CHAPTER IV
PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

4.1: Introduction

This chapter purports to provide a brief contour of the selected district, namely Thajnavur district of Tamilnadu state. Some of the important profiles discussed are demographic, topographical resources and socio-economic details. The present chapter also aims to provide the details of the clusters concerned, the production process and maps the stakeholders concerned.

4.2: Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is a state with ancient history, rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and progressive outlook. Tamil is the official language of the state, a classical ancient language, with its literature and grammar dating back to 5000 BC.

Tamil Nadu is one of the most industrialised states in India with a high Human Development Index. Chennai (formerly known as Madras), the capital city of Tamil Nadu, is the gateway of south India with an international airport, sea ports and good rail and road network connectivity. Coimbatore, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Salem and Tirunelveli are some of the other major towns in the state. The state has a large number of good educational institutions and is one of the leaders in the field of Science and Technology and particularly in Information Technology.
Table 4.1 gives the details of select socio-economic indicators of Tamilnadu viz-a-viz India.

**Table 4.1: India & Tamil Nadu - Select Socio-Economic Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No 1</th>
<th>Economic Indicators</th>
<th>Tamilnadu</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Area ('000' Sq.Kms) (2001 Census)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>32871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Population (in Million) (2001 Census)</td>
<td>62.4 (100 %)</td>
<td>1029 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rural (in Million)</td>
<td>34.9 (56 %)</td>
<td>742.7 (72 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban (in Million)</td>
<td>27.5 (44 %)</td>
<td>286 (28 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Density (Population per Sq.Kms)</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 Males) (2001 Census)</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Birth Rate 2002</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Death rate 2002</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Infant Mortality Rate 2002</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Literacy Rate - 2001 in Persons</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>75.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percapita Consumption of Electricity (KWH.) 2002-03</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Census 2001 from www.censusindia.gov.in and www.tn.gov.in.

It is observed that Tamilnadu state is progressing faster. To substantiate this statement, it is noted from Table 4.1 that, of the total population, while 72 per cent lives in rural India, only 56 per cent lives in rural Tamilnadu. Further, the population density is more at Tamilnadu when compared to all India basis.
Sex ratio is also found to be better at Tamilnadu than on all India basis. All birth, death and infant mortality rates are lower in Tamilnadu when compared to all India figures. The literacy rate in all the levels is much higher at Tamilnadu. The per capital consumption of electricity is more in Tamilnadu than on all India basis. All these go to say that Tamilnadu is progressing faster than the overall country.

4.3: Thanjavur – The Cultural Citadel

Thanjavur (or Tanjore) is considered as the 'rice bowl' of Tamilnadu. The district stands unique from time immemorial for its agricultural activities and is talked about as the granary of South India, lying in the deltaic region of the famous river Cauvery and criss-crossed by lengthy network of irrigation canals. This coastal district abounds in green paddy fields, tall coconut groves, vast gardens of mango and plantain trees and other verdant vegetation. Thanjavur dates back to the Sangam age (about 300 BC), and was ruled by the Chola dynasty for the longest tenure. The Chola kings patronised and contributed to the development of all forms of arts, including metalware and sculpting.

The patronage provided to art and culture by most of the successive Indian rulers of Thanjavur, developed it into a citadel of Indian culture and art. The cultural, the architectural and the scholarly pursuits of these rulers are reflected in the great monuments like Grand Anaicut, Big Temple and Serfoji Mahal Library in the district. The Thanjavur Art Plate cluster is located in the Thanjavur Taluk of the Thanjavur district and the Bronze Icon Cluster is located in Swamimalai in the Kumabakonam Taluk of Thanjavur district.
4.4: **District Profile**

