

WORLD CLASSICAL TAMIL CONFERENCE

COIMBATORE

23.6.2010

Hon'ble Chief Minister **Kalaignar's** Presidential Address
at the Inaugural Function

The most revered President of the Indian Republic, Thirumathi
Pratibha Devisingh Patil,
who has come to inaugurate the
World Classical Tamil Conference, present the
'Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi Classical Tamil Award' and deliver the
inaugural address.

Brushing aside all the impediments created,
the President of India has come over here.
It is because of her love and affection for
Tamil Nadu and its people. On behalf of the Tamils
living all over the world, I profusely thank her.

His Excellency the Governor of Tamil Nadu,
Thiru Surjit Singh Barnala, who has come to release the special
souvenir of the Classical Tamil Conference.

The Hon'ble Finance Minister of Tamil Nadu,
Professor Anbazhagan,

The Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu,
M.K. Stalin, Cabinet Ministers,
Tamil Professors, Scholars, Researchers, Poets,
Tamil lovers and my blood-brothers whom
I treasure more than my life!

I offer my thanks and greetings with folded hands and extend my hearty welcome to all those who have come in such large numbers - as if the floodgates had been opened - to take part in this great, gala event of World Classical Tamil Conference.

In Thanjavur, often referred to as the granary of the Kaveri delta, in the hamlet Thirukkuvalai which wakes up early in the dawn, I was born the dear son of Thiru Mutthuvelar, endowed with poetic imagination, talented in music and interested in farming and of Thirumathi Anjugam Ammaiyaar. At the age of 14, I composed the marching song 'In the land of Tamil heroism' and bearing the flag with the insignia of the tiger, the bow and the fish and raising the voice 'Long live Tamil,' I led a march of the Tamil student army. At the same age, I wrote a play *Selva Chandra*, the introduction to which proclaimed, "The time has come when the Dravidians will awaken; a vast majority of them have woken up with courage and determination; they have girded up their loins to protect their land and safeguard their art and civilization." At the age of 17, I started an organisation named "Tamil Nadu Tamil Student Association" and for its anniversary received from Pavendar Bharathidasan the greeting song "Look! The lion horde is on the move! It searches the enemy camp for tearing it up." My article "Youth Sacrifice" published in one of the first issues of *Dravida Nadu* drew the attention of Arignar Anna. At 20, I presented the short story of social reform "An Old Man's Dream"

under the pseudonym “Cheran” in *Murasoli*. Later, drenched in the loving embrace of Thanthai Periyar and deep affection of Arignar Anna, I took Tamil as my escort and comrade-at-arms. I served the cause of Tamil in various capacities; as a writer of stories, poems, essays, plays and script writer for films and, of course, used my pen as my prime armoury in my political career. Whether in power or out of power, I have tirelessly served my mother Tamil and brought laurels to her.

I deem it a proud privilege to have been given an opportunity to organise and conduct the World Classical Tamil Conference in Kovai and chair the inaugural function. So far eight conferences have been held bearing the name “World Tamil Conference.” This World Classical Tamil Conference is different from the previous eight conferences. The three words, *World, Classical and Tamil* are not only contain a depth of meaning but also are apt to describe the conference. Tamil is not only an international language; it is like a mother for all the languages of the world. The Tamil scholar Devaneyya Pavanar has established that Tamil is the primary classical language of the world. Root Tamil words exist in many languages of the world in various modified forms but retaining the same meanings. For example, in the languages of the world, words of family relations such as ‘amma,’ ‘appa,’ pronouns of address such as ‘naan,’ ‘nii,’ words of natural elements ‘niir,’ ‘neruppu,’ ‘kaarru,’ have close affinity with Tamil. In the languages of the world, it is hard to find a basic

word which does not have some link or association with the Tamil word. Hence Tamil has the status of the first mother tongue in the world.

