LANGUAGE

Hallo.

TAMILNET welcomes you.

We are very glad to share with you through electronics, the Tamil language, which is claimed by some over-enthusiastic Tamils to have a mythic origin at the stage in the evolution of the world, "after the appearance of the rocks, but before the appearance of the sand"!

ROOT

Tamil language is a member of the Dravidian family of languages, which are predominant in South India and north-east Sri Lanka. Some Dravidian languages are spoken by tribal people in different parts of the South Asian subcontinent, such as northern and central India, Pakistan and Nepal. Scholars are not agreed on the original homeland of the Dravidians. Among the Dravidians, the Tamils alone have a continuous literary tradition, going up to the beginning of the Christian era. The Tamil texts from very ancient times preserve memories of having lost land to the sea. The legend about three Tamil academies under the patronage of the Pāṇṭiya kings, one academy succeeding the other in new capital cities, after losing land to the sea, and existing for more than nine thousand years, has been recorded in Kalaviyaturai, which could be dated to about the eighth century AD. Geologists refer to the past existence of a land mass in the Indian Ocean area, which gradually receded before the advancing ocean. There are Tamils who believe that their original homeland was Lemuria, which has been submerged by the Indian Ocean. Another theory is that the South Asian subcontinent was at one time the homeland of the Tamils and that they were pushed to the South by the later Indo-Aryan migrants, a branch of the Indo-European people. The Vedic literature of the Indo-Aryans originated in North-West of the subcontinent. The Indus Valley civilization, occupying almost the same area, preceded the Vedic age. Many scholars identify the Indus civilization as Dravidian, even though total unanimity among scholars could not be achieved as proper methodology for the decipherment of Indus valley script could not still be worked out.

The Euphrates-Tigris Valley, corresponding to modern Iraq in Western Asia, has been the home of many very ancient civilizations. In the southern part of that valley, north of the Persian Gulf, there flourished the Sumerian civilization for many centuries. This civilization had many distinctive features which distinguished it from other civilizations in that valley. It has many resemblances to Indus Valley civilization as well as to the Dravidian civilization of South India. There are scholars working on the affinity between the Sumerian and the Dravidian languages.

Further down on the Persian Gulf, in the western highlands of modern Iran, there was a kingdom of Elam in Biblical times. Some placenames in that region have been shown to have close resemblance to place names in Dravidian languages.

There are scholars tracing the original homeland of the Dravidian race, from the region of the Caucasus mountain.

Those who believe in the Lemurian origin of the ancestors of the Tamils argue that after settling down in South India, groups of these people might have migrated to the Indus Valley and the Euphrates-Tigris Valley.

PALAEOGRAPHY
There is still controversy about the origin of the Tamil script. There are Tamils who argue for a hoary antiquity for the Tamil script in consonant with the legendary history of Tamil literature. The Indus script remains undeciphered. Even if the prehistoric writings in the seals of the Indus valley have been established as belonging to Dravidian language, the problem whether the present Tamil script could be traced to the Indus script cannot be solved automatically, as intermediate stages of evolution, covering more than 1500 years are not available.

Scholars differ in dating the earliest historical inscriptions from North India, South India and Sri Lanka. It is remarkable that the script that was in vogue in all the three regions was basically the same. The main controversy is whether North India adopted a Tamil script with modifications or South India adopted a North Indian script with modifications. The precise dating of the early inscriptions is very difficult and scholars now take Asōkan inscriptions of the third century BC as the starting point. Asoka used Brahmi script to write Prakrit language in his inscriptions throughout India, roughly to the north of Tamilakam. Early inscriptions in Sri Lanka also mainly follow the same pattern. In the Tamil country, all the earliest inscriptions are in Tamil language but the script appears to be the same, modified to suit the Tamil language. This script has been named Tamiḻi by R. Nagaswamy and Tamiḻ-Brahmi by Iravatham Mahadevan. Most of these early inscriptions have been located around Maturai, where the legendary third Tamil academy was located. Cave inscriptions from other parts of the Tamil country are relatively late and they might indicate that writing spread from Maturai to other parts. Even though the cave inscriptions consist mainly of labels and are not many in number, a large quantity of potsherds with writings of the same type have been unearthed from various archaeological sites in different parts of the Tamil country. There is controversy on the dating of these records; the most ancient of the inscriptions could be as old as the second century BC.

From the sixth century AD, we have Tamil inscriptions in Vatteluttu script on inscriptions in natukal (planted stone). The script of the earlier cave inscriptions seems to have evolved into Vatteluttu, may be due to the influence of the common writing material of palm leaf. The Pallava rulers who were claiming a North Indian origin for themselves introduced the Grantha-Tamil script in the seventh century AD. The Grantha script was used to write Sanskrit in South India. In the Pallava kingdom, another script closely resembling the Grantha was introduced to write the Tamil language. The latter two scripts together is sometimes referred to as the Grantha-Tamil script.

