

WHAT IF WE STOP WORKING?

If someone asks about your wife
you may say
"Oh she doesn't work"
but open wide your eyes
I am truly a slave
in the kitchen
in the factory
not a soul to help me
dirty pots
brooms
brushes
are all that stand around me
all the time

The day begins
amidst the wails of the young ones
"Are my clothes washed?"
"Mother, clean me."
"Please, mother, comb my hair."

"Did you buy my book?"
"A pencil, I need a pencil."
"Come on son, you must take your
medicine."
"Listen, is the meal ready?"
"It's very late...where's my lunch?"
"My shirt is crushed,
quick, just run the iron over it
gosh -- aren't my shoes polished yet?
What a slowcoach this woman is!"

At last they've all gone
I'm late too
looks like I've missed the train
crept onto a bus after waging a last
fight,
stood on one foot
clinging like a bat to the pole
and who is this leaning against me
fun for them -- agony for us

and if I don't make it to the market
in the evening
we'll starve tomorrow

Here he comes, my man,
staggering home after work
and may be next
he'll be punching me like a sack of
grain

My body collapses
unable to stand all this
and yet I rise
again and again
to clean the house
and wash the clothes
no rest for me

And then
the night shift
and of course
overtime that must be done
some of my precious hours of rest
are swallowed up there

Truly
I am a machine
in the domestic factory
engaged in non-stop production

When will you ever realise
that woman
belongs to that category
of workers
who are truly essential for
society to survive.

Asian Women Workers' Newsletter