Chapter III

PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

Formerly Tanjore is a municipality and the headquarter of the Thanjavur District in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The name Thanjavur is derived from “Tanjan”, a legendary asura in Hindu mythology. Thanjavur is one of the ancient cities in India and has a long and varied history dating back to the sangam period. The town was founded by Mutharayar king Swaran maran and rose to prominence during the rule of the later Cholas when it served as the capital of the Chola Empire. After the fall of the Cholas, the city was ruled by various dynasties like Pandyas, Vijayanagar Empire, Madurai Nayaks, Thanjavur Nayaks, Thanjavur Marathas and British. It has been a part of independent India since 1947.

Thanjavur is an important center of south Indian art and architecture. Most of the Great Living Chola Temples which are UNESCO world Heritage monuments are located in and around Thanjavur. The foremost among the Great Living Chola Temples, the Brahadeeswara Temple is located in the center of the city. Thanjavur is also the home of the Tanjore painting, a painting style unique to the region. The city is an important agricultural center located at the heart of the region, known as the rice bowl of Tamil Nadu. South zone culture center in Thanjavur is one of many regional cultural centers established by Indian Government to preserve and promote traditional cultural heritage of India. It has a population of 2,90,732 in 2011.

Thanjavur is well connected by roads and railways with other parts of India and with cities and towns in Tamil Nadu. The nearest airport is Tiruchirapalli international airport located at a distance of 56 kilometres. The nearest seaport is Nagapattinam which is 84 kilometres (52 mi) from Thanjavur.
Indian metal craft has attained the standard of a fine art and plays an important part in the religious and community life of the people of the metalware produced all over the country, plates, vessels and utensils, in innumerable shapes, form the major part. The commonest objects are a variety of water vessels, cooking vessels, serving dishes and containers made of brass, copper or silver. It has been praised by the American designer, Charles Eames as the most perfected form, resulting from a classical tradition where form and function have been ideally ‘Married’ by generations of users.

About 2 lakh artisans are employed in the manufacture of art metalware in the country with an estimated annual production worth about ₹120 crores. The export earnings of metal crafts have gone up from ₹2.43 crores in 1966-67 to ₹59 crores in 1979-80 and are expected to reach ₹140 crores by 1984-85. It is proposed to increase production accordingly through additional training and increase of other inputs.

**Efforts for revival by the author** (Nataraja Achari, 1986)

Profile of the study has taken from the book written by Nataraja Achari i.e., Tanjore Art Plate, Art and Artisans, Art Plate Tamil Nadu Viswakarma Artisans Sangam Madras-10. The Art Plate work is a fine one. According to the author, this work should not disappear due to lack of workers. He was very much concerned about the revival of this fine unique handicraft of Thanjavur. This gem work (setting of precious stones in pure 24 ct. gold) should not be disappeared due to lack of workers. This type of disappearance had not been happened to Art Plate in accordance with the opinion of the author. Number of steps have been taken by the author for the revival of Art Plate industries. God was very merciful and his grace munificent to meet Thiru T.K. Palaniappan, I.A.S., who was already known to the author. Because of the various revival activities, taken the author was appointed as director of industries and commerce in the government
of Tamil Nadu. At that time only Nataraja Achari had visited Thanjavur to inaugurate the Musical Instrument Cooperative Society and explained about the dwindling state of affairs of the Thanjavur Art Plate industry to I.A.S. Officer T.K. Palaniappan.

The author (Nataraja Achari) requested him to do his best to protect and preserve and save the Art Plate industry from decay. Honourable Sri.K.Kamaraj was the chief minister of Tamil Nadu then our honourable sri.R.Venkatraman the present vice president of India, was the minister of Industries of our state. Both of them came forward to help the Art Plate industry.

Sri.T.K.Palaniappan I.A.S., advised the author (Nataraja Achari) to start a cooperative society to get government assistance for the revival of the Art Plate industry. He introduced the joint registrar of co-operative societies to the author (Nataraja Achari) and also gave him introductions for the starting of the Art Plate manufacturers co-operative society at Thanjavur. After a fortnight Sri.T.K.Palaniappan sent a co-operative sub-registrar, asking the author (Nataraja Achari) to enroll sufficient members for the proposed co-operative society. At that time not even 10 persons were available in the Art Plate work. Those who were engaged in the industry were reluctant and they did not come forward to enrol themselves as members in the society as they thought that the new society would affect their private business.