The Tamil language had two scripts for some centuries, depending on political boundaries. The Pāṇṭiyas and the Cēras were using the Vatteluttu while the Pallavas were using the Tamil. The Cōḷas, who were under the Pallava domination, were used to the Tamil script. When they conquered the Pāṇṭiya kingdom in the tenth century, they replaced the Vatteluttu script there with their Tamil script. The Cēra/ Kerala rulers continued with the Vatteluttu for some more centuries before writing the Malayālam language in the Malayālam script. The Vatteluttu disappeared and the Tamil script became the only script for the Tamil language.

**LANGUAGE FORMATION**

According to modern linguists, the Dravidian was the ancestral form of the Tamil language. First the North Dravidian and then the Central Dravidian separated themselves and later some languages from the South Dravidian also emerged as independent languages. There was a stage when proto Tamil- proto Malayalam- proto Kannada prevailed and later then Kannada and Malayalam also developed as separate languages. The word Dravidian language is a reconstruction of modern linguists to refer to a stage in the undifferentiated prehistoric development of Tamil and its sister languages.

There are linguists working on extra-Dravidian affinities. Robert Caldwell, the father of Dravidian linguistics, was speculating on these lines and emphasised the Dravidian affinities with the Scythian languages. The title of the Scythian languages has been replaced
by linguists with the names of a number of language families but many linguists are seriously trying to work out the relationship between the Dravidian and the other language families, mainly of Central Asian origin. Even in the last International Tamil Research Conference in Ta'ncavu in 1995, papers were read on the relationship of Tamil with Mongolian, Korean and Japanese languages.

There are some Tamil scholars who stretch philological approach to claim that Tamil language was perhaps the mother of all other languages in the world. Two Roman Catholic scholars- Nallūr Cuvāmi Gnāṇappirakācar (Śvāmi Gnāṇappiragasar) from Ilaiykkai and Tēvanēyappāvānār (Devaneyam) from Tamilnātu are the well-known names associated with this approach.

There are myths, connecting Tamil language to Saivism. According to Tamil legends of the Three Academies, the history of Tamil was intimately linked to Lord Śiva and god Murukaṇ. They participated in the deliberations of the first academy from its inception. Some medieval Tamil poets claim that Śiva was the origin of both Sanskrit and Tamil. It is also a part of medieval tradition that Akattiya (Skt. Agastya, a Vedic sage) learnt Tamil grammar from Śiva and wrote down Akattiyam, its first grammatical work. Puttamittirāpār, a Tamil Buddhist grammarian of the 11th century, challenges the Saiva claim when he says that Akattiya learnt Tamil grammar from Avalokita, a bodhisattva.

There is difference of opinion among modern scholars on the earliest existing documents in Tamil. Three types of documents- the cave inscriptions, the Caṅkam literature and the Tolkāppiyam - each of these has many adherents. Historians, Archaeologists and Epigraphists generally date the cave inscriptions as the earliest documents and then from that stage trace the development of the Tamil language. The legend of the Three Academies refer to Tolkāppiyam as a product of the second academy and the existing Caṅkam texts as products of the third academy. Heated arguments still go on about the relative antiquity of the grammar and the literature. Some grammatical features in the Tolkāppiyam appear to predate the Caṅkam texts while some other features appear to be clearly later developments. The most plausible compromise seems to be that there were two books by the name of Tolkāppiyam, one earlier and the other later than the Caṅkam texts, and the later Tamil tradition has made a synthesis of the two books into one.

Grammar

Tolkāppiyam is the most ancient extant grammatical work in Tamil. There is no mention of Akattiyam anywhere in that book, even though it refers to its indebtedness to other grammarians anonymously. The format of the grammar is descriptive even though it served as a prescriptive grammar subsequently. The grammar is surprisingly very extensive for its early period. The description of minute details of the Tamil language create admiration for the work among modern linguists. The work is in three parts - 1. Eluttu (phonology, morpho-phonemics), 2. Col (morphology, syntax), 3. Porul (Subject matter).

The phonology of Tamil has helped the Tamil language to preserve its individuality and distinctiveness. The other Dravidian languages have borrowed thousands of words from Sanskrit and related languages and then to write them, they borrowed all the sounds, found in the Northern alphabet. Even though the Tamil language has borrowed from Indo-Aryan from very early times, it was careful to use them within the Tamil phonemic pattern. The phonemic pattern of Tamil has been so carefully described in the Tolkāppiyam that it has remained as a guideline for later writings in Tamil. Literary Tamil, especially Tamil poetry, always adhered to the phonemic pattern, even though Tamil prose and inscriptions of the later periods transgressed occasionally.

