This thesis is based on field work carried out during 1991-94 in rural market centres in a tribal belt of western Assam. The aim of the study is to examine the role and function of rural markets and the changes brought about by it in a multiethnic tribal setting.

A market in a rural area attracts visitors not only for economic reasons. There are some socio-cultural reasons for which visitors come to a rural market. It also facilitates cultural contact among the market visitors belonging to different cultural groups. Thus, a market in a rural setting becomes a centre of transculturation. This type of rural market is designated as folk market. The present research work is undertaken within the broad framework of economic anthropology to understand the changes brought about by folk markets in its hinterland.

This work was carried out in an area between Lakhipur in Goalpara District and Boko in southern part of Kamrup District which covers approximately 3,500 km² area. There are as many as 113 rural market centres within this region. Of this, preliminary survey was carried out in 36 market centres. At the micro-level, extensive field work was carried out in 5 markets selected from the preliminary sample of 36, viz., Rongsai, Damra, Amjonga and Darrangim in Goalpara District and Hahim in Kamrup District. Intensive field work was also carried out in 5 hinterland villages of these market centres to examine the impact of the markets on the hinterland society.

As a student of Anthropology, tribal transformation always fascinated me. My interest in the topic further deepened following my joining as a teacher in Anthropology at Durdhnoi College which is situated within the study area of the present research work. In 1988 I have had the privilege of discussing my research interest on tribal transformation when Prof. Ananda C. Bhagabati visited the study area. He encouraged me to undertake the research work in the area.
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