SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS
The study is mainly concerned with the Socio-Economic conditions of Scheduled Caste women in Chittoor district in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Authority of Caste and the supremacy of ascriptive values as determinants of social status were highly typical in Indian character. Here individuals or social groups were no exception to this phenomenon. Scheduled Castes as a distinct group in our society by virtue of the heritage could enjoy only the provision of the lowest dimensions of social status in India.

As a consequence, they had remained culturally, socially, economically and educationally more backward than any other social categories in the country. Even though several attempts were made to improve the social status of these downtrodden sections, in effect they could touch upon only the fringe of the problem. It was only after the emergence of India as a Democratic Republic that considerable progress was achieved by society. The breakdown of tradition and conservation in society removed the permanent barriers to social mobility in India. This process was equally applicable to various sections of Indian society as well. Eversince the beginning of freedom movement in India, the backward classes and particularly the Scheduled Castes have derived new means of social movement aiming at the overthrow of the conventional restrictions imposed on them and the acquisition of
new areas of status in society. In this attempt women of these sections played a significant part.

In the preceding discussions an earnest attempt has been made to assess the socio-economic conditions among the isolated sections of Indian society viz., the Scheduled Castes women. With the basic assumption that with the attainment of new areas of education and the new opportunities for the acquisition of education, women among the Scheduled Caste could improve their educational status and thereby-they can enter the domains of new status in society, the study was started. We also assumed that status of women in society depended to a great extent on the amount of acquiring wealth, new occupational facilities or employment opportunities, and the modification of social customs and related changes in social life. Accordingly, we identified the variables that were relevant to the study of status dynamics based on the above assumption.

An examination of the available literature on status relating to the status mobility of the Scheduled Castes revealed that they were on the whole confined to Sanskritisation and other descriptive models of existing patterns of social life. None of them were really focused on the real areas and channels of status of dynamics of Scheduled Caste women in Andhra Pradesh. Based on the few available evidences on this problem, we formulated few hypotheses
for empirical testing. Major contents of our findings are given below:

The present study, therefore, attempted to assess the socio-economic conditions among the Scheduled Caste women in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. In India, the Scheduled Castes generally and particularly their women folk were enjoying a relatively inferior social status. Here problems of observation of untouchability, limited freedom for women within the home and outside and other impediments on the social privileges of women were serious concerns. Since independence, these sections have been provided with a variety of new choices and opportunities in the career for life. Scheduled Caste women in Chittoor district have been improving their general socio-economic status along the dimensions of education, occupation and income. They are eager to have access to new sources of wealth. When they became really conscious of their relatively low status in the society, a desire to rise in status with regard to that of others could generally be felt. Here entrance into the political field also is not an unimportant one. As they have gained new experiences in all these fields, a tendency is noticed among the Scheduled Caste women to validate their new positions in society by seeking new channels of modernization in customs, religious practices etc., under the shade of Sanskritisation. Even subjecting themselves to religious conversion by Scheduled Caste women is not absent as a means of improving their social status.
Caste organizations too are instrumental in elevating their social position. The role of legislations in this regard is highly prominent in magnifying the sources of status improvement for Scheduled Caste women.

The Scheduled Caste women in Chittoor district have remained educationally, politically, socially and economically backward for centuries. To ameliorate their condition, the Government has guaranteed their rights and privileges in the Constitution and in consonance with the various provisions and safeguards the Government too has undertaken several welfare measures and programmes both at the national and state levels. In view of these existing provisions and safeguards and other welfare measures and programmes, the Scheduled Castes in India have made some progress to some extent. Nevertheless, they have remained to a large extent backward in several aspects. Against this background the present study was undertaken to observe and examine the socio-economic conditions of Scheduled Caste women in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh.

The aim of the study is to make an intensive investigation and examine in detail the socio-economic conditions of Scheduled Caste women who are living in Chittoor district. The study is also devoted to observe if there are any important changes have taken place in
their poor, miserable conditions to which they have been subjected for centuries.

The study is confined to six villages, namely, R.Mallavaram, Vedalla Cheruvu in Renigunta mandal; Narasingapuram, Ithepalle in Chandragiri mandal; Ekambara Kuppam, Kakavidu in Nagari Mandal of Chittoor District. A sample of 360 respondents was taken for the study by using the stratified equal random method. Thus 60 respondents were selected at random from each of the six villages irrespective of its size of the population. Tools like interview schedule and participant observation were employed for collecting the necessary data. The data thus collected through the schedules were later tabulated and analysed.

