There was a time when Rural Development was like the sound of a distant drum. It failed to attract even those for whom it was intended. But today situations have changed radically. At the dawn of the twenty first century, India has been heading for a new global power. India has vowed for an equal status with the strong nations of the world. This new awakening has revolutionised the whole fabric of the national life. It has set on the shoulders of each and every citizen the Herculean task of building a strong and powerful nation from top to bottom. As a result, rural areas hitherto marginalised have been brought to the fore of national scenario and rural people so long steeped in medieval ways of life have been given a new importance in an attempt to bring them to the mainstream of national life and enlighten them with modern ideas and values.

It is in this background that Rural Development is to be studied in all seriousness, not only as a relatively new discipline, but also as the strongest and most effective weapon to combat the innumerable maladies infecting rural India today. The present work is a humble endeavour to throw some light on the various aspects of Rural Development in their right perspectives. Care has been
taken to deal with all relevant matters, meaning and definition of Rural Development, its aims and objectives, strategies, programmes and their implementations, organisations and institutions working for it, problems and prospects etc., so as to give the subject-matter the picture of a comprehensive whole. Efforts have been directed to treat everything in a lucid and precise manner so as to make the matter at once clear and comprehensible to all.

Thus, the opening chapter has been devoted to discussing the basic themes and issues concerning rural development. The first few pages deal with the concept of Development Administration and Development. Today all our tall talk for development is bound to end up in smoke without a special reference to Development Administration. A sound knowledge of the concept is essential for all those engaged in the work of development. In fact, development and development administration go hand in hand. They are like two sides of the same coin.

While tracing the origin of the concept of Development Administration, the World War II has been taken as the background. To quote from Chapter I. "After the Second World War, the newly independent nations of the world, which emerged out of imperial exploitation, embarked upon a complex process of nation building and rapid social reconstruction .....". A theory of Development was thus needed and this theory was elaborated on the basis of western experience. This theory no doubt worked remarkably well in countries like South Korea and Taiwan, where developmental works
were mainly carried out on US aid but elsewhere it miserably failed and created many challenging problems. "Hence the challenge resulted in a search for a new meaning and approach to development". "In country after country, it became obvious that there were serious questions to be asked about economic justice, social equality and political development, the nature and rate of change, the internal consistency of development process, income distribution, etc."

"The emphasis therefore shifted and development began to be regarded as a total process involving economic, social, political and cultural elements. This was to be brought about not through reliance on external assistance, but through national efforts embodied in local community participation and targeted at removing all signs of external economic dependence." Thus, the concept of Development Administration "emerged both as a discipline and a process through which government programmes for economic development were implemented and administered in the hope of achieving the best possible results or maximum gain for society".

In search for a working definition of Development Administration, scholars like Weidner, Fainsod and Riggs have been quoted as safest models. Overloading with definitions has been avoided so as to make the point as transparent as possible. A focus on the "Characteristics of Development Administration" is being expected to give a better grasp of the concept in its totality.
Attention then has been turned to the main theme of the work, that is, Rural Development. In this part, Rural Development has been thoroughly discussed in terms of meaning and definition, aims and objectives, strategies and approaches. While dealing with these seminal issues, attempt has been made to present Rural Development as a complex, comprehensive phenomenon, with the conscious design to bring about the desired positive changes in the socio-economic and cultural life of the rural people.

The next few pages focus on the operational aspect of Rural Development, namely development in rural India. It has been asserted here that rural India today comprising the bulk of the population poses the biggest challenge to the nation's pledge for progress and prosperity and being infected with all the maladies of a backward life is thus the most fertile ground for developmental projects. Development of rural areas has been the crying need of the day. Hence, various developmental programmes have been adopted from time to time for the uplift of the rural poor. All these programmes have been brought under the preview of our discussion. Some of these programmes are: Community Development Programme, IRDP, IADP, SFDA, MFAL, DPAP, NREP etc.

However, all these programmes did not come out of the blue. Rather, they were the natural outcome of some pioneering works in the line undertaken by numerous individuals and organisations. In the succeeding pages, an attempt has been made
to trace the origin and development of rural development programmes in India since the beginning of the 20th century. Experiments in rural development in India started in 1921, with Togore's Sriniketan, culminated in 1931 with Gandhi's Sevagram and extended up to 1952, with Sir V.T. Krishnamachari's Grow More Food Enquiry Committee. All these experiments, no doubt, failed as they were more idealistic than practical, but they had made significant contributions to many aspects of rural development. Rural development programmes of India today owe a great deal to these pioneering works.

