Pure Tamil Movement (Thanithamizh Iyakkam) – Origin 1916, Maraimalai Adigal, Devaneya Pavanar, Perunchitranar, Karanthai Tamil Sangam & Classical Tamil 2004 | TNPSC Notes

TNPSC Notes · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/tnpsc-notes/thanithamizh-iyakkam/en

The **Thanithamizh Iyakkam (Pure Tamil Movement)** is a twentieth-century language movement of Tamil Nadu that asks people to speak and write Tamil with **native Tamil words** in place of borrowed words, mainly from **Sanskrit** and later from English. It took a definite form in **1916** under **Maraimalai Adigal** and his daughter **Neelambikai Ammaiyar**, was given a scholarly base by **Devaneya Pavanar**, and was spread by **Pavalareru Perunchitranar**, Tamil societies such as the **Karanthai Tamil Sangam (1911)** and many journals. Its long campaign for the dignity of Tamil formed part of the background to Tamil being declared India's **first classical language in 2004**.

தமிழில் படிக்க

These notes are written for TNPSC Group 1, 2/2A and 4 aspirants and are meant to be complete on their own. The Pure Tamil Movement is a core topic in **History, Culture, Heritage and Socio-Political Movements of Tamil Nadu** (the Tamil renaissance and language movements). Its scholars, journals and pure Tamil word usage are asked in **General Tamil** (Tamil scholars and their service to Tamil); the Official Language Act, the Tamil development institutions and the classical language status come under **Development Administration in Tamil Nadu** and **History, Culture of India and Indian National Movement** (Indian languages and culture). The life of Maraimalai Adigal is covered in a separate note; this note concentrates on the **movement** as a whole. Read each section, then use the tables, the quick revision table and the key points at the end.

What "Thanithamizh" Means

Thani means "separate" or "pure", so **Thanithamizh** means Tamil used on its own, without mixing in words from other languages. The movement is also described as **Tamil linguistic purism**.

- **Aim:** to use Tamil words in speech and writing and to avoid words taken from other languages when a Tamil word exists or can be formed.
- **Main target:** Sanskrit-derived words that had entered Tamil over many centuries (for example, writers used sareeram or thegam for "body" instead of the Tamil udambu). Later, English words also came under the same effort.
- **Method:** people changed their own names, journals and societies into Tamil; scholars collected lists of borrowed words with Tamil equivalents; new Tamil words were coined for new ideas.
- **Wider goal:** to establish that Tamil is an independent, ancient language that can express every idea by itself.

Background: The Tamil Renaissance of the Nineteenth Century

The Pure Tamil Movement grew out of a wider **Tamil renaissance** – a revival of interest in Tamil language and literature. The Tamil Nadu school textbook lists printing, the study of Dravidian languages and the publishing of old Tamil classics as the base of this revival.

Development	Key fact
Printing in Tamil	The Tamil Nadu school textbook states that Tamil was the first non-European language to go into print, that **Thambiran Vanakkam** was published from Goa in **1578** (some sources give 1577) and that a full-fledged printing press was set up at **Tranquebar** by **Ziegenbalg** in **1709** (some histories date the arrival of the press to 1712). The **Thirukkural** was printed in **1812**.
F. W. Ellis (1816)	Argued that the South Indian languages form a separate family, not related to the Indo-Aryan languages.
Robert Caldwell (1856)	His **Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages** showed the close relation among Dravidian languages and the antiquity of Tamil.
C. W. Damodaram Pillai (1832–1901)	Collected and edited palm-leaf manuscripts, including **Tolkappiyam**, Veerasoliyam and Soolamani.
U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (1855–1942)	Published classics such as **Seevaka Sinthamani (1887)**, **Silappathikaram (1892)**, **Manimekalai (1898)** and Pathitrupathu (1904).

Once the Sangam classics were back in print, scholars could show how rich old Tamil was with few borrowed words. Caldwell's work also gave scholarly support to the idea that Tamil can stand without Sanskrit. These two strands – pride in old literature and the Dravidian-language theory – fed directly into the Pure Tamil Movement.

Causes of the Movement

- **Heavy mixing of Sanskrit:** by the nineteenth century a mixed style of Tamil with many Sanskrit words was common in prose.
- **Rediscovery of the classics:** the printed Sangam texts showed a rich Tamil vocabulary with few borrowed words.
- **Dravidian-language studies:** the work of Ellis and Caldwell argued that Tamil belongs to a separate language family.
- **Status of Tamil in education:** Tamil was called a "vernacular" in university usage. **Parithimar Kalaignar** demanded that the University of Madras should not call Tamil a vernacular, and in **1902** he argued that Tamil is a classical language. Later, when the University of Madras made Tamil an optional subject while English stayed compulsory, the place of Tamil and of Tamil teachers in the colleges was weakened; Maraimalai Adigal left Madras Christian College in **1911**.
- **Social and political climate:** the movement began in 1916, the same year as the beginning of the Justice Party and the Non-Brahmin Manifesto; historians note that the language movement and the non-Brahmin movement strengthened each other.

