ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of this research depends largely on the encouragement of many others apart from the efforts from my side. I take this opportunity to appreciate those who have been instrumental in the successful completion of my doctoral program.

First and foremost, with a deep sense of gratitude and immense respect I thank my supervisor Prof. P. S. Srivastava (Department of Biotechnology, Hamdard University, New Delhi) and my co-supervisor Dr. Manoj Prasad (National Institute of Plant Genome Research, New Delhi). I am indebted to them for their deft touch to inculcate a sense of discipline while assigning me the given project. Inspite of the busy schedule and paucity of time, they guided me with a humane touch during the entire course of my study. I am deeply obliged to them, for spending many hours helping me to tie down loose ends by providing broad base of knowledge and making all the facilities easily accessible. The joy and enthusiasm they have for research was contagious and motivational, especially during tough times in the Ph.D. pursuit. Their calibre, cool nature and cordial behavior made me more confident to tackle the hardships in the preparedness for research work. Their benevolent attitude, scholarly guidance, constructive criticism and encouragement at every step helped me immensely while at work and enabled me to perform fruitfully. The upliftment that they have given to my academic, professional, financial and moral well being cannot be described in words. In every sense, none of this work would have been possible without them.

I put forth my sense of immense gratitude to the honorable Vice chancellor of Hamdard University, Dr. G. N. Qazi for bestowing upon me the opportunity to work under such talented and energetic team of extraordinary community of scientists and researchers.

I express my deep sense of gratitude to the Director of NIPGR, Prof. Akhilesh Tyagi, conceding me to avail the best of facilities at the elite organization called NIPGR. Prof. Asis Datta (Emeritus Scientist, NIPGR) is deeply acknowledged for always inspiring quality work and the much needed support and co-operation during my research period.
Sincere regards are due towards my esteemed faculty members at Dept. of Biotechnology, Hamdard University, Prof. M. Z. Abdin (also Dean, Faculty of Science), Prof. S. K. Jain (Head of Department), Dr. Sandip Das (presently at Department of Botany, Delhi University) and Dr. Farhat Afri for their whole hearted support in this regard.

I avail this privilege to immensely thank Dr. Nese Sreetivasusulu (IPK, Germany), Dr. Ranjit P. Bahadur (IIT, Kharagpur), Dr. Manoj Majee and Dr. Ananda Sarkar (both NITPR), craving for an important work of the project concerned. I appreciate the contributions of time and ideas by Prof. Sheila Srivastava (Department of Genetics, Delhi University, New Delhi) during the needy hours.

I would like to record my gratitude to Dr. Alok K. Sinha, NITPR for his right preparatory guidance and cooperation. He was most instrumental in evoking my research interests by exposing me to several forefront research issues. Prof. Sushil Kumar, Dr. Debasis Chattopadhyay, Dr. Sabhyata Bhatia and other faculty at NITPR are thanked immensely for their timely advices to make my research more productive and stimulating.

I am especially grateful for the conversations I had with Dr. Alka Narula, Hamdard University, as it always instilled me with positive attitude and new enthusiasm. Special recognition goes towards Dr. Sarika Gupta, NITPR, for her generosity with time, constructive suggestions and new ideas at different levels. Their excellence as successful woman scientists becomes a massive source of inspiration for youngsters like me.

Many days I woke up thinking that I would like to be in both places at the same time in that day. I tried, but rarely succeeded to do it! For all these I would like to thank people from both the places, Hamdard and NITPR. They all created a wonderful working environment making my running around worthwhile.

The liberality and assistance of all my seniors and lab mates at Hamdard University, Dr. Shivanee Kaul (ICGEB, New Delhi), Dr. Sumiya Jamshieed, Dr. Junaid Aslam, Dr. Md. Zahid Rizvi, Dr. Alka Singh, Dr. Ritesh Kumar, Dr. Kalspana, Zahid sir, Sumit, Showkat, Aarti and Kshipra has made my goal achievable. My heartfelt
gratitude and thanks go out especially to Gunjan and Karuna for cooperating me in experimental and innumerable other ways.

