Internet Based Learning For Ancient Tamil

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Abstract

       The land of Tamil speech and people was in ancient times ruled by three famous lines of king, the Chera, Chola, and Pandiya. . The land ruled by them was called Chera Nadu (Chera country), Chola Nadu (Chola country), and Pandiya Nadu (Pandiaya country) respectively. The landmass covered by the present-day Kerala State in the South India formed a major part of Chera Nadu, the Central and Northern parts of present Tamil Nadu were the then Chola Nadu and the Southern part of Tamil Nadu was the Pandiya Nadu. Tamils are of Dravidian origin. Many historians claim that the Dravidians, before the dawn of the history of the Tamils, were spread all over India. For various reason they split into small groups. Consequently, the original language also split into different languages. Tamil is found to have retained about 80 per cent of the features of the original Dravidian language.There are three major sub-groups in the Dravidian family of language, namely, South Dravidian, Central Dravidian, and North Dravidian. Internet based Tamil resources to Tamil communities living in different part of globe as well as others interested learn in Tamil. To develop and deliver internet based learning Tamil material in Tamil language, literature and culture to global. Tamil people and others interested.

Keywords: Chera Nadu, Chola Nadu, Pandiya Nadu, Valayapathi, Kundalakesi, Panchkavyams

The languages of the South Dravidian sub-group

1. Tamil, Malayalam Kodagu. Kota,Toda, Kannada, Tulu

The languages of the Central Dravidian sub-group

1. Telugu, 2. Gondi, 3. Konda, 4. Pengo, 5. Manda, 6. Kui,
7. Kuvi, 8. Kolami,   9. Nayki, 10. Parji, 11. Gadba

The languages of the North Dravidian sub-group are mainly

1.Kurukh 2.Malto 3.Brahui

       Tamil is spoken predominantly in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It is spoken also in several other Indian states. In addition, Tamil speaking populations are found in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Mauritius, Fiji Islands and South Africa. Recent Tamil immigrants are found all over the world. The distribution of Tamil-speaking population found in the States of India according to the book 'Distribution of Languages in India in States and Union Territories', 1971, is given below:

The Five Great Epics of Tamil Literature

(Tamil: ஐயிபெருயகாபபபயயஙகள) are five large narrative Tamil epics according to later Tamil literary tradition, namely *Silappatikaram*, *Manimegalai*, *Civaka Cintamani*, *Valayapathi* and *Kundalakesi*. The first mention of the "*Aimperumkappiyam*" (lit. Five large epics) occurs in Mayilainathar's commentary of *Nannūl*. However, Mayilainathar does not mention the names of the five epics. The names of the epics are first mentioned in the late 18th century - early 19th century work *Thiruthanikaiula*. Earlier works like the 17th century poem *Tamil vidu thoothu* mention the great epics as *Panchkavyams*. Among these, the last two, namely *Valayapathi* and *Kundalakesi* are extant.

These five epics were written over a period of 1st century CE to 10th century CE and act as the historical evidence of social, religious, cultural and academic life of people during the era they ere created. *Civaka Cintamani* introduced long verses called *virutha pa* in Tamil literature., while *Silappatikaram* used *akaval* meter (monologue), a style adopted from Sangam literature.

According to the great Tamil commentator Atiyarkkunallar (12th-13th century CE), poems were of two kinds - *sol-totar-nilai-seyyul* (Tamil: �ltசாlல ltதொாடltர நிலை ltசயயுltா, poems connected by virtue of their formal properties) and *porul-totar-nilai-seyyul* (Tamil: ltபாருltா ltதொாடltர நிலை ltசயயுltா, poems connected by virtue of content that forms a unity). *Silappatikaram*, the Tamil epic is defined by Atiyarkkunallar as *iyal-icai-nataka-polur-thodar-nilai-ceyyul* (Tamil:ஐயltா இசை நாடக ltபாlருltா ltதொாடltர நிலை ltசயயுltா, poems connected by virtue of content that forms a unity having elements of poetry, music and drama). Such stanzas are defined as *kavya* and *kappiyam* in Tamil. In Mayilainathar's commentary (14th century CE) on the grammar *Nannul*, we first hear the mention of *aimperumkappiyam*, the five great epics of Tamil literature.

Each one of these epics have long cantos, like in *Silappatikaram*, which has 30 referred as monologues sung by any character in the story or by an outsider as his own monologue often quoting the dialogues he has known or witnessed. It has 25 cantos composed in *akaval* meter, used in most poems in Sangam l/iterature. The alternative for this meter is called *aicirucappu* (verse of teachers) associated with verse composed in learned circles. *Akaval* is a derived form of verb *akavu* indicating to call or beckon. *Silappatikaram* is also credited to bring folk songs to literary genre, a proof of the claim that folk songs institutionalised literary culture with the best maintained cultures root back to folk origin. *Manimekalai* is an epic in *Ahaval* metre and is noted for its simple and elegant style of description of natural scenery. *Civaka Cintamani* is one of the earliest works of Tamil literature in long verses called *virutha pa*.

