CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION
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Contemporary historiography has invoked the relationship between ‘individual and society’, ‘action and structure’, ‘actor and system’, ‘part and whole’, ‘individualism and holism’, ‘micro and macro’, ‘voluntarism and determinism’, ‘subjectivism and objectivism’, and so forth to describe and explain the phenomana of binary relationships. In general, those sets are used in antagonistic terms with the assumption of a zero sum relationship between those sets. The implication here is that, to the extent the everyday lives are existentially governed by intimations of both freedom and enchainment, or by the belief that human are capable of shaping their future only under numerous and often impervious constraints not of their choosing, the life is confronted will-nilley with the agency-structure issue. In other words, as long as actions are explained with reference to structure, or vice-versa, the independent variable in each case remains unavailable for problemlization. Hence it becomes imperative to resolve this impasse, between actors and social structures, in terms of mutual linkage than causal reduction.¹

To the question of the link between action and structure, Giddens gives the answer that ‘they presuppose each other in a dialectical relationship: but it is a dialectic not of a series of sequential acts but of time and space defined as a process in which it is the ‘past in the present and also the future in the present.’² Wendt is also emphatic about solving the agency structure puzzle by a bold
attempt to amalgamate the divide between action and structure. He wants the 
'use of structural analysis to theorize the conditions of existence of state agents, 
and the use of historical analysis to explain the genesis and reproduction of 
social structures.'

This thesis, 'Development Districting in Tamil Nadu: A Study has 
adopted the Wendtian formulation to enquire about agency-structure issue of 
districting in Tamil Nadu. It also follows Karnam historiography to privilege the 
study of districting (an political-administrative development) in Tamil Nadu, to 
blaze a new path away from the routine political, top down, literary ventures of 
research in South India history.

Districting is both a structure and a process. In the initial stages the efforts 
that go into its making, ie. structuring the district, may be denoted as districting. 
Also the same term could be used for the maintenance and management of the 
district that has been brought about. Similarly the thought process that goes to 
visualize the office of the Collector is an agential issue. After its formation, the 
mode of upkeep of the office and functions of the Collector slowly creeps to a 
structural issue. However it is undeniable that the structure of the district and the 
agency of the Collector are made for each other. One develops the other and one 
affects the other. Huge district and huge problems of even small districts cannot 
be met by the agency. Miniscule districts and ceremonial functions of the 
Collector might not warrant their existence itself. Hence an assumption of
cooperative dynamics of the district as a structure and Collector as the agency might be termed as 'development districting'.

During 1765-1947 A.D, under the British Colonial Rule, district in India and in the Madras Presidency was rigorously built up to bring the totality of the government closer to the people. It was the sub-system at the bottom of the provincial administration performing specific tasks assigned to it. Revenue, Law and Order were the dominant considerations and hence the District Collector was accepted as the pre-eminent officer in the district administration. From the British point of view the maintenance of the position of the District Collector was inevitable to the maintenance of the British Rule in India.

To begin with, the East India Company appointed Collectors to superintend the revenue collections. As the Company’s sway extended, the army of the Company could not be present everywhere, and hence the Collector was made officially responsible for law and order. However, during the second half of the nineteenth century, district administration and the Collector faced two challenges: the first was the growth of the functional departments having vertical linkages up to the central level and the second was the establishment of the local self-governing institutions. In the first half of the twentieth century, the structure of district administration consisted of four tiers: Panchayat at the village level, the block/Firka, Taluk and the district at the apex level. Consequently at the district level, the administration was centralized in the hands of Collector, while other district authorities coordinated with the Collector in the functional spheres.
Like the British before them, the Government of India found it necessary to continue the British structure of district administration. However, there was more urgent necessity for the Indian Government to expand and deepen the functional departments in order to cater to the quality of life and welfare of the people. At the same time, the Government of India also felt the importance of democratic decentralization of rural and urban governments. Hence the district became the focal point of not merely land revenue collection and maintenance of law and order but to a host of developmental activities.

