INTRODUCTION

Christianity is one of the world’s popular religions with about 2.1 billion followers. It is based on the teachings of Christ who was crucified and who resurrected. His date of resurrection is said to be the beginning of the Christian Era, i.e., A.D. (anna domini). Christianity teaches people about human virtues like love, pity, kindness, truth, charity and honour. Faith is God and service to God are the twin themes of Christianity. The characters of love, chastity and obedience are enshrined in the Christian text and are preached to everybody.

Born in Asia in the first century, Christianity spread to the west by St. Peter, St. Paul and other followers. St. Thomas one of the disciples of Christ was said to have come to the Western Coast of India, converted many to the new religion and had his last days in a mount near Chennai, which later came to be called the St. Thomas Mount. Those who converted to Christianity under the loving ways of St. Thomas are called St. Thomas Christians. The second wave of Christianity came to India with the landing of the Portuguese at Kappadu near Calicut in 1498. Thereby, all religious orders of Portugal came to India and established their mutts mainly in Goa and in the other Portuguese settlements. They are the Augustinians, the Carmelites the Dominicans, the Jesuits and the Theatines\(^1\). St. Francis Xavier, one of the Jesuit missionaries of France came to the Southern Coast of India and served the people of the coastal belt. The Paravas of the Fishery Coast were the first to embrace Christianity. He instructed Christianity and injected faith in them. His successors succeeded in spreading and strengthening the spiritual life of the coastal people\(^2\).

\(^1\) The Indigenous Religious Congregations India and Ceylon, Madurai, 1948, p.11.
Under orders from the Raja of Travancore, the Portuguese came to Tirunelveli and planted two simple commercial settlements or factories there, one at Tuticorin and the other at Punnakayal. They were under the control of the captain residing at Tuticorin and taking his orders from the Viceroy at Goa\(^3\). These traders were followed by the missionaries to Tirunelveli. The new settlements of the Paravas of the Fishery Coast near the river Tambraparani were looked after by the missionaries of the Fishery Coast.

Tirunelveli attracted the services of Catholicism more than any other place. It was because of the missionaries of South Travancore happened to travel through the Tirunelveli region Christianity spread in the Tamil Country. When Catholicism was welcomed by the natives of Tirunelveli and its surroundings, the missionaries then realized the need for starting mission centre there\(^4\). In 1606, Robert de Nobili came to Madurai and began the Madura Mission\(^5\). St. John de Britto visited the South in 1686-88. The annual letter of 1688 informs that the Saint was building a chapel at Kamanayakanpatti in Kovilpatti taluk ad Fr. X. Borghese made it the permanent residence of the missionaries in the South. However, it is sad to note that the Saint was done to death by Kilvan Sethupathy of Ramnad. In 1714, Fr. Constantine Beschi took charge of the church and introduced Indianisation in worship to attract the people. He was widely known as *Veeramamunivar*\(^6\).

The beginning of the 19\(^{th}\) century marked a period of trial for the Catholics as it coincided with the arrival of non-Catholics such as Methodists in 1816, Anglicans in 1820, Gospal Society in 1825, Congregationalists in 1834, etc. For want of an

\(^6\) Director-Diocese of Palayamkottai-1989, pp. 2-3.
organized church for about 50 years, the Catholics were for the most part a demoralized set.\(^7\)

The coming of four French Jesuit priests namely, Fr. Joseph Bertand, Alexander Martin, Louis Garnier and Louis de Ranquet in 1838 passed the way for the revival of Catholicism in the form of the New Madura Mission. Within 35 years of its existence, it grew into the five Dioceses of Tiruchirapalli, Tuticorin, Arch Diocese of Madurai, Palayamkottai and Sivaganga. In 1838, Palayamkottai town had only some fifty Christian families from the depressed classes.\(^8\) But in the passage of time, the number increased rapidly.

In the same year, 1838, a modest chapel was built for the Christians of Palayamkottai. Many Jesuit superiors from Western countries who came here as priests resided at Palayamkottai and continued their missionary service from 1838 onwards. Many missionaries renouncing worldly pleasures, took up religious service to form a better society by preaching love, brotherhood and charity.

The later half of the 19\(^{th}\) century witnessed many remarkable changes in the Catholic order. Many missionaries came to India. Among them, Rev. Fr. Adrian Caussanel a French Jesuit was a remarkable personality with all missionary zeal, initiative and drive. In 1893, Fr. Caussanal took over as District Superior. His incessant and selfless service earned for him the nick name of the ‘Dragon of the South’. He found that Palayamkottai was suffering from want of necessaries. At that time, there were only a few abbeys in Palayamkottai. His missionary zeal worked in him to establish a new Congregation to work for the upliftment of the poor, deserted and deprived. He thus initiated the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the basic tenet

\(^7\) Ibid., pp. 3-4.  
\(^8\) Ibid., pp. 4-5.
of his new order. Thus was born the Congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart on 11th February 1903. The Charism of the founder permeates through the entire life of the Congregation. Its ministry consists in spreading the good news of liberation to the poor, neglected and marginalized sections of society and liberating them from poverty, corruption, ignorance and superstition. By virtue of their selfless service, they are able to concentrate in managing education, orphanages and other charitable institutions. They identify themselves with the neglected and establish close links with the poor and oppressed people.