No	Name	Author	Notes
1.	*Silappatikaram*	Ilango Adigal	Non religious work of 1st century CE
2	*Manimegalai*	Seethalai Sathanar	Buddhist religious work of 1st or 5th century CE
3	*Civaka Cintamani*	Tirutakkatevar	Jain religious work of 10th century CE
4	*Valayapathi*	Unknown Jain ascetic	Jain religious work of 9th century CE
5	*Kundalakesi*	Nagakuthanar (Nagasena)	Buddhist religious work of 5th century CE

Religious Treatise

The influence of Vedic religion was marked in the religious life of the people in the south. The followers of Veda often entered into dispute with rival religions like Buddhism and Jainism. Hinduism was prevalent during the 1st century CE followed by Buddhism in the next three centuries and finally Jainism taking prominence during the 5th-6th centuries CE. This is well illustrated in the non-religious work of *Silappatikaram* written during the 1st century CE followed by Buddhist work of *Manimegalai* and the Jain work of *Civaka Cintamani*. The joyous life portrayed in Sangam literature is replaced by sombre life depicted in *Manimegalai*. It also depcits punishments to the persons, who knowing the inevitability of death indulge in crimes and carnal pleasures.

Criticism and Comparison

"After the last line of a poem, nothing follows except literary criticism" observes Ilangovadigal in *Silappadikaram*. The postscript invites readers to review the work. Like other epic works, these works are criticised of having unfamiliar and a difficult poem to understand To some critics, *Manimegalai* is more interesting than *Silappadikaram*, but it terms of literary evaluation, it seems inferior. The story of Manimegalai with all its superficial elements seems to be of lesser interest to the author himself whose aim was pointed toward spreading Buddhism. In the former, ethics and religious are artistic, while in the latter reverse is the case. *Manimegalai* also criticizes Jainism while preaching the ideals of Buddhism and human interests is diluted in supernatural features. The narration in *akaval* meter moves on in *Manimegalai* without the relief of any lyric, which are the main features of *Silappadikaram*. *Manimegalai* in puritan terms is not an epic poem, but a grave disquisition on philosophy. There are effusions in *Silappadikaram* in the form of a song or a dance, which does not go well with western audience as they are assessed to be inspired on the spur of the moment. According to Calcutta review, the three works on a whole have no plot and no characterization for an epic genre. The plot of *Civaka Cintamani* is monotonous and deficient in variety in strength and character and does not stand the quality of an epic.

Building Digital Collections of Tamil Works World Wide

In building digital collections of Tamil works, various organisations and individuals have attempted (look at the partial list given in the previous section) to use variety of approaches including encoding, presentation format and duplication of efforts. These are some major issues that need to be addressed in any present or future efforts by the international body interested in building digital or virtual library. Encoding Format: Currently, the digital collections available through Internet resources (gopher, web and FTP servers) use varying degrees of encoding standards. They include, but not limited to, Mylai, Adhawin, Tamilnet, WebTamil, Amutham, Murasu and etc. With the improvement in information technologies in delivering various font faces, newer encoding systems are mushrooming up every day. In order to bring the digital collections for good uses like research, retrieval and searching, encoding format options should be limited to one or two standards. Glyph based encoding standards like TAB/TAM or TSCII, character-based encoding standards like Unicode. There is an increasing popularity for Unicode based fonts due to the adaptation of this in Macintosh and Microsoft (Windows 3.xx195/98/NT) platforms. Text converters are available to go between these formats. These converters should also provide support for standard Romanized transliteration schemes as well.

Presentation, Distribution and Archiving Formats

With recent advances in browser technology, presenting Tamil texts in GIF images have phased out and on line documents are using many different techniques to present the Tamil. Web versions based on HTML using FONT FACE definitions have been used widely since HTML 3.0. This limited the presentation on line due to the need of the specific font face in the client's computers. After HTML 4.0, newer ways of presenting the text (e.g. using META tags, or using cascade style sheet or CSS specifications) have been explored. The use of META tags or Style Sheets helped the use of set of fonts (FONT families) that use a specific encoding (e.g. TAB or TSCII). With this, the recent developed standards could be used widely. Still, this method requires the font files in the clientess computer. However, the user could use the font of his choice to view the files.

Recently, dynamic font rendering techniques have been explored due to its advantage of not needing the specific font file in the client's computer. Newer developments including extensible mark-up language (XML), wireless mark-up language (WML), user interface mark-up language (UIML), many other alternatives are being sought for presenting Tamil documents on line. Distribution of e-text files as plain text (either in Tamil or as Romanized transliterated) has been practiced by many services including Project Madurai. However, with the need for distributing the digital works as formatted, available options are as web pages or as Adobe Acrobat portable document format (PDF) files. use of PDF files can be more useful due to lack of dependence of specific font files in the client computers, and incorporation hypertext and search capabilities in the PDF files.

Searching

Currently, very limited search engines (bilingual) exist to locate the availability of a given work as e-text and also to locate specific words or word sequences in archived texts due to the lack of standards or adopting such standards. Recent developments in encoding standards (TSCII and TAB/TAM) would provide opportunities for such search engines for extensive Tamil literature available on line.

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Duplication and Reproduction

The major problem that exists today with building digital collections is lack of coordination or collaboration among various organizations. Due to this many works have been duplicated at many places. To overcome duplication efforts, a fixed collaboration mechanism for regular exchange of information on etext collections should be made by different efforts. Reproduction of etexts from collections of one project elsewhere and in other projects and also in various websites should be critically addressed.

Yet another issue regarding building digital documents is copyright. In relation to ancient works published in the recent days, the questions on who hold the copyright and for what remains to be solved. In many instances, it is assumed that the publishers of today can claim copyright for explanations and presentation format, but not for the old Tamil literature. However, when considering developmental works in bringing old Tamil literature in palm leaves to digital world, the copyright should be given to the persons responsible for deciphering the palm leaves. It still remains controversial and an international body along with respective governments should mediate in these situations and formulate some standards.

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