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"UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS BEYOND THE KINSHIP CLASSIFICATION: A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF HOW INDIAN WOMEN ENGAGE WITH THEIR HOUSE HELP"

Kinship refers to the complex system of social interactions that exist between individuals and communities based on family ties, whether actual or imagined, and has long piqued the curiosity of anthropologists. The study of kinship has typically concentrated on the connections between families and wider kinship groupings and how these connections relate to place or the land. In the past, anthropologists have made an effort to develop abstract models or classificatory types to explain the connections between kinship groups, but these models have frequently come under criticism for being overly straightforward and failing to adequately represent the complexity of kinship ties in the actual world. Furthermore, ethnographic findings reveal that kinship relationships are frequently discretionary and fluid rather than being predetermined at birth or marriage, challenging the notion that kinship "rules" govern social life. In fact, anthropologists increasingly acknowledge that kindred links can be formed and maintained for a variety of reasons, such as common interests, life experiences, or even economic considerations. They also acknowledge that "fictive" kinship relationships can be just as real as "biological" ones. In this sense, kinship is viewed as a social construction formed by cultural, historical, and economic variables as opposed to being simply based on biological or genetic characteristics (Gillespie 2000).

A social structure known as a "culture of servitude" is one in which dominance, subordination, reliance, and inequality are accepted norms that permeate both the private and public arenas of life. Here, the term "culture" is used broadly to refer to power dynamics as well as consciousness and practise (Ray and Qayum). The term "ideology" is sometimes used to refer to belief systems and moral principles that serve the interests of a specific social class, but the concept of culture is more inclusive and considers all forms of practice and lived experience (Ray and Qayum).

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony describes the nuanced ways in which authority is exerted and justified through a range of cultural and institutional processes, transcending both culture and ideology.

It is crucial to understand that cultures of service do not only exist in connections based on blood ties when it comes to social relationships outside of family. Instead, they occur in a range of settings, including those that are characterized by caste, class, and social rank. In fact, kinship ties frequently cross social hierarchies based on these variables to maintain cultures of servitude (Ray and Qayum). It is crucial to analyze these cultural systems of inequality and power and to work towards establishing more just and equitable social structures. This entails opposing prevailing cultural narratives and customs that uphold hierarchies and subordination and attempting to establish substitute forms of social organization that are grounded in the ideals of equality, freedom, and respect for one another. The intersection between kinship (to be more precise relations outside kinship) and the social dynamics revolving around the house help would be looked at in detail. by documenting (forming a google questionnaire) on how female middle and upper middle class (both employed and unemployed, aged 20 - 50 years) engage with their domestic helpers (especially women helpers).

Testing Hypothesis

It is undoubtedly crucial to take into account how social connections other than kinship may affect how we perceive authority and hierarchy in society, there can be power dynamics and inequality in relationships such as pet ownership, friendships, and even "maid – malkin" (translating to employee) connections.

These connections and how they interact with kinship ties can give us a more complex picture of social power structures. The mechanics of ownership and control in pet ownership, for instance, can provide insight into how power functions in other spheres of life. Similar to how friendships might be built on same interests or socioeconomic standing, examining these relationships can help us comprehend how social inequality is replicated and maintained in our day-to-day interactions.

Nevertheless, it's crucial to understand that these bonds may not be as rigidly structured as familial ties and may not contain the same sorts of resource-sharing and support networks. However, by comprehending the power dynamics at work in these interactions, we can gain a more complete knowledge of how social hierarchies are established and sustained. Researching these challenges necessitates a profound and nuanced comprehension of the complicated ways that power functions in our social interactions, both inside and beyond the family.

Research question

* Can relationships outside the blood line be understood as or even more than blood lines?

* Can the organic process of relation building be given higher importance than the classificatory approach to kinship ?

* Focusing on the practices and understandings by which relationships are constructed in everyday social life, rather than on abstract or idealized rules

* What are the limitations of such relationships (built outside the kinship system) and what's the relevance of it in one's life?