Forerunners: Parithimar Kalaignar and the Tamil Sangams

- **Parithimar Kalaignar (V. G. Suryanarayana Sastri, 1870–1903):** born at Vilacheri near Madurai; head of the Tamil department of Madras Christian College from 1895. He turned his Sanskrit name into the Tamil form **Parithimar Kalaignar** and was among the first scholars to point out the influence of Sanskrit on Tamil. In **1902** he wrote that Tamil is a classical language – the earliest such demand on record.

- **Madurai Tamil Sangam (1901):** founded on **14 September 1901** by **Pandithurai Thevar** at Madurai; known as the "Fourth Tamil Sangam". It ran the journal **Senthamizh** and conducted Tamil Pandit examinations, which trained a generation of Tamil teachers.
- **Karanthai Tamil Sangam (1911):** founded on **14 May 1911** at Karanthai (Karunthattankudi), Thanjavur (details below).

Origin of the Movement in 1916 – Maraimalai Adigal

Maraimalai Adigal (1876–1950), born **Vedachalam**, taught Tamil at Madras Christian College until 1911 and was a scholar of Sangam literature and Saiva Siddhanta. He had argued for the independence of Tamil from Sanskrit even in his early journal writing, but in **1916** he made a public resolve to use only pure Tamil. This is taken as the beginning of the Thanithamizh Iyakkam. The Tamil Nadu school textbook calls him **the father of Tamil linguistic purism**.

He began with his own names and institutions:

Earlier name	Pure Tamil name
Vedachalam (Veda + achalam, "mountain")	**Maraimalai** (Marai = Veda, Malai = mountain)
Swami (title)	**Adigal**
Gnanasagaram (his journal, from 1902)	**Arivukkadal**
Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam (Pallavaram, 1911–12)	**Podhu Nilaik Kazhagam**

Neelambikai Ammaiyar

- Daughter of Maraimalai Adigal; the school textbook says she played an important role in founding the Pure Tamil Movement.
- She compiled **Vadachol Tamil Agaravarisai**, a dictionary that lists Sanskrit words used in Tamil with their pure Tamil equivalents – a practical tool for anyone who wanted to write pure Tamil.
- She followed her father in speaking and writing pure Tamil and spread it through her essays.

Tamil Revival Institutions

Societies, publishers and later the State created the institutions through which the movement reached schools, writers and readers.

Institution	Year / place	Role
Madurai Tamil Sangam ("Fourth Tamil Sangam")	14 September 1901, Madurai	Founded by Pandithurai Thevar; journal Senthamizh; Tamil Pandit examinations
Karanthai Tamil Sangam	14 May 1911, Karanthai, Thanjavur	Tamil literary meetings, journal Tamil Pozhil (1925), schools and a college; demanded classical status for Tamil
Podhu Nilaik Kazhagam	Pallavaram (founded 1911–12 under another name)	Maraimalai Adigal's society, renamed in pure Tamil
South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society ("Kazhagam")	1920, Tirunelveli (later also Chennai)	Founded by Thiruvarangam Pillai and Subbiah Pillai; Tamil publisher; ran the monthly Senthamizh Selvi; published works of Devaneya Pavanar and other scholars
Tamil Etymological Dictionary Project (Senthamizh Sorpirappiyal Agaramuthali)	1974, Government of Tamil Nadu	Devaneya Pavanar first director; traces the origin of Tamil words
Tamil University	15 September 1981, Thanjavur	State university for higher research in Tamil (Tamil University Act, 1982)
Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT)	Moved to Chennai in 2008	Central institute for classical Tamil research; own campus at Perumbakkam, Chennai, since 2022

Karanthai Tamil Sangam (1911)

- **Founded: 14 May 1911** at Karanthai (Karunthattankudi), a part of **Thanjavur**.
- **Leaders:** founded by **T. V. Radhakrishna Pillai**; his brother **Tamilavel T. V. Umamaheswaram Pillai (Umamaheswaranar, 1883–1941)** led it as president.
- **Journal: Tamil Pozhil**, a literary monthly started in **1925**.
- **Classical language demand:** soon after the First World War it passed a resolution asking that Tamil be declared a classical language (sources give 1919 or 1920).
- **Anti-Hindi stand:** it opposed the imposition of Hindi in educational institutions.
- **Education:** it runs schools and the Umamaheswaranar Karanthai Arts College; it promoted Tamil free of foreign words.
- Tamil scholars of the time used its platform; a postage stamp on **Tamilavel Umamaheswaranar** was issued in **2006**.

