Journal of Polity & Society (2024) 16(2), 17 - 30

Aprons, Caps, and Below Stairs: Domestic Service in the British Country House.

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From olden times onwards, wealthy households owning big country houses depended on an army of servants to get the domestic work done. Servants were divided into several categories and were assigned specific duties, which came to be known as domestic service. This way of life flourished and peaked just before the First World War. The post-Second World War period saw the emergence of middle-class and servantless houses, with domestic service attaining a new meaning. The paper analyses the basic structure and principles of domestic service in country houses, focusing on domestic service in Britain. It also examines the transformation in the meaning, nature, and functioning of domestic service over the centuries and the factors leading to this transformation.

Keywords: Domestic Service, Country House, The Servant Problem, Life Cycle Service, Industrial Revolution.

Well-paid butlers, housekeepers, and nannies dominate domestic service in modern-day wealthy households. However, over a hundred years ago, around two million of the forty million British population worked as servants. Domestic service was an epoch in Britain's social, cultural, and economic life in the twentieth century. It was the largest employer for women and the second-largest employment provider for all British people, next to agriculture (Giles Waterfield, 2004, p 10; John Burnett, 1975, pp 136-37). With the increase in Britain's economic and commercial clout, there was a massive influx of wealth from the British Empire around the globe. Improvements in agriculture and the Industrial Revolution transformed feudal homes into grand estates of a new ruling class. The money helped large and wealthy landowners to keep and sustain many servants. The mid-19th century saw the rise of majestic country houses or estates all over Britain. Apart from the physical scale of work, the big country houses required considerable economic and financial management, which made them dependent on many staff and servants, who constituted the domestic service, working continuously for its proper functioning.

Booker T Washington, in his Autobiography, Up from Slavery: An Autobiography, gives an eloquent description of the English Country House. He writes, "*On various occasions, Mrs. Washington and I were guests of Englishmen in their country homes, where I think one sees the Englishman at his best. The home life of the English seems to me about as perfect as anything can be. Everything moves like clockwork. I was impressed too with the deference that the servants show to their 'masters' and 'mistresses' – terms which I suppose would not be tolerated in America. The English servant expects, as a rule, to be nothing but a servant and so perfects himself in the art to a degree that no class of servant in America has yet reached. In our country,*

*the servant expects to become, in a few years, a 'master' himself. Which system is preferable? I will not venture an answer" (*Booker T Washington, 1901, p 286)

Sociologist Dr. Pamela Cox describes a typical country house, Erdigg Hall in North Wales, which was around twenty thousand sq. ft, having six formal reception rooms, a chapel, a grand dining room, and nine large bedrooms. Downstairs had twice as many rooms, including the kitchen, scullery, laundry, bakehouse, and outhouse. Every week, it consumed three tons of coal to fuel fifty-one fireplaces, five ovens, three coppers, and between two hundred to three hundred gallons of water for cooking, cleaning, and washing (For washing, there were around six hundred items per week). Four meals a day were served to about thirty people. All the work was done by a small army of servants by hand, working seventeen-hour days, all year round, with no modern technology. The family members upstairs could summon the servants to any part of the house at any time (for the Housemaid ring once, the still room and Dairymaid ring twice, and the Kitchen maid ring three times) (BBC, 2017). Britain in the Victorian era used the number of servants employed in a household to measure social acceptability and prestige. Country Houses were a physical representation of nineteenth-century values with segregation by gender, skill, age, and class.

