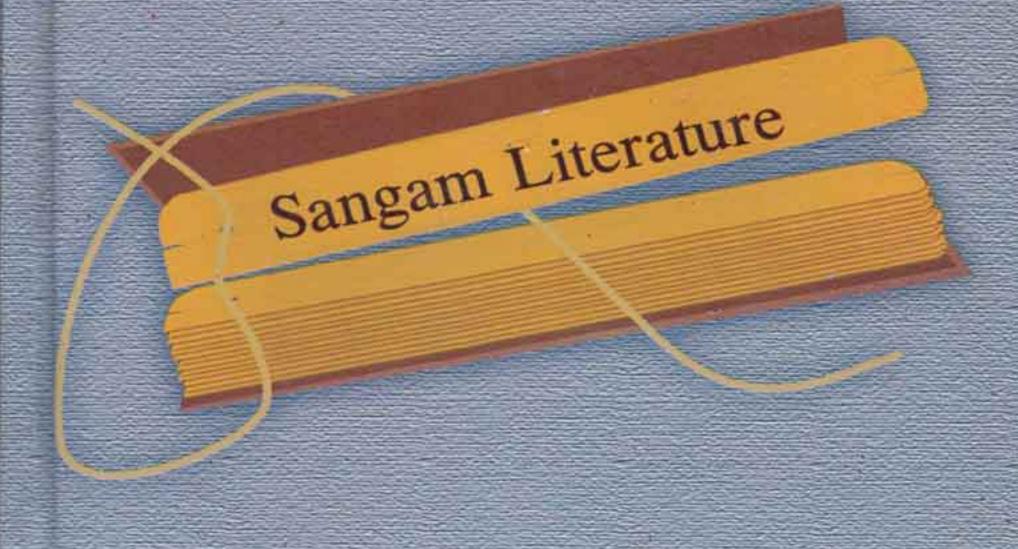
TAMIL AMONG THE CLASSICAL LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD



Dr V.C. Kulandai Swamy

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e-mail: pavai123@yahoo.com

To My Parents

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Preface

When the Home Ministry of the Government of India, in its Notification dated 12.10.2004, announced its classification of Tamil as a classical language, the Tamils all over the world were elated beyond words and felt one inch higher in stature. A declaration made by V.G. Suriyanarayana Sastri alias Parithimal Kalaignar towards the end of the 19th century, in 1887 to be exact, which was followed by a request to the University of Madras in the beginning of the 20th century, a demand to the Government of India towards the end of the 1980's and a movement in the 1990's, was realized in this century. The Tamils celebrated this achievement as a moment of fulfilment and a matter of pride.

Some of the language scholars, especially those from abroad, raised their eyebrows in a mood of wonderment and scepticism as to what the occasion was about. A language does not acquire classical status on the basis of a Government order; nor does it get such recognition by virtue



of the decision of a committee, however eminent the members may be. Classical status for the literature of a language, the identification of the classical literature and the classical period are matters decided by the consensus evolved over a period of time among the world of scholars who have well-defined traditions to guide them in the process.

The path to classical status for a language is through its literature. A language that is in possession of a literary corpus that meets the criteria, generally derived from Greek and Latin literary traditions, may be referred to as a classical language. The classical languages of the world have come to be recognized as such by the learned members in the field. Tamil already enjoys the status of a classical language; that being so, why this movement; what for the Government recognition and what implication does the Government order or notification have? This is their doubt and consequently their query. It is certainly a natural, relevant and legitimate point. We need to provide an answer which requires that we understand in proper perspective our own demand and make the Government of India realize the soul of our claim. The facts are as follows:

- The Tamils have not petitioned the Government of India to grant Tamil the status of a classical language.
- Tamil has already been recognized by the world of scholars as a classical language.
- □ The Sangam period has been accepted as the period of classical literature in Tamil.

In the light of what has been stated above, the issue is: what is our demand? What for have we been individually

and collectively knocking at the door of the Government of India?

These questions are very much in order and must be answered. The answers are as follows:

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, maintains a list of ancient/classical languages.
- In the list maintained by the MHRD, Pali, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian find a place.
- The President of India presents awards and honours annually at the Rashtrapathi Bhavan to scholars in these languages.
- The Government of India promote education and research in these languages and provide financial assistance.
- Among these five languages, Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, particularly Sanskrit, are referred to as classical languages in textbooks and reports of committees.
- Both as an ancient language and as a classical language, Tamil must have found a place from the beginning. For reasons that are not clear, Tamil has not been included in the list. The demand from Tamil Nadu has been to rectify this omission.
- The Notification, dated 12.10.2004, of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, will help the inclusion of Tamil in this list which will rectify the omission and do justice to Tamil.

The fact that, besides Sanskrit, Tamil also is a classical language

- adds another crown to the heritage of India, and more than that
- helps us view Indian civilization and culture with two eyes, i.e., Sanskrit and Tamil, and therefore in wholeness.

India as a country of ancient tradition enjoys a prestige given only to a few in the world. The tradition of a society is based on its civilization and culture which are reflected in the art, literature and philosophy of the land. It is the language which acts as the repository, receives and accumulates the experiences of generations and transmits them to posterity.

The cultural heritage of India is the outcome of the confluence of two major rivers. They are:

- i Sanskrit
- ii Dravidian.

This is an accepted fact of history. The main source of the Dravidian component is the contribution from Tamil which happens to be the oldest of Dravidian languages. According to Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji, the beginning is from Sangam literature.

The archaeologists and historians have studied in full detail the Sanskritic component of Indian civilization and culture and have meticulously and elaborately recorded them. An equally important inheritance in every aspect has been, either unwittingly or deliberately, overlooked. It is because of this fact that reputed historians like Vincent Smith have said that ancient Indian history has been written as though South India did not exist.

The inclusion of Tamil in the list of ancient/classical languages along with Pali, Prakrit and Sanskrit must be considered as the beginning for disseminating and emphasizing the fact that what Greek and Latin are to Europe, Sanskrit and Tamil are to India. They constitute the two eyes through which to view and understand India with all its complexities and contradictions. The activities and responsibilities of the Departments of Education and Culture and the Institutions associated with history, archaeology, epigraphy and numismatics must be reoriented to take into account the additional dimension to our source of knowledge about Indian culture and civilization. A new wave of realization and understanding must become pervasive in the national atmosphere.

The message, Tamil and Sanskrit are
The two eyes of the heritage of India,
Must echo in the North beyond the Vindhyas
And in the forums of the world
Transcending national bounds.

Kulothungan Poems, p.364

is the declaration of the poet; his desire and demand too. It may be stated even to the point of repetition that we had long been seeing ourselves with one eye; consequently, there was no completeness, no wholeness in our perception. This basic deficiency had been pointed out, now and then, by Tamil scholars. However, it did not attract the attention of many, did not receive the acceptance it deserved. The Western scholars, who have done extensive and in-depth investigations of ancient civilizations, have presented their conclusion that Indian civilization and culture are the

integrated whole of two cultures represented by Sanskrit and Dravidian components. There are also Indian experts who have expressed similar views. However, these have not found appropriate place and prominence in the texts on the history of India.

The present development with the Government of India, at the national level, recognizing Sanskrit and Tamil as the classical languages, may mark the beginning of an effort to take the message of Dravidian contribution to the cultural, spiritual and philosophic heritage of India, to the elite and educationists - national and international. We must endeavour to understand our own selves more comprehensively to attain a level of wholeness in our perception. In these efforts, the Tamils have the responsibility to play a lead role. In this context, I must make mention of a long prevailing curse that weakens the Tamil society.

Sanskrit and Tamil really are the two pillars of the great edifice that is Indian heritage. Instead of understanding and appreciating this fact of history, some have pitted one against the other and tried to establish the superiority of one over the other. They are only a few; but even one is enough to hurt or to cause damage; a few are too many. Such people are still there. Their attitude, their actions and utterances have, over the years, created among some an adverse reaction against and avoidable hostility to Sanskrit. This leaves in an otherwise congenial atmosphere, sporadic exchanges of claims and arguments, leaving occasionally a trail of bitterness - though inconsequential, yet resembling a hairline divide in an otherwise solid structure, as far as the language is concerned. Now that Sanskrit and Tamil have come to be accorded equal status, giving de jure recognition to a de facto situation, these differences born out of petty prejudices,

ante-diluvian beliefs and ignorance must totally and without any trace disappear and pave the way for a healthy understanding of the place of Sanskrit and Tamil in the Indian environment. As pointed out by Prof. George L. Hart in his foreword to this book, Tamil and Sanskrit are two great languages of the world. They are indebted to each other and their relationship goes back to the pre-Christian era. They are parts of the diversity that adds colour, strength, richness and vitality to Indian culture and civilization. They constitute the two great pillars for the edifice that is India. We must make an honest effort to disseminate this fact, unaffected by likes and dislikes, unhindered by any veil of attachment that might blur our vision, depending on a rational and scientific approach, following at every step the norms of objective research and accepting the findings as they come without reservation. The contribution to knowledge about India, so arrived at, must be treated as a new dimension to our understanding and a new chapter in the volume of Indian history that runs to innumerable pages. The members of the Dravidian family must feel happy and proud that their contributions, hitherto neglected, have come to be recognized, acknowledged and will in future be increasingly highlighted. Looking at it objectively and in proper perspective, the endorsement of the classical status of Tamil by the Government of India is not a matter of pride for the Tamils alone; it is an event of national importance. The discovery of the importance of Dravidian contribution to Indian heritage is only adding another dimension to the greatness of ancient India.

I have been discussing the status of Tamil as a classical language, the need for its inclusion by the Government of India in the list of ancient/classical languages in my articles in journals, in my poems and in my addresses

in meetings. I have written a series of articles in *Dinamani*, the Tamil daily. It was also the theme of my address in the Dr K.A. Neelakanda Sastri Endowment Lecture series in the Department of Ancient History, University of Madras. However, this book is not a compendium of these articles and lectures. This book has been written after the October 2004 Notification of the Government of India, taking into account the present and future needs.

When I thought of obtaining a foreword to this book, the name that stood foremost in my mind was that of Prof. George L. Hart, Head of the Department of Tamil, University of California, Berkeley, U.S.A. I have quoted his views on the subject fairly extensively in this book. A brief account of his biography is pertinent to this occasion.

He has been a professor of Tamil at the University of California, Berkeley, since 1975 and is currently holder of the Tamil Chair at that institution. His degree, which he received in 1970, is in Sanskrit, from Harvard, and his first employment was as a Sanskrit professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1969. Besides Tamil and Sanskrit, he knows the classical languages of Latin and Greek and has read extensively in their literatures in the original. He is also well acquainted with comparative linguistics and the literatures of modern Europe (He knows Russian, German, and French and has read extensively in those languages) as well as the literatures of modern India, which, with the exception of Tamil and Malayalam, he has read in translation. He has spent much time discussing Telugu literature and its tradition with V. Narayana Rao, one of the greatest living Telugu scholars, and so he knows that tradition especially well. As a long-standing member of a South Asian Studies Department, he has also been exposed to the richness of

Hindi literature, and he has read extensively about Mahadevi Varma, Tulsi, and Kabir.

He has spent many years – most of his life (since 1963) – studying Sanskrit. He has read in the original all of Kalidasa, Magha, and parts of Bharavi and Sri Harsa. He has also read in the original the fifth book of the Rig Veda as well as many other sections, many of the Upanishads, most of the Mahabharata, the Kathasaritsagara, Adi Sankara's works, and many other works in Sanskrit.

I narrate this not so much to show his erudition, but rather to establish his credentials for judging whether a literature is classical.

Stated briefly, when it comes to evaluating the merits of a language for classical status, he is like a person surveying the fields, the dales, the hills and the hillocks, sitting on the top of a mountain. He certainly has an extraordinary background in the field of languages, in terms of indepth as much as extensive study. When I approached him for a foreword, he was kind enough to comply with my request readily. There is no doubt whatsoever that his foreword adds to the value of this book. I am thankful to him and to Prof. I. Maraimalai who initially introduced me to him.

The aim of this book is to discuss certain issues that arise, consequent upon the Notification by the Government of India, endorsing the classical status of Tamil. However, for the sake of completeness, a brief account of Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Hebrew and Chinese, which are in the category of classical languages, is given. No detailed treatment is attempted. Similarly, Arabic and Persian are also touched upon as they are in the list of ancient/classical languages of the Government of India. The information in

this regard for the above languages has been drawn mainly from Encyclopaedia Brittannica, K. Appadurai and K.D. Thirunavukkarasu.

I must express my thanks to Pavai Publishers Private Ltd for bringing out this volume with emphasis on quality of print and format. My thanks are due to Dr V. Murugan, Reader, Department of English, Presidency College, Chennai, who read through the script and to Thiru K. Selladurai and Thiru N. Nagarajan who have done the word processing.

This publication is small in size. However, I hope and trust that it will provide some useful information on the issues involved in the Notification of the Government of India endorsing the classical status of Tamil, the consequential task that emerges and the development that must take place in order that the full benefit of the Notification accrues to the nation.

August 2005

V.C. Kulandaiswamy

Foreword

Prof. George L. Hart rofessor of Tamil, Chair in Tamil Studies University of California, Berkeley, U.S.A.

Kulandaiswamy's book on Tamil as a classical language. I have found that many are somewhat confused as to what a "classical language" is and how the term should be used. In this work, Professor Kulandaiswamy describes Tamil and its history so that students and others can gain a better understanding of what Tamil is, how it developed, and what it has produced. In this foreword, I state why I believe Tamil, uniquely among the Indian languages except Sanskrit, is a true classical language. Its literature, alongside that of Sanskrit, is one of the treasures of all the people of India, and it deserves to be widely known and disseminated. I believe this book will help serve that noble purpose, and I am honored to be able to provide this foreword.

When we say that Tamil is a classical language, what do we mean? Clearly, there is no native term in any Indian language that corresponds to the western word "classical" - the closest we can come is perhaps samskrta, the word for the Sanskrit language, which means "refined," "cultivated," "artificial," and is contrasted with prākṛta, the word for Prakrit, which means "common." When we look at the Sanskrit plays, we find that the more educated people - kings, some Brahmins, ascetics, even Buddhist nuns – speak Sanskrit, while ordinary people speak some form of Prakrit. Thus, from ancient times in North India, Sanskrit was considered an elevated language and was used mainly by highly educated and refined people. Similarly, the notion of "classical" languages is something that arose in the West during the Middle Ages when Latin and Greek were used by educated people, while common people used "vernaculars"languages like French, Italian, English and German. Thus the situation in the West corresponded somewhat to that in Northern India, and also in parts of the South, where Sanskrit was adopted for use as a language of an educated elite. The word "classical" itself was borrowed into English from French, which took it from the Latin classicus, which means "of the highest class."

The translation for "classical language" adopted for Tamil is *cemmoli*, "refined language," a meaning which closely parallels that of *saṃskṛta*. When we look at the history of Tamil, we find many ways in which it resembles the classical languages of the West as well as Sanskrit – and a history that is unlike that of any native Indian language other than Sanskrit. It is these features of the language that qualify it to

be considered a true "classical language." Let us examine them.

The earliest writing we have in Tamil is found in Tamil Brahmi inscriptions dating back to the third century BC only a century or so later than our earliest writing in an Indo-Aryan language (the Prakrit inscriptions of Aśoka). These inscriptions, which have been described and analyzed expertly by Iravatham Mahadevan, show that from the beginning, the peculiar characteristics of Tamil (such as I, n, and r) were written and that Tamil was considered to be entirely different than the languages of the North. As a result, to this day, Tamil does not use the Sanskrit alphabet. Its writing system is perfectly and uniquely adapted to the language. Unlike other Indian languages, it does not have letters for all of the sounds of Sanskrit, and it does have letters for those sounds that are peculiar to it. If we compare it to the languages of Europe, it more resembles Latin or Greek in this respect than any of the modern European languages, which took their alphabets from Latin or Greek and borrowed many words from those languages.

The classical status of Latin and Greek stems not only from their antiquity, but from the peculiar nature of their literatures, which are both old and rich. Greek begins with its epics that date to perhaps the seventh century BC, and reaches its height in the great literary production of Athens in the fourth century BC. The finest Latin, which often imitated Greek, was written about the time of Augustus (the first century BC) by Virgil, Horace, and others. The modern languages of Europe take shape about a millennium later and base their literatures largely on Greek, Latin, and Hebrew

sources. In this regard, Tamil resembles Greek more than Latin: during the first three centuries of the common era, it produced an enormous literature, which we term "Sangam literature," that is entirely its own and owes very little to any outside tradition. A.K.Ramanujan, the great translator of Tamil into English, often referred to this as "classical Tamil literature," and he was certainly correct: Sangam literature is the touchstone for all subsequent literature in Tamil and shaped the future of literary discourse in the language. Even more important, Sangam literature is one of the great literary treasures of the world. Its works provide a Tamil perspective on life and on human experience that is quite different from anything found in Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, or any other language. Its meters, its language, its conventions, and its spirit are all purely Tamil. Its scope is so large that it can easily be compared to any of the other classical languages. As far as date is concerned, we see that it is roughly contemporary with the great productions of Latin. What is not generally remarked is that Sangam Literature actually predates the refined kāvya literature of Sanskrit, which begins with Kālidāsa in the fourth century AD. It is not so early as the Sanskrit epics, and is about a millennium later than the Rig Veda, yet when we speak of "classical Sanskrit," it is usually the works of Kālidāsa and the later writers that we mean. It should also be remarked that Tamil possesses an epic poem, the Cilappatikāram, that is unique to it, and that is comparable in scope and depth to the great epics of Sanskrit.

In perhaps the fourth or fifth century BC, $P\bar{a}nini$ wrote the $Ast\bar{a}dhy\bar{a}y\bar{i}$, which described – and prescribed – the Sanskrit language. It was largely that Paninean grammatical

tradition that allowed Sanskrit to be used for two and a half millennia with its grammar and forms virtually unchanged, and that allowed the language to be used in many different parts of South and Southeast Asia in a form that was accessible to everyone who knew it. A similar process took place in Europe, where Latin and Greek were described in prescriptive grammars in such a way that they would not change and could be read by everyone who knew the languages. In Tamil also a grammatical tradition arose that has been preserved in the Tolkappiyam, which, like the work of Pāṇini, prescribed the proper forms for the language and served to unify it. The Tolkappiyam, which seems to contain sections dating from the beginning of Sangam times to the 3rd or 4th century, describes Tamil in purely indigenous terms, borrowing little from the traditions of the North. It sets a standard for the kind of Tamil to be used by educated people, much as Pāṇini did for Sanskrit, and it has given written or "Classical" Tamil an identity and shape that has changed little over the centuries. It is quite remarkable that an illiterate Tamil villager can still understand many stanzas of the Tirukkural.