Devaneya Pavanar – "Mozhi Gnayiru"

Gnanamuthu Devaneyan (Devaneya Pavanar, 1902–1981) was the leading linguist of the movement. He used comparative and etymological study to argue that pure Tamil equivalents exist for borrowed words and that Tamil is one of the oldest languages of the world.

- **Born:** 7 February 1902 in the Sankarankovil area of the then Tirunelveli district. **Died:** 15 January 1981 at **Madurai**.
- **Teaching:** taught Tamil at **Salem Municipal College** (where Perunchitranar was his student) and worked in the Dravidian linguistics department of **Annamalai University**.

- **Titles:** known as **Mozhi Gnayiru** ("Sun of linguistics"); the **Government of Tamil Nadu** conferred the title **Senthamizh Selvar** in **1979**.
- **Etymological Dictionary:** in **1974** the Government of Tamil Nadu set up the **Senthamizh Sorpirappiyal Agaramuthali (Tamil Etymological Dictionary) Project**, and Pavanar became its **first director**.
- **Works:** more than 35 books, including **Oppiyal Mozhinool** (comparative linguistics), **Tamilar Varalaru** (history of the Tamils), **Tamil Ilakkiya Varalaru** (history of Tamil literature) and **Thiravidathai** (Tamil as the mother of the Dravidian languages).
- **Views:** he held that Tamil originated in a land in the south now under the sea (Kumari Nadu / Lemuria). Mainstream linguists, geologists and historians do not accept this theory – note it as his view, not as an established fact.
- **Honour:** India Post issued a commemorative stamp on him in **February 2006**.

Pavalareru Perunchitranar

Perunchitranar (1933–1995), a student of Devaneya Pavanar, was the poet-journalist of the movement. Through his journals he took pure Tamil to ordinary readers and to children.

- **Born: 10 March 1933** at **Samuthiram** village in **Salem district**; birth name Rajamanickam (also called Duraimanickam). **Died: 11 June 1995**.
- **Title:** known as by the title **Pavalareru**.
- **Thenmozhi:** his pure Tamil journal, run with **Devaneya Pavanar as special editor**.
- **Thamizhchittu:** a pure Tamil journal for **children**, founded and edited by him; he also ran **Tamil Nilam**.
- **Works:** the poetry collections **Kanichaaru** (in volumes) and **Koyyaakkani**, the pure Tamil short epic **Aiyai**, and the Thirukkural commentary **Thirukkural Meypporulurai**.
- **Agitations:** jailed during the **anti-Hindi agitation of 1965**, under MISA during the **Emergency (1976)**, and many other times.
- **Recognition:** the Government of Tamil Nadu has nationalised his works.

Other Propagators

- **Bharathidasan** (the "Revolutionary Poet") supported pure Tamil and spread it through his poems.
- **Subramania Siva** supported the pure Tamil idea in his journal Gnanabanu.
- **Dravidian movement:** historians note that Periyar's Self-Respect Movement and later C. N. Annadurai gave many of the movement's ideas a wider social and political voice.

Key People of the Movement

Person	Years	Contribution
Parithimar Kalaignar (V. G. Suryanarayana Sastri)	1870–1903	Pointed out Sanskrit influence on Tamil; first demanded classical status (1902); took a Tamil name
Pandithurai Thevar	Founder, 1901	Madurai Tamil Sangam (Fourth Tamil Sangam)
T. V. Umamaheswaram Pillai (Tamilavel)	1883–1941	President of Karanthai Tamil Sangam; Tamil Pozhil (1925)
Maraimalai Adigal	1876–1950	Began the movement in 1916; father of Tamil linguistic purism
Neelambikai Ammaiyar	Daughter of Maraimalai Adigal	Important role in founding the movement; Vadachol Tamil Agaravarisai
Devaneya Pavanar	1902–1981	Mozhi Gnayiru; first director of the Etymological Dictionary Project (1974); Senthamizh Selvar (1979)
Pavalareru Perunchitranar	1933–1995	Thenmozhi, Thamizhchittu; Kanichaaru, Aiyai
Bharathidasan	Poet	Spread pure Tamil through poetry

Journals of the Movement

Journal	Linked to	Key fact
Gnanasagaram → Arivukkadal	Maraimalai Adigal	Started 1902; renamed in pure Tamil
Senthamizh	Madurai Tamil Sangam	Journal of the Fourth Tamil Sangam
Tamil Pozhil	Karanthai Tamil Sangam	Started 1925
Senthamizh Selvi	Kazhagam (Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society)	Monthly journal of the Kazhagam
Thenmozhi	Perunchitranar	Pavanar was special editor
Thamizhchittu	Perunchitranar	Pure Tamil journal for children

From Movement to State Policy

Ideas first spread by societies and journals were later taken up by the State.

