Thiruvalluvar, commonly known as Valluvar, was a celebrated Tamil poet and philosopher. He is best known as the author of Tirukkural (Sacred Couplets), a collection of couplets on ethics, political and economical matters, and love. The text is considered a masterpiece of human thought, compared in India and abroad to the Bible, John Milton's Paradise Lost, and the works of Plato.

Thiruvalluvar was celebrated by the Government of India with a commemorative postage stamp on Feb 15, 1960.

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Tamil language and literature at UC Berkeley is taught by Asst. Professor Vasugi Kailasam and Professor Bharathy S. Rajulu, our Tamil language lecturers.

DR. VASUGI KAILASAM (Ph.D, National University of Singapore) is a scholar of modern Tamil literature. Her research interests include global Tamil literature, visual/ media studies and postcolonial studies. She is currently working on two research projects. The first is a book monograph titled 'Tamil Realisms: Reading the global Tamil novel' and the second, 'Post Millennial Tamil Visual Cultures, arises from her work on global Tamil popular cultural production. Prior to UC Berkeley, Dr. Kailasam was the convener of the Tamil Studies program at the National University of Singapore from 2015-2019.

DR. BHARATHY S. RAJULU (Ph.D, Madurai Kamaraj University) has been teaching Tamil language and literature for 30 years. Before coming to Berkeley, she ran the American Institute of India Studies (AIIS) Tamil program in Madurai and was also the director of AIIS South India. Dr. Bharathy was awarded the Walt Disney Motif Award in 2016 for her work in promoting Tamil Language Studies. In selecting her for the award the jury noted that Dr. Bharathy had "created a career that became a platform of education, empowerment and engagement to many" and that her work at AIIS and UC Berkeley had left "a long lasting impact." In addition to Tamil Dr. Bharathy is also proficient in Telugu.
Tamil Studies at Berkeley

Tamil language and literature has been taught at Berkeley for almost fifty years now. Between 1973 and 2011, the Tamil Studies Program was carefully stewarded by Professor Emottisivu George L. Hart III and Professor Kausalya Hart. The former is best known for such well-known books as The Four Hundred Songs of War and Wisdom and The Poets of The Tamil Anthologies as well as for his argument that Tamil is a classical language, a status that the Government of India formally accorded it on 18 September 2004. The latter wrote the definitive textbook for the teaching of Tamil in North America, Tamil for Beginners. Thanks to the Harts’ energy and dedication, UC Berkeley became a major center of undergraduate and graduate training in Tamil. Many of the Harts’ students went on to very successful careers in academia, government, journalism, medicine, and the other sciences.

Attesting to the significant role played by the Harts in popularizing Tamil across North America, the Bay Area Tamil community endowed a Chair in Tamil Studies at UC Berkeley in the 1990s. Since then, the Tamil Chair has been used to fund a wide range of Tamil-specific programs, conferences, and research fellowships.

The teaching of Tamil language and culture is now led by Professor Vasugi Kailasam (who joined Berkeley in 2018) and Professor S. Bharathy (who joined in 2013). Under their leadership, Tamil classes are not only a permanent fixture in UC Berkeley’s curriculum but have also continued to grow with more students enrolled than ever before and rising graduate student applications. Alongside these developments, the Tamil Studies program has been buoyed by growing connections between UC Berkeley and organizations across North America to help popularize Tamil language learning as well as deepen historical, religious, literary and cultural interest in Tamil and Tamil Nadu as well as other Tamil diaspora spaces around the world. Classes currently taught at UC Berkeley include: Introductory, Intermediate and Advanced Tamil, classes on premodern and modern Tamil literature, and global Tamil literatures, history and culture.

Tamil Studies at Berkeley

The Mission & Future Goals

The Institute for South Asia Studies at Berkeley is raising a $1 million dollar endowment in the name of ARIGNAR ANNA to support Tamil-related activities on campus. With this endowment, we hope to have a bi-annual Tamil Studies conference, create a fellowship program for a Tamil Studies scholar from India, and support Tamil language classes. Success will allow Berkeley to do the following:

- Enable heritage and non-heritage students to take Tamil language classes
- Create a context in which heritage and non-heritage individuals can appreciate and participate in broader Tamil language and cultural activities
- Train the next generation of Tamil-focused scholars and academics
- Foster academic connections between Berkeley and Tamil-focused programs across the world
- Create new and innovative pedagogical materials to encourage the global study of Tamil
- Support on-the-ground research in Tamil Studies
- Increase Tamil language holdings in Berkeley’s world-renowned South Asia collection

For more information please contact:
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To make an online donation in support of Tamil studies please go to:
bity/Berkeley-Tamil-Studies

Tamil Studies at Berkeley

Tamil Studies at Berkeley

Ways to Give

The University of California at Berkeley invites alumni, parents and friends active in the Tamil-speaking community to support Tamil language instruction. Gifts from families, businesses, and other organizations are also encouraged. Gifts may be given in the following forms:

- Ought cash contributions, tax-deductible within certain limits of law
- A pledge to be paid over several years
- Gifts of securities
- Matching gifts by employers. Many companies match gifts from retirees and board members as well as employees
- Bequests

All donations are tax deductible. All individuals donating above $500 will be acknowledged on the Institute’s webpage. All individuals donating above $1000 will also receive a personalized certificate of appreciation from the Institute acknowledging their support.