CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
India is one of the oldest surviving civilizations and the biggest democracy in the world. It has a rich and diverse cultural heritage. India ranks second after China in terms of population, first in terms of cattle and buffalo population, and sixth in terms of geographical area. It has the world's third largest reservoir of technically trained manpower and is now one of the seven nuclear weapon states. Its mainland covers an area of 3.29 million sq. km. or 329 million hectares, measures about 3,214 km. from north to south between the extreme latitudes and about 2,933 km. from east to west between the extreme longitudes.1 In the new millennium, where the population has crossed one billion, India has achieved spectacular achievement to her credit on many fronts. In the agricultural field, the country is now not only a net exporter but also one of the largest donors of food to the world. In the field of Science and Technology, our country is on the frontiers of many areas like space, communications and information technology. In spite of this, India has not yet been able to fully develop and harness its human and natural resources for the benefit of the people, and the country has yet to solve its basic problems of illiteracy, poverty, unemployment etc. Our country has a large number of poor people in the world for which, eradication of poverty and unemployment, especially among the rural masses continue to be one of the major challenges and focus areas of national development policy. The challenge of the new millennium is to protect and develop rural areas which are the reservoir of strength for the nation. In the era of liberalization and globalization, the economy is doing well in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth with 9 per cent in 2005-06, followed by 9.2 per cent in 2006-07. Though there has been a fluctuation through 2008-09 to 2014, nevertheless, efforts are put in place to achieve higher growth rate. However, there has been a declining trend in the succeeding years, i.e. 4.35 per cent in 2012-13 and 5.41 per cent during 2013-14. In the field of employment generation and creation of rural infrastructure, the country has lagging behind. The classical medicine of 'trickle-down' theory has failed to arrest the persistent poverty and chronic unemployment. Perhaps no country in the world has invested so much time, energy and resource on employment

generation and achieved so little as India. After more than six decades of independence, India has the largest concentration of unemployed youth in the world where about 3.75 crore people are without any employment. It is observed that 48 per cent people in 12 states of India viz. Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Maharastra, Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh don’t get even two meals a day round the year. There are 45 per cent villages in India where people don’t get work for 6 months in a year and 20 per cent villages don’t have work opportunities for people in any form. Out of 260 million poor people in the country, about 200 million reside in rural areas. Around 100 districts are under constant threat of drought and semi-famine like situations every year.²

In fact, India’s economy is predominantly rural in character. Majority of the Indian people live in villages. India has the largest concentration of rural population than any other country in the world. The rural population largely comprises of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). In 1901, India’s rural population was 89.2 per cent (21.30 crore) and urban population stood at 10.8 per cent (2.60 crore) which increased to 72.2 per cent and 27.8 per cent respectively in 2001. In 2011, 68.85 per cent of the total population lived in nearly 6.38 lakh villages. The villages not only provide food grains to the nation, but also raw materials to the industries. In a broader sense, the country’s existence is largely dependent on the villages. Therefore, economic development of the country in the true sense means the development of the rural areas. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation had written long back on 29th August, 1936 in Harijan that, “I have believed and repeated times without number that India is to be found not in its few cities but in its 7,00,000 villages. I would say that if the village perished, India will perish too.”³

The socio-economic conditions of the vast number of rural people are dependent on agriculture which is the backbone of India’s economy. Agriculture contributes a major portion to our national income. In 1950-51, agriculture and allied activities contributed about 59 per cent to the total national income. In the post-independent period, due to growth of secondary and tertiary sectors, the share of agriculture has

declined gradually. However, the contribution of agriculture to national income still remains very high as compared to that of developed countries of the world. In 1960-61, the share of agriculture was 54 per cent which declined to 48 per cent in 1970-71, 40 per cent during 1980-81 and 23 per cent in 2004-05. But in the developed countries like the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), it is not more than 3 per cent.

Besides, as it were, agriculture is the primary source of occupation of the rural population. Agriculture provides not only food items but also employment opportunities to a very large extend. It is estimated that the agricultural sector supports more than half a billion people and provides employment to 52 per cent of India’s total workforce (2008). This means that agriculture is the main source of livelihood and employment for more than half of India’s population. In developed countries like the UK, the USA, Germany and Japan, the proportion of the population dependent upon agriculture has been declining continuously. In 1995, it was 2.1 per cent in the UK, 2.6 per cent in the USA, 3.0 per cent in Germany and 5.5 per cent in Japan, as compared to 61.6 per cent in India. The higher percentage of population dependent upon agriculture indicates the inability of the industrial and service sectors to absorb the incremental rural population.\(^4\) Therefore, it is worthwhile to mention that an all round development of rural India is impossible without the development of the agricultural sector. But notwithstanding its vital role in the enrichment of the economy, this has remained the most neglected sector in so far as 300 million of the rural people live below poverty line, about 30 per cent are homeless, millions are ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, ill-nourished, ill-educated and thus, lead a miserable life.\(^5\)

It is worth mentioning that, though agriculture is the primary source of occupation of the rural population, in due course of time it failed to provide sufficient employment to rural masses and unable to sustain the excessive population pressure. It was because of the application of age old and traditional techniques, the productivity became very low. In 1950-51, there were only 7 tractors, 62 oil engines and 16 irrigation pump sets per lakh hectare of gross cropped areas of the country. A very negligible amount of fertilizer (0.66 lakh tones in 1952-53) was applied on agriculture. Due to its low productivity, agriculture could manage only subsistence living to Indian farmers and

\(^4\) Katar Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
it was not at all commercialized.\textsuperscript{6} Besides, the size of the agricultural holding is being declined year after year leading to increase of marginal and small farmers. In 1990-91, the average size of operational holding was 1.5 hectares which declined to 1.3 hectares in 2000-01, 8.14 per cent rural families were landless and 34.26 per cent families owned less than 0.20 hectare of land. The continuous sub-division and fragmentation of agricultural land due to increase of population and break down of joint families resulted in increasing excessive pressure on agriculture. The encroachment of agricultural land by rising population has reduced land for cultivation. Consequently, the country has faced a serious problem of increase of agricultural workers. The total number of agricultural workers increased from 55.4 million in 1981 to 74.6 million in 1991 which constituted nearly 23.5 per cent of the total working population of the country. This increasing number has been creating the problem of surplus labour or disguised unemployment, which in turn is pushing their wage rates below the subsistence level.\textsuperscript{7} The higher growth of labour force has led to an increase in the volume of unemployment and under-employment in the country.

Thus, it is observed that due to lack of conducive atmosphere, the rural areas have been associated with poverty, unemployment, under employment and economic inequality. Even, they are deprived of the minimum basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health, education, clean water etc. They are half-fed, half-naked, of poor health and illiteracy swallowed by poverty, disease and unemployment.\textsuperscript{8} Observing the intensified poverty in rural areas our first Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru said, “After the attainment of independence our urgent task has been to devote ourselves to the economic betterment of our people, to raise their standard of living, to remove curse of poverty and to promote equality and social justice. The extent to which we succeed or fail in this great task will be measure of our achievement.”\textsuperscript{9} Therefore, the Government of India (GoI) after independence has given greater emphasis on introduction of anti-poverty and employment generation programmes in order to wipe out the problems faced by the rural masses.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid, p. 204.
\textsuperscript{9} Bharambar Beura, \textit{op. cit.}, pp 139-140.
Keeping this in view, right from the inception of Five Year Plans, the country has tried to tackle the problem of rural poverty and unemployment with the help of various anti-poverty and employment generation programmes by creating adequate livelihood opportunities for the poor. In fact, it is observed that the development of an economy has direct link with the expansion of its employment potentialities. Gainful employment of labour with adequate wage not only adds to raise their standard of living but also significantly contributes by way of increased capital formation and creating demands for goods and services which further pave the way for employment of surplus labour through productive channels. Thus, it also promotes the national income that is taxed to pay for public services, which again boost the standard of living.\(^{10}\) Therefore, one of the avowed objectives of each plan period was to achieve near full employment. However, these twin problems have been aggravated Plan after Plan. Despite more than half a century of planned development, the magnitude as well as the percentage of unemployment and poverty has on the rise. In 1971, the number of unemployed in the country was 18.7 million out of which 16.1 million unemployed were in rural areas and the rest 2.6 million were in urban areas. As per the employment data, the number of registered job seekers in India rose from 18.33 lakh in 1961 to 165.8 lakh in 1981 and then to 370.0 lakh at the end of March, 1994. The educated job seekers in 1961 were 5.90 lakh and rose to 230.0 lakh at the end of March, 1994 which constituted nearly 62 per cent of the total job seekers of the country. The incidence of unemployment increased from 5.99 per cent in 1993-94 to 7.32 per cent in 1999-2000. During 2005-06, the rate of unemployment jumped alarmingly to 9.2 per cent.

