INTRODUCTION

The name Tirunelveli is derived from the three Tamil words, “Thiru– Nel – Veli” which means “Scared Paddy Hedge”. The district is bounded by Virudhunagar district in the north, the Gulf of Mannar in the south, Tuticorin district in the east and Kerala State and Kanyakumari district in the west. In the west, the hills of the western ghats ranging from 1000 to 2000 meters form the dominant boundary. The district lies between 8° 10' and 9° 40' north latitude and 77° 21' and 79° 99' east longitude. The total geographical area of the district is about 6816.57 square kilometers. The population of the district was 16,98,578 in 1961. It has grown to 27,40,065 in 1991 and has further increased to 30,55,452 in 1996.

Early History

The history of this district is bound up with that of the Pandyas who were the lords of the land except for a brief interlude of the Cholas till the middle of the sixteenth century AD. In 1559 A.D. the Nayak rulers established the Nayak dynasty by replacing the Pandyan dynasty. The district then was called as Thenpandinad or Tirunelveli seemai which was divided into petty principalities called Palayams under the governance of the Palayamkars owing allegiance to the Nayaks. The Nayak rule came to an abrupt termination with the Muhammadan invasion of 1736 under Chanda Sahib. During the later half of the eighteenth century, the East India Company was frequently at war with

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2 In the reign of the Chola king Parantaka I (about 906-946 A.D.) that the Pandyas for the first time fell definitely under the Chola yoke. Parantaka defeated Rajasimha Pandya thrice in the field. H.R. Pate, Madras District Gazetteers : Tinnevelly, Vol. I (Madras, 1917), p.47.

3 There were about twenty two Palayams in the area under Tirunelveli district. Bishop R Caldwell, A History of Tinnevelly (New Delhi, 1989), p.56.
the Poligars on behalf of the Carnatic Nawab in Tirunelveli. With the fall of Tippu Sultan in 1799, the British concentrated their force in the south and suppressed the Poligars.⁴

At about this time, the Nawab of Carnatic became powerless and left the management of the territory to the British. Having passed into the hands of the East India Company, they carved out Tirunelveli district in 1781. The Nawab was pensioned off in the same year and the Company appointed receivers in Tirunelveli for the collection of revenue. On 31 July 1801, full rights over the district passed on to the East India company. Lushington, the first Collector, reported that Tirunelveli had been brought “without the smallest disturbances” under the Company’s authority.⁵ Thus, the British rule started in Tirunelveli which lasted till 1947.⁶

In 1986, Tirunelveli district was bifurcated into two districts, one with the headquarters at Tirunelveli and the other with its headquarters at Tuticorin. The district with its headquarters at Tuticorin was named as V.O. Chidambaram district in memory of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, a veteran freedom fighter. The district with its headquarters at Tirunelveli was named as Nellai Kattabomman district after Veerapandia Kattabomman of Panchalamkurichi who led anti-British struggles in the close of eighteenth century.⁷ The name was subsequently changed as Tirunelveli Kattabomman district. In 1997, the Government of Tamil Nadu took a decision to call all the districts

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⁵ Pate, Madras District Gazetteers : Tinnevelly, p.85.


only after the headquarter towns of the districts. Accordingly, Tirunelveli Kattabomman district got its old name Tirunelveli district.⁸

Forests

The word ‘Forests’ is derived from the Latin word “Foris” which means outside. By outside, they must have meant all other lands lying outside the village boundary except cultivated land. Generally, forest can be defined as any land managed for different purposes including eco-preservation, soil and moisture conservation, timber and fuel production as well as industrial wood production and conferring certain benefits on the society. The Madras Preservation of Private Forests Act, 1949 defined forest which “includes waste or communal land containing trees, shrubs and reeds, pasture land and any other class of land declared by the State Government to be a forest by notification in the Fort St.George Gazette”. Communal land has been further clarified as beds and bunds of tanks and of supply, drainage surplus or irrigation channels and threshing floor, cattle stands, village sites and other lands which are set apart for the common use of the villagers.”⁹ As per the dictionary meaning, forest is “a large uncultivated tract of land covered with trees and underwood; woody ground and rude pasture; a preserve for big game; a royal preserve for hunting, governed by a special code called the forest law.”¹⁰ Thus, forests can be termed as a plant community predominantly of trees and other woody vegetation with more or less a closed canopy. The forests are areas covering practically all uncultivated or intended lands covered with tall and dense tree growth.

