PREFACE

The present study proposes a geographical analysis of the nature and conditions of the slum and pavement dwellers of Calcutta, suggesting at the same time the viability of improving their conditions in the near future.

Slum dwellers are defined as those who have municipal addresses and live within the slums registered under Calcutta Municipal Corporation within 1 to 90 wards. It is observed that these slum-dwellers try to settle nearest to their places of work with a view to minimizing their transport expenses. Now, pavement dwellers are labeled as those who do not have any municipal addresses and live mainly on the pavements of the metropolitan cities, undersides of the bridges, courtyards of religious places, hollows of large empty pipes etc. Their daily course—from cooking and bathing to even sleeping—is carried on in open space in front of public views. They tend to be concentrated in certain congested areas of the city where they can get jobs easily, i.e. near railway stations, dockyards, big wholesale markets as well as in Central Business Districts (CBD) and the like.

Calcutta has been specially chosen as the area of study for several reasons. Firstly, nearly 50% of population of Calcutta Municipal Corporation live in slums. Therefore, the study of slums and slum dwellers cannot be overlooked. Secondly, it is the only metropolis of eastern India where population pressure is extremely acute because of national and international migration. These had substantially contributed to the intensity of the problem. Yet, for all that, the issue has been over years neglected or overlooked as far as policy matters are concerned and this has rendered the problem almost unmanageable at the present. Thirdly, the present researcher, being an inhabitant of the city, possesses some first-hand information, knowledge and experience of the problems of the city.

As regards to the nature of the problem dealt with in the present study is that the problem of slum and pavement dwellers is exclusively one of the developing countries, more specifically, it is a problem of urban areas mainly the metropolitan cities of the third world countries. Moreover, it is an urban housing shortage problem related to the low-income of the dwellers and issues out of their unwillingness to pay for housing, healthcare, sanitation and the like.
Why was this particular problem chosen, for instance? To answer this question now, the researcher proposes to underscore a few essential aspects. Among the basic human needs, namely food, clothing, shelter, education and health facilities are at the root of this particular problem which, however, is not a specific problem of a particular city like Calcutta - it is a major concern of all the major metropolises of the third world countries.

The researcher humble hopes that the present study would provide some kind of tangible help to the planners, the administrators, students, social scientists, social workers, voluntary organizations in the near future. Last but not the least, the slum and pavement dwellers may reap substantial benefit in the long-run.