### 4.4.1: Location

Thanjavur District lies at the East Coast of Tamil Nadu. It is situated between $9^\circ 50'$ and $11^\circ 25'$ of the northern latitude and $78^\circ 45'$ and $70^\circ 25'$. of the Eastern longitude. It extends to an area of 3396.57 Sq.Kms. The District is bound in the north by the Coloroon river, which separates it from Perambalur and Tiruchirapalli districts. In the East, it is bound by the Thiruvarar and Nagapattinam districts, and on the South by he Palk Strait and Pudukkotti district, and on the West by Pudukkotti and Tiruchirappalli districts. Select profile of the district is given in Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

#### Table 4.2: Population of Thanjavur District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Population (in j Nos.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1,096,638 (49.5 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1,119,500 (50.5 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,216,138 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** [http://www.thanjavur.tn.nic.in/disprogeogra.html](http://www.thanjavur.tn.nic.in/disprogeogra.html).
Table 4.2 gives the details of the district population. It was noted that men and women are equally represented in the district. Further the rural population in the district is at 66 per cent which is higher than the state’s average of 56 per cent. Similarly the urban population in the district is at 34 per cent which is lower than the state’s average of 44 per cent. There is one University, 15 Arts and Science Colleges, eight professional and special education colleges, and 1535 schools offering general education. The administrative set up of this district is given in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Administrative SetUp of Thanjavur District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL.No.</th>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Revenue Divisions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Taluks</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Revenue Firkas</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Revenue Villages</td>
<td>906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Panchayat</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Union/Blocks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Municipalities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Town Panchayats</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Village Panchayats</td>
<td>569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Assembly Constituencies</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://thanjavur.nic.in/profile.htm.
4.4.2: Agriculture

Agriculture is the main activity in the District. Paddy, Sugarcane, Coconut, Plantain are the major crops cultivated in the District.

4.4.3: Handicrafts

The district is famous for various types of handicrafts, particularly the Thanjavur Art Plates, Swamimalai Bronze (Panchaloha) Icons, Bronze Chandeliers, Thanjavur Painting and Thanjavur Veena (a traditional classical musical instrument).

4.5: Thanjavur Handicrafts

4.5.1: Sculpture □ Art-work on Metals in India

The Indian sculpture and artwork on metals is very ancient and is greatly inter-twined with the socio-religious-cultural life of the people. The art dates back by 5000 years to the Mohenjodaro and Harappan period, through the Vedic times and Sangam periods. The Indian artwork on metals has been developed into a fine art of high quality and has established itself firmly in the common life of the people. Even the common metal items of brass, copper and silver used in everyday life by the people have been an object of observation and research from the American designer, Charles Eames. The craft reflects the skill and dexterity of the fingers and the imagination and creativity of the mind.
4.5.2: Metal Craft in South India

It is very difficult to ascertain precisely the date of origin of metal craft in South India. A proper perspective and understanding of the socio-religious, cultural and spiritual aspirations of the people over the long period of Indian history might help in providing the background for the evolution of this art. Latest excavations at Adichanallur in Tamilnadu have thrown further light on the prevalence of sculpting during the 1000-800 B.C.

4.5.3: Thanjavur Art Plate Cluster

As per the reports prepared by the JSN School of Management Services in collaboration with European Union-India Economic Cross Cultural Programme Project (2006), the Thanjavur art plate is an exquisite product of an art, with a base of a brass plate that is prepared to support the preliminary and secondary reliefs in silver and copper encrusted on it, which contain wondrous expression of skilled craftsmanship, bearing three dimensional figures of gods, goddesses, birds, flowers, animals, fruits, leaves, floral decorations, or according to the requirement of the customers.

It is a traditional art and the skill is taught and handed over from generation to generation (from father to son), with major developments taking place over the last 300 years or so. Researchers on this subject have tended to take a view that the Thanjavur artplate was evolved by the artisans of Thanjavur with the encouragement of the early Hindu Kings, who ruled Thanjavur. This tradition received a very big encouragement about 250 years right from the Maratha King Serfoji and his successors. King Serfoji (1797 to 1832) and his successors had played a very important role in the development
of arts & crafts of Thanjavur and King Serfoji is regarded as the chief patron of the developments in Thanjavur arts & crafts, in their techniques, artistry and exquisiteness, during this period.

