2.1. INTRODUCTION

In India, though the concept of rural development has attracted the policy makers since pre-independence, however, it has been systematically addressed only since independence of the country. The intervention of Government of India in terms of launching various rural development programmes and schemes is remarkable in this regard. With more than 80 per cent of the total population of Assam residing in rural areas, many studies have been undertaken on different areas of rural development including the programmes and schemes taken up by the government for promoting rural development. But most of these studies have concentrated on the pre inclusive growth era. Only a few studies have tried to assess the programmes and schemes implemented in the era of inclusive growth starting from the eleventh five year plan. The present chapter reviews the literature on two such flagship programmes of Government of India, viz., Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act (MGNREGA) and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) with special emphasis on their role in the state of Assam in the era of inclusive growth.

The present chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is an attempt to briefly outline and review some of relevant studies related to the issues, pattern and process of rural development. The rural development programmes are mainly of four types (1) Programme for Self-Employment and Wage Employment, (2) Programme for Rural Infrastructure and Minimum Basic Needs (3) Programme for Social Security, and (4) Programme for Natural Resource Management. In the second section, an attempt has been made to delve into and review the major studies on implementation and impact of the programme called MGNREGA. In the third section, an attempt has been made to
highlight the studies which have explored the implementation and impact of programmes like the PMGSY.

2.2. LITERATURE ON VARIOUS ISSUES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Many studies have been conducted on different issues of rural development. Programmes and schemes adopted by the government are contributing to rural development. Studies related to different issues and pattern of rural development are reviewed in this section.

With reference to the term ‘rural development’, some studies have tried defining it in a comprehensive manner including the possible factors affecting the levels of living of rural poor, especially the marginalized, unprivileged and uninformed sections of the rural people.

Meenue J. (2010) in an article has viewed rural development as a simple concept which is more complex to define. Rural development is seen as a multi-dimensional concept, which involves all kinds of development in rural areas through collective efforts of the government and voluntary agencies in the country. In a country like India where majority of the population dwells in villages, national development becomes almost synonymous with rural development.

In a similar study Ploeg V. D. (2000) explains rural development as being “multi-faceted” in nature. The concept of rural development unfolds into a wide array of different and sometimes interconnected practices. It includes landscape management in rural areas, the conservation of new nature values, agro-tourism and organic farming. But World Bank defines rural development which is more comprehensive than the earlier definition of rural development.
Harris (1982) citing the World Bank definition of rural development where it is clearly specified as a strategy for improving the quality of life of the rural poor. According to World Bank “Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people the rural poor. It goes further to identify four major factors, namely, increased concerns about the persistent rural poverty; changing views on the meaning of the concept of development; emergence of a more diversified rural economy in which rural non-farm enterprises play an increasingly important role; and, increased recognition of the importance of reducing the non-income dimensions of poverty to achieve sustainable improvements in the socio-economic well-being of the poor. Thus, it is found that rural development focuses particularly on poverty, inequality and improvement of the quality of life of the rural people. Efforts at rural development do not yield any result without having a sustained source of income for the rural poor. Since rural development implies economic and social well-being of the rural poor, hence it is important to have a sustainable source of income for the rural poor. In this regard, Ashely C. and Maxell S. (2001) have shown that the rural poor should have sustainable source of income to maintain their present standard of living in the future. In order to make income of rural poor sustainable, there is no other option than to bring sustainability in agriculture as the rural poor are directly engaged in agriculture for their livelihoods. Unemployment is the major problem of the rural areas and to accelerate the pace of rural development it is mandatory to generate employment avenues for the rural poor.

In a study, Bartik J.T. (1995) shows that for growth of employment, development strategies should be designed to address the high unemployment areas more intensively than the low unemployment areas. Increasing local jobs should be the objective of a
development programme with increasing local tax base as the goal. Government cannot remove unemployment problem from the rural areas by merely launching the rural development programmes. Effective implementation of the rural development programmes is vital for generating employment in the rural areas. Effective implementation of rural development programmes would depend upon people’s participation.

According to Singh N. (2008), participation of the rural poor is essential for sustainable rural development. People’s participation in rural development programmes is likely to improve the outcome of the programmes. Regional disparity between rural and urban areas in terms of basic amenities of life and high employment opportunities in urban areas encourage the people to migrate from rural to urban areas.

