

How the **twelve** can help one learning the **three**. Will Tamil புலவர் compose some day a புதிய உரிச்சொற் பனுவல், comprising பன்னிரு தொகுதி? (1857 words)

“நிகண்டு பாடம் உண்டோ?” என்று அவர் கேட்டார்.
நான் “பன்னிரண்டு தொகுதியும் பாடம் உண்டு”
என்று கூறவே, சில சில பாடங்களைச் சொல்லச்
சொல்லிக் கேட்டு விட்டு “நிகண்டை மனனம்
செய்வது நல்லதே [...]” என்றார்.
உ.வே.சாமிநாதையர் (என் சரித்திரம், அத்தியாயம் 27)

இன்ன தின்னுழி யின்னண மியலும்
என்றிசை நூலுட் குணிகுணப் பெயர்கள்
சொல்லாம் பரத்தலிற் பிங்கல முதலா
நல்லோ ருரிச்சொலி நயந்தனர் கொளலே
(நன்னூல், 459m)

Learning Tamil as a foreigner is not easy, because one must learn not only one but at least **THREE** distinct languages, which each have their own grammar and their own vocabulary. In that difficult endeavour, the learners may discover that Tamil poets, who compose songs to music are their best allies, and always have been.

My first contact with the reality of Tamil, as a **global musical soundscape**, took place at the age of 25, in July 1981, when I set foot for the first time in Tamil Nadu and sat in a vehicle going from the சென்னை airport to புதுவை. While I was trying to decipher words written in the Tamil script on the sign boards of shops or on vehicles coming from the other direction, the driver started to play a song in which the first words were “போனால் போகட்டும் போடா! இந்த பூமியில் நிலையாய் வாழ்ந்தவர் யாரடா?”. Prior to this, in the three months during which I had tried to prepare for what would be an initial two years stay, until July 1983, I had procured several books which were Tamil methods, such as the ones by Pierre Meile and by John Ralston Marr, but this landing in Tamil Nadu and the subsequent development was a sudden jump from the fourth sense (காட்சி) to the fifth sense (கேள்வி), and suddenly transformed for me the idea of a language, which I had been trying to imagine for several weeks from a distance, into **The Real Thing**.

I do not know whether it applies to everyone but, in my case, it appears that it was somehow possible for me to memorize a text segment, when it was metrical and carried by a musical melody, as is the case for a song, even though I was not in a situation to go from the words to the meaning immediately. The song fragment would then exist in my mind as a sequence of syllables, not necessarily segmented into words, and its meaning could progressively be acquired, one piece at a time, and slowly become a part of what I could eventually make use of for my own purpose, when trying to express myself in the newly discovered language, provided of course that it would be applicable to my situation. Being a foreigner, there might of course exist no one whom I would be allowed to address as -டா, if we

return to the words “போடா!” and “யாரடா?” which appear inside the fragment quoted above, which is from a 1961 movie called பாலும் பழமும், featuring Sivaji Ganesan.

Of course, after discovering cinema songs, I continued my patient study of what I considered as the two wings of the Tamil diglossia, alias இரட்டை வழக்கு—that involved making recordings on audio cassettes of ராஜராணி கதைகள், and attempting to transcribe them, faithfully, without replacing the spontaneously spoken Tamil by formal Tamil—but I also started to collect the leaflets containing the songs of many Tamil movies, and also at some point a number of booklets containing the முழு வசனம் of Tamil films. Up to this day I have carefully preserved those treasures, but I suspect that such leaflets—measuring 127 mm by 180 mm—and booklets are no longer for sale in the big புதுவை market (குபேர் அங்காடி), although one can still buy the பஞ்சாங்கம் today.

And then, after a few months spent in புதுவை, where I had had the time to make a number of Tamil friends, who were all teaching me their language, each in their own way, came my discovery of Tamil cinema, when I saw for the first time a Tamil movie, from the beginning to the end, sitting in a cinema theatre and having tea at the இடை வேளை. The film which my friends had chosen for my initiation was a very successful new movie, and the story was taking place in a village on the sea side, which was very befitting because I had recently made friends with some fishermen from சின்ன முதலியார் சாவடிக் குப்பம் and was becoming acquainted with Tamil Nadu sea side life. My fishermen friends would later take me with them on their கட்டுமரம், but that is another story. The title of this movie was அலைகள் ஓய்வதில்லை and I was extremely impressed both by the story and by the songs, which were all very nice and memorable. This was very much **unlike** French cinema, in which we almost never have songs, with very few rare exceptions. I acquired of course the leaflet containing the songs and then, luckily, also the 56 pages booklet (122 mm by 183 mm). The விலை was ரூ. 1-25 and it had been printed by கோபி பிரிண்டர்ஸ் (சென்னை-1). Upto this day I have preciousely kept them with me—I also always have a scanned PDF of the booklet on my hard disk, which I have several times shared with others—even though I have also acquired a number of other film booklets, such as for instance தூறல் நின்னு போச்சு, but I regret not having had the occasion to buy the booklets for முன்றாம் பிறை or for ரோஜா, which I like also very much, but I have of course the song leaflets and also the corresponding VCD-s (video-CD-s): this was not yet the time of DVD-s.

