In this research work, I have made a humble attempt to reconstruct from scattered sources and record the social demography from historical perspective change in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam during the period from 1826 to 1941, covering a century of transition. Demography which has been interpreted as accounting of population dynamics is a science of measurement of historical phenomena as well. Population and social processes are generally correlated in popular opinion. The movement of people and immigration, in its economic aspect often figures in discussions too. Demography helps in social planning, in the identification of the environmental circumstances that surround disease clusters, in revealing the effects of social changes on the ages etc. Demography also traces social struggles, bitter national and ideological conflicts. Negatively, it leads to ‘ethnic conflicts,’ by classifying individuals. Likewise many problems relating to present social and political tension in migration prone multicultural societies can be traced to the historical demographic structure and change. Therefore, for a complete socio-economic study of any region, a study of its population remains central. Such a study is necessary for the understanding various socio-economic and ethnic groups in a society. In this sense, no study can be more fundamentally important and at the same time more generally useful and interesting than a study of regional demographic change.

With these facts in mind, I have undertaken a study of social demography of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam during the period from 1826 to 1941. It is true that a demographic study such as attempted in this thesis may be concerned primarily with a period of the past, but it does not lose its significance because present demographic facts are indubitably linked with the past. In this study I have analyzed population
demographically from five major points: number and distribution, social composition, trends and fluctuations, occupational categories, and density and settlement pattern. The study ranges over ten centuries and surveys the six districts of the Brahmaputra valley in the province of Assam during colonial rule. It is worth mentioning here that the boundaries of the districts surveyed have been shifted over time during the period of study.

The demographic history of Assam in the pre-colonial is unique as a recipient of continuous batches of immigration from the neighbouring South-east Asian countries; gradual assimilation and settling down of the immigrants with the local inhabitants, creating thereby a mosaic of population composition in the valley. The colonial period in Assam was a very significant as it witnessed the collapse of the Ahom monarchy which had ruled Assam for over six centuries and simultaneously the rise of foreign mercantile group turn administrators in control of political as well economic power in the region. Prior to this Assam practically remained detached from the mainland India except, for certain rare occasions. The decline Ahom monarchy was speeded up by internal dissensions and intrigues. One such intrigue invited foreign invasion from the king of Burma (now Myanmar). The Burmese invasion let loose a reign of terror in the valley. The situation on the other hand brought the British, eager to protect their economic concerns, into the scene. They cleared Assam of the Burmese atrocities in 1826 but gradually took control of the political administration in the region. The new found interest in extending colonial dominion in Assam was also evoked by the economic potentialities. Many new developments occurred in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam during this period which considerably affected the magnitude and pattern of population. The new rulers brought along the concepts of modernity which stumbled
upon pre-existing concepts, categories, institutions, and practices through which they get assessed and configured differently.

I have explained at the appropriate place the objective of the present research, including the methodology adopted, the temporal scope of the work and the source of statistical data and the documentary evidences used. The attempt in the present research has been to understand the problem which involves an economic dimension in the process of historical flux. I would, therefore make no pretence to completeness and perfection. But I do hope that the results and findings of this study will provide some penetrating insights into the behaviour of the population including its components, in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam during the period from 1826-1941. I, however, hope that my work will at least incite further research in this field.