Rural Development is sometimes fraught with the dangers of a new experiment. In the past, many an experiments collapsed like Babylonian castle thus incurring irreparable damages. Implementation of RD programmes often demands subtle insight and great practical wisdom. Success of rural development depends to a considerable extent on our capacity to understand the feelings and sentiments, habits and customs of the local people. Rural development is not something to thrust upon the people, it is a gradual adjustment to local conditions.

Many experiments in Africa collapsed, simply because they failed to understand this reality. To avert such blunders has been an ordeal for all our development personnel. We should draw useful lessons from others' blunders. Keeping this object in view, a few passing remarks on Rural Development in African Perspective have been incorporated in this chapter.
This has been followed by a bird’s eye view on the socio-economic scenario of present day Assam. All that has been said in this direction has been supported by relevant facts and figures. It has been emphasised that “in spite of the industrial production data, Assam still remains a rural economy”.

The chapter comes to a close with Mahatma Gandhi’s views on rural development. Gandhiji was the only person who could understand rural development in its truest sense. He was a visionary who had dreamt of an ideal rural India based on truth and non-violence, justice and equality. It is also the dream of every Indian living in our own times. Hence, Gandhi’s relevance to our cherished goals for rural development.

Chapter II elaborates the role of organisation in administrative activities. It focuses on the major aspects of organisation. Thus, at the very beginning an attempt has been made to define the term. Scholars like Moovey, Gaus & Urwick have been cited in this context. The chapter then proceeds to underline the importance of planning an organisation and suggests a number of practical measures for effective organisational planning. Then, the twin concepts of organisation, viz. humanistic and mechanistic, have also been discussed. The basis of organisation has been explained in terms of four common bases, (a) Function (b) Process (c) Clientele & (d) Area/Territory.

The chapter then brings Panchayat and Rural Development Department to the fore considering its pivotal role in
rural development. The administrative structure of the Department has been shown in hierarchical order.

This is followed by a detailed discussion on 'Secretariat'. The role and objectives of the Secretariat as the apex body of Government administration have been analysed in their correct perspectives. The controversy centering round the tenure system of secretariat in India has naturally come to the purview of the discussion.

The chapter also gives adequate attention to a vital information concerning Rural Development viz, administrative setup for implementation of IRDP. This has been discussed under three heads: Central Level, State Level and District level. At the Central level, a Central Level Coordination Committee assists the Department of Rural Development in the Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India, comprising Chairman, Members and Member Secretary. Similarly at the state level, a State Level Coordination Committee assists the department of Rural Development comprising Chairman, Members and Member Secretary, while at the District level, the DRDAs work as implementation agencies with a similar composition. The functions at various levels have also been dealt with. The chapter also throws light on such aspects as schemes under which center shares expenditure with states, DRDA Administration, etc.
Chapter III engages attention in Personnel Administration. Organisation by itself can do nothing. The actual work is done by the men and women who hold the various posts, high and low, in the organisation. The employees, officers, or servants who fill the various positions in an organisation are collectively referred to as personnel.

The Chapter opens with a discussion on the meaning and methods of recruitment. Citing D. Waldo, recruitment has been defined as the process through which suitable candidates are induced to compete for appointment to the public service. As for methods of recruitment, the two common practices, namely, recruitment by promotion and direct recruitment have been examined. A comparative analysis has been made by pointing out their relative merits and demerits and a compromise between the two has been suggested as the ideal path to avoid the controversy hanging around each of them.

The recruitment to the higher position in the Rural Development Department is made by the Assam Public Service Commission, which follows the rules of the Government. Selections of candidates for recruitment into ACS and allied services are made on the basis of combined competitive examinations held at two stages, namely, Preliminary Examination and Final Examination. In addition, the Department depends on Employment Exchanges as source of recruitment to the lower positions.
Dealing with promotion, the chapter distinguishes between two categories of promotion, i.e., (i) from a lower grade to a higher grade within the same classes and (ii) from one class of the service to a higher class. It has been maintained that the principles of promotion are only two-seniority and merit. Their relative merits and demerits have also been discussed. Methods of testing merit have been examined under three heads, viz. (i) Written Examination as a method of merit determination. (2) Discretion of the Head of Department and (3) Service records and efficiency rating.

