CONCLUSION

The study “History of Malankara Syrian Catholic Mission in Kanyakumari District” makes it clear that Christianity became the centre of attraction among the people of Kanyakumari District. An enchanting land of scenic beauty and tourist attraction, this part of the land is known for dense forest, thick plantations of coconut groves, vast stretches of paddy fields, rubber plantations, rich mineral wealth and other varied resources and green vegetations. Consequent to its richness and strategic location, this area became the cockpit of rivalry among various dynasties in the past and different political parties in the present either to occupy the coveted throne or the seat of power. A part of the erstwhile princely state of Travancore before 1956, the Tamil speaking areas of South Travancore were got merged and formed the present Kanyakumari District on 1 November 1956. Comprised of the four taluks of Vilavancode, Kalkulam, Agastheeswaram and Thovalai, its beautiful landscape with a variety of rich flora and fauna coupled with the fine climate offered settlement to people of diverse communities and religious affiliation. The availability of water as a result of rainfall and other irrigational facilities, induced most of the people to engage in agrarian activities and hence this district is once known as the granary of Travancore. Moreover, as this district is gifted with a long coastal line, fishing became another major occupation of the people of the sea shore area. In addition, this district is endowed with the Indian Rare Earth Factory at Manavalakkurichi, spinning mill at Nagercoil and Aramboly, wind mill near the border areas of this district and various minor
and major collage industries besides a number of educational institutions which sprung up in different pockets providing ample job opportunities. But though the society is orthodox and steeped in caste rigidity in yore, this tendency slowly began to change giving room for the origin and spread of different religions and their peaceful co-existence.

Kanyakumari District is blessed with different religions. Christianity is one among them. But the advent of Christianity in South India is a subject of endless controversy. However, it is generally accepted that its origin is dates from the arrival of St. Thomas in the West Coast. With the passage of time, the extensive trade relations that existed between Kerala and the Mediterranean countries laid the seed for the germination as well as sprout of Christianity. The rulers of Chera country endowed certain rights and privileges to the Christians and treated them on par with the high caste Hindus and accorded them equal status. When Christianity firmly established its foothold in India, the Reformation occurred in Germany and other foreign countries had its impact in India too. Consequently Christianity was divided into Catholics and Protestants. In Kerala, Catholicism was fragmented into Roman Catholics, Marthoma Syrians, Jacobaits, Syrian Catholics, Anglican Church and various other denominations. Malankara Syrian Catholic Mission is one among them which established its strong hold, especially in the southern parts and established a number of churches. It is heartening to state that the missionaries under strain and stress propagated the religion with social service motive. The existence of various social and economic taboos, poverty and penury, spread of contagious diseases motivated the
missionaries to establish their mission stations. With this purpose Fr. Joseph Kuzhinjalil was deputed to Marthandam which became the first mission station in Kanyakumari District. During his visit to different villages to spread the gospel either by walk or by riding on a bicycle, he saw the deplorable condition of the people, and consoled them through his social services in the midst’s of preaching. On seeing the timely services many people of the depressed communities and other economically weaker sections, became its ardent followers and obtained baptism too. Day by day, the number of adherents increased. They accepted the priest as their spiritual guide and guru. At this budding stage, realizing the shortage of priests and the importance of preaching among women, he sought the help of nuns in missionary service. Consequently, various centres were selected one by one, consecrated churches, established schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, industrial centres, estates and other institutions including nunneries towards the attainment of socio-cultural and economic empowerment of the people. Thanks to their dedicated and untiring effort, today Kanyakumari District is gifted with nearly 77 parishes (pangu) and various other institutions of repute, spreading the fragrance to the people.