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⁸ Velmani, Gazetteers, pp. 1-2.

⁹ Government of Madras, The Madras Preservation of Private Forests Act, 1949 (Madras Act XXVII of 1949) (As modified up to the 15 December 1966) (Madras, 1967), pp.4-5. It should be noted here that there is no statutory definition of forest in either the Indian Forest Acts or any of the State Forest Acts. The Tamil Nadu Forest Act of 1882, which is one of the oldest Acts in India also has not given any definition for forest.

In the legal sense, forest can be defined as an area of land notified by the Government as reserved forest under a forest law.

The entire forest of the Tirunelveli district stretches along the western ghats. The western ghats run to a length of about 160 kilometers in the district starting from the north western part of Sankarankoil taluk and ending at about fifteen kilometers from Kanyakumari. It lies on the western part of Sivagiri, Sankarankoil, Tenkasi and Ambasamudram taluks. The ghats are well clothed with forest containing magnificent and valuable trees between the elevations of 1500 and 3000 feet, scrub jungle and grass at a lower height and elephant grass, bamboos and evergreen forests at the summits. Besides timber of teak wood, black wood, rose wood and timber of several valuable kinds, these mountains produce cardamom, honey, wax, cashew and a variety of minor forest produce.

The rivers and streams originate in the deep recesses of this mountain range. About twenty seven rivers and streams are identified in this ghat section of the district which impresses the importance of the ghat forests as the watershed. One important feature is that the catchment areas are situated in the inaccessible sholas and thick evergreen forests in the higher reaches. In general, the surface drainage is good though in some parts of the ghats above the sholas, the ground tends to be spongy owing to the high contents of clay due to heavy rainfall. Forest protects water sheds, catchment of rivers and streams against erosion and so the forests possess a protective value of the highest importance.

11 Environment Profile of Tirunelveli District, p.2.
In the early period, Tirunelveli district was mostly a forest clad area and cultivation was carried on by the sides of the rivers. As years passed, more lands were brought under cultivation at the expense of the forest. As a result, the boundaries of the forest were gradually pushed back towards the hills and mountains to which they are now almost entirely confined. A.J. Stuart wrote, “in the last century the plains of Tinnevelly are represented as covered with woods and jungle; these have disappeared with the advance of agriculture to so great an extent, that beyond avenues on the main roads, thorn jungles in tank beds or on channel banks, and scattered topes, chiefly fruit trees, but little now remains, except the so called palmyra forest.”14 In 1995 – 96, there were fifty eight forest areas in Tirunelveli district constituting a total area of 119469.62 hectares. 15 It is 17.62 per cent of the total geographical area of Tirunelveli district. Fifty five forest areas fall under the reserve forest category with 40373.62 hectares (33.79 per cent) and three under sanctuary area with 79096 hectares (66.21 per cent).16 Tirunelveli district has only 5.53 per cent of the total forest coverage of the State of Tamilnadu.17

The forest areas in Tirunelveli district classified as per the density and vegetation type show that dense forests account for 33.10 per cent of the total forest area followed by sparse forests with 29.10 per cent in 1990. Details are given below:

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15 Environment Profile of Tirunelveli District, table 15. According to another source, the total area of the forest in the district is 121953 hectares of which 81700 hectares is set apart for Tiger reserve of Kalakad-Mundanthurai. Velmani, Gazetteers, p.29. According to The Forest Cover Report (1990) the total area of the forest is 134633 hectares. In the year 2006, the forest in Tirunelveli district is 122063.36 hectares. District Forest Officer, Short Notes on Tirunelveli Forest Division (Tirunelveli, 2006), p.2. It should be noted here that the division wise forest area varies from time to time due to shifting of areas from one division to another.

