

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Urbanisation and mechanisation has subjected many poor women to many pressures. Consequently, by and large they either face unemployment or retention in low status occupation. A view at the literature related disclosed that there is no uniformity in the extent to which the women participate in gainful activity. Variations have been observed in the labour force participation in their socio-economic conditions and high rate of female labour force have been found in low income areas.

It is also observed that the women employed in the unorganised sectors face several problems than the organised sectors as they are not protected by legislation on working conditions and wages resulting in wage discrimination and working long hours beyond the stipulated hours of work.

The present study therefore, is an attempt to understand the problems of the housemaids employed as full time servants, in the Gandhinagar area of Gadhinglaj town in Kolhapur district. It is a notable feature that the

problems of the housemaids are quite different from the other women working in the other unorganised sectors. Nature of work, hours of work, payment, etc., are quite different though the housemaids get full employment.

Within the limitations of the data available on this subject it is only possible to draw certain broad and tentative generalisations regarding the domestic servants. Though there are number of studies regarding women workers in unorganised sectors, focus on the problems of housemaids are relatively less. The problems relating to her family situations and various kinds of hardships at the workplace are mainly analysed in the present study.

6.1 BACKGROUND OF HOUSEMAIDS

In the first place, it was seen that the large share of housemaids belong to the younger agegroup. There is no age limit for this type of job and the data indicates that the youngest one was 9 years old. Irrespective of age, parents have encouraged them to work when they are physically fit. Though a greater proportion of the respondents are Hindus (80 percent), other religious groups like Muslims, Christians and Jains have entered into this type of work for want of job. A good

proportion (52 percent) are Marathas and Kannadigas (31 percent). It is apparent that Kolhapur being on the border of Karnataka, migration from neighbouring states for want of job is possible. The bulk of the people come from scheduled and other backward castes. A greater number of them are unmarried (65 percent) category. The rate of literacy among the domestics are deplorably low. The maximum education attained is highschool level (8 percent). Joint family is prevalent more among the housemaids (78 percent). Further the data shows that the housemaids belong to larger families. Except for a few (22 percent) rest have more than five members in their family. Larger the family is less would be the income and hence it is obvious that they have entered into this venture to enhance income. Information regarding the distance revealed that more than one half of the respondents live within four kilometers from their work place. Though the distance seems to be less, they are compelled to stay in their respective houses as they are full time employees.

6.2 BACKGROUND OF HOST FAMILY

Analysis of the background of the host family revealed that majority, i.e. nearly 80 percent, of them

have attained more than 45 years. Stepping into old age has necessiated them to appoint servants to give a helping hand. Hindus form greater proportion in the present study. Caste distribution shows that lower caste people constitute only an insignificant proportion (3 percent). Upper middle class constitutes 57 percent. The heads of the host family are engaged in prestigious jobs. More than one half of the housewives are employed and they hold professional jobs like doctors, lawyers, teachers, bank employees, etc. A good proportion of housewives' educational attainment is either higher secondary or above. The minimum income of the families is Rs. 1000/- and ranges more than Rs. 5000/-. The family size is '1-4' for nearly 50 percent of the host families. Property is possessed in some or the other form by most of them. The responses uphold the view that the host families have employed housemaids due to variety of reasons like workload, lack of time, physical exertion, maintenance of house due to small children and frequent visits of guests.

6.3 OCCUPATIONAL ASPECT

Employment of poor women is indispensable for the survival of individual families as well as for the maintenance of wider economic systems. Women contribute substantially to the family apart from their domestic responsibilities. [Banerjee's¹ study shows that due to poverty poor urban women are seeking employment in many non-traditional areas. This is true in the present study too].

Sources of employment in unorganised sector could be of any sort as no hard and fast rules are followed. The women in the present data got employment through different sources like neighbours, relatives, friends, other housemaids and in some cases even through their children. Frequent changes especially among the housemaids is a notable feature. Most (73 percent) have worked in different houses prior to this employment. Excepting a few (10 percent), none has stayed continuously for more than 5 years. As there is no security, future benefits and absence of rules and regulations, this flexibility is an advantage for the housemaids to keep on hopping. Staying for a long period in a house mostly depends on the behaviour of the employers and especially

the general atmosphere in the host family houses. Frequent changes as expressed by housemaids are due to heavy workload, bad behaviour of host family, inadequate payment, distance and uncordial relationship with the members of the host family.

