PREFACE
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India is a secular country and its people belong to different faiths. Christianity spread in India in different spells. St. Thomas preached the gospel in India in the first century itself. In the 16th century, St. Francis Xavier spread the message of Christ in the coastal regions of Tirunelveli. In the 18th, 19th centuries, the missionaries of the Protestant missions, S.P.C.K., S.P.G., C.M.S. and C.E.Z.M.S. preached the gospel in Tirunelveli district. In course of time, churches were organised and for administrative purposes, different Dioceses were formed. Among them, Tirunelveli Diocese plays a significant role in the spiritual, socio-economic and political life of the people of Tirunelveli. The congregation has different auxiliaries such as Mothers’ Union, Girls’ Guilds, Sunday Schools and Children’s Mission. When the Diocese grew from strength to strength, it did not confine its attention and activities to evangelism alone, but undertook manifold welfare activities such as educational, medical and industrial ministries with the object of uplifting the oppressed and economically weaker sections of the society.

Using education as a missionary tool, the missionaries bestowed on the poor girls and awakened sense of freedom, social justice, fraternity and equal opportunities in life. The women missionaries started schools wherever they established churches in order to eradicate illiteracy from the society. Despite various hardships, the women missionaries attempted to impart education to the physically challenged too. Schools were started for the hearing impaired and the visually handicapped. In these schools, free education was provided irrespective of caste or creed.
The women missionaries took suitable measures for the uplift of the underprivileged in the society. Orphans were given asylum in the orphanages and they were fed, clothed and educated to lead a decent and honourable life with a sense of equality in the society. When the locality was affected by flood, famine and cholera, women missionaries came forward to render all possible help. They also took steps for the health care of the poor people. The main thrust in the community development is to create an awareness among the villagers about the causes of their age old suppression on the one hand and the various opportunities available for their liberation and development on the other.

The thesis gives glimpses of the life and work of women missionaries among the women and girls of Tirunelveli. Tirunelveli has been the beehive missionary activity in South India. In this study, due attention is bestowed on the work of the Protestant Women Missionaries of S.P.G. C.M.S. and C.E.Z.M.S. Their work was concentrated on the areas of Palayamkottai, Nazareth, Idaiyangudi, Mengnanapuram, Tuticorin, Swayerpuram and Nagalapuram. They provided education and health care contributing positively to the well being of the depressed class Christians and to their sense of personal worth.

Erection of a historical edifice on this theme appeared hard and complicated in the ordinary sense. Hence care has been taken in the narrative part to avoid deviations from the central theme. To the possible extent, chronology is maintained with relevance to trends and events while analysing
diverse developments. It also highlights the far-reaching consequences brought forth in the society. Importance is given to secular outlook. The present study seeks to be an original contribution in the realm of historical research of modern times.

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