Making of the Medieval Tamil Nadu: Trajectories of Changes in Tamil Textual Tradition from Sangam Period

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Abstract
Significant developments in literary, religious and linguistic formalizations took a shape during the transition from Sangam (c. 3rd BCE to 5th CE) to medieval period (c. 6th BCE to 17th CE) in Tamil region. A major shift from a fully secular and disciplinary type of textual tradition to religious and philosophical type of tradition on the one hand and a revamp of the Tamil language from a very conservative and word level structure into a more complex and agglutinative type of language on the other hand took place almost concurrently during the medieval period. The Tamil language use in the context of both Sangam as well as the religious literature during the medieval period constructs a number of ubiquitous dichotomies such as simple vs. complex language; secular vs. religious; indigenous vs. foreign and so on. These dichotomies, thus, become the objects of study from the point of view of posing such questions like what caused such a change, historically when and how it happened and a related others. Along these lines of thought, this seminar intends to explore these inquiries in the context of both literary and linguistic developments that took place during the post Sangam and medieval periods. We will draw texts from both Sangam as well as medieval Tamil and investigate in detail as to how they differ from each other both connotatively as well as linguistically mainly to identify the trajectories of changes that took place during the transition from one to the other.

About the Speaker
Vasu Renganathan has been teaching the Tamil language and literature at the Department of South Asia Studies, University of Pennsylvania for the past fifteen years. He earned his Masters degree from the University of Washington, Seattle and Ph.D. degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He began his academic career at the Annamalai University and Tamil University, India and continued to engage himself in various capacities at a number of institutions within the US including University of Washington, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin and the University of Pennsylvania, where he presently teaches. He specializes in medieval and Sangam Tamil literature, and actively engages himself in the knowledge of Tamil language, literature and culture from a historical point of view. He has published two books, one in Tamil pedagogy and the other in Thirumular’s Thirumantiram. He has published a pedagogical dictionary of English-Tamil verbs in his capacity as the Associate Editor. He has written more than twenty five research articles in many academic journals, most of them focusing on Tamil language, linguistics, literature and history. He has been an active member of the advisory and executive committees of many Tamil organizations within the US as well as in foreign countries.

Event Details
Monday, 19 August 2013
3.00pm to 4.30pm
South Asian Studies Meeting Room
AS7 #04-11
Kent Ridge Campus
National University of Singapore

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