CHAPTER-VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
CHAPTER-VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present study is concerned with the understanding of the status of widows in rural India—a study undertaken with a view to finding out the problems and changing status of the widows. And it is hoped that it will provide an insight into life of widows in rural society.

The incidence of widowhood brings a lot of changes in women’s life. The consequence of becoming widow is sorrowful stage for the women, as this phase of life is not accepted fully by the society and at the same time the widow is not permitted to change the status. In the social stratification women are in the lower stratum and within it the widows occupy the lowest position as they are prohibited to move in the mainstream. The status of the widows largely depends upon the socio-economic background of the widows. The attitudes towards widows are yet to be changed and for this the prevailing prejudices are to be wiped out from the society.

The present study has analysed the life of 300 widows drawn from 10 villages of Dharwad district. In the last two decades Dharwad district has been developing rapidly in all spheres—educational, cultural, administrative and in other ways too. Its population is assuming a heterogeneous form, consisting as it does of people of various communities, castes and creeds. After reorganization of district in Karnataka on November 1st 1998 the
Dharwad district become small in size and population and now consisted of five taluks. Agriculture, trade and marketing are main occupations in Dharwad district.

The sample of 300 widows were selected from simple random sampling method and the major tool used to collect information was interview schedule. It consisted of five main sections and has yielded significant results in the various areas of investigation. The findings of the interview have been analysed, discussed and conclusions drawn, as stated in the preceding chapters.

Our investigation begins with the profile of the field and the sample. The profile of the field included an account of demographic and socio-economic composition of the field- Dharwad district. The explanation of these compositions is based on the facts obtained through secondary sources.

The profile of the respondents included mainly their age, religion, caste, occupation, educational level, type of family and monthly income etc.

The findings regarding demographic and socio-economic characteristics of widows is as follows:

The findings regarding age composition of widows revealed that a majority of the respondents were in the age group of 31-40 years. More than \( \frac{3}{4} \) th of the respondents are Hindus (84.34 per cent). Middle caste respondents are in significant majority (53.33 per cent). Lower caste occupy the second place (21.33 per cent).
As regards occupation of the respondents, the findings show that a majority of widows (44.67 per cent) are daily labourers and (38.67 per cent) the agricultural labourers are the second largest category and 9.66 per cent are working in their own land. A majority of the respondents (46.66 per cent) are illiterates and 41.00 per cent having primary education and 12.34 per cent have secondary education. With regard to the type of family before and after widowhood, majority of the (71.67 per cent) respondents belonged to joint families before their widowhood, but the number of joint families has decreased after widowhood. At the time of present study 65.67 per cent widows belonged to nuclear families.

The findings of the study revealed that the death of the husband makes changes in the status of women. A majority of the widows (48.00 per cent) have lost their husbands in their middle age and they felt helplessness and insecurity after the death of their husbands.

The findings with regard to the deceased husbands revealed that a large number of husbands did not receive good treatment due to their low level of literacy, low level of income and lack of medical facilities in rural areas.

In the absence of main bread winner widows have all the responsibility of running the family and taking important family decisions. It is observed that a majority of the widows followed the occupations of their deceased husbands.

The findings revealed that the social and economic problems of widows have increased after the death of the husband, but at the same time it increased their work participation in economic activities.
With regard to the emotional status of the widows, the study revealed that in rural area, irrespective of their caste, age, occupational status, widows have low level of emotional status.

In the present study the respondents living in joint family are more happy and content with the emotional support of family members. Over half the number of widows had indifferent health and feel loss of love and affection and lack of social security after the death of husband. They have lost their mental peace and spent many nights without sleep. They feel unhappy and restless in their day to day life and they depended on their friends for getting emotional support. They have been facing humiliation like taunting and illtreatment by their family members.

The findings regarding the cultural status of the widows clearly show that a majority of the respondents had an average cultural status. They became more religious and follow the strict rules and regulations of their caste and religion.