The subject matter of ancient Tamil poetry treating akam, “interior” and puram, “exterior” has been very distinctive to Tamil tradition. The Caṅkam poetry is based on this tradition. Much of that poetry could not have made any sense, if not for its elaborate description in the third part of the Tolkāppiyam. Understanding porul tradition is a sine-quo non for the
understanding much of later Tamil literature also, like the narrative poems and the bhakti literature also, not to mention later pirapantams (Skt. Prabandha).

The subject matter dealt with in the third part of the Tolkāppiyam led to the branching away of three units in later times known as porul, yāppu (prosody), and ani (rhetoric). So later grammatical tradition in Tamil speaks of aint-ilakkanam, “five-fold Tamil grammar.” Viracōliyam of the eleventh century AD is the first grammar in Tamil to have five sections dealing with five-fold grammar. There is controversy on the religious affinity of the author of the Tolkāppiyam, whether he was a Vedicist or a Jain, based on internal evidence. The Jain and Buddhist monks dominated the field of Tamil grammar as authors and commentators during the medieval times before the Saivites took over. Namṉul by Pavaṇanta, a Jain monk of the thirteenth century, is the Tamil grammar of medieval Tamil par excellence. It deals with eluttu and col only. Many modern Tamil grammatical works are based on this work.

ROOTS IN EELAM

The word Eelam is the name used by the Tamils from very remote times to indicate Ilāṅkai, the modern Sri Lankā. It is not clear whether the term referred to the Tamil habitation only in the island or to the entire island. In medieval times, it was used in both the senses. In the Cōḷa inscriptions of the eleventh century, Īṟam was used to denote the north / north-east of the island and Īṟam muluvatam to denote the whole island.

The Tamil Lexicon, published more than 60 years ago, derives this word from Pāli, Sihala and Skt, Simhala. The compilers of the Lexicon took over Wilhelm Geiger’s theory, formulated at a time, when archaeological and classical studies about the Tamils were not sufficiently advanced. The Tamil Lexicon also gives four meanings. Besides the name for the Island, it could mean gold or toddy, besides a shrub. The meaning of toddy is derived from Īḷavar, a South Indian caste name for toddy tappers. The meaning of gold seems to be the one, connecting the Tamils to the Island. Probably, Tamil traders of ancient times gave this name to the fertile and prosperous island, rich in pearls and gems. It is remarkable that the Tamil Lexicon quotes Nakarappatalam of Aracakēcan’s Irakuvamicam (Skt. Raguvamsa), a narrative poem translated and adopted in Eelam, for the usage of the word in the sense of gold.

The word Eelam as a place name occurs in the Caṅkam literature as well as in the Cave inscriptions. Even the Pāli chronicles of Sri Lankā refer to contacts with South India from ancient times. The Brahmī script used in ancient Prakrit inscriptions in Sri Lankā resembles closely the Tamil Brahmi. Even though the ancient inscriptions of Sri Lankā are in Prakrit language, many terms in those inscriptions could be satisfactorily explained only by reference to Tamil usages. Most probably the Tamils formed a substantial portion of the Lāṅka population even at the beginning of the historical period.

The eastern coast of the island probably formed an integral part of the historical habitation of the Tamils. The Tamil Lexicon quotes a phrase Īḷaṉi curryṭal, with the meaning, “Sailing round the eastern side of Ceylon”, from Winslow’s dictionary.

Yālppāṇam peninsula is the core region of Tamil Eelam. Though it has only about two percent of the land area of the island, it has about half of the Tamil population referred to as Ilāṅkai Tamils and about one-third of the entire population of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Human habitation in Yālppāṇam extends to only about 500 BC with the beginning of megalithic settlements. The Tamil Hindu claims on Yālppāṇam begin with king Vicayan building five Icuvarankal, “temples for Siva”, in five different localities, one of them being Kirimalai, on the northern coast of the peninsula. In the Eastern coast of Ilāṅkai, from Tirukkōṇamanai to Tirukkoṉiṉil, the Tamil Hithu claims generally start with the legendary king Trāvanñ (Skt. Rāvana) of Rāmāyana fame.

There is almost appalling paucity of evidence for reconstruction of the past history of Yālppāṇam. Dr. Ragupathy’s Archaeological Survey of Early Settlements of Jaffna is the
primary source for its early history. The first phase of rudimentary settlements were noticed at five sites, two in the small islands and three in the western portion of the peninsula. The type of pottery called Early Carnated Black and Red Ware (ECBRW) was noticed only at the above sites. At two of these sites, this occurred in association with the megalithic burials which contained burial offerings. This type of pottery and burial indicate the Dravidian culture of the inhabitants.