The influence of Tamil is far more extensive than is often realized. The forms and ideas of Sangam literature were taken up by the bhakti writers from the sixth century onwards who produced the <code>Devaram</code> and the <code>Divyaprabhandham</code>. In perhaps the twelfth century, an anonymous Tamilian wrote the <code>Bhagavatapurana</code>, which tells the story of Krishna and which borrows many ideas and themes from the Tamil bhakti writers. These themes were taken up by writers in many traditions, including Telugu and

Hindi. The poems of Āṇṭāṭ and her story became important in other South Indian languages, and are the subject matter of Āmuktamālyadā, one of the major works of Telugu, and also of many Sanskrit works. The stories of the Periyapurāṇam were important for both the Kannada Vīraśaivas and for Telugu. The Malayalam language is, like modern Tamil, an offshoot of old Tamil. Alongside forms and words borrowed from Sanskrit, it uses words and conventions from old Tamil. The fact is, many Indian literatures have been influenced directly or indirectly by the Tamil tradition. Even Tulsi's Rāmacaritmānas owes much to the influence of the Āṭvārs.

In conclusion, we see that Tamil resembles the other classical languages - Greek, Latin, Sanskrit - in virtually every way. It is almost as old as Latin, it possesses a vital and rich literature that is peculiar to itself and is not borrowed, it was standardized at a very early time, it was used in subsequent periods as a language of literature and discourse, and it exerted considerable influence on the traditions of other languages. There are very few world languages that have these characteristics. Other Indian languages are like the non-classical languages of Europe: they did not become productive literary languages until after A.D. 1000, they did not produce their own peculiar grammar, and they did not produce any great body of literature that was entirely their own, without any significant influence from the outside. Just as English and the other European languages were deeply influenced by the European classical tradition, the Indian languages were influenced by Sanskrit and, to some extent, by Tamil. This is not to say that their literatures are not extremely rich and worthy of study. Like French or English, the modern languages of India contain much that is great by any standard, and much of their literature goes back to medieval times. Yet among indigenous South Asian languages, only Tamil and Sanskrit can properly be called "classical" if we use that word as it is applied in the West to Latin and Greek.

Introduction

In our country, when it comes to a discussion of issues concerning languages, objectivity of approach and dependability of data provided are a desideratum: they leave much to be desired. It so happens that I belong to the discipline of science and technology. In my life's journey, whether personal or professional, the vehicle for onward march in the search for truth is the scientific approach and the method of science. I shall not knowingly make any claim in favour of or make any observation in praise of, any object, even if it be my mother tongue that I love most, unless supported by reliable and adequate evidence. We proceed further to explore the status of Tamil, ancient and modern, with this conviction and commitment on my part. It is but the inscrutable law of nature that nothing that departs from truth endures long.

Tamil as a language possesses certain characteristics and dimensions which are unique to it and which no other

language of the world, excepting Chinese and Greek, can claim. They are as follows:

1. Firstly, it is

- an ancient language with a literary tradition of over 2500 years,
- ii an ancient language associated with one of the great civilizations of the world, i.e. Indian culture and heritage, and
- iii a language that is acknowledged as one of the classical languages of the world.
- Secondly, it is the mother tongue of nearly 75 million Tamils living in more than 50 countries of the world besides India and Sri Lanka. It is a modern language rich in literature and satisfying one or more of the social, economic, political and spiritual needs of these people depending on their number and status in each country.
- 3. Thirdly, Tamil is the national (official) language in two countries i.e. Sri Lanka and Singapore; official language in two states in a federation, i.e. Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, and a recognised language in a large number of countries like Malaysia, Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa and many others. In short, it is the mother tongue of a global language family.

Panambaranar, in his preface to the great grammatical treatise *Tholkappiyam*, defines the boundaries of Tamil Nadu as follows:

Tamil world lying between
The Venkata hills in the North and
Cape Comarin in the South

[1]

These boundaries have shrunk both in the North and in the South. However, Tamils live today all over the world, transcending the boundaries of India and Sri Lanka, the major habitat of early Tamils. Poet Kulothungan describes the present status as follows:

Transcending the bounds of India, Spread over numerous lands of the globe Live the Tamils.

A race that originally conceived of The philosophy of one world A race that trumpeted that All the world are their kin.

The Tamil community
Which once proclaimed
That the world is the common nest
For all the humans
Is today a global family. [2]

Tamil today is not the language of a province, the language of a single country, but the mother tongue of a global family. That Tamil is the mother tongue of a global family is a widely accepted fact. The following examples bear out the above statement.

The B.B.C is an internationally reputed institution. Among the 22 languages that find entry in the Indian Constitution. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and Bengali the national language of Bangladesh. Among the remaining 20 Indian languages, the B.B.C. broadcasts only in Hindi and Tamil. Telugu and Marathi are spoken by more people in India than Tamil. But the B.B.C. broadcasts, besides Hindi, in Tamil since it has a global audience.

- China broadcasts in over 40 languages of the world. Leaving Urdu and Bengali, in the remaining 20 languages of India, China also broadcasts only in Hindi and Tamil for the same reason
- The UNESCO, Paris was publishing till recently a monthly journal by the name Courier in over 30 languages. It was published only in Hindi and Tamil among the 20 Indian languages mentioned earlier.

The privilege accorded to Tamil is only because of the wide diaspora of the Tamil community.

Even at a time in human history, when a person born in Conjeevaram did not travel as far as Kavirippoompattinam, a neighbouring town, the ancestors of the Tamils declared:

Every place is my hamlet Every one is my kin.

[3]

The Tamils today have spread across the world, as though with the conviction that the globe is the common habitat for humanity. Tamil is the mother tongue of this global community.

In future, when we plan for the development and use of Tamil, we have to keep these three dimensions discussed above in mind and take appropriate decisions on all occasions. The boundaries of our frame of reference must be wide. The stretch of our vision must be global. Our thinking has to embrace a world community. The implications of our policies and decisions concerning Tamil have much more than national significance. We must avoid rigidity and adopt

a policy of flexibility and be willing to	accept	changes.
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- ☐ We are entitled to think big
- Our ambitions must be high
- Our dreams must be great

Among the three dimensions of Tamil described in the foregoing, we shall in this book deal with only the first aspect consisting of:

- i Antiquity
- ii Indian cultural heritage
- iii Classical status.

All these three are interrelated.

Textual Quotations in Roman Script

 வட வேங்கடம் தென் குமரி ஆ இடைத் தமிழ் கூறும் நல் உலகத்து

- தொல்காப்பியம், சிறப்புப் பாயிரம்

vaţa vēṅkaţam ten kumari ā iţait tamil kūrum nal ulakattu

tolkāppiyam, cirappup pāyiram

 இந்தியத் துணைக்கண் டத்தின் எல்லைகள் கடந்து பூமிப் பந்திடை அமைந்த நாடு பலவினும் பரவி வாழும்

intiyat tuņaikkaņ ţattiņ ellaikaļ kaţantu pūmip pantiţai amainta nāţu palaviņum paravi vālum

செந்தமிழ் மக்கள் சா்வ தேசியத் தத்து வத்தின் தந்தையா் : வய்ய மெல்லாம் தமா்எனப் பறைய றைந்தோா்.

centami<u>l</u> makkaļ carva tēciyat tattu vattiņ tantaiyar : vayya mellām tamar_eṇap paraiya raintor.

புவனமும் மானு டர்க்குப் பொதுவெனும் தமிழச் சாதி குவலயக் குடும்பம்: எங்கும் குறுக்கிடும் சுவர்க ளில்லார்.

- குலோத்துங்கன் கவிதைகள்: பக். 414,415

puvanamum mānu ţarkkup potuvenum tamilac cāti kuvalayak kuţumpam: enkum kurukkiţum cuvarka lillār.

kulöttuńkan kavitaikal: pak. 414,415

 யாதும் ஊரே யாவரும் கேளிர்

- புறநானூறு 192

yātum ūrē yāvarum kēļir

puranānūru 192

Antiquity of Tamil

Antiquity is one of the attributes of a classical language. The ancientness of Tamil is an acknowledged fact. The Encyclopaedia Britannica states as follows:

> Apart from literature written in Classical (Indo- Aryan) Sanskrit, Tamil is the oldest literature in India.

> > (Vol. II, p.530)

The Encyclopaedia of India has the following entry:

Tamil, highly cultivated and developed of Dravidian languages, perhaps the oldest spoken language of the world going back to pre-historic times, has rich vocabulary and can express exactly nuances of thought, meaning and ideas, has a vast literature, early output being that of the three Sangams (or Academies); dating of Tamil literature is difficult.

When we consider antiquity as a criterion for the classical status of a language, what is important is the

ancientness of the literature that meets the requirement of classicism. In Tamil, Sangam literature is stated as classical and it is reckoned as belonging to the period from the 2nd century B.C to the middle of the 2nd century A.D. Dr Bh. Krishnamurti, a doyen in linguistics, highly respected for his scholarship in India and abroad, states:

The Cankam anthologies, considered the earliest of Tamil literature, belong broadly from the second century BC to the third century CE.

 The Dravidian Languages, Cambridge Language Surveys, 2003.

In the case of Sangam works, it is the literary aspect that stands foremost among the scholars. But to me, the Sangam period, Sangam literature and the Sangam poets – all are a great treasure with many dimensions and at the same time a great puzzle, posing many questions.

The Sangam poets were considered poor and were mendicants who went to patrons, chieftains and kings, composed poems, presented them and received their patronage by way of hospitality and rich donations ranging from an elephant to estates consisting of a few villages, but mostly gifts in the form of materials, gold, silver or coins in currency. They composed poems in praise of those that they approached, often advising them or even criticizing them bordering on condemnation. In normal practice, one who goes for alms does not advise, much less criticize; does not get angry. But these poets put on a majestic demeanour; never cowered; expected welcome as a matter of course, and demanded respect. They left the court in a huff when they even remotely suspected disrespect or indifference; politely refused gifts, when they considered them not worthy of their standing. In general, they bade for alms, but were not begging; they craved for patronage, but were not cringing;

praised liberally, but were not flattering; advised them in terse language and even admonished them when warranted. What is even more important, the rulers, the chieftains and patrons highly valued their being sung and eulogised by these poets. The Sangam poets were a kind of people, unique to themselves, not found anywhere else in the world, not even in Tamil Nadu itself in its later history. They represent a phenomenon that deserves and requires further study.

I may quote one or two examples to illustrate the personality of the Sangam poets. Athiyaman Neduman Anji was a great philanthropist and a chieftain. Avvaiyar, the celebrated Sangam poetess went to his court for an audience with him and to receive gifts. It so happened that Athiyaman unexpectedly, for some reason. delayed the presentation of gifts. Avvaiyar was miffed; she declared:

Does not Athiyaman the rider of a speeding horse, understand his obligation?
Does he not understand me and my standing?
The world has not become bankrupt of patrons
By the demise of the wise and the famous.
We pack up the containers of instruments
We carry our musical apparatus on our shoulders.
When the children of a carpenter enter the forest with necessary tools
Will they starve? so is our position
We get food in whichever direction we go [1]

So saying she gets ready to leave Athiyaman's court.

Another instance is in the life of the Sangam poet Perunchithiranar. He goes to Athiyaman Neduman Anji to get gifts. Athiyaman fails to receive him in person. Without giving audience and honouring the poet, he arranges to give him necessary gifts. The poet feels hurt at this treatment. He declares:

Crossing the hills and mountains
I came to receive his gifts
The chieftain invincible to his foes,
Has offered this gift for me
To receive and carry;
How does he know me and my worth
Since he has not met me?
I am not a commercial mendicant
To accept the gift without being
granted audience.
If the standing and worth of the
recipient are assessed
and respected
Even a little that is given
Is honour enough.

[2]

He refuses to receive the gift as he feels that it is beneath his dignity to accept a present under such circumstances as witnessed. This certainly is not normally the behaviour of a person who approaches a patron to request and receive charity.

I may in continuation refer to another example to illustrate the unique character of the Sangam poets. The poet is again Perunchithiranar who goes to the chieftain Velimaan, who is resting and orders his younger brother, Velimaan the younger, to give the poet the necessary gift. Accordingly he gives him a gift, but the poet feels that the gift is not worth receiving; he considers it too modest, unworthy of his standing as a poet. He turns down the gift, goes to Kumanan, another great philanthropist, sings in praise of him, receives a majestic elephant as the gift. He rides on the elephant, takes it to Velimaan the chieftain who gave him a meagre present and donates him the elephant that he got from Kumanan, saying;

You are not the only
Patron in the world;
It is not as though the
World is devoid of philanthropists.
There are those who beseech
And those who grant benefices
The huge stately elephant
That I have brought and
Tethered to your guardian tree
My gift to you.
O! the possessor of a speeding horse.

[3]

We have here the instance of a mendicant poet, who approaches a patron for gifts, gets dissatisfied with the worth of the present and refuses to accept it. So far, understandable, acceptable. But he does not stop at that; goes to another benefactor, gets an elephant as present, brings it back and grants it as his gift to the chieftain who gave him a meagre gift. One can well understand the kind of self-esteem the poets had, and the status that they seemed to have enjoyed and the treatment they were accustomed to expect and receive even though they approached the patrons for benefaction. The Sangam poets appear to be a class of people, unique and without parallel in history.

The Sangam corpus must be researched in breadth and depth by the historians, archaeologists and sociologists. They have many dimensions:

- They provide historical information about the ancient Tamils
- ii They provide information about the social and cultural life of the Tamils.
- iii They constitute the classical literature in Tamil.

It is not as though the Sangam poets alone are part of the history of the Tamils; even the benefactors and philanthropists, the kings and chieftains that they sang in praise of, are historic persons. The kings or patrons like Pari, Kumanan and Athiyaman whom we come across in Sangam poetry are not imaginary literary figures, but are a part of the history of the Tamil country. It is only natural that historians question the acceptance of episodes in literature as part of history. They may and will ask whether there is other evidence authentic enough by way of convincing corroboration. Fortunately, we have such evidences. They are:

- Epigraphic inscriptions
- II. Ancient coins
- III. Sherds of broken earthenware.

Tamil scholars and researchers of the ancient Tamil literature believed, perhaps as a matter of faith, that the names of great patrons, immortalised by the Sangam poets, referred to historic personalities. However, historians will demand more than literary evidence to record an episode or grant a place in history to an individual. Fortunately, developments in epigraphy, archaeology and numismatics come to our help.

Iravatham Mahadevan, a doyen in Tamil epigraphy, has identified a number of stone inscriptions carrying information about kings and chieftains whose names are also found in Sangam literature. Two inscriptions of Mangulam mention the name of Nedunchezhiyan; two by the same name are known to us from Sangam literature (p.116):

- i. Nedunchezhiyan who overcame the Aryan armies (Purananooru 183)
- ii.Nedunchezhiyan the victor at Thalayalankanam. (Purananooru 18,19)

It has been suggested that Nedunchezhiyan of Mangulam inscriptions may be identified with either of them.

Iravatham Mahadevan mentions two identical inscriptions at Pugalur which are grants of Irumporal line of the Chera dynasty ruling from Karur. He compares the genealogy of three generations of the Irumporal line in the inscriptions with the historical data found in the pathikams of *Pathitruppaththu* resulting in the following comparisons (p.117):

Inscriptions

Pathitrupaththu

Kō Ātan Cel Irumporai Celva-k-kaṭunkō Vāli Ātan (7th decade)

2. Perunkatunkon Perun-ceral Irumporai (8th decade)

3. Kaţunkōn Iļankaţunkō Iļan-cēral Irumporai (9th decade)

Mahadevan observes:

Though Ātan is a recurring name in the Cēra dynasty, this name is borne by only one ruler in the Irumporai line. Further, the prefixed attributes peru and iļa in the names of the next two generations of princes in the inscriptions are also found likewise in the Patimuppattu. The evidence can be interpreted as indicating that Perunkaṭunkōn assumed the royal title as Peruncēral Irumporai when he ascended the throne and that when Iļankaṭunkō ascended the throne in his turn, he assumed the royal title Iļancēral Irumporai. According to tradition, the Cankam poets Pālai Pāṭiya Perunkaṭunkō and Marutham Pāṭiya Iļankaṭunkō are identified with these princes.

According to Mahadevan(p.119):

The donor of cave shelter at Jambai is referred to as satiayaputō atiyan neṭumān añci in the inscription. He may be identified as the famous chieftain Atiyamān Neṭumān Añji of Thakaṭūr (modern Dharmapuri) celebrated in Cankam literature.

Mahadevan further remarks (p.119):

A potsherd found during recent excavations at Teriruveli (MudukalathurTaluk, Ramanathapuram District) is incised in Tamil-Brāhmī with the name neṭuṅkiḷ[ḷi*] in characters of ca. 1st century A.D. The name is that of a Cola prince as kiḷḷi occurs only in early Cola names.

Neṭuṅkiḷḷi was known mainly for his internecine fighting with another $C\bar{o}$ prince called Nalaṅkiḷḷi. Once Neṭuṅkiḷḷi withstood a prolonged siege of his fort at Āvūr by Nalaṅkiḷḷi causing much distress to the people and livestock within the fort. The poet Kōvūr Kiḷār chastised Neṭuṅkiḷḷi for refusing to go out to fight or surrender the fort acknowledging defeat. (Purananooru 44,45)

R. Krishnamurthy (p.20), a numismatist with considerable research to his credit, has acquired coins with the legend Peru-valuthi on the obverse and the stylised fish symbol (the lanchana or emblem of the Pandiyas) on the reverse. This is a major breakthrough in the numismatic history of Tamil Nadu, since the names of Sangam Age Pandiyas were known to us mostly from literature so far. The discovery of these coins proves the historicity of Pandiya kings.

Krishnamurthy discovered a silver coin with a portrait and a legend in Tamil-Brahmi script (p.100). He read the

legend as Mak-kotai and identified the coin with the Sangam period Chera King Mak-kotai.

Krishnamurthy has reported the discovery of a silver coin with the legend Kuttuvan Kothai with the portrait of a king on the obverse(p.103). Purananooru(54) talks about Kuttuvan Kothai. Krishnamurthy assigns this coin to later part of the second century. It falls well within the span of the age of Sangam classics.

Evidence has accumulated from epigraphy and numismatics to establish the fact that we can depend on Sangam literature to trace the history and discern the social life of ancient Tamils.

It may be relevant to mention here that a rich and fertile field lies open for research in these disciplines. Researchers in the fields of literature, epigraphy and numismatics have been working in parallel, relatively independent of each other. An interdisciplinary approach comprising these areas may yield very valuable information on the history and social life of ancient Tamils. It is both highly desirable and academically judicious to launch an integrated research on ancient Tamils using all the three disciplines.

The evidence already available presents a picture of the Sangam period as an extraordinary era for literature. The following information (attracts our attention) and demands a closer look.

The Sangam period is from the 1st or 2nd century B.C. to the middle of the 3rd century A.D. On the whole, it may cover a period of four centuries. There have been, even as listed in the Sangam anthologies, 473 poets whose works could be identified and assessed worthy of inclusion in the anthology. The actual number of poets might have been many more. Even the count of about 500 poets of **Sangam quality** in a span of 400 years is remarkable. I wonder whether there was any parallel to this in any other contemporary society.

