An attempt has been made in this dissertation of eight chapters to trace the history of the working class movement in Assam from 1920 to 1939 with special emphasis on the Assam Oil Company Workers' strike of 1939. Plantation labour, however, has been excluded from this study. In fact very little work has been done on non-plantation working class movement of the province. Except Planter Raj to Swaraj by Amalendu Guha and Political History of Assam Vol. II, edited by Arun Bhuyan and Sibapada De, where a few pages have been devoted to the non-plantation workers' struggle, no other book even has thrown any light on this important subject.

In preparation of this dissertation, I had to face some genuine difficulties. The first handicap has been the lack of availability of primary source materials. Consequent to the shifting of the Assam State Archives more than twenty years have passed but it is still to be properly organized and therefore tracing the files and reports has become a genuine problem. Many important manuscripts, though existed in the catalogue, could not be traced. However, my visits to National Archives of India and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library at New Delhi, National Library and West Bengal State Archives at Calcutta, Dept. of Historical and Antiquarian Studies and Assam Secretariat library at Guwahati, AOC Labour Union Office at Digboi and India and Oriental Records Office, London have been much helpful in collecting primary source materials which have helped me immensely in preparation of this dissertation. My interviews with different persons who were either connected with the AMCO or AOC Workers' struggle or witnesses of different working class movement of the period, have helped me to understand the ground-level situations when these important strikes took place.

The present dissertation is a survey of working class movement of Assam during the period 1920 and 1939 in which the genesis of labour movement in the non-plantation sector in Assam has been studied. Different forms of workmen's protest particularly strikes by the working class in Assam during the period intervening between the two World Wars which include strikes in the Assam Government Press, Dibru-Sadiya Railways, Assam-Bengal Railways, Jorhat Police, Assam Railways and Trading Company and the Assam Match Company have been surveyed in a capsular form in the first two chapters.
Assam Oil Company, Digboi, a pioneering organization in the field of oil exploration in India, had the singular distinction of being the largest employer of labour in Assam in the non-plantation sector during the pre-independence days. From 1928-29 onwards, labour-management relations in the Company became strained and by the middle of the 1930s, the workers began to organize themselves. In 1939, the workers showed an exemplary concerted action of working class solidarity when they organized a strike lasting for several months. The strike was very important in the context of labour movement in India, particularly Assam. It exhibited persistent coordinated assertion of rights of the workers of the oil industry—the only one of its kind in India, which was significantly under European management. The strike also testified the fact that the workers were gradually emerging as a class in the province. The multi-faceted dimensions of the AOC workers' strike of 1939 have been incorporated as a case study and elaborately dealt in six chapters.