SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This is the final chapter of the study in which the researcher enumerates the findings along with policy prescriptions for eradication of poverty. Generally, poverty affects slum dwellers because of their poor purchasing power to satisfy their needs. Policy makers across the country have been devising many methods to eradicate poverty but still it is quagmire. India is one of the fastest developing economies where the poverty ratio has been substantially reduced during plan periods. However, a considerable portion of her population still below poverty line. A sizeable reduction in the magnitude of poverty has been one of the major objectives of planning in India. Though the country has made remarkable progress in the growth of per capita income and GDP, the level of poverty base generally was increasing.

In the early phase of our planning process, the planners hoped that the attainment of economic growth would eliminate poverty, by the working of the so called 'Trickle down' theory which implies that the benefits of growth would automatically reach the poor. However, the history of Indian planning has proved that most of the developmental activities have hitherto bypassed the really poor in the country. Hence, it becomes imperative that conscious and determined efforts are made and suitable programmes implemented for the poor, so that the benefits of growth would percolate significantly to the really poor of the country.
In recognition of this fact, in the second phase of Indian planning, specific programmes have been directed towards the poor. However, owes to many constraints these programmes could not make a major dent on this front. There are two main concepts of poverty widely in use: Absolute and Relative. The poverty line also differs according to the concept of poverty used. In India, the concept of absolute poverty is quite important and hence the extent of poverty has been measured on the basis of absolute poverty. According to this, poverty can be measured using the yardstick of a poverty line which in turn can be on the basis of per capita income/per capita expenditure/per capita calorie-intake collectively or separately. Once the poverty line is fixed, the next step is that of arriving at an appropriate index of poverty. Here, we have gone a long way from the traditional measures of Head Count Ratio and Poverty Income Gap to Sen's Index. Although there are numerous variants of Sen's index of poverty (on the basis of axiomatic framework), it is widely used in poverty measurement.

A review of existing studies on poverty in India shows that the extent of poverty varies from study to study and from region to region. However, all the studies have established that the incidence of poverty is very high in India. Further, these studies are largely concerned with measuring the extent and incidence of poverty from a national perspective, conveniently ignoring the wide inter-regional and intra-regional differences which are very conspicuous in a large country like India which still remains an enigma to economists. These macro-level studies have been made on the basis of the data supplied by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) and other official documents. Further, these studies have made use of the national poverty line without
considering the regional differences in their poverty line. Again, from a policy point of view, what matters more than a mere understanding of the incidence of poverty is the identification of the determinants of poverty at the regional levels.

Numerous studies have been made to study the extent of poverty and a comprehensive and scientific study on poverty is yet to be studied. The neglect of poverty determinants by academicians seems to have resulted in a misdirection of anti-poverty measures implemented in the country. Further, in this dynamic world, the determinants of poverty are likely to vary from time to time, and across apace. Hence, even a study which claims to have exhaustively accommodated all the possible determinants, is likely to become out of date with the passage of time. This calls for a detailed study of poverty measurement at regional level. Based on this the study examines the influence of multiple factors on poverty at the regional level still remains generally incomplete and imperfect in India and particularly in Chennai City.

Against this background, an attempt is made to identify the characteristics of the poor and the determinants of poverty in the Chennai and their variations. The study has taken a household comprising of varying number of members. For the selection of 800 households, 300 from North Chennai, 300 from South Chennai and 200 from Central Chennai, the stratified multi-stage random sampling method was used. The information was collected personally through a schedule which covered the various aspects of a household and their living conditions.
6.1. Summary of Key Findings

The study showed that the majority of the poor households belong to the Hindu community; however, it is not a reflection that other religious groups, Christians and Muslims are relatively affluent, but it only shows that the vast majority of the households in these regions belong to the Hindus. The majority of the poor belong to the Schedule Caste community, although Backward and Most Backward communities’ households occupy a noticeable position in Chennai. Thus, the study confirms the fact that the predominant sections of the poor belong to the lower castes.

The bulk of the poor households in Chennai live in rented houses, own their houses, most of them live in houses given free by the government. The structure of the most of the houses is thatched houses. In Chennai, a majority of the houses have two rooms and a separate kitchen, provision for toilet and electricity. Further, a remarkably high percentage of households in the regions are deprived of their own sources of water. Thus, the housing facility of the poor is somewhat better.

Although the size of the family is quite large in all the three regions, it is larger in North Chennai. The dependent population is higher in North Chennai than South and Central Chennai. Most of the poor are in the active age group in all the regions, although this proportion is higher in North Chennai. Thus, the study shows that poor households have a larger family, a high dependent population and a majority of members in the active age group.

The poor households in all the regions do not own productive assets like land, Motor bikes. The average per capita income is also lower in North Chennai
than South and Central Chennai. Hence, it can be safely concluded that lack of productive assets, especially of land, and possession of meager assets are an important characteristic of the poor.

