

A MONTHLY OF DRAVIDIAN LINGUISTICS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA**KOLLAM AND KOṬUṆṆALLŪR**

Without reference to Muziris, nobody can write the history of Kerala as well as the ancient history of South India. Also, no one can write the history of Southern Kerala, the erstwhile *Venadu*, without reference to *Kollam*. Such was the importance they acquired in their glorious past, say before the dawn of *Kollam* era i.e., 825 C.E. Even in the beginning of the Christian era, a large number of vessels were anchored in Muziris to import and export valuable goods as is evidenced by the indigenous Tamil Sangam works and mercantile records of the Romans and Venetians. Pliny calls Muziris as the first emporium of India. Where was this Muziris? For a considerable period, it was a point of controversy among scholars. Caldwell, Gundert and Burnell identified Muziris with modern Koṭuṇṇallūr.

About *Kollam*, references are available from the 6th century C.E. onwards from the records of Tang dynasty of
[..... p. 2]

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ISDL – AN APPROVED RESEARCH CENTRE

As per Order No. Ac.E1.A/052814/2014 dated Thiruvananthapuram, 27.11.2014, the University of Kerala has granted recognition to International School of Dravidian Linguistics, Thiruvananthapuram as an approved research centre in Linguistics.

By this Order, interested research scholars can opt ISDL as their centre for Ph.D. research.

ICOLSI IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM – A HISTORIC EVENT

The *International Conference of the Linguistic Society of India* was held in the Department of Linguistics, University of Kerala, Karyavattom, Thiruvananthapuram from 1st to 4th December 2014. The most serious concern raised in the conference was “many languages of the world are disappearing and many others are on the brink of endangerment”. More than 200 delegates from India and abroad attended and 160 papers were presented in about 50 sessions. *ICOLSI-36* was inaugurated by Dr. Veeramanikantan, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Kerala University. Prof. Anvita Abbi delivered the Presidential address. The felicitations were done by Dr. L. Ramamoorthy, Prof. G.K. Panikkar and Dr. M.R. Thampan. Kenneth L. Hale Award of the Linguistic Society of America was presented to Prof. Anvita Abbi by Prof. Nicholas Evans. Prof. Rajeswari Pandaripande and Prof. Panchanan Mohanty delivered the memorial lectures on Prof. V.I. Subramoniam and Prof. A.P. Andrewskutty respectively. In the inaugural session, the keynote address was delivered by Prof. Nicholas Evans. The Volume 75 (Nos. 1-4), 2014 of the journal *Indian Linguistics* was released in the inaugural function. Dr. Shailendra Mohan, Secretary, L.S.I. presented the report. Dr. S. Kunjamma welcomed and Dr. S.A. Shanavas thanked the dignitaries and delegates.

S. Kunjamma

China.¹ Cosmus Indico Plethus, a 6th-century writer, called this city as Male. Not only as a port city beloved to the Chinese but also as the seat of the first Catholic Bishop in India, *Kollam* gained an important place in South India in a wider historic perspective.

Kollam

Kollam, as mentioned earlier, has a history of 1,400 years. Now, it is a small city of Kerala having the reminiscence of an old port city and certain historical monuments. *Kollam* enjoyed all kinds of imperialistic glory till 1743 C.E. when King Marthanda Varma annexed it with Travancore. The following are the major references we have about *Kollam* in the early decades.

Cosmus Indico Plethus (600 C.E.)	Male
Sulaiman (851 C.E.)	Kulam - Malay
Benjamin of Tudela (1116 C.E.)	Chulam
Abulfeda (1273 C.E.)	Coiloo or Coium
Marcopolo (1298 C.E.)	Kulam
Jordanus (1328 C.E.)	Columbum
Iban Batuta (1343 C.E.)	Kaulam
Nicolo Conti (1430 C.E.)	Coloen
Barbose (1516 C.E.)	Coulam
G. D. Empoli (1530 C.E.)	Colam

All the above references denote one thing which is very important with regard to the etymology of the word *Kollam*. Here, we have different phonetic shades of the word *Kollam*. All the writers except Cosmus recorded the word *Kollam* by keeping the phonetic features of their mother-tongue. Jordanus's *Columbum* clearly is a denotative form of *Kollam*.

