CONCLUSION

The Jesuits are men of God and men for others and this is very expressive from the foundation of the Society of Jesus by Ignatius of Loyola and the missionary ventures of Francis Xavier and others. The Jesuit mission always has the focus on the comprehensive growth of the human society and therefore it stands for the works of charity, developmental work and social empowerment through some specific tasks like literacy, formal education, social awareness, promotion of human rights, training in leadership skills, economic development, legal aid and awareness of health conditions. Indian society is known for unity in diversity with various castes, colours, creeds, classes, languages, regions, ethnicity and so on. Though it is a unique feature in India, the diversity of cultures creates the structures of inequality and injustice and as a result the divisions of the privileged and unprivileged, oppressors and oppressed and rich and poor begin to emerge. In such situations in India, the Jesuits came forward to promote justice by taking up the option for the poor through their formal and nonformal education which aims at the well-being of the society.

The Jesuits always try to answer the cries of the oppressed and therefore their target groups have been mainly, the dalits, the tribals, women, child labourers, landless and bonded labourers, refugees and unorganized labour. In Bengal, the Belgian Jesuits were concerned about promoting education in order to eradicate the social distinctions and promote people to be the agents of social change. The Belgian Jesuits had to look for volunteers to take up the Santal Mission which was the extension of the Bengal mission and the Maltese Jesuits came forward to work for the development of the Santals inhabited in the north eastern part of India.

The tribals in India are identified with distinctive geographical areas, culture which includes a specific way of life comprising language, customs, traditions, religious beliefs, economic and political practices, art and crafts. The Santals are the largest homogeneous scheduled tribal group in India. They are a race with unique cultural, social and religious traditions with their own system of administration of
justice based on their own indigenous rules and regulations in relation to every sector of social life. The Santals of West Dinajpur and Malda Districts of West Bengal and Santal Parganas in Jharkhand and Purnea in Bihar are taken into consideration for the study in relation to the missionary work done to them by the Maltese Jesuits from 1925, the year of the beginning of the Maltese Santal Mission to 1989, the year in which the Santal mission became a full-fledged Jesuit Province, namely, Dumka – Raiganj Province with the first Indian Jesuit as its provincial. The research journey starts from a small Santal village, Majlispur in West Dinajpur (now in Uttar Dinajpur) and climaxes in the Santal Parganas where a majority portion of Santals live in Damin-i-koh.

Though the Santals have a unique Socio-economic, political, cultural and religious set up of their own, their numerous festivities and ritualistic worship focused on the Bongas or Spirits drain their enormous time and energy and human and material resources. They have to be in constant fear of satisfying the Spirits. Their festivals and celebrations sometimes lead them to prolonged intoxication with handi (rice beer) and the dignity of labour is simply forgotten. At times, their customs and traditions hinder them from their normal life and they take their life as it comes. They go to the extent of killing people because of the dangerous practices of Ojhaism and Witch – craft. Only the women have been so far identified as witches and they were killed brutally and this inhuman practice is prevalent even now in the district of Malda. The Santal society is known for superstitious beliefs mixed with the worship of the spirits. Santals do not have and an abstract of time. The whole village may spend the entire day running after a wounded pigeon hopping from the tree with the fond hope to catch it when it falls. Though they are happy people, they take life as it comes and so they are content among themselves but when they are exposed to the outside world, they used to face a lot of challenges. They were not in a position to cope up with the external non-Santal world. At the same time, the strong sense of freedom from the British and Zamindari oppression is also found in them and that has been expressed in the Santal Rebellion of 1855 – 57.
Many exploratory attempts were made by the Jesuits of Bengal Mission to establish a Mission among the Santals in the Santal Parganas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The pioneering mission of Fr. Leopold Knockaert, among the Santals of Purnea area was known for his mission journeys to the Santals scattered in many villages. He was trying to give basic catechism during his visits to the Santals. His five booklets published in 1914-1916 speak of his missionary approach to the Santals. In January 1914, he organized a “Santal Exodus” of the Santals from Bagdob to Abdullanagar near Purnea. This was his initial effort to save the Santals who were oppressed by the Muslim Zamindars. This news of this successful venture brought many Santals to get his protection. In 1915, through his writings, he stressed on liberation from the Bongas (evil spirits), liberation from oppression, liberation from the devil and the curse of sin and restoration to the kingdom of God through Christ. He made the Santals receive their land title from the government officials. He questioned the integrity of the government officials and made them concerned about the poor Santals. His positive outlook towards Santals and their culture earned many converts to Christianity. Though he was able to bring many Santals through his economic reforms, he had to face the constant resistance from the mahajans, Zamindars and government administration. To a large extent, he was tolerated by the officials just because he was a European. He never ran away when he was challenged and he was ready to face any difficulty for the sake of Santals.