The second phase of the settlement pattern in the peninsula emerged around the dawn of the Christian era and continued up to the fifth century AD. This phase is distinguished by the presence of the Rouletted Ware, introduced here with the Roman trade. The Rouletted Ware has been collected from nearly ten sites. All the sites except Kantarōtai are coastal sites. Important new settlements emerged along the eastern coast of the peninsula and in the small islands. Kantarōtai emerged as a central place or urbanised capital. The Roman trade brought in economic boom and resulted in urbanization of Kantarōtai.

Around the dawn of the Christian era, the advent of Buddhism coincided with the Roman trade which led to the development of many coastal entrepots and trade route settlements. Extensive Buddhist remains are found at Kantarōtai. The overlapping of megalithism with Buddhism is evident in the concept and lay-out of the early Buddhist monuments there where a number of stupas are found in a cluster. Such a lay-out was found in Andhra Buddhism and not in Sinhala Buddhism. An indigenous feature of the Buddhist remains in Yāḷppāṇam is the coral and limestone architecture and sculpture. The building material is one aspect that differentiates the Buddhist monuments of Yāḷppāṇam from those of the Sinhala South. The settlement pattern indicates that Buddhism in Yāḷppāṇam is mercantile in character and was patronised by the trading elite, unlike the Sinhala Buddhism which was peasant oriented and patronised by kings.

The third phase marks the deterioration of the previous pattern and concerns the period from around fifth century to tenth century AD. The prosperous Roman trade ended and the settlements in the peninsula had been affected by this. The subsequent Arab-Chinese transoceanic trade did not have its focus in the peninsula. The next phase started around the tenth century AD and continued up to the advent of the Portuguese. The overlapping of the classical Hinduism of the Cōlas with the Yāḷppāṇam Buddhism was almost complete in two or three centuries. Many of the old settlement sites of phase three were abandoned. Kantarōtai, the central place itself, was abandoned. New settlements arose and they were found widely distributed throughout the peninsula. There was a spurt in the Arab-Chinese trade as evident from the Arab-Chinese artefacts of eleventh to thirteenth centuries. With the emergence of the kingdom of Yāḷppāṇam with its capital Nallūr, the present religious trend of Yāḷppāṇam almost took its shape.

INSCRIPTIONS, COINS AND MANUSCRIPTS

Sri Lankā has thousands of stone inscriptions, mainly in caves, connected to Buddhism. Tamil influence can be traced in these inscriptions. In the present Northern Province, except in Vavuniya district, this type of inscription could not be found probably because rocks and hills are not available in the landscape.

Up to the tenth century AD in Yāḷppāṇam peninsula, only six epigraphs - three from Kantarōtai, two from Āṇaikkōttai and one from Vallipuram- have been discovered so far. One of them was a Sinhala inscription of the ninth century AD. A large number of coins, beginning from Punch mark types, have been found at Kantarōtai. Regarding coins, the particularity of the site is the heavy presence of the Lākṣmī Plaque coins. The coin is a rectangular sheet of copper having a standing figure with prominent feminine features resembling a mother goddess. The Lākṣmī Plaque is essentially an indigenous product as a very large number have been reported from Kantarōtai. This type is dated around the dawn
of the Christian era. Nothing was written on these coins. Coins of some Sinhala kings reigning between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries have also been discovered. The reading and interpretation of two of the early epigraphs - one from Aṇāikkottai and the other from Vallipuram - have generated lot of controversy.
A bronze seal of two lines was discovered inside an ECBRW dish, placed near the skull of a skeleton in a megalithic burial complex in 1980. In the first line there are three graffito marks usually found in megalithic pottery and in the second line there are three Brahmi letters. Prof. K. Indrapala feels that the first line consists of three characters or symbols written in the same way as the ideograms on an Indus seal. He wonders whether we have come across the first bilingual inscription in the Indus and Brahmi scripts. He dates this inscription in the third or second century BC. Dr. P. Ragupathy attempts to deduce the prevalence of the god-king concept among the Tamils by his reading of the inscription as kō vēntu. The inscription seems to be so small that different readings are possible. It seems to be unwise to rush into interpretations entailing deep significance.
The Vallipuram Gold Plate was discovered in 1936 and the one sentence inscription was first edited by Paranavitana in 1940. This refers to the erection of a Buddhist temple. The inscription was in Prakrit language, written in Brahmi script. Paranavitana interprets this record in the light of the Pâli chronicles. He finds some resemblance in names between the ruler mentioned in the record and a ruler mentioned in the Pâli chronicles. So he rushes to the conclusion that the Anurâdhapura king of the second century AD was ruling over Yâlppānam in the second century.Claiming to recognise similarities in language and script between the Vallipuram Plate and inscriptions in Southern Ilânkai, he comes to the conclusion that the people of Yâlppânam in the second century were Sinhala Buddhists. Dr. A. H. Dâni pointed out that that on palaeographical grounds, this inscription could be dated only in the fourth century and the script betrays South Indian influence. Prof. A. Vetupillai has argued convincingly that this inscription reveals Dravidian influence and that this could not be cited as evidence for Sinhala settlement in Yâlppânam.
P. Pushparatnam has been doing archaeological field-work in Pēnâkari in the mainland, opposite Yâlppânam peninsula and has come out with many findings of evidence for Tamil settlement there, contemporary with the Cankam period. The discovery of potsherd inscriptions in Brahmi - the certain reading of some of them as Tamil-Brahmi, confirmed by Iravatham Mahadevan - is worthy of mention here.

