

## Interview of the Month

### Dr Jeeven Chemen



#### 1. In brief, who is Dr Chemen?

<u>Family background</u>	<u>Educational background</u>	<u>Career Path</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The youngest among six children</li><li>• Married to Danalutchmee, Educator-Secondary and has two children, one daughter (pursuing medical studies at SSR), one son, form III, Royal college Curepipe</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holder of B.A Tamil, Madurai kamaraj University, 1<sup>st</sup> class honours</li><li>• Holder of M.A Tamilology, Madurai kamaraj University, 1<sup>st</sup> class</li><li>• Holder of Ph.D Tamil linguistics, Madurai kamaraj University</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Education officer, MGI ( 1987- 95)</li><li>• Lecturer ( 1995 to 2006)</li><li>• Senior lecturer ( 2006 till date)</li><li>• Chairman, Tamil Speaking Union ( 2009 to date)</li><li>• Ph. D Examiner for a number of Indian universities</li></ul>

#### 2. Concerning your chairmanship at the Tamil Speaking Union – can you take us through this institution and your interest in it?

The Tamil Speaking Union is a para-statal institution enacted by parliament in 2008 to cater for the development of Tamil language, both written and spoken and other relevant issues related to Tamil language through teaching, research and activities. It falls under the Minister of Arts and Culture and is funded by the Government. It has to be stressed that the Tamil Speaking Union is neither a socio cultural organization nor an ONG.

In the 70s, teaching and learning of Tamil language was implemented by SSR in Mauritius at primary level and it slowly moved to secondary level and today, even at tertiary level. So, when

I looked at the performance and the number of the learners at primary, secondary and tertiary level, I found the situation alarming. I took the matter with a number people who were interested with the issues related to the Tamil community and we began to think of practical solutions. Therefore, along with persons such as Dr Vel Pillay and Mr Kadress Pillay (who have contributed tremendously to this issue), I drew the attention of the government, parents and teachers. However, we were faced by retaliation of many teachers who had a different opinion. But the truth remains– after six years of teaching/learning during 600 hours at primary and some 700 hours at secondary up to HSC, there are still so many errors at basic grammatical level, and so many students who could not speak the language and could neither understand the language. And this is when at this critical moment, that the Tamil Speaking Union was created by the Government and I was requested to be the first Chairman of the Board, which I gladly accepted. I strongly believe in this institution and in the work that we have started and that is yet to be completed. It is sure very challenging as there are many constraints, which I will not go in details but I wish that support given to this cause would increase. I seize this opportunity to request our brothers and sisters of the community who wish to help in one way or the other to come forward and contribute to this laudable cause.

**3. So, it's been one year - what have been your major achievements?**

Within this one year of existence, together with members, we have been able to position the TSU in the socio cultural and academic world of Mauritius. It was strategically done and I must say quite fast as well. I am also happy to say that TSU has achieved a lot during this one year and is now well-known in our community.

Another achievement for me is the collaboration of other organizations with the TSU. This collaboration indicates the interest of others in the mission of the TSU.

Tamil language was promoted through lectures, seminars, and other activities organized throughout the year and these were successful. TSU received good support from media, whether newspapers or MBC.

In 2010, TSU also launched the revolutionary project *Spoken Tamil –Basic level course* across the country in 20 centres. This project aims at empowering the learners with basic spoken skills in Tamil language as spoken in native country. Teachers with good speaking skills and professionals are contributing for the smooth running of the project. Tamil Speaking today has more than 900 learners studying the Spoken Tamil course across the country. The results are more than encouraging and many others are expected to join the basic level next year.

Currently, we are now planning for the academic activities for 2012.

**4. There are many organisations like the Tamil Speaking Union. Don't you think that there too many for our community? What are our challenges?**

I agree that there are many organisations. But I believe that each organization has been set up with a specific mission and vision. For instance, MTTF was enacted to cater for religious issues and its main objectives are to ensure a proper distribution of subsidies given by government and to cater good running of the kovils. In the absence of other institutions in the past, it also catered for culture and language to some extent. Then, the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre trust was set up by the government to cater for cultural issues of the community. Thereafter the responsibility to promote cultures rested upon MTCCT rather than MTTF. MTCCT also took care of some of the language issues.

In 2009, Government came up with Tamil Speaking Union. So, today, all the responsibilities to look after tamil language rest upon the TSU.

So, I strongly believe that TSU is focused on the promotion of tamil language and is definitely not overlapping over objectives of other institutions in the community. TSU is independent to a certain extent but when it comes to the community, all organisations should be able to work together and not to create discord.

We have many challenges, among which are education (one failure at CPE,SC,HSC per region is too much), unity and mutual respect among the community, discipline starting at home, religious practices ( we need to know limits and not overdo things), and many more. But to be able to overcome such obstacles, we need to work together, as a community. We need to respect each other and though proper communication, we should be able to live up to those challenges.

**5. Last but not least, what do you think about this idea of an electronic tamil paper?**

I think that it is a highly laudable initiative. I wish to congratulate the whole team and wish them best of luck. The contents should be varied. I however feel that we should still have a hard copy.

**6. Anything you wish to add?**

I would like to place on record the involvement of some people like Mr Barlen Veerasamy (Treasurer and often acting as secretary )and all the coordinators and teachers and of course all other members of the Tamil Speaking Union who in one way or the other help towards achievement of objectives. I am confident that within 2 or 3 generations, we shall retrieve back both the spoken and written

*Interview done by Kobashni*

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