CHAPTER – II

CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS
The origin of Christianity in Kanyakumari district is shrouded in obscurity. There is a strong tradition among the people in Kerala that the origin and influence of Christianity in the strips of the sandy tract stretching from Kodungallur to Kanyakumari are due to the visit and evangelic work of the Apostle St. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ.

Under the instruction of Jesus As my Father hath sent me even so send I you (St. John 20,21), the disciples proceeded in different directions to preach the Gospel. It is believed that St. Thomas set sail for India to preach the teachings of His Lord and baptise the people in the name of the Father and His son and of the Holy Ghost.¹

The Apostle is said to have landed in A.D. 52 at the port of Kodungallur which was the chief harbour and trading centres in the west coast of ancient Tamil Nadu. He received a spontaneous welcome from the Jews already settled at Malankara, nine km south of the port.² The Apostle first baptized a batch of 40 Jews in Anjuvanam and subsequently converted many natives of Kerala to Christianity. He established seven churches on the western coast. Tradition goes that

the Apostle stayed in the southernmost part of India for a few days on his way to Mylapore, where his relics are said to be enshrined and adored.³

The remnants of a church at Kumari Muttam now known as "Thommai Palli" (Church of St. Thomas) and the State of Travancore took its name are considered to be the most ancient churches in the district and they are said to have consecrated by St. Thomas himself.⁴

According to Kerala tradition St. Thomas erected seven and a half churches on the western coast and the old and small Syrian church of St. Mary at Thiruvithancode, now in Kanyakumari district considered as Araipalli (half church) while the other seven churches are in Kerala.⁵

The first epigraphic evidence of Christian influence in the district is found in two stones unearthed at Cape Comorin. From these inscriptions we learn that Christians were given protection from their Hindu kinsmen and some revenues were allotted to the church of St. Thomas there. Of the dates, A.D.1494 and 1526, found on the stones, the first definitely refers to a period earlier than the landing of Vasco da Gama at Kozhikodu in June 1498.⁶ Nagam Aiya asserts that in

⁶. Ibid
A.D. 1439 there were Christian communities scattered all the way from Cochin to Cape Comorin. Fr. Hosten goes further to say that such settlements were to be found from the Cape to Mylapore.\textsuperscript{7}

The Kurusady (a small shrine) in front of the church at Chinna Muttom is said to be consecrated by St. Thomas himself. The style of the cross in its Kurusady and the cross in the altar of the church at Thiruvithancode are same. There is a well (fountain) known as \textit{Thomayar Kinaru}\textsuperscript{8} near the church at Chinna Muttom.

To work among the Paravas of the fishery coast, St. Francis Xavier, a noted Professor of the Sorbonne University of Paris, came to the southern tip of the peninsula in A.D. 1543. For 14 months, he worked continuously along the coast, naming it \textit{"The Mission of Cape Comorin"}.\textsuperscript{9} In 1544 he had the consolation of baptizing more than 10,000 Paravas along the coast of Travancore from Thuthur to Pallam. It is said that the Maharaja of Travancore gladly gave him consent to the conversion of Paravas out of gratitude for the saint who, armed only with a crucifix, forced the invading \textit{Vadugars} to retreat at Vadasery.

\textsuperscript{7} Sarosh T. Jacob, \textit{Tamil Nadu Christava Sabai Varalaru} (History of Christian Congregations of Tamil Nadu), Tamil, Padmanabhapuram, 2003, pp. 15 – 20.
Thus the people of Travancore were saved through the intervention of St. Francis Xavier.\textsuperscript{10} The Chapel of Our Lady, now within the Cathedral at Kottar, and the shrine dedicated to Our Lady at Cape Comorin are traditionally pointed out as the site of his residence during his stay in these parts.

**CATHOLIC CHURCHES OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT**

The Catholic churches of Kanyakumari coast have been made in Gothic style of the Portuguese architecture. Though many ancient churches were dismantled to give space to the new churches, a few churches are still there. They should be preserved.

A short account of the following churches are given. They are St. Francis church, Kottar; Aralvaimozhi Kattadimalai church; (Our Lady of Sorrow) Colachel; St. Helen church Inayam; St. Antony church Kaliyakavilai; St. Joseph church Pillaiithoppu; St. Ignacious church Kurumpanai; St. Francis Xavier church Mankuzhi; Our Lady of Assumption church, Mathavivilai; The Nativity of our lady church, Mulagumoodu; All Saints church, Muttom; Acessension church, Pillaiithope; St. Thomas church, Thuthoor. These churches were built about 100 years and considered to be of great importance.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} Golden Jubilee Souvenir, Kottar Diocese, Nagercoil, 1982, pp. 5 – 8.

\textsuperscript{11} Personal interview with Rev. George Ponnaiah, aged 60, Muzhagumudhu on 24.04.2012.


St. Mary's Church (Araipalli), Thiruvithancode

The first Christian church in Kanyakumari is the St. Mary's Church at Thiruvithancode. This church is known as Arappally\(^{12}\) (half church). It claims an antiquity of about two thousand years. It is believed that St. Thomas, the Apostle of Christ came to Kerala by A.D. 52. He founded seven and a half churches. Thiruvithancode church is considered as one of those seven and a half churches. The seven churches founded by St. Thomas in Kerala are Kodungalloor, Palayoor, Kottackavu, Kokkamanaglam, Niranam, Kollam and Chayal (Nilackal). These seven and that of Thiruvithancode are the seven and a half churches. This is the traditional belief. But experts in history maintain the opinion that seven and a half churches means seven excellent or magnificent churches and not seven big churches plus a small church.

