

## **SYNTAX EDITION OF TAMIL CLASSICAL POETRY**

In a poem, under the stress and urge of rhyme and rhythm, words stand transposed from their usual syntax order of clarity, taking more entrancing positions of charm and beauty. Facing these artistries in my study of Tamil *Sangam* Classics, though I had the help of scholarly commentaries to get the meaning straight, it was always an ordeal to grasp the content and to remember later. So I longed to hit upon a plan of exhibiting the lines of a stanza by moving the words to suitable places, which ultimately make the new structure look like a map attached to a geographical text book. Hailing my success in this goal, Dr. Dorai Arangaswami urged me to edit the *Sangam* poems in this new picturesque format. Teaching is in my blood –so with great enthusiasm I went on in this adventure, till in a dozen books I had covered a total of 50,000 lines of verse.

Though it will be futile even to briefly describe the alchemic process here, as a skeleton sketch it may be stated that the method is essentially analogous to the school grammar analysis of complex sentences exhibiting the different kinds of clauses in a tabular form. For instance, in the new scheme, a Tamil stanza of four long horizontal lines comes to be represented in 14 long horizontals and five verticals! – showing at a glance, how every word stands in relation to words before and after –comparable to a geographical map.

“Syntax,” says the dictionary, “is the arrangement and interrelation of words in grammatical combination,” – hence the name SYNTAX EDITION which I have coined for this novel and dramatic framework, which greatly facilitates quick comprehension of even the most complicated lines couched in prosodic constraint.

Teachers to whom I showed up my syntax edition recognized the wonderful educational role it can play in the classroom. Dr. A. Srinivasa Raghavan, the popular educator, poet and scholar of Tamil and English, wrote: “Only the abundant love of a teacher for his pupils could have invented such a helpful, perspicuous presentation.” But he added: “Won’t it be very expensive to publish this elaborate format?”

Professor T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram, a distinguished multi-language expert, veteran in linguistics, and a former Vice-Chancellor of Madurai University, said: “Very good! But where is the money?” A prosperous publishing house of Madras shrank from printing even a small book of poetry in this syntax edition. But the eminent Tamil scholar Srinivasa Sarma, proclaimed: “You have written hundreds of poems and scores of plays in Tamil; more than your fame as a poet and playwright, as an inventor of this syntax edition – posterity will remember KNS – for this opens wide the door to hosts of pupils in unborn generations to absorb with ease and quick comprehension our inimitable treasury of immortal and ancient Tamil poetry.”

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## SYNTAX EDITION: A SAMPLE POEM

The enmity and discord which of late  
 Sprung from the rancorous outrage of your duke  
 To merchants, our well-dealing countrymen,  
 Who wanting guilders to redeem their lives  
 Have seal'd his rigorous statutes with their bloods  
 Excludes all pity from our threatening looks.

- William Shakespeare

(Lines 5-10, spoken by Duke of Solinus in Shakespeare's  
*The Comedy of Errors*, Scene I, Act I)

The syntax edition of these six lines is the framework below in  
 20 horizontals and 4 vertical columns:

*(As an aid to explain Prof. KNS's innovative concept of parsing  
 I have color-coded the Table he had conceived -- Seenu)*

I	II	III	IV
1. The	1. enmity 1. which	1. and	1. discord
	2. Sprung 2. outrage	1. of late 2. from 2. rancorous	2. the
	3. To	2. of your 3. merchants 3. our	2. duke
	4. Who	3. countrymen	3. well-dealing
	5. Have	4. wanting	4. guilders
	5. statutes	5. seal'd 5. his 5. with	4. to redeem their lives
6. Excludes	6. all 6. threatening	6. pity	5. rigorous 5. their bloods
6. looks.			6. from our

## PROCEDURE

In the Table above, the digits 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 in front of the word(s) in the Table identify the six lines in the original passage. The words and clauses in these six lines have been placed under four columns based on their meaning and relevance. To understand the passage easily as you read, follow this procedure.

- (a) On the first pass, Columns **I's 3 horizontals**, if read consecutively as:

‘The enmity and discord / Excludes all pity from our / looks’,

gives *at once* the gist of the whole passage.

- (b) Now take a second pass. Column **II's 8 horizontals** should be read interleaved with Column **I's 3 horizontals** as below, giving us more details.

‘The enmity and discord / which / Sprung from the / outrage / To merchants / Who / Have seal'd / statutes with their bloods / Excludes all pity from our / threatening / looks.’

- (c) On the third pass, similarly, Column **III's 7 horizontals** should interface with the horizontals of Columns I and II, resulting in:

‘The enmity and discord / which / of late / Sprung from the / rancorous / outrage / of your duke / To merchants / our / countrymen / Who / wanting guilders / Have seal'd / his rigorous / statutes with their bloods / Excludes all pity from our / threatening / looks.’

- (d) Finally, column **IV's 2 horizontals** to interface with Columns **I, II** and **III** to complete the poem:

‘The enmity and discord / which / of late / Sprung from the / rancorous / outrage / of your duke / To merchants / our / well-dealing / countrymen / Who / wanting guilders / to redeem their lives / Have sealed / his rigorous / statutes with their bloods / Excludes all pity from our / threatening / looks.’

Using the color code, the explanation becomes rather simple:

1. First read Column I's 3 horizontals (yellow highlighted text) to get the gist of the text.
2. Next read Column II's 8 horizontals (green highlighted text), interleaved with column I's horizontals to get more details.
3. Next read Column III's 7 horizontals (blue highlighted text), interleaved with columns I's and II's horizontals to get deeper.
4. Finally, read Column IV's 2 horizontals (grey highlighted text), interleaved with I's, II's and III's horizontals to read the whole text.

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