Word, Sound, Image

The Life of the Tamil Text

Saskia Kersenboom

ROUTLEDGE

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In memory of

Shri Kandappa Ganesan
(1924–1987)
genius of time

Contents

Acknowledgements

Throughout the entire process my husband, Alfred J. van Duren MBA, has encouraged me as well as criticised my work with sobering common sense and sharp insight. His support has preserved my stamina and endurance of it all. Moreover, he is the reassuring embodiment of the world outside one's study, a world full of life, vitality, beauty and love.

Note on Transcription and Transliteration

The transcription used for Tamil technical terms and names of texts, music and dance compositions, is based on a strict transliteration according to the system adopted by the *Tamil Lexicon* (Madras University, 1982). The transcription of Sanskrit terms follows the *Sanskrit–English Dictionary* of Sir M. Monier-Williams (Oxford University Press, 1970). In the case of personal names we have adhered to the transcription preferred by the person in question. If a firsthand record of such choice was not available, we have preferred to transcribe names as literally as possible, either from Tamil or from Sanskrit. Loanwords from Sanskrit in Tamil or mixed terms have been rendered as employed in their specific contexts. Place names follow mostly the commonly used anglicised version. For the sake of readability Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil diacritics have not been used in the main text; these details can be found in full in the glossary.

List of Abbreviations

AI	–	Artificial Intelligence
CD	–	Compact Disc
CD-i	–	Compact Disc Interactive
CD-ROM	–	Compact Disc Read Only Memory
DED	–	Dravidian Etymological Dictionary
Ka.	–	Kannada
NS	–	*Natyasastra*
Skt.	–	Sanskrit
Ta.	–	Tamil
Te.	–	Telugu
TP	–	*Tolkappiyam*

Preface

Enta prayogam? 'What's the use?' – a wary question often heard while trying to get one's data 'straight'. Literally, *enta prayogam* means 'Which application?';[1] and, indeed, how do we apply the knowledge that was gathered at such high costs? What do our painstaking efforts amount to? To the scholar his or her[2] publication may be a result to be proud of: it constitutes the proof of understanding the subject-matter of one's research. But to the Tamil expert and informant scholarly interest, research and its products are by no means a hard proof of insight. *Prayogam,* or application, brings out the notion of a pragmatic nature of understanding.

Originally, *enta prayogam* hit me as a question that I tried to answer in scholarly terms. Such answers never satisfied their audience. Thus, the question transformed itself into a demand for scholarship to satisfy. As a student of Indology I witnessed the grandeur of Philology and Literary Sciences in the examples set by Jan Gonda and Kamil Zvelebil. Classes in Sanskrit and Tamil with them were full of erudition, vision and inspiration that instilled awe and excitement over the new horizons they were able to open up before our eyes. However, Philology-at-large seemed to create a puzzling sense of *vacuum.* When confronted for the first time, in 1975, with the lush South Indian reality, it dawned upon me that my uneasiness 'back home' might have something to do with our type of scholarship. In the same year I began my apprenticeship in South Indian traditional dance, called Bharata Natyam, with Smt. Nandini Ramani, student of the legendary Smt. T. Balasarasvati. At Utrecht University, the training in dance and the study of Indian languages seemed to many to be miles apart and incompatible. Now, almost twenty years later, the continuous training in South Indian traditional dance and music has proved to be crucial fieldwork in Tamil literature.

The Tamils speak a language that belongs to the Dravidian family. It can claim a 'classical status' on account of its early, indigenous grammars and its textual continuity over two thousand years. As early as the sixth century AD the Tamils defined their language as being threefold: *Muttamil* (literally 'three Tamil'), comprising word, music and mimetic dance. The natural consequences of this definition imply that the Tamil language assumes its full scope only in expressions cast in three medial *forms* and in the dimension of *time*. Tamil texts share these features. Their multimedial character, the fourth dimension of time, and their 'doubly interactive setting' between sender and receiver form the core of the problems that Western scholarship encounters when trying to describe, analyse, interpret and represent Tamil literature.

