



# livelihoods

*today and tomorrow*

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‘Kshetram’

**Pandya Nadu**

Pandya Nadu is a region in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The word Pandya is derived from the Tamil word "Pandu" which has two different meanings- one is "very old" & the other meaning is "bull," a sign of masculinity & valor. Pandya Nadu includes districts of Madurai, Theni, Sivaganga, Ramanthapuram, Virudhunagar, Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi and Kanyakumari. Pandyans are one of the ancient Tamil dynasties & also among the three Tamil dynasties; the other two being Chola & Chera. Early Pandyans ruled parts of South India around 600 BCE to first half of 17th century CE. These kings at first ruled their country Pandya Nadu from Korkai, a seaport on the southernmost tip of Indian Peninsula & in later times moved to Madurai. Pandya Nadu is a region in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu.



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Pandyans excelled both in literature & trade. Controlled pearl fisheries, along the South Indian Coast, between Sri Lanka & India, which produced some of the finest pearls in known ancient world. There were also good poets in their courts. According to historians, they were the longest ruling dynasty in Indian history. Coming to colonial times, Tirunelveli was formed on 1 September 1799 by East India Company & it comprises of present day Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi & parts of Virudhunagar & Ramanthapuram districts. It is the second largest district after Villupuram district.

Theni district is divided into two natural divisions, the hilly areas are Periyakulam, Uthamapalayam and Andipatti, having thick vegetation and perennial streams from the hills on the western side and Cumbum valley, as it lies in Uthampalayam taluk. The district was formed by bifurcation from erstwhile Madurai district on 7 July 1996. Madurai is a major city and is the third largest city by population in Tamil Nadu. The city is located on the banks of river Vaigai and has been a major settlement for two millennia. The city was the longest continuous capital city until British rule in India and was the first major settlement in Central and Southern Asia.

Tuticorin district (Thoothukudi) was formed by dividing Tirunelveli district in 1986 and this district is known for pearl cultivation with an abundance of pearls being found in seas offshore. Virudhunagar was formed by separation of Old Ramanthapuram district in 1987 and was formerly called as Karmavirer Kamarajar district. Ramanthapuram district is an administrative district of Tamil Nadu state. Sivagangai district is located at a distance of 48 km from Madurai and is an important city for official and commercial purposes. It is the third largest city in the district after Karaikudi and Devakottai. Kanyakumari is also another important region, formerly known as Cape Comorin; it is the southernmost tip of peninsular India and also southern tip of Cardamom Hills. It has been a town since Sangam period. Sivaganga district has been carved out from composite Ramnad district.

The region also has forest resources; in Theni district alone it is around 33.70%. Wattle, softwood, fuel wood, cashew, neem, tamarind are the main forest plantation species in Theni district. The region of Tirunelveli is rich in minerals, as there are many mines and quarries; limestone, granite and garnet sand are some of the minerals mined or produced in the district. The climatic conditions across the erstwhile Pandya Nadu varies, as the coastal belt experiences tropical climatic conditions characterized with immensely hot summer, gentle winter and frequent rain showers. The summer extends between March and



June, when the climate is very humid. It registers a maximum temperature of 39 °C (102 °F) and a minimum temperature of 32 °C (90 °F). The region receives rainfall from both Northeast monsoon and as well from Southwest monsoon. The coolest month is January and the hottest months are from May to June. There are 21 islands between Thoothukudi and Rameshwaram shores in Gulf of Mannar and it has been notified as the first Marine Biosphere Reserve of India. There are 36,000 species of flora and fauna in the region. They are covered with mangroves, sandy shores, sea grass beds that are conducive for turtle nesting. Coral reefs and pearl oysters are some of the exotic species. Algae, reef fish, holothurians,

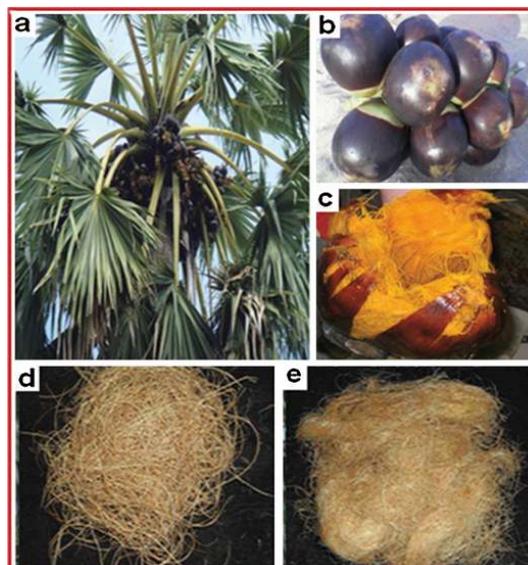


shrimps, lobsters, crabs and Mollusca are very common. There are close to 72 varieties of fish found in the region, out of 600 recorded varieties of fish.