This exquisite art of embossing artistic images of different sizes and shapes on metals, particularly silver and copper, and fixing on the already processed (prepared) brass plates, is unique and confined to Thanjavur. This art is confined to certain number of goldsmith families of the Viswakarma community over the ages, and is more inherited than acquired. For the members of this community, this art is a way of life.

The Government of Tamilnadu, through the Tamilnadu Handicrafts Development Corporation, Poompuhar, is organising training programmes in this art and interested persons in this art from other communities can also take part in this programme.

4.5.4: Thanjavur Art Plate Shields

The Thanjavur artisans are increasingly adapting to variety of customer requirements through improvements in the way they present the Thanjavur Art Plates. Thanjavur Art Plate Shields have become popular as mementoes and prizes. They are manufactured according to the customer specifications that may include temples, churches, images of personalities and organization logos.

4.5.5: Thanjavur Art Plate Variants - Utility as well as Art Showpieces

The traditional Thanjavur art plate artisanship is used by these artisans to produce a variety of other handicraft products, both utility products with excellent art and workmanship as well as art showpieces such as jewel boxes, paper weights, key chains, ash trays, mirror stands, flask covers, cups, bowls, caskets and the like.
4.5.6: The Thanjavur Artisans - The Kammalas Community

This art was confined to certain number of goldsmith families of the Kammalas, belonging to the Viswakarma community, over the ages, and is more inherited than acquired. Some opine that the word ‘Kammala’ is derived from the word ‘karma’ attributing it to the Vedic period of Indian history. Others hold that the word ‘kammalan’ is a corrupt form of ‘kannalan’, which means ‘the one who rules (gives) the eye’ (to the images). In Tamilnadu, the Kammalas live as endogamous territorial groups, namely Pandya (Madurai, Tirunelveli area), Chola (Thanjavur, Tiruchi, Arcot & Chennai areas) and Kongas (Salem and Coimbatore areas).

The art of manufacturing Thanjavur Art Plate & allied products is confined to the Chola Kammalas, living in Thanjavur. Of late, members of other communities have also evinced interest in this art. By religious persuasion, the Kammalas are Hindus (majority being Saivaites and the others Vaishnavaites). They speak Tamil except a small section of Vedugu Kammalas who speak Telugu.

4.5.7: Geographic Location of Art Plate Cluster

This handicraft artwork is confined to the geographic boundary of Thanjavur town. All the manufacturing units are located in this area. There are about 166 members in the Thanjavur Art Plate Workers’ Co-operative Cottage Industrial Society Limited.

The production process requires different types of skills and experiences, which are catered to by different types of cottage units belonging
to the same Kammala community, forming the backward and forward linkages in the manufacturing process of the Thanjavur Art Plate. For example, only a heavy metal worker prepares the first stage in the process that involves preparing the base plate. So, a few units (families) specialising in this task cater to this process requirement. Similarly, only a jewel maker does the preparation of the reliefs and in the encrusting of the relief on the base plate is done by a diamond-setter. Thus, it is a co-operative effort of the artisans. Thus, the craft is based on a certain division of labour among the artisans (artisan families). As a community, the Thanjavur artisans catered to all the required skills for the manufacture of Thanjavur art plate.

Throughout the centuries this craft has been considered and treated as the monopoly of the members of this community. It was their policy to see that the knowledge and technique of this craft was not imparted to members of other communities. In earlier times, even members of the sects within the community were denied the opportunity to learn this art. But the situation has been gradually changing and the community has now successfully persuaded the artisans to share their knowledge with other members of their community in its larger interest.