References

1. Nagamayya - *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. I. P. 244.

[To be continued]
Naduvattom Gopalakrishnan

42ND ALL INDIA CONFERENCE OF DRAVIDIAN LINGUISTS

(Continued from November 2014 issue)

Session 15 centered on *Sociolinguistics* conducted at Prof. Nagamma Reddy Hall was chaired by Prof. K. Ramamurthy. The first paper scheduled was *Business Dialects in Varanasi* by Neha Garg. Rajesh Kumar Singh presented the paper titled *Variation in Indian Sign Language*. Deepa Mary Joseph in the paper *KhasākkīnRe Ithihāsam: A Sociolinguistic Study* dealt with the use and significance of dialects and how dialects develop and maintain the distinct identity of a community. Novelists such as M.T. Vasudevan Nair, Madhavikutty, M. Mukundan and Sara Joseph are a few among the Malayalam novelists who make extensive use of dialects in novel-writing. In *KhasākkīnRe Ithihāsam*, O.V. Vijayan tries to portray the life of villagers and socio-political diversities of the village named *Thasarak*. The study focused on how the writer uses the dialect in order to depict the social diversities.

Prof. A. Rosemary chaired Session 16 on *Semantics* held at Somayaji Hall. The paper titled *Cognitive- Semantic Analysis of 'me' in Bhojpuri* was presented by Gayetri Thakur and Neha Maurya. The study mainly concerns the semantic analysis of spatial postpositions in Bhojpuri within the cognitive framework of lexical polysemy. The next paper was *Idioms in Meiteiron: A Linguistic Approach* by Yumnam Aboy Singh and Naorem Brinde Bala Devi. In the paper, *Landscape and Mindscape - Applying Dravidian Eco-Aesthetics in Malayalam Novels*, Anand Kavalam stressed the eco-centered approaches and visions reflected in arts and literature. He pointed out that the most astonishing aspect in this area is the concept of an eco-aesthetic approach in ancient Dravidian literature which had developed even before the Christian era, probably around third century B.C. in the Sangam works. The notable feature is the development of an eco-critical method known as *Tinai concept* mentioned in *Tolkappiyam*, which is considered as the most ancient ecological criticism in the entire world literature. The paper analysed the salient features of this literary/critical method which portrays human-nature relationship and its

application in Malayalam novels. In the paper, *Synonyms in Cilappatikāram*, Ananthan spoke of how the lexical structure of a language can be shown by meaning-relation or sense-relation which are of two types - syntagmatic and paradigmatic. The paper-presenter tried to bring out the synonyms in *Cilappatikāram* text which are of different types - near synonymy, partial synonymy and total synonymy.

A special lecture was delivered by Prof. G. Uma Maheswar Rao on *Mongolian-Dravidian Connection: Evidence from Morphology*. It was followed by a symposium on *Dravidian Languages: Status and Studies* coordinated by P. Sreekumar of Dravidian University who furnished the details of the present state of research on Dravidian languages. The symposium was chaired by Prof. Christiane Pilot-Raichoor and the panel members were Profs. B. Ramakrishna Reddy, K. Rangan, G. Uma Maheswar Rao, Panchanan Mohanty and Dr. L. Ramamoorthy.

[To be continued]

Y. Viswanatha Naidu & K.N. Geethakumari

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Prof. C.J. Daswani & Prof. Tilottama C. Daswani

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[To be continued]
Reported by Bindu R.B.

NEW ENROLMENT FOR LIFE-MEMBERSHIP (November 2014)

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DERRIDA'S CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE (Continued from the last issue)

After analysing the documents of ancient philosophers, Derrida pointed out that even when they advocated for the spoken language, there are a number of contextual statements supporting the primacy of written language in their writings. By a close analysis of their language, he unearthed these hints and elaborated them. There is a criticism that Derrida did this by literal and pervasive interpretations⁷. Anyway, Derrida tried his best to establish the priority of writing over speech.

