CONCLUSION

A study of the various features of the present Nagercoil town will eventually lead one to the role of the churches in its growth. Nagercoil situated at the Southern end of the Travancore State, shot to prominence obliterating the supremacy of Kottar which had hitherto enjoyed a unique superiority by it. The emergence of Nagercoil as the centre began with the shifting of the L.M.S mission centre from Mylody to Nagercoil in 1818. Ever since the place name 'Nagercoil', began to appear in the State records as well as State and private communications.

Nagercoil, selected for the present study is an area surrounding the famous Clock Tower of Nagercoil. It is administered by the Nagercoil Municipality. The area is bounded by the Anandanar channel on the West and the South, the West flowing Pazhayar on the East and the wide spread paddy fields stretched up to the Putheri Tank on the North. The Mediterranean climate enjoyed by Nagercoil always favours a wide variety of flora and fauna. People from all the social divisions from all over the district live as immigrants in Nagercoil.

The many sided development of Nagercoil is attributed to the Christian Churches. It is said that Christianity came to Travancore in 52 A.D
immediately after the crucification and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Its advent in the country is ascribed to St. Thomas one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. He attained martyrdom at Mylapore in 68 A.D. There were just a few converts and no congregation worth the name. But Tradition says that St. Thomas had founded seven churches in Coastal Travancore and a half church at Thiruvithancode in the South. It is also said most of his early converts were Namboothiri Brahmins. However, recorded history of Christianity in Travancore, has set its beginning with the advent of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century A.D. Along with the main mission of trade, propagation of Gospel also found a place, in the agenda of the Portuguese. They were staunch Catholics and strove hard to get converts to their denomination.

The murky political situation that prevailed in Travancore and the complicity of the Portuguese in it made the work of the Catholic missionary St. Francis Xavier easier. Taking advantage of this situation Francis Xavier converted a large number of fishermen families living along the stretch from Tuticorin in the East to Quilon in the West. But the bulk of his congregation was found between Kanyakumari and Poovar on the west coast.

St. Xavier developed many congregations in this area. They were united to form the Cape Mission. Its headquarters was later established at Kottar in Nagercoil. This move by St. Xavier facilitated the spread of the
Catholic faith over the main land and got more converts from the numerically larger Nadar Community of the region.

The centre that Francis Xavier established at Kottar became the nucleus of the present Kottar Diocese. Yet a large number of its churches and adherents are found in the coastal area. Similarly a large number of its priests also hail from the fisher folk. Hence it goes without saying that the Catholic Church in this region is dominated by the fishermen community. Contrary to this, Nadars are largely found in the four Catholic Churches of Nagercoil.

In Travancore the Church of the London Missionary Society started by William Thobias Ringletaube in 1806 stands as the first protestant church. The endeavour of the founder backed by his native assistant grew into an organisation with many congregations. However, the existence of its centre at Mylody offered little scope for further expansion beyond the place. This drawback was rectified by the second missionary Mead. He shifted the mission centre from Mylody to Nagercoil in 1818.

The transfer of the mission centre paved the way for the westward expansion of the faith. This cleared the path for the elevation of Nagercoil to a position of eminence in South Travancore, previously held by Kottar. This new area, largely inhabited by Nadars offered a rich ground to the L.M.S for its further growth and expansion. As a result of that, within a short period the L.M.S in South Travancore became a Nadar dominated church.
Under the fostering care of Mead and a host of other missionaries, Nagercoil grew as the capital of the L.M.S in South Travancore. The positions of trust and responsibility enjoyed by its Nadar converts were denied to the other unprivileged sections of the society. This act of injustice paved the way for the establishment of the other two protestant denominations.

Among the other two protestant churches the Salvation Army was the first to come. Unlike the L.M.S the adherents of the Salvation Army belonged to the most repressed sections of the society. The Army’s humble beginning among the day labourers of the “Block Rock Estate” acquired wider dimensions with its Boom March and preachings. However, the Army’s work in the village of Attakulam marked a turning point in its history. The policy of adaptation followed by its early missionaries acted as an incentive for the mass conversion of repressed sections like the Parayas and Sambavars to this faith.

The occasional opposition from the caste Hindus did not deter the Army from its path of service. Its various garrisons stationed at centres like Karkadu and Kadaigramam were organised to form the Nagercoil Division. The congregation of this church is called the soldiers. They received shelter and solace under the flag of the Army in their early days of distress and degradation.

The Indian Evangelical Lutheran Church, being the third protestant church of Travancore, also had its beginning in Nagercoil. The
origin of this church takes one back to the Danish Halle Mission of the seventeenth century in Europe. Majority members of the church, as in the case of the Salvation Army, belong to the Sambavar community. From this it is clear that, this Church was also established by a dejected section of the L.M.S Church under a native leader.