Side by side, the incidence of poverty continued to plague the Indian economy. In 1950-51, the rural population below poverty line (BPL) was 47 per cent which went up to 64 per cent during 1954-55. The rate of poverty declined significantly between the mid 1970s and the end of the 1980s. Between 1971-78 and 1986-87, the rural poverty declined from 51 per cent to 39 per cent, and then it went to 34 per cent by 1989-90. The proportion of population below poverty line in rural areas declined from 37.3 per cent in 1993-94 to 24.4 per cent in 2000-01 which again jumped to 28 per cent (302 million) during 2004-05 as compared to about 26 per cent in the urban areas.\(^{11}\) In 2005, the

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World Bank estimates that 456 million Indians i.e. 41.6 per cent live under the poverty line. The National Sample Survey (NSS) report on 21st March, 2007 reveals that among 110 crore of Indians, 30.17 crore live below the poverty line. The poverty ratio (based on the Monthly Per Capita Expenditure of Rs. 816 for rural areas and Rs. 1000 for urban areas), in India has declined from 29.8 per cent in 2009-10 to 21.9 per cent comprising 25.7 per cent in rural areas, 13.7 per cent in urban areas in 2012-13. In absolute terms, the number of poor has declined to 269.3 million with an average annual decline of 2.2 per cent during 2004-05 to 2012-13, of which 216.5 million reside in rural India. Thus, it is observed that the country is facing a chronic poverty and employment problem which has become a great concern for government and economic planners of the country.

Keeping the high magnitude of poverty and unemployment in view, the GoI has initiated a number of anti-poverty and employment generation programmes to tackle the problem of poverty and unemployment. The Rural Employment Generation Programmes (REGPs) aimed at providing additional and seasonal employment to rural poor and also a source to supplement their income. Both self-employment as well as wage-employment programmes have been implemented to eradicate galloping rural unemployment. However, till the 3rd Five Year Plan (1961-66), the emphasis was laid on maximization of the rate of growth of Gross National Product (GNP) and it would automatically 'tide down' to generate poor masses and enhance their income level. But no real and organized efforts were made to tackle rural poverty and unemployment through anti-poverty and employment generation programmes. It was only during the 4th Five Year Plan (1969-74) that the focus shifted from growth-oriented strategy to direct intervention to attack these problems. In fact, the slogans of “garibi hatao” (removal of poverty) and “growth with social justice and equality” were emphasized during the early 1970s to indicate clearly that the emphasis would be on the eradication of poverty and unemployment, not simply an increase in gross national income.

Therefore, in view of this situation, under self-employment programmes, as an integral part of poverty alleviation and employment generation, the GoI has

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12 Gyanindra Dash and Ranjan Kumar Sahoo (eds), op. cit., p. ix.
implemented as many as programmes such as Small Farmers’ Development Agency (SFDA), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers (MFAL), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA). These programmes were subsequently merged into a single programme called Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) in April, 1999 to enable the poor in rural areas to acquire durable community assets for supplementing their income with the help of bank credit and government subsidies that would promote standard of living.

Besides, to provide greater thrust to additional wage-employment to the rural poor on various public works, infrastructural development and food security in the rural areas, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Govt launched many ambitious new schemes like Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Food For Work Programme (FFWP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEG), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), National Food For Work Programme (NFFWP) etc.

In spite of implementation of so many programmes, the achievement in the field of employment generation is far below the target. Still, the number of people below poverty line has been alarmingly increasing. Death due to starvation is high in the country. Nearly one-third of the global poor resides in India and has been suffering due to starvation. The development strategies pursued have failed to make a dent in the problem of unemployment because the strategies have unable to understand the magnitude and complexity of the problems. Except a few exceptions, the performance of these programmes and projects has been disappointing. In fact, neither these have reached the poor nor have produced a sustainable impact on the targeted group. These programmes have been restructured and redesigned from time to time; however, the results are not up to the mark. The objectives achieved and benefits acquired under each of the programmes were not as expected due to various reasons. Most significant reason can be attributed to utter lack of involvement and participation of local people, for whom these programmes were evolved, in the matter of planning, implementation; monitoring-cum-concurrent evaluation. The top-down approach was the real culprit in this regard. In fact, all programmes were planned and implemented by the government agencies such as District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) and Block Development Officer (BDO).
But it has been generally alleged that the government officials are not sincere in the implementation of various Employment Generation Programmes (EGPs). Further, these labour intensive programmes could provide only some relief to the rural poor through short duration casual wage earning employment and provide some food security during the period of acute drought conditions.

The saddest comment on the execution of EGPs came from the former Prime Minister, Late Rajiv Gandhi. He admitted that less than 20 per cent of the funds earmarked under these schemes really percolate down to the people for whom, they are intended. S.R. Moheswari stated that according to a crude estimate, up to four-fifth of the total funds earmarked for rural development is absorbed by the instrument of development itself, namely, the rural bureaucrats.\(^{15}\)

Thus, it appears that various anti-poverty and employment generation programmes have failed to eradicate rural poverty and unemployment. The result is not up to the mark and failed to change the face of villages. The benefits of the programmes could not reach the deserving and the needy persons. They have only been the objects of these programmes, but the socio-economically and politically dominant classes of rural community have grabbed almost all the benefits derived out of the various EGPs. Further, these programmes could neither provide guarantee for regular employment, nor durable community assets could be created leading towards sustainable rural development.

Besides, right to work is not enlisted in our constitution as a fundamental right. However, it is enshrined under Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), Article 39(a) urges the State to ensure that the citizen, men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood and under Article 39(d), it has also been mentioned that there should be equal pay for work for both men and women. Further, it has been stressed under Article 41 that the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work. There was, therefore, an urgent need to ensure a certain minimum days of employment in the form of manual labour to every household in the rural areas.\(^{16}\)

In addition, an act of ensuring employment guarantee was felt in many quarters particularly in the Leftist Camp. Last 60 years of country’s independence, experience

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\(^{16}\) Surendra Swain, “Problems and Prospect of Rural Employment Programmes for Economic Development of Rural India”, in Gyanindra Dash and Rajan Kumar Sahoo (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 78.
shows, not to speak of Left Democratic Forces, the Congress Party itself was compelled to promise to enact laws which will shoulder the country's poverty and economic hardship of the rural poor.

Therefore, in view of this, the Indian National Congress (INC), on the eve of the Lok Sabha Election - 2004 had made a commitment in its National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) to enact an Act which will ensure employment guarantee to the rural poor. Accordingly, after formation of United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government at the Centre under the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh on 22nd May, 2004, the final draft of the NCMP was released on 27th May, 2004 and as its part, the UPA Government promptly legislated the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (henceforth NREGA) on 23rd August, 2005 which is popularly known as NREGA - 2005. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (henceforth NREGS) is a centrally sponsored employment generation programme which is the outcome of the merger of erstwhile poverty and employment generation programmes. In fact, the NREGS is new innovation and not merely a scheme or a programme. There have been numerous employment generation schemes in the past such as EAS, NREP, JRY, SGRY, NFFWP etc. Most of them failed to bring any spectacular development to the rural people. But NREGS is the manifestation of NREGA – 2005, an Act that provides a legal guarantee of employment. This places a judiciously enforceable obligation on the state, and gives bargaining power to the workers. In fact, the launching of this ambitious scheme has been guided by the success of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS), which has been implemented in the State for over last 30 years without declining to the demand for unskilled manual work. The UPA government enacted the NREGA - 2005, by taking into account the experience gained under the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) of Maharashtra, an outcome of a struggle for protection from poverty and unemployment, resulting especially from the massive drought of 1970-73. Numerous studies indicate that the implementation of the EGS by Maharashtra had an impressive impact on the employment as compared to other anti-poverty programmes in India. It is claimed by Maharashtra Government that EGS provided 70 per cent employment in the State in the year 1987-88. Taking a clue from the Maharashtra experience the National Advisory Council (NAC) proposed to enact a new legislation through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, 2004. The NAC did not stop at drafting the Act alone but it calculated that each man-day of employment
generated will cost Rs. 100 (wages) at 2004-05 prices. It includes roughly Rs. 60 as wages and Rs. 40 for the non-labour component including administrative cost. Then 100 days per household on an average is fixed as the benchmark for the initial extent of employment generation. Besides, the experiences gained from implementation of different wage-employment programmes such as NREP, RLEG, JRY, EAS, JGSY, NFFWP, etc. had also been taken into account while formulating the Act.

Statement of the Problem

The NREGS is one of the most significant interventions of UPA Government in the generation of rural employment in India. The NREGS is a landmark in the economic history of independent India which provides legal rights on employment to the rural citizens. The scheme, addressed especially to the problem of galloping rural unemployment, commands a position of an unparalleled significance in the amelioration of poverty and unemployment in the post-independent era. The NREGS is in fact, the manifestation of NREGA - 2005. The scheme is the boldest and most pragmatic approach of the Govt to rural unemployment which was ceremoniously launched on an all India basis in Bandlapalli village of Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh, on 2nd February, 2006. Initially, the scheme covered 200 most backward districts having high percentage of SC and ST population. An additional 130 districts were notified in the financial year 2007-08 and from 1st April, 2008, the remaining districts of the country have been covered under the scheme. During 2009-10 (on 2nd October, 2009), through an amendment the NREGA has been rechristened as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and as scheme it is known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

In fact, the NREGS was designed as per the NREGA - 2005 which provides a legal foundation of work to NREGS and the schemes are the means through which this guarantee comes into effect. The underlying objective of the scheme is to ensure livelihood security of the rural people by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to every rural household in a financial year whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual labour at a statutory minimum wage. Apart from this, the work guarantee can also serve other objectives such as generating productive assets, protecting

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the environment, empowering rural women, reducing rural-urban migration and fostering social equality among others.\textsuperscript{18}

The NREGS is essentially a wage earning scheme introduced for eradication of poverty and unemployment of the rural masses. Any adult above 18\textsuperscript{th} year in rural areas, who applies for work under the NREGA-2005, is entitled for employment in public works within 15 days from the date of application. In case of failure to provide employment within the stipulated time, unemployment allowance is to be borne as per the rule fixed by the state government. Of course, the entitlement of unemployment allowance is not obligatory to an applicant who does not accept the employment provided to the household, or if the applicant does not report for work within 15 days of notified period by the concerned Programme Officer (PO) who is the over all in-charge of the implementation of the scheme. It is noted that Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the “Principal Authorities” for planning and implementing the scheme.\textsuperscript{19} The PRIs are responsible to provide jobs to rural poor within a radius of 5 km. and if the work is not available, the work can be provided within the block and for which act, the workers must be paid daily extra 10 per cent of the wage rate as transport and living allowances.