When he said that writing has more prominence over speech, he did not mean that there was writing even before the manifestation of speech. For him, writing is a metaphorical expression⁸. It is not a black notation seen in a white background. Even when we arrange ideas in our mind, we are indulging in writing. When we say that genes are marked in chromosomes, there again, we are talking about the writing process. When we speak, we are writing in the atmospheric waves. Every talking is a writing in the mind of the listener. So, for Derrida, writing is a very inclusive term.⁹ Even speech is included in it. He reminds us about the statement of Jehova, God of Jews, that he will write his covenants in the minds and souls of his people, and also about the incident when Jehova wrote *Ten Commandments* in stone tablets and gave them to Prophet Moses.

For this kind of writing, Derrida gives the name *Ecriture*. It is a language devoid of any metaphysical presence.

In the context of the theory of deconstruction, language means writing. Writing means *Ecriture*.

Recent Publications: **The Morphosyntax of the Dravidian Languages**, P.S. Subrahmanyam, 2013, pp. xxx + 687, Rs. 1,000/- (US\$ 100/-). **A Survey of Smriti Literature**, N.P. Unni, 2013, pp. 8 + 164, Rs. 200/- (US\$ 20/-). **A Contrastive Study of Case in Bengali and Tamil**, Sourav Chakraborty, 2012, pp. 136, Rs. 120/- (US\$ 5/-).

Derrida established all his arguments about language on *Écriture*.

When we give prominence to speech, we are confronting a metaphysical presence of power. A person who speaks can directly approach us and explain his ideas. He can correct his mis-statements and reinforce his arguments with his body language. In all these contexts, we feel the presence of some authority. Derrida places speech behind writing to avoid this centre of power felt in speech. In writing, there is no such presence. We read a document written centuries ago. There is nobody to explain, nobody to correct, nobody to argue with body language. So it is the pure form of language. We never feel the presence of any power. Here the language comes 'from distance, it is ambiguous and opaque'. These are the qualities of *Écriture*.

Certainly there is some logic in the argument but it is not completely convincing. In writing, we may not feel the physical presence of an authority. Yet there will be the presence of an author. We may not be able to recognise this presence by specific form and name. Do not we feel the presence of authority behind 'Communist Manifesto' of Marx and Engels? If we do a discourse analysis of a work written centuries ago, will not we unveil the presence of a submerged personality?

Writing or *Écriture* is a very important conceptual pillar on which Derrida established his cardinal arguments but the pillar is not built on strong foundation.

It is in this background that we have to discuss Derrida's concept of word and meaning.

Even from the period of structuralism, these two terms - word and meaning - almost disappeared. For Saussure, there is only sign, and sign is the indivisible union of a sound image and a concept. Derrida replaced these terms with signifier and signified. We can tentatively assume that in the linguistic philosophy of Derrida word is signifier and meaning is signified - 'tentatively' because Deconstruction, the theory promulgated by Derrida, has bearings in all levels of cultural studies. Hence the reference of signifier and signified may differ in each context.

For Derrida, the language is a collection of signifiers. We cannot say a chain of signifiers because in a chain there will be an intimate unbreakable relation between its particles. Such a relation is not present in language. Derrida never accepts the grammatical element, syntax.¹⁰

No signifier contains a definite or complete signified. One signifier points to another signifier and not to a signified. For example, if we search the meaning of the signifier 'light', it will lead us to 'brightness' but the status of 'brightness' is not that of a signified. It is another signifier. Then we search the meaning of 'brightness'. It may lead us to 'shine', again to another signifier. This will be an unending process.¹¹ The signified will continue to be elusive. So we cannot say that a sentence has a definite meaning.

