ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I record my sincere thanks for the support and encouragement extended to me by various individuals during the course of my research. Professor Abdul Razak Mohamed, my supervisor, has been the guiding force, with his constant support and motivation. His constructive criticism and valuable insights helped in shaping the core of the research. Professor K. P. Subramanian and the doctoral committee members, Professor V. Shanmugasundaram and Dr. K.R. Thooyavan, were instrumental in improving the quality of the research.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Professor S.P. Sekar, Professor S.F. Rajaratnam, Professor S. Ravi, Professor A. M. Thirumurthy, Professor C. Thangavel, Professor A. N. Satchidanandan and Professor P. Swaminathan for their help and encouragement.

Finally, I record my heartfelt thanks to my parents, V.K. Balachandrika and K. Sivasankaran, my wife M. P. Devaki and my daughter M.P. Meghana, for trusting in me and tolerating my eccentricities.

K.S. RAKESH