CHAPTER V

PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

The area covered under this study is Tamil Nadu, one of the States in India. Its capital is Madras and its official language is Tamil which is one of the ancient languages of the world. A detailed profile of the area is given in this chapter.

5.1 GEOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Tamil Nadu has an area of 130088 sq.kms. representing 4.08 per cent of geographical area of India. Tamil Nadu is the southern most State in Indian Peninsular. It lies in the shape of rhomboid between the Deccan Plateau and the sea. It is bounded by Karnataka and Andra Pradesh States in the north, Bay of Bengal on the east, Indian Ocean on the south and Kerala State on the west. It lies between $8^05'$ and $13^035'$ of Northern latitude and $76^015'$ and $80^020'$ of the eastern longitude. It is separated by Gulf of Mannar from Sri Lanka.

5.2 HISTORICAL PROFILE

The archaeological excavations have proved the existence of a very ancient stoneage culture and megalithic culture well before Christian era. As such culture and history of Tamil Nadu have their roots in pre-Aryan period. Tamil poems called as Tamil Anthologies dating back to 300 BC - 200 AD form a remarkable source of History of Tamils. They speak of the pattern of families, kinship, social set up, political administration, architecture, foreign trade, agriculture, irrigation, cottage industries, division of labour, fine arts, Academy of learned people etc.

Chola kings established their dominance and ruled this part of the country till 5th century A.D. Then kalabras captured it and ruled it till 6th century A.D. Kalabras were against Aryan culture. But Pallava regime which lasted from 6th to 9th century A.D marked the fusion of Aryan elements into Dravidian culture and Aryan practices received royal patronage and caste system came into practice. Cholas reemerged in 9th century A.D. This period experienced the economic phenomenon of urbanisation due to expansion of foreign trade. After this period, sultans, Nayaks, Marattas

2. MIDS (1989) op.cit.
and Palayakaras ruled different parts of Tamil Nadu. Portuguese, Dutch and French colonies were established in different parts. In 1638, East India Company established its rule in Tamil Nadu. During this period the state was known as Madras presidency.

The contribution of Tamils in National Freedom Movement is not insignificant. In fact, the history of freedom struggle in India should start from this part of the country as many chieftains and petty rulers had fought against British supremacy even before the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

After Independence, the state was called as Madras state. In 1956, under the State Reorganisation Scheme, some parts of the state went to other states and few parts of neighboring states were annexed with Tamil Nadu depending on the language spoken in these areas. In 1969, the name of the state was changed as Tamil Nadu.

5.3 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

In 1981, the total population of Tamil Nadu was 48.41m. It was the seventh largest state in India in terms of population. In 1991, it has become 5,56,38,318\(^3\). The

total population has increased by 12.80 per cent in rural areas and 19.28 per cent in urban areas during 1981-1991. The overall growth rate of population of this state is 14.94 per cent over this decade. The density of population was 372 per sq.km. in 1981. In 1991 it has come to 428 per sq.km. as against 267 per sq.km for India.

The sex ratio was 977 females per 1000 male in 1981. It has declined to 972:1000 in 1991. The percentage of literate population to total population was 48.78 in 1981. The 1991 figure is 63.82 per cent pushing the state to the third rank in India next to Kerala and Maharashtra.

5.4 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PROFILE

The Dravidian race is the dominant race of Tamil Nadu constituting nearly 97 per cent of population. According to 1981 Census, Hindus account for 88.90 per cent of total population of Tamil Nadu (82.64 per cent for all India) followed by Christians 5.80 per cent (2.40 per cent for all India) and Muslims 5.20 per cent (11.40 per cent for India) and others constitute 0.10 per cent (3.56 per cent for all India). There is no discrimination against linguistic and religious minorities and they are participating in the economic, social and cultural spheres of this state. This co-existence is an important feature of Tamil Nadu, which
remained almost peaceful during the recent religious riot
an aftermath of demolition of the historical monument namely
Babri Masjid at Ayodya in December 1992. It has been
attributed to the rationalist movement of the humanist
leader Periyar E.V.Ramasami.

