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A Brief History of Tamil "Race Talk"

Racial Discourse, Tamil History, and Social Protest in Tamil South India, 18th Century - Present

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by

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ABSTRACT

A Brief History of Tamil “Race Talk”

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Since the late 19th century, many important non-Brahmin Tamil thinkers, authors, orators, and social movements have used the terms “Dravidian” and “Aryan” to structure their social, religious, political, and cultural statements about Tamil society. Although these various figures and movements represent very different political, social, and cultural interests, they show striking similarities in the ways they describe social, cultural, and political issues in the Tamil present in terms of an ancient racial conflict between indigenous “Dravidian” Tamilians and the invading “Aryans” who imposed Brahmanical Hinduism and its social and cultural values on the Tamil country. This idiom, which I label “Tamil race talk”, casts non-Brahmin Tamilians as the descendants of the ancient Dravidians, a people that established a prosperous civilization in the ancient Tamil country. This ancient Dravidian society was disrupted by the influx of Aryans, who brought with them a self-serving Brahmanical Hindu ideological system by which they unjustly established themselves as superiors- Brahmins- over the indigenous peoples of the Tamil country. Numerous Tamil social movements and thinkers have used and continue to use this conceptual framework to present their social, religious, cultural, and political platforms.

Given the outsize importance of Tamil "race talk" in socially, culturally, and politically influential Tamil discourses of the last two and a half centuries, it is worthwhile to investigate the question of where the terms and concepts found in Tamil race talk originated in the first place, and how it became a fixture of modern non-Brahmin Tamil social thought. This dissertation presents a brief history of Tamil "race talk", beginning with its origins in Western scholarship on Indic peoplehood and missionary writings on Tamil religion, and concluding with its emergence as a Tamil-authored theory of transhistorical Tamil identity and an ideological frame for various Tamil thinkers' conceptions of equity and social progress in contemporary Tamil society. This dissertation draws both from secondary source literature on Tamil history and from close readings of primary source material by both Western and Tamil authors. Tracing this history of ideas offers a wide array of insights into the nuanced meanings of the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" in the major works of social thought associated with these Tamil thinkers and their influential organizations.

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Introduction

> The words "Dravidian" and "Dravidians" are not new products of our imagination. They are historically relevant words that denote our land and our people. They were adopted many thousands of years ago. If you want this to become good and clear to you, go flip through the textbook on the history of the Hindu nation read in our country's schools today. No matter which textbook you pick up, the terms "Dravidian" and "Dravidians" will be on the front page, and their history will be written out. After this, flip to the second page and the titles "Aryan" and "Aryans" will be printed, and their history will be given- whether correctly or not. So, that is to say, although I and others have newly taken them up today, the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" that were imparted to you in your childhood, as well as the findings of research on the true things that happened a great time ago, are nothing new. Because of this, they are the ABCs of the history of our land.
>
> (E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy[1], "Who are the Dravidians?", *Kuḍi Arasu*, 8 May 1948, p. 1)

The above words from E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy, a major 20th-century Tamil social reformist thinker and activist, speak to the critical role that the conceptual categories of "Dravidian" and "Aryan" have played in a wide range of modern Tamil reckonings with ancient Tamil history and transhistorical Tamil identity. While Ramasamy's Self-Respect Movement[2] and Dravidar Kazhagam ("Dravidian Association") promoted some of the 20th century's most influential interpretations of the term "Dravidian" as applicable to contemporary Tamil society, Ramasamy was neither the first nor the last impactful Tamil social thinker or public figure to place great importance on the term "Dravidian" and its implications on Tamil social, cultural, and political identity. Rather, as Ramasamy suggests above, the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" were and are fundamental pieces of the intellectual landscape of the modern (and post-modern) Tamil country. Various other important Tamil organizations from the 20th and 21st centuries, such as Iyothee Thass's Adi

Dravida movement, T.M. Nair and Thyagaraja Chetti's Justice Party, C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Maraimalai Adigal's Pure Tamil Movement[3], and Thol. Thirumavalavan's Viduthalai Ciruthaigal Katchi (VCK), have placed similar ideological and symbolic importance on the term "Dravidian" and the vision of Tamil history that it implies.

Since their emergence in Tamil social thought in the late-19th century, the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" have functioned for Tamil thinkers not only as labels of ancient ethnoracial peoples, but also of contrasting civilizational and moral centers. Many important Tamil thinkers over the last century and a half, including all of the figures and movements mentioned above, have invoked the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" to make social, religious, political, and cultural statements about the Tamil societies of their times. While these thinkers and movements have sometimes radically conflicting agendas and interests, they all use a shared idiom by which they describe social, cultural, and political issues in the Tamil present in terms of an ancient racial conflict between indigenous "Dravidian" Tamilians and the invading "Aryans" who imposed Brahmanical Hinduism and its social and cultural values on the Tamil country. This idiom, which I label "Tamil race talk", casts non-Brahmin Tamilians as the descendants of the ancient Dravidians, a people that established a prosperous civilization in the ancient Tamil country. This ancient Dravidian society was disrupted by the influx of Aryans, who brought with them a self-serving Brahmanical Hindu ideological system by which they unjustly established themselves as superiors- Brahmins- over the indigenous peoples of the Tamil country. Numerous Tamil social movements and

thinkers have used and continue to use this conceptual framework to present their social, religious, cultural, and political platforms.

Given the outsize importance of Tamil "race talk" in socially, culturally, and politically influential Tamil discourses of the last two and a half centuries, it is worthwhile to investigate the question of where Tamil the terms and concepts found in Tamil race talk originated in the first place, and how it became a fixture of modern non-Brahmin Tamil social thought. This dissertation will present a brief history of Tamil "race talk", beginning with its origins in Western scholarship on Indic peoplehood and concluding with its emergence as a Tamil theory of transhistorical Tamil identity and an ideological frame for various Tamil thinkers' conceptions of equity and social progress in contemporary Tamil society. Tracing this history of ideas offers a wide array of insights into the nuanced meanings of the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" in the major works of social thought associated with these Tamil thinkers and their influential organizations.

One of the most valuable of the insights that this line of study can provide is a fuller conceptual and historical understanding of how and why the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" work simultaneously as terms of ethnoracial identity and Brahmin or non-Brahmin caste position in a wide range of Tamil social thought. For instance, although movements like Periyar's Self-Respect Movement and the Justice Party of the 1920s are rightly famous for their critiques of Brahmin privilege in the Tamil country, neither movement uses the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" strictly as labels of Brahmin or non-Brahmin caste affiliation. Rather, essentially all major non-Brahmin Tamil social movements and thinkers of the 20th

and 21st century employ the term "Dravidian" as a term that indicates both a) authentic Tamil historical identity, and b) opposition to Brahmin-centered models of society, politics, religion, or cultural life. This duality of meaning is a product of the complex history of the Dravidian frame in Tamil thought, and it is impossible to understand modern Tamil social thought completely without first understanding this deep conceptual connection.

I intend my description of this history, as well as my theorization of a "Dravidian frame of Tamil history", to complement insightful discussions found in other scholarly works that analyze processes of Tamil cultural, social, and political identity formation that emerged during the British colonial era. These discussions include Sumathi Ramaswamy's discussion of the phenomenon of Tamil devotion (*tamiḻpaṟṟu*)[4], Bernard Bate's analysis of a "Dravidian aesthetic"[5], M.S.S. Pandian's discussion of the formation of the public identity categories of "Brahmin" and "Non-Brahmin"[6], V. Ravi Vaithees's analysis of Neo-Saiva revivalism and Tamil cultural nationalism[7], Thomas Trautmann's studies of "Aryan" and "Dravidian" in the colonial record[8], and V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai's detailed history of non-Brahmin politics and ideology in colonial Madras Presidency[9], among others. This dissertation seeks to complement this body of work by offering an history not only of the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan", but also of the ideas about peoplehood, caste, and civilization that these terms come to encapsulate in modern Tamil social thought.

While at first glance the project of describing Tamil "race talk" may not seem to be relevant outside of the Tamil country, or even to the discipline of Religious Studies in general, the intellectual history that this dissertation charts is fundamentally interwoven with the

processes by which both British colonial scholars and Indian nationalist thinkers constructed a pan-Indian conception of Hinduism grounded in Brahmanical Hindu scriptures. In fact, Tamil race talk may be understood as a cultural, political, and social response to these discourses on Hinduism and Aryan civilization. Whereas Indological scholars and colonial-era Brahmin social organizations argued that the ancient Aryans, the authors of Vedic Hindu scripture, were the progenitors of civilization in ancient India, Tamil reformist thinkers used and use Tamil race talk to argue against the notion that Tamil society is a regional expression of a pan-Indian Hindu civilization. Rather, these thinkers argue, Tamil society was primordially self-contained and self-sufficient in ancient times, and the integration of Tamil people into a society grounded on Brahmanical Hindu values has led to the degeneration of Tamil society. These thinkers go on to present their own formulations of the values on which ancient Dravidian society was founded. For some thinkers, like P. Sundaram Pillai and Maraimalai Adigal, Saiva Hinduism was originally a Tamil religion grounded on the monotheistic worship of Siva, who himself was originally a Tamil god. For Iyothee Thass and his Adi Dravida[10] movement of ex-Paraiyar[11] Tamil Buddhists, ancient Dravidian Tamil society was a righteous Buddhist society, in which the ancestors of today's Paraiyars occupied positions of moral and doctrinal authority. For E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy and thinkers sympathetic to his Self-Respect Movement, ancient Dravidian society was not religious at all: religion, particularly Brahmanical Hindu religion, is mere superstition that has alienated modern-day Dravidians from their rationalist roots.

The regional particularism of the Tamil thought presented in this dissertation should not be seen as a limitation of the scope of its applicability to other regions of the Hindu world.

Rather, I intend this dissertation to bring light the important ways that Tamil modernity has been shaped by projects undertaken by specific groups of Tamil thinkers speaking principally to Tamil audiences. Since the days of Indology, Western scholarship on South Asia has prioritized studying trans-regional phenomena (i.e., Brahmanical scriptures, Brahmanical caste, Brahmanical gods, etc.) over studying the particular features of specific cultural regions or socio-religious communities. Although this tendency has become far less pronounced in today's scholarship on the Tamil country, the Western institutional history of prioritizing trans-regional ways of analyzing Tamil religion, politics, and society has had important implications on the visibility and accessibility of major realms of Tamil social thought in the Western academy. Whereas Western universities have established strong infrastructures to train students to interpret Sanskrit-language Hindu texts, or, in the case of more progressive departments, even to analyze caste dynamics in a specific vernacular Indian environment, these institutional resources do not often lend themselves to the study of a process not easily categorizable according to trans-regional terms like "Hinduism" or "caste". Since at least the late-19th century, the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" have simultaneously indexed caste, race, and nation in Tamil social thought. Isolating caste, race, nation, or some other trans-regional analytic dimension as the chief target of these thinkers' thought runs the risk of discounting the major ways that all of these dimensions interact in how Tamil thinkers understand their social, cultural, religious, and political projects. If there is a single overwhelming conceptual focus in all the Tamil works that employ the Dravidian frame of Tamil history, it is the focus on Tamil peoplehood. Without studying Tamil social thought on its own terms, this focus on Tamil peoplehood, while immediately apparent in many Tamil sources, can be obscured in works of academic scholarship on the Tamil country.

This dissertation consists of six principal chapters. Chapter One of this dissertation focuses on the roots of the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" in Western comparative philological scholarship on South Asia. As Western thought on South Asian ethnoracial peoplehood progressed through the 19th century, the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" developed in conjunction with Western ideas about civilization, linguistic peoplehood, and racial hierarchy. The Scottish missionary-scholar Robert Caldwell's *Comparative grammar of the Dravidian, or South-Indian, family of languages,* while principally a work of Western comparative philology, recast the ancient Dravidians in a way that broke from the consensus of contemporary Indological scholarship and deeply influenced both Western scholars and Tamil thinkers who contributed to the formation of the Dravidian frame of Tamil history. Many key features of the concepts of "Dravidian" and "Aryan" as they appear in works of Tamil social thought can be traced to colonial-era discourses on Indic philological-racial peoplehood. Moreover, the Tamil thinkers who first developed the Dravidian frame frequently cited from both racial-philological scholarship and Indological scholarship on Brahmanical Hindu scriptures.

Chapter Two focuses on the works of Christian missionaries centered in the Tamil country, a body of work that provided important precursors of Tamil approaches to analyzing the ancient Tamil past. Citations of these works appear frequently in the works of early Tamil thinkers, and individual Christian missionary figures like G.U. Pope were active participants in Tamil dialogues about Dravidian antiquity and true Dravidian religion. This chapter contrasts missionary approaches to scholarship on the Tamil country to the approaches of the

Western scholars covered in the previous chapter. This chapter also traces how Christian missionaries' statements about Tamil and Hindu culture connect to their interest in securing the conversions of Tamil Hindus.

Chapter Three outlines the Tamil Neo-Saiva movement, a religious reform movement responsible for the genre of Neo-Saiva historiography, the first body of Tamil thought that systematically adapted Western thought on the Indian racial, philological, and civilizational past to speak on contemporary Tamil cultural and social life. This chapter discusses how the Neo-Saiva religious reform project led important Neo-Saiva theologian-scholars to posit a completely de-Sanskritized Dravidian Tamil past, supporting their findings with frequent references to secular and missionary scholarship about Indic and Tamil society. In this chapter, we will examine the work of P. Sundaram Pillai and J.M. Nallasvami Pillai, two seminal Neo-Saiva thinkers and founding figures of Neo-Saiva historiography. In their Neo-Saiva historiographical works, we will see the roots of conceptions of Tamil racial identity and Brahmanical Hinduism that diffuse to Tamil thinkers outside the Neo-Saiva movement by the end of the 19th century.

Chapter Four examines several essays from a single scholarly periodical, *The Tamilian Antiquary*, published in Madras between 1907 and 1914, and connects them to the emergence of new conceptions of pre-Aryan Tamil classicism and non-Brahmin caste identity in the late 19th century. I have singled out one specific, Tamil-language essay, "A Critical Review of the Story of the Ramayana", for extended analysis as a source that illustrates the nascent connections in mainstream non-Brahmin Tamil social thought between Tamil racial identity

and Brahmanical caste. While *The Tamilian Antiquary* as a whole attests to the circulation of Neo-Saiva ideas about the Dravidian past to a broader public audience, this particular essay offers a remarkably thorough statement of the core ideas that become standard in Tamil "race talk" from the 20th century. I present this essay as a paradigmatic example of the transmission of an originally Neo-Saiva approach to studying the Dravidian Tamil past to a broader non-Brahmin Tamil audience.

Chapter Five discusses a number of important 20th and 21st-century Tamil thinkers, activists, and public figures, each of whom uses Tamil race talk and its accompanying narrative of Tamil history to structure their own engagements with the Tamil past and present. These thinkers and organizations include Iyothee Thass and the Adi Dravida Movement, the Justice Party, E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy's Self-Respect Movement and Dravidar Kazhagam, C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi's Tamil nationalist Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), and Thol. Thirumavalavan and the Viduthalai Ciruthaigal Katchi, a Dalit liberationist political party and activist organization. While these various movements diverge sharply on important social, cultural, religious, and political issues, their modes of organizing these platforms all use the characteristic vocabulary and concepts of Tamil race talk to advance their platforms.

The concluding chapter of this dissertation suggests three chief ways that the history of Tamil race talk can enrich standing discussions about Tamil, Indian, and human social life. These contributions, while natural extensions of the Tamil thought described in this dissertation, also contradict prominent scholarly and activist modes of understanding Tamil race talk. I

argue that the regionally and ethnoculturally specific perspective contained in the modern Tamil discursive tradition of “race talk” resists being collapsed into broader conversations about India, Hinduism, or religion.

Chapter 1: Dravidians and Aryans in Western Racial Thought

"This was a race black in skin, low in stature, and with matted locks; in war treacherous and cunning; in choice of food, disgusting; and in ceremonial, absolutely deficient. The superior civilization of the [Aryan] foreigner soon asserted itself, and the lower race had to give way…"

-1891 Government of India census, p. 123

Introduction

Early Tamil "race talk" emerged in close dialogue with Western scholarship on race, language, and Indic history. Works by Western scholars introduced the core notion that discrete "Aryan" and "Dravidian" races battled in the ancient history of South Asia. Both this notion and other major characteristics of the "Dravidian" and "Aryan" peoples in Western scholarship went onto become foundational components of the vocabulary and syntax of Tamil "race talk". In the second half of this dissertation, we will investigate the ways Tamil thinkers make major changes to Western thought on the Dravidian racial past in order to apply them to their own critiques of contemporary Tamil society. However, before we turn to the development of Tamil "race talk" in the works of Tamil authors and thinkers, it is important that we attend to the Western conceptual and rhetorical foundation out of which Tamil thinkers from the late 19th century and beyond developed their own ways of conceiving of the "Dravidian" race, its pre-Aryan history, and its legacy in contemporary Tamil life.

In this chapter, we will chart the history of the notion of "Dravidian" and "Aryan" races in the works of European scholars, as well as how Western thought on the Aryan and Dravidian races connects to several important currents of contemporary Western scholarship. In

Chapter Two, we will discuss how the works of Christian missionaries stationed in the Tamil country, another important body of influence on early Tamil "race talk", both cohere with and diverge from mainstream Western racial thought on Tamil society and history. These two broad bodies of Western discourse- mainstream, non-confessional, academic scholarship and specialist Christian missionary scholarship- each contributed core ideas and language to Tamil "race talk". However, as we shall see in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, while Tamil "race talk" openly and frequently references Western scholarship and certain important missionary scholars, Tamil thinkers and public figures do not simply rehash Western thought on the nature of the Dravidian and Aryan races. Rather, Tamil "race talk" combines discursive tools from Western writings with distinctively Tamil cultural sensibilities and social and political interests.

Mainstream Western scholarship on the "Aryan" and "Dravidian" races reflects important Western scholarly assumptions about both South Asian civilizational history and the nature of human peoplehood and ethnic diversity in general. In this chapter, we will trace the lineage of Western scholarly thought that informed late-19th and early-20th-century Tamil authors' use of the terms "Aryan" and "Dravidian", as well as their understanding of the broader framework of racial peoplehood in which these concepts originated. We will quickly summarize several important models of Western thought on Indic and human peoplehood, each of which establishes an important feature of the mainstream Western scholarly meanings of the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan".

First, drawing from the work of Terence Keel and Thomas Trautmann, we will see how 15th and 16th-century Christian genealogies of nations established key Christian and Western assumptions about the nature of human peoplehood, assumptions that guide the development of Western thought through subsequent centuries. William Jones, a founding figure of the scholarly disciplines of Indology and comparative philology, both of which emerged in the wake of Jones's explosive findings about the ancient Indo-European language family, borrowed key ideas from this stage in Christian thought, even as he presented a new, philological model for studying the history of the world's ethnic peoples. The works of Jones and subsequent Indologist scholars offered influential models for describing the "Aryan" and "Dravidian" races through reference to the Brahmanical Hindu textual tradition, as well as a newly devised Western scholarly notion of Aryan invasion that described Indic history as the story of an ancient Aryan people's invasion of a previously uncivilized Indic Subcontinent. This reading of Tamil history through the lens of Aryan invasion is an integral component of every permutation of Tamil race talk from the 19th century to the present day.

After tracing the lineage of Indology and its characteristic framing of Indic (i.e., South Asian) history, we will turn to Western scholarly discourse on racial peoplehood on the global scale. Beginning in the late 18th century, burgeoning Western scholastic disciplines in the biological and social sciences introduced purportedly scientific models to classify the world's racial peoples into a spectrum of human advancement and savagery. As we shall see in later chapters, Tamil race talk of the late 19th and early 20th centuries participates in Western scholastic conversations about racial peoplehood, even as it rewrites key components of its worldview and sociopolitical goals. We will quickly trace some of the key

features of Western thought on race in the biological and social sciences to inform our analysis of Tamil "race talk" in later chapters.

To close this chapter, we will take a closer look at one particular scholastic text, the Scottish missionary-scholar Robert Caldwell's *A comparative grammar of the Dravidian, or South-Indian family of languages.* This text had a singularly important influence on Tamil engagements with Western racial thought, since it was the first major Western text to present a description of the Dravidian race based on specific South Indian linguistic and literary evidence, rather than on conceptual or historical contrasts to the ancient Aryans. Caldwell's work introduces new ways to describe Tamil history in the terms of Western racial science, but Caldwell's assertions about Tamil and Dravidian history also preserve critical features of the broader Western project of racial classification in which they are situated. In Chapters Three, Four, and Five of this dissertation, we will see how Tamil scholars engage with and transform this racial project in their own descriptions of Tamil history, civilization, and society.

From Genealogies of Nations to Comparative Philology

As both Terence Keel (2018) and Thomas Trautmann (1997) have charted from different angles, the expansive Western racial thought of the 18th and 19th centuries builds on a conceptual framework that first originated in the work of 15th and 16th century European Christian theologians, specifically in Biblical genealogies of nations.[12] In fact, despite other major changes in rhetoric and methodology, important features of this framework remained largely intact in Western thought well into the 20th century and beyond. Keel, for instance,

argues at length that modern biological and racial science has key conceptual inheritances from the Christian genealogical thought of this period, such as its thought on the origin and nature of human difference, and the universal applicability of a single (Christian, and later biogenetic) model for understanding the origins of all peoples and biological beings.[13] Trautmann, similarly, argues that the "segmentary logic" and tree-shaped conceptual model of Mosaic genealogy, first employed in Christian genealogies of nations, directed how both comparative philology and race science approached the classification of the world's ethnoracial peoples as branches of a genealogical "tree".[14]

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Christian theologians created expansive "genealogies" of the ethnic "nations"- i.e., peoples - of the contemporary world. These genealogies attempted to trace the descent of the world's various ethnic nations through human history back to the Biblical account of the dispersal of Noah's sons following the Great Flood, told in Chapter 10 of the Book of Genesis. According to the Book of Genesis, following the Great Flood, all life on Earth had been wiped out, except for the beings saved on Noah's Ark. Since Noah and his family were the only humans to survive the flood, all humans of the postdiluvian world presumably descend from Noah and his kin. Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, acquired significance in Christian genealogies of nations as the three ancestral patriarchs of all human peoples of the present-day world. These sons' dispersal represents the first migrations of humans from Noah's Ark's landing at Mt. Ararat to the various nations of the present day.[15]

Christian genealogies of nations were not only theological proofs of the link between Biblical history and the modern-day world, but also focal points for European attempts to describe and historicize contemporary human diversity. Terence Keel argues that in early-modern Western biological science, whether applied to humans or life in general, the ostensibly scientific notion of biological determinism filled roles previously occupied by God.[16] The shift from premodern Biblical theories of peoplehood to modern biological racial science did not eliminate the roles God played in the premodern Christian framework, but rather replaced them with scientific principles or left them conspicuously undefined or absent. For instance, Keel argues that while Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a seminal European race "scientist", is commonly recognized as a founding figure of "secular" racial ethnography, he hewed to a teleological view of nature that presents nature as logically ordered and conceived of humanity as the pinnacle of biological existence- ideas deeply resonant with mainstream Protestant Christian doctrine on personhood.[17] Blumenbach's notion that non-white races were degenerate descendants of the original white, "Caucasian" race, Keel argues, can be understood as a secular parallel to Martin Luther's interpretation of the birth and fall of mankind from its initial state of godly purity.[18] In these and other ways, Keel argues, Western thought on race represents a "mongrel epistemology", part religious and part scientific-rationalist.[19]

In the late 18th century, the English philologist William Jones introduced a new, comparatively "scientific"[20] model for tracing the ancient histories of ethnic peoples. Simultaneously, Jones's work transformed European attitudes towards South Asia, and opened the door for a fuller Indological picture of Indic history to emerge. Jones's chief

contributions to these models trace back to his revelation, which he delivered in a legendary address to the Asiatic Society of Calcutta in 1786, that the ancient classical languages of Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek share a number of core grammatical and lexical features. Jones took these similarities to indicate that Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Avestan (i.e., Persian), and a slew of other major European and Asian languages emerged from a single linguistic ancestor in ancient history. Jones's findings formed the basis for the "Indo-European" language family, a conception still current in present-day comparative linguistics.

Keel's notion of "mongrel epistemology" is a useful lens for analyzing the work of William Jones and his angle on analyzing the history of the world's racial peoples. While Jones presented his work as scientific and supported it with systematic philological evidence, Trautmann has argued that Jones's project should be seen principally as a project of ethnology rather than comparative philology.[21] In this sense, Jones's thought on the Indo-European[22] language family and the ancient people who spoke its ancestor tongue can be seen as an evolution of the Christian genealogical project of tracing the descent of the ethnic peoples of the world back to a shared original ancestor.

On one hand, as Trautmann demonstrates, Jones engages in intensive dialogue with Christian genealogical sources, particularly multiple 18th-century European texts on the "nations of the world" (such as Jacob Bryant's History of the World) grounded in the classic Christian genealogical project.[23] Although Jones bitterly contests some of these works' assumptions and conclusions, he does not altogether reject their Bible-centered worldview. Rather, as Edwin Bryant has shown, Jones insists that his scholarly work aligns with contemporary

Christian narratives of Biblical history grounded in the Book of Genesis.[24] While Jones treats the Vedas, Avestas, and other non-Christian religious texts as meaningful historical sources and cites from them amply, Jones does not understand them to overrule the fundaments of Biblical history. Rather, Jones seeks to align the historical narrative of scriptures into a unified world history that began with the dispersal of the sons of Noah.

In addition to Jones's explicit dialogue with the Christian genealogical tradition, Jones's work shows profound conceptual commonalities with the ways Christian genealogies of nations conceived of ethnic peoplehood. In his philological studies, Jones consistently presents linguistic relationships as evidence of ancient migrations and fusions of ethnic peoples, preserving a core feature of how Christian genealogies of nations like Jacob Bryant's interpreted ethnic diversity and its historical origins. Similarly to Blumenbach's secularization (or perhaps "scientification") of core components of Christian thought on peoplehood, Jones's comparative philological work uses scientific language to recapitulate core Christian assumptions about human history. Jones presents the tree-like structures of language families, which chart linguistic ancestors and descendants generated from his philological work, as a tentative map of the genealogical descent and migration of peoples in world history.[25] Like Christian genealogies of nations, Jones's language families chart ethnic peoples' genealogy through historical time. Also parallel to Christian genealogies, Jones connected cultural and civilizational characteristics to figures or events recorded in scriptural texts, although Jones extended his reach outside of the Biblical canon to include texts such as the Hindu Vedas and the Old Persian Avestas.

The idea that ancient commonalities in language reflect ancient commonalities of peoplehood ran with the grain of contemporary European thought, but Jones's findings on the Indo-European language family also had profound and challenging implications on European ethnic self-understanding. After all, Jones's findings implied that Europeans' ancient history was somehow tied to far-flung regions of Asia now inhabited by peoples very foreign to Europe. Moreover, Jones's work came at the peak of global European colonial expansion, a time when various European powers faced an unprecedented pressure to define Europe's fundamental intellectual, cultural, and social values against those of colonized or colonizable races. Jones's work therefore inspired many European scholars to further investigate the relationship between Europe and ancient Asian societies, in attempts to disarm the potential intellectual and cultural threat that Europe's relationship with ancient Asia might pose.[26]

The theoretical "Aryan" people, ancient relatives of Europe's own Indo-European ancestors, became a key component of European thought on the ethnocultural relationships between Europe and Asia implied by Jones's work. As Europe's relatives in Asia, Aryans became the focus of a wide body of European speculation on Europe's own racial origins. Various French, German, and English authors even suggested their own countries as possible homelands of the ancient Aryans, who then dispersed from Western Europe across Eurasia.[27] Aryans, as Europe's quasi-mythical ancient ancestors, held a strong allure to European thinkers looking to contextualize European civilizational achievement in a broader, trans-regional and transhistorical context. The notion of an Aryan people also fundamentally shaped a growing body of European scholarship on Indic society, a topic of study that British colonial expansion across South Asia made increasingly exigent.[28] European studies of Indic

history presented the ancient Aryans as the sole purveyors of civilization and culture in South Asian history. This idea, while of course an obvious attempt to secure European dominance over South Asia's civilizational past, also raised an important and far-reaching question for European scholars. If the Aryans were the relatives of the ancient Europeans, at what point in Indic history did the Aryans stop being Europe's kin and start becoming the mass of essentially and incorrigibly foreign peoples observed by European ethnographers in colonial India?

European scholars had varying opinions on whether the Aryan racial legacy truly influenced Indic civilizational history. Some influential European scholars like James Mill, whose early 19th-century *History of British India* remained a canonical source in British scholarship on India through the early 20th century, completely dismissed the idea that Hindu literature contained anything of meaningful civilizational or cultural value.[29] In contrast, other scholars, such as the legendary German scholar Max Müller, saw great value in studying Sanskrit-language Hindu literature, not only for its potential to illuminate key truths about South Asian culture and society, but also for its capacity to inform European thought.[30] These latter scholars, a loosely affiliated group of scholars who came to be called Indologists, played a critical role in further shaping European thought on the Aryans, as well as on their dark-skinned opponents, the first "Dravidians", in ancient South Asian history.

Max Müller and other Western Indologists championed a textual approach to analyzing South Asian society, history and culture. Indologists engaged with the classical, Sanskrit-language Hindu canon as the ideological foundation of the dominant cultural and social values found throughout Indic civilizational history up to the present day. Given Jones's

findings on an ancient Indo-Aryan subgroup of the Indo-European language family, Indologists approached ancient Vedic literature as an *Aryan* canon, reflective of social, cultural, and intellectual values descended directly from the ancient Aryans. This interpretation allowed Indologists to claim select elements of ancient Hindu civilization, as preserved and recorded in Sanskrit-language literature, as *Aryan* cultural relics, and thereby worthy of praise, without fundamentally unseating the normative European scholarly assumption that European civilization represents the pinnacle of human achievement. However, unlike scholars like James Mill, who denied the existence of higher civilization at any point in South Asian history, Indologists faced the dilemma of determining specific lines of demarcation between Aryan antiquity and the entirely foreign South Asian societies of the present.

A standard narrative of ancient Indic history quickly emerged in Indological scholarship to help resolve this dilemma. This narrative, the Aryan Invasion Theory, became a critical piece of 19th-century European scholarship on all aspects of Indic cultural, social, and religious life. The basic narrative advanced by the Aryan Invasion Theory goes as follows: First, the ancient Aryan people entered South Asia across the mountainous terrain on the northwest frontier of British India. Upon entering South Asia, the Aryans encountered a set of savage, dark-skinned peoples already settled in those regions. The Aryans conquered these peoples in battle and either forced them to flee southward or integrated them into Aryan society as an inferior social stratum. Aryans conquered or migrated to every part of Hindu South Asia, but eventually, prolonged contact and intermixing with native South Asian peoples corrupted

Aryan society, and the intellectual and cultural advancements of ancient Aryan civilization were lost.

The plot of the Aryan Invasion theory stems principally from European Sanskritists' readings of references in the Ṛg Veda to the Vedic *ārya*s' battles with a rival group called the *dāsa,* a group that Sanskritists described as dark-skinned and flat-nosed.[31] [32] Since William Jones and others had convincingly established the precedent of citing Vedic texts as historical sources, many European scholars agreed that these textual references provided an adequately reliable historical account of the Aryan people's experience in ancient South Asia. European scholars also generally accepted the related assumption that a stratum of savage racial peoples was conquered in ancient times by the relatively more culturally and socially developed Aryans. This dualistic (i.e., Aryan vs. non-Aryan) model of Indic history persisted in Western scholarship on South Asia well into the 20th century, and was a key component of subsequent Tamil re-interpretations of these Western racial narratives.

The Aryan Invasion Theory also became an important part of Indological thought on caste in Hindu society. Indologists' scholarship on the Sanskrit-language Hindu scriptural corpus forged a connection between the newly forming European conception of Aryan peoplehood and the Brahmin caste community. This connection derived in large part from the central role that Brahmins play in Brahmanical scripture. The Brahmanical Hindu canon contains a wide body of thought on Brahmins and their particular connections to religious truth and authority. This thought appears not only in famous Brahmanical treatises on caste identity, such as the Laws of Manu, but also in numerous other places in Hindu scripture stretching back to some

of the earliest Vedic texts. Brahmanical texts explicitly and persistently present the Brahmin caste as the only group capable of receiving divine revelation and editing or preserving religious texts. Accordingly, Indologists considered Brahmanical Hindu texts to be the vessels of the Aryan intellectual legacy that they sought to recover from the depths of Hindu history. Indologists considered Brahmins, who were these texts' exclusive composers, editors, commentators, and transmitters, to be the exclusive representatives of this Aryan intellectual legacy in Indic history.[33]

This move dovetailed with Europeans' heavy reliance on the work of Brahmin interlocutors in many other realms of colonial scholarship and administration. As Nicholas Dirks among others has discussed, Europeans relied on Brahmins both as central informants on Hindu religious life and as interpreters and compilers of interview data for European ethnographic studies.[34] Indology's contribution to European thought was not only to outline Brahmins' role in the Hindu religious system, but also, more fundamentally, to demonstrate the centrality of the textual Brahmanical religious and philosophical system in all elements of South Asian life. For this reason among others, Brahmins came to enjoy systemic social, economic, and political privileges across British India. This condition of Brahmin favoritism was a key factor motivating the emergence of Tamil "race talk" in the late 19th century. Moreover, as we will discuss in Chapter Four, Brahmins in Madras Presidency mobilized their putative Aryan racial identity to petition the colonial government for discrete social and political entitlements

Many of the contentions found in Indological scholarship are expansions of ideas found in Brahmanical Hindu scriptural texts. For instance, Sanskrit grammatical texts like the *Vyākaraṇa* describe the *prakrit*s, the spoken languages of South Asia, as degradations of Sanskrit, an idea connected to textual Hindu presentations of Sanskrit as a perfect language and direct embodiment of cosmic reality. The notion that all Indian languages are degraded variants of Sanskrit is the subject of an important 1801 essay, entitled "On the Sancrit and Pracrit languages", by the British Sanskritist H.T. Colebrooke[35]. Colebrooke's essay exemplifies the way Indologists applied Sanskritic Hindu concepts to draw conclusions about contemporary Indic society. In his essay, Colebrooke analyzes a list of *prakrit*s in the *Vyākaraṇa* and uses the terms and geographical referents in the *Vyākaraṇa* to trace these *prakrit* languages' present-day descendants among the languages of British India. Colebrooke points to the *Vyākaraṇa*'s account as evidence that Sanskrit was the original source of all Indian languages, a position that while not necessarily universal among European scholars of Indian languages, was certainly representative of most Indologists' Aryan-centric interpretations of Indic civilizational history.

Indologists also famously based their understanding of caste in South Asian society on the *varṇāśrama* system of Brahmanical literature. This system outlines four distinct caste categories of Hindu society- Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras- with later texts like the Laws of Manu adding an additional set of mixed-caste and outcaste (i.e., *avarṇa*) categories. Since Indologists considered Brahmins to be the descendants of the ancient Aryans, they reasoned that other caste groups were the descendants of other peoples in ancient Indic history.[36] Unlike other important ideas in Indological scholarship, this idea of

ethnic descent does not have any clear precedent in Brahmanical thought, but rather is an Indological innovation. Groups like the *dāsa*s of the Ṛgveda, Indologists surmised, must be the ancestors of the lower castes in Vedic society. The menial social position that these lower castes occupy in contemporary Hindu society is the result of their ancestors' subjugation by the ancient Aryans, who became their Brahmin superiors. This conceptual connection forged an important link between caste and ethnoracial peoplehood in Indological thought, a link that features prominently in Tamil re-interpretations of Western thought on caste and race.

"Civilization", Race, and Social Evolution

Indology took shape as a scholarly discipline during the same period that European social theorists across various fields of study began to develop an increasingly elaborate and racially charged definition of the term "civilization". Over the course of the 19th century, Indology and Western race sciences offered two related but distinct models of analyzing Indic history. Indology used Brahmanical textual evidence to build pictures of the root historical values of Indic society. Race sciences, on the other hand, drew conclusions about Indic society and its people based on key social and biological traits.

The notion of civilization and social complexity, a social-scientific parallel to the burgeoning biological science of race associated with figures such as the German J.F. Blumenbach and the French Pierre de Gobineau, not only describes a set of social and cultural characteristics associated with a specific ethnic or cultural group (e.g., "Western civilization"), but also came to describe a given ethnic group's place in a hierarchy of civilizational accomplishment and capability.[37] A hierarchical arrangement of the worlds' peoples in grades stretching from

high civilization to utter savagery became a hallmark of all forms of mainstream 19th-century Western racial thought.

Racial thought in seminal early works of sociology focused on identifying the different fundamental principles by which the various tiers of the world's peoples organized their civic and civil societies. In the 1830s and 40s, the foundational French sociologist Auguste Comte introduced an influential theory of social evolution, in which he argued that human societies go through several distinct stages of social development before reaching their final evolutionary stage. This evolutionary model generated a new systematic way by which to compare various ethnic peoples' civilizational capabilities and levels of social advancement: their relative positions on an evolutionary timeline. In his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (*Course of Positive Philosophy*) Comte argued that, like other forms of biological life, the various races of humans in the world acquired hereditary characteristics from their ecosystem that enabled them to survive their environment.[38] The English anthropologist Herbert Spencer built on Comte's evolutionary model by further connecting the principles of Darwinian evolution to institutions in human society. According to Spencer, models of society succeed or fail according to their ability to meet the needs of the people they govern. Spencer extended this logic to argue that racial peoples mired in lower stages of social evolution would face threats to their biological survival due to their low levels of social fitness. Ultimately, Spencer argued, the most primitive races of the world would go extinct altogether, and only races capable of adapting and advancing could be assured of long-term survival.[39]

Influential German philosophers, sociologists and social thinkers like G.W.F. Hegel, Max Weber, and Karl Marx presented complementary, philosophical and sociological models for classifying the societies of the worlds' racial peoples. Hegel's work casts the progressive evolution of human societies in terms of self-knowledge and historical self-understanding. Hegel, in his *Philosophy of World History*, argues that each of the various major races of the world demonstrates characteristic modes of thinking. For instance, Hegel presents the "Asiatic" races, the "Chinese" and the "Hindu", as fundamentally rooted in ahistorical tradition, and therefore incapable of achieving the freedom of rational thought evident in contemporary Western civilization. Whereas Hegel argues that the Chinese are bound by a tradition of political despotism, he casts the Hindus as mired in irrational religious fantasy and the ahistorical institution of caste.[40] Marx's "Asiatic modes of production" offers a similar perspective, cast in the terms of labor and economic production. For Marx, "Asiatic" races show characteristic arrangements of economic production. Marx argues that these models keep "Asiatic" civilizations in a static state of socioeconomic development, unlike the dynamic socioeconomic history of the West.[41]

Over the course of the 19th century, these scholars and other important Western sociologists and anthropologists generated increasingly systematic ways of distinguishing among societies at varying levels of advancement. Civilization, and the varying forms of it demonstrated by the world's peoples, became a key way of grading peoples by their inherent social, biological, intellectual, and cultural capabilities. In these gradations, Western civilization is invariably associated with positive features such as rationality, just political society, and free, creative and progressive thinking, while other races show increasing

degrees of irrationality, despotic political rule, perverted social norms, and atavistic, rigid, and superstitious modes of thinking. This socially centered framework ran parallel to the biological discourse on race initiated by figures like J.F. Blumenbach and continued by Ernst Haeckel, Pierre de Gobineau, the Americans Josiah Clark Nott and Charles Davenport, and others through the first decades of the 20th century. Whereas biological race science pointed to physical or hereditary markers of racial inferiority or superiority, often quantified by phrenological measurements of living and dead human subjects, social race scientists pointed to forms of social organization and the cultural or religious life of given ethnic peoples as indications of those peoples' inherent capacity for civilizational advancement.

Dravidians, Aryans, and Colonial Ethnography

Race science, both biological and social, was a critical component of European engagements with South Asian society, culture, and history. The developments of race science filtered into Western scholars' approaches to conceptualizing both the ancient Indic racial past and the South Asian social order of the present day. While Indologists retained a good deal of influence over Western understandings of Indic antiquity, Hinduism, and South Asian society, in the latter half of the 19th century biological and social race science began to supplement and overtake Orientalist models for understanding South Asian society and Indic civilizational history. One of the most famous proponents of the value of race science in the study of Indic society was the British ethnologist H.H. Risley. Risley's perspective gained special prominence from his work on the British censuses of India. Although Risley's race science-based approach was not met with universal approval from Western scholars of South

Asia, by the latter decades of the 19th century race science in Risley's style was a commonplace feature of Western inquiries into South Asian society and peoplehood.[42]

Risley opens one of his most famous works, his *Castes and Tribes of Bengal* (1892), with a descriptive passage that immediately introduces the reader to Risley's thought on race in South Asia. Risley writes,

> On a stone panel forming part of one of the grandest Buddhist monuments in India- the great tope at Sanchi- a carving in low relief depicts a strange religious ceremony. Under trees with conventional foliage and fruits, three women, attired in tight clothing without skirts, kneel in prayer before a small shrine or altar. In the foreground, the leader of a procession of monkeys bears in both hands a bowl of liquid and stoops to offer it at the shrine. His solemn countenance and the grotesquely adoring gestures of his comrades seem intended to express reverence and humility…. A larger interest… attaches to the scene, if it is regarded as the sculptured expression of the race sentiment of the Aryans towards the Dravidians, which runs through the whole course of Indian tradition and survives in scarcely abated strength at the present day. On this view the relief would belong to the same order of ideas as the story in the Ramayana of the army of apes who assisted Rama in the invasion of Ceylon. It shows us the higher race on friendly terms with the lower, but keenly conscious of the essential difference of type and not taking part in the ceremony at which they appear as patronising spectators.[43]

This passage points to several key assumptions of Risley's work. First, in line with most Western thought of the 19th century, Risley presents ancient Indic history as the tale of the interaction between Aryans and non-Aryans. Whereas Indologists framed this interaction in principally cultural terms (i.e., interactions between Aryan and non-Aryan cultures, social mores, etc.), Risley points to race as the true differentiating factor in Indic history. Risley extends this conviction to argue, by reference to the wall relief at Sanchi, that social and historical interactions between Aryans and non-Aryans functioned on principally racial terms. In Risley's view, the ancient Aryans acted as a superior race to the Dravidians since

ancient times, as evinced in part by the collaboration of the Aryan hero-king Rāma with the monkey-king Hanuman and his armies of apes, which Risley understands to be a reference to the ancient Dravidians. In Chapter Four, we will examine a Tamil reading of the Ramayana that imbues it with similar racial significance.

Second, Risley uses the name "Dravidian" to label the non-Aryan peoples subjugated by the Aryans in ancient times. Risley was by no means the first Western scholar to posit "Dravidian" as the opposite of "Aryan" in Indic history, nor was he the last. Rather, his choice of Dravidians as the ancient opponents and opposites of Aryans ran with the grain of both Indology and Western racial scholarship. Risley's description of the Ramayana as an account of the relationship between Aryans and Dravidians recapitulates an interpretation already well-established in Indological thought. Noticeable differences in the skin tones seen in the northern and southern regions of British India also contributed greatly to both Indologists' and race scientists' assumption that southern Indian peoples, Dravidians, were the descendants of the *dāsa*s and other primitive peoples of ancient India.

Third, Risley ties race in India to caste. Unlike Indologists, who based their understanding on caste entirely on information from Brahmanical texts, Risley constructed his categories of caste based on his observations and phrenological measurements of caste communities throughout contemporary India. This model yielded a large variety of castes (i.e., *jāti*s), as opposed to the four major *varṇāśrama* castes uncovered by the Indological model. Risley understood these various communities to represent varying gradations of racial evolution among Indian peoples. In step with a standard racial scientific logic derived from Herbert

Spencer's work, Risley argued that the racial composition of these sub-populations could be linked to their varying degrees of social fitness in Indian history. In his 1891 essay, "The Study of Ethnology in India,"[44] Risley writes,

> The remarkable correspondence between the gradations of type as brought out by certain indices and the gradations of social precedence further enables us to conclude that community of race, and not, as has frequently been argued, community of function, is the real determining principle, the true *causa causans*, of the caste system. Everywhere we find high social position associated with a certain physical type and conversely low social position with a markedly different type.[45]

Since Risley identified Aryan and Dravidian as the two chief racial types of Indic history, these serve as the two poles of the classification of not only the physical features, but also the dispositional traits and abilities of a given caste community. Caste in itself, Risley argues, was the product of long-term patterns of racial interactions through history. Risley explains, invoking the contemporary anthropological concept of taboo:

> …the Indian caste system is a highly developed expression of taboo which came into play when the Aryans first made contact with the platyrhine [i.e., flat-nosed] race which we may provisionally call Dravidian. This principle derives its initial force from the sense of difference of race as indicated by difference of colour, and its great subsequent development has been due to a series of fictions by which differences of occupation, differences of religion, changes of habitat, trifling divergences from the established standard of custom, have been assumed to denote corresponding differences of blood and have thus given rise to the formation of an endless variety of endogamous groups.[46]

The latter part of this passage points to a key feature of Risley's approach to scholarship. Risley, as a thoroughly biological race scientist, rejected both philological and ethnographic evidence as unreliable for use in Indian ethnology. Instead, he turned to physiological evidence, which he assumed was the ultimate basis for the caste system and the divergent paths of social communities in Indic history. Risley writes,

> Evidence showing resemblances or differences of custom, religion, social status, culture and profession… clearly afford no sure grounds for criticizing an hypothesis based on the assumption of the substantial identity in physical type of the numberless distinct aggregates which make up the population of India. Once [one concedes] this identity of type, [then] the question of the real origin of Indian caste recedes into a dim pre-historic distance, where it would be waste of labour to attempt to follow it.[47]

In other words, casual observations, whether of physical features or of social or cultural forms, were not systematic enough to constitute rigorous scientific proof. Ironically, this is the same type of argument that William Jones used to criticize Christian national genealogists and demonstrate the importance of philological evidence in the study of the ancient history of ethnic peoples. This shift in emphasis also helps explain the shift in Risley's work away from the well-worn four *varṇa*s of the Brahmanical-Indological thought on caste and towards a far more diffuse caste landscape composed of thousands of categories and sub-categories. Risley understood this latter model to reflect a more scientifically rigorous approach to describing Indian society. Across his various works, Risley consistently presented his scholarship as a work of natural science, rather than social analysis. In the introduction to *Castes and Tribes of Bengal*, Risley writes,

> …we may perhaps venture to compare the social gradations of the Indian caste system to a series of geological deposits. The successive strata in each series occupy a definite position determined by the manner of their formation, and the varying customs in the one may be said to represent the fossils in the other. The lowest castes preserve the most primitive customs, just as the oldest geological formations contain the simplest forms of organic life.[48]

Risley's metaphor above invokes discourse on transhistorical change found in the disciplines of the natural sciences developing in Western thought at the same time: namely, geology, paleontology, and evolutionary biology. Risley uses this metaphor to present the Indian caste system as a fossil record of racial interactions throughout Indic history. Gradual accretions,

fusions, and fissures split the basic racial types of Indian history, Aryan and Dravidian, into many subsidiary units, the "castes" and "tribes" of modern India.

Mirroring the universal knowledge claims found in other natural sciences, Risley argues that his work on Indian society is of worldwide scientific interest. Risley saw his work on India as valuable not solely through its utility to scholarship on Indian society or colonial Indian administration, but rather because of its unique ability to study racial synthesis and fusion on a large regional scale. In "The Study of Ethnology in India", Risley writes,

> Not only do the administrative conditions of the country [i.e., India] lend themselves readily to the collection of evidence, but the social system is so constituted as to render that evidence peculiarly valuable and telling. In Europe, and in most parts of the world, where anthropological enquiries have been pursued, the prevalence of *métissage*, or the crossing of races, constantly tends to complicate the investigations and to obscure and confuse the results…. In fact, all the recognised nations of Europe are the result of a process of unrestricted crossing which has fused a number of distinct tribal types into a more or less definable national type. In India, whatever may have been the case centuries ago, nothing of this sort is now possible. The institution of caste breaks up the population of the continent into a countless number of mutually exclusive aggregates of homogeneous composition, and forbids a member of one group to marry within any group but his own.[49]

Risley here critiques an alternative, anthropological model of the study of race and caste in South Asia. Anthropology, Risley argues, runs up against the obstacle of *métissage*, racial mixing, which complicates attempts to posit a single, unified model of racial behavior. Risley's biological method, he argues, better accounts for the many endogamous and socially distinct racial communities found across contemporary India.

