Maidservants have become an integral part of middle and upper class society. These servants are, often, an exploited class and are forced to undertake this menial work as they are not fit for other occupations. Their wages are comparatively low, service conditions far from being ideal and they are at the mercy of their employers. They are hired and lived at will, their social status is low and little or no prospect of advancement. Women form the majority of domestic servants; in Kolhapur they are exclusively women. Women as a class is a disadvantaged section of the society and in a male-dominated culture, they are exploited by one and all.

No scientific and in-depth study of maidservants has so far been undertaken and a sociological study of their social background, working conditions, relations with the members of the family and the rest of the society etc., is a felt need. The maidservants work under trying conditions. As the maidservants are under unorganised sector of the work-force, their problems need to be studied on a scientific basis. Their standard of living, their problems, aspirations, their relationships with their employers are some of the areas that are to be studied. Majority of them are uneducated or semiliterate, the family background and life is often not very happy. Their husbands are sometimes unemployed
or if employed spend their earnings on themselves. Often the maidservant is the only bread-winner of the family. She has to perform many roles: as head of the family, as a loving mother who has to look after her children and try to give them better life, as a daughter-in-law who has to look after her old in-laws and so on. This study tries to examine all these aspects of the life of a maidservant in Kolhapur.

A survey of 200 maidservants was undertaken and 50 female heads of the employers are also interviewed to get a complete picture of a maidservant's life. An attempt was made to introduce as much objectivity, in the study, as possible.

The introductory chapter spells out what the study proposes to undertake.

The second chapter reviews the available literature on the subject. The third chapter discusses the methodology used in this study.

The fourth chapter is divided into five sections:

I  Demographic Profile and Social Background of Maidservants

II  Living Conditions
III Working Conditions

IV Aspirations

V Female Heads of the Employer Families: A Profile and Their Opinions

and analyses the material and interprets it.

The last i.e., fifth chapter summarises the findings of the study, followed by a select bibliography.

Model interview schedules form the appendices.

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