- Secondly, we come across, among the poets, persons from surprisingly diverse occupations. There are among the Sangam poets, kings, chieftains, traders, grain merchants, cloth merchants, potters, panars and many other vocations.
- It is really a matter of unending wonder that two millennia ago from today, there was in the then Tamil Country, such level of learning existing across the occupations as to contribute poets from every vocation.
- It is reported that potsherds belonging to the third century B.C. with inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi have been found in excavations in rural areas that are considerably remote from urban centres. It shows, from whichever angle we may look at it, a reliable indication of the spread of literacy among the people even in rural areas.

Collating the above data, Mahadevan draws the conclusion that there must have been widespread literacy among the Tamils of Sangam age (p.160). This finding is somewhat astonishing and extraordinary when we view it against the fact that even as recently as the beginning of the 20th century, literacy in Tamil Nadu was below 10%.

Textual Quotations in Roman Script

1. கடுமான் தோன்றல் நெடுமான் அஞ்சி தன் அறியலன் கொல்? என் அறியலன் கொல்? அறிவும் புகழும் உடையோர் மாய்ந்தென, வறுந் தலை உலகமும் அன்றே; அதனால், காவினம் கலனே; சுருக்கினெம் கலப்பை; மரம் கொல் தச்சன் கைவல் சிறாஅர் மழுவுடைக் காட்டகத்து அற்றே-எத்திசைச் செலினும், அத்திசைச் சோறே.

- புறநானூறு 206

kaţumān tōnral neţumān añci
tan ariyalan kol? en ariyalan kol?
arivum pukalum uţaiyōr māyntena,
varun talai ulakamum anrē; atanāl,
kāvinam kalanē; curukkinem kalappai;
maram kol taccan kaival cirāar
maluvuţaik kātţakattu arrēetticaic celinum, atticaic cōrē.

puranānūru 206

2. 'குன்றும் மலையும் பல பின் ஒழிய வந்தெனன், பரிசில் கொண்டனென் செலற்கு' என நின்ற என் நயந்து அருளி 'ஈது கொண்டு, ஈங்ஙனம் செல்க, தான்' என, என்னை யாங்கு அறிந்தனனோ, தாங்கு அருங் காவலன்? காணாது ஈத்த இப் பொருட்கு யான் ஓர் வாணிகப் பரிசிலன் அல்லென்; பேணி, தினை அனைத்து ஆயினும், இனிது-அவர் துணை அளவு அறிந்து, நல்கினர் விடினே. 'kunrum malaiyum pala pin oliya vantenan, paricil kontanen celarku' ena ninra en nayantu aruli 'itu kontu, innanam celka, tan' ena, ennai yanku arintanano, tanku arun kavalan? kanatu itta ip porutku yan or vanikap paricilan allen; peni, tinai anaittu ayinum, initu-avar tunai alavu arintu, nalkinar vitine.

puranāņūru 208

3. இரவலர் புரவலை நீயும் அல்லை; புரவலர் இரவலர்க்கு இல்லையும் அல்லர்; இரவலர் உண்மையும் காண், இனி; இரவலர்க்கு ஈவோர் உண்மையும் காண், இனி; நின் ஊர்க் கடிமரம் வருந்தத் தந்து யாம் பிணித்த நெடு நல் யானை எம் பரிசில்; கடுமான் தோன்றல்; செல்வல் யானே.

- புறநானூறு **162**

iravalar puravalai niyum allai; puravalar iravalarkku illaiyum allar; iravalar unmaiyum kān, ini; iravalarkku ivor unmaiyum kān, ini; nin ūrk katimaram varuntat tantu yām pinitta netu nal yānai em paricil; katumān tonral; celval yānē.

puranānūru 162

Dravidian in the Indian Heritage

We may now consider the contribution of Tamil to Indian civilization and culture. Addressing the convocation of Pune University in 1953, C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar made the following statement:

The two greatest components of culture in India are Sanskrit and Dravidian.

Dr C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer was an eminent lawyer, a great administrator and a person well read in Indian art, literature, culture and philosophy. His observation has behind it vast learning and immense erudition.

Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji was a doyen among Indologists and linguists. He enjoyed a national and an international reputation. He has made the following observation about Indian civilization and culture (p.49):

One thing I would like to reiterate in this connection. There cannot be any conception of India without either Dravidian (and other pre-Aryan) or Aryan.

Like the warp and woof of a piece of woven stuff, Aryan and Dravidan have become interlaid with each other to furnish the texture of Indian civilization.

Sir John Marshall, as referred to by T.R. Sesha lyengar, has expressed the following assessment of Dravidian contribution (pp.115-116):

According to Sir John Marshall the Aryans were much indebted to the pre-Aryan inhabitants of India in the domain of art. It is in the south of India, in the Amaravati Sculptures, that we find the richest, most rhythmical, and most imaginative designs.... India is indebted for her natural and inborn love of ornamental design to the Dravidian or pre-Aryan people.... It must be admitted that the ancient Aryans were indebted to the Dravidians for their knowledge of architecture.

Dr X.S. Thani Nayagam in his work Tamil Culture and Civilisation has recorded the following views (pp.202,204):

Further the system of local administration now prevalent in the country is considered to be of Dravidian origin...such also is the wonderful installation of the village communities.

Again,

The Vedic religion, says Sir Sarvapalli. Radhakrishnan, absorbed, embodied, and preserved the type and rituals of other cults. Instead of destroying them, it adapted them to its own requirements. It took so much from the social life of the Dravidians and other native

inhabitants of India that it is very difficult to disentangle the original Aryan elements from the others.

Sanskrit and Dravidian constitute the two eyes of Indian civilization and culture. The contribution of Sanskrit has been, and continues to be, studied and researched extensively and intensively in India and abroad. The Vedic, Upanishadic, artistic, literary and historic aspects from the lore of Sanskritic writings have been read, analysed and deliberated at all levels. Either by design or by virtue of lopsided study, a tradition has come to be established that all that is Indian, by and large, is Sanskritic and the entire edifice has been built on that substratum. The Dravidian component, which is substantial, has not been taken up for any serious study. Consequently, we have been looking at ancient Indian culture and civilization with one eye and we do not have therefore the virtue and strength of wholeness. The following view of the eminent historian Dr Vincent Smith will give an idea of the warp in the history of Indian civilization (p.43):

Some day, perhaps, the history of Dravidian civilization may be written by a competent scholar skilled in all the lore and language required for the study of the subject: but at present the literature concerned with it is too fragmentary, defective and controversial to permit of condensation. Early Indian history as a whole cannot be viewed in true perspective until the non-Aryan institutions of the South receive adequate treatment. Hitherto most historians of ancient India have written as if the South did not exist.

From what we have seen so far, two facts emerge. They are:

i Indian civilization and culture are really the product of the confluence of two great rivers. ii Of them, the Dravidian component has not been fully and properly assessed.

The Dravidian component can be studied and evaluated only through the medium of Tamil which is the most ancient of Dravidian languages. We shall examine this aspect in the next chapter.

The Prime Source of Dravidian Culture

Tamil, the most ancient of Dravidian languages with nearly 2500 years of literary history, is the prime component of Dravidian culture just as Sanskrit is the container of the Aryan component. Tamil and Sanskrit are the two pillars of the great edifice of ancient Indian civilization and culture, the same way as Greek and Latin constitute the components of European culture. In order to understand the Indian culture and civilization in its wholeness, we need the help of Sanskrit and Tamil. This fact must be stated loud and clear. Poet Kulothungan gives the following clarion call to proclaim the message:

The message, Tamil and Sanskrit are
The two eyes of the heritage of India
Must echo in the North beyond the Vindhyas
And in the forums of the world
Transcending national boundaries. [1]

In order to seek evidence from the world of scholars that Tamil constitutes the prime source of Dravidian culture, we may look among others at the contribution of Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji, a doyen of Indology and a world renowned scholar. In his lecture on Dravidian, delivered at the Annamalai University in February 1963, he has stated as follows (p.83):

In order to understand and appreciate the basic and characteristic contribution of Dravidian land to Indian literature as a whole, we have thus to take full note of "the Matter of Tiravida-nādu or Drāvida-dēsa." This is to be found, of course, for the Classical Old Dravidian Period, in the Sangam Literature of Tamil, in the first instance.

When we say that Tamil is as important as Sanskrit for the ancient Indian civilization and culture the question will naturally arise whether Tamil as a language is as ancient as Sanskrit and whether it is a classical language as Sanskrit is. We have discussed already the antiquity of Tamil. We shall consider in due course the classical status of Tamil.

It may be relevant to draw attention to an important fact. Every book written in Sanskrit was not necessarily by an author of North Indian origin. We may take sculpture for instance. Tamil Nadu is virtually the haven for granite stone sculpture. There is no granite in the North; we have only sandstone in that part of India: but the authoritative treatment on granite sculpture is available only in Sanskrit texts. Till recently, boys and girls, most of whom were from backward communities, studied Sanskrit as a compulsory subject in the school of sculpture at Mamallapuram. These books must have been written only by scholars from Tamil Nadu also trained in sculpture. A similar situation exists when we come to 'Sharata Natyam. This art form belongs to the South, particularly Tamil Nadu and should have been of Tamil origin.

Again, the authoritative texts on the subject are in Sanskrit. They must necessarily have been written by scholars from this part of the country. We have to bear in mind therefore that the Tamils have also contributed to literature in Sanskrit and it is necessary to sift through the authorship of some of the texts in Sanskrit.

The Hindu religion today is essentially one of Bhakti Yoga. The founders of this wing of Hinduism are essentially the Azhwars and Nayanmars of Tamil Nadu. It is necessary therefore to investigate in some detail the contribution of the Tamils to relatively early Sanskrit literature on various subjects.

Textual Quotations in Roman Script

- 1. இந்தியத்தின் பண்பாட்டின் விழிகள் என்ப இன்தமிழும் வடமொழியும் என்னும் உண்மை விந்தியத்தின் வடக்கேயும் கடல்கள் தாண்டி வெளியுலக மன்றத்தும் விளக்க வேண்டும்
 - குஸோத்துங்கன் கவிதைகள்: பக். 364

intiyattin panpāţţin vilikal enpa intamilum vaţamoliyum ennum unmai vintiyattin vaţakkeyum kaţalkal tanţi veliyulaka manrattum vilakka venţum

kulōttuṅkan kavitaikal: pak. 364

Criteria for Classical Status

It is necessary to consider the criteria for a language to be considered classical. No grammar book has dealt with explicitly the criteria for a language to be identified and recognized as a classical language. One does not come across the definition of a classical language as such either in dictionaries or in encyclopaedias; nor is it discussed in any grammar book. There does not seem to exist anywhere an authoritative list of classical languages.

What is recognized and identified in standard texts is classical literature. Those languages that have classical literature are acknowledged as classical languages. Classical literature is a technical term. The concept of classical languages had its origin in Europe. The term 'classical' is derived from the Latin term 'classicus' which belongs to the 2nd century A.D. From Latin, it was adopted in French and later in English from French.

The literary contributions of ancient Greece and Rome in Greek and Latin were considered by the scholars as classical and these two languages were considered as classical languages. In other words, it is the literature that is assessed as classical and by virtue of the literature the language is termed classical. The criteria for classical status are therefore derived from Greek and Latin literatures. They are by and large as follows:

- I. Antiquity
- II. Harmony
- III. Clarity
- IV. Restraint
- V. Serenity
- VI. Idealism
- VII. Universality
- VIII. Reason
- IX. Order
- X. Humanism

It must be stated again that these are derived qualities or characteristics from ancient Greek and Latin literatures and are not based on any design.

Of the qualities listed above, only antiquity is quantifiable at least roughly; the rest are qualitative in nature. The basis for antiquity again is the classical period of Greek and Latin literatures. The classical period for Greek literature is from the beginning of the 5th century B.C. The classical period for Latin literature is from the first century B.C. Based on these data, we may state that the antiquity requirement may be fixed around 2000 years. There does not seem to be any other basis for quantifying antiquity.

We may look at the definition of classical literature, which forms the basis for a language to be termed classical. According to Grolier Academic Encyclopaedia:

The word classicism in literature refers to those elements of style or content such as reason, clarity, order, restraint and humanitarian outlook, that characterized the writing of ancient Greeks ranging from Homer, Plato and Aristotle.

The following explanation in Encyclopaedia Britannica also deserves consideration:

When used to refer to an aesthetic attitude, classicism invokes those characteristics normally associated with the art of antiquity, harmony, clarity, restraint, universality and idealism (Vol.II p.536).

No language is considered to continue as a classical language from the distant past till the present. The literature of a classical language has an identified period of classicism. Latin is a classical language, but Newton's monumental work Principia written in Latin is not classical literature. Till about the 16th century, the Bible was written only in Latin. The Bible in Latin was not classical literature. In the case of certain languages, the literature of a specified period is considered classical. In the case of Japanese language the literature of the period 794 -1185 is considered classical. In the case of French, the literature of the later part of the 17th century i.e. after the establishment of the French Academy was considered classical. Similarly in English the literature from A.D.1660 to A.D.1714 was considered classical. Here the term classical is used in the sense of 'excellence in quality'.

When interpreted as 'excellence in quality', every language can claim to have a period when its literature could be termed classical and therefore this is altogether different from our discussion. We are considering here the set of classical languages of the world, i.e., classical languages in the sense in which Greek and Latin are referred to as classical languages.

In general, classical languages are ancient and have contributed to the development of a civilization and culture that have a unique place in the history of the world. Greek and Latin in Europe and Sanskrit in South East Asia constitute the containers of the literary and philosophical heritage of these lands. It is against this background that these languages have been recognized as classical languages.

Tamil is as ancient as Greek or Sanskrit and rich in its literature. As the container of the Dravidian component of Indian civilization and culture, it stands as an equal partner with Sanskrit and is one of the two pillars of ancient Indian heritage. Its place in the history of ancient civilization has not been recognized in due time since its literary treasure, scattered all over Tamil Nadu and India and even outside India in the West and in the East was discovered only during the 19th century and translated in parts into English and European languages much later. Soon thereafter, scholars recognized the status of Tamil in terms of its antiquity, grammatical foundation and literary heritage and acknowledged it as a classical language. We shall discuss this aspect again later.

Taking into account all the attributes of a classical language as derived mainly from Greek and Latin literary traditions, we may lay down broadly the following criteria for a classical language:

- i The language has high antiquity of about 2000 years for its early literature
- ii It has a body of ancient literature meeting the core attributes of classicism and held as valuable heritage bequeathed to humanity
- iii The literary tradition is original and not borrowed from another speech community
- iv The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

Classical Languages of Europe

6.1. Greek

Greek, one of the most ancient of world's languages, has a glorious and magnificent heritage; the Greeks were the creators of the literary tradition of the West.

The Greek language went through four stages of evolution: Ancient Greek (14th – 4th century B.C.): Hellenistic Greek (4th century B.C. – 4th century A.D.): Byzantine phase (5th century A.D. – 15th century A.D.) and Modern Greek dating from the 15th century A.D.

The aim of this book is to discuss certain issues that arise, consequent upon the Notification by the Government of India, endorsing the classical status of Tamil. However, for the sake of completeness, a brief account of Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Hebrew and Chinese, which are in the category of classical languages, is given. No detailed treatment is attempted. Similarly, Arabic and Persian are also touched upon as they are in the list of ancient/classical languages of the Government of India. The information in this regard for the above languages has been drawn mainly from several volumes of *Encyclopaedia Brittannica*, K. Appadurai and K.D. Thirunavukkarasu.

Modern Greek exists in three varieties: the first one includes all dialects; the second is Demotic, a separate form, spoken in urban centres and understood by all; the third is known as Katharevusa, the pure language of the Atticists. Since 1976, Demotic has been made the official language of the State. It has replaced Katharevusa as the language for government documents, education, newspapers and many others.

Greek is a refined and cultivated language with a well-defined grammar that continued intact through centuries. It is endowed with a wealth of literature, that is rich in variety and quality as well. Such of the other languages as are comparable in antiquity and literary tradition are deficient in one genre of literature or the other but Greek has the great distinction of possessing almost all genres, i.e., epic, drama, elegy, lyric, philosophy, history, and oration. The exceptions are the modern forms, i.e., novel, short story and essay.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the two great epics, the earliest in Greek or in any other European language, were authored by the great poet Homer who might have drawn them from centuries of oral tradition, They have the Trojan war as the theme with graphic descriptions of the confrontations of the heroes.

The period of Homer is reckoned approximately as the 8th century B.C. Among the important names in ancient Greek literature was Hesiod, belonging, perhaps, to the 7th century B.C. He was a didactic poet and his two works, Theogony and Herakles, follow the epic tradition. His important contribution 'Works and Days' is in lyrical poetry and is an epic intended to guide and counsel agriculturists and workers rather than sing the glories of rulers and the exploits of heroes.

Simonides is another didactic poet who lived in the middle of the 7th century B.C. There is, in his poems, a streak of pessimism which may be the reflection of the adverse circumstances he faced and the failures he met with in his life. Notwithstanding the trials and tribulations he went through, his faith in a life of virtue remained unshaken.

Solon, a prominent lawyer, was also a didactic poet in his own right. He lived in the beginning of the 6th century B.C. His writings deal with the course of human life on earth and emphasize the strength of fate in the joys and sorrows of human beings.

Parmenides of Elea who lived around the earlier part of the 5th century B.C. was a philosopher and a born poet who recorded his thoughts in poems. According to him, all that we see and experience through our five senses are not true; they are illusions. The only true entity is the soul that is boundless, invisible. Surprisingly, one could see that he had expounded almost the same theory as that of Shankara, nearly a millennium earlier. The legend goes that Socrates met him and was benefited by his discussions with him.

Elegiac poetry had its origin around the end of the 8th century B.C., The outstanding elegiac poets were Tyrtaeus, Mimnerumus of Colophon and Theognis, all of whom lived in the 7th and 6th centuries. Pindar who lived in the 5th century is considered the greatest poet of ancient Greece. He was in his own life time universally respected as an outstanding creative contributor. Among his contributions, mention must be made of *Olympionikai* (*The Olympian Odes*)

As for literary contributions in drama, mention must be made of the tragedies of Aeschylus (525 B.C.-456/455 B.C.), the earliest dramatist and of Sophocles (ca.496 B.C.–406 B.C.) who started his dramatic career by defeating

Aeschylus in a contest and had a glorious period. He played a leading role in the life of Athens and his best known work is *Oedipus Rex.* Euripides (ca.480 B.C.-406 B.C.) is referred to as the philosopher of the stage. Aristophanes (450 B.C.-388 B.C.) was the greatest name in comedy. He is credited with having written 40 plays of which 11 survived. He was highly critical of the Athenian scene and the titles of his plays like the Frogs, the Birds, the Clouds were themselves satirical in nature, though they had a substratum of seriousness. The period of Aristophanes saw Greek comedy reach its peak.