In spite of Risley's critiques, anthropological and other social-scientific modes of analyzing "Dravidian" social forms remained influential through the turn of the 20th century. Although

anthropological studies relied on fieldwork over the Brahmanical textual evidence deployed by Indological scholars, Indology's characterizations of pre-Aryan Indic society deeply influenced both what anthropologists labeled "Dravidian" and how they assessed the civilizational complexity and moral rectitude of these "Dravidian" forms of social and cultural life. In the early 19th century, Indologists like H.T. Colebrooke led the charge in arguing that pre-Aryan peoples had exerted a negative influence on Aryan and Indic society, dragging it down from its ancient heights to its present-day state of intellectually and politically stagnant, superstitious decadence. Indologists' pictures of pre-Aryan societies became characterized by the types of idolatry, nonsensical religious mythology, and sordid ritual excesses that most disgusted Europeans about contemporary Hindu practice. These practices included possession traditions, ritual mortification, and sacrifice to meat-eating gods, all of which practices anthropologists observed to be particularly prominent in the extreme southern regions of British India.[50] On the other hand, Indologists and other European commentators ascertained many of the specific features of pre-Aryan society through a negative logic, defining the qualities of pre-Aryans in contrast to the characteristic qualities of Aryan civilization. Parallel to scholars' presentation of the ancient Aryans as virile, intellectually dynamic, and culturally accomplished, Europeans cast non-Aryans as essentially effeminate, intellectually stunted, and violently savage.

This Indological framing of the ancient Dravidians is readily recognizable in the 1913 anthropological work, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, written by the English scholar W.T. Elmore. In the introduction to his text, Elmore characterizes the Dravidians in classic terms:

> The reasons for this apparent neglect [of Dravidian religion] are not difficult to discover. There is no systematized teaching connected with village cults or worship. No interesting systems of philosophy lie behind them. The Dravidians are not a literary people, and their religion has no literature. Their history is contained in the somewhat confused legends recited by wandering singers who attend the festivals and assist in the worship[51].[52]

Elmore's "Dravidian gods" are what modern scholars of Hinduism would describe as regional, non-Brahmanical deities- i.e., gods of South Indian folk worship. In Elmore's work, these deities include a range of goddesses and gods connected to ritual traditions found principally in the Andhra (i.e., Telugu-speaking) region of Madras Presidency, the region where Elmore gathered most of his findings. Elmore's decision to group these specific deities together as "Dravidian gods" reflects normative Indological assumptions about Dravidians and their role in Indic history and society. On one hand, Elmore identifies Dravidian religion as inherently non-literary, non-philosophical, and unsystematic. These characteristics are the direct opposites of the qualities Indologists highlighted in Vedic Hindu literature: literary accomplishment, philosophical profundity, and (to a lesser degree) intellectual systematicity. Whereas Dravidian religion produced no texts worthy of study, the Aryan Vedic tradition produced texts animated by the intellectual dynamism only found among Indo-European peoples. Elmore's reference to the "confused legends" sung by itinerant temple singers adds an implicit critique of Dravidian religion as inherently fantastical, a common European criticism of both Dravidian society and Indic society more broadly.[53]

On another hand, Elmore ties these traits of "Dravidian" religion to inherent traits about Dravidians- namely, that the Dravidians are "not a literary people". This link recapitulates the long-developing European assumption that the social and historical identities of ethnic

peoples are linked to inherited, transhistorical qualities. Describing traditions as "Dravidian" also allows Elmore to situate his argument within the broader framework of the Aryan Invasion Theory, and thereby offer a preliminary historical explanation for the existence of multiple forms of "Hindu" religion within a single regional context. All of these choices bring Elmore's work in line with the disciplinary consensuses of Indology, as well as with other newly developing Western academic disciplines we will discuss further in the next section. Several pages later in his text, Elmore situates the study of "Dravidian" religion in the contemporary European academic landscape:

> Another reason for lack of investigation in regard to these Dravidian gods is that the subject has not been considered an attractive one. There is no historic leader or founder around whose personality any interesting facts or legends may cluster. It is not a worship that any one is proud of, or that any one of ordinary enlightenment attempts to defend. In fact, it would not be classed by most people as coming within the range of the study of Comparative Religion, but would be assigned to Anthropology, or discussed in connexion with primitive customs.[54]

Elmore's words here reaffirm the civilizational logic underpinning colonial distinctions between Aryan and Dravidian. Elmore's list of negative definitions of Dravidian religion- i.e., that it has no founding figures and that it is not anything "anyone of enlightenment attempts to defend"- contrast with the more worthy representations of civilization Indologists found in Vedic (i.e., Aryan) texts. Since in Elmore's estimation Dravidians have no Rāmas or Vedas of their own, their form of worship is more rightly compared to the practices and beliefs of other "primitive" peoples- the topic of anthropology- rather than the developed philosophical ideas undertaken in the study of Comparative Religion. To wit, elsewhere in the text Elmore describes Dravidian worship in terms of other fetishistic "primitive" religions:

> Much of the Dravidian worship is often classified as fetishism. The fetish worshipper of Africa selects any object which strikes his fancy, especially an unusual object, and makes it his fetish. When it appears to be no longer helping him, he throws it away, thinking that its spirit has left it. The objects of worship of the Dravidians bear some resemblance to the fetishes of Africa. Often the idol is a shapeless stone. Like the African, the Dravidian deserts his god, leaving it on the boundary of the village, or the rubbish heap…. It is indeed striking, however, that the fundamental ideas of the Dravidians, as shown in their worship and the stories of their gods, contain so little fetishism, which is commonly thought to be an invariable feature in primitive religion.[55]

Like the "fetish worshipper of Africa", in Elmore's eyes the Dravidian is still fundamentally a primitive religious being. By labelling Dravidian religion as a primitive belief system, Elmore sets "Dravidian religion" apart from more advanced religious and philosophical systems that can be analyzed through the lens of historical evolution and development. This racial classificatory scheme attributes simplistic understandings of both the material and spiritual worlds to Dravidians, Africans, and other primitive races. Elmore registers his surprise at not finding more references to fetishism in Dravidian religious mythology and practice because of his assumption, standard to many Western scholars of the time, that the belief systems and ritual practices of "primitive" races share many basic structural similarities.[56]

In addition to impinging on primitive races' ability to develop cultural and intellectual complexity, the primitive minds and societies of primitive peoples map onto Elmore's estimations of the Dravidian people's inherent civilizational and moral development. Near the end of his text, Elmore writes, patronizingly,

> In the matter of cheating and deceiving the gods we see simply a reflection of the everyday actions of the people among themselves. The Dravidian religion has no

> moral sanctions. It is simply a method of dealing with powerful spirits, the greater number of which are malignant. The religion reflects the morality of the people, and is in no way responsible for it.[57]

In other words, Elmore argues that is not proper to say that the amorality of "the Dravidian religion" *causes* immoral behavior among the Dravidians, but rather that the amorality of "Dravidian religion" *results from* the Dravidian people's inability to develop beyond simple magical thinking. This idea invokes the schemes of racial-civilizational stratification in vogue in the European thought of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Dravidians, like other peoples scattered throughout the colonial world, had not yet advanced to the next stage of human social development, and so could not be expected to develop the capacities, such as complex moral thought and behavioral self-restraint, associated with more developed peoples and civilizations.[58] Elsewhere in the text, Elmore argues that this lack of civilizational development has frozen "Dravidian religion" in its primitive form and allowed it to resist the encroachments of Aryan Hinduism:

> It is evident, therefore that although much of the aboriginal religion and many of the gods have been adopted into Hinduism, working great changes in Hinduism itself, there has been but very little assimilation in the thoughts and customs of the people…. The same strange rites, the same basal beliefs and ideas, which these Dravidians possessed tens of centuries ago, seem no less powerful to-day. The Dravidians have been conquered politically and socially, but religiously the contact of Aryans and Dravidians has resulted in not more than a drawn battle.[59]

This contention explains how "Dravidian religion" is so easy for Elmore to locate in colonial South Indian society, thousands of years after the introduction of Aryan Hinduism through Aryan Invasion. Rather than fusing into a syncretic belief system, Elmore argues that Dravidian and Aryan Hinduism have remained more or less separate traditions despite sustained historical contact. These traditions, and particularly "Dravidian religion", are

therefore meaningful to Elmore principally as markers of ethnic origin and identity, rather than products of intellectual development or exchange. The "Dravidian religion" of the ancient past has survived to the present chiefly because the Dravidian people themselves have not changed. Accordingly, their descendants in contemporary South Indian society continue to hold the same "strange rites" and "basal beliefs" of their ancestors.

Although H.H. Risley is sharply critical of what he perceives as less scientific approaches to scholarship on South Asia, the framework he uses aligns in important ways with Western scholars who studied South Asia using social or cultural data, like Elmore. For instance, while Elmore scarcely refers to biological metrics in his study, Elmore's impulse to classify the forms of South Indian religious life as markers of ancient ethnoracial peoplehood runs directly parallel to Risley's attempt to describe Indian castes and tribes as intermixtures of various ancient racial stocks. Importantly, both Elmore and Risley understand racial-ethnic provenance as the true organizing principle- Risley's "*causa causans*"- of Indic society through history. Elmore chooses "Aryan" and "Dravidian" over alternative ways of distinguishing the two threads of religion he identified, such as "Brahmanical" and "non-Brahmanical", "priestly" and "folk" religion, and so on. Elmore connects the terms "Aryan" and "Dravidian" to these peoples' contrasting degrees of civilizational capability and accomplishment across Indic history. Risley, although disdainful of the types of ethnographic evidence that grounded Elmore's scholarship, also bases his physiological studies of Indian castes and tribes on the premise that biological racial inheritances are the most reliable way to trace Indian peoples' history through time. Like Elmore, Risley understands the present-day characteristics of Indian peoples as reflections of their transhistorical racial capabilities. Risley not only presents racial markers as a way to shed light on the historical identity of

castes and tribes, but also, more importantly, argues that the caste landscape of India represents the perfect ethnographic laboratory for the study of the worldwide human phenomenon of hereditary race.

Robert Caldwell's Comparative Grammar and the "Positive Dravidian"

All of the bodies of colonial Western scholarship we have discussed so far- Jones's comparative philology, European social thought on civilization and social evolution, and pseudo-biological race science- appear prominently in late-colonial Tamil sources focusing on the Dravidian history of the Tamil race. However, the Scottish missionary-scholar Robert Caldwell's *A comparative grammar of the Dravidian, or South-Indian, family of languages* (1848) [henceforth, *Comparative grammar*] played a singularly important role in spurring the emergence of the distinctive readings of Tamil history deployed in 19th, 20th, and 21st-century Tamil "race talk".[60] Caldwell's work provided key scholarly concepts and arguments that Tamil authors incorporated and adapted in their own works. Caldwell's work also laid the foundation for other Western scholarship on Dravidian history that Tamil scholars used to inform and support their own arguments.

As the title of the work makes clear, *Comparative grammar* is principally a work of comparative linguistics. In *Comparative grammar*, Caldwell analyzes the grammars and vocabularies of various South Indian languages in depth in order to demonstrate that they share a common linguistic ancestor. However, like William Jones and his successors, Caldwell assumes in *Comparative grammar* that relationships of linguistic descent also map onto the ancient relationships of ethnic *peoples*. As with Jones's work, the legacy of

Caldwell's work in Western and Tamil thought is both linguistic and ethnohistorical. Caldwell's philological findings on the Dravidian language family[61] mostly remain valid by the standards of present-day comparative linguistics. However- again, parallel to Jones- the ethnoracial argument found in Caldwell's work has exerted far more influence on Tamil scholarship and social thought than his linguistic argument has.

One key contribution of Caldwell's work to both contemporary Western scholarship and subsequent Tamil thought is Caldwell's introduction of a systematic, relatively "positive" conception of Dravidian antiquity. Like the comparatively "negative" conceptions of Dravidians discussed above - that is, conceptions both disparaging and constructed through opposition to the qualities attributed to their Aryan counterparts - Caldwell's description of the ancient Dravidians is "positive" in two senses. On one hand, Caldwell's work is the first major work of colonial scholarship to present a comprehensive counter-argument to Western portrayals of Dravidians as racial savages lacking any capacity for higher moral or intellectual life. On the other hand, Caldwell presents the Dravidian past not as an inscrutable vacuum of pre-Aryan (pre-)history, but rather as an era that produced a degree of documented social and cultural accomplishment- albeit a modest and qualified one. Whereas many works of Western scholarship treat Dravidians as no more than the ancient villains of the Aryan Invasion Theory, Caldwell's work focuses on generating an empirically based picture of Dravidian antiquity using the same method that Western scholars like Jones used to shine light on Aryan history: philological analysis. Caldwell argues that, contrary to the position of Indologists like H.T. Colebrooke, the languages of South India are not corrupt derivates of Sanskrit, but rather are descended from a long-lost proto-Dravidian root

language, in much the same way that contemporary Indo-Aryan languages derive from ancient Sanskrit and proto-Indo-European. In *Comparative grammar*, Caldwell writes:

> It was supposed by the Sanskrit Pandits (by whom everything with which they were acquainted was referred to a Brâhmanical origin), and too hastily taken for granted by the earlier European scholars, that the Dravidian languages, though differing in many particulars from the North Indian idioms, were equally with them derived from the Sanskrit. They could not see that each of the Dravidian languages to which their attention had been drawn contained a certain proportion of Sanskrit words… and though they observed clearly enough that each language contained also many non-Sanskrit words and forms, they did not observe that those words and forms constituted the bulk of the language, or that it was in them that the living spirit of the language resided…. No person who has any acquaintance with the principles of comparative philology, and who has carefully studied the grammars and vocabularies of the Dravidian languages, and compared them with those of Sanskrit, can suppose the grammatical structure and inflectional forms of those languages and the greater number of their more important roots capable of being derived from Sanskrit by any process of development or corruption whatsoever.[62]

Caldwell here references the close connection between Indological scholarship and Brahmanical scripture that we have discussed earlier in this chapter. As mentioned above, Indologists like H.T. Colebrooke cited Brahmanical claims about the Sanskrit language and reinterpreted them in the context of contemporary Indian languages and peoples. Caldwell's critique of these Indologists and their position encapsulates the major innovation of his work: Caldwell argues that descriptions of "Dravidian" society cannot derive exclusively from Sanskritic knowledge and Indo-Aryan linguistics, but rather must incorporate data gathered from intensive study of South Indian languages themselves. Caldwell's philological proof that Dravidian languages did not descend from Sanskrit served as a wedge for Tamil (and to some extent, Western) thinkers to challenge the Indological contention that Aryans are responsible for the existence of higher civilization in South Asia.

Another central contribution of *Comparative grammar* to late-colonial Tamil re-interpretations of "Dravidian" history lies in the conceptual connection it forges between Dravidian history and Tamil language and culture. In *Comparative grammar*, Caldwell consistently presents the Tamil language as the purest descendant of ancient proto-Dravidian, since it has acquired the least lexical and grammatical influences from Sanskrit through history. To this point, Caldwell writes,

> It is true it would now be difficult for Telugu to dispense with its Sanskrit: more so for Canarese [i.e., Kannada]; and most of all for Malayâḷam: those languages having borrowed from Sanskrit so largely, and being so habituated to look up to it for help, that it would be scarcely possible for them now to assert their independence. Tamil, however, the most highly cultivated *ab intra* of all Dravidian idioms, can dispense with its Sanskrit altogether, if need be, and not only stand alone but flourish without its aid.[63]

Caldwell's words here are representative of his general approach to the relationship between Sanskrit and Tamil. Sanskrit, while an integral influence on most of the Dravidian languages, should not be considered part of the proto-Dravidian core language from which Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and other Dravidian languages descended. Whereas Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam have replaced much of their native Dravidian vocabulary and syntax, Tamil, Caldwell argues, has maintained its essentially Dravidian character in spite of Aryan linguistic influences. Not only can Tamil survive without Sanskrit, Caldwell argues: in fact, the Tamil language may "flourish" without Sanskrit's aid. This phrasing reflects Caldwell's understanding of both Tamil and Dravidian linguistic *cultivation.* Caldwell's understanding of Tamil and Dravidian linguistic cultivation derives from Tamil's relative independence from Sanskrit among the Dravidian languages, not only in strict grammatical terms, but also in terms of literary aesthetics. Caldwell writes:

> So completely has this jealousy of Sanskrit pervaded the minds of the educated classes amongst the Tamilians, that a Tamil poetical composition is regarded as in accordance with good taste and worthy of being called classical, not in proportion to the amount of Sanskrit it contains, as would be the case in some other dialects, but in proportion to its freedom from Sanskrit![64]

Comparative grammar's celebration of Tamil as the purest modern descendant of the ancient Dravidian language appealed to a variety of Tamil scholars and authors, who went on to recast Dravidian racial identity in terms of Tamil cultural history. Unsurprisingly, Caldwell's work did not have a similar impact in other "Dravidian" regions of colonial India, such as Karnataka, Andhra, or Kerala. Although Caldwell's work examines a variety of major and minor Dravidian languages, none receive the sustained praise that Tamil does in *Comparative grammar*. Caldwell marshals both philological and racial-scientific evidence in *Comparative grammar* to substantiate his special treatment of Tamil, but it is also important to note that Caldwell's thought on the topic runs in line with the thought of other Christian missionaries stationed in the Tamil country- a scholarly lineage we will examine in more detail in the next chapter of this dissertation.

A third key contribution of Caldwell's *Comparative grammar* to Tamil thought is the contrast that Caldwell draws between Dravidian Tamil antiquity and the Brahmin caste. As we have discussed above, it was a general consensus of colonial Western thought that Brahmins were the closest relatives to the ancient Aryans, both genealogically and intellectually. In contrast to the Tamil re-interpretations based off his work, Caldwell does not present the ancient Brahmins as disruptors of ancient Dravidian society. However, Caldwell does note repeatedly in *Comparative grammar* that ancient Tamilian society did not rely heavily on Brahmins or their cultural perspectives. To wit, Caldwell writes:

> In the other Dravidian languages, whatever be the nature of the composition or subject-matter treated of, the amount of Sanskrit employed is considerably larger than in Tamil; and the use of it has acquired more of the character of a necessity. This is in consequence of the literature of those languages having chiefly been cultivated by Brâhmans. There is only one work of note in that language which was not composed by a member of the sacred caste; and indeed the Telugu Śûdras, who constitute *par excellence* the Telugu people, seem almost entirely to have abandoned to the Brâhmans the culture of their own language, with every other branch of literature and science. In Tamil, on the contrary, few Brâhmans have written anything worthy of preservation. The language has been cultivated and developed with immense zeal and success by native Tamilians; and the highest rank in Tamil literature which has been reached by a Brâhman is that of a commentator.[65]

Caldwell's claim here is an exaggeration, but is not completely false. The Brahmanical ritual and ideological system has a very weak presence in the earliest surviving works of Tamil literature. Brahmins and Brahmanism do not gain a major voice in Tamil literature until centuries after the composition of the earliest surviving Tamil texts. In other regional contexts, Brahmin authors and Brahmanical religious and intellectual orientations play larger roles at earlier points in their literary histories. Caldwell's observations about the relative absence of Brahmins in ancient Tamil history offered powerful support to Tamil authors interested in subverting Brahmin social and cultural dominance in 19th and 20th-century Tamil public society.

Although Caldwell's *Comparative grammar* presents the ancient Dravidian race in a more positive light than most European scholarship on South Asia at the time, Caldwell's praise of the ancient Dravidians has limits. Caldwell's work conforms to the major consensuses of contemporary Western thought on both Indic history and the nature of ethnoracial peoplehood. As we have seen above, the idea that the ancient Aryans were an intellectually and culturally superior ethnic people was a key consensus shared across many realms of

colonial Western scholarship on South Asia. In *Comparative grammar*, Caldwell never disputes the idea that the Aryans are and were a more civilizationally advanced race than the Dravidians. Rather, Caldwell places the ancient Dravidian race in a middle tier of a worldwide racial-civilizational hierarchy, flanked by the truly civilized Aryans and European peoples at the top and the truly savage races of the world at the very bottom. Relatedly, although Caldwell expresses respect for Indian scholars of Tamil and other Dravidian languages, he also treats native scholarship with a patronizing attitude typical of Western scholars at the time. Caldwell writes in the preface to the second edition of *Comparative grammar:*

> If the natives of Southern India began to take an interest in the comparative study of their own languages and in comparative philology in general, they would find it in a variety of ways much more useful to them than the study of the grammar of their own language alone ever has been. They would cease to content themselves with learning by rote versified enigmas and harmonious platitudes. They would begin to discern the real aims and objects of language, and realise the fact that language has a history of its own, throwing light upon all other history, and rendering ethnology and archaeology possible. They would find that philology studied in this manner enlarged the mind instead of cramping it, extended its horizon, and provided it with a plentiful store of matters of wide human interest. And the consequence probably would be that a more critical, scholarly habit of mind, showing itself in a warmer desire for the discovery of truth, would begin to prevail. Another result—not perhaps so immediate, but probably in the end as certain—a result of priceless value—would be the development of a good, readable, respectable, useful, Dravidian literature—a literature written in a style free at once from pedantry and from vulgarisms, and in matter, tone, and tendency, as well as in style, worthy of so intelligent a people as the natives of Southern India undoubtedly are.[66]

In this passage, Caldwell identifies the role that he and his Western compatriots must play in the elevation of Dravidian literature. Without Western influence and training, South Indian scholars are mired in "rote versified enigmas and harmonious platitudes". Caldwell clearly presents his scholarship as a tool by which Dravidian scholars might elevate themselves. As

is true of almost colonial scholarship, the true extent to which Caldwell thought it was possible for South Indian scholars to elevate themselves is up for question.

The first edition of *Comparative grammar* was published in 1848. In 1875, in recognition of the sustained popularity of the work, a second edition of the work was released. For *Comparative grammar*'s second edition, Caldwell added a full new chapter, in-text additions and changes, a new author's preface, and an additional bibliography of scholarship on Dravidian racial history. Caldwell undertook these changes to keep apace of the changing landscape of Western thought on ethnoracial peoplehood in the second half of the 19th century. The first version of Caldwell's work is firmly entrenched in the comparative philological methods pioneered by William Jones and still current at the midpoint of the 19th century. Using lexical, phonetic, and grammatical comparisons, Caldwell attempts in the first edition not only to demonstrate the family relationship of the Dravidian languages, but also to suggest possible connections between the Dravidians and other ethnolinguistic peoples throughout the world. For instance, Caldwell marvels:

> How remarkable that distinct affinities to the speech of the Dravidians of inter-tropical India should be discoverable in the language of the Finns of Northern Europe, and of the Ostiaks and other Ugrians of Siberia; and, consequently, that the præ-Aryan inhabitants of the Dekhan should appear, from the evidence furnished by their language alone, in the silence of history, in the absence of all ordinary probabilities, to be allied to the tribes that appear to have overspread Europe before the arrival of the Teutons and the Hellenes, and even before the arrival of the Celts! What a confirmation of the statement that 'God hath made of *one* blood all nations of men, to dwell upon the face of the whole earth!'[67]

The closing sentence of this passage testifies to the continuing importance of the Christian genealogy of nations in Western (albeit, missionary) thought as late as 1848. This passage

also demonstrates the importance Caldwell's work places on the question of the ancient Dravidians' relationship to other ancient peoples. *Comparative grammar* explicitly touches on many of the connections to other ethnolinguistic peoples listed in this brief passage, investigating possible linguistic and historical links between these peoples and the ancient Dravidians. Per the hierarchical model of race that became dominant in Western scholarship by the mid-19th century, the proximity and nature of these connections could hold valuable information about the inherent racial aptitudes of racial peoples. For instance, when summarizing his discussion on whether Dravidians may be considered members of the Scythian race- and if so, to what extent- Caldwell writes,

> This remarkable difference between the Indo-European languages and those of the Scythian stock seems to have arisen partly from the higher mental gifts and higher capacity for civilisation, with which the Indo-European tribes appear to have been endowed from the beginning, and still more from the earlier literary culture of their languages, and the better preservation, in consequence, of their forms and roots. It seems also to have arisen in part from their more settled habits, in comparison with the wandering, nomadic life led by most of the Scythian tribes.[68]

In this quotation, as was standard in Western philological literature from at least the time of William Jones, Caldwell treats languages and ethnic peoples as synonymous. Indo-European *languages* can be compared from those "of the Scythian *stock*", and that comparison can yield knowledge about the essential traits of the Dravidian *race*. Indeed, Caldwell argues in *Comparative grammar* that the ancient Dravidians were a martial, nomadic people related to the Scythians or Hittites, a mid-range status that placed the Dravidians between more menial races of the world and the truly advanced civilizations of history.

Elsewhere in *Comparative grammar*, Caldwell uses language itself as a marker of the civilizational complexity attained by the ancient Dravidians. Tellingly, Caldwell uses Tamil words as markers of the social, cultural, and moral complexity of the Dravidian race as a whole. Caldwell writes,

> If we eliminate from the Tamil language the whole of its Sanskrit derivatives, the primitive Dravidian words that remain will furnish us with a faithful picture of the simple, yet far from savage, life of the non-Aryanised Dravidians… From the evidence of the words in use amongst the early Tamilians, we learn the following items of information. They had 'kings', who dwelt in 'strong houses', and ruled over small 'districts of country'. They had 'minstrels' who recited 'songs' at 'festivals' and they seem to have had alphabetical 'characters' written with a style on palmyra leaves. A bundle of those leaves was called 'a book'; they were without hereditary 'priests' and 'idols' and appear to have had no idea of 'heaven' and 'hell', of the 'soul' or 'sin'; but they acknowledged the existence of God, whom they styled *kô,* or king- a realistic title little known to orthodox Hindûism.… All the ordinary or necessary arts of life, including 'spinning', 'weaving', and 'dyeing', existed among them. They had no acquaintance with 'sculpture' or 'architecture'; with 'astronomy' or even 'astrology'; and were ignorant, not only of every branch of 'philosophy', but even of 'grammar'. Their undeveloped intellectual condition is especially apparent in words relating to the operations of the mind. Their only words for the 'mind' were the 'diaphragm' (the φρῆν of the early Greeks), and 'the inner parts' or 'interior'. They had a word for 'thought', but no word distinct from this for 'memory', 'judgment', or 'conscience', and no word for 'will'.[69]

This lengthy passage powerfully applies the philological racial logic pioneered by William Jones to an analysis of the ancient Dravidian language. Caldwell finds through his analysis of ancient Dravidian vocabulary that the Dravidians, before Aryan influence, were capable of talking about a basic and dignified village life, but were not acquainted with higher forms of philosophical or religious thought. Whereas the Dravidians were acquainted with basic handicrafts like spinning, weaving, and dyeing, as evidenced by the existence of Dravidian root-words for each of these activities, they did not have words for phenomena like sculpture, astronomy, or archaeology. Similarly, Caldwell points out, the ancient Dravidians had a

native word for “town” but not for “city”, and “ships” but not “commerce”. Most poignantly, Caldwell argues that there were no native Dravidian words for “memory”, “judgment”, “conscience”, or “will” before the arrival of the ancient Aryans. In spite of his considerably more favorable appraisal of Dravidian society than scholars like Risley or Elmore, Caldwell adheres to the same core racial logic that Risley and Elmore use to define Dravidian blood and religious forms as inferior to their comparatively more advanced Aryan, Sanskritic correlates. In Caldwell’s work, as in other contemporary Western scholarly works, higher forms of civilization remain tied to Aryan influence, specifically through Brahmins. Caldwell writes, concluding the above passage,

> In conclusion: “This brief illustration, from the primitive Tamil vocabulary, of the social condition of the Dravidians, prior to the arrival of the Brâhmans, will suffice to prove that the elements of civilisation already existed amongst them. They had not acquired much more than the elements; and in many things were centuries behind the Brâhmans whom they revered as instructors and obeyed as overseers: but if they had been left altogether to themselves, it is open to dispute whether they would not now be in a better condition, at least in point of morals and intellectual freedom, than they are. The mental culture and the higher civilisation which they derived from the Brâhmans, have, I fear, been more than counterbalanced by the fossilising caste rules, the unpractical, pantheistic philosophy, and the cumbersome routine of inane ceremonies, which were introduced amongst them by the guides of their new social state.[70]

Caldwell’s mixed thoughts on Aryan influence here are deeply telling. It is clear from the above passage that Caldwell credits Brahmin influence for introducing higher civilization to the Dravidians. However, Caldwell also surmises that Brahmin influence may have fettered Dravidian society with harmful social inheritances, without which Dravidian society may have been better off. Caldwell’s mixed position here ably mixes his allegiances both to the Aryan supremacy normative in Western scholarship and to a Christian missionary project interested in eroding Brahmin religious authority over South Indian society. As we will see

next chapter, Christian missionaries stationed in the Tamil country, motivated to unseat the dominance of Brahmanical Hinduism in the Tamil country, were generally far more critical of the Brahmanical tradition's role in Tamil society than secular Western scholars.

In the new chapter added to the second addition of *Comparative grammar*, Caldwell incorporates further methodologies and findings of race science into his argument about the Dravidian peoples. Like many other works on race and ethnicity at the time, this chapter cites metrics such as skin color as important indicators of ethnoracial history. However, Caldwell is not convinced that physical race maps onto the ethnolinguistic Dravidian race illuminated in his research. For instance, Caldwell writes,

> The physical type of a race may best be determined by the shape of the head and the more permanent peculiarities of feature, irrespective of the complexion, or colour of the skin; for every one [sic] who has lived in India must have learned to regard colour as a deceptive evidence of relationship and race… It is true that the Brahmans as a class are much fairer than the Pareiyas [sic] as a class: but the conviction is forced upon the mind of every observer, by the hundreds of instances he meets with in daily life, that the colour of the features of the Hindûs is mainly a result of the external circumstances in which they are placed with respect to climate, occupation, and mode of life. As a rule, they seem to be dark-complexioned in proportion as they are exposed to the sun in out-door labour, and fair in proportion as they life a sedentary life; and consequently colour, if an evidence of anything specific, seems to be an evidence mainly of the social status of the individual and his family. We cannot, therefore, expect from considerations of colour and complexion much real help towards determining the race to which Dravidians belong.[71]

Here, Caldwell argues that skin color is not necessarily a telling metric of racial difference, but rather is the result of occupation-based sun exposure. This preserves the core of his philological argument about the Dravidian race, and de-emphasizes the importance of collecting physiological metrics like those collected by Risley for his Censuses of India. However, in spite of his allegiance to the value of philological studies of the Dravidian past,

Caldwell is willing to participate in mainstream contemporary discourses on ethnic and racial peoplehood, in which biological and social-scientific models offer complementary ways of classifying the world's racial peoples in gradations of relative advancement. Elsewhere in this added chapter, Caldwell admits that physical metrics do potentially provide useful information in South Indian ethnic genealogy. Caldwell writes,

> On the other hand, it must be admitted that on the Malabar coast itself, where a moist climate and an abundance of shade seem to favour the blanching of the colour of the skin, the Puleiyas, a caste of agricultural slaves, are noted for their exceeding blackness. On the Coromandel coast, where the people are blacker on the whole by several degrees than on the Malabar coast, I have met with individuals belonging to various castes, even amongst the higher castes, as black as the Puleiyas; but I cannot say that I am acquainted with any caste or class on either coast which can vie with the Puleiyas in being so universally black. In conjunction with this blackness, however, I have not noticed anything in the shape of the head or in the features of the Puleiyas tending to connect them with a Negrito race, or with any other race than their Dravidian masters. The difference seems to me one of colour alone and I must be content, I fear, for the present to leave this difference in colour unaccounted for. The Puleiyas are also a very diminutive race, but that is of very little consequence ethnologically, as it is very easily accounted for by the half-starved condition which they have been kept from generation to generation.[72]

In other words, Caldwell here admits that philological evidence alone cannot explain the unusual darkness of the Puleiya caste's skin. However, Caldwell also dismisses the possibility that this unusual darkness merits the classification of the Puleiyas with other, blacker racial stocks instead of the other Dravidians of South India. Caldwell defends this assertion by referring to other physiological measurements of Puleiyas, such as their head shape, which do not match the typical standards for the comparatively black "Negrito" (i.e. Melanesian) race. Moreover, Caldwell argues that Puleiyas' slightness of stature is not a hereditary trait, but rather a consequence of their community's lack of access to food across generations. Even if Caldwell's interests principally lie in philological classification,

Caldwell here demonstrates literacy in the biological discourses of racial classification centered in Risley's work and other works of Western scholarship, and acknowledges the possibility that physiological markers can illustrate important features of the history of the Dravidian race.

Conclusion

This chapter offers brief summaries of a number of rich moments in Western and colonial Indian discursive history, each of which can be (and often already is) the subject of a monograph, college course, conference, or even field of study in its own right. This long and rich history generated the intellectual environment that 19th-century Tamil scholars encountered both through their education in colonial schools and through their own research as professional academics or theologians. In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, we will chart how various Tamil thinkers have engaged with Western scholarship on racial peoplehood and the Dravidian racial past. There, we will see that while Tamil thinkers have engaged profoundly and seriously with contemporary Western scholarship on race, Tamil "race talk" makes significant and sometimes radical changes to the racial arguments found in Western sources. These changes have principally been motivated by Tamil thinkers' social, cultural, and political interests, but 19th- and early 20th-century Tamil thinkers also drew influence from Christian missionary scholarship on the Tamil country. Before we turn to Tamil adaptations of and responses to Western racial discourse about the Indic and Dravidian past in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, we should first account for this second important channel of exchange between Western thought and Tamil thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Chapter 2: Christian Missionaries and Tamil Culture

For, under some form or other, Çaivism is the real religion of the South of India, and of North Ceylon, and the Çaiva Siddhānta philosophy has, and *deserves to have,* far more influence than any other.

(G.U. Pope, Translator's Preface to *The Tiruvaçagam; or, Sacred Utterances of the Tamil Poet, Saint, and Sage Manikka-Vaçagar*, p. ix*)*

Introduction

Western scholarship on racial peoplehood provided many of the conceptual and rhetorical foundations for the tradition of Tamil "race talk" that would emerge in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Alongside this comparatively secular Western scholarship, scholarly works authored by more confessional Christian missionaries stationed in the Tamil country also left an important imprint on the syntax and vocabulary associated with Tamil race-talk. Western racial scholarship of the sorts we saw last chapter offered early Tamil "race talkers" important methodologies and evidence to frame their claims about historical and racial Tamil peoplehood. Christian missionary writings added to the toolbox of Tamil race talk by systematizing a critique of Brahmanical Hinduism as an oppressive and non-Tamil religious tradition. Rather than the Brahmanical tradition, important Christian missionaries presented a variety of Tamil devotional traditions and literature as the core of a purely Tamil religious history.

The work of Christian missionaries in the Tamil South was by no means sealed off from the important discourses on civilization, modernity, savagery, or even biological race that proliferated in secular Western scholarship at the same time: all of these concepts also appear in missionary writings. However, Tamil country-based Christian missionaries approached

these discourses from a distinctive standpoint tied to the core interests of their missionary project in Hindu-majority South India. As we saw last chapter, much contemporary Western secular scholarship on South Asia was invested in demonstrating the supremacy of the Aryan race in the history of Indic civilization- and by extension, reaffirming the supremacy of white Europeans over all humankind. In contrast, Christian missionaries in the Tamil country, while also certainly convinced of the superiority of white Christians over the unconverted brown masses of the Tamil country, were principally interested in disrupting the social and cultural influence of Brahmanical Hinduism on Tamil society. Christian missionaries in the Tamil country saw Brahmanical Hinduism as the principal rhetorical, ideological, and cultural adversary to the conversion of all segments of Tamil society to Christianity. Accordingly, Christian missionaries in South India tirelessly disparaged Brahmanical theology and Sanskrit-language Hindu scripture in their works, with the goal of eroding Brahmanical Hinduism's control over Tamil society. Missionaries also argued that Brahmanical Hinduism had corrupted a once essentially wholesome, grounded, and perhaps even originally Christian native Tamil religious culture.

In this chapter, we will trace a brief history of Western Christian missionary scholarship on the Tamil country and the Tamil language from its beginnings in the 16th and 17th centuries to its continuation under British colonial rule during the 19th century. We will take a closer look at writings by two Tamil country-based Christian missionaries, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and G.U. Pope, to illustrate the core features of a distinctive Christian missionary perspective on Tamil cultural identity and history. The Christian missionary charge to convert the Tamil masses through text- and sermon-based education motivated Western

missionaries like Ziegenbalg, Pope, and others to study local Tamil cultural life and the Tamil language closely, so that they could develop culturally persuasive ways to win Tamil converts. Because of their intensive study of the Tamil societies around them, Christian missionary writings show far more familiarity with Tamil culture and far greater sensitivity to social and cultural differences between Tamil and Sanskritic language, aesthetics, and folklore than secular Western scholarship on South Asia from the same time period.

Another important feature of Christian missionary scholarship on Tamil society is missionaries' urge to differentiate attractive or non-offensive elements of Tamil society from the perversions of Hindu religion. Although early missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries did not necessarily identify distinctions between Brahmanical Hinduism and Tamil religious culture, missionaries like Bartolomäus Ziegenbalg, whom we will discuss further below, developed considerable respect for the Tamil language and Tamil literary aesthetics, which he held separate from the heathen "Malabarick" religious rituals and beliefs he condemned as a Christian missionary. By the 19th century Christian missionaries had begun targeting the Brahmanical tradition specifically as an oppressive presence in Tamil religious and social life and the main obstacle to the successful conversion of Tamil Hindus. 19th-century missionaries like G.U. Pope sought to amplify specific currents in Tamil religious and literary history to loosen Brahmanical Hinduism's hold on Tamil society.

Both early missionaries' praise of Tamil cultural sophistication and the bifurcation of respectable Tamil culture and religion from perverse Brahmanical Hinduism found in 19th-century Christian missionary writings offered powerful support to early Tamil "race talkers",

such as the Neo-Saiva historiographers we will see next chapter, who were similarly interested in combatting Brahmanical Hinduism's influence over Tamil society. However, as was the case with the race science scholarship we discussed last chapter, the Tamil "race talk" we will examine in the next few chapters of this dissertation makes critical changes to the underlying religious, cultural, social, and political projects animating Christian missionary scholarship.

Dictionaries, Grammars, and the Dialogue of Mission Work

Indology, and more broadly, European academic and administrative scholarship on South Asia, was historically centered on and in northern regions of British India. For instance, Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic were the three dominant languages of Western scholarship on India, and were the three "classical languages" taught to Indian Foreign Service workers.[73] Although all three of these languages had been used to extent in South India at some point prior to British colonialism[74], other, South Indian languages such as Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada historically served as major literary or administrative languages of peninsular India. These languages did not generally receive anywhere near the same institutional attention from Western administrators and scholars that Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic did, especially in the early years of British presence in South Asia. The foundation of the College of Fort St. George in British Madras in the early 19th century mitigated this imbalance to a small extent by establishing official programs for British scholarship on South India and employing a limited number of professors of Tamil and other South Indian languages.[75] However, specialist work on the regional culture of the Tamil country remained mostly marginal to

wider Western deliberations on South Asian culture and history, which remained grounded on the ancient Aryan legacy.

In light of the relative lack of secular Western scholarly interest in the Tamil South, the most comprehensive and influential works of Western scholarship on the Tamil language of both the precolonial and colonial era were composed not by secular, university-based scholars, but rather by Christian missionaries stationed in missions across the Tamil country. Missionaries stationed in the Tamil country were the first to compile multilingual Tamil dictionaries and translate Tamil-language works into European languages, and vice versa. In fact, several prominent European missionary scholars, notably Constanzo Beschi and G.U. Pope, remain famous in present-day Tamil society both for their extensive contributions to the study of the Tamil language and for their original Tamil-language literary compositions.

Christian missionaries achieved greater literacy in the Tamil language and Tamil literary and religious history than their Western peers chiefly due to their missions' need to adapt to Tamil society to survive. Before the British Crown assumed control of India, Christian missionaries' relatively small numbers and limited financial resources relegated them to a somewhat marginal position in local social life. Unlike representatives of both the East India Company and the early British Raj, Christian missionaries generally could not count on wider institutional support (i.e., institutionalized networks of hired translators, etc.) when navigating South Asian cultural life. Accordingly, the survival of individual missions in South India largely hinged on Christian missionaries' ability to integrate into local South Indian communities. This dynamic yielded important epistemological differences between

Tamil-centered missionary scholarship and Indological treatments of South India and broader South Asia. Whereas text-centered Indological scholarship was largely disconnected from in-person cultural interactions and therefore largely unfalsifiable by ethnographic evidence, missionary scholars constructed arguments based in part on their own cultural experiences, and faced the pressure of translating and justifying their conclusions in their local communities. As a result, missionary scholars in the Tamil country often show a much keener grasp of Tamil literary and cultural history than their Indological contemporaries.

The pressure on Christian missionaries to become fluent in Tamil language and culture was not exclusively logistical, but was also connected to a core component of the Christian missionary project in South India: translating the Gospel into terms that potential Tamil converts could understand not just linguistically, but also intellectually, emotionally, and culturally. Both Catholics and Protestants in the Tamil country actively participated in the study of the Tamil language and Tamil literature. However, Protestant missionaries are responsible for a greater share of early Western scholarship on Tamil society. This denominational difference connects to a Protestant theological priority: winning authentic, voluntary converts to the Christian tradition. As Webb Keane has described, Asia-based Protestant missionaries like Dutch Calvinists on the island of Sumba persistently criticized "fetishistic", ritual forms of worship, using similar lines of polemics to the ones they levied against European Catholics.[76] Protestants encouraged an internalized, "modern" model of worship detached from the material religious symbols and forms to which they argued both Catholics and fetishistic Asians were enthralled.[77]

The 18th-century Danish Protestant missionary Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg authored the first European dictionary of the "Malabarick" (i.e., Tamil) language.[78] Although the Portuguese were the first to establish permanent Christian missions in South India[79], it was missionaries of Ziegenbalg's generation- German, English, Scottish, Irish, Dutch, and Italian, as well as Danish- who were the first to establish Christian missions in many regions of the Tamil country. Ziegenbalg documented his experiences with his own mission in a series of letters that were published in Europe in a compiled volume, entitled *Propagation of the Gospel in the East*. Ziegenbalg's letters provide profound insights into Ziegenbalg's approach to missionary work in the Tamil country, as well as how and why Ziegenbalg undertook the task of compiling a Tamil dictionary as a natural extension of that work.[80]

Ziegenbalg, like many Christian missionaries of his time, presented his missionary duty as a charge to rescue the peoples of the Eastern world from cultural and religious darkness. Ziegenbalg's *Propagation of the Gospel in the East* begins with a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, in which Ziegenbalg frames his mission. Ziegenbalg writes,

> Wherefore, as our Candle borrow'd its first Lustre from their Sun; So the *European* Nations may be glad both to *walk* and to *rejoice* in that Light whilst they have it. They may suffer themselves to be warm'd and enliven'd by it in such a manner, as will render their Life pure, their Conversation holy, their Faith and Love so strong and diffusive, that the darkest Corners of the World, be visited thereby, and the thickest Night of Infidelity and Barbarity, of Superstition and Idolatry, be converted at last into a Day of Light and Salvation.[81]

Ziegenbalg's words here echo the Christian genealogies of nations we summarized last chapter. Like these Christian genealogies of nations, Ziegenbalg's letter extrapolates Biblical history onto ethnogeographic categories in the 18th-century world. Ziegenbalg opens the passage above with an allusion to early Christian church history. Whereas originally the

Gospel traveled westward from the Levant to the pagan lands of Mediterranean Europe, now it was time for Europe to return the favor and "relight the candle" of the Gospel in the East. This light of the Gospel would dispel and replace the East's current spiritual darkness, which Ziegenbalg characterizes as "infidelity", "barbarity", "superstition", and "idolatry", all standard Christian polemical terms applicable to pagans across the world.

A core feature of Ziegenbalg's approach to mission work is the value he places on the emotional immediacy of the convert's experience of the Gospel. For Ziegenbalg, a Lutheran, a direct and genuine experience of love for God is the *sine qua non* of authentic Christian faith. In the second letter of Ziegenbalg's compilation, Ziegenbalg attributes the lapse of Christianity in the East to the lapse of the experience of love for God. Ziegenbalg writes,

> Since that Time [of the East's lapse of faith through the Church of Ephesus], the State of *Christendom* hath been farther and farther removed from the first *Light* and *Fire*… which warmed the first Confessors…. As they did remove their Love from God; so did God remove his Light from them, and thereby involved them in Errors and Ignorance. Which, by the Way, may teach us, that an *unfeigned Love to God* [emphasis in original] is the best Security against Errors in Doctrine, and against all such Lies and Delusions, as are like to be spread in the latter Days.[82]

Here Ziegenbalg counterposes direct and experiential love for God with an implicit opposite: a false faith based on doctrinal legalism. Ziegenbalg argues that it was not doctrinal error itself that led the Church of Ephesus astray, but rather the way that doctrinal legalism came in the way of Christians' direct experience of love for God. Ziegenbalg concludes this excerpt by arguing that authentic love for God in fact *prevents* violations of doctrine, since love for God constitutes the core of healthy Christian worship. Although Ziegenbalg writes this passage to introduce his missionary work in Tranquebar, here it is not the Hindus of Tranquebar but the "State of Christendom" itself that Ziegenbalg describes. Like Keane's

Dutch Calvinists on Sumba, Ziegenbalg's approach to his missionary work was deeply influenced by contemporary Christian sectarian struggles between Catholics and Protestants in Western Europe.

In a subsequent passage in the same letter, Ziegenbalg describes his ideal missionary in terms similarly laden with European sectarian conflict. Ziegenbalg writes,

> Any Person therefore designed for the Work of the *Mission*, should have a more *free* and *enlarged* Education, than what is commonly practiced among us. He should be used to view Religion in its *primitive Amplitude*, before it was broke into Parties, and clogged with the Inventions of Men. The Effect whereof would be, that having Religion drawn from the Source, he would the better convey it to others again in the same Goodness and Purity…. If a Man would defend and propagate a peculiar Scheme in *India*, with the same Vehemency as is commonly done in *Europe*, a *Heathen* might easily be induced to believe, as if this was the *Substance* of Religion, and the very vital Part of the Christian *Faith*. He would be in Danger to acquiesce in a *Form*, in a *Scheme*, in a *Name* and verbal *Confession*, instead of *JESUS CHRIST* himself, and of the Religion he hath taught us.[83]

In this excerpt, Ziegenbalg presents the truly qualified missionary as one who is able to communicate the experiential core of the Christian faith without being distracted by doctrinal quibbles. Ziegenbalg again contrasts a pure, "primitive", experiential religion- i.e., experience and Gospel-centered Protestantism- with a religion inappropriately obsessed with theological schemes and invented rules- Catholicism. Ziegenbalg warns that a missionary to India could recreate the theological confusion of Catholic Europe if not properly attuned to the difference between core religious truths- "Religion in its primitive amplitude" - and theological particularities and fine points. In other words, to recall Ziegenbalg's discussion on the Church of Ephesus above, Tranquebar could find itself even further removed from the Light of God if a Christian missionary taught converts points of doctrine without instilling in them a genuine, experienced love for God.

