CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study aims to study the maidservants and for that purpose a sample of 200 maidservants were selected in the city of Kolhapur, Maharashtra. In order to throw more light on the subject, a sample of 50 female heads of the employer families were also selected. The objectives, as specified in the Methodology, taken into consideration, two separate interview schedules, were prepared for collecting the necessary data from the maidservants and the female heads of the employer families. The collected data were tabulated and analysed, as presented in the Analysis chapter under five headings. The results of the study are summarised and presented in this chapter.

As far as the demographic profile of the maidservants is concerned, most of the respondents (89.5 per cent) are below the age of 40, among whom 17 per cent are below 20. The overwhelming presence of young and middle-aged shows that domestic service is either a recent phenomenon for this population or after sometime in the middle age they give up work. Domestic service seems to be open as far as caste is concerned. More or less equal proportions of upper and lower caste women are found to be maidservants. Though this occupation has a very low status, upper caste women also take up this, showing that economic compulsions push them, like any other, to such an occupation.
The majority (67.5 per cent) are married and it implies that their family responsibility makes them go to work. A considerable proportion of them (18.5 per cent) being spouseless, with domestic service they have to shoulder the entire burden of the family. The unmarried respondents support their original families with their job. In all, it is clear that poverty and absence of other earning members have driven these women to take up domestic service.

Their educational level is very low, most of them (62 per cent) being illiterate. Comparatively their husbands are better educated, though not well educated. Even their fathers, belonging to the previous generation, are relatively better educated. This only shows the sex discrimination in the provision of education. Nearly half of the respondents (45.5 per cent) are migrants either due to marriage or due to their parents' migration. However, the presence of many natives (54.5 per cent) among the maidservants shows that not only the migrants but also the natives take up domestic service out of poverty.

Most of the respondents (86 per cent) have nuclear families and their family size goes up to only five (84 per cent), among whom 59.5 per cent have only up to four members in the family. However, many of them being young, it cannot be said whether these small families will remain small. More than three-fourths of the respondents (76.74 per cent) were already employed even before marriage. This, along with the fact that 14 per cent are unmarried.
suggests that even before marriage they took up employment to support their families. The fact that they continue to work after marriage suggests that employment is perhaps a desirable qualification for marriage for these poor women.

Many families of these maidservants (62 per cent) have two earning members whereas a considerable proportion of them (18.5 per cent) have only one earning member, implying that these maidservants are the sole bread-winners. In many cases, their children are also working, some on a part-time basis. A great majority of them (92.5 per cent) have monthly family income only upto Rs. 1,000. While 7 per cent who are married have no children, many of the respondents have only upto three children. When more than one-third of their children are not going to school, the proportion is higher for female children compared to male children (39.07 per cent as against 28.73 per cent). Whereas the major reason for male school dropout is that they did not study well and were not interested in going to school, the major reason for female dropout is that they were required at home to look after the household activities since the mothers are working. Among the working children also the female proportion is a little more than the male. These working children include not only school dropouts but also school-going. The latter take up part-time work and many female children are found in this category, most of them doing domestic service.

While one-third of the respondents have their own houses,
two-thirds of them live in rented houses, the rent ranging upto Rs. 200 per month, mostly upto Rs. 100. Most of them live in single room or double room houses, mostly with tiles and asbestos roof, with mud or tin walls and with mud or cowdung layered floor. Some even have thatched roof. These houses ordinarily have poor ventilation, most of them without running water and toilet facility. Nearly half of the houses do not have the electricity. Their major household articles include simple things such as bicycle and radio. Many are indebted, the debt ranging upto Rs. 2,000. The main reasons for borrowing are to meet with regular expenses as well as ceremonial expenses such as marriage and death. The main source of borrowing is their employers. Other sources include money-lenders, relatives and friends.

More than one-fourth of the maidservants' husbands (27.41 per cent) are unemployed, showing that one of the main reasons for these women to take up employment is the unemployment of their husbands. Some of these unemployed husbands are not capable of working due to handicap and chronic illness. While many are searching for employment, a considerable proportion of them are idlers. More than one-third of the husbands (35.56 per cent) are alcoholics and 17.04 per cent are gamblers. Among the unemployed husbands, half of them are alcoholics and gamblers, pointing to the exploitation of their earning wives.