In fact, the NREGS provides a universal enforceable legal right to the most basic form of employment. It is a bold step towards legal enforcement of the right to work. The Act places an enforceable obligation on the State and gives bargaining power to the labourers by creating accountability. The key to this scheme lies in the word guarantee. The Act makes the employment opportunities a legal right to rural people, something they can demand, complain or in extreme cases, force the government to provide employment. This scheme would go a long way towards protecting rural households from economic insecurity, strengthen their bargaining power, help them to organize and fight for their legal rights.

Thus, the NREGS is a multiple variation thereof operating in different climates and times. What is innovative is to lead it a legal standing in the shape of a Central Act of legislature. It is no longer an executive scheme, but an enforceable obligation, a seal of legitimacy and an element of certainty that an Act entails upon the State. In the form of an Act it equips the labourers with a positive bargaining power, as otherwise a scheme by contrast, leaves labourers at the mercy of government officials. Schemes do come and

pass out, but laws are decidedly durable. A scheme can be terminated, clipped, modified or even cancelled by a bureaucrat, whereas changing a law requires an amendment in Parliament. Over time, the beneficiaries are to become aware of their rights and entitlements and learn how to defend them. As an obvious consequence, the burden of litigations on the judiciary will grow, but that is an indispensable bye-product of a democratic polity.

Significance of the Study

Socio-economically, Assam is peculiar in comparison to other parts of the country. As per 2011 census, the total population of Assam stood at 3,12,05,576 of which 85.90 per cent lived in 26,395 villages of the State. The population of Assam is composed of heterogeneous elements of different races, tribes, castes, languages and cultures. This diversity led to the growth of diverse socio-cultural institutions. Different races, tribes, castes, linguistic groups, cultural groups etc. have practicing different economic activities as their means of livelihood. Besides, since time immemorial caste system has been playing a very significant role in the determination of economic activities of the people of the State. In fact, a large segment of population of Assam comprises of ST and SC which constitute 17.99 per cent comprising 11.23 per cent ST and 6.76 per cent SC, and they maintain different ethno-cultural identities, languages and profess different religious faiths. The living conditions of the rural people especially landless labour, small and marginal farmers and the population who comes under the categories of SC, ST and Other Backward Classes (OBC) etc. are very backward in comparison to other parts of the country.

Assam is predominantly an agrarian State and about 75 per cent of the total population is getting their means of livelihood from agriculture and allied activities. Agriculture provides not only food grains but also employment opportunities to rural people. Agriculture accounts more than one-third of the State income and about 69 per cent of the total working force is engaged either directly or indirectly in this sector. During 2008-09, the share of primary sector was 34.93 per cent. However, the agriculture which is the backbone of State’s economy, suffers from low productivity. In

\[\text{\textsuperscript{20}}\text{ Jogasankar Mahaprashasta, “Constitutionality of Rural Employment” in Gyanindra Dash and Rajan Kumar Sahoo (eds), \textit{op., cit.}, p. 102.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{21}}\text{ Economic Survey, Assam 2009-10, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam Planning and Development Department, Government of Assam, p. 13.}\]
respect of modernization of agriculture, Assam was trailing behind other States of India. Surprisingly, after 60 years of independence, the methods of cultivation in Assam are still backward, unscientific and out dated. Besides, poor irrigation facilities, problem of frequent flood, excessive pressure of population, weak transport and communication, poor literacy and education, low quality of labour, low level of technology are the chief reasons for the agricultural backwardness of rural areas in particular and socio-economic backwardness of the country in general. Consequently, agriculture failed to minimize rural unemployment and improve the quality of life of the rural people. Against the backdrop of low agricultural productivity, slow pace of economic development and a very high rate of population growth, the problem of unemployment has assumed chronic and complex character in Assam. The problem has further been accentuated with the increase in the number of unemployed technical personnel in the State. Notwithstanding efforts are being made through successive Five Year Plans for the generation of employment to the rural people. However, the gap between gainful employment opportunities and rapid growth of labour force has continued to widen. Consequently, the incidence of poverty and unemployment is more pronounced in the rural areas.

Thus, it is observed that socio-economically disadvantageous and backward rural masses are significant segments of rural life of Assam. It comprises the most depressed section of people among the occupational categories like other parts of the country. This group of rural mass is generally engaged in agriculture and other allied activities. Since the concentration of poverty in Assam in particular and in the country in general, is mostly in rural areas and as bulk of population lives in these areas, it can be said that poverty in the country is predominantly a rural phenomenon. As such, right from the inception of Five Year Plans, the GoI has implemented many employment generation programmes in the country with a view to eradicate country’s poverty and chronic unemployment situation. However, due to various reasons, it does not show expected positive results and the socio-economic conditions of the rural people are still far from being satisfactory. As a matter of fact, the introduction of a new scheme to ensure livelihood security by providing guaranteed wage employment to the vast rural masses is felt very urgent. Keeping in view the rural poverty and unemployment, the GoI has implemented the ambitious NREGS to provide guaranteed wage employment to the rural poor. The scheme has been implemented in Assam since 2nd February, 2006. Therefore, the study of implementation of NREGS in Assam assumes relevance in the above
context. It is very significant to evaluate how far the scheme is successful in fulfilling its objectives.

Moreover, as to NREGS, being a new scheme, no systematic major works have so far been done in depth and detail in the context of Assam. Therefore, the present study could be a pioneering work in this regard and it will help to identify the existing research gaps in the field and will provide a base for further extensive research work in the field. In addition, the study will help to make a comparative study of the implementation of NREGS in Assam with the other parts of the country. For these reasons, a micro level study of the implementation of NREGS, with a focus on Assam, has its own relevance. What lends a further edge to research of the present kind is the fact that, at the present juncture, there exist no independent studies to corroborate or contradict the evidence which the government initiated researches have produced on the implementation of NREGS in Assam.

Further, the study will not only add to the pool of scientific knowledge, but will also provide such meaningful suggestions which will have policy implications for the State Government. It will benefit the government and planners who are serious to frame policies to promote socio-economic conditions of the rural people.

Scope of the Study

The present study is a humble attempt to examine the implementation of NREGS in Assam. Therefore, the study is conducted in the State of Assam. However, as it is vast in nature, the researcher intends to delimit the study to Dhemaji district only, which is one of the 27 districts of Assam. Dhemaji district has been selected purposively for this study for the reason that the researcher belongs to the district and is well versed with the socio-economic life of the rural people and local language, which helps in eliciting the requisite information. Besides, Dhemaji district is considered as one of the most backward tribal dominated districts of Assam so as to why the Union Government had identified the district for implementation of NREGS in its 1st phase (2006-07). Further, the district is located at a remote corner of the State adjoining to Arunachal Pradesh, another tribal State of the country. Besides, the district is almost 490 km. away from the State capital Guwahati. Therefore, the investigator has selected Dhemaji district as the study area for the present work.
Out of five Development Blocks in the district, two Blocks viz. Machkhowa Development Block and Bordoloni Development Block have been selected on the following considerations - the distance from the district Head Quarter (H.Q), population composition, occupation of the people, transport and communication, literacy rate and other socio-economic conditions. Further, out of two sampled Development Blocks, two Gaon Panchayats (GPs) from each Block viz. Sissimukh G.P and Bengenagarah GP from Machkhowa Development Block while Joyrampur GP and Mingmang GP from Bordoloni Development Block have been selected in consultation with Project Director (PD), DRDA, Dhemaji and the BDOs of the two selected Development Blocks.

In fact, the present study is a micro level study on the implementation of NREGS and therefore, for intensive field study, the researcher in consultation with PD of Dhemaji district and BDOs of the respective Blocks, has selected two villages – one exclusively non-tribal and the other exclusively tribal village from each GP on the basis of following criteria:

a. The numbers of households of the selected village are around fifty.

b. The selected village is fifty years old in settlement at the existing locality.

c. The number of employed households under NREGS is more than 90 per cent.

d. One of the villages is inhabited by non-tribal and the other by tribal population.

Accordingly, Jorkata Bangali Gaon and Kuhimari from Sissimukh GP; No 1 Barajan and Dighalgar from Bengenagarah GP; Baligaon and Kalbari Boro Gaon from Joyrampur GP; while Parbatipur and Kathalguri from Mingmang GP have been selected for intensive field study. Therefore, the present study is limited to 8 villages of Dhemaji district of Assam. The study covers a period of four years i.e. from 2007-08 to 2010-11.