After the broad topics of his first two letters, the next letters in Ziegenbalg's *Propagation of the Gospel in the East* deal with the specific details of his missionary work in Tranquebar. As Ziegenbalg documents in his letters, language issues were some of the first challenges that he and his party encountered upon arriving in the Tamil country. Ziegenbalg's missionary work centered in a region already frequented by Portuguese traders, and Portuguese was a *lingua franca* understood by a small number of local Tamilians. Ziegenbalg and his missionary partner originally set off on their mission trip intending to proselytize in Portuguese, assuming local audiences would have some level of familiarity with the language. However, Ziegenbalg and his German missionary partner had not yet mastered Portuguese, and found it very difficult to find reliable materials on the way to the Tamil country. Moreover, Ziegenbalg and his partner discovered that the pidgin Portuguese spoken in their region differed considerably from the Portuguese spoken in Portugal, further exacerbating their difficulty in communicating with many locals.[84] Once Ziegenbalg and his partner reached a functional level of pidgin Portuguese, they came to reconsider their original approach to the mission itself. Ziegenbalg writes,

> …we have at last made so considerable a Progress in it, that we are able pretty well to catechize the Heathens in *Portuguese*. We design now to set down in that Language a Collection of the chief Heads of the whole Scripture, and of the Christian Doctrine, and then get them translated into *Malabarick* [i.e., Tamil]. However, the *Malabarian* Language being involved in far more Difficulties than the *Portuguese*, we at first were at a stand, not knowing whether it would be wisely done, to spend our time in learning it; especially since we found the *Portuguese* as yet sufficient for our Design: And as for such of the Heathens as were unacquainted therewith, we thought to manage them by the Help of our Servant, who knows both Languages and is fit enough to be an Interpreter. Besides this, we did not intend to make any longer stay here, than the *Three* Years engaged for at our Departure. But at last it fell out so, that we agreed, one of us should resolve, either to continue here constantly, or at least a considerable time longer, and consequently should employ himself to get the

> Language of the Country to such a degree, as to be fit to improve it to the main Scope we are sent hither for.[85]

Ziegenbalg describes himself and his partner as originally uncommitted to studying the "Malabarian" language at all. However, although Ziegenbalg and his partner reached a functional level of communication with locals using Portuguese (and relying on a local interpreter), they found that preaching in Portuguese meaningfully limited their audience in the Tamil country. Ziegenbalg and his partner's initial difficulties with learning Tamil also prevented them from translating the Gospel itself into Tamil during the initial timeframe of their mission. These shortcomings led Ziegenbalg and his partner to commit to establishing a long-term presence in the Tamil country in order to gain mastery of the Tamil language.

Although Ziegenbalg's complete ignorance of the linguistic situation of the Tamil country in the above passage may suggest that Ziegenbalg held a patronizing attitude towards the Tamil language, that does not appear to be the case from other passages from Ziegenbalg's letters. In fact, shortly after the above passage, Ziegenbalg makes the following comment,

But to give you a taste of the *Malabarian Characters*, or way of Writing, I will set down and decipher to you here the *Malabarick* Letters themselves, that at least you

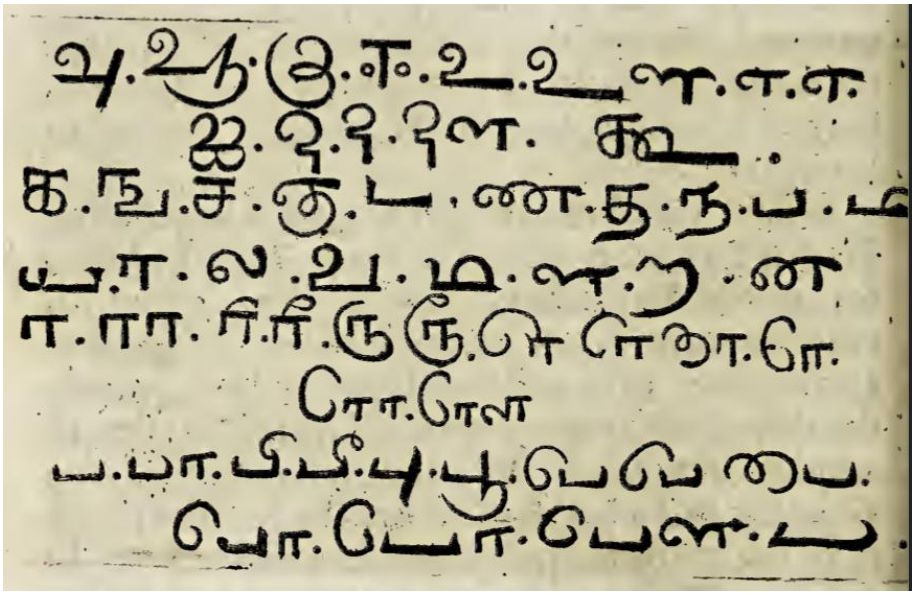

Fig. 1: Ziegenbalg's diagram of the 18th-century Tamil alphabet

may see, that these Heathens are a People quick and sharp enough in their Way.[86]

Ziegenbalg appends a diagram, reproduced above, of the 18th-century Tamil alphabet to document the (qualified) wit of the locals. While Ziegenbalg's praise of Tamil and Tamil people comes off somewhat patronizing, this level of respect for a non-Sanskritic language contrasts sharply with the thorough dismissals of Dravidian society and Prakrit languages found in the work of Indologists like H.T. Colebrooke. Rather than dismissing the Tamil language as a degraded regional offshoot of Sanskrit- an idea that became dominant in the Indological scholarship of the following century- Ziegenbalg instead takes pains throughout his letters to praise the intelligence and elegance of speech he observes among the Tamilians around him. Ziegenbalg, like many of the Christian missionaries who follow him, argues that the study of Tamil has profound value both to the Christian mission in the Tamil country, and perhaps even to the Western world to some limited extent. Ziegenbalg writes:

> It were to be wished, that the *Malabarick* Tongue was taught and learnt in *Europe*, with as great Industry as any other of the *Eastern* Languages; especially since these Heathens are a very numerous People, and make a large Body of the *Eastern* Nations. By this Means, they might, under God's Assistance, be rescued from their gross Blindness and Ignorance; if Protestant Kings and Powers would but readily join in lending a helping Hand to so glorious a Work, and furnish a competent Stock, for making the necessary Preparations towards it. At this rate, we should be enabled to lay open in time all the Secrets of their Divinity and Philosophy, fetching them from their own Writings, enriched with Fables cunning enough and trimmed with as fine Poetical Fancies and Flourishes, as many of our Heathenish Authors, both in *Greek* and *Latin*. And we might perhaps find at least as solid and rational Conclusions in their Writings, as in the much admired *Aristotle*, tho' not involved in so many Intricacies and hard notional Terms of *Logick*, *Rhetorick*, and *Metaphysicks*, as *Aristotle's* Stuff.[87]

Although Ziegenbalg is not quite willing here to elevate the status of Tamil to the status of the "Heathenish" classical languages of Greek and Latin, Ziegenbalg's inclusion of Tamil in this conversation already shows a marked difference from even Robert Caldwell's qualified praise of Dravidian Tamil antiquity. Whereas Caldwell took pains to argue that the Dravidians did not develop an intellectually sophisticated civilization prior to the arrival of Brahminism from the North, Ziegenbalg here suggests that "Malabarick" authors could come to occupy a place like the "heathen" writings of classical Greece and Rome. However, while "Malabarick" writings may prove to hold deep intellectual insights like those of ancient Greek philosophy, Ziegenbalg also reminds us in this passage of the greater, religious blindness with which the "Malabaricks', like the Greeks and Romans before them, are stricken. The cure to this blindness, Ziegenbalg notes, comes both from "God's assistance" and the material support of Protestant "Kings and Powers". In other words, while Ziegenbalg is open to taking "Malabarick" thought seriously, he does so under the assumption that Protestant religious and political power will simultaneously transform the heathen "Malabaricks" into a Christian people.

In another letter in Ziegenbalg's compilation, Ziegenbalg attempts to outline the fundamentals of the "Malabarians'" religious beliefs and practices. Ziegenbalg conducted his mission before the work of William Jones and the surge of European scholarship on the Brahmanical tradition, an intellectual moment that had a major impact on Tamil Christian missionary writings just as it did on secular Western scholarship. Whereas subsequent Christian missionaries began to distinguish between Brahmanical Hinduism and other currents of Tamil religious culture, Ziegenbalg treats the Brahmanical tradition as the regnant form of local Tamil religious life. Ziegenbalg writes,

> *First* then, As for the *Divinity* of the *Malabarians*; (the Name whereby they are commonly known throughout the whole Tract of this Country), I have observed, that the same [i.e., the divinity] is interlaced with a World of Fables and idolatrous Fictions. They have many Hundreds of Gods, but own nevertheless but *one* Divine Being, to be the Spring and Original Source of all other Gods and Things… From this Divinity, as their Tradition runs, did originally spring forth something, which they call *Kiwelinga*[88], and which they worship in their Temples for God. From this *Kiwelinga*, they say further, Three other great Gods took their Rise; *viz. Bramma* [i.e., Brahmā], *Wischtnum* [i.e., Viṣṇu], *and Isparas* [i.e., Īśvara/Śiva]. *Bramma* is said to create and make all things; *Wischtnum,* to rule over things created; and *Ispara,* to destroy 'em again. They are all Three set up here in large *Pagodes* or Temples. Perhaps these poor People have heard heretofore, that there is one divine Being only, but made manifest in Three Persons: For they ascribe in many things such Characters to *Bramma*, as we appropriate to JESUS CHRIST. They say, he has a human nature, but four Heads, and that he has given to Mankind four Books. The First of these did treat of Divinity, and of the first original Principle of all things. The Second, of Powers, and the various Metamorphoses or Transmutations of all things. The Third, they say, contains good Morals. And the Fourth, the Duties to be observed in their idolatrous worship.[89]

Ziegenbalg's opening sentence in this excerpt is a statement that could be found in any number of European texts on non-Western religious cultures. Ziegenbalg contrasts the "fables" and "fictions" of Malabarian religion with the true Gospel of Christ. Just like excessive legalism alienated the Ephesians from the fundamental love of God necessary for

true Christian faith, Ziegenbalg argues that idolatrous fantasy is the chief flaw of the Malabarians' belief system. To wit, Ziegenbalg suggests in this excerpt that the Malabarian people had perhaps already been exposed to the Christian faith, but had misunderstood the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as a statement that there were three personal gods (i.e., "Three Persons") that ruled over the universe. This theory strongly echoes Ziegenbalg's thought on doctrine and the missionary project in the letters we examined above: Ziegenbalg surmises here that the miscommunication of a doctrinal fine point in the past led to the emergence of a fully non-Christian religious landscape in the Tamil country. Ziegenbalg also here shows how an impulse to discern the "primitive" religious truth at the heart of the Malabarian religious system can be useful for a Christian missionary project. Since Ziegenbalg's stated goal is to open lines of communication with local Hindus, he is keenly interested in broadening his admittedly narrow and incomplete knowledge of local religious beliefs and customs. Ziegenbalg writes,

> But this [mythological] Account is attended again with a long Train of Fables and Fictions, too prolix to be rehearsed here. However, these and many other impertinent Stories are set out by the *Malabarians* in so fine Flourishes of Wit, and adorn'd with such a poetical Air, as may make it pleasant enough to read them; though they refute to impart them at large to any Christian, let there never be so much Money bid for them. I keep at present a particular School-Master in my House, whom I hope to prevail with, to transcribe for me the Stories and Transactions of their several Gods, in the Knowledge whereof he is extraordinarily well versed.[90]

Ziegenbalg hoped that deepening his knowledge on Malabarian religious thought would allow him to learn more about how to advertise the Gospel effectively to his surrounding Tamil audiences. Moreover, like many of his Christian missionary successors in the Tamil country, Ziegenbalg registers admiration for Tamil poetic aesthetics, which make the otherwise absurd religious fables he encounters pleasant to read. While Ziegenbalg's goal to

convert the "Malabarians" is clear, it is also clear that he viewed attaining literacy in Tamil culture as a key step in the mission process. This contrasts sharply with the pejorative descriptions of "Dravidian religion" found in scholarly works like W.T. Elmore's, which we discussed last chapter, that present Dravidian cultural forms as inherently regressive and savage.

Later on in *The Propagation of the Gospel in the East*, it becomes clear that Ziegenbalg and his mission needed to bolster their familiarity with Tamil culture in order to improve the middling returns from their missionary outreach. In another letter in the compilation, Ziegenbalg complains,

> I must freely confess that it is very hard to make any Impression upon their Minds, or to bring 'em over out of the gross Blindness that overspreads 'em, to the glorious Light of the holy Gospel. The chief Reason of their Aversion from Christianity is caused by *The scandalous and corrupted Life of the Christians*, conversing with, and residing among them. This has inspired 'em with a more than ordinary Hatred and Detestation of any thing, that favours of the Christian Religion; counting it a great Sin, if any of 'em should make bold to eat or to drink with a Christian. Nay, they look upon Christians, as the very Dregs of the World, and the general Bane of Mankind.[91] [italics in original]

Here, Ziegenbalg blames his own missionary difficulties principally on other Christians, whose behavior had predisposed Malabarian locals to detest all Christians they met. While Ziegenbalg never explicitly names these Christians as Portuguese Catholics, we can safely assume this is what he means throughout the letter, given that Ziegenbalg and his partner originally intended to proselytize to the region in Portuguese, and that numerous diatribes against Roman Catholics appear elsewhere the letter. Whether indeed because of Portuguese influence or not- it has to be said that placing blame on Catholics certainly would appeal to many in Ziegenbalg's Lutheran audience- Ziegenbalg faced a hostile base of potential

converts completely unconvinced of the value of receiving the Gospel. Given Ziegenbalg's report that some locals considered even eating with Christians to be a sin, it is likely that at least some locals did indeed consider their communities ritually purer- or at least socially superior- to Christian missionaries. Across South Asia, communities of higher ritual or social status customarily refuse to eat with communities of lower ritual or social status, and Ziegenbalg's account gives us no reason to assume that all the people around him considered Ziegenbalg or his missionary partner as their social or ritual equals. Given the apparent hostility his audience had developed towards Christianity, Ziegenbalg centered the need to master the local idiom in order to proselytize successfully to the Malabarians. Ziegenbalg writes,

> In the meantime, I am fully convinced, that God will be Praised through out Ministry among the Heathens: If not by a saving Conversion, which we labour after; yet at least by the earnest Tender of his Grace, offered to them for the Good of their Souls. In order hereunto we are now drawing up, with all Diligence, a *Scheme of the Articles of the Christian Doctrine*, and of their Coherence in the Work of Salvation; that so they may get a competent Insight into the whole Oeconomy of the Restoration of Mankind. This is first to be done in *Portuguese*, and then to be put into *Malabarick*. If after this, we should think it necessary, to lay open also in Writing the Folly and Falsity of their Worship, it may then the easier be carried on, by observing the same method. This is the Reason why I have taken some Pains to unravel the *Histories of their Gods*, by frequent Conversation with one or other upon this Subject, and endeavoured to get 'em transcribed, as things that may prove subservient to the *Main Scope* of our Business here.[92]

Ziegenbalg here explicitly states that translating the fundaments of the Christian faith into Tamil (i.e., Malabarick) is the "Main Scope" of his missionary "Business" in the Tamil country. Although Ziegenbalg here only highlights the "Folly and Falsity" of Malabarian religious life, he and other Christian missionaries were also always on the lookout for commonalities between local religious beliefs and the Christian tradition.

The Missionary Scholarly Lineage

Early missionary writers like Ziegenbalg and Costanzo Beschi wrote before William Jones opened the floodgates of European interest in the Sanskrit language and Brahmanical Hindu scripture. As we discussed last chapter, Jones's work had a profound impact on how secular Western scholars approached South Asian history, religion, and public society. Jones's work also influenced how Christian missionaries approached their analysis of Tamil culture, but Christian missionaries, unlike their secular contemporaries, remained principally occupied with questions specific to Tamil language and culture. Accordingly, Ziegenbalg's Christian missionary successors built more directly on the research of their missionary predecessors than it did on the work of Jones and other secular scholars. To wit, in the preface to his grammar of the Tamil language, the Swiss missionary Charles Rhenius situates himself in a lineage of Christian missionary scholars of Tamil:

> It is not the object of the above observation to detract anything from the valuable works of Ziegenbalg, Beschius [i.e., Beschi], and others. They did in their days what they could in Tamil literature, and we are greatly indebted to them for the degree of knowledge they have given us of the Tamil language. But they have all failed in giving us pure Tamil; they have mixed vulgarisms with grammatical niceties, and left us in want of a regularly digested syntax.[93]

Second-generation missionary scholars like Rhenius chiefly focused on further improving missionary works' sensitivity to variations in Tamil linguistic register and dialect. Rhenius describes in the preface of his grammar,

> The present work will, I trust, supply these deficiencies. It is not a Grammar of the high, or rather the poetical, Tamil language; in order to study this, the learned Beschius's second work will still be necessary; but it is a grammar of the vernacular Tamil, as it is spoken and written by well bred Tamulians [sic], yet so as to avoid the errors against grammar which are found among them. It steers between the high and vulgar Tamil, avoids the intricacies of the former, and the barbarism of the latter. The student will, however, find notices of both interspersed in the work for his

> information, which will be useful to him when he either reads the poetical works or hears the common talk of the illiterate.[94]

Over the course of his career, during which Rhenius completed his own Tamil translation of the Bible, Rhenius focused principally on simplifying his register of missionary Tamil and introducing further aesthetic elegance into what he perceived as the rather stilted and stuffy Tamil of writers such as Beschi (whose Tamil is particularly classical in tone) and the German missionary Johann Fabricius.[95] Fabricius was the author of both a compendious early dictionary of Tamil and a word-for-word translation of the Tamil Bible, a translation that Rhenius considered incomprehensible to the average Tamil reader. As we can see from the above excerpt, Rhenius also attempted to bridge the gap between notably different registers and varieties of the Tamil language in order to maximize his version's comprehensibility to a wider Tamil audience. In a similar vein, the German missionary Bernard Schmidt, a contemporary of Rhenius, focused on variations of Tamil dialect between region and caste community, further enhancing missionaries' sensitivity to the linguistic landscape of the Tamil country.[96]

As we discussed last chapter, Robert Caldwell, a Scottish missionary contemporary of 19th-century Protestant missionaries like Rhenius and Schmidt, is best known for his *Comparative grammar,* a work that in many ways fits seamlessly into the lineage of colonial racial-philological scholarship. Since Caldwell modeled his *Comparative grammar* principally on secular works of comparative philological scholarship, *Comparative grammar* differs in important ways from other works of missionary literature authored in the Tamil country. One key difference between *Comparative Grammar* and the work of other Tamil-country based

Christian missionaries lies in the comparative frame of Caldwell's project. Caldwell's predecessors show little interest in Tamil's relationship with other South Indian and South Asian languages, remaining chiefly focused on achieving mastery of the Tamil linguistic, religious, and cultural landscape. Similarly, as we shall see shortly, G.U. Pope and other Tamil country-based missionaries decisively prioritized the study of the Tamil language and Tamil literature over the investigation of Tamil's relationship with other South Indian languages (and peoples).

Caldwell's impulse to compare Tamil with other South Indian languages is much more easily understood in dialogue with the comparative racial-philological work of William Jones and the Indological paradigm that emerged from Jones's work than it is with Tamil country-based missionaries' compilation of dictionaries and grammars of the Tamil language. Just like *Comparative grammar* matches the rhetorical *tone* of contemporary secular Western racial-philological scholarship, it also matches the intellectual *frame* of Western scholarship: in spite of its particular importance to the history of the Dravidian race, the Tamil language is one of many Dravidian languages Caldwell investigates in *Comparative grammar*. On the other hand, the works of Beschi, Rhenius, and other Christian missionaries of the Tamil country often focus exclusively on the Tamil language and Tamil society, instead of embedding their discussions of Tamil society in discussions about India as a whole. This is representative of the missionary lineage of Tamil scholarship, which continued to function as a somewhat self-enclosed scholarly network through the mid-19th century.

Although *Comparative grammar* is closer in form and substance to secular works of Western scholarship than to the work of Tamil country-based Christian missionaries, Caldwell's *Comparative grammar* also shows the imprint of his missionary lineage in several important ways. For one, *Comparative grammar* was radical in its rejection of the theretofore generally normative Western scholarly assumption that Aryans were the sole source of civilization in South India. Although Caldwell's scholarly methodology in *Comparative grammar* demonstrates his deep literacy in secular Western comparative philology, his work can also be seen as a continuation of the missionary tradition of composing dictionaries and grammars of the Tamil language. Like his predecessors Ziegenbalg and Beschi, and contrary to Indologists of his time, Caldwell's work is principally rooted in his mastery of South Indian languages, rather than of Sanskrit and the Brahmanical Hindu corpus. In a similar vein, Caldwell, like other Tamil country-based Christian missionaries, expresses admiration for Tamil culture outside of the Sanskritic frame characteristic of Indologists and other North India-centered scholars. Caldwell is willing to credit the ancient Dravidians with a high degree of cultural self-sufficiency in part because he holds a less entirely positive view of Brahmanical Hinduism's impact on the Tamil country than Indologists and many other Western scholars. Other Christian missionaries in the Tamil country, however, go far further than Caldwell in critiquing the presence of Brahmanical Hinduism in Tamil society. One of the most prominent of these figures is Caldwell's successor, the missionary-scholar G.U. Pope.

G.U. Pope and "Dravidian Religion"

The Anglican Christian missionary G.U. Pope, active in the late 19th and early 20th century, wrote compendiously on the Tamil language and Tamil literature. In addition to composing several grammars and instructional textbooks on the Tamil language, Pope also translated several works of Tamil-language literature into English, appending extensive notes explaining and commenting on passages throughout the texts. Pope mostly translated sources associated with the Saiva Siddhānta tradition, a strain of Tamil bhakti Hinduism traditionally officiated by members of the non-Brahmin Vellala caste community. Pope celebrated Saiva Siddhānta theology as both an authentically Tamil tradition and as a close Tamil analogue to Christian faith. Pope contrasted the Saiva Siddhānta tradition, which he presented as a humble and natively Tamil tradition, to the Brahmanical Hindu tradition, which he considered a corrupting influence on Tamil society.

Pope's binary perspective on Tamil Hindu religious life broke somewhat with that of earlier missionaries like Ziegenbalg, who were critical of Hindu religion more broadly. Pope, who wrote several decades after Robert Caldwell, was literate in the work of Caldwell and other Western scholars, and incorporates Caldwell's framework of Aryan vs. Dravidian into his own analysis on Tamil religious history. However, Pope, unlike Caldwell, is uninterested in comparing Tamil religious life to the religious life of other South Indian or South Asian peoples. Rather, like other missionaries, Pope is interested in Tamil religious life primarily as a means of amplifying Christian influence in Tamil society.

The commentaries Pope appended to the sources he translated offer profound insights into Pope's perspective on the Tamil language and the Saiva Siddhānta tradition. In the preface to

his translation of the *Tiruvāsagam* (Pope: Tiruvāçagam), a major Saiva Siddhānta compilation of devotional poetry authored by the Nāyaṉār[97] poet-saint Mānikkavāsagar, Pope writes,

> It has been repeatedly asked, 'Of what possible use can the republication, translation, and editing of books like the Tiruvāçagam be?'- and, 'Who can be expected to desire to make themselves acquainted with such works?' …If the Tamil people and the English are ever in any degree to understand one another, and to appreciate each other's thoughts and feelings regarding the highest matters, if any progress is to be made in the development of a real science of Hinduism, as it now is, our English people must have the means of obtaining some insight into the *living system* which exercises at the present day such a marvelous power over the minds of the great majority of the best Tamil people.[98]

Like Ziegenbalg above, Pope here emphasizes the importance of opening cultural dialogue between Tamilians and Westerners based on the study of the Tamil language and Tamil literature. In addition to offering new and more effective ways of communicating the Gospel to Tamil Hindus, Pope argues that studying the Tiruvāsagam and other Tamil sources can greatly enrich the "development of a real science of Hinduism". Pope's suggestion that the Tiruvāsagam offers insight into the "the living system" of Hinduism influential over the "great majority of the best Tamil people" should be read as an implicit critique of Brahmanical literature and Indologists' intense interest in it. Whereas Indologists would choose to view Tamil Hindu religious life through the lens of Brahmanical Hinduism, Pope implies here that this Brahmanical picture of Tamil Hinduism does not accurately reflect contemporary (i.e., "living") Tamil religion, but instead offers a rather disconnected picture of an arcane, scriptural religious system.

Pope's distinction between a "living system" of Hinduism and an ossified, ritualistic Brahmanical system runs parallel to the contrast Ziegenbalg draws between the "primitive"

core of true faith and the excessive ritualism that characterizes Catholic faith. However, Pope's description of Saiva Siddhānta as the *dominant* religious system of the Tamil country represents a major turn from how Ziegenbalg engaged with "Malabarian" religion. Whereas Ziegenbalg recognized no distinction between the gods of Brahmanical Hinduism and Tamil-specific cultural and religious forms, in his work Pope identifies two currents of Hindu religion in Tamil society: one, a living, majoritarian, influential strain of Tamil religion- Saiva Siddhānta- and the other, the ossified, ritualistic Brahmanical system overemphasized in Western descriptions of Tamil religion. Throughout his writings, Pope consistently presents devotional Saiva Siddhānta theology as a grounded and emotionally resonant alternative to an excessively intellectual and ultimately insubstantial Brahmanical Hindu tradition.

While Christian missionaries in the Tamil country had long criticized Brahmanical Hinduism as a poisonous influence on Tamil life, Pope is more explicit than many of his predecessors in distinguishing the Brahmanical tradition from other modes of Tamil religious life. Pope's especially binary perspective on Tamil religious life was doubtlessly informed by his extensive engagement with Tamil bhakti texts, which show conspicuous theological differences from Brahmanical Hindu texts. Whereas missionaries like Ziegenbalg attacked the religion of the "Malabarians" writ large, Pope singles out Brahmanical theology for criticism. Pope writes,

> It has been too much the custom in India to hide poverty of thought under a multitude of high-sounding words, and to regard any explanation that is not absolutely absurd as a proof. The *Kandhas* [Sk. *skanda*], or aggregates, represent no facts or realities, but imaginary states or conditions of finite existence, and, according to the popular view of the case, the whole theory means this… is an unreal something, not embodied, not

> permanent, indeed not fully existent, to which clings the responsibility of certain deeds, how done, or by whom, or when, is entirely uncertain, and this shadow of being must have an opportunity of expiating of working out the results of these deeds, and therefore this Ego, without fixed principle, or substratum of existence, or soul, or body, obtains in this world an embodiment.[99]

Here Pope pillories Brahmanical theology for being excessively speculative, a criticism that he frequently levies against the Brahmanical Hindu system. To Pope, this type of excessively theoretical religious system is incompatible with the simple, emotional and experiential personal devotion exemplified by both the Anglican Christian tradition and the poems of Tamil Saiva poet-saints such as Māṉikkavāsagar. The hybrid character of Hinduism is a major concern in Pope's thought, since Pope is invested in amplifying one strain of Hindu worship over others. For instance, Pope writes,

> The composite character of what may be called the Çaiva [i.e., Saiva] religion is very marked; it has borrowed much from diverse sources, and is accordingly full of inconsistencies, sometimes speaking the language of absolute pantheism, and then again seeming to grasp most firmly the idea of a personal divinity, who is at once the Creator, the Preserver, and the Destroyer of all things. The original idea of Çivan [i.e., Śiva] is found in the Vēdas, but the name is simply a euphemism meaning 'propitious' or 'gracious'…. It seems most probable that with the idea of Rudra, the god of the Storm, and Agni, the god of Fire, is mixed up in the notion of an aboriginal demon such as are still worshipped in the South of India. In the hymns to Çivan the most incongruous epithets are applied and actions ascribed to Him. At one time we see Çivan in Kailāsa, the Silver Mountain, surrounded by all the gods in awful state, supreme Ruler of all the worlds, smeared with ashes from the burning-ground, a horrible and disgusting object…. He is at once an awful deity, a frolicsome and mischievous man with superhuman powers, and a ferocious demon, and so is his Çatti, or spouse, who is worshipped under a vast variety of names throughout all India is sometimes the gracious and beautiful mother, and sometimes the fearful and malignant Durga.[100]

Pope begins the above excerpt by contrasting "absolute pantheism", by which he means the Brahmanical concept of *brahman* (i.e., the formless reality of all existence), to its ostensible opposite, "the idea of a personal divinity". Pope then turns to describing what he sees as the depravity of Vedic literature's portrayals of personal deities. Pope attributes some elements

of the Vedas to aboriginal South Indian demon worship- a trope we saw in W.T. Elmore's work last chapter- but otherwise focuses on highlighting elements of Siva's Sanskritic mythology and iconography. This move sets Pope up to celebrate Manikkavasagar's *Tiruvsāgam* for its noteworthy and admirable example of devotion to a personal god. However, the *Tiruvāsagam* is marred with the same hybridity of beautiful and ugly that plagues all Hindu sources in Pope's eye. Pope writes,

> Nothing can be nobler and more spiritual than the accounts found in many of their writings of Pathi (the Lord); but mingled with everything are the incongruous conceptions, a few of which are here shadowed forth. In such descriptions every legend is introduced, every form in which the God is anywhere worshipped is brought in, and the result often to our minds is inexpressibly grotesque. Yet for every particular an explanation of allegories which are supposed to teach the gracious operations of Çivan, the Lord of all. In reading these legends it is necessary to keep always in memory this twofold character of the religious system of South India. Gross and ridiculous representations (so they strike the foreigner) are found in juxtaposition with refined, pathetic, devout, and even sublime expressions. This is peculiarly the case in the lyrics of the profound enthusiast Māṇikka-Vāçagar.[101]

Pope's comments on the mixture of "spiritual" and "grotesque" in the Tiruvāsagam demonstrate the place he envisions for himself as an interpreter of the text. Like other Christian missionaries in the Tamil country, Pope is invested in finding points of convergence between Tamil religious life and Western Christianity. To this end, Pope is at times rather heavy-handed when comparing elements of the Tiruvāsagam or Manikkavasagar's life to salient features of the Christian tradition. Pope's writings draw a systematic theological contrast between a praise-worthy strain of Tamil Saiva devotional faith and a censure-worthy body of Vedic superstition and Brahmanical intellectual sophistry. For instance, Pope writes about the Tiruvāsagam:

> It is quite certain that the influence of these poems in South India is like that of the Psalms among Christians, and that they have touched for generations the hearts of the

> vast majority of the Tamil-speaking people. There is in them a strange combination of lofty feeling and spirituality with what we must pronounce to be the grossest idolatry. And this leads to the thought that in the Çaiva system of to-day two things that would appear mutually destructive are found to flourish together, and even to strengthen one another. The more philosophical and refined the Çaivite becomes, the more enthusiastic does he often appear to be in the performances of the incongruous rites of the popular worship.[102]

Pope here connects Saiva philosophical refinement to increased zeal for idolatrous ritual worship. In other words, Pope argues the two primary evils of the Hindu religious system- sophistry and idolatry- emerge in concert with each other. Pope also emphasizes the emotional resonance of the Tiruvāsagam's hymns among the Tamil people in order to contrast the emotional authenticity of personal devotion with the Brahmanical tradition's speculative philosophizing and lurid iconography. Pope argues that the Tiruvāsagam is marred with the same contradictions and exaggerations that are seen in the Vedic texts, but unlike the Vedas the Tiruvāsagam's core focus on devotion to a personalized Siva fits naturally with theistic Christian worship.

Pope attributes the Tiruvāsagam's devotional message, which he phrases in paradigmatically Christian terms of grace and deliverance[103], to a specifically South Indian current of religious thought. Specifically, Pope highlights the Saiva Siddhānta tradition, the strain of Tamil Siva-bhakti most closely associated with the veneration of the Tiruvāsagam and other Nāyaṉār texts in the present-day Tamil country. Pope presents Saiva Siddhānta as the product of a long, regionally specific religious tradition. Pope writes,

> The Çaiva Siddhānta system is the most elaborate, influential, and undoubtedly the most intrinsically valuable of all the religions of India. It is peculiarly the South Indian, and Tamil, religion, and must be studied by everyone who hopes to understand and influence the great South-Indian peoples. The Vaishnava sect has also many influential followers in the Tamil lands, but these are chiefly immigrants from the North. Çaivism is the old prehistoric religion of South India, essentially existing from pre-Āryan times, and holds sway over the hearts of the Tamil people. But this

> great attempt to solve the problems of God, the soul, humanity, nature, evil, suffering, and the unseen world, has never been fully expounded in English. Its text-books (probably its sources) exist in Tamil only, and in high Tamil verse, which is often made of set purpose obscure and difficult. (Classical Tamil is very little studied, yet this key alone can unlock the hearts of probably ten millions of the most intelligent and progressive of the Hindu races.) In a period quite antecedent to all historic data, the native Dravidian religion was a kind of Çaivism. It had peculiar forms of sacrifice, ecstatic religious dances, rites of demon worship, and other ceremonies which still exist among the villagers of the extreme South, and more or less among the rural population everywhere.[104]

In this excerpt, Pope clearly distinguishes between Saiva Siddhānta, which he identifies as a quintessentially Tamil tradition, and influences from the North, including Vaishnavism and the Aryan religious ideas of the Vedas. Saivism, Pope argues, was prehistorically a South Indian tradition, but had been corrupted and subverted by Aryan influences from the North.[105] Although Pope hews to secular Western depictions of prehistoric Dravidian society as centered on possession rites and demon worship, he also argues that Tamil-language sacred literature contains notable engagements with the questions of "God, humanity, nature, evil, suffering, and the unseen world". Importantly, Pope argues that these ideas are exclusive to Tamil-language sources, recapitulating the widespread Western idea that languages, peoples, and religions are all different sides of the same die of "civilization"- i.e., ethnoracial peoplehood.

Conclusion

Almost all major Non-Brahmin Tamil reformist thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries adopted and adapted Pope's attitude towards the relationship between Sanskritic and Tamil-specific literary works, theological orientations, registers of written and spoken language, religious iconography, and so on. Like Pope, non-Brahmin Tamil social reformists set out to

excavate a uniquely Tamil social and cultural heritage from the depths of ancient Tamil history. Reformist thinkers like P. Sundaram Pillai, Iyothee Thass, Maraimalai Adigal, and E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy all conducted studies of sacred literature in order to distinguish the characteristically Tamil and Aryan elements of contemporary Tamil religious life. All of these reformist thinkers argued that returning to quintessentially Tamil attitudes about Tamil society, culture, and religion would lead to a Tamil social and cultural renaissance. Although thinkers like Pillai, Thass, and Ramasamy presented dramatically different pictures of the mythical Tamil past that should ground present-day Tamil society, all these thinkers, like Pope, contrast an authentic, grounded Tamil tradition with an absurd, exploitative, and essentially foreign Sanskritic tradition. Like Pope, these thinkers connect this framework to clear paths of social and cultural reform, although these thinkers' reformist goals are in some ways quite different from each other.

While Tamil "race talk" derives important rhetoric from Christian missionary writings and shares important assumptions about the relationship between Brahmanical Hinduism and Tamil society, Tamil "race talk" also makes profound transformations to these missionary sources. Whereas G.U. Pope praised Saiva Siddhānta for its similarity to rightly guided Christian worship, the Neo-Saiva historiographers we will see next chapter decoupled Pope and his statements about Tamil society from Pope's Christian religious interests and message. Instead, foundational Neo-Saiva historiographers like P. Sundaram Pillai and J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai cited Pope and other Christian missionaries to prove that Saiva Siddhānta, rather than Brahmanical Hinduism or Christianity, represents the authentic native religious heritage of the Tamil country.

Chapter 3: The Emergence of Neo-Saiva Historiography

Neo-Saiva reformists were the first modern Tamil writers and public speakers to posit a systematic historical, cultural, and religious binary between Dravidian Tamil and Sanskritic Hindu influences in Tamil history.[106] Neo-Saiva thinkers such as P. Sundaram Pillai and J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai were instrumental in disseminating a core narrative model of Dravidian Tamil history that became central to the thought and symbology of subsequent Tamil reformist thinkers and movements. Per this narrative, a once prosperous and culturally independent Dravidian Tamil civilization was gradually infiltrated and subverted by Sanskritic influences brought by Aryan immigrants to the Tamil South.

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, we saw the principal ways that Indologists and Christian missionaries conceived of Tamil civilization relative to the Sanskritic Hindu tradition. Late 19th-century Neo-Saiva thought on the Dravidian Tamil past incorporates key concepts like these from Western scholarly and missionary writings and freely cites from the writings of Western scholars and missionaries. However, Neo-Saiva thought also profoundly transforms these concepts by incorporating them into a distinctively Tamil Saiva religious project. Western Indologists, race scholars, and Christian missionaries all formed understandings of Tamil history intimately shaped by and reliant on Western interests. For instance, as we saw in Chapter One, Robert Caldwell's *Comparative grammar* recognizes key divergences between Indological descriptions of South Indian society and the historical and philological evidence he encountered in the course of his career in South India. However, Caldwell still aligns his thoughts on the ancient Dravidian race with the contemporary Western scholarly consensus that the Aryan race was the sole progenitor of advanced

civilization in Indic history. In Chapter Two, we saw how Christian missionaries like G.U. Pope promoted the Saiva Siddhānta tradition because of its productive similarities to Protestant thought on the nature of God. Neo-Saiva thought, in opposition to Western racial-philological thought and Christian missionary writings, positions the ancient Tamil land as the center of the (Saiva) religious universe. Neo-Saiva thinkers argue that an illustrious ancient Dravidian Tamil civilization was the first to practice true Siva worship, and that Aryan settlers from the North appropriated and corrupted this tradition into the Brahmanical Sanskritic Hindu tradition now found across South Asia. Through this Neo-Saiva historical narrative, the civilizational and moral valence of the Western terms "Aryan" and "Dravidian" is reversed: it is now Aryan racial influence that corrupts a once righteous and distinguished Dravidian Tamil society.

It is also important to note that Neo-Saiva thought on the Dravidian past is not only an adaptation of Western ideas, but is also intimately linked to both recent and ancient thought on the nature of Tamil identity relative to the Sanskrit Hindu tradition. This chapter will begin with a brief history of the dynamics between Tamil and Sanskrit in the pre-modern Tamil country in order to contextualize the moves in Neo-Saiva thought that generate a conception of Brahmanical Hinduism as a foreign influence on Tamil society. We will then turn to the 19th-century history of the Tamil Neo-Saiva Movement in Sri Lanka and Madras Presidency to chronicle the emergence of a distinctive, Neo-Saiva model of Tamil historiography in late 19th-century Madras Presidency. Finally, we will examine excerpts from several of J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai's writings to see how thought on the Dravidian Tamil past relates to the theological priorities of Neo-Saiva literature.

Tamil and Sanskrit in the Pre-Modern Tamil Country

Even the earliest Tamil literary sources make reference to a Tamil "land" [*tamiḻagam*] where Tamil is spoken. The *Tōḷkāppiyam*, the oldest-surviving Tamil-language text, marks this Tamil land as the stretch between Tirupati in the north and Kanyakumari (i.e., Cape Comorin) in the south.[107] Although the Tamil peoples of the Sangam period were not yet politically unified, the Tōḷkāppiyam and subsequent works of classical Tamil literature make clear that the Tamil-speaking peoples of the Tamil land shared a common literary aesthetic and a broad common cultural grounding. The Tamil language itself played a major role in this cultural-aesthetic foundation. The Tōḷkāppiyam conception of mūttamiḻ ("Threefold Tamil") not only describes the three styles of classical Tamil literature, but is also extended to classify broader features of existence, such as artistic aesthetics, through the lens of grammatical structure.[108]

Moreover, the Tamil language features as a sign of social and cultural elevation. As Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam suggests, early uses of "Tamil" as a descriptor of cultural identity may have only applied to the "saṉṟōr" ("cultivated ones"), the elite stratum of Sangam Tamil society.[109] Correctness and fluidity of Tamil speech features as a major marker of social cultivation in many Sangam-era texts. While references to broad classes of people such as the saṉṟōr imply that important social divisions existed in ancient Tamil society, Sangam-era Tamil sources contain few references to Brahmanical caste, suggesting that Brahmanical *varṇāśramadharma* had not yet become a major presence in Tamil social or political life. Similarly, the Tamil religious culture recorded in Sangam texts differs significantly from

classical Brahmanical Hinduism, both in the principal gods venerated (e.g., Murugaṉ and Ammaṉ, versus Brahmanical gods like Śiva, Kṛṣṇa, and Viṣṇu) and the principal modes of worshipping these gods.

The three major imperial dynasties of Tamil history, the Chola, Chera, and Pandiya empires, drew Sanskritic and Brahmanical culture into the official symbology and political machinery of Tamil imperial culture. The Sanskrit language, Brahmanical gods like Śiva, and Brahmanical temple sites at places like Kañci (modern Kanchipuram) became important markers of Chola imperial cultivation. Beginning in the Choḻa period, Tamil imperial rulers began to subsidize major temple sites, such as Chidambaram and Kanchipuram, according to the model of royal Brahmin patronage found in other Brahmanical Hindu states in classical and medieval South Asia. This royal Brahmanical symbology also became a central element of the political and religious influence transmitted to Chola imperial conquests in Southeast Asia.

Between the sixth and ninth centuries CE, the Āḻvārs, a group of twelve Kṛṣṇa-worshipping, Tamil-speaking poet-saints, authored some of the first poetic texts associated with the *bhakti* movement of devotional Hinduism. Friedhelm Hardy[110] argues that the model of emotional bhakti found in Āḻvār poetry is a fusion of Brahmanical Kṛṣṇa worship and native South Indian ecstatic and possession-based religious traditions.[111] While Āḻvār poetry focuses on stories about the god Kṛṣṇa found elsewhere in Hindu literature, its exhortations to form direct emotional relationships with the divine do not have a clear precedent in Brahmanical literature prior to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, a Sanskrit text composed in South India.[112] Āḻvār

poetry has a similarly hybrid character, describing the Brahmanical god Kṛṣṇa and elements of his Brahmanical iconography and mythology using preexisting Tamil literary conventions developed during and directly following the Sangam Era of Tamil literature.[113] Āḻvār poems devoted to Kṛṣṇa draw especially heavily from the *akam* (literally, "internal") genre of Sangam poetry. Whereas Sangam-era *akam* poetry deals with love, loss, and friendship in the human world, Āḻvār poetry applies common themes from *akam* poetry, such as the agony of lovers' separation and the ecstasy of lovers' reunion, to the devotee's relationship with Kṛṣṇa.[114]

The Nāyaṉārs, a major group of Śaiva Tamil poet-saints active between the 10th and 12th centuries, describe Siva-devotion through a similar mix of Brahmanical theological and Tamil aesthetic influences. Nāyaṉār poetry, like Āḻvār poetry, takes influences from the *akam* and *puṟam* (literally, "external") genres of Sangam-era poetry[115]. Nāyaṉār poetry applies *puṟam* conventions for eulogizing rulers and their kingdoms to praise Siva's mythological conquests and salvational power.[116] Nāyaṉār poetry also makes copious use of the *āṟṟuppaḍai* device in *puṟam* literature, in which a messenger offers a traveler directions to a king's kingdom while praising the great wonders to be found there.[117] Similarly, Nāyaṉār poetry offers directions to shrines to Siva in the Tamil countryside, and describes the specific iconographic features found on the images of Siva housed there. Nāyaṉār poetry's extensive focus on the temple geography of the Tamil country, often embellished with Sangam-style sensory descriptions of the natural landscapes surrounding temple sites, grounds the Nāyaṉār canon in a Tamil cultural sphere, even as it integrates this Tamil cultural sphere into a Hindu world containing mythic locations like Mt. Kailasa.[118]

In addition to Tamil bhakti poetry's aesthetic grounding in Tamil poetic convention, both Āḻvār and Nāyaṉār poetry attribute special religious significance to the Tamil language. Although both Āḻvār and Nāyaṉār poetry endorse orthodox Brahmanical views of Sanskrit as a linguistic expression of transcendent reality, they also attribute religious significance to the Tamil language. Numerous Āḻvār and Nāyaṉār poems present Tamil as an accessible and emotionally evocative language compared to the more impersonal and elite Sanskrit language.[119] Since immediate emotional experience is highly valued in both the Saiva and Vaiṣṇava Tamil bhakti traditions, the Tamil language's emotional immediacy lends it soteriological advantages over Sanskrit, which bhakti poet saints argued could not appeal to the Tamil devotee's emotions in the same way.[120] Various Nāyaṉār poets go a step further, and present the Tamil language and elements of Tamil aesthetic theory, such as the three-fold dichotomy of *iyal* (verse), *isai* (song), and *nāṭakam* (drama), as symbolic of and connected to Siva's divine glory. Poems by Sambandhar and Sundarar even describe Siva *as* the Tamil language in its various forms.[121] The poet-saint Appar describes Siva as "the Sanskrit of the North and southern Tamil and the four Vedas"[122], presenting both languages as divine and connected to divinely revealed texts.[123] Moreover, Appar's formulation of "Sanskrit of the North and Southern Tamil" links Sanskrit and Tamil to specific geographic-cultural areas in South Asia, showing that the integration of Sanskritic Hinduism into Tamil religious life did not totally replace the understanding of Sanskrit as a tradition with origins outside the Tamil country.

The relationship between the Tamil language and emotional immediacy in Āḻvār and Nāyaṉār poetry filtered down into the theology developed in Śrīvaiṣṇava and Saiva Siddhānta, the Tamil bhakti traditions that descended from the Āḻvār and Nāyaṉār corpuses, respectively. In Śrīvaiṣṇava, the Brahmin-dominated Vaiṣṇava tradition that treats Āḻvār poetry as canon, there is a long tradition of identifying the *Tiruvāymoḻi* by Nammāḻvār as the "Tamil Veda".[124] This term presents the *Tiruvāymoḻi* as a soteriological equivalent of the entire Vedic corpus: the *Tiruvāymoḻi* alone can orient a devotee to the true nature of existence as powerfully as all Brahmanical literature put together. The Saiva Siddhānta tradition marks the *Tirumuṟai* compilation of Nāyaṉār poetry as the "Tamil Veda" with the same theological implications.[125]

Differences in opinion about the balance between the theological authority of Tamil-language Āḻvār poetry and the Sanskrit-language Brahmanical canon split the Śrīvaiṣṇava community into two branches, the Vaḍakalai ("Northern Sect") and Teṉkalai ("Southern Sect"). The geographic referents of "north" and "south" in the names of these two sects, echoing Appar's dichotomy of "Sanskrit of the North and Southern Tamil" describe the weight each group places on the Sanskrit and Tamil canons in their broader understanding of religious authority. The Northern Sect (*vaḍakalai*) shows greater deference to Brahmanical literature and Sanskrit-language Śrīvaiṣṇava theological texts. The Southern Sect (*teṉkalai*) assigns a greater role to Tamil-language Āḻvār poetry and Tamil-language theological texts.

By the medieval period of Tamil history, Brahmanical temple sites had become important centers not only of religious life but also of political governance in the Tamil country, serving as administrative centers where royal grants of money and property were

distributed.[126] Additionally, from the Puranic period on, Tamil literature had become increasingly Sanskritized in both content and form. Nevertheless, the Tamil language still held powerful religious symbolism in the late pre-modern Tamil country. Sumathi Ramaswamy has presented a late-premodern Tamil text, the *Maduraic Cokkanātar Tamiḻ Viḍutūḍu*, as a testament to the salvational role assigned to the Tamil language in Tamil religious culture of the period.[127] This text is written in the *tūtu* genre, a convention of "messenger poem" in which a messenger delivers a message to a deity or king.[128] Whereas most *tūtu* poems focus on praising the divine or royal recipient of the messenger's message, a large portion of this piece praises the Tamil language in its capacity as divine messenger.[129] This praise includes both formulaic expressions such as *taṇṭamiḻ* ("cool Tamil") and *iruntamiḻ* ("sweet Tamil")[130], as well as a more sustained presentation of the Tamil language as a monarch, a presentation that places the Tamil at the center of both the political and social Tamil world.[131] The *Maduraic Cokkanātar Tamiḻ Viṭutūtu* distinguishes Tamil from other earthly kings, presenting it as superior to even the Three Kingdoms (*mūvēntar*) of the Cōḻa, Cēra, and Pāṇḍiya Dynasties.[132] Tamil is also presented as divine in itself, especially through its connection to Siva, who is the recipient of the message of the poem.[133] Ramaswamy argues that this presentation of Tamil may be a response to parts of the Tamil country's integration into multi-ethnic imperial polities such as the Delhi Sultanate and Vijayanagara Empire between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. In this imperial context, the political supremacy of the Tamil language was unseated for the first extended period in recorded Tamil history, and the *Tamiḻ Viṭutūtu* can be read as a re-assertion of Tamil sovereignty in the Tamil land.[134] Although the understanding of Tamil as the sovereign of the Tamil country is strongly reminiscent of Tamil nationalist discourses that emerge in the British colonial

period, Ramaswamy argues that Tamil is valorized in this text principally because of its divine power to perform miracles, rather than for its connection with a specific ethnic identity or territory.[135]

The Saiva Siddhānta Foundation of Neo-Saivism

Before we examine the emergence of Neo-Saiva historiography and its characteristic engagement with Tamil history and Tamil ethnic identity in the late-nineteenth century, we should first outline the basic contours of the Saiva Siddhānta religious system on which Tamil Neo-Saivism is based. While Neo-Saiva figures make many significant changes to the traditional media and religious messages associated with Saiva Siddhānta, most Neo-Saiva theological claims are based on Saiva Siddhānta doctrine, and Tamil Neo-Saiva orators and writers consistently present their work as a continuation of the Saiva Siddhānta tradition.

