

Preface

This volume, planned as a tribute from admirers to a distinguished scholar, also proves, perhaps inevitably, to be a celebration of the field of Tamil studies. It demonstrates in the best possible way the international nature of this area of academic endeavour and illustrates the wide range of topics it covers. The field was perhaps first defined in modern times by the coverage of the series of conference-seminars organised by the International Association of Tamil Research and inaugurated in Kuala Lumpur in 1968, with papers accepted on any imaginable subject connected with Tamil-speaking people or their homelands. There seemed to be a general consensus within the community of scholars concerned with things Tamil that, whatever, an individual's specialisation, a full understanding of even part of the field depended on the possession of some knowledge of the whole. The enthusiasm with which the I.A.T.R. was set up was doubtless in part the result of the belief that Tamil is in some way unique. Hence perhaps came the felt need for a single-word label for the field — tamilology.

The fascination exercised by Tamil on scholars from other linguistic backgrounds, whether close or remote, has, as noted by other introductory essays in this volume, been apparent for some centuries. The number of such scholars, both from South Asia and further afield, runs into several hundreds.¹ Typically, though not universally, these scholars have been first educated in other fields of study. Once captivated by the spell of Tamil, however, they have retained a life-long attachment. Some, because of an interest in comparative studies, have ventured into related fields, but always without throwing off the ties that bind them to Tamil.

The statement that Tamil 'ends up by possessing its devotees'² may be almost as true of outsiders who have become immersed in it as it is of native speakers who are deeply attached to the language. The prime reason for so many devoting a lifetime of study to Tamil is no doubt the pleasure that it affords. There is, nevertheless, a clear objective case for regarding Tamil studies as special, centring round the fact that Tamil is one of only a tiny number of languages in the world with a recorded history of more than two millennia. It has a central position in one of the world's largest language families, and no matter from where one enters on the study of comparative Dravidian, early acquaintance with Tamil, its history and its early grammars is imperative. It has a literary heritage which is unsurpassed the world over and fully deserving of the efforts of translators to make it widely known.

The importance of Tamil in the modern world does not, however, depend on its history. There are political and social reasons for non-Tamils to take an interest in it. It is a language of major importance, constitutionally recognised,

¹ As shown, for instance, by C. Subramanian (ed.), *Contribution of Non-Tamils to Tamil Studies*, Chennai, Institute of Asian Studies, in preparation.

² Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1997, p. 256.

in four countries of South and Southeast Asia. It is impossible to have a serious interest in India without being well informed about the Dravidian south and in particular about Tamil Nadu, or in Sri Lanka without knowledge of the history of Tamil there. In the decades since the achieving of independence by countries of South Asia, there has been considerable Tamil migration to countries in Europe and North America, many of which now have Tamil communities of considerable size. The need to retain, and in some cases to introduce, facilities for research into Tamil language, culture and history is thus self-evident, and one must hope that governments will see the value of providing the necessary support.

That there is a firm basis for the continuation of these studies outside South Asia is clear from the contents of this volume. The international aspect of tamilology is evident from the mini-biographies of contributors, where one sees that sixteen different countries are represented. Educational background is almost equally varied. Less than a quarter had their undergraduate training in Tamil itself. Others started their academic career in a wide range of disciplines that include classical languages (Sanskrit and Greek), modern European languages, linguistics, philosophy, law, geography, mathematics, chemistry and aeronautical engineering. The involvement of different generations, too, is apparent from the fact that scholars born in every decade from the 1920s to the 1970s have participated in the exercise.

The nature of the field of Tamil studies is well illustrated by the table of contents of this book. The field's diversity is shown, firstly, by the disciplines professed by the authors, among whom are indologists whose work spans both northern and southern parts of South Asia, literary historians and critics, general and theoretical linguists, descriptive linguists, sociolinguists, historical and comparative linguists, philologists,³ cultural anthropologists, political and social historians, archaeologists, epigraphists, numismatists, and art and architecture historians. That some contributors assume two or more of these guises serves to emphasise the interdisciplinary nature of much work in tamilology. The tendency of some specialists in Tamil studies to have an interest in related and geographically contiguous languages is to be seen in chapters focussing on Irula, Kannada, Malayalam and Telugu.