Moens, the Dutch Governor considers the church at Thiruvithancode as one of the seven churches founded by St. Thomas, the Apostle. The letters of Visscher (1717-1723) testified that Bishop Mar Gabriel informed the Dutch Company of the tradition that St. Thomas founded Thiruvithancode church.\(^{13}\)


\(^{13}\) Mayilai Seeeni Venkatachamy, *Christhavamum Tamilum* (Christianity and Tamil Language) (Tamil), Madras, 1938, pp. 18 – 20.
From ancient times Kanyakumari was famous in commercial sphere. It is to be remembered that at the time of the arrival of St. Thomas, there was a commercial relation between Rome, Greece etc with Kadiyapattinam, Colachel, Muttam and the places near Kanyakumari such as Kottaram, Kovalam etc. The anonymous author of *Periplus of the Erthyrian Sea* mentions a river 'paraly' in his writings.\(^\text{14}\) This river flows near Kottaram of Kanyakumari. There are historical writings about the commercial goods from Madurai, Thanjavur, Tirunelveli etc reaching Kanyakumari through Aralvaimozhi. These goods were purchased by foreign merchants. According to Ptolemy (A.D.150) Kottar is a great commercial city.\(^\text{15}\) The ancient church of Thiruvithancode sheds lights to this belief.

The Syrian Christians are the first Christian community in India. This church is believed to be established by St. Thomas, the Apostle of Christ. They were commercially very important people. They used to live near palaces of kings and very important cities. They had very high position in the society and so they had permission to enter into king’s palaces. There are many proofs that the Syrian Christians


were inhabitants of Thiruvithancode, Kanyakumari and places of southern part of Venad.\textsuperscript{16}

In AD 1494 and 1526 two royal orders from the king were promulgated from the old Syrian Church of Kumari Muttom. Durate Barbosa (1514) a Portuguese historian has written about the church at Kanyakumari. In the documents of Synod of Diamper in 1599 there is mention of the church at Thiruvithancode.

A foreign missionary of 16\textsuperscript{th} century writes as follows: 
\textit{There are very many Christians- if they can be called Christians – in places between Kollam and Kanyakumari of Thiruvithancode. They desire very much to receive sacraments. For the last 50 years they have not even seen a priest. They have only the name of Christians. They are proud of being Mar Thoma Christians (Syrian Christians).}

According to V. Nagam Aiya, it is certain that before the arrival of the Portuguese, there were many Mar Thoma Christians in the area from Kochi to Cape Comorin.\textsuperscript{17}

These historical facts prove that there were Syrian Christians in Kanyakumari region, centuries before the foreign missionaries founded Latin Church.

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\textsuperscript{17} V. Nagam Aiya, \textit{The Travancore State Manual}, Vol. II, Trivandrum, 1940, pp. 170 – 175.
From historical documents we can see that the Venad dynasty made Thiruvithancode, the capital by about 14th century. Even before that Thiruvithancode was famous. Thiruvithancode is not far away from Colachel port. There was every possibility for Thiruvithancode to become an important commercial city.

The granite walls of this church (Araipalli) are 2½ feet thick. It is of 45 feet length, 16 feet width and 10 feet height. There is a cross carved on the granite wall at the right side of the entrance to the altar. The façade of this church was built in Portuguese style in later years. The present roof of the church was built later, since the first roof was spoiled by the roots of a tree. In front of the church there is a granite tub for washing the legs and a old well made during the time of St.Thomas. This church has a early simple architecture made of granite stones. In the beginning there was no tiles or woodworks. The woodwork was added later. The church has some interesting painting made by the Portuguese. It has a central hall and a sanctum sanctorum. The Thiruvithancode church had many followers in early days. But due to various reasons they migrated to other parts. This church now is in the possession of the orthodox church.

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During Mukilan's invasion, it is told that the Christians were compelled to change their religion to Islam. When Thomas Whitehouse visited Thiruvithancode in A.D. 1873 there were 30 houses of Mar Thoma Christians and the rest went to Trivandrum seeking work there.

In A.D. 1940 Rev. Dr. Thomas Nangachivettal visited Thiruvithancode. According to him there were 5 Christian families lived there at that time. At present there is only one Mar Thoma Christian family. The orthodox people who are now at Thuckalay and surroundings through they are Malayalees go to this church for Sunday Mass. Thiruvithancode church from ancient times got prominence in historical books, now continues to be a church known to very few. Still, many Syrian Christians from Kerala who come to Kanyakumari are interested to visit Araipalli.

It was at the end of 16th century that the capital of Venad was shifted to Kalkulam (now Padmanabhapuram). The word of Thiruvithancode, has evolved from the word Thiruvithancode means the Sanskritised form Sreevazhumcode.

20. Mukilan was a Muslim general.
St. Thomas Church, Kanyakumari

There is an old church called Thommai Palli or St. Thomas church at Kumari Muttom about two kilometers, north east of cape point. It is now in ruins and only the foundations of the old church are now visible besides present chapel of St. Sebastian.\(^{23}\)

It is said that at the beginning of the 16\(^{th}\) century A.D., the Portuguese sailors who passed through the place made their offerings here for a safe voyage. From the Royal Edict issued in A.D. 1494, it is known that the church at Kumari Muttom enjoyed certain grants from the harbour dues for lighting the lamps in the church.\(^{24}\)

The present church is a lovely Gothic structure of graceful proportions, measuring about 153 feet in length and 53 feet in breadth with the position of the bell 53 feet above the floor level.\(^{25}\) The central tower is crowned with a gold cross. The flag-staff in front is about 130 feet high.\(^{26}\) The church with beautiful statue of the blessed virgin Mary de Mercode is one of the beautiful churches in South India.

\[\text{\underline{23. Personally visited and confirmed.}}\]
\[\text{\underline{26. S. SathaShivam, Cheranadum Senthamilum (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1949, pp. 133 – 135.}}\]
Kumari Muttom was an ancient centre of Syrian Christians. The old church at Kumari Muttom was a proof to this. The traditional faith of the people of this locality is that St. Thomas the Apostle, disciple of Christ founded this church.\textsuperscript{27} In early times ships used to anchor there. The seashore is very calm. So this seashore might have been a rescue place for ships. This was a commercial centre in ancient times.

