CHAPTER II

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Status is the key term in understanding the social differentiation and stratification of human society. As inequality is the universal and accepted phenomenon of human society, so status differentiation and status categories are the universal features of a society. Be it a primitive society, a traditional society or a modern society, the status differentiation, hierarchy of status and status categories are the ingredients of every type of society. Every society provides a different status or position to each individual or group. The criterion of differentiation differs from society to society but it is a necessary component of each society.

Occupational structure or economic structure is closely related to the economic status of people, which affects their behaviour and personality. The social and economic status of women in a society is largely determined by the social element, economic structure of the society and education. The socially and culturally defined status categories are the basic elements of social structure. The concept of social structure in its ultimate analysis leads to the concept of status. The very nature of human aggregate is that there exists no theoretical equality between man and man or between group and group.

Lal holds that while the status of women in a society

is determined by a number of factors, it is clear that the pattern of task differentiation in the family also provides clues to the prevailing status of women in the society. Women's status will be the lowest in a society characterised by firm differentiation between men's work and women's work.

Pitchard\(^2\) holds that in societies where any section of the population is in a service position, the position of women is correspondingly low compared to male sex and especially in the marital status. He further contends that women's position is particularly evident in the lower hierarchy of stratified societies where working class is subjected to exploitation by managerial class.

Occupational structure shows the number of people who are working in various occupations to their livelihood. Though female's contribution is very small as compared to males in employment, these problems and conditions are in fact, inseparably linked everywhere with the general problems of the society they live in. Generally, women are employed largely in the unorganised sectors, both in the urban and rural areas. The occupational structure differentiates the nature of jobs from rural to urban. The following overview of literature deals with studies pertaining to women working in urban unorganised sectors.

Emmanuel Romatat\(^3\), having surveyed some slum industries

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in Calcutta, has brought out a demarcation between formal and informal sector, whereas in the formal sector the level of employment is fixed by a demand for labour at given wage rates, in the latter the abundance of stock and flow of labour means that demand variables like productivity do not play any role in determining wages.

Papola\(^4\) in his study on Ahemadabad, suggests that the informal sector is a convenient way of designating a segment of the society having certain characteristics which lead to unfavourable conditions for the growth of enterprises and activities operating in this segment.

Employment pattern in urban areas shows that women constitute a very small proportion of total workers and out of the total women work-force, the majority is engaged in low prestige occupations. Quoting data on the position of women in Asian countries, Aline Wong\(^5\) felt that rather than bringing about economic independence, employment in certain spheres leads to the exploitation of cheap female labour.

In a number of city surveys it has been found that most of the urban working women are uneducated, unskilled and participating in manual occupations.

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Lakdawala and others, reported that in Bombay employment opportunities were limited to only a few occupations which did not require much skill and training. Professional occupations were second in importance for women. But even in this category most of the women are concentrated in lower grades. A similar pattern was revealed by Sen, in his city survey of Calcutta. He found that most of the women were working in unskilled manual work. Similar is the result in Poona city survey in 1937, and Poona Resurvey 1954. The similar trend is projected in a recent study conducted by Brahme among Hamal women in Poona city.

A Town and City Country Planning Organisation Survey of 1975, found that 38.4 per cent of adult women in Delhi's squaller settlements were employed as against 5.1 per cent of Delhi's total female population.

Findings of the Madras slum survey showed that at least 30 per cent of the adult women were employed though this was

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of true only 6.7 per cent of city's total population.

In the early 70's, Sharma calculated that 75 per cent of all urban working women were concentrated in only 19 occupations. Apart from clerks, teachers and nurses who comprise 20 per cent of the urban female work-force, the vast majority were in occupations which required little or no education. Twenty-five per cent were unskilled labourers or domestic servants. Singh and de Souza found that women were invariably domestic servants, hawkers, construction workers and petty traders. A small survey of 80 working class women in Bombay city concluded that women were either factory workers or domestic servants. Nirmala Banarjee in 1976, found that, of 400 women surveyed, the majority were domestic servants and the rest were distributed in various unskilled and semi-skilled occupations. Nearly 25 per cent were employed as piece rate workers, usually under the putout system. She also observed that not only women


did work in low paid jobs but were also prepared to work in socially tabooed areas.

