CHAPTER VII
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Poverty is a pervasive problem throughout the world. The problem is worst in the parts of the world where the economies are stagnant and the populations are continuously increasing. While this is so, even the richest countries are rarely free from the existence of pockets of poverty. The problem is very complex, diverse, pervasive and also persistent in some countries like ours. Poverty is therefore a subject which requires an understanding but yet not an easy one. An understanding of the problem requires a clear knowledge of the root causes, its spatial and inter-temporal dimensions, its effects, and its possible solutions. Only after gaining such knowledge can we effectively address the problem. To understand its true nature it necessitates a search to obtain the knowledge bases which are empirically tested, free from prejudice and bias. A vast literature on poverty has already been generated. However, since the problem of poverty is diverse, the studies of poverty can as well be diverse and such studies can also bring out diversified results. Our present work is the study of poverty among the rural households selected from two districts of Mizoram who entirely belong to the Schedule Tribes. Our study is based on limited samples of poor households and it is neither a longitudinal research. However, as information about their actual social and economic conditions is personally collected from them, important findings specific to their locality and occupation are derived. The findings are based
on the methodology of our study and these findings are relating to their poverty and its depth, intensity, severity and its manifestation on the income, occupation, employment and consumption etc. The capability failure of the poor is also investigated and the results of the investigation are also illustrated. The causes of poverty and people’s participation and effects of poverty on the people based on two issues are also dealt by the study. A brief summary of the study which is entirely related to the sample populations is listed as follows:

1. The rural populations of the poor largely depend on agriculture and the type of agriculture that they practice is the jhumming system. The majority of our sample populations are jhum farmers. 83 per cent of our sample households in Mamit district practice jhumming and 72 per cent of our sample households in Lawngtlai district practice jhumming.

2. Jhum farming, which is practiced on hill slopes have the disadvantage of low productivity and low employment. As the system is done on hill slope only for one year and without irrigation, no other improved techniques of agriculture are applied. Crop rotation is not possible and long gestation crops cannot be grown. Because of these features, the employment generation capacity of jhumming is very limited. The structural low employment and the low level of productivity create and generate low income and hence poverty.
3. Since the main occupations of the poor are unproductive, they diversify their livelihood by looking for subsidiary income sources. But owing to poverty, the poor have only limited access to other sources and these are determined by their physical environment, poverty alleviation schemes of the government, the demand for labour by private employers particularly in industries and construction.

4. The rural poor belonging to the Casual Labour category are often bypassed by employment opportunities under development projects because the contractors usually mobilize labour in advance from outside the villages.

5. As a whole, the sample poor populations in both the districts receive 55.73 per cent of their income from their main occupation, 22.44 per cent from subsidiary sources, and 10.6 per cent from forest produces, 6.59 per cent from the sale of domestic animals, 4.55 per cent from loans and grants and a negligible 0.32 per cent from farm output. This indicates that the poor diversify their livelihood extensively within the available options, and the forests are important sources of livelihood which contribute a tenth of the poor people's income.
6. While forests and natural resources sustain the livelihood of the rural poor, the poor contribute to the degeneration process of their natural environment because of the system of their occupation and growing population. They acknowledge this but they are equally resentful of the activities of the non-poor for deforestation and its impact on of their environment.

7. The average per capita income within households of the sample population in Mamit district is higher than that of Lawngtlai district but the inequality of income is less severe in Lawngtlai district than in Mamit district.

8. The Aggregate Poverty Gap among the sample is higher in Lawngtlai district than in Mamit district. This means that poverty is deeper among the sample households in Lawngtlai district and it requires more resources in Lawngtlai district to bring the sample poor out of poverty than it is in Mamit district. Likewise the Average Poverty Gap and the Normalized Poverty gap are also higher in Lawngtlai district.

9. The Poverty Intensity Ratio at 0.38 is higher in Lawngtlai district than the poverty intensity of Mamit which is 0.36. And the poverty burden ratio of Mamit district is twice that of the ratio in Lawngtlai district.
10. Severity of poverty in Lawngtlai district is twice that of Mamit district, based on the per capita annual income and consumption and as measured by severity indices.

11. The level of inequality in income and consumption among the sample of poor populations that we studied is not significant as measured by the Gini Coefficient. Our study therefore does not support the hypothesis that there is a high level of inequality among the poor.

12. Poor people as a whole spend a large proportion (58.5 per cent) of their income on food. The food requirement proportion is so large that it leaves very little room for saving and improvement of the level of living to the poor. This supports our hypothesis that the poor spend a large proportion of income on food.

