

Tamil : a Snapshot

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Tamil language and culture

Tamil is one of the longest surviving classical languages in the world. It has its own script with 247 characters.

Sample of English words derived from Tamil.

வணக்கம்
Vanakkam

Curry: கறி கறி ('kari' meaning 'sauce')
Mango: மாங்காய் (maangai)
Catamaran: கட்டுமரம் ('kattumaram', meaning 'logs bound together')



Tamil is the official language of the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu as well as of Sri Lanka and Singapore. The Tamil diaspora has spread across many countries including Malaysia, Mauritius, Fiji and South Africa.

Tamil has an ancient culture much influenced by Hinduism and has made outstanding contributions to the arts. The classical dance form, Bharatha Natyam, still popular today, originated in Hindu temples of Tamil Nadu (See Tamil :Resources). Important festivals are Divali (Festival of Lights) and Pongal (Harvest Festival).

Tamil in the UK

With an estimated population of 100,000 to 200,000, Tamil communities are to be found across the UK in Birmingham, Cardiff, Coventry, Glasgow, London, Manchester, Sheffield, Surrey. In London the largest Tamil communities are in Harrow, Ealing, Brent and Hillingdon but there are concentrations in other boroughs too.

Tamil education The 2012 school census found 24, 605 speakers of Tamil in mainstream schools making it one of the top ten in terms of number of speakers. Whilst a number of mainstream schools run after school classes for Tamil, the language is mainly taught in community based supplementary schools of which there are approximately 40 across the UK.

Examinations

The British Tamil Examinations Board provides information on Tamil examinations (IGCSE, Advanced Level)

<http://bteb.org.uk/>

Supporting Tamil speakers in your school

Advice on Tamil, and register of Tamil schools across the UK

<http://bteb.org.uk/contactus.html>



[With sincere thanks to Britannia Tamil School and Bharati Tamil School, Crawley for providing photos]