The British country house life has formed the central theme of several televised series. Such representations attracted criticism as it was not based on evidence. For example, contrary to what is represented in the hugely successful televised series Downton Abbey, most big employers had little knowledge about their servants, not knowing their servants by name or not knowing how many servants they had. There was a separation between masters and servants, and a separation between servants. Quoting Dr. Cox again, "If a junior staff member comes in contact with a family member, they had to flatten themselves against the wall." Historian Lucy Delap describes these representations as 'heritage nostalgia,' and she feels that they have 'come to take center stage as an evocative, fantasized means of dramatizing the past in Britain' (Delap. L 2011). Historian Lucy Lethbridge explains that the "age of the butler and mob-capped housemaid was barely over before it was transmuted into stories of an English golden age" (Lethbridge, L. 2013 p 316). Anonymity and invisibility formed a big part of the job. It presented a challenging world filled with suppressed passions, strict internal hierarchy, and an obsession with status and class. M. Girouard explains that the servants were neatly tidied away or ejected from the family spaces, and they became almost invisible (M. Girouard, 1980). Sheila Hopkinson, a domestic servant, recalls, "We were underdogs. We were not on the same level as them, and we had to know our place"(BBC 2017). Virginia Woolf observed that 'the Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, and inscrutable' (Virginia Woolf,1924, p 5). The ideal servant was a Victorian invention that ordered society to be in its proper place. Domestic service remained a distinct feature of country house life for a long time. London was the home to many domestic servants in the eighteenth century. Tim Meldrum described London as Britain's center of domestic service. They were primarily women migrants from the countryside, ensuring a constant stream of young country girls entering domestic service. The expanding and diversified population supplied enough servants (Tim Meldrum, 2000 p12). Urban households took many young girls from the countryside into domestic service. (P. J. Corfield 1982).

At the theoretical level, it is to be noted that domestic service remained the least explored or neglected study area, as the focus was mainly on industrial and other professional workers or the 'productive' workers. The paper uses an interdisciplinary theoretical framework to analyse domestic service in British Country Houses, considering labour, culture, gender, and economy. E.P. Thompson's (1963) social history of the working class and Gramsci's (1971) idea of cultural hegemony provide the basic premises for labour and cultural analysis. Thompson placed domestic servants within the broader context of capitalist transformation and industrial advancement. He was of the view that although their work was undervalued and invisible, it was essential for propagating aristocratic lifestyles and class structures. Gramsci's idea shows how the standards of deference and servitude were accepted both in the upper class and among the servants. Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theory of the production of space describes the physical design of big houses like the country houses, having an inbuilt segregation plan like separate staircases, basement quarters, thereby reinforcing class distinctions. Gender forms another aspect of the analysis. Joan Scott's (1986) idea that gender is the principal way of signifying power, and the paper shows how domestic service is highly gendered in performance, expectation, and limitations. Leonore Davidoff views domestic service as an elusive study area, as the master-servant relationship was not seen as an essential part of history. From an economic dimension, Karl Marx's labour theory of value, which portrays labour exploitation, provides the base for the inherent exploitation in domestic service. Leftist writers generally ignored domestic service as it was considered 'unproductive,' adding 'no economic value.' (Davidoff L 1995 p 21). Laura Schwartz argues that tying the interests of the wealthy employers and servants together, coupled with the limited access to the lives and work of the servants, prevented any scholarly analysis (Schwartz. L 2014, p174). Adam Smith, in his 'Wealth of Nations,' considers a manufacturer's labor productive since it adds value to the product and gives the laborer income and profit for his master. At the same time, the labor of a menial servant adds no value. He adds that a man will grow rich by employing many manufacturers and become poor by keeping several menial servants (Adam Smith, 2010). By 1970, demographers saw that the youth of the north and west of preindustrial Europe had gone through many years in 'life cycle service,' which is the period of leaving their home for service till their marriage. (Jeanne Clegg, 2015 pp 43-66). The history of domestic service provides an opportunity to enquire into various subjects as it touches on many aspects of social, cultural, economic, and political life. It is also closely related to the history of internal rural-urban migration and international migration movements (Theresa M 1976). These theoretical ideas provide a multidimensional framework for probing domestic service not simply as employment, but as a cultural institution present in systems of class domination, gender regulation, and economic reproduction

The lives of ordinary people are greatly affected by important events like industrialization, the emergence of new ideas, and changes in family structure. The paper analyses domestic service in this framework (top-down approach) and uses narratives and interviews of those concerned to get a balanced perspective (bottom-up approach). Years of service presented a chaotic and emotional legacy filled with a complex mix of deference and resentment. Domestic service overcame the drastic changes in the wake of the two wars, the radical and revolutionary 1960s, and is still relevant in modern society as families, mainly the middle class, struggle to balance

work and domestic work (Lucy Delap 2011). The study uses historical and descriptive research to analyze roughly two centuries of country house domestic service. The paper briefly covers two centuries of domestic service in country houses in Britain. Domestic service is not simply a service but also a background in which significant social, cultural, economic, and political change can be experienced and understood. The focus is on the structure and principles that formed the base of domestic service in country houses in Britain. It also examines the transformation in the meaning, nature, and functioning of domestic service over the centuries and the factors that led to it. The paper is divided into four parts. The first part deals with the origin of domestic services, while the second part dwells on the establishment of domestic services in British society. The third part looks into the effects of the First World War on the institution of domestic service, while the last part deals with the transformation of domestic service in the modern era and its relevance.