SHANMUGAM IAS ACADEMY
www.shanmugamiasacademy.in

Year	Step	Significance
1956	**Tamil Nadu Official Language Act** passed on **27 December 1956** (published in the Gazette on 23 January 1957)	Tamil became the official language of the State
1969	Madras State renamed **Tamil Nadu** (with effect from 14 January 1969)	The State took a Tamil name
1974	**Tamil Etymological Dictionary Project** set up by the State Government	Devaneya Pavanar first director; scientific study of Tamil word origins
1981	**Tamil University**, Thanjavur, established on 15 September 1981	Higher research in Tamil language, arts and culture
2004	Tamil declared a **classical language** by the Government of India (12 October 2004)	National recognition of the antiquity of Tamil

The State also coins and publishes Tamil technical and administrative terms and has nationalised the works of many Tamil scholars, including Perunchitranar, so that they are freely available.

Tamil as a Classical Language (2004)

- **Early demands:** Parithimar Kalaignar (1902) and a resolution of the Karanthai Tamil Sangam (1919/1920).
- **Declaration:** the Government of India created the category of "classical language" and declared **Tamil** the **first classical language** on **12 October 2004**.
- **Criteria in 2004:** (1) high antiquity of early texts / recorded history of **over 1,000 years**; (2) a body of ancient literature valued as heritage by generations of speakers; (3) an original literary tradition not borrowed from another speech community.
- **Revision (2005):** the antiquity requirement was raised to **1,500–2,000 years**; Sanskrit was declared classical in 2005. The criteria were revised again by the Linguistic Experts Committee on 25 July 2024.
- **Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT):** began as the Centre of Excellence for Classical Tamil at the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysuru, and moved to **Chennai in 2008** as CICT, an autonomous body under the Union Ministry of Education; its own campus at **Perumbakkam** opened in 2022.
- **Benefits of the status:** national awards for scholars of classical languages, university chairs, research centres and translation of ancient texts.

Language	Year declared classical
Tamil	**2004 (12 October) – first**
Sanskrit	2005
Telugu and Kannada	2008
Malayalam	2013
Odia	2014
Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, Bengali	October 2024 (total now 11)

Impact on Tamil Usage

- **Vocabulary:** many Sanskrit-derived words gave way to Tamil words in writing, speeches, textbooks and the media. Coinages of pure Tamil words by Pavanar and others have entered common use.
- **Names:** scholars, poets and ordinary families began to take Tamil names (Vedachalam → Maraimalai; Suryanarayana Sastri → Parithimar Kalaignar), and journals and societies took Tamil names.
- **Reference works:** lists and dictionaries of borrowed words with Tamil equivalents (Neelambikai's Vadachol Tamil Agaravarisai) and the State's Etymological Dictionary.
- **Education and administration:** Tamil became the official language of the State (1956); Tamil terms were prepared for administration and technical subjects.
- **Identity:** the movement strengthened the idea that Tamil is an independent and ancient language, which fed into the anti-Hindi agitations and the demand for classical status.
- **Debate:** some writers preferred a simple, widely understood Tamil rather than strict purity, and some theories linked to the movement (such as Lemuria) are not accepted by mainstream scholars. A balanced answer mentions both the achievements and these debates.

Common examples asked in General Tamil (borrowed word → Tamil word):

Borrowed word	Pure Tamil word	Meaning
Sareeram / Deham	Udambu / Yakkai	Body
Sirasu	Thalai	Head
Jalam	Neer	Water
Aarambam	Thodakkam	Beginning
Santhosham	Magizhchi	Joy
Abhipraayam	Karuthu	Opinion

