



### Tamil Chair Inc. – Board

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## What does a chair mean?

*An endowed educational chair is an academic unit that gets instituted under a specific Department of studies in an institution of Higher Education with the financial support from private donors. and it lasts as long as the University exists.*

## What is Tamil Chair, Inc.?

*Harvard University has reviewed and accepted a proposal to institute a “Sangam Tamil Chair” in the Department of South Asian Studies with the primary focus on the studies of the Tamil Sangam Literature, in an effort to promote the significance of Tamil language and share the rich literature with the enlightened minds and souls of the rest of world! To raise funds to endow the Chair, Tamil Chair Inc was set up. Tamil Chair Inc. is a non-profit 501 (C) (3) organization. Any donations given to Tamil Chair, Inc. are tax deductible.*

## What is the need for a Tamil Chair?

*Tamil language has one of the oldest written traditions in all of Asia and boasts a rich body of literary work dating back 2,500 years. Tamil has been accorded with a prestigious recognition as one of the seven classic languages (Greek, Sanskrit, Latin, Hebrew, Persian, **Tamil** and Chinese), and it is one of the very few that has survived all the way through to the modern world since its beginning. Currently, Tamil is the 20th most commonly-spoken language (by 80 million people) in the world, with vibrant literatures for over 2 thousand years.*

*Literature represents the culture and tradition of a language or people, and it provides a kind of blueprint of human civilization. Thus far the global reach of Tamil literature is so limited, and for its ancient and Classic standing, Tamil literature deserves to be critically looked from new and diverse perspectives and the resulting knowledge needs to be shared across other cultures for mutual benefits.*

*So the purpose of this chair is multifold. First, it is a matter of great prestige for Tamils to have our language taught at the world’s most prestigious university which attracts brilliant students from all over the world. There is also a need for research in ancient classical Tamil literature. Harvard will produce Tamil scholars who will be trained in research methodologies.*



*The 21st century has turned to Asia as a center of international trade, culture, critical inquiry, and academic institutions globally have shown great interest in establishing programs to focus on a particular Language to widen the shared understanding of the traditions, culture, intellectual and social practices behind it. It is about time that we as Tamils find ways and means to share universally the beauty and richness of Tamil. And, if not now, when?*

## Is Sangam literature the only Tamil that will be taught?

*No. Sangam literature and other Tamil literature will be taught. Since Sangam literature is the basis of all later literature including our religious literature, all related literature will be taught.*

## Why at Harvard?

*Harvard University, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, is the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States and considered as one of the celebrated citadels of Higher Education for the global community. Representing many different countries, languages, and research interests, Harvard functions as a premier academic hub promoting great diversity and intellectual vitality, and no other university in the world can match its scale. Harvard has the top-class academic faculty which makes it easier to recruit very well-known scholars and experts in any field. Being primarily a research university, Harvard provides a great opportunity for Tamil scholars, researchers, students and enthusiasts to advance the understanding of Tamil Sangam Literature and promote its glory to worldwide learning community.*

## Are students interested in learning Tamil at Harvard?

*Yes. There are currently students who are taught Tamil by Mr. Jonathan Ripley, who was trained by Dr. Norman Cutler at the University of Chicago. The students approached Harvard University requesting Tamil studies and the university hired Mr. Jonathan Ripley as a preceptor to teach Tamil. Currently, there is not a professorship for Tamil. Having a professor position will create higher studies and research in Tamil. About half a million Tamils live in North America and Harvard University has few hundred Tamil students. There are close to 50 accredited Tamil schools all over the U.S. and many students will take up Tamil studies.*

## How long will Harvard teach Tamil?

Once the Chair is endowed, Tamil will be taught as long as Harvard University exists.