Timmer C.P. (2005) in a study reveals that most of the population across the world live in rural areas but have migrated to urban areas in search of work which has historical evidence. The author also asserts that growth in agriculture productivity can not only reduce poverty but also can increase the income and employment in the non-farm sector causing more declines in rural poverty on account of multiple effects. Growth in agriculture productivity is the important measure to curb the migration from the rural to urban areas. Rural development programmes and schemes are contributing to rural development and trying to curb the unemployment problem together with addressing myriad problems of rural areas. In this regards, Jahan I. (2015) has analyzed both centrally sponsored and state sponsored rural development programmes for improving the quality of life of the rural poor. The study has been carried out in Uttar Pradesh. The study basically examines the physical and financial performance of both centrally
sponsored and state sponsored rural development programmes in Uttar Pradesh. The study finds that while the physical performance of some schemes is good but it has failed to bring about effective results in terms of dealing with the unemployment problem. A Group of Writers (2012) in their article entitled “Impact of MGNREGA on rural employment and Migration: A study in Agriculturally-advanced districts of Haryana” reveals that despite being a source of employment, the MGNREGA has not been able to check the migration from underdeveloped to developed regions because of high market wage rate. The study also finds that farmers owning large size of landholdings and more number of animals are not interested in participating in the MGNREGA programme.

From the above studies, it is clear that rural development is a strategy designed to improve the well-being of the rural poor, vulnerable and marginalized people. Thus, it is found that rural development focuses particularly on poverty, inequality and improvement of the quality of life of the rural people. Government both the centre and state should come up with well-designed schemes and programmes targeting these problems related to rural areas.

2.3. STUDIES ON VARIOUS ISSUES ON MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is one of the important flagship programmes of Government of India towards inclusive growth. This programme has been able to capture all sections of rural poor in villages by providing 100 days guaranteed employment in a financial year. Many studies have been conducted on different aspects of the Act. Some studies are related to women empowerment
through MGNREGA whereas other studies deals with issues like employment generated for social groups under MGNREGA, rural assets created under MGNREGA etc. Some studies are related to impact assessment of MGNREGA on rural areas whereas other studies deal with performance of the programme. A few studies on MGNREGA are reviewed here.

One of the important features of the programme is to ensure women empowerment by giving employment opportunities to the rural women under this programme. As per the guidelines of the Act, one third of the total employment should be generated for women. When women are gainfully employed, they are economically empowered. Das, D. (2012) in a study has shown that women participation in MGNREGA programme lead to women empowerment. By generating employment for women at fair wages in the villages, the MGNREGA can play a substantial role by empowering the rural women economically, and thus laying the basis for their greater independence and self-esteem. Women are benefitting from the programme as the programme offers one-third of employment to them. The MGNREGA has had a positive impact on employment generation of women. Hence, women participation in the MGNREGA programme is necessary for ensuring women empowerment.

Karthika, K.T. (2015) has shown that women participation, especially the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe have increased which in turn has helped to improve their economic condition and thus bring about women empowerment.

A similar study was done by De, U. K. and Bhattacharyya, P. (2011) in Morigaon district. The study tries to assess the level of participation of women in the much popular Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)
activities vis-à-vis their male counterpart where special provisions are kept for the increased participation of women. The result shows that women participation in unskilled work is high among backward communities. But due to lack of proper implementation of the programme including lack of work-site facilities, the programme has not succeeded to the extent desirable. Studies also show that women participation in unskilled work is inversely related to education.

Social groups like the SCs, STs and OBCs are the important beneficiary sections of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The MGNREGA programme offers more employment to the marginalized section. Keshlata (2014) has conducted a study to evaluate the development of the scheduled tribes through the MGNREGA. The paper concludes that the STs are economically and socially backward based on different development parameters like literacy rate, health indicators etc and are below poverty line. The MGNREGA has ensured livelihood security to the rural people and the ST households have also benefitted from the programme. Supporting this statement Dr. Kadrolkar, M.V. (2012) has drawn a conclusion from the study ‘An Impact Assessment study of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Karnataka’ that the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households have indeed benefited from the programme. Similarly, Gangadhara, Y.R. and Aswath, G.R. (2016) have conducted a study in Karnataka to examine the performance of MGNREGA. The study concludes that the employment status in the state shows that the MGNREGA has helped to provide employment to the marginalized groups.