Theocritus (ca 310 B.C. - 250 B.C.) was the creator of pastoral poems in idylls. His best known work is Thyrsis. Herodotus (ca.484 B.C. - ca 420 B.C.) was the originator of the true historical method in Western culture. Thucydides (ca. 460-ca. 400) was another great contributor to history known for his objectivity, detachment, and a style remarkable for compression and terseness. The speeches of Demosthenes (384 B.C.-322 B.C.) were models in the art of persuasive presentation. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the trio, earned immortality for Athens, the city they lived in. Plato (ca. 428 B.C.-348 B.C.) was the founder of an Academy, a great philosopher and one of the greatest intellectuals produced by the Greek civilization. His language was elegant and powerful. The contributions of Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C.) were really monumental in literary criticism, and philosophical and scientific thought. Aristotle started his career as a member of the Academy of Plato where he spent 20 years. He was also the teacher of Alexander; when he was 50 he founded the school named Lyceum.

The classical period for Greek literature is reckoned as 500 B.C. to 320 B.C. The Greeks have really provided the benchmark for literary tradition in Europe.

6.2. Latin

While the Greeks were idealists and were deeply interested in intellectual pursuits, arts and sciences, the Romans were realists, involved in war and politics, valued practical arts and sciences. The Romans provided the foundation for legal structure in Europe and developed the concept of all being equal before the law. The Romans inherited from the Greeks most of the genres of literature like epic, drama, different forms of poetry, history, oratory and philosophy. To these, the Romans made their own contribution by way of satire and what has come to be known as the novel.

We may identify three periods for Latin literature: the period of the Republic; the period of Augustus considered the golden days and the period of Roman empire. The Latin literature as such comprises the body of writings during the Roman empire when Latin was a spoken language and later throughout the medieval and Renaissance periods when it was used for official purposes, scholarly writings and discourses, and religious ceremonies.

It may be pertinent to mention here that the first important contributor to Latin literature was a freed Greek slave, Livius Andronicus (ca. 284 B.C.- ca. 204 B.C) who translated Homer's *Odyssey* into Latin by the title Odyssia. Although it had very little poetic merit, it was the first major poem in Latin. Therefore, his work is considered significant in the development of Latin literature. Other writers in the earlier periods were Ennius (239 B.C-169 B.C.) who is considered the father of Roman literature, and authored the epic *Annales* of which some 600 lines survived. Ennius excelled in tragedy; titles of some 19 plays survive. He was a man of varied interests. He is credited with a mode of poetic expression which reached its peak in Virgil's Aeneid. Plautus (ca.254-184 B.C.) is supposed to have written 130

plays and of them 21 comedies survive. Plautus was a great Roman dramatist whose comedies have truly Roman flavour though the plays were borrowed from Greek. Tradition has it that he was associated with the theatre from youth. The original plays of Plautus did not survive; only the theatre editions of his works survived. Lucretius, who lived in the first century B.C was a poet and philosopher and held a unique place in the Latin literary world. His single long poem De rerum natura, (On the Nature of Things) won him an immortal place in Latin poetry. He has rendered in Latin poetry what Epicurus the Greek philosopher wrote in Greek in prose. It was a difficult task that he executed with great distinction. According to him, the universe consists of an infinite extent of empty space and an infinite number of irreducible particles. He believed in soul, but maintained that it did not live after death; it evaporated into thin air. His was an advocacy of so organising one's life as to maximise the pleasures and minimise the pain. To achieve this, one must overcome the fear of death and of the gods. Among the most significant contributors is Cicero (106 B.C. - 43 B.C.) who was a politician, advocate, orator, philosopher with voluminous contributions and also a talented versifier. Cicero was a contemporary of some of the great names in Roman history like Caesar and Pompey with whom he was closely associated, sometimes supporting them and sometimes distancing himself from them. Cicero was an orator par excellence and a lawyer of enviable ability. His contributions to Latin poetry deserve mention. At the height of his career, Catullus called him the 'father of his country'. The period of Cicero, and the reign of Augustus that followed constitute the golden age of Latin literature. Cicero incurred the enmity of Octavian, Caesar's adopted son, and the other two members of the triumvirate, i.e., Antony and Lepidus. Cicero was captured and killed. Mention must also be made of Julius Caesar (100 B.C. - 44 B.C.) who was also a writer of merit, besides being one of the greatest Roman generals and statesmen. During the Republic, writers enjoyed considerable freedom. Catullus (ca 84 B.C.-54 B.C.) the poet, a contemporary of Cicero, Caesar and Pompey had even criticized both Caesar the great and the mighty Pompey. It is said that as a poet, his technical brilliance remained unsurpassed. His contributions fall under lyric, miniature epic and elegy. Latin writing came to be conditioned during the period of Augustus (63 BC – AD 14) who was Caesar's successor and first emperor from 27 B.C. – A.D. 14. Subject to the need to adapt to the preferences of the regime, art and literature flourished and enjoyed the patronage of Augustus who was deeply interested in promoting them.

The prominent Latin poet was Virgil (70 B.C. – 19 B.C.) the author of Aeneid, who enjoyed the patronage of Augustus. Horace (65 B.C.- 8 B.C.) his contemporary was one of the most important poets of his time and was famous for his humour and satire. He had a brief stint in the army and commanded a legion of Brutus and Cassius in the battles against Antony and Octavian. He later became a clerk in the treasury and got introduced to literary circles. He wrote the first book of Satires. His later works were Epodes, Odes, second book of Satires and Epistles. According to Horace the best poems should edify as well as delight. He believed in gods, but denied an after life. He was considered to have represented the refined virtues of the Roman society. Somewhat less sophisticated was Ovid (43 B.C. - A.D.17) who incurred the wrath of Augustus and was banished on unrevealed charges of immorality. In his exile in Tomis, he regretted his indiscretion which offended Augustus in the humblest of language, but still maintained his status as a poet and almost stated that over poetry, the emperor had no power. He was an author of many significant works and among them his epic *Metamorphoses* considerably influenced Latin poetry.

Livy (59 B.C. – A.D.17) was a great historian and the author of the concise history of Rome which became a classic in his own life time. He was a person with an independent mind; did not seek any patronage; was an admirer of the values of early Rome and entertained fond hopes that the emperor Augustus might restore some of them. Tacitus (ca. A.D.56 – ca.120) was probably the greatest historian and was known for his masterly handling of literary Latin. It is said that in modern scholarship his books are studied seriously for reconstructing the early history of Roman empire. The genre of natural history was represented by Pliny the Elder (23 – 79). Seven writings are ascribed to him; of them only the work entitled *Natural History* survived. He faced a tragic death going too near the fumes of the erupting volcano, the Vesuvius.

Although Latin literature in its early stages was influenced by the Greek literary tradition, the robust native element asserted itself and in combination with Greek elements, provided the vigour and beauty that was characteristic of Latin literature. The classical period of Latin literature comprises part of the first century B.C. and part of the first century A.D.

Ancient/Classical Languages: Indian Government List

7.1. The Background

The Government of India maintain a list of ancient/ classical languages in which the following languages find a place:

- I. Pali
- II. Prakrit
- III. Arabic
- IV. Persian
- V. Sanskrit

Every year, scholars in these languages are identified and honoured by the President of India at an appropriate function in Rashtrapathi Bhavan. Of these languages, Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit are referred to as classical languages in certain documents, committee reports and the university curriculums.

It is seen that the Government of India have not issued any order declaring Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit as classical languages. If any order had been issued at some point of time, it is not traceable. It is also realized that classical language status is not normally conferred by a Government order. The status comes through a process of widespread recognition by the scholars in the field on the basis of the literary tradition of the language, evaluated against universally accepted norms of classicism.

Against the criteria mentioned above, it is necessary to explain and justify the demand made on the Government by the Tamil community on behalf of Tamil. The demand of the scholars and leaders from Tamil Nadu was not that the Government of India by an order confer on Tamil the status of classical language. Tamil already enjoys such recognition and is referred to as a classical language in relevant literature dealing with the subject. The Government of India have not so far included Tamil in the list of ancient/classical languages mentioned earlier. This is a lapse or an omission due to lack of application of mind to this problem. The request made was to rectify this error. It is necessary that we understand in proper perspective the nature of our request and also clarify to the Government of India the real significance and implication of our representation.

It was mentioned that the Government of India did not seem to have issued any G.O. prescribing the list of ancient / classical languages. The origin of the list that is now with the MHRD and used for annual awards, it seems, is lost in the passage of time. The list comprising Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit must have come into existence during the British regime, in all probability during the period of the East India Company itself.

With the advent of Islam and Turko-Iranian power in India about the 10th or 11th century A.D. and later with the

coming of the Arabs and Persians in the medieval period, the language education underwent major changes. Arabic was introduced as a religious language of the Muslims and Persian became the administrative, academic and poetic language in areas under the governance of Muslims. Sanskrit continued to be regarded as the language representing ancient Indian heritage. Warren Hastings who took over as the Governor of Fort William in Bengal in 1772 showed interest in the education of Indians and also had a taste for many things Indian which included ancient Indian literary works.

In the earlier part of the 19th century, Parliament empowered the Governor General to provide one lakh rupees each year for education. Over a period of time there was accumulation of funds, and plans were drawn up for setting up schools and educational institutions. In the course of this development, a controversy arose on the choice of subjects - whether to opt for Oriental education or Western education. Those who preferred and advocated education in Arabic, Persian and mainly Sanskrit were referred to as Orientalists and those who strongly advocated Western education, especially in modern areas and mainly sciences, were called Anglicists, which included many prominent Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy. During this period. Arabic and Persian were considered as representing Islamic culture and heritage and Sanskrit the ancient Indian heritage. Since then, it appears, they formed the trio and went together, referred to as classical languages without rigorously examining the implication of the meaning of the term, 'classical'. It is surmised that since then the practice might have continued with these three languages representing the composite culture of India. At some stage, the two ancient languages of India, i.e., Pali and Prakrit, must have been included and the Government of India might have made the list for Presidential recognition.

7.2. Arabic

Arabic is the language of the Koran and the religious language of the Muslims all over the world. Spoken in Arabia, Syria, Iran. Egypt, and in some African countries, the spoken dialects differ, but the literary form is about the same, throughout the Arab world. The literary Arabic is also referred to as classical Arabic which is the form found in the Koran.

The earliest written Arabic is said to be a royal funerary inscription dating from 328 B.C. Arabic literature is considered to belong to two distinct periods, namely i. classical, and ii. modern. The classical period begins with the poetry and proverbs of the nomadic Arabs of the desert and they were preserved by oral tradition, perhaps, from the 6th century or even earlier. They were recorded starting from the 7th century and continued during the following centuries also. The golden age of Arabic literature started with the advent of Islam in 622 and contributions belonged to many countries. For instance, there were Persians, Egyptians, Indians, Syrians and many others. The conquest of the Arab speaking world in the 17th and 18th centuries resulted in substantial loss of Arabic literature that existed at that period of time. The modern period in Arabic literature began with the renaissance movement in the 19th century, inspired by contact with the West. Such new forms of literature as novel and drama were developed under the influence of European works. Although other forms also owed much to Western influence, they also had their roots in classical Arabic literature consisting of short stories and verses.

Although the expression, "classical" is used with regard to early Arabic literature, it does not appear to be in the same sense in which the term is used while referring to ancient Greek or Latin literature. The Koran, the revealed book, could perhaps be considered the earliest literature in classical

Arabic. Briefly stated, Arabic does not belong to the family of classical languages as Greek or Latin or Sanskrit.

7.3. Persian

A member of the Indo-Iranian set of the Indo-European family, Persian is the official language of Iran and is written in Arabic script. It has three periods:

- i. Oid Period
- ii. Middle Period
- iii. Modern Period

The Persian language spoken upto the 3rd century B.C. is Old Persian. It consists of numerous inscriptions. Persian spoken from the 3rd century B.C. to the 9th century A.D. is referred to as Middle Persian. It consists of numerous epigraphic texts in Aramaic script and also literature describing the religious traditions of Zoroaster and Manichaeus. Written in a Semitic script, the name of Middle Persian was *Pahlavi*. Modern Persian is the language spoken from the 9th century onwards. It is, as mentioned earlier, written in the Arabic script and is the official language of Iran.

The first writings in Persian were in verse. Translations in prose from Arabic were made and initial writings were influenced by Arabic literary conventions. The golden period of Persian literature was from the 8th or 9th century to the 15th century. Persian can be considered one of the richest literary languages. Many were the gifted creators and among them seven are the most distinguished and honoured as the seven stars of Persian literature. They are Ruthaki and Firdausi in epic poems, Nizami in stories, Rumi in mystic poetry, Saadi in didactic literature, Hafiz in lyric poetry and Jami in all areas of literature. The period represented by these great masters is considered the golden period of Persian

literature. In terms of antiquity and certain other characteristics for classicism derived from Greek and Latin literature, Persian may not be considered a classical language in the sense in which Greek and Latin are classical languages.

7.4. Sanskrit

The word Sanskrit in its original form means polished, cultivated, purified, refined and correct (according to the rules of grammar). It is an Indo- European language said to be dating back from as early as 1800 B.C. It was described and standardized by the great grammarian Panini. The period generally assigned for his work is about 500 B.C. *Rig-Veda* seems to be the earliest literature in Sanskrit. In the development of Sanskrit two main periods are identified.

i The Vedic Period 1500 B.C. - 200 B.C.

ii The Classical Period 500 B.C. A.D. 1000

There is an overlap of about 300 years between the Vedic Period and the Classical Period.

The Classical Period for Sanskrit starts with the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. It was for this language that Panini wrote the grammar and it came to be referred to as Sanskrit later.

Sanskrit literature is really vast. Among the vast literary works, Ramayana and Mahabharata have found their way into all the Indian languages. They have their place in every Indian family. Their influence is discernible beyond the borders of India in South East Asian countries. Mahabharata consists of one lakh verses. It is eight times as long as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey put together. In the world of literature, there does not seem to be any work of comparable

dimensions in any language. Sanskrit literature has an astonishing diversity. It consists of ithihasas, puranas, historical epics, fairy tales and fables, lyric poems, gnomic verse and didactic poetry and philosophy. There are, again, a number of texts in each category.

Sanskrit was accorded the status of a classical language, not because of any effort or contribution on our part. The credit goes to the scholars of the West. Since the transfer of the Headquarters of the East India Company from Chennai to Kolkata, officers of the Company and other Western intellectuals started taking interest in literature in Sanskrit. Sir William Jones, a judge, established an institution by the name Asiatic Society. Through this institution and through the efforts of scholars like Max Mueller, Colebrook and others, books in Sanskrit were translated on a large scale into English and European languages like German and French. Among the 50 volumes edited by Max Mueller under the series entitled Sacred Books of the East, a substantial number are from Sanskrit.

The Westerners were mostly dependent for centuries on Greek and Latin for contributions in art, literature, philosophy, law and politics. The Vedas, Upanishads, epics, drama, puranas, literature in general, philosophical treatises, didactic works and others opened up for them the gates of a new world - a vastly different world. These works had a significant impact on the Western intellectuals - poets, philosophers and creative writers. Men like Goethe, the great German poet, Coleridge and Shelley, the English poets, Walt Whitman, the revolutionary American poet, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the philosophers, Thoreau and Emerson, the thinkers, were all greatly attracted to the literary works in Sanskrit. They rated the Sanskrit literature as classical like

literature in Greek and Latin, and Sanskrit entered the family of classical languages.

Tamil did not have the benefit of its literature, especially Sangam literature, being introduced to the outside world in any significant measure either in the 18th century or even during the major part of the 19th century. Even the Tamils were not aware of the Sangam works in the 18th century. Tamil literature was not translated into other languages in any appreciable scale even after the Sangam and post-Sangam works were discovered. It is because of these circumstances that Tamil literature did not have the benefit of translation and dissemination among Western scholars. Consequently, recognition of its classical period and classical status was delayed. An important task that awaits even now is the publication of a series of books entitled 'Ancient Tamil Literary Series' on a massive scale under a comprehensively planned project.

Chinese

Chinese is one of the oldest languages with the longest continuous history of literature in the world. Chinese and Hebrew, besides Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and Tamil, are considered ancient languages that qualify for classical status.

Chinese literary tradition is said to have an antiquity of over 3000 years. Some even reckon it as nearly 4000 - 5000 years. The unique aspect of the Chinese language is while the spoken Chinese varies from region to region in China, the written language is one for the whole nation. The beginning of Chinese literature is identified with the Chou dynasty.

The period before 600 B.C. may be termed pre-historical: the period from 600 B.C. to A.D.200 may be called ancient. The period from A.D. 200 to A.D. 1200, may be considered the middle period. Though during the years from roughly A.D. 200 to A.D. 600 after the fall of the Han dynasty, the literary development did not enjoy a favourable atmosphere

because of political division, literature flourished during the middle period as a whole. Six dynasties ruled one after the other during this period. According to the ancient Chinese tradition, literature must educate, edify and provide ethical and moral guidelines to human society, and therefore fun and frivolity had no place in literature. Chinese literature had significant impact on the literary traditions of the neighbouring countries like Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

The two great contributors to the development of Chinese literary tradition were:

- i Confucius (551 B.C. 479 B.C.)
- ii Lao-tzu (born ca. 604 B.C.)

These two philosophers or sages were the founders of the two indigenous religions, namely Confuncianism and Taoism. The monumental contribution of Confucius, according to the prevailing legend, is the preparation of anthologies consisting of Chinese literary contributions from about 3000 B.C. to 600 B.C. The collection consists of five anthologies and they are as follows:

- i Classic of Changes (I Ching)
- ii Classic of History (Shu Ching)
- iii Classic of Poetry (Shih Ching)
- iv Record of Rites (Li chi)
- v Spring and Autumn (Ch'un Ch'iu)

These five classics have been held in high esteem by the Chinese scholars and they are referred to as Confucian classics. Of them the *Classic of Poetry* alone is in poetic form; the rest are in prose. The most valuable contribution of Confucius is said to be the anthology, *'Classic of Poetry'* consisting of ancient poems. It is believed that the volume entitled *Spring and Autumn* consists of his writings also.

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Vol.16, Macropaedia), Confucius is also the author of the book *Lun Yu* (Conversations) or Analects which is a collection of his sayings, mostly in the form of answers to questions or discussions.

Lao-tzu was a contemporary of Confucius, but somewhat older than he, and he is credited with the authorship of *Taute-Ching* ("Classic of the Way of Power"). which has been translated into many languages and widely read. He was, as stated already, the founder of Taoism. The information available about the contributions of Confucius and Lao-tzu seems to be a combination of history, legend and myth. Lao-tzu remains an obscure figure despite his historical importance. The principal source of information about him is the biography in the *Historical Records* written by Ssuma-Ch'ien about 100 B.C.

When it comes to anciet poetry, the Classic of Poetry, one of the five anthologies, exerted a profound influence. The importance accorded to this work is because of its antiquity and the belief that it was edited by Confucius himself. Another type of poetry following a different metrical pattern was developed in the South and the celebrated poet in this tradition was Ch'u Yuan who lived in the third or fourth century B.C. He was, perhaps, the first known poet of China.

