Majority of the Third World Countries including India are caught up in 'poverty trap'. These countries are subject to both absolute and relative poverty. In India, nearly 76 per cent of the people live in rural areas. They comprise marginal and small farmers, agricultural labourers, rural artisans and non-agricultural labourers. Half of the rural population are below the poverty line. Absolute rural poverty persists due to low incomes resulting from lack of asset base, absence of non-farm employment opportunities and low level of technology etc. Relative rural poverty results from skewed distribution of assets.

Several estimates have been made in India regarding the percentage of people below the poverty line. There have been variations in the different estimates of poverty. The Planning Commission in its Seventh Plan document stated that the proportion of people living below poverty line has gone down from 48.3 per cent in 1977-'78 to 36.9 per cent in 1984-'85.

A number of studies on Indian rural poverty have been conducted by institutions and individual scholars. Most of the studies were conducted at the macro-level based on secondary data as furnished by the National
Sample Survey Organisation and official documents. But, then, India is a vast country with different agro-climatic regions and different socio-economic conditions. Hence, the need for conducting a micro-level study to get a correct picture of the region-specific dimensions of rural poverty. The present micro-level study was conducted in two sample villages of a mandal in Anantapur (drought-prone) District of Rayalaseema region in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

For the present micro-level study, Chennekothapalli Mandal in Anantapur District was purposively selected. The villages in the Mandal were classified into i) IRDP, and ii) non-IRDP villages based on the implementation of Integrated Rural Development Programme. Two villages - one IRDP village (i.e. Nyamaddala) and one non-IRDP village (i.e. Venkatam Palli) were selected on random sampling basis. Sample households of non-IRDP village acted as 'control group' for making comparison on the dimensions of poverty with the sample households of IRDP village. And within the IRDP village non-beneficiaries acted as 'control group' for making a comparative study of the dimensions of poverty with those of beneficiaries.

The micro-level study was conducted keeping in view the objectives, viz. i) to study the socio-economic profile of the respondents both in IRDP and non-IRDP villages;
ii) to assess the extent of poverty in terms of the levels of income, assets, expenditure, debt and employment of sample households both in IRDP and non-IRDP villages and iii) to study the impact of IRDP and the levels of poverty among the sample households of both IRDP and non-IRDP villages.

Anantapur is a chronically drought-prone district in the state. It has 63 mandals. Agriculture is the mainstay of Anantapur economy. Around 80 per cent of the working population seek employment in the agriculture sector. Small and marginal farmers constitute nearly seventy per cent in the total size of holdings. The District offers meagre irrigational facilities. It is grossly underdeveloped in the matter of industrialisation.

Chennekothapalli Mandal in Anantapur District, under the present study, has under its jurisdiction eleven revenue villages and thirty three hamlets.

In order to get an insight into the dimensions of rural poverty, two sample villages viz., Nyamaddala village (where the Integrated Rural Development Programme was in operation) and non-IRDP village viz., Venkatampalli (Which is not covered by the IRDP). And within the sample IRDP village, the levels of poverty among the sample beneficiaries vis-a-vis non-beneficiaries were compared. Further, a comparative study of the nature and magnitude of poverty of
the sample households of IRDP and non-IRDP village was attempted.

An examination of the socio-economic profile of the respondents of both IRDP and non-IRDP sample villages revealed that 31 per cent of the respondents belong to 'backward caste', another 29 per cent to 'scheduled caste'. Respondents of 'scheduled tribe' constituted only 15 per cent. Majority of respondents were found in the age group of 31-40 years and 21-30 years. Eighty six per cent of the respondents had 'nuclear families'. Evidently the 'joint family' system seem to be on the wane in both the sample villages. A highest percentage of respondents had small size families. Nearly 93 per cent of the respondents were found to be married.

Education is one of the important variables of human resources development. The highest percentage of illiteracy prevalent in both the sample villages points to the fact that the educational dimension of human resources development has not received the due importance it deserves.

In both the sample villages, cultivators constituted nearly, 51 per cent, followed by 'landless labourers' (i.e. 25 per cent).

Shelter is one of the important basic needs. It
was found, that a highest percentage of respondents lived in 'rented' houses in non-IRDP villages as compared to respondents of IRDP village. Further, when we look at the distribution of respondents in IRDP, village, we noticed that the 'beneficiaries' were relatively in a better position in regard to the owning of houses as compared to non-beneficiaries. Again the possession of 'owned house' among the weaker sections of beneficiaries was high, as compared to the weaker sections of the 'non-beneficiaries' category. Further, we found that in the case of IRDP village, 43 per cent of respondents had 'pucca' houses as compared to 33 per cent with 'pucca' houses in non-IRDP village.

