CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The recently introduced concept in historical research is subaltern studies. According to this concept, in historical writing due importance should be given to the activities of the common people rather than the king and the other well placed people. Further in the past scholars applied macro level study in history. They approached history of a nation as a whole highlighting the glories of major dynasties and ignoring the contributions of minor dynasties to history, but now it is found that they are not real history. For the enrichment of the country every region and everybody has contributed their might. Therefore to find an objective history of a country due attention must be paid to every region and everybody. Hence, now a days scholars have begun to apply micro level study in history and topics are selected at even village level or at taluk level to highlight the contribution of that area to glorious history.
In tune with this modern trend this topic “Christianity and social Changes in Agasteeswaram Taluk” has been selected. It deals with the political suppressions, economic degradations and social inequalities that existed in the Agasteeswaram region and the efforts of Christian Missionaries and their different steps to politically strengthening them, economically empowering them and attaining social equality. Further this work is about the trials and triumphs of the people of this region. It is but because of the untiring endeavours of the Christian Missionaries the people became an enlightened and liberated people from oppression and suppression. It attempts to reconstruct the story of the liberation of the people on a journey from that of bondage to a life of freedom and dignity. Unfortunately the journey of liberation has become “A Forgotten History”, with the passing of time and as people enjoy the fruits of the liberative process, it is natural, that it fades away and becomes a distant memory.

Therefore it is imperative to bring out the past into the present, so as to enable the younger generation of readers to know and acknowledge the heights to which their ancestors climbed in the past with the assistance of the Christian Missionaries and with a view to making the later generations feel that the Christians belonged to this area are greatly indebted to the Christian Missionaries.

Hence an unbiased probe into this dark area of this taluk becomes necessary to bring it to light and this aspect makes this work
unique in character. With the scope for a diligent examination this topic has been selected for pioneering rather maiden effort in the religious aspect with historical and analytical approach.

Statement of the Problem

The mission field in this taluk was not a bed of roses. The missionaries had to encounter several formidable obstacles in the land of the high caste Hindus. The oppressed had been attracted towards Christianity with diametrically opposite values and principles such as love, compassion, sacrifice and forgiveness. These views of both Christianity and the depressed masses which made them stand poles a part kindled the curiosity in the researcher for their conversion. It is a believable fact that Christianity flourishes where there is oppressive poverty or deprivation.

A few questions as to the nature, causation and effect of deprivation may arise. These are some of the unique questions to be analysed. There ought to have been of some driving force that made this setting of the Thames on fire possible. Hence a probe into the possible reason and motives behind become imperative and that forms the nucleus of this thesis.

Already many research works have brought out highlighting social, political and religious history of Kanyakumari District. For instance Hector’s “HISTORY OF PROTESTANT MISSION IN THE KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT (1806-1947), a Ph.D Thesis, P. Rama
Chandran’s “HISTORY OF NANCHILNAD, a Ph.D Thesis, and Chellathurai’s “CHURCHES AND THEIR SERVICES IN NAGERCOIL” a Ph.D Thesis. Though all these works have supplied useful information they were very much limited and highly superficial and have no direct bearing on the present research topic is concerned, thus adding to its uniqueness.

Sources of Information

The chief primary sources are the District Statistical Handbook, Inscriptions, Master Plan, Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly Official Report, Cover Files, which have been preserved in Kerala Archives, Records of the London Missionary Society and the Correspondence from the Home Board of the LMS which have been preserved in the United Theological College Archives in Bangalore, Governmental Orders and Minutes of the Nagercoil District Conference.

Gladston, Church History of Travancore by C.M. Agur and A People’s Revolt in Travancore by R.N. Yesudhas are used as the chief Secondary source of information. Besides, a number of periodicals and magazines like the Evangelical Magazine, the Missionary Chronicle and The Indian Evangelical Review have been judiciously made use of.

For the study of the Salvation Army, reference to the Mission in the various reports connected with the LMS, The History of the Salvation Army Vols.I, II and III, written by Robert Sandall, the official historian of the Salvation Army, The Salvation Army Year Book, the Centenary of the Salvation Army Medical Souvenir and other publications have been used with great advantage.

It has also the pride of running the Concordia Seminary of its own at Nagercoil. The Concordia Seminary’s Archives possesses Minutes of the Nagercoil District Conference and the General Conference of the MELIM. A brief record of the work of the Lutheran Church in the Nagercoil District Conference under the title ‘Fifty Years’ compiled by E.H. Meinezen was of immense help. Other Mission publications such as Much Cause for Joy by M. Herbert Zorn, have also thrown light upon the beginnings of Lutheran work in the region under study.

For the study of the Roman Catholicism, the mission publication such as The Diocese of Kottar, A Review of its Growth by J.M.
Villavarayan and records preserved in the Kottar Diocese Archives provided me with some reference materials and published works.


Besides the above mentioned sources, a large number of books on Missions, Journals, Souvenirs, Pamphlets have been utilised as sources of information.

Limitations

At the outset it must be confessed that the search for original, often unpublished sources was not crowned with a success. Even in Churches adequate records are not available. The non-availability of adequate primary records was a major handicap. As far as this topic is concerned desperate search for the records of missionary activities among the people preserved in the Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum ended in terrible disappointment. To make matters worse, most of the records are in a dilapidated and brittle condition. In spite of these factors, with the available materials this topic has been analysed to the best of ability by
following a methodology which is partly historical and partly analytical not out of any fascination for completing but of necessity. This is a sincere attempt to research in the real sense of the term and present a continuous and systematic account of the spread of Christianity in this taluk which has not so far received the attention it deserves.

**Chapterisation**

This has been arranged in nine chapters including Introduction and Conclusion.

In the first chapter statement of the problem, other related works, sources of information, limitations and methodology are analysed.

The second chapter gives a pen picture of the land and its people and the social inequalities which existed in this area.

The third chapter deals with the coming of the various missions.

The fourth chapter deals with the establishment of the Churches and the various programmes of the Churches.

The fifth chapter deals with an attempt that has been made to unravel the educational activities of the various missions.

The sixth chapter deals with the medical mission and the establishment of hospitals to extend their sympathies to the suffering people.
The seventh chapter analysed the material as well as spiritual establishment made by the missions and their long range impact on society as a whole.

The eighth chapter deals with the economic empowerment and the improvement of standard of living are analysed.

The ninth chapter presents the findings, remarks and suggestions.