

Mr. Chairman, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamilnadu, Hon'ble Minister for Communications and Information Technology, Distinguished Members on the dias, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am extremely happy to participate in the pleasant function. There is a saying that

“You must do today’s job with today’s tool, if you do today’s job with yesterday’s tool tomorrow you will be out of business.”

Government perhaps is the only organisation that can do today’s job with yesterday’s tool and still be in business. The computer is today’s tool.

We have been using 8 bit encoding for Tamil and Indian Languages. It was in 1999 at the Tamil Net 1999 conference that the coding for Tamil was standardised at the initiative of the then Chief Minister Hon'ble Dr Kalaiangar and the Minister for Commerce Hon'ble Thiru. Murasoli Maran. Tamilnadu introduced TAB and TAM. I may mention in passing that Tamil was the only language for which encoding was standardised at that time.

There was an important development in 1991. Unicode Consortium was formed and 16 bit encoding was introduced. The 8 bit encoding for Tamil had only 128 locations and for a language with 247 alphabets, it was great effort developing software with these limitations. In the 16 bit Unicode Encoding there was scope for the languages to get as many locations as may be needed since there were 65536 locations. English has locations for the capital letters and small letters. The Chinese group of languages have 27000 locations. When the Government of India was asked about the requirement for Indian languages, unfortunately the officer incharge at that time has communicated same 128 locations as the requirement. That was the origin of our handicap.

Sir I was a student in early 1960's in the University of Illinois, U.S.A. At the door of the computer centre, there was a small board which was a sort of warning. It said:

“Look alive, you can be replaced by a button”

Sir, many of us in Government could possibly be replaced by a button. Fortunately we continue because of security of service. The lapse on the part of one individual in the concerned Ministry at the centre in 1991 – 92, who was not alive to the emerging development. We are now stuck with 128 locations for Tamil and Indian Languages.

The Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamilnadu even in 1999 wanted that an appropriate coding system with adequate locations for Tamil under the **16 bit Encoding** may be developed for further action.

Tamil Virtual University and its then director Dr Ponnaivaiko and members of the Kanith thamilh Sangam developed the encoding system which was presented at different computer conferences. It was also placed in the website in 2005 for inviting comments from Tamil Diaspora. Adequate reviews, suggestions and criticism were received from different parts of the world where Tamils live.

On 02.09.2006 a conference was organised by the Tamil Virtual University to consider the comments received. A technical committee was also constituted for studying the observations made and for making recommendations.

Briefly stated the recommendations have three major components.

1. A task force may be constituted to review the proposed encoding the comments received about it and make final recommendations for adoption before December 2006.
2. The Government of Tamilnadu may give wide publicity to the proposed encoding inviting comments.
3. An International convention with the participation of Tamil Diaspora may be held and in that convention the final 16 bit all character encoding may be arrived at to enable the Government to take further action to get necessary approval from the Unicode Consortium.

It is our fond hope that the Hon'ble Minister for Communication and Information Technology will be able to persuade to the Unicode Consortium to do justice to Indian languages.

Sir I am of the considered opinion that if a 16 bit all character Tamil encoding for Tamil is achieved it will be almost equal to providing this great language with a pair of wings.

I may say in conclusion that getting Tamil approved as a classical language the Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr Kalaiangar established its ancient glory. The Hon'ble Minister for Communication and Information Technology succeeds in achieving a 16 bit all character encoding for Tamil he would have launched Tamil in the space of modern glory. The 75 million Tamils living all over the globe will remember it with enduring gratitude.

Thanking you.