**The servant struggles**

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Last night I watched ‘The White Tiger’ on Netflix. This movie throws some light on what it is like to be a servant. What was unique about this depiction was that it didn’t just show what an external struggle looks like for a maid or housekeeper, but the internal struggle of one human being who serves another in a way that is less serving, but more surrender.

I always considered myself a good employer to the household help I have, until something that the main lead said in the movie made me rethink. He said, “it was all worthwhile to know just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant.”

This dialogue made me realise that in spite of a good salary and taking care of my household rest, basic needs and being respectful towards them, I still have no idea what it is like to be a servant.

There is no doubt that working in a household is different from working for an office. Most of us have access to our household help all the time and that’s probably one of the biggest issues in the way servants work in Pakistani households. Part time help I feel, still has more space to be free as they come and work for a few hours and leave. It’s the full time help that is in question here and how thin is the line between servant and slave here.

[Biden forms China task force to meet growing challenges](https://nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2021/biden-forms-china-task-force-to-meet-growing-challenges)

Yes, I consciously use the word ‘slave’ here as whether we like to admit or not, there are invisible chains around these cooks, drivers and maids who work for us 24/7.

On average, the salary ranges from 10,000 to 20,000. There is a hierarchy amongst the domestic staff where the driver is considered more superior, followed by the cook and then the maid. The poor cleaning lady is at the lowest step of this ladder and in spite of having probably the hardest job of cleaning and making our homes shine, gets less salary as well as respect.

Why I feel that we treat our servants more as slaves is the kind of routine our house help has. In most households, they wake up at 7:00 am in the morning with some kind masters allowing the servants to rest for two hours in the afternoon followed by work till almost at an average 10:00pm at night. So we are talking about 12 hours of work, which is more than most jobs in the world and highly underpaid for the hours worked.

It’s not cooking or cleaning or driving which is the issue as none of it is hard labour, but it’s the complete control that we have on our servants in those 12 hours. We decide when they eat, what they do, if they are allowed to make any calls during work or any breaks other than calls of nature—that also makes us impatient if they are over extended. I wonder what they feel when we ring the bell or call their names as many times as we like and expect a prompt reply—‘Ji saab or Ji baaji’—when we don’t get up to drink the glass of water ourselves and ask them to fetch it for us.

[KP Govt innovates tool to strengthen ADP planning process](https://nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2021/kp-govt-innovates-tool-to-strengthen-adp-planning-process)

I ask a simple question to anyone including myself who considers himself a kind and considerate employer. The next time when we call out our servant and they say no, how will we receive it? For example, if they say they are in the middle of cooking something and cannot go up to the room to give the glass of water? Will we accept that or will it make us angry and consider that defiance? Or if our driver, who takes care of our cars like a personal possession, asks to use the car for a personal errand?

Is it not true that anytime our servants question anything, we consider it defiance or disobedience? Do we really allow them free will? Can they take a day off while they are staying with us without any reason?

The irony isn’t lost on me when we have such different rules and salary or the way we treat the Filipino maids we hire. The same work and we are willing to pay in dollars and treat them like equals.

The question to ponder over is that yes, we do gestures of care for our staff now and then but only when we choose to. Let’s introspect on how we can respect them more and make them see themselves as an equal to us and not a ‘slave’ to us ‘masters’. Let’s treat them in a way that they feel not like a ‘servant’ all the time.