CONCLUSION

Introduction

The thesis titled Social History of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century of Tamil Society as Revealed by the Jesuit Annual Letters and the Writing of Indian History has dealt with the arrival of the Jesuits has brought out their missionary activities in the Old and the New Madura Missions upto nineteenth century. The origin, development, features and the impact of the Jesuit Letters have been discussed. The socio, economic, political and religious conditions of Tamil country as revealed by the Annual Letters of Jesuit Fathers have been highlighted. Each chapter begins with an introduction which points to the content to be elaborated in the chapter and ends with a brief summation. The concluding part of the thesis is a critical analysis and findings on each chapter particularly on the socio economic political and religious conditions of the Tamil Society. The second part of the conclusion reiterates that these letters play a vital role as the primary source materials to write Indian History.

The Jesuit missionaries who involved themselves in preaching the gospel and teaching catechism changed the focus of their mission. They widened their vision and developed an integrated approach towards their mission after seeing the pitiable condition of the Paravas. The poor fisherfolk were trained to read and write. The women in the Fishery Coast followed superstitious beliefs and they did not enjoy equal position on par with men. They were instructed to lead a better life. The missionaries were on the side of the Paravas when they were attacked by their enemies. The Jesuits also raised their voice against the Portuguese captains when the latter oppressed the fisherfolk.

This broad vision of understanding the mission is very relevant today. The missionaries are looked upon as foreigners who came to convert the poor by providing
food and money. This is untrue in the case of the Jesuits particularly in the Fishery Coast. It is the Paravas who supported the Jesuits monetarily.

According to Schurhammer before their conversion the fisherfolk were Saivites. The Paravas had the tendency of going back to their old religious practices; they could not adopt the western religion completely. The missionaries were successful in their attempt of preventing the neophytes going back to their age old religious practices. In this way, the feast of Our Lady Snows was introduced by the Jesuits in Thoothukudi.

The missionaries introduced the celebration of saints’ festivals like St. Joseph, St. Antony, St. Peter and so on. The faithful erected kurusadis and grottos in which the above saints’ statues were placed. Novenas were conducted. Thus developed folk religious practices and the devotees were content with the familiar atmosphere prevailed over there. Therefore the inhabitants of the Fishery Coast were never truly assimilated in any real sense into the Portuguese matrix but instead always maintained their separate identity.

The missionaries further widened their vision when strong personalities like Fathers Criminali and Henriques arrived at the Fishery Coast. Fr. Henriques established cordial relationship among the Hindus, the Catholics and the Muslims. Since the Paravas were originally Saivites their conversion was not accepted by the Hindus who lived in the interior places. Secondly, the Muslims hated the Portuguese as well as the Paravas because the Muslims had lost their hold on the pearl fisheries. It was an ardous task placed before Henriques who had to create peace and harmonoy in the Fishery Coast. When he died in Punnaikayal in 1600 his body was brought to Thoothukudi via sea. All the shops had been closed by the Muslims in Kayalpattanam.
Fr. Henriques is still remembered for his efforts to impart education to the fisherfolk children. He started schools, seminaries, hospitals and colleges. Students were sent to Quilon to pursue their higher studies. The Jesuits or other missionaries did not continue the work launched by their predecessors.

In the seventeenth century the Jesuits moved to Madurai with the hope of converting the castes other than the Paravas. De Nobili’s new way of life resulted in inculturation. The missionary learnt the good elements in the Hindu culture and adopted them. This paved the way for the conversion of caste Hindus as well as people from lower castes. But the division among the Jesuits as order of the missionary Brahmins to work among the high castes and Pandararwamis to serve among lower castes was apparently against the spirit of Catholicism. Since caste system was very rigid, the missionaries were helpless. It was impossible to bring unity among different castes. So the Jesuits divided themselves into two groups to work among the high castes and the lower castes.

In the eighteenth century, the Jesuits faced two critical events: one: the arrival of Lutherans and their preaching, two: the suppression of the Society of Jesus which halted all the activities and the Jesuits underwent several hardships. Regarding the first factor, Beschi through his writings counteracted the principles of Lutheran doctrine.

The suppression resulted in the neophytes going back to their old belief system. The situation of the Fishery Coast became worse. Disorder and immorality prevailed for about thirty years.