Among the languages of the world, since time immemorial, the Tamil triad, literature, music and dance had attained maturity; hence Tamil achieved permanence. The growth of art allied and interrelated with literature has afforded stability to the language and so we realise that Tamil is the world's mother language. To King Solomon who lived in the tenth century AD, peacock's plume, elephant's ivory and perfumes were sent through ships. The researcher Caldwell discovered that there are more than twenty Tamil words in the Vedas. From this we learn that Tamil had an existence prior to Sanskrit. In Valmiki's *The Ramayana* there are references to the three kings who ruled South India and Kapatapuram, the capital of the Pandyas. This is understood to refer to the Kapatapuram of Lemuria continent where the second Tamil Sangam was held. Chanakya, the courtier of Chandragupta of the fourth century BC, who wrote *Arthasastra*, refers to pearl-diving expeditions in Kapatapuram. The Sanskrit linguist *Kaatyayana* who lived in 350 BC makes a reference to Chera, Chola, Pandyas. In *Purananuru* there is a reference to the war between the five Pandavas and the one hundred Kauravas in which Udayancheralathan fed both the armies. Hence he came to be known as Cheeran Perunchoorruthiyan Cheeralathan. The Mahabharatha war is believed to have taken place in 1500 BC. We may conclude thereby that this Cheran's rule was during 1500

BC. All these reveal the ancient origin of the Tamil race and the hoary tradition of Tamil.

Wise scholars John Marshall, Rev. Father Heras, Sir Martin Wheeler, Kamil Zvelebil and others have laid emphasis on the truth that Dravidians are the creators of Indus Valley civilisation and that the language of the people of Indus Valley was Dravidian. Indus Valley civilisation is Dravidian culture. It is closely associated with the ancient culture of the family of Dravidian languages. Dr. Iravatham Mahadevan who has been conducting research on Indus Valley civilisation for the last forty years claims that it is possible to understand the Indus Valley script from the myths recorded in ancient Tamil literary works. The recipient of this year's 'Kalaingar M. Karunanidhi Classical Tamil Award', Professor Asko Parpola of Finland, pursues research based on the hypothesis that the script and language of Indus Valley civilisation belonged to the Dravidian family. He has demonstrated with authoritative proof that the inhabitants of the Indus Valley spoke the Dravidian language, close to Old Tamil.

With the availability of the literature of the last Sangam age like *Akananuru* and *Purananuru* we are now in possession of Tamil classics that existed some two thousand years ago. With the availability of *Tolkappiyam*, we are now in proud possession of Tamil, prior to three thousand years. With the evidences of Indus script, we learn of the existence of Tamil five thousand years ago. Ancient Tamils, travelling on land and through the seas, conducted trade and commerce in

places like Ujjain, Kalingapatnam, Kasi and Pataliputra in India and Kaazhagam (Burma), Thakkolam, Kataram, Savagam (the East Indies). Even as the Tamils traded with countries abroad, foreigners came to India for trade. *Silappatikaram* states that businessmen from abroad speaking alien languages stayed in Kaverippoompattinam which was once a world famous seaport known for trade. *Silappatikaram* refers to the 'Ionian settlements' (yavanar irukkai) where the foreigners brought in ships lived together with the natives. *Pattinappalai* mentions the prosperous city where men speaking diverse languages were found living happily with the rest.

The Arabian traders and the Yavanars who came to Tamil Nadu from the northwest regions settled in Musiri in the Chera country for their business. Through such interaction in trade and commerce and through continued relationship with other languages, Tamil came to be known all over the world. It came to be regarded and accepted as the first mother language of the world for its primordial origin and eminence.

For a language to be termed classical, there are eleven distinct, well-defined yardsticks; antiquity, individuality, common character, neutrality, parental kinship, linguistic principles, literary prowess, noble ideas and ideals, culture, art and wisdom born of experience. That Tamil possesses all these and even greater merits has been accepted unanimously not only by scholars in Tamil Nadu and other Tamil scholars in the rest of India but by foreigners who learnt and attained enviable proficiency in Tamil.

The first and foremost Tamil scholar who raised his voice that Tamil is a classical language is V.G. Suryanarayana Sastry, aka Paritimarkalaingar. The first foreigner to declare that Tamil is a classical language is Robert Caldwell. He, who lived in 'Shepherd's Colony' in Ireland, came to India and settled down in Idayankudi in Nellore district where he spent the rest of his life. He loved the Tamil soil and the Tamil language. So many organisations, Tamil scholars from India and abroad and public intellectuals joined the chorus of raising their voice for acquiring the right of the classical status for Tamil. Special mention should be made of Chennai Saiva Siddhantha Mahasamajam, Karanthai Tamil Sangam, Metropolitan Tamil Sangams, the universities in Tamil Nadu including Madras University and Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tamil scholar Devaneyya Pavanar, Dr. A. Agesthalingom, Dr. V.C. Kulandai Swamy, Dr. John Samuel, Thiru Manavai Mustafa, Dr. Avvai Natarajan, Dr. Porko, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Dr. Kamil Zvelebil and Dr. George L. Hart.