Until today, the concept of *Muttamil* has not been pursued logically, nor has Tamil literature been allowed a conclusive, rigorous, genre-based classification. This failure cannot be attributed to any individual scholar, but rather to methods of research. Generally, textual data are recorded and analysed in line with their final mode of representation, that is, publication. The format of a book did not only colour the perception of textual data, it provided as well the guiding principles of description, analysis and interpretation. If data were understood to form a book, then surely 'meaning' should be elicited by reading. The twin 'reading-and-writing' that constitutes a vital paradigm in the Humanities does not form a natural pair in Tamil scholarship. Here, writing does not necessarily give rise to reading; it rather serves as a memory aid to a performance of the text. The full representation of a text is therefore not found in a document but in an event. As a result meaning is produced in an entirely different manner. One might say that the Western proof of solid textual scholarship is voiced by the academic 'must' *publish or perish*, whereas the traditional Tamil expert adheres to the ultramodern saying, popular at the MIT, *demo or die*, i.e. demonstrate or die![3]

In 1987 I received a fellowship from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences to investigate the concept *Muttamil* and its implications for the Tamil language and its literature. From the start I decided to accept the self-definition of Tamil as being literally threefold. This meant to pursue its practical consequences and to become a student in Tamil prosody

and in instrumental music. Early Tamil grammarians regarded the large lute as vocal cords made visible, and refer to it in matters of phonology.[4] The *vina* is considered its direct descendant. Side by side I continued my training in dance and in vocal music. Here, as elsewhere, people kept asking me *enta prayogam* 'Which application?' The only convincing argument for studying *Muttamil* was actual demonstration. My 'official debut' in dance took place in March 1989 in Shri Krishnaganasabha (Madras). Quite often *pulavar* R. Kannan prompted me to substantiate my point of studying Tamil prosody by reciting medieval Tamil poetry and grammars on the art of prosody. The same demand was felt by my music teachers Shri B. Krishnamoorthy (vocal), Smt. R. Ramani, Smt. Vinita Venkataraman and the late Shri M. Nageswara Rao (*vina*); I am sure they will not approve until they hear and see me performing before a Madras audience as well. Such is the pressure of application as proof of analytic capacity, synthetic grasp, comprehension, understanding and 'feel' of style and nuance in interpretation that the search for an apt representation of knowledge other than performance became increasingly difficult.

My first confrontation with computerised multimedia, in 1988, proved to be an eye-opener that took me in the direction of the very recent invention of CD-i: the Compact Disc-interactive.[5] After the success of CD-audio, CD-ROM (Read Only Memory) digitalised the printed word. Now, Compact Disc-interactive has succeeded in combining the earlier Video Disc and Compact Disc functions into one disc comprising word, sound and moving image. Multimedia have reached a point where they can truly be called 'secondary orality'. Predictions made some thirty years ago by Marshall McLuhan and others have come true.[6] The object of research, being 'primary orality', poses new demands for a new type of scholarship. Philological precision falls short when studying the phenomenon of real-time communication by which an oral tradition is shared and transmitted. Linguistic Anthropology afforded me new, broader and more generous parameters to analyse and comprehend such phenomena.

With the advent of CD-i anthropological and linguistic fieldwork are offered a chance to represent their data, which depend on word, sound and image as their existential condition, as well as their analyses, in one comprehensive exteriorised form. CD-i picks up the above challenge where Video alone has to let

go. Although film, video and audio recordings serve an excellent purpose on the descriptive level, they do not offer any possibility of interacting with the program and asking questions of an analytical, compositional or semantic nature. An attempt to interfere with a video or audio recording results in a stop, a still, a slowing down or a close-up, but not in an answer nor in a 'research trajectory' behind the still. CD-i can do all that film, video and CD-audio achieved separately, plus providing the traditional facilities offered by the book: we may enter the domain of transcriptions, translations, prose, graphs, drawings, commentaries – in short, the entire apparatus inherited from the technology and culture of writing. CD-i invites scholarship to add to the huge heritage of the book, the treasure house of three-dimensional form that belongs to the sphere of Fine Arts, as well as the mysteries of time as they are known to the Performing Arts. Thus it poses a challenge to the Humanities as a demand for a truly interdisciplinary study. CD-I as a knowledge representation synthesises scientific analyses that gradually fragmented into lives of their own. These various lives are moulded now, once again, into one organic whole.

