

GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISION RIVER FLOWING AND CLIMATE SYSTEM IN TAMILNADU

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Geographical Division

Geography of the Tamil land influenced the Tamils of the Sangam Period, to a large extent. According to *Tolkappiyam*, the Tamil speaking people were divided into four major divisions based on the geographical conditions. They were the people of the mountain (Kuringi), of the forest (Mullai), of the plain (Marudom) and of the sea coast (Neidal). Towards the end of the sangam epoch, the Tamils added one more division, ie. Paalai (Desert). People led different ways of life and different cultures evolved in these regions. After Independence, the heterogeneity of the Province was rationalized by its partition into five separate States-Orissa, Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Mysore and Kerala. Out of the Madras Presidency, Madras State was formed on 1 November 1956.

Madras Presidency was the second largest province in British India and had a population of 46 million in 1931, as compared with Great Britain's population of 40 million. About half of the Madras Presidency spoke Tamil. The Tamil-speaking area, which is referred to in these pages as Tamilnad, is the home of Tamil language which has an unbroken literary record, apart from Sanskrit in India.

Lady Pentland, whose husband was Governor of Madras from 1912 to 1918, described the extent of the Presidency as "bigger than any other Indian province except Burma, and nearly five times bigger than Scotland, with a population nearly ten times bigger, speaking seven principal languages". She continued, "It has a special Madrasi clannishness, perhaps as a recompense for its isolation at an extremity, like Scotland".

River System

Tamilaham has a fine river system in Cauveri. Palar, Vaigai, Pennar, Vellar, Tamiraparani, Paraliyar, Bharathappuzha and Periyar are the important rivers in Tamil Nadu. Though they are short in length and small in size, they supply a substantial amount of water needed for cultivation.

The Cauveri known as the 'South Indian Ganges', is famous for its sacred character, beautiful scenery and the maximum use of its water. It was celebrated in Tamil literature and

history. It runs 475 miles. Brahmagiri near Talaikkaviri in Kudagu is its birth place. It flows south-eastwards across the Mysore plateau and enters Tamil Nadu after crossing the Eastern Ghats. The Cauveri is the only river in South India whose water is used for irrigation and other purposes without even a drop of it being wasted. The Chola Ruler, Karikala, controlled the frequent floods and raised high banks along both sides of the river and constructed the famous Kallanai. Because of this river, Tanjore has come to be called 'the rice bowl of Tamilaham'. Srirangapatnam, Hogennakkal, Srirangam, Trichy, Tanjore etc, are some of the places which are benefited by Cauveri. It bifurcates into two branches, called Kollidam and Kaveri, at Srirangam. The entire Districts of Trichirappalli and Tanjore get irrigation from this river. This historical river is now politically a thorny issue.

The Palar originates from Nandidurg in Mysore. It runs through the North Arcot District and falls into the Bay of Bengal. The towns of Vaniyambady, Vellore, Arcot and Chengelpet are situated on its banks. It irrigates a limited area. The Pennar rises in Chennanarayan Pettai in Mysore. It passes through Bangalore, Salem and Cuddalore. It has limited scope for irrigation. The Vaigai raises from the Palani Hills and flows through the town of Madurai. It falls into the Bay of Bengal. Now-a-days, it is dry for most part of the year. The Vaigai dam was constructed on it. It waters a limited area in Madurai and Ramnad Districts.

Indika of Megasthenes refers to the Tamiraparani River. It originates in the southern part of the Western Ghats. It flows through Tirunelveli District. The South West Monsoon waters it. This river falls into the Bay of Bengal, creating a large delta at its end. Korkai, the famous sea-port, was situated at its mouth. The agriculturists of Tirunelveli depend on this river. It is said that Tirunelveli is the gift of Tamiraparani as Egypt is said to be the gift of the Nile.

Bharathappuzha is the largest river in Kerala State. Its length is 156 miles. On its banks stand Chittor, Palghat and Ponnai. Periyar is another river in Kerala. The length of the river is 146 miles. It rises in Ayiramalai. It flows through Kalali and Alwaye. One of its branches flows through Kodumgallur, the capital of Chera Kingdom.

Another river is Paraliyaru. It flows through the taluks of Tovalai and Agastisvaram in Nanjinad and falls into the Manakkudy Estuary. The length of the river is 23 miles. Bhutappandi, Kottar, Nagercoil and Suchindram, the important towns in Kanyakumari

District, are situated on the banks of the river. The Pandyan Anai, constructed across this river, recalls to our memory, the Pandyan rulers.

Generally, the river beds are fertile. They provide people with the necessities of life. Most of the historical capitals, temples, cities and important towns were constructed on the banks of these rivers. These cities served as the seats of Dravidian civilization. The Gulf of Mannar is famous for pearl-fishing.

Climate and Rainfall

The economy of Tamils is closely associated with the rainfall and the climate. Tamilaham has been one of the driest regions in the south. Though Tamil Nadu enjoys a high temperature throughout the year, April, May and June experience the hottest climate. But Tamil Nadu is blessed with regular monsoons. During South-West (June-October) and North East Monsoons, the temperature falls at a rapid rate which continues from October to December. North East Monsoon provides adequate rains to Tamil Nadu. Kerala receives the largest amount of rainfall from the South West Monsoon. But it provides scanty rain to Dindugal, Madurai, Tanjore, Pattukottai, Coimbatore, Pollachi, Tenkasi, Kanchipuram, Tiruppattur, Ambur Vaniyambadi, Namakkal, Karur, Erode, Trichy and Kanyakumari Districts. But the North-East Monsoon provides the heaviest rainfall for Tamil Nadu. Of the two, the major contribution is from the North East Monsoon which is also noted for its vagaries. Usually, the North East Monsoon gives fertility to the Southern Districts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The average rainfall is 40". On certain occasions, Tamilaham faced drought and famine due to the failure of monsoons.

Its Effects

The natural boundaries of Tamilaham protect its history to a large extent. Tamilaham was not affected by any invasion while the north suffered from various expeditions by Sakas, Huns, Ghazni etc. But the geographical conditions of Tamilaham had saved it from the impact of exotic culture and political influences. Till the Muslim invasion in the 14th Century, Tamilaham preserved the purity of Dravidian culture, mainly due to the geographical protection. Hence we can conclude that the historic, economic, cultural, social and religious developments in Tamilaham are moulded by its geographical character.

To sum up, geography influenced the course of history of Tamil Nadu. While Delhi was constantly attacked by invaders through the Himalayan Passes, Tamil Nadu at the

Southern end of Indian peninsula was free from invasions till Malik Kafur marched into Madurai. This was chiefly responsible for the cultural exclusiveness which characterizes Tamil Nadu.

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At the same time, the fact that even the important river Cauvery has its origin in Karnataka has also compelled Tamil Nadu to stay within the Indian Union. In other words, geography generates both centripetal and centrifugal forces in Tamil Nadu. The centrifugal tendency results from its cultural exclusiveness which has been determined by the geographical location of Tamil Nadu while centripetal trend results from its dependence on Neighbouring States for riverine shares.

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