

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Classical Tamil Winter School

organised by the Centre of the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient in Pondicherry,

2nd - 27th February 2004

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A sequel to the first Winter School

This year, in January-February 2003, the Classical Tamil Winter School took place for the first time in Pondicherry. For four weeks the participants had the opportunity to study texts from a wide range of Classical Tamil literature (mostly) of the first millenium. The morning sessions were taught by European teachers, the afternoons were devoted to reading classes with the Pandits of the Centre. While this course was designed more or less for beginner's, we now offer a more advanced course scheduled for next winter: a four weeks reading group on one particular text, the *Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi*. This courtly epic, predominantly of the erotic genre, though not lacking in heroic elements either, is one of the important links between the early Cankam literature and later literary developments. While clearly tied to the oldest tradition in its themes and imagery, it represents a new phase of the language from a morphological and syntactical point of view, and thus probably has to be dated late into the first millenium. Although quite long (more than 3000 verses) and complex this text is nevertheless fairly comprehensible, and as an additional virtue it is endowed with a commentary by Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar, perhaps the greatest of the medieval commentators and scholiasts, to whom we also owe not only several commentaries on Cankam works, but also one on nearly the whole *Tolkāppiyam*. In other words, by closely reading the *Cintāmaṇi* we will pursue three goals in one:

- trying to understand a pre-medieval Tamil work of high aesthetic range,
- getting an introduction into the work with the commentary idiom, something indispensable and yet so often at least as complicated as dealing with the literary works themselves, and moreover, and perhaps most important of all,
- we will get a glimpse at the basic relation between a literary work and its commentary.

Precisely because the text of the *Cintāmaṇi* is comprehensible by itself, we will try to appreciate why Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar was not satisfied with a simple reading, but put a considerable amount of ingenuity into the effort of making things more complicated and, so at least according to some initiates, much more beautiful.