

# POVERTY IN CALCUTTA, 1950 - 1972

B. K. GUHA THAKURTA

Since the publication of the pioneering work by Prof. Dandekar and Prof. Rath<sup>1</sup>, many research workers have been interested in studying the level of poverty in the different regions of India. The present paper aims at making a similar study in respect of the city of Calcutta. It attempts at measuring the extent of poverty in the city during the period between 1950 and 1972 with the help of certain economic indicators.

## *Scope and Limitation of the Study*

In attempting to measure poverty it is first necessary to define poverty. For the purpose of an Econometric Study the definition should be capable of quantitative interpretation. A common approach in this regard has been to consider a person poor if his income falls below a certain limit. This limit, commonly known as "poverty line", is worked out on the basis of some predetermined criteria. Thus, the amount of money necessary to purchase the minimum quantum of food (measured in calories) required for the sustenance of an average individual can be taken as the income limit determining the poverty line. According to another approach the amount of money required for the purchase of a basket of goods which will be necessary to maintain the minimum standard of living of an average individual can determine the poverty line.\* None of these approaches is, however, above criticism. The first method becomes controversial as there exists difference of opinion among nutrition specialists regarding the minimum calorie requirement.<sup>2</sup> The second method necessitates the determination of the "optimum" basket of goods and this always leaves scope for difference of opinion. However, even after taking all these criticisms and imperfections for granted, the greatest practical difficulty with which one is confronted in the determination of the poverty line is the non-availability of suitable data on which the results can be based. In the ultimate analysis the criterion for determining the line of poverty, depends primarily on the type of data available.

## *Source of data*

The present study is based on the data thrown up in the course of a series of family budget enquiries undertaken by the Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, West Bengal, between 1950-51 and 1971-72. Data on the intake of food for people belonging to different income classes

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\* There may be other approaches. The two methods described here are illustrative.