The study has revealed the following important findings:

The study by and large reveals that poverty, indebtedness, rurality, illiteracy and low status in social hierarchy are some of the important characteristic features of Scheduled Caste women living in Chittoor District. With regard to their social life some changes are noticed in respect of family and marriage. The traditional joint family is replaced by nuclear family. The joint family is no longer strongly persisting among Scheduled Caste women though a few causes have been reported. Out of 360 respondents an overwhelming number of 298 have nuclear families. Their percentage is 82.78, whereas 62 (17.22 per cent) of them have
joint families. This fact corroborates the number of members in the size of a family. The data show that among Scheduled Caste the small and middle size families are predominant. The small size family is very much prevalent.

Marriage is considered an essential event in the life of Scheduled Caste. Traditionally the marriage system among Scheduled Caste has not undergone any significant changes. Most of the rituals associate with the marriage are strictly followed and adhered. However, the conduct of marriage for a period of one week at one time is now abandoned. The entire process of marriage instead is completed in a day or two. And during this brief period all rituals and ceremonies are respected and honoured by Scheduled Castes. Their marriages are held either in the bride’s house or in a temple or in a hired choultry. The expenses are simplified. And they celebrate the marriage with less pomp and grandeur. Nevertheless, all the members of the community will take part in the ceremony with gaiety and enthusiasm.

The Scheduled Caste people observe the rules of exogamy, in that they prefer males outside one’s own endogamous group (gotra). Marriage within the same ‘gotra’ and surname is not allowed and prohibited. It is considered incestuous. Most of the marriages are arranged. The Scheduled Castes marry to their own kin, unless they are compelled to go for partners outside their kin.
Cross-cousin and uncle-nice marriages as the study indicates are prevalent.

Child marriage is strictly prohibited. The Scheduled Castes marry off their daughters only after they attain puberty. In the study no cases of child marriages are detected. Almost all the Scheduled Caste women respondents married when they attained puberty. Out of 360, 80 female respondents who married when they reached puberty. Later marriages due to economic reasons and other social factors are also seen among Scheduled Caste women. The data show that only 5 respondents married after 25 years. From the study no love marriage, that is marriage by elopement, was seen. In spite of this fact, Scheduled Caste women as found are not quite averse to love marriages. They encourage exogamous marriages too.

Among Scheduled Caste women widow-remarriage is allowed. It is never looked down upon. The couple is treated well on par with the other normally married partners in the community. But the widow remarriage is generally arranged with the widow's consent and her parents. No elaborate ceremonies are observed and followed. Although there are 13 widow respondents, none of them have remarried. One significant change that may be noticed here is that formerly the practice of the brother marrying the deceased brother's wife is slowly disappearing.
The study also reveals an important fact that the bride price (oli) which was strongly followed among is now replaced by dowry (varakatnam). This is due to the influence of the caste Hindus. However, the dowry among Scheduled Caste is not much. The price ranges between Rs.500 and Rs.5,000. It is based on the economic and social status of the bridegroom.

With regard to education, it has been found that the educational levels of Scheduled Caste women are far below the average when compared with the literacy standards of the population. The study shows that the majority of Scheduled Caste women in Chittoor district are illiterates. Out of 360 women respondents, as many as 220 (61.11 per cent) are found as illiterates. Only 140 (38.89 per cent) of them have education at different levels. The interesting fact is that the literates 67 have primary education and 40 high school education.

It is further learnt from the study that many of the adults in the families of respective respondents have not been benefited by Adult Education Programme. On the whole the illiteracy strongly persists among the Scheduled Caste women in Chittoor District.

One of the sad features in the educational standards of Scheduled Caste women is that the literacy among their children is at lowest ebb. It may be seen from the available data that out of 521 children, nearly 46 per cent are illiterates, and the remaining
54 per cent literates. On the whole, the literacy standards of Scheduled Caste children are improving, which needs a greater attention for better education.

The low level that is 46 per cent of illiteracy among Scheduled Caste children may be attributed to the many drop-outs at various levels in schools. The data indicate that the majority of drop-outs have taken place at the primary stage itself. On questioning, the 360 women respondents have furnished three different reasons namely, disinterest shown by the children, additional income from children and maintenance of household affairs. The investigation reveals that a greater proportion of 57.14 per cent of the respondents confessed that many of their children dropped at primary stage because they had no inclination towards studies. Thus, it is learnt that disinterest in studies is the chief cause for illiteracy among Scheduled Caste women.