Stina, K. Sarkar, A. Singh, R. and Singh J.S. (2015) have carried out a study on performance of the MGNREGA programme in Manipur. The study shows that the
programme has succeeded to provide employment to the backward communities. In terms of social category wise employment generation, the share of the backward communities and women is 69.58 and 42.37 per cent respectively. But the overall performance of the programme in terms of job and asset creation has not been satisfactory during the reference period. Asset creation under the MGNREGA is important weapon through which employment is generated for the vulnerable section of the society. Implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has come as a relief to the vulnerable sections of a society as it has created enough capital assets to get employment in future along with guaranteed wage employment. The same conclusion has been drawn on assessing the role of the MGNREGA in Barpeta district of Assam. Das, D. (2016) has shown that the programme has been working as one of the important means of employment generation for the marginalized and vulnerable sections in rural areas. However, Dr. Reddy S.M and Dr. Kumar P.S (2016) have argued that the programme has failed to provide the minimum working days to the marginalized sections in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. The study finds that the programme has failed to provide the minimum working days to the weaker sections of the society viz. the SCs and STs as per the guidelines of the Act.

The MGNREGA seeks to ensure livelihood security to the rural poor by offering 100 days guaranteed employment. When the rural people are able to get employment under the programme, it helps them to increase their expenditure on different heads of daily requirements. Thus it helps in improving the socio-economic condition of the rural poor. Thus, MGNREGA affects the social factors such as family status and livelihood, and economic factors such as income and expenditure of the beneficiary households which
in turn affects the socio-economic conditions of the beneficiary households (Khan, S.2015). In this connection, Kiruthia, E. (2017) has shown that most of the workers have savings account either in banks or post office, and it is only because of the impact of the different rural development programmes like the MGNREGA that this is a reality today. The study concludes with the view that the programme has succeeded in improving the socio-economic condition of the rural households.

Similarly, Pamecha, S. and Sharma, I. (2015) in their joint paper entitled ‘Socio-economic Impact of MGNREGA - a study undertaken among beneficiaries of 20 villages of Dungarpur district of Rajasthan’, shows that the programme has brought changes to the lives of the beneficiaries. The study concludes by stating that the MGNREGA has been successful in increasing the income of the rural poor by providing wage employment to the rural households of Dungarpur district.

Supporting the conclusion that MGNREGA has been successful in improving the socio-economic condition of the beneficiary households, Bahuguna, R. Pandey A.C. and Soodan V (2016) in their study entitled “A study on socio-economic impact of MGNREGA on beneficiaries in Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand, India” tries to figure out the impact of the MGNREGA on the overall economic and social development of beneficiaries in the district. The study finds that the MGNREGA has significantly improved the social and economic well-being of the rural poor in the district. Supporting this argument, Melkamu M and Bennor, K.R (2015) have shown that the MGNREGA programme has had positive impact on household expenditure in the study area. The programme has contributed to improving households’ monthly per capita expenditure. The study also concludes that family size, total annual income, farm
size and educational level are the determinants of the households’ participation in the MGNREGA programme in the study area.

A study was conducted by Supriya, Kumar, J. and Sarkar, P. (2011) in the in Burdwan district of west Bengal to examine the impact of the MGNREGA on rural poor who comprised of small and marginal farmers and agricultural labour. The study has shown that people belonging to the poor socio-economic strata have declined in the study area from the initial year of implementation and people belonging to the upper socio-economic strata have increased. Due to the positive impact of the programme, the people from the lower strata have improved their socio-economic condition.

The MGNREGA work is basically confined to land and water resources which include water harvesting and conservation, soil conservation and protection, irrigation provisioning and improvement, renovation of traditional water bodies, land development and drought proofing. Employment is being generated by taking up these activities under the MGNREGA. The programme has improved the socio-economic condition of the rural people by generating employment and income in Pauri Garhwal District of Uttarakhand (Negi. R.S, Singh S. and Dhanai R. 2015).

Panda, S. and Majumder, A. (2013) reveals that the MGNREGA is the silver bullet for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment. The study therefore, takes into account the improvements or changes brought in by the MGNREGA in the lives of the rural poor. The study concludes that the MGNREGA has been playing significant role for improving quality of life of the rural poor. The NREGA has brought changes in the life of the beneficiaries. But it also opined that the change that has been brought about by the NRGEA among the beneficiaries is temporary (Thomas, B. and Bhatia, R. 2012).
However, the programme has its own set of problems pertaining to its implementation and monitoring. Although there is a provision for 100 days guaranteed employment under the MGNREGA but such a practice is not found in the reality. Padma, K. (2015) in the paper entitled “Performance of MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh” assessed the performance of the MGNREGA programme in Andhra Pradesh. The study reveals that job cards have not been issued to 100 percent households and only a few households have completed 100 days employment despite availability of labour in rural areas. Again, Saikia, A. and Borah, A. (2017) have shown that livelihoods of the participants of the MGNREGA though have improved in the Kamrup district of Assam, the programme suffers from many limitations in implementation and monitoring.