Two writings of Unnikerala Thiruvadi were found out from this church. These royal orders are preserved at present in the museum at Padmanabhapuram palace. The contents of these are

1) For the purpose of purchasing oil for the lamp of Kumari Muttom church, taxes shall be collected from different nets such as Madivala, Vaalavala, Chalavala and Chanavala.\textsuperscript{28} Every country boat engaged in exporting and importing at Kovaikkulam (Kovalam) harbour of Kumari Muttom should give one panam each. The king’s share from the grains and fish also shall be given for this purpose. But the inhabitants within the limits of Kumari Muttam need not pay the taxes such as Idankaivalakaippamam, Padaippanam, Parichanda kanikka etc. This order was published on M.E. 669 on 15\textsuperscript{th} of the month of Chithira (A.D. 1494). In the year M.E. 701 (A.D.1526) on 20\textsuperscript{th} of the Tamil


\textsuperscript{28} Aaivu Kalanjiam, Monthly Historical Research Journal, Nagercoil, April 2007, pp. 36 – 38.
month of *Pankuni*, he promulgated the second order by which low caste Hindus were forbidden to enter into the residential places of the Mar Thoma Christians. Historian Durate Barbosa visited Kerala in 1514. He wrote about the church at Cape Comorin as follows: *"There is a church at Cape Comorin (Kanyakumari Cape) which is built and run by Armenians (Syrians). There are crosses on their altars. The sailors who pass by, pay their offerings in this church. Portuguese priests are offering Holy Mass there."*29

At the time of St. Francis Xavier, many Syrian Christians joined Latin Church. At present the church at Kumari Muttam belongs to Kottar Diocese.

**The Church of Our Lady at Kanyakumari**

From the time of St. Xavier there has been a church and a resident Parish priest at Cape Comorin and it forms the nucleus of the present church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title "Our Lady of Ransom". Later the old church was demolished and the foundation stone of the present church of sublimity was laid down. It was completed in the year A.D.1956.30 The altar and sanctuary of the old church are kept in tact behind the present church. The structure of the new edifice is well proportioned and very imposing and it forms __________________________

30. Personally visited and confirmed the Inscription available infronof the Church.
an outstanding example of Gothic architecture. The interior portion is very graceful and quite conducive to prayer and worship. The hall with 153 feet in length and 53 feet in breadth is divided into three aisles by two rows of pillars. At the entrance there is a big mandapa on which three towers rise into the skies. The central tower with a height of 153 feet was crowned with a golden cross blessed by Rt. Rev. T.R.Agniswamy, the Bishop of Kottar, on the 20th November 1955. The towers on either side are 100 feet tall. Two big bells are hung in them at a height of 53 feet from the ground.\footnote{31}{Personal interview with Mr. Christy, Church Secretary, aged 53, Kanyakumari on 10.04.2012.}

The wooden altar depicting all the Apostles and many saints and also some scenes from the Bible is a masterpiece of carving. It contains the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary which has a very majestic and queenly appearance. It is estimated that the statue is of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century A.D.\footnote{32}{Personal interview with Mr. Shenthee Natarajan, aged 68, Epigraphist, Nagercoil, dated 17.03.2012.}

"Our Lady of the Cape", a large oil painting on wood, also of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century depicting Our Lady with the Child Jesus on her lap with St. Ignatius and St. Xavier kneeling on either side is preserved very carefully by the church authorities. In the paintings St. Xavier does not hold a crucifix in his hand. At her feet may be seen the Cape
and a rock with some catamarans floating in the sea hence the name "Our Lady of Ransom".  

In front of the church there is an iron flag staff towering up for more than 40 feet. It was one of the masts of a steamer that was wrecked near by in A.D.1912.  

An additional wooden flag staff is also fixed above this when the flag is to be hoisted for the feast usually held in December. 

The feast at this Church enhanced by taking out two Rathas (chariots) on the tenth day. The statue of Out Lady decked with many gold ornaments is placed on the bigger Rathaa which is supposed to be exact in all dimensions and proportions as prescribed in the Hindu Silpa Sastra.  

**The Cathedral of St. Francis Xavier at Kottar**

The Cathedral of St. Francis Xavier, one of the most impressive historic monuments of India, containing a small chapel of Our Lady where Francis Xavier used to celebrate Holy Mass, is situated

35. Personal interview with Swami Vincent, aged 72, Kanyakumari dated 10.02.2012.
37. Dinamalar, Tamil Daily, Nagercoil, 3-12-2007, P.III.
at Kottar, a renowned pilgrim centre for Christians and it is generally known as second Goa. At Goa the body of St. Xavier is kept.\(^\text{38}\)

Kottar is now a suburb of Nagercoil town. It was a commercial centre of fame from days of yore. The ancient Greek writer, Ptolemy, (A.D. 150) describes it as a Metropolis with considerable trade. In A.D. 1544 St. Francis Xavier selected this place of great antiquity for his evangelise work in the erstwhile Travancore State.\(^\text{39}\)

One of the earliest and ablest of the Jesuits, Francis Xavier, who devoted to the cause, had the highest talents and the utmost energies, blessed by the Pope and encouraged by the king of Portugal with the highest honours, Xavier started for the east. The soldier of God reached Goa in a ship which furrowed the heavy seas for full thirteen months with its one thousand passengers. Xavier learned, taught and prayed with the most genuine devotion for the success of his efforts. His labours in Malabar were crowned with success. Ten years before his arrival, a deputation of seventy men from the fishery coast complained to the Portuguese authorities at Cochin against the oppression of the Muhammadans and requested their assistance, promising to become Christians. They were baptized then and there. This opened a good prospect and Fr. Miguel Vaz who was sent to the

\(^{38}\) Dinamalar, Tamil Daily, Nagercoil, 3-12-2006, pp. 11 – 14.

place succeeded in baptizing twenty thousand persons, the population of thirty villages, in fifteen months. It was these new converts whom Francis Xavier was commissioned to look after.\textsuperscript{40}

After working for sometime in the Tuticorin coast converting a large number, he proceeded to Travancore where he commenced his operations under the permission of the ruler. There were already a few churches in existence such as the one at Valiathura. Xavier's method was simple. He did not weight for the erection of costly chapels and commodious churches. "Wherever he made converts he erected first a cross and then a booth of branches and palm leaves which was in time replaced by a church built of stone and cement. He writes that in one month he was able to convert ten thousand persons and that frequently in one day he baptized a well-peopled village". This statement may not be literally true. But the achievement was such as to justify a complacent attitude of mind. Xavier fixed his headquarters at Kottar where a church was built.\textsuperscript{41} He soon become a prominent figure.