In the absence of land, lack of employment opportunities was identified as a persistent problem among the female participants. As the village economy is agrarian, the only employment available within the village economy is in agriculture. However, agriculture provides employment only for a short period. Women do not get employment within the village and they have to seek employment outside. Migration data in South Asia for rural-rural and rural-urban flows in which women are represented in large numbers, is usually ascribed to marriage or association. Only recently has such data been questioned since it appears to be conclusion linked to sex-based stereotypes regarding economically active women. Several research studies on the micro-level as Singh pointed out, show that women also tend to migrate for economic reasons and not merely because of marriage and association. Regarding the rural-urban migration of women the World Bank has estimated that the volume of migration has been increasing more rapidly than that of males for the last several decades. In the urban centres women are over represented in unorganised and non-modern sectors. Further, employment among women from the lower middle class and poor socio-economic groups


is more common than it is among the elite. The committee on the status of women in India found large number of women seeking employment during slack agricultural seasons in irrigation, road and other construction work. A study in Andhra Pradesh showed that women and children comprise an important part of migrant labour force in tobacco industry.

National Building Organisation sponsored studies (1977-78) in Delhi, Ahemadabad, Poona, Madras and KALVAL (Kanpur, Agra, Varanasi, Lucknow and Ahmedabad) towns to review the living conditions of both male and female labourers found that 96 per cent in Delhi, 69 per cent in Ahemadabad, 78 per cent in Poona, 70 per cent in Madras and 59 per cent in KALVAL towns were migrants from rural to urban areas.

Leela Kasturi's study of south Indian weavers caste migrants in a Delhi slum showed that metropolitan cities were chosen

for migration in the hope that they would provide employment for women in domestic service or construction work. Pauperisation due to decline in the handloom weaving industry brought these women to the cities; the aim in migrating was to look for any kind of employment and not necessarily for better jobs.

In a study of women among migrant Bastis Singh and De'Souza found that majority of the adult women had worked prior to migration. After moving to Delhi they did not give up employment though they had a smaller range of employment opportunities in the city. While only two women had been unskilled or semi-skilled workers in the village, 42 women said they were employed in such jobs after moving to the city. Only nine women had been domestic servants in the village as against 372 in Delhi. More significantly, occupations which involved traditional skills such as home based production and agriculture were replaced by unskilled domestic or other kinds of manual services. Thus, even when the traditional caste-based occupation is not available, poor women migrate to the cities in search of jobs. Thippiah demonstrated women labourers in the urban informal sector are migrant families at different points of time because of drought, employment and marriage and wage differentials between rural and urban sector.


A study of migrant women in Delhi slum shows that limited nature of employment opportunities offered to women as compared to men. Among the females who migrated to Delhi, 87 per cent are domestic workers. Among the occupational categories they form 84 per cent of the total labour force. In occupations of high prestige and income, migrant women are hardly represented. Participation of migrant women in the labour force is much higher (40 per cent) as compared to resident women (5 per cent). The type of jobs available are of the lowest status and pay.

A study undertaken by the National Institute of Urban Affairs has brought to light the following conclusions.

In urban areas, nearly 40 per cent of the women employed are in services, followed by 30 per cent in trade, 15 per cent in manufacturing, 8 per cent in construction and 5 per cent in primary activities. Substantial number of such enterprises consisted of individual enterprises engaged in small business like dairying, pottery-making, selling dolls, goldsmithing, Pan-bidi selling, fruits and vegetables, laundry, cane and bamboo products in which family members do also participate and co-operate as workers. A high percentage of the women works outside home (57 per cent) and only 43 per cent work within home. Out of them over 60 per cent are either mobile or operate on pavements, making vulnerable to

the vagaries of wealth which spells irregularity in work and home.

Thippiah in a study on the basis of informal sector units of Bangalore metropolitan area revealed that woman labourers are suffering from poverty, unemployment, insecure employment exploitation, harassment etc.

A study made by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, New Delhi on socio-economic conditions of women labourers in building and construction industry revealed that women labourers engaged in the unorganised segment suffer from disabilities and exploitation of higher magnitude than those employed in the organised sector.

In Brahme's study of 75 coolie women in Poona city showed that the respondents were involved in the transportation of goods by carrying headloads or pushing handcart from railway wagons to godowns, and from godowns to shops as well as to residence of customers. In addition to that they were also responsible for sorting, weighing and arranging goods, and repairing gunny sacks used for transportation. Most of them were migrants and were engaged in strenuous and dangerous jobs.

Nirmala in her study in Calcutta concluded that many

27. Ministry of Labour, Govt. of India, New Delhi.
poor residents of cities are increasingly taking up jobs of different kinds. Of the 400 women studied the majority were domestic servants and the rest were distributed in various unskilled and semi-skilled jobs.