The reasons for this grim situation are mainly economic, since most families do not want to lose their income earned by their children. Their low levels of literacy are deeply rooted in their poor socio-economic environment. Low educational levels among these people act as barriers to mobility, both geographic and occupational. If the social and economic position of these sections improves, their levels of education will also increase. Therefore, special concerted and real efforts are needed to improve their levels
of living. Further, for the adequate utilization of existing educational facilities proper and necessary motivation and aspirations have to be created among the children and adults in Scheduled Caste families. The motivations and aspirations may be in the form of offering continuous counseling to the adults in the respective families. This will check the dropouts among the children and considerably improve their status in education. Further, the financial concessions extended to these children must be strictly implemented so as to see that every member is benefited without getting affected by undue and unnecessary procedural delays at the administrative levels. In addition the attitude of teachers in the classrooms towards this particular section must also undergo changes. The teachers must be responsive, positive and sympathetic towards the problems and low social status being faced by Scheduled Castes. Ultimately, the teachers can be good motivators in respect of encouraging Scheduled Caste parents to send their children to schools without affecting their sentiments. Social distance is found to influence the pattern of education among Scheduled Caste children. One of the key factors is caste prejudices observed by the upper castes. This may be rightly checked by the teachers who can instill some confidence in the minds of children and encourage them to live with the other children without any social inhibitions, discriminations and prejudices.
The economic conditions of Scheduled Caste women in Chittoor district as revealed in the study evidently speak of their poverty and backwardness. There are no perceptible and viable changes in their mobility in the society. They are still doing low occupations, either working as labourers in the agricultural fields or doing many odd jobs to sustain themselves. They are not holding any key positions in the society. By and large their sources of income are poor and miserable and as such their economic conditions remain to be backward and their standards are lagging far behind the other caste people in the society.

A change in their occupational pattern is noticed. The shift from their traditional impure occupations to traditional pure occupations is an important change that may be noticed among Scheduled Caste women. This change is not only seen among the Scheduled Caste in India but also in similar castes. As a result of this shift nearly 61.11 per cent of the respondents are either carrying out their agricultural operations in their limited lands or working as labourers in other's fields. Only 4.72 per cent of the respondents are engaged in business. Apart from this change, no significant change is noticed in occupational mobility among Scheduled Caste women.

From the study, it is learnt that majority of Scheduled Caste women are daily wage labourers. They work as labourers in the
fields for twenty days in a month. And the daily rate of wages is meager and insufficient. The data show that the female labourers are paid at the rate of Rs.40 and male labourers at the rate of Rs.60 per head a day. These wages are too insufficient for them to meet their minimum requirements and daily needs.

The study reveals that Scheduled Caste women do not hold any worth-while property except lands for cultivation. And these lands are either inherited or given by the State Government in the form of pattas. The data pointed out that 81 (22.5 per cent) out of 360 respondents hold lands of both wet and dry with an acreage ranging from one to three. Among the size of the holding of lands, out of 81, as many as 46 (56.79 per cent) have only one acre of either dry or wet land. They purely depend upon the monsoon. Thus, their holdings of lands are few when compared to the other castes in the villages and most of them (77.5 per cent) under study are found landless.

From the study, it is understood that the agricultural implements used by Scheduled Caste women are almost similar to the ones used by the other caste people in the villages. In the sense that they are not using any sophisticated and mechanized implements since their holdings are limited and small.

With regard to their income, they depend upon agricultural labour, business, cultivation and other manual works. And whatever
the income derived from these sources is meager. It is found that the average annual income of a Scheduled Caste woman family ranges between Rs.5000 and Rs.10,000. The income of greater proportion of 190 females in the study is between Rs.5000 and Rs.10,000 which is below the average annual income of a family at state level, that is less than Rs.11,000. There are only 3 families whose income is more than Rs.30,000. This amply testifies the poverty to which most of the Scheduled Caste women are subjected.

Further, the expenditure incurred by the majority of Scheduled Caste women is more than their income and consequently most of them run into debts in varying degrees. The data state that the average annual expenditure of a Scheduled Caste women family is Rs.8,000/-. This exceeds the average annual income of 96 families, which is less than Rs.5000/-. It is found in the study that the problem of indebtedness among Scheduled Caste women is severe and intense. Since their income sources are limited, they are forced to borrow loans to meet their expenditure. The study reveals that the total women respondents are in debts and the most of them have below Rs.2000. These indebted Scheduled Caste women have taken loans ranging from Rs.500 to Rs.12,000 and above. Borrowing has become a pattern of their living. Among the various purposes
specified by the respondents, majority of them have borrowed for house construction, family maintenance and agricultural operations.