Many of the respondents (59 per cent) hand over their
wages either to their husbands or in-laws or parents or siblings, depending on whom they are attached to. Others retain their earnings to themselves at their own disposal. When a considerable number of them are spouseless and more than one-fourth have unemployed husbands, it is not surprising that these respondents retain their earnings at their own disposal.

When women go out for work, they find it difficult to perform their traditional household tasks and they have to get help from other family members. Many of these maidservants get help from their female children (44 per cent) and only 18 per cent from their husbands, whereas 23.5 per cent do not get help from anybody. Even in the case of husbands helping, despite the fact that 27.41 per cent are unemployed, only very few help in cooking, washing and cleaning which are essentially female tasks. Other sources of help include only female members of the family. Thus, employment of women in this case of maidservants has not produced any sex role reorganization in the family. The female tasks are simply passed on to other female members. Many of these maidservants (75.5 per cent) spend two to four hours on their own household tasks.

More than one-third of the respondents (36.11 per cent) who have children below five years of age take them along to the workplace while others either leave them with other family members or with neighbours. They maintain good health without any serious
problem, except for a negligible few (3.5 per cent). Their leisure activities mainly include cinema and chatting with neighbours. While one-fourth of them take up other works like knitting and sewing, 10 per cent have no time for any other activity.

A large number of the respondents were initiated to work by their parents (64.5 per cent), since many of them started working before marriage. Among those who started working after marriage, most of them were initiated by their husbands (20 per cent out of 23.26 per cent). Only 14.5 per cent took up employment at their own will. Except for a very few, these maidservants have not stuck to the same employer. They often change their employers, the main reason being less pay and bad treatment. Pregnancy is another reason. They are often dismissed by their employers. Many of them have worked for more than four years as maidservants.

As the income they get from each house is very less, they often work in more than one house. They work for one to three hours in each house. Mostly they get upto Rs. 100 per month per house. In many cases, they work in houses which are near to each other. It is also a pattern that to some houses they go every alternate day. Thus they try to manage with their timings for working in as many houses as possible to earn enough money to support their families. Since they cannot afford to spend for any transportation, they go to their workplace by walk and because of this they try to select houses as near as possible to their own
houses. However, many of them have to walk one to three kilometres and some more than that. Though many of these respondents are working in more than one house and some are working in as many as seven houses, they are getting little income for their service. At the most they get upto Rs. 500 per month, among whom most of them earn between Rs. 100 and Rs. 400. Apart from pay, the other benefits that they get from their employers include food, tea and in some cases clothes.

Their main tasks in the employers' houses are washing clothes, cleaning dishes, sweeping and cleaning the house and furnitures. Other major tasks are cooking, preparing for special occasions, child-care activities such as bathing, looking after and taking to school and shopping for provisions and vegetables. With their own family commitments and serving in more than one house, it is not always possible for the maidservants to be punctual for all houses they serve. On the other hand, the modern urban families have to plan for their domestic tasks and waiting for the maidservants often means wasting time for the employers and it disrupts their plans. Many maidservants (58.5 per cent) experience bad treatment, often meaning scolding, from the employers when they happen to arrive late for work. If they abstain from the work, their wages are deducted, that is, they do not have any leave facility. However, this is true only for 52 per cent of the respondents. The employers usually treat them smoothly (61.5 per cent) whereas the treatment is rough for 38.5 per cent.
Many of the respondents usually work up to 8 to 9 O’Clock in the evening. Apart from this, sometimes they are required to work at late night hours on special occasions like festivals and parties. This is so for 55 per cent of the respondents. This suggests that what they occasionally get as benefits like festival money and clothes are not simply extra benefits, but they work for it. The household appliances, such as mixer and washing machine are not accessible to half of the respondents, partly because they do not have adequate knowledge to handle them and partly because the employers do not allow for fear of wearing them out. Even if it is accessible, many of the respondents (56.57 per cent) do not think that their workload is decreased. They state that the work to be performed with the appliances itself will be heavy or once that task is performed other additional tasks will be assigned.

