

Political History of Tamil Nadu

European colonization (1650–1850)

European settlements began to appear in the Tamil country during the Vijayanagara Empire. In 1605, the [Dutch](#) established trading posts in the [Coromandel Coast](#) near Gingee and in [Pulicat](#). (for location: <http://maps.google.com/maps?q=13.416667,80.316667&ie=UTF8&ll=13.400307,80.266113&spn=0.163648,0.31929&t=h&z=12&iwloc=addr&om=1>)

Pulicat: Its a travel of 54 Kms from CMBT (Koyambedu), follow the 100 ft Road, from Koyambedu towards reterri side, follow straight till you reach a dead end, where you have to take a left turn, passing thro' an entry point of "Ennore Port Trust". Up on entry into Minjur, (opp to Inidan Oil Bunk) take a right turn, cross the Railway level crossing, turn first left & continue following the road, for next 17 kms (You can maintain only 25 km/h due to wavy road with pot holes). After this 17 kms You would hit a road " Ponneri- Pulicat" main road, where take a right turn & the 4 km drive ends in Pulicat Jetty only. **Entry tax** for vehicle is 20 (with receipt) is collected. By then you would be surrounded by local Acquaintances requesting you to prefer their Boat. (Rs 200 to 300 per boat, inclusive of drop, waiting & return - each boat can accommodate 18 adults). The ride of 15 minutes to a lonely Island, where you see Casuarina plantation. Sea is calm and not to shallow. No one can say how safe is to swim there..The friendly Boat man stays with you waiting till you return. Ideal Picnic place for spending nearly 6 hours... It's unfortunate that there is **no provision for night stay** available there as of now. The light house personnel can be requested for permission for a visit up there, from where you could have a good look at the sea..

The British East India Company built a 'factory' (warehouse) at Armagaon (Durgarazpatnam), a village around 35 miles North of Pulicat, as the site in 1626. In 1639, Francis Day, one of the officers of the company, secured the rights over a three-mile long strip of land a fishing village called Madraspatnam from the Damarla Venkatadri Nayakudu, the Nayak of [Vandavasi](#). The East India Company built [Fort St George](#) and castle on an approximate five square kilometre sand strip.^[71] This was the start of the town of Madras. The coromandel coast was ruled by the [Vijayanagara King \(Aravidu Dynasty\)](#), [Peda Venkata Raya](#), based in [Chandragiri](#) and [Vellore Fort](#). With his approval the English began to exercise sovereign rights over their strip of land.^[72]

In 1675, a column of [Bijapur](#) army came to Thanjavur to help Vijayaraghava and retrieved Vallam from the Madurai Nayak. However the same army subsequently killed Vijayaraghava Nayak and Ekoji managed to ascend the throne of Thanjavur kingdom. Thus began the Maratha rule of Thanjavur. After Ekoji, his three sons namely Shaji,

Serfoji I, Thukkoji alias Thulaja I ruled Thanjavur. The greatest of the Maratha rulers was [Serfoji II](#) (1798–1832). Serfoji devoted his life to the pursuit of culture and Thanjavur became renowned as a seat of learning. Serfoji's patronised art and literature and built the [Saraswati Mahal](#) Library at his palace. The incursion of the Muslim armies from the north forced a southward migration of Hindus from the central Deccan and the Andhra countries to seek shelter under the Nayak and the Maratha kings. The famous [Carnatic music](#) composer [Tyagaraja](#) (1767–1847), along with the Trinity of Carnatic music flourished in the Thanjavur district during this time.^[73]

With the demise of the [Mughal](#) Emperor [Aurangzeb](#) in 1707, his empire dissolved amidst numerous succession wars and the vassals of the empire began to assert their independence. The administration of the southern districts of Tamil Nadu was fragmented with hundreds of [Poligars](#) or *Palayakkarars* governing a few villages each. These local chieftains often fought amongst each other over territory. This turned the political situation in the Tamil country and in South India in general into confusion and chaos. The European traders found themselves in a situation where they could exploit the prevailing confusion to their own advantage.^[74]

The [French](#) were relative newcomers to India. The [French East India Company](#) was formed in 1664 and in 1666 the French representatives obtained Aurangzeb's permission to trade in India. The French soon setup trading posts in [Pondicherry](#) on the Coromandel coast. They occupied [Karaikal](#) in 1739 and [Joseph François Dupleix](#) was appointed Governor of Pondicherry. In Europe the [War of the Austrian Succession](#) began in 1740 and eventually the British and the French forces in India were caught up in the conflict. There were numerous naval battles between the two navies along the Coromandel coast. The French led by [La Bourdonnais](#) attacked the poorly defended Fort St. George in Madras in 1746 and occupied it. [Robert Clive](#) was one of the prisoners of war from this battle. The war in Europe ended in 1748 and with the [peace of Aix-la-Chapelle](#) Madras was restored to the British.^[75]

