PREFACE

Status of women is a hotly debated subject today.

The reason is not far to seek. Because not only in the west but also in India steps have been taken towards empowerment of women in all fields – social, political, economic and legal. They can vote and elect their representatives or can themselves be elected as people's representatives in parliament, state legislature and various local bodies. Moreover in an ever increasing number they are holding public offices and entering into various independent professions. In the industrial field also, women workers have gained much in terms of wages, conditions of work and social security.

Insipite of these developments Indian Women’s position in society in general, has remained much below the expectation and in particular, they are very oppressed and neglected. In the informal sector, their position is worse than in formal sector. An important part of the informal sector is the domestic service with which all of us are acquainted. And maidservants are an integral part of this domestic service. In fact, they are part and parcel of our lives. Middle class families can starve for two or three days, but can hardly do away with the services of the maidservants. Every body is familiar with their activities, but does know perhaps about their way of life and struggle for existence.

This prompted the present scholar to undertake a research study on their conditions of life as well as social status in and outside their family.

Perhaps not many disagree that sociological study of the status of maidservants is a
rewarding experience. It is not only for the students of sociology but also for all right thinking people. For it portrays how unorganized sector earns its livelihood by providing various kinds of domestic services in return for money. That is why this present endeavour was made to study the maidservants of the city of Calcutta, the product of which is the present Ph. D thesis.

However, it is an exploratory study conducted among the maid-servants who reside in the various areas. It also gives an insight into professional socialization. The present study has been based on 20 slums (Bustees) in Calcutta. The study does not aim to theorize generally about the maidservants. But it also attempts to arrive at some hypothesis regarding the role and status of the maidservants. At the end some tentative suggestions have also been made to improve their social status.

I feel happy in making acknowledgements but at the same time bear that somebody in the list might be missed. The work was undertaken some six years back when in course of discussion with my supervisor I selected the present topic for my Ph. D research. My supervisor Professor, Bholanath Bandyopadhyay of the Department of Sociology, University of Calcutta, has been a constant source of inspiration for me. But for his careful guidance the present study could not be what it has been, I must acknowledge my gratitude to him.

In the conduct of year round field study I got immense help from the Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata which not only allowed me to use its library and research section but also provided me with much needed financial assistance in favour of research scholarship. I would never forget my debt to this great institution.
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I would also offer my thanks to staff and teachers of the department of Sociology, University of Calcutta, Members of the Ph. D Committee in Sociology and Ph. D Section of the University of Calcutta for their constant help, guidance and inspirations.

Finally, I must thanks the Librarians and Staff of the national Library, Calcutta, for the vital library assistance they provided.

I shall consider my labour rewarded, if the Thesis is helpful in any way to the planners, researchers and administration in uplifting the social status of the poor madservants in our country.

Calcutta

Dated

Manasi Chakraborti