

PHOTO: ZAHEDUL I KHAN

Domestic Divide

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Even a few decades ago the white population of American South used to depend on African American domestic workers for household support. There was a film in 2011 "The Help" on the subject that drew rave reviews and Victoria Spencer, an African American, won Oscar Award for the Best Supporting Actress in 2012. The movie wonderfully brought out the domestic divide in the then American South.

It is common for the rich and the comfortably placed in societies of Asia to have domestic workers. This is particularly a common feature of agrarian and feudal society or of developing societies with rich-poor gap.

Bangladeshi society is not an exception. It is the way of life and the attitude towards labour that cannot do without domestic workers for those who can afford it. In a way it is providing employment for a floating population and rural labour. Bangladeshi society cannot suddenly do away with this dependence considering its densely populated demographic character. But what draws attention is what follows the domestic divide. The majority of these domestic workers are women and children. They come from broken, abandoned and burdened families of naturally disadvantaged areas. Garments factories are bringing a change and the supply chain is no longer that obliging. That has not changed the nature of domestic divide.

In general domestic workers in Bangladeshi households are a segregated part of the house. Their services keep the house going but there is a different set of standard for them. It is true to a great extent that a Bangladesh with its domestic workers is a place where double standard sets the rules. This is a legacy of the past - passed on from generation to generation. The underlying attitude that cultivates the discrimination is in general not premeditated. But the domestic divide is a fact and cruelties and abuses do happen. Few of them come to light, others go unrecorded.

Putting children as domestic workers is a privilege that international law does not permit. The