SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER VIII

8.1. Introduction

The present study on old widows views aging as one of the issues in terms of various insecurities that old women in particular or old population in general face in the society. At the micro level, the study mainly concentrates on the issue of aging in respect of old widows living in rural areas. It focuses more on the socio-cultural environment of old widows which influences the experience of aging and the old age related problems. In other words, it looks at the issue of old age care vis-a-vis the social structure of ‘family’ as an institution. It allows one to assume that the way a person leads one’s old age involves the elements of interrelation between an individual and the social environment, getting reflected in terms of social treatment, attitudes and practices meted out towards old people, in the society and in the family.

Women since birth enjoy a secondary status as compared to their male counterparts. At parents’ home they supposed to be dependent on one’s father or brothers. They are seen as a ‘shielding glass’ for them. At in-laws place, it is their husbands who initially look after them and later it’s their sons on who they have to depend for needs/support. It suggests that they experience a dependent identity at both the places. Besides, ever since birth, women find themselves in an un-equal position in their families, as more importance is given to males, be it education, food intake or socialization process. This discrimination in their progressive years has its negative impact on them in the sense that it culminates into women experiencing a low status in the family and society- socially (secondary status), economically (less education—no/unskilled job), and politically (no decision making power in the presence of males in the family). This status stays with them creating problems/ difficulties in leading their normal lives as they may suffer social, economic problems within the family besides dependence on husbands and others, in case they are not independent.

The secondary social status influences one’s ‘social’ processes too as women grow old. Unequal opportunities and bias towards them since birth results in serious
problems and difficulties in the later years of women’s lives. Thus, women are vulnerable at younger and even during old age— the age when with no social and economic standing they get exposed to more uncertainties. The vulnerability of women is more in older age as there are more chances of their living a widowhood life. This could be due to increased life expectancy as compared to men. Thus, in the later years of their lives more number of women tends to live without their spouses with various difficulties to face as compared to those with surviving husbands.

The present study provides a micro level account of the life of rural old widows in terms social, economic and psychological problems they face and the coping mechanisms they adopt to overcome them. Widowhood hampers their active aging in terms of various challenges to live with while making adjustments to their lives. Other than day to day challenges, they also have to deal with the diminishing old age care in the current context. It is observed that the loss of one’s husband with who one’s identity is associated is a tragic event that disrupts the life of widowed women in many ways. It disrupts their personal and family life suddenly for which they may not prepare mainly for two reasons. First, the uncertainty that surrounds the possible death of one’s husband. Secondly, they may not be well equipped with the required resources such as educational qualification or the right over some property/savings that can help them overcome such sudden events. Therefore, a difficult and stressful life may await them over the years due to lack of support. A life-course approach towards their old age life is very much relevant here considering that this study focuses on the rural parts of Haryana—a state mainly governed by a patriarchal social structure which is less favorable to women in terms of providing them with equal opportunities. Thus, unequal opportunities and a discrimination oriented socialization process hold serious implications for women as compared to men. Living under the shadow of men in a male dominated social set up all life with a relatively less control over their own life across different spheres can affect women badly when they suddenly become widows. In view of their unpreparedness to deal with the outside world since beginning, and a family without the authority of one’s husband, the sudden widowhood can bring in various upheavals in the life of women—financial insecurity, loss of social status, and adjustment problems with one’s life and so on. Moreover, it is also relevant to mention here that although Haryana ranks as one of the highly developed states in terms of economic development including the selected
villages at various stages, such a development of the state or that of the villages has hardly affected the social status of women in general. Their status in the family continues to be secondary and dependent. Such a dependent and low social status is something that is common to old widows expecting a few who have some control over economic resources. Therefore, one can argue that their low and dependent status during old age is the cumulative effect of their earlier life phase lacking education, employment, decision making power, right or usage right over one’s property and so on. Changes in the family set up, changing social values, poverty etc. further exacerbate their problems and the concern for old age care by their family members.