Xavier was one of the earliest missionaries from Europe who understood the importance of securing the friendship and cooperation of the Syrian Christian community. He wrote to Ignatius

\textsuperscript{40} Kavitha, K.M., \textit{History of Nagercoil Town}, unpublished M.Phil Dissertation submitted to Azhagappa University, Karaikudi, 2008, pp. 60 – 63.

Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), requested him to send a powerful Jesuit preacher to perambulate the sixty villages of the Syrian churches. Becoming weary of work and depressed in mind because of his failure to convert as large numbers as he desired, he left for Japan where he hoped to win greater victors. He dies in the course of the voyage off the Chinese coast.

In 1546 the Portuguese established at Cranganore a Franciscan college by the order of the Archbishop of Goa and under the patronage of the king of Spain. The object was to educate the young men of the Syrian Christian community in the classical Latin language and give them an acquaintance with the rites of Latin Christianity. Vincent de Logos, upon whom Francis Xavier lavished high praise in his letters to the king of Portugal and to Ignatius Loyola, laboured in that college for many years, preaching among the Syrians until the moment of his death. These young men were not pressive historic monuments of India, containing a small chapel of our lady where Xavier used to celebrate Holy Mass, is situated in the heart of Kottar.

The Cathedral at Kottar is a complex of many structures built at various times. It came into prominence after the death of St. Xavier. In A.D.1545, the Venad king Unni Keralavarma donated the land to St. Francis Xavier for his help to check the Vijayanagar army under its general Vittala. Xavier constructed a small church there and it was called as St. Mary’s church. Only in A.D.1606, the church was named after Xavier in order to celebrate the declaration of Xavier as saint.45

In A.D.1640, it was converted into a granite church. In A.D.1713 and 1865, the church witnessed expansion. In A.D.1876, Jokkun Fernandez erected a wooden palipeeda with architectural and sculptural beauty. At the end of 19th century the chief architect and designer of Travancore state John Louis Fernandez built the granite mandapa infront of the church. On May 26, 1930, it was declared as a Cathedral. In A.D.1942 a tower was added with Xavier’s figure. In 1955, the present shape of Xavier Cathedral came into existence.46

It was the first church built after St. Xavier. The mortal remains of Saint Devasahayam Pillai were buried at this church only in

A.D.1752. During the construction of the granite mandapa, the architect who designed the granite mandapa, John Louis Fernancez’s body was buried there within this Cathedral.\textsuperscript{47}

It is learnt from the church records that the church was built in the year A.D.1600 when father Andreas Buserio was the Parish priest. He used to celebrate the Feast every year on the day of the death of Xavier and for that Feast the greater part of the Christians of the coast used to attend.

In the year A.D.1865 the church was enlarged and the shrine of Our Lady where Xavier used to celebrate Holy Mass was also renovated and vaulted over. In 1930 the church was raised to the status of a Cathedral.\textsuperscript{48} The cruciform church has acquired different styles of architecture. The old church of round arches and vaults in Romanesque, the extension with high-pointed arches is of Gothic and the fine stone mandapa in front is purely Indian. The twelve towers in the church represents the 12 disciples of Jesus Christ.

In 1942 in commemoration of the fourth centenary of the arrival of St. Xavier in India, a beautiful tower to the saint, a grotto to Our Blessed Mother and a small shrine to St. Ignatius, who sent him to India, were constructed in the Cathedral premises. It is said that the

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\textsuperscript{47} Aaivu Kalanjiam, Monthly Historical Research Journal, Nagercoil, April 2007, pp. 38 – 42.
\textsuperscript{48} S.R. Narseesan, Punitha Francis Saveriar, (St. Francis Xavier) (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1989, pp. 3 – 7.
\end{flushright}
beautiful statue which adorns the main altar has been brought from Goa. In 1955 the church was further extended and the chapel of Our Lady was incorporated into the church.\textsuperscript{49}

The church of St. Xavier enjoys a great fame as a place of miracles from early times. The fame of these miracles spread far and wide and ever since the church is being visited by thousands of pilgrims for fulfilling their desires. It has become almost proverbial to say that, "\textit{Kottattu Savariyar Kettavaram Tharuvar}" (Xavier of Kottar grants all prayers). Strange but true it is to note that salt and candle sticks are offered to St. Xavier even by the Hindus and the western portion of the church campus is owned by Kottar Nainar Desikavinayakar Hindu Devasthanam Trust. The church authorities used to remit Rs. 150/- to the Devasthanam Trust as annual rent.\textsuperscript{50} It is an excellent testimony to communal amity and religious harmony.

Like the temple of Nagaraja for the Hindus, another one famous for the Christians is the St. Xavier’s Church at Kottar. It is a complex of many structures built at different times. The church came into prominence after the demise of Xavier. He was popularly called \textit{’Valiya Pandaram’}\textsuperscript{51} by the people of Kottar.


\textsuperscript{51} Lawrence, \textit{History of Catholic Church in Kanyakumari District}, Nagercoil, 2002, pp. 120 – 125.
The annual festival of the church is celebrated during the month of November - December lasting for ten days. The car festival on the ninth day is most important. During these festival days the shrine attracts larger crowds of visitors from all over Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Even the Hindus in large number used to participate in the festival.

**Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, Nagercoil**

One can see the majestic church of Sacred Heart of Jesus opposite to the Municipal park in the heart of Nagercoil Town. In the year 1907 there was a Tamil school in the name of St. Francis started in the campus. Subsequently boarding was attached to school with a small chapel dedicated to the saint. In the year 1977 the small chapel was demolished and the foundation for a new church was laid on 19th March 1977. The new and beautiful church was blessed and the altar was consecrated on 7th December, 1979 by the then Bishop of Kottar Diocese Rt. Rev. M. Arokiasamy. The benefactors of the church were from Rome and Germany.

**De Lannoy's Church, Udayagiri Fort**

De Lannoy was a Dutch general who was defeated and captured by Maharaja Marthandavarman in the battle of Colachel. He

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52. Personally visited and confirmed through the inscription available in the school – campus.
was later appointed as Valiyakkappithan (Commander-in-chief) of the Travancore army. He became so popular due to his dedicated services especially the construction of new fortifications and modernization of Travancore army.

De Lannoy was a Roman Catholic. He built a chapel at Udayagiri Fort in 1765. The permission to built the chapel was given by king Ramavarma of Travancore kingdom. After his death, he was buried with military honour in an impressive tomb with in the chapel which he built.\textsuperscript{54} It may be mentioned that it was a Catholic church under the control of Vicar of Verpoly. Worships were conducted here and Gen. De Lannoy and his family and the Catholic officers of the army used to worship here at the time of the king Karthihaithirunal.\textsuperscript{55}

It is adjacent to the south wall of Udayagiri Fort. There is an altar and a worship hall which stands westwards. The main entrance is in the western front. In the front wall there are two windows on either side. Half – pillars, at the top a doom on the Goddess, above the doom a stone-cross all these things are found. The stone cross is not found at present. Below the worshipping hall there is a small narrow place.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Welcome to Kanyakumari}, Pamphlet published by the Tourist Traffic Advisory Committee, Kanyakumari District, Nagercoil, 1980.
In the north corner of the church there is a small entrance through which the priest enters to the altar. Today the tombs are left to the mercy of the elements of nature without even a roof. The recent findings of beams and roof tiles indicate the existence of a roof. There was a priest appointed by King Karthihai Thirunal (1758 – 1798), the successor of Marthandavarma and was paid by the king.57

The chapel, tombs and the fort were renovated in A.D.1762 during the time of Karthihai Thirunal Maharaja. During the renovation many facts have surfaced. One unrecorded granite tomb stone with cemetery marking has been found outside the chapel about 20 feet from the wall of the chapel.

In the chapel constructed within the fort by De Lannoy, we can see seven grave yards in which Latin and Tamil languages were used in five graves and in the remaining two inscriptions are in English. In the northern side of Udayagiri fort, there is a tunnel but no information is available regarding the purpose of it.

This tomb stone is measuring 6 feet in length, 3 feet width lay north to south direction. But the head of the tomb stone with marking of a bone in ‘X’ shape is kept towards the south. It is not known to whom it belongs.58 After A.D.1898 the roof of the church was vandalized and some changes were made.

When the British took over the administration of the Travancore State in 1809 the Protestant Missionaries used to conduct the religious service in the church under the leadership of Rev. Ringle toube, the first Protestant Missionary.  He stayed at the Udayagiri Fort in A.D. 1809-1810.  Rev. James Mead (1792-1872) who came after Rev. Ringle toube, tried to convert the Catholic church into a Protestant church.  He also wanted to start a Mission in the Udayagiri Fort.  But he left the idea because of the objection from the Catholic bishop of Verpoly.  Even now we can notice carved place in the church to keep the image of Mother Mary on the wall facing the cemeteries.

St. Eliyas Church, Thuckalay

Just like other Christian missionaries who came to South Travancore, a group of missionaries came from Belgium.  They were called as Carmalites.  They started their evangelic activities at Thuckalay since A.D.1911.  In the beginning the prayer hall was built with thatched sheet.  Later in A.D.1916, the foundation stone was laid for a new church and on 16th July 1919, Bishop Aloysius Bensicar

commissioned the new church by name St Eliyas Church. It was constructed with granite stones only.

**St. Antony’s Church, Vettuvenni**

It is situated near the Srikandan Sastha temple, Vettuvenni, a suburb of Kuzthithurai town. Originally a cross was installed and prayers were conducted. Rev. Vensensus, of Thiruthuvapuram constructed a small church there and later it was expanded. For the foundation and development of the church, the role of one Vaidyar family of Pullankuli deserves special mention.

**Periyanayagi Church, Thiruvithancode**

It is situated in the Monday Market – Azhagiya Mandapam road at Vattam, a suburb of Thiruvithancode village. Thiruvithancode was the capital of Venad rulers during the early period. So Christian missionaries and Islamic saints established their places of worship at this place. A small church was constructed there and named as St. Mary church. Franciscan and Carmel missionaries and also the Society of Jesus personal worked in this church. In A.D.1544 St. Francis Xavier visited the church at Thiruvithancode.

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63. Personal interview with Rev. V. George Ponnaiah, aged 60, Mulahumoodu dated 3.05.2012.
64. George K. Vargheese, Arapalli (Half Church), Tamil, Thiruvithancode, 2010, pp. 4 – 8.
Constantine Joseph Beschi alias Veeramamunivar inaugurated *Periyanayaki Annai Worship* in the Madras Presidency. It was Rev. Baskalraj who named the St. Mary church at Thiruvithancode as Periyanayaki Church.  

