

A short note on the dictionaries needed for Dravidian languages

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The book *Dravidian languages* by the famous linguist Bh. Krishnamurthy (published by Cambridge University Press, 2003) is an important book that offers a panoramic view of all the major Dravidian languages and also sketches of lesser known languages of the Dravidian family. The aim of the book is comprehensively to cover the Dravidian language stock. There is a good bibliography on Dravidian languages also provided. But it is not the place to look for dictionaries available for each language of the family. For that purpose we have to turn to other sources to be informed of the lexicographic works.

There are sources to know of the dictionaries of Dravidian languages. The voluminous book of Gregory James titled *ColporuL, A History of Tamil Dictionaries* (CreA, Chennai 2000) provides a historical survey of Tamil dictionaries from the British period to 20th century. And also there are two bibliographies of Tamil dictionaries: one by A. Dhamotharan and another by P. Mataiyan. They are a classified list of well-known and also lesser-known dictionaries.

I would like to go back in time for my exposure of word indexes and dictionaries either published or were in the offing. It was the year 1961. A word Index for Puranaanuuru prepared by V.I. Subramoniam was published by the University of Kerala. This is the first one adopting the linguistic principles of word categories for one of the

Sangam anthologies, Ettutokai. Thereafter word indexes for single texts and for the whole anthologies started coming out either attached to dissertations or as stand alone volumes.

The Tamil language is fortunate in the area of reference work activities. Among the Dravidian languages Tamil is in the forefront in bringing out a six-volume bi-lingual (Tamil -English) lexicon, commonly known as Tamil Lexicon completed in 1936, edited by S. Vaiyapuri, a publication of University of Madras. It has drawn words from diachronic sources, starting from the beginning of Tamil literary works, upto to the first half of 20th century and also from our rich inscriptional sources. Very recently the Etymological dictionary of Classical Tamil, commenced by Devaneyya Pavanar, came to conclusion as a multi-volume dictionary. Another 'first' is the Encyclopaedia, the Tamil title is கலைக்கஞ்சியம், in 10 volumes,

edited by Periyasamy Thuran in the second half of 20th century. Tamil creative writers took initiatives in bringing out dialect dictionaries in small to medium- sized volumes. Coimbatore and Tirunelveli dialects and the spoken Tamil of central districts got the benefit of this ventures.

Though word indexes prepared and published for Sangam anthologies, a dictionary for these ancient texts remains unfulfilled. There have been attempts to compile one but without tangible result. The absence of a meticulous dictionary for Sangam literature is a handicap to further the research on historical principles of the semantic map of the ancient Tamil.

In addition to a dictionary for Sangam anthologies, a synonyms dictionary for each Dravidian languages, if prepared, will pave the

way for Dravidian language cognates on authentic and firmer grounds. Lack of such basic reference works will lead only to speculative and tentative research in the field of lexical studies.

One example to illustrate the point: there are many words for kings in Sangam anthologies but words for queen are far and few! How are we going to interpret this lexical phenomenon?

When compared to other Dravidian languages, Tamil is fortunate to have some very good reference works well in advance. A six volume Tamil Lexicon, drawing words from the very ancient texts of just before the beginning of Common Era and up to the first of the 20th century that was completed in 1936 is a milestone. There were attempts to revise this Lexicon. The critic of this Lexicon, Devaneyya Pavanar, commenced a lexicographic project that saw its completion only recently.

Contemporary Tamil also got its share of attention in the field of lexicography. A Dictionary of Contemporary Tamil by the publisher CreA, for which I served as the Chief editor, is also a welcome addition for the reason that it solely focussed on the modern Tamil. As a sequel to it, a dictionary for idioms and phrases was also published. A dictionary of word combinations of contemporary Tamil is another new addition in the Tamil lexicography.

Turning to other Dravidian languages, Malayalam took the initiative to produce a multi volume dictionary in 1964 itself. I came to know the release of the 8th volume recently. Kannada is fortunate to have a six volume Lexicon edited by Prof. Upadyaya. Surprisingly the major language of the Dravidian family, Telugu has not seen serious, academic lexicographic work so far. As far as I know there is no dictionary for Telugu on historical principles.

Leaving aside the literary languages of the family, the languages of hilly regions, such as Toda, Kota, must get the attention of the lexicographers to bring out general as well as special dictionaries in order to make any generalisation of lexical studies, especially the cognates and their meanings. Though we have the Dravidian Etymological Dictionary, prepared by Emeneau and Burrow, there is a lot of scope to enrich the dictionary by way of finding more cognates from materials published later in this field.

In my opinion, a dictionary of synonyms for each language will be a handy research tool to go to the basics of historical lexical studies.