Saiva Siddhānta emerged as a distinct theological tradition between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries CE.[136] Over this period, Saiva Siddhānta theologians from both the Brahmin and Vellala caste communities composed the predominantly Tamil-language commentaries (*siddhānta*) on Brahmanical and Saiva texts that outline the Saiva Siddhānta religious system.[137] The Saiva Siddhānta textual canon is a mix of Tamil and Sanskrit-language sources. In addition to the Tamil-language poetry of the Nāyaṉārs, Saiva Siddhānta regards the Vedas, Āgamas, and various Tamil and Sanskrit-language Saiva Purāṇas as canon. The inclusion of the Āgamas, Sanskrit-language tantric ritual texts, in the Saiva

Siddhānta canon reflects the historical influence of tantric Saiva thought on esoteric Saiva Siddhānta theology.

Saiva Siddhānta is a bhakti tradition, a classification that describes several important features of Saiva Siddhānta theology and practice. Like other bhakti traditions across South Asia, Saiva Siddhānta centers its theology and practice on a monotheistic devotional relationship between the god Siva and his human devotees. The Saiva Siddhānta tradition uses the mantra *pasu-pati-pāsam* to summarize the devotional relationship. *Pasu*, literally "cow", represents the animal nature of human existence. *Pati*, "lord", represents Siva and his ability to rescue the devotee from the cycle of death and rebirth. *Pāsam* represents the bonds of attachment that ensnare the devotee to death and rebirth, and which devotion to Siva is able to sever. Once Siva severs the devotee's bonds to worldly death and rebirth, the devotee is able to join Siva in eternal, divine bliss.[138]

Although Brahmin theologians played an important role in the formation of Saiva Siddhānta textual theology, Saiva Siddhānta has always been a predominantly Vellala tradition in both constituency and leadership.[139] Before the modern period, Saiva Siddhānta was by no means anti-Brahmanical, but important differences existed between Saiva Siddhānta practice and orthodox Brahmanical ritual. Like other bhakti traditions, Saiva Siddhānta treats its devotional canon, the poems of the Nāyaṉārs, as readily accessible to the public, in contrast to the tightly guarded Vedic canon. In premodern practice, Nāyaṉār poems were predominantly experienced orally, particularly through the singing of Nāyaṉār hymns by designated cantors (*ōduvār*). *Ōduvār* play a central role in the daily worship schedule at

Saiva Siddhānta temple centers, and their oral delivery of Nāyaṉār poetry adds another important register of stylistic coloration to the texts.[140]

Neo-Saivism and Protestant Textuality

British colonialism to the Tamil country introduced several important new dynamics to Tamil religious discourse. As in other lands colonized by European powers, British colonial rule imposed European scientific and religious epistemologies on colonial populations in Tamil South India. As we saw last chapter, textuality, which had played a major role in important turns in Protestant religious and epistemological thought over the previous several centuries, became one of the crowning features of definitions of religious legitimacy used across the English colonial world. Under English colonial rule, the colonized peoples of British India faced an unprecedented pressure to connect their religious practices to textual traditions in order to legitimate them. In response, during the 18th and 19th centuries, numerous religious reform organizations from various religious communities in British India emerged that presented themselves as modernized, textualized versions of ancient non-Western religious traditions.[141]

Tamil Neo-Saivism, like other reformist Hindu religious groups at the time, heavily incorporated newly introduced, "modern" technologies of print and public speech. Bernard Bate has written extensively about the role that Arumuga Navalar, a Ceylon-based Tamil orator, publisher, and Saiva religious thinker, played in opening up new, modern pathways of public discourse in the Tamil-speaking world. Bernard Bate identifies Navalar as the inventor

of the modern genre of Tamil public address (*meṭaittamiḻ*), a style that became a central feature of both Neo-Saiva ministry in the Tamil country and public address in Tamil electoral politics.[142] Bate argues that before Navalar began delivering Tamil-language addresses to open public audiences, no parallel oral tradition existed in Tamil society: public speeches, when delivered, were addressed to smaller, limited audiences such as royal courts.[143] Navalar's public addresses mimicked the style of European public speaking in which he had been trained in his missionary school education, a style intended to facilitate the transmission of the Christian Gospel to masses of unconverted natives. In line with how Christian missionaries emphasized the use of clear language to transmit a comprehensible version of the Gospel to potential converts, Navalar delivered his addresses in an accessible register of spoken Tamil that prioritized comprehensibility over poetic stylization.[144] However, Navalar intended his speeches as a direct response to Christian missionary efforts to Christianize the Ceylonese Saiva community. Bate argues that Navalar's public addresses offered a key early Tamil public formulation of Saivism as a discrete "religion".[145]

In addition to his regular public speaking, Navalar was an active publisher who edited and printed a wide number of Tamil-language Saiva works and commentaries. Navalar applied his philosophy on comprehensibility in Tamil prose to his publications. Navalar is perhaps best known by today's Tamil grade school students not for his career in public oration, but rather for his role in standardizing the conventions of the printed Tamil language, including key features of modern Tamil punctuation and spelling.[146] Navalar introduced these systematic reforms to enhance the readability of his texts to a general Tamil-speaking audience.[147] These innovations include Navalar's standardized rules for the application of

Western punctuation marks like commas, periods, and question marks to Tamil-language text.

The Anti-Sanskritic Neo-Saiva Turn

Arumuga Navalar's project to standardize Saiva literature for mass consumption opened the door for the emergence of more radical Neo-Saiva religious reform projects. Although Navalar's project revolutionized Tamil approaches to both Tamil religious scripture and printed Tamil text writ large, Navalar stopped short of critiquing the Sanskritic tradition or Sanskrit-language Hindu texts. It was Neo-Saiva thinkers and orators on the Tamil mainland who developed and disseminated the construction of Neo-Saivism as a uniquely Tamil religion, and presented elements of the Sanskritic, Brahmanical Hindu tradition as foreign impositions on Tamil society. Not all Neo-Saivas were necessarily aligned with this radical rethinking of Hindu orthodoxy: more conservative Neo-Saiva factions were far less committed to criticizing the Sanskritic tradition than the radical populist faction of the Tamil Neo-Saiva movement.[148]

V. Ravi Vaithees has argues that major differences between the religious landscapes of colonial Ceylon and Madras Presidency can help explain the anti-Sanskritic bent the mainland Neo-Saiva movement took compared to its counterpart in Ceylon.[149] Ceylonese Hindus' principal theological opponents were the Western Christian missionaries who targeted both Tamil-speaking Hindus and the Sinhalese Buddhist majority population of Ceylon.[150] Navalar's printing work and orthographical reform can be understood in part as a

response to the text-focused Christian missionary work levied against Ceylonese Hindu communities. On the colonial Tamil mainland, in contrast, Vellala Neo-Saivas competed far more intensely with other influential Hindu religious reform groups than they did with Christian missionaries.[151] Vedantic, textually focused Hindu reform movements like the Vibuthi Sangam and Sadur Veda Siddhanta Sabha had already garnered support from Brahmin and other privileged-caste Hindus in Madras Presidency in the decades before the rise of the Neo-Saiva movement in the Tamil country.[152] Although these reform movements envisioned sometimes major changes to orthodox Hindu theology and practice, they also reinforced existing, Brahmin-dominated religious and social power structures. While neo-Vedantic groups like the Arya Samaj sought to democratize access to Brahmanical texts in a similar way to how Navalar distributed Saivite Hindu texts, most neo-Vedantic organizations showed little to no interest in unsettling Brahmin dominance in Hindu religious history and present-day Hindu religious society. Moreover, in the mainland Tamil country, British colonial rule lent unprecedented power to Brahmin communities based in part on Indological and Brahmin-centered readings of Brahmanical texts. This shift came largely at the expense of the Vellala community, which, as we discussed above, held considerable cultural and religious power in precolonial Tamil society.

Vaithees highlights several figures who played particularly important roles in fostering the anti-Brahmanical tradition on the Tamil mainland. The firebrand orator Ramalinga Swamigal was a major voice of anti-Brahmanical and anti-Sanskritic ideas in the early mainland Neo-Saiva community. Swamigal delivered lectures across the Tamil mainland attacking the Brahmanical tradition as a pernicious accretion to the true, non-Brahmanical core of Siva-

bhakti. Swamigal's presentation of his own poetic works to his followers as revelation drew the disapproval of Navalar, and the ensuing "*arutpā-marutpā*"[153] controversy drove further divisions between Navalar's established Neo-Saiva network and Swamigal's upstart community on the mainland. Vaithees describes the author and orator Somasundara Nayakar as a figure whose impact on Neo-Saivism in Tamil Nadu is parallel to Arumuga Navalar's impact on the Neo-Saiva tradition as a whole. Works by subsequent Neo-Saiva authors often eulogize Nayakar as a preceptor of their tradition who clarified and systematized key points of Neo-Saiva doctrine.[154] Nayakar's systematization of Neo-Saiva doctrine through a number of influential printed treatises laid the foundation for the Neo-Saiva historiographic turn.[155]

Neo-Saiva Historiography

In the closing decades of the 19th century, works by the university historian and Neo-Saiva thinker P. Sundaram Pillai introduced narratives of Tamil history that draw systematic contrasts between an indigenous Tamil cultural and religious lineage, and the Sanskritic, Brahmanical tradition imported from the north. Before long, other influential Neo-Saiva figures like J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai also began to argue that there are deep historical connections between Saiva Siddhānta and Tamil ethnic, national, and racial identity. Articles and lectures by Sundaram Pillai, Nallaswamy Pillai, and other Neo-Saiva scholars are responsible for introducing important discursive tools to mainstream discussions about Tamil cultural identity and racial history. I call this sub-current of Neo-Saiva thought "Neo-Saiva historiography" to recognize the key distinction between this line of thought and the theological argumentation found elsewhere in Saiva and Neo-Saiva literature. While

premodern texts such as the Nāyaṉār poems and the *Maduraic Cokkanātar Tamiḻ Viṭutūtu* discussed above draw a connection between the Tamil language and Siva, Neo-Saiva historiographic texts from the turn of the 20th century connect the Saiva Siddhānta tradition not only to the Tamil language, but also to conceptions of a transhistorical Tamil *people*. Neo-Saiva historiography presents the connection between Saivism and Tamil as an essential feature not only of lived Tamil cultural and social identity, but of scholarly *representations* of the Tamil people. For instance, P. Sundaram Pillai's seminal essay *Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature or the age of Tirujnana-Sambhanda* (henceforth, *"Milestones"*) offers one of the earliest systematic historical contrast between the currents of Tamil Saivism and Sanskritic religion in the Tamil country.[156] Sundaram Pillai does this by tracing a chronology of Tamil-language sources in the Saiva Siddhānta canon, using Saiva scriptures as "milestones" of a broader narrative of Tamil history. Sundaram Pillai argues in *Milestones* that Western scholars have constructed an erroneous representation of South Indian history by depending on Brahmanical textual sources, rather than Tamil ones, as source material. A narrative centered on Tamil Saiva literature, Sundaram Pillai argues, is a far more representative picture of Tamil cultural history.[157]

Neo-Saiva historiography exists on the border between Western academia and Saiva theology. Essays like *Milestones* and other historiographic Neo-Saiva writings often fall into lines of historical or philological inquiry that seem outside the realm of standard theological discussion, such as chronological dating or linguistic comparison. However, for Neo-Saiva historiographers, demonstrating certain historical truths, such as the independent civilizational prosperity of ancient Saiva Tamil society, also responds to important lines of

argument found in Brahmanical and Neo-Vedantic theological messaging. One of the key theological interventions found in Neo-Saiva historiographic work is its geographic and cultural recentering of Hindu history and theology on the Tamil country. Both Neo-Vedantists and conservative Brahmins of the 19th and early 20th centuries considered the Brahmanical Hindu tradition to be the source of the highest forms of religious revelation available to Hindus anywhere in South Asia. Neo-Vedantist and Brahmanical theological movements of the 19th and early 20th-century Tamil country emphasized Sanskrit and Hindi-language instruction as a key component of proper Hindu religious education and Hindu religious authenticity.[158] In contrast, the regionally specific, Tamil-language poetry of the Nayanars occupies a central place in the theology and religious canon of Tamil Neo-Saivism and Saiva Siddhānta. Mainland Neo-Saiva figures like Ramalinga Swamigal had already criticized Brahmanical texts and rituals as obstacles to authentic Siva worship, but did not historicize the dynamic between Brahmanical Hinduism and other, natively Tamil religious forms and influences. Neo-Saiva historiographers extended Swamigal's critique of Brahmanical ritual into a civilizational clash between an imported Brahmanical religious system and a native Tamil tradition of devotional Saivism. Although Neo-Saivism inherited its broad conceptual framework of Dravidian and Aryan racial history from 19th-century Western scholarship, Neo-Saiva historiographers use this framework to push back not only against competing Neo-Vedantist, Vaishnava, and conservative Brahmanical religious messaging, but also against Western scholarly and missionary depictions of Tamil Saivism.

While some sources like Sundaram Pillai's *Milestones* take a Western-style scholastic tone, many other early expressions of Neo-Saiva historiographic ideas appear within markedly

theological Neo-Saiva literature. In these cases, Neo-Saiva authors use the Western academic tools of historiography and textual analysis to support their theological contentions. To illustrate this model of Neo-Saiva historiography at work, we will now analyze several excerpts from the writings of J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai, a leading Neo-Saiva ideologue and editor of the influential Neo-Saiva publication *Siddhānta Deepika*. *Siddhānta Deepika* was one of the principal publications that circulated Neo-Saiva ideas about the ancient Tamil past to literate Neo-Saiva audiences across Ceylon and the Tamil mainland. Comparing segments from several of Nallaswamy Pillai's essays from around the turn of the 20th century offers a representative picture of how statements about the Tamil past and Tamil history work in synergy with Neo-Saiva theological and doctrinal arguments. While not all of Nallaswamy Pillai's writings are markedly historiographic, Neo-Saiva historiographic concepts fit seamlessly into Nallaswamy Pillai's theological arguments, which he levies against competing currents of Tamil Hindu thought and authority.

The 1911 volume *Studies in Saiva Siddhānta*, published by J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai's son, compiles a number of articles printed in *Siddhānta Deepika* and other Tamil publications such as *Madras Review* and *The New Reformer* over the previous several decades.[159] Many of the essays in this compilation are markedly didactic or theological in tone, and focus on demonstrating points of Saiva Siddhānta doctrine through close study of Tamil-language Saiva texts. For instance, the opening essay of the compilation, "Flower and Fragrance"[160], cites poetic phrases by a number of Nāyaṉār poets in order to illustrate the impact of Siva's grace (*aruḷ*) on the soul of the devotee. Many of J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai and other Neo-Saiva theologians' writings present Siva's grace (*aruḷ*) as the mechanism by which the souls of

devotees are liberated from the cycle of worldly death and reincarnation. This general argument is not unique to Neo-Saivism, but rather runs with a current of *bhakti* theology found both in classical Saiva Siddhānta and also in other Saiva and Vaisnava *bhakti* movements across South Asia. Hindu bhakti traditions across South Asia present devotional relationships with individual gods as the most effective (and sometimes, only) way to achieve the prototypical Hindu soteriological goal of *mokṣa,* For instance, in the Bhagavad Gītā, a classic Sanskrit-language work of Vaisnava bhakti literature, Krishna explains that *bhakti-yoga,* devotion to Krishna as a personal god, is a far faster and easier way to achieve *mokṣa* than the modes of ritual sacrifice and non-dual meditation featured in the Vedas and Upaniṣads.

Nallaswamy Pillai's essay "The House of God", also printed in *Studies in Saiva Siddhānta*, makes reference to a similar array of religious competitors. "The House of God" opens with two Nāyaṉār verses eulogizing the Tamil Saiva temple center at Chidambaram. After crediting the opening poems, Nallaswamy Pillai writes,

> We have elsewhere observed that even if we have lost our books on Veda and Vedānta, we could evolve the whole thing again from the symbols we possess, provided we had the tiny key to unlock these sacred mysteries. The hoariest and most ancient wisdom is thus enshrined in these unmistakeable symbols, and when we understand them aright, we are enabled to test and know which is the true Philosophy and which is the true Religion, surrounded as we are to-day by a multitude of Religions and Philosophies conflicting in themselves and yet claiming to be the most ancient and truest.[161]

The beginning of this passage presents a theme commonly found in bhakti theological literature. Many bhakti traditions, including Saiva Siddhānta and the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition discussed above, argue that a select canon of devotional literature holds as much or more

theological weight than the entirety of the Brahmanical corpus. In the same vein, Nallaswamy Pillai speaks about being able to reconstruct the entirety of the Vedas and Vedantic literature from a "tiny key" of sacred symbols. In "The House of God", Nallaswamy Pillai presents this "tiny key" as the devotional love exemplified in Nāyaṉār poetry devoted to the Saiva temple center at Chidambaram. Nallaswamy Pillai argues that this type of devotional love is a universal experience that lies at the heart of all human religion, Hindu and otherwise.

Nallaswamy Pillai's words above make clear that he understands the project of finding religious truths to be a competitive one: there are various traditions staking their claims to "be the most ancient and truest" of India. Phrases like "true Religion" and "true Philosophy" reflect the influence of Christian missionary discourse on the Hindu reformism of the 19th century. As we saw last chapter, Western Christian missionaries in the colonial world contrasted the light of "true" Christian faith with the specters of "idolatry" and "superstition" that dominate the religious lives of benighted foreign peoples. Although comments on the truth and falsehood of religious systems can certainly be found in pre-colonial Hindu polemics, the conception of a single "true" religion or philosophy is far less natural to an orthodox Hindu theological context than to a Christian one. As we saw above, canonical Brahmanical scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita recognize multiple pathways to liberation from death and rebirth, even if some pathways are deemed more effective than others. However, the context of British colonial rule created new pressures and incentives on South Asian religious communities to present themselves as the preeminent representatives of longstanding, textual religious traditions.

Nallaswamy Pillai's mention of Veda and Vedanta in the above excerpt, while a formulaic pairing in Hindu theological literature, calls out two chief Hindu opponents to the Neo-Saiva movement.[162] The Vedas, long celebrated by Indological scholars as the oldest texts in recorded Indic thought, are also a major symbol of the Brahmanical tradition and conservative, Brahmin-dominated structures of Hindu religious authority. Vedanta literature, on the other hand, plays a central role in the theology and canon of the Neo-Vedantist Hindu reform movements of the 19th century, the chief reformist Hindu competitor to the Neo-Saiva tradition on the Tamil mainland. Later in "The House of God", Nallaswamy Pillai writes more about these theological opponents:

> …we have to get clear of two sets of men, who pester us often with their cant. One of such will raise the cry of sectarianism, and the other, with the catch-word, revivalism. There are some very estimable people belonging to both these classes, we admit, as well as their sincerity, but with most it is all mere cant, pure and unmitigated cant. They believe neither in the one nor the other; they have neither inclination nor with to study and think, and pause and enquire into the truth of things. They are themselves sectarians, so blind that they will not acknowledge themselves to be such… And is not the present enquiry solely devoted to reach the 'region of universalism', "பொதுமென்று"[163] where… every religionist comes and bows in adoration of the One Supreme, saying they see no symbols of any creed but all *Ākāš*?[164]

The "two sets of men" Nallaswamy Pillai pillories here are the conservative Hindus and Neo-Vedantists he alludes to as "Veda and Vedanta" in the previous excerpt. Along with Neo-Vaishnava reformists[165], conservatives and Neo-Vedantists were two of the most salient religious competitors to the Neo-Saiva reform project. Nallaswamy Pillai uses the term "sectarianism" to call out a major line of Neo-Vedantist critique of Neo-Saivism. Neo-Vedanta groups emphasize the theological importance of the Vedantic theological-philosophical system, presenting it as an expression of the core religious message of the

Hindu tradition as a whole. As an explicitly Saiva tradition, Neo-Saivism has a clear sectarian allegiance to Siva, opening it up to the charge of "sectarianism" relative to the purportedly "universalist" Neo-Vedanta tradition. Nallaswamy Pillai turns this accusation around and criticizes Neo-Vedantists for being more sectarian than they would like to admit. Nallaswamy Pillai cites *Ākāš* (Sk. *ākāśa*), a Vedantic conception of universal heavenly essence, to attack Neo-Vedantists for being closed off to Neo-Saiva lines of theological reasoning. If the Vedantic tradition ultimately recognizes no difference among the outward signs of different religions, Nallaswamy Pillai argues, then why do Neo-Vedantists write Neo-Saiva theology off as sectarian instead of taking it seriously as an approach to a deeper religious truth?

"Revivalism", on the other hand, summarizes the critiques levied by more conservative Hindus against the reformist modernists (*naveenar*) of the Neo-Saiva movement. Contemporary Western Christian religious discourse used the term "revivalism" to describe a model of populist, charisma-based religion that had become popular in places such as the southern United States. By calling Neo-Saiva theology "revivalism", more conservative Hindu voices lampooned Neo-Saivism as an illegitimate, upstart tradition powered by popular fervor rather than theological merit. Whereas Neo-Vedantists opposed Neo-Saivism because of its competing reformist goals, conservative Hindus, including conservative strains within the Neo-Saiva community itself, were not convinced about the need to reform Hindu society at all.

The core argument of "The House of God" does not deal directly with Tamil history or the relationship between Tamil and Sanskrit in the ancient Tamil past. However, the Tamil country and Tamil-language religious texts still play a major role in the essay. Nallaswamy Pillai's choice to open the essay with Nāyaṉār poems celebrating Chidambaram is not solely rhetorical: for Nallaswamy Pillai, the symbol of Chidambaram is the "tiny key" that can demonstrate the devotee's relationship with Siva and the universal truth that the heart is the center of human religion. Nallaswamy Pillai writes of Chidambaram in "The House of God",

> And though there are thousands of temples all over the land, the heart of every true believer has always turned, with love and longing, to this *centre-spot*. And it is believed that Chidambaram occupies a central geographical position between the northern and southern extremes of India, including Ceylon. And corresponding to this position in the macrocosm, Ārumukha Nāvalar observes that, in the human microcosm also, the place points to the region of Sushumṇā between Iḍā and Piṅgaḷā *nāḍi*s.[166]

In these three sentences, Nallaswamy Pillai presents three different ways of understanding Chidambaram as a religious "center". First, Nallaswamy Pillai describes Chidambaram as the center of the Tamil temple landscape. Whereas there are many smaller temples around the Tamil country, Nallaswamy Pillai argues that the temple complex at Chidambaram has a preeminent presence in the heart of "every true believer". Since Chidambaram is a Saiva temple complex, Nallaswamy Pillai's statement also makes a clear Saiva sectarian claim on the Tamil devotional landscape. Second, Nallaswamy Pillai centers Hindu geography on Chidambaram, presenting it as a nexus between the "northern and southern extremes of India, including Ceylon". This cultural-religious map divides India into its northern and southern regions, which, as we saw above, is a framing found in both Saiva and Vaishnava Tamil bhakti texts as a way of differentiating the Sanskritic and Tamil influences on their traditions. Third, Nallaswamy Pillai cites Arumuga Navalar to argue that Chidambaram

corresponds to a specific region on the "human microcosm", or yogic body. The yogic body is a yogic and tantric conception that organizes the energies of the human body and mind into *cakra*s (energy centers) and *nāḍi*s (channels by which energy flows). Yogic and tantric meditation practices aim to transport *kuṇḍalīni*, base energy, through the *cakra*s of the human body in order to liberate a practitioner's soul from *saṃsāra* or to gain supernatural abilities or powers. Arumuga Navalar's comment, grounded in the Saiva Siddhānta tradition's reading of the tantric Sanskrit-language *Āgama* texts, maps the geographical site of Chidambaram onto the yogic body of the devotee, underscoring the special devotional importance of the Chidambaram temple complex. This bodily conception resonates with Nallaswamy Pillai's argument that all religious traditions are ultimately grounded in the human heart.

Outside of his comments on Chidambaram and his copious citation of Tamil-language works, Nallaswamy Pillai does not engage substantively with the Tamil language or conceptions of Tamil history in "The Heart of God". Many pieces by Nallaswamy Pillai and other Neo-Saiva authors follow this model and focus principally on points of Hindu doctrine through reference to Nāyaṉār poetry and other Tamil-language works. However, in other pieces, Nallaswamy Pillai is more explicit about the connection between Saiva Siddhānta and Tamil linguistic and cultural identity. For instance, Nallaswamy Pillai opens the English-language introduction to his 1895 commentary on the *Sivagnana Botham* (சிவஞான போதம்) by writing,

> The system of Hindu philosophy which is expounded in the following pages, and its name will be altogether new to many an English educated Hindu who is content to learn his religion and philosophy from English books and translations and from such scraps as turn up in newspapers and magazines. Yet it is the Philosophy of the Religion in which at least every Tamil speaking Hindu is more or less brought up and the one Philosophy which obtains predominance in the Tamil language. This

> philosophy is called The Siddhānta Philosophy and is the special Philosophy of the Saiva Religion. The word means True End; and as used in logic, it means the proposition or theory refuted, which becomes the Purvapaksham. The Saiva Philosophy is so called as it established the True End or the only Truth and all other systems are merely Purvapakshams.[167]

Nallaswamy Pillai's contention that "the Saiva Philosophy" (i.e., Saiva Siddhānta) is associated with "the only Truth", as opposed to the falsities of other religious systems, mirrors lines of argument we saw in "The Heart of God". In this passage, however, the Tamil provenance of Saiva Siddhānta takes center stage. Echoing G.U. Pope, Nallaswamy Pillai argues that Saiva Siddhānta is "the one Philosophy which obtains predominance in the Tamil language". Whereas "The Heart of God" presents a universalist theological argument, Nallaswamy Pillai's introduction to *Sivagnana Botham* identifies Saiva Siddhānta as a quintessentially Tamil tradition.

In comparison to "The Heart of God", Nallaswamy Pillai's introduction to *Sivagnana Botham* also takes on a more scholastic tone. This scholastic tone is a key feature of what I have called "Neo-Saiva historiography", a distinct sub-genre of Neo-Saiva literature. "The Heart of God", although composed in formal Western-style prose, is dedicated to a theological question, and makes few claims about Tamil history. Neo-Saiva historiographic texts, on the other hand, connect Neo-Saiva theological arguments with scholarly Western conversations about the history of Indic peoples and Hindu religious texts. Whereas "The Heart of God" exclusively cites from religious scriptures, Nallaswamy Pillai's introduction to *Sivagnana Botham* cites and engages with a number of English *translations* of Hindu texts. The difference between citing religious texts directly and describing the work of translators of texts is profound: by analyzing Western scholars' translations of Hindu texts, Nallaswamy

Pillai is able to engage with Western scholastic *representations* of Tamil Hinduism and the Hindu tradition writ large. Nallaswamy Pillai cites some of these translators' choices in support of his own arguments. For instance, Nallaswamy Pillai writes,

> There can be no doubt that the Tamilians, having very early secured a translation of this work [the Sariraka Sūtras of Vyāsa] through Meikanda Deva with his invaluable commentary, cared to possess no translation of any other work on Philosophy from the Sanskrit, and in spite of the great praise that is bestowed on the Bhagavat Gita, the Tamil reader knows nothing about it, and it is only recently a Tamil translation has been got out. Of the merits of this Philosophy, which is discussed here as the Adwaitha [sic] Philosophy, the word Visishtadwaitha having never come into use with the Tamil writers, I need say nothing here, following the example of the first translator Rev. H. R. Hoisington who neither says a word in blame nor in praise of it, leaving the readers themselves to form their opinions.[168]

In this excerpt, Nallaswamy Pillai clearly has a theological axe to grind. Contrary to the claims of Neo-Vedantist and Vaishnava reformist groups, Nallaswamy Pillai insists that the Bhagavad Gītā and the Vedantic (i.e. Advaita) philosophical corpus have historically been insignificant in Tamil religious life. To support his claim, Nallaswamy Pillai cites the fact that the Reverend H.R. Hoisington, the first to translate *Sivagnana Botham* into English, makes no mention of Advaita at all in his translation or commentary on the text. Elsewhere in his introduction to *Sivagnana Botham*, Nallaswamy Pillai cites Rev. Hoisington's dating of the *Sivagnana Botham* and elements of Āgama thought to at least 1000 BCE as proof that the *Sivagnana Botham* is a more ancient text than the Ramayana.[169] Here, too, Nallaswamy Pillai cites Western scholastic discourse- in this case, an estimation of the chronological date of the composition of a Tamil Hindu text- to argue that Saivism is a religious system native to Tamil South India. This combination of Western scholastic models of textual analysis and historical evidence with Neo-Saiva positions on Hindu religious questions is the hallmark of Neo-Saiva historiography.

While texts by secular and missionary Western scholars are a key channel of evidence in Neo-Saiva historiographic texts, Neo-Saiva authors like Nallaswamy Pillai were not beholden to the conclusions of Western authors or audiences. Above, we have already seen Nallaswamy Pillai criticize Western audiences for their general ignorance of the Saiva Siddhānta tradition. Later in his introduction to *Sivagnana Botham*, Nallaswamy Pillai writes,

> Such is the paucity of knowledge possessed by foreigners and conveyed in the English language regarding South Indian chronology, language, religion, and philosophy, chiefly through want of patriotism and enthusiasm on the part of Tamil speaking Indians of the South.[170]

This sentence contains two assumptions inherent to Neo-Saiva historiography. First, Nallaswamy Pillai argues that there is a gap in public knowledge about the true religious identity and history of the Tamil country. While in this case Nallaswamy Pillai identifies a gap in foreign, English-language knowledge of South Indian religion and culture, other Neo-Saiva historiographic texts indict Tamil audiences for their ignorance of their own traditions. This ties into a second major assumption articulated in this excerpt: it is Tamilians, not Westerners, who are culpable for the loss of the true story of Tamil history. Nallaswamy Pillai argues here that Tamilians' lack of "patriotism and enthusiasm" caused a deficiency of accurate English-language studies on Tamil religion. Similarly, although Neo-Saiva historiographers credit Western scholars' contributions to correcting the Tamil historical record, they understand this project as one in which Tamilians should be intimately involved.

Compared to both of these sources, J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai's "Ancient Tamilian Civilization", from Volume II of *Siddhanta Deepika*, is an even more direct statement of

Neo-Saiva historiographic thought on the Tamil past. The tone and content of this essay differ noticeably from the more theological "The Heart of God". Whereas "The Heart of God" seeks to prove a specific doctrinal point about devotional love and religious experience, "Ancient Tamilian Civilization" takes a broader, historical view. In spite of their differences, both sources together show the complete scope of the Neo-Saiva project, which aims to recenter Tamil religious life on the Saiva Siddhānta tradition, and by extension, the Tamil country itself. *Siddhanta Deepika* regularly printed essays of both of these types, testifying to the porous borders between theology and history or textual criticism in Neo-Saiva scholarship.

As a more explicitly historical essay, "Ancient Tamilian Civilization" offers a more systematic discussion of the ancient history of the Tamil race. While Western racial-philological thought is a central presence in Nallaswamy Pillai's essay, Nallaswamy Pillai uses this conceptual system to argue against the Indological consensus that Sanskritic civilization is the sole example of high civilization in Indic history. J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai paints a portrait of the racial-philological climate in which he wrote:

> We may be allowed to say that we were the first to broach the notion that the Tamilians had no sort of connection with the north or northern settlers, and they never derived their letters or arts or civilizations from the Aryans… In regard to the Tamil language itself, our old Tamil Professor, himself a Tamilian from the extreme South, used to hold forth that it was derived altogether from the Sanskrit, and his successor in the chair spoke of the affinities lying deeper between Sanskrit and Tamil, and spoke of the two peoples living together in the fatherland, at a very remote time, and used to derive every sort of Tamil word from Sanskrit by all sorts of tortuous process.[171]

While Nallaswamy Pillai does not use the word "Dravidian" here, it is clear that his understanding of ancient Tamil history is deeply informed by the Aryan Invasion Theory

narrative. In colonial Indian universities at the turn of the century, funding for Sanskrit far outstripped funding for "vernacular" Indian languages, and little research on Tamil history or Tamil literature was subsidized.[172] A chief reason behind this differential distribution of research funds was the Indological assumption that the classical Indian language of Sanskrit had more to say about core Indic civilizational values than the comparatively degenerate vernaculars of present-day India. In this excerpt, we also see a traditional Brahmanical approach to Tamil grammar that assumes that Tamil is a *prakrit* language ultimately derived from Sanskrit. The successor to Nallaswamy Pillai's conservative professor expressed a similar position on the relationship between Sanskrit and Tamil by referring to the Aryan Invasion Theory. Consistent with the discussions on race and language we saw in Chapter 2, it is clear throughout this excerpt that the history of languages and the history of peoples are essentially synonymous to both Nallaswamy Pillai and his Tamil professors. Nallaswamy Pillai too refers to Western racial thought to rebut his professors' arguments:

> We were, however, inclined to think at one time that the relation of Tamil to Sanskrit would be like that of Anglo-Saxon to Latin and Greek; and though this may be true still to a certain extent as regards the outermost polish, yet this could not be true as regards the origin of the two peoples and their languages. Nearly all these theories suggested a connection with the North somehow or other, and we had first to disabuse our mind of all such notions, and the main lines of argument we followed were the following. The Tamil people do not bear any marks of a conquered race. If they are, rather we should say were, proud of any one thing, it was of their independence, and as it is his speech which brings out a man's real nature, we see in the Tamil language a vigour and independence displayed which is unparalleled in the history of the world amidst similar surroundings.[173]

This quotation shows a similar type of racial triangulation to the sort found in the work of Robert Caldwell, H.H. Risley, and other Western scholars. Nallaswamy presents the example of the relationship between the Anglo-Saxon language family (the sub-family of the Indo-European language family to which English belongs) and the classical languages of Latin and

Greek as an example of the sort of civilizational comparisons that can be made between Sanskrit and Tamil in ancient Indic history. However, Nallaswamy Pillai finds even this comparison inadequate for the credit the Tamil race deserves as an independent generator of thought and culture. Nallaswamy Pillai's estimation of the Tamil race is far higher than Caldwell's. Whereas Caldwell argued that Brahmins introduced higher forms of intellectual and religious life to the Dravidian South, Nallaswamy argues that it was Aryans, rather than Tamilians, who early on ceded to Tamil cultural and linguistic authority:

> The early [Tamil] writers were so scrupulous as to not to admit foreign words, and their influence must have been so great at one time that even Aryan writers dared not take liberties with the language. Its influence was so great that it brought the whole body of Aryan settlers in the south under its complete sway, so that we have, as we had already remarked, very few words of any importance written in Sanskrit by South Indian Aryans before the 8th and 9th centuries after Christ. It was not the case of the Aryans taking the Tamilians under their wings at first: though there can be no doubt that under the latter dynasties of Pandya, Chera and Chola, which upset the previous and more genuine Tamil dynasties, they gained more in power and in influence.[174]

Nallaswamy Pillai's argument in this passage demonstrates several important features of Neo-Saiva historiography that we have already seen in previous excerpts. First, Nallaswamy Pillai definitively argues that Tamil civilization was culturally dynamic and self-sufficient before the arrival of Aryan settlers. According to Nallaswamy Pillai, Tamilian society ceded to the influence of Aryan settlers only after centuries of sustained pressure and political conciliation, a process that alienated Tamilians from their original civilizational identity. Unlike in many of the other passages we have studied this chapter, there is no explicit connection Nallaswamy Pillai draws between Tamil history and the Saiva tradition. However, Nallaswamy Pillai's mention of the lack of important Sanskrit-language South Indian Aryan texts in early Tamil history alludes to the core Neo-Saiva argument that Tamil

Saivism and its Tamil-language scriptures are the quintessential representations of the religious and cultural heritage of the Tamil people.

Second, Western racial-linguistic science features as a key organizer of historical information in Nallaswamy Pillai's argument above. As in the works of Western comparative philology we analyzed in Chapter 2, Nallaswamy Pillai treats languages like Tamil and Sanskrit as documents of the histories of ethnoracial peoples. For Nallaswamy Pillai, the incorporation of Sanskrit loanwords into Tamil symbolizes the shift in power through which Aryan ideals and norms gained control over Tamil cultural and social life. This connection between Tamil linguistic purity and broader narratives of Tamil cultural history would become even more important in the work of Maraimalai Adigal, a 20th-century Neo-Saiva author, lecturer, and founder of the Pure Tamil Movement (*ta̲ṉittami̲ḻ iyakkam*) whom we will study in more detail in Chapter 5.

In addition to ideas and methodologies from racial philology, Nallaswamy Pillai also uses a Western historical chronology centered on the birth of Christ to structure his Tamil historical narrative. Nallaswamy Pillai argues that broad dynamics of the influence of Tamil and Sanskrit can be traced to important historical developments in discrete periods of Tamil history. by applying specific chronological dates and periods to his historical narrative, Nallaswamy Pillai is able to marshal a wide body of Western scholarship in support of his argument. Both Neo-Saiva historiographers and numerous other Tamil thinkers we will see in the coming chapters of this dissertation use a mix of Western historical, archaeological,

and racial-scientific concepts to advance their own distinctive framings of the history of the Tamil race.

Chapter 4: Dravidians and Aryans in *The Tamilian Antiquary*

Neo-Saiva historiographers of the late 19th century were the first Tamil authors to frame Tamil history as the story of two opposing groups: the indigenous, Saiva Tamilians, and the foreign Aryan invaders who imposed the Brahmanical tradition on the Tamil South. By the turn of the 20th century, the terms Aryan and Dravidian had become conceptual poles organizing not just Neo-Saiva, but also mainstream Tamil thought on Tamil ethnicity, Brahmanical caste, and Indian political nationalism. Terms like Dravidian and Aryan became mainstays of English and Tamil-language works by other Tamil scholars, as well as in such places as newspaper editorial pages and the names of Tamil political, cultural, and religious organizations. Although the political, social, and cultural interests of the various non-Brahmin constituencies and movements of modern Tamil history have not always been aligned with each other, in 20th-century Madras Presidency, the term "Dravidian" came to describe a shared intersectional position relative to "Aryan" dominance through colonial Brahmin favoritism, Brahmanical religious authority, and the highly Sanskritic and North India-focused Indian national project. This conception of "Dravidian" Tamil history as the indigenous ethnoracial heritage of non-Brahmin Tamilians is the shared foundation on which various non-Brahmin Tamil thinkers, orators, artists, and movements of the 20th and 21st centuries have constructed competing, socially critical conceptions of ancient Dravidian Tamil civilization.

Non-confessional (i.e., "secular") Tamil scholarship from the early 20th century bears many of the core features of Neo-Saiva historiography. Like Neo-Saiva historiography, many works of non-confessional Tamil scholarship seek to distinguish ostensibly indigenous[175],

"Dravidian" elements of Tamil civilizational history from the imported Brahmanical Hindu tradition, and use Western scholarly methodologies and citations to support their claims. Also like Neo-Saiva historiography, most non-confessional Tamil scholarship from the early 20th century contains an activist charge: scholars often present their individual discoveries about ancient Tamil civilization as pieces of larger projects to rewrite the record on Tamil history or reform features of contemporary Tamil society. Unlike Neo-Saiva historiography, however, non-confessional Tamil scholarship from the early 20th century does not present Saivism as a fundamental component of Tamil ethnic or civilizational identity. Even when speaking broadly about Tamil history, Neo-Saiva historiographers ground their arguments in their analyses of Tamil Saiva sources, and argue that Saivism is a constitutive feature of Tamil cultural and religious identity. Non-confessional scholars, although open to the use of Saiva sources as textual evidence, have no clear theological allegiances when discussing Tamil history.

Two major historical processes mediated the transfer of Neo-Saiva historiographic ideas about the Tamil past into mainstream Tamil scholarship. First, the rediscovery of a wide range of works of Sangam-era literature in the late 19th century set off a surge of Tamil literary and scholarly interest in the Tamil language and the ancient Tamil past. This surge of interest inspired many Tamil authors from all segments of literate Tamil society to eulogize the Tamil language as a preeminent symbol of a transhistorical Tamil identity. Moreover, the relative lack of Sanskritic influence in Sangam literature offered strong support for the argument that Tamil civilization had achieved a high degree of cultural prosperity prior to the arrival of Aryans and the Brahmanical religious system to the Tamil country. Neo-Saiva

scholars 'theological allegiances to the highly Sanskritized Tamil Saiva corpus held them back from highlighting Sangam literature as a uniquely Tamil literary tradition. Thinkers outside the Neo-Saiva movement, on the other hand, were more open to reading Sangam literature as a truer expression of the indigenous, Dravidian culture of ancient Tamil civilization.

Second, around the turn of the 20th century the term "non-Brahmin" emerged as a popular label of political, social, and cultural identity in Tamil Madras Presidency. The label "Non-Brahmin" created new ties of political and social solidarity among caste communities that had not necessarily been politically or socially aligned in premodern Tamil history. Whereas Brahmins in Madras Presidency and across India emphasized their ties to the pan-Indian Brahmanical tradition, "non-Brahmins" instead presented themselves as the descendants of native, Dravidian Tamil civilization. The conceptual tools of Neo-Saiva historiography offered a powerful way for non-Brahmin thinkers to stake their claims to a transhistorical Tamil racial and cultural identity, in contrast to the "Aryan" Brahmins who brought Brahmanical culture from North India into the Tamil country.

This chapter will begin by describing each of these historical processes in more depth. The interaction of these processes generated the discursive environment where various non-Brahmin Tamil thinkers, speakers, and regular people came to understand Tamil and Sanskrit as opposing forces in Tamil history. We will then turn to an early 20th-century Tamil scholarly compilation, *The Tamilian Antiquary*, as an illustrative example of how non-confessional, non-Brahmin Tamil scholarship incorporates elements of Neo-Saiva

historiography into ostensibly secular studies of ancient Tamil history. We will devote particular attention to one specific essay, "A Critical Review of the Story of Ramayana" [sic], which is attributed both to the seminal Neo-Saiva historiographer P. Sundaram Pillai and to one V.P. Subramania, who turned Sundaram Pillai's notes into a scholarly essay following Sundaram Pillai's death. This essay is a remarkable document that offers deep insight into the ways that Western racial thought, Indology, Neo-Saiva historiography, Tamil language devotion, and non-Brahmin politics converged to forge a new, racialized idiom of caste politics in modern Tamil public society. "Critical Review" also foreshadows the intellectual moves that various important 20th and 21st-century Tamil social thinkers and political figures make in the context of their own movements.

Tamil Devotion, the Tamil Renaissance, and the Rediscovery of the Sangam Canon

Beginning in the 1870s, two Tamil publishers, C. Damodaram Pillai and U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, independently discovered a number of well-preserved palm-leaf manuscripts of a wide range of Sangam-era works of literature. Before the introduction of paper under British colonial rule, palm leaf was the standard medium by which Tamil texts were preserved. Although relatively durable, palm leaf manuscripts are susceptible to long-term spoilage due to excessive moisture and other environmental factors.[176] Whether because of this long-term spoilage or other reasons (i.e., the selective promotion of openly sectarian works of Tamil literature), the Sangam-era literary works on the manuscripts that Damodaram Pillai and Swaminatha Iyer recovered had been lost from Tamil public knowledge. Up to that point, the

mainstream Tamil literary canon consisted of principally of relatively highly Sanskritized Saiva and Vaishnava scriptures, commentaries, and didactic works.[177] Compared to these texts, rediscovered works of Sangam literature showed conspicuously less Sanskritic and Brahmanical influence, both linguistically and culturally.[178] This textual evidence lent strong support to the contention that Tamil civilization had an independent, non-Sanskritic origin.[179]

The rediscovery of the Sangam classics powered an explosion of Tamil literary activity, commonly known as the "Tamil Renaissance" (*tamiḻ maṟumalarci*), in the closing decades of the 19th century. By this time, Tamil-language type and printing infrastructure had become accessible to a variety of Tamil printers and publishers, opening new channels of publication for Tamil-language texts and texts chiefly marketable to Tamil audiences.[180] Both C. Damodaram Pillai and U.V. Swaminatha Iyer edited and published the Sangam texts they compiled, and their printed volumes reached a wide audience of literate Tamilians. Their collective efforts led to a reformulation of the Tamil literary canon that included the Sangam Era as a formative period of Tamil literature. A new Tamil literary aesthetic emerged that privileged the Sangam period over subsequent, more Sanskritic periods of Tamil literature. A.R. Venkatachalapathy has argued that this reformation of the Tamil canon is also a secularization of Tamil literature: whereas once openly religious Tamil texts formed the Tamil literary canon, mainstream understanding of the Tamil canon shifted to emphasize the comparatively non-religious Sangam Era.[181]

Sumathi Ramaswamy (1997) has discussed a parallel process in late-colonial Tamil history by which the Tamil language becomes an object of religious or quasi-religious devotion

(*tamiḻpaṟṟu*). While resonant with the premodern divinization of the Tamil language that Ramaswamy identifies in the *Maduraic Cokkanātar Tamiḻ Viṭutūtu*, Ramaswamy argues that the tradition of Tamil devotion that emerges in the late 19th century is a characteristically modern phenomenon. Compared to premodern Tamil devotion, modern Tamil devotees were far more interested in presenting Tamil as a historically ancient language, a move commonly found in many "modern" social and intellectual movements of the time.[182] Ramaswamy presents a classification of four major Tamil approaches to "imagining" the Tamil language as a symbol of a transhistorical Tamil people: Neo-Saiva, classicist, Indianist, and Dravidianist.[183] Ramaswamy associates each of these characteristic imaginings of the Tamil language to a discrete sociopolitical project. While Ramaswamy constructs this typology specifically in reference to the phenomenon of Tamil devotion (*tamiḻpaṟṟu*), this classificatory scheme is very useful for mapping out the major ways that early-20th-century Tamil authors connected the ancient Tamil past to the Tamil sociopolitical present. As such, it is worth briefly describing each of Ramaswamy's four categories.

We have already attended last chapter to the Neo-Saiva theological project that underlies what Ramaswamy describes as the Neo-Saiva strain of Tamil devotion.[184] Neo-Saivas connect the civilizational elevation of the Tamil language to its roots in Tamil Saiva religious culture, and hail Saivism as the religion of the Tamil people's golden age. Ramaswamy's "classicist" Tamil devotees[185], on the other hand, were predominantly concerned with the scholarly representation of the Tamil language, and by extension Tamil civilization, as "classical", a label of transhistorical prestige that Western thought granted to languages like Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin. Over the last few chapters of this dissertation, we have already

encountered several examples of how purportedly "classical" languages were considered markers of higher-tier civilizations, as opposed to "vernacular" languages spoken by unremarkable modern peoples. Classicists sought to prove that the Tamil language- and by extension, the transhistorical Tamil people- deserve the same "classical" status as Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and other "classical" languages. We will see more examples of this line of thinking in the first two essays from *The Tamilian Antiquary* we will discuss below. Ramaswamy's third category of Tamil devotees, "Indianists", sought to represent Tamil as one of the many vernacular languages and ethnic heritages that make up a historically unified, if cosmopolitan, Indian national identity. Indianists sought to connect Tamil history to a broader narrative of Indian history centered not on the Tamil country, but on the broader Indian nation. Finally, Ramaswamy's "Dravidianist" Tamil devotees are those sympathetic to the "Dravidian" ideology of E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy's "Self-Respect Movement" (*suyamariyādai iyakkam*) and Dravidar Kazhagam (DK), two organizations we will discuss in more detail next chapter. Dravidianists argued that Tamilians are a Dravidian people, and should actively reject Brahmanical caste, Brahmanical Hinduism, and perhaps religion altogether as vestiges of the Aryan invasion (whether figurative or literal) of the Dravidian South.