Being a Catholic Christian, the scholar was much interested in recapturing the services of the Congregation. In fact, while the scholar was doing her M.Phil. thesis, she found the scope and purpose of the study more rewarding though much written records are not available at ready hand, like the archival materials. Her personal involvement with the Congregation gave her confidence and conviction that she could do a good work until then not undertaken by anybody. Some Brothers have published some of their experiences and experiments both administrative and social in Tamil into small pamphlets and papers. However, the scholar, finding the wide coverage of the Congregation throughout India, is concentrating mainly in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra and Madhya Pradesh found the scope very positive chose this study.

The purpose of the study is to recapture the volume and the value of the services of the Congregation and its social relevance and to record them in the pages of history. If not done, it may go unnoticed and unrecorded. In addition to what extent, the Congregation has harmonized, integrated and lends a lease of life to the marginalized sections of the society. It tries to bring out the impact of religious, educational and

9 Brothers of the Sacred Heart, Palayamkottai, August 1994, p.2.
10 Ibid., p. 5.
material assistance given to the downtrodden by the Congregation in liberating them from age old caste taboos and religious restrictions.

The area covered in this study is mainly the District of Tirunelveli. But it does not preclude other areas of the location of its branches elsewhere. It is true that the area of the study is vast and therefore it confines itself to the Tirunelveli District. The study proposes to analyse its spread to other areas and the impact of branches on the primary centre.

The period covered in this study is between 1903 and 2013, a history of one hundred and ten years. That is a period of growth and spread and harvesting. The Brothers of the Congregation have made some beginnings of publishing a few books on the founder Fr. Caussanel and the services of the Congregation at various centres. But the first critical study about the Brothers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at Palayamkottai was made by the scholar in 1990. Leaving a large margin to embellishments and exaggerations a well appraisal of the Congregation could be attempted. Generally, for any research study, previous literature is necessary. It only helps the scholar to trace his / her path without floundering. This scholar has reviewed a few works in this study in that capacity.

Regarding a study of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, there are a large number of primary sources and secondary sources. The major primary sources of this study are the ideal visions of Fr. Caussanel, the letters, correspondences, Minutes, Reports, Directories, Office records, Manuscripts and tablets. The Journals, articles, periodicals, the District Gazetteers and works in Tamil form the secondary sources. These sources are carefully handled and used in this study. All these materials are found of socially and religiously relevant to this study. This scholar has collected the sources of
information by interviews and personal visits to other Congregations. Many books and records are preserved in the Library of the Sacred Heart Congregation. For want of material about finance i.e., income and expenditure related records, a scientific analysis could not be made. All the audited accounts are not made available for researchers. That is the major limitation of the study.

The method of approach is mainly descriptive and just evaluative. In the evaluation statistics is not applied. The language used style of writing is simple English.

The hypothesis of this research is any spiritual and religious service when done with social relevance and dedication could change the face of the society. The scholar after making a thorough study of the subject finds the services rendered by the Congregation to the society are so exemplary. From Palayamkottai, it spread to various places and is doing yeomen service to society. This appears to be done in the case of this society, which very ably served the cause of the people. Its social relevance is felt by the members of the Congregation wherever its branches are founded.

The entire study is covered in eight chapters excluding the Introduction and the Conclusion. After introducing the subject, the first chapter begins to study the ancient social and religious condition of Tirunelveli. The land of Tirunelveli has a historic past. So many historic events and incidents have happened here, which are made mention in the study about the name ‘Tirunelveli’ is attempted.

The second chapter deals with the genesis of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart Congregation.
The third chapter deals with the life history of Rev. Fr. Adrian Caussanel separately who founded this Congregation. A seed was sown by him which grew up into a stately tree spreading its branches far and wide.

The aims and objectives of the Congregation are explained in the fourth chapter. Fr. Caussanel had certain aims and objectives in starting the Congregation. They are spiritual, religious, educational and social in their approach. Its main objectives are to propagate the Sacred Heart Devotion among the public.

The fifth chapter deals with the organization and administration of the Congregation. The Congregation has a proper organizational formation. The formation commission provides a best administrative body.

The educational service is given in the sixth chapter. The educational service of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart is a tangible testimony to the commitment to discern the needs of the time and respond to their Charism and the directives of the founder. The Congregation has concentrated in educating the poor, the downtrodden and the neglected sections of the society.

The seventh chapter explains the social service of the Brothers. The objectives and purposes of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart are to provide service to the human, educational, social and cultural and moral development of the people.

The eighth chapter gives an account on the religious service of the Brothers. The main apostolate of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart is evangelization through direct Catechetical activity, charitable institutions and social actions.
Thus the Congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart was established by Fr. Caussanel only to serve the poor people. Service is indispensible to the lives of the priests. The Congregation has concentrated more on educating the poor, the downtrodden and the neglected sections of the society. Above all, their commitment to the poor and the marginalized should in the first place be reflected in their educational institutions. They restore the fallen and bring about peace and harmony among different communities. The Brothers make every effort to satisfy the minds of the people. Thus in the religious history of Tamil Nadu, the Congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart at Palayamkottai has carved out a meritorious place for itself.