The Emergence of Domestic Service

The medieval meaning of the word servant meant someone employed to provide labor for a family and, in return, got lodging within the household (Peter Fleming, 2007 p7). Society had a deep-rooted and complex web of master-servant relationships, with people presenting as servants of the king or God, irrespective of their status. In pre-industrial times, domestic service constituted employment and relationships. The significant feature of a servant was having a master. The emergence of a wealthy class with grand houses created a significant demand for servants. In Northern and Western Europe, many men and women remained unmarried and joined domestic service to accumulate income and get life skills and professional training (John Hanchal, 1983 pp 65-104). These majestic houses formed the core of public and private functions and made room for many servants working in the kitchen and engaging in other household work. A typical country house had a variety of workers for different jobs arranged in a strict hierarchical order. Male servants generally had a butler at the top, usually followed by the coachman, first footman, second footman, and hall boys. The female staff had a housekeeper at the top, followed by a head housemaid, a housemaid, and a laundry maid. The number of servants employed was directly correlated with the income levels of the households. The majestic greatness of the Lord was determined by the number, ceremonial nature, and the deference of the servants, apart from the rich materials, food, and wine (Musson Jeremy, 2009). European aristocrats showcased their social standing and prestige through the number of servants they had.

The gender of the servants was also a matter of prestige, as the aristocrats kept male servants. (Cissie Fairchilds 1984). One could have as many servants as possible without limits on the number of servants. Six hundred liveried servants accompanied the Earl of Warwick to London in the mid-fifteenth century, while William Cecil, Baron Burghley, had over one hundred servants around the same period (Woolgar C M 1999). The medieval aristocrats yearned for a comfortable, well-protected life for themselves and their families (Alison Sim, 2006 pp 69-79). In the 15th to 17th centuries, the master of the house was the head and center of all activities. The servants' presence and performance reflected his power, reputation, and dignity. The number of servants one had and the dress of male servants were a measure of a master's standing, as depicted in the television series Downton Abbey, where the Butler, Mr. Carson, scolds the second footman, William, for ignoring the coming off

of the seam of his coat. He is also warned not to repeat the mistake of appearing in such a 'state of undress' as the dignity of the servant reflects the pride of the family he serves. The seventeenth century saw a marked difference in the idea of domestic service, and the organization of country houses was influenced by the Renaissance and Reformation. On the positive side, there was a gentle shift towards a moral and civilized way of life (Cooper, Nicholas 1999). Serving all dishes simultaneously or dining 'a la française became prominent (Philippa Glanville & Hilary Young, 2002). It saw the rise of professionalism and specialized roles for servants, and the pronounced division between the master and the servant was reflected in the house's architecture. The servant's hall came into being, which prevented casual encounters with the lower servants. More significantly, this period saw the emergence of women servants and the roles of housekeepers and governesses. There were waiting-woman housekeepers, chambermaids, cook-maids, under-cook-maid, nursery maids, dairymaids, laundrymaids, housemaids, and scullery maids. Another notable change was the presence of the black servant, page, and footman (Musson Jeremy, 2009).

The Struggle and Consolidation

The modernization process of the country houses started in the eighteenth century, and work was given to the specialized staff. The servant was transformed from a family member to a paid staff member. The house became a workplace. Their recruitment was done locally through recommendations from high-class employers, senior servants, former servants, and trusted merchants. Agencies, unique registries, newspaper advertisements, and word of mouth were very successful. Open market recruitment like 'Statute Fair,' a country fair, was held every autumn, mainly to hire labor of all types for contracts for one year in most market towns. Young boys from the West Indies, Africa, or India were brought as enslaved people to become pageboys in high-class households. They lived an alien and baffling life, although some were treated well and given an education. By 1770, 14,000–20,000 blacks lived in London as trade flourished between Britain and the West Indies (Little Kenneth, 1947). The middle of the seventeenth century saw the increased use of African male servants in aristocratic English households (Peter Fryer,1984). Tunnels were constructed to allow servants to approach the basement quarters outside the main house, further increasing the separation between employers and servants. Another interesting development was fixing bells to call for servants from their quarters as and when required. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the country houses became grander in design, with an intricate arrangement of rooms for the masters and servants. The kitchen had several different and specific areas for preparing food, cleaning, and washing. As described by Jeremy Musson in *Up and Downstairs*, country houses became a machine for living (Musson, Jeremy 2009). With the spread of commerce, the Industrial Revolution, and agricultural development, many became so rich that they could keep many servants. François, the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, observed, "The servants constitute the central part of the employers' expenses: they were provided with boarding and sumptuous food (Mortlock, 2007).