The caste system is a predominant social
institution. The early Tamils did not have this social
stratification. Under the Aryan customs which influenced
the social set up after 6th century A.D., the society was
classified into four castes - Brahmins, Shaktriyas, Vysias
and Shudras. Brahmins were treated as learned people and
they despised physical labour. They advised kings on
the basis of Shastras. Shaktriyas were the rulers.
Vysias were the merchants. Shudras were the manual
labourers. They performed the social functions which
were looked down by other caste groups.

The same caste hierarchy continues today though not
with legal sanction. Each caste has many sub-castes. As per
the official list of the Government of Tamil Nadu, there are
300 castes including 20 to 30 principal and more than 250
sub-castes. The struggle in favour of the oppressed castes
was organised in the state by Periyar E.V Ramsami and this
led to the first amendment to the Constitution of India
favouring reservation of jobs in central Government and
seats in educational institutions for schedule castes and
scheduled tribes. Tamil Nadu Govt. is the pioneer in
reserving seats and jobs for the scheduled castes (SCs),
scheduled tribes (STs), backward castes and most backward
castes. The reservation ratio is 18 per cent, 1 per cent,
30 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. The caste is the
basis of many welfare schemes implemented by the state
Government. Inter-caste and inter religious marriages and
marriages conducted without any religious rituals but in a
rational way were legalised by passing a legislation in
Tamil Nadu Assembly in late 1960s as a result of the
rationalist movement. Therefore social history of Tamil
Nadu is incomplete if it does not include the life,
activities and achievements of Periyar E.V. Ramasami. The
recent Central Government order favouring reservation of
jobs for backward caste people as per the recommendations of
Mandal Commission is in fact a fruit of his efforts.

5.5 POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROFILE

Local autonomy and elections to local governing bodies
is not a new phenomenon for Tamils. Such local governments
were replaced by district boards during the British rule.
After Independence, in 1958 the three tier system of local
administration was introduced having village panchayats as
the base, and panchayat unions and district development councils as their upper layers. The towns and cities have municipalities and metropolitan cities have corporations as their local bodies. Elected members represent Panchayats, Panchayat Unions, Municipal Councils and Corporations.

For revenue administration and public administration purposes the state is divided into 22 districts. The districts are named after social reformers and freedom fighters belonging to the state. The districts are Madras, Chengai M.G.R., Salem, Dharmapuri, North Arcot Aubedkar, Thiruvannamalai Sambuvarayar, Coimbatore, Nilgris, Nagai Quaid-e-milleth, Periyar, Trichirappalli, South Arcot, Thanjavur, Pudukottai, Ramanad, Pasumpon Thevar, Madurai, Kamarajar, Dindigul Anna, Thirnelveli Kattabomman, V.O.Chidambarnar and Kanniyakumari.

A district has 3 to 4 revenue divisions; each revenue division has 9 to 11 taluks; each taluk has 10 - 12 firkas; each firka has 15-20 revenue villages, and each revenue village has many villages and hamlets. The district administrative head is the District Collector. Sub-Collector or Revenue Divisional Officer is in charge of administration of a revenue division. Tahsildars look after the taluk administration, Revenue Inspectors take care of Firkas and Village Administrative Officers of revenue villages. There were in 1992, 22 districts, 60 revenue
divisions, 172 taluks, 1101 Firkas and 17275 revenue village in Tamil Nadu.  

Tamil Nadu has a Legislative Assembly with 235 members. The party which has the majority of elected members will be the ruling party and its leader will be the Chief Minister of the state. Chief Minister with the help of a council of Ministers and executives look after the administrative affairs of the state. The Assembly is headed by 'Avai Thalaivar' (speaker) elected by members. The Assembly passes legislations for the improvement of the state.

A detailed note on the police administrative set up of the state is given in Chapter IV.

5.6 ECONOMIC PROFILE

The state Domestic Product (SDP) is the economic indicator of growth of the state economy. SDP measures the value of goods and services produced within the state in the year under consideration. The economy of Tamil Nadu consists of primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. It is primarily agrarian. The average annual growth rate is nearly

4 per cent. The average annual growth rate of primary sector was 1.80 per cent, that of secondary sector was 3.9 per cent and in tertiary sector it was 6.4 per cent. The contribution from primary sector is declining; that of secondary sector remains the same and that of service sector is increasing.\(^5\) This is a welcome change.