**St. Michael Church, Puliyurkuruchi**

This church is closely associated with Devasahayam Pillai, a Catholic martyr who has been declared by Rome as Saint. He was originally a Hindu and because of the advice given by De Lannoy, the Valiakappithan, of Travancore army, he embraced Christianity. The irritated Maharaja of Travancore ordered for the arrest and torture of Devasahayam Pillai. On the way he was taken to the place which is called locally as *Muttruidichan Paarai*. In A.D. 1775, a church was built there. In order to remember the sacrifices of Devasahayam Pillai, a memorial has been constructed in 1992.

**St. Michael Church, Rajavur**

It is situated at Rajavur village which has the distance of 12 kms from Nagercoil town. In A.D.1680 two Christian migrants Samiyadiaan and Kanakan came and settled in this petty village. In the beginning a cross was installed there and prayers were


66. Personal interview with Dr. N. Ayyappan, aged 53, Puliyurkuruchi, dated 15.05.2012.
conducted.\textsuperscript{67} Later St. Michael’s church (Kurusady) was inaugurated. It is a place where thousands of mentally disturbed people are coming on all Saturdays. Significantly non-Christians majority in large number are the routine visitors of this church. In A.D.1917 the people got affected due to Calera and they began to pray the God. At last they got escaped from the severe disease and the people believed that Arokkianather protected them from that disease.\textsuperscript{68}

Since 15\textsuperscript{th} century A.D., Christianity spread in this village. Only in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century the Christians built a small church with thatched sheet. Later due to the efforts of Bishop of Quilon, Rev. Bensikar, a new church was built on 3\textsuperscript{rd} May 1918.\textsuperscript{69}

In A.D.1918, foundation stone was laid for the constructions of a new church and gradually the church emerged. Again it was decided to expand the church. The construction of the present church at Rajavoor was completed on 07.05.2004.\textsuperscript{70} The Bishop of Kottar Diocese declared this church as with special status.


\textsuperscript{69} Personal interview with Mr. Maria Soosai, aged 80, Rajavoor dated 3.01.2011.

\textsuperscript{70} Parish File, Diocese of Kottar, Bishop House, Nagercoil, 2010.
Devasahayam Mount, Aralvaimozhi

It is situated in the Nagercoil-Tirunelveli trunk road near Aralvaimozhi. Originally called as Neelakanda Pillai, he was an ardent Hindu in the beginning. Later due to his close contact with De Lannoy, Valiyakappithan (Commander-in-chief) of the Travancore army, he got baptised and named as Devasahayam Pillai. It is strongly believed that the Maharaja of Travancore ordered for his execution and at last he was shot dead at this hillock on 14th January 1752. The church has been named after Viyakula Annai and it got popular due to the killing of Saint Devashayam Pillai and thousands of Christians from distant places are coming to this church.\footnote{Personal interview with Mr. George, aged 60, Secretary, Devasahayam Mount Church, Aralvaimozhi, dated 30.05.2011.}

Earlier in A.D.1862, a small church was built there and the present church was inaugurated on September 15th, 1975. Recently Devasahayam Pillai has been declared as a saint by the Pope of Rome.

St. Layola Church, Ramanathichanputhur

Ramanathichanputhur is a place situated near Marungoor, a place famous for its Murugan temple. A famous Catholic Church was built in 1850’s and it has been named after St. Layola.\footnote{V.John Lings, Catholicism in Rajavoor, unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, M.S.University, Tirunelveli, 2010, pp. 32 – 35.} The Catholic missionaries of Vadakkankulam came to this small village in horses
and they started the evangelic work there. Very soon it became a strong Catholic centre that led to the conversion of Rajavur village situated near Marungoor as a Catholic hamlet.

**St. Arockia Annai Church, Rajakkamangalamthurai**

Thanks to the sincere efforts of St. Francis Xavier, Catholic churches emerged in the entire coastal line of Kanyakumari district. Rajakkamangalamthurai church was one among them. In A.D.1570, a small Catholic Church was built at this coastal village and in 1852, the church witnessed expansions. The present church construction was started in 20.03.1955 and it was completed on 08.09.1976.\(^73\)

**St. Xavier’s Church, Kaaravilai**

The Carmolite missionaries started evangelical activities at Kaaravilai during the dawn of 18\(^{th}\) century A.D. The present church emerged in 1976 and it was built with the financial support of Aabenparists of Germany.

**St. Alankara Matha Church, Kanyakumari**

The foundation stone of the present church was laid on May 31\(^{st}\), 1900 by Rev. John Konshalvel and completed in A.D.1914. In A.D.1956, modification were done and it was consecrated by Rev. T.R. Anyasamy. The flag staff of this church was donated by __________________________

\(^73\) Personal interview with Mr. Eranimos, aged 80, Rajakkamangalamthurai, dated 12.08.2012.
Mr. Kayathan Villavarayar of Tuticorin which was collected from a damaged ship near Leepuram.\textsuperscript{74} Two chariots were also built in 1789 and 1833 respectively.

**St. Michael Church, Asaripallam**

During the 1750's, Asaripallam was a popular place for Visvakarma community. The Chettiars (Vysyas) of Kottar also migrated and settled in this village. Due to differences arose in the local Hindu temple, the Chettiars got peptized and at present nearly 4000 Christians are there in this church alone.\textsuperscript{75} St. Mary's Primary School was started on 25.06.1901 and St. Michael's Primary School was started on 01.06.1921 and both are maintained by this church.

**St. Mary's Church, Puthanthurai**

Once there was a hostility between the Muslims and the Parathavas\textsuperscript{76} and a Portuguese Messenger John de Cruz joined hands with the local Parathavas and settled the war. Significantly in this village, people from Veerapandyan Pattinam, Tuticorin, Kuthankuzhi, Manappad came and settled in this village and a church was built in 1779.

\textsuperscript{74} S. Padmanabhan, *Kumari mavatta kottaihal*, (Forts of Kanyakumari District), Tamil, Nagercoil, 1971, pp. 7 – 10.

\textsuperscript{75} Personal interview with Mr. Pithalis, aged 65, Editor, “Oli Vellam”, Monthly Magazine, Aasaripallam, dated 12.06.2012.

