I owe a debt of gratitude to several people and institutions who have helped me considerably at the various stages of study and the preparations of this thesis. Though their list is excessively long, most prominently, I am thankful to:

Professor R. Balasubramanian from whose erudite scholarship I benefitted greatly during the initial years of my research. He has been very kind to give me many valuable suggestions, both philosophic and stylistic for the improvements of my research programme.

My supervisor Professor V.C. Thomas who read the whole draft several times and provided me with a host of valuable suggestions and critical comments. I remain indebted to him for his constant encouragement, patience and generosity all through the completion of this work. I am extremely greatful to him for his readiness to share his valuable time and knowledge of the subject with me.
My dear teachers, Dr K.Srinivas, Dr(Ms)B.R.Santhakumari and Dr (late) Veena Arora, for their constant encouragement, timely help and personal advice.

Mr G.Padmakumar for his encouragement and moral support to begin my research work in Pondicherry University.

Dr E.J.Manimaran, Dr James Kurian, Dr (Fr)E.P.Mathew, Fr Babu Joseph, Dr P. Sudarsan, Mr S. Punniamurthy, Mr Muraleedharan and Ms Patcheammalle — all my friends at the M.Phil. and Post-graduate levels, for their love and kindness showered on me. I gratefully acknowledge the innumerable favours that I have received from them from time to time both in my academic life and personal career.

Dr E.V.Ramasamy, Mr L.K.Sebastian and Mr Hariprasad for their kindness and enormous patience in sharing the final moments of my research work.

Ms P. Radjeswari, Mr K. Rajavelu, Mr G.Latchumanan, Ms S.Asha and Mr P. Ramalingam for their administrative and personal help in all possible ways.