culpable part does not occur to the employer because the benefit is mutual. It is the income that the child earns that his or her family needs. The child domestic workers' family may not be in dire straits to need the child's income. They do not want to wait for their children to acquire education that promises very little or the girl is soon to be married away, or they are frustratingly inattentive of studies. Women domestic workers often come from broken families, or are abandoned or burdened with sick husbands and large brood of children. This is the social profile of domestic workers that lodge at the employers' house.

Not many houses have separate living arrangements for domestic workers. There is separate space for domestic workers in modern apartments but it is cramped. Generally domestic workers lodge in spare spaces - veranda, corridors, store room, dining spaces and if lucky in the drawing room, and at the worst in the kitchen. They sleep on the floor. Bathrooms are generally separate for domestic workers as in the film "The Help".



A different set of living standards are allotted to the domestic workers.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Noted Paschim Banga film maker Mrinal Sen film"Kharij" (Outcast) tells the story of the death of a domestic worker boy due to suffocation from carbon monoxide from a coal stove in the kitchen that had no ventilation (mysteriously shut from outside) where he was made to sleep. Considering the mastery of Sen, Kharij was an indictment of the domestic divide.

Coming back to living arrangements for domestic workers, if there is a *chouki* (wooden board having stands) the domestic worker is fortunate. It is generally meant for the *choukidar* or *darwan* (gateman).

Domestic workers sit on the kitchen floor to take their meals. The breakfast is left over rice and curry from the previous night. The rice vegetable and curry for lunch are freshly cooked. There are houses that offer them a little refreshment with tea in the afternoon. *Paan* (betel leaf) is well looked after where the lady of the house or the grandma takes *paan*. In many houses the rice for domestic workers is of inferior quality from what the members of the house take.

It is heartening that the number of houses practicing laissez faire is rising. It is more visible when the domestic workers huddle around the television set in the evening.

There are families where brutality and abuse is the natural way. A kick in the back or in the private part if the child is late in getting up in the morning; when he or she breaks a cup or a tableware, or when something is missing in the house, or when the baby of the madam gets hurt, the abuses are of many kinds. What follows is getting him by the scruff of his neck followed by punching on his back and slapping right and left; scalding her with a searing hot iron cooking ladle (khunti) or getting her by her locks bending her down and punching her on the back and slapping.

Public conscience is rattled when the news comes out in the newspapers. That is that and is soon forgotten. Crime has no class. Yet the faith in domestic workers is fragile because of the eternal attitude "keshta betai chor" (it is Krishna who is the thief).

Dignity of labour speaks of the quality and advancement of a society. Western society can naturally take pride on it. Even American society has the need for domestic workers on an hourly and specific job basis, where they may not lodge at the employer's place. Domestic workers are common in Singapore too. For Bangladesh, there is nothing wrong in keeping domestic workers. But the domestic divide of its nature is not a thing to pride on. It is development and a practicing modern and just society that will rid Bangladesh of the domestic divide that discriminates against domestic workers. For that, Bangladesh has a long way to go. However the good work to water down the domestic divide has to go on. ■