CONCLUSION
The sixteenth century witnessed far reaching changes in Europe. One such was due to the Reformation. The Reformation is the name given to the protests against corruption in the Catholic Church, at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In 1517 Martin Luther, Professor of Wittenberg University, Germany, posted his 95 theses on the church door at Wittenberg triggering the Reformation. It led to a split in the Christian church and the establishment of Protestantism. Soon, rejecting the authority of the Catholic church, Northern Germany, Scandinavia, Holland and England became Protestant. This led to deep divisions, among and within nations and prolonged warfare in Europe. When the dust did settle down, the European powers looked at far away places to spread the word of God and established churches.

The Dutch were the first to bring Protestant Christianity to the Tamil country. They captured Tuticorin in 1658 from the Portuguese. They built the first Protestant church in Tuticorin in 1750. It was King Ferederick IV of Denmark, a Lutheran who conceived the idea of sending Protestant missionaries to India. Unable to get Danes willing to do mission work in India, the King’s Court Chaplain finally found two young German theological students, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Pluetschau. They came to India, landed at Tranquebar on 9 July 1706 and established a Protestant mission. From Tranquebar, missionary work was extended to Madras, Cuddalore, Tanjore, Trichy and Tirunelveli.

From 1770 to 1820, the Society for Promoting Christian knowledge took
keen interest in the Danish Royal Mission at Tranquebar. The field of work of the S.P.C.K. Mission stretched from Tranquebar on the East Coast to Cape-Comorin in the extreme south. The period from 1809 to 1816 was a dark period for Tirunelveli district because of droughts and epidemics and the persecution of Christian community by Brahmins. Thus the land and its people had the direct need for missionary service.

The S.P.C.K. and S.P.G. provided Christian literature to the natives and fostered Christian education. They worked vigorously at the beginning of the eighteenth century. But by the end of the century, their fortunes had declined. The S.P.C.K. could get no new missionary to reinforce its German Lutheran staff in India. As for the S.P.G., the contributions received had fallen to £600 a year. Subsequently, unable to continue with their missionary work, the S.P.C.K. handed over its missionary work in 1825 to S.P.G. The C.M.S. was founded on the principle that it was the primary duty of the church to evangelize the world. All the Mission Societies were developed on similar patterns of evangelism, educational and medical work. Tirunelveli became a separate Bishopric under Bishop Morley who was in charge of the S.P.G. as well as the C.M.S. In 1924, these two missions were merged into a single Diocese, Tirunelveli.

Women missionaries were sent by the various missions of S.P.G., C.M.S. and C.E.Z.M.S. from time to time to promote the welfare of the people of Tirunelveli district. They dedicated their life for the uplift of the women of Tirunelveli. Their selfless sacrifice and dedication led to the establishment of
Protestant churches in Tirunelveli. They laboured hard for the welfare of the women and established a net work of schools. This enabled the women to throw off the several shackles of cruelty and injustice which bound them for several centuries. The women missionaries helped them towards self-realisation. They realised that their potentialities and knowledge would help in the uplift of the society. No doubt, their work symbolized a revolution in the status of women.

The women missionaries were pioneers in the field of education of women in India. They realised that education was the best means to raise the women from their state of degradation. In 1816, when the missionaries arrived in Tirunelveli, there was only a microscopic minority of women who knew the Tamil alphabet. The traditions and customs of the society kept them in bondage. It had been thought that a woman had just to superintend the affairs of her house and minister to the wants of her family. She was not expected to gain any possible profits from education. It added no value for the matrimonial contracts. The idea of educating girls was altogether ridiculous as far as the natives were concerned. A more formidable obstacle to the education of village girls was the custom of early marriage. The process of liberating them from this state of affairs through education was started by the women missionaries. Their educational institutions for women in Tirunelveli, effected great changes in the lives of women of Tirunelveli.

Despite of odds and difficulties, the missionaries of the S.P.G., C.E.Z.M.S. and the C.M.S. founded a network of schools and churches throughout Tirunelveli district. The mission had to supply church workers to churches and teachers to
schools. As a result, Teacher Training Schools, formerly known as Seminaries were established. They produced teacher-cum church workers. Native Christian women were trained for the purpose of imparting education to the female children and adults. In the beginning, there were only a few trained native teachers. Hence, the women missionaries established schools throughout the mission districts. The Girls' Boarding Schools provided primary education for the daughters of rural Christians. They were encouraged to return to their home villages as teachers. For the non-Christian population, several day schools were started. The aim of the school was to provide education for village girls. These girls were expected to return to their villages capable of instructing others.