The percentage of unirrigated land constituted 48 per cent in IRDP village compared to only 23 per cent in non-IRDP village. On the whole, the percentage of irrigated land was found to be more when both the villages were considered together.

The average value of the total livestock asset was found to be same in both the sample villages. Further, the average value of the total durable assets of respondents in IRDP village was high as compared to those of non-IRDP village. On the whole, it appears that the total average value of household assets in non-IRDP village was found to be high as compared to IRDP village.
Income and consumption tests serve as the yardsticks to measure the levels of living of the people. Incomes of the households or persons are taken as indicators of assessing the levels of poverty. The levels of poverty of sample households in both IRDP and non-IRDP villages was assessed based on the criteria of per household and per capita incomes. In our study it was found that in the IRDP village the number of beneficiaries below the poverty line (i.e. all those households whose income was less than Rs.6,400) was found to be high in the category of 'cultivators' and 'landless labourers' as compared to the same category of non-beneficiaries. An equal number of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries were found below the poverty line in the category of 'rural artisans'. Besides, a slightly higher number of beneficiaries were found above the poverty line in the category of landless labourers as compared to non-beneficiaries of the same category.

Based on the yard-stick of annual per capita income, none of the respondents were found below the poverty line in the category of rural artisans and salaried job/petty traders. Further, we found that the number of sample households above the poverty line were found to be more among the beneficiaries as compared to sample non-beneficiaries.
Based on the occupational category, we find that the number of sample beneficiaries who were above the poverty line were found to be more as compared to the sample non-beneficiaries.

One of the major objectives of IRDP is to help the target poor beneficiaries rise above the poverty line we found in our study that the number of sample beneficiaries who were below the poverty line got reduced in the post-IRDP period as compared to pre-IRDP period. Further, we found that there was significant increase in the number of sample beneficiaries of 'SC and ST' category rising above the poverty line as compared to 'non-SC and ST'.

One noteworthy observation we made in our study was that the number of respondents in non-IRDP village, who were above the poverty line, were more in number in the category of 'non-SC and ST' as compared to the 'SC and ST' respondents. Obviously, the non-viable economic conditions and lack of institutional support services (in the form of IRDP) might account for it.

A comparison of the levels of poverty of respondents of both IRDP and non-IRDP villages revealed that the number of respondents who were above the poverty line were more in IRDP village as compared to non-IRDP village. Further, a
slightly higher number of respondents were found above the poverty line in IRDP village as compared to non-IRDP village points to the impact of IRDP on the sample beneficiaries.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the majority of rural households. Mulberry and groundnut are the major commercial crops which were found to be rewarding to the farmers. We found that the per acre net income earned by beneficiaries in regard to mulberry and groundnut crops was high as compared to that of non-beneficiaries.

On the whole, we found that the per household income of sample beneficiaries of IRDP village was found to be comparatively high than that of the respondents of non-IRDP village in the income range of Rs. 6001 and above. Further, a slightly higher per household income of sample beneficiaries as compared to that of non-beneficiaries points to the fact that the integrated rural development programme had had a positive impact on the beneficiaries vis-a-vis non-beneficiaries and respondents of non-IRDP village.

Low level of income and poor asset base seem to perpetuate poverty among the rural poor. A closer examination of the asset base of the rural poor reveals that cultivated land and fixed assets are the major sources of
income and employment. In order to get an insight into that nature of poverty, the pattern of asset distribution among the respondents of both the sample villages was examined.

It was found that among the respondents of both IRDP and non-IRDP villages, the share of 'land' in the total assets was high. Next in order came 'livestock' and 'other assets'. By virtue of being a beneficiary under IRDP, the sample beneficiaries were in an advantageous position in regard to asset base as compared to non-beneficiaries and respondents of non-IRDP village.

As compared to beneficiaries, per household asset value was found to be high in the case of landless labourers and cultivators among the non-beneficiaries. Again, we noticed that the per household asset value among cultivators in the category of non-beneficiaries was less as compared to cultivators in the category of beneficiaries. On the whole, the per capita asset value of all sample households was found to be high among the salaried job/petty traders and landless labourers.

