

Sub-project A04

Teaching Language and Literature: Tamil Manuscript Compendia on Grammar

PD Dr. Eva Wilden

Dr. Giovanni Ciotti



Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ et al., MSSML, Tañcāvūr

Sources

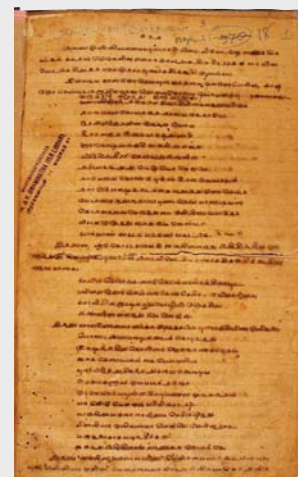
Part of the rich heritage of Tamil manuscripts consists in compendia that contain extracts of various treatises from the wider field of grammar. This comprises not only phonetics/phonology, morphology and syntax, but also poetics, rhetoric, and metrics – in Tamil a single domain named *ilakkaṇam*. Also personal adaptations of treatises or their commentaries are found, often simplified, as well as unidentified smaller texts which may be summaries of or notes on established texts. What they all have in common is that they appear to come from a context of learning and teaching. The sub-project envisaged here proposes to collect, classify and analyse manuscripts of this type.

Goals

The double goal of the sub-project is that of better understanding the contexts and the different levels at which grammar – a fundamental discipline in a diglossic tradition – was taught, as well as to assess the personal contributions made by individual teachers, and perhaps also students, to the wider domain. This understanding will shed fresh light on the historical processes that took place from the 17th to the early 19th centuries when, after a phase of reconsolidation and systematisation of traditional knowledge under the Nayak rulers, there followed a compartmentalisation of knowledge and loss of information. This will enable us to understand how grammar, with its tool box necessary for re-accessing the earlier literary heritage, came to play a nodal role in the subsequent period of resurrection, called Tamil renaissance, when during late colonial times Tamil texts were re-canonised and printed for the first time. The sub-project will survey these manuscripts and their contents, establish their regional and scholastic affiliations, and understand how they fit in with the aims and creeds professed in traditional literary and scholarly prefaces. In the wider context of cultural history, it is these manuscripts that document the transition from comprehensive cultural learning aware of the full range of the literary heritage as symbolised in the corpus of the *Caṅkam* to the compartmentalised patchwork knowledge that seems to be characteristic of the resurrection phase and the print renaissance of the 19th century. An additional question pertains to the production of manuscripts. While manuscripts from within the classical fold of learning have a standardised layout and *Schriftbild*, many of the examples under scrutiny here exhibit individual deviations from the norm, up to highly idiosyncratic and almost illegible, in short, personal forms of handwriting.

Manuscript culture in Tamil Nadu

The overall number of manuscripts transmitted in Tamil Nadu can only be roughly estimated. According to the catalogue of Tamil Palm-leaf Manuscripts (Chellamuthu 1989) the number of manuscripts in Tamil language would be around 25 000. However, this catalogue comprises only the larger libraries. If one takes into consideration the smaller collections of innumerable temples and private households, the figure ought to be far higher. Moreover, this figure does not at all take into account the numerous paper manuscripts. The catalogisation is insufficient. What is worse, printed catalogues are full of misleading or even simply false information. The state of preservation in general is not good, partly due to the problems arising with a climate as hot and humid as that of Tamil Nadu, partly due to lack of awareness and ensuing neglect. For the better part conservation is not ensured. Various institutions have been involved with projects of microfilming or photographing part of the heritage, at least as far as the palm-leaf manuscripts are concerned (such as the IGPCA). A small part of the manuscripts for the literary tradition of the first millennium has by now at least been digitised (EFEO Pondicherry; now also Cemmoḷḷi, the Centre of Excellence for Classical Tamil in Chennai). More manuscripts can be found in various European libraries as part of their colonial heritage. In particular, this sub-project will make use of manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris and the Orientální Ústav of Prague.



Akapporuḷ Ilakkaṇam, UVSL 18, Ceṅṅai