The economy of the region is vast and diverse. In Tuticorin, it is centered around the port, which provides most employment. The region also hosts industries and there are many coal based power plants. Kovilpatti consists of many small sized industries; match stick industries. In Virudhunagar, the predominant economy is match industry, fireworks & printing. The area is also the main market for oil, chicory, coffee seeds, dry chillies and pulses. In Rajapalayam, there are ginning factories, spinning mills, power loom and handloom industries & also it is the second biggest weaving town in the state after Coimbatore. Ramanthapuram’s economy is centered on chilli and pepper, with 34% of share in production & making it the top producer of chilli in Tamil Nadu.

In Madurai, the economy is predominantly agrarian. In Vaigai delta, across Madurai North, Melur, Nilakottai and Uthamapalayam, these areas are known as “double-crop paddy belts.” The farmers in the district supplement their income with subsidiary occupations like that of dairy farming, poultry farming, pottery, brick making, mat weaving and carpentry. In foothills of Kodaikanal hills, there are jasmine plantations and trade in flower markets. With the advent of Small Scale Industries (SSI) after 1991, the industrialization in the region increased employment in the sector across the district. The region is one of the rubber growing areas in South India and there are rubber-based industries in Madurai. Gloves, sporting goods, mats, other utility products and automobile rubber components are produced by industries. Automobile manufacturers are the major consumers of rubber components produced in the city. There are also numerous textile, granite and chemical industries operating in Madurai. The state government also proposed two IT-based SEZs in the region too.

Tirunelveli too is predominantly agrarian and is a major producer of rice, coconuts, bananas, spices and other forest-based products. The district is home to almost 50% of the buffalo population and it being a coastal district, there is also fishery development and production. This district has the third largest cement company in India; India Cements Limited, which



began in this district in 1949. In Theni district, economy is mostly agriculture & land area under cultivation is 4.33%. The principal crops under production are sugarcane, cotton, rice, millets, cereals, pulses, groundnut, gingelly, silk, banana, coconut, tea, coffee, cardamom, grapes and mangoes.

Cumbum valley is the major centre for grape production, with more than 4,000 small farmers producing over 90,000 tonnes of muscat grapes and the Thomson seedless grapes and they are harvested throughout the year. Cotton spinning mills and sugar mills are the major industries in the district. It is also home to the largest quantity of cardamom trade in this district. This district is also one of the active business hubs in the western side of TN; thus, inviting more industries to its locality. Sivaganga is one of the country's 250 most backward districts out of a total of 640. It was one of the six districts in Tamil Nadu, received funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF).

Livelihoods in erstwhile Pandya Nadu are very diverse. The livelihoods are centered on agriculture and allied activities. The local people work as cultivators, agriculture labourers, engaged in household industries, marginal workers, marginal cultivators and marginal agriculture labourers, marginal workers in household industries, etc.. There are off farm livelihoods provided by industrial sector & many of them work as daily wage labourers. In Tirunelveli, jaggery is produced from palmyrah juice and production of jaggery is one of the key livelihoods for local population of Tiruchendur and Sattankulam taluks. The other workers are salt pan workers; the district of Tuticorin constitutes of 70 percent of the total salt production of Tamil Nadu and 30 percent of that of India. The state is the second largest producer of salt in India next to Gujarat. The district remains the source of farm employment, as the Tamirabarani river is the major lifeline of Tirunelveli district. Kanyakumari, region has a major tourism industry and provides livelihoods to many of the local population.

The region has its own challenges, thermal discharge from thermal plants and excessive brine run off from the salt pans is impacting the flora and fauna in the region to a large extent. Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve was under threat due to coral mining, high amount of seaweed collection. The region, being home to one of the world's richest concentration of marine species and lifeline for close to 1,50,000 fisher folk, who rely on the coast for their livelihoods, is under the threat of disaster. It was under UNDP initiative, the coral reef cover along the Biosphere Reserve (BR) increased from 37 percent to 43 percent (2005-2009). The engagement of local populations help in expanding horizons to look beyond traditional coastal and marine based livelihoods and organizing of local populations helped in generation of alternative livelihoods and enterprises. We need to protect the sensitive ecological belt, as the 7,500 km coastline is home to 20 percent of the country's population, who are poor and vulnerable. With growing impact of climate change, the dependency on coastal livelihoods is under threat. ❖