BEGINNINGS OF LITERATURE IN EELAM - EARLY HISTORY.

Though writing has been continually practised in Ilânkai for about two thousand years, early literary works in the national languages have not been preserved and the earliest extant literary texts in either of the two national languages could not be dated beyond the last thousand years.
Attempts have been made to trace the beginnings of Eelam poetry and grammar from the Cankam period. Different arguments have been put forward to claim poets like Muraṇcâyūr Mutunâkârayar and Ammâl vanâr and grammarian Tolkâppiyar for Eelam but scholars have found them unconvincing. Vittuvâl Ci. Kanēcâyar was the first to include Liṭtuttu Pēntâvanâr in his Liṭtuttu Tamil Pulavar Caritam (History of Tamil Poets in Eelam), 1939. There are two separate entries in Cankam anthologies, two poems by Eelattu Pēntâvanâr and five poems by Maturai Eelattu Pēntâvanâr. Kanēcâyar has taken both names as belonging to the same author.
Some scholars have expressed scepticism about taking this poet as an Eelam poet, just depending on the place name and about taking two entries of names as belonging to one person. The poet has only akam themes for his poetry and so it is difficult to locate him in a regional and historical milieu.
Modern research is establishing the fact that the early history of Ilânkai was very much influenced by the Tamils. There must have been a substantial Tamil population in the island
from the beginning of the historical period. It is from 247 BC, the date of introduction of Buddhism in Ilankai, that the real historical period can be said to have begun. Even according to the Mahāvamsa, the Pāli chronicle of the Sinhalas, the Tamils made three different attempts to rule from Anurādhapura. During a period roughly corresponding to two centuries before the Christian era, there was Tamil rule for about eighty years. This could not have been possible without a settled Tamil population in Ilankai, who could make a challenge for sovereignty over the whole island. A poet from this region could not be dismissed as an improbability.

Maturai Eelattu Pētāntēvaṉār seems to be the name assumed by Ilattu Pētāntēvaṉār, after having been settled in Maturai. A comparative study of the poems, given under the two different entries, helps in identifying them as belonging to one author.

The seven poems have been included in three different anthologies, known as Kuruntokai, Nāṟṟip pirai and Akanāṟṟiṟiṟu. If not for the anthologies, this early flowering of Eelam Tamil poetry might have been lost to the posterity.

From early fourteenth century AD, Eelam Tamil literature has a continuous history. Between the ninth and the thirteenth century AD, many Tamil inscriptions have been discovered from different parts of the island. The language of the inscription is an indication that it was understood by at least a section of the people in that locality. Tamil inscriptions have been found both in Anurādhapura and Polonnaruwa, the capital cities. Many Tamil inscriptions have been found in and around Tirukkōṇāmalai, in a triangle among Tirukkōṇāmalai, Padaviyā and Polonnaruwa, making one speculate whether that region could be the core of Eelam.

There is reason to believe that literary activities in Tamil were going on in Ilankai, even though they have not been preserved. Poems inscribed on stones only have been preserved for posterity. Four Tamil poems, in three different metrical forms, have been discovered from three different locations. The first one of the ninth century AD, in venpā metre, was from Anurādhapura, praising a Tarumapāḷḷa for raising the Mahātūrampāḷḷi there. The second one in venpā metre belongs to Kotagama, near Kegalle, praising the victory of a Yāḷppāṇam king against the Sinhala king in the fourteenth century AD. There is an inai klural ṛcñiyappā in a Padaviyā inscription, referring to a Hindu temple in the twelfth century. A thirteenth century viruttappā from Panduvasnava, near Dambedeniya, mentions the establishment of a number of Buddhist edifices during Nissankamalla’s reign. Many technical terms of astrology occur in this inscription.