The Sarah Tucker Institution became a beacon of hope to the females among the native converts in Tirunelveli. The Sarah Tucker Institution set up a network of fifty Branch Schools for Hindu children and provided quality education to the poor children of Tirunelveli. Subsequently, higher education became possible to the girls when the Sarah Tucker College at Palayamkottai was established. The collegiate education changed the nature and outlook of women to lead more meaningful life. A large number of caste Hindu women turned as reformers and political leaders. The women missionaries encouraged the students to prepare for higher government examinations. They also consistently offered teachers training and encouraged staff members to attend training institutions. The missionaries also attempted to enlarge the educational experiences of the girls and inculcate in them a love of education and a desire to read books other than required ones. To develop their leadership qualities, they
were encouraged to participate in the voluntary organizations, Y.W.C.A., Gleaners' Union and Girl Guides. The association, Girl Guides greatly broadened the girls' sense of membership in a wider society beyond their immediate class and region.

The great diffusion of knowledge through Mission Schools and various other agencies facilitated the annihilation of superstitions to a large extent and it also helped in the moral regeneration. Slowly human consciousness and awareness of the value of women, the meaning and importance of justice and equality began to dawn on the native society. Education made the native women more conscious of their rights and privileges. The western education broke down the traditional caste basis of occupation and made possible of individual upward status and thus get rid of their inferiority complex. When the missionaries first came to Tirunelveli and started girls schools, the parents exclaimed derisively, "What! she may teach the cows next". Ironically, it is here that education thrived. Standards were high and educated Christians had the chance to go abroad and earn money or income in several walks of life. Thus the women missionaries created an atmosphere in favour of women's education. It made other agencies, including government to work in favour of female education.

Medical Service was another area where women missionaries played a vital role. Many women in Tirunelveli died because social custom prohibited their treatment by the other sex. Earlier, the tradition-bound people used to take recourse to conventional medicines and medical treatments at the cost of their lives. The women missionaries recognised the need and importance of medical
work and to meet the physical needs of the people. Therefore, they worked in
the dispensaries and hospitals, established by the European missionaries. In
the dispensaries and hospitals, women missionaries were assisted by the native
women. The S.P.G. and C.M.S. missions and the Diocese appointed medical
evangelists in every hospital in Tirunelveli District. Allopathic medicines
introduced by the missionaries had magnetic effect upon the people. Through
the medical mission, the women missionaries impressed upon the natives, the
efficacy of allopathic medicines. The people, though reluctant at first to use of
allopathic medicines, realised in course of time the value of the medicines which
could bring quick relief to them.

The women missionaries introduced a good nursing service. They trained
the mid-wives to be hygienic. Besides medical assistance, preventive measures
were demonstrated to villagers. The women missionaries created an awareness
among the people on health. When the people suffered by famines, cholera, the
missionaries took great steps to render service to the people. At that time the
dressers, trained by the women missionaries distributed medicines. In order to
reduce the high incidence of infant mortality and general illness that plagued the
society of Tirunelveli, much effort was taken to teach both women and men, the
basic rules of hygiene and sanitation. Lecturers on sanitation, hygiene, maternity
and child welfare helped the rural womenfolk. Leprosy clinics were started by
the missionaries for leprosy patients. Thus the death ratio of women declined.
The failure of the monsoon led to severe famine and people were affected by
deficiency diseases. Hence, the Diocese of Tirunelveli supplied vitamin tablets,
food cereals and milk powder to the poor patients free through the Diocesan hospitals.

The women missionaries took various steps for rural reconstruction. They started lace and embroidery industries in different places of Tirunelveli which provided employment opportunities to the native women especially the widows. Such employment opportunities brought women of different castes, religions and regions together. By introducing industrial training to the women of the villages of Tirunelveli, the women missionaries inculcated in them the ideas of freedom and free thinking. Thus women learned to stand on their own legs with their earnings. Further, the industrial and job oriented training contributed much towards the eradication of caste distinctions. The Mission sponsored lace and embroidery work under the supervision of the Missionary wives and lady missionaries. The finished products found great demand in the foreign countries. The profit was used to build and equip the schools for girls and for other mission work. But the supreme social value of these cottage industries was its cultural and educational influence upon thousands of women drawn from the poorest classes in the community.

The lace and embroidery industries under the missionaries raised the economic status of women. In villages, many of the poor lace and embroidery workers emerged as leaders among their neighbours. Economic independence brought improvement in their general manners as well as social habits and paved the way for their social uplift and general well being. The people began to observe
habits of courtesy, cleanliness and punctuality. The lace and embroidery industries served as places of social gathering. The workers met together regularly from various centres and enjoyed the fruits of co-operation and unity. At certain times, the missionary ladies, embroidery workers and Zenana helpers came together for a pleasant chat. Such informal meetings brought the women of different castes and communities together. Night Schools and Summer Schools were conducted for adult women by the lady missionaries. The missionaries attempted to instill in these women, a desire to participate actively in the social welfare activities. They also organised special camps for the benefit of the children.