Analysis of subject through the questionnaire

How do these maids become the resource of everyday social canards ?

How female employers would also act as moneylenders when their house helps them.

Most of the employers are not willing to change their maids looking into the time period they have worked for and the house and family information that they know (which also includes some emotional aspects).

Literature review

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, social theorists like Durkheim, Engels, and LePlay, among others, first theorized about how kinship systems changed as societies became more complex and a variety of institutions were created to manage activities that had previously been regulated by family practices in simpler agrarian societies. These theories laid the foundation for contemporary, post-industrial kinship research. There was widespread agreement that as societies transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial base, kinship structures increasingly became more straightforward and less necessary (Furstenberg 2020). However, recent research has refuted this theory, claiming that although kinship networks' precise roles may have changed in post-industrial countries, they haven't necessarily lost significance. For instance, anthropologists like David Schneider have suggested that the concept of "kinship" has been supplanted by a more inclusive sense of "family" in contemporary Western countries, which includes a larger range of social interactions than only those based on blood links. Similar to this, feminist scholars have emphasized how crucial familial ties remain for women's social and economic well-being despite changes in their structural makeup.

An essential source of information on kinship ties and family relationships in the United States is the National study of Family and Households (NSFH), a study that is nationally representative. The survey's findings refute past beliefs regarding the scope and emotional acuity of kinship networks inside the American family structure. The NSFH findings show that kinship networks are often bigger and more emotionally intense than previously anticipated, with many people stating that they have strong emotional bonds with their aunts, uncles, and cousins (Furstenberg 2020). The NSFH findings emphasize the continued significance of familial ties in American culture and indicate that, in light of these results, our understanding of the emotional dynamics of families and social networks has to be revised. It's critical to be aware of some limitations that necessarily limit the effectiveness of demographic and social surveys that report on contacts with and assistance from kin groups outside of the natal family. Social network studies that primarily rely on the expertise and tenacity of interviewers as well as the dedication of the respondent to deal with a protracted series of repetitive questions have raised issues about the quality of the data (Furstenberg). The NSFH results show that kinship networks are typically wider and more emotionally intense than has previously been acknowledged in the general sociological literature on the American family system, to summarize information from the only source that provides trustworthy data on kinship ties outside of the nuclear family (Furstenberg).

Joan Tronto objects to the counterargument to moral and ethical concerns regarding domestic servitude, claiming that it is "no different from purchasing services and goods on the market." She emphasizes that because domestic work generates care, it also entails establishing and maintaining "care relationships" that may resemble family bonds. (Raka & Qayum 92)

Research method and Results

Google forms were used for data analysis. The responses taken are in a pie chart form. The final percentage of each response is taken out of the total number of responses, that is -

eighteen. The link for the responses obtained is given below (the appendix is attached at the end of the document). After collecting and transcribing the data, Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used for the analysis of data

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScanBvSqcXk5zfCwtY2J0P_IP4Bj3AXn8BUBCNqK6n6SyfhOg/viewform?usp=sf_link

Analysis of the data collected

The participants were equal in numbers varying from the age of 20 - 50 (20 - 25 being a little higher) and the ratio of employed and unemployed women were also equal. However the way in which participants responded to other questions, related to how they engage with their house help, were highly variable. When asked if the participants give a gift or grant any bonus to their house help during the time of festivals, functions etc a 100% answered yes. The reason behind gifting or providing any kind of bonus to one's house help can be many, varying from acknowledgement of her hard work to the festive spirit or even the reciprocity or the cultural expectations (to maintain a social standing within the community), it might even give a sense of dependency that can be fulfilled from gifting or just from a simple notion of well-being/welfare of the house help. No matter what the reason might be, it is important to acknowledge and critically engage with these nuances which in any case exist in the majority of the houses, and why is there a need for such an engagement, why do the employers feel that the house help needs to be gifted when they really do not share any blood

connection.