As regards the sources of credit available, it is discovered that 50.00 per cent of 180 families have taken loans from the Government agencies DWCRA. Only 5 per cent from the commercial banks and 26.11 per cent from relatives and friends. An insignificant percentage (that is 18.89 per cent) has borrowed money from money lenders. Though the Government agencies have made success in providing credit facilities to the poorer sections, it is observed that the Scheduled Castes still depend upon money lenders, friends and relatives for loans since they are easily accessible in all respects. However, the breakthrough made by the Government agencies in this regard is noteworthy and encouraging. These agencies have to work hard in liberalizing their credit facilities and eliminating the influence of private individuals upon the poorer sections. Especially, in respect of insisting upon necessary securities, providing low interest rates and repayment of loans on maturity the agencies have to take the stock of hardships of the poor.

As far as their housing conditions are concerned the Scheduled Caste women live on the outskirts of the villages which are known as Scheduled Caste (SC) colony. Segregated habitation is the distressing feature of their living. Social restrictions,
economic oppressions and religious sanctions are still imposed upon them by the caste Hindus. The very segregation indicates to what extent the untouchability is practised in the villages. It is found that a large number of Scheduled Caste women (52.8 per cent) are living in houses with thatched roofs. These houses are built with walls made of mud. Though the Scheduled Castes are satisfied with these houses, the problem of accommodation is actually felt. The data further show 130 respondents (36.1 per cent) have pucca houses with brick and cement roof and only 40 (11.1 per cent) with tiled roof. These pucca houses are built by the State Government. Most of the houses are built by the Scheduled Caste themselves on their own acquired lands. And they have no proper sanitation and drainage facilities. They live in unhygienic environment with very little civic amenities.

The study also reveals the state of conditions of the roads linking the six villages under study. The roads are in bad shape with many pits which cannot be used during rains due to slush and stagnation of water. Similarly, in all the six villages it is also noticed that the Scheduled Caste women have an acute problem of drinking water. They walk a long way to fetch water in summer seasons. At the all sample six villages, water taps provided by the Government. As for the electricity, though all the six villages are electrified, most of the Scheduled Caste women have been benefited by it. This is
amply testified by the data which shows that 304 (84.45 per cent) houses are electrified and 56 (15.15 per cent) non-electrified.

It is discovered that majority of Scheduled Caste women do not lead an ostentatious life. They are basically poor and their income is far below the national average. They do not have proper furniture. In most of the houses small planks of wood prepared by country wood are used as seats.

With regard to their food habits, it is found that all the Scheduled Caste women eat meat. They take meals twice a day. Their food consists of rice, butter milk and some curries. Most of them take the previous night's food in the early morning and go to fields for work. When they return home in the evening, they cook and eat. Only on festive occasions, or at get-togethers, they consume meat. If they have enough money, they buy a goat, slaughter it and share its meat among all the Scheduled Caste peoples. From the type of food they consume, it is understood, that they hardly take nourishing food which is essential for the healthy state. It is for this reason, most of the Scheduled Caste women look weak, dull and pale and undernourished/malnourished.

Further the Scheduled Caste males consume drinks like toddy and alcohol. Some of them take once in two or three days. On festive occasions they all rejoice in drinking. Similarly smoking is common among all male members. Even children are found
smoking and it is not treated with punishment. Regarding their
dress, they do not wear expensive clothes. No significant change is
witnessed in their dress pattern. They wear only cotton and low-
priced clothes. Only on festive occasions, they buy cheap clothes
and wear them. All the members of the family go for new clothes
on these occasions. They do not dress gaudily.

The findings of the study in the preceding pages evidently
reveal the State of socio-economic and political conditions of
Scheduled Caste women in Chittoor district. Certainly, they live in
grinding poverty and extreme backwardness. They still face the
problem of low status in social hierarchy. They are still segregated
and not properly integrated with the mainstream of national life on
par with the Hindu caste women.

To improve the socio-economic status among Scheduled Caste
women, the Government must make sincere and honest efforts to
introduce and implement several developmental schemes.