

3rd Classical Tamil Winter School

organised by the Centre of the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient in Pondicherry,

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This year, in February 2004, the Classical Tamil Winter School took place for the second time in Pondicherry. For four weeks the participants have been studying the *Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi*, one of the great premedieval epics of Tamil literature. The mornings contained reading sessions with T.V. Gopal Iyer, a great connoisseur of this text, and classes with the European teachers, trying to follow up on the same verses. The afternoons were devoted to reading classes with the Pandits of the Centre of the EFEO in Pondicherry. This course was meant to be one of the first advanced level, and we are intending to offer a sequel scheduled for next February: as usual a four-week reading group, but this time we are planning to read 2 texts, each for 2 weeks. The first will be the *Akanāṇūru*, perhaps the toughest of many tough texts in the oldest part of Tamil literature, the Cankam corpus. It contains 400 most beautiful and sophisticated love poems, of which we will read a subgroup of poems situated on the seashore (*neytal*), and once again we are fortunate to have with T.V. Gopal Iyer one of the last traditional specialists in the domain. Moreover in the case of this text we will have as textual basis a critical edition (which helpfully for students also contains a glossary with full morphological analysis), first output of the project Cankam started by the Pondicherry centre. This means that apart from trying to understand (and analyse) the poetry, we will be talking about the process of text constitution, one of the many fairly blank spots in Tamil studies. The second text will be yet another Akam collection, but much later, namely the famous *Tirukkōvaiyār*, of perhaps the 9th century. This is the first text of the *kōvai* genre, still en vogue up to the 19th century – an anthology where all the situations to be expected in love poetry are strung into a sequence, telling a kind of story. This choice will give us opportunity to regard the development of the whole of Tamil Akam poetry (we won't forget bhakti in this context) and its concepts. (Sorry for the people who were expecting Puṛam too, but perhaps we can promise them a similar synopsis of Puṛam for the year after.)

Moreover, in 2005 we are planning a second level in order to accommodate also a fresh group of beginners. This group will have grammar classes and exercises, while reading (comparatively) easy texts from a wide range of Tamil premedieval literature with the European teachers. There will be ample opportunity too for participating in the afternoon's reading groups with the Pandits of the Centre.