Ramaswamy's typology of Tamil devotion is an eminently useful scheme for mapping out the contrasting threads of discursive engagement with the Tamil language found in early 20th-century Tamil public society. However, Ramaswamy's typology also disguises an important binary in these early engagements with the Tamil language. For "Indianists" and some "classicists", Tamil is merely one of many important Indian languages with notable

literary and cultural histories. For Indianists in particular, Tamil occupies a deeply honored, but subsidiary position in the history of a united Indian people. It is Sanskrit and the Sanskritic tradition, rather than Tamil, that Indianists generally identify as the unifying force of an Indic cultural history. This position is fundamentally incompatible with the position of Neo-Saivas and "Dravidianists", who argue that the civilizational roots of Tamil society are native to the Dravidian Tamil land. For Neo-Saivas and Dravidianists, India may be a political reality, but it is not a historical unit into which Tamil history can be reduced as one component part among others. Whether explicitly or implicitly, Neo-Saiva and Dravidianist engagements with the Tamil past center Tamil cultural, literary, and social history on the Tamil (or Dravidian) land itself, rather than the broader context of India.

It is no coincidence that the most prominent "Indianist" devotees of the Tamil language, such as Subramania "Bharathiyar" Bharati and C. "Rajaji" Rajagopalachariar, were members of the Brahmin caste community, the constituency in colonial Tamil society most invested in the promotion of Sanskrit- and Hindi-language education in Madras Presidency.[186] While both Bharathiyar and Rajaji were indisputably lovers of the Tamil language, both figures also promoted Sanskrit and Hindi-language education during their lifetimes.[187] Other members of the Brahmin community of Tamil Madras Presidency at that time sought to draw stricter lines between the Aryan heritage of Brahmins and the culture and language of their Dravidian surroundings.[188] Some Brahmins in the Tamil country even bragged about only speaking Sanskrit and English, and not the purportedly degenerate Tamil tongue of their environs.[189] At the same time that many Brahmins sought to distinguish themselves culturally and racially from non-Brahmin Tamilians, other prominent Brahmins in the Tamil country, such as G.

Subramania Iyer[190], G. Annaji Rao[191], and P.S. Sivaswamy Aiyer[192], presented the nation of India as the domain of Brahmin culture. Annie Besant, famous Indian Home Rule advocate and head of the Madras Theosophical Society, was an active advocate of the notion of Brahmin superiority in Tamil society, and campaigned tirelessly for the expansion of Sanskrit-language education and *varṇa*-based social codes in Madras Presidency.[193]

In contrast to Indianists, Neo-Saiva and Dravidianist devotees of Tamil overwhelmingly hailed from non-Brahmin Tamil backgrounds. Neo-Saivas and Dravidianists were the key actors in the Anti-Hindi Agitations of 1937-1940, a series of major Tamil public protests that successfully pressured the national Indian government to push back its plans to adopt Hindi as the official national language of all India. A subsequent series of protests in 1968 in Tamil Nadu on the same issue was a key factor propelling the Dravidianist Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) to electoral victory in Tamil Nadu. Since that election, either the DMK or the ADMK, another rhetorically Dravidianist political party, have held control of the Tamil Nadu state government. The differences in caste identity between Indianists and other schools of Tamil devotees is connected to another crucially important process occurring at the turn of the 20th century in Madras Presidency: the formation of a "Non-Brahmin" political identity.

From Neo-Saiva to Non-Brahmin

As studies by M.S.S. Pandian[194] and V. Geetha & S.V. Rajadurai[195] have demonstrated, in the closing decades of the 19th century, the term "Non-Brahmin" gained salience as a label

of political and social identity in Tamil-speaking Madras Presidency. Before this time, the various non-Brahmin caste communities of Madras Presidency were not meaningfully politically or culturally aligned with each other.[196] Although some members of less privileged caste communities participated in Non-Brahmin political organizations and embraced mainstream Non-Brahmin political ideology, the Non-Brahmin politics of the early 20th century were dominated by relatively privileged non-Brahmin caste communities, such as Vellalas, Nairs, Reddys, and Chettis. The rallying cry of what became known as Non-Brahmin politics was the charge to counteract the disproportionate political and socioeconomic privilege that Brahmins enjoyed in colonial Madras Presidency society in the late 19th century. Although Brahmins accounted for just over three percent of the population of the state in 1912, they occupied a majority of seats at various levels of colonial legislature and judiciary.[197] Moreover, colonial social codes systematically deferred to Brahmanical texts and customs, including Brahmin demands for caste-segregated streetcars, water tanks, and roadways.[198] In Tamil newspaper editorials and other public fora in the late 19th century, self-identifying "Non-Brahmins" criticized some or all of these examples of Brahmin favoritism.[199] This current of political thought culminated with the formation of the Justice Party, a self-professed "Non-Brahmin" political party, which presented its platform through an official tract entitled *The Non-Brahmin Manifesto* (1916). This text principally focuses on the demographic discrepancies in Tamil public office between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins, and argues that this discrepancy does not reflect a difference in aptitude or intelligence, but rather bald Brahmin favoritism in Madras Presidency government. The *Manifesto* declares,

> We do not deny that in these days of fierce intellectual competition the skill to pass examinations is a valuable personal possession. But it passes our understanding why a small class which shows a larger percentage of English-knowing men [i.e. Brahmins] than their neighbors, should be allowed to absorb all the government appointments,

> great and small, high and low, to the exclusion of the latter among whom may also be found, though in small proportions, men of capacity, enlightenment and culture.[200]

The *Manifesto* makes two chief policy demands: the rectification of disproportionate Brahmin representation in Madras Presidency government, and the abandonment of the scheme of Home Rule by which an independent India would be left vulnerable to Brahmin domination. The *Manifesto* states,

> We are not in favor of any measure which, in operation, is designed, or tends completely, to undermine the influence and authority of the British Rulers, who alone in the present circumstances of India are able to hold the scales even between creed and class and to develop that sense of unity and national solidarity without which India will continue to be a congeries of mutually exclusive and warring groups without a common purpose and a common patriotism.[201]

In this passage, not only does Britain figure as the adjudicator between Indian caste groups, but it also figures as the single unifying thread of what is otherwise "a congeries of mutually exclusive and warring groups without a common purpose and a common patriotism", rather than a unified Indian people, as implied by the Home Rule platform of the Indian National Congress. Subsequent Tamil movements adopted a similar stance towards British colonialism for the same reasons, although figures like Periyar also regularly tangled with British colonial officials.

In his study on the emergence of caste politics in twentieth-century India, Alex Lee argues that not all caste identities in colonial India necessarily became markers of a specific political identity. While in some cases caste communities have sought to distinguish themselves from surrounding caste groups, in other cases individual caste communities have chosen to downplay the differences between their communities and others in a shared sociopolitical

bloc. Rather, certain educational and economic elites from given caste communities "activate" caste identities as politically or socially relevant to their given contexts.[202] The formation of a coalition of "Non-Brahmin" caste communities against Brahmin political and economic favoritism in Madras Presidency is a prime example of this process. Privileged-class non-Brahmin Tamil caste communities had the requisite levels of literacy, education, and free time that Lee argues were necessary to support the foundation of caste-based political movements.[203] However, while elite caste groups' political interests certainly played a major role in the evolution of non-Brahmin political discourse in Madras Presidency, it is misleading to describe Dravidian political rhetoric as a merely superstructural feature of non-Brahmin Tamil politics. This is the position of the mid-20th century materialist "Cambridge School" of Tamil history, associated with scholars such as like Christopher Baker and David Washbrook who argue that the development of a public "Dravidian' identity was strategically developed by non-Brahmin elites to secure a greater share of economic and political power in colonial Madras Presidency.[204] The Cambridge School interpretation does not account for the fact that the Non-Brahmin Movement's use of "Dravidian"-centered language was not simply rhetorical.[205] As we have already seen in many ways in this dissertation, this discourse on the Dravidian racial history of the Tamil people has a rich and complex history, and reading principally as a self-interested elite political strategy discounts many important features of its emergence as a feature of mainstream non-Brahmin Tamil thought on Tamil historical, cultural, social, and racial identity. Moreover, the Non-Brahmin Movement did not simply treat the term "Dravidian" as a symbol of Non-Brahmin political aspirations; many supporters of non-Brahmin politics made tangible cultural and linguistic demands related to the Tamil-centered cultural orientation implied by a Dravidian racial identity.

The most salient of these demands was the Non-Brahmin Movement's campaign for the expansion of Tamil-medium and Tamil-language education at all levels of education in Tamil Madras Presidency. Certainly, at least part of this demand was practical and economic: British subsidization of the study of Sanskrit and Sanskritic literature in schools and universities lent the Brahmin communities a significant degree of educational cultural privilege in Madras Presidency society. Many Non-Brahmin parents worried that their children would be at a structural disadvantage to Brahmin students, whose families had been associated with Sanskrit-language education and the Sanskritic Hindu textual canon for generations.[206] However, it is important to remember that this material situation itself emerged out of Western Indological and racial discourses on Indic history. Brahmins received systemic privileges in colonial Madras Presidency society predominantly because of their association with the Aryan ancestors of both Indic and Western civilization, an association that Western figures like Annie Besant stridently promoted alongside the social recognition of Brahmin supremacy through Brahmanical caste purity codes and special educational accommodations.[207] Tamil non-Brahmin reclamation of the term "Dravidian", the racial opposite of "Aryan" in the versions of the Aryan Invasion Theory applied to the Dravidian South, can be read as a discursive response to the systematic denigration of the Dravidian people and their characteristic Dravidian ways of life across most contemporary Western scholarly thought. To this point, spokespeople and supporters of the Non-Brahmin Movement also publicly decried the cultural implications of prioritizing Sanskritic literature and the Sanskrit language over South Indian literature and vernaculars in Madras Presidency schools.[208] The privately funded Annamalai University was founded in response to a

longstanding Non-Brahmin interest in a university dedicated exclusively to the study of Tamil literature and the Tamil language.[209] Whereas Western universities were very reluctant to fund faculty or departments invested in studying "vernacular" languages, literatures, cultural relics, or political histories, Annamalai University was expressly commissioned to lend resources to the study of the Tamil language and Tamil history.

Since Tamil-medium education offered obvious advantages for monolingual non-Brahmin Tamil students, the Justice Party and the early Non-Brahmin Movement's demand for Tamil language education was one of the least controversial features of its platform among members of the movement. The social issues of untouchability and caste hierarchy, however, were live-wire issues that divided the early Non-Brahmin Movement into two distinct camps. These camps correspond to the two distinct approaches to lower-caste activism that Alex Lee locates in 20th-century India. One approach to caste-centered activism seeks to raise the social, political, or economic position of a specific caste community or coalition of castes, without necessarily transforming the nature of caste hierarchy itself. A second approach seeks to separate a given community from notions of hierarchical caste altogether.[210]

One faction of the Justice Party, led by Party co-founder Dr. T.M. Nair, saw Untouchability and caste hierarchy as undesirable presences in Tamil society, and argued that the Non-Brahmin political project naturally extended to reforming Tamil society to rectify these injustices. This faction fits Lee's model of holistic caste critique: Nair and his associates understood caste discrimination itself to be a systemic social issue. The other faction of the Justice Party, led by Party co-founder P. Theagaraya Chetti, was not committed to any broad-

based platform of social reform outside of specific economic and political reforms intended to counterbalance disproportionate Brahmin privilege in Madras Presidency.[211] Tensions emerged among these groups over the role Dalits, including the high-profile politician and activist M.C. Raja, were entitled to play in the Non-Brahmin movement.[212] The ideological fissure within the Justice Party in the 1910s and 1920s can be seen as a microcosm of an important continuing tension between caste non-Brahmins and Dalits (or adi dravidas) in "Dravidian" readings of Tamil history up to the present day.

Non-Brahmin politics played an important role in circulating originally Neo-Saiva perspectives on Tamil history to a broader non-Brahmin Tamil public audience. The Justice Party called its print periodical *Dravidan* ("Dravidian") in recognition of what had by the 1910s become a commonplace Tamil association between the terms "non-Brahmin" and "Dravidian". However, Non-Brahmin political thought was not the first Tamil thought system to connect contemporary Tamil caste society to ancient Dravidian and Aryan racial identity. In the 1880s, the thinker, activist, and religious leader Iyothee Thass founded community organizations that addressed the Dalit Paraiyar community as "Adi Dravida", the "First Dravidians" of the Tamil country. Thass began lobbying colonial British administration to recognize Adi Dravidas as an independent non-Hindu community in the colonial census, a project Thass continued for decades.[213] We will examine Thass's thought and career in more detail next chapter, alongside other important Tamil figures and social movements that bring discourses of Tamil racial history into their social and political projects. However, before we study these various important Tamil thinkers and movements, it is worthwhile to take stock of the discursive terrain from which all of these projects

emerged. For that, we will now turn to *The Tamilian Antiquary*, a scholarly compilation published during the same general period that Thass began to publish longer expressions of his Adi Dravida-centered engagement with Tamil history.

Dravidian History in *The Tamilian Antiquary*

Both of the sociohistorical processes we have discussed in this chapter- the flare-up of "devotional" enthusiasm for the Tamil language in the late 19th century and the emergence of a "non-Brahmin" sociopolitical identity around the turn of the 20th century- deeply color 20th-century Tamil scholastic engagements with ancient Tamil history. Not all Tamil historians necessarily argued that Tamil history told the story of an independent Dravidian civilizational legacy: prominent Brahmin historians like K.A. Nilakantha Sastri, while detailed and diligent in their chronologies of Tamil political history, situated Tamil history in the context of a broader history of India rooted in the Sanskritic tradition. However, by the second decade of the 20th century, the notion that non-Brahmin Tamilians belong to an ancient Dravidian race had become a dominant way Tamil thinkers engaged with Tamil history, Brahmanical Hinduism, and present-day Tamil ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity in the non-Brahmin Tamil mainstream. Through the work of these thinkers, the Tamil language, Sangam Tamil literature, and other purportedly pre-Aryan elements of Tamil culture became powerful symbols of not only Tamil history, but a specfically *non-Brahmin* history of Tamil cultural life.

We will now turn to analyzing several essays from *The Tamilian Antiquary*, a rich source that illustrates both how a Western vocabulary of race entered Tamil scholarship on the ancient Tamil past, and how Tamil scholars and activists began to connect statements about the ancient Dravidian racial past of the Tamilians to a social critique of caste in contemporary Tamil society. *The Tamilian Antiquary* is a bilingual compilation of 53 scholarly essays published serially between 1907 and 1914. The great majority of essays in *The Tamilian Antiquary* were composed in English, and even Tamil-language essays, such as "A Critical Review of Story of Ramayana and an Account of South Indian Castes (Tamil) Based on the Views of P. Sundaram Pillai", discussed below, are often paired with English-language introductions or bunched into a single print issue with several English-language essays. However, as is common in Tamil-authored texts from the turn of the century[214], many essays in The Tamilian Antiquary print Tamil letters rather than their transliterated equivalents, indicating that they were intended for audiences literate in Tamil as well as English. As the title of *The Tamilian Antiquary* implies, all 53 essays in the compilation deal with topics related to ancient Tamil history, ranging from literary study to archaeology to political history. The editor of the series, D. Savariroyan, while obviously sympathetic to a Dravidian-centered (and perhaps Neo-Saiva) reading of Tamil history, also solicited a diversity of perspectives on ancient Tamil history to represent in the essays in the collection. Unlike Neo-Saiva publications, which often printed Saiva prayers and invocations alongside individual articles, *The Tamilian Antiquary* is not an explicitly Neo-Saiva or even Hindu text. Rather, the compilation is clearly modeled on contemporary, non-confessional Western scholarship, such as we saw in Chapter One of this dissertation.

The authors in *The Tamilian Antiquary* hold a variety of caste identities and cultural positions: Brahmin, non-Brahmin, and Christian missionary authors are all included in the compilation.[215] Because of this cultivated diversity, T*he Tamilian Antiquary* offers a meaningful glimpse into how broader Tamil academic and public culture had begun to reckon with Western scholarship on the Tamil and Indic past. Western thought on race in particular plays a centrally important role in *The Tamilian Antiquary*. Many of the compilation's essays use Western race science to contradict claims advanced in Western Indological scholarship about Sanskrit and its role in ancient Tamil history.

In the opening essay of The Tamilian Antiquary, "The Bharata Land or Dravidian India" D. Savariroyan, editor of the series, offers a clear statement of the question of Tamil racial identity that is central to many of the series's essays:

> This ancient language of the Bharata land is now confined to the southernmost part of the peninsula and is known only as one of the vernaculars of Southern India; yet an acute and critical student of the language will not fail to notice that Tamil is something more than a mere vernacular and is one of the two important classical languages of India. Oriental scholars unanimously agree in holding that Tamil 'is one of the most ancient, copious, and refined languages spoken by man.' But they are at variance in the discussion of the question as to which family or group the language and the race belong.[216]

Savariroyan's argument that Tamil is a "classical" language places him firmly within the bounds of Ramaswamy's "classicist" strain of Tamil devotion. Like other "classicist" Tamil devotees of the early 20th century, Savariroyan argues that the Tamil language is not a mere vernacular language, but rather one of the primary classical languages of ancient India. As we discussed in Chapter One, Western racial philologists associated "classical" languages

with racial peoples credited with high levels of literary and civilizational accomplishment. Per this racial-philological logic, by establishing that Tamil is a classical language Tamil authors could prove that the Tamil race is inherently capable of higher civilizational achievement. Moreover, philological models of racial-linguistic descent assumed that classical languages decayed into vernaculars, a process philologists observed in the relationship between North Indian languages and Sanskrit. Accordingly, designating ancient Tamil as a "classical" language specifically prevented Tamil from being presented as a subordinate offshoot of Sanskrit, but rather as a freestanding and parallel language.

The notion that Tamil is a classical language was deeply politically relevant to contemporary conversations about Indian national identity. In his famous tract *Hind Swaraj* (1910), M.K. Gandhi, whose thought played a critical role in the Indian nationalist movement, persistently presents the linguistically and culturally diverse population of British India as a single Indian national people unified by a shared religious and intellectual history. Gandhi writes,

> The English have taught us that we were not one nation before, and that it will require centuries before we become one nation. This is without foundation. We were one nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom. Subsequently they divided us.[217]

While Gandhi recognizes ethnic and linguistic differences among peoples across India, he fervently argues that it was only after the introduction of technologies such as the railway that differences became salient among different Indian peoples. Before this time, Gandhi argues that religious pilgrimage routes led people from all over ancient India to learn each other's languages and cultures.[218] While Gandhi does not describe any vernacular Indian language as inherently more or less Indian than another, he does suggest that all Indians

across the country learn Hindi, the single most widely spoken vernacular language in modern India, as a means of facilitating communication and cultural exchange among different ethnic groups.[219] Although Gandhi does describe this process of cultural exchange as a means by which North Indians would become exposed to South Indian languages and cultures, Gandhi's suggestion of the Hindi language as a common tongue for all cultural regions of India lends a structural linguistic advantage to native Hindi speakers and other speakers of closely related North Indian languages over speakers of South and Northeast Indian languages. Gandhi also suggests that all Hindus learn Sanskrit, since Sanskrit is the scriptural language associated with the Hindu tradition.[220]

Savariroyan titles his essay "The Bharata Land or Dravidian India" in clear opposition to the Indian nationalist claim that the Sanskritic, Brahmanical Hindu tradition is a common thread stringing together all the "vernacular" regions of modern India. According to Savariroyan, it was not Sanskrit, but rather Tamil that was originally spoken across the Indian subcontinent. This idea, while informed by Western assumptions that the pre-Aryan population of India hailed from Dravidian racial stock, lends Tamil a larger place in Indic history than all but the most Tamil-focused Western scholars would grant it. This status feeds directly into Savariroyan's claim that Tamil is a classical (i.e., ancient) language, rather than a more recently formed "vernacular". Per this status, Tamilians would no longer need to look to Sanskrit as the root of its religious and literary traditions. Rather, as Sangam literature makes clear, early Tamil civilization had a complex cultural identity of its own before the arrival of Sanskritic traditions to the Tamil South.

Savariroyan's description of the connection between the Tamil language and its racial-linguistic classification recalls the work of Western philologists like William Jones and Robert Caldwell. As we saw in Chapter One, the equivalence of language and race was a foundational principle of Western comparative philology. Like Caldwell in *Comparative grammar*, Savariroyan is acutely interested in determining the precise historical relationship between Tamil racial stock and other racial types. As we saw in Chapter One, Caldwell's classification of Dravidians as a "martial race" led him to posit ancient connections between the Dravidians and nomadic Eurasian peoples such as the Hittites. However, whereas Caldwell uses philological evidence to demonstrate the civilizational superiority of the Aryans over the ancient Dravidians, Savariroyan uses Western racial thought to argue that Tamilians should in fact be considered members of the Caucasian race. Savariroyan writes,

> From an ethnological point of view the Tamilians do not racially belong to the Turanian (Mongoloid) family. Recent investigations go to prove that there is a marked mental and physical difference between the two species. Organic laws, on which we more strongly depend for the classification of races, establish that the Dravidian of Southern India belongs decidedly to the Caucasian melanochroid physical type of the human species, a branch of Homo Caucasicus of Mr. Keane.[221]

As we discussed in Chapter One, over the course of the 19th century Western racial thought shifted from a philological model to a model based on the emerging discipline of evolutionary biology. This discursive shift accounts for the especially biological and bodily language used in this passage and throughout *The Tamilian Antiquary* to describe racial difference. While the racial philology of the early 19th century drew broad links between linguistic groups and traits of their inherent racial character, by the turn of the 20th century Western scholars used anthropometry and archaeology to argue that specific inherited physical traits, such as skin color, brow height, hair texture, and nose shape, systematically

mark the intellectual and moral capabilities or shortcomings of individual racial groups. Savariroyan places his work into dialogue with this strain of scholarship by situating Tamilians relative to Mongoloids and Caucasians, two major racial types in contemporary anthropometric racial scholarship. However, Savariroyan does not cite anthropometric data to substantiate his argument that Tamilians are members of the Caucasian physical type. Rather, Savariroyan constructs his argument by citing the underlying logic of racial classification. Since "organic laws" categorize races according to both their mental and physical capabilities, the obvious civilizational achievements of the Tamilian people, such as the classical Tamil language, make clear that the Tamil race should be classified alongside other Caucasian races with similar levels of civilizational elevation. Savariroyan here argues that the similarities between the civilizations of the Tamil and Caucasian races are more important to the racial classification of the Tamilians than biological markers. Savariroyan cites the racial classification scheme of a Western scholar as support for the idea that the Caucasian race contains a darker-skinned sub-group. This wedge of Western scholarship allows Savariroyan to subvert the logic of white supremacy that otherwise places Tamilians in a category inferior to Aryans and other whiter races.

In Chapter One, we also saw how the tiers of 19th-century Western racial classification were held to mark the inherent moral tendencies and capacities of a given racial group. Parallel to his argument that the classical Tamil language proves that Tamilians are too intellectually sophisticated to be classified as members of a savage, Mongoloid Turanian race, Savariroyan argues that Tamil literature proves that Tamilians are too morally sophisticated to be grouped with the morally degenerate Turanian race. Savariyoran writes:

> In the opinion of Charles E. Gover the 'Tamilians possess one of the noblest literatures the world has seen. 'As regards the absurdity of affiliating the Tamilian family with the Turanian, the latter savant, in his excellent work- The Folk Songs of Southern India, thus declares, 'These such witnesses, added to the hundred this book contains, suffice to show that, whether as regards literature or morals, the Dravidian people are deserving of and entitled to the honour of omission from the Turanian family. It will not be out of place here to note what place the Turanian people occupy among the nations of the world. The general opinion of scholars, as a rule, is that the 'Turanian peoples display an utter want of moral elevation. 'Their languages are poor in literature; they have no high moral ideas; and their aspirations are low.[222]

The final sentence of this excerpt recalls the excerpt of Caldwell's comments on Dravidian social vocabulary that we examined last chapter. Literature and "moral ideas" are two central components of how Caldwell assesses the civilizational advancement of ancient Dravidian society. In Caldwell's estimation, both the literature and advanced moral vocabulary associated with pre-Sanskritic Dravidian society are non-savage, but they also clearly lack the degree of intellectual rigor and cultural complexity that characterize Aryan cultures. Savariroyan's quotation of the Western scholar Charles E. Gover goes on to implicitly rebut Caldwell on both points: the excellence of Tamilian literature and morality proves that Tamilians are among the most advanced of the world's races.

We see a similar reapplication and reversal of colonial scholarship in the next essay printed in *The Tamilian Antiquary,* V.J. Thamby Pillai's "The Solar and Lunar Races of India: Who Are Their Modern Representatives?" (henceforth, "Solar and Lunar Races of India") While Savariroyan's essay exclusively cites from colonial racial scholarship, Thamby Pillai cites copiously from Vedic scripture and Indological literature in addition to colonial racial science. Western Indologists had long prior established the precedent of treating events and descriptions in Hindu scriptural literature as reflections of material historical fact. Thamby

Pillai's essay follows Indologists by using the Vedas as historical documents to illustrate important dynamics in ancient Indic history.

As mentioned briefly in Chapter One, Indologists early on became fascinated with references in the Rg Veda to ancient conflicts between the Āryas, which Indologists glossed as "Aryans", and the Dasyus, which Indologists identified as a dark-skinned race indigenous to South Asia. Passages describing these conflicts became some of the principal evidence Indologists cited in support of the Aryan Invasion narrative. Thamby Pillai's essay connects this topic of Indological scholarship to a lineage claim made by the Pandian Dynasty, the first of the great Tamil dynasties of the imperial era of Tamil history. The Pandians claimed to be descendants of the "lunar race" of Brahmins, a lineage traditionally linked to the "solar race" of the Brahmins of the Vedas. Thamby Pillai is particularly invested in the issue of skin color in Vedic history, since as we saw in both Caldwell and Savariroyan's writings, the physical characteristics of ancient races were considered to mark the intellectual, civilizational, and moral capabilities of a given racial stock. Rather than arguing that the Dasyus of the Rgveda were not dark-skinned- something that modern Vedic scholars like Edwin Bryant have suggested based on criticisms of Indologists' translation of the Vedic verses in question[223]- Thamby Pillai instead argues that the whiteness of the Aryans had been exaggerated relative to their Vedic opponents. Thamby Pillai writes:

> …it is said that the epithets of contempt, such as 'the noseless ones', 'born of a black womb', etc., which the Vedic Ariyas [sic] applied to the 'Dasyus', distinctly imply a vast difference of colour between the former and the latter. In order to arrive at a correct conclusion on this point it is necessary to remember that, according to the Aitreya Brahmana, the enemies of the Ariyas or the Dasyu or 'Dasas', as they are called, were themselves Ariyas…. This being so [that the Aryas and Dasyus were brothers], it is only reasonable to suppose that, if there had existed any difference as regards complexion between the Ariyas of India who was a 'black' himself and their

> opponents, it must have been, mainly, one of degree only. And it need hardly be thought a curious thing that the leader of the Ariyas should have been a swarthy-skinned person as he was as much a 'Kausika' himself as 'Visvámitra' who, judging from the complexion of his progeny, must have been a very 'nigger'. The theory of 'white Ariyas' is, thus, seen to be ill-supported by the traditions and writings of India… The Vedic Dasyus were, doubtless, a very black race, like the Veddhas of Binntenne, whom an average Tamil would usually call 'a black race'. It is the habit of the people of this country to call a person 'black' if he happens to be a shade or two darker than the ordinary run.[224]

Thamby Pillai references a common use of "black" in many South Asian languages (e.g., Tamil "karuppu") to describe a relative, rather than absolute, darkness of skin tone. If indeed the Dasyus were only black relative to the Aryans, Thamby Pillai argues, there is no reason that the Aryans themselves could not have been much darker-skinned than white Europeans or other races. Moreover, the existence of a wide spectrum of skin tones within a single ethnic group or territory is a common phenomenon across South Asia: even siblings and other close relatives are frequently compared to each other as "fairer" or "duskier" by family members.

Thamby Pillai's jocular use of "nigger" as an epithet for a particularly dark-skinned race is a powerful testament to the global reach of the colonial racial system. Since colonial anthropologists connected skin complexion and other physical features to levels of intellectual and social development, language disparaging American blackness retains its ethnological symbolism when applied to dark races in other areas of the world. It is clear from this passage, however, that Thamby Pillai is not uncritically rehashing white European (or American) scholars' thought on the relationship between skin color and other aspects of a racial stock. Rather, by disputing the Western assumption that the ancient Aryans were a light-skinned race, Thamby Pillai mounts a profound challenge to the racial logic at the heart

of Indological accounts of Vedic history. If, as Thamby Pillai argues, Aryans were not actually appreciably whiter than their enemies, then the classification of races according to skin color cannot be treated as a reliable indicator of the civilizational achievements or capabilities of the races in South Asian history.By contending that the skin color of a race can change substantially over long periods, and that skin tones vary randomly among people within the same racial group, Thamby Pillai opens the door to arguing that racial categories lose their meaning over historical time, an idea that when taken to this level clashes fundamentally with the foundational logic of both Western race science and the Aryan Invasion Theory. If the "black" races of the past are not necessarily all black now, then how can skin color be presented as a reliable marker of transhistorical racial identity? If there was no radical color difference between the Arya and the Dasyu in the Rgveda, then how could race have been the key division distinguishing the two groups from each other?

Although Thamby Pillai's argument has implications on broader assumptions contained in Western racial thought, Thamby Pillai, like Savariroyan, is principally interested in accurately classifying the Tamil race, rather than making claims about race in general. Although Thamby Pillai critiques the use of dark or black skin as an identifier of racial inferiority, he also is keen to note that Tamilians do not fit the description of a "black" race like the Dasyus. Thamby Pillai writes,

> The fact should be borne in mind that it is a misrepresentation to call the whole Dravidian race 'a black race'. 'Not one of the epithets expressive of contempt,' said the late lamented Swami Vivekananda, 'for the ugly features of the Dasyus or the Veddhas would apply to the great Tamilian race. In fact, if there be a toss for good looks between the Northerners and Southerners of India, no sensible man would dare prognosticate the result.'[225]

The dominance of Dravidian politics in post-independence Tamil Nadu may make these blandishments of the Tamil race's natural good looks seem humorously chauvinistic today. However, is important to remember that Western racial thought has long distinguished races according to their physical attractiveness: the term "Caucasian" itself recognizes the beauty of a fair-skinned physical type found in the Caucasus Mountains.[226] Moreover, in Chapter One we saw Robert Caldwell cite colonial scholarship on the physical attractiveness of various South Indian ethnic populations to speak to their ancestral racial provenance and their implicit degrees of racial-cultural advancement. In the above excerpt, Thamby Pillai cites a comment made by the famous Neo-Vedanta reformist figure Swami Vivekananda along similar lines: Tamilians are simply too good-looking of a race to be tabbed as the Dasyus of Vedic antiquity. However, while the Dasyus of these Vedic accounts were not Tamilians, Thamby Pillai does find the Tamilians elsewhere in the Vedic corpus. Thamby Pillai argues that the Aryans of the Vedic period included a branch, the Asuras mentioned in the Rg Veda, that descended from an already prosperous Tamil racial lineage. Thamby Pillai writes:

> There seems to be only one Indian race now to which most of these considerations [i.e., descriptions of the Asura lineage of the ancient Aryans in the Vedas] readily apply, namely the Tamil-speaking race, the representative of the Dravidian peoples of India. Their antiquity in India is conceded on all hands to be far greater than that of the Sanscrit-speaking peoples. The traditions of India as preserved in Sanscrit literature itself associate their kings with events of remote antiquity. The Tamils themselves have lost traditions if they had any current among them which indicate any locality outside India as their original land of birth. On the contrary, the few legends that linger among them point to the existence of a belief among the early Dravidians that their ancestors lived in a continent that lay to the south of the present Cape Comorin and was subsequently submerged under the sea, with all their ancestors.[227]

Thamby Pillai's argument in this excerpt shows the importance of historical antiquity to his and many other Tamil historians' claims about Tamil civilization. By claiming that Tamils had already established a cohesive political society at the time of their encounter with the ancient Aryans, Thamby Pillai is able to reverse the evolutionary logic inherent to dominant European accounts of South Asian racial history. It was not the Aryans who brought civilization to the Tamil South; rather, the ancient Aryans themselves were partly Dravidian, specifically through the Asura lineage recorded in the *Ṛg Veda*. Through this argument, Thamby Pillai disarms one of the prototypical European expressions of the Aryan Invasion narrative, which pits the ancient Aryans against a savage, dark-skinned indigenous race. To explain the absence of literary evidence of this ancient Dravidian society, Thamby Pillai cites the notion of the lost continent of Kumarikandam, a longstanding Tamil historical myth that gained new traction in the Western scholastic world through the emergence of Western ideas about a lost continent of Lemuria submerged somewhere beneath the Indian Ocean. As Sumathi Ramaswamy has noted, Tamil scholars frequently used the traditional conception of *kaḍalkoḷ*, "seizure by the sea", in conjunction with the new scholarly visibility of Lemuria, to justify their claims that a literate, culturally sophisticated Dravidian Tamil civilization existed in ancient history.[228]

In tone, methodology, and content, both Savariroyan and Thamby Pillai's essays closely resemble the contemporary European scholarly sources they cite. However, they also reflect a considerable amount of influence from Neo-Saiva historians' works. Like Neo-Saiva historians, both authors' historical inquiries hinge on an ancient duality between Aryan and

Dravidian, the latter of which is taken to represent the original, pure, and authentic historical and racial identity of the modern Tamil people. Similarly, both authors, like the authors of many Neo-Saiva historical works, understand their scholarly projects as means of restoring dignity to the reputation of the Tamil people, dignity that has at times been obscured by gaps and mistakes in Western scholarship. Savariroyan and Thamby Pillai's focus on correcting errors in Tamil historiography runs parallel to Neo-Saiva criticism of Vedic and Brahmanical Western approaches to studying the Hindu tradition. Instead of arguing that the religious messaging of the Brahmanical corpus is a distortion of the pure, monotheistic, Saiva core of the Hindu tradition, scholars like Savariroyan and Thamby Pillai argue that both Western scholarly evidence and the Brahmanical corpus fail to support Indological, Brahmin, and Indian nationalist assumptions about the historical role of the Aryan race and Sanskritic Hinduism in the Tamil country.

"A Critical Review of the Story of Ramayana" and a Racial Theory of Caste

The essay that follows Savariroyan and Thamby Pillai's contributions in *The Tamilian Antiquary* is credited to one V.P. Subramania Mudaliar, and has the lengthy title, "A Critical Review of the Story of Ramayana [sic] and an Account of South Indian Castes (Tamil) Based on the Views of Prof. P. Sundaram Pillai" (henceforth, "Critical Review").[229] "Critical Review"[230] richly documents the discursive exchanges by which discourses and methodologies from Western racial science, Indology, Tamil Christian missionary writings, and Neo-Saiva historiography enter various Tamil social reform projects of the 20th century. "Critical Review" is not a particularly famous piece in its own right: I have not encountered

any specific references to it in any of the primary or secondary literature I have studied for this dissertation project. However, even if "Critical Review" is not necessarily held in itself as a canonical piece of 20th-century Tamil thought, it offers us a remarkably rich and original example of the conceptual connection between caste and race that becomes near-universal in 20th and 21st century Tamil thought on caste hierarchy, Tamil culture, Hinduism, Untouchability, gender, the Hindi language, and other social and cultural issues in the contemporary Tamil country. This connection between caste and race is less evident in the previous two essays from *The Tamilian Antiquary* we examined above, which focus principally on elevating the racial reputation of the Tamilians. In "Critical Review", on the other hand, the connection between caste and race plays a central role: the racial history of the Tamil people offers a direct explanation for the disadvantaged caste positions that non-Brahmins Tamilians occupy in present-day Tamil society.

As is evident from the article's title, V.P. Subramania Mudaliar presents his Tamil-language essay as a summary of P. Sundaram Pillai's unpublished thoughts on the Ramayana and caste in Tamil history. P. Sundaram Pillai did not engage this explicitly and systematically with the topic of caste in any of the publications he completed during his short but distinguished academic career, which was cut short by his death from illness at age 42. However, brief testaments to Sundaram Pillai's secretly held thought, including J.M. Nallasvami Pillai's English-language introduction to this piece, suggest that Subramania Mudaliar's argument is at least broadly consistent with Sundaram Pillai's actual historical theory.[231] Nallasvami Pillai's introduction also notes that Sundaram Pillai disseminated these ideas about caste in Tamil South India both through written personal correspondence and in private in-person

conversations at the sites of public lectures or conventions.[232] Although we are exclusively studying written texts in this chapter, Nallasvami Pillai's claim that Sundaram Pillai spread his ideas to a wide network of Tamilians through public lecture circuits testifies to the continuing importance of public oration in Tamil public thought, which we discussed briefly last chapter. Ideas that appear in socially critical Tamil writings from this point up to the present day are often tied to points raised in public lectures, and transcripts of important lectures have long been printed as standalone leaflets or in compilations of several important speeches.[233]

Unlike Sundaram Pillai's considerably more famous essay, "Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature, or the Age of Tirujnana-Sambandha", "Critical Review" makes hardly any reference to Saivism or the Tamil Saiva corpus: the only explicit mentions of Saivism in "Critical Review" can be found in a stretch of several sentences in the middle of Chapter Three of the essay[234], and Saivism does not play a significant spoken or unspoken role in any other section of the essay. Instead, like Thamby Pillai's "Solar and Lunar Races of India", "Critical Review" draws much of its evidence from textual analysis of the Brahmanical tradition. Whereas Thamby Pillai focuses on the Rgveda, "Critical Review" focuses on the Ramayana, another classic Brahmanical epic that Indologists frequently read as a description of racial conflict in ancient India. A key difference between "Critical Review" and "Solar and Lunar Races of India" is the interpretive stance that "Critical Review" takes towards its scriptural source material. In "Solar and Lunar Races of India", Thamby Pillai argues that Indologists have misconstrued comments about the physical features of the Dasyus to apply to the ancient Dravidians. This argument indicts Western interpretations of the Rgveda, but

does not critique the Rgveda itself. Although Thamby Pillai is keen to argue that Tamilians were not the Dasyus of the Vedic account, he does not argue that there was no such savage Dasyu race in Indic history. “Critical Review”, by contrast, presents the Ramayana as a biased document containing a distorted version of actual Tamil history. This critique of bias implicitly presents the Ramayana as a fallible, human-authored text, rather than a divinely inspired scripture. The textual analysis component of “Critical Review” seeks not only to glean true historical details from the biased Ramayana narrative, but also to characterize and demonstrate the Ramayana’s bias itself.

“Critical Review” is divided into several “chapters” that differ considerably in tone and subject matter. Chapter One of the essay is a work of textual criticism that analyzes characters and events from the Ramayana to argue that Valmiki, the author of the epic, elevated descriptions of his own Aryan people and denigrated the various Dravidian peoples of the kingdom of Lanka. For decades, Western Indologists and missionary scholars had speculated that the Ramayana tells a story of ancient Indic racial history in which the “Aryan” king Rama vanquishes the *asura*[235] races native to South India. “Critical Review” follows Western scholarship by identifying Rama and his people as Aryans, and Ravana and his *asura*s as ancient Dravidians. However, like the other Tamil-authored pieces we have analyzed over the last two chapters, “Critical Review” makes profound changes to the racial projects found in Indological and missionary scholarship. As we have discussed, Indologists argued that Aryans brought higher forms of civilization to the previously uncivilized lands and peoples of the Indic Subcontinent. Tamil country-based Christian missionaries argued that the Brahmanical tradition is the preeminent obstacle to the Tamil people’s acceptance of

true Christian faith. “Critical Review”, on the other hand, presents the ancient Tamilians and Dravidians as a self-sufficient people, and presents them as peers to other races, nationalities, and civilizations.

Chapter One of “Critical Review” is rhetorically structured as a criminal defense case: it attends to the various “crimes” the Ramayana accuses the Dravidian characters Rāvaṇa and Vāli of committing and refutes these charges point by point. “Critical Review” uses various lines of quasi-legal reasoning to argue against the portrayal of Rāvaṇa and Vāli as the villains of the epic. In some cases, the essay compares the deeds of Dravidian (i.e., *asura*) figures in the Ramayana to the deeds of Aryan “heroes”, and argues that Rāvaṇa, Vāli, and other Dravidians were more morally justified in their actions than their Aryan counterparts. In other cases, the essay defends Rāvaṇa and other Dravidian *asura*s by placing their actions into historical context, showing that the *asura*s acted according to the regnant social and political conventions of their time. “Critical Review” is also careful to highlight instances in which the Ramayana document the civilizational, intellectual, and moral advancement of the *asura*s or South Indian peoples like the Pāṇḍiyas. Altogether, while Rāvaṇa and Vāli are the principal named defendants in the criminal case of Chapter One, this criminal case is actually a class-action lawsuit detailing the ways in which the Ramayana literally demonizes the Dravidian people as *asura*s and makes libelous claims about ancient Tamil and Dravidian civilizational history.

Compared to the literary critical tone of Chapter One of “Critical Review”, Parts Two through Four of the essay take on a more sociological and historical tone. Instead of the

textual evidence deployed in Chapter One, later parts of the essay lean on a mélange of Western racial scholarship, Tamil Sangam literature, and contemporary Tamil ethnography to support its argument. "Critical Review" marshals these sources to compare the Indic concept of *jāti,* "caste"[236], with ways that other societies around the world have conceived of divisions among social and cultural peoples. "Critical Review" argues that while *jāti* is a marker of community identity in present-day India, ancient Dravidian Tamil society did not conform to this hierarchical model in the distant pre-Aryan past. According to "Critical Review", it was only *after* the arrival of Aryans in South India that Dravidian *jāti*s were placed into a hierarchy of *jāti* groups considered inferior in status to the "Brahmin" Aryan invaders.

Given the topic of this dissertation project, it is worthwhile to look in closer detail at a selection of passages from "Critical Review". "Critical Review" features most of the types of historical, textual-critical, and racial-scientific reasoning we have seen thus far in this dissertation. "Critical Review" uses these Western scholarly tools and evidence to make striking conclusions about Tamil peoplehood and *jāti* identity in both the Tamil past and present. The lines of reasoning found in "Critical Review" not only show the impact of Western racial scholarship on Tamil historical thought, but also exemplify how racialized readings of Tamil history became a central feature of non-Brahmin Tamil social and political thought in the 20th and 21st centuries. "Critical Review" discusses the social issues of caste discrimination and hierarchy in Tamil society through the lens of Tamil racial identity and history. This juxtaposition of caste and race is the signal feature of the later 20th and 21st-century Tamil theories of caste advanced by the thinkers and movements we will examine

next chapter. In “Critical Review”, as in these other thinkers and movements’ race-centered readings of caste, the structures of caste and race do not work independently; rather, these two structures are part of the same historical process by which non-Brahmin Dravidians find themselves an inferior position to Aryan Brahmins in the modern Tamil country. The historical invasion of the ancient Aryans was the key moment at which Tamil society began to shift away from equitable Dravidian social mores and towards oppressive, Brahmin-serving Brahmanical thought on caste hierarchy and Hindu religion. This shift in alignment of power in Tamil history corresponds to the differential political, social, and cultural privilege of Brahmins and non-Brahmins in early 20th-century Madras Presidency.[237]

Chapter One of “Critical Review” opens by comparing the historicity of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, the two major epic texts of the Brahmanical Hindu tradition. The Brahmanical tradition classifies both the Mahabharata and Ramayana as *itihāsa*s, texts considered to be accurate descriptions of actual earthly historical events.[238] “Critical Review” argues that in spite of this classification in the Brahmanical tradition, only the Mahabharata finds substantiation in the historical record generated by modern Western science. The Ramayana, on the other hand, cannot be considered an objective description of true history. This line of argument, found throughout “Critical Review”, resonates with both Neo-Saiva approaches to Western knowledge and the ways that other “secular” scholars like Savariroyan and Thamby Pillai use Western racial science and textual analysis to argue against Indological readings of Indic and Tamil history. “Critical Review” explains:

> The Ramayana and Mahabharata are classified as *itihasa*s. Distinguished scholars of ancient history say that of these two texts, the Mahabharata is a text based on actual

> historical facts, which have been compiled, reduced down, edited, and rendered into many metrical verses. They say that the Ramayana was not composed in the same way, and they offer as evidence the fact that no actual historical events corresponding to it have been discovered to exist, and that the important terms *sītā* [*sītai*] and *rāma* [*rāmaṉ*] refer to irrigation trenches and water, respectively, in Vedic usage. They say that the original meaning of the term Aryan [*āriyar*] was "pastoralist", and say that the work narrates in great detail how these "pastoralists" stretched out across and cultivated three regions of land, where they dug irrigation trenches, circulated water, and created farmland, and then nations, and then went on to spread Aryan civilization beyond its original bounds. They say that it is clearly evident that after overcoming the original inhabitants of North India, the Aryans crossed into South India, conquered as far as Lanka, and established kingdoms. Therefore, they say that it is an imaginary story- that one poet garlanded the heroism and victory of the Aryans with prodigious imagination and the nine rasas. However, since this is the case, it may be that an Aryan poet wrote the Sacred Ramayana in praise of the strength and victorious heroism of his own *jāti*.[239]

In this excerpt, "Critical Review" does not cite any specific authors or works of scholarship. However, from the details the essay cites, it is clear the Western scholarship from which "Critical Review" draws is deeply rooted in the Aryan Invasion Theory's racial interpretation of Tamil history. On one hand, this excerpt offers a brief summary of the Aryan Invasion narrative of South Indian history: Aryans, a civilized people, invaded the South, established their own rule, and introduced agriculture and other forms of high civilization to South India. On the other hand, "Critical Review" cites Sanskritist and Indological scholarship to argue that the names of Rama and Sita, the two principal protagonists of the *Ramayana*, are etymological derivatives of words for key features of organized sedentary agriculture, one of the advancements Indologists and many other Western historians credited to the ancient Aryans. This implies that Ramayana is in fact a metaphorical description of Aryan immigration to South India, rather than a description of actual historical figures and events. This reading of the Ramayana is a very useful piece of supporting evidence for "Critical Review", but "Critical Review" applies it in a way that goes against the grain of the Western

scholarship that generated this sort of information about the Indic past. Most Indologists and other Western scholars would be prone to interpreting the etymological connections between names like Rama and Sita and ancient Sanskrit agricultural terms as evidence of the Aryan race's role in introducing organized agriculture to the places they came to inhabit in South Asia. In contrast, as we shall see see below, "Critical Review" does not endorse the assumption that it was the ancient Aryans who actually brought high civilization to the ancient Dravidians of South India. Rather, as the closing sentences of the above excerpt suggest, the Ramayana is not a metaphor that accurately accounts for historical events. Rather, "Critical Review" contends, the plot of the Ramayana reflects the authorial bias of Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana, towards his own Aryan "*jāti*".

The phrasing "Aryan *jāti*" is a reflection of perhaps the most striking and original feature of "Critical Review": its multivalent use of the term *jāti.* "Critical Review" uses *jāti* as not only a descriptor of caste, but also, through the term's literal meaning of "birth", a descriptor of other modes of racial, social and ethnic peoplehood found across the globe. "Critical Review" devotes significant attention to defining *jāti* and delineating its different forms in human society and even animal biology. As we will see below, in the course of its discussion of *jāti* "Critical Review" draws deeply from various Western academic disciplines, including sociology, racial anthropology, and history. The figurative and eclectic usage of *jāti* found in "Critical Review" is a particular quirk of this document, and should not be taken as representative of mainstream Tamil usage of the term. However, even if the usage of *jāti* found in "Critical Review" is idiosyncratic, its fusion of contemporary Western scholarship with a critique of Brahmanical caste in modern Tamil society resonates deeply with how the

non-Brahmin Tamil activists, politicians, and cultural critics we will discuss next chapter connect Brahmanical caste to Dravidian Tamil history.

