Introduction
Cultivation of crops for export market became a striking phenomenon in the British period. Though commercial crops were not unknown in Tamilnadu earlier, a special drive was undertaken by colonial administration to motivate the agriculturists to take to cash crops in adherence to the commercial policy of the British Government. The two-fold objectives of commercial policy of the Government was to ensure the production of raw material in India for British industries and the consumption of British goods in India.

Indigo and jute were encouraged to be cultivated in Bengal. In Madras cotton, groundnut and tobacco were the popular commercial crops. Later coffee and tea were also attempted. With the expansion of cultivable land large tracts of and were brought under cash-crop cultivation. The introduction of new-cash crops and intensification of the drive for commercialization of agriculture had significant effect in the Tamil society.

The historians who have attempted economic history of Tamilnadu have made a reference to the process of commercialization of agriculture. The studies which helped to gain insight into the subject of study and the works done so far by scholars relating to commercialization of agriculture are delineated here.

_A Note on the Permanent Settlement_ (1940) by P.K.Gnanasundara Mudaliyar contributed to the knowledge of the system of land revenue settlement. The work concentrated on the system of revenue management at the time of the introduction of the settlement in the Madras presidency. Most of the chapters are
devoted to the study of the settlement as extended to the different parts in the presidency and to tenancy regulations that were introduced in later times. *Economic Conditions in Madras Presidency 1800-1850* (1941) by Sarada Raju is an important work that contributed to the knowledge of the colonial economy of Madras presidency. An indepth analysis of the colonial rule and various economic aspects such as the land tenures, crop pattern, industries, trade, transport and prices are dealt with in this work.

B. S. Baliga’s work on the *Studies in Madras Administration* (1960), in two volumes contains various essays written by him at different times. This is an important work for the total understanding of Colonial Tamilnadu. In his work *The Ryotwari System in Madras, 1792-1827* (1962), Nilamani Mukherjee analyzed the effect of the general introduction of the ryotwari system in the Madras Presidency. The study traces the origin of the ryotwari system of land revenue administration in Baramahal and discusses the extension of it to other parts in detail. The last part of the work concentrates on the effects it produced on the economic conditions of the presidency, on its social structure and on the administrative framework. The work concludes with the death of Thomas Munro in 1827.
A similar study has been undertaken by T. R. Beaglehole *Thomas Munro and the Development of Administrative Policy in Madras, 1792-1818* (1966). This work traces the origin and development of the ryotwari settlement in Madras Presidency. Beaglehole’s work concentrates on the personal contribution of Thomas Munro to the introduction of it in several parts of the Presidency. By 1818 the system of settlement had spread to all parts of the Madras Presidency. *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire* (1989) by Burton Stein deals with the origin and extension of the ryotwari settlement. The contribution of Munro to the development of this system of settlement is part of the biographical study undertaken by Burton Stein.

The history of agricultural labour in the Madras Presidency is made the theme of work of *Land and Caste in South India* (1965), by Dharma Kumar. The work explains the impact of agricultural policies on the labour during the nineteenth century. It discusses the form of agrestic servitude, the wage structure and the causative factors for emigration. The Government policy towards land tenures of different kinds is presented in the work. The whole work concentrates on the question of the class of landless agricultural labourers. His conclusion is that they were not wholly created during the British rule.
Christopher John Baker's, *An Indian Rural Economy, 1880-1995*, *The Tamilnad Countryside (1984)* traces the history of that region, by examining how agrarian trade was organized. He discusses the connection between internal and external trade, the functions of the market for the capital etc. The emphasis of this book as on the links between the countryside and town and the role played by the state in bringing about the transformation.

David Ludden's *Peasant History in South India (1989)* concentrates on the variable ecological context that shaped the agrarian policies. It traces the history of peasants for the millennium, 900 A.D. to 1900 A.D. and discussed the implementation of these policies in the colonial context and offered an understanding of the world of the peasants in the micro region of Tirunelveli district. Ludden emphasized that the ryotwari system was imposed by the Government on the different production systems i.e., the wet land (Nunjah) which contributed most of the revenues of the district and large area of dry lands (Punjah). While discussing the subsistence production and the community maintaining strategies, he also explained the tensions between them.

*The Cambridge Economic History of India, 1757-1970, Volume 2, (1982)* (ed.) by Dharma Kumar, explains the various economic policies of the British Government. Large parts in this work are devoted to statistical analysis of income and agricultural prices based upon assumptions not convincing and therefore not able to illuminate agrarian policies, their determination and their
effect. The book by R. Ratnam, *Agricultural Development in Madras State Prior to 1900*, Madras, 1966, deals with the state of agriculture and industry in the Madras Presidency in the beginning of the nineteenth century. It also explores elaborately and systematically the process of commercialization of agriculture and the trials of commercial crops cultivation under the British initiation.

J. Talboys Wheeler, *Hand Book of the Cotton Cultivation in the Madras Presidency*, 1862 is a good source for the study of cotton cultivation in the Madras Presidency during the nineteenth century. It covers the various efforts made by the colonial Government for the promotion of cotton cultivation in Madras Presidency for the export transaction. C. D. Maclean, *Standing Information Regarding the Official Administration of the Madras Presidency*, Vols. I, II & III, Madras, 1877 is a comprehensive work dealing with various issues starting with the political consolidation of the Madras Presidency under the British. Land revenue settlement and its related problems, development of irrigation, economical condition of the peasantry, indebtedness, transport development, finance, famine, emigration, crops cultivated are discussed, etc.

Sir George Watt, *The Commercial Products of India*, London, 1908 is an important study, which deals with the commercial crops in historical perspective from pre-British period. Commercial crops, their origin, nature, development, reasons for popularization of cotton are delineated.
However, a detailed account of the history of commercial agriculture specifying the crops with regional emphasis has not been attempted to my knowledge. The objective of my study is to attempt such an account.