**EELAM POETS/ SCHOLARS PATRONISED BY KINGS**

The word “pulavar” in Tamil could mean both poets and scholars. They were mainly using verse “ceyyul” for their productions. This kind of explanation is essential to understand the patronage extended by Yāḷppāṇam kings to pulavar. The Kindom of Yāḷppāṇam was in existence from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries AD and there are traditional accounts that they were patronising Tamil poets.

The earliest extant books from Ilankai are works on astrology and medicine. The astrological work Caracōṭumāḷai presents an interesting problem. There is another astrological work also called Cekaracēcēkaramāḷai. This presents no problem. The kings of Yāḷppāṇam had two alternate throne names: Cekaracēcēkaran and Pararacēcēkaran. Cōma Sarma, the author of the second astrological work, was patronised by a Cekaracēcēkaran, most probably in the fourteenth century. The author has seen the earlier work and revised it with lot of additional information. He cites the names of some astrological sources, may be to lend authority for his revisions. The first work praises the king Parakkiramaṉ, who was mentioned as tampaiyar kāvalan, “king of people of Tampai”. As no Tamil king in Ilankai with this name has been mentioned anywhere and as Tampai looks like a shortened Tamilised form for Dambadeniya, this work is now identified as belonging to Parakkramabāhu IV of Dambadeniya. The author of this astrological work is mentioned as
Tēguvaraip Perumāḷ. Tēguvaraip seems to be the Tamilicised form for Devinuvara, the southern tip of the island if Ilakki, which got its name from a Viṣṇu temple, prominent during the medieval times. The word perumāḷ is a Tamil translation for Viṣṇu which could serve as a personal name. Befitting this interpretation, the author praises only Viṣṇu and Viṉāyaka, who is expressly referred to as nephew of the former, at the beginning of his work. Parākramabāhu IV is referred to as a Sinhala Buddhist ruler in the Pāḷi chronicles. The Sinhala kings of that period married frequently into South Indian royal families and so rulers could claim kinship with Tamil dynasties. Tēguvaraip Perumāḷ praises his patron as a scion of the Cōḷas, who planted the tiger emblem on the Mēṟu mountain, who was wearing āṭṭi flowers and who belonged to the solar dynasty. This king was probably a Sinhala to the Sinhalas and a Tamil to the Tamils.

The production of Cekarācācēkaram as an āyurvedic medical text was most probably contemporaneous with the production of Cekarācācēkaramalai during the reign of Varōtaya Cēkāyāriyap. The names of authors of the two extant menical texts -Cekarācācēkaram and Pararācēkaram - have unfortunately not been preserved. The latter work was a very ambitious project. Pararācēkaram is a massive work of encyclopaedic proportions, running to twelve thousand verses. This is probably a compilation in Tamil of the then available medical knowledge from Āyurvedic medicine, Siddha medicine and folk medicine.

For poetry as such, Aracakēcarai, a member of the royal family, is credited with the narrative poem Irakuvammicam, an adaptation from Kālidāsa’s Ragavamsa. There is a folk epic in Eelam on Kannaki worship. Three different versions - Kövālappär Kātai in Yālpāṇam, Cilampu Kūrāl in Mullaitivu and Vajakkurāl in Maṟakkaḷappu - have been recited now during Kannaki worship. All three of them have an easily identifiable common core and some of the references seem to point to an Āryacakkakkaravarittī as the author of the work. So the core of these three versions might have been written or compiled during the rule of the Yālpāṇam kings.

**NARRATIVE POEMS**

Two forms- kāviyam and kāppiyam- are used interchangeably in Tamil to refer to a literary genre. Some early writers in English have translated these terms as epics. As Tamil literary works of this genre do not share many features of the literary form epic in other classical languages, it is fashionable now to use the term narrative poem to denote the particular literary genre in Tamil. The proper Tamil term for the literary genre should have been porut totar nilai ceyyul. The Sanskrit word kāvyā, “poetic creation” appears to have been Tamilised into kāviyam and kāppiyam. These Tamilised forms make their appearance in Tamil late, may be only from the twelfth century.

