CONCLUSION

South Travancore, the southern extremity of Indian sub continent and a portion of Travancore played a significant role in the history of Travancore. Her topographical situation and the ethnic combinations were well suited to the role that she had played in the history of Travancore as a whole. Politically she was under the control of Travancore kings from 18th century. The period between 1806 and 1956 is rightly called as the Era of Socio-Religious Reform movements in South Travancore.

The social life of the people of South Travancore was filled with many problems. The landlords and the upper castes enjoyed all facilities to lead a life of ease and indolence and the law of the land gave them all the protection that they needed. The Brahmins who claimed to be priestly class ascertained superiority in the society by their birth and got exemption from all taxes. The Nairs claimed superiority by their military service to the state and feudal rights. Because of their official capacities they ill-treated the other communities and pushed them to live a miserable life. The existence of feudal
levies, slavery, dress restrictions and restrictions to enter into temples were very much affected the depressed people. Because of these evil practices the people were suffering and stretch their arms in vain and eagerly awaiting a saviour to come and save them from this cancerous systems.

It was during this time, the Catholics and the Protestant Missionaries came. The Catholics concentrated only on coastal areas because they thought that the people of coastal areas were the weakest populations. But it was the London Mission Missionary Society and its Apostle Rev. Ringeltaube who came to disseminate Protestantism in South Travancore first concentrated on the inland areas. Hence the advent of Rev. Ringeltaube to South Travancore was a milestone in the socio-religious history of South Travancore. He laid the foundation for social awakening among the people of South Travancore. On that foundation the superstructure was built by a host of missionaries those who were came to South Travancore.

Indeed, the missionaries came to South Travancore for gospel service. But the pitiable condition of the Travancore people changed their prime aim. In addition, illiteracy of the native people was a hinderance to their gospel service.

The literate high caste people did not turn their ear to missionaries. Meanwhile the low caste people considered them as their redeemers. So
missionaries wanted to liberate them from the clutches of the age old customs. Missionaries took this as a challenge and educated the people first.

In addition to their missionary service, they established educational institutions. These institutions enlightened the people and through that they could understand the real positions under which they were put in. This awakening made the people fight for the eradication of social evils.

The missionaries could achieve their goals with the help of British government. Because Travancore followed pro-British policy. From 1805 they began to administer their country according to the direction of the British government. As a representative of British, a resident was appointed for the Travancore state. This resident helped a lot to the missionaries to abolish the social evils existed in the Travancore society.

The missionaries brought the inhuman attitudes of the high caste people upon low caste people to the knowledge of the Resident and British higher authorities through petitions and the Residents brought these atrocities to the knowledge of the Travancore kings. As a supporter of the British government the king could not neglect the Resident's advices.

Utilising this opportunity the Residents forced the government to issue series of proclamations in favour of the low caste people. Through this way thousands of years old customs were banished from the society.
Besides the services of Missionaries the social reformers like Vaikunda Swamigal, Sri Narayana Guru, Chattambi Swamigal and Ayyankali condemned the social evils such as unseability, unapproachability and untouchability and fought for the upliftment of the depressed communities. They educated the people by saying that man is born free and he had all the privileges of a free citizen. Vaikunda Swamigal worked for the creation of a casteless society and insisted the unity of all people and self respect. He gave equal importance to economic life and vehemently condemned the oppressive and obnoxious Oozhiyam and Viruthi and other poll taxes which were imposed on the low caste people.

He was followed by Sri Narayana Guru, the Ezhava leader, propagated the doctrine of One Caste, One Religion and One God. Narayana Guru taught the people that religion is for man but man is not for religion. In 1904, the S.N.D.P. Yogam or Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogan was established. It advocated the solidarity and equality of mankind. He opposed untouchability and taught equality of mankind. His teachings helped the untouchables identify their own personality. Thus the teachings of Sri Narayana Guru were responsible for augmenting depressed class movement among the Ezhavas.

Like Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamigal too fought for liberal social outlook. He advocated a casteless society and kindled social awareness
among the people. He shattered the myth of Brahmins right to the monopoly of vedic learning and emphasized that every Hindu has the right to access the treasures of the vedic lore. Another important social reformer of modern times was Ayyankali, the Pulaya leader. He was conscious about the low social and economic condition of the Pulayas. Ayyankali asserted the use of public roads for his people. He was responsible for the formation of Sadhu Paripalana Samajam that worked for the socio-economic emancipation of the Pulayas. Thus, the social reformers worked to liberate the oppressed class from the clutches of feudal lords.

The Oozhiyam and Viruthi were the oppressive feudal levies that prevailed in the society of South Travancore. It was during this time, the Christian missionaries worked shoulder to shoulder with the common people and the peasants to eradicate this social evil. Consequently, a proclamation was issued in 1815 by Maharani Gowri Parvathi Bai to exempt the Christians permanently from the oozhiam service. Similarly, the feudal taxes were abolished step by step and it relieved the people to certain extent.

