ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my supervisor Professor Ravi Srivastava whose immense support has helped me write this thesis. His suggestions, comments and guidance at various levels helped me not only in giving a direction to the thesis but also made me a much more mature researcher.

This thesis wouldn't have been possible without the help and support of many many people who helped me in doing my fieldwork in the villages of Nadia and Jalpaiguri. Thanks to Ms. Bani Saraswati of Sreema Mahila Samity (Duttaphulia, Nadia) who arranged my stay in the village, Ashit and Anando who helped me in acquainting with the villagers in Nadia district. I could do my field survey in Jalpaiguri only because of Narayan kaky and Jyobotosh kaky; they made all the arrangements in the villages so that I could do my survey.

I am also thankful to the Principal, Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, for granting me study leave for two years which helped me concentrate on my thesis, keeping aside my teaching commitments.

Writing this thesis hasn't been an easy task at all, with ups and downs, at times even feeling like not pursuing it anymore. But the fact that I have finally completed it is only due to the constant support of my family and friends. Jhumur and Anupam have always been supportive. Special thanks to Shilpy for always being there for me.

Thanks to Sakthi who helped me with my data work and to Rachanadi who kept my spirits up when I needed it the most.

Finally, I owe my gratitude to Ma, Baba, my brother and sister's whose unconditional support at all stages of my life made things easier for me.

July 2008

KAKALI BARUA