Equally diverse are the themes treated, though there is much linkage between these — and this “connexité dans la diversité” binds the different contributions together. Further than this, it provides cohesion between different sections, as shown by chapters concerned with aspects of Sangam literature. The work of the great poet Kapilar is examined with a view to analysing the extent to which the individual style of the poet can be detected in the arrangement of the natural elements of a landscape — its flora and fauna — in a particular configuration (14).⁴ From a comparison of the typical structures of *akam* poems in the Sangam anthologies with classical Sanskrit poems, there

³ The difference between a linguist and a philologist is, as the Second Foreword to this book points out, not always clear to linguists — even those who are members of the Philological Society of Great Britain. Such linguists could with profit read the opening paragraph of chapter 25 of this volume.

⁴ Essays referred to are identified by the chapter numbering given in the Table of Contents.

emerges a conclusion that some of the unique characteristics of classical Tamil poetry result from the nature of Tamil syntax (13). An examination of the language of Sangam poetry from a different viewpoint raises the question of whether the archaic features that have been recognised therein support the commonly accepted dating of the corpus, or whether these features are deliberately inserted and therefore whether a later dating might perhaps be more realistic (24). Two inscriptions from the time of the Cōlas, one from the eleventh and one from the twelfth century (the first of them containing a reference to Kapilar) are seen to throw interesting light on the influence of Sangam poems in the medieval period (29).

The third part of the oldest surviving Tamil grammar, the *Tolkāppiyam* is the subject of two contributions. The first (11), taking as its starting point the question of the extent to which the construction of the *Tolkāppiyam* is similar to the Sanskrit *sūtra* style, analyses in detail the structure of the first of the nine chapters of *Poruḷatikāram* (the *Akattinai-iyal*), doing this partly through annotations to the translation of the appended Tamil text. The second takes up the issue of the relative chronology of the *Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷatikāram* and *Iraiyānār's* treatise of love poetry, the *Akapporuḷ* (12).

Tamil devotional poetry is the theme of four essays, two relating to devotees of Siva and two to those of Vishnu. The work of a number of Saivite poets is discussed in the context of the attribution of the quality of madness both to Siva and to his devotees (1). Appar's approach to the worship of Siva is shown to have a number of individual characteristics, some of these clearly related to his social background (2). A wide-ranging discussion of the Vaishnava saint poets concludes that labelling these collectively as *Āḷvārs* results from a combination of hypercorrection and folk-etymology and that they are more properly called *Āḷvārs* and that they, like the Saivite poets, are therefore *Nāyaṅārs* (4). A description of Tirumaṅkaiyāḷvār's *Tirukuruntāṅṅakam* and *Tiruneṅuntāṅṅakam* is followed by a translation of the two works — perhaps for the first time in Italian (3).

A somewhat neglected, yet important, period in Tamil literature is represented by the analysis of a fourteenth-century example of the *kalampakam* or "mixed bag", the *Tillaikkalampakam* of the Twin Poets *Iḷaṅcūriyar* and *Mutucūriyar*, set in the background of an account of the nature of the genre (10).

The temporal sequence moves forward five centuries to a further paper that concerns itself with the interaction of the Tamil and Sanskrit traditions, as shown by a nineteenth-century drama taking as its theme the story of Śakuntala, Ananda Padmanabha's *Cakuntalai nāṅṅakam* (15).

For the twentieth century, the dominant genre in this volume, as in life, is prose fiction, with treatments of both the short story and the novel. Characteristics of both sub-genres are elucidated through the tracing of the theme of facing death in novels and stories of several leading figures of the second half of the twentieth century (8). Vannadasan's 1992 collection of stories,

Kaṇṇivu, is shown to embody a minimalist approach to the writing of short stories in that deep human emotions and experiences are presented through plots that are simple sometimes to the point of being non-existent (7). A more recent (twenty-first century) collection of stories, Pugazh's *Mutti*, in which narrative as well as dialogue are both in spoken Tamil but are stylistically different, is taken as an illustration of post-modernism in Tamil language and literature (9). One paper is concerned with an aspect of prose fiction in one of Tamil's sister languages in a discussion of the Malayalam writer Basheer's autobiographical novels and stories in which he recreates his experiences in the Indian independence movement (6).