The phrase "Aryan *jāti*" also offers a concise statement of the key objection "Critical Review" raises to the Ramayana's account of South Indian history. Valmiki's Ramayana presents Ravana and his supporters as non-human creatures, labeling them as *asura*s, *rakṣasa*s, and other types of quasi-demonic beings found in Hindu mythology. "Critical Review" argues that this is a calculated lie by Valmiki, and that the *asura*s and *rakṣasa*s he describes were in fact human beings, as were "*deva*s" ("gods") like Rama. "Critical Review" defends its position by appealing to Western archaeological scholarship. Since archaeologists have never found fossil remains of human beings with multiple heads and arms anywhere in the world, descriptions of Ravana as a multiple-headed, multiple-armed demon could not possibly be literally true. A footnote in "Critical Review" explains:

> In lands such as Europe and America, deep excavations at some sites have uncovered bones of animals called 'mammoths', which were much larger than even elephants, as well as bones of very large snakes called boa constrictors that even swallow livestock, and it has become evident that such animals also lived on this land at one time. The Western mammoth is one of the animals that quickly went extinct after the frost [of the Ice Age] thawed. When the final layers of ice cracked, if they did not lose features such as their thick-skinned chests, they died out thousands of years ago and are now extinct- if you were to cut off the meat off of one of its chests, the meat would spoil before even dogs would be able to finish eating it. In this way, there were many types of animals that existed in previous times that do not exist now and are known through the bones of theirs that have been discovered. Nonetheless, there have been no humans discovered from that time, and not a single human or bone of a human with a very large body, more than one head, or more than two arms. Strange features like two heads or four arms would nowadays be seen as evil omens, and would have died out a great many years ago. Nevertheless, bones of a human with this type of gruesome form have not been discovered.[240]

Here “Critical Review” taps into contemporary evolutionary biology to shore up its claim that Ravana and other *asura*s could not possibly have been quasi-human beings. Paleontology has revealed that many seemingly unbelievable creatures, such as the mammoth, lived on Earth in the distant past. However, archaeological digs have never turned up any evidence of deformed human creatures per the Ramayana’s descriptions. Moreover, “Critical Review” argues that such creatures would be persecuted by other humans for their anatomical deformities and would not survive long enough to become a race of people. This argument draws on the concept of evolutionary fitness central to Darwinian evolution: the physical form of a given creature is not random, but rather is the product of eons of evolutionary selection. If a specific physical feature presents an obvious disadvantage to a creature’s survival, then creatures with that feature will die out and yield space in the ecosystem for creatures more suited to survive their conditions. Since anatomical features like multiple heads and multiple arms would be targeted by human persecution, “Critical Review” argues, these features could not have characterized any group of people for any significant amount of historical time.

If this is the case, then Valmiki must have had a different reason for distinguishing between beastly “*asura*s” like Ravana and heroic “*devas*” (“gods”) like Rāma. “Critical Review” suggests that Valmiki used these terms to elevate his own Aryan *jāti* over the Dravidian peoples they encountered in battle. The story that Valmiki presents as a battle between godly heroes and ghastly demons is in fact a story of two human peoples (i.e., *jāti*s). “Critical Review” proclaims,

> Rāvaṇa did indeed imprison a "deva". So what? Who was the "deva"? He was from a group among the Aryans. Aryans called those who were not of their *jāti* '*asuras*', '*rakṣas*', '*turaṅgas*', and likewise declared those of their own *jāti* '*devas*' and '*suras*'. (This is the way Brahmins came to acquire the name of *bhūsūra*s. The meaning of *bhūsūra* is 'god of the earth', and therefore, they declare themselves gods living on earth. By giving themselves this name, they separate themselves from other *jāti*s and call their food '*devapūja*'. What an injustice!) Therefore, the so-called 'gods' were Aryans hostile to Rāvaṇa's *jāti*. Defeating one's enemies in battle and imprisoning them was a feat worthy of praise in those days- has it become a crime?[241]

When stripped of the moral valence marked by terms like "*deva*" ("god") and *rakṣasa* ("demon"), "Critical Review" observes that the conflict of the Ramayana can be read quite differently. If Ravana and his race were human beings rather than demons, and Rama and other Aryans were human beings rather than gods, suddenly the moral standards by which Dravidians and Aryans should be judged shift drastically. No longer is the Ramayana a story about cosmic good and evil, but rather a story about human conflict. "Critical Review" punctuates this statement with a quick aside lampooning the Brahmin tradition of referring to their food as "devapūja" ("god-offerings"). Just like Ravana and the Dravidian asuras cannot be assumed to have the wicked morals of *asura*s, *rakṣasa*s, or other demonic beings, the critical reader of the Ramayana should certainly not assume that Rama and his Aryans had pure, divine motives. In fact, "Critical Review" argues that according to the conventions of human warfare current at that time and place, the Dravidians were well within their traditional cultural rights to defend themselves from Aryans' attack. "Critical Review" elaborates by invoking Ravana's infamous abduction of Rāma's wife Sītā:

> In the time of battle or enmity between people of one *jāti* and people of another *jāti*, one side or another steals cattle or other things, and men from all times have been said to abduct and imprison women and other such deeds without being called criminals. The Aryans, however, tried to invade and seize the Dravidian land. In a time such as this, does Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sītā amount to a crime? Rāvaṇa

> captured Sītā according to the customs of battle; it is obvious that it is a grave sin for someone to capture the wife of someone else living peacefully within the same kingdom.

In its point-by-point defense against the "crimes" charged to Ravana and his associate, the *asura* (i.e., Dravidian) king Vali, "Critical Review" turns to this line of argument often. Although the *Ramayana*'s author Valmiki describes many of the actions of Ravana, Vali, and other asuras as cruel and immoral, "Critical Review" rejoins that the members of the Dravidian *jāti* in fact acted with exceptionally high moral character considering the social and political circumstances in which they found themselves. Contrary to Western scholarly assertions that the ancient Dravidians were a savage, brutal race, "Critical Review" argues that Ravana and other asuras behaved humanely and compassionately towards even their worst enemies. Although traditional readings of the Ramayana present Ravana's abduction of Sita as a sordid, horrible act, in the above excerpt "Critical Review" recasts Ravana's act as a reasonable, tactical response to Aryan invasion. Following this excerpt, "Critical Review" argues that Ravana's conduct towards Sita during her imprisonment was exemplary: not only did he never lay a hand on her, he even appointed his brother's daughter as Sita's personal attendant to ensure that Sita's needs were being met.[242] Ravana did this, and did not change his treatment of Sītā even when the Aryan king Rāma and his brother Lakṣmana killed a number of Ravana's kinspeople, including his brother Kumbakarṇa and his treasured son Indrajit.[243]

"Critical Review" argues that Ravana's humane conduct towards Sita demonstrates the high level of moral advancement Tamil civilization had attained. This high level of Tamil moral advancement contradicts Indological aspersions of pre-Aryan South Indian culture as insipid

and amoral. In contrast, the "heroic" Aryans mounted an invasion of the Dravidian land with the goal of taking it over, a profoundly self-interested and morally reprehensible motive, and acted brutally and savagely to all whom they encountered. The conclusion of this section of "Critical Review" states this argument poignantly:

> If you believe that Rāvaṇa needed to do something to avenge his enemy's murder of his grandmother Tāṭaka and the disgrace and mutilation of his sister Śūrpaṇakhā, then Rāvaṇa certainly should be allowed to capture Sītā. If he did imprison Sītā in this way, is "crime" really the right word for his actions? Given that Rāvaṇa treated Sītā in exactly the manner described [i.e., humanely], and did so in revenge for what Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa did to Tāṭaka and Śūrpaṇakhā, it is clear how the Dravidians and the Aryans treated women- and what levels of civilization each had attained. It would not be surprising if the Dravidians had called the Aryans "mlecchas".[244]

The Sanskrit term *mleccha* appears in numerous Brahmanical texts to describe various barbaric peoples living outside the pale of Hindu civilization. "Critical Review" uses this Brahmanical term powerfully: according to this reading of the Ramayana, who is actually civilized and who is actually barbaric? If the beings in the Ramayana are actually all human beings, then what should one make of the fact that Rāma and Lakṣmana murdered Dravidian *asura*s thoughtlessly while Ravana showed mercy for his enemies even under extreme emotional duress? Moreover, if a *mleccha* is a foreign barbarian, and Rāma and Lakṣmana stormed violently into the land of Ravana's advanced and humane civilization, then aren't Rāma, Lakṣmana, and the Aryans actually *mleccha*s in spirit, if not in letter? Earlier in the essay, "Critical Review" points out that the Ramayana itself identifies Ravana and Vali as figures of great scholastic accomplishment and refinement.[245] In terms of the material forms

of civilization, "Critical Review" notes that Valmiki describes Ravana's city as teeming with streets, palaces, and gardens[246], whereas the Aryan invaders were still living in stick huts.[247]

"Critical Review" argues that if the Dravidians were a refined and civilized people in all these different ways according to Valmiki's own words, then Valmiki's presentation of the *asura*s as the villains of the story of the Ramayana could not possibly be accurate. In fact, Valmiki's own descriptions of Ravana and other Dravidians, as well as his account of certain historical details, suggest that Valmiki is reversing the true historical narrative of the Aryan invasion of Ravana's land of Lanka. "Critical Review" argues that Valmiki's brutality in describing the *asura*s connects to a broader history in Brahmanical thought of defining foreign peoples as demonic creatures in order to present them as systematically inferior to Aryans. The essay explains in a later section:

> Let us look at how the Aryan word "*mleccha*" is defined in glossaries and other ancient texts. The Aryans were naturally disposed to think of outsider *jāti*s as inferiors in the same way. When those among them who had made journeys to distant nations first saw new *jāti*s, these *jāti*s appeared differently in the travelers' imaginations: one *jāti* as *asura*s, another *jāti* as as *rakṣasa*s, others as celestials[248], and they gave many names to many *jāti*s in this way. Afterwards, in Aryan usage it became the custom to refer to these *jāti*s using these *jāti* names. In this way, when the nations of the *jāti*s that acquired the names of *asura* and so on were colonized by Aryans- whether by conquest, peaceful means, or both- all the *jāti*s that did not join with the Aryans are burdened with the disgraceful name of *śūdra*. Ignorant people from these *jāti*s also came to call themselves *śūdra*s. Since the number of ignorant people in any nation at any time period is far greater than the number of people who have become aware, after the Aryans assigned these names they became conventions within the jātis themselves.[249]

In other words, the preexisting Aryan impulse to label outsiders as inferiors led Aryan invaders to assign the *jāti* label *śūdra* to the Dravidians who refused to help Rāma and his

armies defeat the *asura* king Rāvana. Even though this label is both pejorative and unfair, many of the Dravidians who were labeled *śūdra*s have retained this *jāti* status and accepted the unfair treatment that comes with it, solely out of ignorance. “Critical Review” argues that this ignorance is not a feature specific to Tamil society, but rather a feature of human society more broadly. Because of this public ignorance, a critical mass of ancient Dravidians accepted an inferior place in the Aryan caste system, which declares people to be inherently unequal by birth and vaunts some peoples’ social position over others’ in reflection of this caste hierarchy.

Chapter Two of “Critical Review” is entitled, “The *Jāti* Situation in South India Before the Time of the Rāmāyaṇa”. In this chapter, “Critical Review” continues to use *jāti* as a term to describe social difference. However, Chapter Two of “Critical Review” is dedicated to demonstrating that pre-Aryan Dravidian understandings of *jāti* were fundamentally different from the *jāti*s imposed on South Indians following the Aryan invasion metaphorically described in the Ramayana.“Critical Review” argues that Dravidians and Tamilians, like all peoples around the world, had ways of differentiating peoples from different places and walks of life. “Critical Review” explains, drawing an analogy to other categories of national and ethnic peoplehood found around the world:

> *Jāti* hierarchy did not exist in any of the nations that have since disappeared from India. In these nations, “*jāti*” was the term used to describe whichever nation of people was living there. In the way that those living in China are called Chinese, those living in Japan are called Japanese, those living in Russia are called Russians, those living in Germany are called Germans, and those living in England are called English, groups acquired *jāti* names. This is why many of the *jāti*s that remain today have retained *jāti* names referring to their nation. A few of the English invaded America and became “Americans”, and another few invaded Australia and became “Australians”, and by way of the countries to which they immigrated, they forgot

> their old *jāti* names and took on new ones. In India as well, before the Aryans came, the various peoples had *jāti* names referring to the various places they inhabited.[250]

Before the introduction of the hierarchical Brahmanical *jāti* system (i.e., *varṇa*), "Critical Review" argues, peoples across what is now India were labeled according to the places where they originated or resided. These *jāti* labels were not permanent, but rather changed according to a people's geographic location over time, just as originally British colonists became "Australians" and "Americans" when they moved to new continents. This way of describing differences among peoples clearly derives principally from the concept of the ethnolinguistic nation-state current at the start of the 20th century.[251] However, contrary to the Indian nationalist movement's presentation of India as a historically unified nation, "Critical Review" recognizes the existence of multiple "nations" in what is now called India. In later passages, "Critical Review" explains that some of these "national" differences map onto linguistic differences, such as the difference between Tamil-speaking peoples and the speakers of other Dravidian languages.[252] In addition to these differences, relics of a Dravidian mode of regional *jāti* classification can be found in the *tiṉai* system of Sangam-era Tamil poetic aesthetics. "Critical Review" explains,

> In the Dravidian land that became South India, *jāti* names emerged in reference to a jāti's location and trade. Those names still endure today. Those who lived before us in the hills were called *kuṟavaṉ*, those who lived in the desert were called *maṟavaṉ*, those who were in the woodlands were called *iḍaiyaṉ*, those in the wetlands were called *maḷḷaṉ*, and those who abided on the coastline were called *paravaṉ*. Today, everyone knows these *jāti* names and these *jāti*s. However, the differences among these groups today did not originally exist. This is because of how those before us divided the five categories of *kuṟiñji*, *pālai*, *mullai*, *marudam*, and *neydal* and categorized information about the humans, animals and plants of these climes into the *tiṇais*: so that they could tell the difference between one clime and another and clearly organize the confusion of landscapes. They did not classify humans or their ways of life in the same way that they classified this other information, nor did they establish a distinction between one caste as higher and another as lower.[253]

Just like people of other nations, the essay argues, Tamil peoples also originally identified each other by names tied to the regions they lived. The essay argues that the ancient Tamil people called each other by *jāti* names correlated to the *tiṉai*s, the five natural landscapes that are a central aesthetic and symbolic feature of Sangam-era Tamil poetry.[254] In the same way that the *marudam* regions of the coast hold poetic associations with particular animals, plants, and poetic tropes, people from the *marudam* regions of the Tamil country were known as *maḷḷaṉ*s, a name that marked both their region and the traditional trades (e.g., fishing) practiced there. The names that the essay attributes to these groups are terms also used to refer to 20th-century *jāti* (i.e., caste) communities. However, the essay argues that these terms did not originally imply a hierarchical arrangement of *jāti* peoples, something that became a key feature of *jāti* after the introduction of the Brahmanical *varṇa* system. Rather, they emerged as labels of convenience to classify the many different landscapes and peoples of the Tamil country. To that effect, people and families were not tied to *jāti* labels for life: in the same way that the English became Americans when they moved to a new land, the essay argues that a *kuravaṉ* from the hills could become an *iḍaiyaṉ* simply by moving to the woodlands where *iḍaiyaṉ*s reside.

In Chapter Three of “Critical Review”, "*Jāti* in South India in the Time After the Ramāyaṇa”, the essay argues that the Aryans imposed a new mode of hierarchical *jāti* arrangement on the peoples of South India. Whereas once peoples from *jāti*s like *kuravaṉ*s and *iḍaiyaṉ*s were considered equals, the Brahmanical *varṇa* system labeled various Dravidian peoples *śūdra*s, a group at the bottom of the four-fold *varṇa* hierarchy. As we will see next chapter, the Tamil activist thinker E.V. “Periyar” Ramasamy frequently used this

same line of argument when excoriating Tamil society's observance of Brahmanical caste hierarchy. Next chapter we will also examine the thought of Iyothee Thass, who identified the Paraiyar community, a community considered Dalit in contemporary Tamil Hindu society, as the descendants of the moral and religious authorities of pre-Aryan Tamil society. As we will discuss in more detail next chapter, Thass's thought challenges the notion that all Dravidian peoples were labeled *śūdra*, since it is the *avarṇa*[255] Paraiyar community that Thass labels as the "original Dravidians" (*"ādi drāviḍa*").

Like the thought of Periyar, Thass, and others, "Critical Review" does not limit its discussion of *jāti* - i.e., caste - to ancient history. Rather, beginning in Chapter Three, "Critical Review" begins to reference contemporary examples of *jāti* identity formation in colonial Madras Presidency and British India. Over historical time, "Critical Review" argues, *jāti* identities have been shown to change, and under the administrative conditions of British rule *jāti* communities have become especially invested in elevating their *jāti*'s position in the Brahmanical caste hierarchy by imitating Brahmin social codes. This is the same process that the scholar M.N. Srinivas famously labels as "Sanskritization"[256] later in the 20th century. "Critical Review" explains, referencing the traditionally low-status Shanar community of the Tamil country:

> The Shanars who adopted higher-caste customs such as abstaining from drinking liquor, marrying widows, and so forth acquired an extremely distinguished position. Their attempt is not surprising. Under the British Raj, which has turned less powerful *jāti*s with characteristics like this into powerful jātis, it is natural they would become higher in position. In little time, both the wealth and education of the people within this *jāti* increased. Shanars like them in northern districts, seeing that they were low in rank according to the practice of other *jāti*s in their districts, became bitter and attempted to better their jāti position. In previous times, some among the Dravidian *jāti* became distinguished in education, wisdom, and morals, and became elevated over other groups similar to them.[257]

This passage is representative of many passages in "Critical Review" that discuss how contemporary Tamil *jāti* communities have developed internal differences based on changes in ritual practice or title. "Critical Review" argues that it was the Aryans who originally introduced the notion of hierarchical *jāti* to the Dravidian South and labeled large swaths of Dravidians as *śūdra*s for their refusal to aid Aryan invaders. However, the pressures and incentives that this hierarchical system introduced have caused Dravidian peoples to fight among themselves to prove the higher status of their own *jāti* group. Over time, "Critical Review" argues, *jāti*s frequently split into different status groups, and members of one sub-*jāti* begin to distinguish themselves from their former equals by refusing to eat food prepared by other sub-*jāti*s and other such markers of differential *jāti* status.[258] "Critical Review" bemoans,

> Alas! What can be said for their ignorance? They call themselves Vellalas, Maravars, Idaiyars, and other such groups of Dravidians and get into fights saying, "We're a higher jāti", "No, we're a higher jāti", without knowing that Brahmins established caste difference, and they take on the name of Kshatriya when in truth, regardless of who among them is higher and who is lower, their lineages are low in prestige, and Brahmins have become superiors to all of them, and likewise, those who constitute the broader Dravidian people in society- Vellalas, Maravars, Idaiyars, and so on- have become inferior. Is there anything akin to this anywhere at any point in time?[259]

Although Brahmins - i.e, Aryans - are responsible for introducing the notion of hierarchical *jāti* to the Dravidian South, Dravidians themselves are not blameless for their subjugation in this system. Instead of rejecting the Brahmanical notion of *jāti* altogether, Tamil *jāti* communities like Vellalas, Maravars, and Idaiyars compete for the scraps left to them as sub-Brahmin groups in Tamil society.

"Critical Review" not only critiques the effects of Dravidians' observance of the principle of *jāti* hierarchy, but also attempts to explain how exactly Brahmanical *jāti* differs from other ways of differentiating *jātis* exemplified in other places and times. This is the principal subject of Chapter Four of "Critical Review", which is entitled, "The Definition of *Jāti* and the *Jāti* Situation in South India". In this chapter, "Critical Review" bifurcates *jāti* into two categories, "natural" *jāti* and "artificial" *jāti*. A striking passage from the beginning of Chapter Four explains:

> There are two types of *jāti*: 1) natural *jāti*, and 2) artificial *jāti*. An Alambadi cow has a long face, long and narrow horns, and a hanging penis, while a Kongu Nadu cow has a flat face, horns that are neither long nor narrow, and a contracted penis, and the various breeds of cattle like this are illustrations of natural *jāti*. In this way, there are many natural *jāti*s of human beings. Thick, protruding lips, a flat nose, large, puffy eyes, a gap-toothed mouth[260], and other such features are characteristic of Negroes, and slanted eyes, a flat, round face, and other such features are characteristics of the Chinese and various other natural *jāti*s. Artificial *jāti*s are *jāti*s differentiated by humans in ways other than these natural differences. However, in the way stated previously, for a long time the Aryans in South India married Dravidian women, and over many centuries they became mixed with the Dravidians to a great degree, to the point that all the natural features dividing them vanished, whether entirely or all but entirely.[261]

In this relatively brief passage, "Critical Review" uses the term *jāti* to label schemes of classification found in Western biology, racial anthropology, and history. The scheme of biological taxonomy introduced by the Swedish biologist Carl Linnaeus in the 18th century differentiates biological species and sub-species according to observable differences in their physical forms. "Critical Review" presents differences between the Alambadi and Kongu Nadu breeds of cows to demonstrate this model of biological classification. "Critical Review" continues on to connect this model of physical differentiation to observable differences among human racial groups. "Critical Review" identifies features like thick lips and "slanted" eyes as characteristic features of human racial groups akin to differences

between breeds of cows. The measurement of facial features such as the ones that "Critical Review" mentions here is a prominent feature of colonial-era Western anthropology, which sought to correlate physical differences among racial peoples to features of their cultural and social behavior. Finally, "Critical Review" argues that natural *jāti* distinctions between the Aryans and Dravidians have vanished following centuries of intermixture between the ancient Aryans and ancient Dravidians. Earlier in this dissertation, we have seen this same idea appear in various Western descriptions of Indic history centered on the Aryan Invasion Theory.

Although "Critical Review" uses the same conceptual tools that Western scholars used to construct hierarchies of the world's racial peoples, the essay does not follow Western scholarship by correlating physical differences to stable and essential traits of their social or cultural behavior. Instead, "Critical Review" argues that "natural" *jāti* distinctions such as skin color or other physiological features contrast with the "artificial" *jāti* labels human communities apply to themselves. Similarity in skin tone between two groups of people does not necessarily indicate that these two groups will have the same social customs or identities. "Critical Review" explains:

> There are many artificial *jāti* categories among the Dravidians, such as Vellalas, Maravars, Idaiyars, Kammalars, and so on, but they all belong to the same natural jāti. Some became Brahmins, some became Vellalas, some became Maravars, some became Idaiyars, some became Kammalars, and a some became members of each of the other *jāti*s of South India, and they each adopted a particular style of cutting hair and a particular style of dress, and this happened again as *jāti*s began dividing themselves into various (sub-)*jāti*s that those well-versed in the Laws of Manu would not have distinguished from each other. A short time before when we talked about the Negro and Chinese *jāti*s, it was not necessary to talk about their differences in skin color. The Negroes have black skin. The Chinese have yellow skin. The American

> Indians have copper-colored skin that looks like a combination of these two races' skin tones. Everyone should be able to discern that, in the same way we have stated above, these three races of humans do not each have one single way of cutting their hair, do not all wear the same clothes, and do not eat one type of food, but rather are made up of many other *jāti*s of various sorts. Through research on physical distinctions of the above sorts, it has been established that all Dravidians are of one natural *jāti*.[262]

As we have discussed throughout in this dissertation, many strains of Western thought contemporary to "Critical Review" use racial categories to systematize differences among the civilizational capabilities of racial peoples. Here, "Critical Review" draws an analogy between artificial *jāti* categories among the Dravidians and the differences in custom and culture within other racial groups of the world. The idea that "natural" race does not necessarily correlate to social custom goes against the grain of an influential strain of Western scholarship on race and peoplehood in the colonial world. As we saw in Chapter One, the British ethnologist H.H. Risley sought to explain caste in South Asia by determining the precise proportions of Aryan and Dravidian racial stock found in each caste population. As we also saw in Chapter One, mainstream Western scholarship like Elmore's *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism* directly connects "Dravidian" forms of worship to the inherent racial qualities of the ancient Dravidian race. In contrast to this body of Western scholarship, "Critical Review" severs the connection between natural and artificial *jāti*, and argues that social and cultural forms vary within racial groups. In line with this idea, although "Critical Review" harshly criticizes both Valmiki's Aryan-biased telling of the Ramayana and the Brahmanical conception of *jāti* that Aryan invaders introduced to the Dravidian South, "Critical Review" never attributes the impact of Aryan invasion to the natural *jāti* - i.e., biological race - of the Aryan invaders. Instead, "Critical Review" criticizes the Brahmanical *definition* of *jāti* for segregating peoples of a natural *jāti* into false hierarchical categories. By

singling out an Aryan ideological system as the root cause of the degraded state of today's non-Brahmin Tamilians, "Critical Review" presents Aryan influence as a reversible feature of today's Tamil society. If Tamilians can remember the original, non-hierarchical social values that governed ancient Dravidian civilization, they can find a way to escape being degraded as *śūdra*s in the Brahmanical *jāti* system.

The closing pages of "Critical Review" punctuate this argument by citing a total of thirteen excerpts of draconian laws and punishments prescribed in the Laws of Manu (Sk. *Mānavadharmaśāstra*), a canonical Brahmanical text on *varṇadharma*. "Critical Review" presents this list of excerpts as testimony to the inherent cruelty of Brahmanical thought on *jāti*. Whereas other modes of differentiating peoplehood do not necessarily hold some groups to be inherently superior or inferior to others, the hierarchical nature of Brahmanical *jāti* (i.e., *varṇa*) persistently denigrates *śūdra*s and others of low caste position. At the conclusion of its list of excerpts from the Laws of Manu, "Critical Review" offers a short but pithy statement of its argument on *jāti* as a closing comment:

> Through moral rules such as these, the Laws of Manu and other Aryan law books establish the cruel and unjust principle that the higher live above the lower, on the basis of discrimination by occupation. If we compare ideas like this, to which people of many nations and times have consented, to those found in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* and other originally Dravidian [*ādi drāviḍa*] works, the differences between the Aryan theory of dharma and the rules present among the Dravidians will become obvious.

This paragraph presents a paradigmatic example of how a wide range of non-Brahmin Tamil thinkers from the turn of the 20th century to the present day have reckoned with caste through the ostensibly racial vocabulary of "Dravidian" and "Aryan". As we have seen,

"Critical Review" argues that the features of pre-Aryan Dravidian society fundamentally differed from the social values the Aryans imposed on the Dravidian South. This excerpt contrasts the "Aryan theory of dharma" with a philosophy expressed in classics of "originally Dravidian" [*ādi drāviḍa*] literature, such as the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. As we will discuss in more detail next chapter, "*ādi drāviḍa*" is the same phrase that Iyothee Thass used to label the Buddhist religious leaders of ancient Tamil society who had been relegated to the degraded status of Paraiyar by Aryan invasion. Nothing in this excerpt suggests that "Critical Review" has Thass's specific usage of *ādi drāviḍa* in mind. However, it is not a coincidence that both Thass and "Critical Review" arrive at the same way of describing certain features of ancient Tamil society as "originally Dravidian". As we have seen in our analysis of Savariroyan and Thamby Pillai's essays from *The Tamilian Antiquary* above, the question of the Dravidian origins of various features of Tamil cultural and linguistic history was central to how many Tamilians reckoned with both Tamil history and the Tamil social present. For scholars like Savariroyan and Thamby Pillai, uncovering "originally Dravidian" cultural, literary, or linguistic features of Tamil society strengthened the case for recognizing Dravidian Tamil civilization as one of the great classical civilizations of the world. "Critical Review", printed in the same compilation as these comparatively academic sources, intends not to change the reputation of Tamil civilization, but rather to critique elements of contemporary Tamil society. In this sense, "Critical Review" more closely resembles the work of Thass, who had been using the phrase "*ādi drāviḍa*" to rally members of the Paraiyar community to reject the degrading label of "Paraiyar" in Tamil Hindu society. In the years directly following the publication of "Critical Review" in *The Tamilian Antiquary*, Thass published a number of

lengthy essays on *ādi drāviḍa*s and Tamil history in his own print publication, (*Oru Paisat) Tamiḻaṉ*.

Conclusion

I have pulled out these three essays from *The Tamilian Antiquary* to argue that the originally Neo-Saiva historiographic perspective on Tamil history we discussed last chapter evolved into a more or less mainstream non-Brahmin outlook on the Tamil past. Two broader Tamil social processes, the "Tamil renaissance" inspired by the rediscovery of the Tamil classics and the emergence of the social-political caste label "non-Brahmin", mediated how Neo-Saiva thought on the Tamil past shaped mainstream engagements with Tamil antiquity and Dravidian racial identity. The essays by Savariroyan and Thamby Pillai that we examined above are two excellent examples of how Neo-Saiva historiographic thought was "secularized" in the work of Tamil scholars. While Neo-Saiva historiography grounds its descriptions of the Tamil past in the original Saiva religious identity of the Tamil people, Savariroyan and Thamby Pillai barely mention Saivism at all. However, Savariroyan and Thamby Pillai arrive at historical conclusions completely in line with the historical arguments of Neo-Saiva historiography: the accomplishments of the Tamil civilizational past were not precipitated by the arrival of Aryan invaders, but rather are grounded in an authentically and originally Dravidian civilizational legacy.

"Critical Review" is a fascinating source to analyze for the purposes of this discussion, because it anticipates how ideas about the Dravidian Tamil past became central to a diverse lineage of Tamil activist thought stretching from the early 20th century to the present day.

We have already briefly noted the similarities between "Critical Review" and the essays on the Dravidian past that Iyothee Thass published in the following years. "Critical Review" and the sources by Thass that we will discuss in more detail next chapter show many deep structural and discursive similarities in how they connect an analysis of Dravidian Tamil history to a critique of the Tamil present. Outside of their different perspectives on caste abjection in the Brahmanical system- Thass's *ādi drāviḍa* community occupies an even lower position in the Brahmanical caste hierarchy than the *śūdra*s of "Critical Review"- the key difference between Thass's work and "Critical Review" is organizational rather than intellectual. "Critical Review" can be read as a freestanding academic critique of Brahmanical caste in contemporary Tamil society. Thass's work, on the other hand, cannot be separated from Thass's ideological platform or his tireless work as a political activist and community organizer. Thass published his works in serial form in *Tamiḻaṉ,* a journal addressed principally to *Ādi Drāviḍa*s and Paraiyars who had not yet embraced their *ādi drāviḍa* identity. In this sense, Thass's relationship to his work resembles not only the Neo-Saiva thinkers we discussed last chapter, but also a host of other major Tamil social, cultural, and political reformist movements from the 20th and 21st centuries. Next chapter, we will examine Thass's work alongside the writings and speeches of other Tamil social reformists and political figures who anchor their social and political platforms on their own readings of Dravidian Tamil history.

Chapter 5: 20th and 21st-Century Applications of Dravidian "Race Talk"

Introduction

In Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation, we charted the emergence of a distinctive racial idiom of "Dravidian" Tamil history in Tamil thought over the 19th and early 20th century. By the first decades of the 20th century, the same time that the volumes of *The Tamilian Antiquary* went to print, this racialized reading of Tamil history and its distinctive conceptual vocabulary- Dravidian "race talk"- had become an integral part of Tamil social, cultural, and political activism. From this time until the present day, a wide range of important Tamil social thinkers, activists, and political figures, including Iyothee Thass, E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy, Maraimalai Adigal, C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, and Tholkappiyan Thirumavalavan, have applied Dravidian "race talk" to their signature social, cultural, and political projects. This chapter will trace the thread of Dravidian "race talk" through the varying ideological platforms and public actions associated with each of these thinkers and the social or political groups they represent. While these thinkers and movements differ widely in their respective goals, constituencies, and organizational models, they all draw from a shared, racialized idiom of Tamil history. For each of the thinkers and movements we will cover in this chapter, Tamil social progress and prosperity in the present day requires the elimination of undue "Aryan" and Brahmin influence on Tamil society and the restoration of authentic, pre-Aryan, "Dravidian" social and cultural mores.

Whereas previous chapters of this dissertation have principally focused on analyzing primary source material, there is already a wealth of excellent secondary English-language scholarship in print that discusses the movements and figures we will analyze in this chapter. Some of this scholarship, such as G. Aloysius's study of Iyothee Thass and Adi Dravida Buddhism[263], V. Ravi Vaithees's study of Maraimalai Adigal and Tamil Neo-Saivism[264], and Marguerite Ross Barnett's study of the DMK and the emergence of political Tamil nationalism[265], offers profound insights into the work and historical and ideological context of individual scholars and movements we will discuss in this chapter. Other works, such as M.S.S. Pandian's study of the emergence of the Brahmin/non-Brahmin binary in Tamil public society[266], V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai's comprehensive study of non-Brahmin ideology and political activism in the 19th and 20th centuries[267], and Sumathi Ramaswamy's study of the phenomenon of Tamil language "devotion" in the modern era[268], analyze multiple thinkers and movements through the lens of broader historical and ideological processes. These and other sources together offer a wide and multifaceted picture of these movements and their evolution through the 20th and 21st centuries.

The purpose of this chapter is not to rewrite the extant scholarship on these movements and figures, but rather to highlight the discursive similarities that these movements and figures share. The intellectual and historical context we have discussed in the last three chapters of this dissertation has provided us the tools to understand each of these figures' and movements' "race talk" as part of a major discursive tradition in modern Tamil public society. This discursive tradition of Dravidian "race talk" offers a powerful model for talking about caste, ethnolinguistic identity, religion, and various important political, social, and

cultural issues through the lens of a historical and civilizational binary between authentic, "Dravidian" Tamil identity and the "Aryan" Brahmanical tradition introduced to Tamil society by northern invaders.

Iyothee Thass: Paraiyars were the "First Dravidians" (Ādi Drāviḍa)

19th-century Vellala Neo-Saivas such as P. Sundaram Pillai and J.M. Nallasvami Pillai occasionally wrote about the special role the Vellala caste played in pre-Brahmanical Tamil history. However, as we saw in Chapter Three, 19th-century Neo-Saiva historiographers was far more interested in tying Tamil racial, cultural, and linguistic identity to Saiva Siddhānta theology than in making clear statements about caste and caste discrimination in contemporary Tamil society. In contrast, Iyothee Thass, who began his activist career in the 1880s, used the discursive terms of Western racial science to present a direct argument about caste hierarchy and his own Paraiyar caste community. Iyothee Thass first developed his racialized understanding of Paraiyar identity through his capacity as a grassroots activist. In 1881, Iyothee Thass, already an accomplished practitioner and teacher of Siddha medicine, began advocating for the rights of the "lower castes" in the highland regions of the Nilgiri Mountains and encouraging members of these castes to re-label themselves as "Original Tamils".[269] In 1886, Thass followed up with a public statement that the "original Tamil" peoples in these areas were not Hindus.[270]

A major turn in Thass's career came when Henry Olcott of the Theosophical Society, an influential and eccentric Western religious-philosophical organization with a headquarters in

Madras, paid for Thass to study Buddhist scriptures in Ceylon, an important center of Theravada Buddhist thought and practice. Olcott and the Theosophical Society's motives for funding Thass's journey derived from Theosophical beliefs about the nature of human existence. Theosophists like Madame Blavatsky argued that humans were the latest form in an evolutionary chain of cosmic races that have inhabited the Earth. By deepening the spiritual awareness of humankind, Theosophists maintained that humans could ultimately effect another transformation and evolve to their next cosmic form.[271] Training Thass to be an expert in Pali-language Buddhist scriptures prepared him to serve as an authority on Buddhist scripture in India, which the Theosophical Society considered to be a boon to the Theosophical project of the spiritual awakening and evolution of the human race. Ironically, this same idea also emboldened Annie Besant, a leading Madras-based Theosophist, to argue that Brahmins should be granted special social entitlements in line with Brahmanical sacred texts.[272]

After his studies in Ceylon, Thass founded the Sakya Buddhist Society introduced Sakya Buddhism as a core feature of his ministry to the *ādi drāviḍa* community. Buddhist moral and scriptural education became one of the chief organizational focuses of the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha alongside Adi Dravida political activism. Individual chapters of the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha, operant in the Tamil country, Karnataka's Kolar Gold Fields, and the foreign cities of Rangoon and Durban, followed a Buddhist calendar, hosted regular prayers and sermons, and distributed alms to the local *ādi drāviḍa* community.[273] While *Tamiḻaṉ* ("Tamilian"), the official periodical of the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha, also regularly printed essays by various authors and letters sent in by community members, Thass

was unquestionably the primary theological authority of the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha. In the opening decades of the 20th century, Thass published a wealth of scholarly essays, theological commentaries, and responses to reader questions to guide the religious practice of Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha chapters.[274] Foremost among these is Thass's magnum opus, the *Ādivēdam* ("The Original Veda"), which presents a sweeping historical summary of the *ādi drāviḍa*s and the Aryan invaders who relegated them to a debased position in present-day Tamil society.[275] Adi Dravida Mahayana Sabha chapters treated the *Ādivēdam* as scripture, keeping copies at temple centers and conducting regular readings during public sermons.[276] The *Ādivēdam*, though considerably longer than many of Thass's other writings, takes on a similar tone to many of the other essays Thass printed in *Tamiḻaṉ*. In the *Ādivēdam* and other sources, Thass links the content of mainstream, Pali-medium Buddhist scriptures to both Tamil-language Buddhist classics and the earlier Sangam Era of Tamil literature. Thass marshals evidence from these sources to argue that the pre-Brahmanical society of the Tamil country was a Buddhist society guided by Buddhist ethical principles. Thass argues that the *Ādi Drāviḍa* community whose members are disparaged as "Paraiyars" in contemporary Hindu society were in fact the leading religious authorities of this Tamil Buddhist civilization.[277] While other segments of ancient Tamil society accepted the religious authority claims of Brahmin, Aryan invaders and became subsidiary castes in the Brahmanical caste hierarchy, the ādi drāviḍas refused to bow to Brahmin authority. As a result, the Paraiyars were expelled from caste Hindu society and relegated to the most debased status in the Brahmanical caste system.

Similarly to how Neo-Saiva historiographers draw a connection between Tamil cultural identity and the primordial Saiva religious practice of the Tamil country, Thass's identification of the *ādi drāviḍa*s as Buddhists connects a Buddhist moral-theological message with a historical narrative tracing the gradual subjugation of the ādi drāviḍa community in Tamil society. Whereas Neo-Saiva theologians like J.M. Nallasvami Pillai principally engage with other religious traditions as theological adversaries, Thass's foregrounding of the caste abjection of the Paraiyar community adds a sharper social-critical edge to his narrative of Tamil religious history. Across many of his writings, Thass contrasts the institution of priesthood in pre-Aryan, Buddhist Tamil society with the Brahmin-exclusive model of priesthood associated with the Brahmanical religious system. Thass argues that the *ādi drāviḍa* priests of Buddhist Tamil society attained their position due to their exemplary moral character, and were expected to serve as moral and religious examples for the masses. Brahmin priests, on the other hand, attained their position solely through their birth into the Brahmin priestly caste, and did not need to reflect any type of moral or spiritual elevation.[278] Thass argued that many of the practices associated with Brahmin priesthood in the present day, such as the *upanayaṇa* initiation rite and the wearing of the sacred thread, were originally symbols of the *ādi drāviḍa* institution of priesthood, and were subsequently appropriated by Brahmin priests for their own tradition. Accordingly, Thass and the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha attempted to reclaim these symbols as trappings of a regenerated *ādi drāviḍa* priesthood.[279] This symbolic reclamation also requires Ādi Drāviḍas to pursue moral perfection in their social and religious lives.[280]

Like all of the movements that follow in this chapter, Thass uses the racial terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" to index a network of connected religious, social, cultural, historical, political, and linguistic identity markers. The historical role *ādi drāviḍa*s played as the moral leaders of Buddhist Tamil society, as well as the circumstances of their subsequent dethronement by Aryan invaders, are key ideas that explain the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha's investment in Buddhist religious education, Tamil-language literary study, and public advocacy campaigns. It is impossible to disconnect Thass's account of Paraiyar marginality from the narrative of Tamil Buddhist history that informs it. For Thass, both ancient, Sangam-era Tamil literature and Pali and Tamil-language Buddhist texts offer pictures of the social ethic associated with pre-Aryan Tamil society. Per Thass's reading, the religious and moral values contained in both of these groups of texts point to a Tamil society free of a hierarchy of caste-by-birth, a society instead guided by the wisdom, virtue, and dedication of the *ādi drāviḍa* spiritual élite. Thass uses the racial vocabulary "Dravidian" and "Aryan" to distinguish righteous, virtue-focused Buddhist Tamil society from the Aryan, Brahmanical, birth-focused tradition that replaced it.

Thass's movement grew rapidly in the first two decades of the 20th century, but Thass's death in 1914 was a major blow to the organization. A few chapters of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha continued to operate for several decades and distributed printed copies of Thass's work, and organized interest in Tamil Buddhism continued through the 1930s. By the end of the 1930s, Thass's movement had been absorbed into other social reform organizations, particularly the Self-Respect Movement of E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy.[281] Even though the Dravida Mahajana Sabha was relatively short-lived, Thass's thought succeeded at

introducing the term "Adi Dravida" into common Tamil parlance as a term for "Dalit". Moreover, Thass and associated thinkers like Rettamalai Srinivasan influenced subsequent anti-caste thinkers and activists like Periyar and perhaps even B.R. Ambedkar, who himself led a mass Dalit conversion to Buddhism several months before his death.[282]

E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy: The Dravidian race was not always superstitious

By the late 1920s, Iyothee Thass's movement had been predominantly absorbed into the Self-Respect Movement (Tamil *suyamariyādai iyakkam),* another Tamil social movement that fiercely attacked Brahmanical caste and Brahmanical Hinduism. In contrast to Thass's movement, which almost exclusively ministered to the Paraiyar community, E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy's Self-Respect Movement enjoyed broad popularity within a number of non-Brahmin caste communities, as well as segments of the Christian and Muslim communities of the Tamil country.[283] The popularity and social impact of Ramasamy's Self-Respect Movement, as well as its successor, the Dravidar Kazhagam ("Dravidian Association") enshrined "Periyar" as an iconic social thinker and cultural figure of the 20th century. The two major "Dravidian parties" of current-day Tamil electoral politics, the DMK and the ADMK, both claim Periyar as a founding figure.[284] Statues of Periyar can be found in traffic circles across modern Tamil Nadu, and his work remains influential and widely read by 21st-century Tamil audiences.[285] As a result of his social and cultural reach, Ramaswamy, his thought, and the social movements he founded have been the subject of wide scholarly attention.[286]

The charismatic leader and founder of the Self-Respect Movement, E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy, hailed from a privileged-caste, non-Brahmin family from the northern Tamil town of Erode. Ramasamy grew up a devout Vaishnava Hindu, and attained a high level of Sanskrit language and Vaishnava Hindu scriptural education during his teenage years. Ramasamy began his activist career when he joined a local chapter of the Indian National Congress's Non-Cooperation Movement as a young adult. After working for the Non-Cooperation Movement for several years, Ramasamy became disillusioned with what he saw as a failure by the Indian National Congress to address the issue of caste discrimination in India or even within its own ranks.[287] Ramasamy's deep frustration with the Indian National Congress and its thought on the Indian nation, which Ramasamy had come to see as a veiled form of Brahmin supremacy, led him to break ranks with Congress and form the "Self-Respect Movement" (*suyamariyādai iyakkam*) as an organization genuinely committed to the eradication of caste discrimination in Madras Presidency.

Like Thass before him, Ramasamy understood Brahmanical caste as a fabrication by which immigrant Aryan Brahmins established themselves as superior by birth to the Dravidian peoples native to the South. Across many of his speeches and writings[288], Ramasamy observed that orthodox applications of the Brahmanical *varṇa* system to Dravidian South India classified all Dravidians as *śūdras*, the lowest of the four castes of the Brahmanical Hindu system whose prescribed ritual duties consist of acts of servitude to the Brahmin caste.[289] This classificatory system, Ramasamy argued, allowed Brahmins to claim ritual and social authority over Tamil society by merit of their superior status by birth. The Self-Respect Movement is named for the "self-respect" (*suyamariyādai*) that Ramasamy argued

Tamilians must achieve if they hope to be an independent, prosperous people. Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement argued that Tamilians can only achieve the social prosperity of the modern world if they cast off this degraded state and regain their "self-respect" as members of the ancient and dignified Dravidian race.

While Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement understood Brahmanical caste as one of the primary obstacles to Tamil self-respect, caste was far from the only dimension of Tamil social life that Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement targeted in speech, writing, and organized activist action. Rather, Ramasamy's usage of the racial terms "Aryan" and "Dravidian" was deeply intersectional, including not only caste hierarchy, but also gender discrimination, economic injustice, and cultural, linguistic, and religious bias towards the Aryan North. For Ramasamy and other Self-Respecters, the common thread linking all of these dimensions of Tamil social, cultural, and economic life is the role the Brahmanical tradition plays as a structure of intellectual and religious authority. True Tamil "self-respect" requires not simply a rejection of Brahmanical caste labels, but also a rejection of the other ways in which Brahmanical thought, scripture, gods, and religious authorities impinge on Tamil social and cultural values. On the gender front, the Self-Respect Movement persistently emphasized the importance of maintaining equality of labor in the Tamil household and eliminating Brahmanical Hinduism's control over women through the notion of chastity.[290] Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement argued that Brahmanical Hinduism imposed patriarchal gender norms on the Dravidian Tamilians, and restoring Tamil self-respect entailed the restoration of equal and equitable gender norms in Tamil society. Many women, including Nilavathi Ramasubramaniam, Kunjitham Ramasamy, and

Ramamritham Ammaiyar, were active and influential participants in Self-Respect activities, regularly publishing essays in Self-Respect journals, delivering public addresses, organizing conferences, and directing movement attention towards specific activist causes.[291] In large part thanks to the work of women activists like Ramamritham Ammaiyar, the Self-Respect Movement provided pivotal support for the Devadasi Abolition Act, a piece of British colonial legislation that outlawed the traditional institution of employing "devadasis", temple courtesans, at many Hindu temples.[292] The Self-Respect Movement also became famous for its simple "Self-Respect marriage" ceremony, which the movement promoted as an alternative to customary Brahmanical wedding ceremonies.[293] These ceremonies not only rejected the asymmetrical gender mores prescribed for Brahmanical Hindu spouses, but also severed the exploitative economic link between Brahmin ritual officiants and paying Non-Brahmin patrons.

On the cultural and linguistic front, the Self-Respect Movement presented cultural and linguistic deference to Hindi, Sanskrit, and North India as another key component of Tamilians' loss of self-respect. The Self-Respect Movement was intimately involved in several important Tamil cultural and linguistic reform actions in the early 20th century. Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement offered support to the Tamil Isai ("music") Movement, a movement that sought to overhaul the standards used by contemporary Tamil musicians and music broadcasts.[294] The Tamil Isai Movement criticized the overabundance of Sanskrit- and Telugu-language Carnatic music at every level of Tamil musical instruction and performance.[295] Abraham Pandithar, considered the forerunner of the Tamil Isai Movement, was an influential scholar of Tamil songs and musical forms, and his work

suggested a clear Tamil alternative to these Sanskrit- and Telugu-dominated Carnatic musical conventions.[296] In the early 1930s, Ramasamy supported the Tamil Isai Movement as a counter-measure to Brahmin domination in Tamil cultural life.[297] Ramasamy argued that the current conventions of Carnatic music devalued the contributions of non-Brahmin musicians, and overvalued Brahmin musicians and musical influences. With Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement's support, the Tamil Isai Movement succeeded at drumming up interest in Tamil musical education by the late 1930s.[298]

Like Thass, Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement persistently critiqued the social manifestation of caste discrimination as a key feature of the Brahmanical Hindu notion of caste. Just as patriarchy is a product of exploitative and superstitious Brahmanical ideas about gender, Ramasamy argued, caste difference is a fictitious idea linked to the Brahmanical Hindu religious system. However, while Ramasamy's use of the racial language of "Dravidian" and "Aryan" may imply that Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement replaced caste identifiers with stable markers of ethnic or biological race, this is not necessarily the case. Unlike the essays from *The Tamilian Antiquary* we analyzed in Chapter Four, Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement spent little time deliberating on the specifics of Tamil racial classification in the sense established by Western racial science. Rather, like Thass, Ramasamy presents the binary between Dravidian and Aryan as a clash of intellectual-cultural value systems. The establishment of Tamil "self-respect" in contemporary Tamil society is not a revelation of the purity or authenticity of non-Brahmin Tamilians' Tamil or Dravidian biological-racial heritage, as a Western race scholar like H.H. Risley might try to quantify. Similarly, Ramasamy, although he was famous for the acerbic

(and often overtly jocular) rhetoric he directed against Brahmins during public speeches, never presented Brahmins as *physically* racially distinct from non-Brahmin Dravidians.[299] Rather, Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement describe both Brahminism Tamil self-respect as rooted in the social, cultural, and political choices that modern-day Tamil social actors take. This dynamic is best represented by Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement's campaign to encourage people to abandon caste names, which had customarily been used as surnames in the Tamil country. At a Self-Respect Conference in 1929, Ramasamy publicly renounced his own caste name, Naicker, which he had previously used in his publications and public life. Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement presented the abandonment of caste names not only as an overt rejection of the Brahmanical caste labels that demean Dravidians as sub-Brahmin *śūdras*, but also a rejection of Brahmanical Hindu authority over Tamil social and cultural life.[300] In this sense, dropping one's caste name is similar to undertaking a Self-Respect marriage or restructuring Tamil songs to de-emphasize Sanskrit lyrics: in all these cases, present-day Tamilians seek to discard Brahmanical forms of social and cultural life in favor of utilitarian, "Dravidian" modes liberated from Brahmanical orthodoxy.