The efforts of the Christian missionaries and social reformers were responsible for the abolition of slavery also. In those days slavery deeprooted in the society. The low castes could neither sell their products in the local markets nor procure their needs. There were regular scales of distance even to enter into the temples for the worship. It was the hinderance for the
upliftment of the society. They were treated as animals. The slave trade also prevailed in the society severe restrictions imposed on them even in the day today life of that people. So the Christian missionaries and social reformers felt that this land of the celestials noted for milk and honey, should be free from slavery. Their attempts to liberate the slaves were the classical example of liberation. However, in 1812, Rani Lakshmi Bai made a proclamation against buying and selling slaves. Though it gave a sign of relief it did not fully relieve the slaves. The proclamation of 1815 too partially fulfilled the demands of the missionaries. However, the proclamation of 1823 favoured the abolition of slavery, yet the problem of slavery continued. In 1843, the Viceroy’s Council passed orders to free slaves all over India. It was followed by the proclamation of 1857 to free the slaves. But the final blow came in 1862. Even though slavery was abolished there were problems and those problems were settled only in 1922 by the Devaswom proclamation.

The problem of upper cloth was a serious problem that rocked the social life of the Avarnas. The backward class women were not permitted to cover the upper part of their body with a piece of cloth called ‘thol cheelai’. The missionaries noticed that at least 70% of the women left the upper part of their body uncovered. They made representations to Col. Munro. Consequently, Col. Munro who was the then Resident Dewan, passed an order in 1812, permitting the Ezhavas and Nadar Christian women to cover the
upper part of their body. Subsequently, in 1814, he issued another order to this effect. But the high caste people opposed them. Yet the Nadar Christians and the other backward communities tried to wear upper cloth. The opposition from the higher castes paved the way for the outbreak of the upper cloth revolt in 1822, 1829 and 1858-59. Mostly the ignition for the revolts came from the high castes. However, during the period of trials and temptations the missionaries stood with the people and guided them to success. Consequently, the proclamation of Her Highness Maharani Parvathi Bai in 1829 and the proclamation of 1859, gave freedom of dress or equal rights to the backward class women to wear upper cloth like the high caste women. Yet the social reforms did not stop with that. It continued.

As far as South Travancore was concerned, Religion was a root cause for all social and religious evils existed in the society. The worship of Siva, Vishnu and other Brahminical deities and the study of Vedas were the monopoly of Brahmins. It wounded the feelings of the low caste people. Usually people embraced a religion to get peace of mind and to redress their sorrows. But in South Travancore religion was the chief cause for all sorrows of the low caste people. In addition, the high caste people prevented the low caste people from entering the temples. It led them to follow evil worships and they made stone pieces, bricks, wood pieces as their gods. They worshipped their gods with blood sacrifice and intoxicated liquors as offering.
In due course, it grew as a barbarious and uncivilized custom. At this juncture, the introduction of Christianity gave new life to these people.

Soon after they got peace of mind from the new religion they were ready to get rid of their evil worship, uncivilized customs and superstitious beliefs. As a result, groups of people came forward to embrace this new religion.

At one stage the mass conversion wounded the feelings of the orthodox Hindus. So they wanted to reform their own religion. Socio-Religious Reform Movements started by Muthukutti Swamigal, Narayana Guru, Ayyankali were the consequence of it. Thus the introduction of Christianity very much influenced the Hindu religion. Drastic changes took place in the religious field. Superstitious beliefs were eradicated considerably from the Hindu religion.

The crusade against temple entry was another attempt to enable the Hindu Avarnas to obtain entry into the premises of temples. There were different scales of distance for the backward communities to enter into the Garbhagraham or the Sanctum Sanctorum of the temples. Denial of temple entry was a refusal of one’s own rights to worship god. Hence the people started to oppose this segregation. The revolts at Kumaracoil in 1854 and subsequent incidents at Thickanamcode and Vadiveeswaram were the
classical examples of the atrocities of the high castes over the low caste Hindus. These incidents attest the fact that the people of South Travancore were the pioneers of Temple Entry movement. Subsequently Suchindram Satyagraha and the Vaikom Satyagraha were conducted to liberate the people from this oppressive attitude of the high castes. At last the proclamation of 1936, laid down twenty-one rules and conditions to permit the Avarnas into the temples. The citizens of the state resolved to commemorate the proclamation because it upheld their rights to enter into temples and worship God, the Almighty who is the omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. Thus the oppressed got the freedom of worship because of the enlightenment and social awakening of the social reformers and the educational endeavours of the Christian Missionaries.

Even after they received several privileges from the government the people did not stop with that. Further they wanted to reform the society. The temperance movement which was held vigorously after independence attest this fact.

The temperance movement was started by the politicians and other social workers and reformers to give up the habit of drinking toddy or arrack of any kind. It deteriorated the family life of the victims besides economic loss. The actions of the Nagpur City Congress, the creation of Temperance Conference, the suggestions and ideas given in the conference and the creation
of Prohibition League were meant for the prevention of drinking habits. After Montford Reform, the excise policy of several provinces underwent a thorough revision. The Prohibition Enforcement Act and other acts connected with it brought the drinking habit under control in many parts of Travancore including South Travancore. After that remedial measures were introduced to rehabilitate the workers involved in the preparation were with noble intention of safeguarding the family life and the health of the intoxicants.

Thus, the hard work of the London Missionary Society’s Missionaries, the Social Reform Movements of Muthukutty Swamigal, Sri Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamigal and Ayyankali were aimed at the humanitarian point of view. They achieved their aims to save the people from their sufferings, and lit the light of happiness in the families. Thus the social reform movements obtained an everlasting place in the minds of the people for generations to come. The social reforms gave a social identity to the oppressed and raised their heads aloft.