Timeline of the Pure Tamil Movement

Year / date	Event
1578	Thambiran Vanakkam published from Goa – first Tamil printed book (TN textbook; some sources give 1577)
1709	Ziegenbalg's printing press at Tranquebar (TN textbook; some histories give 1712)
1812	Thirukkural printed
1816	F. W. Ellis on the separate South Indian language family
1856	Robert Caldwell's Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian languages
1887–1904	U. V. Swaminatha Iyer publishes Seevaka Sinthamani, Silappathikaram, Manimekalai, Pathitrupathu
1901 (14 Sep)	Madurai Tamil Sangam founded by Pandithurai Thevar
1902	Parithimar Kalaignar writes that Tamil is a classical language; Maraimalai Adigal starts Gnanasagaram
1911 (14 May)	Karanthai Tamil Sangam founded at Thanjavur
1916	Maraimalai Adigal begins the Pure Tamil Movement
1919/1920	Karanthai Tamil Sangam resolution for classical status
1920	South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society (Kazhagam) founded at Tirunelveli
1925	Tamil Pozhil started by the Karanthai Tamil Sangam
1956 (27 Dec)	Tamil Nadu Official Language Act
1965	Anti-Hindi agitation; Perunchitranar jailed
1969 (14 Jan)	Madras State becomes Tamil Nadu
1974	Tamil Etymological Dictionary Project; Devaneya Pavanar director
1979	Pavanar receives the title Senthamizh Selvar
1981 (15 Jan)	Devaneya Pavanar dies at Madurai
1981 (15 Sep)	Tamil University, Thanjavur
1995 (11 Jun)	Perunchitranar dies
2004 (12 Oct)	Tamil declared India's first classical language
2008	Central Institute of Classical Tamil moves to Chennai
2024 (Oct)	Five more classical languages; total 11

Writing Mains Answers on the Pure Tamil Movement (Group 1 / Group 2)

Descriptive papers ask about the Tamil renaissance, language movements and Tamil scholars. Build your answer around these points and support each with a fact from the notes above.

Origin and growth of the Thanithamizh Iyakkam (about 150–250 words)

- **Introduction:** a language movement to use native Tamil words in place of borrowed (mainly Sanskrit) words; began in 1916 under Maraimalai Adigal.
- **Background:** Tamil renaissance – printing, Ellis (1816) and Caldwell (1856), editions of the classics by C. W. Damodaram Pillai and U. V. Swaminatha Iyer; Parithimar Kalaignar's classical-language claim (1902).
- **Launch:** Maraimalai Adigal's renamings (Maraimalai, Adigal, Arivukkadal, Podhu Nilaik Kazhagam); Neelambikai's dictionary of Sanskrit words with Tamil equivalents.
- **Growth:** Karanthai Tamil Sangam (1911), Kazhagam (1920), Devaneya Pavanar's etymological work, Perunchitranar's Thenmozhi and Thamizhchittu, poets like Bharathidasan.
- **Conclusion:** from a scholar's pledge it became a mass sentiment and then State policy.

Impact of the Pure Tamil Movement on Tamil society and administration (about 150–200 words)

- **Language:** pure Tamil words in writing, media and schoolbooks; Tamil personal names.
- **Institutions:** Tamil Nadu Official Language Act, 1956; Etymological Dictionary Project, 1974; Tamil University, 1981.
- **National recognition:** classical language status in 2004; CICT in Chennai (2008).
- **Identity and politics:** fed into the non-Brahmin and Dravidian movements and the anti-Hindi agitations.
- **Evaluation:** enriched Tamil vocabulary and confidence; debates remain on strict purity versus easy communication and on some theories such as Lemuria.

Tamil as a classical language (about 100–150 words)

- Demands: Parithimar Kalaignar (1902), Karanthai Tamil Sangam (1919/1920).
- Declared on 12 October 2004 – India's first classical language; criteria of over 1,000 years antiquity, ancient literature, original tradition.
- Results: CICT, awards, research chairs; 11 classical languages by 2024.

SHANMUGAM IAS ACADEMY
www.shanmugamiasacademy.in

Practice: Match the Following

Item	Match
1916	Pure Tamil Movement begins
Karanthai Tamil Sangam	14 May 1911, Thanjavur
Madurai Tamil Sangam	Pandithurai Thevar, 1901
Tamil Pozhil	Karanthai Tamil Sangam journal, 1925
Thamizhchittu	Children's journal of Perunchitranar
Mozhi Gnayiru	Devaneya Pavanar
Vadachol Tamil Agaravarisai	Neelambikai Ammaiyar
1974	Tamil Etymological Dictionary Project
12 October 2004	Tamil declared classical language
Perumbakkam, Chennai	Central Institute of Classical Tamil campus

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **1916 vs 1911:** 1916 is the start of the Pure Tamil Movement; 1911 is the founding of the Karanthai Tamil Sangam.
- **Fourth Tamil Sangam:** the Madurai Tamil Sangam of 1901 (Pandithurai Thevar) – not the Karanthai Tamil Sangam.
- **First demand for classical status:** Parithimar Kalaignar (1902) – not Maraimalai Adigal.
- **Pavanar vs Perunchitranar:** Pavanar (1902–1981) was the linguist and teacher; Perunchitranar (1933–1995) was his student, the poet and editor of Thenmozhi and Thamizhchittu.
- **Thenmozhi:** Perunchitranar's journal, with Pavanar as special editor.
- **Classical language year:** 2004 for Tamil; 2005 is Sanskrit.
- **Antiquity criterion:** over 1,000 years in 2004; raised to 1,500–2,000 years in 2005.
- **Official Language Act:** 1956 (Tamil Nadu Official Language Act) – not 1967.