As time went on, I continued my exploration of the Tamil universe, discovered the நன்னூல் and the குறுந்தொகை, with the help of a blind Tamil poet in முத்தியால் பேட்டை—his pen name was தமிழவேள்—and finally made the decision to prepare a Ph.D. in the subdomain of Linguistics called “History of Linguistics”. Since the தொல்காப்பியம் was the most ancient trace of the attempts by those called தமிழ் புலவர் at codifying their poetical language, I chose as a topic for my dissertation, after consulting with professor முத்து சண்முகம் பிள்ளை, the commentary composed during the medieval period by a scholar called சேனாவரையர் on the சொல்லதிகாரம் which is

the second book of the **தொல்காப்பியம்**. My thesis, defended in 1990, consisted in studying and translating into French the whole of that commentary, which I always carried in those days for many years in my pocket, as a 297 pages book, printed in **சென்னப்பட்டணம்** in 1934, as a reprint of the **ஆறுமுகநாவலர்** 19th century edition. It was then my luck that I was recruited as a researcher first by the EFEO (École Française d'Extrême-Orient), in 1991, and then by the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), in 1992, becoming then a member of a research team called HTL (Histoire des Théories Linguistiques). I also had the privilege when I came to India of receiving the teachings of the great Tamil scholar **தி.வே. கோபாலையர்**, who was posted for many years in the EFEO center, and with whom I revised my Ph.D. thesis.

During all these years, it has been my conviction that a central task was to understand what had made the community of Tamil **புலவர்** —both poets and scholars— such an efficient group, capable of transmitting across many centuries a large body of knowledge, a living culture, from teachers to students, for the benefit of Tamil audiences, which obviously recognized their merits. If we do not know exactly how the **குறுந்தொகை**, the **கலித்தொகை** or the **பரிபாடல்** were performed, because there has been a kind of gap in the living transmission, and they have had to be resurrected by Tamil philologists, we can at least believe that we have a rather precise view of the transmission and performance of the **தேவாரம்** songs, because ever since they were composed, there has always been native speakers of Tamil who knew them by heart and could sing them, even though the ancient poetical language (**C**) in which they are composed is not exactly identical to either of the two languages present in the modern Tamil Diglossia, which are Spontaneously Spoken Tamil (**A**) and Formal Tamil (**B**), which is why I like to refer to the linguistic capacity of those who master the **THREE** registers as the **Tamil Triglossia**, the **முந்நீர்** in which I try to swim.

Concerning the universe in which Tamil **புலவர்** were educated, one element which has especially fascinated me for many years is the fact that a **புலவர்** had to study not only **இலக்கணம்** (i.e. poetical grammars such as **தொல்காப்பியம்**, **நன்னூல்** and other similar treatises) but also the **உரிச்சொற் பனுவல்** —this is how **மயிலைநாதர்** calls them when commenting on **நன்னூல்** 459— i.e. those collections of poetical words which are nowadays called **நிகண்டு**, among which the three most famous are **திவாகரம்**, **பிங்கலம்** and **சூடாமணி நிகண்டு**, the latter one being what is referred to by **உ.வே.சா.**, when he mentions the “**பன்னிரு தொகுதி**”, the **TWELVE** collections, in the short quotation which precedes the beginning of this short essay.

Returning now to the modern period and my initial fascination with many Tamil cinema songs, which started to imprint themselves in my aural memory in 1981, I would like now to make a thought experiment, in the final section of this short improvisation, in honour of a poet who is the composer of some of those lyrics which initiated me into the special beauty of Tamil when it is sung. Let us imagine that someone has fed into a computer file the texts of the songs listed below, extracted from the following films: **அலைகள் ஓய்வதில்லை** (AOI), **தூறல் நின்னு போச்சு** (TNP), **மூன்றாம் பிறை** (MP), **ரோஜா** (R) & **அண்ணாமலை** (A). The incipit list for those songs which I have listened to is as follows:

1. தரிசனம் கிடைக்காதா — என் மேல் கரிசனம் கிடையாதா தேவி ... (AOI)
2. ஆயிரம் தாமரை மொட்டுக்களே வந்து ஆனந்தக் கும்மிகள் கொட்டுங்களே (AOI)
3. விழியில் விழுந்து இதயம் நுழைந்து உயிரில் கலந்த உறவே (AOI)
4. தங்கச் சங்கிலி மின்னும் பைங்கிளி தானே கொஞ்சியதோ (TNP)
5. முருகமலை காட்டுக்குள்ளே நரி கதை (MP)
6. வான் எங்கும் தங்க விண்மீன்கள் விழி இமை மூட (MP)
7. சின்ன சின்ன ஆசை சிறகடிக்கும் ஆசை (R)
8. புது வெள்ளை மழை இங்கு பொழிகின்றது (R)
9. காதல் ரோஜா எங்கே நீ எங்கே (R)
10. ருக்குமணி ருக்குமணி அக்கம் பக்கம் என்ன சத்தம் (R)
11. வந்தேண்டா பால்காரன் (A)
12. அண்ணாமலை அண்ணாமலை (A)
13. கொண்டையில் தாழம்பூ நெஞ்சிலே வாழப்பூ (A)
14. வெற்றி நிச்சயம் இதுவே சத்தியம் (A)
15. ரெக்கை கட்டிப்பறக்குதடி (A)
16. ஒரு பெண் புறா கண்ணிரில் தள்ளாட என் உள்ளம் திண்டாட? (A)



Starting from the collection of words found in those songs familiar to me, and adding to it the lyrics of all those songs of which I must confess my ignorance, can one start compiling a thematically organized புதிய நிகண்டு, alias புதிய உரிச்சொற் பனுவல், in the words of மயிலைநாதர் commenting on the நன்னூல்? Making a new set of பன்னிரு தொகுதி might be a challenge appealing to modern Tamil lexicographers. I hope they will give it a try. I look forward to seeing the result.

தமிழ்மொழி முந்நீர் கரைதேடி பன்னிரண்டும்
ஆராய்வேற்கு உண்டே துணை

Jean-Luc Chevillard / ழான் லூய்க் செவ்வியர்
(as my late friend ச. மதனகல்யாணி used to write my name)