Birth anniversary of Veeramamunivar (Constanzo Beschi), who enriched Tamil – 8 November

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News

The birth anniversary of Veeramamunivar (Constanzo Giuseppe Beschi), the Italian Jesuit who served Tamil greatly, was remembered on 8 November. He was born on 8 November 1680 at Castiglione delle Stiviere near Mantua, Italy. He reached Goa in 1710 and the Madurai Mission in 1711. Mastering Tamil, he composed 'Thembavani', an epic of 3,615 stanzas. His other major works are the dictionary 'Sathurakarathi' (1732), 'Paramartha Guru Kathai' and the grammar 'Thonnool Vilakkam'. He translated the Thirukkural into Latin. He died on 4 February 1747 at Ambalakadu (Sampaloor) in present-day Keralam.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Original name	Constanzo Giuseppe Beschi
Born	8 Nov 1680 – Castiglione delle Stiviere, Mantua, Italy
Arrival	Goa 1710; Madurai Mission 1711
Epic	Thembavani – 3,615 stanzas on St Joseph
Dictionary	Sathurakarathi (1732) – name, meaning, category, rhyme

Point	Details
Prose	Paramartha Guru Kathai – humorous tales
Grammar	Thonnool Vilakkam; grammar of colloquial Tamil
Translation	Thirukkural (Virtue, Wealth) – Latin
Died	4 Feb 1747 – Ambalakadu, Keralam
Memorial	Statue on Marina Beach, Chennai (2nd World Tamil Conference, 1968)

Background

- History: from the 16th to 18th centuries European missionaries shaped Tamil language, printing and lexicography. Beschi stands alongside Robert de Nobili (Madurai), Ziegenbalg (Tranquebar press), Caldwell (Comparative Grammar, 1856) and G.U. Pope. The title 'Veeramamunivar' means 'the brave great ascetic'.
- Sathurakarathi is regarded as the first alphabetical Tamil dictionary. Earlier, verse lexicons called 'nigandu' (Divakaram, Pingalam, Choodamani) explained words; Sathurakarathi arranged words alphabetically in four parts – name, meaning, category and rhyme. He also compiled Tamil–Latin and Portuguese–Tamil–Latin dictionaries.
- His forerunner in the Madurai Mission was the Italian Jesuit Robert de Nobili, who reached Madurai in 1606, adopted the dress and life of a sannyasi and called himself 'Tattuva Bodhakar' (teacher of wisdom). Beschi followed the same path, living as a Tamil ascetic.
- He helped build the Adaikala Matha shrine at Elakurichi (now Ariyalur district) and the Periyanayagi Matha church at Konankuppam. He adopted Tamil dress, food and ways of life.

Tamil Nadu link: Beschi's statue is one of the Tamil-scholar statues unveiled on Marina Beach (2 Jan 1968) for the Second World Tamil Conference, Chennai, January 1968. He worked in the Madurai, Tiruchi and Thanjavur regions.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

The birth anniversary of Veeramamunivar (Constanzo Giuseppe Beschi), the Italian Jesuit who served Tamil greatly, was remembered on 8 November. He was born on 8 November 1680 at Castiglione delle Stiviere near Mantua, Italy.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Original name: Constanzo Giuseppe Beschi; Born: 8 Nov 1680 – Castiglione delle Stiviere, Mantua, Italy; Arrival: Goa 1710; Madurai Mission 1711; Epic: Thembavani – 3,615 stanzas on St Joseph.

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Practice questions (with answers)

1. Who is the hero of Veeramamunivar's epic 'Thembavani'?

A) Jesus Christ

B) St Thomas

C) St Joseph

D) St Francis Xavier

Answer: C – Explanation: The 3,615-stanza Thembavani narrates the life of St Joseph, foster-father of Jesus.

2. Into how many sections does Veeramamunivar's 'Sathurakarathi' divide words?

A) Two

B) Four

C) Six

D) Eight

Answer: B – Explanation: Four sections – name, meaning, category and rhyme ('chatur' = four); compiled in 1732.

3. What kind of work is Veeramamunivar's 'Paramartha Guru Kathai'?

A) Religious epic

B) Grammar treatise

C) Humorous stories

D) Verse lexicon

Answer: C – Explanation: An early Tamil prose satire about a foolish guru and his equally foolish disciples.

4. Which Italian Jesuit reached Madurai in 1606 and adopted the dress and life of a sannyasi for his mission?

A) Robert de Nobili

B) Ziegenbalg

C) Robert Caldwell

D) G.U. Pope

Answer: A – Explanation: De Nobili called himself 'Tattuva Bodhakar'; Ziegenbalg was a German Lutheran missionary at Tranquebar.

5. Statues of Beschi and other Tamil scholars on Chennai's Marina were installed for which event?

A) 2nd World Tamil Conference

B) 1st World Tamil Conference

C) World Classical Tamil Conf.

D) 3rd World Tamil Conference

Answer: A – Explanation: They were unveiled on 2 January 1968 for the 2nd World Tamil Conference, Chennai, under CM Annadurai.

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