PREFACE

The study entitled "A Sociological Study of Health in the Mishing Tribe of Golaghat District in Assam" is an attempt to analyse tribal health in its totality in the context of the Mishing tribe of Golaghat district in Assam. People living in tribal areas often face obstacles in accessing basic health care services due to remoteness and backwardness of the areas where they live. Understanding the health care needs of tribal people in these difficult circumstances with special focus on utilization of tribal medicinal substances is significant for devising comprehensive programmes. The widely varying prevalent health practices or health seeking behaviours, use of indigenous herbal drugs, taboos and superstitions are responsible for determining the health behaviour and health status of the tribal groups.

The present study focuses on some of the major issues of tribal health in general and the health status of the Mishing tribe in particular, on the basis of the data collected on socio-economic status, health care practice, heath status, health seeking behaviour, knowledge on indigenous medicines, superstitions about health etc., through a structured interview schedule and indepth informal interviews administered in two Mishing villages of Assam's Golaghat district; namely, Namtemera and Baghedhara, and the Mishings families settled in Golaghat town. The study is divided into nine chapters, in all, entailing a bibliography and preceded by a preface. The first chapter which introduces the study presents the formulation of the research problem, theoretical perspectives, extensive review of the existing studies on various aspects of tribal health, the methodological strategy consisted of theoretical framework, types and sources of the data, universe and units of the study, selection of the units, techniques and tools for data collection, methods of data analysis and sociological significance of the study. The second chapter entitled *Tribal Health in India* makes an overview of the studies on tribal health in India. The third chapter on *The Mishing Tribe* describes the origin and growth of the Mishings, their social structure, occupation, religious beliefs, festivals, culture, education, language and literature, social institutions and health practices. The fourth chapter entitled *Field of the Study* delineates the attributes of the Golaghat district in general and of Baghedhara and Namtemera villages and Golaghat town in particular and depicts the patterns like

geographical location and surroundings, structural aspects such as population, economy, education, health, social organization, power structure, status of women, marriage, religious beliefs, etc. of the Mishing tribe in the historical perspective. The fifth chapter entitled *Health Culture of the Mishing* discusses the concepts of health, disease, etiology and treatment of diseases in the Mishing society. The sixth chapter on *Health Status of the Mishing* deals with the status of health of the Mishing in the light of the indicators such as death rate, morbidity rate, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, maternal and child health care practices, communicable diseases, sex ratio and hygienic condition of living. The seventh chapter entitled *Health Seeking Behaviour of the Mishing* analyses the health seeking behaviours like washing, cleaning, eating, sanitation, consumption of alcohol, purification of drinking water, etc. at personal, household and community levels of their life. The eighth chapter entitled *Health Care System of the Mishing* discusses both traditional health care practices like herbal medicines, magico-religious practices, health care functionaries, health care delivery, etc. and modern health care services, health care delivery and their influence on the traditional Mishing health care system. Lastly, the chapter nine summarises the study and discusses the findings and conclusion of the study.

The findings of the study show that like other tribal communities, the Mishings also possess some traditional medicines in their society. They have a rich herbal knowledge or ethnomedicine and they depend upon it for their health care. However, their magical rituals are entirely different. They believe that a cordial relationship with the deities and ancestral spirits will ensure good health for them. So, various ceremonies are observed for this purpose every year. The introduction of modern medicine has multiple impacts on the community in general and their traditional health care system in particular. In their contemporary society one can find the coexistence of traditional and modern medicines as they employ their own herbal and magical therapies for some particular diseases and modern medicines for other diseases. Thus, they resort to both ethnomedicine and modern medicines for recovery of health. In their changing health care they have adopted some new practices such as vaccination and immunization of children, parental and antenatal treatment, dieting etc. They are also conscious on personal hygiene, safe drinking water, household sanitation, etc. Through proper health education these ideas can be broadened among them and their misconceptions in this respect can be dissipated.