

inSocialWork Podcast Series

Episode 140 - Christin Mary: India's Invisible Maids: National Domestic Workers Movement

[00:00:08] Welcome to in social work. The podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at www.insocialwork.org. We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of social work is to engage practitioners and researchers and lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice to research. We're in social work. Happy spring everyone. Our downtown area is busy recuperating from hosting the first round of the NCAA March Madness basketball tournament. And it is once again possible to park our cars and get a table at our wonderful restaurants. I'm Peter Sobota in December of last year two physicians in India barricaded and locked their 13 year old maid in their apartment and left for their holiday in Thailand. While this is an extreme example our guest for this podcast states that young girls are frequently trafficked from India's rural regions to cities in order to be exploited by wealthy and middle class families. In this episode our guest sister Christin Mary discusses her work within India's National Domestic Workers Movement. Sister Christy describes the background and mission of the program and the movement's role in organizing and empowering domestic workers. In discussing the movement's organizing and legislative achievements sister Christy outlines the power of a true movement where the person who at one point was the client is now empowered to become the change agent in furthering the work of the successful human rights organization. Sister Christy Mary is the state coordinator of the National Domestic Workers Movement. In Mumbai India. Sister Christy was interviewed by our own Dr. Filomena Critelli associate professor at the UB School of Social Work.

[00:02:03] This interview was recorded in February of 2014. I have the pleasure of speaking here with sister Christin Mary's who is the National Domestic Workers Movement in Mumbai. So we're here with the buffalo to Mumbai connection and I have the privilege of visiting NDWM's office last October and felt it was just so important for people to hear about the wonderful work that is going on at NDWM and we're really fortunate to have sister Mary sister Christy here to talk to us some about the marvelous work that she's doing with this organization. So could you please tell us some of the background of your organizations the National Domestic Workers Movement. Some of the history and mission they organization called National Domestic Workers movement was started in 1985 by Sister Gandhi was a missionary from Belgium. It was in 1985. Those time they realized that domestic workers had no voice no face and no identity and the domestic work was not there and it's nice to us walk. So you the the and to dignity to domestic work was started the movement listening to their stories. The mission of the movement is to ensure it destroys dignity and that it can be sent to the domestic workers and to protect the rights of child domestic workers. We do this through a different task. We organized the domestic workers and we mobilize them and give them awareness on their rights and they are exploited and they say the condition of their war and the living and working conditions. And also we believe in enabling the domestic workers to participate in fighting for their rights.

[00:04:07] So we claim them identified the leadership quality in them. We make them leaders to lead the other fellow workers to motivate their domestic workers to participate in the industry. And in India there was no increase existing labor laws that are not included that domestic workers under the Bill of youth or be lobbied the government to pass minimum wage to provide the social security and to protect them from exploitation and the world thinks of slavery. They are facing Sylvie blobby though the one month and the twenty five years we have achieved many things like in the United States government

state governments have included domestic work under the minimum wage. Also in 2000 and the the was a Social Security Act was passed in under which the domestic workers are Soviet included and the provision of that act was that each state must set up the Social Security Board to provide social security provision to the domestic workers. So we also lobbied the State Government to set up social welfare board and in some states already the states have set up socially said Woodlake Maharastra Tamil Nadu Kerala Andhra Pradesh and the social welfare said. And you need state the minimum wage act was passed Hartsell in 2010 when a law came out of the convention the national labour or conference of decent work for domestic workers. The Indian government was not willing to support the convention to be intensely lobbied with the bill on Monday before the next campaign to support the convention. Plus the government also agreed to support the war in favour of the ILO Convention. And in 2010 the government introduced a bill to protect the movement against sexual harassment in working place.

[00:06:23] But the bitter the behind the excluded the domestic workers from its full view. But the be made to the Parliament Darrion. The labour minister and we went into the welfare minister and many other bureaucrats blobby to beat them too. It included almost equal access under the Bill of these severely and also had taken the victims of sexual harassment to do in front of a parliamentary committee to give the evidence because of a constant campaign. The government had included the domestic workers also under the full view of the bill to protect women against sexual harassment in the working now that is fast and it has become a drag. So we can see you work on many fronts. I mean you've had some really important legislative victories in terms of you were saying like the domestic work wasn't recognized as work it wasn't even covered right by any of the labor protections and you've managed to get this. You've brought it out into the public the institutional sphere that people are recognizing that these workers need to be protected and be covered by these various laws. It's amazing the breadth of the kinds of things that you've achieved. And I think another point that I'm hearing you say is that I think it's very special about your organization is that you're not just doing for you know you're actually doing broad based organizing of a whole variety of people. So can you tell us a little bit more about how the organization got its start. Now you hear there was some very interesting and very pivotal things that went on that brought the issue of domestic workers to the public eye.