The per household and the per capita asset value of beneficiaries in the caste category of 'SC and ST's' and 'non-SC and ST's' was found to be higher as compared to non-beneficiaries in the same caste categories. A slightly higher value of the assets of the beneficiaries points to the fact that there was a perceptible impact of the integrated
rural development programme as compared to non-beneficiaries. And unlike in the case of respondents of IRDP village, the average asset value of respondents in the category of 'SC and ST's' was high in non-IRDP village.

Next to the income and asset base of the respondents, we examined the expenditure pattern of sample households of IRDP and non-IRDP villages for meeting their basic human needs in terms of food, clothing and other necessities.

It was found in our study that the per household total expenditure on food was high in the case of IRDP village as compared to non-IRDP village. The consumption on vegetables and beverage (i.e. milk etc.) was found to be low among the rural poor irrespective of their background. Their main diet is rice and ragi. Obviously, their meagre income accounts for the low level of consumption.

Next to food, clothing is one of the important basic human needs. We found in our study that the per household expenditure in coarse and mill cloth was, more or less, same in the case of respondents of the sample villages. However, the per household expenditure on coarse cloth was found to be high in the case of respondents of non-IRDP village, as compared to IRDP village. Further, the respondents of IRDP village seem to be comparatively in a better position
in regard to consumption of mill cloth as compared to non-IRDP village. Besides, the monthly expenditure on clothing incurred by the respondents of IRDP village was found to be more as compared to the respondents of non-IRDP village.

The quality of human life is essentially dependent on the state of human health. Interestingly, in our study we found that the per household total expenditure on health was high in the case of non-IRDP village as compared to IRDP village.

Next to the physical will being, education is an important variable in the development of human resources. We found that the per household expenditure on 'secondary education' of the children was high in the case of IRDP village. On the other hand, except in the case of secondary education, the per household expenditure on elementary and higher education was high in the case of respondents of non-IRDP.

The extent of expenditure incurred on the services by rural households is an indicator of their level of living. We found that the expenditure incurred by the respondents of IRDP village on the services of washerman, barbers and tailors was high. Further, it was found that the per household expenditure incurred on cosmetics by the respondents of both the sample villages was, more or less, the same. In regard
to household expenditure incurred on miscellaneous items, except in the case of items such as 'travel' and 'asset improvement', the per household consumption expenditure on items such as 'rent on house', 'entertainment', 'smoking, liquor, repair of oil engines' was high in the case of respondents of IRDP village as compared to non-IRDP village.

One striking observation we made in our study was that the per household annual expenditure incurred on food by sample small farmers, both in the case of IRDP and non-IRDP villages in the income range of Rs.6,001 and above, was more or less, the same. And the lowest per household annual expenditure on food was incurred by both sample landless labourers among beneficiaries of IRDP village and respondents of non-IRDP village.

The per household annual expenditure incurred on total non-food items was high among the respondents in the income range of Rs.6,001 and above both in IRDP and non-IRDP villages.

We found that compared to the sample beneficiaries, the per household total consumption expenditure of marginal farmers among non-beneficiaries of IRDP village and marginal farmers respondents of non-IRDP village was high in the income range of Rs.6,001 and above. Further, compared to
beneficiaries of IRDP village, per household total consumption expenditure of small farmers, rural artisans and salaried job/petty trader respondents of non-IRDP village was comparatively less.

A break-up of the gross household expenditure of the respondents revealed that the respondents of IRDP village incurred more amount of expenditure on repayment of debts', followed by food, clothing,'other items' (including 'rent on houses' etc.) and health. Further, when compared to the respondents of non-IRDP village, the per household expenditure incurred on 'food', 'children's education', 'health' and 'other items' by the respondents of IRDP village was high.

The majority of the rural poor are indebted. They might have incurred debt either for meeting the domestic consumption requirements or for undertaking economic activities. We found in our study that non of the sample households in the non-IRDP village borrowed from institutional credit agencies. In the case of IRDP village, nearly 63 per cent of sample beneficiaries, as compared to only 54 per cent of non-beneficiaries, borrowed from institutional credit agencies. Further, we found that the average debt incurred per household among the beneficiaries was high for the purpose of 'sericulture' followed by sheep-rearing, purchase
of tyre carts, bullock-carts dairying seem to be not a paying proposition in the sample IRDP village as the average debt per household for the purchase of milch cows was lowest both in the case of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.

