

**ADDRESS BY THIRU BANWARILAL PUROHIT, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF
TAMIL NADU AT THE INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY & INDIAN
CULTURAL FESTIVAL ORGANISED BY VIT CHENNAI & DESIYA CHINTHANAI
KAZHAGAM, CHENNAI AT VIT CHENNAI ON 21.02.2019 AT 11.30 AM**

Anaivarukkum Vanakkam

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Distinguished Invitees

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy to be here today on the occasion of the International Mother Language Day being organised by the Desiya Chinthanai Kazhagam and VIT, Chennai.

The International Mother Language Day is celebrated every year on 21st February. It is a worldwide annual observance to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and to promote multilingualism.

First announced by the UNESCO on 17 November 1999, the Day was formally recognized by the United Nations General Assembly through a resolution.

In that resolution, the United Nations General Assembly called on its member states "to promote

the preservation and protection of all languages used by the people of the world". The United Nations General Assembly further proclaimed its commitment to promote unity in diversity and international understanding through multilingualism and multiculturalism. It is this resolution of the United Nations General Assembly passed in 2009, that forms the basis for today's celebration.

There is a quote by Nelson Mandela that needs to be mentioned at this juncture:

"If you talk to man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language it goes to his heart."

Languages are the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage. All moves to promote the dissemination of mother tongues serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education but also to develop fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue.

According to the Indian census report, more than 19,500 languages or dialects are spoken in India. The top 11 languages of India based on the total number of speakers, are: Hindi, English, Tamil, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Urdu, Kannada, Gujarat, Odia, and Malayalam.

You are all aware that there are 22 languages which are called the Scheduled Languages of India. They are listed in the Constitution of India and the list includes Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Punjabi, Assamese, Maithili, Santali, Kashmiri, Nepali, Sindhi, Konkani, Dogri, Manipuri, Bodo, and Sanskrit.

Of them, there are 6 languages which have been granted the status of Classical Languages of India, on the basis of having a long literary history and for not having borrowed extensively from other languages:.. They are Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Odia and Malayalam. As you can see, Tamil enjoys the pride of place in all the three lists

I have mentioned so far. It is a classical language, a language spoken by millions of people and it also finds place in the Constitution of India.

There is much more about which Tamil and Tamilians can be proud about. During the last 16 months of my stay in the State, I have come across many fascinating aspects of Tamil literature, Saiva Siddhantam and the Thirukkural which I would like to share with you.

The Thirukkural which was written more than 2000 years ago focuses almost on all aspects of life. It is loaded with nuggets of wisdom on good governance, planning, specialization, merit selection, placement, communication, equality, time management, financial management, water

management, etc. These valuable pearls of wisdom are relevant to present day living.

Thirukkural is appealing to the mind and sweet to the ears, conveying maximum sense in minimum words. Its construction resembles that of a design in a mosaic.

Mahathma Gandhi after reading a translation of Thirukkural remarked “The maxims of Thiruvalluvar have touched my heart and soul. There is none who has given such a treasure of wisdom like him.”

One is reminded of a poem by Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai in this regard. He calls the Thirukkural a dictionary of ethics for all humanity to live a life of happiness. He goes on to add that the

Ramayana as presented by Kambar, illustrates through the narrative of Rama's life all the great values embodied in the Thirukkural. This shows the extent of the massive influence of the Thirukkural on later works in Tamil!

The poems belonging to Sangam literature which were composed by Tamil poets, more than 2000 years ago, remind us of the antiquity of the language. All through history the Tamil language flourished because of the royal patronage and its close affinity to the Tamil way of life and spirituality.

May I make a request to you? For a moment please close your eyes and imagine where Tamil and Tamil Culture world have been if it had not

enjoyed the royal patronage of the Pallava and Chola dynasties for nearly 600 years between the 7th century and the 12th Century. There would have been no Mahabalipuram, no Kambar, no temple building activity and no Sekkizhar and no Periyapuram. The seed for this was sown by a Shaivite Saint Appar who cured Mahendra Varma Pallava of a serious illness. Such is the power of Saiva Siddhantam, the power of spirituality. The Nayanmars followed Appar. The Cholas followed the Pallavas. Dance followed music and the rest is history.

You are also celebrating the cultural festival here today. Music and dance sound the sweetest when they find expression in a language known to

the listener. The tradition of Tamil music goes back to the ancient era of Tamil history. There are various references to this musical tradition found in the ancient Sangam books such as Ettuthokai and Pathupattu. The ancient grammatical work Tolkappiyam mentions the various musical expressions pertaining to the five landscapes of the Sangam literature.

In the post-Sangam period, Tamil music evolved to a different level of sophistication. The Cilappatikaram describes music based on logical, systematic and scientific calculations in the arrangement of the dancers on stage to represent the notes and tunes.

The compositions of the Tamil Saivite saints such as Appar and the Vaishnavite saints such as Perialvar between the sixth and the tenth centuries CE were set to music and sung in temples. The musical poet Arunagirinathar further embellished the Tamil musical tradition through his compositions of Tamil hymns.

The Tamil Trinity of Muthu Thandavar, Arunachala Kavi and Marimutthu Pillai have hundreds of devotional songs in Tamil to their credit and these songs have immensely helped in the evolution of Carnatic music.

I have touched upon a few elements of the greatness of Tamil and Tamil Culture. The

language of Tamil is like a limitless ocean whose depth is unfathomable.

Similarly every another tongue has its unique place in ones heart. So do our festivals.

They teach us how to respect nature. The Pongal festival in Tamil Nadu, the Chhath festival in Bihar, the Ganga Aarthi at Haridwar are examples of how we respect the elements of nature as gods and goddesses.

Diwali is a very important festival celebrated all over India and symbolizes the destruction of evil and the lighting up of humanity in our lives, year after year. Holi, the festival of colours is celebrated during the spring, with festivity and joy. I have mentioned only a few festivals here. In India where

tolerance and mutual respect for all religions is guaranteed under the Constitution every religion, every region and every ethnic group has its own set of festivals and celebrations, which are representative of their culture.

The purpose of celebrating International Mother Language Day and the Indian Cultural Festival here is to make every one of you realize that in a land of varied cultural diversity, we are held together by a unified bond of a rich heritage and the freedom to celebrate it. No-where else in the world can we see this diversity and variety.

I am informed that VIT students have 35 different mother languages. I congratulate the VIT and the Desiya Chinthanai Kazhagam for having

staged this event and appreciate the spirit of oneness that I see in all the young students assembled here. You are indeed being true to the ideals of this institution which is a place to learn that provides a chance to grow. I wish you all success in your endeavours.

Nandri Vanakkam....

Jai Hind....