The Churches so blossomed in several villages of Kanyakumari District necessitated the conduct of regular holy mass and other ecclesiastical services to preserve the pristine divinity. In the beginning, the priests followed Latin liturgy and later the Syriac liturgy in prayer and sermon. However, the growth of Trivandrum diocese on a firm footing and the subsequent formation of Marthandam diocese, the followers of
this new faith longed to know the content and meaning of the prayer and sermon conducted in different alien languages. Therefore, after much debates and discussions, to quench the thirst of the church members, liturgy was changed into vernacular languages, Malayalam in Kerala and Tamil in the Tamil speaking area of Tamil Nadu. This shift upset the mind of some parish priests of Kerala, who are proficient in Malayalam but not in Tamil. Yet, they boldly accepted this. But, in the promotion of ecclesiastical activities, the parish priests strictly followed the rites and rituals as prescribed. As such they engaged in baptizing the people and motivated them to adopt various religious observances like fasting, meditation, confession, and the like. In addition, various Christian festivals are celebrated with much paraphernalia and religious fervor. Besides, measures were adopted to form ecclesiastical organizations like Kolping organization, MCA, Pious Association, MCYM, Vince De-Paul Society, Children’s for Unity, Legions of Mary, Catechism, Holy Childhood, sisters of Charity and the like in every church. Entrusted with the selected members of the Church Committee, they looked after the religious affairs with devotion and dedication. They induced a sense of involvement of all the people in church activities and equip biblical knowledge to the children at an early stage itself.

The Malankara Syrian Catholic Missionaries besides involved in ecclesiastical activities, concentrated much on the promotion of learning too. In the inception period, while they engaged in church activities, they felt the ignorance and illiteracy of the local people as well as the adherence. Therefore the missionaries decided to make a thorough cultural
transformation. To attain this objective and to propagate religion they realized the importance of education which is considered as an effective tool to social change. Therefore, they started various educational institutions to transform the marginalized section to attain equal status on par with high caste people. Moreover it helped to avoid the monopoly of education enjoyed by the privileged few. To cherish these ambitions, the missionaries opened various schools ranging from Nursery Schools to Higher Secondary Schools to impart learning equipping the pupils to compete with the raising standard. Moreover, Malankara Catholic College established at Mariyagiri, the college of education located at Kirathoor and the community college at Mariagiri, affiliated to various universities offered under graduate and post graduate course in various disciplines. It fulfilled the aspirations of the student communities. In addition, the inauguration of Mar Ephraem College of Engineering and Technology located in a eagle view and eco friendly environment at Malankara hills in Elavuvilai satisfied the long felt ambition of the missionaries as well as the local people, to provide better quality technical education to the young students of the Diocese and other distant areas. These schools and colleges have well equipped laboratories, computer lab, libraries and other required modern infrastructural facilities. These institutions encouraged the students to update their knowledge by giving proper encouragement by way of fee concessions, scholarships and other prizes too. Above all their educational institutions maintained good discipline.

Economic empowerment is another area of missionary concentration. Kanyakumari District with its fertile soil and
sufficient water provide vast potential for agrarian, industrial and other economic activities. But under the age old practice of aggrestitic slavery, most of the able bodied men mostly remained idol and unemployed. The landlords under the pretext of landlordism extracted much labour from the unprivileged section and paid no wage or meager salary, insufficient to meet the minimum expenses. Therefore the labourers of the depressed communities were not in a position to provide either nutritious food or educate their wards. Hence they borrowed money from the money lenders to meet their emergency expenses. Under the jaws of the landlords and money lenders, the depressed communities always lived under perpetual poverty. Realizing the difficult situation, the Christian Missionaries came forward to give land to the landless, home to the homeless and job to the jobless. Moreover, financial assistance was given to the needy people to start small scale industries. Arrangements were made to provide loan from the banks at the minimum rate of interest. Above all, such people were induced to save money by investing money in various insurance policies. Various Self Help Groups were formed to raise the economic standard of the women. Adequate training was given to the needy people in livestock rearing, stitching, sewing, embroidery work and establishing income generating small scale industries. Similarly, much importance is given to agrarian activities. In order to boost agrarian production they encouraged scientific forming, supplied high yielding seeds and seedlings. Besides all these activities, much employment avenues are created in their estates, schools and colleges and other establishments. Thus the missionaries strived hard to enhance the economic condition of the people.
As noted earlier, the society in Kanyakumari District followed the age old customs and tradition, caste gradation strictly from the past. People of the depressed communities were steeped in ignorance, poverty, believed in superstitions and worshipped ghost and spirits, who were ill-treated to the core. Further they were denied property right, entry into temple for worship, prevented to walk on highways, never allowed to draw water from the public wells, wear upper garments, use of chapels, construct double storied houses and imposed caste restriction including untouchability, inapproachability and unseeability. However, with the arrival of Christian missionaries and the subsequent propagation of gospel and the introduction of education, such inhuman activities and taboos began to vanish greatly in a phased way. Under their inspiration the downtrodden people begot a new culture, became neat and tidy, wore proper dress, learnt to live in hygienic and sanitary atmosphere. Imbibed from the westerners all these changes enabled them to form a caste less society and to live in harmony with each other. Moreover the missionaries established home for the aged, destitutes, orphans and other physically challenged persons who were not only admitted but provided them food, clothing, shelter and medicine freely. It enabled them to forget their worries and live like others happily. Various welfare measures introduced for women helped them to earn income independently and freed them from perpetual bondage. In addition proper medical facilities are provided for the economically weaker sections especially the leper’s. Counseling is given to the alcoholic and other drug addicted people to change their life style. Above all, attention is paid to the welfare of children. The extension of community services through the
MIDS fetched everlasting acclaim. Their immense services extended during the Tsunami still in the green memory of all.