SHANMUGAM IAS ACADEMY
www.shanmugamiasacademy.in

Quick Revision Table

Topic	Fact
Meaning	Thanithamizh = Tamil without borrowed words
Founder	Maraimalai Adigal, 1916 (father of Tamil linguistic purism)
Important role in founding	Neelambikai Ammaiyar (daughter)
First classical claim	Parithimar Kalaignar, 1902
Madurai Tamil Sangam	14 Sep 1901, Pandithurai Thevar; journal Senthamizh
Karanthai Tamil Sangam	14 May 1911; Umamaheswaranar; Tamil Pozhil (1925)
Kazhagam	1920, Tirunelveli; Senthamizh Selvi
Devaneya Pavanar	1902–1981; Mozhi Gnayiru; Senthamizh Selvar (1979); Etymological Project director (1974)
Perunchitranar	1933–1995; Samuthiram, Salem; Thenmozhi, Thamizhchittu; Kanichaaru, Aiyai
Official Language Act	27 December 1956
Tamil University	15 September 1981, Thanjavur
Classical language	12 October 2004 – first in India
CICT	Chennai from 2008; Perumbakkam campus 2022

TNPSC Key Points (PYQ-style facts)

- Pure Tamil Movement (Thanithamizh Iyakkam) began in 1916 under Maraimalai Adigal.
- TN textbook: Maraimalai Adigal – father of Tamil linguistic purism; Neelambikai played an important role in founding the movement.
- Renamings: Vedachalam → Maraimalai; Gnanasagaram → Arivukkadal; Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam → Podhu Nilaik Kazhagam.
- Parithimar Kalaignar (V. G. Suryanarayana Sastri) – first to argue Tamil is a classical language (1902).
- Madurai Tamil Sangam: 14 September 1901, Pandithurai Thevar.
- Karanthai Tamil Sangam: 14 May 1911, Thanjavur; journal Tamil Pozhil (1925).
- Kazhagam (South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society): 1920, Tirunelveli.
- Devaneya Pavanar: Mozhi Gnayiru; Senthamizh Selvar (1979); director of the Tamil Etymological Dictionary Project (1974); died 15 January 1981, Madurai.
- Perunchitranar: born 10 March 1933, Samuthiram (Salem); Thenmozhi, Thamizhchittu; Kanichaaru; died 11 June 1995.
- Tamil Nadu Official Language Act: 27 December 1956.
- Tamil University, Thanjavur: 15 September 1981.
- Tamil: first classical language, 12 October 2004; criterion then – over 1,000 years antiquity.
- CICT moved to Chennai in 2008; 11 classical languages after October 2024.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Thanithamizh Iyakkam (Pure Tamil Movement)?

It is a language movement that asks Tamil speakers and writers to use native Tamil words in place of borrowed words, mainly words taken from Sanskrit and later from English. It took a definite form in 1916 under Maraimalai Adigal and was carried forward by Neelambikai Ammaiyar, Devaneya Pavanar, Pavalareru Perunchitranar and many Tamil journals and societies.

Who started the Pure Tamil Movement and in which year?

Maraimalai Adigal (born Vedachalam, 1876–1950) started it in 1916. He began with himself: Vedachalam became Maraimalai, the title Swami became Adigal, his journal Gnanasagaram became Arivukkadal and his society at Pallavaram was renamed Podhu Nilaik Kazhagam. The Tamil Nadu school textbook calls him the father of Tamil linguistic purism; his daughter Neelambikai Ammaiyar helped found the movement.

What was Devaneya Pavanar's contribution to the movement?

Devaneya Pavanar (1902–1981) gave the movement a scholarly base through word-origin (etymological) studies. He argued that pure Tamil equivalents exist for borrowed words, wrote more than 35 books including Oppiyal Mozhinool, and in 1974 became the first director of the Tamil Nadu Government's Tamil Etymological Dictionary Project (Senthamizh Sorpirappiyal Agaramuthali). The State Government gave him the title Senthamizh Selvar in 1979.

When was Tamil declared a classical language and why is it important?

