

**ADDRESS BY THIRU BANWARILAL PUROHIT, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF
TAMIL NADU AT 'BOOK RELEASE FUNCTION' ORGANISED BY
DR. U.V.SWAMINATHAIYER LIBRARY AND UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS AT
UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS, CHENNAI ON 12.07.2018 AT 5.30 P.M**

Anaivarukkum Maalai Vanakkam

Prof. P. Duraisamy
Vice-Chancellor, University of Madras

Dr.G.Viswanathan
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Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies

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Secretary, Dr.U.V.S.Library

Dr.E.Sundaramoorthy
Vice-Chairman, Dr.U.V.S.Library

Distinguished Invitees

Ladies & Gentlemen

It gives me great happiness to be here today on the occasion of the platinum jubilee celebrations of the Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer library.

Dr. Swaminatha Iyer, who was endearingly called as the 'Tamil Grandpa', is remembered with pride and reverence for his contribution to the Tamil language.

The perfection and scholarly acumen that Dr. Swaminatha Iyer brought to the positions he held have led to laurels being showered on him as 'the greatest Tamil scholar of our times'.

The venerable scholar's son, Sri Kalyanasundara Iyer handed over the manuscript collections of his father to Srimathi Rukmini Devi, President of Kalakshetra. His objective was to see that his father's rare and valuable collections of Tamil manuscripts were preserved intact, so that they continue to remain as a treasure which future generations can make use of and feel proud about. The library bearing Dr. Swaminatha Iyer's name was opened in 1943 with the assistance of Dr. Rukmini Devi.

With its invaluable collection of palm leaf manuscripts, paper manuscripts, and more than 33,000 books on Tamil literature, the library is a storehouse of knowledge for scholars searching for windows to the past.

Among the treasures of the library, are the letters received by Dr. Swaminatha Iyer that he filed with the same care and precision with which he edited his works.

These letters numbering over three thousand were written by teachers, peers, fellow scholars, editors, students, foreign Orientalists, patrons, philanthropists and others.

They throw light on the process by which Dr U.V. Swaminatha Iyer collected the manuscripts, edited and published them. The long list of his correspondence reflects many unknown facts about Tamil society and the printing technology of those days.

Among those whose correspondence is found in the library, are renowned Tamil scholars such as G.U. Pope, Julion Winson, Pandithurai Devar, Manonmaniam Sundaram Pillai, V.K. Suryanarayana Sastri, S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, Maraimalai Adigal, C.W. Damodaram Pillai and freedom fighter V.O. Chidambaram Pillai.

The publication of these letters in the form of a book to mark the 75th year celebrations of the library is definitely deserving of great appreciation.

In a long academic career spanning over half a century the Tamil Grandpa enabled the publication of most of the literary texts ranging from the

Seevaga Chintamani to the Kurunthogai that now form the basis for regarding Tamil as a classical language.

Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer's love for Tamil was inborn. He learnt Tamil literature and grammar as a devoted student under Mahavidvan Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, a great poet and scholar. Tyagaraja Chettiar who was the head of the Tamil Department at the Government Arts College, Kumbakonam was also a student of Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai. He was a man of great erudition and was held in high esteem alike by his pupils and by the public. When Chettiar retired, he recommended that Swaminatha Iyer be invited to take his place. Swaminatha Iyer was duly appointed to that post on 16 February 1880. During his tenure at the College, Swaminatha Iyer met Salem Ramaswami Mudaliar, a Civil Munsif who had been recently transferred to Kumbakonam. The friendship between them proved to be a turning point in Swaminatha Iyer's life. Ramasamy Mudaliar was responsible for persuading U. V. Swaminatha Iyer to edit and publish the ancient Tamil classics. Swaminatha Iyer had till then confined his enjoyment of Tamil literature to medieval works. Mudaliar also gave him a handwritten copy of *Seevaga Sindhamani* for publication.

As the *Seevaga Sindhamani* was a Jain classic, Swaminatha Iyer went to the homes of learned member of the Jain community in Kumbakonam to get some doubts cleared. He also read the Jain epics and collated several manuscript versions and arrived at a correct conclusion. It was due to his efforts that the *Seevaga Sindhamani* was published in 1887. From that time onwards, he began to search for Sangam classics with a view to editing and publishing them. This resulted in the *Pattupattu* was published.

Thus began Swaminatha Iyer's long search for the original texts of ancient literary works during which he regularly worked with S. V. Damodaram Pillai. It was a search that lasted for his entire life time. Many people voluntarily parted with the manuscripts in their possession. Swaminatha Iyer visited almost every hamlet and knocked at every door. He employed all the

resources at his command to get at the works. As a result, a large number of literary works which were gathering dust as palm-leaf manuscripts in lofts, storerooms, boxes and cupboards saw the light of day. Of them the Silappatikaram, Manimekalai and Purananuru

were received by Tamil lovers with a lot of enthusiasm. Purananuru, which mirrored the lives of Tamils during the Sangam period, prompted scholarly research on the subject. In a span of about five decades, Swaminatha Iyer published about 100 books, including minor poems, lyrics, puranas and bhakti (devotional) works.

Swaminatha Iyer retired from active teaching in 1919. His research work increased manifold after retirement. He travelled from place to place in search of palm leaf manuscripts so as to edit and publish them. From 1924 to 1927, Iyer was the Principal of the Meenakshi Tamil College in Annamalai University, Chidambaram. After he resigned the post on health grounds he came to Madras and continued his research.

It was due to his efforts that the world came to know the literary output of the ancient Tamils and their past. Tamil poet and nationalist Subramania Bharati, who inspired the freedom movement with his songs, admired Swaminatha Iyer. Paying tribute to Swaminatha Iyer in one of his poems, Bharati equated him with the sage, Agastya.

The meeting of Rabindranath Tagore and the grand old man of Tamil literature in 1926 in Chennai was a historic moment. Not only did Tagore call on Swaminatha Iyer, but also penned a poem in praise of his efforts to salvage ancient classical Tamil literary works from palm leaf manuscripts.

In 1932, the Madras University awarded an honorary PhD to him in recognition of his services.

In journalism it is said that one picture is equal to a thousand words. Similarly, a single letter says and signifies so many things and takes us right into the contexts of the past.

Dr A.R Venkatachalapthy has sifted through the voluminous correspondence and compiled a well-edited volume that is bound to attract readers interested in the world of Tamil letters and the history of Tamil literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kudos to him for his efforts.

My heartiest congratulations and compliments are due to the Dr. U. Ve. Sa. Library, and the committee headed by Dr. G. Viswanathan for being the driving force behind Dr. Venkatachalapathy.

I am sure that initiatives such as this will inspire many more Tamil Scholars to follow in the footsteps of Dr. U. Ve. Swaminatha Iyer in helping us to unlock the rich treasures of the past.

Nandri Vanakkam...

Jai Hind....