[00:08:11] Maybe you could tell us a little about that. The most troubled of the Mustique workers are not to see a mostly working place for domestic workers. Most of all it is within Ford Wortzel toward the exploitation abuse and the problems they face is within the forewarnings so in some way really that indeed the basis of the abuses is reported out. So again to John who witnessed the discovery of these domestic workers started the movement listening to these stories forming them in small groups and afterwards he does back to the Blundy four states at present in the active in the state and we have our own 200 staff working with us organizing domestic workers day cleaning them on day rides and giving them away on day nights and also organizing campaign. And we also have a commitment towards protecting the rights of the child domestic workers. In India there is a law to ban children being employed as domestic as well as the due to poverty and many other factors that are not working in the home. Those children are also one another through exploitation abuse and the many other problems. So the household escudos children we rehabilitate them in the shelter at home. Yet in four of the states the household that alone in the slums in the area will be identified that child domestic workers and and own groups. And when you play this on day right. And we motivate them to get involved in the school. And we support their feet and we are told me the name solidness campaigns in

the public place in the railway station. We believe in enabling the children not to participate.

[00:10:15] To that to get them to promote the right the participation of food safety. We in these children. We identified the energy and strength of the children and they themselves have become that that leads to a more Tardigrade in the neighborhood of the friends and the the groups will be either being innovative or the mates of the children themselves. The plan they execute. They are a part of this campaign program and they address the media on the struggles of domestic workers and detailed domestic workers and they appeal to the go on Monday to have some minimum wage and to feed that decent wage for domestic workers or that they are a second generation don't become tidy domestic workers. So like that to be involved in different activities that the work with the children I think was something that really stood out to me when I visited your offices because you're not just doing for them the fact that you are really organizing the children to act on their own behalf and I think maybe just a little background could help some people may not realise that there's children I understand as young as eight being working in a home doing domestic work and I understand there was one incident that really mobilized. Maybe there were many but I remembered something that stuck out in my mind of a child that was actually killed in the home. I don't know if some people think it's just a very benign work that kids are working in the home and they're treated like family members but that's not necessarily the case right. There's been some glaring kinds of abuses of children. They don't grow so many incidents happening like that.

[00:12:01] Children are being brought from from the radio play belt because they are poor they have parents who are we embroilment. The areas that are vulnerable is not laid back due to different areas issues with the children being brought from from the area and placed in them in the cities for walks. Nobody knows what is happening with these children. They are hidden within the four walls. They face a lot of struggling suburbs is one such incident. Domestic workers was killed and their body was hanging. So the neighbours phoned and it was reported this incident invited the public anger and the media made that the Act activists to get the public opinion. So the government was attacked for not for being insensitive to the needs of the children. So the Indian government I didn't go there they'll tell you to go as tightly but before in the under the time Labor Act to the child domestic work was not included as tightly muzzled after this incident. The government defines the notification that the employers we employ children don't go back into their homes who will be punished and that they will be fined and the fine will be deposited in the children's name by the future. So like that the Canadian law was barred. So afterwards data was diminishing for a child almost equal. But the problem of the village it's the people that are all over the place. Lydia is the boss. So the problem still continues.

[00:13:49] Right I know you have various types of you have the adult workers people that are migrating be working with a lot of populations but I think it's really impressive that in terms of the issue for the children you're working on multiple fronts trying to change the laws but also to kind of address some of the root issues that when children are working that they're not getting education and so trying to help break that cycle by helping them to achieve education to know their rights so that they can be empowered and try to break that cycle. So you've talked about many wonderful achievements of your organisation but maybe you could tell us some of the things that you're most proud of that you've accomplished in your work. Yeah. The reason that humans that we feel more proud is that we succeeded to demand the government to include the domestic workers under the Bovie of the actor sexual harassment act because as a child already the struggles and the problems of domestic workers are within four walls. They are vulnerable to harassment

abuse and sexual molestation. These cases even they are afraid to come out to report when they face such problems because of losing their job but then when they see the law as included that she goes on the list for you it is easier for the music to come out and to report the cases. So to include this must be good because we have been instrumental in lobbying with the government. So we are proud of that. Also the government had drafted a national policy to the domestic work to protect the rights of domestic workers in lieu of minimum wage Social Security and complain mechanism and minimum wage. So you know we find that the government had to set up its task force to draft the national policy to be there. There are not some members of the task force.