Available data demonstrate that construction is one of the largest sectors of economic activity, second largest to agriculture in the underdeveloped countries. Construction sector provides employment opportunities to a large number of unskilled labourers. The construction sector generally developed on traditional lines, is considered as an important spectrum of informal sector.

Mathur, has studied the problems of women workers in construction line, especially the quality of life basing upon primary and secondary sources. The study sponsored by National Building Organisation (1977-78) also revealed that there were constant problems of instability and insecurity of employment for the workers. Lal Das highlights sex discrimination against female workers in unorganised construction sector of Andhra Pradesh. The study has observed that development has improved the standard of living but increased economic and social disparities. A recent study on socio-economic conditions of women labourers in building and construction

32. Ibid.
industry brought to light that women labourers in the unorganised segment suffer from disabilities and exploitation of much higher magnitude than those employed in the organised sector.

The National Committee on Labour initiated two studies in Patna (covering 3 projects) and other in Delhi (covering 9 sites) and found that women are employed mostly as unskilled labourers and are recruited directly by the contractor or the sub-contractor. Most of them are rural poor migrants (77.6 per cent of the Patna group and 86 per cent of the Delhi group). The Delhi group consists of migrant labour from Rajasthan and a majority belong to Scheduled Castes and Tribes. In Bihar study, 37 per cent of Bihar and 80.76 per cent of Delhi group were young women below 35 years. Some 40 per cent of the Delhi respondents became employed before reaching their 15th year, and 40 per cent had worked more than 7 years of the Bihar group. Some 81 per cent had begun their working life as wage labourer very early in their childhood. Of the rest, 12.7 per cent became wage labourers between the ages of 15 and 20.

The working conditions in both the areas were deplorable and welfare facilities were absent.

A study by Thippiah on the basis of informal sector

33. Ministry of Labour, Govt. of India, New Delhi.
35. Ibid.
units of Bangalore metropolitan area revealed unemployment, underemployment, insecure employment, exploitation and harrassment. They live in slums and shanty towns which are devoid of basic amenities. He also found that informal sector women labourers are paid low wages and their wages are just around the subsistence level. Some women were asked to work 10-12 hours a day in addition to household work.

Kaptan, in a case study of Amaravati city regarding the income, wages and working conditions of women workers in unorganised sector, revealed that the social conditions in which they live continue to be traditional, exploitative and anti-woman in nature.

Regarding the age distribution of the working women, studies conducted in developing countries have reported a bimodal age distribution. In Britain, the highest employment rate is between 16 and 22 years; thereafter it gradually increases upto the age of 32, from which it increases again and the second highest is between 42 and 46. A similar pattern exists in the U.S.A. as well. Vinita Srivastava's study discloses that women have entered

the labour-force after 35 years of age. This shows that women have entered into labour-force before they have completed 25 years of age and no one has entered after 35 years of age, indicating that overall majority have entered during their active motherhood period. Thippiah, 41 demonstrated in his study that most of the women labourers are between 18 and 32 years of age.

Marital status is an important determinant of women's employment. Vinita, 42 in her study found that 74 per cent entered labour-force before marriage and only 5.34 per cent entered after marriage. Another factor which is said to be very intimately related here is married women's employment situation. If family circumstances are such that they require the care of the housewife practically for the whole day, then naturally, it will not be possible for her to participate in an outdoor activity. Margret Gordan, 43 summarises the typical labour-force participation pattern of women as follows.

She will marry in her early twenties, work until shortly before birth of her first child, drop out of the labour-force for a number of years thereafter, and return to the job market sometime after her youngest child has entered school. After that, although her labour-force participation may not be continuous the chances

are that she will work most of the time until she is between 60 and 65 years of her age.

A number of studies have also shown low participation rate among mothers of young children. Manpower report, \(^{44}\) states that the rate of participation in the U.S.A. among women in their early thirties (30-34 years) is 21 per cent for those who have children under 3 years, 32 per cent for those who have children between 3 and 5 years, 44 per cent for those who have children between 6 and 11 years, and 53 per cent for those who have children between 12 and 17 years. Gendell Murray, \(^{45}\) in her study of Swedish working wives found that the situation for mother with pre-school age children has deteriorated. Srivastava's \(^{46}\) study shows that as the age goes on increasing the proportion of employed women goes on decreasing and the beyond the age of 46 years a few are employed. The issue of discrimination is of vital importance. Mencher and Saradamani, \(^{47}\) noted that it was taken for granted that women would be paid less than men for similar jobs. Singh and DeSouza, \(^{48}\) established that employers practised wage discrimination, and men were often paid more than

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44. Manpower Report, U.S. Department of Labour Manpower Administration, No. 12 (Washington D.C.), May 1964, p. 3.


