

Digital Archives for German-Tamil Studies with Particular Reference to Some Ancient Tamil Heritage Aspects

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1. German -Tamil Studies: In 1706, the first German Protestant missionary named Ziegenbalg came to Tamilnadu with the wrong notion that Tamils were barbarous. But soon he found good enough reasons to change this view. He wrote to Europe to change this wrong notion, citing many Tamil heritage aspects with notes on Tamil literature like Acharakkovai, Aathichuudi, Kondrei Vendhan, Needhi Venba, Thirukkural, etc. He wrote that many Tamil savants bequeathed a rich cultural legacy. From then on, the Europeans changed their wrong notion and had high regard for Tamil culture. It is my humble submission, that much of these German observations had not been brought out for the reason that they were written in Tamil and old German languages and preserved in the former eastern Germany, access to which was rather difficult for research scholars in those days.

2. Source materials in Germany: Following this first German in 1706, for 250 years from then on, hundreds of Germans came to Tamilnadu, as missionaries, travelers, academicians etc., interacted with the native Tamils in different fields and wrote down in their diaries, travel accounts, station registers, letters etc. all about the customs and manners, legends and fables, diseases and medicines, rites and rituals etc. and on many other indigenous cultural, literary, medical and socio-economic aspects. There are as many as 200, 000 Mss. on these topics besides hundreds of Tamil palmleaves too, now preserved in the Franckens archives in Halle/Germany. In my published doctoral dissertation, I had investigated a few of these German observations, leaving out religious aspects.

3. Medical data: The Germans from the cold Europe, fell ill in the hot tropical Tamilnadu for the first time here only and hence they knew nothing about tropical diseases and corresponding medicines. When they were cured by the native Tamil Siddha medical doctors, they were surprised at the high level of indigenous medical knowledge and almost all the Germans wrote down in hundreds of their diaries about the tropical diseases and Siddha medical system and sent them all to Germany in ships. A particular German missionary named Gruendler spent an unbroken period of 11 years, collecting Tamil medical palmleaves, translating them into German and sent them all in remarkable haste to Germany by the next available ship. Those Germans found out to their pleasant surprise, that the Tamil medical men were experts in diagnosing the diseases by pulse, phlegm, urine, skin, tongue and eyes tests and prescribed proper medicines. As many as 4448 diseases - including certain special diseases for men, women and children were identified. Waguda Chuvadi, Udal kooru thathuvam, Sittar Aaruda Nondi Chindu, Malika Sanka Litham are some of the medical books, which the Germans took away to Germany. The importance of 'Nallennai' (gingili oil) in preparing many Siddha medicines had been widely observed. (a German diary). And now, about a very important medical note of the dreadful and

as-yet-incurable disease Hydrophobia / Rabies: There is no medicine anywhere in the world, for curing the chronic rabies patients. It is indeed a laudable aspect that 300 years ago, the Tamils knew of the Siddha medicine to cure a dying rabies patient and this Tamil medical prescription was also taken to Germany without leaving any copy of it in Tamilnadu.

4. Other Heritage aspects: Some of the Germans were interested in Tamil language and literature, some others in the Tamil Siddha medical system, a few more in the socio-economic aspects and another set of Germans, in the indigenous cultural aspects. But all of them praised the antiquity, richness of Tamil language and culture. As a matter of fact, the 'Ainthinai Ozhukkam' i.e. the very cultured lifestyles of the people in the five different kinds of land known as Kurinji, Marudham, Mullai, Neidhal and Paalai were very much appreciated and praised by those impartial Germans.

5. Request to the INFITT: Single-handedly, I am unable to bring out all these ancient Tamil cultural, literary, medical heritage aspects as revealed in thousands of German diaries and especially the Rabies project. If a full-fledged digital archives can be established, with these data stored in it, then nearly 75 million strong Tamil diaspora around the world will come to know of these and far above all, such a digital archives will cater to the needs of Tamil heritage researchers also. Hopefully do I leave this request to the kind consideration of the INFITT. For further information about my research field, my academic and professional profile, may I invite you to my personal website: <http://www.german-tamilology.com>

BRIEF BIO DATA

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German Language : Nine semesters' course : 1966 – 69 & 1979; d) B.Sc. : (Physics, Chemistry & Maths.) Madras University, 1966

Experience: 35 years as T.N. Govt. College teacher

Publications : (book, articles and conference papers) : One book, ten articles and six conference papers - three in Germany (21 articles in Aanandha Vikatan)

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Fellowships & grants : Three from German agencies and three from ICHR, N.Delhi

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