Word, Sound, Image: The Life of the Tamil Text is a book and is not a book. *As a book* it takes up one Tamil text as an example of Tamil literature. The 'oral genius' of the Tamil textual tradition is brought out by the fact that the three lines that form the manuscript of this text may take thirty or more minutes to perform. Philology and Hermeneutics are at a loss here, and are forced to enter into a new dialogue. This monograph is the playground for that dialogue. The INTRODUCTION juxtaposes the two traditions of *erudition* by reassessing the concept of 'text'. Part I, HABITUS, highlights the text as *textus*, that is, as a weave interweaving with the world. Part II, PRAXIS, examines the text as a *speech artefact*, as a product of artisanal skills, chiselled into a dynamic, meaningful form. Finally, Part III, REPRESENTATION, questions the nature of data *storage* as well as of the *representation* of knowledge. Embodiment, transmission and performance are contrasted with abstraction, custody and lasting objectification.

As a vehicle this publication holds an 'incremental future': its dust-jacket contains a CD-i demonstration disc. The 'demo' offers five minutes out of the total half hour it takes to perform the full Tamil text discussed in the monograph. It aims to be a mini-size demonstration of what a new textual scholarship might look like

when facilitated by CD-i. At the descriptive level we find the integral recording of a sentence of Tamil words, sounds and images. Questions at the descriptive level are answered by transcription of the three separate layers of the sound, the word and the image, as well as by the translation of the latter two. At the analytical level the user may choose to enter the worlds behind the event: on the one hand the world of FORM, and on the other, the world of CONTENT. Questions concerning the first open up the formative grammars of Tamil prosody, music and dance, whereas questions about the second move through semantic networks that connect the five minutes of the Tamil text with the conventions of the Tamil universe. At the interpretative level, the 'speech artefact' emerges as a concrete moment in the continuous, ever-active movement between forming and meaning.

The question 'Which application?' is being challenged by the present attempt. Apart from the live training and performance that make up the age-old method of storing, maintaining and analysing oral tradition, this experiment instantiates a new way of studying texts, on the one hand, by committing philology to the praxis of 'participant participation' as a praxis of anthropology; and, on the other hand, by representing these texts together with the analyses of their praxes and cultural world through a medium that is as flexible and true to the real-life event as possible. To conceptualise 'culture' as a 'performing art' demands an application that differs from writing taken alone. This experiment proposes such an application by combining graphic and multimedial publication. Thus one part of the question *enta prayogam*, namely 'Which application?', has been answered; the other part, 'What is the use?', is to be answered by the interactive reader.

Notes to the Preface

1. The Tamil term *pirayo kam* (Skt. *prayoga*) is of crucial importance in the present intellectual pursuit; it questions the methodological grounds and aims of academic research. In a broader context it may mean: 'discharge – as of weapons', 'use, application to a purpose, use of means', 'practice of magic', 'medicine', 'authority, quotation', 'example,

illustration'. Its derivation *prayojana* (Ta. *pirayocanam*) indicates the result of such practice: 'usefulness', 'profit, advantage', 'result of actions', 'reward'.

2. For reasons of stylistic economy and ease the general use of the masculine third person singular should be understood as indicating both male and female gender.

3. See Brand, S., *The Media Lab, Inventing the Future at M.I.T.,* p. 4. 'Students and professors at the Media Laboratory write papers and books and publish them but the byword in this grove of academia is not "Publish or Perish". In Lab parlance it's "Demo or Die" – make the case for your idea with an unfaked performance of it working at least once, or let somebody else at the equipment. "We write about what we do", comments Director Negroponte, "but we don't write unless we have done it."'

4. *Tolkappiyam,* Chapter *Eluttu atikaram,* Stanza 33: aḷapiṟantuyirttalum oṟṟicai nīṭalum/ uḷaveṉa moḷipa icaiyoṭu civaṇiya/ narampiṉ maṟaiya eṉmaṉār pulavar// 'the experts say that it belongs to the secret knowledge of the string that joins with sound, to resonate the latent realities of both breathing passed into measurement and the lengthening of realised sound'.

5. Harvard University, Special Program in the study of Oral Tradition and Literature, then organised by Prof. Dr Albert Lord and Prof. Dr Gregory Nagy.

6. See the chapters 'The Making of Typographic Man' and 'The Galaxy Reconfigured' in Marshal McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*; also the chapter 'Print, Space and Closure' on 'secondary orality' in W. J. Ong's *Orality and Literacy, The Technologizing of the Word,* pp. 117–38.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Wos lejgner a blinder lebt, alz mer set er.