4.5.8: Thanjavur Art Plate Manufacturing - The Artisan Cottage Industry

The Thanjavur artplate manufacturing is recognised as cottage industry, that is, the manufacturing takes place at the households itself. A separate area in the house itself serves as the workshop, called in the local language as the ‘pattrai’. Women are not given any role in the manufacturing process. The boys of the community are generally engaged to assist in the manufacture and it is
mainly during this unpaid apprentice period that they learn the nuances of this
art under the guidance of the elder craftsmen. This is how the craft technique
and skill have been handed down from generation to generation

4.5.9: Thanjavur Art Plate

Components of an Art Plate: The Art Plate of Thanjavur has three main
components:

The Base Plate: The base plate is made of brass. Over this base plate, the relief
work made of silver and copper sheets are encrusted.

The Primary Relief: The Primary or main relief is encrusted in the central
hollow portion of the plate and it is the main motif. This is made of silver and
is larger than subsidiary reliefs, which are encrusted around it. This three
dimensional image may represent gods, goddesses, birds, flowers, animals,
fruits, leaves, floral decorations, logos of institutions/organisations,
personalities, or to put it simply, what the customer wants.

Subsidiary Reliefs: Subsidiary reliefs are made of silver and copper sheets and
are encrusted on the rim of the brass plate all around the primary relief. Like
the primary relief, these subsidiary reliefs may depict gods, goddesses, birds,
flowers, animals, fruits, leaves, floral decorations, logos of institutions/
organisations, personalities, or as desired by the customers. The subsidiary
relief, made of silver and copper, is encrusted on the rim of the plate alternately
so that a silver relief will lie in between two copper reliefs. Floral decorations
are engraved in between the outlines of primary and secondary reliefs. They
generally consist of some motif that repeats itself.
4.5.10: Raw Materials

The main raw materials required for making the art plates are:

(a) Brass sheets (out of which the base plate is made),

(b) Silver sheets (for making reliefs),

(c) Copper sheets (for making reliefs),

(d) Lead (for making moulds, used for depicting 3-D figures),

(e) Asphalt (a by-product of Petroleum production) or Wax, which is used for the base board). The local wax is a mixture of bdellium, known locally as “Kungiliam”, gingili oil and brick powder.

All the raw materials are available locally. Brass, procured from Punjab and Haryana in North India and Copper, procured from Mumbai are available in the local market. Some of the artisans, based on specific requirements, procure some items either from Kumbakonam or from Chennai.

4.5.11: Tools

Tools form an important aspect of the production process, helping the handicraftsmen to achieve artistic excellence. As stated earlier, the workshop (called in local language as the ‘Pattrai’), is inherited and passed on from generation to generation. Most of the tools are available locally and some of them may be made to order or fine-tuned in the Pattrai. The tools required by the artisans mainly include baseboard, the hammers, the punches and chisels. There could be a requirement of over 300 types of tools under the above given broad classification, for catering to the needs of varying designs and dimensions. While
the designs keep changing over the centuries, the main tools used by the artisans have remained more or less the same. Thus, the vital aspect of this production process is the skill - the workmanship of the artisan.

4.5.12: Production Process

The Thanjavur art plate cluster is composed of units performing various specialised functions that form part of the production process. The cottage unit that manufactures the final Thanjavur art plate uses other cottage units for the various specialised processes that the art plate has to undergo before it becomes a finished product. The main production process stages are furnished below:

1. Preparation of the base plate.
2. Preparation of Casting Copper Plate (or what is also called as the os-plates)
3. Preparation of casting moulds
4. Preparation of the reliefs using Casting Copper Plate (or the os-plate) cast dyes.
5. Encrusting the reliefs on the base plate and engraving the floral design round the reliefs; and
6. Finishing touches to the art product - chiseling and polishing.

The production process stages require obviously different types of skill and experience, which are rarely found in the same individual craftsmen. The base plate, which is the first stage, is prepared only by a heavy metal worker. The preparation of the reliefs is done only by a jewel maker and in the encrusting of the relief on the base plate is done by a diamond-setter. Thus, it is a cooperative effort of three craftsmen. All the workers do not attempt every item of the work involved in the production of the plate. Thus, the craft is based on a certain division of labour among the artisans.
4.5.13: Training

For generations, there had been nothing like a formal training in learning this art. To these artisans, this art has been a way of life. The art, its nuances and skills are getting picked up as the boy grows. The Patraï (workshop) along with the skills (and the training) gets handed over from one generation to another.

