ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I take this opportunity to express my profound thanks to Dr. C. Kuruvilla Jacob, Director (Training) at Rubber Training Institute, Rubber Board, Kottayam, who not only served as my project guide but also continuously challenged and encouraged me, never accepting less than my best efforts. This project could not have been completed without his constant guidance throughout the preparation of my thesis.

I am greatly indebted to the directors of Rubber Research Institute, Dr. N. M. Mathew and Dr. James Jacob, who granted access to the laboratories to conduct my research. I also acknowledge esteemed scientists, Dr. Jacob Mathew, Dr. Kochuthresiamma Joseph, Dr. Shaji Philip and Dr. Annakkutty Joseph for their timely help and cooperation during my project work. It was a pleasure, and an honour indeed to have the opportunity to work with such great minds.

I also thank the statisticians, Mr. Ramesh B. Nair and Mr. Aneesh P. for their help in analysing the data. Also, special thanks are due to the library staff for their sincere help throughout my tenure at Rubber Research Institute of India.

It was Prof. Thomas Mathew, retired Head of Botany Department, Mar Thoma College, who inspired me to undertake this project. Also, there are several unnamed friends, colleagues and family members who were a constant source of encouragement, during my moments of personal crises.

I could not have completed this project without the support and understanding of my dear husband, loving children, mother and brother who made several sacrifices in their personal lives and adjusted their priorities to help me with this project. Finally, I thank Almighty God who gave me the strength and will to undertake and complete this project.

Manju Philip