6.4 DAILY CHORES

Domestics employed especially as full timers are expected to perform all kind of activities. The present study indicates that no hard and fast rules are observed by the employers. The working hours are not fixed and the housemaids keep working from dawn to late in the night unlike in the organised and other unorganised sectors. The work prolongs according to the habits and policies of the host family members. Usually the waking time of the housemaids is around 6 in the morning and normally go to bed by 11 P.M. in the night. Most of them are busy throughout the day. Though no fixed time is prescribed for taking breakfast, lunch or supper, food is supplied at appropriate time. However, favourable opinion is given by the respondents, on the whole about the treatment they receive. Activities expected to perform regarding child care, giving bath to children, cleaning child's cloth,

cleaning child after nature's call, taking the children to garden or market. Other activities performed are sweeping the floor, washing dishes, bringing provisions, milk and cooking. Whether the housemaids like the job or not they are compelled to perform their duties. Anyway, majority (66 percent) like the activities prescribed by their employers. Many of them get adequate rest in the noon and it extends between 1 to 2 hours for their tiring work. Evening activities of the housemaids include cooking, bedding, washing floor and marketing. Before going to bed they do either reading, writing, watching T. V., chatting with the children and attend to their personal work. Three of them are interested in studies. However, they are required to work in the late hours of night whenever necessary. Generally the performance of the housemaids is satisfactory to majority of the housewives.

6.5 RELATIONSHIP WITH HOST FAMILY MEMBERS

The relationship of the housemaids with her host family members seems to be cordial. The present data outlines that 63 percent of the housemaids feel that the employers are affectionate with them, though 37 percent have negative opinion. It is common that no two persons are similar. Many of them feel that they are treated as

their own daughters or relatives but 35 percent feel that they are treated as labourers. Further the respondents feel that the reason for such treatment is their poor economic conditions. Many complained that they feel uneasy and lonely. It is a fact that they feel so because they stay away from their own houses.

6.6 RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

The present study reveals that their relationship with their own family members are strong. Domestic workers visit their houses whenever they get a chance, at least 1 to 5 times in a year. Presents or gifts they receive is not any indicator for showing affection towards the domestic by their members as far as our data is concerned. During times of depressed feeling or homesickness they do not mind to visit their houses nor the employers allow so. Majority (78 percent) feel that their family members feel sorry for sending the respondents as housemaids. Their parents do visit them whenever they are free, but other members' visits are not appreciable. They are of the feeling that they feel refreshed whenever they return from their home.

6.7 ECONOMIC ASPECT

The general opinion is that housemaids are the lowest paid employees even in the unorganised sector due to their nature and less significant duties. It is true as far as the present study is concerned. The maximum amount the housemaids receive is Rs. 250. Majority (58 percent) of the housewives paid the wages ranging between Rs. 101 to 150. Only 2 percent of the host families paid between Rs. 201-250. It is a notable feature that though the full time domestics are employed throughout the year unlike workers in the unorganised workers, the wages they receive is comparatively much lesser. Though the earning members constitute more than one member in the family, their income do not yield much to the total income. This may be because of the fact that most of them are involved in low paid jobs. Spending seems to be very limited as the housewives are supplying essential commodities. Saving habit is found only among 58 percent of the respondents, and their sources for saving for them being post office, bank or bhishi. Their saving amount ranges between Rs. 25 and Rs. 50 (53.4 percent). This limited income naturally hinders them from savings. Some of the non-savers expressed their desire to save, but their inadequate income and the need to send the

entire amount to their families have obstructed so. It is a fact that the nature of grievances in the unorganised sector mostly reveals to the basic requirements like wages and benefits. In the present study, the domestics are of the opinion that facilities are better in other areas. They feel working conditions are better, payment is good, facilities are better and the relationship with host family is cordial.

6.8 EDUCATIONAL ASPECT

The influence of education plays an important role in acquiring better employment. An educated women is more likely to get a well paid job than a less educated women. In the present study, the domestics mostly are less educated. The main reasons for withdrawal from education were bad economic condition, first child in the family, mother's poor physical condition, no parents, discouragement by father, failure or less facilities in rural areas they live in. Most of them are found to be unable to persue education. However, 62 percent expressed their willingness to continue informal education. Those unfavoured even for informal education are mainly due to either higher workload or lack of permission of host

family. Anyway two of the respondents expressed that there is no need whatsoever to continue education. Lack of support is also one of the reasons why domestics have least interest in any type of education at this stage. Favourable opinions are recorded with regard to vocational training. The areas of interest disclosed are tailoring, weaving, spinning, basket making, painting, and typing which are available in the nearby places. Reading habit is found to be common among most of them though the level of education is low. They spend their leisure time activities either reading, gossiping, watching T. V., garden work, tailoring, playing with children of the host, etc.