When about two-thirds of the respondents (66 per cent) get rest pause in their work, the remaining one-third do not get. While in some cases the employers do not grant rest-pause because of their tight schedule, in many other cases the maidservants do not opt for rest because of their own tight schedule. They have to rush to the other houses and then to their own house to take care of their own domestic chores. This being the case, 40.5 per cent of them experience fatigue at work and some of them address complaint of heavy workload to their employers. But only a few employers consider their complaint. This is perhaps a main reason
why most of the servants do not address complaints. Since the maidservants have to work in the interiors of the house such as kitchen, half of them are subjected to close supervision by the watchful eyes of the employers. In the rest of the cases the servants enjoy the trust of their employers. Once they have become familiar to the employers' families and when the employers have developed trust in them, such a watchful supervision ceases. Among those who are subjected to close supervision only one-third are discontented about it and for the rest majority it is not embarrassing. They rather take it for granted as part of their work.

Since the working conditions are not properly defined, the employers tend to feel that the maidservants are not working enough for what they are paid. On the other hand, the servants tend to feel that they are exploited. About half of the respondents state that their employers are demanding more work. However, many of them (63 per cent) could get money in advance from their pay. They also got financial help from the employers when they had fallen ill (58.68 per cent of the cases). It is also a practice for more than one-fourth of the respondents that when they are sick, they make substitute arrangement for their work with other family members. Whether the absence is due to sickness or due to any other reason, the wages are deducted regardless in 32 per cent of the cases.

When 45.55 per cent of the maidservants belong to the
lower castes, 61.5 per cent state that they are experiencing untouchability at work. However, 62.5 per cent are satisfied with their job, while the rest 37.5 per cent are not satisfied. The main reasons for dissatisfaction are less pay, heavy workload and bad treatment. When nobody is aware of any trade union meant for maidservants, everybody wants to join union, if there is any.

Education is generally viewed as a vehicle for social mobility and the attitude towards children's education reflects one's mobility aspirations. Among the 140 maidservants who have children, a vast majority of them (82.14 per cent) are willing to provide education to their children. While this is so generally for the children, only 67.69 per cent of those having female children would like to educate them. Whereas 70.54 per cent of those having male children are willing to provide higher education for them, only 39.23 per cent of those having female children are willing so. Though the maidservants themselves are females, a certain degree of sex discrimination is there in favour of male children.

Given their limitations, many of these respondents want their sons to become industrial workers or clerks or to take up any job, showing their indecision. However, a considerable number of them want their sons to become professionals like doctor and engineer; while some of them desire for business, often meaning self-employment. Compared to the male children, the aspiration for professional jobs for the female children is less and includes mainly
teaching. Some want their daughters to become clerks, often typists or telephone operators. Thus, feminine jobs are preferred for the female children. Many of them either do not want their daughters to do any job or prefer some self-employment at home. Thus, again in the occupational aspirations also sex discrimination is reinforced.

Some of the respondents hope that they will give up their job when their children are settled. Some others are waiting for their husbands to get a better job. However, many of them are not sure as to how long they will have to work and some of them even think that they will have to work throughout their life as maidservants.

As the female heads of the employer families are evenly distributed over the different age-groups, there is no indication that women of any particular age-group are likely to employ maidservants. While most of them belong to the upper castes, a considerable proportion (22.22 per cent) of them belong to the lower castes, showing that it is not caste but other factors that lead to the employment of maidservants.

A great majority of the female heads of the employer families are married and employed in various occupations. This suggests that when married women are employed, they are not in a position to perform their household duties. In such a situation, they employ maidservants to take care of the household tasks. Thus, employment of women in one section of society opens up employment
chances for women in other sections, though of lower status. Moreover, not only these female heads are working full time, but more than one-third of them have no time limit in their occupations. A considerable number of them are engaged in business and some others have occupations like doctor, nurse, journalist, social worker, police constable etc., which are time demanding. It is obvious, then, that their nature of employment also dampens their performance of household tasks. Hence, they have to employ maidservants. The major reason as stated by these female heads for employing maidservants is heavy workload.

Most of the employer families have monthly income more than Rs. 3,000, extending beyond Rs. 5,000 in which category the largest number of them are found. This affluence facilitates them for the employment of maidservants. Apart from regular pay, they also provide other benefits such as food, clothes, festival money and medical help to their servants. While half of the employers allow their servants to use the household gadgets such as mixer and washing machine, the others do not allow mainly because the servants do not have adequate knowledge to handle them properly and frequent use of the gadgets may wear them out soon.