8.2. Aging Experience of Widows

Based on the responses and observations of widows, it is understood that they live a life full of serious challenges spread across social, economic and political spheres, thereby suggesting a burdened living status with various insecurities in their old age. As compared to others, this burden appears more visible in respect of those widows who generally go through a fairly long period of widowhood without any financial security for handling the family responsibilities. This implies that in view of a high life expectancy in the case of women and social barriers towards remarriage of widows or the lack of support, the status of widows is much more complex as compared those old women with surviving husbands. Without husband they have to manage themselves and their families on their own in the initial years and live a life of dependency in the later years in the absence of their own economic security. As observed in the study area, for woman, old age and widowhood are problematic and both tend to increase their dependency levels (personal and financial). Given their socialization process, widows are more likely to seek support from their children and others. Besides, life also seems difficult for widows as they feel isolated due to their insignificant presence in the family because of their old age and widowed status. It is very obvious that after husbands’ death, widows depend on their children for care and love, but the changing relationship between children and widowed mothers results in their increased feeling of isolation. This brings to dilute the assumption that extension of children’s love, care and widows/old people staying with them is going to continue.

It is also presumed that one ‘being old’ is more a psychologically and socially defined complex set of phenomena rather than just the chronological passage of years.
for women. Widows’ perceptions about their life (whether difficult or manageable) are associated more with various socio-cultural events that occur in the lives of widows that influence the way they view their own life in terms of old age and widowhood, a journey into the realm of uncertainties. For instance, widows in the study area presume that once a person attains the age of fifty, her/his process of getting old begins. But equally important in their view are the other factors associated with one’s life cycle, such as diminishing physical strength, married status of children and tensions and sorrows in their life – which they think influence the aging process. Although widows consider such factors common to the lives of others also who might experience this dual burden – old age and widowhood- and the resultant uncertainties, many of them think that every widow may not experience exactly the same stresses nor respond to them in the same way. Although they tend to generalize certain problems that widows face, such feelings or perceptions are the result of their own life experiences gained through old age and widowhood. They think that the issues that they are dealing with are shared by all others too who belong to the same group like theirs i.e., ‘old widows’, but in terms of different degrees and variations.

It is observed that many old women who have been interviewed had got married at a younger age, many in their adolescent years (between ten to twenty years), with an average of seven to ten years of age difference between the spouses. In terms of literacy too, widows are found to be illiterate or have studied up to a few classes. However, it has been reported that some of the husbands had studied up to higher level or more as compared to their wives. It can be said that the widows interviewed, however, were part of the period, when marriage at an young age was more prevalent and the education of girls was not a priority issue at all. Rather they were groomed to handle household tasks with the intention of preparing them for their actual role of wife and daughter-in-law to one’s husband and his family respectively. All of which have had a negative influence on women’s health and social status. Despite the fact that in recent times such practices have changed, as now even in the rural areas girls are getting educated and also that age at marriage has also increased, still not all women are fortunate enough. Those who have been part of such practices are more likely to face many difficulties as they grow old becoming part of the group of old widows in the near future. Thus, like in the case of studied widows, the lack of education and early marriage of women can have negative effects on their lives in
varied forms including income-earning potential, non-ability to bargain for resources within one’s household, decision making autonomy, control over their own fertility, and participation in public life. Hence, to improve the situation of widows or potential widows, efforts are required to provide them with educational opportunities and required skills for dealing with old age related problems and also to reduce or remove gender based discrimination against women which is essential for them to lead their later life with dignity and fewer problems.

8.3. Economic and Social Insecurities

Considering the fact that traditionally women are not allowed to work outside home the first effect of one’s husband’s death is the economic difficulty that families face. It is clearly evident from the study findings that the loss of one’s husband results in the financial constraints for the widow’s family. This is also one of the reasons for many widows to engage themselves in some kind of jobs, which they were not doing earlier irrespective of their growing old. They work mainly to sustain themselves and their families. As many widows are found illiterate, or have studied up to primary level, they lack access to skilled jobs. Also those forced to work are mainly absorbed into wage-labour, a major source of income for them. Widows facing financial problems, however, do not present a picture /case of homogeneity, rather they represent a heterogeneous group. Many of the poor widows belong to from lower castes. However, widows from upper castes or peasant communities (OBC) also found poor. In the case of women belonging to lower castes the poor status could be due to the fact that, they hardly own any land or economic resources against their names. They are also not engaged in high paid jobs (both men and women) mainly due to result the social custom of discrimination against their caste. All these factors prevent them from accessing better economic opportunities and hence, remain at the bottom with poor financial conditions. In the case of widows coming from other upper social categories it may be that generally males inherit family property. Also unlike lower caste people they may also be rigid in terms of not allowing women to work outside home and own property and hence, women from such social categories may also face financial constraints in later years. Thus, in both the cases, women with no economic resources of their own and restrictions on their taking up jobs outside result in their poor economic status.
It is worthwhile to mention here that even if women are allowed to work outside, it is subject to some rules and restrictions. As it has been observed, those widows working in the study area out of necessity, are allowed to work within the village premises only. Even whatever work they do is limited to their own fields or others or schools. Although there are various mills/factories operating across all the three villages, widows are not to be seen working there (with a few exceptions). One of the non-working women from a poor family observes:

