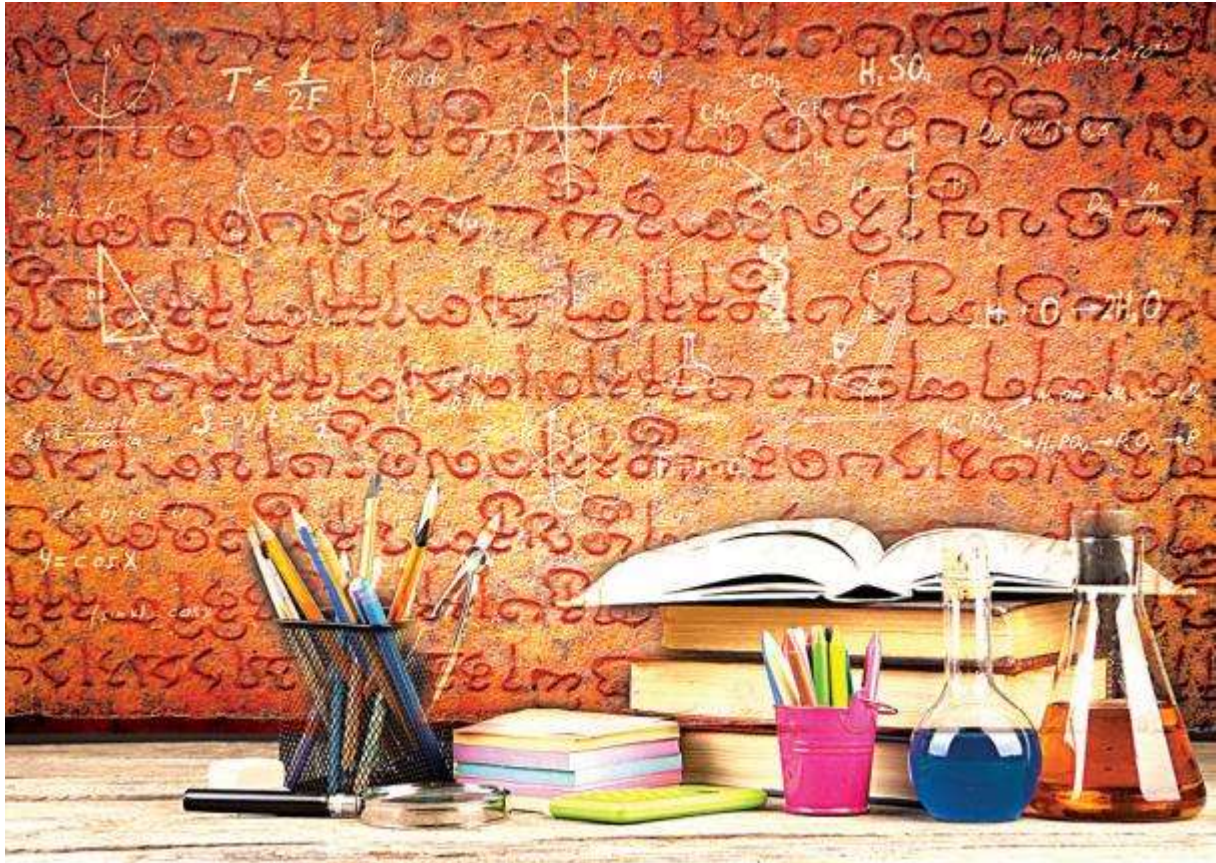


Tamil chairs in foreign varsities is important: But what about those back at home?



Ira. Pannirukaivadivelan

It is welcome that Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin announced at the recent classical Tamil award function that the government would set up Tamil chairs in five universities abroad. They include De La Reunion University in Reunion, an island in Indian Ocean and a region of France, University of Sumatera Utara in Indonesia, Center for Khmer Studies in Cambodia and University of Languages and International Studies in Vietnam .

But at the Central Institute of Classical Tamil where the classical language award function was held, Tamil scholars and Tamil studies employees are not permanently posted. Only its director

has been appointed on permanent basis. That too, he has come here on deputation from the Kangeyam Government Arts College.

