Preface.

The present study is an attempt to bring out the role played by the women of Assam in different phases of the freedom movement of India during 1921 to 1947. It has been my feeling that sufficient studies in this aspect of the freedom movement have not been made in the relevant literature and other scholarly works.

The present state of Assam is divided into two valleys, viz., the Brahmaputra valley and the Surma or Barak valley. The focus of our study is the Brahmaputra valley which included the districts* of Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Darrang, Nowgong, Kamrup and Goalpara. This valley may be called Assam proper.

The year 1921 is taken as the starting year because, in that year, Assam was actively drawn into the orbit of national politics. The chapterization of the work is done on the basis of the phases of the movement highlighting the major events at the national and provincial levels followed by the role played by the women in each of them. The introductory chapter tries to present the social and political background of the Assamese society. It also gives a glimpse into the social and political environment under which the women of the valley joined the freedom movement.

The study is mainly based on official documents, interviews with some of the surviving freedom fighters and their personal statements, news papers, booklets and bulletins
on freedom movement, souvenirs and journals, manuscripts, reports of different committees, AICC and APCC records and other Government publications. However, there was a dearth of information about women's role in the contemporary publications except the newspapers. Except for a short period, all the volumes and issues of the 'Asamiya' were consulted. In order to ascertain the authenticity of the news items and the information obtained through personal statements and interviews, all available records were consulted as far as possible. The Asam Mahila Samiti, which was the main women's organization working practically for the whole period of the movement and on whom we could have depended much for materials for study, also could not provide us with any reports or written records of that period.

The Government reports also do not give sufficient information about women's involvement, due possibly to the fact that the police generally avoided arresting women participants in the movement, unless they were found to have been involved in more serious incidents.

Some of the living women freedom fighters and their counterparts were interviewed and their personal statements were recorded by us. These interviews and discussions were of great value in understanding the extent and nature of involvement as also the sufferings and sacrifice of the women.
Names of about thirteenhundred fifty active women freedom fighters were collected and sets of questionnaires were sent to 372 of them, reported to be alive. This was found to be one of the most important sources of information. However, only 130 women, i.e., 35%, responded to the questionnaire. It has also been found that materials like secret messages, letters, bulletins, proceedings, etc. lying with the women were destroyed in the natural process because of neglect and poor maintenance and lack of knowledge about their historical value.

A comprehensive list of women martyrs and freedom fighters, prepared on the basis of information available from different sources, is appended at the end of the work.

It is the humble belief of the writer that all authentic and available materials have been used in the present work. All observations and facts in the following are reported as they came to my notice. I bear the responsibility for all the views expressed and the shortcomings this dissertation might possess.

(Dipti Sharma)

The districts of the Brahmaputra valley have since been reorganized into Sibsagar, Jorhat, North Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur, Darrang, Nowgong (Nagaon), Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Pragjyotishpur, Kokrajhar, Dhubri and Goalpara.