

**G.I. APPLICATION NUMBER – 423**

Application Date: 22-05-2013

Application is made by Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation (Poompuhar), Government of Tamil Nadu, No. 759, Anna Salai, Chennai - 600 002, Tamil Nadu, India for Registration in Part A of the Register of Thanjavur Netti works under Application No. 423 in respect of Handicraft (Pith works) falling in Class – 20 is hereby advertised as accepted under Sub-section (1) of Section 13 of Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.

- A) Name of the Applicant** : Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation (Poompuhar),
- B) Address** : Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation (Poompuhar),  
Government of Tamil Nadu,  
No. 759, Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002,  
Tamil Nadu, India.
- C) Name of the Geographical Indication** : **THANJAVUR NETTI WORKS**



- D) Types of Goods** : Class 20 – Handicraft (Pith works)
- E) Specification:**

Thanjavur Netti Works (Thanjavur Pith Work) is made from pith. The pith is obtained from Netti, a hydrophyte plant called as Aeschynomene Aspera. The artisans are skilled in this particular craft and this art is traditionally and hereditarily transferred from their fore-fathers. The notable works from Thanjavur Netti Works include models of the Brihadeeshwara Temple, Hindu Idols, Garlands, door hangings and show pieces used for decoration. The Pith stems, i.e. hydrophytes are found in and around the Thanjavur region and Mannargudi. The lakes around Pudukottai (Pudukullam & Kallaperumbur lake) are surrounded with marshy land which favours the growth of the Hydrophytic plant. The soil found in Thanjavur is favourable for the growth of the plant that is used for the production of pith handicraft based in Thanjavur.

- F) Description:**

Thanjavur Netti works in the Thanjavur district (formerly known as Tanjore) is one of the primary traditional art forms that have been famous all over the world. Thanjavur and Kumbakonam (including areas in and around) are two towns in this district that have prolific artisans and craftsmen who excel in this craft of making artifacts out of pit obtained from Hydrophyte family Aeschynomene Aspera.

Netti / Sholapith is a variety of weed of hydrophyte plant which is used as raw materials for developing the artifacts. It is a dried milky white spongy plant material. It is also known as "kidachi" in Malayalam and "Pent" in Telugu. The biological name of Netti/ Sholapith is 'Aeschynomene indica' or 'Aeschynomene aspera'. The 'netti' is the cortex or core of the plant and is about 1 ½ inch in diameter.

Aeschynomene Aspera is an aquatic plant which is considered as a minor weed of rice paddies. The food stored in the stem of this plant forms the Pith. Pith cells lie at the center of the stem for the storage of the food. Pith forms the core of the plant that grows in water. The leaf of the hydrophytic plant looks like the leaf of Indian Gooseberry. The flower is yellow in colour.

They grow on the margins of wetlands, such as lagoons, tanks and lakes as well as in swampy grassland. It also grows on the river beds in Thanjavur. It is also known as kidachi, Pent, Netti, etc. with the biological name of 'Aeschynomene indica' or 'Aeschynomene asperar'. These hydrophytes may also be obtained from small lakes and ponds in the region of Thanjavur.

Good quality pith is pure white in colour with soft surface and no cracks, while poor quality pith is one with reddish core and a hard bark and has many nodes. They are very light and careful handling is required. The pith is a very delicate material and highly brittle in nature.

The distinctness of the Pith artifact's remains in the simplicity of its production. The artifact's created out of the pith obtained from the hydrophytic plants looks similar to the ones made in marble and to the ones made in elephant's tusk. They shine in a very elegant way. However, products made from the Pith are brittle and break easily, unless kept carefully. Hence, most models are preserved inside a glass box.

**G) Geographical area of Production and Map as shown in page no: 13**

The Thanjavur Netti Works production is based in the Thanjavur District (majority of production is done in the towns of Thanjavur, Kumbakonam and Pudukkottai) Pudukkottai District in Tamilnadu

**Geographical Position of Thanjavur District:**

Latitude: 9.50' N and 11.25' E

Longitude: 78.45'N and 79.25'E

**Geographical Position of Pudukkottai District:**

Latitude: 9.50' N and 10.40' E

Longitude: 78.25' N and 79.15' E

**H) Proof of Origin (Historical records):**

Like many other traditional crafts, Thanjavur Netti works had its origin in the ritual and religious needs of the people. The pith was initially used for making garlands out of slices beautifully cut into cylindrical and round shapes and then dyed with different colours. Bulls and buffaloes were garlanded during 'Mattu Pongal', which is celebrated during January or February i.e. during harvesting season. Mattu Pongal is celebrated very lavishly in the Tanjore region which was one of the encouraging factors for progress of pith handicrafts.