13. The average household size among the sample in Lawngtlai district at 6.96 is clearly higher than that of Mamit district which is 4.92. It can be concluded that poverty and household size have a positive relation as seen from earlier results of poverty measure and family sizes. In other words, the sizes of poor families are usually large and vice versa.
14. There is a significant rate of illiteracy among the poor in both the districts. The rate of illiteracy in Lawngtlai district at approximately 38 per cent is higher than that of Mamit district which is approximately 24 per cent. The overall illiteracy rate of both the districts is 32 per cent. The overall female illiteracy is 37 per cent and male illiteracy is about 28 per cent. The spatial difference of poverty results and data of illiteracy supports the hypothesis that poverty and illiteracy have positive relation. In other words illiteracy is rampant among the poor people.

15. The most important reason of illiteracy among the samples is their poverty stated by them as family problems. The positive relation between poverty and illiteracy is confirmed by verbal responses of the households and statistical data.

16. Among the sample families, there is a low level of human development as indicated by the high level of illiteracy, low level of skill for alternative employment and high prevalence of diseases and poor sanitation. The low level of human development is a cause of poverty among them.

17. The capability poverty of the sample population is revealed further by the high percentage of illiteracy especially the female illiteracy, low level of
electrification of the houses, the unsafe and inadequate sources of drinking water, unhealthy cooking fuel used, poor quality of the type of toilet used by the poor, and high disease prevalence. In support of our hypothesis, it is observed from the samples that there is a significant incidence of capability failure.

18. Poverty of the rural populations is attributed to the occupation and as the majority of the populations in our samples are jhumming farmers the cause of their poverty is brought into effect by the cyclical phenomenon of bamboo flowering and disastrous signs associated with it. The survey year being the year of bamboo flowering, the jhumming families are found to be greatly impoverished by the incident. The incidence deprives them of their own food grains production and compels the jhum farmers to earn income from alternative sources to buy nearly the entire requirement of food grains.

19. Besides the structural unemployment, the unemployment is cyclical in nature. The Jhum farmers’ annual employment days are shortened by crop failure and its disincentive to farming activities as a result of ‘Mautam’. Whatever amount of labour they put in for jhum farming is gravely unproductive because of the incidence. The employment days of other few households belonging to different
occupation are also shortened by the failure of agriculture because the incidence pushes or marginalizes many workers out of jhumming and these marginalized farmers compete in the other jobs which have limited opportunities. In short, there is a low level of employment among the rural poor and it is concluded that low level of employment in rural areas generates poverty and specifically, the situation of low employment and low income is most pronounced among the jhumming families and the Casual labour families.

20. The growing population has a negative effect on the productivity of jhumming by shortening the jhum cycle of the jhum lands and increasing distance of jhumming plots in rural areas. On the other hand, the population growth through its effect on urbanization and increasing privatization of land by the urban people in some rural areas also negatively affects the livelihood of the rural people. At the household level, a larger family size decreases the availability of food grains within the household and the larger sized families usually have more dependents than smaller families.

21. Based on the information of the growth of urban population in Mizoram, the rural populations are undoubtedly the influx of population in urban areas, because the natural rate of increase cannot be solely
ascribed to the high level of increase of urban population. Hence it is concluded that the rural non-poor migrate to the urban places but the rural poor do not migrate to urban areas as migrating to urban areas requires financial and human resources which the poor cannot afford. And our study does not support the hypothesis that poverty leads to rural-urban migration.

22. The sample households depend chiefly on the public provision of food grains or the public distribution of food grains. Since all families reported that they have two meals a day and since all families reported that they depend on the PDS food grains, it is inferred that the public distribution of food grains is the most effective instrument of ensuring food security for them. This supports the hypothesis that public expenditure is instrumental for poverty alleviation because without the government expenditure incurred on subsidies, procurement, and distribution of food grains under PDS, the fate of the poor in rural areas of Mizoram will be beyond imagination.

23. The poor are also benefited by other poverty alleviation schemes of the government such as wage employments. But these serve to alleviate poverty to a lesser degree as they could get only a limited number of employment in terms of man-days.
24. The poor people lack own initiative to come above poverty line. They are unorganized, and do not show any sign of associating themselves to fight against poverty or poverty generating forces. Cooperative societies and self help groups are not formed by them. They just wait for the provision of wage employment opportunities from the government and they do not create long term opportunities by themselves. Therefore the participation of the poor in poverty alleviation is found to be weak, and without their own participation, poverty is bound to persist among them for many years to come. This severe lack of participation has its root from the low level of literacy and low level of skill and training among them. The absence of dissemination of information about the opportunities, lack of bank in rural areas and high handedness of the banks to the poor do not encourage the active participation of the poor towards rural development.

