CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

During the past five decades since the beginning of the process of planning, India has achieved remarkable progress in all spheres. But a greater proportion of the increase in output and income has gone to a small section of the population. Consequently, the masses in India have witnessed very little improvement in their living conditions. Although the magnitude and causes of poverty vary from region to region, the incidence of poverty is widespread throughout in rural as well as urban areas. In the rural areas, the peasant cultivators with very small holdings, the landless labourers and the rural artisans are the worst affected categories. The income they earn is insufficient to support the family which is generally large. As a result, these people have very little to spend on education, health and housing. Generally the poor people live in deplorable living conditions and degraded environment.

It has been emphasised all over the world that adequate housing occupies an important role in the welfare of the people. No human being can lead a decent and honourable life in the modern society without proper shelter. In a way, housing reflects the general welfare of the individual, family and community as well as the society. Unsatisfactory
housing conditions lead to serious consequences such as diseases, immorality, juvenile delinquency and even wrecking of marriages. In the urban areas it leads to many problems like improper disposal of waste, inadequate sanitary conditions and lack of drainage facilities, etc. Apart from this, it also leads to problems like alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution and other illegal activities.

During the past five decades of the post independence era, the government has been taking various steps to augment the quantity and improve the quality of housing stock India. But the housing shortage has been growing because of rapid population growth on the one hand and decay of the existing stock on the other. According to recent estimates, millions of houses have to be constructed and upgraded in order to achieve the target of providing shelter to all in the rural areas.

The depressed classes, particularly the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who from about one-fifth of the country’s population, continue to live in abject poverty and destitution. Comprising mostly the segment below the poverty line in the economic gradation, the SCs and STs have to curtail even the necessities. As a result, they are unable to acquire pucca dwelling units with basic amenities and essential services. Consequently a vast majority of the Scheduled Castes have to live in deplorable environmental conditions and degranded environment.

As the SCs and STs are socially segregated and separated from the upper castes, they are forced to live in ghettos outside the villages.
generally called as colony. Having realised the deplorable housing conditions of the the Scheduled Castes, the government has formulated a number of housing schemes especially for them. It is true that these programmes have helped a large number of Scheduled Castes to get better shelter facilities. Nevertheless a sizeable proportion of them still continue to living in deplorable conditions without access to basic amenities and essential services.

Data show that the housing shortage in Tamil Nadu is more severe in the case of Scheduled Castes. In fact, a greater part of the shelterless population and a large proportion of those living in substandard units constitute the Scheduled Castes. Vellore is one of the poorest districts of Tamil Nadu. This district has a sizeable presence of Scheduled Caste population. The growing number of kutcha houses, inadequacy of basic amenities and essential services portray the deplorable housing conditions in Vellore district. The increasing pressure on housing, the deplorable living environment, increasing rate of shelterless population and above all the introduction of welfare measurers for the weaker sections, necessitated the government to introduce mass housing programmes. There are a number of rural housing programmes to motivate and help the people to acquire dwellings. Among these the Indira Aaways Yojana gives priority to rural SCs and STs as well as freed bonded labourers who from the socially disadvantaged and the poorest among the poor in the rural areas.
Analysis of data show that significant progress has been made in improving the housing facilities of the Scheduled Castes in Vellore district. But many still continue to suffer from poor housing conditions and deplorable living environment. Although there are a few studies which through light on the housing conditions in rural areas, there is scarcely any empirical study on the housing conditions and living environment of the Scheduled Castes in Vellore district. The present study has been undertaken with the main objective of analysing the housing conditions and living environment of the Scheduled Castes in Vellore district. This chapter presents the summary of the findings of the study based on the analysis of information gathered from respondents' households through a sample survey, besides giving some suggestions to improve the housing conditions and living environment of Scheduled Castes.

