

TAMIL LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper examines the antiquity, development, literary richness, and cultural significance of Tamil language and literature. It highlights Tamil as a living and evolving language that has preserved its identity while adapting to changing social and communicative needs. Particular attention is given to the contribution of C. Subramaniya Bharathi and other important Tamil prose writers to the growth of modern Tamil prose. The paper also discusses the literary and philosophical importance of works such as Thirukkural and Kamba Ramayanam. It emphasizes the relationship between Tamil literature, cultural consciousness, and the Indian freedom movement. The study concludes that engagement with Tamil literature contributes substantially to an understanding of South Indian civilization and the wider cultural heritage of India.

KEYWORDS: Tamil Language, Tamil Literature, C. Subramaniya Bharathi

Article History

Received: 29 Nov 2025 | Revised: 02 Dec 2025 | Accepted: 08 Dec 2025

INTRODUCTION

Tamil is one of the world's ancient languages and has maintained a vibrant literary and cultural tradition across centuries. Its ability to evolve while preserving its distinctive linguistic character has contributed to its continued significance in India and abroad. Tamil literature contains rich traditions of poetry, prose, philosophy, and social thought. Writers such as C. Subramaniya Bharathi, Va. Ve. Su. Iyer, and other prose writers contributed significantly to the modernization of Tamil expression. Classical works such as *Thirukkural* and *Kamba Ramayanam* further demonstrate the philosophical and literary richness of the language. The study of Tamil language and literature therefore offers an important understanding of South Indian culture as well as the broader literary heritage of India. Tamil Language and Literature

Bharathi is one of the greatest prose writers of Tamil language. He believed that greatness of a man gets embodied in the words that he uses. S. Thillainayagam in this connection says, "We must also bear in mind the precept of Bharathi: 'If there is light in the mind, it gets reflected in the words.'" (Thillainayagam 7) C. Subramaniya Bharathi says, "If there is straightforwardness and courage in the mind, the hand will by itself write unambiguously." Bharathi says the same thing but in a different style, "If there is light in the mind, it gets reflected in words." (Thillainayagam 22) The earlier statement by C. Subramaniya Bharathi implies courage of writing depends upon the celerity of mind and rightfulness of purpose. His love for Tamil is expressed in straightforwardness by him in these words: "I will speak in Tamil as much as I can. I will think only in Tamil. I will try to meditate on Parasakthi—the whole world's foremost power—all the time. And I will write about it tirelessly." (Thillainayagam 11)

And it must also be noted what Ambreen Safser Kharbe in her work *English Language and Literary Criticism* says, “Language is evolutionary.” She further says, “The study of language cannot be isolated from other branches of study.”(Kharbe)

Many languages like Tamil, Marathi, Gujrati, Punjabi, Bangla etc. spoken in India are considered as regional languages by many. But the fact is different. Tamil is one of the ancient languages of the world like that of Greek or Sanskrit. And the important thing about this language is that despite of the fact that it is the oldest language, it evolved itself in the course of time to suit modern people’s needs of communication, and here lies the true test of this language. Tamil is not only a language, but a great carrier of socio-cultural legacy of India. Malayalam, a language spoken in Kerala is considered as its sister language. In his great work *Tamil: A Biography* David Shulman says, “Tamil is, the name of an ancient language, spoken today by some eighty million people in south India, Sri Lanka, and a large diaspora that includes Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, South Africa, Paris, Toronto, and many other sites throughout the world... Tamil is perhaps the only case of a very ancient language that still survives as a vibrant mother-tongue for tens of millions of speakers.”(Shulman) It makes one thing clear that is Tamil is not a regional language, but a global language. Tamil speakers are spread in the world’s different parts and with them Tamil language also like that of English language.

