PREFACE

An important development in the last few decades in the developed and in developing countries has been the rapid increase in the female work force participation rate. Women are now recognised as a critical group for development. According to the World Bank Country Study (1991) “Gender and Poverty in India”, women must be seen as economic actors - actors who have a particularly important role to play in efforts to reduce poverty. The full and complete development of a country and the welfare of the world require the maximum participation of women.

The development of entrepreneurship among women is an important step to increase women’s participation in economic development. But in the developing countries like India the entrepreneurship field is still now considered to be the domain of males. This becomes clear as one proceeds to have a cursory glance over the domain of entrepreneurship. The domain, till today, is pre-dominantly the one of males with women having a minimal representation.

While gender discrimination continues to be a feature of both developed and developing countries, the same is more appalling in the developing world where women get less of everything.

Gender theorists’ main contribution has been to show how women’s position in the entrepreneurial field can be considered as part of social system where women are subordinates. So the study of gender relation is important because development takes place within the context of a given socio-economic political framework where women are treated differently from their male counterparts in the household sphere, and hence their responses to and relations within the entrepreneurial world have not been congruent. The present study focuses on the performance and problems of women entrepreneurs from a gender perspective.

The 20th century has witnessed a relentless struggle by women for establishing their claims for equality. Not only have the women stepped outside their rigid domestic confines, but are surging forward in all directions in their bid to gain control over their
own lives and destiny. But despite their struggle and obstacles, women are today entering the field of business in increasing numbers. The growth of women owned business is a reflection of the changes in our society.

The present study was undertaken with a view to find out the entrepreneurial performance, profiles and problems of women in business in the South Assam region of India.

At the outset I must acknowledge my debt to my supervisor professor Apurbananda Mazumdar, whose encouragement and guidance have made completion of this Ph.D project possible.

I am also grateful to all the faculty members of the Department of Commerce especially to my esteemed teachers Prof. N. B. Dey and Prof. D. K. Pandiya for their encouragement and suggestions throughout the course of the project.

The present study has been based both on primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from the field by means of direct personal interviews. Eighty sample respondents were interviewed. A carefully designed schedule was used for the purpose of interviewing the respondents. The biggest difficulty encountered by me in course of collection of the data was in tracing and locating the entrepreneurs and in securing the needed co-operation. In many cases even two visits did not prove adequate for eliciting the needed information. Many of them asked to leave the schedule with them on condition that after filling in, the schedule will be returned by post. Again many of them stated that they need permission from their guardians or husbands to fill in the schedule. Needless to say that I had to undertake great deal of strain and troubles in getting the filled in schedules duly returned in all these cases. I must heartily thank all the sample respondents for their generous support and for making their precious time available to me, although for practical reasons I can not mention their names here.

For secondary data I have visited different offices. For this I owe a lot to the officials of the District Industries Centres in Silchar, Hailakandi and Karimganj who helped me profoundly in identifying and selecting the women entrepreneurs particularly those who
had set up their enterprises under the financial assistance provided to them by the Government under the PMRY Scheme.

I am also grateful to the officials and staff of the Small Industries Service Institute, Silchar, the Jan Shikshan Sansthan, Silchar, and the Jute Service Institute, Silchar.

Major part of my survey of literature is based on the materials that were available in various libraries. I thank the librarians and the staff members of Assam University Library, Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, Delhi, Ratan Tata Library of Delhi University and the North Eastern Hill University Library, Shillong.

A good deal of information relating to the operation of the women enterprises were procured from the local branches of various scheduled commercial banks operating in Silchar, Hailakandi and Karimganj. I particularly thank the branch managers and the staff of the various branches of the State Bank of India, the United Bank of India, the Allahabad Bank, the Central Bank of India for their help in procuring the needed data relating to women-owned enterprises.

I thank Mr. Sandip Chowdhury of Hailakandi Road Silchar for typing the dissertation neatly and with meticulous care.

Throughout this entire period of pursuing this research project my father and mother have been the constant sources of my inspiration. But due to the sudden demise of my father the project work was suspended for few months. I convey my regards to my mother who extended her wholehearted co-operation in carrying forward my research work. No word would suffice to match the untiring support that I received from my mother during all these days of strain and stress.

Whatever errors remain are of course exclusively of mine.

Silchar

The 2nd January, 2007

(Soma Roy)