The study has revealed that a large majority of respondents and the members of their households are employed as agricultural labourer and that only a few of them are involved in the cultivation of their own land. Lack of education and skill is the prime distinguishing feature of the rural poor, particularly the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Although a significant proportion of the respondents are literates, most of them have only limited schooling. Most of the respondents stated that they had to withdraw from school to engage in income earning pursuits in order to support their families. Most of the respondents reported that they are able to get work only for limited number of days. Only during the agricultural seasons they are able to get regular work.
A vast majority of the respondents reported that their earnings are irregular and as a result they are not able to meet even the basic requirements and essential services. Most of them reported that they have to borrow even for their daily sustenance during the seasons in which they have no work. They also stated that many of them have become indebted due to borrowing at high rates of interest for meeting the day to day consumption expenditure as well as for conducting functions and ceremonies. Consequently, they have very little to spend on education, health and housing. Analysis has revealed that the housing conditions of the respondent households are poor and inadequate in terms of availability of basic services. Their houses are very small in size and not sufficient to accommodate even a small family. The houses are built with low ceiling with inadequate sunshade and it is very difficult to live in the summer. In order to improve their housing conditions especially in group housing, the height of the ceiling, separate kitchen, adequate sunshade deserve top priority. This would improve the housing conditions of the scheduled caste and enable them for a better livelihood.

The study has shown that group houses provided by the government are generally very small to accommodate the large family. Nevertheless, the group houses provided by the government are considered to be better than the own houses that are in non-group houses. Therefore, according to the information provided by the respondents, in the absence of any other alternative, they want the group housing scheme to be continued. The occupants of the group houses expressed the view
that the roof level should be raised besides making adequate provisions for ventilation. They also expressed the view that more space should be provided. Comparison within the sample reveals that education and income do not have much influence on their level of living. The study has revealed that across the four blocks there existed difference on socio economic status, housing facility, health and infrastructure facilities.

In India, rural housing in general is plagued by inadequate infrastructure such as safe drinking water, provision for the disposal of human waste, drainage, easy access to power, road, transport and communication and the poor Scheduled Caste people suffer most due to lack of such infrastructural facilities. Good infrastructure is an input to maintain good health. A comparison of the mean value of the health and infrastructure index show that the group houses are provided with better facilities than the non-group houses. This confirms that group houses provide better living condition, which, in turn, produce better conditions. Therefore, the government can boost this programme with adequate and livable infrastructural facilities and create employment opportunities within the areas and it will lead to social development with better quality of life to the rural inhabitants, particularly to Scheduled Castes. This does not, however, indicate that the group houses provided by the government are considered as adequate. But is the absence of any other alternative for the poorest sections, the group houses are considered by the respondents as a better means of dwellings for them.
Suggestions

Based on the above findings, a few suggestions are presented below to tackle the problems of housing facilities for the Scheduled Castes.

1. Measures have to undertaken for increasing gainful employment opportunities to ensure regular earnings and income thereby enabling the Scheduled Castes people to build their own houses.

2. Layouts with infrastructural facilities may be laid and free house sites may be allotted to the Scheduled Castes; and housing loans at low rates of interest may also be provided to them.

3. Agro-based industries may be developed wherever possible and in other places cottage industries may be encouraged to increase employment opportunities.

4. Measures may be undertaken to promote animal husbandry, poultry, horticulture, and floriculture with a view to provide supplementary income earning opportunities.

5. Group housing schemes should be modified to make the dwellings more comfortable by providing pucca ceiling with RCC roof and separate kitchen.

6. Repair and maintenance charges should be given to both the group householders and non group householders.
7. Steps may be taken to construct group houses for all the houseless people with minimum basic amenities in a gradual manner.

8. There is a need for separate Corporation for supply of raw materials, furniture, and equipments in the block level for the better implementation of group housing programmes.

9. There must be a provision for conversion of thatched houses into pucca house through house loan scheme with subsidised rate of interest.

10. There must be a provision for community workshop both agro and non-agro based in the rural areas.

11. Community agriculture farms should be created for the rural landless labourers with locally available resources.

12. There is a need for separate National Rural Housing and Habitat Policy for the upliftment of the rural houseless people in general and Scheduled Castes in particular.