“.....vaise ...aas-paas factories hain...aur agar kaam ke liye poochenge to vahan mil jayega.....lekin aurat ka...factory mein kaam karna accha nahi maante hain...jo karte hain...usko besharam maante hain.” (....we can get work in factories.....but working in a factory is not considered good......and those who work are seen as women without shame).

Apart from own economic resources, social assistance from the government also gives widows a sense of economic security. This is important for them for whatever financial help they receive helps them fulfill some of their basic needs. It also helps them command some bargaining power in the family. But owing to their limited exposure to the outside worked, most of them find it problematic to access such external help which affects their economic as well as bargaining power with in one’s family. Here it is also relevant to mention that widows seek more help from the government in addition to pension in order to maintain their social position in the family. This prompts us to differ from Dandekar’s (1998) observation that old age pension is a better solution to old age related problems. No doubt it influences old widows’ status in the family but interventions other than this that can tackle their various immediate needs would be much more significant from their long term security and old age care point of view.

Children are always seen as a preferred source of security and support by the old. For widows their presence assumes much more importance. For those with no children life can be difficult as they have to work for taking care of themselves irrespective of their health status. However, it is also true that support from their children depends on various factors and it’s not that all children readily provide necessary support and care to one’s parents. It has been observed in the study area that
though widows with sons interact with all of them sharing a cordial relationship, it is with their youngest one’s, that they share their stay and food. This seems typical of those widows whose sons are all married. It suggests that although the marital status of sons influences the staying of widows, they have a limited option for their own choice and that they generally end up living with one of them who takes them as his responsibility. It is also to be noted that the son with who a widow shares her living is not always forced in a better position as compared to his siblings, rather he enjoys a lower position. This living arrangement also implies the breakdown and separation of the household with a separate kitchen for each son and his family. Such a family structure highlights the changing picture of the joint family system and it is revised version. It takes on a new form that may be referred to as a ‘modified extended family’ or as ‘intimacy at a distance’ (Ward 1978). This reflects the fact that although families are less likely to live together, they do maintain regular and cordial contacts. Such contacts for Adams (1967) means a ‘positive concern’- a long standing, durable interest in the welfare of other family members. However, such a family set up is of concern with regard to old age care for widows or old persons in the long run as few people will be available for extending help. 

Old people prefer to live within the family set up in view of its traditional role (some of which is declining of late). However, it is to be kept in view that just staying with one of the offspring, sharing food and shelter does not necessarily mean that the old receive a better care from their families or that their children take care of them. Rather one has to focus on the quality of life or the way they share their life with other members of the family that can provide an actual picture of the old age life as it involves so many aspects. It has been observed that even though old widows in the study area stay with their families, receiving shelter and food, in many cases, especially those who are in an older-old group and those not doing any kind of work and are dependent on children, in the name of a living place, they generally get a bed or charpai in the courtyard or aangan. It is this place where they spend their whole day including eating and sleeping at night. Thus, their world is restricted to this small place for most part of their later years as the other better rooms remain occupied by their sons, wives and children. It is common among poor households or those with insufficient space or fewer rooms that can accommodate each and every member of the family. Thus, here widows forced to forego their own comforts/wishes in favour
of others and settle for any available space as long as it is with in the confinement of home.