The conflict between the British and the French continued, this time in political rather than military terms. Both the Nawab of the Carnatic and [Nizam of Hyderabad](#) positions were taken by rulers who were strongly sympathetic to the French. Chanda Sahib had been made Nawab of the Carnatic with Dupleix's assistance, while the British had taken up the cause of the previous incumbent, [Mohammed Ali Khan Walajah](#). In the resultant battle between the rivals, Clive assisted Mohammed Ali by attacking [Chanda Sahib](#)'s fort in [Arcot](#) and took possession of it in 1751. The French assisted Chanda Sahib in his attempts to drive Clive out of Arcot. However the large Arcot army assisted by the French was defeated by the British. The [Treaty of Paris \(1763\)](#) formally confirmed Mahommed Ali as the Nawab of the Carnatic. It was a result of this action and the increased British influence that in 1765 the Emperor of Delhi issued a [firman](#) (decree) recognising the British possessions in southern India.^[76]

Although the Company was becoming increasingly bold and ambitious in putting down resisting states, it was getting clearer day by day that the Company was incapable of governing the vast expanse of the captured territories. Opinion amongst the members of the [British Parliament](#) urged the government to control the activities of the Company. The Company's financial position was also bad and it had to apply for a loan from Parliament. Seizing this opportunity, the Parliament passed the Regulating Act (also known as [East India Company Act](#)) in 1773.^[77] The act set down regulations to control the Company Board and created the position of the [Governor General](#). [Warren Hastings](#) was appointed the first Governor-General. In 1784 [Pitt's India Act](#) made the Company subordinate to the [British Government](#).

The next few decades were of rapid growth and expansion in the territories controlled by the British. The [Anglo-Mysore Wars](#) of 1766 to 1799 and the [Anglo-Maratha Wars](#) of 1772 to 1818 put the Company in control of most of India.^[78] In a sign of the early resistance against the English control, the Palayakkarar chieftains of the old Madurai Kingdom, who had independent authority over their territories, ran into [a conflict](#) with the Company officials over tax collection. [Kattabomman](#), a local Palayakkarar chieftain in the Tirunelveli district, rebelled against the taxes imposed by the Company administration in the 1790s. After the First Polygar War (1799–1802), he was captured and hanged in 1799. A year later, the Second Polygar War erupted and was put down by the Company after a long and expensive campaign. The end of the Polygar Wars gave the British complete control over a major portion of Tamil Nadu.^[79]

In 1798 [Lord Wellesley](#) became the Governor-General. In the course of the next six years Wellesley made vast conquests and doubled the Company's territory. He shut out the French from further acquisitions in India, destroyed several ruling powers in the Deccan and the Carnatic, took the Mughal Emperor under the company's protection and compelled Serfoji, the king of Thanjavur to cede control of his kingdom. The Madras Presidency was established so that the territory under direct Company control could be administered effectively. The direct administration began to cause resentment among the people. In 1806 the soldiers of the [Vellore](#) cantonment rebelled when [William Bentinck](#), the Governor of Madras decreed that the native soldiers should abandon all caste marks. Fearing this act to be an attempt of forceful conversion to [Christianity](#), the [soldiers mutinied](#). The rebellion was suppressed but 114 British officers were killed and several hundred mutineers executed. Bentinck was recalled in disgrace.^{[80][81][82]}

The simmering discontent in the various districts of the company territories exploded in 1857 into the [Sepoy war](#). Although the rebellion had a huge impact on the state of the colonial power in India, Tamil Nadu was mostly unaffected by it. In consequence of the war, the British Government enacted the Act of 1858 to abolish the powers of the Company and transfer the government to the [Crown](#).