While making the investigation, the following research questions are used.

- When, how and why did the intensive process of commercialization of agriculture begin in Tamilnadu.
- How the crops especially cotton were attempted and what were the methods adopted by the colonial administrators to increase the land under commercial crops.
- What were the special measures and incentives provided by the provincial Government to encourage the agriculturists to take to commercial crops.
- Was the land alienation that took place on a large scale, anything to do with commercialization of agriculture.
- Was there any relation between commercial agriculture and pauperization of the peasantry.
- What were the consequences of commercial agriculture in colonial Tamil society.
The period of study is restricted between 1800 and 1900 A.D., since it was the century during which colonialism was at its zenith. The Tamilnadu, i.e., the area of study—will refer to the Tamil districts of the then Madras Presidency such as Madras, Chengalpattu, South Arcot, North Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore, Tiruchirappali, Thanjavur, Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli and the Nilgiris.

The study has been mainly based on archival sources. The Reports of the Colonial Government in the Departments of Agriculture, Land Revenue and Settlement, Public and Board of Revenue, Collectorate Records, Manuals, Gazetteers, Census Reports, Travel Accounts and Reports on Native Newspapers and Memoirs form the primary sources. The books and journals containing information on the subject of research constitute the secondary sources. There are seven chapters in the thesis.

**Chapter I: Genesis of Commercial Agriculture**

It starts with the explanation of commercial agriculture. The subsistence nature of village agriculture and the process of commercialization of agriculture that was set in motion are discussed next. The factors that influenced the colonial Government to opt for commercialization of Indian agriculture are explained. The available literature on commercial agriculture is also reviewed in the introductory chapter to reinforce the importance of the present study.
Chapter II: British Land Revenue Administration and its Fallout

The chapter starts with the description of three major land tenures in Tamilnadu. A discussion on the experiment of survey and settlement operations in some districts for the revision of land tax finds a place there. The land rent differed from place to place and district to district and so in order to confirm it, various statements on land revenue assessment are presented. The mode of land rent payment and the amount collected in Tamilnadu is also discussed. The impact of burdensome land rent on the already deteriorating agrarian condition under various captions is brought out.

Chapter III: State of Irrigation.

In the beginning of nineteenth century the colonial Government neglected irrigation. The old irrigation sources were neglected by the British. The interest they had on producing raw material for their industry motivated the imperial rulers to develop the irrigation sources. Yet until the first four decades of the nineteenth century irrigation had been left to its deteriorating condition.

Chapter IV: Cotton Production.

Cotton is one of the most popular commercial crops in Tamilnadu. Tracing the origin of cotton cultivation in the province, advances granted by the East India Company for the promotion of this commercial crop and other forms of
encouragement made to the peasantry by the East India Company are dealt with first. The heavy tax levied on looms led to the destruction of handloom sector and the subsequent effort of the Government for the promotion of cotton cultivation through the seed distribution thereby inducing the peasantry to take to the cultivation of cotton and take part in the process of commercialization of cultivation are delineated with the pros and cons. In addition to the efforts made by the three American cotton planters, Mr. Fischer, Dr. Wight and Mr. Finnie, the other elements involved in the promotion of cotton cultivation in Tamilnadu are also pointed out. An account on the complete failure of the cotton experiments is attempted in the end. The tragic role played by the moneylenders is narrated.

Chapter V: Groundnut Cultivation.

Chapter V starts with a short discussion on the history of groundnut with particular reference to the state of its cultivation as a commercial crop in Tamilnadu in the early part of the nineteenth century. The area under groundnut cultivation and the export trade transacted are highlighted. The subject of the study is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the period between 1800 and 1857. The Government efforts on the promotion of the groundnut crop cultivation, with the experimentation of variety of seeds are discussed in the second part covering a period from 1857 to 1900. A statistical representation is also attempted to show the increase, decrease and the fluctuation of the area under groundnut
cultivation in various districts of Tamilnadu, with special emphasis on the district of South Arcot. The cost of cultivation of groundnut as mixed, pure, irrigated and rain fed crop and its profit to the peasants also find a place in the study. The export trade transaction there on is discussed in detail with relevant statistical data. In addition the working of chekku and mill and the diseases that afflicted the groundnut crop are also discussed.

Chapter VI: Consequences of Commercial Agriculture

The impact of commercial agriculture on the Tamil society is dealt with. The development of railway network and the developmental works like experimental farms, and the trials of improved agricultural implements are treated as positive features, whereas the ruin of peasantry in Tamilnadu, caused by market fluctuation, low wages, price variation, famine and drought and the resultant distress emigration are considered to be the negative aspects.

The Government was keen on the development of irrigation in the latter half of the nineteenth century is corroborated by the area of land that was brought under irrigation. The capital outlay for the investment on the development of irrigation in different districts in Tamilnadu by the British Government was higher in the latter half of 19th century. The prevalence of water cess in various time in different localities and the water cess levied on the land under cotton
cultivation are discussed in this chapter. The approximate share of area under cotton crop cultivation under the total area of irrigated land is also mentioned.

Yet the negative results such as increasing incidence of rural indebtedness and the resultant emigration and the recurring instances of famine are also highlighted.

The concluding part summarizes the findings. The increasing instances of land alienation, emigration to overseas countries in search of livelihood, ever increasing number of landless labourers are the outcome of the commercialization of agriculture in Tamilnadu. If the land revenue policy had driven the desperate peasants to the cultivation of commercial crops, the fluctuation in market price, which was fixed internationally, ruined the ignorant and illiterate peasantry beyond redemption.