



Historical Dictionary of the Tamils (Historical Dictionaries of Peoples and Cultures)

By Vijaya Ramaswamy

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The cultural heritage of the Tamils dates back two thousand years. As a language, Tamil has existed since the pre-Christian era, around the same time as the early classical languages Hebrew and Sankrit. The first book on Tamil grammar, the *Tolkappiyam*, was written around the fifth century BCE. Today, Tamil cuisine has captured the imagination of the vegetarian world, and Tamil cinema, with its heavy political allegories and opera style music, is popular across the globe. Not confined to their homeland of Tamil Nadu, the Tamils constitute a powerful diaspora in Sri Lanka (where they are fighting for their political rights), Singapore (where Tamil is one of the national languages), and Malaysia. The diaspora extends to places as far flung as the U.K., the U.S., and Australia. Tamil temples and cultural centers can be found everywhere from Pittsburgh to San Francisco and from Texas to Toronto.

The *Historical Dictionary of the Tamils* presents a vivid picture of the Tamils' cultural and literary traditions, both the historic past and the vibrant present. This is done through a list of acronyms and abbreviations, a chronology, an introductory essay, a bibliography, black and white photos, maps, and over 500 cross-referenced dictionary entries covering Tamil history from the megalithic age to present day and Tamil personalities, economics, literature, music, politics, and cinema. This one-volume reference is an excellent entry point into a deeper understanding of the cultural milieu of the Tamils.

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Editorial Review

Review

The volume will make an excellent addition to academic libraries, both colleges and larger high schools, as well as to general library systems. (*American Reference Books Annual*)

[A] straightforward, meticulously researched text. Recommended for cultural studies and South Asian-oriented collections. (*Library Journal*)

If one wanted to get some initial information on contemporary figures in Tamil political, cultural and economic life, then this would be the volume to refer to? in fact, the lively entries informed by an insider knowledge of contemporary figures in Chennai metropolitan life are one of the unusual aspects of this dictionary and certainly among its strengths. So, in effect, imagining a potential reader who wishes to gain some knowledge of contemporary Tamil metropolitan politics and personages as a preliminary to beginning research on the subject? for such a person this dictionary would be a useful tool. (Srilata Raman, University of Toronto, 2008 *Journal of the American Oriental Society*)

The approximately 500 cross-referenced entries of this dictionary provide a portrait of the history and culture of the Tamil-speaking people of Tamil Nadu (in India) and in diaspora in Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Malaysia. Covering the megalithic age to the present day, Ramaswamy (history, Jawaharlal Nehru U., India) offers information on Tamil history, significant people, economics, the arts, and politics. She also provides an introductory essay on Tamil history and culture, a chronology, and thematic bibliographies. (*Reference and Research Book News*)

The Tamils are known for their rich culture, brilliant intellects, powerful language, and vigorous economic and social advance. This book makes millennia of Tamil history, and its colourful contemporary politics, come alive. (Professor Surjit Mansingh, formerly School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University)

This book is an invaluable resource for the history and culture of the Tamils, whose extraordinarily rich traditions of more than 2000 years form a basic part of both ancient and modern India. (Professor George Hart, Chair in Tamil Studies, University of California, Berkeley)

About the Author

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