

Domestic days: women, work, and politics in contemporary Kolkata

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Abstrak

Maids have become an inseparable part of the daily lives of middle-class urban households in India. Despite the fact that increasing numbers of poor women are joining this profession, very little has been written about them, especially the part-time domestic workers, each of whom services a number of households at a time. They are not accorded their rightful status as workers either by the employers, their own families, the government or the traditional trade unions. Isolated in the privacy of employers homes, the problem of recognizing their work or organizing them is the same one as for women isolated in their own homes. Another important reason is that most such women are rendered voiceless by their social location: unlettered; staying in illegal settlements; migrants; working to survive; performing feminine work, both paid and unpaid, and both devalued. This book is, therefore, about making the unheard heard. It draws from personal narratives of part-time women domestic workers residing in two slum settlements of Kolkata, who speak about their work, lives, dreams, and despairs. By moving between the workplace and the homes of the workers, this book makes a departure from general accounts of labour and instead talks about labouring lives. The book also discusses public policy and politics which have historically neglected this section of workers as well as the recent efforts to give them visibility and voice.