ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"….looks like I'll grow up and become an ammachi (grandmother) before he finishes his peachdi (Ph.D.)."

That was my six-year-old daughter Ashima expressing anguish to her mother, Santhy, over my endless trips to Mumbai and stay away from home. After all, I started this long academic journey when she was only one year old. So for over eighty per cent of her life I have been engaged in this endeavour. Her statement also reveals how much of a group enterprise this journey has been. On one hand it is a solitary journey, a human in quest for greater understanding in a chosen discipline, while on the other it is a mass journey with all those around that human being affected in one way or the other, for better or for worse. And this section of my thesis attempts to record that mass journey and to acknowledge those co-travellers who enriched it and gave of themselves, their homes, their time, and their resources, to ensure that the endeavour was successful.

The first of those co-travellers was my guide, Dr. Surinder Jaswal. Right from giving me food, and taking my family out when we stayed in Mumbai, to keeping Santhy supplied with books, and well, guiding me in my research work, she was many things to me; the cliché friend philosopher and guide was never truer. I still don’t understand how she processes so many things at once. From her teaching assignments to guiding students, conducting research and training from Kashmir to the Andamans, to selecting staff in different premier institutes, to carrying on the mantle of social work and fighting for its rightful place among different disciplines, to all the thankless jobs associated with Deanship, to supporting her family and Patch (her beloved dog) and Sheela Mau (her daughter Mahika’s cat), to guiding research students like me, she does it all. Among the many things which make her special, one I will remember is her ability to make one seek understanding by building on what one knows (and can do) without being made to feel ignorant. I have asked her if all the scholars she guides need as much time and inputs as I do, and she has always laughed it off, never directly answering that question. Did I fail to take a hint…?

Closely linked to guiding me in my research work were my two Doctoral Advisory Committee (DAC) members - Prof. N. Jayaram and Prof. T. V. Sekher. Prof. N. Jayaram was really busy with his teaching, writing and administrative work, editing journals and of course cooking when he was in Mumbai. Yet, even at the end of a tired day he would never refuse to meet me and discuss the progress of my work. So, most of our meetings were in his flat in Mumbai or in his house when he would visit Bangalore for a short break. One memorable meeting was on a holiday, in a coffee shop on the busy Brigade Road, when he planned the visit in such a way that he could rejoin his family for shopping after meeting me. The meeting went on for about 3 hours, and I don’t know if he could shop after that.

Prof. T. V. Sekher was another kind professor who not only encouraged me in my research but broadened my horizons through our involvement in the medical history programme. He spared no effort in helping me get access to all the materials I needed for research from the IIPS and ISEC libraries. Being from IIPS, he had to travel to TISS for my DAC meetings and presentations. But he was always willing to come, even at
short notice. He would refuse my offer to drop him back to IIPS and would walk or make his own arrangements. On a short visit to Bangalore, Prof. Sekher even met me at a relative’s house to discuss my research findings.

Other colleagues from TISS – Sunil Santha, Jacqueline Joseph and Ruchi Sinha (starting from my M.A. research days) – have also expended their mental capital in thinking through and helping me with my research. My teachers, from the erstwhile MPSW department – Vimla Nadkarni, Katy Gandevia and Shubdha Maitra were always encouraging and supportive. Srilatha Juvva opened her home for me to stay and cooked traditional South Indian dishes (with hand-ground masalas specially brought all the way from Andhra) ‘to help my research work’. Daniel and Ketki, my batch-mates from TISS who are now faculty at TISS, have also played hosts and offered their homes when I needed a place to stay. Mallikarjun Angadi was kind enough to help me locate all the required articles and books, and provide me with comfortable seating at the library during the crucial thesis writing days. Nirmala Momin always cheerfully found a place for me to stay, especially during the last phase when I needed to stay on campus for longer periods. Olive, Roopa, Leoni, Vishreya, Manisha, Savitri, Valodra, Dinesh, Evon, Roja, Laxmi Narayan, Medha, Vidya, Poornima and Anil Datar are some of the others who helped me through this journey in their own ways. The library staff, the admin staff and the support staff have all contributed to this journey in different ways. TISS has become a second home now – a relationship which began in 1998.

The next set of co-travellers (those left behind would be a more apt description) is my family. As Santhy said, it was almost as if their lives were on ‘pause’ mode. But time and life waits for no one. Ashima, who was a toddler when I started the research work, has become 6 years old and Ananya is already 2 years old. In the meantime we also started a new journey together in radical unschooling which requires great involvement of the whole family in learning together and absentee-fatherism was a hindrance, but Santhy has kept it going. No words can ever recount what they have been and are to me…

Our parents were the next in line to be affected. My father did more than just pay the fees all through my academic life, including the PhD. His grit and determination to complete any task he takes up has been inspiring. He learnt computers almost after his retirement and now is so well-versed in it that he even guided me with all the tables and percentages in my field work. His constant reminder to me to be persistent and disciplined helped me a lot in completing my thesis. At moments when the research work seemed uphill and too taxing with all the other tasks at hand, he would always encourage me to continue, taking care not to be too pressurising. In my school and college days, it was my mother who was the more calming one and the pressure-reliever, advising me to sleep well the night before exams (even if I hadn’t studied enough). Well, it was indeed surprising to see papa play that role now. My mom passed away in 2002 and my father has taken on part of her role too. I guess that is life’s lessons, its own Ph.D…

My maternal grandmother –my only living grandparent– has been a true pillar of strength for me. From inspiring me with stories of her nursing student days (in pre-Independence Delhi) and subsequent Air-Force career, to learning cricket after she
crossed 75 years so that she could follow the matches with me, to providing whatever emotional and material comforts we needed, to still worrying over me and consistently praying for me, she has always been there. I thank God for her life.