The average per capita calorie-intake is very low in all the regions and it falls quite short of the minimum requirements. But the per capita calorie-intake is lower in North Chennai than South and Central Chennai. The largest contribution to calories is from cereals in the regions, it being higher in South and Central Chennai. Consumption of pulses and nuts, and meat, egg and fish is quite low in the regions. However, consumption of pulses and nuts, vegetables, spices and beverages is greater in North Chennai than South and Central Chennai, while it is somewhat more in the case of milk and milk products, edible oil, fruits and spices in North Chennai than South and Central Chennai. This is largely due to the difference in the food habits of the people.

Out of the total expenditure of the poor households, food accounts for about 53 per cent in all the regions, while the remaining 47 per cent caters to non-food items. The higher level of non-food expenditure has been detected on account of the expenditure on liquor, fuel and light, marriages and other ceremonies, clothing and medicines. A vital finding is that the proportion of non-food expenditure is almost equal to food expenditures.

The average per capita expenditure (food and non-food) of the poor in North Chennai is higher than other regions in Chennai city. However, the average per capita expenditure on liquor and addiction, and entertainments is higher in North Chennai than in other regions. Altogether, the per capita expenditure of the poor is much higher than that of the average per capita income
in all the three regions. Thus, the study points to the fact that poverty line should take into account food expenditure as well as non-food expenditure in measuring the incidence of poverty. This is because those who are not poor in terms of calories will be poor in terms of shelter, clothing, fuel and light, etc. Further, drinking is rampant at least among a few poor households.

Although 35 per cent are poor in terms of per capita expenditure about 45.7 per cent are poor in terms of per capita calorie-intake. In terms of subjective criteria of poverty - according to the perceptions of the poor, almost all are either poor or destitute. This shows that the incidence of poverty will vary from one poverty line to another, further pointing to the need for different poverty lines.

The poor households feel that their poverty is due to unemployment, poor earnings and bad habits like drinking and careless spending and they console themselves that it is their fate. Quarrels are common among the poor and it is largely due to drinking and financial difficulties.

The poor do not have the feeling that the government is for their betterment, as they believe that government jobs and public services are more advantageous to the rich. Although a majority of them approach government hospitals for treatment, they are not able to get proper treatment owing to their poor financial condition. They have the feeling that the poor are not properly cared for by government doctors. Health officials have visited and sprayed preventive chemicals in the poor households of Chennai. Their poor economic condition has made them discontinue their education. However, the majority of the poor are in favour of sending their female children for higher education.
Among the poor in the regions, some have migrated in search of employment and it has resulted in improving their standard of living. Sterilization is very common among the poor in all the three regions. However, the poor do not follow birth control devices of a temporary nature. Infant and child mortality are very high among the poor of both the regions.

The Regression Analysis was used to identify poverty determinants shows that in terms of per capita calorie, the determinants of poverty are: 1) per capita income, 2) dependency ratio, 3) size of the household, 4) per capita expenditure on food items, b) cereals, c) pulses and nuts, d) milk and milk products, e) edible oil, f) meat, egg and fish, g) vegetables, h) fruits, i) spices, j) beverages, k) food in the open market, and (5) proportion of expenditure on 1) fuel and light; m) clothing and n) toilet articles to the total expenditure.

In terms of the difference between actual and required per capita calorie, the common determinants are: 1) per capita income and 2) per capita expenditure on a) food items, b) food in the open market, c) cereals, d) edible oil, e) meat, egg and fish, f) vegetables, g) spices, b) fuel and light and i) toilet articles. Specific determinants for North Chennai include 1) nature of family and 2) per capita expenditure on a) ration shop items and home-grown, Those for Pondicherry include 1) per capita area, 2) dependency ratio, 3) average days worked in a week, 4) per capita debt, and 5) per capita expenditure on a) pulses and nuts, b) milk and milk products, c) fruits, d) sugar and salt, e) beverages, and f) entertainments.
In terms of per capita income, the common determinants are: 1) per capita calorie, 2) per capita difference between actual and required calorie, 3) size of the household, 4) average wage rate, and 5) dependency ratio.

6.2. Policy Implications

The major policy implications emerging from the study are; the poverty determinants vary in accordance with differences in the socio-economic, demographic and political characteristics of the poor between regions and areas. Consequently, the policy makers should consider these variations in the determinants of poverty while formulating anti-poverty programmes. Hence, the prescription of uniform policy measures is inadequate and instead these programmes have to be formulated specifically to the regions and areas.

The Public Distribution System has to be made more effective by providing better quality products and with more items and the rules regarding the supply of these items have to be liberalized to make the poor purchase them on a daily basis.

The determinants of poverty vary according to the poverty line which points to the need for different poverty lines even for measuring the incidence of poverty. Further, it also indicates the need for different poverty lines, particularly for regions and areas giving more or less equal weightage for food and non-food items.

In the end, poverty should be removed from its labyrinth and poor people are to be brought up from the clutches of poverty. This can be done through creation of more employment opportunities, increased provision of education
and health facilities, safe drinking water, improved sanitation condition and
nutrition, better housing and variety of related social and welfare services.
Moreover, the steps should be taken to improve economic and social
infrastructure in the slum areas of Chennai city.