I would like to extend my thanks to my lab members at NIPGR, Dr. Sarita Bhutti, Charu, Kajal, Karunesh, Awadhesh, Amita and Bharti for their pleasant friendship and making the lab a convivial place to work. Most of all, I applaud Pranav, as during the period of my trial and tribulation, he acted as harbor in the tempest. He has always provided optimist company, encouragement, sound advice, and lots of excellent initiatives throughout my research period especially during the thesis-writing. I would have been lost without him.

I particularly attach importance to the patient gestures of my seniors Dr. Ananthi Jayaraman, Dr. Vivek Dixit, Dr. Pallavi Sharma, Dr. Rakesh Shukla, Dr. Sanjay Ghawana, Dr. Vineeta Tripathi, Dr. Deepti Jain, Dr. K. Prabhakar Rao, Dr. Kundan Kumar, Dr. Santosh Kumar, Dr. Monika Jaggi, Dr. Prasad, Aparna di, Neeraj sir, Wankhede sir, Rajeev sir, Kunal sir, all currently, or previously, at NIPGR. I appreciate the camaraderie of my colleagues especially Nazia, Hathiram, Rashmi, Parul, Smriti, Sudhakar, Sushmita, Protiti, Rehna, Ruby, Harmeet, Arvind and Swati. My time at NIPGR was made enjoyable in large part due to my ever zealous and loving juniors, Raghu, Arsheed, Siddhi, Mukesh, Atish, Kamlesh, Hitashi, Ganga, Rajeev, Poonam, Vibhav, Archita, Sharmila, Swati Sharma, Annapurna, Manjul, Aditi, Pooja, Bhanu, Nisha, Priyanka, and Renu.

I am also grateful to the financial, academic and technical staff at Hamdard University, especially Mr. Anish Cherian, Mr. Farid, Ms. Rekha and Ms. Shweta. I acknowledge the help provided by lab attendants Satish, Gautam, Nafees, Shazid and Tofik. Word of thanks goes to all the staff members of NIPGR, Arun sir, Mr. Ashok, Mr. Shobharam, Mr. Anand, Mr. Surender and Mr. Manohar for making my work easy in CIF. I am thankful to Chandraprakash, Bikash and Robi da for helping me in lab as well as maintaining the plants in green house and fields.

To complete a part of my research work, I visited Leibnitz Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research (IPK), Gatersleben, Germany for a month. During this period I met many wonderful Indian and German people whom I would like to thank especially,
Sumathi ma'am and little Siri, Yana, Harshavardhan, Rajesh, and Christiana for their hospitality.

I gratefully acknowledge the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, New Delhi for the award of Senior Research Fellow. A part of my work was also supported by the financial support from the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India. I would also like to thank the editors and several anonymous reviewers for their help and comments that improved various published papers.

I thank all my relatives for their encouraging words especially my loving cousins Gaurav, Tushar, Shrey, Nikhil, Aparna and Shruti for standing by me through moments of joy and despair. Without the support of my friends it was not possible to bring this work to its logical end. Those who were always a pillar of strength to me include Preeti, Binod, Reshmi, Amit, Arpita, Samta, Pratibha, Pushpanjali, Priyanka, Aparna, Jayshree, Nishant, Saurabh, Vibhuti and Vaibhav.

My parents, Ms. Rajni Puranik and Mr. P. W. Puranik, have played the most pivotal role to boost my aspiration and have given moral support by patting on my back to see that my confidence is not dented at the time of stress. If we ever had a family motto that would have been - If there's a will, there's a way - a philosophy of life I have been carrying with me every day. The successful completion of my doctoral program is an answer to their prayers and a fruit of their blessings. No words can be enough to thank them, for that, I dedicate my thesis to their feet. However, this is just a small step towards unveiling their dreams.

According to a Jewish proverb, 'The last, Ah!, the last is the most precious'. So, unfailingly I pray and thank to the Almighty for his shower of blessings and giving me the strength to do my duty to the pinnacle satisfaction of my superiors. Sai, it is under your compassion that I stride to live, learn and flourish.

Swati Puranik