The average debt per household in non-IRDP village was found to higher than that in IRDP village. And it is in the case of 'sericulture' that the average debt per household was high, followed by 'sheep-rearing, 'bullock carts etc.' We found that average debt per household was found to be, more or less, the same among marginal farmers and landless labourers. Among the respondents of both the sample villages, average debt per household was found to be high among sample beneficiaries in the category of rural artisans in the income class of Rs. 6,001 and above.

It is generally said that the poor are caught up in the 'debt trap' under the adverse influence of the vicious circle of poverty. We found in our study that 60 per cent of overdues were incurred by the respondents of the IRDP village. Further, we found that 60 per cent of overdues were found in the schemes of 'business sector, sheep-rearing, tyre carts' etc. Again, it was found that the percentage of overdues incurred in the case of non-IRDP village was highest.

The Integrated Rural Development Programme is ex-
pected to create productive assets and subsequently the process of maintenance and operation of the assets would lead to additional employment generation. In our study, when we compared the potential employment and actual number of days employed per adult in both the sample villages. We noticed that the actual number of days employed by each adult in non-IRDP village was high (i.e. 250.96) as compared to that of IRDP village (i.e. 218.24). Further, the number of days unemployed as percentage to total number of days of employment in a year was found to be less in non-IRDP village (i.e. 4.93) as compared to IRDP village (i.e. 17.33). Evidently, it appears that the impact of developmental programmes in IRDP village was not highly significant. However, one striking fact we notice is that the number of days employed per adult unit is less than the annual potential employment per adult unit in both the sample villages.

We found that the average household employment was high in the category of 'SC and ST' beneficiaries as compared to 'non-beneficiaries. On the other hand, the average household employment was found to be high in the category of non-SC and ST respondents.

Number of earner members in a family is one of the contributing factors to the earning capacity of the family. Low work participation rate and unemployment are the indi-
cators of rural poverty. In our study, it was found that the percentage of dependents to total earners was high (i.e. 93.6 per cent) in the case of non-IRDP village as compared to 82.31 per cent in the case of IRDP village. Further, it was found that the percentage of total earners and the percentage of female earners to total earners was less in non-IRDP village as compared to IRDP village. Besides, a highest percentage of dependents to total earners were found in the case of non-IRDP village.

In a drought-prone District like Anantapur, the annual potential employment is estimated to be 264 days per adult labour. We found in our study that the respondents of both IRDP and non-IRDP were employed less than 264 days.

A panoramic view of the dimensions of rural poverty in both the sample villages reveals that the educational dimension of the human resources development has not received the due importance it deserves in both the sample villages. It is high time that the programme National Literacy Mission (NLM) be implemented in letter and spirit so that any successful attack made on the illiteracy of the rural masses will help awaken their awareness of the rural socio-economic environment in which they live, the dynamics of and constraints to development and motivate them to take an active participation in solving the twin problems that plague the
rural sector, viz, poverty and unemployment.

As compared to the respondents of non-IRDP village and non-beneficiaries of the IRDP village, the sample beneficiaries of IRDP village seem to be in a relatively advantageous position in regard to possession of a house of their own, and durable assets. Further, the observation that the number of beneficiaries of 'SC and ST' caste category could rise above the poverty line, in the post-IRDP period, as compared to the respondents of the same category in the non-IRDP villages testifies to the fact that institutional support services in the form of IRDP programme helps beneficiaries among the weaker sections become economically viable.

Despite the fact that the sample beneficiaries of IRDP village were relatively better than the respondents in other categories, it seem all is not well with the implementation of integrated rural development programme and its arrowed objective of waging an assault on rural poverty. The very fact that the actual number of days employed by each adult in non-IRDP village was high as compared to those of IRDP village points to the fact that the impact of development programmes was not significant in IRDP village.

In the light of our study, we suggest that a holistic strategy be implemented to wage a successful assault on the multi-dimensional problem of rural poverty. A scientific
identification of beneficiaries, (who are genuinely below the poverty line), a correct assessment of the level of education, dietary habits, status of health, ownership of assets, possession of personal skills, nature of employment would help in formulating holistic, micro-level planning for poverty alleviation and employment generation in the rural sector. An effective strategy for rural poverty alleviation should take care of the development of rural human resources in respect of health, nutrition, education, awareness-building, skill-formation, asset erection and its maintenance and employability. A bureaucracy/administrative machinery committed to the cause of upliftment of the rural poor and institutional structures for the effective promotion of peoples' participation in the formulation and implementation of grass-root level developmental programmes are the essential pre-requisites for making a successful dent into the problem of rural poverty.