When the Society was re-established, the French missionaries controlled the New Madura Mission. Now a new conflict emerged – between the Goan missionaries and the French missionaries. But the French missionaries carried out their activities
vigorously in Ramnadu, Trichy, Madurai and Palayamkottai. It was the time when Protestantism was spreading in the south. Though the Jesuit missionaries experienced oppositions from the rulers, ecclesiastical authorities, their own companions and the Goan missionaries, they did not give up their missionary zeal. Their greater love for the Society on one side and to prevent the fast spreading of other sects of Christianity motivated them to work for their mission more.

In the nineteenth century, Jesuit mission stressed upon providing higher education in Tamil Nadu. Bishop Alexis Canoz played a vital role in this regard. Colleges and high schools were founded in Trichy and Madurai. New religious congregations were established. They took up the task of educating the children. Orphanages were established. This multi dimensional approach of the missionaries attracted the Brahmins and other high caste Hindus.

The missionaries did not confine themselves only to the spiritual domain. Their broader perspective of understanding of mission found solutions to the day today problems of the people. When Tamil Nadu was experiencing a great famine, the Jesuits collected a huge amount of money to help the affected people. Relief measures were also undertaken by the missionaries along with the government officials. All these resulted in further spreading of Catholicism in the nineteenth century.

The Jesuit missionaries sent Annual Letters to Rome describing their activities. Ignatius of Loyola the founder and the first Father General of the Society of Jesus was responsible for inspiring his fellow men to send Annual Letters. He insisted upon the authenticity of the letters. He also reiterated that the letters must edify the readers. The Jesuits were asked to provide all kinds of information in the letters. So the Annual Letters carried information about not only the religious activities but also the political, social, economical and religious conditions of the kingdoms where they resided.
Francis Xavier sent letters annually and asked his companions to fulfil the expectation of the Father General. This practice is prevalent even today. Fathers Polanco and Valignano played a key role in the perfection and printing of letters. These letters aroused great enthusiasm among the Jesuits and the lay people. The Jesuits opted themselves to serve as missionaries in the East and the youth committed themselves to renounce the world. Thus the letters which carried the news about the spread of Catholicism through mass conversion made an adverse impact on the Reformation Movement.

The Jesuits compiled the letters into a book. Fr. Costelloe’s work “The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier” brings out almost all the letters written by Francis Xavier. Henry James Coleridge has authored “The Life and Letters of Francis Xavier.” This work is based on the letters of Francis Xavier. Documenta Indica, Volumes I – XVIII and Monumenta Ignatiana, Epistolae S. Francisci Xaverii and Documentação para a História do Padroado Português do Oriente are compilations of the Jesuit Letters. Georg Schurhammer, Joseph wicki and António da Silva Rego have done commendable work in this regard.

Since the Jesuits were all learned men, the letters and reports they sent were very accurate. The letters were known for sincerity, piety and authenticity. Also the letters exhibited prudence and discretion. The Annual Letters bear witness to these above characteristic features.

Francis Xavier was the pioneer of sending letters from India. He insisted upon sending annual reports of the activities in the Fishery Coast and other places like Malabar Coast and Goa. The socio, economic, political and cultural lives of the people are highlighted in the sixteenth century letters of Francis Xavier.
The structure, style and pattern of the letters of Francis Xavier have been discussed elaborately. Because he is the one who motivated his fellow men to send detailed report regarding the missionary work from various mission stations. He wrote the Annual Letters in different languages so that the beneficiaries would be larger in number. When the letters are read carefully the following truths will be revealed.

i. The understanding of mission by Francis Xavier was wider even in the sixteenth century. He came to convert the people, but his humanitarian activities tell more about an integrated approach to the mission. He tried to answer to the political, social and economic and religious problems.

ii. Francis Xavier was a vision oriented man. He introduced lay collaboration in the formation of Christian faith. In the absence of priests, the kanakkapillai worked efficiently. It is being continued today even after five hundred years.

iii. Francis Xavier built up the Parava community based on a strong faith. The Portuguese were surprised to see the spiritual formation of the fisherfolk of the Fishery Coast. This was tested when the Dutch forced the Paravas to embrace Calvinism. But they remained firm to their faith.