As for prose during the early period, mention has already been made of Confucius and Lao-tzu. The contributions of Mencius, a follower of Confucius, who lived about 400 B.C. have an enduring place in Chinese literature. Mention must be made of the Taoist sage Chuang-tzu whose writings are termed inimitable and unique. Other writers of standing are Mo-tzu, Han-fei-tzu and Lu-Pu-wei.

Period from about the 3rd century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D: During this period, literary activities took

new directions and in poetry the *fu* genre, a combination of rhyme and prose flourished. Though it was considered a minor craft, it was popular and many pieces were produced. The masters in the field were *Mei Sheng*, *Ssu-ma-Hsiang-ju* and *Yang Hsiung*. When it comes to prose, the celebrated authors were *Ssu-ma-Chien* and *Pan Ku*. The former was the author of *Shih-Chi* (Historical Records), a great work on which he spent 18 years.

A.D: The outlook for literary development was not dismal despite the social and political confusion. It may be said that both folk songs and literary poetry flourished. The two poets that deserve special mention are Ts'ao Chih and T'ao Ch'ien. It was a period of revolt against conventionality. One could see the evidence of it in rich measure in the work of Liu-Yi-Ching entitled Shih-Shuo hsin-yu (A New Account of Tales of the World). Liu Hsieh contributed the first full length book on literary criticism. During this period considerable Buddhist literature was translated into Chinese and its impact was discernible.

Period from 7th century A.D. to the 10th century A.D: It is stated that during the T'ang Dynasty (618 - 907), Chinese literature especially poetry saw its golden age. A new form of poetry, given the name of *Lu-Shih* (regulated verse), emerged and was well developed. The T'ang poets were said to be more than 2200 and their works totalled over 48,900 pieces. The greatest poet of this period was Tu Fu who excelled in all verse forms. During the five dynasties, another verse form known as tz'u emerged and the greatest poet in this genre was Li Yu.

In prose writing the popular name was Han Yu who led a major reform against the then existing artificial prose style. Han Yu's chief associate in the reform was Liu Tsung – Yuan who wrote charming travel and landscape pieces. Period from the 10th century A.D. to the 13th century A.D.: Poetry of the conventional type was cultivated by numerous rival schools and the greatest among them was Lu Yu who was a traveller and patriot and wrote about 20,000 poems of which some 9000 have been preserved. The verse form tz'u which was developed during the period of the five dynasties became the most popular genre during the Sung dynasty. This period also saw the greatest woman poet of China, Li Ch'ing-chao. As for prose the reform initiated by Han Yu was reemphasized by such writers as Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Tung-p'o Mention must be made of the great historian Ssu-ma Kuang and Chu Hsi, the scholar philosopher and the principal formulator of Neo-Confucianism.

In a review of Chinese literature, mention is made of Confucian Classics, but one does not come across specific mention of any period as classical period or any particular cluster of literature as classical literature in the sense in which we talk about classical literatures in Greek and Latin. However, considering the great antiquity of Chinese literature, the sustained literary tradition and the abundance of literature available, one can hope to identify literary contributions that meet the criterion of antiquity and characteristics of classicism.

Hebrew

Hebrew is a Semitic language written in the Semitic script from right to left and has 22 letters. It is considered to have four periods:

- i Biblical or Classical Hebrew until around 3rd century B.C., when most of the Old Testament was written
- ii Mishanite Hebrew, the language of Mishna consisting of literature of Jewish traditions written about A.D.200 . This form of Hebrew was never a spoken language among people.
- iii Medieval Hebrew from about the 6th century A.D. to 13th century A.D.
- iv Modern Hebrew, the language of Israel in modern times.

It is agreed by scholars that the oldest form of Hebrew is that of some of the poems in the Old Testament. Use of

the spoken language declined from the 9th to the 18th century. However, the medieval language underwent development in different directions. Modern Hebrew based on the Biblical language contains many innovations aimed at meeting the present-day needs.

Hebrew literature has had a continuous tradition from the 12th century B.C. to the present. The earliest Hebrew literature is the Old Testament which consists of a collection of historical, legal, ethical and liturgical works composed over a period of many centuries. These works were studied and taught in synagogues and schools. They were not written down but preserved and transmitted orally. About A.D.220 the main laws were compiled by Judah ha-Nasi and committed to writing in the Mishna.

The expansion of Mishna by successive generations of scholars by way of commentaries was known as Gemara.

The Mishna and Gemara together constituted the Talmud. Another important work of the same period is Midrash, which consists of a series of contributions made over many years giving the legendary and imaginative interpretations of the Bible.

Hebrew ceased to be the language of the people but was used only by scholars and the clergy during the Judeo-Hellenic period. After the Talmudic era, it lapsed even as a literary language and was revived in Palestine and Spain from the 7th century. Hebrew literature flourished in Spain.

A monumental contribution of the Judea-Arabic school was Mishne Torah which is the formulation of code of Rabbinic Law by the Spanish-born Moses Maimonides.

In Europe, interest was concentrated on the study of Talmud and the Bible. Rashi of Troyes was the greatest exponent of Biblical commentary. From the 12th to the 17th century, legal and ethical compositions were produced in every part of the world. The 16th and the 17th centuries saw the rise of Poland as a major centre of Jewish learning.

Moshe Hayyim Luzzarato, the poet and playwright of Italy, heralded a new era in Hebrew literature. Among the great names in Hebrew literature is Moses Mendelssohn in Germany, who translated the Old Testament into German in Hebrew characters.

Another important development is the Jewish enlightenment, Haskala, which was popular in Russia and Poland. It produced rich literature in Hebrew which was not the spoken language of the people. Some of the noteworthy names are the novelist Abraham Mapu and the poet Judah Leib Gordon and the essayist Abad Ha'am among other novelists, poets and essayists.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the centre of Hebrew literary activity moved to Palestine. The credit for a monumental contribution to reviving Hebrew as a spoken language goes to Eliezer ben Yehuda. Mention must be made of the writings of the Nobel Laureate (1966) Shmuel Yosef Agnon. Hebrew literature moved to native born Hebrew-speaking Israelis after the coming into existence of the State of Israel.



Classical Status of Tamil

The status of Tamil as a classical language has been recognized and acknowledged by the scholars of the world. In the list of ancient/classical languages, maintained in the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Government of India, Tamil has been left out, even though, on every account, it should have found a place. The non-inclusion, perhaps, was not deliberate, but historical and circumstantial. The representation made to the Government of India by the Tamil scholars and representatives of the public was to rectify the omission.

The Government of India in its Notification No. IV-140147/2004- NI-II has stipulated in Para II, the criteria to be satisfied by any language to qualify for classical language status. Certain stipulations in the criteria are highly debatable or perhaps unacceptable. These are under the review of an Expert Committee of Linguists appointed by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. However, on

the basis of the criteria stipulated in the Notification mentioned above, it has been declared as follows:*

It is also notified that the Tamil language satisfies the criteria listed at para 2 above and would henceforth be classified as a classical language.

With the status that Tamil already enjoys among the scholars of the world, the present endorsement by the Government of India of such standing will bring to a close any lingering debate on the subject. No further effort is needed to establish the status of Tamil as a classical language. However, for the sake of completeness of the theme dealt with in this book, the views of certain scholars are recorded in the following pages.

The earliest of the scholars to declare that Tamil is a classical language in the sense in which we use the term today was V.G. Suryanarayana Sastriar who also adopted the pure Tamil version of his name as "Parithimal Kalaignar". In his book in Tamil on the 'History of Tamil Language', he has stated as follows(p.71):

We will establish here that Tamil is, like Latin, Greek and Sanskrit, a great classical language.

He proceeds to narrate the grounds as proof of his conclusion.

It is possible to quote many writers in support of the case of Tamil on the subject. However, for the sake of brevity, the presentation in the following is restricted to the views of Dr A.K. Ramanujan, Dr Kamil Zvelebil and Prof. George L. Hart. According to Dr Ramanujan (pp.11,12):

 ^{*} The Notification of the Government of India is given in Annexure -1 and Annexure-2.

Tamil, one of the two classical languages of India, is the only language of contemporary India which is recognizably continuous with a classical past.

In his monumental work, *The Smile of Murugan, on Tamil Literature of South India,* Dr Kamil V. Zvelebil observes as follows:

First of all, the so-called Cankam poetry is regarded by the Tamils themselves, by the professional historiographers and critics, as well as by intellectual readers, as classical, in the sense in which we regard some parts of our national literatures as classical. Second, it has been, since probably the 5th-7th cent. A.D., a finite, "frozen" corpus, a body of texts which had not been expanded since it ceased to be part of a live oral tradition. Since those times, it has become a part of the "classical" heritage as it were. Third, it is the expression of a linguistic, prosodic and stylistic perfection; it is a finished, consummate and inimitable literary expression of an entire culture, and of the best in that culture; in this sense, it is truly a "classical" product, a classical literature (pp.49-50).

But the early Tamil poetry was rather unique not only by virtue of the fact that some of its features were so unlike everything else in India, but by virtue of its literary excellence; those 26,350 lines of poetry promote Tamil to the rank of one of the great classical languages of the world (pp1-2).

Besides the conclusions of Dr A.K. Ramanujan, and Dr Kamil V. Zvelebil, it is pertinent and desirable to record excerpts from a statement made recently by Prof. George L. Hart who is now the Head of the Tamil Department, University of California, Berkeley, U.S.A. A brief biographical information about Prof. George Hart given in the Preface of

this book will be helpful to understand the value of his assessment.

Prof. George L. Hart enumerates the grounds by virtue of which Tamil enjoys the status of one of the classical languages of the world. His reasoning is as follows:

First, Tamil is of considerable antiquity. It predates the literature of other modern Indian languages by more than a thousand years. Its oldest work, the Tolkappiyam, contains parts that, judging from the earliest Tamil inscriptions, date back to about 200 BCE. The greatest works of ancient Tamil, the Sangam anthologies and the Pattupattu, date to the first two centuries of the current era. They are the first great secular body of poetry written in India, predating Kalidasa's works by two hundred years.

Second, Tamil constitutes the only literary tradition indigenous to India that is not derived from Sanskrit. Indeed, its literature arose before the influence of Sanskrit in the South became strong and so is qualitatively different from anything we have in Sanskrit or other Indian languages. It has its own poetic theory, its own grammatical tradition, its own esthetics, and, above all, a large body of literature that is quite unique. It shows a sort of Indian sensibility that is quite different from anything in Sanskrit or other Indian languages, and it contains its own extremely rich and intellectual tradition.

Third, the quality of classical Tamil literature is such that it is fit to stand beside the great literatures of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Chinese, Persian and Arabic. The subtlety and profundity of its works, their varied scope (Tamil is the only premodern Indian literature to treat the subaltern extensively), and their universality

qualify Tamil to stand as one of the great classical traditions and literatures of the world. Everyone knows the Tirukkural, one of the world's greatest works on ethics; but this is merely one of a myriad of major and extremely varied works that comprise the Tamil classical tradition. There is not a facet of human existence that is not explored and illuminated by this great literature.

Finally, Tamil is one of the primary independent sources of modern Indian culture and tradition. I have written extensively on the influence of a Southern tradition on the Sanskrit poetic tradition. But equally important, the great sacred works of Tamil Hinduism, beginning with the Sangam Anthologies, have undergirded the development of modern Hinduism. Their ideas were taken into the Bhagavata Purana and other texts (in Telugu and Kannada as well as Sanskrit), whence they spread all over India. Tamil has its own works that are considered to be as sacred as the Vedas and that are recited alongside Vedic mantras in the great Vaishnava temples of South India (such as Tirupati). And just as Sanskrit is the source of the modern Indo-Aryan languages, classical Tamil is the source language of modern Tamil and Malayalam.

Perhaps the case for Tamil could not have been made by any one in a more effective and forceful language than the one employed by Prof. Hart. After having narrated the claims of Tamil for the status of a classical language, he concludes as follows:

Let me state unequivocally that, by any criteria one may choose, Tamil is one of the great classical literatures and traditions of the world.

It seems strange to me that I should have to write an essay such as this claiming that Tamil is a classical language. It is akin to claiming that India is a great country or Hinduism is one of the world's great religions.

The status of Tamil as one of the great classical languages of the world is something that is patently obvious to any one who knows the subject. To deny that Tamil is a classical language is to deny a vital and central part of the greatness and richness of Indian culture.

Prof. Hart was aware of the popular demand made on the Government of India by the scholars of Tamil and leaders of Tamil Nadu to endorse the recognition that Tamil enjoyed as a classical language, and the hesitation to accede to the request, and delay in conceding the demand on the part of the Government of India. He discerns the probable reasons as follows:

In trying to discern why Tamil has not been recognized as a classical language, I can see only a political reason: there is a fear that if Tamil is selected as a classical language, other Indian languages may claim similar status. This is an unnecessary worry. I am well aware of the richness of the modern Indian languages—I know that they are among the most fecund and productive languages on earth, each having begotten a modern (and often medieval) literature that can stand with any of the major literatures of the world. Yet none of them is a classical language. Like English and the other modern languages of Europe (with the exception of Greek), they rose on pre-existing traditions rather late and developed in the second millennium. The fact that Greek is universally recognized as a classical language in Europe does not lead the French

or the English to claim classical status for their languages.

In Kannada, the very first work that may lay claim to being a literary contribution is *Kavirajamarga* which belongs to the 9th century A.D. In the case of Telugu, it is the *Mahabharata* of Poet Nannaya which belongs to the 11th century A.D. Malayalam is, as recorded almost uniformly by scholars, an offshoot of Tamil from the 9th century A.D. and the earliest literary work is the *Ramasaritha* which belongs to the 13th century. If we consider the North and the North East of India we have no evidence of any literary work earlier than the 7th century A.D. In *Marathi* the first literary contribution may be ascribed to the 7th or 8th century A.D. In the Assamese language, the *Kamarupa Carya* is estimated to belong to some period from the 7th to the 12th century A.D.

In Bengali, any claim to literary contribution may be from or after the 12th century and in Hindi, not earlier than the 15th century. Antiquity apart, it is also a moot question whether any of the literary works in the above languages will fulfil the requirements that go to make a literature classical in the sense in which literature in Greek or Latin is considered classical.

It may sound a repetition; still it merits to be emphasized again. A language does not acquire classical status on the basis of such recognition by the Government or the recommendation of a Committee, however eminent the members of the Committee may be. The recognition of Tamil as a classical language is a matter of pride, not only for the Tamil language or the Tamil people, but is also a measure of the height of civilization and culture that ancient India reached more than two millennia ago.

Not against Sanskrit

Any effort or movement aimed at recognizing certain merits, or establishing certain rights of Tamil is often interpreted or construed by some as a measure directed against, or in general opposed to Sanskrit. This unfortunately is a wrong or mistaken approach that persists in some quarters.

It may be stated with all emphasis and authority at one's command that Tamil Nadu, for centuries, has been a land that provided a fertile atmosphere for the studies in Sanskrit. It is a land whose rulers throughout history patronized Sanskrit scholars; that accorded them a privileged place in their courts; that promoted schools for imparting instruction and research in Sanskrit; that treated Sanskrit on a par with or even better than the language of the soil.

The Pallava kings not only patronized Sanskrit, but also granted it the status of court language. They created educational institutions for Sanskrit and supported scholars

and poets. Kanchi, the capital of Pallava kingdom, also remained the capital of Sanskrit studies at least in the whole of South, if not in India. The great Sanskrit poet Bharavi adorned the court of Pallava kingdom.

Sanskrit enjoyed a pride of place not only during the reigns of non-Tamils like the Pallavas, but received a privileged treatment in the empire of Pandiyas after the Pallavas or in the reigns of imperial Cholas. The great Chola kings, who have left a mark in the history of India for their naval might, for their victories in wars within the country and for having been the only dynasty in India that invaded countries abroad crossing the seas and fought triumphant battles in far off lands like Sumatra, were great patrons of Sanskrit. During the whole period of their rule, art and literature flourished. They even granted privileges that were exclusive to Sanskrit. They granted to Sanskrit a position not even a trace lower than that for their own mother tongue Tamil.

V. Krishnamurthy in his paper entitled, "The Vedic Education Promoted by the Cholas" states as follows (pp.5-6):

Even before the period of Cholas, Vedic education in Sanskrit was supported by kings. The Pallava and Pandiya kings showed great interest in instruction in Sanskrit treatises. Ghatikas, Mutts, Aghraharas, Patasalas and Kandikas flourished as venues of Sanskrit study.

The Ghatikas at Kanchi and Parthipa Saharapuram belong to the Early Chola periods.

During the later Chola regime, such institutions were established at Ennayiram, Thirubhavani, Thirumukkudal and lands were gifted for their

maintenance. Hundreds of students studied there and they spread Sanskrit learning by visiting the numerous Brahmadesas which existed in the length and breadth of the Tamil country.

Scholars like K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, S.R. Balasubramaniam, S. Meenakshi, S. Gurumurthy besides Lokanayaki Nanniththambi have done research in this field. All of them have given details about the literature studied in these schools, the number of students, the quality and preparation of the teachers and the lands gifted to these institutions.

After the Cholas and a brief period of Muslim rule, came the Nayakkar kings. The period of Nayakkars was considered a golden period for Sanskrit. The Maharashtra rulers who had their headquarters at Thanjavur were also great patrons of Sanskrit. In general, Tamil Nadu had been in the past a soil where Sanskrit blossomed in every respect, whether it was philosophy. literature, Vedic studies or religious rituals.

There seems to be unfortunately a curse that any effort to promote Tamil or claim for it its due place is interpreted as a movement against some language or institution.

- If we claim that we would like to conduct our worship of gods in Tamil Nadu in Tamil, it is blamed as an anti-Sanskrit movement.
- If we plead that in musical performances in Tamil Nadu, songs in Tamil also be sung so that the audience may understand the content of the song, it is condemned as narrow-minded and anti-Telugu agitation.
- ☐ If we request that in the numerous offices of Government of India, Tamil also be used so that the common man in Tamil Nadu can understand the

proceedings, we are told that it is anti-national and anti-Hindi.

- All over the world the education of children is in the medium of their mother tongue. If we demand that Tamil be used as the medium of education in the schools in Tamil Nadu, it is criticized as Tamil chauvinism and anti-English posturing.
- Thirukkural represents the cultural and philosophical heritage of the ancient Tamils and it is a universal treatise on the Art of Living. If we promote efforts to disseminate the message of Kural among the people of Tamil Nadu, it is perceived as anti-Bhagavad Gita.

We are no enemies of any language, any people. The imperial Cholas, whose victories extended to Maldives in the South, Sri Lanka in the near East, Ganges on the North and Sumatra on the Far East, did not endeavour to impose their language on any people. Even today, in the whole of India, Tamil Nadu is the only state where a student from any part of India can complete his/her studies in the school up to +2 and in the universities upto B.A., or M.A., or for that matter up to Bachelor's degree and Master's degree in any subject without having to study Tamil, the official language of the State. The Tamils have been a civilized people and have never imposed anything of theirs on anybody else. The fear created or the blame levied when a claim is made to gain for Tamil its due place and secure for it its due right, is unfounded and is often the manifestation of long harboured prejudice. It does not deserve either serious attention or anxious consideration.

