INTRODUCTION

India situates in the southern peninsula of Asian continent is in triangular shape extending Southwards to the Indian Ocean. It covers an area of 3,268,090 square kilometers, situated between 8 4’ and 37 6’ North parallels of latitude from South to North, and between 68 7’ and 97 25’ East Meridians of longitude from West to East. The District of Tinnevelly is situated in Tamil Nadu, one of the largest states of India (Total area- 130,058 square kilometers). Tamil Nadu is the cradle of the ancient Dravidian civilization and a wide open archive of ancient legacies. Madras, called “Chennai” in Tamil, is the capital of Tamil Nadu.¹

The Diocese of Tinnevelly spreads its wings to the extent of about 11,400 square kilometers in the district of Tinnevelly and the adjacent areas, are situated in the remotest South Eastern extremity of the Indian peninsula.² The District of Tinnevelly is situated between 8 9’ and 9 43’ North latitude and 77 12’ East longitude. It is bounded on the North by Ramnad, the South by Kanyakumari, the West by the Western Ghats and on the East by the Gulf of Mannar. The economy of Tinnevelly district is based on agriculture. The socio-economic condition of the people is below average. Generally, a warm climate prevails in the district. The rainfall is about 815mm in a normal year. The district is fed only by the North East monsoon from October every year because South West monsoon is naturally stopped by the Western Ghats. The Tamiraparani is the main perennial river watering the district of Tinnevelly, which emerges from Pabanasam

². H.R.Pate, Tinnevelly District Gazetteer, Madras, 1917, p-2
hills or Periya Pothigai and traverses about seventy-five miles through Ambasamudram, Tinnevelly, Srivaikundam, Tiruchendur and then drains into the Gulf of Mannar.

The town of Tinnevelly was the ancient capital of the district of Tinnevelly. Palayamkottai is a modern city of Tinnevelly. The other leading towns in this district are Kovilpatti, Srivilliputhur, Srivaigundam, Ambasamudram, Nazareth and Tuticorin. The river Tamiraparani runs through the middle of the district and each side of the river has a belt of rich soil, on which rice, plantain and other vegetable crops are grown. In this belt, the farmers have two crops of rice every year.

The black stemmed Palmyra trees (Panai Maram) are spread in all over the district of Tinnevelly and can be seen in thick masses mainly in loose red soil areas in Tiruchendur, Nankunery taluks and in the sandy areas adjoining the whole length of eastern coast and near the coast in the southern part of the district (a wide belt of red soil land) with great dunes called ‘Theri’. The average height of a Palmyra tree (Borassus flabelliger) is about 40 to 50 feet with a crown of fan shaped thick leaves. People use the hollowed out age-old trees as water pipes and its tender leaves for making baskets and various handicraft items. Its thick leaves are used as water buckets and the fully matured leaves for thatching mud houses. The fibre strings ‘Mattai’ are used for yarns, ropes and brushes. The fruit of the female tree gives a soft jelly-like fluid. The baked roots are relished by almost all the people in the district as they are fibre-rich.
A sweet juice called ‘Pthanir’ is tapped from Palmyra trees. It is very tasty and sweet to sip. The palmyra season begins in February. The palmyra climbers tap the juice from the palmyra trees for making palm jaggery. From the beginning of April to the middle of July, the juice collection and jaggery preparation is the major occupation of the people in this area. From the end of July, the juice collection gradually slows down and comes to an end. Generally, the climbers collect the juice in the early morning. They boil the juice to produce coarse sugar known as jaggery (Karuppukkatti) and palm candies. Silukarupatti or Puttukkaruppatti is a spiced jiggery produced from refined palm juice. It is very famous in Tinnevelly region.

**Political History of Tinnevelly Region**

Chera, Chola and Pandia kings were the main rulers of the ancient Southern India. Tinnevelly region was under the Pandya and Chola dynasties from BC 600 to AD 1500. In the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries, the Nayaka dynasties came to the stage.³ During their regime a number feudal chiefs known as Poligars (Head of the army camp) ruled over the Tinnevelly region.⁴ By the middle of 18th century, Trichy, Tinnevelly and Madura region went into the hands of the Nawab of Carnatic. Muhammad Ali Nawab appointed a military man, Yusoof Khan, a converted Muslim to South region of Tamil Nadu. He was a Tamilian and his original name was Maruthanayaham Pillai of Ramnad. The Nawab became the dummy head of these regions. Later On, Yusoof Khan declared himself as a ruler of Madura region. Therefore, the Nawab sought the help of the East India Company. The English army utilized this opportunity

for strengthening their hold in the Madura and Ramnad region and came forward to help the Nawab in his administration and to control the Sub-heads and the Poligars in 1751. It suppressed the revolters in the Poligars group. It captured Madura and hanged Yusoof in 1764. Then the Nawab signed a treaty with the English in 1781. Accordingly, the English became the army heads of Trichy, Tinnevelly and Madura regions. During this period, there were thirty-two hereditary chieftains in Tinnevelly region. The Poligars of Tinnevelly and Madura gradually neglected the control of the Nawabs and took all power in their hands. The company maintained garrisons of sepoys and English troops at all main centres of the Tinnevelly region and collected taxes from the chieftains and the Poligars regularly. ⁵

As a result, the Poligars began to lose their control in their territories. Hence they rose against the company and fought against them to retain their sovereign rights. But the company suppressed the revolters with the help of its well trained army. From 1751 to 1801 there were a series of “Poligar Wars” against the Poligars to bring them under the control of the company. Kattabomma Nayakar was a strong poligar in the Eastern Tinnevelly region. The last two serious poligar wars were against Kattaboman in 1783 and 1799. ⁶

During the last Poligar was, the Nawab handed the administration of the Carnatic, including Tinnevelly and Madura to the company on condition that the company should pay one-sixth of the revenue of the Nawab’s region to the Nawab. This arrangement was lapsed in 1785 and the British East India Company took the management of the region in 1790. Finally in 1801,

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the Nawab formally ceded the whole of the Carnatic region to the English East India Company. It was the beginning of the British rule in Tinnevelly region.