47. Mencher Joan and Saradamani, K., Muddy Feet and and Dirty Hands: Rice Production and Female Agricultural Labours, Economic and Political Weekly, 1982.

women for the same kind of job. Nirmala Banerjee, \(^{49}\) also found in the unorganised sector, there is evidence that for each qualificationwise category, women earn less than men.

Singh's \(^{50}\) survey of 150 women respondents reported that they were being paid Rs. 4.50 a day as against the then prevailing official rate of Rs. 5.15. Ranade's \(^{51}\) Patna survey revealed that men were paid at least Re. 1 more for doing exactly the same jobs as women. Further, women in this sample and in the Warangal \(^{52}\) study of 240 women said that though they had worked overtime on several days, they had no way of totalling how much extra was due to them. Women in Warangal were not paid any extra overtime.

Women in the Delhi survey \(^{53}\) earned between Rs. 100 and Rs. 125 a month while average earnings of the Warangal survey, \(^{54}\) were Rs. 225. In the National Building Organisation-sponsored study, \(^{55}\) skilled labourers were getting more than Rs. 200 and unskilled were getting less. Brahme's, \(^{56}\) study disclosed that the Hamal women earned between Rs. 1.50 and Rs. 3.00 per day.

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54. Murali, M. \textit{et al., Op.cit.}
It has been widely assumed that household chores are the responsibility of the wife irrespective of whether she is employed outside the home for the benefit of the family. In effect, with the belief that child rearing and housework are 'women's work' women are compelled to manage two full time jobs with little or no support of the husband. In a study, of the role conflict experienced by nurses, social workers and researchers in Delhi with regard to their family responsibilities, it was found that all these women experienced the greatest difficulty in combining their professional work with their role as mother. Sza lai notes that working women adjust to this inequitable distribution of parental tasks by having recourse to preferences and prejudices about family. In India traditional concepts about women's work persist and, according to Kapur, the tendency of husbands to act on the belief that household jobs and child-care are the wife's duty, are the 'most significant factors' of marital discord. Apart from the general expectations that all wives must be housewives, it has been noted that 'when occupational sacrifices have to be made, the wife is usually happy to be one to make subordinating her own career to that of her husband's.


Work participation rate among women according to the level of education shows that the highest proportion of workers are among illiterate and it decreases with the increase in the level of education, that is, comparatively a lesser proportion of the literates work as compared to the illiterates. Nath, on the 1961 census data and Singh, on the 1971 census data suggest that women's participation in the labour-force tends to decline with the increase in literacy. In fact Singh, states that those women with the less amount of education whether trained in formal system or not, were the most likely to work. According to Standing, empirical research has so far not adequately demonstrated any consistent association between education and female labour-force participation.

De'Souza, has shown by comparing different regions that the rate of women workers varies with the level of socio-economic development and the percentage of women engaged in tertiary occupations. Comparatively the rate of women workers is much higher in less


64. Ibid.


developed areas where more people are engaged in primary and secondary occupations and it is lower in more prosperous regions where a large proportion were working in tertiary occupations.

Though scores of studies have accumulated concerning various problems of the working women in unorganised sectors, there is still one major issue that has not received the attention it deserves, that of female domestic workers, which is a problem that concerns both adult women and young girls. Domestic servants have existed since time immemorial. They were there in feudal societies of yesteryears. With rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, many changes have come about in the socio-economic life of the people, causing a tremendous increase in the demand for domestic workers. Movement of the poor from the rural to the urban areas has been steadily increasing and they have been employing themselves in domestic services. But study in this area is a neglected one. A few research works have been conducted to inquire into the various problems of the housemaids.

Nayak and Nayak, in their study on domestic workers in South India, with particular reference to a Catholic community in Nanavoor found that the socio-economic background is in a helpless plight. This dependence is total and most of the families had incurred debts. Only 27 per cent had their salary paid to them while 13 per cent did not even know the amount they received as salary.

Alcohol abuse and domestic violence were common in their families. The families are either abandoned or poor and often ill-fed.

Ravichandran, has brought out the deplorable socio-economic condition of the women domestic workers residing in a slum in Madras. Sixty per cent of the women workers belonged to the Scheduled community and the remaining backward caste. More than 50 per cent were illiterates and the remaining had primary education. The lowest income was Rs. 20 and the maximum was Rs. 70. Eighty per cent were heavily indebted and 65 per cent suffered from some physical ailment.