They even went to the extent of challenging the author (Nataraja Achari) saying that they would do everything to mar his attempt. But the author (Nataraja Achari) did not lose hope. The author (Nataraja Achari) enlisted his own workers and other artisans in jewellery and metal work as members of the society. A total of 29 members thus enrolled. In the midst of stiff opposition from the traditional Art Plate manufacturers. The author (Nataraja Achari) was able to
register a co-operative society. Thus on 1st September 1957 “The Thanjavur Art Plate workers production and sales co-operative Society” was registered. The author (Nataraja Achari) became the first president of the society. The author (Nataraja Achari) appointed four more Directors and informed the Director of Industries and commerce, Government of TamilNadu to start the functioning of the society. The Government of TamilNadu sanctioned ₹3000/- as reserve fund subsidy, and ₹400/- as share capital loan besides a working capital loan of ₹23,000/-. A rented building was Vijayataya Chola conquered Thanjavur about 850 A.D. from the mutharayar chiefs and made it the capital for his newly founded line of imperial cholas. Who ruled Tamilnadu for more than 400 years (850 to 1279). The kings left an imperishable mark on its history. Probably Thanjavur was previously called as Thanjai. But others give a derivation to the name from Thanjam, a demon who was haunting the locality and was destroyed by God Vishnu. The demon’s dying request to Vishnu was to name the place after him. His request was granted. Some others also give a derivation from Thanjam meaning refuge; the city being thus called the city of refuge, Thanjavur became famous during the regime of Raja Raja Chola I and his grandson.

Thanjavur rose to glory during the later chola Regime between 11th and 14th centuries A.D and became the centre of learning and culture. It is the headquarter of the district of the same name Thanjavur known as the rice bowl of Tamil Nadu, it is also known for its exquisite handicrafts. Thanjavur is one of the thirteen coastal districts of TamilNadu in the production of sea fish which accounts for about 5 percent of the total catches of the state. The district it famous for its exquisite ancient hadicrafts making of bronze icons, Thanjavur Art Plates, bell metal castings, bowls, napkin and powder boxes and artistic in-lying and engraving work of motifs well-known for pith-work, ornamental fans, mats, and making of musical instruments of jack wood. It is also a flourishing center of handloom silk and cotton sarees.
Thanjavur Big Temple (Sumathi, 1991)

The greatest of the chola emperors Rajaraja-I (1985 A.D-1012 A.D) the son of Sundara chola, built the magnificent temple. From the epigraphical evidence it is known about Rajaraja-I started building this temple on his 19th year and completed on 275th day of his 25th year. It took just 6 years to complete this work on 1010 A.D. The big temple of Thanjavur was called as Rajarajeeswaran abode of the lord of Rajaraja chola or the temple for lord Iswara built by Rajaraja chola the great with the fall of the cholas, Thanjavur was resurrected by the Nayaks and Marathas during the time frame the name was Sanskritised and called Brahadeeswara temple. Now-a-days it is called Thanjai periyakovil. Big temple is surrounded by moat on two sides and grand anaicut river on the other side. This temple is unique to have the tallest tower over the sanctum Santorum unlike the other temples. It is 216 feet tall. The walls of the Sanctum are covered, with the wall paintings at Chola and Nayak periods, comparable to the famous Ajanta cave frecoes. Guarding the inner shrine of the temple is the gigantic statue of Nandi (Bull).

Today the world knows Rajarajeeswaran as the big temple or Brahadeeswara temple, on UNESCO world heritage monument, but what the world does not know is about the all round skills of its builder Rajaraja Chola the great, the architectural intricacies of the temple and the sculptures and the arts which have lasted a millennium.

Another glory of the Thanjavur Town is Art Plate production. At the time of Raja Serfoji the II Art Plates are made up by gold metal. But the same Art Plates are made up of silver, copper and brass. The Art Plate enterprises are concentrated in three important streets like Nanayakkara Chetty Street, Jovuly Chetty Street and Ellaiamman Kovil Street. These are the three streets taken into account for the study i.e. economic analysis of small scale Art Plate entrepreneurs in Thanjavur town. Eventhough certain Art Plate enterprises are found here and there in Thanjavur Town.