However, in recent years, the Government of Tamilnadu (through its handicrafts production, training and marketing outfit, Poompuhar) and the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts Board), Government of India have initiated steps for providing structured training programmes and organised marketing of the products since 1980s. The training concentrates on the technical skills associated with the production of the Thanjavur artplates.

4.5.14: Advanced Training Centre

Considering the need to maintain, support and develop the traditional art craft that produces products of exquisite beauty and excellent craftsmanship, the growing demand for these products and the scope for employment in this vocation, the Ministry of Commerce, Government of India has started an advanced training center in art metal-ware making in Thanjavur. This centre concentrates on imparting technical training to craftsmen.

4.5.15: Marketing Channels and Distribution of Art Plates

The Thanjavur artisans cater to the demand for Thanjavur art plates, both for domestic consumption as well as for exports. However, depending on the geographic location and the marketing complexities, including logistics & procedural formalities involved, the products are sold directly by the artisans or
through show rooms of handicraft organisations or through the merchant exporters (who act as middlemen, buying from the artisans and exporting the products). Direct selling by the artisans is done to individual customers (by visiting their workshop/showrooms), institutional buyers, and those approaching through word of mouth and personal selling. The artisans also have a list of domestic commercial middlemen in the form of jewellery shops, gift shops, handicrafts showrooms, khadi sales bhavans, handicrafts showrooms owned by the State Governments, like Poompuhar (Tamilnadu State), Kauveri (Karnataka State), Kairali (Kerala State) and Lepakshi (Andhra Pradesh). The Thanjavur art plates are also sold in special fairs/exhibitions abroad.

The Victoria Technical Institute (VTI), Chennai is another important outlet for marketing the art products of the Thanjavur artisans. The VTI tries to develop and promote South Indian handicrafts and provides reasonable prices to the artisans. Over the years the VTI has earned wide reputation for offering the world the best of Indian handicrafts, especially the South Indian handicrafts. A visit to the institute is considered essential in the itinerary of the foreign dignitaries visiting our country. Separate space is provided in VTI for exhibition and sale of Thanjavur art plates.

The Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation (HHEC) of India is a subsidiary of the State Trading Corporation of India (STC) was established in June 1962. HHEC’s policy in the field of direct exports is designed to develop new markets and expand traditional ones and to introduce new products suitable to the consumer’s demands abroad. The Corporation undertakes and executes wholesale orders, conducts retail sales operations through retail outlets abroad, and participates and sells in major exhibitions around the world.
The Central Cottage Industries Corporation of India Ltd. is another institution supporting cottage industries. It has a Central Cottage Industries Emporium in New Delhi, with branches in Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and Jaipur.

4.5.16: Feature of Intra Cluster Linkages

The interesting feature that was noticed in the Thanjavur art plate cluster was the presence of subclusters that contribute through established linkages to the production process. Every Thanjavur art plate has to have the contribution from all the sub-clusters.

This is a unique feature of this cluster, in the sense that unlike other clusters, where the production of a product is generally confined to a particular community and geographic area (and each unit produces the final product independently) and the skill of artisanship is passed over from generation to generation, there is a presence of generation of sub-clusters within the community and the geographic location, each complementing and contributing to the final product of the bigger cluster.

4.5.17: Thanjavur Art Plate Workers Co-operative Cottage Industries Society Limited.

This is a cooperative society, formed for the welfare of the artisans to enable organised marketing of the Thanjavur art plates. The society was formed under the Government initiative and was registered in 1957. The society presently has 166 members. The society purchases the Thanjavur art plates and their art variants from the members and markets them. It also procures orders from private institutions as well as Government handicrafts promotion agencies.
and executes them through the artisan members. The members are however
free to undertake independent production operations and marketing’ This is an
additional channel that is provided to the Thanjavur artisans.