It may be recalled that many of the maidservants have stated that they are experiencing some or other kind of untouchability at work. However, most of the employers (92 per cent) allow their maidservants to cook their food. Cooking food is a very sensitive
area as far as household tasks are concerned. It also requires that the person who cooks will have to enter the interiors of the house. When this is allowed by a great majority of the employers, the untouchability as stated by the maidservants does not suggest to the traditional untouchability based on purity and pollution. But it may be because of their low occupational status that they are treated like that.

Most of the female heads of the employer families (84 per cent) are not satisfied with their maidservants. The main reasons for dissatisfaction are that they are not punctual and they are irregular, they are not hygienic, they expect more undeserved rewards for what they do and they are gossiping and unreliable.

It is not surprising that in the absence of specific working conditions, the parties, i.e., the employers and the employees, have differential expectations and they are not satisfied with each other. Thus, when many of the maidservants are not satisfied with their job, most of the employers are not satisfied with their maidservants. Though they are not satisfied with each other, there is, however, mutual adjustment in many cases. The maidservants take advance money from their employers whenever they need. They also get some financial assistance from their employers when they fall ill. They get other benefits from the employers such as clothes, food etc. Moreover, the maidservants' major source of borrowing is their employers. When they need, the maidservants could borrow
money from their employers without any interest. On their part the maidservants do some extra work when needed. Especially, during times of festivals and other ceremonies and parties, they stay back in the night and work. When they are not in a position to attend the work, some of them send one of their family members to compensate the loss of work. Thus, there is rather more adjustment than conflict in the face-to-face employer-employee relationship between the maidservants and their employers.

As stated earlier, employment of women in one section of society leads to the employment of women in another section. Thus, the present study shows that most of the female heads of the families, which have employed maidservants, are themselves employed. Their employment renders that they are not in a position to take care of their household activities. Many of them are engaged in time-demanding occupations. Their major reason for employment of maidservants is heavy workload. Hence they try to share their role burden, especially the domestic role burden, with others because they cannot make any compromise in their employment situation which is contractual, formal and out of one's own control. Thus, the traditional family role of women is split and external members are hired for performing part of the traditional housewife role. So employment of women of one section of society leads to the employment of women from another section, i.e., the maidservants.

However, it is noteworthy that when women of the affluent
classes face with problems of managing two roles, one as an employee and the other as the housewife, they employ other women at home. The latter, i.e., the maidservants, too have to face the same problem of managing the two roles as a worker and as a housewife. As one cannot make any compromise in the contractual employment situation, one has to make some adjustment at home. When their employers can afford to employ these maidservants to take care of the domestic role, these maidservants cannot afford to employ others to take care of their own household activities. They rather take extra efforts to manage both the roles. In most of the cases, they get help from their daughters.

It is generally held that when women go for employment, i.e., when they share their husbands' role of earning, there will be role reorganization, i.e., the husbands will share the traditional housewife role. But this gender role redefinition is not evident in the present study. When there is such a problem of maintaining the household tasks, they rather employ other women, i.e., the maidservants. Thus, the feminine tasks are just passed on to the hands of other females. In the case of the maidservants also, when they get help from other family members in managing their household tasks, these other family members are largely females. Only in very few cases the husbands are helping. Thus, there is no evidence of role reorganization between the sexes because of women's employment.
Sex discrimination is also exemplified by the differential aspirations of the maidservants for their sons and daughters. Sons are favoured in the provision of education as well as higher education. Many of them do not want their daughters to be employed. They rather prefer them to be at home with some self-employment until they get married. Some have already initiated their daughters to domestic service. Even some of the school-going girls work as maidservants on a part-time basis. This only shows a succession in occupation, and a solidification of a class of maidservants. The fact that different caste women are found among these maidservants shows that caste is not a bearing factor in this occupation. It is rather their poverty that drives them for employment. To escape the clutches of poverty, to help the family these women take up domestic service when there is a demand for it. However, the undefined working conditions with no specific rules and regulations of work have done no good to them, as they have not done anything better for their employers either.

The present study has its own limitation in that it has been conducted in a particular city with a limited size of sample. Thus any wide generalizations out of this study should be taken with enough care and scrutiny. However, this is an explorative attempt especially when there are not enough studies for an adequate understanding of the working and living conditions of maidservants, an emerging class of women workers in the unorganized sector.
of urban centres. Further studies in different urban centres will reveal much about this class of women workers and constitute a body of knowledge about domestic service.