GARLAND TO GOD: A MULTIMEDIA FORMAT

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Digital Devaram. Kaṇiṇit Tēvāram. Ed by V. M. Subramanya Aiyar, Jean-Luc Chevillard and S. A. S. Sarma. (Collection Indologie 103). Pondicherry: IFP / EFEO, 2007. [CD-ROM].

PRESENTATION

A MULTIMEDIA PUBLICATION *Digital Tēvāram*, prepared jointly by the Institut Français de Pondichéry and École Française d'Extrême Orient, is a most remarkable event in the field of classical Tamil studies and Indology in general. The CD appeared as a result of a program, started in July 1997, under the guidance of Dr. Jean-Luc Chevillard (editor) and Dr. S. A. S. Sarma (assistant editor). But essentially it is based on the huge work aiming to create a trustworthy edition and English translation of the *Tēvāram* corpus, initiated at IFP as early as 1970s.

Tēvāram (which is usually translated as 'Poems to God' or 'Garland to God') is a collection of hymns to Shiva (Sanskrit *Śiva*, Tamil *Civaṉ*), dated 7th to 8th centuries A.D. and attributed to three poets and saints: Sampantar, Appar and Sundarar. Together with the Vaishnava corpus *Nālāyira Tīvya Pirapantam*, it represents the earliest textual reflection of *bhakti* movement in India. It is important to remember that *Tēvāram* is not only a corpus of early medieval texts in Tamil but that it also belongs to a living religious tradition of South India. It constitutes the initial part of the Tamil Shaiva Canon, *Paṇṇiru Tiṟumuṟai* 'Twelve [books] of Sacred Order', being the first seven of them. As such, hymns of the *Tēvāram* serve as liturgical texts in most of the Shaiva temples all over Tamilnadu, where they are recited along with Sanskrit *stotra*s (Cutler 1987: 187–194). The importance of the *Tēvāram* corpus for Tamil society is difficult to overestimate. One more point worth mentioning here is that this poetry is most intimately connected with the

emerging social institute of religious pilgrimage in medieval South India. Most of the songs in the corpus praise Shiva in a certain place, or even certain shrine, which are perfectly identifiable and often rather precisely depicted (Spencer 1970; Peterson 1982). A common formula repeating with small variations almost everywhere is "Shiva residing in…". Hymns of the *Tēvāram* are deeply rooted in the Tamil land itself, and hence their adequate representation requires this geographical dimension.

THE CONTENT OF THE CD

1. Tamil text (both in original script and in transliteration) of all the 798 *patikam*s 'poems', comprising *Tēvāram* corpus. This text is based on the edition prepared by the outstanding scholar T. V. Gopal Iyer (1926–2007) for the Institut Français de Pondichéry and published in two volumes as *Tēvāram*. Vol. 1. *Ñāṉacampantar*. (Publications de l'Institut Français d'Indologie 68.1), 1984 and *Tēvāram*. Vol. 2. *Appar and Cuntarar*. (Publications de l'Institut Français d'Indologie 68.2), 1985. By now this book has become a bibliographical rarity. While printed text of the *Tēvāram* is traditionally arranged either according to *paṇ*s 'musical modes' used in recitation or according to *talam*s 'sites' mentioned in the hymns, use of hyperlinks in this CD version provides the reader with the possibility to read it both ways.

2. Complete English rendering (or "pre-translation") made by V. M. Subramanya Ayyar (1905–1981). This work, which indeed constitutes the core of this publication, was carried out between 1976 and 1981, when it was interrupted in its final stage by the translator's death. Since 1984 the huge 15-volume manuscript of circa 3,500 pages has been kept in two copies at the IFP library (Pondicherry) and at the EFEO library (Paris) and has never been published before the present digital edition. Rendering mixes the Tamil text and the English gloss. Needless to say that this work, though modestly referred to as "gloss", "rendering" or "pre-translation", can be very helpful both to readers fluent in Classical Tamil and to those who are only making their first steps in it and want to feel taste of some original texts. Until now texts of the *Tēvāram* were only partially translated into English (for most important of the existing translations see Cutler 1987, Peterson 1989 and Shulman 1990), and now finally their full "pre-translation" became available for the wide scholarly community. CD also includes interesting biographical materials about Dr. Subramanya Ayyar himself.

3. A full concordance of the *Tēvāram* corpus based on the PIFI edition of the text. Concordance contains ca. 200 thousand occurrences of ca. 45 thousand word-forms. Each occurrence is linked with corresponding passage in the PIFI edition and in the English rendering.