Do you offer any bonus/gifts to your house help at the time of festivals, celebrations, house functions etc?
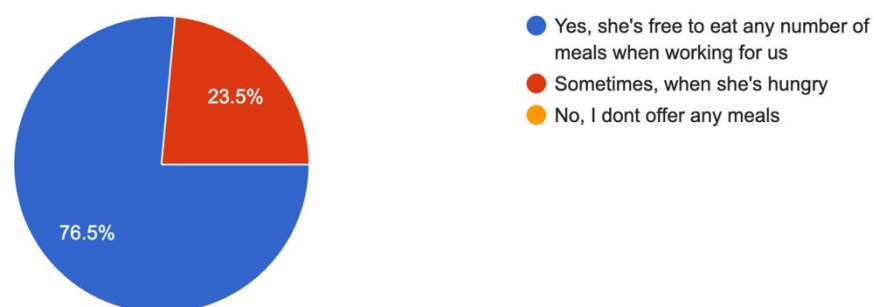
17 responses

- yes
- no, we have a formal relationship

100%
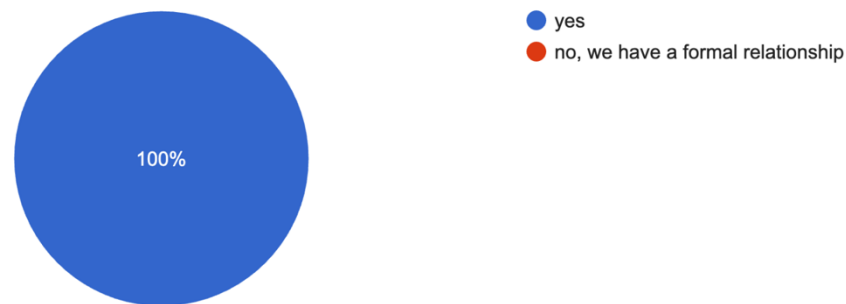
While responding to the number of meals the participants offer to their house help, 75.6% of them replied that their house help is free to take any number of meals that she desires. While this meal offering can be a reflection of social stratification or reciprocity (as taken in consideration in the last point too) or even the moral and ethical obligations, the higher importance shall be given to the values and beliefs that lead to this kind of sharing and caring, amongst individual who do not stand an equal status. The space, time and relationships that one individual develops with their house help as compared to some other individual shall also be considered.

Do you offer any meals to your house help

17 responses

- Yes, she's free to eat any number of meals when working for us
- Sometimes, when she's hungry
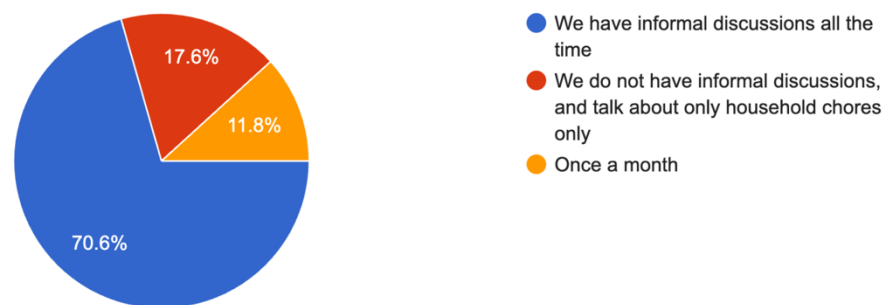- No, I dont offer any meals

23.5%

76.5%

Another important response to the questions like formal and informal discussions that the

employers usually have with their househelp, or if the employers feel that the house help shares her opinions and problems with the employers. To which a larger percentage replied that more often than usual they have informal discussions with their house help and that the househelp also shares their problems with them. These kinds of engagements show that the employer and househelp relationships go beyond what is conventionally and traditionally seen as a "give and take" relationship. Here the employers might develop a sense of accompaniment (as they tend to have casual talks with the househelp) and sympathy (as they tend to hear about the househelp's problems and personal issues).