The elderly abuse is becoming an important issue that they have to deal with within the family. Although the abusive treatment of the elderly people at the hands of their near and dear ones in the family for various reasons is considered an urban feature, it is also becoming a rural phenomenon especially if the old are dependent on children for support. As widows live with children, when asked about the abusive behaviour faced by them, though most of them say they don’t have problem in the family nor from family members, but one can’t ignore the fact that this may not be true in respect of all. As it is observed that, during group discussions with only widows being present, they report some form of ill treatment on the part of the family members such as sons fighting with them, children not talking to their mothers, daughter in-law not listening to them and not showing respect or sometimes not giving food for some reasons etc. In one widow’s case, one of her son has taken over her property by forcing her into signing certain legal documents without letting her know of his intentions. After taking over the property he has deserted her and the younger brother. Now the mother and her younger son are living separately in a small house, while working as wage laborers to meet their basic needs. But it has been observed that during discussions in the presence of family members most widows avoid revealing anything bad happening to them. They respond that they do not face any abuse and that nothing bad happens in the family. Such a stark reality suggests the existence of intra-family complexities that influence the family care of old widows (other elders too), something which is not becoming visible, mainly due to the fear of one losing the only available support. Thus, rather than being with their dear and near ones in conflict and jeopardizing their care, they have accepted their fate and adjusted with the real life situation while remaining silent even if it means facing abusive treatment at the hands of their children.

Generally women have a very limited role to play in the decision-making process with male members dominating this domain, although, a woman is consulted and involved only with those issues related to her or the household; other than that, she is expected to refrain herself from participating in any other kind of conversations and issues. This is more common in northern India, which is governed by a strong
patriarchal social system. Thus, after one’s husband's death, the role is transferred to the elder son of the household, who would step into the shoes of his father in terms of taking all the important decisions related to the household. This seems to be the case in the current study area also where it is observed that in the absence of one’s father, it is the eldest married son who makes all the decisions on behalf of all the household members if all are staying together, and if a widow stays with one of their sons, then he is the main decision maker. However, widows’ role in the decision making process can get strengthened if they have their own economic status that helps them participate in the family discussions.

8.4. Widows Adaptation to Changing Circumstances

8.4a. Being Useful to the Family in Exchange of Care

A woman’s contribution to one’s household through varied services is never valued in economic terms, rather old women, in general, are considered as those who are at the receiving end, but one forgets that rather than being mere receivers of care, they too contribute in various ways to the household. This is common to both men and women, but more so in the case of women, who continue with their roles as contributors albeit with certain changes as they age. In the context of rural areas engulfed as they are by poverty, where family members struggle to meet their daily needs, the issue of taking care of the elderly parents assumes a fair degree of complexity.

However, the present study finds that in the study area, old widows continue to be active contributors to their families rather than being just receivers of care. Some are gainfully employed to be economically useful to their households. Those who are not employed outside, are also found useful to their households. They contribute their bit through carrying out domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, tending animals and taking care of grand children (like getting them ready for school, leaving them at school) and so on. Thus, in one or the other, all the widows are found contributing to their households.

Their contribution throws light on two important aspects of their life- (their remaining engaged in some form of work or the other) compulsion and necessity. Those widows, who work outside home, mainly belong to low income groups and
thus their financial contribution to the household is important and necessary to a fair extent. ‘Compulsion’ to contribute through household chores mainly arises in respect of those widows who do not work outside. They are compelled to help through household chores as they do not have any other option due to the absence of support from other members like daughter or daughter-in-law (also in cases where widows’ daughters are married or are staying with unmarried sons). Secondly, their contribution becomes necessary in order to establish their social position in the family and to receive care by their children. However, contributing to one’s family does not seem to be a compulsion for those widows belongs to better off categories. Also non-economic contribution by those who are living alone with unmarried sons involves work burden is increased as compared to those with married sons (due to the presence of daughters-in-law) or an unmarried daughters who take on the household work responsibility.