16 Environment Profile of Tirunelveli District, p.7 and table no.14a.

17 Tamil Nadu Forest Department, The Forest Cover Report (Madras, 1990), p.31.
### Vegetation Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetation Type</th>
<th>Extent in Hectares</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Forest Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dense forests</td>
<td>44565</td>
<td>33.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparse forests</td>
<td>39181</td>
<td>29.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area covered by plantations</td>
<td>11980</td>
<td>8.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheet and rock sites</td>
<td>3392</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoney and rocky scrub</td>
<td>3643</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrub area</td>
<td>6286</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass land</td>
<td>4726</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degraded forest area</td>
<td>20860</td>
<td>15.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Forest Area of the Division**: 134633

**Percentage of Total Forest Area**: 100.00

Source: Tamil Nadu Forest Department, *The Forest Cover Report 1990*, p.35.

The per capita forest area in the district has shown a declining trend from 0.070 hectares in 1961 to 0.039 hectares in 1996 due to steady increase in population.

Population pressure on forests in Tirunelveli district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Forest Area</th>
<th>Per Capita Forest Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1698578</td>
<td>119469.62</td>
<td>0.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1991741</td>
<td>--- do ---</td>
<td>0.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>2223170</td>
<td>--- do ---</td>
<td>0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2740065</td>
<td>--- do ---</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3055452</td>
<td>--- do ---</td>
<td>0.039</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Environment Profile of Tirunelveli District*, table 15.

Tree growing is not the only function of the forest department. Besides tree growing, the main objectives of the forest department are to protect the fragile ecosystem in the hills for soil and water conservation, preservation of the biodiversity, economic
development of abutting villages and protection of wildlife. Wildlife means “the uncultivated flora and undomesticated fauna” which otherwise includes both plants and animals. Killing of wildlife, as in the case of other parts of India, was prevalent in the past and a few species were driven to the point of extinction. Poaching of elephants for their tusks, poisoning of carnivores for their skins and killing indiscriminately herbivores for their flesh and hides had accounted for reduction in number of animals. In order to protect the wildlife, two separate wildlife divisions in the Tirunelveli ghat forests were formed from 1 April 1977 namely Kalakad Wildlife Division for the preservation of the only primate endemic to this region of western ghats, the Lion Tailed Macaque and Mundanthurai Wildlife Division primarily for the preservation of Tiger.

**Early Administration**

Forestry\(^{18}\) had been an important part of Indian economy. The epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* gave description of forests as Dandakaranya and Nandavana. The first indication of forestry administration was found in 300 B.C. during the reign of Chandra Gupta Maurya, when a Superintendent of Forest was appointed to protect forests and wildlife.\(^{19}\) Kautilya’s *Arthasastra* refers to certain arrangements for the protection of woodlands, for the appointment of officers for supervision of forest operations and the collection of revenue from the produce removed from the forests.\(^{20}\) However, in the subsequent periods, the rulers did not take any interest in the conservation of forests. Therefore, forests were open to all and hence the people exploited forests freely for fodder, firewood and timber. Thus, the reckless felling of trees for many years resulted in

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\(^{18}\) Forestry is defined as the theory and practice of constitution and management of forests and utilisation of their products. It also stands for scientific management of forests for the continuous production of goods and services.

\(^{19}\) Forest Research Institute, *100 Years of Indian Forestry, 1861-1961* (Dehra Dun, 1961), pp.71-72.

the destruction of forests. Yet, in the pre-British period, forest seemed to be adequate to meet the requirements of the subsistence economy of the people.