## What are the benefits of Tamil Chair?

*The scope of the academic work for the Department of South Asian Studies (<http://sas.fas.harvard.edu/>) in Harvard is quite broad and currently Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Tamil are the Indian languages that are being taught. Having a dedicated **Tamil Chair Professorship** will help explore the Tamil studies on a much deeper level through a rigorous approach executing formal academic research processes to bring out the traditions, the cultural, intellectual, and social practices of the Sangam period that are barely explored as of now. This will elicit Tamil's long tenured literary tradition to the peer academic communities and establish it's much deserved recognition as a Classic language.*

*For all other Classic and widely spoken languages, there is so much research and progressive work that is done at various international academic centers. It is quite urgent and highly imperative that the same world class effort is put forth for Tamil to expand its stature and reach. It will enhance not only the chances for continual use but also the newly embraced recognition from the global populace.*

*While formal education and research will continue, being in Harvard, this Chair could possibly become the guiding light for all other institutions that has engaged in similar work, and the collective academic effort will further strengthen the language and draw new students from India and other countries in great numbers assuring us the Tamil language's legacy to survive and grow.*

## Who is spearheading this fundraising effort?

***Dr. S.T. Sambandam** and **Dr.V. Janakiraman** are the two seed donors who have made generous commitment to help secure the endowed chair at Harvard and are spearheading this effort at a very high level. They approached Harvard University and obtained approval in July 2015 to set up a Tamil Sangam chair.*

*Dr. Janakiraman (hails from Vadakandam, Thiruvavur) is a practicing Cardiologist in Pennsylvania and has been in US since 1975.*

*Dr. Sambandam (hails from Thirukudanthai, Thanjavur) is an Oncologist residing in Cranston, Rhode Island and has been in US since 1971.*

*While nurturing a sibling-like close relationship mutually, they are very proud of their Tamil heritage and passionate about everything related to Tamil and Tamil literature.*

***Mrs. Vaidehi Herbert, Hawaii, USA**, has translated the 18 Sangam books, 7 PathinenKeezhKanakku books, Muthollaayiram and Paandikovai to English. She has also translated Tagore's Gitanjali to Tamil. She conducts 2-day workshops in the U.S. and Canada for beginners. Her goal is to share the beauty of the poems with all Tamils ([learnsangamtamil.com](http://learnsangamtamil.com)). She ignited the initial fire in Dr. Janakiraman. At her request, Mrs. Mallika Janakiraman, Dr. Janakiraman, Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Sambandam and Dr. Sambandam decided to set up a chair at Harvard. The target goal is a large sum and with that in mind, the fundraising effort will span across the globe. In addition to the above, numerous people have pledged their active engagement and support for this noble cause and to work on this huge effort.*

## What is the recruitment process and timeline?



தமிழ் இடுக்கை  
TAMIL CHAIR

The total commitment to Harvard for instituting the **Tamil Chair** is Six Million US Dollars. Upon receipt of the entire funds, Harvard will begin an international search for the right candidate to assume the Tamil Chair. The candidate has to meet Harvard's stringent expectations on true scholarship in Tamil, necessary academic training, probing mind to do world class research, capacity to produce high quality articles for publications and above all the willingness to be an inspiring teacher and mentor for the future students and peers.

## How can you help in this historic effort?

Both Dr. S.T. Sambandam and Dr.V. Janakiraman have already made the seed contributions of **\$500,000 each** amounting to \$1 million toward the Tamil Chair funds. We have to raise the remaining \$5 million through various means of individual and public contributions.

Your contribution is eligible for **tax-deduction** in both US and Canada. So please contribute generously for this noble cause. Also kindly spread the word among your friends, family and other Tamil enthusiasts, and encourage them to contribute generously. Some employers may match the employee contribution for this kind of effort and please explore those options to augment the fund generation. By being part of this great effort, you all will become a part of the Tamil history. You can send your contributions by one of the options under DONATE.

## Why have multiple entities to Donate to the cause?

It is a matter of preference and convenience. You can pay directly to Harvard University or to Tamil Chair Inc. We prefer you make the check to Tamil Chair Inc. or even if you prefer to make the check to Harvard, mail it to Tamil Chair Inc. Mailing to us helps us to make an entry in our Donor list and then forward the amount to Harvard. Harvard does not have a separate bank account for this chair. So to ensure that the check is properly credited to Tamil Chair, we follow this process. It is just to make tracking easier.

## Will 100% of donated amounts given to Tamil Chair, Inc. go to Harvard University?

Absolutely, Yes. 100% of your donations will go to Harvard University for the Tamil chair. Tamil Chair Inc. is run by volunteer board members who bear its operational costs and sponsor promotional events and expenses. Please note that if you donate through a credit card, there is a transaction cost deducted by the credit card bank. Tamil Chair gets only the amount minus the transaction cost.