An important implication here is that widows perceive their participation in various activities (both economic and non-economic) as important, as it determines their social status in the family. More importantly, it helps them avoid their dependency on others- a sign of dignity and non-liability to others. Their economic contribution, whether in the form of holding any property or receiving pension, allows them to bargain in the family sphere with respect to their role in the decision making process and their voice being heard. In cases where widows happen to be the only earning members, they have a better say in the family matters. Thus, one being economically productive (in terms of being employed, owning property or getting pension) has two implications for old widows. First, it ensures their economic security, and secondly it also helps them establish a better social status and relationship with the other family members. This observation could be related to the Marxian thought that social relationship/status between people is determined by their relative hold on the source of economic production. The old in general, and old women in particular, are more likely to get marginalized and disadvantaged because of their vulnerable position in the economic sphere. But, those with their own economic resources or a better access to economic means are able to gain a fair degree of social importance in the family set up.
The contribution of widows highlights their utility to their families even at an old age besides enhancing their status and securing care in the family. Further, being productively engaged in activities also seems to be important, in the sense that, it helps them overcome psychological problems like loneliness or depression. Moreover, their economic contribution also signifies that they are not a burden but part of a mutual support system of the household. The relation is two way in the sense that the family members need old women and they need their family members for certain needs. This dual relationship can be associated with the underlying aspect of ‘Exchange Theory’, (a micro level interactionist perspective focusing on interactions between individuals) that people attempt to maintain a balance in their exchanges with others (Morgan and Kunkel 2001). Following this perspective, one can argue that in exchange for care and support from their children, widows try to be useful to their families by contributing economically in their own capacity and to avoid becoming a burden on them. Similarly children provide them with care in exchange of their contribution to the household. Such kind of a trade-off also highlights a feature of the modern family system where the status of family members depends more on the contribution they make to the family and the rewards they can get from the family.

8.4.b. Adjustment to a New Situation: Acceptance and Hope

There is a deep-rooted belief that children are a source of security in one’s old age. the traditional socialization process emphasizes the fact that it is the duty of children to take care of their parents when they become old and fragile or when they are in some difficulty. All the widows in the study area also believe in the notion of children as a social security. But in reality, many have experienced that in today’s society, this is not happening. Not all children play their roles sincerely in terms of providing the required care and support to one’s old parents. Parents generally expect their son/s to take care of them in old age as who ever stays with them inherits their property and the decision making power related to household issues. They have no such expectations from their daughters who are in a way considered as alien. However, the indifference on the part of sons in taking up this role has taught them that old parents should be self dependent so that they do not have to depend on ‘others’ – invariably son/sons. This gains importance in the current context of changing relationships between the two generations- parents and children. The
increased individualism among children coupled with other factors has challenged the foundation of traditional social security for the old even in rural areas. However, this also has resulted in a positive change in that women (widows) have realized the fact that they can no longer rely upon their children for every need. The present situation has made the old widows come to terms with reality in terms of developing an independent attitude that instead of depending on others for help and care, it is better that they learn to be self-reliant so as take care of themselves as long as they could.

It is equally important to note that it is not only because of the fast changing attitudinal changes occurring among the present younger generation towards their parents (which is quite opposite of what women used to have with their own parents), but also because of the heightened economic vulnerability of the rural households in the wake of many changes that affected agriculture and allied occupations that are responsible for the present situation. The financial constraints experienced by the rural household have created difficulties in handling the family issues. A majority of the widows in the study area stay with their sons who have to take care of their own children in terms of catering to the needs of their education, basic amenities etc. This leaves them with little money to manage all the household expenses and to fulfill the needs of their old mothers. Hence, in a majority of cases, the widows’ needs and demands get sidelined or become secondary in importance. But, one can not ignore the fact that for them, the family is the only available source of social security during their later stages of life. Thus, it has become, in a way, inevitable for widows to accept this reality and try to adjust with their situation without forcing their demands on children within the family presently undergoing rapid structural and functional changes.