The Čilappatīkāram and the Manimekalai are two of the earliest narrative poems in Tamil and they seem to reflect Tamil tradition in many ways. The authors take their stories from the Tamil country and have heroines as their main characters - a novel feature in such poems. They also make use of akaval metre, peculiar to Tamil. Ilakki, the author of the Čilappatīkāram, is evaluated as one of the greatest Tamil poets. He narrates the story of a modest and chaste Tamil woman, who takes revenge for her husband, after arguing her case convincingly in a king’s court. The unity of the then truncated Tamilakam is forcefully brought out in the story where Kannaki, born in the Cōḷa country and argued her case in the Pāṇtiy country had been made the Pattini goddess in the Čēra country. There are frequent references to heroic Tamil kings extending their domination even up to the Himalayas. As plenty of allusions are found for iyal, icai and nāṭakam in this work it is also acclaimed today as mut tamil kāppiyam. The Čilappatīkāram is a primary source of treasure for researches on ancient Tamil music and dance. The author has made good use of folk-song motifs like vanippāṭal and kuravaippāṭal.
As the Cilappatikāram and the Manimēkalai appear to narrate the two parts of the same story and for some similar reasons, both are sometimes referred to as irattaik kāppiyarkal, "twin epics". The Manimēkalai narrates the story of a young girl, born to Kōvalan and Mātavi. Even though she was living in a Buddhist nunnery, she was tormented by conflict in her mind as she was loved by a prince. Finally she becomes a nun. The author is using the story to popularise and propagate Buddhism. As Buddhism is an international religion, the Manimēkalai assumes international importance. The Manimēkalai is probably the only Tamil text, for the study of which an international workshop was held. This was held in Uppsala University in Sweden in 1995. These two works attract international scholars and so they are getting many translations.

The first reference to aim perun kāppiyankal, "five major narrative poems" occur in the 14th century. Their enumeration as Civakacintāmaṇi, Cilappatikāram, Manimēkalai, Valayapati and Kuntalakēci is found in a 19th century poem. The last two are no longer extant. The first one, whose author was a Jain monk, narrates a story of North Indian origin and utilises virutam metre, which is common to both Tamil and Sanskrit. This work follows faithfully the rules laid down in Dandin's Kavyadharsa, a Sanskrit work on rhetoric. This work was a path-finder to the later narrative poems in Tamil, even to the Christian Viramānujivar's Tempavani and the Muslim Umauppalavar's Cīrappurāṇam.

It is not known who made the compilation of aim perun kāppiyankal. All the five works are connected to the Jains and the Buddhists. But Utyanaa Kai, by a Jain author in akavali metre, had not been included even though it must have preceded Civaka Cintāmaṇi. Probably because the Periyapurāṇam and the Kampa Rāmāyaṇam were Saiva and Vaiṣṇava works, they were not included among the five major narrative poems. It is even claimed that the Periyapurāṇam was written to counter the popularity of the Cintāmaṇi. The plot of the story becomes complicated as this work narrates the story of 63 individual nāyānmar and 9 collective categories. Even though Cuntaramurtiṇayaṉar appears as the hero, Appar, and Campantar outshine him in some respects. As this work looks like the history of the Saiva bhakti movement of the Pallava period, some scholars call this a national epic.

Kampar's Irāvatāram, generally known as Kampa Rāmāyaṇam, has all the features of a narrative poem in abundance. Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa in Sanskrit, the original, is an itīkācāram, "epic" as well as an itīkāviyam. Kampar is the greatest Tamil poet, may be of international status. International scholars have not shown much interest in Kampar probably because the original is in Sanskrit and the author of the original is also having international status. A socio-political interpretation of the Rāmāyaṇa, that it indicates the Aranyan of South India and that it ridicules the Dravidians as monkeys and demons, has dimmed its importance for some time but now it is realised that it has to be treated as literature and Tamil language cannot afford to dump a poet of this stature. Kacciyaappar's Kantapurāṇam is apparently modelled on the Irāvatāram. The story is about Murukaṇ, the Tamil god, and the work is intended for the Saiva Siddhānta traditionalists, even though it utilises myths of North Indian origin.

There is also another category in Tamil, called a'u niru kāppiyankal, "five minor narrative poems". This compilation Yacōtara Kaviyam, Cūḷāmaṇi, Nākakumāra Kaviyam, Utyana Kāviyam and Nilakēci is very late. Except for Nākakumāra Kaviyam, which is probably extinct, all the others have been printed. All of them are of Jain origin. Cūḷāmaṇi is acclaimed by many modern scholars as having more literary merit than Cintāmaṇi. Nilakēci is a fine example for religious polemics and apologetics - polemics against Buddhism and apologetics for Jainism. Some writers use the word niru kāppiyam to refer also to literary genre like paraṇi, ulā and pīḷaṇattamil.

CLASSICS: CAṆKAM AND AFTER.

There is some controversy on what Tamil classics are and on what caṅkam poetry consists of. The Tamil literature of the period preceding the seventh century AD could be considered
Tamil classics. Three anthologies - etuttokai, "the eight anthologies", pattuppāṭṭu, "the ten songs", and the patinēn kaṇakku, "the eighteen minor works" can be treated as classics. The first category of the etuttokai itself consists of eight anthologies. Basing on internal evidence like the theme, metre and language of the poetry, modern scholars postulate two different periods of time for this poetry. As the word caṅkam is very closely associated with the early poetry, the periods are classified as Caṅkam and After, the latter one referring to the post-caṅkam period. The fourth century AD can be taken as the beginning of the latter period. Two works of etuttokai- Kalittokai and Parippāṭai- and one work of the pattuppāṭṭu - Tirumurukāṟṟuppatai- and the patinen kikkanakku belong to the post-caṅkam period.