4. Set of maps with exact geographical locations of the 276 shrines mentioned in the *Tēvāram* hymns (traditional number is 274). To avoid any confusion caused by often changing administrative divisions, exact longitude and latitude figures for each site are also provided.

5. Set of 269 pictures at 31 shrines, showing their modern condition. All the photos were taken in the period between 1997 and 2006.

6. 109 audio recordings from 63 distinct hymns totaling more than 7 hours. Recordings represent different *paṇ*s 'musical modes' in which patikams are sung, as well as different styles of their vocal rendering by different performers.

OBSERVATIONS

Materials are hyper-linked to each other. Tamil text is linked to the corresponding passages of the English rendering. In one click a reader can get information on the shrine mentioned in any particular hymn, including its different names and positions within old and contemporary administrative divisions systems, as well as a full list of hymns in which it is mentioned and, in some cases, its recent photos. Moreover, one can click on the name of the *paṇ* and see a list of other hymns performed in the same musical mode. For many hymns several versions of vocal rendering is provided, so as to give the user an opportunity to compare them (all in one click again!). When you have all this brought together, the impression is that the format of a multimedia edition is not merely a matter of fashion but probably the only adequate solution to represent the texts of the *Tēvāram* within their natural musical and geographical contexts. And a very lucky solution, indeed!

Last but not least, technical requirements for the software are very low, and I didn't meet any difficulties with running this CD on my PC (Windows XP, Firefox browser). Actually it took me a while before I could enjoy zoomable SVG-requiring maps, but happily regular maps were also there. Another strong side of the CD (not always the case with digital editions) is that misprints appear to be very rare in it — I was quite happy and surprised not to find any so far.

Having said this, I should note that there is still room for improvement in this project.

What one can expect from such an edition and will not find in this CD is a convenient tool for quick search through the entire corpus. This would be possible if corpus existed also as a single searchable file, not as 798 separate pages, or (best option) if a simple search engine were integrated into the product. This not having been done, the most obvious drawback of the CD is that in its present edition it does not provide any user-friendly option to search for certain word-combinations through the corpus, which is necessary for finding parallel places and thus an indispensable part of any philological work. For this purpose I will recommend to address e-texts at Project Madurai, an electronic library created and maintained by the community of amateur researchers and devotees of the Tamil language.

The concordance only gives opportunity to search for single words. It is organized as a number of separate HTML-pages, not as a single searchable file, which makes it a bit inconvenient to use.

Besides, this CD doesn't solve the problem of putting all the Tamil-language commentaries on the *Tēvāram* in one place. The existent 7-volume edition of the *Tēvāram* with commentaries by several modern Tamil scholars published by Jnanasambandam Press in 1953–1964 is long out of print and almost not available outside India. No doubt, digital access to commentaries linked to the main text would be a very helpful tool for further research. Meanwhile, the editors themselves admit that "a number of improvements are of course still possible". They even state that there soon "ulterior versions, if there is a demand for them", might appear.

What is to be done in future? Morphologically tagged Tamil corpus is still a desiderata for researchers both in historical and in general linguistics. Until all the Ancient and Medieval Tamil texts are turned into a tagged electronic corpus, a reliable history of Tamil language can hardly be written.

Digital concordance of the corpus with links to the corresponding places in the gloss can be used as a quite convenient "pre-dictionary" of the corpus. It is a matter of discussion whether a "real" dictionary of a certain relatively "small" corpus like *Tēvāram* is really needed, but apparently this concordance can serve as a basis for dictionary of Medieval Tamil, if one is to be compiled some time in future.

After all, philological software with digital corpus, advanced search tools and integrated multimedia content is no news at all. The first successful project of this kind, *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG), was launched at University of California Irvine as early as in 1972, and in mid-1970s corpus of Greek e-texts was already available to the scholarly community (at that

time on magnetic tapes). Probably the highest-quality standard in projects of this kind nowadays is represented by the Bible Works software, compiling ca. 200 existing translations of the Bible in about 40 languages, all the critical editions of the Old Hebrew and Greek texts with morphological tagging and a number of dictionaries and grammars. For Tamil philology such ambitious projects are of course a matter of distant future, but this future is now becoming a bit closer.

With this digital edition of *Tēvāram* anyone who wants to read Shaiva religious poetry in Tamil will find a clever and entertaining companion. Besides, an important step has been made to turn classical Tamil studies into a modern, technologically advanced science.

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