Unique classical language

The Tamil Nadu government must take note of the fact that in India, several departments and chairs for Tamil have been paralysed. It is also noteworthy that the Tamil linguistic research section and research centre, the Tamil lexicon revision work plan, the Tirukkural and Christian chairs and linguistic research centres in Madras University have all been closed.

“No historian and no archaeologist, for that matter, can deny my assertion that ‘it is Tamil which is the most ancient of languages spoken on this Indian soil and is still spoken since time immemorial.’ Tamil is a language rich in sublime literature and eternal charms. If only the most ancient language has to be declared as a national language of India, then Tamil deserves to be accepted as such,” said Quaid-e-Millath in the constituent Assembly several decades ago.

It is worth pondering what a special status was accorded to such a unique classical Tamil language in those days and afterwards in the Indian history. Moreover, it is one of the present-day needs that research has to be undertaken on how many higher institutions of learning have accommodated the academic activities involving learning and teaching for the sake of propagating the antiquity, rich tradition and enormous elegance of the classical Tamil.

It is to be recalled that on behalf of the Tamil Nadu government a sum of Rs. 5 crore has been handed over to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in order to upgrade the Tamil section to the Tamil department functioning at the Centre of Indian Languages.

Tamil in N-E India

India's north-east region consists of eight states, sharing borders with four countries. The north-eastern India is generally called a museum of Indian languages and cultures because over 200 races and diverse languages are there in the region. The Guwahati University set up in 1948 has created facilities for learning and research of Tamil. In the Indian languages' literature department established in 1967, Assamese, Tamil, Nepali, Odiya, Bengali, Hindi, Rabha, and Mising languages have been accommodated. Tamil is the only South Indian language that has figured in the list of languages studied in that department. There is an exclusive library for Tamil books in the department collected from the Tamil Nadu government and the Institute of Indian Languages.

The north-east Indian students have, of late, been showing excessive interest in learning Tamil. The Guwahati University has created facilities for students to pursue Tamil as a subject in diploma and postgraduate comparative literature courses and for Tamil research students to pursue M.Phil and Ph.D courses.

It is to be noted that two girl students of Assam have got doctorates, doing comparative studies of Tamil and Assamese literary methodologies and of Tamil and Assamese children's stories.

For the past few years, there has been a drop in student admissions to the Tamil courses in the university because of the halt in scholarship from the Tamil Development Department. In the north-east India, it is the only university where Tamil is taught and pursued in several courses. So, it is the bounden duty of the Tamil Nadu government to upscale its efforts and aid to develop Tamil in Assam.

Non-functional Tamil departments

It is sad that the Tamil departments functioning in colleges affiliated to the Banaras Hindu University and Delhi University in north have become dysfunctional.

Tamil departments have been set up in Aligarh Muslim University, Agra University, Lady Ram College (Delhi), Chandigarh University, Patiala University and universities of Kolkata, Lucknow, Panjab and Allahabad. But it is a moot point how many departments of these universities are functioning with professors possessing proper research credentials.

Of these universities, it is only in Delhi and Jawaharlal Universities that the Tamil departments are functioning at present. Even their functioning is not up to the mark from the perspective of Tamil development. But the state of affairs in universities in South India, the birthplace and cradle of the Dravidian languages, is no less abysmal.

Tamil department is there in Kerala, Hyderabad, Osmania, Andhra, Venkateswara (Tirupathi), Dravida (Kuppam), Bangalore, Mysore and Bombay Universities. But in those Tamil departments, professor posts have not been filled and so the way the departments function is quite lackadaisical.

What needs to be done?

The state and union governments must come forward to think over this issue and provide proper funds and hard work.

The Tamil department in Osmania University, which once boasted of having reputable Tamil scholars such as C. Ilakkuvanar, A.M. Paramasivanantham, T.Singaravelu and so on, has not been fully functioning. The university was set up in 1947 before the states were re-organised on linguistic lines. The Chancellor of this university is none other than TAMILISAI Soundararajan, Governor of Telangana. So, she must go the extra mile to ensure that the Tamil department functions better.

Of course, there is no gainsaying that the Tamil chairs in foreign universities are important. But the government must realize that the Tamil departments and chairs in Indian universities and

colleges are no less important and so they must also be developed.

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