Acknowledgements

This thesis derives its energy and inspiration from the paths that I have traversed in the course of time and from the fond memories of many who happened to be there with me on the journey.

I am deeply grateful to my Supervisor, Tejaswini Niranjana, for giving my scattered thoughts and ideas an order, value and clarity. Without her persistent demands that stretched me beyond my limits in conceiving the thesis, I would not have completed it.

I thank Anweshi Research Centre for Women’s Studies, Hyderabad for being a catalyst in changing the flow of my life from that of a settled government employee to an unsettled, yet, challenging one.

To Bindu K. C., who always listens to me passionately and boosts my confidence by reassuring me that my ideas are relevant, I owe my thanks.

While envisioning the thesis, the initial ideas could be brought into sharpened focus with the intricate and challenging comments from Rochelle Pinto. Without her consistent support from the beginning of this journey, I would not have been able to develop these ideas into a workable theme. Had she not been there to give assurance and moral support during the early years of my life in CSCS, I would have left academics forever. I thank Rochelle for her faith in my work.

I am deeply grateful to:

Milind Wakankar, Anup Dhar, S. V. Srinivas and Sitharamam Kakarala for their insightful comments that urged me to work hard and aspire for more, though I am not sure whether I have met their expectations.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha, for all his valuable comments and suggestions, which I took years to comprehend and to incorporate into the thesis, though only to some extent.

Vivek Dhareshwar, for introducing me to a new way of looking at my reference materials by asking a different set of questions on them.

Lakshmi Arya, for her detailed comments on one of my chapters.

Prathama Banerjee, for giving me extensive inputs during the first two years of my research.

Rakesh Pandey, Aditya Nigam, Ravi Vasudevan and Sarada Balagopalan of CSDS for their inputs at various stages.

Madhulika Banerjee, Barbara Ramusack and Waltraud Ernst for engaging with the thesis at different stages.
Sasheej Hegde, Udaya Kumar, Sundar Sarukkai, Raju S., Sanal Mohan, Nizar Ahammed, Rajan Gurukkal, Raghava Varier, M. V. Narayanan, K. N. Ganesh, Sujatha V. and Yasser Arafath for engaging with the thesis at various stages.

Bharathi, Rajesh, Sujaya, Padmavathi, Vijayalakshmi, Vani, Maheswari, Nagesh, and Nagaraj for their timely assistance, technical and administrative support and their warmth.

CSCS, for the financial support in the form of fellowship and assistantship.

I thank Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, for the fellowship provided to me for pursuing the research.

My thanks to many of my friends for being with me at difficult times, without whom I may not have completed this thesis:

To Navaneetha, not only for her suggestions at different stages of my work, but also for her hospitality.
To Smriti, for her inputs that came unexpectedly.
To Meera, for her unending supports that gave me the confidence to stay back in academics, and for her conviction in my work. She is one amongst the few who were vigilant to keep the mast intact, when the ship of my research was on the verge of sinking.

To my fellow passengers, Rakhi, Ranjini and Elizabeth, for having accommodated me in the same boat. To Ranjini, especially for sharing a place to stay in the initial years of my ‘Bangalore days’ and for pouring the spirit of life.
To Ambika, for her unconditional hospitality, for the wits, jokes and walks that made life much more bearable in Bengaluru, in spite of the depressing and yet exciting demands of research.
To Shashikala, Rajeev, Bitasta, Nitya, Zainab, Kaiwan, Nisha, Ashwin, Sruti Chaganti, Swagato Sarkar, Kanthi, Wing-Kwong, Hsing-Wen, Arun, Sneha and Udayan for imparting the feel and pleasure of an academic community within CSCS.
To Teena, for the long-distance conversations which made the complications of research work much lighter and easier, and for extending her support in doing the last minute editing.
To Rajesh K. P., for the long conversations that sometimes cleared my head.
To Amruth, for sharing various articles and reports, his enriching suggestions and for showing a consistent concern and trust in my work.
To Carmel Christy, Shamshad Hussain, Ratheesh Kumar and Ratheesh Radhakrishnan for taking pains and time to read some of my unfinished chapters, and for listening to my rambling thoughts patiently.
To Sunitha Nair, Binumol Abraham, Ashitha and Sumeetha M., who all came into my life at different points and stayed back with their love and assurance.

To Hazeena, Habeeb and their little cherubs, Shada and Sheza, for being around during all the turmoil of writing, for being non-judgmental of my dramatic mood swings, for the food, unyielding care and support, laughter and endurance.

To Gowri, for her relentless assurance and conviction in me and my work.

To Geetha P., for the interest she showed in my work, despite being from a different discipline.

To Hameeda and Siddik for their warmth, hospitality and concern about my work and life.

To Shirly, who became an encouraging source in reading a chapter.

To Aparna Eswaran, for the editing work.

To Shobhana for helping me navigate through the books and the rare collections of the State Central Library, Thiruvananthapuram.

Many of the names mentioned above are of friends who believed in me, when I had stopped believing in myself during the course of the research.

My immense thanks to all the practitioners I had interviewed. The prolonged conversations, the extensive details and the food and warmth they gave me were a humbling experience.

I thank the following archives, libraries and the librarians who were incredibly helpful in providing materials: The Appan Thampuran Library and Museum, Thrissur; Sahitya Academy, Thrissur; Ayurveda College, Thrippunithura; Sri Chithira Thirunal Public Library, Thiruvananthapuram; Govt. Ayurveda College, Thiruvananthapuram; Kerala University Library, Thiruvananthapuram; Kerala Council for Historical Research, Thiruvananthapuram; Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram; The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi; The United Theological College, Bengaluru; The Publication department, Kottakkal Aryavaidya Sala; The Folklore Department, Calicut University; Deshaposhini Library, Kozhikode; Directorate of Archives, Thiruvananthapuram; Regional Archives, Kozhikode and Kochi and The Central Archives, Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

I owe my thanks to:

Indira aunty, my sister Pankajam and niece Rajasree, for their persistent concern regarding the completion of this thesis.

To Sanjay, my son, for letting me pursue my search, without complaint.

To Surendran, for being there in my life without making demands, and also for undertaking the cumbersome process of editing at different stages of my work.
To Santhakumari, my amma by custom, for her endurance and support that enabled me to do the years long research without feeling guilty for avoiding many of my expected familial responsibilities.

To Janaki, my amma, who is not with me today, and who had been reluctant to let me be free and breathe fresh air. In fact, her differential approach, though discouraging at those times, gave me the vigour to beat the odds and to explore. In retrospect, I thank her for being herself, and this thesis is dedicated to her and Santhakumari, my mother-in-law.