In addition to this the Netti work is said to have been existed from the Maratha period as stated in the Tanjore Gazette.

Documented records about Tanjore (as it was then called) gives out 'pith' as an important industry for making of pith images and garlands, which was carried on by 'Nayudus', 'Marathas' and 'Musalmams' of that region. Record states that business flourished during that time. The pith was

obtained from near Tanjore or Mannargudi. They were cut with long sharp knives into wafers which were curled and pinned into the shapes of beautiful white flowers or figures and decorated with glided metal. Customer base was very wide i.e. customers were from all over the Madras presidency (as it was then called). The rich heritage and historically significant spots in Tanjore has also been a motivating factor for such rare and precious art forms to flourish.

Further, Gazetteer records of 1907 also states that, Pith work as an important industry and its product was known to be used in 'Mattu Pongal' festival. Hence origins of pith works is an age-old tradition.

#### I) Method of Production:

Netti (Pith) is the basis of any of the materials crafted in Thanjavur. It is obtained from the lakes across Thanjavur, Pudukottai and Mannargudi. Netti is a special variety of pith (waterside weed), used as raw material for developing the pith models. It is a milky-white, light weight sponge-wood which is grown in marshy waterlogged areas. The biological name of shola pith is *Aeschynomene aspera*.

*Indica* or *Aeschynomene Aspera* (bean family) and is an herbaceous plant. Only good quality pith that is pure white in colour with soft surface and no cracks are used for production, while poor quality pith with the reddish core and a hard bark (has many nodes) is discarded. The pith is very light and careful handling is required. The pith is a very delicate material and highly brittle in nature. The root is boiled, and dried in the sun. It is then cut to size and a pencil drawing is inscribed on it. A rough carving is followed by the carving of finer details with a blunt chisel and it is polished with sandpaper finally. The outer brown skin is removed by cutting with the help of a sharp knife. The inner soft white portion of the stem is used to make the art pieces. The pith locally known as Netti is cut into fine pieces of different designs and shapes as per the requirement of the product to be made. For basic carving long knife is used and for detail and minute carving small knife is used. The carved pieces are assembled together and stuck with adhesive into one piece of art. Blue prints of the design or photos are used as reference to make the miniatures. It takes one day to make small figures whereas 10 to 12 days to finish a detailed designed idol. It takes almost a month to finish set of art piece of a place or temple. Sometimes customers send the reference of the art piece they want to be made. Some pith works are painted with water colours to make it look colourful and attractive.

Thanjavur Netti Works is famous for miniature works of Thanjavur temples and idol making. The finished pith work is generally fixed to a wooden base and covered with glass to protect from dust and moisture. This helps to preserve the works for years. For normal pieces ply wood made stands are used as base, whereas for big and important pieces teak and wood stands are used. Miniatures of rural and urban place are also made, which are decorated with lights. The art pieces made of pith starts at the range of fifty rupees and goes up to lakh.

**Raw Materials:** Netti / Sholapith is a variety of weed of hydrophyte plant which is used as raw materials for developing the artifacts. It is a dried milky white spongy plant material. It is also known as "*kidachi*" in Malayalam and "*Pent*" in Telugu. The biological name of Netti/ Sholapith is '*Aeschynomene indica*' or '*Aeschynomene aspera*'. The '*netti*' is the cortex or core of the plant and is about 1 ½ inch in diameter. They are very light and expert handling is required. The core is light, porous. Soft, and pliable and can be shaped to suit the imagination of the artisan. Good quality pith is pure white and smooth with soft bark and no nodes, wherein poor quality weed is one in which pith is reddish in colour with hard bark and has many nodes.

There are certain small lakes. Ponds in the region of Thanjavur from wherein hydrophytes maybe obtained.

**Tools:** Tools used are simple and doesn't involve any chemicals or environment harming substance. They are stated as follows:

- Sola Pith Plant (Netti): Used to make the miniature art piece.
- Long Knife (Kathi): Used to carve the pith into required shape and size.
- Small Knife: Used to carve the minute details of the design.
- Carborundum Stone (sana kal): Used to sharpen the knife.

Other tools that are used for this handicraft are mentioned below:

- Scissors for sculpting the precise detailing and various combinations.
- Geometry box for precise measurement and details.
- Glass case (it is used to cover the pith artifact).
- Glass cutter (It is a tool used to make a shallow score in one surface of a piece of glass that is to be broken in two pieces).
- Silicon carbide combination stone is used for sharpening knives, chisels. plane iron. blades, etc. and
- Home-made glue/ paste.