4.6: Swamimalai Bronze Icon Cluster

Swamimalai is a small town on the banks of the river Cauvery, about 6
km west of Kumbakonam in Thanjavur district remarkable specimens of
bronze icons noted for their pleasing form and perfection and facial expression
are manufactured at Swamimalai. Majority of the present day artisans belong to
the Viswakarma community, known as the Kammalas. Among this, they
belong to the category of ‘Sthapathis’, who are proficient in classical sculpting,
following the techniques, grammar, metallurgy and using tools, specified in
ancient literature of “shilpa” and “agama” shastras (treatises), as have been
handed down to them, from generation to generation. The oral tradition,
believed to be origin of these enterprises in Swamimalai is that, the ancestor of
the present day artisans found the clay on the river banks of Cauvery river in
and around Swamimalai, as perfectly suitable for the process technology of
‘cire perdue’ (or lost wax), used in the manufacture of bronze icons, and hence
decided to settle down in the place. Though the period of settling down at
Swamimalai is uncertain, it is said to have taken place sometime during 985 -
1044 AD, the reign of Raja Raja Chola and his son Rajendra I. Since then,
Swamimalai has been the centre for manufacture of bronze icons in the
classical Chola period style. As a famous artisan of Swamimalai eulogised, ‘the
clay here is so fine that it will reproduce the clearest of fingerprints’.
4.6.1: Bronze Icons of Swamimalai

The bronze Icons of South India in general and particularly the Chola period style bronze have had their own irresistible appeal to the viewers, art-experts as well as laymen. August Rodin, the famous French sculptor, described the bronze icons of South India as “the most perfect representation of rhythmic movement in art”. These icons, in their chiseled splendour and symmetrical form, attest to the classic grandeur of an art form that reached the peak of perfection almost one thousand years ago. Acclaimed as amongst the finest achievements of metal sculpture in the world, the Chola bronzes embody grace, and precision in minute details, which bring together in one composite whole an artist’s imagery, a poet’s sensibility and a craftsman’s skill. Through measured proportions and exquisite beauty brought out by excellent craftsmanship, the Sthapathis (artisans) endowed the icons with a perfection that brings gleam of wonder in the eyes of the observer.

4.6.2: The Artisan Community

Similar to Thanjavur, the artisans in Swamimalai also belong to Kammalas community. Sthapathis, among the Kammalas, enjoyed a higher status among the Viswakarmas and have been traditionally accepted more freely by the higher castes. The construction of temples and the making of idols required the knowledge of the Agamas and the Silpasastras, which were mainly in Sanskrit. Sanskrit has therefore formed a bond between the priestly classes and the elite of the artisan classes, viz., Viswakarma, and as a result of which some priestly culture was transmitted to the latter. The Silpasastras also
demanded of a Sthapathi, the knowledge of the shastras (treatises) and versatility in related arts. It is his capacity for conceiving and executing of the design, which has elevated the Sthapathis from the rank of ordinary-craftsmen. No doubt, in actual execution, the common craftsmen help them.

4.6.3: Training

Sthapathis are trained for the work from cradle. The son begins to help his father as soon as he can and as he helps, he learns. The constant observation of his father in his attempts in soft stones, wood, wax and metals train his mind and hands from an early age in the art of image making. He acquires the theory of his work unconsciously from the knowledge and experience of his father, which represents the effort of a lifetime which would be transmitted to the son without any deliberate attempt to learn. He then goes for a period of apprenticeship for training under some other Sthapathi, learning whatever he can from his new master. That is how a perfect artisan is evolved in course of time.