<div align="right">– Yiddish proverb</div>

'The longer a blind man lives, the more he sees!' A paradox for an answer. Throughout his entire work George Steiner poses the question about the merit of literary studies. In his essay *To Civilize our Gentlemen* (Steiner 1969, 77–91), he sets out to identify such presumed merit in terms of 'the source and essence of a truly humanizing culture',[1] only to conclude the very opposite:

> It is at least conceivable that the focusing of consciousness on a written text which is the substance of our training and pursuit diminishes the sharpness and readiness of moral response ... The capacity for imaginative reflex or moral risk in any human being is not limitless: on the contrary, it can be rapidly absorbed by fictions, thus the cry in the poem may come to sound louder, more urgent, more real than the cry in the street outside (Steiner 1969, 83–4).

The urgency in Steiner's quest resembles the Tamil insistence on *enta prayogam?* 'What's the use?', or, 'Which application?' He seriously doubts the moral idealism that inspired and validated the Humanities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The concatenation of wars, cruelties and human violence makes it painfully clear that the old premises and optimism do not work in our times. Reading 'great literature' bears no moral fruit. Perhaps because 'literature takes a great deal of living with and living by' (Steiner 1969, 77). But how do we perform such 'living with and living by'? As a profession, a career,[2] or as an identification and embodiment?

From the angle of a professional occupation with the text, we may observe that the existential condition of scholarship is the text – reading the text, writing the text.[3] Such life is determined

by a 'permanent game of references referring mutually to each other' (Bourdieu 1990, 103). The scholar weaves from himself a web of intertextuality, suspended between the works of others. It constitutes the 'symbolic capital' of the intellectual, standing out on its own without any root in the experiential world. The currency of this symbolic capital is coined in terms of erudition and academic power.[4]

This self-enclosure of the textual life and of the text as a sign of knowledge and as a password to power is telling in the light of Foucault's interpretation of the sign, that is, the sign as word and its relation to the world.[5] In his terms, the 'ancient sign' is merged with the world. To utter the word is to enter the thing. Activated by the mysterious powers of language, the word opens up the very experiential reality it refers to. In contrast, the 'classical sign' splits into two: a natural sign that is given by natural phenomena, and a conventional sign that is discerned and attributed by mankind. The latter sign craves representation in order to communicate and survive. Language, once more, becomes representation: at this point, however, no longer as speech, but as script. The classical sign emerges as a crystal-clear, visible description of the conventions of the world. It takes the shape of a treatise, a 'grammar' that is systematically codified and that aims to be conclusive. The treatise is solidly concrete and paper-bound, so that form and content may last for mankind to hold, see and read and to educate society.

Bourdieu (1990, 70) remarks that the ambition to codify and represent in a systematic manner should be accompanied by a theory of the effect of codification. This warning is to be taken seriously: as the classical sign bifurcated into two signs, pursuing two different directions, it entered into two fundamentally different lives. The natural sign continued to live and breathe with the world: water remained water, fire continued to be fire as it continued to be hot. But the other, new sign turned away from the world – just a quarter: the treatise describes the conventions of the world and allows the reader to study the text and to compare it with the sunlit world. Such contemplation and comparison no longer draw their vital energy from roots cast into the natural, wet and smelly soil, but from their suspension in an abstracted realm. Professionally speaking, the expert of the world no longer takes the world for reference, but concentrates, instead, on his own textual orbit.

The third sign spins off from the conventional sign. The ambition of the classical sign, to offer a treatise that should be conclusive, proved to be insatiable. Any conventional sign produced by one generation provides ground for interpretation to the next. Thus, the genesis of one text from the other turns into an endless chain of rebirths that crave a life of their own, cast into individual textual representation. The fragmentation of the ancient sign, at this point, reached a hectic pace. The old situation of speech, of word as utterance, was marked by a unity of sender, receiver, time and place. The text as sign suspends these four coordinates in no man's land: writer and reader have turned half a circle away from the world. With their backs to the circumstance of seasons, of dawn and dusk, untouched by the five senses, they live a professional life of their own, individually, in a world fashioned by man-made conditions and imperatives. Here indeed the blind man does not need eyes to see: the inner sweep of his imagination suffices: in fact, it is richer, louder, more urgent and more real than the world outside.