In many country houses, the household servants were taken from the families of tenant farmers and estate workers. The servant's job was not without its advantages, as it provided opportunities for learning new skills, getting an education, security, and exposure to the world as the masters traveled extensively. The position of the footman was of great interest. He was the most popular among the domestic servants.

Their primary duties included carrying verbal messages and money, providing trusted intimacy, keeping secrets, acting as bodyguards, or holding food and wine in ceremonies at their master's table. Footmen were chosen for their height, good looks, and ability to look well-dressed in the family livery. Considered the most insignificant in the medieval and Tudor household, they were mainly employed to deliver messages and to announce the arrival of the nobleman and his party by running ahead of them (Hecht, Jean,1956). Nevertheless, later, the footman became a symbol of status, having a vital role in managing a grand house. Catharine Cape commented on 'the crowds of footmen in the metropolis, retained, not for use, but show, idle themselves, corrupted and corrupting (Cape, Catharine, An Account of Two Charity Schools, 1800). There is a saying that the term 'Flunkey' used to describe generally useless and highly decorated servants was aimed at the footman (Horn Pamela, 2004). By the mid-1700s, the servant class had a group of skilled and responsible upper servants, like male cooks, stewards, housekeepers, butlers, male secretaries, chaplains, and tutors. The indoor men servants wore livery, and the women cleaned and worked in the kitchens. The stewards managed the house, the accounts, and the administration, often acting as land stewards, taking care of estate workers, tenants, and rents (Christe, Christopher 2000). Most houses had a bailiff managing the home farm that supplied the needs of the house. French chefs were famous and in great demand, and their number increased with the advent of the French Revolution (Horn Pamela, 2004).

The eighteenth century saw the time of the day's main meal shift from lunchtime to the evening. The butler became a prominent figure in the household, and in an affluent family, he reported to a steward, managed the footmen, and supervised the waiting at the table. He had control of the wine cellar and was the custodian of the plates and delicate glasses. He supervised the cleaning and storing and provided security for all valuable items in the butler's pantry (Hecht, Jean 1956). The groom of the chambers was a young confidant to the chamberlain during the medieval period and was referred to as a senior manservant by the later eighteenth century. He mixed and dined with other senior servants like the head cook and butler, and wore livery. He delivered the presentation, cleaned the main reception rooms, and ensured that the furniture was returned to its proper place after being used by visitors and that the tables were in order. The groom of the chambers oversaw greeting and announcing visitors and directing them to their designated spaces, ensuring their comfort. (Christe, Christopher 2000). The housekeeper controlled the female indoor staff who were earlier under the mistresses of the household. Under her would be the female cook, followed by many chambermaids, housemaids, laundrymaids, and kitchen and scullery maids (Waterfield, Merlin 1990). The number of women servants in grand country houses did increase by the eighteenth century, and many had low-paid jobs. The female scullery maid cleaned the kitchen, washed the cooking vessels, and prepared food. Laundry work was primarily done by hand, mostly supported by wooden bats (Horn Pamela, 2004).