Review of Literature

The main purpose of the review of literature pertaining to the implementation of NREGS in Assam is to give a proper orientation and perspective to the present work. A survey of literature places a significant role in establishing the backdrop for any research work in social sciences. It is felt that justification of present study can be made by reviewing the available literature on the subject. Therefore, an attempt has been made to review the literature on the subject so as to establish the relevance of the present study.

However, the literature available on the present work is limited in number. In fact, the introduction of NREGS is a recent phenomenon. Therefore, it may be logical to
state that the scheme is still in experimental stage. Nevertheless, recently the NREGS as a historical and revolutionary step in the area of amelioration of rural unemployment has attracted the attention of scholars, academicians, political leaders and researchers both in India and abroad. Consequently, a few studies in the form of research works i.e. articles, papers, booklets, reports etc. are conducted in the State and other parts of the country. In this connection, reference may be made to the work of Nikhil Dey and Reetika Khera, in their Primer *Employment Guarantee Act* (2006). They analyze that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act -2005 is a law whereby any adult willing to do unskilled manual labour at a minimum wage is entitled to being employed on public works within fifteenth days. This Primer is a simple introduction to the Act. Through a question-answer format, it discusses the basic features of the Act and suggests a few ideas about what concerned citizens can do to intensify the campaign for a full-fledged Employment Guarantee Act.

R.R. Trivedi and B.S. Aswal in their book *Encyclopaedia of NREGA and Panchayati Raj* (2011), highlight details about the salient features of NREGA. Besides, the book also emphasizes on several other issues such as organizational structure of implementing authorities of NREGA; generation of employment under NREGA during 2006-07 in selected States such as Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal; bank payments: end of corruption in NREGA; role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in implementation of NREGA; participation of women in NREGA etc. relating to the implementation of NREGS.

Asha Kiran in his book *NREGA: A Rural Revolution* (2011), describes that the NREGA – 2005, better known as NREGA, is perhaps the first of its kind in the world when the Congress-led UPA Government has adopted a revolutionary step by providing an economic safety net to 2/3 of the country’s population or 71.9 per cent India’s rural poor. Further, the author also highlights that the NREGA can be well taken as an innovative policy to boost (1) the rural economy, (2) stabilize agricultural production and (3) reduce the population pressure on urban areas for employment and thereby transform the geography of poverty. The NREGA, by providing legal guarantee to work, marks a paradigm shift from all earlier and existing wages employment programs because it is an Act and not just a scheme.
Karnati Lingaiah in his book *Rural Development in India* (2001), has written on the subject of ‘Rural Development’ from the pocket of view of the problems and prospects of rural development from economic, political, social and administrative matters. Further, the solutions given by the planners, administrators, bankers, industrial houses, cooperative societies and voluntary agencies involved in the vast field of rural development have also been enumerated in this book. Apart from this, the author also highlights some other aspects and issues such as causes, extent of rural unemployment problem, employment policies in India, types of rural unemployment problems and the various employment generation programmes launched in India in the post-independent era.

Kalpana Das in her book *Rural Development in Mizoram* (2004), has focused on the study of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) in Mizoram. The author states that the IRDP is a major self-employment generating programme which could not deliver adequate results and had hardly any impact on rural employment and poverty.

S. B. Golahit in his book *Rural Development Programme - Theory and Practice* (2007), has evaluated the working of IRDP at the national and regional level. Further, the author also highlights the important obstacles of working of IRDP in rural areas and the impact of IRDP assistance on income generation capacity of the beneficiary and their ability to cross the poverty line.

Basanti Das in her book *Governmental Programmes for Rural Development* (2007), describes that before focusing the policy of Globalization and ongoing schemes like National Rural Employment Guarantee Act - 2005, it is very urgent to know the background of rural development policy. Hence, this book has an evaluative stands of such government policies intended for rural and tribal development of the country.

Gagan Kumer Singh in his book *Administration for Rural Development Programmes in India* (2003), has presented a complete picture of historical background and working of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in India. Besides, the author has also tried to examine and analyze the various bottlenecks in implementations of RDPs and the possible solutions to those bottlenecks.

D. Sunder Raj in his article “Rural Employment and People’s Participation”, in S.B. Verma, R.D. Singh and S.K. Jiloka (eds), *Rural Poverty Alleviation and Employment*, (2006), has highlighted the various wage-employment as well as self-employment generation programmes initiated in India during the post-independent
period. The study further describes the significances of people’s participation in rural employment generation programmes. India has planned and executed the rural works programmes. Several evaluations have been undertaken in the direction of quality performance and achievements, and the said rural works programmes did not offer a solution to the alleviation of poverty, without people’s participation, where misutilisation, corruption, middle-man involvement, negligence and non-commitment of stakeholders are on way. Rural employment is a weapon to fight poverty, but when it is clubbed with people’s participation it becomes the powerful weapon to fight rural poverty.

H.D. Dwarakanath in his article “Rural Employment Generation: Some Strategies,” in S.B. Verma, R.D. Singh and S.K. Jiloka (eds), *Rural Poverty Alleviation and Employment*, (2006), highlights some important rural employment generation programmes launched during the post-independent era in India for the amelioration of rural unemployment. The author suggests some measures in order to eradicate the problem of unemployment. The measures which the author had forwarded were the vast infrastructure of research and development that we have built-up in the public sector should be used for the promotion of intermediate technology and the capital-intensive techniques of production which can be used by the industries; employment opportunities in the rural and urban areas should be promoted by a large national programme of public works for the creation of national network of infrastructural facilities especially in the field of transport and communication that can widen the Indian market and facilities for mobility of goods and people and create opportunities for new as well as increased economic activity in both rural and urban areas; natural resources such as land and forests have a vast scope for employment generation through programmes of afforestation, regeneration and restoration of degraded land etc.

Srivallabha Sharan in his article “Rural Employment” in S.B. Verma, R.D. Singh and S.K. Jiloka (eds), *Rural Poverty Alleviation and Employment*, (2006), has explained that the challenge of new century is to protect and develop villages. To protect villages, rural employment is necessary. Internal strength gives sustenance to the individuals, society and nation. Villages are the reservoir of strength for the nation. Providing effective rural employment and making village self-sufficient would provide a strong foundation for national development in the new century. Rural development is the first and foremost condition of national development.
Navin Chandra Joshi in his article "Strategies for Rural Employment" in S.B. Verma, R.D. Singh and S.K. Jiloka (eds), *Rural Poverty Alleviation and Employment*, (2006), has highlighted some new strategies for rural employment. The author points out that there is need to increase of investment in agricultural sector substantially as also to bring about abundant improvement in rural infrastructure. Only then the changes would bring about adequate improvement in the living conditions of the rural people, particularly the rural poor or those living below the poverty line.

N. Rajavel in his article "Management of Unemployment Problem" in S.B. Verma, R.D. Singh and S.K. Jiloka (eds), *Rural Poverty Alleviation and Employment*, (2006), has discussed that the unemployment problem is a great obstacle to the economic growth. Mere introduction of some schemes to provide temporary relief definitely will not serve the purpose. The need of the hour is framing of a constructive policy, strategy, rules and procedures besides planning to save the country from an explosion of the unemployment problem.

E.C. Thomas in his article "Job Guarantee for Rural Poor" in Sawalia Bihari Berma, Yogesh Upadhya and Sant Gyaneshwar Pd. Singh (eds), *Rural Employment*, (2008), describes some of the important salient features of NREGA. The author also highlights that the key to this legislation lies in the word 'guarantee'. The Employment Guarantee Scheme is different from other employment generation programmes on several grounds. The employment generation programmes were implemented as programmes, subject to budgetary constraints and rules and regulations to suit the implementing authorities. They were not statutorily assured and judicially enforceable rights or entitlements of free citizens of the country. With the present Bill (NREGA – 2005), the State fulfils the right of the poor to a livelihood.

Jugal K. Mahapatra in his article "Rural Employment Guarantee" in Sawalia Bihari Berma, Yogesh Upadhya and Sant Gyaneshwar Pd. Singh (eds), *Rural Employment* (2008), deals with some important aspects of NREGS. It makes a distinction between wage schemes and NREGS. Schemes can be started or closed through executive fiat, whereas a law cannot be withdrawn or amended without the sanction of the Parliament. Further, the study also pointed out the different categories of works under NREGA, the three-tire structure of Panchayats i.e. village, intermediate and district level for implementation of NREGS.
Manuha Puri in his article “The NREGA: Rural People to Grow with the Nation” in Sawalia Bihari Berma, Yogesh Upadhya and Sant Gyaneshwar Pd. Singh (eds), Rural Employment (2008), has discussed that NREGA is the best effort of the Central Government of India to improve the rural people with the development of nation. The author says that the key to this Act lies in the word “Guarantee”. It makes a right something that people will expect and demand, something they can complain about or in extreme cases, sue the government to get. Further, the author expresses that people must have faith in our Prime Minister who has described the Act as ‘a landmark in our history in removing poverty from the face of the nation”.