With the 'classical' and the 'modern' sign Bourdieu's warning assumes its full implication. The force of textual entropy of scholarship makes not only Steiner gasp for breath. The ardent plea of Said in his *Orientalism*[6] demonstrates what havoc such a literary attitude has brought about in the study, description, analysis and interpretation of non-Western literatures and cultures. Said argues that, to some, the Orient was a career caught up in a network of political power; to others, poets and moral idealists, the Orient was an intoxicating vision, a *fata morgana* that could never disappoint nor be dismantled, as they never attempted to get physically close.[7]

After some five centuries of Western Tamil scholarship a reassessment of very basic notions of Tamil texts and their production and reception is inevitable, if only for pragmatic reasons, such as an adequate description of their form, let alone as an adequate representation of the communicative power of their content. By reopening the questions of the *status, nature, reality, representation and raison d'être* of the Tamil text, we part company with traditional Western Philology and Hermeneutics. By processing a sample of Tamil textual activity on a Compact Disc-interactive, we explore new ways of representing texts, away, again, from the modes of representation that were almost synonymous with the methodologies mentioned above. As a

'new sign' deeply rooted in real-life praxis, it hopes to complete the circle that was started five centuries ago. Thus back again, facing the world, this 'new sign' may do more justice to a literature that insisted for two thousand years on maintaining a fully-fledged relationship with the sensuous, experiential world.

Texts

The confrontation of Western scholarship and indigenous Tamil learning resulted in an impressive output of grammars, dictionaries, lexicons, editions of Tamil texts, translations and interpretations over a period of almost five centuries. But these were rarely transferred into a dialogue.[8] All activities were marked by an explicit agenda on both sides: ranging from religious fervour, missionary zeal, scientific positivism and administrative ambition to the demarcation of group and national identity. These motivations derived their vitality from other sources than Tamil textual creativity 'on its own terms'. Their relevance was clear from the start and in some cases continues to be so. What remains today, when missionary and administrative aims have ceased, and the belief in the positivist ideals of literary science has abated? Mere description, translation, a historical cabinet or museum? Perhaps, Tamil verbal art – again? As a novice student of Bharata Natyam I made the eager mistake of enquiring from the great dancer Smt. T. Balasarasvati what she thought of the 'future' of Bharata Natyam. The answer was stunningly different from what I could imagine: 'Tcha, what is there? Dance has always been, so it will continue. If you are a dancer, you dance.' This shattered my confident enthusiasm for interpretation and explanation on a 'meta' level. In analogy, Tamil literature has been there, notably, for twenty centuries. Like the dancer who dances, a vital literature will be, if only because of its acute immediacy.

Examples of such tenacity are found in lyrical poems that go back to the earliest strata of Tamil literature. Two thousand years ago courtesans performed *varnams* for the Tamil king; in the twentieth century performing artists still do so. It is in the synchronic immediacy of experiencing the performance that all validations merge and blur. No philological, historical, religious,

moral, hermeneutic, psychological, functional, structuralist, semiotic, receptionist, sociological or (neo)-Marxist analysis and interpretation can represent what that textual event is. If all interpretation boils down to reductionism that falls short of the event, then why try? Or should we search for the crucial difference elsewhere, in another methodology and another mode of representing the Tamil text? The gap between nineteenth-century and earlier orientalist Philology or Hermeneutics and the indigenous Tamil expert must have been unbridgeable. We realise this, in retrospect, when we take a critical look at their respective agendas, expressed in and on their own terms. First, the agenda of the Humanities, because they pleaded so explicitly and eloquently for their own cause. Ricoeur summarises Philology and Hermeneutics as follows:

> . . . hermeneutics comprises something specific; it seeks to reproduce an interconnection, a structured totality by drawing support from a category of signs which have been fixed by writing, or by any other process of inscription equivalent to writing. So it is no longer possible to grasp the mental life of others in its immediate expressions; rather it is necessary to reproduce it, by interpreting objectified signs. This *Nachbilden* (reproducing) requires distinct rules since the expressions are embedded in objects of a particular nature. . . . it is philology – the explanation of texts – which provides the scientific stage of understanding.
>
> For both thinkers [i.e. Schleiermacher and Dilthey: SK], the essential role of hermeneutics consists therein: 'to establish theoretically against the constant intrusion of romantic whim and sceptical subjectivism . . ., the universal validity of interpretation upon which all certainty in history rests.[9]