All these changes occurring within the family structure and the society at large have prompted widows observe collectively that women should be allowed to access proper education and that they should take up formal employment to ensure their economic security in terms of adequate savings. Women should also be given the right over family property, which will increase their economic security besides helping them face challenges boldly. According to them, economic power and position to women strengthen their ability to take care of themselves – healthcare and other needs. The collective thoughts emerging from the life course experiences of
widows suggest that as day-to-day life is centered on the household economy, a woman needs to be economically powerful if she were to ensure her own wellbeing and proper care in the later years of life. The economic self-sufficiency of women would provide them with a sense of security in the later years in terms of handling their lives as they are more likely to find themselves alone either due to the death of one’s husband or deserted. With a fair degree of financial autonomy, the chances of their getting abandoned by their own children get reduced. In the study area one can observe that women who are economically useful to the household or women who happen to be the head of the households with a working status, do influence the decision making process, besides having common living arrangements and respect from their children. Besides, for some, the economic contribution to one’s household means a way of surviving/staying in the house. Hence, one can argue that if a woman is economically secured it will reduce her feeling of dependency and declined importance in the family, in addition to improving her social stature and bargaining power.

This observation clearly strengthens the assumption of a certain link age between economic security of old widows and their better social status/care. Owning property or being employed has positively affected the lives of widows. The fact of owning economic assets/resource has given them a sense of security and power to negotiate with other family members regarding certain household issues. In terms of caring and cordial relationships, it has also resulted in their living with children under the same roof. The presence of family members helps one’s personal and psychological state. However, the overall situation makes one believe that the traditional norms and values are fast disappearing from the rural families too. With the persistence of internal disturbances, the role of family is withering away in terms of providing social, economic and emotional security to the old. Thus, changes in the ‘family’ role also bring about changes in the old age care of widows or the old in general.

As mentioned earlier, there are a few widows in the study area that enjoys a better position in the family mainly because of their economic status; it is to be noted that not all of them work outside or hold any property like land, home etc. in their names legally. But for others, just having the house in which they stay as their own
has led to a feeling of non-dependency among them despite the fact that many of them do not possess any legal proof of ownership. If such a hold over property has brought about a feeling of non-dependency among widows (at least economically which also follows care) one can argue that the actual right access to economic assets and employment will be more useful them to lead their old age life with dignity and fewer problems in the family. Therefore, it is important that more attention and efforts are directed towards the economic rights of women over property like male counterparts along with proper education of girl children. It will benefit her in more terms and will allow her lead a life in much better ways in a long run.

The economic self-dependence helps women most at a stage when they become old and widows in terms of facing multiple problems in their later years in view of the responsibility of maintaining the family without one’s husband. Moreover, for widows a fair economic standing means less dependency on children/others, control over one’s life spending as they wish- all of which can bring about a sense of security and dignity to them. It may in turn enable them to maintain their social importance in the family in terms of respect. Thus, widows or women can experience a better quality of life even in old age years as a better socio-psychological status is very much interrelated with a better economic status with all the three complementing each other. the fact that these factors have their influence on one’s old age, clearly denotes that the non-availability of such positive opportunities to women at an younger age would undoubtedly affect the economic, social and health status of women when they grow old (as they are interrelated). Hence, it is important that women access such opportunities at an young age as they can improve their status in later years as most of them may enter the dual phase of old age and widowhood in future.

There is no doubt that as compared to the earlier times, there has occurred a certain shift in the position of women today as a result of the availability of external support, help and facilities, but the percentage of such women may be quite low. However, it may be true in the case of women living in urban areas. Such a situation as such or their empowered status is influenced by various reasons like class, caste, region etc. Thus, for women living in rural areas to be considered empowered may not be absolutely true, as the social structure or life in villages is still against women’s autonomy, freedom or against providing equal opportunities to women folk.
Moreover, even if some facilities for women are available in villages, the position of old women per se is worse as they are not able to access the benefits of any outside secondary facilities/programmes as these are not focused on their problems directly, rather are more oriented towards other groups of women—adolescent girls, pregnant women or middle aged women. The situation of older women is such that with no other option left, they are looking for better things to happen and are working for their own betterment in whatever way they can. They have accepted their status of widowhood and are trying their very best to go along with the tide with whatever limited opportunities and facilities available to them. It is so because they know that totally negating the family system is not a good option for them. They also know it very well that, for the time being, there is no other better alternative (despite having some issues with other members) than the family for their immediate rescue. ‘Family’ is still the primary source of their old age care and they also know that if they resist it for some reason or the other, it may not work in their favour as they can not take anything for granted. Without one’s husband they have to live their life within the family structure and have to seek children’s care now and in the near future—for performing their last rites.

