

## CHAPTER I

### **INTRODUCTION**

" To awaken the people it is the woman who must be awakened, once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves. "

- Jawaharlal Nehru

In India, as in any other country the problems a woman faces have a specific colouring depending on the socio-economic and cultural milieu in which she has been nurtured and moulded. Her problems are influenced by various social considerations. Furthermore she and her life necessarily determine the welfare of the home, family and society.

International woman's year has created a universal awareness of women's problems to a considerable degree and now is the time for intense follow-up and careful study and assessment of women and their problems.

It is almost universally accepted that woman's role is primarily confined to the home and her role is limited to

procreation, rearing of children and catering for the needs of menfolk by way of creative comforts. Under certain conditions, in addition to the role of a housekeeper, woman also participates in variety of gainful activities of the community.

For countless centuries women in India have been subordinated to men and socially oppressed. The condition of upper class women was in this respect worse than that of peasant women<sup>1</sup>.

Before independence, women did not have any important existence of her own, she existed for men and always played the second fiddle to them. In India women were supposed to have any personality of her own apart from their ties to their husbands. They could not find any other expression to their inborn talents or desires except as housewives.

In the early Vedic period, the women were relatively more independent, thus they were free to participate in religious, economic, and cultural activities of the time. They had an approach to higher education. The marriage institution was also healthier. They were free to express and exercise their opinion in the selection of husband.

Manu long ago declared that ' women were adored gods frequented that place '. But later on towards the end of early vedic phase their position began to decline. Their movements and activities began to be strained. The most powerful force behind this shifting trend was certainly religion.

In the eighteenth century, at the dawn of British rule, the position of women in India was in a sorry state. The vedic liberties enjoyed by women were forgotten. Only the fossilised narrow practices of a conservative and static society prevailed.

In the last forty years of independence, women have made considerable progress everywhere. They have entered all fields of economic, social, and political fields of the nation. The policies of the central and state governments together with the other voluntary agencies have changed the picture of women in the last four decades.

Women in the past were confined to domestic and agricultural activities. Perusal at the female employment situations in India, one finds that most of the women are working in the rural sector. In a country like India where nearly 82 percent of the population is rural and 18 percent

is urban. It is natural to expect an equally large proportion of its workers to be engaged in rural sector. Practically all the female workers are in agriculture and allied activities. The nature of these occupations is such that household responsibilities can be easily combined with productive work.

Women workers can be classified into two broad categories according to the degree of 'organisation' and nature of problems of their sectors of employment, viz, the unorganised and the organised sectors. The difference between these two is not functional, as between agricultural industries and services, because these functions may be found in both the sectors. The organised sector is characterised by modern relations of production and is regulated by laws that seek to protect the security and working conditions of labour organisations that can engage in collective bargaining. This includes the entire public sector of services and industry, as well as public sector which is regulated. The unorganised sector on the other hand includes agriculture as well as various industries and services, and is characterised by the absence of all these protective measures and machinery. Information about socio-economic conditions and work opportunities in this sector is also scanty. The status of women workers in India is

obvious from the fact 94 percent of them are found in the unorganised sector leaving only 6 percent in the organised sector.

The National Commission on Labour attributed the following characteristics to unorganised labour :

- a) Small size of establishments with low investment per employed person,
- b) Casual nature of employment,
- c) Ignorance and illiteracy,
- d) Scattered nature of establishments,
- e) Superior strength of employers operating singly and in combination.

The gradual commercialisation and modernisation of the economy and the efforts made by the Government to replace traditional by institutions of credit and marketing to stabilise ownership of land and to maintain minimum wages have by no means succeeded in organising the production relations or in controlling the degree of exploitation of the weaker sections either in agriculture or non-agricultural occupations in the sectors. Nor they have

solved the problems of low productivity, poverty, unemployment, and underemployment.