25. Some positive features of the rural administration which is learnt from interviewing the village council members are that the Village Council is taking up the responsibility of selecting beneficiaries of wage employment schemes and wage distribution to the beneficiaries. And the village council members have been given training on various schemes of the government involving health and education for the rural people. The village council members also
responded that they formed Village Education Committee and Village Health and Sanitation Committees. They also replied that they received Untied Fund for the functioning of the Village Health and Sanitation Committee of their villages. These Committees are newly introduced, but it is likely that they will have positive implication on the human development of the rural populations in the near future.

The following few points of conclusion drawn from the study may be added. These points are policy indications which are found to be applicable to the areas and population of all the poor in the study areas. These are as follows:

1. As poverty is a result of low income and low employment, it is necessary that more employment opportunities should be created by full implementation of the poverty alleviation schemes. If the poor were actually given 100 days of employment by the government as the rules of the current scheme- NREGS stipulates, it would considerably lower the problem of poverty in the rural areas.

2. As the growing population has an effect of compressing the land use and environmental degradation and as it further leads to poverty, family control or family planning policies are still necessary
to be implemented among the rural population as well as the urban population.

3. The occupation of a majority of the population in rural areas is jhumming agriculture but since this system is unsustainable, their occupation should be supplanted by settled cultivation system. Making terrace cultivations on convenient hill slopes should be patronized or encouraged by the government. This will not only prevent the yearly destruction of forests by jhumming families, it will also prevent soil erosion. It will also ensure long term productivity by means of application of irrigation and other technology. The settled nature will also ensure protection against destruction by rats and other pests. The government can also provide incentive and support to those who adopt such method. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme can be utilized for the construction of terraces on hill slopes so that the short term and long term benefits of the employment under the scheme can be received by the rural poor.

4. The rural poor lack housing facilities. It is necessary that the housing scheme for the rural poor, the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) be continuously implemented. We may suggest that the full amount of sanction for the construction of houses be utilized for the beneficiaries because it appears that there is uneven utilization of the fund between beneficiaries as seen from the
uneven quality of the houses constructed under this scheme.

5. The poor lack electricity even when the village is electrified. This is because of their poverty and poor housing. It is of urgent necessity that the government of Mizoram should rapidly and fully implement the scheme for electrification of rural houses— the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran (RGGVY).

6. Full implementation of Rural Water Supply programme is also needed to improve the living condition of the poor and to reduce the problem of their lack of social service in this regard. The Accelerated Water Rural Water Supply Programme, a component of the Bharat Nirman has to be urgently implemented to cover all villages of Mizoram.

7. The rural poor are also in need of health support. The National Rural Health Mission has to be given full swing implementation. The medical personnel working in rural areas have to be increased. The functioning of National Rural Health Mission has to be improved. The village level workers working on voluntary basis have to be given more incentives or their services regularized. Since these people are actually residing in rural areas they are likely to be loyal to their fellow villagers at their work and remain in their work without demanding transfer to urban areas.
8. Illiteracy is high among the rural population and many illiterates are adults; female illiteracy is even higher, and since illiteracy and poverty are interrelated, it is imperative that adult education programme be implemented in the rural areas. The programme can be incorporated in the Sarva Sikhsa Abhyan (SSA). The Village Education Committee (VEC) also has to take notice of problem of adult illiteracy among the rural poor and the function of VEC has to address the problem. And a massive education programme, specific to the adults should be carried out to remove the problem of illiteracy.

9. Road connectivity is still very poor among the villages that we studied in Lawngtlai district. Among the ten villages included in our sample in Lawngtlai district, only five villages are connected by all-weather roads and that too are not in a good shape. The remaining five villages are connected by only fair-weather roads. The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) scheme has to be implemented in full earnest not only to ensure fair weather connectivity but to ensure all-weather connectivity.

10. Banking network and banking facilities are very weak in rural areas of Mizoram and as a result of this any involvement of the banking sector for development of the poor, is not seen or heard among the poor
households that we study. It is clearly indicative that rural banks have to be established on a wider scale in rural areas of Mizoram to provide the necessary credit to the needy for starting alternative means of occupation or self-employment especially among the rural poor.

11. People sometimes fall in and out of poverty line meaning that many of the poor are transient poor. Those non-poor who are in the periphery always have a good chance of falling below poverty line. Even if the poverty alleviation schemes successfully bring people to cross the poverty line, it is not certain that they will remain above poverty line forever. To prevent such slip back, the government should provide follow-up schemes for those people in the rural areas.

12. The church and the Young Mizo Association did have a role in the distribution and collection of relief to the victims of Mautam. But beyond relief they should also play an important role in bringing the poor above the poverty line by supporting the government in matters of educating and sensitizing the poor people. The church can organise programmes for the education of the poor on the available schemes of development meant for the poor. Other NGOs can also cooperate in this regard and they can also be acting as countercheck bodies against dishonest political and bureaucratic activities.