Asset creation is one of the important features of the Mahatma Gandhi national Rural Employment Guarantee Act. In this regard, Shasikumar, T.P. (2013) has examined the performance of the programme in Karnataka. The state of Karnataka has observed considerable achievements during the implementation of NREGA in terms of employment generation and asset creation.

Good governance is vital for proper implementation of any rural development programme. There is a positive impact of good governance on employment generation under these programmes. Good governance comprises of participation, transparency, accountability, effectiveness& efficiency, and equity.

2.4. STUDIES ON DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA

The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana has been considered as one of the most important government interventions in the field of rural infrastructure development.
Different studies have shown that rural connectivity has improved with the launch of this flagship programme. The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana has transformed the rural economy from the state of backwardness into an advanced economy. The impact of improved rural connectivity created by the PMGSY programme on key areas of rural economy has been widely acknowledged in different studies. In this section some studies are reviewed.

Improved rural connectivity directly and indirectly affects the health, education, transportation and agriculture sectors of the connected habitations. In this regard Gahlot, V. (2010) has shown that the impact of improved rural roads on the connected habitations in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan has been profound. The study found that improved rural connectivity resulted in better access to transportation, health and education facilities in the connected habitations of the sample districts. Parida, A. (2014) carried out a study in Puri district and concluded that improved rural connectivity has also improved the socio-economic condition of the people in the connected habitations. The main findings of the study are – (i) women have started coming out of the private domain and are actively participating in various social activities, (ii) the PMGSY project has given rise to a much needed transport system, (iii) the all-weather roads have offered safe, smoother and quicker mobility round the year without any resistance. Therefore, the quality of life of the rural poor is also affected by the improved rural connectivity created by the PMGSY. Parida, A. (2014) in yet another study has captured the importance of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana programme in improving the quality of life of rural people. The paper observes that road connectivity is one of the many factors that influence change for development. There are several other factors which are at work simultaneously including resource
endowment, political factors etc. Therefore, it is often not possible to establish a causal relationship between road connectivity, and social and economic changes in its area of influence.

Similarly, Dr. Samanta K.P (2015) in the paper on “Development of Rural Road Infrastructure in India” analyses some past trends and present practices related to rural transport in India. In addition to this, the study investigates the impact of rural infrastructure development on socio-economic condition of the rural population including the overall contribution to the Nation. The study finds that there is a positive relation between rural road infrastructure and socio-economic condition of the rural poor. Improved rural connectivity has provided better access to health, education, communication etc. which is important for improving the quality of life of the rural poor.

In this regard Jain P. (2014) in a study carried out in Madhya Pradesh observes that improved rural connectivity due to rural road construction under the PMGSY has improved the employment situation in terms of creating more job opportunities in the study area. Better access to health and education has been observed in the study area due to improved rural connectivity through the PMGSY.

Supporting this statement, Sampath R. and Murugan, D. (2013) have shown that improved rural connectivity brings prosperity to the connected habitations which in turn improve the socio-economic condition of the rural people. The study tries to quantify the possible impact of roads on socio-economic development of rural areas. The study is based on the analysis of data for nine districts to quantify the aggregate impacts. The paper concludes that the road construction through the PMGSY has positive impact on
rural areas. The findings of the paper have shown that improved rural connectivity through the PMGSY has increased agriculture production. Increase in fertilizer consumption and increase in non-agricultural activities are also observed in the study area. Access to health, education, bank and post office has improved due to improved rural connectivity through the PMGSY.

Another study by Singh G. (2015) in Bastar district focused on the role of the PMGSY for improving the quality of life of the rural people in the district. The findings of the study have shown that rural roads play a vital role for development of rural areas. The Ministry of Rural Development has undertaken many programmes for improving the quality of life of the rural people and the PMGSY is a unique programme in this case.

