PREFACE
This dissertation is a record of the experiences undergone by me while studying the agricultural practices in vogue among the tribal and non-tribal farmers of the Lakhimpur Block of Assam, and associating these practices with the performance of those farmers in raising crops and utilising land and other resources at their disposal. Initially, my outlook was quite traditional, typical of a student trained in the traditional branch of economics, with my ears turned deaf and eyes turned blind to the messages of Institutionalism. It was the constant hammering of my Supervisor, Dr. S.K. Mishra, that I could be awakened from my slumber and I started looking into my research problem from a new viewpoint, with a new methodology.

Initially, after I woke up from slumber, I could hardly understand why my Supervisor was decided to initiate me in 'Institutionalism' and why, looking at my research topic through the coloured glass of "institutionalism", I won't necessary produce a thoroughly biased research findings. When I expressed this fear to my Supervisor, he suggested me to read Myrdal's "The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory". It took me long time to read and comprehend what Myrdal writes in the said book. But after a great deal of effort, when I
could grasp the imports of that book, I was dismayed. I could hardly believe how much biased a student of traditional economics might be, and how ignorant of his bias!

I realised that biases in social science cannot be erased simply by keeping to the facts and by refined methods of statistical treatment of the data. Facts, and handling of data, sometimes show themselves even more pervious to tendencies toward bias than does pure thought. I was convinced that the chaos of possible data for research does not organise itself into systematic knowledge by mere observation. Hypotheses are necessary. We must raise questions before we can expect answers from the facts and the questions must be significant.

There is no way of studying social reality other than from the viewpoint of human idea. A disinterested social science has never existed and, for logical reasons, can't exist. The value connotation of our main concepts represents our interest in a matter, gives direction to our thought and significance to our inferences. It poses the questions without which there are no answers.

Hence I made up my mind. Instead of going to the field and collecting data with a bias of which I am ignorant and work with a make-believe that I am unbiased, it
is better to be fully aware of my ideological precepts and ask questions and ask significant questions knowing fully well why do I ask certain questions. If a disinterested social science can never exist, then I must know my interest. If a researcher must have biases, then they should be explicit in his approach. The research work, then, will remain biased — there is no way to purge a social science research of the ideological biases — but explicit biases add honesty to research. I believe that a biased and dishonest research is worse than a biased but honest research.

A reader of this dissertation will find the tint of institutionalism explicit throughout the text. Disregard for institutional variables and bereftment of the elementary considerations of social psychology are the sine qua non of research in the traditions of the establishment economics. I wonder if economists ever think of what C.G. Jung said of the social psychology — the collective subconscious. It is indeed a fact that need seriously be taken care of. Every community has a collective subconscious. Most of the social and economic behaviour are guided not by the individual consciousness, what one calls rationality, but by the collective subconscious, an impression of which is there in the minds of every individual
member of that particular community. Of course, there is something called individual subconsciousness. The thought and acts are guided by individual subconsciousness also. Thus, there are two components of the unconscious behaviour: one that is guided by the collective subconsciousness and has a regularity and communality at the societal level, and the other that is purely personal and works out to be random at the societal level. The conscious behaviour added to these two unconscious behaviour make up the total of behaviour.

Economic behaviour, the endeavours of a man directed toward meeting the material requirements of life, is a complex of three types of behaviour - collective subconscious behaviour, individual subconscious behaviour and individual conscious behaviour. For traditional economics, the first two are non-existent; for an institutional economist, all the three are existent and the first one is dominant.

Then the explanation of economic behaviour must look into the mores, customs, traditions, beliefs, attitudes and social norms which an individual is subject to. No simple "economic explanation" will do.
Ever since Adam Smith, the establishment economics has continuously made great efforts to mould its methodology on the line of physical sciences, and more Newtonian an economist has been, more scientific he has been considered by the profession. To be "scientific" then, it is required to assume a man an object under the push and pull of extraneous forces and the economy to strive continuously for an equilibrium in a physicist's sense. Rationality in this sense is an induced gravitational force. To be 'scientific' is to be Newtonian and to purge economic analysis of all values, habits, subconscious tendencies and make the economic science an "objective" study. We have parted with this "objectivity" in our approach, since we sincerely believe that economics can neither be moulded on the lines of physical sciences, nor can it be value-free. Economics is the study of man and society and it must involve itself into a study of the set pattern of habits of thinking and acting and its repercussions on human behaviour in general and economic behaviour in particular. Hence our "institutional approach" incorporating sociological, economic, anthropological and social psychological considerations of economic behaviour.

In Chapter I, we have presented the objective of our study and the methodology adopted. We have presented the
odds against our methodology, and after presenting a critique of the Schultzian methodology, we have justified our own. We have provided an outline of our research work, the procedure of data collection and concept of agricultural practice.

In Chapter II, we have presented the characteristic features of our study area, the sample villages, the typical agricultural practices carried out in these villages and thus we have provided a background for an empirical research.

In Chapter III, we have analysed our sample data and found out the discernible patterns in the data. We have found how tribals and non-tribals differ among themselves and in which dimensions.

In Chapter IV, we have searched for the determinants of agricultural productivity and utilization of land resources. We have shown how institutional variables are significant in explaining agricultural performance of farmers in our study area.

In Chapter V, we have gone in for suggesting some policy guidelines for agricultural development, provided a summary of the study and closed the investigation.
This research work has been a pleasant experience for me. It is better not to mention my gratitude to my Supervisor; to remain silent is a more impressive expression of my intense feelings.

I acknowledge my sincere feeling to my father-in-law, mother-in-law and brother-in-law for their silent sacrifices without which I could not have dreamt of completing this work.

I would like to express my gratitude to all my teachers in the Department of Economics for their valuable suggestions and inspirations from time to time.

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I take this opportunity to put on record my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Joseph F. Khongbuh for typing out my dissertation with utmost care.
The completion of my study is the result of affection, co-operation and inspiration of my worthy husband Mr. Premananda How Bora, for which no words are sufficient to express my heartfelt gratitude to him.

Our little baby "Pranju" has been a great source of encouragement and inspiration while finishing this research work.

In spite of the best and most valuable that I could receive from all whom I have offered my gratitude by name, and many others whose name could not be mentioned here on account of the human weaknesses of which, I believe, I share the larger portion, there may be errors and omissions betraying my consciousness. For such errors and omissions I and I alone should be put to blame and criticism.

SHILLONG