Till the middle of the present century, the economic progress of nations continued to be conceived of as a trend increase in their national and per capita incomes. The distributional questions involving economic disparities remained rather ignored. During the second half of this century most of the newly liberated underdeveloped countries also opted for the western development policy under an illusion that growth would promote employment which would, in turn remove poverty. India was no exception to this belief.

In early seventies it was realised that during the early phase of planned development the extent of disparities in wealth and income increased, unemployment remained unabated and mass poverty had no tendency to decline. With a view to reducing economic disparities the development strategy was reoriented to emphasize growth with social justice or equity. Accordingly, the existing area-based programmes of rural development were supplemented by the target group-oriented approach. How far different regions and cross-sections of population differ in terms of gains of development, can be properly understood by examining the extent of economic disparities among them. Keeping in view the fact that regional disparities in the levels of development ultimately get reflected in the differences in economic conditions of the people in different areas, the
present research endeavour makes an modest attempt to examine the disparities in the household assets, employment, income and levels of consumption in respect of different categories of rural households belonging to the progressive and less progressive development blocks.

The study has been divided into six chapters. Chapter I is intended to serve as a background. Besides giving a brief account of the economic inequalities in the process of development, it outlines the broad features of the economy of Himachal Pradesh and the region under study. It also makes a brief mention of some important related studies and ends with the statement of objectives of the present study. Chapter II deals with the research design comprising of the concepts used, sampling of households and tools of analyses. Chapter III provides the socio-economic characteristics of the households in the progressive and less progressive areas. The distribution pattern of household assets and disparities therein have been analysed in Chapter IV. The patterns of income and employment have been dealt with in Chapter V. The pattern of consumption and disparities in the consumption expenditure form the subject matter of chapter VI. The important conclusions emerging from the study and suggestions are contained at the end of this work.

I express my deep sense of gratitude to Dr. N.K. Sharda, for supervising this research work.
I also express my sincere thanks to my distinguished teacher, Prof. L.R. Sharma, Chairman Department of Economics, for his sustained encouragement and guidance during the course of this research work. My thanks are also due to Dr. Dalip S. Thakur, Associate Professor, Department of Economics for his valuable comments and timely guidance. I put on record my sincere thanks to Prof. J.P. Bhatti. I am grateful to Dr. K.C. Sharma, Assistant Professor in Economics for his useful suggestions at the stage of analyses of data. I am also thankful to all my friends who helped me at different stages during my research work.

I am also thankful to the respondent households who spared considerable time to make available the requisite information to me. The co-operation received from the staff of government departments and libraries is also acknowledged with sincere thanks. My thanks are also due to Mr. Jagdish Thakur for typing this thesis with great interest and patience.

Finally, it is my utmost duty to place on record my debt of gratitude to my parents for their material, moral and financial support during the entire period of this research work.

Dated: 31.1.1994

(Mohinder Singh)