\textsuperscript{76} Parathavas - a sect of the fishermen folk. This community comes under inland fishing.
In 1850, St. Francis Xavier laid the foundation for the new church and in 1902 it was opened by Rev. Bensikar. Due to its collapse, a new church was built in 2005.

**PROTESTANT CHURCHES**

Among the Protestant Christian missions working in the district of Kanyakumari, the London Missionary Society, now known as the Congregational Council for World Mission is a prominent one. The churches founded by this missionary society have constituted themselves into the *Kanyakumari Diocese of the Church of South India*.77 Nagercoil town owes much of its present position and importance due to the efforts of the missionaries.

The above society has played an important role in several fields and their constructive work formed the landmarks in the history of the district. Many firsts such as the first English School, the first printing press, the first newspaper and the first hospital in the erstwhile Travancore State had been due to the influence and hard work of the missionaries. The YMCA Rural Reconstruction Centre at Marthandam, another organ of the Mission is the pioneer in the field of Rural Reconstruction.78

The origin of Protestant Christianity in the district dates back to the beginning of the 19th century A.D. One Maharajan, a native of Mylaudy 10 km. south of Nagercoil was the first man who embraced Protestant Christianity in the district in the year 1801 and he was baptized with the name Vethamonickam.\textsuperscript{79} Since then Vethamonickam worked for the cause of Christianity in this region.

In 1805 Vethamonickam visited Tranquebar, the cradle of protestants in South India and made the acquaintance of Rev. William Tobias Ringle toube, a Prussian by birth and a Lutheran by faith. At the request of Vethamonickam, Rev. Ringle toube came to Travancore as the first Protestant Missionary on 25\textsuperscript{th} April 1806.\textsuperscript{80} The first Protestant Church in Travancore was built by him in March, 1809 at Mylaudy situated near Suchindrum. He also founded a school near the church in the same year.

The missionary constructed seven churches around Mylaudy. They were at Mylaudy, James Town, Thamaraikulam, Zionpuram, Puthalam, Ethamozhi and Kovilvilai. When his successor the Rev. Charles Mead settled in Colonel Munro’s circuit bungalow at


Nagercoil, the headquarters of the society and the school were shifted to Nagercoil from Mylaudy in April, 1818.\textsuperscript{81}

Under the influence of Colonel Munro, the then British Resident in Travancore State, Her Highness Gowri Parvathi Bai, the Maharani of Travancore appointed Mr. Mead as civil court judge. Col. Munro was most helpful and encouraging to the missionaries.\textsuperscript{82} The Travancore Government had also helped their work by granting them the land on which the Home Church, college and mission building stand. In his diary Rev. Charles Mead writes "..... west there is the Mohammedan Mosque, in the east stands a heathen Hindu temple and on the high way on the midst I have commenced a house to the living God. God grant that the other two should decrease and that the House should increase". It is said that there was a mosque on the bank of the tank now known as "Bethesdakulam" and a graveyard nearby. Now the Nagercoil Municipality has constructed a shopping complex on the site.

Let us discuss the important historical protestant churches of Kanyakumari District one by one.

**Home Church, Nagercoil**

The Home church at Nagercoil is an outstanding example of the architectural achievement of the L.M.S. missionaries. The


\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
Church is 140 feet long and 70 feet wide including the spaces of 70 feet and 20 feet which form the front verandah.

It is the biggest Protestant church not only in India but also in the entire Asian continent. Nearly 3000 people can assemble in the church. Rev. Charles Mead, who belonged to London Missionary Society was responsible for the construction of this grand church with Greecoroman and Gothic architecture.

When Rev. Charles Mead assumed charge of the Mission, he wanted Nagercoil to be the Head Station for missionary activities. With that in view he wanted to build a church and asked the missionary Rev. Richard Knill in January 1819 to lay the foundation of a church measuring 1401x70ft.\(^{83}\)

The Maharani of Travancore donated liberally in cash and timber for the construction work. The prisoners from the local jail contributed their free labour. The Nagar Amman Kovil temple (Nagaraja temple) elephant was used to lift wooden beams. Since the material used for the construction was granite, it was called 'Kallukovil'.\(^{84}\)

It is seen from the church records that this church was built in the year A.D. 1600. In was enlarged in the year A.D. 1865. In

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A.D.1930, the church was raised to the status of a Cathedral, which has been called as 'Kallukovil' as it is built with huge stones.\footnote{S. Dharmaraj, \textit{Thadayangal}, Thuckalay, 2006, pp. 30 – 40.}

The church is 140 feet long and 70 feet wide including the space of 70' and 20' which form the front verandah and the office rooms in the rear.\footnote{Dinamalar, Tamil Daily, Nagercoil, 28-08-2006, p. XI.} The home church is one of the oldest and biggest of the protestant churches in South India. The edifice can provide accommodation for nearly 250 people at a time. The imposing Home church was constructed in Greek style.


For the construction of this magnificent church, the successive Maharajas of Travancore and the Raja of Cochin came forward and liberally donated.\footnote{Ibid.} The Raja of Tanjore donated Rs. 500/-.
The Maharani of Travancore donated the landed property and granite stones utilized for the construction of the church.\textsuperscript{89}

In this context, the role of Col. Manroee, the Resident Regent of Travancore Kingdom deserve special mention. He was behind the appointment of Rev. Mead as Hon. Magistrate of Nagercoil. The latter utilized the prisoners of the nearby jail for the construction work. Even now Home church is very popular, though it has crossed 193 years.\textsuperscript{90}

**Singlare Church, Marthandam**

It is one among the important protestant churches of Kanyakumari District. Rev. Robert Singlare, a Scottish national and a member of London Missionary Society was the man behind the construction.\textsuperscript{91}

On 26\textsuperscript{th} of July 1924, the foundation stone was laid for this church.\textsuperscript{92} The sketch was prepared by the Scottish architects. A native mason Isravel of Marthandam was the head of the team which constructed the church.

