INTRODUCTION

The dissertation on “Multifarious Services of Roman Catholic Diocese of Salem” is an attempt to trace the origin, growth, the various services, the multifarious activities of the diocese and its impact on the social and institutional structure of the society. The spread of Christianity and the selfless services of missionaries made an indelible mark and a tremendous impact on the Tamil society. The traditional Tamil society was a caste-ridden society. The economic disparity, rigid caste system and the denial of educational opportunities to the large section of the people attracted the attention of the missionaries to serve for the sake of the downtrodden and the neglected groups. The early Christian missionaries committed themselves in spreading the gospel as their primary mission work. Besides this, they concentrated more on the protection of human rights, promotion of universal education and strived hard for the uplift of the subaltern group including the women.

Religion plays a predominant role in the life of man. It helps the human beings to lead their daily lives in harmony with themselves and with others and to lead a grace filled life of peace and happiness. Man finds perfect happiness in the Supreme Being, namely God who is the object of all religions of the world. The manifestation of ultimate reality can be seen in ‘History’ as well as in Nature. Keshav Chandra Sen, one of the exponents of spiritual interpretation of history says, “The universe exhibits on all sides marks of design and beauty, adaptation and method. Each object shows God’s handiwork. But God is not manifested in matter alone. There is another revelation. There is God in history. He who created and upholds this vast universe also governs and destines the affairs of nation.”
Religion consists of full harmony of life and embraces, equalizes the heart and the intellect. Arnold Toynbee, the well known British historian, studied the genesis and fall of some 21 different civilizations spanning a period of approximately 9000 years and found that 19 of them declined and disappeared when the spiritual or religious foundation that sustained them had become corrupted. Each time, he states, the people have lost faith in its religion, its religion has succumbed to domestic social disintegration.

In the case of India, the cradle of many civilizations both ancient and modern, the rich diversity of its cultural, social, religious and political milieu has been a source of energy and admiration to enterprising people who came to our nation such as Aryans, Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Portuguese, English and French. Throughout its thousands of years of history, religion has played a vital role in shaping its destiny. Religion provides the bulwark of any social order and it is religion that has been the source of ethics and morality. The problems that have grown out of the bond between scientific-technical development and the worldwide economic network those of ecologic destruction, excessive arms buildup or extreme economic imbalances in the context of present day materialistic values are largely due to the downfall of true religious principles.

Man has progressed step by step from the cave age to the jet and nuclear age. Now the world has ushered a new age, which is rightly called the ‘Technetronic Age’, which is shaped not so much by the tradition as by the impact of modern science and technology. Mrs. Indra Gandhi, addressing 38th United Nations General Assembly
Session on behalf of India and 100 other Non-aligned nations very aptly said, “Our plea for peace is not out of superior virtue but because peace is indispensable, because the present military technology threatens the extinction of the human race. No peace today, no life tomorrow. We must realize that in our world, the only form of existence is co-existence with all peoples and countries.”

India is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world, with one of the most deeply religious societies and cultures. Undoubtedly our nation is rightly called as the land of spirituality mainly due to the presence of various forms of faith practised here. The religion of more than 84% of the people is Hinduism, considered the world’s oldest religious and philosophical systems that are strong and influential not only in India but across the world. Zoroastrianism, Judaism and the Baha’I faith are also influential but their numbers are smaller.

The Christians come third. They constitute about 2.3% of the total population of the country. About 70% Indian Christians are Roman Catholics. The Christian population in India is larger than the entire population of Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland and equal to that of Canada or Australia and on the Asian continent, India has the largest number of Christians. Today, they are most prevalent in north eastern states such as Nagaland, Mizoram and Tripura and in the Southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Goa.

The impact of Jesus Christ (4BC-30AD) who was born 2000 years ago, on human history is so obvious and enormous. He is the founder of the most influential religion namely Christianity and the Christian church. He is the hinge on which the doors of history swing. The centuries are measured from his birth. The religion that he
started many centuries ago is now the popular religion in the world with over 2 billion adherents. The Christian scriptures that are primary source of information about the founder and the origin of Christian church are contained in the Bible which is the holy book of Christians. Its influence has exceeded that of any volume ever written in human history. It has been translated into 6000 languages. It is the most valuable literacy help for the maintenance of Christian life. Christianity is like all the other religions in fact that it originated in Asia and yet its influence has been mostly in the west. The people of the west have derived their ideals of justice, freedom, opportunity, cooperation and progress from no other religion than that of Jesus Christ. The most distinctive features are the exemplary character and effective teachings of its founder and its civilizing influence and missionary activity.