Another elderly person who inspired me and gave me the first glimpse of social work through the Scriptures was my grandfather’s brother H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathis, or Thirumeni appachan as we call him. His books – *Theology of a Classless Society*, *The Sin of Being Rich in a Poor World*, *Sharing God and a Sharing World* and a later addition, *One Religion of Love*, challenged my thinking from when I was very young. I remember sitting on his lap as we travelled to different Mission centres which he initiated. He encouraged me to ask questions, and challenged me to think and not accept anything blindly. His strong convictions and extremely passionate beliefs have moulded the thinking of several generations. The Malankara Orthodox Church has given him the title ‘Sabharatnam’ – a jewel of the Orthodox Church. At 94 years, he used to get so passionate while discussing social justice, that his caretakers had to physically calm him down, as over-exertion would send him right back to the hospital. He passed away on February 16, 2012.

Some more elders – Santhy’s parents…. I am never comfortable calling them in-laws. They are parents, period! Right from gifting my first laptop when I started the research to tirelessly and joyfully cooking for us, to making any and every convenience possible so that I could get on with the job, they were always there. Mama, who needs only half a word to get her eyes moist and voice choked in gratitude, has always been a praying mother. I have learnt so much from being around Apicha ever since he came to Bangalore following ill-health. The doctors who checked the blood flow to his heart were surprised that he was alive. Yet, he made it a point to be involved in all the work at office and even drove down to headstreams in the maddening morning hour traffic every single day so that I could concentrate on my research work. His deep insights, clear thinking and quick action have made him a role model for many, including me. His administrative and negotiating skills are exemplary. I hope to learn much more by being with him.

The effect of my research journey doesn’t stop there. It goes on to extended family and their family as well. My sister Navitha, her husband Jogyachen and daughter Joanna have been my home away from home after they shifted to Mumbai. Jogyachen’s parents Phillipose achen and Kochamma opened their home and hearts to us when we were looking for a place to stay in Mumbai. The memories of Kochamma’s cooking are still fresh in my memory. Through Achen, we were also able to find a comfortable place to stay in Mumbai. Santhy’s brother Sam and and wife Cibi were ever-willing to make their house a second home for Santhy and the kids whenever I was away and help me with my work. And any time I worked on my thesis at their place, they kept me supplied with food and drinks so that I could ‘work hard’. Santhy’s sister Grace and family (Bobby and the kids – Kripa and Diya) were other givers-of-happiness for the family when I was away. Sam and Tony, thanks for crossing the Ts and dotting the Is. If my ‘tense’ is improving, it is due to you. The number of people who are required to make one research thesis happen is mind-boggling!
A family member whose research journey mirrored mine was Sheebachechi – my cousin’s wife. She was more disciplined and completed hers sooner, but it was fun to exchange research woes with her, and for my cousin brother Biju and daughter Ruth to compare their situation with Santhy and the kids. When I was young, we lived next door to my uncle and aunt (who passed away recently). We used to fondly call them appachan and ammachichi. From helping us get ready for school, to helping us prepare speeches for school and church events, to buying us any new snack or juice when it hit the market, to separating us when we used to fight with our cousins (Biju and Binu), to teaching us table manners and other etiquette, they were my second set of parents. Even when my aunt was in the hospital, she wanted to know how my research work was going, and how long it would take for it to be completed. My uncle has been a silent pillar of support.

My colleagues at headstreams – Anu, Kempanna, Lokesh, Poojar, Rajesh, Shafi, Shivabayavva, Smitha and Swarna, have been really patient and have gone out of their way to ensure that I could concentrate on my research. The board members of headstreams have also been kind in providing me time and support to complete my research, and I am grateful to all of them.

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If there is one thing that I’m really grateful for in this whole research process (other than the research work itself), it’s the time, space and opportunities for reading, meditation and reflection. The Ph.D. process helped in deepening my thoughts, analysing my beliefs and growing closer to God. And I can say, in the words of the Bible (Proverbs), ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom…. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the fraudulent mouth….’ Thank you Lord!

When my guide reads this, she is bound to ask me what framework I used in writing this section. The only framework I have used here is gratitude. The limitation of this framework is that it is never enough and can never adequately give back what I have gained from all the kind souls who made this journey an enriching experience. So, I am going to use another framework to hopefully cover some of that limitation, and it is called ‘pay it forward’, where I hope to pass on the love and kindness I enjoyed to others whom I meet.1

"You don't pay love back; you pay it forward."

1 The ‘pay it forward’ concept even has a Wikipedia page from which the above quote was retrieved (April 16, 2012). Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pay_it_forward There is also a movie by that name (2000) with Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt and the adorable Haley Joel Osment.