DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

2.1 HISTORY OF PONDICHERY REGION

The Pondicherry region is the capital of the Union Territory of Pondicherry. The original name of Pondicherry was Vedapuram or Vedhapuri. At the time when the French came, it was known as Puducherry. Pondicherry has a long (12000 years) and chequered history. The periods can be divided as sub periods namely the Ancient period, the Tamil period, the Period of Alien Rulers and the period of the struggle for freedom. In the ancient period the Cholas, the Pallavas and the Pandyas ruled this territory. It was under the Vijaya Nagar Empire from the 14th to 15th century. It was followed by the Muslim rulers. The Portuguese were the first to come to Pondicherry followed by the Danes who stayed in Pondicherry for a short time. In 1693 Pondicherry passed to the hands of the Dutch who purchased it from the ruler of Gingee. Four years later, Pondicherry was again transferred to the French and all the French Trade was from Pondicherry. The original fishing village of Pondicherry was transformed into a flourishing textile port under the French rule. In 1742, Joseph Francois Dupleix became the Governor of French India. After the rule of Dupleix the supremacy of France declined and Pondicherry passed into the British hands. However in 1861, the French came back and settled permanently till the merger. The French ruled Pondicherry for 138 years. Pondicherry gave shelter to great freedom fighters like Sri Aurobindo, Poet Subramania Bharati. A series of events after the Independence of India led to the freedom and merger of Pondicherry on 1st November, 1954 with the Union of India.
2.2 LOCATION

The study area is situated on the eastern coastal plains of the Coromandel Coast of South India bordering the Bay of Bengal and is located between 79° 37'50" to 79° 53'22" East longitude and 11° 46'20" to 12° 3'30" north latitude.

The study area comprises of the whole of Pondicherry region and parts of South Arcot Vallar and Villupuram Ramasamy Padayatchiar districts of the neighbouring Tamil Nadu state. This area forms part of the survey of India topographical maps number 58M/9, 58M/13, 57P/12 and 57P/16. The total extent of the study area is 86136 ha. including water bodies etc. The Pondicherry region is about 162 km, south of Madras and 22 km north of Cuddalore. The site is bounded on the east by the Bay of Bengal and on all other sides by parts of Tamil Nadu state. As mentioned earlier the main focus of this study is on Pondicherry region with an extent of 29377 ha. The Pondicherry region has been divided into seven communes for administrative purpose and about 75% per cent of the Union Territory of Pondicherry's population is inhabiting in this region. The location map is furnished in Figure 1.

The maximum temperature is about 35 to 40° c and minimum temperature is about 17 to 22 c with a normal annual rainfall of about 1233 mm. The south west monsoon and North east monsoon are the principal monsoons influencing this region. The North east monsoon contributes maximum rainfall. The area is generally a flat alluvial plain, except in the north eastern and north west portions where the landscape is elevated (30 - 45m) and are intersected by ravines and gullies. The coastal plain is a thin stretch with a chain of sand dunes. The alluvial plains are intensively cultivated and almost all crops typical to the tropics are grown here.

The study area with its rich diversity of soils, geological formation, rich resource of groundwater, intensive agriculture and diversity in types of
crops offers excellent scope for undertaking studies on land resources and management. The land resource parameters such as geology, physiography, hydrology, climate and other parameters like land use, agriculture, socio-economic conditions of the study area have been studied in detail and described in chapter. The region was predominantly agriculture oriented and about 60 per cent to 70 per cent of the population are dependent on agriculture. However since the last decade there has been a decline in the trend of land use for agriculture and large tracts of agricultural land have been diverted for non-agricultural purposes such as Industry, habitation, etc. With the cessation of the conjunctive use of ground water with surface water for agricultural purposes and the exclusive reliance on groundwater for all purposes, the groundwater potential has started decreasing and in the coastal stretch sea water intrusion has been observed. The ever inflating population with associated developmental activities has put a heavy pressure on land resources and the stage has reached a state where if no proper integrated ameliorative and conservative measures are taken the position may become indeed critical. The situation warrants a rich base line data of the natural resources, evaluation, appropriate land use plans, judicious use of natural resources and management of these resources.

The entire study has been directed in this direction and special effort has been taken to interpret the data to accomplish the needs of the user agency and also advocating methods for effective resource management.

The present study was mainly concentrated in the Pondicherry region of the study area. In spite of the extensive work done earlier by the State Agriculture Department and Central Govt. Organisation and the rich data base created in agricultural statistics and other information by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Pondicherry, the development taking place in Pondicherry region are very imbalanced and unecological. The future of agriculture seems to be at stake. The basic forte of agriculture, namely groundwater and soil resource is becoming scarce. Under the prevailing circumstances, judicious use of the water and appropriate land use have become mandatory.