In his great work *Tamil: A Biography* David Shulman further says, “A language is never a thing, even if its speakers sometimes do whatever they can to turn it into one—to make it an “it”.” Language is a living being and not a thing. So David Shulman says that we touch it, we see its movements and hear its aliveness. At a point in the book David Shulman says, “In fact, “Tamil” as a body of knowledge has a still wider application, so that “to know Tamil” can also mean “to be civilized being.” He further says, “It was the one of the languages of the South Indian civilization.”(Shulman) These statements by learned scholar David Shulman make many things clear such as Indians were civilized before the arrivals of the British people. It also implies the greatness of Tamil as a language and her users. In this connection it is worth to note the words of S. Thiruvalluvar. S. Thiruvalluvar translated many Tamil prose in English. In his book *Tamil Prose after Bharathi Valikannan* says, “In fact, Tamil language is what is found in the tongue of Tamil men, women and children”(Thiruvalluvar)

Va. Ve. Su. Iyer is a great Tamil prose writer. He read many classics of the world. “He discovered that the *Rayamanam* of Kambar was of higher merit in many aspects when compared with the epics of Goethe, Homer and Valmiki. He found that among all the great epics of the world *Kamba Ramayana* was fit to take the foremost place. To present this to the world he published research treatises in English. Later, he translated the *Thirukkural* into English.” (Thiruvalluvar 13) “The aesthetics in *Kamba Ramayana* is of a very high order. It is ambrosia to knowledgeable readers.”(Thiruvalluvar 13)

Thirukkural is a poetic work. It is the masterpiece of Tamil literature. It was written by Thiruvalluvar or Saint Valluvar. In India great poets are revered as saints. Great poets like Kalidas, Ravidas, Kabir etc are revered as saints and their verses as holy-verses. *Thirukkural* is a compound word. ‘*Thiru*’ means *holy or sacred* and ‘*kkural*’ means *short verse*. It means *Thirukkural* means *sacred verse*. The book has a great philosophy of living good life. It talks about various aspects of life like virtue, love, justice, war and education. It has been a great source of inspiration to every reader.

S. Thiruvalluvar in his work *Tamil Prose after Bharathi Valikannan* says, “In Tamil, innumerable words have gone out of use. Several grammatical prescriptions have become obsolete. New words and views are constantly making their entry into the language and stay put... Still, amidst all kinds of various, a unique characteristic—a Tamil

characteristic—has been continuous existence. This characteristic has soaked itself in all the words in parlance and even in the words borrowed from other languages and have been ringing sweet in the ears of the Tamils.” He further says, “Those who had learnt English too, began to enjoy reading Tamil magazines.”(Thillainayagam 1-2)

After reading S. Thillainayagam’s great work *Tamil Prose after Bharathi Vallikanna* one can understand that Bharathi, C. subramaniya Bharathi, Va. Ve. Su. Iyer, V. Raa, T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar, U. V. Swaminatha Iyer, Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan are some of the great prose writers of Tamil language.

C. Subramaniya Bharathi says that Tamil prose style is not many years old. He believed, “My view is that writing in a way the language is spoken is best.”He further says, “Whatever is written, whether a story, an argument, a principle or a newspaper matter, it is good if it turns up like spoken words.”(Thillainayagam 9)India’s freedom movement gave spirit to Tamil language. “But it must be said that Tamil prose began to develop spiritedly and speedily only after the thirst for freedom and political awakening got hold of the people throughout the century.”(Thillainayagam 7)It must be noted that “The development of Tamil prose is mostly seen only in stories.”(Thillainayagam 7)

In the 13th chapter of the book *Tamil Prose after Bharathi* S. Thillainayagam talks about another great prose Tamil writer Muni. He tells us that Muni has woven his stories beautifully with feelings that impress us. He begins his stories in very simple manner, but as he proceeds; his style becomes weighty and tangled. “The skill of Muni in selecting a situation to the character’s state of mind and its anxieties and elaborating on it subtly is praiseworthy.”

Reading Tamil literature provides a very different kind of understanding of not only South India, but it also provides a great understanding of ancient India and India as a nation. If it is applicable to Tamil language then it is also applicable to other Indian languages. India has great literature in different languages and readers must try them to understand India in true sense.

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