The Annual Letters made an impact on the Church as well as the secular world. Both the Jesuits and the non Jesuits received the letters jubilantly. Great historians like Sri Ram Sharma and A. Vincent Smith have highly appreciated the letters and have insisted upon the reference of the same in writing history.

Francis Xavier raised his voice against the oppression of women and insisted upon treating the slaves kindly. The season of pearl and chank fishing is a unique feature of the letter of Francis Xavier. The Fishery Coast was under the control of three rulers. The names of the rulers, their battles with one another centred around
pearl fisheries are mentioned in the letters. The introduction of the folk religion made
great impact on the fisherfolk.

The letters have been used as primary sources to write both religious and
secular history, they suffer from shortcomings and criticism too. Sometimes the
missionaries had been carried away by prejudices while narrating wars between the
rival princes. A few letters have been written without verifying facts. Secondly, the
missionaries were not able to pronounce certain names correctly. Those mistakes have
become permanent ones. Thirdly not all the missionaries learnt Tamil, the local
language. Some were dependent on the topazas who misled the missionaries with of
their incorrect translations. Yet the Annual Letters have enriched the secular history
of India and Tamil Nadu.

Though women were not treated on par with women, the missionaries have done
justice by including a few women in their letters. Rani Mangammal has been portrayed
as a courageous woman. Her conquests have been widely covered in the Annual
Letters. She governed her state to the satisfaction of her people.

The imprudent governance of Minakshi also has been brought out. Her
succession to the throne resulted in a civil war and it invited the Prince of Arcot to
annex Madurai. The Nayakdom experienced turmoil and turbulence. One of the two
factions conspired to overthrow the queen. She was unable to settle the disputes
created by two factions, whereas Rani Mangammal a manly hearted woman had ruled
with such a resolution that all efforts of her late husband’s relatives could never snatch
the government from her hands.

The personality of two Maratha rulers Shahji and Tukkoji are described in the
Annual Letters. Both of them never cared for the welfare of their people. Shahji spent
most of his nights in the company of women. As he had no male issue to succeed, he
spent his life in offering sacrifices to his gods. He was greedy and collected gold and silver and buried them.

Both the Nayaks of Madurai and Marathas of Tanjore depended on the Brahmins. The Brahmins have played different roles like ministers, commanders-in-chief and temple priests. In some cases the rulers left everything in the hands of the Brahmins and plunged into merry making. Often not only the kings but these administrators also were responsible for the misgovernance of the people in the Maratha kingdom and the Madurai Nayakdom.

The Brahmin commander-in-chief misguided the rulers in the battle field. Rani Mangammal failed to capture Tanjore in her war against Shaji, the reason being the Brahmin General Narasapaiyan instead of moving ahead with war entered into an agreement with the enemy along with his father. Huge amount of money was collected from the ambassadors of Shahji by the general’s father.

According to Fr. Bourzes, Vijayaranga Chokkanatha, the grandson of Rani Mangammal spent his time in the harem and forgot his subjects. His prime minister, a Brahmin, plotted to kill the ruler. The Annual Letter says that the Brahmin turned to be a warrior. From the letters of the missionaries, we understand the different atrocities committed by the administrators.

In the society the Brahmins belonged to the upper caste. Huge amount of money was spent on the Brahmins. People were commanded by the rulers to feed the Brahmins.

Religion was controlled by them and who ever harmed cow and Brahmins were punished severely. Thus the Brahmins dominated political, social and religious spheres.
The missionaries enlighten us regarding the position of women. The wife was treated like a slave by her husband. Neither she could sit along with her husband nor dine with him at the same table. She was expected she could to show reverence to her husband by not uttering his name. She was abused verbally and sometimes beaten by her husband. She was ill-treated by her mother-in-law. To teach a lesson to her husband and mother-in-law, the wife stayed in her mother house for a longer period. This involved some efforts to make peace between the two families.

Another issue the Annual Letters stress upon women is sati. The proceedings of the Provincial Councils held in Goa insist upon that the missionaries oppose the practice of sati and other such practices in the sixteenth century. But in the eighteenth and nineteenth century society, sati was prevalent only among the royal families. It is disheartening to see the entire royal women folk – the queen and all the concubines who were in large number fell on to the fire calling out the name of the god. Rani Mangammal escaped from such inhuman act on the pretext of protecting her grandson. Muthammal waited till her delivery and accepted the fate strongly and performed sati.

