Merit and Demerit of the Grammatical Method of Vīracōliyam

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Vīracōliyam is one of the major treatises on Tamil grammar,prosody and poetics. It has been widely accepted that this treatise is assignable to the 11th century A.D. Chronologically Vīracōliyam is the second grammar belonging to the Tamil grammatical tradition with Tolkāppiyam (1st century AD) as its sole extant antecedent. Vīracōliyam came a thousand years after Tolkāppiyam ; when the whole language situation and the approach to Tamil grammatical description had changed. The author of Vīracōliyam observed these changes and marked the beginning of distinct trend in Tamil grammatical thought. However he was taken over by the Sanskrit models and failed to explain the basic taxonomic differences between Sanskrit and Tamil. Therefore Vīracōliyam is considered as a spoilt work and lost its place in the Tamil grammatical tradition. However there are some special features in this grammar. Vīracōliyam introduced a new grammatical thought in the Tamil grammatical tradition. Tolkāppiyam concentrates only on literary Tamil. However Vīracōliyam has drawn its attention also to the spoken Tamil. Furthermore it is the only grammar had written by a Buddhist scholar in the Tamil grammatical tradition.Therefore this paper attempts to explore the merit and demerit of the grammatical method of Vīracōliyam.

Key Words: Grammatical Tradition , Taxonomic Differences, Language Situation