The high moral standard of Christian life, life of charity and integrity of action etc., attracted men of good will to Christianity. Thousands of martyrs who willingly marched to their death opened the eyes of many to the truth of the Christian religion. It was the time when the Roman world was full of slaves with no rights and freedom. The message of universal love which the apostles preached enabled this downtrodden part of society to find solace in the religion of Christ.

“India was, it must be remembered, a country of many religions, in spite of the dominance of the Hindu faith in its various shapes and forms. Christianity had reached India probably during the first century after Christ. There were a large numbers of Syrian Christians in South India and they were as much part of the country as anyone else” – so said Pandit Jawaharalal Nehru, the Prime Minister of independent India.
The 12 apostles of Jesus Christ spread the gospel in every nook and corner of the world. St. Thomas Didymas, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ came to India in the first century and spread Christianity in Malabar Coast in Kerala and Mylapore in Tamilnadu. But the Christian groups founded by St. Thomas Didymas the apostle and other early missionaries were cut off from Rome for long period. Their Christianity was limited mainly to the southwest coast. The coming of the Portuguese and other Europeans gave a new dynamic impulse to Christianity in India. During the 16th century the missionaries came to India with the permission and sometimes with the support of the colonial powers to spread the gospel. In the areas under Portuguese control, the converts to Catholicism usually adopted the Portuguese way of life. In the beginning of 17th century Southern Kongunadu a part of Salem District under Madurai Nayakkars accepted Christianity.

One can definitely proclaim on the basic of corroborating evidences that Christianity stepped into Salem in 1623 due to the tireless efforts of the celebrated Jesuit missionary Fr. Robert de Nobili [1606 -1656]. He baptized Ramachandra Naik, the Chieftain of Sendamangalam and also converted an old soldier into Christian faith. This incident marks an epoch making event in the history of spread of Christianity in Salem. Since then this region has seen the presence of many missionaries both of Society of Jesus and of the Paris Foreign Mission as well as of the Diocesan Clergy.

The Diocese of Salem was established on 26th May, 1930 by Pope Pius XI canonically under the guidance and the painstaking efforts of Missionaries of Paris
Foreign Mission Society. The Diocese of Salem was erected initially with 11 parishes to cater to the needs of Catholic Community. The legacy and the mission of the missionaries is continued by the Indian brethren. They have built-up solidly on the foundation the missionaries laid, so that the Diocese today can boast of progress in a variety of fields- in the creation of new parishes and churches, institutional expansions and in areas of social apostolate and inter religious dialogue. The Christian community of Salem, though a small minority, has made significant contribution in the spiritual, educational, social and humanitarian fields of national life.

This small community started growing steadily from year to year under the pastoral care and untiring labours of the missionaries and later under the able guidance of Rev. Bishops Henry Prunier (1930 – 1949), V.S. Selvanathar (1949-1974), Michael B. Duraisamy (1974-1999) and S.Singaroyan (2000 to till date). There is no doubt that the Roman Catholic Church in this region, though insignificant in numbers, yet exercises an influence that is out of proportion to its membership. Its admirable educational system and the charitable social work for all sundry, without distinction of caste, creed or religion largely influence the non-Christians of Salem region.

Few scholars have worked on the various aspects of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salem. Rev.Fr.L.Depigny highlighted the spread of Christianity in Salem region in his work “The Short History of Spread of Gospel in Salem District.” Rev. Fr. M.S. Joseph attempted to trace the origin of the Diocese with available source materials provided by Fr. L. Depigny in his work “A Short History of Salem
Diocese.” Mrs. M.Sarojini made an attempt to give a clear account of missionaries and their services in Salem District in her dissertation “Role of Catholic Missionaries in Salem District.” Another scholar Sahaya Mary has traced the History of Salem District with special reference to Infant Jesus Cathedral in her dissertation work entitled “Infant Jesus Cathedral.”

This dissertation on “Multifarious Services of Roman Catholic Diocese of Salem” tries to trace the origin of the diocese and to study its development, structure, administration, and its various forms of ministries namely pastoral, educational, economical and social rehabilitation rendered to the people of Attur, Namakkal and Salem Districts.

This dissertation covers overall aspects of the diocese taking into account its vision, mission, challenges and tremendous achievements from 1930, the year in which the Diocese was established upto till date. Since Christianity stepped into this diocese as far back as 1623, an attempt is also made to trace the history of Christianity in this region since 1623. The Diocese of Salem has been holding the pride of place in the region of Tamilnadu. Its laudable services to the people in various spheres in general and its contributions to the growth of Christianity in these parts in particular have amply evidenced from what has been enumerated in the following chapters. However, a detailed study of this multifarious service minded body was found wanting. This dissertation is hoped to fulfil that want.