As for training, it has been stated that the SIRD has developed certain work specific agenda from which rural people can derive economic benefit having scope for self-employment and generating additional income to improve their living standards. More than 80% of people in Assam are agriculturists. The main source of income for them is agriculture. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan is of the view that the Assamese, one and all, from the poorest to the nobility are devoted to agricultural pursuits. Yet the method of cultivation they practise is quite traditional which is labour-intensive, unremunerative to the comparison of their labour. Even the bullock variety of Assam is not so strong to draw the plough for tillage. Under such circumstances, it is indeed a right step taken by the SIRD for the mechanisation of the implements of cultivation. The income generating and self employment creating activities undertaken by the SIRD for the rural employed youth such as horticulture, floriculture, mushroom cultivation, dairy farming,
poultry, piggery pisciculture development, food-processing, improvement of the designing of the jute products and handloom and textile products, imparting knowledge on computer application have shown ways for economic activities to the otherwise frustrated unemployed youth of the rural areas in Assam. There is no stop to the flow of the rural youths to the SIRD office, with queries for their establishment in socio-economic fields of life. Rural people have started considering the SIRD institute as a place where they can receive guidance as to how to proceed to take up self-employment activity in the villages in a scientific and commercial way.

Chapter IV, deals with ‘Developmental Programmes’ carried out by the Government of India from time to time for rural transformation. One of the encouraging features of developmental programmes in India is that they are not mutually exclusive, rather they are intimately connected with one another, and this is quite in tune with the spirit of rural development. Throughout the chapter, attempt has been made to maintain this unity in diversity. Thus, while discussing such programmes as TRYSEM, DWCRA, EAS, SGRY etc., they have been shown as integrated to IRDP.

Since IRDP is the pivot round which all other programmes revolve, it has been brought to light at the very beginning of the discussion. The phenomenon called IRDP has been thoroughly discussed in all its varied aspects so as to establish it as a multi-dimensional programme based on employment
generation through optimum utilisation of local resources, etc., etc. All other programmes have also been proportionately discussed.

As for TRYSEM, it has been said that it aims at providing basic technical and managerial skills to the rural youth in the age group of 18-35 from families below the poverty line to enable them to take up self-employment and wage employment in the broad fields of agriculture and allied sectors, industries, services and business activities. Thus, DWCRA was introduced for ensuring the benefit of IRDP to reach to women directly. The primary objective of EAS is to provide gainful employment during lean agricultural season in manual work to all able-bodied adults in rural areas who are in need and desirous of work, but cannot find it.

Other programmes like SGRY, JGSY, IAY, PMGSY, SGSY, PMGY (GA), IWDP, GKY, etc., have also been properly discussed delineating their salient features. All these programmes aim at all-round development of rural areas. Rural India today is beset with such vital problems as poverty and unemployment, ill-health and insanitation, lack of communication, poor housing and social injustice, etc., etc. These programmes strive at speedy solution to all such problems. It should be noted in this connection that performances of these programmes in Assam have been added as tailpiece to each of them. ‘Success stories under SGSY’ has been added to the end of the Chapter citing instances of achievements under SGSY in some parts of the country. It is hoped that these case histories will arouse interest in programmes of rural
development and dispel doubts of those who only see the negative sides of such programmes.

Chapter V entitled ‘Panchayati Raj and Rural Development’ discusses the role of Panchayati Raj as the most powerful institution for betterment of rural society. Highlighting the objectives of Panchayati Raj, it has been stated:

“The primary objective of Panchayati Raj is to establish an integrated structure of local democratic or self-governing bodies linking the village within the district and to make the village Panchayat, a unit of planning and execution of all schemes of rural development. Secondly, Panchayati Raj aims at developing the initiative of local people and create conditions for maximum popular participation. Thirdly, it seeks to develop sound leadership at all levels in the district necessary for the success of democratic institutions. And finally, it seeks to provide at the instance of Panchayati Raj bodies a development oriented and efficient administration”.

