Preface

After obtaining my B.E. Degree from Assam Engineering College in 1964, I worked for the Public Works Department of Assam for seven years. While I found life in Assam to be serene and fulfilling, the prospects of adventure and opportunity lured me to America. In 1971, I obtained a permanent visa to pursue my profession abroad. My first year in America was filled with uncertainty. In retrospect, it proved to be one of the greatest challenges of my life. I was a stranger in a new world, foreign to everything in my environment - the people, the culture, and way of life. Gradually, I became acclimated with my new surroundings and began a new life amid a new culture, comforted by the arrival of my wife and infant son, the following year.

When I left Assam in 1971, I had not planned on settling in America permanently. However, in the midst of establishing a career and supporting a family, the years passed by quickly and I found myself regarding America as my second home. However, the rich culture and history of Assam were always prominent in my memory and in the practices of my life. Today, in my later years, I have grown more appreciative and curious towards the culture, values, language and literature of my homeland, Assam.

Over the years, there have been many Assamese who came to America. Although miles separate us across this vast country, we are all connected by a common thread that is intricately woven. The thread is the Assamese culture. In
an effort to promote this sense of unity for the next generation, we have successfully established an organization focusing on our Assamese roots and history. Assamese people from all over the country gather annually to meet each other and partake in Assamese songs, *Bihu* dances and other various cultural activities. With the help of my friends, I enjoyed bringing to life mythological dramas (*Bhaona*) from the epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana for the children. It delighted me to see the happy faces of youth enjoying and participating in their culture. Our annual conventions were also graced by the presence of noted artists and scholars from Assam such as Dr. Nagen Saikia, Dr. Lakshminandan Borah, Dr. Birendranath Datta and Dr. Bhupen Hazarika.

Perhaps due to nostalgia, I started writing a few articles that were published in Assamese magazines and newspapers in Assam. Upon leafing through one of these newspapers, I learned that Tezpur University was offering interdisciplinary opportunities for study and research work. I was aware of the valuable contributions made by the American Baptist Missionaries in Assam in the nineteenth century. I developed a desire to study the matter in depth. On a trip to Assam, I met with Professor (Dr.) K. M. Pathak, Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University, and expressed my interest to pursue research work on the contributions of the American Baptist Missionaries in Assam. Professor Pathak referred me to Dr. Birendranath Datta, Professor & Adviser of the Department of Traditional
Culture and Art Forms at Tezpur University. Professor Datta pointed out that the contributions of the American Baptist Missionaries encompassing all the cultural and artistic dimensions had not been properly explored. Professor Datta gladly consented to guide me on my research topic: 'The Role of the American Baptist Missionaries in the Nineteenth Century Social Transformation in Assam - Cultural and Artistic Dimensions.'

I made five trips to Assam, each approximately one month to collect data and meet with people who had already studied other related aspects of the contributions made by the American Baptist Missionary in Assam. I also made several trips to archival libraries and historical places of the American Baptist Missionaries in America to collect data and photographs of related historical objects.

I would like to thank Professor K. M. Pathak for giving me the inspiration to complete this research work. I would also like to thank Dr. Birendranath Datta who has generously provided his guidance, encouragement, and time to assist me in attaining my goals. However successful I have been in my endeavours thus far, it is only due to the consistent help and encouragement of my advisor Prof. Datta. I am expressing my sincere regards and thanks to Prof. Datta and I will always remain grateful to him remembering the memories.

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I also thank my friends and others who have helped me in various ways in connection with my research work both in Assam and America.

Finally, I thank my wife, Kalpana, who always accommodated her own schedule to accompany me on my trips for collection of materials for my research work which were hundreds of miles away from my home. She was always by my side encouraging me to achieve my goals. I also thank my son, Pallav, my daughter-in-law, Poonam, and my daughter, Ruby, and all my family members in India and America for their moral support in my endeavour.

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Brojen Bordoloi
MAP OF NORTH-EAST INDIA SHOWING ASSAM