[00:15:54] So that was also an achievement and also they shared with them also we have achieved through the Umballa the Domestic Workers the union they seem process of domestic workers. Now we knew that three years before we have started the process of unionizing the domestic workers that is to give full power to the domestic workers to be in decision making to plan to secure and also to meet they themselves go want to meet the Labor ministers they will solve the problems and they they have become leading leaders to lead the union and to address their issue to participate in campaigns. What does the media. So this process we've had started three years before and now we have also floated the federation nationally the mystical trade union federation in that six unions are part of this for that if any does give us the federation need for domestic workers in India. So this is this has been this process has been struggling because of the domestic workers with their background or with the limitation the GabRu to plain via the bridge to motivate them jambalaya dumb and they themselves come forward today to take up the leadership ballot in their hand and to promote their rights to take the rights of their fellow workers. This is another achievement. The purpose and the yellow gunmen and as they said the India were in favour of the ILO Convention in the beginning he was not ready to support the convention. So he was being a member of the task force. We also demanded the government to support it. Now India has not ratified the convention. So the organism. Mini campaign with signature postcard campaigns to meet the higher authorities.

[00:17:57] The labour minister and the youth chief for snuffle you'll be chairperson Heaney's Javier Rivera part of the aniseed to the government. So by meeting the various bureaucrats ministers and parliamentarians we are trying to demand the go on to that if they ILO Conventions and that these are the ongoing process but we are happy that we now queued to demand that go on month to vote in favour of ILO Convention. Excellent. Such broad based advocacy and it sounds like you're really building so much capacity and that you're being acknowledged that your voice is having an impact on the national level like that. I think you've kind of touched on this and some of the things that you said are curriculum here at the School of Social Work is very focused on the issue of human rights and very helpful if you could talk to us a little bit about how you incorporate human rights and children's rights. This framework in your work I think you did touch on that. But if you could explain a little bit more about that. Yeah the whole issue of promoting the rights of domestic workers entitled almost equal human right is the issue because the domestic workers are denied their basic rights as workers. They had a contribution to the economy of the country and development of the country is not and not recognized. So have a decent living wage fight for a decent wage is the right to Social Security's when the issue is there. It's a human right issue. Also the Human Rights Convention the UN conventions ILO Conventions to protect the right of the most workers leave the national organization.

[00:19:48] We also have mine and many other organizations and unions that will demand the government to ratify the convention and do business in one state. And also the trial date the basic rights that I do livelihood the right to education right through development

and the right to participation we believe in order to ride and do other activities already affords and over the process we introduce everything to achieve this forward. So we identify our organization very much identifies the issue of domestic workers and trade domestic look as a human rights issue. Wonderful. So could you share an example of a success story of a woman or a child who has become involved with your organization because you really involve in build capacity with the people that you're not working for them you're working with them. It comes across very clearly. So maybe you could share an example of how being involved with your organization impacted a woman or a child or how Rossotti of or not all persons are not children who share many of the people who have joined their mambos up of a movement. Many years before. And today we participate in the constant training and the guidance that we have been giving. They have become the agent of change. They have become the catalyst for change. Being part of the movement that lead significantly to top the few of the leaders who are very much convinced of promoting better and creating awareness on the rights of domestic workers are like the victim of society we both said these these are the most got this a stigma attached to them.

[00:21:41] They are first of all they are the widows and the struggling to take care of their children. They're fighting with their life in spite of this club. They all joined to process the initiated and to cooperate with the movement and if they did they will become the leaders to go out into the areas to organize and mobilize domestic workers to participate in all the activities and the campaign. The plan was to go and they even got to meet the labour ministers the Malays Jambi to Buffone raised their issues in the Parliament and the assemblies. So they had the energy and the enthusiasm and the cooperation they do was easy and Almazan that is very promising very great thing and even the children share the elderly few children who are task force will violists is task was actually to be glad they had a program. Their campaigns and they participate and be good to rescue the children and the media to promote the Child Rights and to protect the rights of domestic workers so that they the children don't become the child domestic workers who models that some poor children are very very energetic and enthusiastic and they knew they had time and the energy to promote the Idir groups dates I think those are wonderful examples of success in terms of building capacity and really transforming the lives of the people that are involved with you. I really want to thank you so much for taking your time just hearing all the things that you're involved with. We know you're working tirelessly and we appreciate you taking the time to share your experiences with us. Thank you very much. For taking time taking effort to interview to get to know about the movement.

[00:23:40] I look forward to collaborate. You've been listening to sister Christy Mary discuss her work with the National Domestic Workers Movement in social work Hi I'm Nancy Smith professor and dean of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school our history our programs and what we do we invite you to visit our Web site at W WW social work that Buffaloe.