How often do you speak with your maid, outside the formal discussions of work (like her home situations, economic condition, her family problems, gossips of the locality you stay in etc) ?
17 responses

- ● We have informal discussions all the time
- ● We do not have informal discussions, and talk about only household chores only
- ● Once a month

17.6%

11.8%

70.6%

However, when asked if the employers share their experiences, problems etc the ratio differed extensively, wherein 47.1% of them said yes while the remaining 23.5% answered no and the rest 29.4% feel reluctant to speak about it.

Are you comfortable talking about your work, routine, problems, or general discussions involving your life, with your house help?

17 responses

- yes
- no
- Sometimes, but I am reluctant

47.1% — yes
23.5% — no
29.4% — Sometimes, but I am reluctant
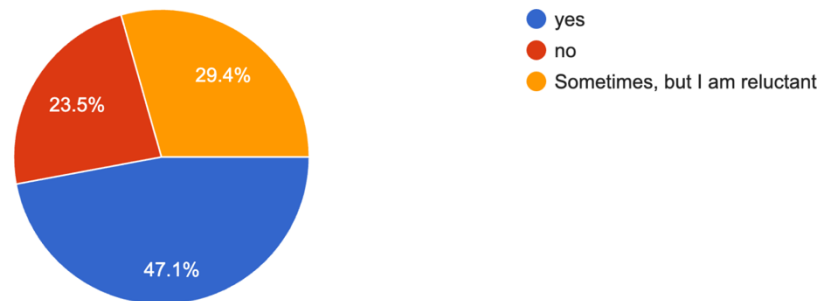
In their book "the *Cultures of Servitude" by Raka* Ray and Seemin Qayum they extensively talk about domestic space and labor in understanding class. Class in this research analysis becomes important not only because of the employer and househelp relationship, but also as to how do the employers place them in this engagement and due to this position and status they might be reluctant to share the same kind of space as their counterparts or not share at all. The book also highlighted how in doing so the role of affect and structures of feeling comes in production in everyday life. From the responses that I have generated through this research I found that though there might be a dependency that the employers get on their house help but they do try to reciprocate it by various means be it gifts, bonuses or meals etc. However it is difficult to say if they happen to generate feelings of attachment, in some cases I observed that after spending working time together (during the household chores) there might be a sense of belonging that would go beyond the formal employer and employee relationship which made the larger number of participants say that they do feel like a family with their house help, but when it came to sharing their opinions and problems most of the employers were hesitant, which might be due to various elements caste, class, social status and a feeling of vulnerability that employers might fear to develop, this sort of an assessment appears to be rather more rational than moralistic.

Conclusion

These relations {the one that paper was oriented on tracing (that of Indian women employers and their house help)} are often predicated on a social hierarchy in which the employer holds power and the maid holds a subordinate position. The nature of the employer-maid relationship can vary depending on factors such as cultural conventions, economic standing, and personal preferences. In some circumstances, the connection is formal and absolutely professional, with well-defined boundaries and expectations. In other circumstances, the connection might be more casual and intimate, with the employer and maid sharing familiarity and closeness, which also might lead the employers with certain preference for their long term house help. Offering meals, lending money, listening to one's house help's problems, gifting them etc all these are certain practices which have changed over a period of time and people in an urban setup tend to do it more often than the ones in a rural setup, however stating he status of relationship needs a more detailed study to reach to any such conclusions, as through this research we can only understand that these relations move in a more unidimensional way than a bilateral movement, which again maybe due to the power dynamics, social and economic status etc. To analyze and understand non-kin relationships, anthropologists may employ a variety of theoretical frameworks, such as social exchange theory, which focuses on the give-and-take nature of relationships, or social stratification theory, which investigates how power and status influence social relationships.

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