6.9 HEALTH ASPECT

Health of the respondents depends upon the nature of work, type of food and the amount of rest they get. In the present study, the housemaids maintain an average health. Though most of them fall ill frequently, the nature of illness is simple and suffer from minor problems like cold, fever, headache, stomache, body pain, etc. This can be accounted due to excessive physical strain and irregularities in food habits. Enquiry about the previous

years illness, the data indicates that 75 percent had fallen ill, and excepting a few the ailment was simple. The frequency was 1 to 3 times for more than 60 percent. The maximum time they abstained from work due to illness was 2 weeks. Proper care was taken by host families when the housemaids fall ill. Seeking the help of the housemaids family members or relatives and in some cases the help of other housemaids, are some of the alternative arrangements made by the housewives during the absence of the housemaids. Expenses for the treatment are borne mostly by housemaid herself or family members in most of the cases. Most (62 percent) of the host families seem to be kind enough to bear the hardships during the time of their illness and no illtreatment is reported by the housemaids after resuming the duty. The responses also indicate that parents do not visit them during their illness. Some opined that they do not inform their family members for simple illness. Further they added, lack of time for the parents is one of the reasons for not visiting on such occasions, but they definately visit them in times of serious illness.

The findings of the present study on the whole highlights that there exists still a wide gap between the employer and the employee in different socio-economic

aspects. This gap has culminated both to reciprocate each other. The poor economic condition of the housemaids, i.e. the downtrodden section to depend for remuneration, whereas the elite section depend on the housemaids for comfort and to lessen the burden of work. Banerjee's¹ shows the same trend, that due to poverty, poor urban women are seeking employment in many non traditional areas. D'Souza² and Nirmala Banerjee³ have also found that most of the women in unorganised sectors of urban areas are domestic servants. They are desirous of getting one or other kind of employment. Easy availability, absence of rules and regulations in appointment, and that of separation are factors related for women to enter easily into this type of work. Employment of women in the present data confirms that it has contributed to the strengthening of the economic stability of the respondents family.

Further, it is conspicuous that occupational status is related to the educational attainment of the respondent. As Sharma⁴ stated that in urban areas women participate in occupations which require little or no education, The present data also outlines that the educational level of the respondents is deplorably low.

Both social status and the educational level are obviously related to occupational status⁵ which is attained by housemaids in the present study.

It is observed that representation of lower or backward caste people constitute a major proportion in the sample. This clearly corroborates with the study of Dube and Ratna⁶ who say that there is clearcut and consistent relationship between caste, occupation, ritual and social status.

The relationship of the housemaids with their family members appears to be strong. The domestics retain their intrinsic love for the home, their family members and combine this with their determination to play a vital role in helping the economic status of the family.

Rao and Raju⁷ in their study about housemaids concluded that the relationship between the employer and employee is unsound. But our study holds a contrary view. On the whole the relationship seems to be cordial, though conflicts are likely to arise occasionally. No restriction is observed in the supply of essential commodities, low level of wages, lengthy working hours,

workload and untimely direction of work is manifested. The housemaids have agreed to join only after knowing the conditions of work.

The data also reveals that housewives are maintaining a smooth relationship so as to make the housemaids to stick on. This is obvious from the words of the housemaids who pronounced that the host family members are very affectionate and treat them as their own daughters or relatives. This may be attributable to the fact that the frequent changes of housemaids may collapse the routine work, moreover, in the present day it is difficult to find a housemaid easily as most of the workers prefer some other job which fetches better remuneration. It is also a well known fact that the housemaids would quit if the atmosphere in the house is unfavorable, hence, adjustment seems to be the only alternative for the employer.

6.10 SUGGESTIONS

1. Working women should be protected with special legislation so as to maintain harmonious relationship between the host family and the housemaid.
2. Working women must be provided with proper social **education.**
3. Working women should get proper support from the community to formulate their own union to represent their problems.
4. Working women must be fixed by considering present standard and due consideration of inflation.
5. Children of working women should get special benefit from Govt. for their education.
6. Working women require proper training to handle certain machines like washing machine, grinder, etc.

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