Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to God, the Almighty for granting me enough strength to face all the obstacles which I came across in my research career and for blessing me with so many wonderful people throughout my stay at BITS. The completion of this work would not have been possible without the direct and indirect contribution of several people.

I would like to express my deepest thanks to my supervisor Dr. Sandhya Mehrotra who has always been extremely kind, supportive and affectionate towards me. I have been lucky enough to have Sandhya mam, as my guide who helped me in most difficult phases of my research career and kept motivating me throughout these years. Her valuable guidance, suggestions, consistent encouragements and timely appreciation have always helped me in moving one step further. Mam has always given me enough freedom and flexibility to strategize and perform my research work. Her moral integrity and work ethic have always been a source of inspiration for me.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the members of my Doctoral Advisory Committee (DAC), Prof. Rajesh Mehrotra and Prof. Shibasish Chowdhury for critically evaluating the thesis and suggesting requisite corrections. I can never forget the days when Rajesh sir use to ask all of us "*Is there any exciting results*" these words have always directed my mind towards self-assessment which eventually helped me in improving my research abilities. I would not hesitate in saying that Rajesh sir has always played the role of mitochondria - *the powerhouse for our lab*. The light hearted nature of Shibasish sir has always created a pleasant environment in every meeting or seminar and at the same time, his insightful discussions always guided me to improve my work.

I offer my gratitude to Prof. Souvik Bhattacharyya (Vice-Chancellor), Prof. A. K. Sarkar (Director), Prof. S. K. Verma (Dean, Academic Research Division, BITS, Pilani) and Prof. Hemant R. Jadhav (Associate Dean, ARD) for providing me necessary facilities and for permitting me to make use of institute's infrastructure.

Special thanks to the Head of the Department of Biological Sciences, Prof. Prabhat Nath Jha and all the other faculty members for always being supportive and cooperative and for allowing me to smoothly utilize instruments and other facilities available in the department. I would also like to acknowledge the convener of Doctoral Research Committee (DRC) Prof. Jitendra Panwar and other committee members Prof. Shibasish Chowdhury, Prof. Prabhat Nath Jha, Prof. Vishal Saxena, Dr. Pankaj Kumar Sharma and Dr. Sandhya Mehrotra for their constant assistance and for managing several policies throughout the PhD tenure from admission to thesis submission.

BITS Pilani has provided me ample opportunities to develop teaching skills while working as a co-instructor in several courses particularly General Biology. I hereby express my note of thanks to the General Biology instructors Dr. Pankaj Kumar Sharma, Dr. Manoj Kannan, Dr. Rajdeep Chowdhury, Prof. Vishal Saxena and Dr. Sandhya Marathe for their enormous efforts and efficiently amazing way of teaching which developed a confidence in me to pursue my career in teaching.

This acknowledgement will remain incomplete without the special mention of my seniors Dr. Purva, Dr. Gagan, Dr. Arpit, Dr. Kuldeep, Dr. Senthil, Dr. P.A. Boopathi and Dr. Navin who were always there whenever I needed any kind of help or advice. Dr. Purva and Dr. Gagan have also helped in understanding various experiments.

I would like to thank my fellow colleagues, lab members and juniors who have created a family like work atmosphere in the department and I could not have asked for more than what I got from all of them. Thank you Shobha, Nisha, Asha, Sneha, Pinky, Zaiba, Brijesh, Ujjawal, Mukund, Naveen, Dilip, Monika, Sandeep, Vikram, Vikas, Shahid, Shraddha, Ramandeep, Rajnish, Poonam, Chetna, Leena, Shubhra, Divya, Parva, Rini and many others. Special thanks to all the members of "Environmental Biotechnology" lab who always helped me in accessing their lab's facilities for conducting several experiments. I would also like to thank Priyanka Bhatiya for helping me with plant transformation experiments.

My heartfelt thanks to some of the most special friends Gurpreet, Ravi, Purva didi, Zarna Isha didi and Rakesh for standing with me in ups and downs of life and for being patient with me during these years. I immensely appreciate their love, care and efforts for making this journey joyous and memorable. I would again like to thank Gurpreet for helping me in analysing bioinformatics data, proofreading my manuscripts and thesis chapters and for her constructive suggestions and discussions in planning lab experiments. I was fortunate enough to have Vandana as a friend with whom I have performed a large portion of my research work and I would like to mention that it was such a great support for me to have her in most tiresome experiments. I also thank Vidushi for helping me in my time of need, moral support, and words of motivation and for always creating a cheerful and positive environment in the lab.

A word of gratefulness to the all non-teaching staff members Goyal ji, Subhash ji, Ajay ji, Soni ji, Mahipal ji, Raghuveer ji, Parmeshvar ji, Mahendra ji, Mr. Naresh and Mr. Mukesh for their innumerable help in various official matters. I really appreciate the help of Mr. Manoj in preparing soil mixture pots for growing plants for lab experiments.

I am thankful to Dr. Siddharth Tiwari (NABI, Mohali) for permitting me to use gene gun and Anshu Alok for assisting while performing the experiment. I would also like to thank Dr. Sneha Lata Singla-Pareek (ICGEB, New Delhi) for allowing me to work in her lab for isolation of plant protoplast and Brijesh for helping in using their lab space and instruments during the experiment. I also extend my sincere word of thanks to Prof. G. Dean Price (ANU, Canberra, Australia) and Dr. Kundan Kumar (BITS Pilani K.K. Birla Goa campus) for providing us the BicA transporter constructs and plant expression vector respectively.

I acknowledge the financial support by CSIR and DST which was utilized to avail fellowship, purchase research chemicals and for attending conferences and workshops.

Finally, I want to show my deep sense of gratitude towards my beloved Grandparents with whom I have spent my whole childhood and my parents Mr. D. R. Nogia and Mrs. Geeta Devi for their unconditional love and enormous sacrifices they did for providing me a better education. My father has played a fundamental role in my life for whatever I have achieved till date. I have learned from him that hard work, consistent efforts and positive attitude will take me to great success. I am also thankful to my siblings Kusu, Moti, Mendu and Jitu for their faith in my abilities and words of encouragement. My family members have always motivated me to continue research in the times when I was about to give up and thereafter I kept moving ahead. I dedicate this work to my parents who always supported, motivated and believed in me.