8.5. **Emerging Issues**

The living status of widows in the study area highlights certain emerging issues that need a proper attention for understanding the reality of their life. It is assumed that the old are living with their children, they are dependent. But the present study allows us to think beyond the existing living arrangements in terms of looking at the fact of who is living with who. It brings to light the fact whether the old are living with children or it is vice versa. It has been observed that in some cases, widows’ family members are dependent on their earnings as they happen to be the only earning members. Thus, for them, it is vice versa i.e., children are staying with their widowed mothers as they are running the family with their own earnings and also own the house where they are all staying together. This situation raises a need for understanding the kind of living arrangements with all their intricacies for desire or preference to live with someone are two different things. Such an understanding allows us to shun the idea or belief that widows or the old are always dependent on their children for support when they grow old. However, in the study area, the non-
dependency status of widows presents the old widows and women in a new perspective - independent and dignified.

Social security programmes for the old people are aimed at ensuring the financial independence and dignity of them, but considering the fact that only a small section of the people have benefited from them, there is a long way to be covered to achieve this goal. There are two major schemes of the government that are mainly oriented towards old women namely National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS) applicable to all old people above sixty years, and the Widow Pension Scheme, meant exclusively for widows irrespective of age. But, there are no other welfare schemes with specific focus on old women or widows like insurance or loans for education of children or any other medical benefits. It means interventions with a more focus on widows as a target group have been woefully inadequate.

Therefore, before coming up with new other measures for the old, one should also assess the needs of various groups – old widows, old women, so that the new programs and welfare activities can be directed towards their old age issues. Any kind of facility or measures should enable them to acquire a better control over their lives particularly in terms of participate in the decision making process on matters which affect them besides considering them as equal partners in the development process.

Another emerging issue that is noteworthy is the contribution of old widows to their households. Their contributory role allows us to circumvent the idea of social neglect that old women or old people in general are expected to face, because generally one tends to perceive them as lacking in worth or who are seen as non-productive to the family. Rather they continue to contribute positively and while at the same time play a significant role in the family till they become physically incapable. Therefore, neglecting the contributions of the old who are mainly considered as dependents (by viewing themselves as non-contributors) does not provide us a real picture of the old. Rather there is a need for evolving a broader outlook for understanding old age related issues in relation to the active role that the old people perform in the family.
8.6. Suggestions

It is well documented that most of the northern part of India is governed by a patriarchal social setup. For women, this social structure means an oppressive and discriminatory social system. It represents the dominance of men over women and biasness and disadvantages for women. Haryana, being part of such a social setup, also depicts the characteristic where women experience disadvantages, discriminatory treatment and biased behaviour in the social spheres that affect their lives. Restrictions in terms of accessing education, employment and rights over property adversely affect their lives especially at a time when they are most. All this becomes crucial when they become widows, especially during their later years as they always tend to dependent on their husbands for everything and the sudden loss of one’s husband brings in various difficulties and insecurities for them to live with. It is a major concern considering the fact that in Haryana, the statistics show more widows coming under the age group of forty-five and above. Moreover, one does not find much difference in the social position of women in the state. It is mainly because the cultural and social ethos here are deeply rooted that they have not vanished not got weakened in the wake of the economic development that the state has undergone of late across different spheres.

Thus, it can be said that, in this part of India, the long-standing (life-course) discrimination against women put them in a disadvantageous position all through their lives, which increases their difficulties at the time of their being old and widowed. But, as visible in the study area, if they remain economically productive and secure there is a possibility of their being able to handle their lives better in later years. It will also help determine their significant roles in the social sphere. Moreover, control over one’s economic resources might allow them to secure social support from children in their old age as their children stay with them and provide them with needed support and respect though with different intentions. This may also be generalized for women and widows at large.

Besides focusing on empowerment of individual women, it is also true that ‘family’ is the first place where individuals learn many things as it is the best old age care institution. Both support and care, (support can be defined as financial assistance (self or external) and care (most important) as extending emotional support) can be
best provided by the family members or by those with who the old live. Both these aspects determine women’s later lives in terms of their wellbeing.

