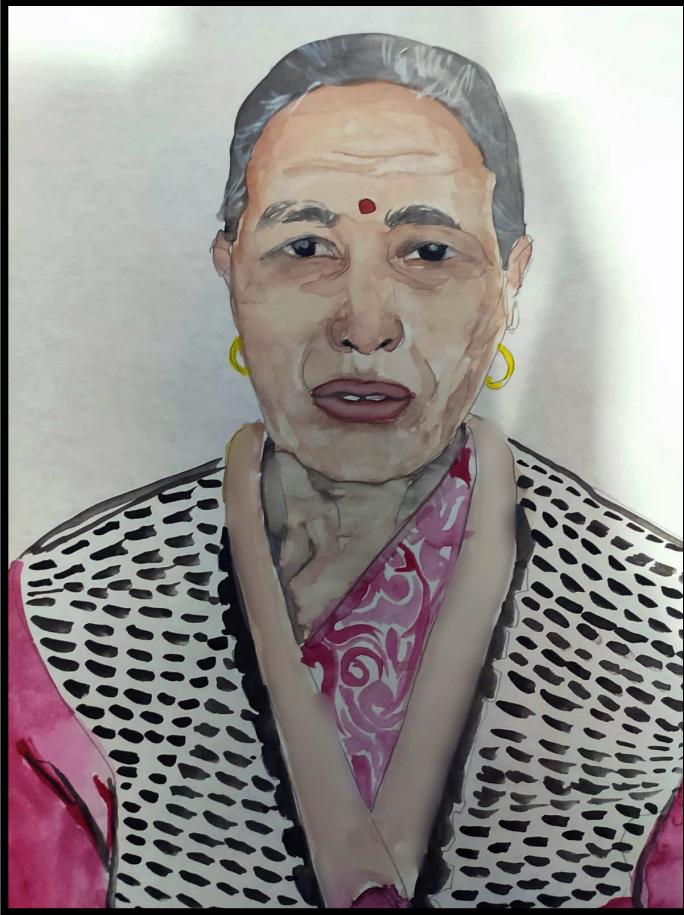


Laxmi

Prachi Bagla*



Almost every house in urban India has a near indispensable daily visitor- a part time maid to help with the household chores like cleaning, mopping, washing dishes, cooking etc. We, the employers do not misbehave with them (lest they should leave the work), we do not indulge with them either to know their background, education, family, health, financial difficulties, trauma... All that we remain concerned with is their reporting for work on time with no unannounced leave. In most cases, the work must be done irrespective of their physical and mental condition. No sick leave for them and if unwell, they should be back within 1-2 days.

On their part, maids come to our homes, do work like a robot and leave as early as possible to reach the next home on time. If one observes them keenly, or probe a little, it will not be difficult to discern that many of them have a very sad story of life. They are subjected to all sorts of abuses in the hands of their husband, male children and sometimes even their parents who live off their earnings and treat them like trash. These females keep giving in in the hope of a better tomorrow which never comes and the life drags on.

Laxmi, a native from a village near Kathmandu, Nepal, does mopping and cleaning in three premium flats in IP Extension, New Delhi. She never went to school and,

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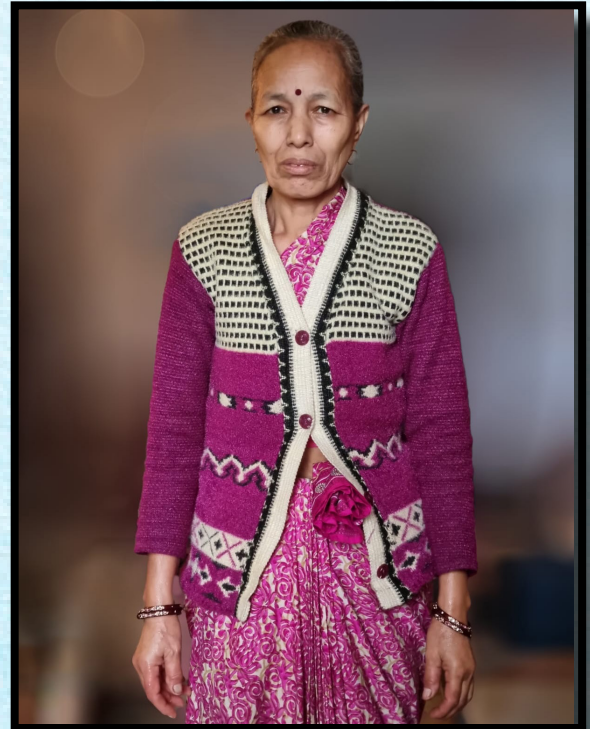
therefore, cannot read or write. She got married at the age of 21 with a Nepalese and came to India with him.

Laxmi's struggle for survival and a dignified life started soon after she moved to India. Her husband, a security guard in a housing society, a beast from day one, never cared for her. There was no love or respect in her marriage. Sparing the details and coming straight to her condition now, her husband contributes nothing at home and spends his entire salary on drinking and gambling. On the top of it, he snatches money from her for his enjoyment. Laxmi buys her peace of mind by handing over the money as if she resists, she is beaten up badly. Just to avoid that physical trauma, she quietly hands over the money to him.

Laxmi has two children. Mention of her daughter brings spark in her sad eyes. She, aged 30, a postgraduate, married to a school teacher, is looking forward to joining B.Ed and eventually taking up a job in some government school. Emotionally very attached to her mother, she promises to take care of her in her old age. However, her son, 25, is a headache in her life. He studied only till 10th standard and has inherited all the wonderful traits from his father like drinking, bullying his mother for money, and additionally loitering and doing nothing to earn on his own..

Laxmi works so hard and makes in her life live off her hard earned meagre earnings. What a shame! She spends her almost entire money on meeting household expenses and financing their drinking and gambling. If she manages to save some amount, she deposits that in her bank account about which her family doesn't know. A wise step on her part as her experience of life has taught her that she will have to fend for herself in her old age.

She hasn't met or talked to her parents or siblings at least for the last 20 years. She lost touch with them and doesn't know whether her parents are alive and where her brothers and sisters are.



Laxmi is 56 years old now and hopes for nothing. She says she has cried a lot in her life, taken such beating that she shudders even by a mention of it. When asked what will happen to her in her older age when she is not able to work so much, she has no answer and no hopes, but a blank expression.

There are Laxmi's all around us. They are spending lives with worthless, irresponsible men who just eat and beat. Blood boils but what can be done to help them! It is an impossible situation, people tell that they burnt their fingers when they tried to intervene. Actually what lacks in their lives is too personal and one cannot live another person's life. People avoid indulging as no amount of counseling, warning or threats to the erring husbands will help as they may become more ferocious and torture their wives even more. As for adult children, they are too selfish and very quick to understand the power they enjoy by siding with the tormentor.

A helpless situation indeed!!

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Reviewer's Comment

My maid aged around 50 years of age, frail yet very active, uneducated but most worldly-wise has a pathetic and complicated scenario at her place. Her husband has a job , but whatever meager amount he earns is spent by him on his drinks., He contributes next to nothing for household expenses and is concerned only with his meals and his bottle. Her elder son is an electrician but prefers not to work most of the time and sleeps through the day at home. He has set a very poor example for his younger sibling whose argument for not working on regular basis is , 'if you can feed him (the elder brother) despite him not working, then why not me?'

As a result, my maid, her daughter and daughter-in law go out to work as part time domestic servants to run the household and to carry on with irresponsible male members of the family.

What a shame!!

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