For the first 150 years, the East India Company showed interest only in business and trade. It was only from 1744 that Lord Robert Clive turned it into a military power.\(^7\) It did not indulge in the propagation of Christianity or support the Evangelistic work done by the Christian Missionaries.

**Christianity in Tinnevelly**

The first Christian enterprise in the Tinnevelly region was that of the Roman Catholic clergyman of the Portuguese Mission, who worked actively among the fisherman in the Eastern coastal area from 1532 onwards. St. Francis Xavier did effective work among them during 1542-1544. From 1600 onwards the “Madura Mission” of the Jesuits, led by Robert de Nobili, Britto and Beschi, established Churches in the interior of the district. Pope Clement suppressed the Jesuit Order in 1755. With the suppression of the order, the Catholic Churches lost their strength and languished under the Priests from Goa. In Palayamkottai area, the Missionaries of the Society of Jesus continued their service and laid strong foundation for the Catholic Church. Later on, the Brothers of the Sacred Heart also joined them. They served as catechists and teachers in the Catholic Mission Institutions.\(^8\)

Protestantism is one of the major divisions of Christianity, which emerged from Roman Catholic in Germany in 1529 under Martin Luther, a German Priest. Owing to the untiring

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efforts of the Protestant Missionaries, this division was established all over the world. In South India, the Missionaries of the Royal Danish Mission of Denmark (R.D.M.) and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) systematically propagated Christianity from 1706. The S.P.C.K. catechists frequently visited Tinnevelly and prepared the ground for establishing the Protestant division of the Christian Church.

The ecclesiastical overseeing of all Churches in India in the Anglican Communion was under the control of the parliament of England. The British Parliament passed a bill in 1833. Accordingly, the Diocese of Madras was created in 1835. All the Churches in Tinnevelly area functioned under the control of the Diocese of Madras. In 1877, the Madras Diocese appointed two Suffragan Bishops to the Tinnevelly Church. In 1896, the Bishop of Madras separated Tinnevelly from the Diocese of Madras and named it as the Bishopric of Tinnevelly.

**Aims and Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to bring out the history of the Spread of Protestantism in Tirunelveli district. The primary objective of this study is to highlight the services of the diocese and the missionaries in various fields - education, social and evangelistic. It aims at the critical assessment of the activities of the missionaries among the villages to uplift them from ignorance and illiteracy.

**The Area and Period of Study**

The modern state of Tamilnadu is viewed as the area of this study. It is an elaborate
study which covers the religious and educational services of Protestantism and its impact in Tirunelveli. The seventh century is considered as the period of this study.

**Methodology**

Different research methods have been adopted in this study. They are analytical, interpretive and descriptive method. The source materials have been critically analysed and investigated. Descriptive method is used in the presentation of this study. The researcher has relied on the primary sources that dealt with the activities of the Missionaries in the historical period from A.D.1785 to A.D.1908. Secondary sources have also been referred. A summary, an analysis and a conclusion have been made at the end of every chapter. A final conclusion, including all the aspects of the conclusions made under every chapter, has been presented elaborately.

**Sources for the Study**

The source materials for this study were collected mainly from TamilNadu Archives, Chennai. They are available in English. The primary sources are in the form of manuscripts and published documents of the Government of Madras. The books written and translated by Bishop Caldwell and G.U.Pope and the letters written by his family members constitute the primary sources of information. The translated books from Tamil to English having his own handwriting are preserved in the Pope’s College Library, Sawyerpuram.
The next important source comes from different books written by private agencies, journals, newspapers and souvenirs, which form the secondary sources. They furnish information regarding the activities of the missionaries at various centres.

**Hypothesis**

- Bishop Robert Caldwell, G.U.Pope developed Tinnevelly and surrounding villages.
- Missionaries formed diocese in the Tinnevelly district and administered well.
- Missionaries educated the people of the rural areas.
- Eradicated evil practices and other superstitions lechers.
- Missionaries started many philanthropic and medical services for poor people.

**Plan of the Thesis**

The thesis has five chapters along with introduction and conclusion. Introduction highlights the aim and the objectives of the study, its area and period, methodology, sources of historical material and limitations. The first chapter brings out the historical background of Early Protestant Missionaries in Tirunelveli District.

The second chapter deals with the Administration of the Diocese. The Diocese of Tinnevelly is the first Diocese in India where Indians were free to express and administer themselves in the Church. The third chapter describes the Protestant Missionaries’ contribution to Education. Christian Missionaries came forward to educate them and thus gave a lift to the
backward communities. They founded elementary schools in rural areas and also established high schools and colleges in some selected places.

The fourth chapter analyses the various social services and medical missions done by the Christian Missionaries. The economically poor people could not receive medical treatment from the private hospitals. Realising the situation the diocesan hospital offered medical treatment and medicines to the poor and needy at a cheap cost. The fifth chapter on Evangelistic Work analyses the various evangelistic work done by the Diocese in Tinnevelly region. The Diocese nurtured the growth of the congregation by conducting continuous evangelistic work through churches, institutions and the evangelistic band. Finally, the thesis is concluded with an estimate of Spread of Protestantism in Tirunelveli district.

**Limitation of Study**

The researcher’s attempt in this research is very modest, in the sense that she has not totally exhausted the topic. This research has an area of Tirunelveli which needs further and deeper study not only for the sake of historical research, but also to throw light on the life of the people of the Missionaries’ period.