The MoRD (2015) in its study entitled “Impact Assessment Study of Improved Rural Road Maintenance System under PMGSY” has assessed the impact of rural road maintenance and examines whether the benefits from the construction of the rural roads have increased or not. The study has been carried out in four states viz. Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. The findings of the study show that rural connectivity and rural road maintenance have positively affected the connected habitations. The study also concludes that the impact of rural connectivity under the PMGSY on different areas of human development has been found to have improved in the study area. Agriculture is the main source of livelihoods of the rural people. Improved rural connectivity has positively affected the agriculture production and productivity. Lokesha M. N. and Dr. Mahesha, M. (2016) in the paper entitled “Impact of Road Infrastructure on Agriculture Development and Rural Road Infrastructure Development Programmes in India” has shown the importance of road infrastructure for agricultural development. The paper also analyses the rural road infrastructure
programmes in India. The study finds that the impact of improved rural roads on agriculture is positive. Agricultural production and productivity has increased due to improved rural infrastructure. Increase in cropping intensity and change in cropping pattern are also attributed to improved rural road infrastructure. Similarly, Majumder R. (2002) has found that transport infrastructure has positively affected the agriculture output level. By applying regression analysis, the study also concludes that the road infrastructure significantly affects production and productivity. Supporting the statement Dr. Patel A, (2012) in the study has shown that 15 per cent of agriculture produces is lost between farm gate and consumers due to poor roads which adversely influence the income of the farmers. Therefore, improved rural connectivity is the prerequisite for agricultural development. In this regard, government intervention in the form of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and Bharat Nirman seems to be appropriate.

P. Satish (2007) in the paper on “Rural Infrastructure and Growth: An Overview” explores the different issues of rural infrastructure and growth. In the first section of the paper, the author has explained that improved rural infrastructure raises the agriculture production and productivity which is prerequisite for rural development. The study also investigates into the growth of rural infrastructure in India since independence. The author shows that although many efforts have been put into place since independence for improving rural connectivity but the progress of road infrastructure has been remarkable only after the implementation of PMGSY. Dwada, N. (2015) has shown that improved rural connectivity is vital for agriculture development. According to the author, PMGSY road construction involves huge public expenditure in the form of PMGSY programme and it brings some social and economic benefits to the connected
habitations which include increase in agriculture production, change in crop pattern, better price for agriculture product, reduction in transportation cost, creation of new employment opportunities in agriculture sector and increase in production of dairy products. This study is an attempt to recognize how improved rural road connectivity can result in increasing agriculture production and more number of employment generations. The study also investigates the impact of PMGSY in the field of education, health, transport and urbanization. The paper concludes that improved rural connectivity provided by the PMGSY has led to a better transport system throughout the seasons.

Ahmed and Hossain (1990) in the study “Development Impact of Rural Infrastructure in Bangladesh” establishes the link between poverty alleviation and infrastructure development where the authors find that infrastructure leads to increase in crop income of the small farmers which in turn reduce poverty among small and marginal farmers. Similarly, Mukherjee D. (2012) in his study brings forth that improved rural connectivity brings some benefits to the people from the rural pockets. This improves the capacity to work which in turn helps to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life of the rural poor.

Improved rural connectivity is also imperative for industrial development. In this regard, A Group of Writers (2016) in the paper entitled “Impact Assessment of PMGSY on Construction Industry” explore the impact of road construction under the PMGSY on construction industry. In this paper, the authors have shown the importance of the PMGSY for construction industry by taking primary data from the state of Karnataka. The study concludes that there is a positive impact of road construction under the PMGSY on construction industry. The findings indicate 1.5 times increase in engineers employed by the contractors to maintain and monitor the quality of site. The capacity of
the contractors and rural road infrastructure agencies has increased significantly due to implementation of the PMGSY.

Improved rural connectivity has also improved the transportation system of the connected habitations. Upen K. (2014) has explored that that the implementation of the PMGSY in Assam has had a positive impact on rural transportation in Assam. But the author suggests certain changes in the government plans and programmes to fulfill its objectives. But proper implementation of the programme is necessary for acquiring more benefits for the programme. Malik, B. (2014) has explored the significance and importance of constructions of rural roads. The author explains that a revolutionary change in the rural road infrastructure has been observed since the year 2000 after implementation of the PMGSY programme. The study has shown that there are still some issues to address for successful implementation of the rural road programmes and projects. Some critical issues are decentralization of responsibilities, availability of relevant data, shortage of man-power etc. A study by Dr. Gupta A. (2013) observes that the progress of rural road construction is very slow in India but the efforts made by the Government of India and other international institutions would help to accelerate the process of development.

2.5. CONCLUSION

Most of the studies pertaining to the MGNREGA and PMGSY do throw light on the different aspects of the programme throughout India along with analyzing the impacts these programmes have been having on the rural gamut of the country. Most of the earlier studies have been project or programme centric focusing on the programme only. This study is an attempt to look at how interventions by the state through rural development programmes like the MGNREGA and PMGSY may impact the rural
households, socially as well as economically. In the light of the above review of literature, the present study is an attempt to look into these two programmes in the state of Assam.