Tracing the origin of Panchayati system in the far Vedic age, this chapter draws a historical sketch of the development of the system as a traditional form of local self-governing institution down the ages. Being ignored and suppressed by the British rulers, the system revives immediately after independence. Following the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee, the
Panchayati Raj was established as a full-fledged institution of local self-government.

Since decentralised planning is as much necessary as decentralised power, it has been deemed suitable to engage a few lines in the line of the subject. While admitting the need for decentralisation in planning, stress has been given on the point that both centralised planning and decentralised planning must be taken into account, because it has been found that there are certain areas of development where centralised planning works better and there are others where decentralised planning is undoubtedly the only choice.

The chapter also traces the origin and development of the Panchayati system in Assam. It has been maintained that the traditional system of village administration in Assam was based on the principles of community life. Apparently, village administration then was a living embodiment of mutual trust and cooperation, honesty and integrity, stability and peace. Thus, the 'Namghars' and 'Satras' were not only religious places but also common platforms for settling all grievances and disputes amicably. "The village administration in Assam is also rooted in Chowkidari System. The main objectives of village administration were to protect the lives and properties of the people. The Chowkidari system required the villages to provide some arrangement for collection of taxes and payment of salaries to the Chowkidars to secure service from
them". During the British regime the traditional system of Panchayat suffered a great setback and it had to pass through a series of ups and downs.

Taking the year 1915 as the starting point of modern Panchayati system in Assam, the chapter takes into account the various changes taking place in the system in the course of its development culminating in 1994. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment had given a constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions under Article 243. In conformity with the Amendment, the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 was passed and it provided for a three-tier Panchayat system in Assam.

In this context, the chapter depicts the overall socio-economic scenario as noticed in traditional rural Assam. If self-sufficiency is the hallmark of rural development, as remarked by Mahatma Gandhi, Assam has set a glaring instance of the same in its socio-economic life down the ages. Silk industry has been a part and parcel of Assam economy since time immemorial.

Tea industry in Assam is famous all over the world. The tea community consisting of persons belonging to UP, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, etc. and the greater Assamese community accepting them as brothers sets a rare example of peaceful co-existence.

The chapter also recollects Rajiv Gandhi's contribution towards rural reconstruction. According to Rajiv Gandhi,
"development has to mean the development of our villages. It is the villages that must be transformed. Indeed, once the villages are developed, the critics will be automatically benefited......"

The chapter winds up with a retrospective view on the recent development of the Panchayati Raj in Assam.

When strong currents of rivers flow ahead they leave bubbles behind. Scientific experiments sometimes meet with disastrous consequences. Should then such experiments be stopped for ever? On its onward march towards destination, rural development has to face many a challenge, often upsetting its activities to a considerable extent. Such challenges are innumerable and often of varied nature. It will take a lot of time and space to discuss each one of them.

This chapter (Chapter VI) exclusively deals with only a select few problems affecting the grass-root level. Some of such problems are: planning, people's participation, weak grass roots link, ignored 'women's involvement, training, corruption, etc. As for planning, it has been said that the planning processes in India have miserably failed to materialise the people's expectations. A proper blending of centralised & decentralised planning should be the ideal form in years to come. Also in implementation of plans, local condition must always be taken into consideration.
So far as people's participation is concerned the chapter stresses that the whole thing has been made a mockery over the years. It has now been an accepted truth that people's participation is a must for the overall success of rural developmental programmes. As a matter of fact, rural development is of the people, for the people and by the people. In order to involve the people in developmental activities, proper strategies should be adopted. In this connection, the chapter makes a number of suggestions, following which in their right earnest can maximise people's participation.

Weak grass-root link is another factor adversely affecting rural development programmes. Although a hue and cry is being raised over people's participation, still there is a wide gulf between the people & the development personnel. The sooner this gap can be bridged the better.

The chapter also takes the matter of women's involvement in developmental activities seriously and expresses concern over this vast section of population being hitherto ignored. It suggests that in order to tide over this problem, the development functionaries should adopt adequate strategies to be intimately connected with the womenfolk and drag them on to the mainstream of development.

Lack of proper training is also hindering the progress of rural development. Unless there should be enough provisions
for proper training of functionaries in technical and all other matters, better performance can newer be expected. Hence, it has been maintained in the chapter that training of diverse nature offered at different levels and at different stages in the career of extension personnel can play an important role in rural development.

