

TAMIL AS A CLASSICAL LANGUAGE

**A Four-Days Symposium
(17th to 20th January 2008)**

Tamil is not merely a provincial language; it is not merely a national language of India confining itself only within the borders of the Indian peninsula; it is the only international language of India- a linguistic area blessed with its linguistic multiplicity of more than 1562 languages; Tamil is the only Indian language which enjoys the status of official language in two neighbouring countries outside India namely Sri Lanka and Singapore in addition to its status both as an official language and a classical language in its own country and spoken by its men and women in more than fifty five diaspora countries of the world.

Tamil language has a continuing, vibrantly alive existence, growth and development through centuries down to the present, witnessing diversity and ramifications through space and time. It has tributaries of languages growing from, meeting and mingling all along its course by virtue of its seminal position as a major language of the Dravidian family of languages. It had been flowing parallel to the streams of Northern tongues, chiefly Sanskrit, right from the pre-Christian days of the Indian cultural evolution, maintaining healthy affinities with those tongues, and yet preserving its uniqueness and identity as the expressive medium of a cultural community.

A hoary language, with its deep roots in almost all the important language families of the world, the extant documented heritage of the unique and refined literary, linguistic, cultural and art traditions of the Tamil speaking community date back atleast to the beginning of the Christian era. A sea-faring race, the circumnavigation of the Tamils and their commercial contact with far off nations both European and Asian, is really remarkable and their contributions to the evolution of a composite Asian culture is indeed immense.

Tamil is the typical representative of the Dravidian heritage which is a significant component of the Indian heritage without which any study of Indology will remain an incomplete and fragmentary attempt. It is a very unique language which is both classical and modern. The classical status is denied to this language in its homeland for quiet along time although this has been hailed as one of the classical languages of the world by all the leading Indologists of the world. One hundred years of continuous battle by the Tamil community won for Tamil the status of a classical language at the national level in par with Sanskrit.

All steps are afoot to maintain this hardly earned status at the national level and our next step is to get the same recognition at the international level. At his juncture, it is

imperative to make our people, especially our people living in various parts of the world and the international Tamil scholarship to know about the classicalness of our language and its rich heritage and to discuss with them the steps to be taken to get the same recognition at the international level which this great language highly deserves.

A Symposium on this most fascinating topic will definitely help our scholars to reflect aloud jointly this significant issue and it will surely widen our perspective and understanding about our great heritage. This will help the Tamils all over the world to have a clear idea about the efforts taken in the motherland to promote Tamil Studies at the global level by the indigenous scholars and foreign scholars. This will also give adequate feed back about the nature of Tamil Studies carried out both in India and other countries. It will also help other linguistic communities to participate in all the efforts undertaken to promote Tamil research at the global level and to contribute whatever they can for the benefit of this great heritage. Since the theme has international relevance, four Tamil scholars of international reputation, representing various countries are suggested as resource persons to participate and initiate the deliberations and discussions.

In addition to the panel of the above Tamil scholars from foreign countries, nearly forty scholars of our country will present research papers on various aspects of this unique theme. A list of the tentative topics for deliberation is presented below for your perusal. It can be an interactive programme with full participation of the audience in all discussions. The programme will continue for four days. There shall be forty-five papers tentatively and the paper presenters will be given twenty minutes time to present papers and ten minutes for discussion

Adequate homework has to be done by the resource persons and the paper presenters with proper feedback on the subject so that the uninterrupted flow of the programme can be maintained.

Tentative Topics:

1. Tamil as a classical language – A historical perspective.
2. The efforts to be undertaken at the regional level.
3. Classical status at the national level.
4. Classical status at the Global level
5. Promotion of Tamil Studies at the national level- problems and prospects.
6. Promotion of Tamil Studies at the Global level – Problems and prospects.
7. Translation of Tamil classics – present stage.
8. Translation of Tamil classics into Dravidian languages.
9. Translation of Tamil classics into other Indian languages
10. Translation of Tamil classics into Asian languages.

11. Translation of Tamil classics into European languages.
12. Developing co-ordination among Tamil scholars in other countries.
13. Co-ordinating the centers that have Tamil programme in other countries.
14. Promoting Tamil Studies with the collaboration of foreign scholars and institutions
15. Strengthening the centers in other countries that have Tamil programme.
16. Training the young scholars in overseas Tamil programmes.
17. Preparation of reference works on Tamil Studies
18. Creating Human resources in specialized Tamil studies programme.
19. The changes to be done in the existing syllabus for the M.A., M.phil., programme etc.,
20. Online Training in Tamil Studies.
21. Need for co-ordinating the Tamil Diaspora.
22. Documentation of the fast decaying oral traditions.
23. Preservation of Tamil Palm-leaf manuscripts and other documented heritage.
24. Need for intensive studies in the external history of the Tamils.
25. Studying the impact of Tamil culture in South East Asian countries.
26. Need for the study of the affinities between Tamil language and the other families of languages.
27. Tamil – Japanese
28. Tamil - Malay
29. Tamil – Korean
30. Tamil – Hebrew
31. Tamil - Greek
32. Tamil - Chinese
33. Tamil – Arabi
34. Tamil – Coptic
35. Tamil and other European Languages
36. Tamil culture and the medieval traders.
37. Tamil culture and the Tamil Diaspora.
38. Trade with Rome and Roman settlements in Tamilnadu.
39. Interaction with the Jews and the Jewish community in South India.
40. Tamil culture and the silk route.
41. Tamil culture and the spice route.
42. Tamil culture in the Mediterranean region.
43. Spread of Tamil culture in the Middle East.
44. Tamil culture in Thailand
45. Tamil culture in Cambodia, Burma, etc.,

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