Thus, in view of the changing times, an important task before us is to strengthen the status of women in the family by creating a favorable environment where women can freely participate in the decision making process of the household. It is important for isolating women’s identity without one’s family is not easily acceptable, while favorable socio-economic aspects can have a lasting impact on their life. In fact there is a need for adding life to their years instead of letting them merely live their years. Besides this an equally important task is to strengthen the institution of ‘family’ for the revival of its primary role i.e. to take care of its older members.

With growing years, widowed women’s lives become more problematic—socially/culturally and economically— if they do not have any pre-planned security measures (such as property/money/home etc.) of their own. Considering the linkage between the life-course experiences of women and their impact on women’s lives there is a need for devising term measures for securing their lives both in their younger and later years. Although there are a few welfare measures, that are oriented towards widowed women, such a help is not sufficient because of their assorted differences. Hence, there is a need for stronger interventions to deal with the problems especially pertaining to their economic, social and health issues in addition to their overall wellbeing of widows and women in general, with its implications on their life as they grow old.

Following are some of the suggestions based on the findings of the study:

- Life-course circumstances have a great bearing upon the different phases of women’s lives. With reference to successful aging the immediate task is to provide an equal socialization process for men and women from childhood in terms of equal opportunities across various spheres.

- Economic independence of women is very significant for leading their old age life with few financial problems. This can be achieved by providing them with an access to education and employment like in the case of men. Education being an important indicator of social change that elevates the status of
women, providing educational opportunities for girls is important from the viewpoint of securing better jobs and economic security for them.

- Giving women the right over property both at the natal and in-laws family is essential for ensuring their economic independence. This can help women in terms of economic security at different stages of life, especially during the widowhood period or at a time when they are deserted by kin in the old age.

- Women remain economically productive to the household in some way or the other throughout their lives. Their contributory role to the household becomes much more important when they lose their husbands with dependent families. Considering the ‘widowed feminization of ageing’ remaining productive by the old widows is significant. Therefore, old widows/women (or those old women who are in need/willing to work but have no options) can be seen as a target group. They can be provided with certain employment opportunities that are with in their reach and skills. Viewing them as a productive resource will not only give them a platform to live with dignity and support in their old age but also their contribution may reduce the burden of household responsibility, especially in the rural areas where many families live in poverty which inhibits children to take care of their old parents.

- In view of the rural society being under transformation, the issue of old age within the family set up is becoming more complex due to both external and internal factors. Hence, there is a need for secondary old age care services for looking after the old in near future especially pertaining to their recreation and employment generating activities. Construction of Old age home in villages may not bring desired result, as many of them will not be using it partly because they cannot associate themselves to the concept of staying in old age home though their family stays nearby. Even if few are willing to live, then the infrastructure of old age homes built in villages does not allow them to do so. In such a case, such facility can be converted to a place where all the needy old/widows can meet and spend their time reducing their psychological issues and simultaneously also remain engaged in some kind of employment taking care of their economic security in a better way.
- The provision of better health care security for the old also becomes an important issue considering the increasing age with a higher life expectancy and the old living for more than eighty years. Thus more effective and low cost health services are a must especially for old women and widows in the rural areas. It is observed that many people in the rural areas delay their treatment due to the non-availability of best services or because they are poor or are not able to bear the cost of such modern health facilities.

- Thus, for the old a mix of support and services is required that can overcome, in the long run, their living and dependency requirements.

Widows are trying to rebuild their social position in the household as well as the community. It is important as they have lost their ‘social identity and position’ in the family following the loss of their husbands considering the fact that their status remains associated with one’s male partner in the family and society. In view of the structural and social changes taking place and the increasing importance of the economic capability of a person in day-to-day spheres and the value of being productive in the present society, widows are striving to be economically secure and productive to ensure their social security and position in the family. However, it is also relevant to mention here that their struggle at this stage of their lives can be attributed to the reason that as ‘Women’ they always remain tied down in the form of gender based discrimination- forced traditional norms, silence towards their problems, illiteracy, ignorance towards their welfare rights/programmes and so on. Hence, if they are freed from these bondages with respect to positive opportunities available to them since early years of their lives then they will have freedom with power to lead their lives in a much better way within the family structure with or without one’s husband- in younger as well as their later years.

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