Jean Dreze in his article “Employment Guarantee Act: Promise and Demise” in Sawalia Bihari Berma, Yogesh Upadhya and Sant Gyaneshwar Pd. Singh (eds), Rural Employment (2008), has discussed about the necessity of initiation of NREGA. The main cause is that an Act places an enforceable obligation on the State, and gives bargaining power to the labourers. The study also highlights the main provisions of NREGA such as aims and objectives, permissible works under the Act, principal authorities of implementation of the scheme etc. Apart from this, the author points out some demises relating to successful implementation of NREGS. To start with, there is no guarantee of time-bound extension of the Act to the whole of rural India. In fact, even in areas where the Act does not come into force, the guarantee of employment applies only ‘in such rural area in the State and for such period as may be notified by the Central Government’. In other words, the guarantee can be withdrawn anywhere at any time. Similarly, the basic feature of the ‘Employment Guarantee Scheme’ is to be initiated by State Governments, and the entitlements of the labourers under these schemes, have been shifted from the body of the Act to a pair of appended ‘Schedules’. These schedules can be modified by notification of the Central Government, without amending the Act itself. This gives the Central Government sweeping powers to derail the schemes, or to reduce the entitlements of the labourers.

Puran Singh in his article “National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme – A Task Ahead” in Sawalia Bihari Berma, Yogesh Upadhya and Sant Gyaneshwar Pd. Singh (eds), Rural Employment (2008), has highlighted the main features of NREGS. Besides, pointing to some deficiencies, suggestions are highlighted in this article. In conclusion, the author expresses that the success of NREGS depends on the acceptability of the people, which further rests on the level of awareness among various stakeholders
and the desire among them to implement it. Therefore, the government should launch an intensive awareness programme through different media and make the masses aware of the objectives and provisions of the scheme. He suggests that government should appoint public information officers at the central as well as State levels especially for the purpose of NREGS. Print media and other means like folk, street theatre groups, radio doordarshan/video, or internet etc. can play a catalytic role in changing the mindset or behaviour of the people, thereby attracting active participation of the rural mass.

Dhurjati Mukherjee in his article “Guaranteed Rural Employment Towards Socio-Economic Transformation” in Sawalia Bihari Berma, Yogesh Upadhya and Sant Gyaneshwar Pd. Singh (eds), *Rural Employment* (2008), describes that in a country like India where the significant percentage of the population are poor and have to struggle for a livelihood, this scheme (NREGS) should have been implemented long back. Further, the author says that as is being emphasized by a section of planners and economists, a new strategy of development has to be evolved taking into consideration not just the growth factor but the question of gainful employing the economically active population. It is this strategy which will bring the rural population into the mainstream of life and activity and ensure for them a better livelihood so that they could be a part of the prosperity of the country.

Sudhakar Patra and P.C. Dhal in their article “Rural Development and National Rural Employment Act,” in Gyanindra Dash and Rajan Kumar Sahoo (eds), *Rural Employment and Economic Development* (2009), highlight the economic viability of Employment Guarantee Scheme. Besides, it also describes the important features of NREGA and suggests that the effective implementation of employment guarantee depends on the efficiency of Central Employment Guarantee Council at the Central level, State Employment Guarantee Council, District Programme Coordinator, Programme Officer at the Block level and Panchayatiraj System.

Jugasankar Mahaprashasta in his article “Constitutionality of Rural Employment” in Gyanindra Dash and Rajan Kumar Sahoo (eds), *Rural Employment and Economic Development* (2009), has analyzed the constitutional background of rural employment. It states that right to work is not enlisted in our constitution as a fundamental one. But it is enshrined under Directive Principles of State Policy (Part – IV, Article - 43) as an economic ideal which the State should strive for. “The State shall endeavour to secure just and human conditions of work, a living wage, a decent standard
of living and social and cultural opportunities for workers”. Taking cue from this constitutional obligation, the UPA Government’s premier pledge and the top political agenda has enacted National Rural Employment Guarantee Act – 2005. Apart from this, the author also makes a difference between NREGA and other employment generation programmes.

Bharamarbar Beura in his article “Economic Development through Generation of Rural Employment” in Gyanindra Dash and Rajan Kumar Sahoo (eds), *Rural Employment and Economic Development* (2009), points out some of the important causes of unemployment in India. The author has expressed that poverty and unemployment are the two sides of the same coin. Poverty leads to unemployment and *vice versa*. In rural India, poverty is intensified and unemployment is rampant. Different reasons may be responsible for the purpose. Those may be: (1) Larger portion of agricultural labourers than the cultivators, (2) Greater tendency towards urbanization but the inadequate development of industries, (3) More pressure of population on agriculture, and (4) High rate of literacy. Besides, the author also highlights the possible measures to eradicate unemployment from rural sector. They are: (1) Modernization of agriculture with update technology, and (2) Setting up of more number of agro-industries in rural areas.

Amrit Patel in his article “Role of PRI’s in Implementing Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme”, *Kurukshetra*, (Vol – 54, No.-10, August, 2006), has pointed out some important constraints of existing rural employment generation programmes. Here the author focuses that with the passage of the 73rd Amendment of Indian Constitution, 1992 (which became law on April 24, 1993), people’s participation in the process of planning, decision-making, implementation and delivery system in rural India has been recognized. Besides, the author also highlights that Government’s keenness to involve Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI’s) directly in NREGS is laudable. Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas would decide the types of work to be undertaken in the villages and use of funds earmarked under the scheme. Since the scheme calls for significant involvement of local people and PRI’s it is absolutely essential to impart comprehensive training for transferring various skills. It is also essential that the implementing process need to be reviewed and monitored regularly at the PRI level, thus, implementing the scheme as an integral part of rural development plan.
J.N. Singh and Anurag Mishra in their article “Backward Linkages of Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme”, *Kurukshetra*, (Vol – 54, No.–10, August, 2006), have analyzed that backward linkage or advance planning is critical to the successful implementation of the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (REGS). The basic component of this advance planning includes collaborative partnership and public accountability, community participation, role of PRIs, coordination among the agencies and resource support. Carefully planning the process of the implementation of the scheme may go a long way towards earning a bread for the empty bellies.

M.L. Dhar in his article ‘Employment Scenario in India’, *Kurukshetra*, (Vol. - 56, No. 4, February, 2008), has focused on the employment scenario in the country. The author also highlights that the most significant intervention in generation of employment is the NREGA which provided employment to 2.12 crore households and 6,399,55 lakh man-days have been taken up for creating village assets.

S.M. Jawed Akhtar and N.P. Abdul Azeez in their article “Rural Employment Guarantee Programme and Migration”, *Kurukshetra*, (Vol – 60, No.–4, February, 2012), have described that MGNREGA is an alternative to arrest out-migration of unskilled, landless labour force from the rural areas to urban areas by ensuing up to 100 days of wage employment within their native jurisdiction so that these guaranteed wage employment can be judiciously and rationally utilized by the landless peasants during lean and distress seasons. The author expresses that the MGNREGA will have significant positive impact on seasonal rural-urban migrations by providing rural workers with employment during the lean season. This will reduce the problems of excessive population pressures in Indian cities as surplus rural labour will find employment in their own villages.

S.M. Jawed Akhtar and N.P. Abdul Azeez in their article “Budgetary Allocation and Its Utilization MGNREGS - A Viewpoint” *Kurukshetra*, (Vol – 60, No.–6, April, 2012), have pointed out the budgetary allocation of funds under NREGS during 2006-07 to 2012-13. During this period, the total budget outlay of the Central Government under NREGS was 2,05,500 crore. Besides, it also highlights the utilization of funds under MGNREGS. The percentage of MGNREGS fund on wage is higher than that of defined ratio. The share of expenditure on wage has increased from 66.21 per cent in 2006-07 to 76.39 per cent in 2011-12.
Jitendra Ahirrao in his article “A Brief Scanning of MGNREGA”, *Kurukshetra*, (Vol – 60, No.–9, July, 2012), has discussed the progress of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) during 2006-07 to 2011-12. The author makes it clear that during this period, the total financial outlay of Central Government for MGNREGA was Rs. 1,72,500 crore and the total 115181.34 lakh man-days were generated during the reference period. Further, it says that the national average during the five years for utilization of NREGA resources was merely 77.64 per cent.

A. Nayyer Shamsi in his article “National Rural Guarantee Act”, *Competition Refresher*, (November, 2007, Vol – XXV, No – 11), deals with some of the important features of NREGA. It states some important issues relating to the implementation of NREGA such as financial allocation, wider coverage, empowering women, specific guidelines etc.

J. Krishnamurthy in his article “Employment Guarantee and Crisis Response,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (March 04-10, 2006, Vol – XLI, No. 09), highlights that the National Employment Guarantee Act and related programmes from the perspective of responding to sudden (and rapid) onset of events like economic crises and natural and man-made disasters. It advocates to use NREGA as part of the rapid response to crises and disasters. Particular attention is focused on the aggregate impact of localized disasters or crises, which may be large and need to be addressed in disaster management strategies in India.

Bela Bhatia and Jean Dreze in their article “Employment Guarantee in Jharkhand: Ground Realities”, *Economic and Political Weekly* (July 22-28, 2006, Vol – XLI, No. 29), have made a recent survey in two districts of Jharkhand. The study highlights many serious flaws in the implementation of NREGS. Some of them could be explained as teething problems. As the experience of Rajasthan shows, there is scope for better implementation. All said and done, NREGA has created a sense of hope amongst the rural poor. This sense of hope can be further strengthened if people understand that the Act gives them employment as a matter of right, and that claiming this right is within the realm of possibility.

