



The A to Z of the Tamils (The A to Z Guide Series)

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 A to Z 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 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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