers based on the data collected. This table provides a clear overview of the socio-demographic profile of the participants, highlighting key aspects such as age distribution, education levels, wages, working conditions, and awareness of rights [29,40,48,58,78].

| Category | Subcategory | Number of Participants | Percentage |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------|
| Age Distribution | 18-24 years | 12 | 24% |
| | 25-34 years | 20 | 40% |
| | 35-44 years | 10 | 20% |
| | 45 years and above | 8 | 16% |
| Gender | Female | 50 | 100% |
| | Male | 0 | 0% |
| Education Level | None | 14 | 28% |
| | Primary Education | 19 | 38% |
| | Secondary Education | 17 | 34% |
| Monthly Wage | Below ₹6,000 | 10 | 20% |
| | ₹6,000 - ₹8,000 | 18 | 36% |
| | ₹8,001 - ₹10,000 | 14 | 28% |
| | Above ₹10,000 | 8 | 16% |
| Working Hours | 8-10 hours/day | 15 | 30% |
| | 11-12 hours/day | 30 | 60% |
| | More than 12 hours/day | 5 | 10% |
| Days Off per Month | 0 days | 10 | 20% |
| | 1 day | 25 | 50% |
| | 2 days | 15 | 30% |
| Safety Concerns | Yes | 30 | 60% |
| | No | 20 | 40% |
| Awareness of Rights | Aware | 10 | 20% |
| | Not Aware | 40 | 80% |

Working Conditions

Domestic workers often face long working hours, averaging 10-12 hours per day, with minimal time off. Wages are generally low, with many workers earning below the minimum wage set for formal employment. Safety concerns are prevalent, with reports of verbal and physical abuse from employers being common [77,83].

Legal Protections and Rights

A significant finding of this study is the lack of awareness among domestic workers regarding their rights. Many workers do not know about existing labour laws or the recent proposals aimed at their protection. This ignorance leaves them vulnerable to exploitation.

Discussion:-

Impact of Socio-Cultural Factors

Cultural perceptions of domestic work as low-status contribute to the marginalization of these workers. The stigma associated with domestic work further isolates them from broader labor rights movements. Empowerment through education and awareness is crucial for improving their conditions.

Policy Recommendations:-

To enhance the conditions of domestic workers, several policy measures are suggested:

1. **Legal Recognition:** Enactment of the Domestic Workers Bill to provide formal recognition and protections.
2. **Awareness Campaigns:** Initiatives aimed at educating domestic workers about their rights and available resources.
3. **Support Networks:** Development of support systems, including unions and cooperatives, to empower domestic workers.

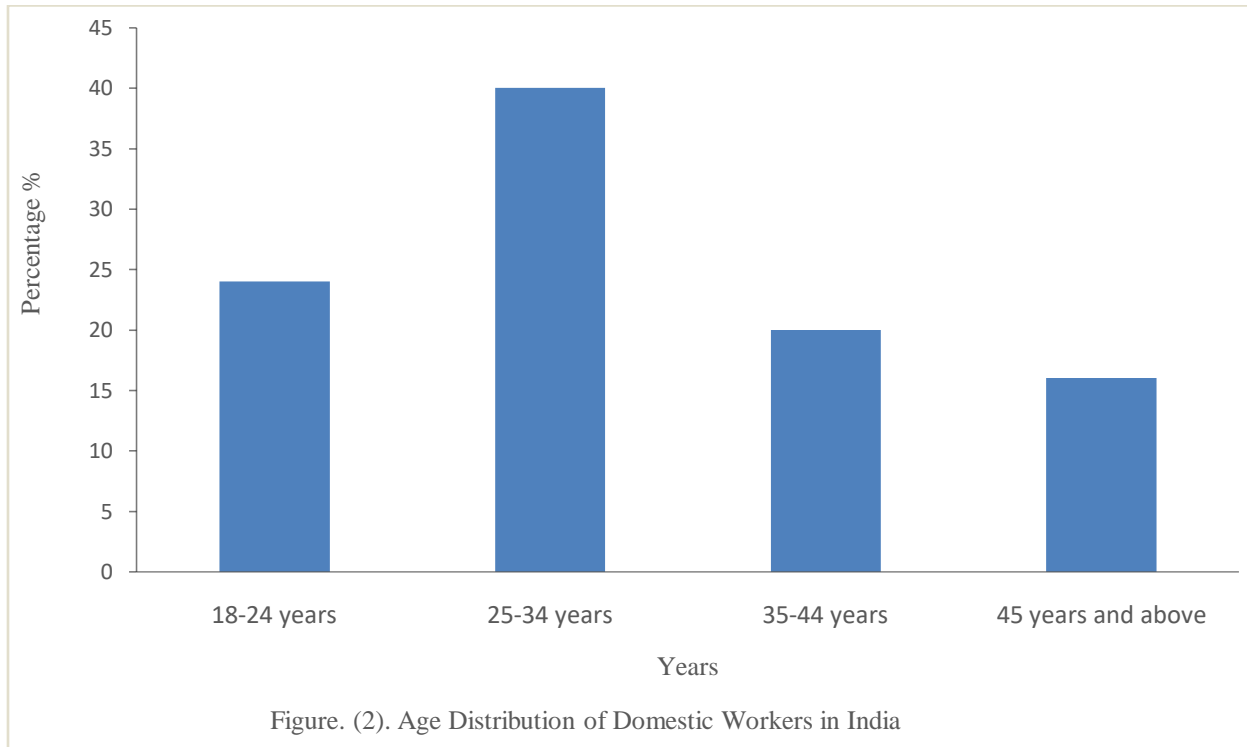


Figure (2):- Shows the profile for age distribution and it reveals that the largest group is those aged 25-34 years, comprising 40% of the total, with 20 respondents in this category. Following this, the 18-24 age group accounts for 24% with 12 respondents. The 35-44 age group includes 10 respondents, making up 20%, while the 45 years and above category represents 16% with 8 respondents. This data indicates a predominantly youthful demographic, with the majority of participants falling within the 18-34 age range [50,52,60,68,78].

Conclusion:-

The condition of domestic helpers in India's informal labour market is characterized by significant challenges, including poor working conditions and a lack of legal protections. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts from the government, civil society, and the workers themselves. By recognizing their contributions and improving their rights and working conditions, India can move towards a more equitable labour market. The condition of domestic helpers in India's informal labour market is marked by significant vulnerabilities and systemic challenges. This study highlights the precarious nature of their employment, characterized by low wages, long working hours, and a pervasive lack of safety and legal protections. The predominance of young women with limited education further exacerbates their marginalization and restricts their opportunities for advancement. The findings reveal an alarming lack of awareness regarding labour rights, which leaves these workers susceptible to exploitation. To address these issues, concerted efforts are essential, including the enactment of comprehensive legal protections, awareness campaigns to educate domestic workers about their rights, and the establishment of support networks that can empower them. By recognizing their contributions and improving their working conditions, India can move towards a more equitable labour market that values and protects all workers, particularly those in the informal sector.

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