One of the greatest challenges in India today is to achieve national development. India is a land of village communities. As a matter of fact, the village was the basic unit of administration as far back as the Vedic Age. India has been a predominantly rural country. Over the last about four and a half decades of Indian Independence, attempts have been made by the various governments to take the economy to the new heights of development and to promote social justice through a series of Five Year Plans. The various approaches, strategies and policy programmes have been planned and executed for the purpose. But the fruits of development have not reached the rural poor, particularly those living below the poverty line.

The present strategy of direct attack on poverty through specific poverty alleviation programmes is justified on account of insufficient percolation of benefits to the poor from overall economic growth. The strategy of direct attack on poverty cannot be sustained and would not yield the desired results, if the overall growth of the economy itself is slow and the benefits of such growth are inequitably distributed. Firstly, the resources and the capability needed for running such programmes cannot be generated in the system unless the economy itself is buoyant and there is a sustained increase in output. Secondly, the demands for goods and services produced by a poor household
enterprises significantly in response to the overall increase in state income. The programme of poverty alleviation should thus be regarded as supplement of the basic plan for overall economic growth, in terms of generating productive assets and skills as well as income for the poor. Therefore, a critical study of rural development programmes particularly in Himachal Pradesh being a hilly state of India has been undertaken.

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