The Annual Letters speak about the healthy environment in which the babies grew up. The cradles which the mother prepared both at home and in the field has been described. Male children were welcomed in the family. Education was given only to the male child. The female child assisted her mother in collecting fire wood, cow dung and drawing water.

Women were not treated as equal partner in married life. A woman was considered as a maiden to work and cook. Though women earned money by working in the field, making baskets and mats and pressing oil they were considered as secondary citizens at home and in the society.
The Annual Letter of 1701 speaks about the negligence of agriculture by the rulers. Senji and Vellore were in a prosperous condition when the two cities were under the reign of the Nayaks. When they were passed on into the hands of the Mughals, no one was allowed to plough the land and it turned into forest and it became a dwelling place of thieves. This situation resulted in migration. Along their migration they met with robbery and assault.

The cruel face of famine which occurred in the Marava country has been brought out in the Annual Letter of 1729. The Marava country experienced drought due to the failure of monsoon rain and it resulted in famine and pestilence. Many lost their lives. Due to death the size of the family was reduced. In some cases, a whole family had been wiped out. It affected the cattle also.

The Jesuit Letters have been written in languages like Portuguese, Latin, Italian and French. They have the nature of chronicles and records. They are valuable source materials to write geography, cosmology, missiology, maritime history, economic history, political history, cultural history and so on. Since the missionaries witnessed the important events that took place in Tamil Nadu their letters are contemporary sources. Like chroniclers, the Jesuits have recorded the daily happenings in the courts of great rulers. These records formed basis for Annual Letters which contain the contemporary activities of the people which are primary sources.

These primary sources must be explored by the scholars of history. Here language becomes a barrier because most of the primary sources are in Portuguese and French. The authorities of the archives and libraries where the original documents or letters are deposited can initiate translations of these documents. Scholars who have real thirst to refer to the original sources must learn either Portuguese or French languages. The eighteen volumes of Documenta Indica throw light on the missionary
activities of the Jesuit in India particularly in the Old and New Madura Missions. Interesting information about the Pearl Fishery Coast, mass conversion of the Paravas and their struggles with the other religious groups are found in abundance in Documenta Indica.

Those who have mastered the Portuguese language have contributed more in the field of maritime history. Exponents like K.S. Mathew, Pious Malekandathil, Jeyaseela Stephen and Sanjay Subramanian have authority over Portuguese language and thus have authored a number of books which are based on the original documents. Sathyanatha Aiyar has consulted the Annual Letters of French missionaries of the New Madura Mission. His work on History of the Nayaks of Madurai has number of references from the original documents. The present scholars are expected to follow the footsteps of Schurhammer, Joseph Wicki, Henry Heras and H. Hosten who pioneered the work of referring to the original documents and their publications are a mine of information for historians.

Conclusion

The concluding part of the thesis has brought out a critical analysis and the findings of the thesis on “Social History of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Tamil Society as Revealed by the Jesuit Annual Letters and the Writing of Indian History”. The Jesuit missionaries came to the Tamil country to do the work of evangelisation. But the socio, economic, political and religious struggles of the people widened their approach towards the mission. Their educational and other humanitarians services included all religions into their fold. Their multi dimensional activities made an impact on the society in the past and they continue to bring changes at present also.
The Annual Letters of Jesuit missionaries bear witness to all their missionary activities. These letters are authentic, contemporaneous and emerged from their association with the ordinary people as well as the noble classes. The political, social and economic condition prevailed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries give a vivid picture about the society. The information furnished in the Annual Letters are helpful to write social history of the Tamil Society.

Scope for Further Research

The thesis is an attempt to bring out the social history of Tamil Nadu based on the Jesuit Letters. Letters related to the Nayaks of Madurai, the Marathas of Tanjore and the Maravas of Ramnadu can be dealt with separately. Research also can be undertaken on comparative study of social condition under various kingdoms based on the letters. Thus the thesis opens avenues for future research by the scholars. If the future scholars create a true research culture, a comprehensive social history based on the primary sources will be achieved.