In India Co-operation has been assigned a very important role in ameliorating the lot of the villagers, who constitute about eighty percent of the total population. Its role in rendering distributive justice is no less important. Originally co-operation in India was devised as an instrument to fight the evil of rural indebtedness; but later it has embraced other aspects, viz, production, distribution, service etc., in addition to credit. The First Five Year Plan pronounced 'The field of public co-operation becomes in fact co-terminus with national development.'

India is committed to democratic socialism. The twin principle of 'individuality and mutuality' of co-operative action fits well with the evolutionary and gradual process of democratic socialism. Social justice is one of the foundations of national development. Co-operation is one of the best means for achieving it.

But so far co-operation has been of limited success only. The All-India Rural Credit Survey Committee Report repeatedly said 'Co-operation has failed, it must succeed!'

The Thesis is an attempt to study the problems and prospects of Co-operatives in Assam. The work on the Thesis is prompted by a desire in my heart to do something genuine and concrete to my fellow brethren and to my dear motherland. I deem it a duty on my part to study the
problems that confront our society and offer solutions to these. The problems of low economic development, poverty of the people, exploitation and inequalities of income are at the forefront in our society. In my view cooperation can play a very significant role in solving these problems. So, I have chosen the subject 'Role of Co-operatives as an Instrument of Socio-Economic Progress in Assam: A Case study of the District of Sibsagar'. Co-operation if guided and managed well can be a powerful instrument in transforming the lot of the poor villagers of Assam who constitute 91 percent of the total population of the state.

I have chosen Sibsagar district as the Case Study, because this is my home district. It is also a duty on my part to focus light on the various aspects, such as, the economy, the people, potentiality for economic growth etc, of my native district. Intensive study of the problems and prospects of the district will throw light on those of the other districts of the state as well, since problems and prospects are very much alike varying in degrees only.

The methodology adopted in the study is Field Survey and compilation of data available from different sources. I have visited about 80 percent of co-operative societies of all the categories of the district. Officials of the Co-operative Department, functionaries of Societies, and Co-operators were interviewed. Every effort is made for objective assessment and for arriving at unbiased conclusions.
The First Chapter of the Thesis makes an analysis of the Aims and Objects of Co-operation. It also traces the origin of co-operation. The History of the Cooperative Movement in India is also studied at length.

In the Second Chapter the History of the Cooperative Movement in Assam is studied. A part of it also deals with the Co-operative heritage embodied in the Assamese Culture.

The Third Chapter analyses the development of Co-operatives in Sibsagar district. A thorough survey of the economy of the district also figures here.

In the Fourth and Fifth Chapters two case-studies have been made. Woka Tea Estate owned by Assam Tea Employees Industrial Co-operative Organisation Limited is studied in Chapter Four. Woka is the only tea garden in the co-operative sector in Assam. In Chapter Five Assam Co-operative Sugar Mills Ltd., is studied.

Chapter Six deals with the problems of Co-operatives in the district and Chapter Seven, with their prospects.

In the Eighth Chapter Conclusions are drawn and suggestions are offered.

It is my sincere hope that the study will reveal the problems and prospects of co-operatives of the district in their proper perspective. Further, I hope the suggestions offered will be helpful to the policy makers, officials of
the Co-operative Department, Co-operators and the people interested in co-operative development and socio-economic studies.

In the preparation of the Thesis, I have taken extensive help from different Books. Lavish use of the Reports of various Committees appointed by the Govts. of India and Assam is also made. Other Govt. publications also provide enough materials. Help is also taken from many Journals. I must record my gratitude to the Authors and Publishers of the Books, Reports and Journals I have used.

My Guide, Dr. A K Sarma, Professor, Business Administration, and Dean, Faculty of Commerce, Gauhati University, is to me a constant source of inspiration and of wise counsel. I acknowledge my heart-felt gratitude to him in guiding me in my work.

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