The Government of India declared Tamil a classical language on 12 October 2004; it was the first Indian language to receive the status. The demand was first raised by Parithimar Kalaignar in 1902. The status led to central support for research, awards and the Central Institute of Classical Tamil, which moved to Chennai in 2008. By October 2024 India had 11 classical languages.

How did the Pure Tamil Movement change the use of Tamil?

Many Sanskrit-derived words in writing and speech were replaced by Tamil words; people, journals and societies took Tamil names; Tamil journals such as Thenmozhi and Thamizhchittu spread pure Tamil to adults and children; and the State took up Tamil development through the Official Language Act, 1956, the Tamil Etymological Dictionary Project (1974) and the Tamil University, Thanjavur (1981). Many Tamil words now common in government use and the media spread through this campaign.

Practise this topic with our free Tamil quizzes, follow daily current affairs (English) and Tamil current affairs, and see our TNPSC PYQ books such as the Tamil Nadu Administration PYQ book and the General Tamil PYQ book. For classroom and online TNPSC coaching at Gandhipuram, Coimbatore and Anna Nagar, Madurai, see our TNPSC course page or call 99941 46662 (Coimbatore) / 73059 47122 (Madurai).

Practice questions

1. In "Thanithamizh", what does "thani" mean?

A. Old
B. Separate / pure
C. Simple
D. Poetic

2. The Pure Tamil Movement mainly sought to avoid words borrowed from which language?

A. Sanskrit
B. Persian
C. Portuguese
D. Telugu

3. Who first argued, in 1902, that Tamil is a classical language?

A. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer
B. Maraimalai Adigal
C. Parithimar Kalaignar
D. Devaneya Pavanar

4. What was the original name of Parithimar Kalaignar?

A. V. G. Suryanarayana Sastri
B. Vedachalam
C. Rajamanickam
D. Devanesan

5. Who founded the Madurai Tamil Sangam, called the "Fourth Tamil Sangam", in 1901?

A. Umamaheswaranar
B. Pandithurai Thevar
C. Thiruvarangam Pillai
D. Bhaskara Sethupathi

6. On which date was the Karanthai Tamil Sangam founded?

A. 14 September 1901
B. 14 May 1911
C. 15 July 1916
D. 27 December 1956

7. Which journal did the Karanthai Tamil Sangam start in 1925?

A. Senthamizh
B. Tamil Pozhil
C. Thenmozhi
D. Arivukkadal

SHANMUGAM IAS ACADEMY
www.shanmugamiasacademy.in

8. Which "Tamilavel" led the Karanthai Tamil Sangam as its president?

A. T. V. Umamaheswaram Pillai
B. C. W. Damodaram Pillai
C. Pandithurai Thevar
D. Subbiah Pillai

9. Who is known as "Mozhi Gnayiru" (Sun of linguistics)?

A. Perunchitranar
B. Bharathidasan
C. Devaneya Pavanar
D. Parithimar Kalaignar

10. In which year did the Tamil Nadu Government set up the Tamil Etymological Dictionary (Senthamizh Sorpirappiyal Agaramuthali) Project?