In the early years of the British rule, the administration remained indifferent towards the problems of Indian forestry. Their general policy was to expand agriculture and collect the cream of the forest timber. Even then, in 1855, the Government of India issued a memorandum outlining for the first time a permanent policy for forest conservancy.\textsuperscript{21} Dietrich Brandis,\textsuperscript{22} an expert on forestry was appointed as the first Inspector General of Forests in 1864 to organise the Forest Department. The first Indian Forest Act was enacted in 1865 to establish State control over forests. This was the first attempt at forest legislation by the British in India. Thereafter, a revised Indian Forest Act was passed in 1878 which aimed to improve the Indian Forest Act of 1865.\textsuperscript{23} Through these successive regulations, State control over forest was firmly established. Further, the Government of India formulated a forest policy in 1894 which formed the basis of future forest administration in British India.\textsuperscript{24}

The British considered forest education as the basic requirement for the promotion of forestry. Therefore, they established the first forest school in Dehra Dun in 1878. Thereafter, technical education too was introduced and training programmes were organised as well. In 1906, the Imperial Forest Research Institute was established in Dehra Dun. In 1910, the Board of Forestry composed of the representative Conservators was created at the national level under the presidentship of the Inspector General of


\textsuperscript{22} Brandis was a fully qualified and scientifically trained Forester. A German who had received his training in Germany, at the time one of the finest training grounds in the world.


\textsuperscript{24} Circular No.22F, 19 Oct., 1894.
Forests. However, the gains in the policy and administration of forest conservation received a setback during the two world wars. Enormous quantities of timber were extracted, causing excessive felling which continued throughout India during the two world wars.

In August 1856, Dr. Cleghorn submitted a report to the Government of Madras containing proposals for establishing forest conservancy. These proposals were forwarded to the Government of India for sanction which was accorded in November 1856. On 19 December 1856, Cleghorn was appointed as the first regular Conservator of Forests in the Madras Presidency. During the next five years, he toured various parts of the presidency and submitted three general reports on the forests. In his reports, he suggested for the introduction of an efficient protection of the forests from the improvident acts of the people and the destructive acts of the timber merchants and general prescriptions of management. Under his able and energetic administration the forest revenue had risen to Rs.3,93,591 in 1859-60. Thus, Cleghorn laid the foundation of an effective system of forest conservancy in Madras.

In the first stage of forest administration in Tirunelveli district, as elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, attention was paid to obtain the required timber from the forest. Felling of large quantity of trees urged the administrators to plant more seedlings to replace the loss. Later on, they followed the policy of systematic conservation of forests by taking protective measures against further depredation. Thus, importance was attached to protection of the forest and an attempt was made to guard the forest against unregulated felling. In course, regeneration and planting work became an integral part of forest

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conservancy which not only aimed to compensate the loss caused by removals but to augment forest resources in order to meet the increasing demands.

Survey of Previous Literature

Numerous attempts have been made by several scholars to analyse and discuss the Indian forestry. William Schlich in his work\textsuperscript{27} has analysed the system of regular forest management in the different provinces of the British Indian empire. E.P.Stebbing\textsuperscript{28} wrote two volumes on the history of the forests of India. The first volume is devoted to the history of the years 1857-1864 and the second volume is devoted to the period from 1865 to 1870. He has traced the growth of the Indian forest service and the various stages through which the forests had passed during the British rule. The book dealt with the continued devastation of the forests by timber merchants in order to supply the Government’s requirements; but it would be shown that towards the end of 1864, a full realisation of the value of the forest had been understood by the Government of India. The scientific conservancy of the forests of India is also analysed in this book. After discussing the development of systematic forestry in Europe, Great Britain, Ireland and Japan Dietrich Brandis\textsuperscript{29} analysed Indian forestry. R.S.Troup in his work\textsuperscript{30} described the main facts connected with the work of the forest department in India. While sketching the outlook for future expansion, particular attention being paid to the possibility of the local development of industries which depend to a greater or less extent on a plentiful


\textsuperscript{28} Stebbing, \textit{The Forests of India}, Vo.I and II.

\textsuperscript{29} Dietrich Brandis, \textit{Indian Forestry} (Oriental University Institute, 1897).