Still agriculture is the main source of livelihood. The employment in primary sector was 63.70 per cent in 1981, that in secondary sector was 16.90 per cent and in service sector 19.4 per cent. As per 1991 census (provisional) the workers of India constituted 37.64 per cent of the population. Out of this 34.12 per cent are main workers and 3.52 per cent are marginal worker. Males in the former category constitute 50.54 per cent and females 16.43 per cent. Males in the latter category form 0.98 per cent and females 6.26 per cent. In Urban areas out of the total working force 9.73 per cent are females and rest are males. Tamil Nadu gives a different picture. 44.13 per cent of population are workers. Of this 57.01 per cent are males and rest are females. Main male workers constitute

55.85 per cent and the rest females. In Urban areas, out of 34.66 per cent workers, 53.79 per cent are males and the rest are females. Of this 53.32 per cent are male main workers and 13.45 per cent are female main workers.

Social welfare measures such as setting up of health centres in villages and dispensaries or hospitals in towns; opening up of schools and colleges; providing housing and water facilities, electrifying the villages and operating fair price shops to ensure the supply of essential goods to the poor at fair prices are taken by the state government to improve the living conditions.

By 1990-91, 439 towns, 15815 villages and 47725 hamlets were electrified; 262 hospitals were established; 40103 schools, 209 colleges and 20 medical colleges were established. The Government is also implementing Nutritious Noon Meal Programme and supplies food to poor people. Old Age Pension Scheme is also being implemented.

5.7 PROFILE OF WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU

From the Tamil Anthologies, the position of women in early Tamil Nadu could be understood. These Anthologies reveal that women had a right to learn and demand for justice. They acted as advisers to the kings and composed poems. One poem written during 200 B.C – 300 A.D says that
only education makes a woman beautiful and not her dress nor her long hair. The society accepted ‘Kalavu Manam’ (Love Marriage). During the times of war, women, children, old people and cattle were sent to places of safety. But polygamy was also common.

In the later period, due to Aryan influence Manu code became the code of conduct. The emergence of caste system prevented marriage between castes and love marriages. Manu code compares women with slaves and animals. It stresses that a man with a son is the most blessed person in the world and that a woman who cannot give birth to a child through her husband can have sexual relationship with her brother-in-law and bring forth a child. This code of Manu underlines the Hindu manners and customs till today. As a result women have lost their freedom to learn and earn and their personal autonomy, as the code states that a woman should depend on her father during her early age, on her husband after marriage and on her son in her old age.

Periyar E.V Ramasami, brought about a revolutionary change in the attitude of people of Tamil Nadu towards women. He identified the causes for women’s subordinate position and talked about and discussed them in his writings and speeches. He stressed even in 1920s that deprivation of
ownership of means of production and lack of education and training to operate equipments had made women male dependents. He condemned the rituals which Hindus practice from birth to death as they dishonour human beings in general and women and labouring class in particular. He was the first one in India to advocate birth control to improve the physical and mental health of women. Through his Self - Respect Movement he tried to improve the position of women and he stood for women’s education and employment. Poets Bharathiyar and Bharathidasan advocated the same ideals. His followers put them into practice in the form of legislative and welfare schemes. Since 1967 the Government of Tamil Nadu have been implementing a number of schemes to improve the position of women. It has gone to the extent of reserving 30 per cent seats for women; providing scholarships to first generation learners and providing scholarships to the daughters of widows upto UG classes.

As a result of these efforts and general awakening among women, 51.33 per cent of women had become literates (13th rank in the country), and 47.7 percent of rural women and 24.3 per cent of urban women were in employment in
1987 - 88. The employment of women in the organised sector has shown an upward trend indicating an increase in the employment among educated women. It was as follows:

Table 5.1 Women Employment in Organised Sector (in thousands) in Tamil Nadu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>1987</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>144.8</td>
<td>268.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>129.4</td>
<td>160.2</td>
<td>166.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Despite the measures taken by the Government, women's position still remains depressing. Working women bear the dual burden of home work and office work. Female infanticide is practised in some pockets of the state. Bride burning, raping and dowry deaths are common features. The educated employed women also commit suicide due to their inability to live separated from the husbands for fear of social aversion. Women face illtreatment from husband and in-laws. Old women are deserted by their sons and daughters. Women suspects are raped in police custody. To

safeguard the interests of women and to promote peace in their familial situation women police are being recruited and All Women Police Stations are being set up to provide Counselling to the women in distress.