The nineteenth century was the age of industrialization and rapid urbanization. Industrialization gave the country house owners wealth since many had mining rights and owned land with substantial benefits. Industrialists, bankers, and business people made land investments for economic and social benefits (F.M.L Thompson,1963). The years between the 1840s and 1880s witnessed the building of numerous new country houses, which helped the owners gain significant political influence. This

period witnessed the peak of country house life supported by servants. The pride, esteem, and social standing of experienced and well-connected country servants increased with their demand. The development of railways and better roads made travel much easier between country houses, enabling higher levels of entertainment. Domestic service became a huge source of employment, especially with agriculture remaining in the doldrums and uncertain for most of the nineteenth century. The period also saw the employment of domestic servants in professional and middle-class homes, following the aristocratic household lifestyle. With the increase in domestic servants, well-trained and experienced country house servants were increasingly seen as model servants (Jessica Gerard, 1994). Besides casual work during harvest, finding jobs became extremely difficult for women in rural areas. So, entering domestic service was an option for regular income, especially for single women and girls from rural areas. Despite its difficulties and physical and mental strain, domestic service did provide safety, food, and accommodation, and a chance to work, make good money, and get training and education for many from poor backgrounds. Most important of all, it did provide scope for making good saving,s which were helpful during retirement, illness, and old age. This was true in the case of domestic servants retiring from big estates. At the same time, many from professional and middle-class homes did end up in workhouses (Horn Pamela, 2003). By the 1870s, state education and literacy became widespread, and people had access to the popular press, radio, and cinema. The choice of professions increased, and young girls were reluctant to go into service as they could work in shops, factories, and offices (Horn Pamela, 2003). Free education was introduced in 1890, and the Balfour Act of 1902 raised the school-leaving age to twelve. The Suffragette movement caught the attention of young women who started looking for secretarial jobs or jobs at shops. The demand for higher pay increased, and with the enactment of the National Insurance Tax of 1911, employers had to pay a weekly amount to cover the potential illness of the servants. All these developments forced even wealthy country house owners to reduce the number of staff (Alison Maloney,2011).

New job opportunities were offered in factories, typewriters created clerical jobs, and Florence Nightingale gave nursing a socially acceptable position and job for women (Turner E. S, 2001 p 233). The deference, obedience, and discipline of traditional service were too challenging to accept in an age of intense political activity, with the country gradually moving towards universal suffrage. So, the moment they got a chance to leave the service, they left, never to return. In the early 20th century, most grand country houses had a modern outlook and were lavishly staffed and intricate. Additions to staff were technicians mainly for electricity management, chauffeurs for cars, head and ordinary, telephone clerks, telegraphers, night watchmen, washers, and footmen. The estate manager looked after estate management, and there was also a chaplain, organist, librarian, and gardeners (Gorst . F 1956). Specialization became more rigorous than in earlier times, with experienced servants training the new ones to help them move on in their careers and be capable of handling responsible positions.

First World War and Its Effects

The First World War shook the institution of domestic service to its foundations and saw the end of the golden age of domestic service (Alison Maloney,2011). At the start of the war, all eligible men were asked to enlist. Also, there was a call to release

the servants to help with war duty. Older men, boys, and, more importantly, women started doing men's work to compensate for the loss of male servants. However, it was not the country houses that lost their men workforce. Almost all sectors started facing a shortage of male workers. So, women started filling those vacant slots. One-third of the women came from domestic service. They were employed in technical, mechanical, and even more dangerous jobs at the munitions factory, where they did chemical processing and bomb-making. The high pay and sense of friendship drew women into these jobs. The regulated working hours and subsidized child care also attracted them. They joined workers' unions, which saw a rise in female membership by about 160%. As the war ended, women still had to return to domestic service. Nevertheless, this time it was with a difference as a new generation of forthright servants started questioning the very ideal of service. This period witnessed the collapse of the old order, the strained relationship between master and servant, and the very idea of service in a deeper crisis. Margaret Powell, the author of the best-selling memoir "Below Stairs," was the most original and authentic voice that told the world about domestic service's grim and appalling realities. At fifteen, she joined the service as a kitchen maid in Hove in Sussex. Her humorous and crisp description of the daily work of a kitchen maid was stunning. She remarked that after seeing the kitchen maid's daily duties, she thought it was a week's work (Margret Powel, 2012). This period also witnessed the attempt made by activist Julia Varley to organize domestic servants under a union. She started to organize women servants in Birmingham by starting a servants' club at Loveday Street. She brought out a servant's charter asking to treat domestic servants with dignity. However, the attempt proved a failure, and Julia Varley blamed snobbery or the existence of class distinctions within the servants' community as the primary reason. She lamented, 'You would not believe the class distinctions there were among servants. The cook would not mix with the housemaid and all that sort of thing' (Bournville Magazine, 1951). Nevertheless, other factors like the widespread change like workplaces, fear of losing references, economic depression, and crushing unemployment following the war proved to be major obstacles to the successful unionization of servants (Horn P, 1975).