Two Millennium Cold War

A review of the history of the Tamil language does reveal an astonishing fact. The advent of Sanskrit in Tamil Nadu dates back to pre-Christian era. Although it was foreign to the soil, it was held in high esteem and patronized almost from its beginning. Strangely, those who considered Sanskrit their language were prone to claim and maintain that Sanskrit, the immigrant language, enjoying the good will and hospitality of the Tamils was superior to Tamil, the language of the hosts, the language of the land and a language as ancient and as rich in grammar and literature as Sanskrit.

The earliest instance that one could quote is from Silappathikaram, the great Tamil epic of Ilango Adigal. He refers to the fact in Kalkot Kathai that two North Indian kings, by name Kanakan and Vijayan, made derogatory observations about Tamil in an unguarded idle talk. Ilango Adigal says:

Kanakan and Vijayan spoke derogatorily
About Tamil, the rich language,
Because of their unguarded tongue [1]

The annotators interpret the word 'Tamil' as meaning 'Tamil kings'. Kanakan and Vijayan were not at war with any Tamil kingdom. They had no particular enmity against any Tamil king. If in general, they had spoken ill of Tamil kings, why should Senguttuvan alone wage a war against Kanakan and Vijayan without any consultation with other Tamil kingdoms, namely the Cholas and Pandiyas? The term Tamil here may rightly be interpreted to mean the Tamil language, the Tamil culture and perhaps the Tamil rulers. The use of derogatory language against someone normally signifies a sense of superiority on the part of the user. It is appropriate to interpret the action of Kanakan and Vijayan indulging in the use of derogatory language as a reflection on the language, and culture of the Tamils and perhaps the might of Tamil kings also. Ilango Adigal, the author of Silappathikaram, was an ascetic and a sannyasin; he was above the mundane weaknesses of likes and dislikes. He must have, by bringing in the episode of Kanakan and Vijayan and attributing to them the act of indulging in derogatory language against Tamil, reflected the then prevailing practice, on the part of at least some, of claiming superiority for the language and culture which they rightly or wrongly considered theirs.

There are any number of instances to show the claims made explicitly that Sanskrit was superior to Tamil. An objective review of this cold war between the two languages and two cultures would show that the Tamil protagonists were on the defensive, moderate in their assertion and claimed only parity for their language.

There is an anecdote attributed to Nakkeerar, the great Sangam poet, One potter by name Kuyakkondan made a statement that Sanskrit was superior and Tamil was inferior. This enraged Nakkeerar and he cursed him. However, realizing that he repented his statement, Nakkeerar redeemed him, reciting the following poem.

He suffered my curse because he declared That Sanskrit was superior and Tamil was inferior.

On the authority of Agaththiya, the saint From the salubrious Pothigai hill,
Let him be redeemed in the name of Tamil
The refined language. [2]

It can be seen from the quality of the language that the poem did not belong to the period of Nakkeerar, the Sangam poet, but must have been composed by someone much later. However, this anecdote, whatever be the period and whosoever the poet, only proves that the practice of claiming superiority for Sanskrit over Tamil continued to be in vogue with some, throughout the history of these two languages.

We may come somewhat closer to the present. Saminatha Desikar was a highly respected scholar who lived in the 17th century. In his book on grammar (p.9), he has stated as follows in a poem:

Numerous are the books in Tamil
But is there one in pure Tamil?
Five letters of the alphabet
Are no doubt unique to Tamil
Will not the wise feel
Ashamed of claiming that
Five letters constitute a language?

Dr K. Kailasapathi, the renowned literary critic, finds these lines as having earned in the history of Tamil a notoriety for scandal. That so renowned and respectable a scholar as Saminatha Desikar had indulged in such crude rhetoric and derisive language only shows a tendency that prevailed on the part of the Sanskritists to belittle Tamil, perhaps, even without provocation. The objective in general was to establish the superiority of Sanskrit.

In contrast to the offensive stance of Sanskritists, those who spoke in defence of Tamil only maintained, almost uniformly, that both the languages were equal. Even in a moment of annoyance, they did not claim any superiority for Tamil. Theirs has been consistently a conciliatory tone and a posture of respect for both and a claim for parity.

The saint poet Sivagnana Munivar, while singing the glory of Tamil, in his work *Kanchip Puranam* states as follows:

Lord Shiva, the rider on the bull
Has devised the expertise of
Panini the grammarian for Sanskrit.
In parallel for rich Tamil
He fashioned the services of Agaththiya
The great saint scholar
Worshipped by the whole world.
When that being the case
Who on this earth surrounded by the seas
Could assess the greatness of Tamil? [4]

While endeavouring to devote a poem specifically in praise of Tamil, he compares it with Sanskrit; even so, would only go so far as to draw a parallel and claim no trace of superiority for Tamil. Again in the same *Kanchip Puranam*,

he explicitly argues the case for establishing that both Sanskrit and Tamil are equal.

The first teacher of both the languages,
If both these languages have been
Moulded by the two stately grammarians,
If the users of both the languages
Have been men of repute and wisdom,
Is there any doubt whatsoever
That both the languages are equal? [5]

Where was the need for Sivagnana Munivar in the narration of a story to go out of the way to endeavour to prove that both the languages are equal by referring to their origin? It must only have been to refute the claims of some that one was superior to the other. It had become necessary for an ascetic and a sannyasin to enter into this controversy. Even under those circumstances he had claimed equality. He would only assert:

Is there any doubt whatsoever That both the languages are equal?

and not claim any superiority for Tamil. In general, the protagonists of Tamil have adopted a posture of conciliation, followed a path of partnership and conducted themselves with moderation and spoken with humility.

The proponents of Sanskrit attributed divinity to it; declared it to be the language of the Devas and claimed sacredness for its literature. It becomes necessary for the champions of Tamil to prove that Tamil also has claims to superhuman association and contribution to performace of miracles. Paranjothi Munivar, another sannyasin and poet,

in his *Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam* draws events from the lives of great Saivite saints to show how they performed great miracles, by invoking powers by singing songs in Tamil. Paranjothi Munivar states:

Is it the breezy Tamil
Or the languages of
Any other land which

- Sent Lord Shiva Himself on a pacifying mission
- Transformed the bones of a woman back to life
- Brought back the young one swallowed by a crocodile
- Opened the long closed door of the temple in Thirumaraikkadu? [6]

Dr K. Kailasapathi states that when we read this poem composed by Paranjothi Munivar seething with indignation, we see in our mind's eye the fanatic Sanskritists who were responsible for his provocation.

Bharathi, who sang the praise of Tamil in the form of an autobiographical narration by Tamil, the mother, attributes to it, the following observation:

The three dynasties of kings

Patronized me with perennial love;

Among the rich languages of the world

I stood equal to the great Sanskrit.

[7]

Even here, Bharathi claims for Tamil a status and a place equal to Sanskrit. We have all through claimed only the recognition due to us; we never belittled any; nor did we show any predilection in that direction. Sundaram Pillai the

author of Manonmaniam claims that Tamil constitutes the right eye of Goddess Saraswathi. Right and left do not carry with them any connotation of high and low; but even this he was provoked to say only to repudiate those who said that Tamil was only the left eye of the Goddess of Learning. But there are some among the Sanskritists who even in the age of science and technology, when many myths about languages have disappeared, when many mysteries have been cleared, when the real strength and weakness are known, believe in divinity, sacredness and superhuman attributes, based mostly on blind faith and perhaps traditional prejudice and seek to accord, some in whispers and some in loud voice, a higher status for Sanskrit than Tamil.

When Tamil finds a place in the list of ancient/ classical languages maintained by the Government of India (GOI), and when Tamil is recognized along with Sanskrit as a classical language by the GOI, the long disputed parity gets established by an acknowledgement of the Government representing 1000 million people belonging to the same soil as these languages, and this besides a universal recognition that exists already to that effect among the scholars. Thus comes to a happy end a two millennium cold war.

At this point and on this occasion, I must record an ambition, a dream, an undying flame of desire that keeps burning deep in my psyche. The contents of the ancient languages, namely Sanskrit and Tamil, are the two mighty rivers whose confluence goes to make the civilization and cultural heritage of this sub-continent. Some among the Tamils who profess Tamil to be their mother tongue, show an affinity and preference to Sanskrit and claim for it certain privileges and deny them to Tamil, either cut of honest, though misplaced conviction, or to perpetuate certain vested interests, and this makes the rest of the Tamils suspect their loyalty to Tamil, notwithstanding the fact that they claim it as

their mother tongue. Nearly three millennia of cultural evolution has made Sanskrit a part of the common heritage of the land and it is exclusive to none. However, some out of self-interest, some others out of ill-conceived ethnic consciousness and yet others who are self-appointed champions, project Sanskrit in the scheme of things in a manner that it attracts hostility among the Tamil lovers who tend to suspect and question their loyalty to the Tamil language and culture. This phenomenon has brought about a smouldering hostility and persistent divide, not pervasively, but among sections of Tamils who matter. It has created a warp, a hair line fissure in the integrity of the Tamils. The minutest of warps is enough to render a mighty structure weak. True solidarity does not permit even the slightest divide in fundamental binding factors even if it be in a corner of the fabric. The challenges of the era of knowledge demand the fullest utilization of the human resources of a society focussed on the objective without any frittering and fragmenting. It is my fond hope and abiding wish that the recognition and acknowledgement by the Government of India and through that by the 1000 million people of this land that Sanskrit and Tamil are the two ancient and classical languages of this land should put an end to all the disputes, cement all the fissures, heal all the wounds and in brief bring truly to an end, in every respect, the two-millennium-old cold war on the Tamil soil.

Sanskrit and Tamil are, as stated more than once, the two pillars of Indian culture and civilization that pervades the length and breadth of the country from Kashmir to Cape Comorin. Depending on the region, the place and the aspects of life, the influence of one may be more or less predominant, but they are an integral part of the literary, cultural, spiritual and philosophical tradition of this great country. It is part of the soil and pervasive in the air. The contribution of Dravidian

component was not so evident, was somewhat hazy or kept hidden, unidentified and therefore unrecognized. It must be conceded that our own knowledge and understanding of the components that go to make our culture was incomplete, somewhat imperfect, lacking in wholeness. We must endeavour to understand the constituents of our culture in all its aspects. We must approach this problem with an open mind and objectivity. The Dravidian component could be identified and explained mainly through the medium of Tamil. Therefore the scholars in Tamil and in other languages of the Dravidian family must endeavour to see more clearly in the light of the new dawn. In achieving this objective, thinkers, educationists, spiritualists and writers must cooperate in an honest search for truth on the basis of evidence available and make it known to the public at large.

We talk normally about biodiversity and need to preserve the richness of the biosphere. India is a land of an integrated culture consisting of enormous diversity. It adds to the quality of our life; adds colour to the national scene and richness to our cultural atmosphere. We must understand the identity and source of each element of our culture and preserve it as part of our extremely rich heritage.

The present development must also bring about a new assessment of our outlook and approach to problems of language and culture in the Tamil society. That Sanskrit and Tamil are the two ancient and classical languages of India should constitute a powerful liquid in which all kinds of minor divisive elements floating hitherto get dissolved and only the healthy and genuine components that add to the richness of life in the Tamil society must survive. The vague suspicions and mutual distrust which prevailed on their own and promoted by some, either out of self- interest or a simplistic view of things, should become a matter of the past.

I have in my poetical contributions, even 15 years ago from today, emphasized the need for a change in our outlook and understanding; an inclusive value system and eschewing distrust and discouraging divisive forces. The poem runs as follows:

If we do not solve even
The simple problem as to
Who could be identified as Tamils,
Will there be any harmony
Will any success accrue to us?
They are all Tamils, who

- In the depth of their hearts
- Accept and feel Tamil
 as their mother tongue.

[8]

(Kulothungan Poems p.379, 1989)

Again in another poem, I came back to the same question in 1995 and declared as follows:

It is not their ancient
Birth or contact or
The country of origin
From which they or their
Ancestors hailed
It is not their social customs
Or conduct or colour of the skin
Nor the religion they belong to
Or the value system they follow;
These are no touchstone
To decide whether
One is a Tamil or not.

All those who feel emotionally With no trace of reservation That Virgin Tamil is their mother, are beyond doubt Tamils.

[9]

	(Kulothungan Poems p.395,1995)
ı	I have made these observations in all sincerity- no ightly, not in a routine way. They have been made
	☐ after a long and anxious contemplation,
	☐ after clearing the hesitation that prevailed in the depths of my heart,
	after considering the social and political history of Tami Nadu during the last century and evaluating the forces that were of significance,
	after taking into account the social and political movements that came into existence, that were and that are wielding great influence, their need then, their need now, analyzing them and also giving due consideration to the interest that I had in them, and
	with Indian unity in mind and with great faith in it
	o identifying myself with it,
	 joining wholeheartedly in the national stream,
	 but without getting dissolved and losing my identity,
	☐ after giving due consideration to the problems faced by our predecessors in the past; anticipating the problems we may face tomorrow and also the

challenges we may be confronted with and possible conflicts that might arise,

- after assessing the dimensions of the intellectual leadership needed to present forcefully the rightful share of our contribution to Indian civilization and culture in all forums and succeed in getting them accepted, and
- after evaluating, to the best of my ability, the quality and quantity of human resources needed in the field of knowledge, the statesmanship required in the political life, to ensure that in the social, political and economic spheres and in the administration of the country we play our role adequately.

I recorded the above observations based on my own humble experience, and my understanding of the dimensions of the problem, ignoring and even rejecting some of the differences that long existed in this society and with an ambition to ensure the convergence, like the rays of the sun, of the integrated might of the family of Tamils, without allowing it to be frittered away. Those who were inclusive and integrating never failed; the ones that were exclusive and differentiating never succeeded.

Sometime back, Mahathir, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, stated that "the world is afraid of the Jews". This statement attracted strong adverse criticism and even condemnation especially by the political leaders in Europe and the U.S.A. Irrespective of the truth in and justifiability of, the statement, the fact remains that the Jews as a community are powerful and maintain a majestic identity in the world. There can be no dispute about that. Their population in the world is just about 0.4 per cent. They were the world's ancient refugees, spread all over the world, persecuted, discriminated against, segregated and

compelled to live in highly adverse circumstances for centuries. Even today Israel, their country, is a small land, mostly desert and poor in natural reserves especially of the basic one, water resources. But they are powerful and maintain an image of strength. It is only natural that one wonders about the mainstay of their success. There are two aspects that contribute to their present position:

- i Their faith in education and knowledge, and the importance they have traditionally given to learning
- ii The unity that prevails among them like the nervous system in the body and the thread in a chain of beads.

Both these are no sins; they are admirable qualities. There is nothing wrong in holding them as a model in these respects, whatever be our assessment of their political role. Our own great philosopher poet Valluvar declared:

Those who possess knowledge
Possess everything. (430)

In order that we play in future our role at the national level creditably and competently and claim our share of participation in every area of national activity, we must endeavour to consolidate the intellectual might of the Tamils in Tamil Nadu and the sizable number of Tamils spread over the length and breadth of the country, rejecting completely and totally all petty differences and issues that divide.

Among those who claim Tamil as their mother tongue, no section, no community can prosper by isolating itself or remaining aloof from the mainstream. We shall also not pave the way for success in our efforts by keeping any section or any community, especially the talented ones, away from our fold. As already stated, those who were inclusive and integrating, never failed and the ones that were exclusive

and segregating never succeeded. Apartheid in any form, in any incarnation, is unhealthy and carries with it the potential for rendering the system weak. We shall again get back to the main theme.

Sastriar, declaring Tamil as a classical language was kept burning, though dim and flickering during certain periods. In the 1980's there were sporadic efforts to emphasize the need for taking up the matter to obtain recognition at the level of the Government of India. The effort gathered momentum and matured into a sort of movement in the 1990's. It attracted the attention of political leaders and was also taken up by the Government of India at the level of the Prime Minister.

It is said that truth triumphs; it may be true, but in practical life truth also triumphs only when it has gathered enough strength behind it. Although there have been many efforts, many representations and demands, ultimately it goes to the credit of Kalaignar Karunanidhi, who gathered enough support to get what was an absolutely just and legitimate request recognized and conceded. The people of Tamil Nadu would ever remember it with a sense of gratitude.

The notification by the Government of India endorsing the classical status of Tamil is only the end of one chapter. It must necessarily lead to the next step. Treating the notification of the Government of India as the beginning, we must

- prepare short and long term development plans,
- □ allot adequate funds,
- initiate appropriate action to help the scholars in India and abroad have greater opportunities to know the

a	contribution of ancient Tamils to humanity in general and Indian civilization and culture in particular, and
□ c e	develop modern Tamil to fulfil adequately the social, economic, political and spiritual needs of the present.
new era	Ve may ensure that from now on, we are starting a a for Tamil. I may reiterate what I have stated already:
	Our ambitions must be high
	Our dreams must be great.

Textual Quotations in Roman Script

- வாய்வாளாண்மையின் வண்டமிழ் இகழ்ந்த காய்வேல் தடக்கை கனக விசயர்
 - சிலப்பதிகாரம், கால்கோட்காதை

vāyvāļāņmaiyin vantamil ikalnta kāyvēl tatakkai kanaka vicayar

- cilappatikāram, kālkōţkātai

 ஆரியம் நன்று தமிழ் தீதென உரைத்த காரியத்தால் காலக் கோட்பட்டானை- சீரிய அந்தண் பொதியில் அகத்தியனார் ஆணையால் செந்தமிழே தீர்க்க சுவாக

> – தனிப்பாடல்திரட்டு, பாடல் **15** ஆசிரியர்: சு.அ. இராமசாமிப் புலவர்

āriyam nanru tamil titena uraitta kāriyattāl kālak kotpattānai- ciriya antan potiyil akattiyanār ānaiyāl centamilē tirkka cuvāka

tanippāṭaltiraṭṭu, pāṭal 15
 āciriyar: cu.a. irāmacāmip pulavar

 அன்றியும் தமிழ் நூற் களவிலை அவற்றுள் ஒன்றே யாயினும் தனித் தமிழ் உண்டோ அன்றியும் ஐந்தெழுத்தாலொரு பாடை யென்று அறையவே நாணுவர் அறிவுடையோரே

 இலக்கணக்கொத்து: நூற்பா 8

anriyum tamil nur kalavilai avarrul onre yayinum tanit tamil unto anriyum ainteluttaloru patai yenru araiyave nanuvar arivutaiyore

- ilakkaņakkottu: nūrpā 8

4. வடமொழியைப் பாணினிக்கு வகுத்தருளி அதற்கிணையாத் தொடர்புடைய தென் மொழியை உலகமெலாம் தொழுதேத்தும் குட முனிக்கு வலியுறுத்தார் கொல்லேற்றுப் பாகர் எனின் கடல் வரைப்பின் இதன் பெருமை யாவரே கணித்தறிவார்

> - காஞ்சிப்புராணம் தழுவக் குழைந்த படலம் 248

vaṭamoliyaip pāṇiṇikku
vakuttaruli atarkiṇaiyāt
toṭarpuṭaiya ten moliyai
ulakamelām tolutēttum
kuṭa munikku valiyuruttār
kollērrup pākar enin
kaṭal varaippin itan perumai
yāvarē kaṇittarivār

kāñcippurāṇam
 taluvak kulainta paṭalam 248

5. இருமொழிக்கும் கண்ணுதலார் முதல்குரவர் இயல்வாய்ப்ப இருமொழியும் வழிப்படுத்தார் முனிவேந்தர் இசை பரப்பும் இருமொழியும் ஆன்றவரே தழீ இயினார் என்றால் இவ் இருமொழியும் நிகரென்னும் இதற்கையம் உளதேயோ

- காஞ்சிப்புராணம் தழுவக் குழைந்த படலம் 249 irumolikkum kannutalar mutalkuravar iyalvayppa irumoliyum valippatuttar muniventar icai parappum irumoliyum anravare tali iyinar enral iv irumoliyum nikarennum itarkaiyam ulateyo

kāñcippurāņam
 taluvak kulainta paţalam 249

6. தொண்டர் நாதனைத் தூதிடை விடுத்தது முதலை உண்ட பாலனை அழைத்ததும் எலும்புபெண்ணுருவாக் கண்ட தும்மறைக் கதவினைத் திறந்ததுங் கன்னித் தண்ட மிழ்ச்சொலோ மறுபுலச் சொற்களோ சாற்றீர்?