\textsuperscript{30} R.S.Troup, \textit{The Work of the Forest Department in India} (Calcutta, 1917).
supply of forest products. B.H.Baden Powell\textsuperscript{31} has analysed the evolution of forest law. L.K.Jah\textsuperscript{32} has discussed in some detail the forest policy in India. Vasant Desai\textsuperscript{33} has described various aspects of forests and related issues in a lucid manner. Sitaram Rao\textsuperscript{34} has analysed the issues related to social forestry.

Most of them are mainly macro-level studies concentrating on the activities of the Forest Department and trace the history of the progress in the scientific conservancy of the forests of India. Tamil Nadu has received only a passing reference in these works, while little or no attention has been paid to the distinctiveness and complexities in the forest administration in Tirunelveli district. However, studies of this sort are valuable as they provide a conceptual framework for further study.

Among the micro-level studies, only a very few works are devoted to the study of the forest administration in Tamil Nadu. H.Cleghorn’s\textsuperscript{35} work is a description of the author’s tours in the forests of Madras presidency and forms a valuable record of the period from 1856 to 1859. Dietrich Brandis\textsuperscript{36} work contains suggestions regarding the forest administration in the Madras presidency prior to 1883. D.Janaki\textsuperscript{37} has discussed the salient features of the history of forest administration in Tamil Nadu from 1935 to 1967.

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{31} B.H.Baden-Powell, \textit{Forest Law} (London, 1893).
\item\textsuperscript{32} L.K.Jha, \textit{India’s Forest Policies} (New Delhi, 1994).
\item\textsuperscript{33} Vasant Desai, \textit{Forest Management in India-Issues and Problems} (Bombay, 1994).
\item\textsuperscript{34} Sitaram Rao, \textit{Introduction to Social Forestry} (New Delhi, 1979).
\item\textsuperscript{35} H.Cleghorn, \textit{Forests and Gardens of Southern India} (London, 1861).
\item\textsuperscript{36} Dietrich Brandis, \textit{Suggestions Regarding Forest Administration in the Madras Presidency} (Madras, 1883).
\end{itemize}
T.Sekar\textsuperscript{38} has analysed the forest history of Anamalais and presented an overview of what all happened to these forests in the last two centuries. T.Sekar, in yet another work\textsuperscript{39} presented the initiative and notable achievements made by the forest department in the Nilgiris.

Virtually no particular and systematic attempt has so far been made to study the forest administration in Tirunelveli district. Hence the need for the present study in which a modest attempt has been made to analyse the most important developments that had happened in the administration and management of forest and wildlife in Tirunelveli district from 1950 to 1995.

**Sources of Information**

The present study is based on archival material preserved in Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai. Among these, the Government Orders of the various departments of the Government of Tamil Nadu such as Agriculture, Development, Environment and Forests, Food and Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries, Public and Revenue have been found useful. In addition to these, a large mass of statistical data published in District Manual, District Gazetteers, Census Reports, the Madras Forest Manual, Performance Budget, Annual Administration Reports and Jungle Conservancy Reports are very useful. The Annual Reports prepared by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and his Proceedings, Annual Reports of the Conservator of Forests and the Annual Reports of the District Forest Officer give ample material on the forest administration. The Working Plans prepared by Lasrado, Cariappa, Rajasingh, Srinivasan, Rahmatullah, Kadakshamani and Balakathiresan contain valuable information to understand the administration and management of the Tirunelveli forest division. The Management Plans for the Mundanthurai Tiger Sanctuary prepared by Mangalaraj Johnson and Doraisamy,

\textsuperscript{38} T.Sekar, *Forest History of Anamalais, Tamil Nadu* (Chennai, 2003).