British rule (1850–1947)

In [1858](#) the British Crown assumed direct rule in India. During the early years the government was autocratic in many ways. The opinion of Indians in their own affairs was not considered by Britain as important. However, in due course the British Raj began to allow Indians participation in local government. Viceroy [Ripon](#) passed a resolution in 1882, which gave a greater and more real share in local government to the people. Further legislation such as the 1892 Indian councils Act and the 1909 "[Minto-Morley Reforms](#)" eventually led to the establishment of the [Madras Legislative Council](#).^[83] The [non-cooperation movement](#) started under [Mahatma Gandhi](#)'s leadership led the British government to pass the [Government of India Act](#) (also known as [Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms](#)) of 1919. First elections were held for the local assemblies in 1921.^[83]

Failure of the summer [monsoons](#) and administrative shortcomings of the [Ryotwari](#) system resulted in a severe famine in the Madras Presidency during 1876–1877.^[84] The government and several charitable institutions organised relief work in the city and the suburbs. Funds were also raised from Europeans in India and overseas for the famine relief. Humanitarians such as [William Digby](#) wrote angrily about the woeful failure of the British administration to act promptly and adequately in response to the wholesale suffering caused by the famine.^[85] When the famine finally ended with the return of the monsoon in 1878, between three and five million people had perished.^[84] In response to the devastating effects of the famine, the government organised a Famine Commission in 1880 to define the principles of disaster relief. The government also instituted a famine insurance grant, setting aside 1.5 million Rupees. Other civic works such as [canal building](#) and improvements in roads and railway were also undertaken to minimise effects of any future famines.

Independence struggle

The growing desire for independence began to gradually gather pace in the country and its influence in Tamil Nadu generated a number of volunteers to the fight against the British colonial power in the [struggle for Independence](#). Notable amongst these are [Tiruppur Kumaran](#), who was born in 1904 in a small village near Erode. Kumaran lost his life during a protest march against the British. The location of the French colony of Pondicherry, offered a place of refuge for the fugitives freedom fighters trying to flee the British Police. [Aurobindo](#) was one such living in Pondicherry in 1910. The poet [Subramanya Bharathi](#) was a contemporary of Aurobindo.^[86] Bharathi wrote numerous poems in Tamil extolling the revolutionary cause. He also published the journal *India* from Pondicherry. Both Aurobindo and Bharathi were associated with other Tamil revolutionaries such as [V.V.S.Aiyar](#) and [V. O. Chidambaram Pillai](#).^[86] Tamils formed a significant percentage of the members of the [Indian National Army](#) (INA), founded by

[Netaji](#) to fight the British occupation in India.^{[87][88]} [Lakshmi Sahgal](#) from Tamil Nadu was a prominent leader in the INA.

In 1916 Dr. T.M. Nair and Rao Bahadur Thygaraya Chetty released the *Non-Brahmin Manifesto* sowing the seeds for the Dravidian movements.^[89] During the 1920s, two movements focused mainly on regional politics began in Tamil Nadu. One was the [Justice Party](#), which won the local legislative elections held in 1921. The Justice Party was not focused on the Indian independence movement, rather on the local issues such as affirmative action for socially backward groups. The other main movement was the anti-Hindu, [reformist movement](#) led by [E.V. Ramasami Naicker](#).^[89] Further steps towards eventual self-rule were taken in 1935 when the British Government passed the [All-India Federation Act of 1935](#). Fresh local elections were held and in Tamil Nadu the [Congress party](#) captured power defeating the Justice party. In 1938, Ramasami Naicker with [C. N. Annadurai](#) [launched an agitation](#) against the Congress ministry's decision to introduce the teaching of Hindi in schools.^[90]

Post Independence period

The [political state](#) of Tamil Nadu in India was created in [1969](#) when erstwhile [Madras State](#) was renamed.

The trauma of the [partition](#) did not impact Tamil Nadu when India was granted Independence in 1947. There was no sectarian violence against various religions. There had always been an atmosphere of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence between all religions in Tamil Nadu. Congress formed the first ministry in the Madras Presidency. [C. Rajagopalachari](#) (Rajaji) was the [first Chief Minister](#). Madras Presidency was eventually reconstituted as Madras State. Following agitations for a separate Andhra state comprising of the Telugu speaking regions of the Madras state by [Potti Sriramalu](#) and others, the Indian Government decided to partition the Madras state.^[91] In 1953 [Rayalaseema](#) and the coastal Andhra regions became the new state of [Andhra Pradesh](#) and the [Bellary](#) district became part of the Mysore state. In 1956 south [Kanara](#) district was transferred to Mysore, the [Malabar coastal](#) districts became part of the new state of Kerala, and the Madras state assumed its present shape. The Madras state was named Tamil Nadu (the land of the Tamils) in 1968.

[Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka](#) during the 1970s and the 80s saw large numbers of [Sri Lankan Tamils](#) fleeing to Tamil Nadu. The plight of Tamil refugees caused a surge of support from most of the Tamil political parties.^[92] They exerted pressure on the Indian government to intercede with the Sri Lankan government on behalf of the Sri Lankan Tamilians. However, LTTE lost much of its support from Tamil Nadu following the assassination of [Rajiv Gandhi](#) on [21 May 1991](#) by an operative from Sri Lanka for the former Prime Minister's role in sending [Indian peacekeepers](#) to Sri Lanka to disarm the LTTE.^{[93][94]}

The east coast of Tamil Nadu was one of the areas affected by the [Indian Ocean earthquake](#) of 2004, during which almost 8000 people died in the disaster.^[95] The sixth most populous state in the Indian Union, Tamil Nadu was the seventh largest economy in 2005 among the states of India.^[96] The growing demands for skilled labour has caused increased number of educational institutions in Tamil Nadu. The widespread application of caste based [affirmative action](#) caused the state to have 69% of all educational and employment vacancies to be reserved to the backward castes. Such caste-based reservations have huge public support in Tamil Nadu, with no popular protests organised against its implementation.^[97]

Evolution of regional politics

[Annadurai](#), [Karunanidhi](#) and [M.G. Ramachandran](#), the three chief ministers of Tamil Nadu between 1967 and 1984, belonging to the 'Dravidian' parties.

The politics of Tamil Nadu have gone through three distinct phases since independence. The domination of the Congress Party after 1947 gave way to the Dravidian populist mobilisation in the 1960s. This phase lasted until towards the end of the 1990s. The most recent phase saw the fragmentation of the Dravidian political parties and led to the advent of political alliances and coalition governments.^[98]

Annadurai formed the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam ([DMK](#)) in 1949 after splitting from [Dravidar Kazhagam](#).^[99] DMK also decided to oppose the 'expansion of the Hindi culture' in Tamil Nadu and started the demand for a separate homeland for the Dravidians in the South. The demand was for an Independent state called [Dravida Nadu](#) (country of [Dravidians](#)) comprising of Tamil Nadu and parts of [Andhra](#), Karnataka and Kerala.^[100] The increased involvement of the [Congress Party](#) in Madras during the late 1950s and the strong pan-Indian emotions whipped up by the [Chinese invasion of India](#) in 1962 led to the demand for *Dravida Nadu* losing some of its immediacy. Consequently in 1963, when the Sixteenth Amendment to the [Constitution of India](#), precluded secessionist parties from contesting elections, the DMK chose to formally drop its demand for an independent Dravidistan, focusing instead on securing greater functional autonomy within the framework of the Indian Constitution.^[101]

The Congress party, riding on the wave of public support stemming from the independence struggle, formed the first post-independence government in Tamil Nadu and continued to govern until 1967. In 1965 and 1968, DMK led widespread anti-Hindi agitations in the state against the plans of the Union Government to introduce Hindi in the state schools. [Affirmative action](#) in employment and educational institutions were pioneered in Tamil Nadu based on the demands of the Dravidian movement.^[102] The leadership of the [Dravidian movement](#) had very capable authors and literati in Annadurai and [Karunanidhi](#), who assiduously utilised the popular media of stage plays

and movies to spread its political messages.^[103] [MG Ramachandran](#) (MGR) who later became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, was one such stage and movie actor.^[104]

In 1967 DMK won the state election. DMK split into two in 1971, with MGR forming the splinter [AIADMK](#). Since then these two parties have dominated the politics of Tamil Nadu.^[105] AIADMK, under MGR retained control of the State Government over three consecutive assembly elections in 1977, 1980 and 1984. After MGR's death AIADMK was split over the succession between various contenders. Eventually [J. Jayalalithaa](#) took over the leadership of AIADMK.

Several changes to the political balance in Tamil Nadu took place during the later half of the 1990s, eventually leading to the end of the duopoly of DMK and AIADMK in the politics of Tamil Nadu. In 1996, a split in the Congress party in Tamil Nadu eventuated in the formation of [Tamil Maanila Congress](#) (TMC). TMC aligned with the DMK, while another party [MDMK](#), which split from DMK aligned with the AIADMK. These and several smaller political parties began to gain popular support. The first instance of a 'grand alliance' was during the 1996 elections for the [National parliament](#), during which the AIADMK formed a large coalition of a number smaller parties to counter the electoral threat posed by the alliance between the DMK and TMC. Since then the formation of alliances of large number of political parties has become an electoral practice in Tamil Nadu.^[106] The electoral decline of Congress party at the national level, which started during the early 1990, forced the Congress to seek coalition partners from various states including Tamil Nadu. This paved the way for the Dravidian parties to be part of the [Central Government](#).^[107]