Besides social emancipation, the Malankara Syrian Catholic Missionaries attempted to develop the health and hygienic condition of the people. Most of the hard working people without obtaining sufficient nutritious food look weak. People who settled in the remote and rural areas used unprotected, filthy and contaminated water for drinking purposes, prone to contagious disease. In order to avoid this, the missionaries adopted various schemes to supply protected drinking water. Similarly, financial assistance was given to construct hygienic modern toilets which protect the atmosphere from pollution. So also awareness camps were organized to teach the use of pesticides to avoid the spread of Malaria, Dongue Fever, Cholera and other contagious diseases. Above all, health for one million scheme is introduced to protect the health of the people. Through blood donation camps, the members of the new faith were advised to donate blood to save the life of many from risk.

In order to develop the environment and to make eco-friendly, various measures were adopted including the prevention of the use of chemical pesticide by the farmers. Community health education programme was initiated to create awareness. Thus proper motivation is given to the people to maintain good health which is considered as their wealth.

The multifarious activities and various other establishment of Malankara Syrian Catholic Missionary required a well knitted administrative mechanism. In the apex of administration of this mission, the pope stood in high esteem in the Catholic
Administrative hierarchy. Next to him, the Bishop occupy a respectable position, endowed with varies rights and privileges. He is assisted by Vicar General who is incharge of the parish priest. Below him the Procurator discharged the financial duties. Akin to him, the Chancellor occupy the pivotal position who is in charge of receiving orders from Rome and carryout the same to the concern department. Next to him, seven district Vicars are appointed to look after each religious districts. It is understood from records that Marthandam diocese is divided into seven Maraiavattam. However, each parish enjoys full autonomy and the concerned parish priest looked after the administration of the assigned church under the guidance of elected church council or committee. Apart from, them separate administrative establishment is formed to look after various branches flowered under this mission.

The Malankara Syrian Catholic Mission blossomed in Kanyakumari District flowered in different branches introduced yeomen service to the people. Managed under the Marthandam Diocese with seven maraiavattam, it has 77 parishes (pangu), four colleges, and number of schools, the missionaries not only engaged in ecclesiastical activities but imparting education too. Proper attention is paid to ameliorate the suffering of the people by way of giving lands, houses, medical aid, looking after orphans, widows, physically challenged and other economically weaker sections. Under their parental care, the downtrodden people obtained culture and equal status in society. Many of the social ills disappeared under their patronage. The huge churches schools and colleges, hospitals and health centres exhibit their meritorious welfare activities which still remain as living
monuments to all visitors, vibrating love, peace and brotherhood. Though they did valuable services to the society, yet they are insufficient to meet the need of the growing masses. Hence, much more attention and plan are to be required to consecrate more churches, establish educational institutions, hospitals and like in the remote villages to meet the ever increasing requirements of the people. Thus, the Malankara Syrian Catholic Mission should further sprout its branches with bunch of flowers to spread its fragrants, in all directions, making the people to live in peace, harmony and co-operation.