\textsuperscript{39} T.Sekar, *Forest History of the Nilgiris* (Chennai, 2004).
the Management Plans for Kalakad Sanctuary prepared by Ramanathan and Joseph Jogindranath and the Reconnaissance Report, Kalakad Wildlife Sanctuary prepared by Pramod Kant have been consulted to study Kaladad-Mundanthurai Sanctuaries. The Inspection Notes on the forests of Tirunelveli division also contain valuable information. The reports of the various forest committees and the Policy Note on Forest Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu, the Forest Policy Circular of 1894, National Forest Policy Documents of 1952 and 1988 are very useful to understand the various stages in the evolution of the forest policy. The Administration Reports of the Forest Department of Tamil Nadu and the Administration Reports of the Tirunelveli Circle give facts and figures on the forest department. Besides these, the Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council and Madras Legislative Assembly Debates have been consulted. In addition to, interviews were obtained from the officials of the forest department who were associated with the forest administration during this period. Back issues of newspapers and journals have also been consulted. Apart from the above sources, secondary sources have also been consulted for the present work.

**Summary of Chapters**

The *Introduction* of the thesis gives the scope and purpose of the study, a brief survey of the existing literature and the sources of information.

The *Forest of Tirunelveli and System of Management Prior to 1950* is the first chapter which deals with the total area of the Tirunelveli forest division, configuration of the ground, types of forests and the attitude of the early rulers towards forests. The study reveals the fact that the Indian rulers did not take any concrete step to conserve the forest resources of Tirunelveli district and to protect the forests in the early decades. In course of time, in order to prevent the unrestricted felling of trees, the Board of Revenue issued the Jungle Conservancy Rules in 1860. Subsequently, Working Plans were prepared as
early as 1895 and the evergreen forests were worked based on the prescriptions of the working plans in Tirunelveli district. All these developments are described in this chapter.

The second chapter **Felling and Planting** deals with the working plans and their prescriptions. During the post-independence era, the officials of the forest administration in Tirunelveli district as elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, recognised the importance of preparing the forest working plans on scientific basis. The attention bestowed upon raising plantations like teak, fuel, softwood and bamboos are elaborately discussed. Moreover importance is given to highlight how fire, hill men inside the reserve forests and villagers in the plains caused injuries to the forest. An analysis is also made to trace the revenue from the forest consequent to the increased planting activities, the creation of wildlife sanctuaries, the advent of the social forestry and the stoppage of felling of fuel coupes.

**Social Forestry** which forms the third chapter deals with the advent of social forestry. By the 1950s, the fuel crisis of the rural population became acute. Therefore, the forest department began to consider the needs of the rural population and attempted to secure their cooperation in raising plantations. From 1963, farm forestry plantations were raised in community lands, Government wastelands and degraded forests which helped to generate employment, regenerate the degraded forests and fulfill the needs of rural population.

The fourth chapter **Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve** gives importance to the wildlife conservation. The forests in Tirunelveli are considered a home to many endangered animals, birds, insects and reptiles. In 1988 the Mundanthurai and Kalakad Sanctuaries were merged and declared as the seventeenth Tiger Reserve of India. Since then much attention was paid to the protection of wildlife and its management. Biotic interference by way of grazing and illicit tree felling was completely stopped. All these
developments are described in detail. Launching of the eco-development project in 1994 with the assistance of the World Bank and its impact is also analysed.


The sixth chapter **Administrative Set-Up** describes the administrative set-up, the powers and functions of the officials of the forest department in Tirunelveli district. Tirunelveli Forest Division came into existence with effect from 1 April 1977. It consists of five territorial ranges. The head of the division is designated as District Forest Officer. The Social Forestry Division is headed by Divisional Forest Officer, Social Forestry. This division controls its five ranges. The Field Director is the overall controller of the Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve. He is assisted by the Deputy Director and various other officials based at Ambasamudram. The Tiger Reserve consists of seven reserve ranges. Tirunelveli Forest Division was in Madurai Circle prior to 29 August 1979. After this, the Tirunelveli Circle came into existence. Subsequently, the nomenclature was changed to Wildlife Southern Region with effect from 1991 and continued up to 1999. In 1999, the name was again changed as Tirunelveli Circle. All these organisational developments are discussed in this chapter.

The thesis concludes with a brief summary of these developments, major findings and some suggestions.