Preface & Acknowledgements

At the very outset, I wish to mention that this work on the Dalit women of Kolhapur District in Maharashtra is dedicated to a Dalit – Pastor Sachin Lokhande. It finds its origins in conversations between myself and Pastor Lokhande and his wife Leah, that began years back in the premises of Bishop’s College, Kolkata. Pastor Lokhande had come to Kolkata to study Theology along with his family of four. Through many visits to his hometown Kolhapur, this relationship turned into a deep-rooted and loving friendship with Pastor Lokhande, Leah, and their three children, Sarah, Mercy and Sahil. The saddest and most unfortunate event was undoubtedly, the untimely demise of Pastor Lokhande in August, 2015.

I am thankful to each and every person at Kolhapur, Nagpur, Pune, Wardha, Mumbai and Delhi who interacted with me and enriched me on the subject of Dalit struggles thereby bringing conceptual clarity to my work as the days went by.

I am indebted to the Church leaders and Bishops as well as leaders of the Dalit organizations whom I met at Delhi at the NCCI meet on Dalits in the year 2010. I am deeply grateful to the Professors at Mumbai University and Kolhapur University who shared their views on the subject with me, thereby enriching me. The members and leaders of the Kolhapur Diocese, Dalit organizations (organizations working for the devadasis and kalavanteen women) along with the Government organizations in Kolhapur whom I interviewed were very hospitable and warm. I am thankful to them too. My interaction with many Dalit women’s activists and women’s studies Professors at the IAWS Conference at Wardha in January 2011 has been of immense help in widening my knowledge on the subject matter.

I owe a lot of learning to the Mahar and Mang, devadasi and kalavanteen communities of Kolhapur who opened up their lives to me. They accepted me and made me a part of their day-to-day lives, which has become an unforgettable experience for me.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to Pintu bhaiyaa and Sanju dada and their families for providing me with immense mental and physical support and making their house a home far away from home.
My husband Dipanjan and my in-laws – no words can describe the intensity of their love and support; especially my son Diptanshu who was born in the middle of my work – he has been a welcome distraction. I also wish to thank my mother-in-law’s sister Bhabani Pal, who shouldered the responsibility of looking after my son from a tender age – without her support, it would have been difficult for me.

My parents – Swapan Gonsalves and Tanusree Gonsalves – are true artists who nurtured my desire for self-expression from a very early age. Their sacrifice has enabled the boundless possibilities of my life – I am what I am today because of them. I also thank my sister Trijita Gonsalves for being my intellectual and emotional support throughout.

I am profoundly indebted to my Professor and guide Dr. Bonita Aleaz who has acted as the wind beneath my wings – like a kite she has encouraged me to fly higher even in the face of contrary winds; a friend, philosopher and a guide for a lifetime.

Last but not the least, I thank each and every Dalit man, woman and eunuch who met me, gave me time, helped me understand their lives - it was their strength and resilience which kept me going.