Classical Tamil poetics is original, and not indebted to Sanskrit. The most comprehensive statement of Tamil poetics is the third book of the Tolkāppiyam. Poetry is classified into akam and puram categories. The akam poems have as their focus the individual within the matrix of familial relationships, foremost among them being love between man and woman. The bias is impersonal: the experience itself is rarefied and frozen in the shape of a poem. The puram poems are centred outside the matrix of familial relationships, and are occasional in character. They explore the relationship between man and the world around him, with reference to a specific place and time.

Women preside over the akam poems, which are redolent of their ambience and sacred power (anāṅku). Premarital love (kalavu) and marital and extramarital love (karpu) in all their phases are the subject of akam proper, which include phases like meeting, waiting, sulking, lamenting, and parting. The characters of the akam poems include the heroine, her friend, mother, foster mother, the hero, his friend or bard, the concubine, her friend, and passersby. Each poem is in the form of an utterance in the form of a monologue of one of the characters and the poet never directly addresses his audience. Men preside over the puram poems, which reverberate with the exploits and prowess in battle of heroes.

The first elements (mutal) are place and time. Place refers to the seven landscapes (tinais), into which the world of akam is divided, the tina being a complex of "land, class and behavior pattern". The tinais are named after their characteristic flowers or trees and are presided over by deities. Time includes both the seasons of the year and the hours of the day and the night. The native elements (karu) comprise interrelationships between humans and nature. They include human beings, their occupations and past times, musical instruments, musical mode, animals, birds, trees and flowers. The human elements (uri) are the phases of love that correspond to the five tinais. Two phases of love- unrequited love (kaikkilai) and mismatched love (peruninai) - are not considered suitable for poetry.

The world of puram also comprises seven tinais. They correspond to those of akam. Six of them are named after flowers or trees. Flowers, appropriate to each phase of combat, are worn as garlands by warriors.

The akam/puram classification may be regarded as a unique contribution of Tamil poetics. The genres complement each other. Often they overlap, even fuse together to speak passionately and with sophistication of an ancient way of life. Prof. A. Veluppilai characterises this period as iyarkai neri kkalam, "Naturalistic Age".

Of the six works of the etuttokai of the early period, puranāṉṟu and patiruppattu belong to puram and the rest to akam. Of the nine works of the pattuppāṭṭu of the early period, three - kuṟıneippāṭṭu, paṭṭuippāṭṭai and mullaippāṭṭu - belong to akam and the rest to puram. The puram poetry reflects the heroic age of the Tamils and it has many comparable features with such poetry in many ancient literatures, especially the heroic poetry of Greek literature. Prof. S.Vaiyāpuripillai drew attention to this fact and Prof. K. Kailāsapathy developed his ideas in his work on Tamil Heroic Poetry.

The next period has been characterised by Prof. A. Veluppilai as aṟa neri kkālam, "Didactic Age". Eleven works from eighteen minor works are didactic in theme. All eighteen works are in venpā metre, unlike earlier works which are in akavali metre. There are clear indications that the Tamil society had changed very much from the earlier stage. The dark age of the Kalabhra Interregnum follows the early period. There was political
upheaval and foreign rule. The Jains have become influential. The Buddhists were receiving patronage. Even though the Vedic religion was on the defensive, they were trying to adopt to the changed circumstances. The beginning of the bhakti religion can be traced to the end of this period.

Of the eleven didactic works, two -Tirukkuṇaḷ and Nalatiyār- have been exercising great influence on the Tamil society. Even though both of them treat āram, porul and inpam, the three aims of life, their entire focus was on guiding the people on ethical lines. Nalatiyār was a Jain work. It also attracted Christian missionaries who made translations.

The Tirukkuṇaḷ has gained international renown and it has been translated into many Indian languages as well as into many foreign languages. It is non-sectarian in that its author has been claimed by the Śaivites, the Vaiṣṇavites, the Jains and the Buddhists as one of their own. Now, the Christians are looking for Christian influence on the author. It is treating porul and inpam also in a very detailed manner. In the section on inpam, he synthesise the world-affirmation spirit of the Caṅkam period with what he gets in the Kāmasūtra and other Sanskrit Classics. He seems to have made a synthesis of his deep knowledge of politics with what is found in Sanskrit Arthasastra and other texts. The modern revival of Tamil nationalism places heavy emphasis on the value of the Tirukkuṇaḷ.