Unemployment due to the Great Depression forced many women back into domestic service. Although the government introduced unemployment benefits, curiously, domestic servants were excluded from them. Many houses had staff in the same numbers as before, as nationally, more than 1.4 million people were still engaged in domestic service. But with new economic shocks like taxation, inflation, and the Great Depression, the number of domestic servants declined. There was a reduction in the supply of servants, and many tried to claim unemployment benefits under a false identity, causing outrage among the people looking for domestic servants. and created the much-discussed and debated 'servant problem'. Newspapers ran stories like "Scandals of the dole-Paying women to be idle" and "Girls who ought to be in service." The issue was discussed in parliament. The difficulty in getting servants forced the Ministry of Reconstruction to set up a government commission that revealed a strong dislike for domestic service. The committee came up with recommendations like better conditions, better training, and improving the status, but the recommendations were ignored, and the report was conveniently shelved (Horn, P 2003). The question to be dealt with was how to make the domestic servant job attractive. Attempts were made to change the uniform's design and pattern,

especially to do away with the most hated cap, seen as the symbol of indignity, and substitute it with a much more delicate and prettier cap (Judy Giles, 2001). Society hostess Lady Malcolm tried to make a difference by organizing an Annual Servants' Ball in 1928 at the Grand Central Hotel in London, where employers and servants joined together in what she called a Cinderella Dance (BBC, 2017).

All these attempts proved to be failures when a new middle-class service emerged out of nowhere as people moved towards suburban and rural areas to avoid the crowded city surroundings. The number of small, privately owned houses substantially increased with the rapid development of suburban areas. The families preferred a day servant who came early in the morning and left late in the evening. This brought a big change in the employer-servant relationship as they had limited space in the house, which brought more proximity as the kitchen with modern labor-saving devices became a part of the main rooms. Still, the houses were semi-detached because they had separate entrances for servants and outside bathrooms and toilets for servants. The rich class still tried to keep as many servants as possible, but the shortage became increasingly acute as new industries started absorbing young people (Lucy Delap,2011). Migrant servants were looked upon to counter the shortage of servants. The period between the wars is also considered the time of increased exploitation of servants as the government stepped up the pressure on women to join domestic service through policies like the provision of training, emigration policies, and refusal to pay unemployment benefits to those women who declined domestic service. As the Second World War began, there was an influx of nearly twenty thousand refugees, especially Jewish refugees, to England, mainly from Germany and Austria. To stem the flow, the British government issued domestic service visas that allowed only live-in servants. They were mostly employed in servant-keeping families and were unprepared for domestic work (Holmes R,2018). By the late 1930's domestic service became mainly a female occupation.

Into the Modern Age and the Struggle to Reinvent

With the Second World War ending, the economic, political, and social landscape changed drastically, along with social attitudes and expectations. The technological revolution reduced the manual labor required to run the house daily, with electricity enabling lighting and heating, and carrying messages by hand was done away with the invention of the telegraph and the telephone. Economic factors, especially the hike in taxation, had a significant impact on the household's finances. Increased taxes coupled with reduced land values and rentals forced many aristocrats and gentry to reduce the household size and sell off their ancillary estates and city houses to hold on to their main assets. (Horn Pamela 2003). Sir Ernest Gowers, in 1950, wrote a report commissioned by the government on the collapse of the country houses. The report cited declining rent from the estates due to social and economic changes, increased estate duties and income taxes, and increased wages for domestic labor as the primary factors for the decline and collapse of country houses (Ernest Gowers, 1950). The war changed the attitude of the generation willing to go into service. Around four hundred thousand domestic servants left their work, men joining the army and women working in the munitions factories (Horn Pamela, 2003). Many men who lost their lives during the war were landowners and heirs. Economic uncertainty, inflation, and rising taxation destroyed the country house living. Most of the men were either reluctant or did not rejoin the domestic service after the war.