A. 1956
B. 1969
C. 1974
D. 1981

11. Which title did the Tamil Nadu Government confer on Devaneya Pavanar in 1979?

A. Kalaimamani
B. Senthamizh Selvar
C. Tamilavel
D. Pavalareru

12. Where did Devaneya Pavanar die on 15 January 1981?

A. Chennai
B. Madurai
C. Salem
D. Thanjavur

13. At which college did Perunchitranar study under Devaneya Pavanar?

A. Pachaiyappa's College
B. Salem Municipal College
C. Madras Christian College
D. Annamalai University

14. Which pure Tamil journal for children did Perunchitranar run?

A. Thenmozhi
B. Thamizhchittu
C. Senthamizh Selvi
D. Tamil Pozhil

SHANMUGAM IAS ACADEMY
www.shanmugamiasacademy.in

15. Who was the special editor of Perunchitranar's journal Thenmozhi?

A. Maraimalai Adigal
B. Devaneya Pavanar
C. Bharathidasan
D. Umamaheswaranar

16. Perunchitranar's birthplace, Samuthiram, is in which district?

A. Tirunelveli
B. Salem
C. Thanjavur
D. Nagapattinam

17. Which of these is a work of Perunchitranar?

A. Oppiyal Mozhinool
B. Kanichaaru
C. Vadachol Tamil Agaravarisai
D. Manonmaniyam

18. Where and when was the South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society ("Kazhagam") founded?

A. Madurai, 1901
B. Tirunelveli, 1920
C. Thanjavur, 1911
D. Chennai, 1956

19. On which date was the Tamil Nadu Official Language Act passed?

A. 26 January 1950
B. 27 December 1956
C. 14 January 1969
D. 15 September 1981

20. When was the Tamil University, Thanjavur, established?

A. 15 September 1981
B. 14 May 1911
C. 12 October 2004
D. 15 January 1981

21. On which date did the Government of India declare Tamil a classical language?

A. 12 October 2004
B. 25 November 2005
C. 31 October 2008
D. 3 October 2024

SHANMUGAM IAS ACADEMY
www.shanmugamiasacademy.in

22. What antiquity criterion was set for classical status in 2004?

A. Over 500 years

B. Over 1,000 years

C. 1,500–2,000 years

D. Over 3,000 years

23. In which year did the Central Institute of Classical Tamil move from Mysuru to Chennai?

A. 2004

B. 2006

C. 2008

D. 2022

24. Match: (a) Madurai Tamil Sangam (b) Karanthai Tamil Sangam (c) Pure Tamil Movement (d) Kazhagam — 1. 1911 2. 1920 3. 1901 4. 1916

A. a-3, b-1, c-4, d-2

B. a-1, b-3, c-4, d-2

C. a-3, b-1, c-2, d-4

D. a-4, b-1, c-3, d-2

25. Consider: (i) Tamil was India's first classical language. (ii) Telugu was the second classical language. (iii) After October 2024 there are 11 classical languages. Which are correct?

A. (i) and (ii) only

B. (i) and (iii) only

C. (ii) and (iii) only

D. All three

Answers with explanations

1. **B) Separate / pure** – Thani means separate or pure – Tamil without borrowed words.
2. **A) Sanskrit** – Its main target was Sanskrit-derived words; later English words too.
3. **C) Parithimar Kalaignar** – Parithimar Kalaignar made the first recorded claim in 1902.
4. **A) V. G. Suryanarayana Sastri** – V. G. Suryanarayana Sastri turned his Sanskrit name into Parithimar Kalaignar.
5. **B) Pandithurai Thevar** – Pandithurai Thevar founded it on 14 September 1901.
6. **B) 14 May 1911** – It was founded at Karanthai, Thanjavur, on 14 May 1911.
7. **B) Tamil Pozhil** – The Karanthai Tamil Sangam started Tamil Pozhil in 1925.
8. **A) T. V. Umamaheswaram Pillai** – Tamilavel Umamaheswaranar (1883–1941) was its president.
9. **C) Devaneya Pavanar** – Devaneya Pavanar is called Mozhi Gnayiru.
10. **C) 1974** – It was set up in 1974 with Pavanar as its first director.
11. **B) Senthamizh Selvar** – The State Government gave him the title Senthamizh Selvar in 1979.
12. **B) Madurai** – Pavanar died at Madurai on 15 January 1981.
13. **B) Salem Municipal College** – Pavanar taught him at Salem Municipal College.
14. **B) Thamizhchittu** – Thamizhchittu was for children; Thenmozhi was his main journal.

15. **B) Devaneya Pavanar** – Devaneya Pavanar served as special editor of Thenmozhi.

16. **B) Salem** – He was born at Samuthiram, Salem district, on 10 March 1933.

17. **B) Kanichaaru** – Kanichaaru is his poetry collection; Oppiyal Mozhinool is Pavanar's.

18. **B) Tirunelveli, 1920** – The Kazhagam was founded at Tirunelveli in 1920.

19. **B) 27 December 1956** – It was passed on 27 December 1956 and gazetted on 23 January 1957.

20. **A) 15 September 1981** – The State Government established it on 15 September 1981.

21. **A) 12 October 2004** – 12 October 2004 – Tamil became India's first classical language.

22. **B) Over 1,000 years** – Over 1,000 years in 2004; raised to 1,500–2,000 years in 2005.

23. **C) 2008** – It moved to Chennai in 2008; the Perumbakkam campus came in 2022.

24. **A) a-3, b-1, c-4, d-2** – Madurai 1901, Karanthai 1911, Pure Tamil 1916, Kazhagam 1920.

25. **B) (i) and (iii) only** – Sanskrit was second (2005); Telugu came in 2008.

Shanmugam IAS Academy – your next step

- **Courses:** TNPSC Group 1, 2 / 2A (Prelims + Mains), Group 4, UPSC / IAS, Bank, SSC, SI – Coimbatore · Madurai · Online – https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/fees
- **Books (PDF):** TNPSC PYQ books, UPSC books – https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/study-materials
- **More free PDFs:** https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/free-pdf-download · This page: https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/tnpsc-notes/thanithamizh-iyakkam/en

Admissions – call / WhatsApp: 99941 46662 · 99944 27714 · www.shanmugamiasacademy.in