According to Derrida, all signifiers are void. The power of signification depends on the difference between them. In this matter, Derrida accepts the view of the structuralists. Even this difference does not convey a definite meaning. Each signifier appears with shades of meaning that it had in its different occurrences in different contexts. Totality of these shades of meaning is termed trace. It is not possible to fix a definite meaning relevant in a particular context on the basis of trace. Derrida defined trace as absolute past and gave another name *arche* - writing. Harold Cowards tried to connect this concept to the Indian notion of *Samskāra* which is transmitted from birth to birth.

When we pass from one signifier to another, we feel the difference, and through that we contact *trace*. At the same time, the signified is deferred indefinitely. 'Difference' is spatial and 'deferred' is temporal. Derrida combined both and coined a new word - *differance*. The dynamics of meaning is *differance*. Yet the elusiveness of meaning is not controlled. It is deferred indefinitely. Since it transcends all the elements of a language, it is called transcendental signified. Nobody ever reaches the kingdom of transcendental signified.

From a statement, what we get is a very vague idea of its meaning. To be more accurate, it

Recent Publications: **The Contribution of Melpüttur Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭatiri to Sanskrit Literature with Special Reference to Vyākaraṇa**, P. Visalakshy, 2013, Crown ¼, pp. 428, Rs. 900/- (US\$ 81/-). **A Contrastive Analysis of the Phonological Systems of Bengali and Malayalam**, Dhruvajyoti Das, 2014, pp. xii + 140, Rs. 220/- (US\$ 20/-). **Veṭṭakka:ḍa Iruḷa Tuṇḍumallige - Ballads and Dictionary - Three Dialects**, R. Perialwar, 2014, pp. 8 + 112, Rs. 150/- (US\$ 15/-).

is not meaning, but possibilities of meanings. It is the duty of the reader to generate a meaning from these possibilities.

In the first significant paper he presented at the John Hopkins University, *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, he broke away the subtle thread of logic, *Logocentrism*, that united all the aspects of language and gave uncontrolled freedom to them. Thus the meaning and formation of meaning had become a play - 'free play' of meaning - on which the writer has no control.

This treatise on language had been accepted by many intellectuals and as mentioned in the beginning created chaos in the world of ideas but a group of traditional scholars with strong will questioned and rejected the theory. M.H. Abrams, the renowned scholar, presented a paper criticising and rejecting this theory in the meeting of the Modern Language Association and asserted that, in their discursive practice, deconstructionists rely on the communicative power of language which they theoretically deny. Hillis Miller, an ardent follower of Derrida, accepted the contradiction and replied that the basic argument of Derrida itself is that language has a contradicting tendency.

Notes

7. That Rousseau cannot possibly mean what he says (or say what he means) at certain crucial junctures is the outcome of Derrida's perverse but utterly literal reading. Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction Theory and Practice*, 1986, p. 33.
8. That writing is in fact the precondition of language and must be conceived as prior to speech. This involves showing to begin with that the *concept of writing cannot be reduced to its normal sense*. *Ibid*, p. 28.

9. Thus we say 'writing' for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: cinematography, choreography of course, but also pictorial, musical, sculptural "writing". One might also speak of athletic writing and, with even greater certainty, a military or political writing in view of the techniques that govern those domains today. It is also in this sense that the contemporary biologist speaks of writing and program in relation to the most elementary processes of information within the living self. *Of Grammatology*, 1994, p. 9.

10. Even syntax, the organization of words into a significant sentence, is given no role in determining the meanings of component words for according to the Grapho-Centric model, when we look at a page, we see no organization but only a chain of grounded marks, a sequence of individuals. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, David Lodge & Negelwood (Eds.), p. 263.

11. There the signified always functions as a signifier. Secondly, that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing above affects all signifieds in general, affects them always already, the moment they enter the game. There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the ply of signifying references that constitute language. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak (Trans.), 1994.

D. Benjamin

NEW ISDL PUBLICATION

STUDIES ON BANGLA AND DRAVIDIAN

Syamala Sasidharan, Sourav Chakraborty & G.K. Panikkar (Eds.)

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