The Tamilnadu State Government took the initiative of establishing a training centre with the assistance of the All India Handicrafts Board (Office of the Development Commissioner, Handicrafts), with cooperation and participation from the Swamimalai artisans. Nevertheless, learned observers and art experts find more excellence in the works of the traditional Sthapathis, who they opine, have a deeper feel and a more scientific approach to the subject of icon-making than many of the new entrants to the field who go by approximate measurements.
4.6.4: Functional Classification of Sthapathis

Icon workers in the Tamilnadu state can be grouped into two categories, those who work exclusively in stone and those who work only in metal. The Sthapathis working on metal are concentrated mainly in and around Swamimalai. Their marital alliances are always arranged with the other Viswakarma branches of Goldsmiths and Silversmiths of Thanjavur and Kumbakonam. This is another evidence of their common ancestry.

4.6.5: Bronze Icon Sthapathis at Swamimalai

The reason for the concentration of metal workers at Swamimalai is lost in antiquity. The oral tradition of the present day Sthapathis are the successors of one Akora Bhadra Acharya, who came to Swamimalai and settled in that place. The age of Akora Bhadra or his arrival at Swamimalai is, however, uncertain. Some believe that it is during the Chola period (985 - 1044 AD).

The artisans have their own Pattrai (Workshop), which is usually a part of their household. The labour of the female members is seldom used in production of icons. Every Pattrai has a Sthapathi who is a major craftsman; sometimes two or three members of the same family may work in a Pattrai. Besides the Sthapathi, labourers will be hired to work in the Pattrai. They do not belong to the Sthapathi family and not always to the Viswakarma community. Often, they are drawn from various other communities, who have found that job is rewarding, and assist the Sthapathi in such operations as the pouring of the metal cast. Many of these are employed permanently. Others are skilled in varying degrees and are employed only when there is need for their
labour in the Pattrai. The actual modeling of the image in wax is still done only by the Sthapathi and he also gives the final touches to the metal cast. No Sthapathi works in other Pattrais permanently for wages.

4.6.6: Production Technique

The Making of Metal Images as Described in Manasara

Metal icons are produced in what is traditionally known as the “Madhu Chistam” or cire perdue casting technique. Incidentally, art historians cite the famous ‘bronze-dancing girl’ found in Mohenjodaro in the Indus Valley excavations, as the earliest known examples of cire perdue work. The ancient classical Sanskrit sources as Manasara and Silparatna give detailed descriptions (or even prescriptions), conceivably for the regulation of the craft. Some of these treatises are attributed to the period 4th to 6th century AD. The technique of icon casting as practiced by the Sthapathis of Swamimalai is in no sense an improvement on what is described in Manasara. The tradition and technique have survived unchanged.

4.6.7: Broad Classification of the Product

The Sthapathis make a broad classification of the end use to which the product that they manufacture is expected to be. The classifications are given below:

(i) The Icon is to be used for religious purposes or
(ii) The icon is to be an art piece, adorning offices or drawing rooms.

In the event of the Icons being used for religious purposes, the Sthapathis follow the prescriptions laid down in the relevant treatises for guidance of the Sthapathis regarding: firstly, the ‘meditation verses’, that
would provide the spiritual meaning; and secondly, the physical attributes. It is stated that 114 specifications have been laid down. Complying with these, the artisan makes the image using imagination power and according to the traditional practice followed by the family. The mental attitude of the Sthapathi is given very high importance in this case. When the end use of the Icons is to be only an art piece, the religious practices are not followed, and great care is taken in bringing out finer details of workmanship.

4.6.8: Production Process

The work of making an image in bronze can be divided into four different stages, which are as follows:

1. Modeling the image in wax.
2. Preparing a clay mould out of the wax model.
3. Making a metal cast from the clay mould and
4. Finishing and polishing.