Still that voice which reverberated loudly in Tamil Nadu for more than a century withered and wasted away unnoticed and uncared for like the moon on the forest region or the rains on the ocean. But with the guidance of the Pole star (Dhurva natchathiram) of our political set-up and the sacrificial lamp Thirumathi Sonia Gandhi, the United Democratic Alliance Party ably led by the redoubtable Dr. Manmohan Singh formed the Government. Only then was the claim of the

DMK that Tamil should be declared a classical language accepted. The Central Government made a public declaration granting classical status for Tamil. On that occasion, Thirumathi Sonia Gandhi wrote the following letter to me:

Dear Thiru Karunanidhiji,

I have received your letter of 28th October. I am glad that all the formalities for declaring Tamil as a classical language have now been completed. This is an achievement for all the constituents of the UPA Government, but particular credit goes to you and your party.

Let me tell you that I do not treat this as just a letter; I honestly wish and believe that a hundred or two hundred years hence or for all time to come, my great-grandchildren should treat this family heirloom as a copper plate sheltered, guarded and protected by their grandsire.

The voice that was raised for a hundred years began shedding its lustre like a lamp on a hill. In the context of the Central Government's declaration that Tamil is a classical language, this is the first conference of its kind. Hence, it is appropriately named World Classical Tamil Conference and held in the city of Kovai. Tamil, without losing its beauty and youth, has been a living language all these five thousand years. We have to take note of its future growth and plan ways and means of augmenting its development in different forthcoming spheres of human endeavour such as literature, comparative studies, language

studies, translation, history, philosophy, humanities and folklore. We have to plan and enthuse further meaningful research on these areas and encourage intense research on the archaeological findings from the Indus Valley through Adichanallur and Kumarikkandam that was swallowed by the cruel sea. This conference aiming at achieving these objectives is held at the Kongu region.

Perumpalai in the north, Vaikavur in the south, Poruppu Velikkunru in the west-Kongu spreads upto the Kaveri-surrounding Kulittalai.

These were once defined as the boundaries of Kongunadu. Kongunadu finds a special place in the history of the Tamil country right from the days of the Sangam age. Kulittalai which elected and made me a member of the legislative assembly for the first time belongs to Kongunadu.

The citizens of the Sangam age chose only the following seven as the most charitable philanthropists of Tamil Nadu: Paari, Ori, Kaari, Pegan, Aai, Adhiyan and Nalli. With Kumanan who once said, "For granting charity, I am like those seven" is the eighth magnanimous liberal of the Sangam period. Among those eight generous personalities, Pegan, Athiyaman, Ori and Kumanan belong to Kongunadu. Besides, Kadia Neduvettuvan, Nannan, Poonthurai, Inthurkkizhan, Konkanangkizhan, Vicchiko, Thaman Thondrikon, Mokurpazhayan who were leaders in the age of Sangam; Pazhayakotai Charkarai, Mummudipallavarayar, Kadaiyurk Kangeyar, Kotrai Venadudiyar,

Masakkali Mandradiyaar, Vanankaamudi Vanarayan, Kalingarayan, Paariyuran, Ulagudaiyan, Agalangan, Immudichozhiyandan, Deeran Chinnamalai, Kollimazhavan and other leaders of the later Sangam age also ruled this great Kongu country.

Anji Atthai magal Nagaiyar, Adiyar Vinnathanar, Andhi Ilankiranar, Alathurkkizhar, Aaviyar, Irumbidarthalaiyar, Erumaiveliyanar, Karuvur Kannampaalanaar, Karuvurkkizhar, Karuvurkkochanar, Karuvur Seraman Satthanar, Kudavayir Keeratthanar, Kollikkannanar, Senguntrur Kizhar, Perunthalai Satthanar, Ponmudiyar and other poets sang, nurtured and nourished pure Tamil. They too belong to this Kongu land.

This Kongu country is the proud abode of such poets, and matchless leaders. Kovai is the exquisite capital of this beautiful land. The World Classical Tamil Conference now opens in a spot chosen for its proper location and ambience. The right model for womanhood and the pride of the Indian land, the President of our great republic Thirumathi Pratibha Devisingh Patil accepted our invitation and has come here to inaugurate the conference. Thiru Surjeet Singh Barnala, the Governor of Tamil Nadu and my friend, has come to release the special souvenir of the conference and deliver his address. Joining all of you in welcoming them into our midst, I conclude my presidential address of the World Classical Tamil Conference.

Thank you! Vanakkam.