Arun Jacob and Richard Varghese in their article “NREGA implementation- I: Reasonable Beginning in Palakkad, Kerala”, *Economic and Political Weekly* (December 02-08, 2006, Vol – XLI, No. 48), deal with the implementation of NREGA in Kerala. The study was conducted in the district of Palakkad of Kerala. The study reveals that
the local bodies i.e. PRIs members played a vital role in implementation of the Act. While implementation has been largely fair and corruption-free, the scheme needs to be more efficiently and effectively used so as to meet the long-term requirements of the State and its people.

Prakash Louis in his article “NREGA Implementation II - Birth Pangs in Bihar”, *Economic and Political Weekly* (December 02-08, 2006, Vol – XLI, No. 48), has discussed what is holding back the government of Bihar from implementing the national rural employment guarantee scheme in the state? Like its predecessor, the present leadership of the state government too seems to be strong on rhetoric and weak in implementation.

Mihir Shah in his article “Employment Guarantee, Civil Society and Indian Democracy”, *Economic and Political Weekly* (November 10-16, 2007, Vol – XLII, No. 45-46), has expressed that even as we celebrate 60 years of Indian democracy, with millions of our people hungry, cynical and insecure, and living under the barrel of the gun (of the state or the extremists), we need to worry about the quality of our political process. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has the potential to provide a “big push” in India’s region of distress. For NREGA to be able to realize its potential, the role of civil society organizations is critical. But this calls for a new self-critical politics of fortitude, balance and restraint.

Pramathes Ambasta, P.S. Vijay Shankar and Mihir Shah in their article “Two Years of NREGA: The Road Ahead” *Economic and Political Weekly*, (February 23-29, 2008, Vol- XLIII, No. – 8), have described that NREGA has raised expectations like no other rural development scheme. It further suggests with that the Information Technology (IT) can be effectively applied in NREGA.

Anish Vanaik and Siddhartha in their article “Bank Payments: End of Corruption in NREGA?” *Economic and Political Weekly*, (April 26-May 02, 2008, Vol – XLIII, No. 17), have explained that the payment of wages into bank accounts for work carried out under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has been suggested as a way to prevent embezzlement of funds. The practice has already begun in a few districts. Is this a fool proof system to control corruption? The early experience from a few blocks in Orissa suggests that this process is not free from its own problems.

with the draft report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) on the working of NREGA which was used by many sections of the media. In this study, the authors highlight some important constraints of implementation of NREGA and their possible recommendations for the successful implementation of the scheme. CAG has singled out lack of dedicated administrative and technical staff for NREGA as the key constraint responsible for procedural lapses. For instance, according to the Operational Guideline (OP), the “programme officer” at the block level is supposed to be a full-time, dedicated post of rank equivalent to the Block Development Officer (BDO). Besides, the CAG recommended to appoint a full-time gram rozgar sevak (employment assistant) in each gram panchayat. As the CAG report points out, however, these appointments are yet to be made in many States. Staff shortages have become a common excuse for non-compliance with the guidelines. Another critical finding relates to special staffing needed to a select group of districts, “which suffer from acute poverty, where unemployment demand is high, and consequently where there is increased pressure on the NREGA organizational set-up” CAG prescribes adequate staff as the way to enforce accountability in the matter of record maintenance and online data management.

Anish Vanaik in his article “NREGA and the Death of Tapas Soren”, Economic and Political Weekly (July 26-August 01, 2008 Vol – XLIII, No. - 30), describes that Tapas Soren, a tribal of Birakhap in Jharkhand, committed self-immolation recently, impoverished by the constant demand for bribes by local officials for work done under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. His death soon after the murder of Lalit Mehta who had exposed corruption in NREGA schemes in Palamu, is a damning comment on how the scheme is being implemented in Jharkhand.

Santosh Mehrotra in his article “NREG Two Years On: Where do we go from here?” Economic & Political Weekly (August 2-8, 2008, Vol-XLIII, No. - 31), has examined the performance of NREGS since its inception. The study deals with the key issues of designing and implementing of NREGS in its first two years of implementation. Besides, it summarizes the key areas of progress as well as weaknesses in the scheme. Further, it outlines the key areas where remedial action to repress the weakness is either being taken or actively considered.

Reetika Khera in her article “Empowerment Guarantee Act,” Economic & Political Weekly (August 30 – September 05, 2008, Vol – XLII, No. – 35), states that the NREGA could empower the rural poor to demand a fair amount of employment at the
minimum wage. The study was conducted in Jagrut Adivasi Dalit Sangathan in Madhya Pradesh. The experience of the Jagrut Adivasi Dalit Sangathan shows the power of grass root organizational work in activating the NREGA. Levels of NREGA employment in the Sangathan areas are as high as 85 days per household per year, and nearly half of all working households have got 100 days of work. The Act may also be an opportunity to promote overall rural development and alter the balance of power in village society.

K.S. Gopal in his article “NREGA Social Audit: Myths and Reality” Economic and Political Weekly (January 17-23, 2009, Vol – XLIV, No. - 03), explains that much has been said and written about the social audits conducted in Andhra Pradesh under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. But he is critical on the ground these audits have achieved much less than advertised and they have ignored many important aspects of implementation of NREGA. The social audit process has a long way to go before it can claim to have contributed to transparency, empowerment and good governance.

Reetika Khera and Nandini Nayak in their article “Women Workers and Perceptions of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act”, Economic and Political Weekly (October, 24-30, 2009, Vol- XLIV, No. – 43), explain that the NREGA, which entitles rural households to 100 days of casual employment on public works at the statutory minimum wage, contains special provisions to ensure full participation of women. The study, based on field work of six States in 2008, examines the socio-economic consequences of the NREGA for women workers. In spite of drawbacks in the implementation of the legislation, significant benefits have already started accruing to women through better access to local employment, at minimum wage, with relatively decent and safe work conditions. The study also discusses barriers to women’s participation.

Anindita Adhikari and Kartika Bhatia in their article “NRGEA Wage Payments: Can We Bank on the Banks?”, Economic and Political Weekly (January 2-8, 2010, Vol. - XLV, No. - 1), have discussed that the government of India has shifted from cash payment of wages under the renamed Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Scheme to settlement through bank accounts. This has been done in order to prevent defrauding of workers and to give them greater control over their wages.

Kaustav Banerjee and Partha Saha in their article “The NREGA, the Maoists and Development Woes of the Indian State”, Economic and Political Weekly (July 10-16, 2010, Vol. XLV, No. - 28), have conducted a study in the States of Jharkhand,
Chhattisgarh and Orissa. The study concludes that socio-economic deprivation and exclusion have resulted in the growth of the Maoists in the backward areas of the country. The levels of distress rural can be tackled - the proper working of the NREGA seems to be small but necessary step is needed in this direction.

Kamala Sankaran in his article “NREGA Wages: Ensuring Decent Work”, *Economic and Political Weekly* (February 12-18, 2011, Vol. - XLVI, No. - 07), describes that for several decades now there has been an unresolved debate about the feasibility of having a national minimum wage, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act with its provision for a country-wide wage rate has placed the possibility to do so squarely on the agenda. The NREGA wage rate must logically be a need-based national minimum wage under the Minimum Wages Act. Declaring a need-based minimum wage rate under NREGA which is linked to the schedule of rates allows for sufficient flexibility to account for regional or geographical variation.

J. Jeyaranjan in his article “Women and Pro-Poor Policies in Rural Tamil Nadu: An Examination of Practices and Responses”, *Economic and Political Weekly* (October 22-28, 2011, Vol. – XLVI, No. - 43), has conducted a study in a village of Tamil Nadu. The study examines the initial response to the NREGS on the ground, the reasons behind the low participation, and its subsequent reworking to make it not just viable but also "successful". As conceived, the transformative potential of NREGA is limited. When operationalised in letter and spirit, such programmes may alleviate poverty, and to that extent empower women, but cannot transform our rural economies that are characterized by low growth, poor investments in infrastructure and limited generation of growth-led decent employment.

Asha Sharma in her article “SC/ST Employment Guarantee: Women’s Empowerment in Rural India by MGNREGA”, *International Journal of Human Development and Management Sciences* (January - December, 2012, Vol. - 1, No. – 1), highlights the difference in employment and empowerment attainment among SC/ST women in rural India. The author analyses that high poverty rates pose to be significant obstacles in attaining empowerment among SC/ST women in India. By putting cash earning in women’s hands, NREGA has both increased and diversified the contribution that women are making to household incomes as wage earners.

T. Ranganathan in his article “Poverty Alleviation Programmes in India – Policy Perspectives”, *International Journal of Innovative Research & Development* (October,
2012, Vol. – 1, No. – 8), has reviewed the policy perspectives of Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAPs) and to analyze various programmes and its policy back – drops from first to eleventh plan onwards. The author explains that the PAPs recycle the overall standard of living of the people. As these programmes ensure a minimum income and ensures livelihood, in turn PAP ensures better health, better education to their children. Hence, the income generation through employment gives minimum hopes to take care of the future generation in respect of their education, public health including adaptation of family planning and other development aspects in growing economics.

K.V.S. Prasad in his article “Performance of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA): An Overview”, International Journal of Management & Business Studies (October –December, 2012, Vol. - 2, No. - 4), has made an attempt to review the performance of MGNREGA. It also explains the objectives, features, permissible works under this Act and funding pattern of MGNREGA.