> - திருவிளையாடல்புராணம் மதுரைக் காண்டம் 58

tontar nātanait tūtitai
vituttatu mutalai
unta pālanai alaittatum
elumpupennuruvāk
kanta tummaraik katavinait
tirantatun kannit
tanta milcolo marupulac
corkaļo cārrīr?

[6]

tiruviļaiyāṭalpurāṇam
 maturaik kāṇṭam 58

மூன்று குலத்தமிழ் மன்னர் - எனை மூண்ட நல்அன்பொடு நித்தம் வளர்த்தார் ஆன்ற மொழிகளின் உள்ளே - உயர் ஆரியத்திற்கு நிகர் என வாழ்ந்தேன் - பாரதியார் கவிதைகள்: தமிழ்த்தாய்

mūnru kulattamil mannar - enai mūnta nal_anpotu nittam valarttār ānra molikaļin ullē - uyar āriyattirku nikar ena vālntēn

 pāratiyār kavitaikaļ: tami<u>l</u>ttāy 8. யார்தமிழர் என்பதையே நாம்தீர்க்க வில்லையெனில் சீர்வருமோ! வெற்றிநமைச் சேருமோ! செந்தமிழை எம்மொழியென் றேற்பவர்கள், இதயத்தில் எந்தமிழைத் தம்மொழியென் றெண்ணுபவர் தமிழரே; மேலுமிதில் வாதமிடல் வீணர் செயல்

yārtamilar enpataiyē
nāmtīrkka villaiyenil
cīrvarumō! verrinamaic
cērumō! centamilai
emmoliyen rērpavarkaļ,
itayattil entamilait
tammoliyen reņņupavar
tamilarē; mēlumitil
vātamiṭal vīņar ceyal

- kulōttunkan kavitaikal: pak. 379

குலோத்துங்கன் கவிதைகள்: பக். 379

9. தொன்றுள பிறப்பின் தொடர்போ, நாடோ, இன்றுள நடைமுறை இயல்போ, மேனியின் நிறமோ சமயமோ, நியதியோ வாழ்வின் அறமோ தமிழரின் அறிகுறி காட்டும் உரைகல் அன்று; தம் உணர்வின் ஊற்றுகள் கறையில வாகக் கன்னித் தமிழ் எம(து) அன்னை யென்பவர் அனைவரும் தமிழரே. [9] - குலோத்துங்கன் கவிதைகள்: பக். 395

tonrula pirappin totarpo, nato, inrula nataimurai iyalpō, mēniyin niramo camayamo, niyatiyo valvin aramō tamilarin arikuri kāttum uraikal anru; tam unarvin ūrrukaļ karaiyila vākak kannit tamil ema(tu) annai yenpavar anaivarum tamilarē.

kulōttuṅkan kavitaikal: pak. 395

Privileges of Classical Status

The languages of India are listed in the VIII Schedule of the Constitution of India. Tamil finds a place as one among the twenty odd languages along with ones like Konkani which did not have a script of its own till recently. The place accorded to Tamil just as one among the twenty-two is not in keeping with its antiquity and contribution to the ancient culture and civilization of India. A deep sense of disappointment was smouldering in the minds of enlightened Tamils. This discontent will now disappear. The recognition accorded will make them feel that in the scheme of things, Tamil has been granted its due place. We have reason to be happy that Tamil, which was one of the twenty-two languages of India, is now one of the two classical languages of India.

There are in the world today around 6000 languages. Among them only six languages are considered the classical languages of the world. We have reason to be proud that Tamil is one of the six.

During the year 1974-75, when I was the Director of Technical Education, Govt. of Tamil Nadu, I wrote a series of monographs under the title 'Our Urgent Needs'. It was a personal contribution aimed at bringing to the knowledge of those in power, certain areas of weakness and deficiency with particular reference to development and reform in our education system and promotion of Tamil. One among the monographs was entitled, 'Development of Tamil'. It was printed and published in 1978 when I was Vice-Chancellor, Madurai Kamaraj University. The following are some of the observations from the monograph:

Tamil has certain characteristics unique to it and not shared by other languages which are official languages or languages of the people in various states in India. Like Sanskrit, it is the language of Indian culture. Either an Indian or any citizen of the world can understand comprehensively and appreciate fully the culture and civilization of India, its literary, philosophical and spiritual heritage only through the medium of both Sanskrit and Tamil; either one of them or the literary works in any one of them, will not be adequate.

Though not stated explicitly, Tamil is considered only one among the languages of the states and Sanskrit alone is thought of as the language of ancient Indian culture.

A research student of Warsaw University, Poland, has made certain observations about the importance of Tamil for understanding Indian culture and civilization. It only demonstrates the fact that the claims in my monograph are obvious even to a student researcher in the field. He says:

'... only after having realized that the Indus-Harappan civilization contains Dravidian cultural elements, that I started learning Tamil. It is now... my considered opinion that for one to fully understand the cultural heritage of India, one must study the contributions of the Dravidians. Most of the European scholars think that India means North India. It is regrettable that the Dravidian civilization and culture are ignored or neglected; the study is confined to North India and that is presented as true India.'

For this state of affairs we must hold ourselves fully responsible and not blame others. While we were smouldering within ourselves that others did not understand fully and appreciate adequately the heights reached by our culture, we have done precious little for others to know, understand and appreciate our contribution. There been a tendency to look at Tamil and Sanskrit as two components opposed to each other, as conflicting factors. We must totally give up this approach and view them as the two eyes of the Indian heritage. In Europe today, Latin and ancient Greek are studied in all the universities since they are treated as providing the foundation for European civilization and culture. Tamil is as ancient as any of these languages or even more ancient than Latin. Starting from our first Prime Minister Nehru to Prime Minister Morarji Desai, there was none who would ignore a factor that added to our ancient civilization and culture, that would help enhance the prestige of the nation.

A language that is not in vogue has no detractors but when it comes to a language that is in use in day-to-day life for social, economic and political life, acceptance of any privilege does not come that readily; at the same time, when facts of history are presented in a coherent manner one cannot ignore them long. Truth can

penetrate any barrier; it will light up any area of darkness. It is regrettable that the Departments of Tamil in our universities and the universities themselves have done very little in this regard. Our political leaders who enjoy great reputation, have not emphasized this aspect in due time after independence. We must consider ways to compensate these past lapses.

We must in all possible ways emphasize the fact that the history and culture of ancient India, their finer aspects, could be understood in their wholeness only from the literary treasures of both Sanskrit and Tamil. We must publish, in English to start with and in other Indian languages later, books containing the literary works, devotional poems and spiritual and philosophic treatises as translations and research publications. We must arrange to start departments and establish chairs on a larger scale than at present for the study of the contribution of Tamil to Indian culture. Universities in Tamil Nadu should strengthen their departments of Tamil and related disciplines and promote basic research in the foundational aspects of Indian art, literature, philosophy and spirituality.

When it is recognized that Sanskrit and Tamil are the two ancient and classical languages of India, the fact that these two constitute the pillars of the edifice of Indian culture and heritage will be known in course of time pervasively in India and abroad. Tamil will then be reckoned not just as one of the regional languages, but as the cultural language of the Indian subcontinent. The following advantages will as a consequence accrue to Tamil:

- We shall see the cultural heritage of India in its wholeness with two eyes instead of partially seeing it with one eye as done hitherto.
- Consequent upon this development, Tamil will become an important language for those who study

and do research in Indology and will become one of the disciplines in universities in India and also abroad where there are Indian studies.

- At present, Sanskrit has a department in all central universities. As one of the two classical languages of India, Tamil will necessarily gain a place in central universities.
- The President of India honours scholars in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Pali and Prakrit annually at Rashtrapati Bhavan. The number of scholars is given against each language:

i Sanskrit 15

ii Arabic 3

iii Persian 3

iv Pali 1

v Prakrit 1

They are also granted a cash award and a certificate of honour. It may be expected that in future, scholars in ancient Tamil will also be honoured by the President along with the rest. Recently, the Ministry of Human Resource Development has announced certain awards, fellowships and the constitution of a Board for the Promotion of Classical Tamil. The information available is given in Annexure-3. Mention may be made of the following possible developments:

The Central Government spends over Rs.10 crores for studies and research in Sanskrit in universities and institutions in different parts of India. The Govt. will have to come forward to promote studies and research in Tamil. It may be expected that in course of time, reasonably widespread Tamil studies and

research will be organized in universities and research institutions.

- Many universities abroad have a 'Department of Indian Studies'. Sanskrit today is the major language of study in these departments. Tamil already has a place in some universities. The position will substantially improve and both these languages may become important tools in future.
- As stated earlier, Indian civilization and culture has two great components, the Sanskritic and the Dravidian. Tamil is credited with constituting a component only in its capacity as the oldest Dravidian language. In general, the place accorded to Tamil is the recognition granted to Dravidian component and therefore, this development will ultimately be a matter of great satisfaction for the entire Dravidian family of languages.

The notification by the Government of India is only an enabling provision for all the developments discussed in the foregoing paragraphs to take place. They will not happen on their own as an evolutionary process. It is not easy to set right the consequences of long neglect in a short time. It is certainly a task that needs massive effort. What is required is a nation-wide understanding and acceptance of the new dimension in our heritage. It needs patience and calls for planned effort and initiating a process of education at all levels including history in schools, history at degree level and research in history in doctoral studies. It is setting right a major deficiency or even a distortion in our history. It requires an open mind and objectivity at the higher levels of teachers in schools, academics in universities and educational administrators at all levels. The Government of Tamil Nadu, the universities and research institutions and intellectuals in Tamil Nadu must approach this as a national task and play their role with moderation, depending on persuasion and positive proof for any claim made. The Government of India and the academic institutions under the purview of the Central Government must take sincere steps to give effect to the classical language status accorded to Tamil.

A nation may aspire for achieving greatness in the present or hope for acquiring it in future and may succeed in that effort. But a great ancient civilization and culture is given only to a few nations. No race, no nation can desire and acquire it. It is an inheritance and only a few – very few – nations are privileged to have and be blessed with such inheritance. The realization that we as a nation are the proud possessors of not only a classical language in Sanskrit but also a second one in Tamil – perhaps the only nation to be the home for two classical languages of the world – is not only a matter of pride for the Tamils, but really for the Indian nation as a whole.

Ancient Tamil Literary Series

Confluence of Two Rivers

Dr Radhakrishnan, the great Indian philosopher and former President of India, said:

Indian literature is one though written in many languages.

The above observation may be true in principle, but if it is to be realized in practice, Indian literature must reach the Indian people and the literary world. For that to happen, Indian literature must be translated into all the Indian languages and into the important languages of the world.

If we take the Indian subcontinent, only Sanskrit and Tamil have a literary tradition going back to the pre-Christian era. There are in the world only a few languages that can claim to possess epics that are nearly as old as two millennia or even older. In Europe they are Greek and Latin and in India, Tamil and Sanskrit.

No Comprehensiveness

India does not fully know its own literary treasure. Silappathikaram and Manimekalai are two great epics in Tamil. They are not known as extensively as the Ramayana and Mahabharatha. As a matter of fact, they are hardly known outside the boundaries of Tamil Nadu. India has not known even Thirukkural, the great work of Thiruvalluvar, as much as Kautilya's Artha Sastra. Kamban is acknowledged as one of the greatest poets of the world. But the Indian literary world does not know Kamban as much as Kalidasa. The Sangam classics are considered unique, and have no parallel in any other language. Their literary excellence is admired uniformly by scholars who study them. But they are not known even in the departments of languages in Indian universities and the literati - the creative writers and academics in the field of literature. There is no evidence of any concern or application of mind on their part, since the existence of these great works is still not known widely.

The ancient Tamil literature bears testimony to the heights attained by the Indian literary tradition. It has touched a level of excellence which is a matter of pride not only for the Tamils, but the Indian sub-continent as a whole. The clarity, depth and refinement that one sees in *Thirukkural* is a measure of intellectual achievement of humanity itself over 2000 years ago. The rich mine of ancient Tamil literature has not been fully excavated and explored. It has not become common currency among the members of even the literary world.

When Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister of India visited the Soviet Union, she prided herself declaring that hers is the country where a poet has 2000 years ago declared:

Every place in the world is my hamlet Every one is my kin. When we read this as a news item in the press, we grew an inch taller; he was our Sangam poet Kanian Poongunran. But such profound statements of wisdom or truth as the following, have not received wider attention:

Every place in the world is my hamlet Every one is my kin.

Whatever be your thoughts Let them all be pitched high.

If it be a matter of dishonour They shall not have it Even if it be accompanied by the whole world as gift.

The great are the ones that achieve the unachievable.

I wish the whole world had the bliss I enjoy.

Service all my life is my motto.

We are the subject of none whatsoever: nor do we fear Death.

A coward has no fortress.

He who has knowledge does have everything.

A help rendered is as great as the culture of the one who receives it.

[1]

These have not been quoted as do the statements from the Vedas, Upanishads or Gita; they have not found a place as quotations in school texts or mottos in educational institutions. Although Azhwars and Nayanmars were the sources of the Bhakthi form of Hindu religion, their supreme masterpieces *Thivya Prabandham*, *Thevaram* and *Thiruvasagam* are not known widely. We Indians are relatively ignorant of our spiritual heritage.

14.3. Merit of Tamil Literature

Whether it is the literary tradition of the West or that of the East, great epics have as their heroes and heroines either a king and a queen or a prince and a princess. Again, the theme mainly will be love and war. A commoner is never in the role of the protagonist. A social problem is never the theme. But the two great epics in Tamil are radically different. In Silappathikaram, for instance, the hero comes from a merchant community. So does the heroine. They are rich no doubt, but they are not members of a royal family. Moreover, in a male-dominated society it is the hero who plays the leading role. In Silappathikaram, it is Kannagi, the heroine, who is in the commanding role. She accompanies her husband Kovalan to Madurai where he attempts to sell her anklet. He is falsely accused of theft of the queen's anklet and is given the death sentence. Kannagi, a woman and a commoner, marches in great rage straight to the King's court, demands audience, gets it and proves beyond doubt that her husband was not guilty and was unjustly put to death. It is again extraordinary that a commoner, that too a lady, moves from the territory of Chola Kingdom to Pandiya Kingdom, argues her case against the king himself, and wins. The king confesses to being guilty of wrong judgement and having done injustice, repents, falls from the throne and dies. The entire theme, the course of events and the message conveyed are revolutionary.

Kannagi, a woman, a commoner, a widow, is raised to the level of a goddess in the epic, her only virtue and claim being her chastity, loyalty to her husband and her ferocious demand for justice.

Much is being talked about the subaltern class in recent years. In a monarchy, a person belonging to the third rung in the four divisions, however well off he or she may be, is but a commoner and a subaltern. Madhavi, an important character, again is a courtesan by birth. She enjoys a place almost equal to that of the heroine.

The drama takes place in a monarchy, when the king was considered an incarnation of God. Under such circumstances it is also extraordinary that it is stated in the introductory poem of the epic that one of the objectives of the epic is to demonstrate that in the governance of a country, deviation from the path of virtue will lead to fatal consequences.

Considering that *Silappathikaram* was written nearly two millennia ago, it is a unique creation by a member of a royal family who has taken sanyasa. It deals with a theme quite revolutionary for the age in which it was written and has characters for the hero and heroine unusual for the epic tradition. We do not know as a nation that we are the proud inheritors of such an epic. It is because an opportunity for wider dissemination of this work has not been created. In general, as a nation we do not yet know all that we possess as our legacy.

Sangam literature marks the classical period of Tamil. It may not be possible to discuss here the merits of Sangam works at any length. A few examples may be quoted to bring out the secular character, humanism, universality, serenity, restraint and clarity. It has been stated in an earlier chapter that the poets who composed the songs in Sangam

works belong to all categories of occupations – ranging from potter and peasant in a village to minister and prince in a kingdom. The poem under consideration is by a Pandiyan King Ilamperu Vazhuthi. Considering the enmity, innumerable strifes, jealousy and meanness that we witness in the human society and the endless wars that have been and are fought between kingdoms and nations, big and small, he wonders as to how humanity survives. He gives expression to his conclusions in the following poem:

This world survives (because)
Even if it be the nectar
of the Devas (that gives immortality)
they will not consume it
all by themselves.

They do not get angry They do not waste time In indolence.

They fear what must be feared in life.

They will give even their lives for an act of enduring fame.
That which brings dishonour
They will not accept even if
The whole world be offered with it as gift.

They never feel weary
They are such magnificent
members of the society
As to live and persevere
Not for themselves but
for the sake of others.

Only because such people are in the society The world survives .

[2]

The nobility of the tradition which specifies that they would give their lives if it is for enduring fame but if it would bring dishonour they would not accept even if it be offered with the whole world as gift, leaves us admiring and wondering at the value system projected. It is an ideal that will be unhesitatingly accepted by any civilized society of the world at any time in human history.

Again from Purananooru, the Sangam classic, we may see another poem. Saththan, the chieftain of Ollaiyur passed away. He was a great philanthropist and patron of poets. It was a season of mullai flowers and they were in abundant blossom. The poet addresses them. The atmosphere is steeped in grief:

> After the sad demise of Saththan, the great hero With strong spear Who vanquished many warriors, Oh! Mullai flowers! Do you still blossom in the Ollaiyur land (of Saththan) when

- The young will not wear (flowers)
- The womanfolk will not pluck
- The Panan will not use the arm of the yazh to reach and secure, and
- The Padini will not wear?

This short poem in a few lines by purporting to address the flowers that blossom, insensitive to the pervasive grief when no one had any use for them brings out effectively the pathos in the atmosphere. The sad hearts and tearful eyes are brought before our mind's eye with a delicate solemnity in the words.

Oh! Mullai flowers

Do you still blossom?