The participation in religious activities is less among the upper caste widows as compared to middle and lower caste widows. They perform daily prayers and fasts. The findings pertaining to the child-rearing practices of widows revealed that they have been facing a number of problems in bringing-up of their children. The average number of children per family is less than three which incidentally proved that they became widows at young age, that is, between 20-30 years.
The traditional belief of son preference and discrimination against female children is evident in the present study. They have more male children than the female; and their daughters are more illiterate than their sons they arranged marriages of their daughters at very early age.

With regard to the self perception of the widows the findings revealed that they considered themselves as more useful to their family and children.

They have become more religious than before. Though they feel loneliness but they try to live happily with their children and other family members.

CONCLUSION

What with the changes that have come about over the passage of time from pre-historic Bharat through foreign occupation to the modern politically independent India—wide-spread literacy particularly of women, the growth of public conscience recognizing that the wife is not merely dependent but a companion and partner of her husband in life’s journey, the present day acceptance that every women is an individual and not a non-entity and, therefore, she has a right to happiness and to lead her own life—all these have brought about a substantial change in the life of every woman. But the life of widows has not changed much. They continue to suffer from humiliation (being considered inauspicious), economic hardships resulting in insecurity and the lowering of social status, and the loss of emotional support resulting in personal loneliness.

The Hindu higher castes (widow marriage is common among Christains and Muslims) have prohibited marriage, the middle castes, except some, have
frowned upon it and the lower castes allow it. Widow marriage has always been looked down upon though social reformers beginning with Raja Ram Mohan Roy have encouraged it. Today it is not looked down upon though it has not yet become popular or common.

In this study the respondents became widows before they were 20. Probably late marriages would be a solution to this problems. Since women in India get married off to men who are invariably older, and sometimes much older, than themselves.

There is no denying the fact that economic hardships are, comparatively speaking, easier to bear and conquer than others. In the Hindu religion widows are really an unfortunate lot. With the joint family system disintegrating into nuclear families, the burden of life for a widow becomes worse. In a joint family a widow is still a member of the family with no economic problems or social loneliness. She is looked after by the other members and the children of her close relatives become in a way her own. But in a nuclear family a widow is on her own, all by herself, unless she has young children to be taken care of or grown-up children who can take care other.

The Hindu social code looked down upon widow marriage as though a widow marrying again implies disloyalty to her first husband, who was superstitiously believed to be waiting in heaven for his wife to rejoin him. It was stupidly believed a widow was inauspicious because she must have been born under evil stars and therefore, lost her husband and would bring bad luck to others, if she took part in a marriage or present at some religious ceremonies.
It is a problem worth pondering over as to why most of the widows are not too particular about marrying again in spite of the difficulties—social, economic and emotional—they find themselves in. Hindu women, particularly those who are illiterate and who come from rural areas, have imbibed with their mothers' milk that everything in life is fore'ordained or pre-destined and nothing can change it. To such persons a sense of stoicism and acceptance comes naturally. It is, therefore, no surprise that in spite of 83 per cent of them admitting that they are lonely without their husbands, 93 per cent of the widows consider themselves essential to their family, 66.34 per cent useful to their children. 78.66 per cent have a favourable attitude towards their neighbours and 64 per cent of them have no fear of the future. It comes as no surprise that only 17 per cent of them are in favour of re-marriage.

Those who prefer to remain widow and lead an independent life should be treated as a valuable and viable part of society and those who honestly feel that they should get married again should be made welcome without prejudice by women who have been fortunate enough not to lose their husbands. Every one has the birthright to live as she likes as long as her activities are in accordance with her conscience and the constitution of the land. Until the widows come out of their old out-moded way of thinking that they should be loyal, as long as they live, to their dead husbands and learn to live their own life and be true to themselves, they should be treated as human beings, which they are. And they should continue to be treated as human beings if and when they get married.