The services of the women missionaries at times of famine were noteworthy. To save the poor people from natural calamities, they approached the foreign Christian missions. Two relief organisations of America, the Church World Service and Mennonite Church rendered help to the Diocese through the National Christian Council (N.C.C.). They sent their own representatives to supervise the relief works. The Church World Service of the U.S.A. and the Methodist Mission in London voluntarily came forward to render help. Co-operative Societies and agricultural Sangams were formed by the missionaries for the welfare of the agricultural labourers of Tirunelveli. Native women were given employment in the Co-operative stores. From the salary, thus earned they could manage their families. They became more self-reliant and independent.

The vigorous and continuous missionary attacks on evil practices such as child marriage, compulsory widowhood, female infanticide, slavery and
devadasi system had a tremendous impact on the society of Tirunelveli. The social evils contributed greatly to the isolation of women. Muslim women were expected to observe purdah, the wearing of a veil in front of the face and wearing burqa, a long outer garment covering the body from head to foot. Seclusion not only limited women’s intellectual horizons and opportunities for personal growth, but also confined them to an often unhealthy environment devoid of fresh air and inaccessible to proper medical care. Hindu widows were often encouraged to immolate themselves on their husbands’ funeral pyres. Those who did not willingly burn themselves were treated as bringers of evil and domestic slaves. Even the presence of widows at ceremonies was considered inauspicious. Many were even thrown out of their husbands’ homes to fend for themselves. The Muslim widow was better protected, but the Muslim wife, unlike the Hindu wife, could be divorced on the slightest pretext and thrown on her own resources.

Polygamy was practiced by both Hindus and Mulsims. The wife was also declared to be the marital property of her husband and was placed in the same category of cows, female camels and slave girls. The women missionaries trained the women to strive against social abuses to enhance their status in society. Further, the women missionaries, Miss. Amy Carmichael and her associates rescued small girls, dedicated to become devadasis. They also saved the boys who were sold to drama companies.

The Zenana Mission did yeomen service for the of social and economic uplift of the women of Tirunelveli. In their endeavour, the women missionaries
were assisted by native missionaries. The Christian missionary ladies daringly entered the caste homes and courageously fought against ignorance and illiteracy of the women and helped the much distressed ones to inhale the air of emancipation and independence for the first time in their lives. Zenana ladies with their bands of Bible women taught the women in their houses. They taught reading, writing, arithmetic, sewing, lace and embroidery and other saleable crafts and offered comfort especially to poor, aged and blind women. Zenana missionaries who saw sick women and children in the homes could report symptoms to a doctor and bring the suggested medicines. The evils of superstitious beliefs were explained to them. Zenana visitation also provided a means of keeping in contact with girls who had withdrawn from the girls’ schools in order to get married. The impact of missionary education and modern thought was so great on the native mind that some of the time-honoured beliefs and customs were seriously questioned and ridiculed even by high caste students.

Thus the lady missionaries acted as agents of change in the society of Tirunelveli. Through magazines and books, the missionary ladies could successfully sow the seeds of revolution and paved the way for social reorganization.

In addition to their service for the uplift of the women of Tirunelveli, the women missionaries toiled hard for the welfare of the physically handicapped especially the blind, deaf and dumb. The women missionaries, Miss. Askwith, Miss. Florence Swainson and other European ladies were directly involved in this venture. The Schools for the Blind, Palayamkottai and the Florence Swainson School for the Deaf, Palayamkottai catered to the physical, mental, spiritual and
social needs of the hearing impaired children. These institutions received financial and material assistance from friends in Canada, England and other European countries. The rich Hindus gave donations to the missionaries. The school met the entire expenditure of feeding, clothing educating and training the poor children of Tirunelveli. The women missionaries also worked towards the uplift of the socially neglected groups of the society. Slave girls were admitted in the Boarding Schools. They were given lace making training which helped them to eke out their living. Slave girls became self-reliant. They were redeemed from slavery and accepted Christian faith.

The services rendered by the women Christian missionaries are commendable. They faced the challenges of the orthodox Hindus. In the initial stages, the missionaries found it difficult even to enter the villages. However, they persisted and succeeded in achieving their goal. Today in the Tirunelveli District, Palayamkottai region is called the Oxford of South India, mainly due to the tireless activities of the Christian missionaries of various denominations.