Another study in Madras by Alphanse Miranda and Udhaya Mahadevan, assessed the socio-economic and health conditions of women and found that 50 per cent employed were part-time domestic servants and most of them were employed in more than two houses. A sizable majority of 70 per cent were in the age groups 35-45 years. The common health disorders reported by the women workers were stomach ailments, menstrual problems, anemia and general weakness.

A study of two hundred domestic workers from the


slum communities of Indore, Madhya Pradesh, showed that illiteracy was rampant among the respondents - as high as 92 per cent. More than 95 per cent were backward castes. In many cases, these women were the sole bread-winners. Thirty-six per cent had 6 to 8 dependents and in most cases their husbands were unemployed or underemployed. As many as 57 per cent reported that their family life was marked by frequent quarrels. They lacked social and leisure activities of their own choice. They suffer from anemia, malnutrition and a chain of related illnesses. Apart from that they developed cracked hands which become sore due to continuous work in water and use of strong abrasive powders and soaps. Among the surveyed 37 per cent were in the age group of 10-15 years. It was also found that nearly one quarter of them did not even know what salary they were paid for their work. They are made to sleep under the staircase or in varandah. They have no fixed time for work nor are they taken care of when they fall sick. They are deprived of respectful treatment. They are solely dependent on the employees and are powerless. Nearly 25 per cent belonged to rural areas. They are looked with suspicion when they return to their native places from cities. In many cases marriage proposals are turned down because of the suspicion of their morality.

A study by Subbarao and Raju, in Andhra Pradesh, among the housemaids concluded the relation between housewives

and housemaids is unsound.

Kanungo, in a detailed study at Bhubaneshwar in Orissa among 50 domestic worker-girls found that 35 girls work as full-time workers. Among them 2 per cent are below 9 years, 18 per cent belong to the age group of 9 to 12 years, and among them 10 per cent are part-time workers and 8 per cent are full-timers. Maximum domestic workers belong to the age group of 12 to 14 years. Among the part-timers only 16 per cent are literate who can write or read a little. Among the full-timers 46.6 per cent were literate and 20 per cent among them have formal schooling of 2-3 years. It was also found that recruitment as domestic workers was either done through their parents or through middlemen. In the sample of 50 girls, 48 per cent were recruited by their parents, 40 per cent through middlemen and 12 per cent by self-approach. Most of the part-timers work in more than 2 houses. For full-timers there is no fixed time and their work goes on till 11 O'clock in the night. The average income for girls below 9 years is Rs. 30, girls of 9 to 12 is Rs. 45, and girls between 12 and 15 years, an average income of Rs. 60 per month. In general, the major works done by these girls are scrubbing the utensils, cleaning the floors and rooms, washing clothes and in some cases cooking and serving food.

In addition to that making beds for the family members,

fetching milk, escorting children to their schools, looking after children, helping housewife in the kitchen, looking after cattles or household pets were also performed. In most cases, the parents collect money directly or indirectly. The full-timers sleep under the same roof with the daughters or employers. When the girls sleep with parents, they sleep either in store-room or drawing room. The health conditions of the working girls were not satisfactory. Many suffer from stomach ailments due to irregularities of food. There was no uniform condition of leave for them. But when they (full-timers) fall ill, the employer takes care.

According to 1971 census 25 per cent of the working children in Delhi are employed as maids. Pratima Nath and Majumdar, in a study in Greater Calcutta found that 27.5 per cent are domestic servants. Similarly, to understand the problems of domestic workers, the proper valuation of this labour and the attitude of the children, the National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development, New Delhi, conducted detailed study on working children in 1978 and found that out of 300 girl children, 32.3 per cent were working as domestic workers. A study made by Mohapatra, in the three areas of Cuttak city, Jalpur Road, N.A.C. and Jari Gram Panchayat found that out of 483 households surveyed, 128 households (30.78 per


cent) employ children for household work.

A study in Orissa, also indicated that out of 165 cases studied 32 are domestic servants and further indicated that caste, religion and family background are considered in the recruitment of domestic servants. Another study in Khariar (Kalahandi District), Orissa, revealed that out of 32 samples, 20 were females and among them 9 were working as housemaids.

From the studies quoted above it is clear that employment of women and especially their employment participation in unorganised sector, is high in the urban areas. Though women in rural areas are displaced from their traditional jobs, due to the mandate of poverty they seek alternate jobs and migrate to urban areas and get absorbed in any kind of jobs according to availability.

Though scores of studies have accumulated concerning the various problems of the working women, little attention is extended to the housemaids' problems and exploitation. The present study is an attempt to investigate the various problems of the housemaids in the city of Kolhapur, Maharashtra.