**Process of manufacturing:** Steps followed in production is illustrated as follows:

- i. The pith plant is recognized by the shallow layer of leaves that float on the marshy water at a depth of two to six feet. The pith which is grown on the water will grow up to 4-5 feet. It will become dry when the water becomes dry.
- ii. The pith collector collects this reed. The reed is dried and subsequently sold as sticks of 2 to 3 feet.
- iii. The brown cover of the Hydrophyte (Sholapith) is sliced and removed using an appropriate knife.
- iv. Only ivory coloured pith is selected and processed further. If pith is of colour which is not of standard quality it is discarded.
- v. Thereafter using knife as an only tool, pith is sliced into equal dimensions. It is done in such detailing that every slice is of equal dimensions so that there is no disparity when Artifacts is being compiled.
- vi. They are cut, sliced and sub structured in accordance with the specification of the product.(illustration: in structure of 'Nandi the bull' broad outlines of Nandi is designed on the pith rows and thereafter sliced into equal dimensions creating a numbers of Nandi structure; Similar preparation is done in for the artifacts of pillars')
- vii. Individual sub structures of the models are made and structured using the home-made paste. The raw tendrils of the reed are boiled, ground and mixed with flour to make the glue paste.
- viii. A small weight is used for pressing the structures while binding.
- ix. Then sculpture or design is structured on it by the artisans.
- x. Then final touches are given. For example, in making of a temple partially completed 'Gopuram' (monumental tower) structures are kept in a row for mounting the 'Kalasam' (Generally all Hindu temples have kalasam on their top) and other decorative elements.
- xi. If colouring is done it is done with bright colours and coloured realistically.

## J) Uniqueness:

- i. Distinguishing feature of Thanjavur Netti Works is its workmanship. The location of Thanjavur and its religious significance is one of motivating factors behind development of pith industry. The government has recognised the pith work industry as one of the major handicraft symbol. (The sight of architectural masterpiece such as Thanjavur Big Temple (Brihadeeshwara Temple) is inculcated deep inside artisans, brain and therefore it is no surprise that Thanjavur big temple model is one of the most prestigious pith works.

- ii. Good quality pith that is white in colour is used for production. Poor quality pith that is red in colour is not used.
- iii. Pith doesn't require any mould or supporting instruments to create desired shapes unlike metal scriptures. It requires basic tools such as knives, scissors and geometric tools box to mould it.
- iv. Thanjavur Netti work is famous for miniature works of Thanjavur temples and idol making. The finished pith work is generally fixed to a wooden base and covered with glass to protect from dust and moisture. This helps to preserve the works for years. For normal pieces ply wood made stands are used as base, whereas for big and important pieces teak and wood stands are used. Miniatures of rural and urban place are also made, which are decorated with lights. The art pieces made of pith starts at the range of fifty rupees and goes up to lakhs.
- v. The pith is obtained from near Tanjore or Mannargudi and is cut with a long sharp knife into wafers which are curled and pinned into the shapes of white flowers or figures and decorated with glided metal. Orders for garlands made in this manner come from nearly all the districts in the Presidency.

**K) Inspection Body:**

The artisans traditionally practice the craft under the guidance and instructions of master artisans which acts like an internal inspection mechanism.

