

# USING GIS FOR TAMIL CULTURAL DATA MANAGEMENT: AN APPLICATION IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA

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The research areas of literature and humanities significantly rely on information and source materials gathered from various places. Oral history collection is an important aspect of data collection in any research in this domain. Another mostly encountered data source is in the form of stone inscriptions of cultural and historical significance. In most cases, the places of origin of these cultural data sources are of importance due to their ability to contextually inform about the data. It is not only the place of collection that is useful, but also any other place that could have been mentioned as part of a cultural piece can also form part of a broader narrative. In the context of Tamil culture of Sri Lanka, it can be observed that there are significant challenges in identifying before the patterns from existing research and the gaps for potential research possibilities within a geographical region. Most of the existing culturally relevant data in the form of oral history recordings or readings from inscriptions are not accurately correlated to relevant geographical identifiers. Even though some relevant research outcomes are available in the form of books, journals, and research articles, until they are mapped to relevant places of regions, it is not possible to answer any wide-reaching research questions or observe informative patterns about history and culture. In this research, we propose a technological solution that would enable researchers to tag relevant data points from collected data with a GIS-based location identifier. This system can also be used to classify existing research outcomes onto the same shared location information. The resulting information base can provide an overview of patterns from collected data points correlating to locational points. As a collated data source, it can inform of possible patterns of problems or issues specific to a place, that may not be readily identified, but cursorily mentioned in the data as related to a different problem. The current phase of research explores data collected from the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. The Eastern Province was chosen due to its significant internal cultural diversity of Tamil culture, with ancient worshipping methods, *vadamodithenmodi koothu* dance traditions, epigraphical inscriptions, and indigenous medicine. It is envisaged that the proposed framework will be later expanded to include other parts of Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

**Keywords:** Spatial Humanities, Geographical Information System (GIS), Web-GIS, Tamil Culture, Cultural Repository