The *Palimedai* (altar) is 120 feet length and 50 feet breadth. The church tower is 100 feet high in which a trifaced clock was fixed.


\textsuperscript{90} *Ibid.*

\textsuperscript{91} Personal interview with Dr. K. Muthunathan, aged 70, Rtd. Principal, Nagercoil on 10-2-2012.

The church bell was designed at Glaxco.\textsuperscript{93} The roof has been filled with slat tiles imported from Scotland. The church beams were prepared from Malabar teakwood. There are six majestic pillars inside the hall which are supporting the arches.

The entrance of the Gopura highlights the artistic beauty of Dravidian style of architecture. The construction of the church came to an end on 13\textsuperscript{th} May 1933.\textsuperscript{94}

\textbf{OTHER CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS}

During the later part of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, there was strong spiritual awareness in England and Europe and the desire to spread the Gospel to other parts of the world was much in evidence. With that view many evangelical societies were established, and one such society was the London Missionary Society formed in 1795 which did the evangelical services at south Travancore. Among the modern churches in the district, the one at Marthandam and another at Nagercoil erected in the heart of the towns are noteworthy. Because of the initiative of London Missionary Society a number of churches were built. Let us discuss one by one.

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\texttt{93. A. Maxwatt, Christhava Siddantha Thirattu (Tamil), Tirunelveli, 1960, pp. 200 – 210.}
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\texttt{94. Dinamalar, Tamil Daily, Nagercoil, 15-02-2007.}
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Among the Protestant churches Mylaudy Church, Kovil Vilai Church, Thamaraikulam Church, Puthalam Church, Athicaud Church, Eathamozhy Church, Pichaikudiyirupu Church deserve special mention.

**The Salvation Army's Booth Thucker Hall at Nagercoil**

Another Christian Mission in the district is Salvation Army which is famous for its well equipped Catherine Both Hospital locally known as Putheri hospital founded in the year A.D. 1895. Before launching the programme of their medical service M/s. Devasundaram, William Stevens and a group of volunteers went to a cave at the top of Marunthuvaalmalai (Medicinal hill) and fasted and prayed for four days and nights. The hospital now known as the Catherine Booth Hospital named after the founder of the movement, is one of the largest mission hospitals in India. The services of the foreign doctors like Nobel Williams, Alloway and Rader in the hospital were noteworthy.

Until A.D. 1923 the Salvationist families used to gather for prayer and meeting in the old palmyra-leaf-thatched shed stylishly known as the Central Hall situated in the Training College premises in the present Women's Christian College Road at Nagercoil. When General Bramwel Booth visited Nagercoil in the month of December,

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1922 he felt the need of a Territorial Central Hall for Sunday prayers and week-day meetings. He voluntarily sanctioned a substantial amount of Rs. 15,000/- for the project. Eloquently named after the commissioner Booth Thucker, an I.C.S. officer who dedicated himself for the sake of the gospel and established the work of the Salvation Army in India the hall was dedicated on 15th October 1923 by the then Commander of the Madras-based Composite Southern India Territory Commission Arthur Blowers.\(^{98}\) The Booth Thucker hall situated in Vetturnimadam Junction at Nagercoil stands as the Jerusalem of South Eastern India Territory of the Salvation Army. The 12 pillars in the majestic hall reminds us of the 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ.

**The Calvary Lutheran Church at Nagercoil**

The Sambavars\(^{99}\) of South Travancore felt that the London Missionary Society did not do any missionary work in their colonies. So, Mr. G.Jesudasan belonging to the Sambavar community invited the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Missionaries who were doing missionary work at Krishnagiri in the then Madras Presidency to preach the gospel of Christ among the Sambavars of South Travancore. On 21st February, 1907 they started the Lutheran missionary work.\(^{100}\)

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99. Sambavars -a sect of the Parayas (Dalits) of Kanyakumari District.
The first Lutheran church was built at Kalungady, Vadasery in A.D.1907 and in the succeeding years so many Lutheran churches were built in many Dalit villages in South Travancore. These village churches were used as village schools during the week days to educate the illiterate villagers. Subsequently a theological seminary was established at Nagercoil in the year 1924 by the Lutheran missionary which is the popular Concordia Seminary. In order to accommodate the teachers and students of the newly established Seminary, the Lutheran missionaries wanted to build a new church at Nagercoil near the Seminary. On July 24th 1924 the first worship service was conducted at the dormitory of the Lutheran Girl's Boarding School at Nagercoil. And that day is considered as the birth day of Calvary Lutheran Church, Nagercoil.101 Rev. Gutneckt was in charge of the worship service and he was assisted by 7 students of the Seminary. However the missionaries realized the urgency to build a separate church exclusively for the worship service. In 1932 the worship service was shifted to the seminary chapel.102

As the seminary chapel could not accommodate all the members, the missionaries wanted to build a new church. The

foundation stone of the new church was laid in 1952. At the cost of Rs. 2½ lakhs the new Lutheran church was built which reminds the name of the place where Lord Jesus was crucified. It was dedicated on 11th April, 1971. This church is one of the most beautiful churches in India. It has been built in a unique architectural style.\textsuperscript{103}

To summarize, the Christian monuments of Kanyakumari district are equally famous like the Hindu monuments even though they are numerically less in number. The Catholic and Protestant missionaries introduced Gothic, Roman and Greek style of architecture in this district. Like the Christian missionaries, the Sufi saints, who came to India for the propagation of Islam, also constructed a number of Islamic monuments like Durgahs and mosques. The net result was the introduction of alien Islamic style of architecture. These Islamic monuments also add glamour to the fame of this district. Let us discuss the various Islamic monuments one by one in the forthcoming chapter.

\textsuperscript{103} J.R. Narshesan, \textit{Kumari Christhavarhalin Payanapaathai} (Tamil), Nagercoil, 2000, pp. 1 – 3.