When Fr. De Bono, the first Maltese Jesuit came and settled among the Santals in Majlispur, he was well prepared to identify himself with the poor Santals of the locality and so he embraced the life-style of the Santals who live in the rough huts and so the Santals could feel free with the missionary. When the people relied on him, he was ready to take up the case of the oppressed Santals by the Muslim money lenders, Zamindars who were supported by the government officials. When he plunged in the fight against the Zamindars, he had to face life - threats from the economically powerful Muslims and the indifferent government officials and at the same time he was able to understand the helplessness of the poor Santals to the core. They were not able to understand the depth of the atrocities caused by the Muslim Zamindars. At times, the Father all alone believed in the providence of God. But his
boldness to fight against the evil and oppressive forces and his sense of justice and social equality, human dignity and respect for poor and marginalized to go with the ahead with the redeeming of the mortgaged lands of the Santals.

When Fr. Benjamin Cauchi stepped in to Santal Parganas, the Santals themselves could not accommodate him initially because they were influenced by the Protestant missionaries who had already settled among them. Even he went to the extent of staying under a tent. His poverty and his belief in God were the only strength he had. He was prepared to take up the life of a nomad and therefore he was flexible to any situation which went against him. The Protestant missionaries went the extent of attacking him through the printed materials with the help of the Santals. But at the same time, there were some Santals who were open to him and so they went to the extent of donating land to establish in Monglapara. But when he put up the structures of a school, church and a presbytery and settled himself with his companion Jesuits, he had to face a court order and as a result he had to destroy the whole structure and vacate to the nearby place Torai. Though he and his companions threatened by failures, he went ahead of establishing and extending Mission work with the support of the Archbishop Ferdinand Perier who always encouraged him and supported him. Even at the time when nothing spectacular was established, Archbishop Perier paid a visit to Fr. Cauchi just to encourage him and show his solidarity with him in the establishment and extension of the Santal Mission in the Santal Parganas.

The Maltese Jesuits established Schools and hostels in the Mission Stations to promote literacy among the Santal children. They realised that, with education in Hindi, Bengali and English mediums, they would be able to bring the Santal boys and girls as the future leaders of their own society. They also gave much stress and the promotion of Santali in the Mission Primary Schools and this was to make them learn their Catechism and to increase their General Knowledge about the world in a very familiar way. It was easy for the Santal students to mingle with the Non-Santals in a very cordial way, freeing themselves from fear and shyness. These children in the Schools were also able to teach their illiterate parents in their own small ways.
The Teachers who were chosen among the Santals were given periodical orientation programmes, so that they could empower themselves inorder to empower others. The Jesuits wanted to inculcate the value of leadership, both in the Church and in the society, and therefore, they gave a lot of concessions for the Catholic Santal children to stay and study in the Mission Schools. They also prepared and introduced simple books to learn Santali. Moral Education was given much importance in the Schools and in the Mission Stations, so that, they could cultivate values in their early stages of their life.

The Missionaries gave much importance to the Santals only and so, sometimes, it looked as if they were meant only for Santals. The Non-Santals could feel the attitude of exclusivism among the Missionaries. Though the Missionaries intended to bring equality among all the Santals under their jurisdiction, they could not avoid the division that existed between the literate and illiterate Santals.

The High Schools were constructed only in the prominent places of the Mission Stations, the starting of the Primary Schools in the remote villages is something to be appreciated about the Missionaries. As for the Collaborators are concerned in their Education and other Mission works, they were mostly depending on their own Sisters and Fathers from Malta and Italy. In this regard, they could have promoted the Indians for the expansion of the Santal Mission. But one thing, these Missionaries were thorough with the vernacular Santali language, and since they were well versed in speaking and writing, they gladly started promoting Catholic literature. Their aim was to reach out the Santals in the remote villages through the Print Media.

