Preface

In the rural economy of Assam, small farmers constitute a sizable section of the rural community. They are numerically large but economically poor. Many of them are scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

Small farmers belong to the weaker section of the rural society which also includes marginal farmers, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers, rural artisans etc. They together constitute 82.30 percent of the households but cultivate only 42.60 percent of the land area according to 1976-77, Agricultural Census.

One of the important objectives of our economic planning is to ensure social justice to this vulnerable section by allowing them to enjoy the benefits of development and opportunities for attaining a minimum level of living. In order to promote social justice and to improve the economic status of this under-privileged class, different beneficiary oriented programmes like Small Farmers Development Agency, Drought Prone Area Programme, Command Area Development Programme, Integrated Rural Development Programme etc. have been introduced under the Five Year Plans. Land Reform measures like zamindari abolition, protection of sharecroppers,
Imposition of ceiling on land holdings have been taken to safeguard the interest of this section of weaker agricultural community. But there are grounds to believe that the impact of all these measures and programmes on the economic life of the weaker section has been very limited.

In this perspective, we have made an endeavour in this thesis to make an empirical study of the economic conditions of one of the most important constituents of this weaker class of the rural community, that is small farmers. Our canvass of study is restricted to the small farmers of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam which covers as high as 86 percent of the population and 78 percent of the area of the state.

An attempt has been made in this thesis to study in detail the economic conditions of this size-group of farmers in Assam, the various problems being faced by them and the impact of the different plan measures taken up so far to improve their conditions.

The thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduces the location of the state and discusses, in brief, the profile of Assam in respect of population, land utilization, production and productivity etc. Further, it critically discusses the definition of small farmer.
Methodology and sampling design followed in the sample survey have also been discussed in this chapter. The second chapter discusses the socio-economic conditions of the sample villages. The third chapter deals with the various plan measures adopted by the government to improve the conditions of agriculture in general and small farmers in particular. The fourth chapter studies various reform measures, organisational as well as technological, adopted by the state government to improve the economic condition of the small farmers by providing necessary facilities. Further, the chapter makes a micro-study of the economic conditions of the small farmers of the sample villages by studying their household conditions, possession of consumer goods, income-expenditure pattern, and to assess thereby their poverty situation. In this chapter, crop intensity, production and productivity, application of various inputs like seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, irrigation and credit supply, in the sample villages have also been studied. It focuses the poor credit worthiness of the small farmers and also reveals the unsatisfactory performance of the credit institutions so far as small farmers are concerned. In the fifth and final chapter, the summary of findings and policy prescription have been given.

We selected 68 villages of 34 Community Development Blocks of seven districts of Brahmaputra valley for our study. The names of the surveyed villages and C.D. Blocks, have been given in-detailed in Appendix C.
Methodology:

The study has been made on the basis of the central hypothesis that the condition of the small farmers in Assam has not undergone any fundamental change during the plan period. An attempt has been made to test the hypothesis not only by means of official data but also by means of primary data collected from the field through sample survey. The details regarding the design of the survey and field work have been described in the first chapter.

Before undertaking the survey, the author made extensive study of the relevant literature by visiting different libraries, institutions, banks and government departments e.g. National Library (Calcutta), Economics Department Library of Calcutta University, Library of the Calcutta Centre of Study in Social Sciences, Library of Indian Institute of Management (Calcutta), Gauhati University Library, Assembly Library (Dispur, Gauhati), Library of the Reserve Bank of India (Gauhati), Library of the Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam (Gauhati), Central State Library (Gauhati), District Library (Gauhati), Regional Office of the State Bank of India (Gauhati), United Bank of India (Gauhati), United Commercial Banks of India (Gauhati), Regional Rural Banks at Nalbari and Golaghat,
The thesis has been prepared under the supervision of Dr. K. Alam, M.A., Ph.D., Professor and Head, Department of Economics, Gauhati University. He has supervised the work at each and every stage, sparing his valuable time. I express my sincere gratitude to him.

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Ramt. Chandra Roy

(R.C. Roy)
Lecturer in Economics,
Pettigrew College,
M.G.R. University,
Manipur, and
U.C.C. Teacher Fellow.

Department of Economics,
Gauhati University,
Gauhati

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