According to the 1971 census, 80 percent of women workers are in agriculture, constituting 87 percent of the female work force in rural area and 17.5 percent in urban areas. The participation of women in agriculture is declining due to the introduction of modern methods of cultivation. The biased approach of agricultural extension workers, who teach new methods to men has an adverse effect on women and enter into non-agricultural occupations. Except for some rough estimates based on the 1961 census, no reliable information is available regarding the volume of employment and characteristics of this amorphous group, employed in the unregulated industries and services. These widely scattered and small establishments, with low capital investment, include the traditional village and cottage industries, household and small scale industries, and unregulated industries like sweepers, scavengers, or domestic servants. These large numbers of women are employed in non-agricultural occupations both in rural and urban areas.

Urban centres have always been considered the nucleus of human civilization. However, they owe their

existence, origin and growth to the functions they performed themselves as well as for the areas surrounding them. It is native type and variety of occupations that make them distinct from the areas called rural<sup>2</sup>. The occupational structure of people differs markedly from rural to urban areas. In urban areas the functions are diversified. Employment pattern of women in urban areas is such that firstly women constitute a very small proportion of total workers, and secondly, out of total number of women workers the majority is engaged in low prestige occupations.

The question of women's employment has come into prominence as a result of changes which have taken place in the scope and character of the economic life of the society. The forces which have most affected the role of women are, the general decline of handicrafts, increasing pressure of population in agriculture, increase of poverty in the rural sector resulting in migration, development of modern industry with its increasing technological advances and the spread of education.

Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation and planned economy in Indian economy has witnessed a rapid growth in business. As a result of this modernisation the earlier

basis of social organisation has shaken and a new social order has taken place. In a modern society the thoughts, beliefs, habits and customs of the people lay greater emphasis on rationality, universality and a secular ideology, which mean equality, freedom and independence for everyone<sup>3</sup> (Apter : 1965).

As a corollary to this the agriculture and rural economy has undergone a transformation from traditional times of operation to commercial times of operation. The educated and the elite in the rural areas have been migrating to urban centres for searching jobs and profitable jobs and profitable business outlets. Whereas, the agricultural uneducated members of rural India have been migrating to the overpopulated urban centres and selling there mostly as workers in unorganised industry or business. As a consequence, employment opportunities were open for women and has altered the role of women drastically. When the elite women took employment for better status, poor category involve in work to help ward-off for herself and her large family. Poverty compels them to enter into jobs which entails hard labour and reward very little. In the ILO report, it is observed that agricultural labourers are the reservoirs which provide a constant flow of labour into non-agricultural occupations (ILO, 1960, p 15). Since it is



difficult to get jobs in unorganised sectors immediately most of the females migrated, found it easier to secure the job of housemaids.

The affluent sections of people in society has a plethora of needs but they do not have sufficient manpower to satisfy these needs. They employ maidservants to maximise their comforts and to maintain the dignity and prestige and also the status symbol. Employed women on the other hand, who have settled in the organised industry, business and government departments are required to fulfil the role expectations as a housewife along with the duties as an employee outside. In such a situation, the employed housewife requires some help in household chores to lighten her burden in this respect, because her work role inevitably encroaches on her time and energy, approximately allocated to the housewife's role. One of the ways of lessening her burden in the house is to employ servants. These factors have contributed to the galloping demand for housemaids. Generally, domestic servants are broadly divided into two types, firstly those who are whole timers who stay for 24 hours at their employer's house and do all sorts of domestic chores. They visit their parents houses occasionally but prefer to spend more time at their host house. The other

type include those who are part-timers, who stay during the day time at their employer's house and perform all the functions in the day time and return to their homes by the fall of the darkness.

Women working as domestic servants, who fall in the unorganised sector fall largely in a neglected category. They suffer from insecurity of employment, lack of standard minimum wages, excessive hours of work, and absence of any welfare amenities.

In view of this background, it is felt that there is an acute need for a study among the domestics. It is felt that the problems faced by the full timers would be more acute than the those of the part-timers as they spend the whole day with the employers and adjust accordingly. Hence, an attempt has been made to conduct a study among the full-time housemaids to understand their varigated socio-economic problems and the facts of their life.

#### REFERENCES

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