Two of the studies in the literature section bridge the gap between modern times and literature of a millennium or more ago. The novel *Tillāṇā Mōkaṇāmpāl* by Kalaimaṇi (the pseudonym of Kottamaṅkalam Cuppu) aims to reconstruct the cultural past of Tamil and pays particular attention to Saivism in the Tamil region and within this to the *Tēvāram* hymns. Translated extracts from a number of chapters of the novel illustrate some of these Saivite elements (5). In many cultures, features of great works of literature penetrate folklore, and an example of this is the allusions to the *Rāmāyaṇa* that are to be found in Tamil riddles, as sixteen cited and translated examples indicate (16).

Linguists among the community of tamilologists both individually and collectively move between the description of Tamil itself and external relations of Tamil. The four descriptive pieces contributed cover between them the whole period of the history of the language. A discussion of the Tamil case system suggests that a departure is needed from the analyses presented in native and missionary grammars, in that the set of case relationships in Tamil grammar is more complex than a representation through a finite set of eight cases allows (19). A small number of rules is shown to be sufficient to generate the full set of numerals in Tamil (21). The group of word forms in Old Tamil that consist of a stem and pronominal ending without any overt marker of tense have traditionally been classified as *kuṛippu vinai*, but this categorisation can be shown to be over-simplistic in that it is clear from their syntactic behaviour that these forms fall into three sets — a class of defective verbs and a second group which subdivides into a class of personal nouns and a class of adjectival nouns (20). A paper on ideophones in Tamil discusses the nature of *X-ənal* expressions through the history of the language, taking as a starting point those found in the *Tēvāram* (26).

Other chapters on linguistic topics are concerned in varying degrees with languages other than Tamil. Bishop Robert Caldwell's long unchallenged derivation of Tamil *īlam* from Pali *sihala* is shown to be unsound, *īlam* in fact being a Dravidian word (23). The long-range comparison of Dravidian and Altaic is taken up in a comparison of the phonological shape of words for "sheep – deer – cattle" in languages of the two families (22). A major difference in the grammar of Tamil and Malayalam, namely the lack in the latter of verbal suffixes indicating person-number-gender, is shown not to have applied in a "History of Malabar" published in 1868, in which a third-person ending *-āre*

occurs (18). A major development in the literature on a language very closely related to Tamil is announced in the description of a forthcoming etymological dictionary of Irula (17). A gap in our knowledge of the philological tradition of Kannada is filled by a discussion of the place of the *Kavirājamārgam* within this tradition, which is shown to be independent of the Tamil grammatical tradition (25).

The study of inscriptions, which has made great strides in Tamil Nadu of late, forms a part of several chapters. These are largely concerned with aspects of political or religious history. One, however, takes a purely linguistic issue, that of the presence or lack of voiced plosive consonants in Old Tamil; contrary to a widely accepted view, it is argued that evidence from a careful study of Tamil-Brāhmī strongly indicates that plosive consonants in the Tamil of two millennia ago were voiceless in all environments (31). Two Cōla-period inscriptions from the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the Villipuram and North Arcot districts of Tamil Nadu throw light on the influence of Sangam poetry in the medieval period (29). Two recently discovered tenth-century inscriptions, again in the Villipuram district, contain information about the customs and beliefs of Jains in Tamil Nadu (34). Material for the study of processions in the medieval South Indian temple is found both in literary texts such as *Paripāṭal* and the poems of Nammālvār and in inscriptions on temple walls (27). Between the fifth and fifteenth centuries more than 300 *stelae* in memory of fallen soldiers were erected, and the form and content of these is examined, with a focus on those in *vaṭṭeluttu* from the sixth and seventh centuries (35). Tamil inscriptions in South India and Sri Lanka together provide information about itinerant merchants in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (36).

Archaeology, epigraphy and numismatics all provide evidence of external trade links in ancient times. The existence of trade between Tamil Nadu and Ancient Greece and Rome emerges from an account of the relevance to the dating of Arikamedu to the dating of other sites at Karaikadu and Alugankulam, where there have been finds of pottery and rouletted ware, some with graffiti (32). Recent numismatic and epigraphic discoveries on the western and southern coasts of Sri Lanka and South India bear witness to cultural and trade relations between the two (33). Outside modern Tamil Nadu, Koṭuṇṇallūr in the Kerala district of Trichur was, under the name of Mahōdayapuram, the centre of Cēra rule and a trading port with links to the Mediterranean and to West Asia. Its subsequent development into a religious centre sacred to followers of many religions can be traced through literary sources such as *Periyapurāṇam* and through inscriptions (28). The perceived importance of inscriptional sources in the study of the history of South India has led to a major international project involving scholars from Sweden, Germany and South Asian countries for the setting up of a Digital Archive of South Indian Inscriptions, and this volume contains the project's first report (30).

