PREFACE

While doing my Master’s Degree course in Sociology at Christ College, Bangalore between 1991 and 1993, I once had a discussion with Prof. N. Jayaram who had come to give some guest lectures. It was he who created in me the interest for sociological research on the Catholic community. He suggested that being a Catholic nun, I could give an ‘insider’s’ view of the community. Subsequently, a unique feature of the Catholic community in South India drew my attention, and that was the high degree of integration that the Catholic community enjoys with the Hindu community. Exploring the ways in which the Catholic community negotiated with its new religion from its native cultural traditions absorbed my mind for a long time. It took seven long years before I could formulate a research project on the subject. Since I hail from Tamil Nadu and am familiar with its culture, the choice of the field was natural.

Doing research in this field was both exciting and challenging. It was exciting because I relived my own childhood religious experiences, most of which had remained embedded in my own subconscious. My childhood days were spent amidst well-established Catholic and Hindu communities living in contiguous villages. My worldview was shaped by these vibrant Catholic and Hindu communities and I was fully immersed in the socio-religious ceremonies of these communities. These experiences began to unfold as I started collecting data illuminating the same in such a way that I could immediately grasp their sociological significance. Simultaneously, it turned out to be a path fraught with danger. Understanding the data from the terrain of one’s own subconscious could lead one into an irredeemable subjectivity. To that extent, doing
research on this subject was quite challenging. I could claim in all modesty that my formal training in methodology was a boon and the input from my guide who is a non-Christian provided the balance. To retain the religio-cultural flavour filling the social intercourse between the Catholics and the Hindu communities, I have liberally used Tamil words and phrases. To retain the phonetic integrity of these words and phrases in English I have followed the system of Tamil transliteration followed by Mozi Trust, Chennai (1999).

Doing research is a journey. The track on which I have travelled, has criss-crossed many individuals, communities and institutions. I feel overwhelmed, when I recall the role they have played. Most important among them is my supervisor, Dr. N. Jayaram. He has been a never failing guide. He sharpened my thoughts, challenged me when I erred, encouraged me when I failed, and rejoiced when I climbed certain heights. He personally attended to every detail of the thesis at every stage and spent long hours going through all my chapters. I place on record my deepest gratitude for all that he has been to me in the completion of this thesis.

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I must record my debt to the Catholics and the Hindus who accepted me in their midst, and offered me hospitality during my stay with them. They paid close attention to all my queries and were earnest in their responses. They were prompt in inviting me on specific occasions to all the significant rituals taking place in the villages, Ashrams and
pilgrim centres. They personally accompanied me and explained to me the significance of each ritual. Almost all of them were interested in my research. Some even requested that I write my thesis in Tamil so that they could read it. Some others wanted to see the thesis after its completion in whatever language in which I choose to write.

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