Utpal Khera and Biplab Das in their article “Impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India – A Case Study on Gourangachak of Hooghly in West Bengal”, International Journal of Innovative Research & Development (November, 2012, Vol. – 1, No. – 9), describes that the MGNREGS has delivered the largest employment programme in human history. The scheme has two category of objectives, primary objective is augmenting wage employment and auxiliary objectives is strengthening natural resource management through works that address causes of chronic poverty like flood, draught, soil erosion and encourage sustainable development. In this study the author tries to find out the impact of MGNREGS on a village called Gourangachak of Hooghly in West Bengal.

P. Shenbagaraj and S. Arockiasamy in their article “Impact of MGNREGA on local development: A study of Ottapidaram blocks in Thoothukudi district, Tamil Nadu”, International Journal of Innovative Research & Development (April, 2013, Vol. – 2, No. – 4), analyze that the scheme was able to provide only 26 days of employment to the rural poor in a financial year on average. Moreover, the average earnings by each person did not exceed Rs. 2000 per year.

MGNREGS in Assam. The study has made the conclusion that the NREGS has not performed well in Assam. This paper makes a number of policy suggestions to improve the performance of the NREGS.

Rupa Barman Borgohain in her article “Guaranteeing Employment: a bold vision”, The Assam Tribune (13th March, 2005), highlights that the enactment on NREGA is a bold step towards the eradication of rural unemployment. The NREGS is a landmark in the parliamentary history of independent India which provides legal rights on employment to the rural poor.

Jean Dreze in his article “NREGA: Dismantling the contractor raj”, The Hindu, (20th November, 2007) made a survey on NREGA in western Orissa points to a quiet sabotage of the transparency safeguards aimed at perpetuating the traditional system of extortion in rural employment programmes. The survey suggested that the “contractor raj” is alive in implementation of the NREGS. This survey, initiated by the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute at Allahabad University, was conducted from 3-12 October 2007 by students of the Delhi University in collaboration with local volunteers. Thirty randomly-selected gram panchayats, spread over three districts (Bolangir, Boudh and Kalahandi), were studied.

H.K. Goswami in his article “NGRGA: a powerful weapon”, The Assam Tribune (18th April, 2008), has described that the NREGA - 2005 has had a positive impact on the lives of millions of people across the poorest districts in the country. The Act, which guarantees 100 days of employment per household at minimum wage, is the first piece of legislation that compels the State to provide a social safety net for impoverished rural households. Moreover, the article highlights that perhaps the most remarkable feature of NREGA, making a decisive break with the past is the complete ban on contractors. Even since independence, most government programmes in rural areas have been implemented through the agency of local contractors, who have emerged as major agents of exploitation of the rural poor.

H.K. Goswami in his article “NGRGA implementation in Andhra Pradesh”, The Assam Tribune (15th October, 2009), has expressed that the Government of Andhra Pradesh (AP) is successful in implementation of NREGA. The author points out that what has happened in AP over the last two and a half years is unparalleled in the history of independent India. According to author, the significant development in the implementation of NREGA in AP was that the use of Information Technology (IT) in all
stages of implementation of the scheme, from registration of workers to issue of job cards, preparation of work estimates, muster rolls (attendance sheets) and payments to workers have been computerized.

Jean Drèze, Reetika Khera and Siddhartha in their article “Corruption in NREGA: myths and reality” *The Hindu*, (Jan 22, 2008), have explained that corruption can be eradicated from NREGA, and the way to do it is to enforce the transparency safeguards that are built into the Act and the guidelines. Along with this, swift action needs to be taken whenever corruption is exposed. This is not the time for a loss of nerve.

Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey in their article “NREGA: Breaking new ground”, *The Hindu* (Jun 21, 2009), highlight that the NREGA has a unique legal space for the poor, with a consequent, legally-mandated obligation on the administration to deliver. In fact, implementation rests on the simple philosophy that ordinary people will go to great lengths to procure their entitlements, given the space to do so. The NREGA sought to create real opportunities and legal spaces, with the belief that people will begin to push to overcome bureaucratic and political resistance. The Act has a number of “trigger mechanisms” designed to activate and establish people’s entitlements. One such trigger is the right to have a Job Card. The Act mandates that anyone who applies at their Panchayat for a Job Card must be given one within 15 days. Without a Job Card, people cannot even apply for work, nor corroborate the records. It is a “license” and “pan card” of the wage worker’s family, with a record of days of work and wages received during the year.

Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey in their article “Dalits, the poor and the NREGA”, *The Hindu* (August 27, 2009), have analyzed that there was an unanimous agreement among the group of farmers including small and marginal farmers who work on NREGA worksites that the amendment would place the controls of the NREGA in the hands of the landed peasantry. Another apprehension that was strongly articulated was the potential disintegration of the strong transparency and accountability provisions that have been woven into the NREGA, as collective work on community land is replaced by work on individual landholdings. Dalits and the below poverty line group, however, had a sharper and personalized reaction. One of them said: “We have just begun to get something out of this Act, and it seems everyone wants to find ways of taking it away from us. Dalits and the poorest farmers will be pushed out, and the landless will be left
developing assets for others.” So far, only a fraction of poor and Dalit farmers have been sanctioned works. There is no justification to include others, and move to the second generation when the priority group is still to be covered.

Sudipto Mondal in his article “NREGA: Workers misinformed on wage structure”, The Hindu (October 2, 2009), has described that the activists of the Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha (KPRS) appears to have made significant progress in the implementation of the NREGA in the Munoor Gram Panchayat. The author says that the workers on site threatened to stop coming to work in future if the wages are not raised. The workers, mostly women, have come to believe that they are going to be paid only Rs. 82 per day. They demanded at least Rs. 125 per day, the wage that they would have earned as agricultural labourers, in addition to lunch and two cups of tea a day. The KPRS activists supported the demand for raising the “minimum wages of Rs. 82.”

Vidya Subrahmaniam in his article “Social and political dividends from NREGA”, The Hindu (October 18, 2009), has analyzed that it is because of the patriarchal, dominating nature of the panchayat set-up, most of the villagers lacked the courage to speak up. This situation would gradually change if accountability was built into the system. Accountability could also impact social evils like unsociability, which the audit team found was widely prevalent in NREGA sites. In many panchayats, SC and ST beneficiaries under NREGS were given separate utensils and prevented from accessing common resources.

Reetika Khera and Karuna Muthiah in their article “Slow but steady success”, The Hindu (April 25, 2010), have described that the scale of NREGA employment (average person-days per rural household) in Tamil Nadu has increased steadily from 9 days in 2006-07 to 42 days in 2009-10 in the Phase 1 districts. In the initial years of implementation, the focus of the State Government seems to have been on putting systems and staff in place. At the outset, it took innovative steps to prevent corruption. For instance, recognizing that the procurement of materials requires contractors and that contractors are a major source of corruption, the State issued orders to implement only kachha works, i.e. works with no material component. The significant achievement in the State was women's participation in NREGA. The share of women in the NREGA workforce in Tamil Nadu has recorded high (around 80 per cent) from the beginning and is the highest in the country. Secondly, the involvement of GPs in the implementation of NREGA is also noteworthy. The GP plays an active role in selecting NREGA works,
monitoring implementation, and so on. GPs are well-equipped (with proper buildings, furniture, computers, stationery, staff), which enables them to perform these roles. Besides, the study also highlights that GS meetings were held regularly and well-attended which indicate that GPs are functional and lively. Even, the participation of women in GS meetings was noticeable.

K. Balchand in his article “Minimum wages likely for MGNREGA workers”, The Hindu (October, 16, 2011) expresses that the centre is likely to pay minimum wages to workers under the MGNREGA in compliance with the recent Karnataka High Court ruling upholding the supremacy of the Minimum Wages Act (MWA) over the MGNREGA. Union Minister of Rural Development Jairam Ramesh has taken a decision favouring payment of minimum wages for agricultural workers and the wages should not be lower than the minimum wages. The wages would be revised annually and a full revision would be effected every five years in consultation with the States.

T.H. Chowdhary in his article “NREGA is money down the drain”, The Hindu Business Line (December 23, 2011), describes that the people who claim that welfare schemes ought to prevent the migration of workers from rural areas are promoting dependency and idleness and destroying the work ethics. The Indian Government is to spend Rs 88,000 crore on rural development during 2011-12 financial year out of which about Rs 40,000 crore is under the NREGA. Government spokesmen and media fed by the government are asserting that the NREGA is meant to stop migration of workers from rural areas.

Prasad Nichenametla in his article “NREGA 2 aimed at bolstering UPA 2”, The Hindustan Times (February 22, 2012), explains that the UPA government has widened the scope of its flagship MGNREGS to include works related to agriculture, animal husbandry, poultry, drinking water and sanitation. In its initial avatar launched over six years ago, the MGNREGA was limited only to works concerning water and soil conservation, afforestation and land development. It was largely seen as a subsistence dole for the rural people in the lean farm season. Now, however, it will create productive assets and generate incomes for the poor. Further, the study focuses that the "Inclusion of these works will be a major relief to millions of farmers now working under NREGA and will do justice to thousands of crore left unutilized under the scheme every year."

Rukmini Shrinivasan in her article “NREGA’s non-existent impact on migrant labourers”, The Times of India (June 28, 2012), explains that for last two years, the
"success" of MGNREGS in reducing the number of men migrating out of India’s poorest States has become something truism. However, in Punjab the impact of the scheme on migrant labourers was not satisfactory. The study says that "Eight lakh migrant workers come to Punjab during the peak seasons. There is little or no change in this number".