The volume ends with a pot-pourri of papers tantalisingly illustrating the further scope of Tamil studies. The impossibility of confining the field within a

definition of what is solely Tamil is shown by an account of the political theory of the early sixteenth-century Vijayanagara emperor Krishnadevaraya, who, a native of the Tulu country, wrote the Telugu work *Āmukta-mālyada*, which contains descriptions of, for example, Villiputtur and Madurai. One section, *Rāja-nīti*, provides advice to a ruler, and a translation of this is appended to the chapter (37).

Very different aspects of the vast field of Tamil studies are shown by a description of a manifestation of the traditional sport of bull-baiting, *jallikkaṭṭu*, in a Christian setting (38), and by an account of the 400-year history of tobacco in Tamil Nadu (39). Tolkāppiyar is seen to be more than a grammarian in a presentation of his ideas on the nine types of what are victories in the truest sense, because they depend not on the destruction of an adversary but on the exercise of such qualities as compassion, forgiveness and sympathy (40). Five poems conclude the volume (41).

The editors will hope — with confidence — that what they have succeeded in putting together in this way will provide a rich feast for the scholar whom they and all contributors wish to honour. François Gros has for much of his life been the principal standard-bearer for Tamil studies in France. His contribution has been enormous. Yet since the time when he returned to indology from the teaching of French, there have been periods when he has of necessity had other weighty preoccupations, as in the 1980s when he devoted himself to the re-establishment of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* in countries of Southeast Asia. Among his many other administrative responsibilities has been the major one for Tamil studies of the directorship of the indological section of the *Institut Français* in Pondichery.

A scholar's reputation among his peers nevertheless depends principally on his teaching and above all on his research. François Gros's courses in the section for history and philology in the *École pratique des Hautes Études* have embraced Sangam literature, Tamil Saivism and Vaishnavism and the devotional poetry connected with the two, the poetry of Bharati and the dramatic work of Bharatidasan, twentieth-century Tamil prose literature, including 'dalit' literature, Tamil grammatical and literary theory, Tamil inscriptions and the cultural and religious history of Tamil Nadu.

Through the direction of research a scholar aims, among other things, to ensure the future of his own subject and to encourage work in related areas. Among Tamil themes pursued by François Gros's students have been Tamil-French bilingualism in Pondichery, Buddhism in Tamil Nadu, the Tamil case system, the grammatical metalanguage of medieval Tamil commentators, the architecture of towns in the Kaveri valley, and the contemporary Tamil short story. In respect of Tamil's linguistic neighbours, in which he has always taken a serious interest, his students have successfully defended theses on aspects of traditional theatre in Kerala, the oral literary tradition of Karnataka, and the contemporary Kannada novel.

François Gros's own research and publications, both individual and collaborative, have been no less broadly based. They span the whole range of

Tamil literature from Tiruvalluvar to twentieth-century poetry and prose.⁵ There are studies of ancient religious sites and legends associated with them, on the history of the involvement of France in India, on the cultural relationship between France and India, on the Tamil diaspora in Mauritius and Reunion, on the fortunes of Agastya in South India. The importance of translation in the spreading of knowledge of cultures other than one's own has not been overlooked — with versions in French of important literary works from the *Tirukkural* through to the modern short story.

This range of teaching and research interests matches remarkably closely the range of topics covered by this volume, which can thus be seen as a very appropriate work to present to a man who is firmly in the line of great Tamil scholars from France discussed in the Avant-propos. François Gros's achievements and leadership are widely admired, and all contributors will have been pleased to have the opportunity of expressing appreciation of what he has accomplished. Those who have also enjoyed the gift of his friendship over many years and have savoured his honesty, openness and good company will be especially happy to have helped put together this academic garland.

[R.E. Asher]

⁵ No (bio-)bibliography is attempted here, but there are indications of the range of Professor Gros's work to be found below in the Notice biographique and the Avant-propos, as well as in several of the contributions to this volume.