4.6.9: Marketing Channels and Distribution of Icons

The demand for Swamimalai bronze icons is either through

(i) Demand for specific icons, purely for religious purposes, or
(ii) Demand for icons as an art work

Of the above, the demand for specific icons for religious purposes is generally directed to experienced traditional Sthapathis who are chosen based on their past record or word of mouth. There is immense scope in the second category of demand, both within the country as well as abroad. Given the fact that Swamimalai bronze icon cluster is the main (or in fact can be considered as the sole) source for manufacture of Chola Style of icons, with all its elegance and splendour, it is the lack of marketing inputs that hinder the further
development of the icon cluster. Lack of awareness among the artisans is another barrier to development of the cluster.

The distribution channels are same for both Thanjavur art plates and **Swamimalai** icons.

### 4.6.10: Swamimalai Icon Manufacturers’ Co-operative Cottage Industrial Society Ltd.

This is a cooperative society, formed for the welfare of the artisans to enable organised marketing of the Swamimalai bronze icons produced by its member units. The society was formed under the Government initiative and was registered under the Societies Registration Act. There are 169 members. The society is a common forum to evolve solutions for the issues faced by the cluster. The society also undertakes structured marketing activities and has a separate showroom at Swamimalai. A special officer, appointed by the state Government takes care of the administrative activities of both Thanjavur art plate and Swamimalai bronze icon societies.

### 4.7: Stakeholder Mapping of Both the Thanjavur Art Plate and Swamimalai Icon Clusters

**National Level**

- Ministry of Small Scale Industries (http://msme.gov.in)
- Ministry of Agro & Rural Industries (http://ari.nic.in)
- Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (www.mit.gov.in)
- Ministry of Commerce and Industry (www.commin.nic.in)
- Ministry of Human Resource Development (www.education.nic.in)
- Ministry of Textiles (www.texmin.nic.in)
Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts, Ministry of Textiles)
(www.indianhandicrafts.org.in)
Small Industry Development Organization (www.smallindustryindia.com)
National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC) Ltd. (www.nsicindia.com)
Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (www.epch.com)
Khadi and Village Industries Commission (www.kvic.org.in)
The Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India Ltd. (HHEC)
(www.hhecworld.com)
The Central Cottage Industries Corporation of India Ltd
(www.cottageemporiumindia.com)

State Level
State Government of Tamilnadu (www.tn.gov.in)
Departments of Government of Tamilnadu
Handlooms, Handicrafts, Textiles and Khadhi
(www.tn.gov.in/department/hhtk.htm)
Small Industries (www.tn.gov.in/department/sind/htm)
Rural Development (www.tn.gov.in/department/rd.htm)
Industries (www.tn.gov.in/department/industries.htm)
Information Technology (www.tn.gov.in/department/IT.htm)
District Industries Centre (Thanjavur / Nagapatinam)
Tamilnadu Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd. (Poompuhar)
(www.tn.gov.in/hhtk/handicrafts/handi-profile.htm)
Swamimalai Icon Manufacturers’ Co-operative Cottage Industrial Society Ltd..
Victoria Technical Institute
Development Finance Institutions / Banks

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDEI) (www.sidbi.com)

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) (www.nabard.org)

State Bank of India

Other Commercial Banks

Other Trade Organisations / Service Institutes

Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) (www.cii.online.org)

Tamilnadu Small and Tiny Industries Association (TANSTIA) - PNF Service Centre, Chennai, (www.tansitafnf.com)

4.8: Conclusion

This chapter has given a complete profile of the study area with details of the Tamil Nadu state and then the Thanjavur district. Besides, the chapter also traces the historical developments in the clusters, the players, the procedures they adopt, and the stakeholders involved. The Thanjavur art plate cluster is a traditional MSE cluster, which came to prominence in the last four centuries. Though the artisanship is mainly confined to a single community, with the establishment of Government sponsored training centres, more people have taken to this trade. These products, with exquisite artwork, have gained worldwide appreciation. However, the cluster units are yet to take up direct marketing of their products to overseas clients in a structured way. The Swamimalai bronze icon cluster offers a case of a cluster that is structurally traditional, that has been in existence for the past 1000 years, but with a product that is internationally well appreciated. It is the traditional discipline and rigour of dedication that adds value to its products.