In the late 1930s, Ramasamy assumed control of the Justice Party, a non-Brahmin Tamil political party, merged it with the Self-Respect Movement, and rebranded the new group as the "Dravidar Kazhagam" ("Dravidian Association", commonly abbreviated "DK"), a non-electoral social organization dedicated to advocating for an independent Dravidian state in South India.[301] Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement had long been critical of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress's plan for a single independent Indian nation, viewing it as

an extension of Brahmin control over Tamil and South Asian life. Whereas the Self-Respect Movement chiefly focused on grassroots activism against Brahminism in the Tamil country, the Dravidar Kazhagam connected the fight against Brahminism to the question of political self-determination. Just as Muhammad Ali Jinnah and B.R. Ambedkar lobbied the British government for special protections for their constituencies against political disempowerment in a Hindu-majority nation, Ramasamy argued that the social and cultural self-interest of the Dravidian peoples of South India was not secure in the context of a multicultural India demographically and politically dominated by North Indians and Brahmins, respectively. In opposition to the Indian National Congress's plan for a single independent nation of India, Ramasamy and the Dravidar Kazhagam campaigned the British government for a separate Dravidian nation, Dravida Nadu, that would include Tamil Nadu, Andhra, Karnataka, and Kerala, the four South Indian ethnic regions where Dravidian languages are majority languages. Ramasamy described the independent Dravidian nation as a place where Dravidians would be totally free from Aryan and North Indian political influence, allowing for the holistic reform of Dravidian society and public life.

In the Self-Respect phase of Ramasamy's ideology, Ramasamy focused most of his critiques on the Brahmanical tradition itself, analyzing Brahmanical texts to illustrate their deleterious impacts on the Dravidian Tamil people. In his later thought associated with the Dravidar Kazhagam, Ramasamy focused more critique on the Indian National Congress's Indian nationalism, which he saw as a veiled form of North Indian Brahmanism and a new way of guaranteeing Aryan political, cultural, and social supremacy in the Dravidian South. The Self-Respect Movement played an integral role in the Tamil country-wide protests of the

anti-Hindi Agitation of 1937 and 1938[302]. These protests arose in response to the Indian National Congress's decision to make Hindi-language education compulsory in all schools across India, a decision that also drew the outrage of Maraimalai Adigal and the Neo-Saiva Movement. Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement saw compulsory Hindi education as an Indian National Congress attempt to devalue Tamil and non-Brahmin Tamil culture within the framework of an Indian nation dominated by Sanskritic Hinduism and the North Indian demographic majority of the broader Indian state. Although the Self-Respect Movement and Neo-Saiva Movement were often at odds with each other due to the Self-Respect Movement's strident critique of Neo-Saiva sources[303], anti-Hindi imposition protests gave common cause to both movements, who used the shared slogan, "Tamil Nadu is for Tamilians".[304]

The Anti-Hindi Agitations were so disruptive that they forced the Indian National Congress and Madras Presidency Chief Minister C. "Rajaji" Rajagopalachariar to postpone their decision to implement Hindi-langauge education. The Indian National Congress resolved to return to the question of a national language of India in several decades, setting the stage for a second round of major anti-Hindi agitations in 1967, which we shall discuss below. Although the British government ignored the Dravidar Kazhagam's demands when drafting its plans for Indian independence in 1947, Ramasamy continued to write and speak prolifically until days before his death in 1973. The nearly 70-year-old Ramasamy's marriage to a considerably younger woman, his 31-year-old assistant, caretaker, and fellow DK member Maniammai (née Gandhimathi), in 1949 severely affected his reputation within the Dravidar Kazhagam, many of whose members saw this marriage as an inappropriate use of

his power within the organization.[305] Ramasamy argued that his marriage was for strictly legal reasons: he had decided to establish a legal and political heir given his ailing health, and there was no way for him to designate Maniammai as his legal heir under Indian law without marrying her.[306] While the age gap in Ramasamy and Maniammai's marriage was widely criticized, the Dravidar Kazhagam's reception of this union and Ramasamy's reasoning for it was inseparable from the issue of the succession of the leadership in the Dravidar Kazhagam. Ramasamy's 1969 marriage to Maniammai designated her as his official successor only a year after he announced longtime Dravidar Kazhagam member C.N. Annadurai his official successor at a Dravidar Kazhagam conference.[307] Ramasamy did not make his specific reasons for changing his choice of successor explicit, but cited correspondence with his longtime ideological-political rival and personal friend, C. "Rajaji" Rajagopalachariar, longtime Congress Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, as a major influence on his decision.[308] Barnett (1976) has argued that Ramasamy's decision was largely motivated by Ramasamy's distrust of Annadurai's increasingly populist and electoral approach to the Dravidar Kazhagam's organizational future: Ramasamy wanted his organization above all to remain uncompromising in its social principles, and Ramasamy and Annadurai had already had a sharp public disagreement over Dravidar Kazhagam policy in the wake of Indian independence in 1947.[309] Precipitated by these tensions, in 1949 Annadurai split off to found the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam ("Dravidian Progress Association") as an independent organization. We shall return in more detail to Annadurai and the DMK's Tamil nationalism further below.

In spite of the messy organizational divorce between Ramasamy and Annadurai and the subsequent decline in the social and political reach of the Dravidar Kazhagam, Ramasamy is still widely revered in the Tamil country as a foundational figure in socially critical Tamil thought. Periyar reading circles are common in universities across India, and 21st-century Tamil writers and activists, such as Thol. Thirumavalavan, whom we will discuss further below, continue to engage frequently and substantively with Ramasamy's thought. The Dravidar Kazhagam continues to operate in the 21st century as a publishing house for Self-Respect and Dravidar Kazhagam materials, historical studies of these movements, and contemporary socially critical thought based on the work of Ramasamy and other Self-Respect figures.[310] Its headquarters in Chennai features both a statue memorial installation dedicated to Ramasamy and a bookstore where Dravidar Kazhagam original texts and republications are available for sale.

Maraimalai Adigal, Pure Tamil, and 20th-Century Neo-Saivism

The prolific author and speaker Maraimalai Adigal was a leading figure in 20th-century Neo-Saivism, the continuation of the Neo-Saiva tradition we discussed in Chapter Three. Adigal, né Swami Vedachalam, began his career working with Somasundara Nayakar under the aegis of the 19th-century Neo-Saiva Movement we discussed in Chapter Three[311]. Over the next several decades, Adigal broke out as a leading Neo-Saiva theologian, speaker, and cultural thinker in his own right. Adigal's periodical *Gnānasāgaram* (from Sanskrit *jñānasāgara*, "ocean of knowledge") became the preeminent ideological voice of the Neo-Saiva Movement in the 20th-century, filling a similar role to J.M. Nallasvami Pillai's *Siddhanta Deepika*. Over the course of his career, Adigal published hundreds of texts on a panoply of

Saiva theological topics, Tamil religious and cultural history, and Tamil linguistics.[312] Adigal not only biographized and compiled the work of influential 19th-century Neo-Saiva scholars, but also added his own thought to the tradition, particularly on the Tamil historical past and esoteric religious topics like spirit possession and the afterlife. Adigal disseminated his thought through frequent public lectures[313], which he often delivered to conspicuously privileged-class audiences in an elevated register of spoken Tamil largely incomprehensible to less educated Tamilians.[314]

Whereas we spent Chapters Three and Four analyzing some of the only extant fragments of P. Sundaram Pillai's thought on the Tamil past, Maraimalai Adigal wrote compendiously on Tamil and Vellala antiquity, describing in detail the cultural and social mores of pre-Aryan, Vellala-dominated Tamil society. In comparison to many of the other thinkers in this chapter, Adigal did not use the racial term "Dravidian" very frequently, instead preferring to use "Tamil". Adigal's understanding of "Tamil" ethnic and linguistic identity, however, was deeply rooted in a historical narrative of Aryan invasion and the binary between Aryan Brahmins and (Dravidian) Tamilians throughout Tamil history. Adigal persistently framed the issues of caste discrimination and Tamil linguistic purity in contemporary Tamil society as the result of Aryan interference in ancient Tamil history. Like some of the Neo-Saiva thinkers before him, Adigal granted a special role to the Vellala caste community as the preeminent cultural and spiritual authorities of pre-Aryan Tamil civilization. In his *Vēḷāḷa Nāgarigam* ("Vellala Civilization"), Adigal argues that ancient Tamil society was a Vellala-dominated agriculturalist society characterized by non-violence, intellectual cultivation, and economic bounty.[315] Based on Sangam-era literary sources, Adigal argues that the Vellalas

presided over an arrangement of eighteen occupational groups with distinct economic roles.[316] Although this arrangement is strikingly similar in organization to the occupational *varṇa* system of Brahmanical Hinduism, Adigal argued that Brahmanical caste broke with this model by imposing differences of social treatment based on occupational caste grouping.[317] The ethic of differential social treatment, Adigal argues, is the chief problem associated with the contemporary practice of Brahmanical Hindu caste, and is connected to other disruptions the ancient Aryans brought to the peaceful, equitable Vellala-led society. Whereas Vellala kings were expected to use their agricultural surpluses and other sources of wealth to provide for their subjects' needs, incoming Brahmins introduced a Brahmanical religious system in which Brahmin priests *extracted* wealth from surrounding communities.[318] Whereas Vellala-led religious rituals were non-violent and vegetarian, underscoring Tamil and Vellala respect for life and land, Aryan Brahmins introduced caste-exclusive Vedic rituals centered on the execution of animals. Over time, Brahmanical influence completely eroded the Vellala institution of kingship and alienated Tamil society from its roots as a peaceful, agrarian, egalitarian society.

One of Adigal's most important cultural impacts on Tamil society was his foundation of the Pure Tamil Movement (*Tūyattamiḻ Iyakkam*), an organization devoted to reshaping the Tamil language based on its Dravidian linguistic roots and rejecting Sanskrit loanwords, grammatical influences, and literary aesthetics. Adigal cited a conversation with his daughter, Neelambigai Ammaiyar, an influential activist in her own right in the 1930s and 1940s[319], as the moment when he realized that native, "pure" (*tūya*) Tamil words were inherently better suited for the Tamil language than their Sanskrit equivalents.[320] Adigal's objections to

Sanskrit linguistic influence were simultaneously aesthetic and symbolic. On one hand, Adigal argued, the phonetic structure of the Tamil language made it clumsy for Tamil poetry and prose to incorporate Sanskrit loanwords, since Sanskrit phonetics differ conspicuously from Tamil's.[321] For Adigal, simple, elegant "Dravidian" Tamil words in ancient usage starkly contrast with the polysyllabic Sanskrit equivalents standard to modern Tamil. On the other hand, for Adigal, as for many other figures we have already examined in this dissertation, the preservation of the Tamil language has greater significance for the wellbeing of Tamil civilization. Adigal argued that the prosperity and longevity of Tamil civilization depends on the development of a strong and independent Tamil language that accurately reflects the roots of Tamil civilizational identity. This conception connects linguistic purity to earlier Neo-Saiva conceptions of the non-Aryan civilizational identity of ancient Dravidian Tamil society. While 19th-century Neo-Saivas like P. Sundaram Pillai and J.M. Nallasvami Pillai presented the Tamil language as a preeminent symbol of the distinctive glory of ancient Tamil civilization, Adigal connected this idea to a discrete linguistic reform campaign. Among other activities, Adigal and the Pure Tamil Movement published Pure Tamil dictionaries and advocated for various linguistic reforms replacing Sanskrit terms with equivalents derived from Sangam Era Tamil. Adigal's interest in these linguistic reform programs was not only motivated by aesthetic concerns about the Tamil language, but was also, more importantly part of Adigal's broader racial-religious project advocating for the restoration of Tamil society to its pre-Aryan, Vellala-dominated roots.

Outside of their collaboration during the Anti-Hindi Agitations, Adigal and the Self-Respect Movement were often at odds with each other over the course of the early 20th century.[322]

The flamboyant atheism (including anti-Saivism) of Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement naturally provoked angry reactions from Adigal and other Neo-Saivas. Additionally, Adigal felt that the Self-Respect Movement had appropriated ideas about Dravidian Tamil history that he had been writing and speaking about since the early 20th century.[323] Generally, Neo-Saivas were surprised that the Self-Respect Movement criticized Saivism instead of allying with Neo-Saivas to confront Brahmin domination of Tamil society.[324] The Pure Tamil Movement and the Self-Respect Movement also held ideological differences about the role of linguistic purity in modern Tamil usage. In the early decades of the 20th century, many Tamilians observed the need to coin new Tamil-language words for modern technological phenomena.[325] Indian nationalists, in deference to the role the Sanskrit language plays as a unifier of Indian cultures, suggested developing new terms based on existing Sanskrit lexical roots. Both the Pure Tamil Movement and the Self-Respect Movement soundly rejected this idea for its privileging of Sanskrit, and by proxy, Brahmin social and cultural interests, over Tamil. However, while Adigal and the Pure Tamil Movement insisted on coining new words from Sangam Era Tamil roots, Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement rejected this suggestion for being too inaccessible to Tamil audiences. Ramasamy suggested English-derived loanwords instead, with an eye towards scientific and technological rationalism. Although categorically in favor of the use of the Tamil language in public addresses, Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement were wary of the religious significance Adigal and the Neo-Saiva Movement attributed to the Tamil language. Ramasamy's suggestion of English as the basis for Tamil root-words is also a product of this anxiety.[326] In spite of these differences, however, Adigal, Ramasamy, and their respective movements agreed that the struggle between Tamil and Hindi was not only a

matter of present-day linguistic politics, but also, and more importantly, a reflection of a dangerous cultural dynamic pitting the Tamil language and non-Brahmin Tamilians against Brahmins, Brahminism, and North Indian cultural power. In other words, while Adigal and Ramasamy fiercely disagreed about the role that Saiva Hinduism should play in a regenerated Tamil society, both conceived of the Tamil language in terms consistent with the broader tradition of mainstream non-Brahmin Tamil "race talk".

C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, M.G.R., and Dravidian Party "Race-Talk"

Although E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy assumed control of the Justice Party and merged it into the non-electoral Dravidar Kazhagam in 1938, Ramasamy himself never ran for public office. Over the 1940s and 1950s, however, other Tamil thinkers with political ambitions used Periyar's thought to frame a distinctly Tamil nationalist model of Tamil electoral and political discourse. The ideological shift from Periyar's Dravidian nationalism to the Tamil nationalism of the Dravidian parties was principally precipitated by two men: the playwright, stage actor, and longtime Dravida Kazhagam member C.N. Annadurai, popularly known by the titles "Arignar" (Tamil *aṟiñar*, "scholar") and "Anna" (Tamil, "big brother", and an abbreviation of his name), and the former screenwriter turned politician M. Karunanidhi, commonly nicknamed Kalaignar (from Tamil *kalaiñar*, "artist"). Annadurai, the first DMK politician to serve as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, was responsible for much of the earlier thought associated with the DMK's social and cultural platform, while Karunanidhi was integral both in marketing the DMK's platform to Tamil audiences and in setting a new political direction for the DMK as Annadurai's successor after Annadurai's death in 1969.

In the 1950s, DMK rhetoric maintained much of the anti-Brahmanical rhetorical force of the Dravidar Kazhagam. However, over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, the issue of Tamil regional cultural autonomy gradually became the chief emphasis of the DMK platform. As leader of the Dravidar Kazhagam, E.V. Ramasamy argued for Dravidian political independence not only to safeguard Tamil linguistic and cultural autonomy, but also, even more importantly, to ensure that Brahmin Indian nationalists could gain the national political power to impose Brahmanical thought about Hinduism or India onto the Dravidian South, which Brahmanical thought canonically identified as a land of *Śūdra*s. Although in the 1950s and 1960s Annadurai and the DMK continued to emphasize the need for Tamil politics to confront Brahmin privilege in Tamil society, this priority became secondary to the party's emphasis on the defense of Tamil culture and the Tamil language within the now-official Indian nation.[327] In this shift from a focus on Tamil *society* to a focus on Tamil *culture*, Annadurai and the DMK adapted the Self-Respect Movement and Dravidar Kazhagam's tradition of Dravidian "race talk" to identify Tamil culture and the Tamil language as preeminent markers of the Tamil people's Dravidian heritage in a culturally plural Indian nation dominated by the political and cultural interests of the North Indian demographic majority. The DMK's increasing focus on the issue of Tamil linguistic autonomy as the pivotal issue of "Dravidian" politics speaks both to the progressive culturalization of DMK race-talk and the DMK's increasing interest in building electoral vote banks in order to contest Tamil Nadu state elections.[328]

Like the Self-Respect Movement and Dravidar Kazhagam before it, in the 1950s and 1960s the DMK attracted a large number of Tamil writers, artists, and scholars to its support base, and conducted extensive ideological outreach through artistic and scholarly channels. The DMK's most famous arm of artistic outreach was its masterful use of film to promote party rhetoric. Both Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi, by then also a high-ranking member of the DMK, had backgrounds in script writing and stage performance, and used their connections and refined rhetorical and artistic skills to write and promote a series of widely popular films in the 1950s. These films emphasized the themes of poverty, political corruption, and the precarious future of the Tamil language, all issues DMK party rhetoric tied to Congress Party rule.[329] The most successful of these films was 1952's *Parasakthi*, written by M. Karunanidhi.[330] *Parasakthi*, which stars the Tamil film icon Sivaji Ganesan, masterfully deploys cultural metaphors and references to Self-Respect Movement figures and ideas to present the DMK's platform as a means of defending the Tamil country from the loss of its language and culture at the hands of Brahmanism and North India. The film opens with a poem by Bharatidasan, a poet famously affiliated with the Self-Respect Movement, and proceeds to tell a story of the travails of a separated family. Various characters and pivotal lines from the film reference the names and titles of famous figures from the Dravidian Movement, such as leading Justice Party figure (A.L.) Pannirselvam, E.V. Ramasamy's first wife Nāgammai, and Annadurai's popular title "Arignar".[331] At various pivotal points in the film, Brahmanical Hindu symbols and figures play markedly negative roles, as do North Indian moneylenders and army officials. At one of the dramatic climaxes of the film, a Brahmanical temple priest attempts to rape Kalyani, a female protagonist of the film, in the *sanctum sanctorum* of a temple, prompting her to flee and throw her starving child into the

river as an act of mercy, since she realized she had no means to support feed him.[332] This sequence presents Kalyani's poverty and tragic sacrifice of her child- a sacrifice she compares to the Tamil folk legend of Nallathangal, who sacrificed her seven children in a well because she was too poor to feed them- as a metaphor for the fate of Tamil culture and the Dravidian land at the hands of Brahmanical, North Indian power.[333]

Parasakthi's runaway success- it screened in some Tamil cinemas for over one hundred days[334]- further amplified the DMK's platform and bolstered Karunanidhi's profile as a Tamil public figure. Although many Tamil viewers adored the film, Pandian (1991) chronicles how the film drew controversy for both its portrayal of Brahmins and Hinduism and its political implications in contemporary Tamil Nadu. In what has become a time-honored tradition for similarly controversial films across modern India, a police report was filed with the Madras Commissioner of Police within days of the film's release- in this case, by an official of the Indian Civil Service.[335] Nonetheless, films like *Parasakthi*, as well as other forms of DMK media outreach such as radio dramas, secured broad Tamil public support for the DMK's platform on Tamil cultural and economic autonomy from North India.[336] In addition to courting mass audiences through mass media like film and radio, the DMK reached out to Tamil academics and literati by sponsoring political poetry competitions, literary conferences, and scholastic studies of the Tamil language and Tamil history.[337] In contrast to Ramasamy and other Self-Respect orators, who pointedly used a register of Tamil that was comprehensible to even uneducated Tamilians, DMK political orators began to curate a distinctive register of poeticized oratorical speech that uses markedly archaic Tamil pronunciations, rhetorical patterns, and cultural references.[338] This

style of speech belongs to what Bernard Bate has called "the Dravidian aesthetic"- an aesthetic complex of stylistic, rhetorical, and discursive patterns that has become a feature of mainstream Tamil political discourse not only in the DMK, but also in many of its competitors in present-day Tamil electoral politics.[339] Bate argues that Tamil political orators use various rhetorical techniques to present themselves as representatives of Tamil antiquity and the linguistic purity of the elevated register of *ceṉtamiḻ* ("highest Tamil").[340] While Bate argues that some of these strategies were developed by Tamil speakers like Arumuga Navalar and the nationalist orator Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundaram in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Bate identifies other rhetorical strategies in the toolbox of "Dravidian" political oratory that are considerably more ancient, dating back to ancient courtly practice and the period of medieval Tamil bhakti literature.[341] While certainly appealing to many Tamil scholars and poets, the "Dravidian" style of oratory pioneered by the DMK became a crowning feature of how "Dravidian" Tamil politicians began to approach mass public engagement as well. The longstanding association in non-Brahmin Tamil discourse between the Dravidian race and the ancient golden age of Tamil civilization lent great symbolic force to this markedly anachronistic oratorical style's claim to represent a purer and more dimension of Tamil identity: the Tamil country's uniquely Dravidian heritage.

While the DMK continued to emphasize the importance of protecting Dravidian Tamil culture in the Tamil land in party discourse, Annadurai oversaw the DMK's ideological and political transition from a Dravidian nationalist party to a culturally nationalist Tamil political party willing to participate in the Indian political system. In a 1967 speech delivered by Annadurai in Chennai, Annadurai officially abandoned the DMK's demand for an

independent Dravidian nation.[342] In this speech, Annadurai states that while the social and political conditions that created the demand for Dravida Nadu remain relevant, the continuing protection of Tamil culture necessitates working within the framework of Indian electoral politics.[343] This transition of policy enabled Annadurai and the DMK to credibly contest for Tamil political power through the established Indian electoral system while remaining rhetorically opposed to the Indian national project. While the social and political radicalism of the early DMK had already eroded somewhat by the time that C.N. Annadurai was elected as the first DMK Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu in 1967, the the DMK's brand of Tamil cultural nationalism had become a dominant component of its public appeal. The Indian Government's scheduled revisiting of the proposal to make Hindi the national language of India, the same proposal that incited the Anti-Hindi Agitations of 1937-1938, set off another round of major public protests across Tamil Nadu earlier in 1967. The re-emergence of the threat of the imposition of Hindi on the Tamil country echoed DMK discourse from the 1950s that warned of the threat that the Indian national government plays to the survival of the Tamil language and culture- the unique heritage of the Dravidian race. Annadurai, Karunanidhi, and the DMK actively organized and promoted protests during the 1967 Anti-Hindi Agitations, and their role in these protests was a major boost to their Tamil electoral popularity over the incumbent administration of Tamil Chief Minister K. Kamaraj, who represented the Congress Party.

C.N. Annadurai died only two years into his Chief Minister term, and M. Karunanidhi succeeded him as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and the head of the DMK. While Karunanidhi remained a forceful and effective orator in support of Tamil cultural

nationalism, under Karunanidhi's administration DMK policy became even more populist and politically pragmatistic, prioritizing campaigns about marketable issues like public corruption and financially lucrative opportunities like the repeal of Tamil anti-alcohol laws.[344] The relationship between "Dravidian" political discourse and the socially centered "Dravidian" ideology of Ramasamy's Self-Respect Movement became even more strained with the fissure of the DMK into two competing "Dravidian" parties, the DMK and the ADMK, in the early 1970s. The upstart ADMK was headed by the wildly popular Tamil screen actor M.G. Ramachandran (popularly, M.G.R.), who was a famous member of the DMK and had offered pivotal public support for Karunanidhi's 1971 re-election campaign.[345] While M.G.R. used the "Dravidian" style of oratory pioneered by the DMK to great effect in his own political career, John Harriss, Ambrose Pinto, and others have argued that the emergence of the ADMK marked a further turn in Tamil politics away from radical social and economic agendas and towards the pursuit of vote-banks through client-patron relationships.[346] In fact, several major figures of "Dravidian" Tamil politics, M.G.R. and his ADMK successor Jayalalitha, his mistress and filmic co-star, have been Brahmin themselves, and both the DMK and the ADMK, the two "Dravidian parties" that dominate contemporary Tamil regional politics, have entered electoral alliances with the BJP, the Hindu nationalist political party currently in control of the Indian national government.[347]

Thirumavalavan, Tamil Dalit Liberation, and the Radical Potentials of Dravidian "Race-Talk" in the 21st Century

As Bernard Bate has argued, Dravidian "race-talk" remains a major part of Tamil political culture and symbolism in the present-day. However, given the widening disconnect between

the “Dravidian” social and political ideology of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s and the policies of the “Dravidian parties” of present-day Tamil Nadu politics, it is important not to assume that Dravidian “race-talk” only survives as a rhetorical tradition of Tamil political public address. Indeed, in addition to informing the symbology and rhetoric of mainstream Tamil political parties, Dravidian race-talk continues to serve as a productive idiom for activist Tamil social critique in the 21st century. The conceptual connections between the ancient Dravidian past and present-day social reformism remain intact across a wide range of contemporary printed Tamil works. More broadly than just these printed works, the intellectual foundation that they sustain creates a common vocabulary of social progressivism in contemporary Tamil society. Kalpana Ram has argued that Self-Respect thought descends through a “rain of words” to disenfranchised Dalit women, who use the tools of Dravidian thought to lobby for their own political, social, and cultural interests.[348] Ram’s model describes one of the principal ways by which Tamil reckonings with the Dravidian past over the last century and a half continue to influence contemporary Tamil understandings of the term “Dravidian” and its sociopolitical implications. Dravidian political discourse is not automatically socially or politically progressive- as many critics of Tamil nationalism are quick to point out- but it is also quite incorrect to assert that Dravidian “race talk” is never progressive, or that it is not a central body of influence on contemporary progressive Tamil scholars and activists. In Tamil Nadu, a long tradition of Dravidian Tamil history-making and deliberation on the true nature of “Dravidian” Tamil identity chart clear potentials of social and political action for actors in contemporary Tamil society.

A prime example of the application of racial discourse to 21st-century Tamil social critique can be found in the speeches and writings of Tholkappiyan Thirumavalavan, the leading orator and political figure associated with the Viduthalai Ciruthaigal Katchi ("Liberation Panthers Party", commonly abbreviated VCK), a Dravidianist Dalit political party and activist organization descended from the famous Dalit Panthers founded in Maharashtra in the 1970s.[349] The Dalit Panthers, a group ideologically descended from the Black Panthers of the United States, advocated a platform of Dalit liberation modeled on the Black Panthers' theory of Black self-reliance and active self-defense.[350] In the years following their foundation, the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra prioritized Dalit community self-defense and grassroots activist action against caste discrimination and violence over engagement in electoral politics.[351] The VCK too initially followed this model, boycotting Indian elections for a decade. In 1999, the VCK decided to change its policy and begin contesting elections as a Tamil Dalit liberationist political party, with Tholkappiyan Thirumavalavan as its flagship candidate.[352] In spite of the VCK's limited electoral successes since 1999, Thirumavalavan has ascended to become one of the most recognizable public speakers and social critics in present-day Tamil Nadu.[353]

Thirumavalavan and the VCK use Dravidian "race talk" to anchor a theory of Tamil Dalit liberation in which Dalit liberation and the defense of Tamil cultural and linguistic autonomy are two sides of the same coin.[354]

This culturally and linguistically rooted approach to Dalit liberation differs from mainstream, "Ambedkarite"[355] Dalit political philosophy, which prioritizes building Dalit solidarity across ethnolinguistic regions and deemphasizes cultural and linguistic differences among Dalit

communities. Although the VCK identifies itself as an Ambedkarite group and supports the goal of maximizing Dalit political and social power India-wide, Thirumavalavan and the VCK argue that true Dalit liberation in the Tamil country must include the affirmation of Tamil cultural and linguistic autonomy. In a speech delivered in the early 2000s and published in Meena Kandasamy's 2003 compilation of translations of Thirumavalavan's speeches, Thirumavalavan argues that being an Ambedkarite group and insisting on Tamil cultural and linguistic autonomy are intrinsically connected.[356] Thirumavalavan argues that both Dalit liberation and Tamil cultural independence are intrinsically opposed to the same system of Brahmanical Hinduism, which simultaneously labels Dalits "untouchable" and Tamil "a low language" relative to the sacred language of Sanskrit.[357] In both cases, Brahmanism and Aryanism designate certain groups as inferior and certain groups as superior by birth. In the context of an Indian nation without strong checks against the influence of Brahmanical Hindu thought or North Indian cultural nationalism, Thirumavalavan argues, failure to understand the connection between anti-caste social politics and pro-Tamil culture politics will prove fatal to Tamil movements seeking to mount meaningful opposition to Brahmanism and Hindu nationalism in contemporary Tamil society.[358]

The discursive tools of "Dravidian" racial vocabulary are not simply useful to Thirumavalavan and the VCK as contradictions to Hindu nationalist claims that India is a Hindu nation rooted in the Brahmanical Hindu tradition. In another speech, entitled "Only Caste-Annihilating Tamil Nationalism Shall Uproot Hindutva", Thirumavalavan argues that it is Dalit people and communities that are the most threatened by the erosion of Tamil

linguistic and cultural autonomy.[359] After crediting Iyothee Thass's role in introducing key tenets of Tamil nationalism to the Tamil country through his thought on the *Ādi Drāviḍas*, Thirumavalavan echoes Thass's argument that the first Dalits were those who most stridently rejected Brahmanical leadership.[360] In yet another speech, Thirumavalavan argues that because of

Dalit's long-term exclusion from caste Hindu society, it is in the cheris where the most authentic forms of ancient Tamil (i.e., Dravidian") language, culture, and religion still survive, whereas other corners of Tamil society have ceded to Brahmanical influence.[361] For this reason, Thirumavalavan argues, the defense of Tamil culture is a defense of Dalit Tamil culture more than any other group in Tamil society.

In step with this line of rhetoric, the VCK has hosted a number of high-profile events in the 21st century centered on Tamil linguistic and cultural pride. These events have present indigenous Tamil culture as a casteless alternative to Sanskritic Hindu culture. Thirumavalavan and the VCK have presided over multiple mass name-changing events, in which attendees with Sanskrit-derived names receive official government name-change forms and step-by-step guidance to help change their legal names to names derived from Tamil. Thirumavalavan and the VCK present these name-change ceremonies as symbolic rejections of Brahmanical power in Tamil society. In 2014, in the wake of an Indian Supreme Court ruling banning the traditional Tamil bull-taming custom of *jallikaṭṭu*, Thirumavalavan and the VCK organized a "caste-less *jallikaṭṭu*" to protest both the Indian government ruling and the customary exploitation of Dalit labor through the *jallikaṭṭu* tradition.[362] While other Tamil Dalit groups supported the *jallikaṭṭu* ban because it resolved the labor issues

surrounding *jallikaṭṭu,* Thirumavalavan and the VCK argued that national encroachment on Tamil cultural life represents a significant threat to Dalits, as well as other Tamil people.[363] Instead of taking the side of the Indian national government and condemning *jallikaṭṭu,* Thirumavalavan and the VCK instead opted to attempt to rework it to become a regenerated, explicitly Tamil and anti-caste practice. This move to overhaul an existing Tamil cultural tradition to meet the ideals of pre-Brahmanical Tamil civilization falls in line with the way many other Tamil thinkers, activists, and scholars we have discussed in this dissertation have sought to reformulate present-day Tamil society to recapture its righteous social order and cultural-civilizational prosperity.

Conclusion

The terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" remain deeply culturally and politically resonant in present-day Tamil society, over a century after they first emerged as major presences in colonial-era Tamil public discourse. The continuing relevance of these terms in the present-day Tamil context reflects the continuing significance of the social, cultural, and political dynamics that yielded the earliest Tamil reinterpretations of Western racial thought. Whereas in the colonial context the British Indian government systemically privileged both Brahmins and Brahmanical Hindu literature and ritual practice over Tamil non-Brahmins and vernacular" Dravidian texts and practices, in post-independence India Dravidian "race talk" has been used to speak both to the precarious place of Tamil culture in an Indian nation biased towards North Indian languages and cultural values and to chart ways to contest Brahmanical caste and Hindu nationalism in the contemporary Indian state. The conceptual

dichotomy between indigenous, “Dravidian” non-Brahmin, Tamil forms of culture, social ethics, religion, and the Tamil language and the corresponding prescriptions of the “Aryan” Brahmanical tradition arguably continues to serve as the dominant discursive model by which Tamil social critics articulate projects of Tamil social reformism in the 21st century. Even if the 21st-century manifestations of Tamil “race talk” no longer feature overt references to colonial-era Western racial thought, they engage meaningfully with idioms of Tamil cultural, social, and civilizational identity that emerged in the 19th century as Tamil responses to Western scholarship on the Dravidian and Aryan races. Like Non-Brahmin Tamil thinkers at the turn of the 20th century, 21st-century Tamil “race talk” continues to challenge the assumption that indigenous Tamil culture shares a common historical or ideological descent with the Brahmanical tradition introduced to the Tamil country in ancient history. Instead, present-day Tamil “race talk”, whether a part of “Dravidian party” discourse or VCK Dalit Liberationist oratory, frames the protection and restoration of ancient, pre-Aryan forms of Dravidian life as the principal social, political, and cultural goals of Tamil public society.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have attempted to explain how and why the notion of an ancient Dravidian race, an idea gestated in Western thought on race from the 18th and 19th centuries, became a foundational idea to a wide range of non-Brahmin Tamil thought and discourse from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. I have undertaken this project because I believe that understanding Tamil "race talk" on its own historical terms offers critical context that illustrates how Tamil thinkers and activists have actually used and continue to use terms like "Dravidian" and "Aryan". The body of this dissertation has offered a history of "Dravidian" racial discourse from its roots in Western scholarly and missionary writings to its adaptation and elaboration through the works of various important Tamil activists, scholars, and theologians from the 19th and 20th centuries. Now that we have this whole historical narrative in view, it is time to take stock of why and how this history matters to us as 21st-century scholars and public citizens. In this concluding chapter, I have identified three important questions this dissertation's history of Tamil race talk can help answer. In all three of these instances, the history of Tamil race talk we see in this dissertation suggests adjustments to common scholarly, activist, or disciplinary assumptions about Tamil, Indian, and human society.

Are Dravidians Indian?

Are Tamilians Indian? Is the history of Tamil Nadu part of the history of India? For many scholars and non-scholars alike, these questions may seem so simple that they become absurd. Where could the Tamil country be if not in South India? How could the history of

Tamil Nadu be cordoned off as separate from the history of other Hindu-majority societies in the Indian Subcontinent? Can't Tamilians be both Tamil and Indian at the same time?

To be sure, there are many meaningful ways that the historical experiences of the Tamil country cohere with the experiences in other regions of colonial and post-colonial India. Many of the political, intellectual, and social pressures that Tamil society faced under British colonialism closely resemble the experiences of other "Indian" peoples. However, it is also true that Tamil race talk in the Tamil country is the product of a regionally specific discursive process, and this process cannot necessarily be generalized to other ethnic, cultural, or linguistic regions of British or post-independence India. Additionally, this regionally bounded history led many important Tamil social thinkers and activists to speak out against Indian nationalism as an arm of Aryan, Brahmanical power. The continuing relevance of Dravidian "race-talk" in contemporary Tamil social discourse attests not only to the importance of this regional history in the making of a distinctive brand of non-Brahmin Tamil public modernity, but also to the continuing salience of many of the same cultural, political, and social dynamics that popularized this discourse in the first place.

As we saw in the first chapter of this dissertation, Western scholars created special associations between the pan-Indian Aryan Invasion Theory and the denizens of Tamil South India. Western scholastic and missionary discourse of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries specifically racialized Tamilians as Dravidians, a race without genuine links to the font of Indo-Aryan civilization purportedly responsible for the Vedic scriptures and the Brahmanical Hindu tradition. Colonial scholarship based on the Aryan Invasion Theory often identified

the Dravidians as the savage native peoples of South Asia who were displaced by the invading Aryans from the North. Although British ethnographers like H.H. Risley searched for "Dravidian" blood across the Indian Subcontinent, the work of Robert Caldwell and other Western scholars solidified a particular association between the label "Dravidian" and the speakers of the related "Dravidian" languages of South India. Moreover, Robert Caldwell's work positioned the Tamil language as the closest and most authentic representative of the pre-Aryan proto-Dravidian language. While Caldwell recognized a modest level of Dravidian civilizational accomplishment prior to the arrival of the Aryans to Dravidian South India, even he recognized the Aryans as the civilizational superiors of the ancient Dravidian race. The British colonial administration of Madras Presidency, as in other regions of British India, systematically deferred to purportedly "Aryan" forms of Indic civilization and culture, including Brahmanical law, Brahmanical Hindu scriptures, the Sanskrit language, and the Brahmin caste community. This Aryan supremacist reading of "Indic" culture and history, also voiced by numerous Brahmin supremacist figures and groups in Madras Presidency, correspondingly devalued the non-Aryan cultural and linguistic forms native to South India. This cultural devaluation corresponds to the systemic political, social, and economic colonial favoritism that lent Brahmins a wildly disproportionate share of Madras Presidency's political and judicial positions, educational resources, and access to high-paying trades like medicine, law, and engineering. In other words, Western thought on the Aryan and Dravidian races was not simply an intellectual matter, but also, through systemic colonial policy, a political and cultural reality in the Tamil South.

Non-Brahmin Tamil thinkers and activists of the colonial era responded to this racial classification and its sociopolitical implications in Madras Presidency by using the term "Dravidian" as a multivalent term that marks caste and ethnolinguistic identity as as two sides of the same historical coin. In mainstream non-Brahmin usage, "Dravidian" implies distance from Brahmin caste privilege, Brahmin-dominated Hindu religious orthodoxy, and the Sanskrit language. Moreover, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, many Tamil thinkers used the racial language of "Dravidian" and "Aryan" to reject the Indian nationalist contention that the Tamil country is a segment of a greater Hindu or Indian civilization. Instead, beginning in the late 19th century, many major non-Brahmin Tamil thinkers and movements sought to highlight the civilizational legacy of the Dravidian race in opposition to the Brahmanical tradition of the Aryan North. Neo-Saiva theologians like J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai and Maraimalai Adigal argued that what is now known as the pan-Indian religion of Hinduism first originated in the Saiva religious traditions native to the Tamil South. Other important thinkers we have discussed in this project, such as Iyothee Thass and E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy, argued that Hinduism was an Aryan import that fundamentally transformed Tamil social and cultural values to privilege immigrant Brahmins over the native Dravidian inhabitants of the Tamil country.

Non-Brahmin Tamil thinkers and movements of the last three centuries have overwhelmingly understood the social welfare of non-Brahmin Tamilians as intrinsically and inextricably connected to the welfare of Tamil culture, Tamil literature, and the Tamil language in the Tamil country. On one hand, offering the Tamil language a greater place in Madras Presidency's institutions of higher education promised to benefit non-Brahmin communities

with less English language proficiency than the largely English-literate Brahmin community. On the other hand, the combined Aryan supremacist denigration of Tamil non-Brahmins as Dravidian inferiors to the Brahmin caste, vaunted by figures such as T. Sadasiva Iyer and Annie Besant, demanded a similarly two-pronged response able to advocate both for the social welfare of non-Brahmin Tamilians and for the cultural role that "Dravidian" (i.e., non-Brahmanical) Tamil culture and the Tamil language should play in a culturally equitable Madras Presidency. In the modern Tamil country, "Dravidian" became a signature term identifying this line of social-cum-cultural thought, which continues to play a central role in Tamil anti-caste activism and sociopolitical discourse in the 21st century.

This complex web of Western discourse, premodern Tamil history, and the sociopolitical climate of colonial Madras Presidency set the terms by which Tamil thinkers beginning in the 19th century used the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" to think through the issues of caste, ethnicity, nation, and religion. Since Tamil race talk derived from a set of historical conditions and experiences unique to the Tamil country, it is only natural that Tamil thinkers and movements

have generally used Tamil race talk to prioritize action within the Tamil country over outreach to other ethnocultural regions of British India. As such, it is inappropriate to characterize Tamil discourse on the Dravidian race as a simple permutation of national discourses about phenomena such as caste. Although caste is a central component of almost all Tamil applications of the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" to contemporary Tamil society, Dravidian "race-talk" is not just national caste talk in disguise. Rather, the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan", as well as their connection to the putative Indian nation, present a theory of

caste that attributes caste discrimination to regions outside the Tamil country. Instead of describing caste as a national Indian problem, these Tamil thinkers have preferred to reject the frame of India altogether, and instead argue that the foundation of Tamil caste reform lies within the civilizational history of the Tamil land itself.

At its surface, E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy's Dravidar Kazhagam may seem like an exception to the Tamil-centered focus of the Tamil race talk we have seen in this dissertation project. As briefly mentioned last chapter, the chief policy goal of Periyar's Dravidar Kazhagam was to convince the British government to recognize the homelands of the four major "Dravidian" ethnicities of South India- Tamil, Telugu, Kannadiga, and Malayali- as an independent "Dravidian nation" (*drāviḍa nāḍu*). Indeed, Periyar was serious about this goal: he tirelessly sought support for the Dravida Nadu scheme both among the potential South Indian citizens of this independent Dravidian state, and from other blocs of Indian political power, such as the Muslim League and B.R. Ambedkar's Dalit Movement. However, given both Periyar's own career arc as an activist who made a point never to run for public office and the nature of contemporary Tamil public discourse on the Dravidian "race", it is important not to misunderstand the Dravidian nationalism of the Dravidar Kazhagam as an aspiration to *Indian* political power. Rather, the Dravidar Kazhagam's Dravidian nationalism is better understood as an application of Periyar's thought on Dravidian "self-respect" to the question of Tamil political nationalism.

For an illustration of the importance of this distinction, consider the following excerpt from Nicholas Dirks's famous *Castes of Mind*, a classic study on the emergence of the discourse of

caste across British India. After a short summary of Periyar's career and ideology- earlier in the work he boasts of having studied Periyar in his undergraduate years- Dirks describes the impact of Periyar and his discourse as follows:

> Except for a brief moment in his early career, his interest was far less in the representation of non-Brahmans in numerical terms than in the representation of non-Brahmans in symbolic terms; non-Brahmans were to be seen both as the majority and as the principal modality of social value. His use of the transformed idea of *varnashrama-dharma* as a way to forge a new egalitararian majority rankled non-Brahmans for obvious reasons, but it was also the case that E.V.R. [i.e., E.V. Ramasamy] shared with Gandhi the conviction that caste was deeply anchored in the social conventions of the subcontinent. Indeed, E.V.R. shared a great deal with Gandhi—in his reliance, for example, on the symbolic character of politics, on the necessity of social reform, and in his overriding interest in ideology rather than political process. He even set himself up as a kind of Rabelasian alter ego to Gandhi, wearing black rather than white, indulging his appetites rather than curtailing them, and establishing a personal cult that was nevertheless based on social service, among other things. But for a variety of reasons E.V.R. was always positioned on the margin—of the nationalist movement, of social reform, and of symbolic access to the national pool of ideological possibilities that were cultivated within colonial nationalism. The margin became a space where all action was reaction—spectacular at times, utopian as well, but driven by forces that were always elsewhere. When E.V.R.'s own movement began to enter the main- stream of Tamil political life in independent India, E.V.R. seems to have had no choice but to stay in the opposition. He agitated against the compromises of normal politics, provoked Hindu and Brahman sensibilities, and echoed Gandhi's own profound unease about the inexorable tyranny of social hierarchy. He occupied a space of radical critique that is as impressive today as it was always a sign of the contradictions of the position of minority in a caste hierarchy. And yet E.V.R. was ultimately trapped by his own critical language, in a syntax that could never transcend its oppositional character.[364]

In this dissertation project, I have interpreted E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy's thought through the lens of other important non-Brahmin Tamil discourse from the late-19th and early-20th centuries. My line of analysis casts Ramasamy as an important participant in a broader trend by which non-Brahmin Tamilians have sought to center Tamil historical, social, and cultural on the Tamil country itself, rather than British India. Nicholas Dirks here instead chooses to view Ramasamy through the lens of a national deliberation on caste, Indian nationalism, and

Brahmin power. In the context of a national discourse on caste led by figures such as M.K. Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar, Dirks paints Periyar as a through and through contrarian, the black to Gandhi's white. Dirks correctly points out that Ramasamy considered Gandhi one of his foremost opponents, and devoted special attention to refuting Gandhi's thought on the Indian nation. However, Dirks's contention that Ramasamy and his discourse were "driven by forces that are always elsewhere", or that for Ramasamy "all action was reaction" unabashedly center an Indian frame of reference over the Tamil-centered frame of reference promoted by Ramasamy and a host of other socially critical Tamil thinkers, speakers, and activists beginning in the late 19th century. Like other Tamil thinkers who used Dravidian race talk to advocate for concrete social or political platforms, Ramasamy persistently argued throughout his career that Tamil social prosperity depends on Tamilians' ability to escape Brahmanical hegemony. Rather than semi-jealous mimicry, Ramasamy's elaborate and longstanding opposition to Gandhi can easily be explained by pointing to what Ramasamy himself said about Gandhi: he saw Gandhi as an advocate of Brahmin supremacy under the guise of Indian nationalism.[365] For Periyar and other Self-Respect thinkers, the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" identify the two chief ideological-cultural forces at loggerheads for control over Tamil society: the Brahmanical tradition associated with caste, Hindu superstition, and North Indian cultural and linguistic power, and the native Dravidian social values of the Tamil country and other regions of South India. Periyar and the Dravidar Kazhagam's greatest ambition was not to assume control over a unified India, but rather to free the Dravidian South from the political destiny of an India rooted in Brahmanical classicism and North Indian cultural power and uncommitted to confronting caste, patriarchy, or any of the other social products of Brahmanical social hegemony.

Dirks's argument that Ramasamy and his discursive tools were "marginal", and that his career was "driven by forces elsewhere" directly clash with a mainstream Tamil perspective on Tamil history. Even if Ramasamy's scheme for Dravida Nadu can be reduced to a footnote in a history of the broader Indian independence movement, few people with meaningful experience in the Tamil country would use the term "marginal" to describe Ramasamy's career. Indeed, E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy remains a household name in 21st-century Tamil Nadu, a fixture in university bookstores, roadside statues, and Tamil political iconography. More significantly, as we saw last chapter, Periyar's thought deeply influences powerful currents of present-day socially critical Tamil thought and activism, such as the Tamil Dalit liberation platform of Tholkappiyan Thirumavalavan's VCK. It could even be said that the "marginality" of Ramasamy's thought on Tamil self-respect is one of the major sources of its appeal: unlike national Indian discourses, Tamil race talk accounts for differences in cultural and political power between the Tamil South and North India. The topic of cultural and linguistic power became explosively relevant in the Anti-Hindi Agitations of 1937-1938 and 1967, the latter of which propelled M. Karunanidhi's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam to its first major electoral victory. Dirks's appraisal of Periyar's career skims over Periyar's integral role in organizing and promoting the Anti-Hindi Agitations of 1937-1938, which not only was a protest campaign specific to the Tamil country, but also was successful in changing Indian national policy on language. In the years since Indian independence, the "marginal" discourse of Dravidian "race talk" has continued to play a central role in Tamil public life.