Rampant corruption from top to bottom has also overshadowed all our country's developmental activities and this is one main reason why rural development in spite of all its high-sounding programmes is fast losing popular ground. Unless the functionaries learn to hold national interests above their mean, selfish interests, only miracles can cure this leprous malady.

These problems are, however, not insurmountable mountains. As pointed out in the chapter, these can be done away with provided rural development is taken in the right earnest.

Rural development in India however, offers a brilliant prospect, considering its vast potentialities still to be fully explored. One of these factors is agriculture which is the backbone of national economy, but the most backward sector. Poverty is still a nightmare in our society and most of the poor people are rural peasants. For removal of poverty, accelerated agricultural development is urgently required. Use of latest technological advances, total land reforms, etc., are some of the means to expedite agricultural production and development which will automatically lead to raising the
standards of living of the rural poor. All this has been precisely discussed in the chapter. As for land reforms, there are still many things to be done. No doubt, the days of feudal exploitations are gone, still the land reform measures in our country suffer from many deep-rooted weaknesses. The chapter points out the major weaknesses in our land-reform measures and stringent government policies for their redressal can bring about a radical transformation in the country's rural economy and life.

Agricultural marketing which is an essential part of agricultural economy is at its worst. Rural marketing system in India suffers from such defects as inadequate storage, unsatisfactory means of transportation, absence of grading and standardisation, multiplicity of charges, lack of organisation and institutional marketing, etc. All these defects result in low income to the farmers and unless these are removed, the whole planning process will be adversely affected. The chapter suggests a number of positive steps in the line of scientific marketing system.

As for rural industrialisation, the chapter stresses the need for revitalising the traditional village and small-scale industries. Apart from other problems, the chapter deals seriously with the problem of sickness affecting most of rural industries, its apparent causes and possible remedies. It has been suggested that while adopting employment oriented industrial strategy, expansion of small-scale and agro-based industries should be promoted through rural industrialisation. In order to increase the productivity
with peace in industrial sector, efforts should be made to establish industrial democracy in our country.

Proper application of science and technology in rural agriculture and industry is a must for doing away with stagnation in rural economy. As has been pointed out in the chapter, a judicious balance between achieving higher productivity and increasing employment opportunities both in the spheres of agriculture and industry has to be struck either adopting new technologies or gradually replacing the traditional one or improving the existing one. Further, the technology should be simple, understandable and maintainable by the vast majority of rural population, should make full use of locally available resources, should be conducive to the generation of community cooperation and participation, should be neutral to scale and must be ecologically sound.

Last but not the least important, the chapter reflects on the sorry state of affairs confronting rural youth of India today. Rural development turns into a mockery if vast majority of rural youth remain jobless, thus causing colossal wastage of human resources. A scientific strategy to fight rural unemployment and poverty must be adopted: Employment opportunities in rural areas can be found in agricultural sector and non-agricultural sector. Employment opportunities can be created by the application of improved technology in farm planning and crop production, diversification of allied activities such as animal husbandry, khadi, fisheries, etc. In non-agricultural sector employment can be
generated through development of infrastructure such as irrigation, rural electrification, rural roads, etc., professional services such as barbers, cobblers, etc., by upgrading their skills and growth of village and small-scale industries.

Rural development is a long and hazardous journey. It is not a vermillion road that can easily lead us to our cherished goal. It is a thorny path and we have to be very cautious at every step, with our eyes fixed on the fore every moment. We may slip at the slightest carelessness on our part. Often we are likely to take the wrong way. Sometimes we are in doubts and uncertainties as to which way to go. We have to grope in the dark. At times, we are beset with dangers and difficulties, and we are struck with fear and threat. But come what may, nothing can stop us, nothing can take us back because we are on a mission to do good to our fellow beings. Our beacon light is our father, the great Mahatma, who is the living incarnate of courage and conviction, sacrifice and selfless service. We will walk hand in hand and we are sure we will reach our goal in near future. We will bring Swaraj, Ramrajya to our people. We will bring peace and prosperity to them. Until then, we will not take rest. Until then, we will eat and sleep and dream with these words as our guiding principle in life:

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep." (Robert Frost)