Sources of Information

Both the primary and the secondary sources have been used for the completion of this study. Of the primary sources used for the study are the Annual Reports of
various commissions and committees such as Dialogue and Ecumenism, Laity, Family, SC, ST, BC Commissions, Social Service, Education, Youth and Social Communication. The Diocesan News Letters throw more light on the various activities of the Diocese throughout the year. The Reports of Salem Social Service Society highlight the great strides it has made in reaching to the poor and socially backward masses through its various development programmes. The registers and files maintained at Health Care Centres furnish ample facts about massive programmes launched to give relief to the various diseases. The Annual Reports of Leprosy Relief Rural Centre at Settypatty, St. Mary Magdelene Polio Centre at Mathiampatty, St.Mary’s General Hospital at Arisipalayam and other hospitals and dispensaries run by the religious congregations of Salem Diocese provide the vital information about relief measures taken by the Diocese to ensure medical aid to those downtrodden who suffer from various ailments. The code of cannon law and the documents of Vatican II explain the way of life of the clergy and religious, their powers and functions and also their administrative procedures involving the diocese. Newspapers form yet another source utilized for the study.

The Catholic Directory of Salem Diocese narrates the various activities of the diocese. The Annual Report of ITI, Schools and other educational institutions explain the several steps initiated by the diocese to give all round development to children, women and youth. The facts and figures found in the primary sources are supported by the secondary sources. They run in volumes and furnish additional information. The souvenirs, school handbooks, calendars, pamphlets, journals, brochure of Epiphany Centre and the Gazetteers form the important secondary sources.
**Methodology**

Various types of techniques have been adopted for collecting and analyzing the sources. Apart from gathering data for the study from the various records, interviews were conducted periodically using questionnaire with Directors of various commissions, committees and church officials, heads of various social and religious and educational institutions and the beneficiaries of various educational and social welfare programmes of the Diocese. The interview schedule was prepared and the data analyzed for interpretation. This method helped the researcher to collect required information pertaining to the activities of the diocese.

**Chapterization**

This vivid study is designed into 5 chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. The aims and objectives, area, period, methodology, importance of the study, source of information and the details of the chapters in brief are highlighted in Introduction.

The First chapter “Spread of Christianity in Salem” deals with spread of Christianity in Salem under Madura Jesuit Mission, Mysore Jesuit Mission and Paris Foreign Mission Society and the impact of the selfless services of these missionaries on Tamil society.

The Second chapter “Origin, Development and Administration of the Diocese” enumerates the origin, development and administration of the Salem Diocese. It also explains elaborately the predominant role played by the Diocesan clergy in building up the Salem Diocese solidly on the foundation the missionaries laid and the laudable progress achieved by them in a wide variety of fields such as creation of new parishes,
churches institutional expansion and in areas of the social apostolate and the day-to-
day administration of the church. The phenomenal growth and able administration
under the sagacious guidance of Rev. Bishops Henry Prunier (1930-1949),
V.S. Selvanather (1949-1974), Michael B. Duraisamy (1974-1999) and S. Singaroyan
(from 2000 to till date) are also discussed in this chapter.

The third chapter “Religious Services” analyses the various religious services
of the diocese and the participation of laity in the administrative framework and
development activities of the diocese. The religious services of the diocese are the
foremost among the various service oriented activities rendered through the ages. The
bishop, the clergy, the men and women religious orders and the lay faithful are
involved actively in promoting the religious services of the diocese. An attempt is
made through this chapter to describe in brief the various activities and meritorious
achievements performed through the ceaseless efforts and hard labour of the diocesan
clergy, the religious communities and laity of the Diocese of Salem and its impact on
the social and institutional structure of the society.

The fourth chapter “Educational Services of the Diocese” throws light on the
educational services of the diocese. In the modern period, education has become a
powerful instrument not only for personal realization but also of national
development. It is education that determines the level of prosperity, welfare and
security of the people. The church has a great role to play in the progress and
development of education since it is concerned with the whole of man’s life. The
people of the diocese are convinced of the view that best service they could render a
nation for its socio-economic development is the dedication of their lives to the
training of its youth with high ideals. The strenuous efforts of the diocesan priests, the religious brothers and sisters for imparting value based life oriented education in Salem region is enumerated in this chapter in detail.

The fifth chapter “Social and Medical Services” gives an account of socio welfare services, developmental and animation activities of Salem Social Service Society and rehabilitation programmes, medical services and health care centres run by the religious communities for the betterment of the downtrodden. It also brings out the vital role played by the Diocese in the eradication of economic disparity, rigid caste system and denial of educational opportunities to the large section of the people including women, and the measures taken to ensure the protection of human rights, promotion of universal education, health care, women empowerment and the uplift of the downtrodden people in Salem region.

Conclusion is the last part of the study in which an attempt is made to analyse the vision, mission, challenges and achievements of the diocese and its impact upon the people with special reference to the findings derived out of the study.