

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD  
( PRIME MINISTER )

EVENT: PERASMIAN PERSIDANGAN - SEMINAR ANTARABANGSA PENGAJIAN TAMIL

VENUE: PUSAT DAGANGAN DUNIA PUTRA, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 15 NOV 1987

TIME:

Yang Berhormat Datuk S. Samy Vellu,  
Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Penganjur;  
Dif-Dif Kehormat;  
Para Peserta dan para hadirin sekalian.

Saya mengucapkan selamat datang kepada para peserta sekalian ke Persidangan-Seminar Antarabangsa Mengenai Pengajian Tamil ini. Saya percaya berbagai perkara akan dapat dibincangkan di Persidangan ini dan saya berharap Persidangan ini akan dapat menyumbangkan ke arah peningkatan ilmiah dan juga persefahaman. Saya juga berharap tuan-tuan dan puan-puan akan cuba melapangkan masa untuk melihat bukan sahaja Kuala Lumpur, tetapi jikalau boleh kawasan-kawasan sekitarnya. Dengan berbuat demikian saudara-saudari akan dapat mengalami dan memahami sedikit mengenai negara Malaysia ini.

2. Persidangan pertama mengenai Pengajian Tamil ini telah diadakan di Kuala Lumpur pada tahun 1966, iaitu 21 tahun yang lalu. Sekarang sekali lagi Kuala Lumpur telah dipilih menjadi tuan rumah kepada Persidangan ini. Dengan adanya Persidangan ini di Kuala Lumpur, ini jelas membuktikan bahawa Kerajaan Malaysia membenarkan penggunaan dan pengajian lain-lain bahasa, selain daripada Bahasa Malaysia yang menjadi bahasa rasmi di negara ini.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. The Tamil language with its long history has been also acknowledged by scholars as one of the most melodious languages of the world. There can be no doubt that such a quality has been attained by the Tamil language through the long period of its development and cultivation by many generations of scholars, poets, teachers and students since ancient times. Indeed, the idea of holding regular meetings of scholars for the purpose of attaining higher standards in the use of language and in the building up of a good literary heritage is not new to the Tamil tradition, for such an idea has been the basis of the academic activities of the Sangam, or the Academy, of learned Tamil poets.

4. At present the Tamil language is being used not only in the state of Tamil Nadu in India, but also by Tamil minorities in several other parts of the world such as

East and South Africa, Burma, Fiji, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Malaysia.

5. I understand that the oldest surviving instruments of the Tamil language belong probably to the third century B.C., though such literary works were no doubt preceded by several centuries of literary development. Indeed, Tamil literature shares antiquity with the other ancient and classical literatures of the world and at the same time it continues to flourish as a vigorous medium of speech and writing in our own times. This is something that cannot be said of some of the other ancient languages.

6. The earliest known evidence of the existence of Tamils as a people with a distinct culture comes from the remains of the pre-historic sites in the Indian subcontinent. A significant feature of Tamil culture is that several of these elements would seem to have attracted the attention of people in other parts of the world in the course of early and regular maritime contacts which the Tamils have had with them. The Tamils as merchants, craftsmen, priests and scholars have played an important role in the development of great civilizations in India as well as in other parts of the world including Southeast Asia.

7. The field of Tamil studies is indeed a large one involving various disciplines such as linguistics, literature, history, archaeology, anthropology, sociology and science. This Conference, I am told, will present and discuss a wide range of subjects and topics. This includes a section on science and technology where several papers on the use of Tamil language in computers and word processors will be discussed. This is clearly indicative of the expansion of Tamilology to include new horizons in keeping with modern needs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Tamilologies ought not to be merely satisfied with pointing out the relics of the past. There is no doubt that the archaeologists or the historians of society, language, literature, religion, and arts are the discoverers and investigators of the past. But they need not be mere recorders of the past; indeed they ought also to be the interpreters of its relevance to the present and the assessors of the achievements through the ages.

9. This scholarly interpretations should represent the voices of human progress and human vision, which afford an important corrective to the superficial instant judgments which is the fashion now. Such interpretations of permanent age-old values of human mores, ethics and philosophy would serve not only as a guide for the future, but also as a bulwark against the dangers of depersonalization of humanity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. Finally, I would like to express my hope that all the participants and guests of the Conference would have a comfortable and enjoyable stay in Malaysia and that the participants would have a successful deliberation.

11. I now have much pleasure to declare the Sixth International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies officially open.