Manikam Ramaswami in his article "NREGA: A real trickle-down", The Hindu Business Line (July 5, 2012) has explained that the Union Government put around Rs 20,000 crore in the hands of the poor, the actual amount that accrued to the poor is almost Rs 4 lakh crore (200 million multiplied by Rs 100 multiplied by 200 days) a year, as wages for 200 million people rose by over Rs 100 a day. This is the first time a scheme has put, not government money but the richer peoples’ money, of this order, in the hands of those below the poverty line. A true ‘forced trickle-down’ effects, a right antidote to the several trickle-up effects which we keep creating.

However, these studies do not prove the hypotheses of the present study. Because the work carried by the different writers were not directly related to the present study. This work, therefore, is an endeavour to justify the validity of the hypotheses on the basis of relevant data.

Objectives

The main focus of the present study is the examination of implementation of NREGS in Assam. Therefore, based on the broader framework of the statement of the problem, the objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To examine how far the State is successful in implementation of NREGS.
2. To examine how far the objectives of NREGS have been fulfilled in the State.
3. To assess how the National Rural Employment Guarantee Funds (NREGFs) have been utilized in Assam.
4. To investigate the performances of NREGS in Assam.
5. To find out the obstacles in successful implementation of NREGS.
6. Finally, to suggest suitable measures for the effective implementation of the scheme.

Research Questions

The principal interest of the present study is to examine the implementation of NREGS in Assam. Besides, it is necessary to find out the bottlenecks that stand in the
way of securing a proper implementation of the scheme and in suggesting the ways to overcome the difficulties. In view of this, in this academic exercise an honest attempt has been made to examine the following questions -

1. Are the implementing authorities sincere in implementation of NREG schemes?
2. How far the State is successful in the implementation of NREGS?
3. Are the people really benefited from the NREGS?
4. What measures are to be needed to implement the scheme successfully?

Methodology

The present study is a micro level research on the implementation of NREGS in Assam. The study is basically an empirical one. The methodology that has been followed in this study is historico-analytical. The historical method has been applied for historical records, information, documents, and file records etc. which are the basis of the present study. The analytical method is employed to analyze the facts pertaining to the study.

Keeping the objectives and research questions in view, it has been decided to collect relevant data from both primary as well as secondary sources. The secondary data have been collected from books, journals, newspapers, booklets, official records and reports available at Block, District, State and National level offices. For the evaluation of the performances of NREGS in Assam, the secondary data available at official website (www.ngega.in) since 2007-08 to 2010-11 have been compiled and analyzed.

The primary data for this study have been collected basically through interview schedules and field observation. Therefore, to conduct the study, two separate sets of structured and unstructured interview schedules have been prepared and administered. The first schedule was prepared for the beneficiaries of NREGS while the second schedule for the implementing authorities of the scheme. The questions of the first schedule were devoted to find out the bio-data of the respondents such as age, sex, religion, caste, educational status, marital status, occupation, annual income etc. Further, the schedule was also devoted to the questions relating to the perception of respondents on different aspects of implementation of NREGS such as their awareness, employment, participation, Job Cards, unemployment allowance, payment of wages, engagement of contractors, utilization of funds, transparency, success or failure of the scheme, suggestions for its improvement etc. For this purpose, total sample sizes of 400
respondents have been drawn from the eight sample villages, i.e. 50 households from each village. Simple random sampling method is applied in the selection of respondents from among the households employed under NREGS.

The second schedule was adopted to collect relevant information from the Block level implementing authorities since Block is the basic unit of planning and implementation of NREGS. The questions relating to the bio-data of the respondents such as age, sex, religion, caste, academic qualification etc. were included in the beginning of the schedule while the questions regarding the perception of implementing authorities on different aspects of implementation of NREGS such as their awareness, employment, the relationship between people's elected representatives and bureaucracy, Job Cards, unemployment allowance, payment of wages, utilization of funds, transparency, training, hindrances in proper implementation of the scheme, suggestions for improvement of the scheme etc. were incorporated in the letter part of the schedule. For this purpose, total 50 Block level implementing authorities i.e. 25 from each Block comprising government officials and people's elected representatives of PRIs (present and previous) have also been selected as respondents to interview for the collection of requisite information.

In this connection, it is worth mentioning that before it was finalized, the interview schedules were pre-tested. A small number of respondents (Approximately 9; 2 from implementing authorities and 7 from beneficiaries) employed in Joyrampur Panchayat of Bordoloni Sub – Division was selected for testing the schedules. The questions were re-framed both in the structure and in the content, whenever necessary, in the light of the above pre-testing. Uttermost attention was taken to the following points in the preparation of the schedules.

1. The questions were framed in a simple language, so that the respondents could easily understand their meaning.
2. The questions were prepared in English for the sake of convenient but were translated into the local language at the time of their administration for the purpose of eliciting information.
3. Brevity of the questions was maintained to avoid confusion on the part of the respondents and to elicit exact and precise information.
4. The questions were arranged in a logical sequence so that response could slide down automatically from one question to another.
5. A full assurance of confidence in the use of information was given to the respondents.

6. The schedules were prepared in such a way that not more than an hour would be required to finish it up so that the respondents would not feel bored.

However, by merely interviewing the respondents on specific points contained within a pre-designed interview schedule, it may not be possible to get an insight into the gamut of the problem. There is always a difference between what people say and what actually they do. Therefore, to supplement the findings of the field study, the participatory and non-participatory methods of observation have also been employed to collect relevant information. Further, the collected data have been arranged in a tabular form, followed by their analysis and interpretation. Besides, the simple statistical methods like percentage, average have been applied to analyze the data for the study. Of course, certain data like age, annual income of the common people of the villages under observation etc. were based on their memory, as they did not maintain any recorded evidence to support their information. Therefore, cross checking and observation of facts minimized the deficiency in the compilation of data before making their final analysis. Besides, the researcher belongs to the same district and could collect certain information, which helped in deriving some conclusions and which facilitated the analysis. Thus, various methods such as interview, observation and inferences drawn from secondary sources etc. have been employed for the completion of the present study.

**Limitations of the Study**

The present study is limited to following respects:

1. The findings of the study are based on expressed information of the respondents which may have its own limitations. The objectivity of the investigator is naturally circumscribed by the extent of the respondents' readiness to give the real information. Possibility of hiding certain facts on the part of the respondents cannot be completely ruled out, although every possible effort had been made to elicit authentic information.

2. Some difficulties were also experienced in clarifying the purpose of the inquiry to the respondents. Many of them thought that the inquiry was directly related to some programme of solving their problems.
3. The technique for the collection of data employed in the study was that of structured and unstructured interview schedules. All the respondents were interviewed on the basis of the questions incorporated in the schedules and necessary relevant information was collected. Therefore, the generalizations and the findings of the study are limited to this technique of data collection only.

4. The scope of this research is limited to the eight selected villages of Dhemaji district of Assam. Therefore, conclusions based on this study have their own limitations and can be made applicable elsewhere, with certain precautions.

5. The study covers only 4 years of period, i.e., 2007-08 to 2010-11.

6. The prime concern of this research was to focus attention on the broader aspects of their problems, and the present study will give the base for formulating the hypothesis for further research.

Chapterisation

The study has been presented in the following six chapters including introduction and conclusion.

Chapter – I: Introduction

The first chapter begins with the introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the study, scope of the study, review of literature, objectives of the study, research questions, limitations of the study and the methodology that has been employed for the study.

Chapter – II: Settings of the Study: A Profile

The second chapter deals with the settings of the study. In this chapter an attempt has been made to present a brief socio-economic profile of the State of Assam, of the District and two sampled Blocks and the eight selected villages under study in the Section ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ respectively.

Chapter – III: Rural Employment Generation Programmes in India

The third chapter delves deep into the rural employment generation programmes in India since independence up to the implementation of NREGS. This chapter is divided into two Sections. Section ‘A’ investigates the various rural employment generation programmes in India since independence while Section ‘B’ analyzes the different
centrally sponsored employment generation programmes operating in the State of Assam.

Chapter – IV: Salient Features of NREGS and its Performances in Assam

The fourth chapter embodies the salient features of NREGS and its performances in the State of Assam. This chapter has been divided into two Sections. The salient features of NREGS have been analyzed in Section ‘A’ while Section ‘B’ examines the performances of the scheme in Assam.

Chapter – V: Implementation of NREGS in Dhemaji District

The fifth chapter of the thesis, which is the core chapter, enumerates the implementation of NREGS in Dhemaji district of Assam. This chapter is based on an analysis of respondents’ perceptions on the implementation of NREGS. The chapter has been divided into two Sections. Section ‘A’ presents the perception of NREGS beneficiaries in implementation of the scheme while the Section ‘B’ analyses the perception of implementing authorities on NREGS.

Chapter- VI: Conclusion

Finally, the sixth chapter is the concluding chapter. It ends with the important findings of the study arrived at on the basis of analysis of data collected from both primary as well as secondary sources. Besides, this chapter also identifies the major obstacles pertaining to successful implementation of NREGS in Dhemaji district of Assam and their possible suggestions to rectify the weaknesses if any, involved in the implementation of NREGS in the study area.