Since the strings of district administration is kept together in the hands of the Collector several problems have arisen. He is responsible for everything done by the state/central governments and functional agencies in his geographical area. No ministry knows how much of his time is entitled to and none has any capacity for ensuring that it receives that portion of his time and energy. He is responsible to everybody for everything with varying degrees of clarity. No one can hold him responsible for anything in particular for few facilities exist with him.

Hence two schools of thought have emerged in post-Independence India with regard to district administration. The first school, led by R.Dwarkadas, maintained that the office of the Collector was designed primarily to meet the requirement of a police state under foreign domination. The school wants a thorough overhaul of the duties and powers of the Collector, by stripping him of the excessive responsibilities and making functional agencies more independent.
The second school of thought, which has emerged from the lobby of civil servants themselves, has believed that the office of the Collector has stood the test of time and that it should be retained with appropriate structural changes so that it does not become incongruous with democratic set-up.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has weighed both schools of thought. It has accepted the larger truths inherent in both these arguments. Weakening the role and authority of the Collector would lead to proliferation of multiple and complex agencies in a district but that would fetch problems of coordination. If the office of the Collector is abolished, there is no functional substitute or model of district administration that is readily available and handy. At the same time there is a growing need for efficient district administration to take care of the poverty of rural areas and the infrastructures of industrial urban areas. Hence the Government of Tamil Nadu bowed to democratic pressures of efficient district administration and to the wisdom of the administrative experience, not by abolishing or weakening the office of the Collector but by creating smaller districts in terms of their practical need.

In the pre-Independence period the purposes of the British for the formation of the districts were to annihilate the old political structures to bring about territorial and political control, to enforce law and order, to meet the military costs and to bring about a mechanism by which their Raj could be kept up. For these purposes, the office of the Collector, his power and functions, as well as his role were either strengthened or trimmed. Colonial districting was
inclined more towards the welfare of the Raj and not to the welfare of the ‘natives’. In the post-Independence period, the district as a structure, and the Collector as the agency were allowed to be retained and maintained, now to serve the development and welfare of the ‘citizen’. As the ethos of district administration had changed, there came the necessity to bring about a structural adequacy to the and the agencies compatibility of the agency to the structure. Tamil Nadu attempted both these exercises.

In the process of obtaining structural-agential equilibrium in Tamil Nadu, the political interference was never allowed to surface. There were bitter political feuds perhaps in the naming of the district (witness the naming of the Madurai Kamaraj District to naming all districts during M.G. Ramachandran’s Chief Ministership and the consequent abolition of the names of all political personalities in any of the districts), but it could be safely be asserted that politics has never played a role in districting. Only aspirations and needs of the people and functional overload of the bigger districts were the reasons for the bifurcation of existing districts into new ones.

With regard to assessment of agential work of revenue Collector, it could be safely be said that land revenue was the basic and most important revenue in the pre-Independence period and the role of the Collector in the post-Independence period in that regard had slowly shrunk, for land revenue was not the major source for revenue for any state in India. With regard to upkeep of law and order in the pre-Independence period, the function of the Collector as
District Magistrate were fulsome but in the post-Independence period, the separation of the judiciary from the executive reduced the volume of work for the Collector but not the responsibilities.

As needs and aspirations and the contexts, of social groups differ, development administration in Tamil Nadu finds itself embodied in working out the participation of the people in their development and welfare and in making, implementation and evaluation of public policy issues. In sorting out the optimality of the public policies between those that satisfy the groups and those that cater to homogenize all the population, the district as a structure and the Collector as the agent continue to be highly relevant. If there was any time gained by the collector from the revenue and law and order spheres, it has been more utilized in the development side by the Collector now. It only means development districting in Tamil Nadu, in both its structural and agential roles continue to be interactive and more focussed to the democratic and basic needs of the people, which only means development districting in Tamil Nadu is a meaningful, but a complex dynamics.
END NOTES