The early Lutheran missionaries started their work with the help of native G. Jesudhason. He was a Government servant in the beginning. As the days passed by the Lutheran congregation grew in strength and developed into the Nagercoil Synod of the IELC. The churches of this Mission were established at Vadasery, Ganesapuram and Nagercoil in the Nagercoil area. They too promoted the growth of Nagercoil. Their religious and social service brought about social rejuvenation to their adherents.

Among the auxiliary activities of the churches educational endeavours take the pride of place. The L.M.S being the pioneer in the field of education succeeded in imparting the same impartially to all sections of the society. Their Boarding School, Day School, Night School, Hostels and Schools for repressed caste children in their villages could bring the male and female children of all the communities within the orbit of education.

The seminary or the central school of the L.M.S started by Mead in 1819 not only offered higher education but also later emerged as the first college in South Travancore. The other churches following the example of the L.M.S., started schools in their vicinity for the benefit of their
congregations and the common public. All in all, Nagercoil began to
develop into a centre of education in Travancore with a network of
educational institutions.

The involvement of the L.M.S., Catholic, Salvation Army and
Lutheran Mission Churches in the field of education considerably reduced
the state's burden, in the cause of education. Besides this, the churches
became a source of inspiration and guidance to the state to start such schools
in various places of the country.

The Churches while imparting education to the children of all
communities of the region, never failed to take care of their health and
sanitation. It is a known fact that the health and sanitation of the people of
those days was far from satisfactory. Common ailments and occasional
epidemics made life weary and miserable for the common man. The absence
of English medicines and western mode of treatment for diseases encouraged
country quacks to exploit the sick and aggravate their misery.

Women had to endure terrible suffering at the time of child
birth for want of qualified mid-wives. Tradition and superstition prevented
the high caste women from going out of the house for child delivery. To put
an end to these evils the L.M.S started a hospital at Neyyoor in 1838. It was
the first hospital in the whole State of Travancore.

However, in the case of Nagercoil, the medical work of the
Salvation Army began in 1893. It started off as a Bath Room Dispensary.
Very shortly it rose to prominence as the Salvation Army Catherine Booth
Hospital, Nagercoil. As it is situated in the place called Putheri in the Nagercoil centre, it is popularly known as the Putheri hospital. This hospital grew in size and stature as the counterpart of the South Travancore Medical Mission of the L.M.S. at Neyyoor. It played a key role in the development of Nagercoil.

Managed by the London Headquarters and manned by the members of the local congregations of the Salvation Army, the CBH has been rendering meritorious service in the cause of the health and sanitation of the place. Its service to the people and the state caught the latter's attention. The State came forward to help the hospital with financial assistance and representation in the medical Board of Travancore. The nursing and other paramedical courses offered in this hospital provided job opportunities to many members of the Army in India and abroad. Altogether it helped the poor outcastes to gain recognition in the society.

The branch hospital of the L.M.S at Nagercoil was of great help to the local people. In short the central hospital of the Salvation Army and the branch hospital of the L.M.S at Nagercoil could cater to the health and sanitation needs of the people of the region for a long time.

The churches in Nagercoil had other social enterprises like printing press, lace making, brush making and orphanages. The printing press of the L.M.S started by Mead in 1821 at Nagercoil helped in the promotion of education and went a long way in causing a social renaissance in the region. Lace industry started and promoted by all the churches helped
in the eradication of the economic poverty of the unprivileged sections. This industry started by the missionary ladies was a beacon of hope to the women of the downtrodden sections, especially the widows and the destitutes.

In short, the lace industry was instrumental in the abolition of the slavery of women as well as their empowerment in many a way. The Brush making industry of the Lutheran Church was a humble attempt of that church to extend economic benefit to its poor converts. But it did not succeed in the long. Unlike this venture, the orphanage of the Catholic Church offered protection and solace to the orphans and the destitutes for a long time. Now a days such orphanages have lost their uniqueness because many other agencies assisted by the State and voluntary organisations have entered the field. By and large one can see that the Churches became a huge social movement by themselves. Education and humanitarian services became their mainstay. These in turn were the hall marks of Nagercoil’s development.

Before concluding it is pertinent to say that but for the generosity of the Travancore rulers, nothing much could have been achieved. When compared with their Indian counterparts the Travancore rulers were noteworthy for their modern outlook and religious tolerance. They had great concern for the well being of their subjects but could not do much for them. It is here that the Christian Missions helped them out.

The Christian Missionaries came forward to find remedies for many of the social maladies while attempting to accelerate evangelization.
At this juncture it should be understood that the Travancore administration, unmindful of the ultimate goal of the missionaries offered a free hand to them to carry on their activities from different centres. Its net result was the emergence of Travancore as a model state and the elevation of Nagercoil as the most literate town in independent India. Hence the Travancore rulers deserve honour and admiration.