In moments of actual encounter with alien textual activity, this agenda proved to be a hidden one: phenomena were not studied in order to detect their individual coherence and autonomy, but rather for the sake of something hidden, behind them: a *universal-validity-of-interpretation-upon-which-all-certainty-in-history-rests*. This cascade of concepts was bewilderingly strange to Tamil experts. The secular character of historical and philological analysis, as much as the romantic spirituality of Hermeneutics, was unknown and unloved in Tamil company. Both, however, developed powerful material tools, such as grammars, dictionaries, text-editions, libraries and museums, that were to be

admired; mental tools, such as the concepts: interconnection, comparison, structured totality, fixation, *Nachbildung, Auslegung* and *Interpretation*, produced constructs that had no physical shape or presence, but were nevertheless there, influencing the quality of life. Orientalism developed a life of its own, reigning supreme in the West and as an obnoxious reminder of difference in the East. The agenda of Tamil experts was a straightforward one: their language, and *eo ipso* their literature, were of divine origin, of divine substance and directed at a divine aim. The gift of 'threefold Tamil' is a gift from God. Even today students of Tamil learn by heart a prayer to the elephant-headed god Shri Vinayaka, Lord of Obstacles:

> pālum teḷitēṉum pākum paruppum ivai
> nālum kalantuṉakku nāṉ taruvēṉ kōlañcey
> tūṅka karimukattut tūmaṇiyē
> nīyeṉakku caṅkattamiḻ mūṉrum tā

> Milk, clear honey, coarse sugar and porridge – these all four in a mixture
> I give to you, O pure Ruby, whose elephant head is striking because of its swaying decorated trunk;
> you, in return, must give to me the Academic Tamil that is threefold.

This stanza is ascribed to the poetess Auvaiyar (twelfth century AD), and is taught as reminder of the divine origin of the Tamil language. Only through mediation of the gods can Tamil be absorbed by human beings. The knowledge of Tamil, the words, the sound and its enactment instantiate the divine: Appar, a poet-saint of the late sixth century AD, describes the god Shiva as muttamiḻum nāṉmaṟaiyum āṉāṉ (*Tevaram* 6.23.9.1.), 'the One who has become *Muttamil* and the four *Vedas*'. In other words, God incarnates into the threefold Tamil. The very utterance of Tamil is vibrant with divine presence and power. The threefold nature of Tamil is believed to generate such conditions of divine presence.

Not all Tamil is capable of doing so. The ordinary, everyday Tamil, spoken at home and in the market-place, does not have these powers. It is called *kotum tamil*, 'bent, uneven, crooked Tamil'. In order to acquire a divine quality it has to be chiselled,

as the goldsmith melts and forms his precious metal. It was in the so-called *cankams*, Academies or gatherings of experts, that the standards for 'good artisanship' were set and tested. As a result 'qualified Tamil' was also *cankattamil*, implying a triple expertise: *iyal* (natural word), *icai* (musical rendering) and *natakam* or *kuttu* (mimetic rendering). The last two modes of expression, especially, safeguard the divine powers of the language. In order to hear and see, one must be there as a witness; and, in the case of a god, one's incarnation must be committed to an experiential, sensorily accessible presence.

This promise of interconnecting the momentary physical with the metaphysical eternal is held by the threefold Tamil. Its formula of natural word, musical rendering and mimetic rendering is chiselled according to the standards of the experts in the community, as *cem tamil* or *centamil*, 'auspicious Tamil'. *Centamil* always stood in contrast to *kotuntamil*, not as 'literary' to 'spoken' Tamil, as we are told by early and contemporary Western grammarians,[10] but as 'holy, auspicious' Tamil to 'ordinary, rough' Tamil. It is therefore not surprising that the traditional aim of Tamil texts was not reading but 'presencing', that is, making the text present.

In this vein, the philosopher-saint Tirumular (late sixth century) says in stanza 15 of *Tirumantiram*

> ennainan rāka iraivan pataittānān
> tannainan rākat tamil ceyyu mārē
>
> The Lord has made me well /
> in order that (I) make Him well in Tamil / /

This stanza is uttered in the context of describing himself as 'one who has been ruminating rare food, i.e. the knowledge of *Muttamil* that forms the essence (literally 'that-ness') of the Eternal in the form of the god Shiva'. Taking the divine as its origin, substance and aim, Tamil textual activity followed an agenda that was totally incompatible with Western literary sciences. As a result the two traditions mainly followed their own tenets, sometimes because of lack of understanding but more often because they found it hard to take each other seriously. Interesting 'cross-breeds' have seen the tropical light, such as Father Beschi's *Paramartta kuruvin katai*, 'the story of Guru Para-