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## HISTORY OF COIMBATORE DISTRICT

V. Pradeepa\*

Coimbatore is the second largest City in the State of Tamil Nadu. It is the administrative headquarters of Coimbatore District. Coimbatore is also known as the "Manchester of South India". Coimbatore is known for its industrial hub, educational institutions, health care facilities, pleasant weather friendly culture and hospitality. There is significant majority of persons from North and West Indian origin in Coimbatore.<sup>1</sup>

### Etymology

One possible reason for the City's name could be that a king called Kovan, who ruled the area and hence the name Kovanpudur (Kovan's City) evolved and it was anglicized as Coimbatore. In modern times, the name is sometimes abbreviated as Kovai. Based on the Indian railway station code, it is also believed that the City is named after the presiding deity of the town "Koniamman", Konniammanpudur turned into Coimbatore.<sup>2</sup>

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### Topography of Coimbatore

Coimbatore is an inland District in the South peninsula. Coimbatore has a total area of 7469 square kilometers. It is bounded by Nilgris in the North and the same in the West, Periyar District in East and Anna District in the South.<sup>3</sup> Coimbatore District is surrounded by the mountain ranges on all sides except in the South-East where there is a gap sloping towards the East. It has a crescent shape with a gradual slope towards the interior. It was the largest of the upland basins lying between the Tamil Nadu Hills and the Western Ghats. The Kongu Country was an undulating plain. Amaravathi basin forms the continuation of the Western Ghats in the West and the South with the *Anaimalai* and the Palani hills in Coimbatore District.<sup>4</sup>

### Boundaries of Kongu

Only in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the boundaries of Kongu were defined in Kongu Mandala Sathagam. This may have been written after a well defined stage of Kongu region.<sup>5</sup> According to the Sadagam, the Eastern boundary was Madukkarai. In some other version Eastern boundary was mentioned as Kulithalai, Velliyangiri in the West, Palani mountain in the South, Thalaimalai in the North were other boundaries. Some historieans have included Dharmapuri District. V. Ramamoorthi has maintained the Mysore District of Karnataka State was also included in Kongu.<sup>6</sup>

## Geography

Coimbatore is situated in the extreme West of Tamil Nadu, near the State of Kerala. It is surrounded by mountains on the West, with reserve forest and the (Nilgiri biosphere reserve) on the Northern side. Many lakes and ponds were constructed near the river in the ancient times. The City of Coimbatore has nine lakes and wetlands. In most of urban ecosystems, these wetlands are the major life supporting component with high concentration of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrate species.

## Climate

Coimbatore has pleasant, salubrious climates not reaching the high temperature of other southern Indian cities, situated in the western part of the state of the Tamil Nadu. Coimbatore is located at an elevation of about 398 meters. The mean maximum and minimum temperatures during summer and winter varies between 35°C to 18 °C. In the months from July to February, highest temperature in 38° C and the lowest is 12° C.

## Demographics

According to the population census of 2011, the density was about 10,052 per sq km. The languages spoken in the city is primarily Kongu Tamil, which is a dialect in the Tamil. Majority of the population includes Hindus, although Muslim population is also large. But

Christians, Sikhs, and Jains are also present to some extent. Malayalis are the majority in the City who has arrived from Palakkad, and other regional people are Telugus, North Indians mostly from Gujarat, who are involved in the commercial activities. Due to the high rate of economic growth and availability of jobs in the City, a population explosion was seen during the 1970s. Presently, about 33% of Coimbatore's population is found in the slums.<sup>7</sup>

## History of Coimbatore

Originally Coimbatore District formed part of the Kongu Country, the history of which dates back to the Sangam age. It is found that in early days the area was inhabited by the tribes, the most predominant among them being the Kosars who are reported to have had their headquarters at Kosampathur which probably later became the present Coimbatore. However, tribal predominance did not last long as they were over-run by the Rashtrakutas. From Rastrakutas the region fell in to the hands of the Cholas who were in prominence at the time of Raja Raja Chola. On the decline of Cholas the Kongu territory was occupied by the Chalukyas and then by the Pandyas . Due to internal strife in the Pandya Kingdom the Muslim rulers from Delhi happened to interfere. Thus the area fell into the hands of Madurai Sultanate from whom the Vijayanagar rulers wrestled for the region during 1377-78 after overthrowing the Madurai Nayaks. During the period of Muthu Veerappa

Nayak and later during the period of Tirumalai Nayak internal strife and intermittent wars ruined the kingdom.

In 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the Coimbatore region came under the Kingdom of Mysore, controlled by Hyder Ali and later Tipu Sultan. After defeating Tipu Sultan in the Anglo-Mysore Wars, the British East India Company annexed Coimbatore to the Madras Presidency in 1799. Coimbatore played a prominent role in the Second Poligar War against the British in 1801, as it was the area of operations of Dheeran Chinnamalai. In 1865, Coimbatore was established as the capital of the newly formed Coimbatore District and in 1866 it was accorded the Municipality status. Sir Robert Stanes became the first Chairman of the Coimbatore City Council. Industrialisation of the region begin in 1888 and continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The city experienced a textile boom in 1920s and 1930s due to the decline of the Cotton industry in Mumbai. The region played a significant role in the Indian independence movement. After independence, Coimbatore has seen rapid growth due to industrialization. Coimbatore is known for its industrial hub, educational institutions, health care facilities, pleasant weather, friendly culture and hospitality.

The City has a multicultural society with of Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam speaking people. Sikhs, Rajasthanis and Gujarathis are also found in large numbers. The culture of the region, with only a

few non- religious festivals taking place each year. Coimbatore like most other places in South India has a number of old and historically important temples. Hindus are the dominant religion, but Islam, Christianity, Jainism, and Sikhism are also prominent in Coimbatore.<sup>8</sup>

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8. *Manual of Coimbatore*, p. 2.