Preface

Most third world countries are becoming increasingly urban in recent years and their proliferating slums constitute the most important and persistent problem of their urban life. The condition of the slums which represent focal points of urban poverty, have direct impact on the living condition of not only their residents but also on residents of the cities by deteriorating the urban environment. In India, slums are increasing at a rapid pace with the spread of urbanisation over the last few decades. While no Indian City today is free from slums owing to a heavy exodus of population from rural areas, the problem seems to be more acute in the metropolitan and larger cities. Although the huge slum population to a great extent influences the social and economic environment of the city, the below – dignity level of existence of the slum dwellers has not been treated adequately in the literature. While the existing studies in this area fail to explain the complex socio-economic process causing the genesis and growth of urban slums, the information on slums and squatter settlements that is found at present is also felt to be inadequate for the purpose of urban planning. The kind of data that is available does not give a clear idea about the intensity of the problem in the city.

However, slums and squatter settlements, which until now carried with them a stereotype image with a negative bias, have started being recognised as significant contributors in shaping the growth of the urban economy. The hutment dwellers of the city not only represent the physical and human adjustment to poverty, they also provide a substantial part of the low wage labour force mainly to the tertiary sector of the urban economy.

Thus looking at the positive contribution of the slum dwellers in the cities and towns, one can realise that, these people constitute an integral part of the city economy. Unfortunately neither the state cares much about the poor who live in the slums nor does it make any genuine effort to
eradicate the causes of slums. Hence realising the seriousness of the problem of slum dwellers, a modest attempt has been made to study the economic condition of slum dwellers in the national capital (New Delhi) and a provincial capital (Bhubaneswar). The study attempts to highlight the economic condition of this underprivileged societal group who gets so little in return inspite of their significant contribution to the urban economy.

The study begins with a historical background of the growth of urban centres in India by comparing them with the urban centres in the European countries in the mediaeval period in order to establish the similarities and the contrast between the two. In the first chapter the development of the cities and towns in the colonial period as well as in the post independence period has been discussed at some length. The discussion extends to the second chapter where the efforts made by the government for the further development of the urban centres through the successive five years plans have been studied, with emphasis on the plan outlays particularly for the urban housing sector.

In the third chapter we look at the existing literature on slums both in the western countries as well as in the developing countries including India. The different theories regarding the origin of slums and the social characteristics of slum dwellers are also dealt with briefly in this chapter.

A field study of slum dwellers was conducted in 1995-96 at New Delhi and Bhubaneswar. The socio-economic background of the slum dwellers of our sample households in the two cities has been discussed in the fourth chapter in which the causes of migration of slum dwellers are also studied at length. The economic activities of the slum dwellers and their occupational characteristics are discussed in the fifth chapter. On the basis of the nature of their occupation the workers have been divided into three categories in order to understand their working conditions in detail. The study provides us the terms and conditions under which the workers have to work in the informal sector of the city economy. In this chapter an
attempt has been made to see the applicability of the existing relationship between the consumer worker ratio and the family labour force in the context of the slum dwellers.

Chapter six reflects the economic condition of slum dwellers by taking into consideration the income and expenditure pattern of the sample households. The environmental condition of the slums under study at New Delhi and Bhubaneswar gets reflected in chapter seven, which depicts the distressing features of habitation of the poor in a city environment. The study ends with a concluding note that shows the similarities and the dissimilarities existing in the standard of living of the slum dwellers in New Delhi and Bhubaneswar. We argue that there is little reason for comfort when it comes to the prevailing economic condition of the slum dwellers irrespective of the city size.