New and unfamiliar experiences broadened society's understanding of servants' lives. The real issue in the servant-supported country-house way of life was economic due to reduced returns from land rentals and increased taxation, and wage levels. The after-effects of the two world wars permanently affected and changed the character and condition of the servants employed in country houses. Few were interested in returning to the complex and layered staff hierarchies, which were the crux of the pride, prestige, and organization of the British country house.

A crucial factor was the difficulty in getting new servants to maintain the essence and constitution of the house. The servantless middle-class home caught the imagination of the public. The houses had labor-saving devices and easy-to-use and clean furniture. The staff was reduced substantially, and many homes were managed with lowly paid parlormaids, nannies, cleaners, and Au Pairs. J B Priestley famously remarked in 1927 that domestic service was 'as obsolete as a horse' in the era of motor cars (J B Priestley 1927). The scarcity of workers greatly affected the practicality and desirability of maintaining big houses. Most country houses were stopped from being used for private domestic use, and many were either abandoned, sold off, or demolished. Many were handed over to the National Trust, and some were leased (Caroline Seebohm, 1989). Those who were able to cross the troubled post-war years managed to get the services of some servants, while others used the estate staff to carry on with their way of life. Some were fortunate enough to get back the service of trained staff who stayed till their retirement. However, there was a realization that things would never be the same again, and the inevitable happened when the entire generation of trained staff retired. Although the older generation tried to continue with normal staff size, economic hardships and the wish for privacy forced them to reduce the staff number (Christopher Simon Sykes 2005). Lucy Delap believes that domestic life in the twentieth century was 'free from the taint of domestic service' since it was considered 'residual and anachronistic' (Delap L 2011). With the advent of new labor-saving devices and attitudinal changes of the younger generation towards domestic work, a need for different staff patterns for domestic work arose. The younger generation was ready to do the housework, including cooking, while managing their careers. Mrs. Robert Noble observes that modern women, irrespective of class, have no wish to spend their lives cooking, washing, and cleaning (Robert Noble, 1930 p 8). The late twentieth century and early twenty-first century saw diversity in domestic service. The staffing patterns remain unclear. It is to be noted that most country houses continue to have some staff so that life goes on. The conditions that made the functioning of the big houses no longer exist. Incomes are low, wages are high, labor is difficult to get, and there is no desire to get into domestic service. Today, country house owners seldom follow earlier traditions and staff patterns. They use the services of secretaries, nannies, cleaning staff, drivers, security, and gardeners. They also use the services of temporary staff provided by agencies to manage major social and domestic events like festivals and marriages. Some traditional job titles still survive, but individuals increasingly handle different duties simultaneously. While the permanent staff may live with the main family, the working pattern and principles have changed beyond recognition. It is still a wonder that despite all the upheavals that shook and dismantled the domestic service, it still survives with a different style and structure.

Conclusion

Domestic service has remained a central element in British society, irrespective of class, race, and gender. The main themes in the study include the master-servant relationship, the social status of domestic service, change in the family structure, feminization of the service in the modern age, decline in domestic service, and a comeback of sorts in the post-Second World War period. The study briefly examined country house living and domestic service at its cultural, social, political, and economic levels. Descriptions of country house domestic service mostly gave the memories of a fantasized past, not showing its exploitative and discriminatory nature. The industrial revolution changed the idea of work, work identity, and labor. It also redefined the function and meaning of the household. Over the years, the relationship between the masters and the servants in the British country houses has undergone significant changes. The most significant change has been from a family member to an employee. Modern domestic service has seen changes in gender composition and is mostly seen as a female-dominated sector. Transnational Migration of men and especially women from developing countries entering domestic service has changed the complexion of domestic service. Discrimination and exploitation have diminished substantially, if not eliminated. The working conditions and pay have improved to a great extent. Domestic service has shown a slight change in the present, although the reasons for joining the service remain the same. Domestic services in country houses became less and less prominent by the late twentieth century, and the trend continued in the early twenty-first century. New employment opportunities have emerged in the field of care for the elderly, disabled, and children. Analysing domestic service in the British country houses gives a critical view of the labour inequality, gender dynamics, and social mobility, which is relevant in the globalised domestic labour economy. The word servant may have disappeared from everyday discourse, and there may be no obvious pattern of employment of domestic staff today. Still, country houses require assistance to make them work, just as they did five hundred years ago, even with modern technology. It is, without doubt, clear that British society was significantly affected by how country houses and domestic services were organized.

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