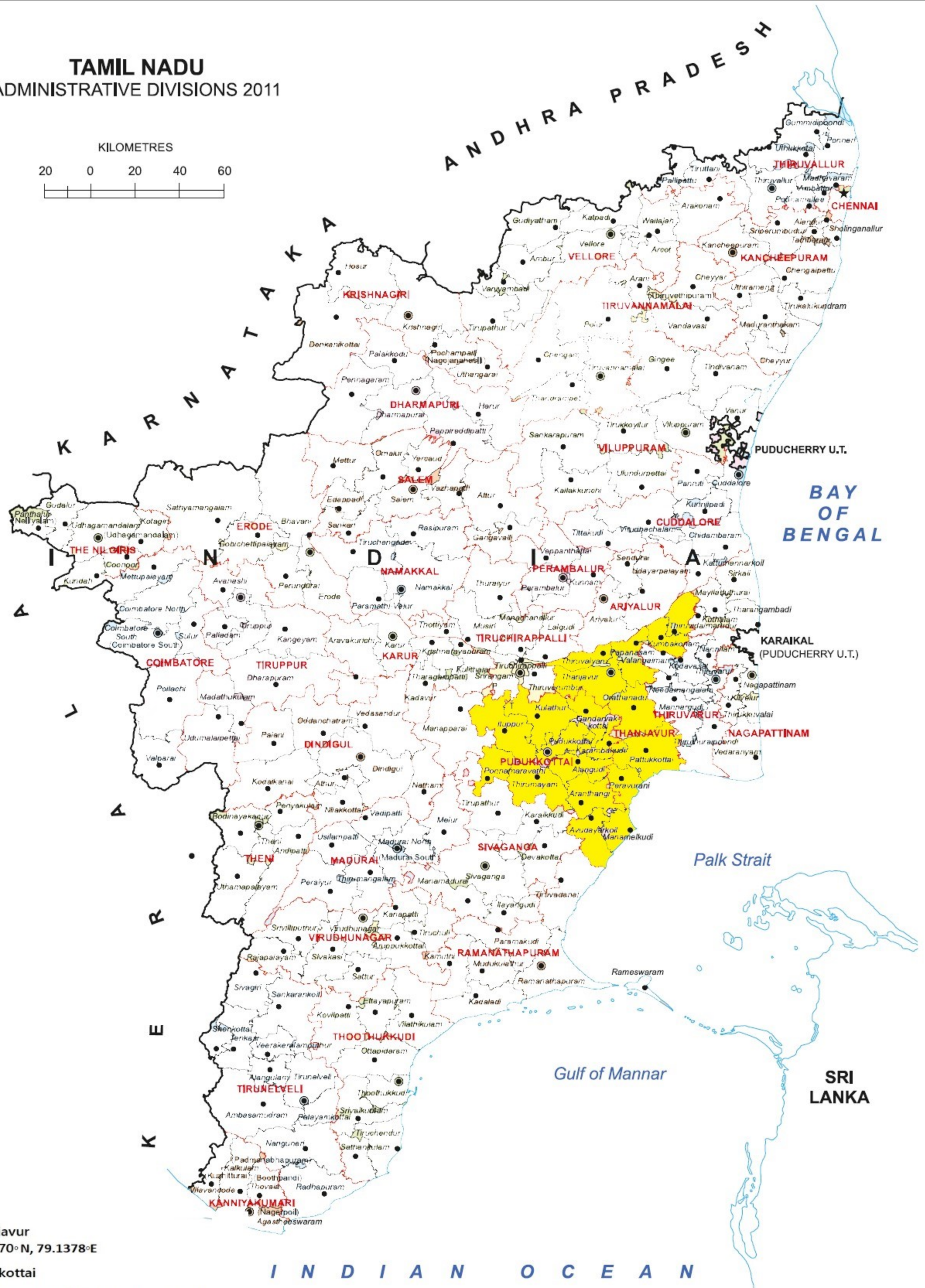
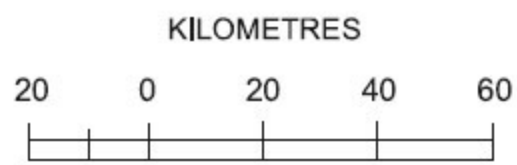
An Independent Inspection Body is constituted for purposes of maintaining quality of products which is as follows:

- I. One State Representative (Head Officer, Handloom and Handicrafts Department, Department of Textiles) - Chairman
- II. One Representative from TNHDCL
- III. One Representative from Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Regional Office, Chennai;
- IV. One Representative from District Industries Officer;
- V. One Representative from Govt. Fine Arts College, Chennai;
- VI. Four (4) Representatives from Artisans.

**L) Others:**

- i. The popularity of Netti works of Thanjavur region has resulted in wide customer base. Products have been bought by customers from Russia, US, Singapore, Germany, Malaysia and a few more foreign countries.
- ii. Thanjavur Pith work is being promoted by, Poompuhar (Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation) a state owned organization. They have various centers throughout the nation. i.e. in Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata, Thanjavur, and many more places in the state of Tamil Nadu. Pith work artisans are encouraged to exhibit their work in these showrooms so as to attract wider customer base.
- iii. Thanjavur Pith works are usually undertaken by families and it is one of the main sources of income in the region of Thanjavur. They are trained and engaged in this business. Knowledge and skill is passed traditionally from one generation to another through 'Guru-Shishya' method.

**TAMIL NADU**  
ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS 2011



Thanjavur  
10.7870° N, 79.1378° E

Pudukkottai  
10°22'46.7868"N and 78°49'15.0492"E

-Area of Production

District headquarters are also Taluk headquarters.

Where the district/taluk name differs from its headquarters name, the latter is given within brackets.