Pari, the chieftain of a hill country was one among the seven celebrated patrons in Tamil history. The three great rulers of the Pandiya, the Chera and the Chola kingdoms, who could not battle against Pari individually and defeat him, joined together, defeated him, killed him and occupied his territory. Pari had two unmarried daughters and the poem composed by them, lamenting in their hour of sorrow, wrenches our heart with grief.

In that month, when
there was bright full moon
We had our father
We also had our hill
It was not captured by others.
In this month,
In the bright full moon
We do not have our father
The triumphant kings
Have also captured our hills.

[4]

The melancholy scene with two young royal sisters orphaned, rather suddenly, bereft of their property, steeped in grief with emptiness all around finds full expression, and touches the hearts of the readers here to their very depths.

Love and war were the perennial and unbounded sources of poetry, and ancient poets have created immortal epics singing their glory. The finest pieces of literature were the expressions of a loving heart either in elation, or in anguish or deep depression as the case may be.

An immortal poem in *Kurunthokai* describes the union of the young hearts of two lovers who were total strangers before they met and became indistinguishably united as the rain water that falls on the soil. The short poem runs as follows:

We do not each of us
know your mother
and my mother,
Are your father
and my father related?
By what relationship
did we come to
know each other?
It is the loving hearts
that have become inseparably one
Like the rain water
Dropping on the red soil.

[5]

The rain clouds are far above the ground. The field with the red soil lies somewhere on the earth. There is no relationship between the clouds and the soil. There is no introduction between them. They are so far apart. The simile of the rain water descending from the clouds, mixing indistinguishably with the soil on which it falls to the two strangers meeting each other, becoming lovers by mutual attraction and getting united is extremely appropriate and memorable. Here is a poem describing the love between

two, whose mothers are strangers, whose fathers are not known to each other. The poem itself does not contain the name of any member, any place, any family. The names of parents, even the names of the lovers are not given. This event can well be ascribed to any pair, in any part of the world, in any period of human history. It is timeless. The Sangam classical poetry is remarkable for universality, serenity, humanism and appeal. When we read the lines

The civilized ones will consume

Even if it be poison

If given by their friends

[6]

we really wonder at the refined state of friendship contemplated. The present century has seen so much advancement in civilization, culture, concept of human dignity and respect for others' sentiments. But looking at it even from the present state of advancement of humanity, the height of the sense of obligation and trust in friendship and the concept of true culture portrayed by these few lines stand unparalleled. These and many others are gifts of India to the societies of the world. But the world is not aware of it. India itself is not aware of its own possession and its bequest to the world. The world is poorer for it; India itself is poorer for it. That such messages of wisdom and treasure of history remain confined to books in libraries and discussions in classrooms in certain corners of Tamil Nadu represents a sad loss of their extremely civilizing influence to the broader humanity..

The world knows fully the root, the trunk and branches of ancient Greek civilization. The Greek contribution is now the possession of the whole world. The world knows, or at least the enlightened members know the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita. But the contributions of the Tamil civilization that flourished in the same period remain like a lamp, burning

bright, but within the confines of a pot. We must look into the grounds for the state of affairs that have existed hitherto. Even now, it is not too late. For doing what is right and what is good, it is never too late.

14.4. Translation Efforts So Far

Starting from the 18th century, books in Sanskrit, like the Vedas. Upanishads, such literary creations as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata. works of Kalidasa, Magha, Bhadruhari and many others, Artha Sastra of Kautilya, the Pancha Thantra of Vishnu Sharma, Manu Dharma Sastra and numerous treaties from Sanskrit were translated on a massive scale into English and other European languages. The pioneering institution in this effort was the Asiatic Society established in Kolkata. In addition, the Westerners have, individually and through institutions, contributed massively to translation efforts. Sir William Jones, who was a judge in the Kolkata High Court, played a leading role in taking to the world the Sanskritic component of the Indian heritage. We have in London the statue of Sir William Jones holding Manu's Dharma Sastra in his hand.

In general, Europe was dependent on Greek and Latin for its literary, artistic architectural and philosophical tradition. The enormous contributions available in Sanskrit - the Vedas, Upanishads, epics, puranas, dramas, philosophical treatises and spiritual works - opened up to the creative writers and intellectuals in Europe, the U.K. and the U.S.A. a whole new world and attracted their attention and earned their admiration and acceptance. A parallel effort in translating writings in Tamil did not take place. The Westerners, mostly missionaries, showed interest in Dravidian and Tamil studies in the 17th century. But when the activities moved to Kolkata which became the capital for the East India Company, the interest of the Westerners turned to Sanskrit.

14.5. Tamil Literary Series

Some books in Tamil have been translated, mostly into English. This task has not been undertaken as a planned, institutional activity. Sporadic efforts have been made by Indians and foreigners to translate some books. In the recent years, there is evidence of considerable interest in Tamil literature on the part of Westerners. Silappathikaram and Manimekalai have been published in English in abridged versions in prose with translation of the poems in selected parts. There are other publications also. The fact that commercial publishers have entered the field indicates that there are buyers and there will be a growing market for such publications.

It is obvious that there is a need to initiate a planned programme to translate and publish ancient Tamil works in other languages, mainly in English to start with. One may ask whether we should undertake now a task that was done in a language like Sanskrit in the 18th and 19th centuries. Search for the new is a continuous process in human society. Besides it is our duty to make available to the rest of the world, the treasure of knowledge accumulated by our ancestors in any one part of the globe. It is only a part of the perennial search for the new and it never becomes outdated.

We may start with Sangam literature, move through post-Sangam period and go up to the 10th or 11th century or may be upto the period of Kamban. The Sangam, post-Sangam and later works may be published under the rubric, Ancient Tamil Literary Series.

The publication may run to about 50 volumes consisting of 300 to 350 pages each in a well defined and uniform format. The series must become a brand by itself. There are many precedents for such publication series.

It should not be our objective to provide only a literal translation of the literature in Tamil. Each volume must have a comprehensive introduction explaining the background, the theme, the literary excellence, the social and historical setting, the cultural aspects and the philosophy of life of the Tamils as seen from the publication. The text proper must be translated, but with adequate intermediate commentaries as may be appropriate. A single anthology like *Purananooru* may have more than one volume in the Series. There may be a common introduction to all the volumes and a special introduction to each volume describing such aspects as may not have been dealt with in the common introduction. The details have to be worked out by a properly constituted, competent editorial board.

The initial translation must be in English. In the next stage, we may take up translation into Hindi. As a rule, the translation must be only from the original. The Hindi translation must also be from the original only, though good commentaries in English may be consulted for help or clarification.

If the programme of translation is taken up, on the basis of comprehensive planning, under credible leadership, supported by a competent editorial board, finding financial support may not be a problem. If properly introduced to the public and widely advertised, adequate demand will be generated. It is also possible to enter into an agreement with one of the major publishers with appropriate conditions in tune with the objectives of the project.

The Government of Tamil Nadu may establish a truly autonomous academic body to undertake the task. Such bodies, in general, are not effective in promoting sales and dissemination. It may be advisable in such a situation to entrust the sales to one of the renowned publishers. The

volumes published must reach as many libraries as possible within and outside the country.

The most important part of the task is to bring in place a really competent editorial board which has to have a macro view of the total scheme and then consider individual titles. It will undoubtedly be a Herculean task to identify individuals who are proficient in English, knowledgeable in Tamil language and literature and have proper appreciation of the cultural and literary heritage of the ancient Tamils. Such persons are becoming rare; but if we launch a search, with suitability for the work on hand as the only criterion for selection, it will be possible to assemble an editorial board and find authors. The most important requirement is the appointment of a right person to head the project. If a really efficient and suitably qualified person is chosen for the leadership, we may take it that half the job is done. We have any number of examples of such series in other languages, not only in literature, but in other subjects as well. We can immensely benefit from the experiences of others.

It may be said in conclusion that this is neither a scheme nor an endeavour to glorify the ancient Tamil civilization and culture. This is only a modest effort to introduce to the world the origin, the richness and the unique features of a principal tributary to the vast reservoir of Indian culture – a tributary that has not so far been known in full measure. It is only an effort to present another component – a major component – of Indian culture, thus bringing to our knowledge and understanding a certain wholeness which was lacking.

If we introduce Socrates and Plato to the world, it is not for glorifying the Greeks or for the benefit of the Greek people. It is only an attempt at carrying to the world the thoughts of giants among men in order that it helps refine our outlook and approach and enrich the civilization of the world. It is also a witness to the intellectual attainments of humanity some 2500 years ago. Great men and women, wherever they were born, whatever be their language, whichever be their race, are bright stars in the firmament of humanity. We are only trying to identify a few more such stars and introduce them to the world.

Textual Quotations in Roman Script

 யாதும் ஊரே யாவரும் கேளிர் yātum ūrē yāvarum kēļir

உள்ளுவது எல்லாம் உயர்வு உள்ளல் uḷḷuvatu ellām uyarvu uḷḷal

பழி எனின் உலகுடன் பெறினும் கொள்ளலர் pali enin ulakuṭan perinum kollalar

செயற்கு அரிய செய்வர் பெரியர் ceya<u>r</u>ku ariya ceyvar periyar

யான் பெற்ற பேறு பெறுக இவ்வையகம் yān perra pēru peruka ivvaiyakam

என்கடன் பணி செய்து கிடப்பதே enkaṭan paṇi ceytu kiṭappatē

நாமார்க்கும் குடியல்லோம்; நமனை அஞ்சோம் nāmārkkum kuṭiyallōm; namanai añcōm

அச்சம் உடையார்க்கு அரண் இல்லை accam uṭaiyārkku araṇ illai

அறிவுடையார் எல்லாம் உடையார் arivuṭaiyār ellām uṭaiyār

உதவி வரைத்தன்று உதவி: உதவி செயப்பட்டார் சால்பின் வரைத்து

utavi varaittanru utavi: utavi ceyappattar calpin varaittu

2. உண்டால் அம்ம இவ் உலகம்-இந்திரர் அமிழ்தம் இயைவது ஆயினும், 'இனிது' எனத் தமியர் உண்டலும் இலரே; முனிவு இலர்; துஞ்சலும் இலர்; பிறர் அஞ்சுவது அஞ்சி, புகழ் எனின் உயிரும் கொடுக்குவர், பழி எனின் உலகுடன் பெறினும் கொள்ளலர்; அயர்விலர்; அன்ன மாட்சி அனையர் ஆகி, தமக்கு என முயலா நோன் தாள் பிறர்க்கு என முயலுநர் உண்மையானே.

- புறநானூறு **182**

untāl amma iv ulakam-intirar amiltam iyaivatu āyinum, 'initu' enat tamiyar untalum ilarē; munivu ilar; tuncalum ilar; pirar ancuvatu anci, pukal enin uyirum kotukkuvar, pali enin ulakutan perinum kollalar; ayarvilar; anna mātci anaiyar āki, tamakku ena muyalā non tāl pirarkku ena muyalunar unmaiyānē.

puranānūru 182

 இளையோர் சூடார்: வளையோர் கொய்யார் நல்யாழ் மருப்பின் மெல்ல வாங்கி பாணன் சூடான்: பாடினி யணியாள்: ஆண்மை தோன்ற ஆடவர்க் கடந்த வல்வேல் சாத்தன் மாய்ந்த பின்றை முல்லையும் பூத்தியோ, ஒல்லையூர் நாட்டே

புறநானூறு 242

iļaiyōr cūṭār: vaļaiyōr koyyār
nalyāl maruppin mella vāṅki
pāṇan cūṭān: pāṭini yaṇiyāl:
āṇmai tōnra āṭavark kaṭanta
valvēl cāttan māynta pinrai
mullaiyum pūttiyō, ollaiyūr nāṭṭē
- puranānūru 242

அற்றைத் திங்கள் அவ்வெண் நிலவின் எந்தையும் உடையேம்: எம் குன்றும் பிறர் கொளார் இற்றைத் திங்கள் இவ்வெண் நிலவின் வென்று எறி முரசின் வேந்தர் எம் குன்றும் கொண்டார்: யாம் எந்தையும் இலமே - புறநானூறு 112

arrait tinkal avven nilavin entaiyum utaiyem: em kunrum pirar kolar irrait tinkal ivven nilavin venru eri muracin ventar em kunrum kontar: yam entaiyum ilame

- puranānūru 112

பாயும் ஞாயும் யார் ஆகியரோ?
 எந்தையும் நுந்தையும் எம்முறைக் கேளிர்?
 யானும் நீயும் எவ்வழி அறிதும்?
 செம்புலப் பெயல் நீர் போல
 அன்புடை நெஞ்சம் தாம் கலந்தனவே.
 - குறுந்தொகை 40

yāyum ñāyum yār ākiyarō?
entaiyum nuntaiyum emmuraik kēļir?
yānum nīyum evvali aritum?
cempulap peyal nīr pōla
anpuṭai neñcam tām kalantanavē.
- kuruntokai 40

 முந்தை இருந்து நட்டோர் கொடுப்பின் நஞ்சும் உண்பர் நனிநா கரிகர் -நற்றிணை நானூறு 355

muntai iruntu naṭṭōr koṭuppin nañcum uṇpar naninā karikar -narriṇai nānuru 355

Annexure-1

Government Order

No. IV-14014/7/2004-NI-II, Government of India, Bharat Sarkar Ministry of Home Affairs/Grith Mantralaya

> Jaisalmer House, Mansingh Road, New Delhi-110011 dated 12th October, 2004.

NOTIFICATION

- It has been decided by the Government of India to create a new category of languages as 'Classical Languages'.
- The following criteria will be used to determine the eligibility of languages to be considered for classification as a 'Classical Language':*
 - High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a thousand years.**
 - A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
- * The criteria are being reviewed by a Committee of Linguistic Experts, appointed by the Government of India, Ministry of Culture.
- ** The period for antiquity has since been revised by the Government of India as 1500 -2000 years.

- The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community.
- It is also notified that the 'Tamil Language' satisfies the criteria listed at para 2 above and would henceforth be classified as a 'Classical Language'.
- The Ministry of Culture will take all further steps to follow up and implement the above decisions.

(A.K. JAIN) Joint Secretary to the Govt. of India Tel.23070574

To

The Manager, Government of India Press, Faridabad.

No. IV-14014/7/2004-NI-II

Dated the 12th October, 2004

Copy to:-

- The Prime Minister's Office, South Block, New Delhi.
- 2. Cabinet Secretariat, Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi.
- 3. Ministry of Culture, Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi
- Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Secondary & Higher Education), Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi.
- 5. The Chief Secretaries of all the States/Union Territories.

Government Order

No. IV-14014/7/2004-NI-II,

Government of India, Bharat Sarkar

Ministry of Home Affairs/Grith Mantralaya

Jaisalmer House, Mansingh Road, New Delhi-110011 dated 12th October, 2004.

NOTIFICATION CORRIGENDUM

In the Notification of even number dated the 12th October, 2004 to be published in Part-I of Section 1 of the Gazette of India to create a new category of languages as 'Classical Languages', the following point may be inserted at sub-para (iv) after sub-para (iii) under para No.2 of the said Notification:-

- (iv) The classical language and literature being distinct from modern there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.
- All other provisions of the said Notification will remain unchanged.

(A.K. JAIN) Joint Secretary to the Govt. of Inaia Tel.23070574 To

The Manager, Government of India Press, Faridabad.

No. IV-14014/7/2004-NI-II Dated the 29th October, 2004 Copy to:-

- 1. The Prime Minister's Office, South Block, New Delhi.
- 2. Cabinet Secretariat, Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi.
- 3. Ministry of Culture, Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi
- Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Secondary & Higher Education), Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi.
- 5. The Chief Secretaries of all the States/Union Territories.

Government of India: MHRD Announcement

Maistry of Furnau Festaure-Davelopment (Department of

Secondary & Higher Education), Shashi Shavan, New Delhi

The Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India after the approval on 14-7-2005 of the proceedings of the Standing Finance Committee meeting held on 14-06-2005 has stated in a press release that the following steps will be taken for the promotion of Classical Tamil.

1. Tamil Language Promotion Board

A Board for the promotion of Tamil will be set up. The Board will advise the Government of India on matters pertaining to the development of the Tamil language.

2. Centre of Excellence

A Centre of Excellence in Classical Tamil and Dravidian Languages will be established.

3. Awards

Two International Awards and one National Award will be presented for the scholars in Classical Tamil.

4. Certificate of Honour

Certificate of Honour will be presented to 8 Distinguished Scholars of Classical Tamil language.

Five cash awards will be given for the young scholars of Tamil .

5. Fellowships

Five post doctoral fellowships and 10 doctoral fellowships as per the UGC norms will be awarded annually.

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About the Author

Prof. V.C. Kulandaiswamy obtained M.Tech., from I.I.T., Kharagpur, and Ph.D., in Hydrology and Water Resources, from the University of Illinois, U.S.A. Starting as an academic, he was Assistant Professor, Professor and Dean in the College of Engineering, now Anna University. He has made outstanding contributions to Hydrology; a model developed by him for Rainfall Runoff Studies is known as 'Kulandaiswamy Model'. He was a member of the UNESCO Planning Group (1978) for the preparation of the Second VI Year Plan (1981-86) of the International Hydrological Programme. He was also UNESCO Adviser / Expert (1979-81) in Hydraulics and Hydrology.

Later, he was Director of Technical Education, Tamil Nadu (1974-78), and successively Vice-Chancellor, Madurai Kamaraj University (1978-79), Anna University (1981-90), and Indira Gandhi National Open University (1990-94). Currently, he is the Chairman of the Tamil Virtual University Society.

He had been, and is, a member/chairman of a number of academic bodies, working groups and expert committees at the national and international levels in Hydrology, Technical Education, General Education and Distance Education. He is a Fellow of the Institution of Engineers (India), Indian National Academy of

Engineering, Indian Academy of Sciences, Computer Society of India, and Indian Society for Technical Education.

His interests also centre around modernising Tamil to serve as a medium for Science and Technology, and Script Reform in Tamil for easy learning. He was the Chairman of a Committee set up by the Government of Tamil Nadu for Script Reform.

He is a recipient of many distinctions: was awarded D.Litt (h.c.) / D.Sc. (h.c) by seven universities; received the Indira Gandhi National Integration Award (1988), the UGC Pranavananda Award for Education (1990), and the Central Board of Irrigation and Power, "Diamond Jubilee Award" (1991). The Institution of Engineers (India) conferred the recognition of one of the eminent "Engineering Personalities of India" (1991).

He was made an Hon.Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada (1999) in appreciation of his services to Distance Education. He was one of the first two, chosen by the Senate of IIT Kharagpur from the 35,000 odd Alumni for the Distinguished Alumnus Award, instituted in 2003 and conferred in its 49th Convocation. He was the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1988) for his contribution to Tamil literature. He was conferred the national honours of Padma Shri (1992) and Padma Bhushan (2002) for Science, Engineering and Education by the President of India.

Let me state unequivocally that, by any criteria one may choose, Tamil is one of the great classical literatures and traditions of the world.

- Prof. George L. Hart



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