Since the Santals were fond of music, dance and drama, the Missionaries were giving the faith formation through the means of Mass Media. The Catholic Santals, who were deprived of the recreation facilities were enriched much by the entertainment given to them along with Christian faith and moral values. The Santals had no tendency to save money for the future and therefore, they were prone to approach the money lenders and Zamindars and finally became landless
labourers. But the saving attitude which was inculcated by; the fathers really gave them human dignity.

The community development programmes gave them much relief from their economic clutches and they were able to attain their basic needs of human life.

Though Maltese Jesuits were trying to take many efforts to promote human dignity to the Santals through various socio-economic, political, religious and educational reforms, is looked as if it was their need for their survival in India. Sometimes it looked as if they wanted to make the Santals dependent on them too much as if they were the only saviours of the Santals and kept them in the receiving end. They took quite a long time to extend their mission to the Paharias and other non- Santals.

Even with regard to promotion of vocation to priesthood, they took their own time and only in 1960’s they promoted vocation from India. Till then they were promoting only their own Maltese/Italian candidates. They promoted the first local Santal priest Anthony Murmu who did a lot for the promotion of the Santal welfare. But unfortunately, he involved in the politics, became an M. P. and finally he had to die in an encounter with the non- Santals who were supported by the government officials against Santals. Even J. Troisi, who did a commendable research on Santals, did not survive as a priest to continue his mission among the Santals. His abrupt departure away from them and the mission land is a great disappointment. The Maltese Jesuits worked for the empowerment of the Santals and if the Santals are empowered, they are supposed to empower other Santals. But in reality, the Santals are good people in themselves, but they do not go out of themselves in order to empower other Santals in the same society. The Maltese Jesuits who are still working in among the Santals trying more and more prepare the people for Christ and others.

The Santal identity was denied and it was not explicitly seen due to the oppressive forces which dehumanized them to a large extent. The Zamindari system and landlordism were powerful economic forces with the introduction of currency
system began to dominate and suppress the Santals who were cultivators and their economy was rural and agriculture based. Whenever these Santals were in need of money, they went to the Muslim Zamindars and mahajans and got it for a high and abnormal rate of interest and the dependency on money became too much because of the currency based economy and the Santal peasants were not able to repay the loan taken from the Zamindar, they are forced to leave their lands to the Zamindars and thus the Santals who were agriculturists were forced become the landless labourers. By losing their landed property, the Santal cultivators became suppressed and they lost their identity. The illiteracy created social and cultural alienation among the Santals. The superstitious beliefs, Ojhaism and witchcraft dehumanized the Santals and they faced so much pain and agony due to the health hazards. Many Santals, especially, the women were victimized and they were killed due to the evil effect of the Ojhas (medicine men). The influence and interference of the political parties in the Santal traditional Panchayat system affected their identity as the natural and rural administrators.

When the Maltese Jesuits came to work among the Santals, they were very much concerned about them and so they took efforts to restore their identity which was suppressed. They strongly desired to empower them and restore their dignity. They directly encountered the Zamindars and moneylenders settled issues with the government officials and restored the lands from the Zamindars in favour of the Santals who had lost their lands. The missionaries introduced savings schemes and credit systems so that the Santals could be free from the moneylenders and mahajans and they could become self-sufficient. As part of the Community development projects, they constructed Rice Banks, dug ponds and wells in order to give sufficient water for drinking and for cultivation and cattles and introduced agricultural programmes for better cultivation. By doing all these welfare projects, the Santal were able to restore their identity and became dignified once again in the society. The Primary Schools, High Schools, the educational funds and scholarships and the technical institutes established by the Maltese Jesuits removed the socio-cultural alienation from them and gave them self-identity and they were able to
reaffirm themselves in the society. The medical facilities introduced by the missionaries with the help of the Sisters restored a healthy Santal community.

The faith-formation programmes, the establishment of various mission stations, promotion of Marian devotion, Orientation programmes, camps and seminars organized by the missionaries really empowered them and so they could reaffirm themselves with their dignified identity in the society and in the Church. The cultural festivals and mass media programmes, the folk arts and the linguistic contributions gave the Santals a legitimate status in the society.