Perhaps the chief contention I seek to make through this dissertation is that regionally specific Tamil discourse centered on Dravidian "race talk" is a constitutive element of how

most socially and culturally critical non-Brahmin Tamil thinkers have reckoned with issues like caste, religion, language, and nation since the late 19th-century. Dirks's portrayal of Periyar as a figure of perpetual marginality and opposition implies that this Tamil discursive history is secondary to a broader, Indian history of caste, Brahminism, and Indian nationalism. If we take the words of the Tamil thinkers and orators in this dissertation seriously, we see that there is a strong and longstanding Tamil tradition of rejecting the notion that Tamil history and Tamil society are smaller parts of a cosmopolitan Indian whole. This line of thinking has surged in support in response to Indian national government attempts to regulate Tamil linguistic or cultural life: the Anti-Hindi Agitations of 1937-1938 and 1967 and the pro-*jallikaṭṭu* Marina Beach protests of 2014 have contrasted native Tamil cultural forms to the interference of an Indian national government demographically and politically driven by North India. Dravidian "race talk" is the model of Tamil public discourse most directly associated with this impulse to center the Tamil country and its history over a putative Indian nation dominated by Brahmin and North Indian interests. Although not as famous among scholars of Indian history as the national figures M.K. Gandhi or B.R. Ambedkar, E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy and other Tamil thinkers occupied central places in Tamil public conversation. These Tamil thinkers deserve to be taken seriously as figures with comparable, if not even greater impact on Tamil discourse and public society than Indian national figures with higher scholastic profiles.

Why Race Talk?

As we saw in Chapter 1, early-modern Western thought on race offered powerful legitimations for Western colonial expansion over the non-Western world. Given the

connections between this Western thought on race and the widespread violence, economic oppression, and social and cultural devastation colonized peoples suffered under Western colonial rule, it is reasonable for an anti-racist or anti-colonial scholar to be uneasy with the roots of Dravidian "race-talk" in Western thought on Aryan and Dravidian racial history. How can Tamil "race-talk" be socially or politically progressive when key features of it emerged from a Western thought system that systematically presents white Europeans as superior by birth to the other racial peoples of the world? How can thought predicated on racial differences between Dravidians and Aryans become the basis of progressive action, especially in a multicultural Indian state?

It is useful here to invoke Michael Omi and Howard Winant's notion of a "racial project", a component of their now well-known model of "racial formation".[366] Omi and Winant argue that racial categories in society emerge through discrete "racial projects" with discrete social, political, or cultural goals.[367] Dravidian "race-talk" is a template for a number of important Tamil racial projects of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, all of which seek to use the notion of a Dravidian race to effect change in some realm of contemporary Tamil society. As we saw in Chapter 4, while early 20th-century Tamil historians used unabashedly racial language to discuss the ancient Tamil past, these Tamil historians did not generally use this racial language to argue that the Tamil people are racially superior to any other given race. Rather, Tamil historians like V. Savariroyan and V.J. Thamby Pillai from *The Tamilian Antiquary* use the discursive tools of Western racial thought to argue against Orientalist histories of the Dravidian South that present it as a savage wasteland prior to the arrival of Aryan civilization. Neo-Saiva historiographers like P. Sundaram Pillai and J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai use Western racial language and works of Western racial scholarship to tell a story of

Tamil Saivism centered on an indigenous, Dravidian Tamil golden age. Iyothee Thass used the Western racial categories of Aryan and Dravidian, as well as the Western scholastic narrative of the Aryan invasion of ancient South Asia, to write a history of *ādi drāviḍa* Tamilians that decouples them from their degraded social and ritual position in Brahmanical Hindu-dominated Tamil society. E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy and the Self-Respect Movement presented Western-style rationalism as a key component of a self-respecting Tamil future. C.N. Annadurai and other post-Indian independence Tamil nationalists continued to use the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" to describe the position of Tamil culture and the Tamil language within an Indian state demographically and politically dominated by North India. Even as the social progressivism of the "Dravidian" parties of Tamil politics come increasingly under question, radical anti-caste politicians and activists like Thol. Thirumavalavan continue to use the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" to articulate an intellectual and political platform dedicated to the defense of Tamil Dalit communities and the fight against Hindu nationalism.

In short, although the roots of Tamil "race talk" undeniably lie in Western discourse on South Asian racial-linguistic classification, Tamil "race talk" has from the beginning represented a profoundly different racial project than its Western ancestor. Over the last two centuries, Tamil authors have predominantly used Tamil race talk to reject or subvert politically or socially dominant discourses on Tamil society, culture, and history. This discursive history in the Tamil country has established Tamil race talk as a tradition unto itself, still vibrant in the 21st century even as its roots in 18th and 19th-century Western racial scholarship become more and more distant. It is this discursive history that has been far more important to the construction of the Tamil meanings of the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" than the Western

scholarship where these terms were first used as labels for ancient racial peoples. By the same token, it is important to remember that the terms "Dravidian" and "Aryan" do not automatically make a discourse on Tamil society socially or politically progressive. Race talk is a tool, and Tamil thinkers of the last two centuries have used this tool for various types of social, political, and cultural projects. This is a central point in Thirumavalavan's critique of the Dravidian parties' nominal Tamil nationalism: in spite of their use of the term "Dravidian" and Periyar's image as a token of their social progressivism, their policy records show a willingness to collaborate with wielders of Indian national political power and their cultural platform of Hindu nationalism.

When questioning the progressive value of Tamil "race talk", activist-minded critics often invoke comparisons between regionally particularist Tamil nationalism and a universal (i.e., pan-Indian) struggle against class and caste oppression. In this way, the question of whether Tamil "race talk" can be a tool of progressive social and political action becomes tied to the question discussed in the previous section: are Tamilians Indian, or something else? In the view of critics of Tamil race-talk, bringing up the issues of ethnic heritage or self-determination as major features of a progressive social or political platform can be a distraction from the root social or political issues to which the platform intends to respond. For instance, in his introduction to *Uproot Hindutva*, a compilation of translations of a number of Thol. Thirumavalavan's articles in Tamil newspapers and periodicals, the Mumbai-based activist Ram Puniyani takes a moment to criticize Thirumavalavan and the VCK's discourse on ethnic Tamil nationalism as potentially counterproductive to a broader, Indian fight against caste:

> On a note of difference I would like to point out that today while ethnic nationalism like the Tamil Nationalism [sic] can be a powerful symbol of opposition to the domination of Hindutva politics, alone it may not be adequate to overcome the problem. We know that as a nation-state, India is a well entrenched entity and the linkages of the downtrodden all over the country are the only force which can overcome the intimidatory and oppressive politics of the upper castes, the caste Hindus and affluent middle classes who have come to form 'Shining India', the slogan of the BJP in the last parliamentary elections. While the ethnic culture [sic] needs all the nurturing and protection from the onslaught of Hindutva culture, this alone may not be able to protect the interests of the poor, the low caste, and the other weaker sections of society.[368]

Puniyani here presents the VCK's Tamil nationalism as a symbolic mode of resistance to Hindutva politics, a framing that attests to one key dimension of how Thirumavalavan and the VCK present their Tamil nationalist platform. However, whereas Puniyani paints the VCK's Tamil nationalism as a principally symbolic feature of their platform, in many of his essays in *Uproot Hindutva*, Thirumavalavan argues that Tamil cultural and linguistic autonomy are critical features of a meaningful Dalit liberation platform for Tamil Dalits.[369] On one hand, as we saw last chapter, Thirumavalavan argues that Tamil nationalism specifically serves Dalit interests in Tamil Nadu: it is Tamil Dalits who have been the most invested in protecting indigenous Tamil culture and who stand to lose the most from the erosion of Tamil cultural and linguistic identity.[370] On the other hand, Thirumavalavan and the VCK, like other Tamil thinkers we have studied in this dissertation, use the distinctive idiom of Tamil "race talk" to place the issue of caste oppression in the context of the Dravidian history of the Tamil country, rather than in a broader Hindu or Indian context. To wit, in "Tamilian Advancement: Is Casteism an Obstacle?", an essay printed in *Uproot Hindutva*, Thirumavalavan presents Tamil and casteism as opposite ends of a single spectrum of social-cultural identity:

> Listening to the advice of the Aryans, the kings of those times developed and patronized religion. They changed the social structures. Having captivated the rulers,

> they used the Tamilians themselves and crippled Tamil social organization. Using the Tamil rulers, they firmly established such casteist structures. Gradually they made the Tamilians into Hindus. They made them forget that they were Tamilians. The historical truth is that Tamilians are not Hindus. So, if the Tamilians have to revive themselves and have a revival, a renaissance, the first thing is for them to realize that they are not Hindus. they have to openly announce that they are not Hindus. It is only when such a mindset is acquired that the Tamilian shall renounce caste; he shall cut away the remaining domination; he shall tear away the bonds, the handcuffs over his hands, over his brains. Living his life as a Hindu, a Tamilian can never destroy caste. Remaining a Hindu, he cannot destroy Aryanism and Brahmanism. He cannot defeat Hindutva. So, we need to do the work of making each and every Tamilian realize and feel he or she is a Tamilian.[371]

This passage, which resonates deeply with ideas from ideas found in the thought of both Iyothee Thass and E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy, takes a transhistorical view of caste in Tamil society, presenting it as an invasive Aryan import dating back to ancient Tamil history. Although Thirumavalavan uses Tamil "race talk" to distinguish caste and Hinduism as foreign imports to the Tamil country, Thirumavalavan here does not contrast Tamilians to any specific racial or ethnic group in contemporary India. Instead, like Thass and Periyar, Thirumavalavan argues that the true realization of authentic Tamil cultural identity requires the abandonment of one's ideological, political, religious, and cultural attachments to Brahmanical Hinduism.

Undeniably, as Puniyani suggests above, the Tamil nationalist framing of caste found in this passage is less discursively useful to a pan-Indian anti-caste movement than a less ethnically specific attack on Brahmanical caste. However, it is also undeniably true that the ethnic and racial language that Thirumavalavan uses to speak about the place of caste and Brahmanical Hinduism in Tamil society is far more resonant with how the majority of socially critical Tamil thinkers have engaged with the issue of caste over the last two centuries than an ethnically detached, pan-Indian framing of caste would be. Given the deep importance of the discursive tradition of race talk in modern Tamil history and the continuing sociocultural and

political relevance of Tamil race talk in present-day Tamil society, it is fair to question whether abandoning Tamil race talk would actually be beneficial to Thirumavalavan's Dalit liberation project. Although the VCK's pathway to Tamil Dalit liberation differs from a more typical Ambedkarite vision of pan-Indian Dalit liberation, it makes a set of appeals to Tamil cultural and historical identity that cannot be matched by discourses that prefer to speak of India as a collective whole. Over the last two and a half centuries, countless non-Brahmin Tamilian thinkers, social critics, and everyday people have expressed anxieties that dimensions of indigenous Tamil cultural and social life cannot survive within an Indian state that does not respect the authority of these cultural and social values over Tamil life. Even if a pan-Indian approach to caste liberation could place Thirumavalavan in step with other Dalit thinkers and activists across India, as Puniyani seems to suggest in his words above, this pan-Indian approach does not have strong tools to address these Tamil cultural, social, and political anxieties. Is Thirumavalavan, as a Tamil Dalit speaker, politician, and activist, obliged to ignore these specifically Tamil anxieties and the discursive history of Tamil race talk in order to be maximally politically powerful or useful to a pan-Indian Dalit movement? Is Tamil race talk inappropriately regionalist even if it is arguably the most established and influential idiom of Tamil social criticism in modern Tamil social discourse?

I am not arguing in this chapter or this dissertation that Tamil race talk should be immune to all modes of historical or political criticism. It should not, and in this dissertation we have seen multiple instances in which Tamil thinkers and activists have used Tamil race talk to criticize how other Tamil thinkers and groups themselves conceive of the Tamil racial past. Rather, my argument is that we should not assume that Tamil race talk is a vestigial or less advanced version of a more progressive discourse on caste or any other component of Tamil

or Indian society. The rich discursive history of Tamil race talk is not best understood as a bloated extension of British colonial power or an ultimately counterproductive deference to regionalist cultural fervor. Instead, Tamil race talk deserves to be read on its own terms, as a complex Tamil intellectual and aesthetic response to multiple systems of power in colonial and postcolonial India. I do not believe it is meaningful or productive to denounce Tamil race talk simply because it makes use of terms and concepts that originated in Western racial thought, nor do I think it is meaningful to criticize discourses intended for Tamil audiences for not being generalizable to a pan-Indian stage. Rather, I think we arrive at a much richer and more representative picture of Tamil discursive history and present-day Tamil social politics if we understand Tamil race talk as an Tamil response to discourses- both Western and Indian nationalist- that decenter the role of Tamil history and culture in their descriptions of broader "Indian" national histories. Under British colonial rule, both Vellala Neo-Saiva thinkers like P. Sundaram Pillai, J.M. Nallasvami Pillai, and Maraimalai Adigal and more classicist Tamil scholars like *The Tamilian Antiquary*'s V. Savariroyan and V.J. Thamby Pillai used Tamil race talk to respond to Western and Brahmin discourses that presented civilizational advancement in the Tamil country as an Aryan or Brahmin import. Thinkers like E.V. "Periyar" Ramasamy, C.N. Annadurai, and Thol. Thirumavalavan have used Tamil race talk both to critique contemporary Tamil society and to criticize the Indian nationalist project and Indian nation for favoring Brahmanical Hindu influence over the Tamil country. Iyothee Thass and Thirumavalavan have used Tamil race talk to suggest new Tamil Dalit (or *ādi drāviḍa*) social and historical identities that restore the historical dignity stripped away from their communities by the foreign Brahmanical Hindu system. All of these thinkers and many other Tamil thinkers, activists, and public figures from the 19th, 20th, and 21st

centuries have collectively been responsible for creating and sustaining the idiom of Tamil race talk in Tamil public thought.

Can "Race Talk" Answer Religious Questions?

I have submitted this dissertation as the culmination of a degree program in Religious Studies. To be sure, religion has played a central and obvious role in each of the chapters of this dissertation. In Chapter One, we saw how the premodern Christian theological tradition of composing "genealogies of nations" shaped early-modern Western approaches to mapping out and categorizing the various ethnolinguistic peoples of the world. In Chapter Two, we saw how Christian missionary interests molded influential early Western scholarship on the Tamil language and ancient Tamil literature. In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, we saw how various Tamil thinkers used concepts from Western scholarship to structure their engagements with various Hindu texts and traditions.

However, in spite of the many important ways that Tamil race talk intersects with more traditional Religious Studies subjects like Christian national genealogy, Protestant textuality, Hindu theology, Buddhist history, and atheist philosophy, there are some ways that my focus on Tamil race talk may seem to be a surprising subject for a Religious Studies doctoral dissertation. As an editor for one of my publications reminded me when I suggested the Self-Respect Movement as the subject for an article, rituals like Self-Respect marriages do not fit the standard mold of what most people consider "religious" rituals. For Periyar and the Self-Respecters, Self-Respect marriage ceremonies were preferable to traditional religious marriages *because* they avoid relying on the types of religious-superstitious thinking that

have kept Dravidian Tamilians mired in self-oppression instead of Dravidian self-respect. While it is far easier to see the work of thinkers such as Sundaram Pillai, Thass, and Adigal as works of theology, these thinkers comment extensively- and at times, predominantly- on Tamil culture, literature, and civilization in their writings. Although Maraimalai Adigal was a remarkably prolific author of treatises on Saiva theology and ritual practice, he is arguably best known in present-day Tamil society for his role in founding the Pure Tamil Movement and introducing its distinctive perspective on Tamil linguistic authenticity. In the same way, Arumuga Navalar is best remembered in mainstream Tamil society for his reforms to Tamil orthography and punctuation, rather than his thought on Saiva practice.

Tamil "race talk" is not exclusively a religious idiom, but as we have seen in this dissertation, race talk is a major component of many important and socially resonant 19th, 20th, and 21st-century Tamil responses to the role the Brahmanical Hindu tradition has been granted in contemporary Tamil society. The chief ideological and political opponents of the wielders of Dravidian "race talk" over the course of its history have been Brahmin chauvinists, Indian nationalists, and Hindu nationalists, all of whom in some way or another understand the Sanskritic Brahmanical Hindu tradition as a key piece of a unified Indian historical identity. In this sense, Tamil race talk can be read as one of the dominant ways Tamilian thinkers of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries have reckoned with questions about the place of Brahmanical Hinduism- and religion in general- in Tamil public life.

This is an important point to make in the field of Religious Studies in particular. For a number of intellectual, historical, cultural, financial, and political reasons, Religious Studies

departments in Western universities have overwhelmingly prioritized the study of orthodox religious groups and scriptures in their coursework, sometimes to the exclusion of more demographically predominant forms of religious practice and thought. It is inconceivable for a Religious Studies department in a Western university to offer coursework on Hinduism without mentioning the Vedas, the Upanishads, or the Hindu Epics, for instance. On the other hand, it is not only conceivable but also commonplace for Religious Studies curricula across the Western world to neglect attending to cultural and historical differences among regions of India and South Asia, to say nothing of specifically Tamil reckonings with questions of the role of Brahmanical Hinduism in Tamil public life. I say this from personal experience: not once in my undergraduate Religious Studies major at American University, for which I took multiple classes on Hinduism and religion in South Asia, did I encounter the idea that cultural differences could affect how different South Asian peoples think about or experience purportedly "Indian" or "Hindu" concepts. This is a major intellectual gap that promotes a homogenized vision of South Asian religiosity: without the tools to think about ethnic or cultural difference within South Asia, sources like the Tamil works analyzed in this dissertation cannot possibly be fully intelligible to responsible Religious Studies scholars. The established methodologies of Religious Studies scholarship do not always automatically direct scholars or students towards all of the ideas and historical processes that are most important to how a given group understands and answers religious questions. In addition to recording what I have learned about Tamil race talk and its historical influences, I hope this dissertation testifies more broadly to the value of taking worldly ethnic, cultural, and social differences seriously in the study of the human pursuit of transcendent religious rewards or truths.

Appendix: A Full Translation of "A Critical Review of Story of Rāmāyaṇa and an Account of South Indian Castes"

Below is a full translation of the Tamil-language essay that constitutes the main part of Vol. 1 No. 2 (1908) of *The Tamilian Antiquary*. For my analysis of this source, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

A Critical Review of Story of Rāmāyaṇa and an Account of South Indian Castes

Part One

The Caste Situation in South India at the Time of the Rāmāyaṇa

The *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* are classified as *itihāsa*s. Distinguished scholars of ancient history say that of these two texts, the Mahabharata is a text based on actual historical facts, which have been compiled, reduced down, edited, and rendered into many metrical verses. They say that the *Rāmāyaṇa* was not composed in the same way, and they offer as evidence the fact that no actual historical events corresponding to it have been discovered to exist, and that the important terms *sītā* and *rāma*[372] refer to irrigation trenches and water, respectively, in Vedic usage. They say that the original meaning of the term Aryan was "pastoralist", and that the Vedic texts narrate in great detail how these "pastoralists" stretched out across and cultivated three regions of land, where they dug irrigation trenches, circulated water, and created farmland, and then nations, and then went on to spread Aryan civilization beyond its original bounds. They say that it is clearly evident that after overcoming the original inhabitants of North India, the Aryans crossed into South India, conquered as far as Lanka,

and established kingdoms. Therefore, they say that it is an imaginary story- that one poet garlanded the heroism and victory of the Aryans with prodigious imagination and the nine *rasas*[373]. However, since this is the case, it may be that an Aryan poet wrote the Sacred *Rāmāyana* in praise of the strength and victorious heroism of his own caste.

When that poet accepted the erroneous claims of those who were in that day called Aryans[374] as true, then these stories were accepted as true by the Aryans without the need for further proof. The establishment of these claims as truth was the reason that those with non-Aryan[375] qualities[376] came to wonder at and venerate the Aryans, their enemies. Those who were not Aryan were the denizens of South India led by Vāli, and perhaps also the denizens of Sri Lanka led by Rāvaṇa. Although Vāli, Sugrīva, and others are called monkeys by the Aryans, they were akin to the Aryans as human beings created by God[377]. Although Rāvaṇa and others are called "rakṣasas", they were also human. These two classes of peoples were our Dravidian ancestors.

The *Rāmāyaṇa*[378] says that there are few to be lauded and applauded among the Dravidians, and says that because of their crimes, Rāma waged war against the Dravidians, was victorious, and took control of their kingdoms, and Vālmīki says that the Dravidian princes who helped them became his viceroys. Who were those who committed the crimes? What were the crimes they committed? What were the means by which they won? Let us investigate.

I. Foremost among the criminals:

i. Rāvaṇa

ii. Vāli

II. Foremost among the crimes:

i. Rāvaṇa's crimes:

(1) Imprisoning a "god"

(2) Caused hindrance to the sage

(3) Kidnapping and imprisoning Sītā

ii. Vāli's crimes:

(1) Drove Sugrīva out from his kingdom

(2) Kidnapped Sugrīva's wife

III. Means they were accomplished: stated below.

I. The criminals

i. Rāvaṇa was a scholar of the Vedas and the Śāstras, remarkably erudite, marvelously heroic, and brave; by the strength of his arm, he conquered many kingdoms; upon doing this, Aghora[379] imparted him the gift of divine strength; he was an excellent student of music; he supported both his kinsmen and the citizens who lived under him: in this way he receives praise of all sorts. He was also said to have had ten heads[380] and twenty arms; this is to make note of his great learnedness and abundance of strength. Characteristics like this that run contrary to nature are all fanciful embellishments, and it is necessary to carefully distinguish the truth from figurative language.

ii. Vāli's conquest of Rāvaṇa, described above, is by itself enough to demonstrate his peerless strength. Vāli was an officiant of Siva-pūja; his generosity with his family wealth, affection for his brothers, chaste wife, cultivation of bhakti, lion-like heroism[381], remarkable friendship, flawlessness of speech, complete renunciation of worldly attachments, and other such remarkable qualities were evident to his enemies, and their hearts melted, swayed by compassion, and they welcomed him as a friend of their good nation and good *jāti*, having heard of his good character and good morals- and their great compassion upon seeing him testifies to this.

II. Crimes

Could people recognized to have such good qualities be capable of committing crimes? Are the crimes they are said to have committed actually crimes? Let us investigate.

i. Rāvaṇa's crimes

(1.) Rāvaṇa did indeed imprison a "deva". So what? Who was the "deva"? He was from a group among the Aryans. Aryans called those who were not of their *jāti* '*asuras*', '*rakṣas*', '*turaṅgas*', and likewise declared those of their own *jāti* '*devas*' and '*suras*'. (This is the way Brahmins came to acquire the name of *bhūsūra*s. The meaning of *bhūsūra* is 'god of the earth', and therefore, they declare themselves gods living on earth. By giving themselves this name, they separate themselves from other *jāti*s and call their food '*devapūja*'. What an injustice!) Therefore, the so-called 'gods' were Aryans hostile to Rāvaṇa's *jāti*. Defeating

one's enemies in battle and imprisoning them was a feat worthy of praise in those days- has it become a crime?

(2.) Rāvaṇa hindered a sage- but who was the sage? It was a Brahmin[382] sage from among the Aryans. The Aryans gathered armies and headed southward, and took a layperson[383] author with them, and whether they invaded or not, they entered without the consent of the Dravidians in the armies of the existing Dravidian nations, and in the course of performing their religious rites[384] they came to desire an enemy informant versed in the strengths and weaknesses of the Dravidians. Rāvaṇa was the first of those whom the sages they tried to sway away[385] from their home countries, and his resistance to their attempt is recorded. Resistance like this to an attempt to be swayed reveals the high character[386] of the Dravidians. This is also shown by how, outside of hindering these Aryan sages' religious duties, the Dravidians are never said to have taken any innocent lives. If they had, wouldn't Vālmīki, the poet of the opposing side, have mentioned it? However, as described by the above poet, the enemy, learning that it was not the Dravidians' custom to kill mendicants[387], desired an agent who knew their own people's strengths and weaknesses[388] and if Rāvaṇa tried to expel these wolves in sheep's clothing[389] without killing them, is that a crime?

(3.) He abducted and imprisoned Sītā. In the time of battle or enmity between people of one *jāti* and people of another *jāti*, one side or another steals cattle or other things, and men from all times have been said to abduct and imprison women and other such deeds without being called criminals. The Aryans, however, tried to invade and seize the Dravidian land. In a time such as this, does Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sītā amount to a crime? Rāvaṇa captured Sītā

according to the customs of battle; it is obvious that it is a grave sin for someone to capture the wife of someone else living peacefully within the same kingdom. We shall now examine the manner in which Rāvaṇa conducted the abduction and imprisonment of Sītā. In accordance with her esteemed royal status, he assigned his brother Vibhīṣana's daughter to be her constant companion (in Vālmiki, horrible beasts like *rakṣasa*s accompanied her in addition to women, etc.), appointed other women as her attendants, and sent her to live in his special pleasure-garden[390]. He put her there without using a trace of violent force, but rather used sweet words of kindness to try to gain her consent. If she agreed, he would marry her and name her his highest queen. Indeed, his words,

> "Gods and goddesses worship her lotus-red foot
> Uniquely pre-eminent in the refuge of the three worlds
> Your eyes manifest such brightness:
> What fools do you pass over?"

should suffice as proof of this. When she imparted many types of teachings without offering her consent, he did not treat her violently as a foreign enemy. Thus far, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa had entered his country, circled his city with a large army, crowded his people together, and when they killed his dear brother Kumbakarṇa and treasured son Indrajit[391], he did not get angry and kill Sītā. He did not cause her any type of sorrow at all. Even if the thought of killing her may have been justified, this thought did not occur to him. It occurred to Rāma first, when struck by fear he killed an illusion of Sītā. He did not harm a hair on the real Sītā's head.

Now we should devote a section to examining another issue. While this was how Rāvaṇa the Dravidian kept Sītā the Aryan in his custody, we shall now examine to the fate of Surpaṇaka

the Dravidian when she was caught in the hands of the Aryan Lakṣmaṇa. From the moment he recognized the shape of Śūrpaṇakhā's face, Lakṣmaṇa conducted himself with haughtiness and dishonor. Vālmīki says that Lakṣmaṇa's sole reason for this was to make right the injustice of Śūrpaṇakhā's kidnapping Sītā and then setting off on her own. Which of these two is in the right? Even if we hold Vālmīki's account as true, would we not laugh at a hero named Indrajit who did not assign a servant to attend her or offer any other reasonably means to prevent her from leaving her? Did Rāma himself not contradict his brother, who said this was suitable? If these actions had already occurred before Rāma contradicted him, are these not truly sins? If Rāma understood how he had killed the demon Tāṭaka with his own hands, how could he shame his brother for doing this to another woman or tell him how he should grieve? However, these women are rakshasas, aren't they? Does killing or disgracing them amount to a crime? Let's say that long ago I was an *asura*[392]- a *rakṣasa*- and the lower *jāti*s around were known by the name "monkeys", and the upper *jātis* were known by the name "Aryans". In this case, Tāṭaka, Kumbakarṇa and other such important figures would be *humans* called rakshasas. By saying this, Vālmīki marked them as outsiders[393], and this analogy confused those who did not know the truth of the matter; in a similar way, confused, they equate the sin of shaming a woman to the sin of killing a woman.

If you believe that Rāvaṇa needed to do something to avenge his enemy's murder of his grandmother Tāṭaka and the disgrace and mutilation his sister Śūrpaṇakhā[394], then Rāvaṇa certainly should be allowed to capture Sītā. If he did imprison Sītā in this way, is "crime" really the right word for his actions? Given that Rāvaṇa treated Sītā in exactly the manner described, and did so in revenge for what Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa did to Tāṭaka and

Śūrpaṇakhā, it is clear how the Dravidians and the Aryans treated women- and what levels of civilization each had attained. It would not be surprising if the Dravidians had called the Aryans "*mlecchas*"[395].

From the descriptions of the streets, palaces, gardens, and so on of Rāvaṇa's city, it becomes clear that the Dravidians were refined in various forms of civilization. The praise that Rāvaṇa, Hanuman, and others gave to the Dravidians' excellence of learning demonstrates the preeminence of the Dravidians in matters of scholarship. Through how Rāvaṇa acted towards Hanuman and Aṅgada[396], it becomes clear how the Dravidians treated the Tutars[397]. The courtesy with which Sītā was treated while imprisoned makes clear that the Dravidians were members of a truly enlightened civilization.

ii. Vāli's crimes

We will now describe Vāli's "crimes": driving his brother Sugrīva out of the land and keeping watch over his brother's wife. Vāli became king of his kingdom through the traditional claim to the throne held by the king's eldest son. When he traveled to neighboring lands for various reasons, he entrusted the kingdom to Sugrīva. Sugrīva, desiring to be king, refused to return control of the kingdom upon his brother's return. Because of this, Vāli conquered him, freed the kingdom, took control of it, and then exiled Sugrīva, as well as those such as Hanuman who supported him in treachery against the king. Sugrīva deserted his wife, just as other traitors to the king left the women dependent on them behind. This may be true. However, there is good reason to infer that Vālmīki is saying something slightly different: that Sugrīva, as a friend of Rāma, had Rāma's approval. Even though Sugrīva did

not kill Vāli out of desire for his kingdom, when Vāli died, by custom Vāli's son should have been crowned king. It did not happen this way; Sugrīva instead crowned himself king, which constitutes treason. Sugrīva and his brother became king, but in two different ways: Vāli envisioned Sugrīva as a father and protector, and Vālmīki may instead be trying to justify the great sin of Rāma's murder of Vāli, who trusted that his brother's remaining love for him would lead him to protect his line.

III. The Ways the Aryans Conquered the Dravidians

It is thought that Rāma held the confidence of his people, acted righteously and was the strongest of all men, and that one should not hold affection for Vāli, but instead relate to Sugrīva. However, Vāli had the reputation of not needing anyone's help. If someone showed him friendship, he had the reputation of rewarding their friendship in turn. Does he help Rāvaṇa, a Dravidian king like him and one of his old friends, against the invasion of the enemy king Rāma? He does. Sugrīva, however, remained on the throne, since he stood to lose certain luxuries and riches if he abandoned it. If by helping Vāli he could acquire the kingdom, then naturally he would be very conscientious; however, instead he opposed his older brother; did nothing to prevent the attack against Rāvaṇa, a king of his own jāti; and advised his armies to support the attack against Rāvaṇa. Rāma then extended his friendship to Sugrīva and taught him and other exiled heroes like Hanuman the sophisticated battle tactics that he had learned to give them a way of defeating Rāvaṇa. He then gathered them and set them against Vāli and his army, and stayed hidden instead of leading the charge, so that at the right moment he could notch and fire an arrow to kill Vāli. Obviously this

benefitted Sugrīva, and if Rāma had not shown up, then he would have fallen as an enemy of Vāli, who once held faith in him. We must consider the possibility that Rāma told Sugrīva, "Once you secure Vāli's help in conquering Rāvaṇa, you will come to rule in his place."

Just like Rāma conquered Vāli and his kingdom with the help of Vāli's younger brother Sugrīva, Rāma conquered Rāvaṇa and his kingdom with the help of Rāvaṇa's younger brother Vibhīṣana. Vālmiki celebrates Vibhīṣana for his extremely high character. For this reason, Vibhīṣana is known as "Vibhīṣana Āḻvār"- the title "Āḻvār" is applied to the most esteemed Vaishnavite religious teachers[398]- and if you say this name, everyone understands who you are talking about. The reason that this Dravidian receives this kind of praise from an Aryan[399] is that he helped the Aryans, contrary to the wellbeing of his race and the wellbeing of his elder brother and other kinfolk. Like Sugrīva, Vibhīṣana committed treason against both the king and his brother by aiding Rāma. The important difference between Sugrīva and Vibhīṣana is Sugrīva's use of deceit. Vibhīṣana is fearless and bold, while Sugrīva is a cowardly child. Vibhīṣana renounces his worldly life in order to wage war against the immensely powerful Vāli, and on many occasions in the battles waged in Lanka he commits daring feats without fear of death; we may question whether Sugrīva even saw combat at any point. In order to save Sugrīva's life, Indrajit missed Sugrīva with the arrows intended for Lakṣmaṇa. Vibhīṣana publicly ceded his share as elder brother to Vāli's kingdom back to Vāli; Sugrīva came to rule through his own self-interest, and sought to seize the kingdom for himself through trickery. Vibhīṣana stood with his brother whether he was right or wrong, and the moment that his brother stumbled, he became stricken with grief; Sugrīva, while living comfortably in a position of great honor bestowed by his brother, was crowned king in

his stead. It is therefore clear why Vibhīṣana is placed in a higher tier than his brother as an ally of Rāma against Rāvaṇa.

Rāvaṇa was not improper in how he watched over and restrained Sītā, but Vālmiki has said that Vibhīṣana watched and thought that Rāvaṇa had become wicked, and advised his brother to become righteous again, and when Rāvaṇa did not heed this advice, Vibhīṣana sought refuge with Rāma. It has previously been established that, after removing the Aryan bias and looking at things from a fair standpoint, Rāvaṇa's keeping watch over Sītā does not constitute a crime. Although this was called a crime, this is not the true reason that Vibhīṣana abandoned Rāvaṇa and allied with Rāma, the enemy of his *jāti*. Upon thinking his brother was becoming a bad person, he could have left him for city or country or whatever place he pleased and lived as a householder or a renunciant. However, when the elder brother[400] desired to remain king rather than become a commoner, Vibhīṣana instead thought that it is not good for the country to have a wicked person as king, and therefore for the good of the country it is necessary to depose him, and to join with Rāma as an ally in order to carry out this obligation. This too did not succeed, because although Vibhīṣana said that Rāvaṇa was becoming an enemy to his own *jāti* by causing trouble for the so-called "gods" of the Aryan jāti, none of his kinfolk, friends, or subjects anywhere said that Rāvaṇa had been a hindrance to them. Like Vibhīṣana, Rāvaṇa also told Kumbhakarṇa and Indrajit that it was necessary to keep Sītā imprisoned in isolation and assigned them duties. They did not agree with his demands. Did they then abandon him like Vibhīṣana did? They remained at his side in battle and renounced the world on his behalf[401]. The thought may have arisen in Kumbhakarṇa's mind to acquire the entire kingdom by becoming the enemy of Rāvaṇa, but when Vibhīṣana

said in the middle of battle, “Older brother, Rāma is promising me the kingdom of Lanka if you surrender and join him,” he was utterly disgusted and refused, thinking nothing of the possibility of acquiring his own kingdom, and his affection for his kin, his king, his country, and his *jāti* were foremost in his thoughts. Is Kumbhakarṇa called one of the great men of his *jāti* or his country[402], or given the title of Āḻvār, which is suitable for Vibhīṣana? The moment that Vibhīṣana abandoned his brother he ceaselessly fought for the enemy, and, not at all in line with his glorious, valiant reputation as the brother of Lord Rāvaṇa, he took shelter, bent his knee, and did a depraved deed: he told the secrets that killed his own friends and his friends’ sons. Indeed, when this deed led Vibhīṣana to die by Rāma’s arrow for Rāvaṇa’s transgressions, without ever coveting the kingdom, wasn’t the crown raised onto Kumbhakarṇa’s head?

Hence, from the Sanskrit *Ādikāvya*[403] of the Rāmāyaṇa we have learned a bit about the history of a small group from within the Dravidian *jāti*, as well as this group’s distinctive characteristics, such as its prosperous rule, its valiant bravery, its custom of kingship, and its civilizational life. At that time, the Aryan invaders of India had not yet entered large cities, but rather had settled in villages of huts built on the plains[404]: this and other such information is made clear in those same *itihāsa*s. There was not yet any division of *jāti*s anywhere at that time[405]. The Aryan poet[406] called the Dravidians who failed to assist the newly arriving Aryans “*rakṣasa*s”- a misconception- in order to lower their status by assigning them qualities[407] like ungratefulness or other such characteristics. The Dravidians who warmly welcomed, hosted, and venerated the sage Bharadvāja, a Brahmin offerer of oblations[408], and

his chaste wife are described by Vālmīki as a different type, characterized by generosity. Enough said.[409]

In the time of the Rāmāyaṇa, the region south of the Vindhya mountains[410], beginning in the northern parts of what is currently known as the kingdom of Naisām[411], was divided into the eastern "Daṇḍaka Forest"[412] and the western "Janasthānam", was half civilized land and half jungle, and was ruled by Rāvaṇa. The king of Lanka's[413] younger sister Sūrpaṇaka ruled that region as his proxy. As far south as Mysore District, lands were ruled by distinguished Dravidian kings such as Nīla, Sugrīva, and Vāli. The region south of the border of the Mysore mountains has been known as "Tamiḻakam[414]" since then, and mentions of this land's refinement and excellence can be found in the Rāmāyaṇa. "If you turn at the Kaveri River[415], cross the Porunai River[416], and proceed in that direction, you will see the golden gate of the fortress of the Pāṇḍiyas," Vālmīki says, speaking of the army of the heroes of Sugrīva, Hanuman, and so on. He named this town "Kapadapuram"[417] after the golden gate[418] of the Pāṇḍiyas' fortress. This makes it clear that this city acquired its reputation as "The Song of the Middle Sangam"[419] before the time of the Rāmāyaṇa. If we consider Kapadapuram, and before it, the perfect city of Teṉ Madurai[420] of the First Sangam that was taken by the sea[421], then the beginning of the prosperous rule of the Pāṇḍiyas[422], needless to say, came far before the time of the Rāmāyaṇa. Now let us examine the *jāti* situation in South India in the time before the Rāmāyaṇa.

Chapter 2: The *Jāti* Situation in South India Before the Time of the Rāmāyaṇa

Jāti hierarchy did not exist in any of the nations that have since disappeared from India. In these nations, "*jāti*" was the term used to describe whichever nation of people was living there. In the way that those living in China are called Chinese, those living in Japan are called Japanese, those living in Russia are called Russians, those living in Germany are called Germans, and those living in England are called English, groups acquired *jāti* names. This is why many of the castes that remain today have retained caste names referring to their nation. A few of the English invaded America and became "Americans", and another few invaded Australia and became "Australians", and by way of the countries to which they immigrated, they forgot their old *jāti* names and took on new ones. In India as well, before the Aryans came, the various peoples had *jāti* names referring to the various places they inhabited. In the Dravidian land that became South India, *jāti* names emerged in reference to a jāti's location[423] and trade. Those names still endure today. Those who lived before us in the hills[424] were called *kuṟavaṉ*, those who lived in the desert[425] were called *maṟavaṉ*, those who were in the woodlands[426] were called *iḍaiyaṉ*, those in the wetlands[427] were called *maḷḷaṉ*, and those who abided on the coastline[428] were called *paravaṉ*. Today, everyone knows these *jāti* names and these *jāti*s. However, the differences among these groups today did not originally exist. This is because of how those before us divided the five categories of *kuṟiñji*, *pālai*, *mullai*, *marudam*, and *neydal*[429] and categorized information about the humans, animals and plants of these climes into the *tiṇais*: so that they could tell the difference between one clime and another and clearly organize the confusion of landscapes. They did not classify humans or their ways of life in the same way that they classified this other information, nor did they establish a distinction between one caste as higher and another as lower.

Like how the English have taken up residence in America today, in previous times a *kuṟavaṉ* from the hills would become an *iḍaiyaṉ* if they came to reside in the woodlands. In this same way, one who moved from any region to another would take on the *jāti* identity of the place where they had taken up residence. A member of one *jāti* was like a member of any other *jāti*, and if a girl of another *jāti* took one's fancy, they were allowed to consort with her. One may recall that in ancient poetry like Jīvaka's *Cintāmaṇi*[430], King Jīvaka marries women of many *jāti*s and engages with and delights in people of all *jāti*s.

The name "Dravidian kingdom" is an ancient name for South India. Within this kingdom were five prominent languages: Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and Tulu. These five are called "the Five Drāviḍas". The name "*Drāviḍam*" is also used figuratively to refer to Tamil in particular. However, it is a name common to the five aforementioned languages. *Drāviḍadēsam* is the part of India where these five languages were used. On the basis of these five languages came the names of those who had them as mother tongues: Tamilians, Telugus, Malayalis, Kannadigas, and Tuluvas. All these people may be labeled as the Dravidian *jāti*. The aforementioned *kuṟuvar*s, *iḍaiyar*s, and so on constitute branches of the "Tamilians" of the Dravidian *jāti*. The majority of those who live in the northern part of the island of Lanka emigrated from South India, and so they also belong to the Dravidian *jāti*.

Are all of the peoples listed above actually one *jāti*? We will deliberate this below. At the start of this deliberation, we must specify what we mean by saying these peoples belong to the same *jāti*. It is not strictly necessary to determine whether these people were one *jāti* or

many *jāti*s. All that is necessary to say now is that all of those included under the name 'Dravidian' are of a different *jāti* than the Aryans, and whether they are one *jāti* or many *jāti*s, we can certainly not say that one was of a higher status than another. However, the Dravidians are also not of higher or lower status than the Aryans. In the same way that the Chinese, the Japanese, and so on can exist alongside the Aryans without being their superiors or inferiors, so also could the Dravidians.

It was after the Aryans came that differences among the *jāti*s of the regions and distinctions between higher and lower castes came into being. This was what Kapila was talking about when he saw a Brahmin and said, "You are a Cho̱la[431] in the land of the four *jāti*s". It was the Aryans who established the four jātis of *brāḥmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*. There were originally no *jāti* divisions among them. The names of today's *jāti*s originally designated occupations. However, because these occupations gradually came to determine the wages one received, the various occupational groups became various social classes. Brahmin[432], Kṣatriya, and Vaiśya are the three Aryan *jāti*s: the "Śūdra" *jāti* is a single general name for all those outside of those Aryans.

All of the j*āti*s in the world naturally think of the *jāti*s they've conquered as inferiors. For this no further evidence is necessary. It is enough to point out that Tamilians are *mlecchas* relative to the Aryans, including the illustrious Brahmins. Let us look at how the Aryan word "*mleccha*" is defined in glossaries and other ancient texts. The Aryans were naturally disposed to think of outsider *jāti*s as inferiors in the same way. When those among them who had made journeys to distant nations first saw new *jāti*s, these *jāti*s appeared differently in

the travelers' imaginations: one *jāti* as *asura*s, another *jāti* as as *rakṣasa*s, others as celestials[433], and they gave many names to many *jāti*s in this way. Afterwards, in Aryan usage it became the custom to refer to these *jāti*s using these *jāti* names. In this way, when the nations of the *jāti*s that acquired the names of *asura*[434] and so on were colonized by Aryans- whether by conquest, peaceful means, or both- all the *jāti*s that did not join with the Aryans are burdened with the disgraceful name of *śūdra*. Ignorant people from these *jāti*s also came to call themselves *śūdra*s. Since the number of ignorant people in any nation at any time period is far greater than the number of people who have become aware, after the Aryans assigned these names they became conventions within the jātis themselves. Many know that in Tirunelveli District, in villages where Christians are the majority and Hindus are a minority, if a Hindu inhabitant asks someone, "Are you a Christian", if someone is not a Christian it is customary for them to answer, "Lord, I am unworthy!" The reason that Hindus in villages like this call themselves by the term "unworthy", which Christians gave them, is certainly that they are unaware of the meaning of the word. In present-day disciplines like astronomy, and in the agriculture business, and among butter-churners and other craftspeople, and in military tactics, and in government work, the successful are those who have learned to use various modern power sources like steam power and electricity whenever possible, and those without these things bow their heads and marvel at powerful holy men among the Europeans, and without knowing the greatness of their religion, which is imbued with the highest knowledge, the most disgraced[435] class accepts the term "unworthy" for themselves relative to the Europeans. Likewise, in the places Aryans enveloped and inhabited, other jātis came to accept the label of *śūdra* relative to the Aryans. The number of Christians in various places in India is only a small number. However, wherever they go,

they break into the mind, and there will come a time when all Hindus in India will call themselves “unworthy”.

Thus, per the discussion above, we have seen that, other than the distinctions of the tiṇais, there were no divisions among the jātis of the ancient Dravidians. Not a single example of the differentiation of the status of jātis can be found in ancient texts. I have pointed out above that when Aryans entered and settled in South India, the “Dravidians”, who were various peoples who lived alongside each other in kinship, did not fit into any of the four major categories attached to Aryan jāti[436], and they were burdened with the broad name *śūdra* alone as if they were Aryans without either knowing or deserving it. It is now appropriate to attend to the decay and destruction of the Dravidians within the broad *jāti* system after the Aryans became established in South India.

Chapter 3: *Jāti* in South India in the Time After the Ramāyaṇa

In this section, part I will discuss the Aryans, and part II will discuss the Dravidians.

I. <u>The Aryan situation</u>

Once Aryans entered South India, they brought with them *jāti* rank, which subsequently entered and became diffused throughout South India. After coming to South India, they mixed with Dravidians there, and the originally pure state of the Aryans gradually became very muddled. This becomes clear to those who examine the differences in form between the

Aryans of the Northern nation and the Aryans of the Southern nation. The Rāmāyaṇa says that Rāma and other Aryans dined with Vibhīṣana[437] and other Dravidians in a sage's *āśrama*. When, later on, the Aryans began to come southward, they dined together again. Although they are not Aryans, even today Northern Brahmins in Bombay and so on eat with people of *jāti*s that eat the flesh of cattle. In ancient times, when the land they inhabited was no longer sufficient, a few Aryans came and settled in the South, and most of them were male. The fact that today the great majority of the overall number of people who migrate from one country to another are male rather than female makes clear that this was also the case in previous times. Since there were not enough women of their jāti, it became customary for these Aryans to marry Dravidian women. Following this custom, the *Manudharmaśāstra*[438] says that Brahmins may also marry women from the other three jātis. The number of Aryans increased as Aryans married Dravidian women in this way and had offspring, and as bit by bit members of their race[439] from the North came and settled down. When the Aryan population increased and accumulated, Aryans gradually stopped marrying the Dravidians' women.

I said before that the Aryans did not conquer the South with their own army, but rather that in the battles that occurred Dravidian kingdoms aided one side or the other. Aryans stayed in the kingdoms that aided them and were victorious. Because they aided them in this way and were dear to them, the other people of these kingdoms received esteem and support and lived in prestige. This becomes clear when we see that Droṇa is the archery teacher of the Pandavas and Duryodhana among others, and that he and Kṛpa are the generals who lead the army of Duryodhana. By serving as the kings' teacher in this way, they received the kings'

respect, and in this way some others also acquired respect, and became worthy of reverence from all the people. After becoming teachers in the worldly tasks important for war, they gradually became prominent gurus of Vedic practice. Before the Aryans came to the nation of the South, the Dravidians had been members of the Saiva religion. The Saiva religion was first established here in very ancient times. However, there are some minor differences between the Saivism of that time and the Saivism of today. When Aryan *purohit*s[440] were placed in charge, they discarded whatever of the ancient Saivism it pleased them to discard, and they mixed the great share of things they didn't discard into their own religion, and they ornamented the stories of the Purāṇas to instruct the Dravidian peoples in accordance with this. After inculcating this, *purohit*s sought to make *purohit* work their primary livelihood, and went to settle in many places all across the Dravidian land. Through their work as priests, both their Aryan religion and the theory of *jāti* spread. By accepting these doctrines, the Dravidian people became separated into many *jāti*s.

I mentioned a little earlier that the Aryans turned the Dravidians into Aryans. Members of other *jāti*s had become Brahmins only a short time before. We still cannot say that this had completely stopped at this point. Historical scholars have established the fact that the Vaiṣṇava theologian Rāmānuja and his pupils received initiation, and people of many *jāti*s who embraced his doctrine became Brahmins. The people of the Sāttaṉi *jāti* were appointed as servants, and while in the process of becoming Brahmins, whether because of the weakening of the unity of the above mentioned scholars or some other reason, they were stopped, like Triśaṅku was stopped on his way to the realm of the gods.[441] In a theater, actors put on costumes behind the curtain, and if they were to put on too little of this costume and

come out just wearing a jasmine flower[442], there would be an uproar in the theater and the play would stop; likewise, when the time they were rejected came to pass[443], the Sāttāṉis became seen as incomplete[444] Brahmins. This Aiyar[445] *jāti* title is like wearing their clothes, and many more examples like this can be found by those who look. Dr. Parnell says that it is clear based on evidence from stone inscriptions that in the south of the Kannada district those who are Brahmins today were of different castes five hundred years ago. “In the northern regions of the land there are castes that have newly become Brahmin; before our own eyes the leader and members of another caste became the leader and members of an Aryan (Rajputra) caste,” writes the esteemed Dr. Hunter. In villages all over our South India, craftspeople have established the custom that their castes are higher than the Brahmins’, and a hundred thousand Saurashtrans[446] have claimed to be Brahmins and Shanars, Kṣatriyas in these modern times.

Now that I’ve mentioned the differences between the Aryans in the North and the Aryans in the South, I will conclude my discussion on the standing of the Aryans. The Aryans of the North marshaled armies of their own jāti and conquered the North. The Aryans in the South conquered the South by aligning with one group of the Dravidians’ armies to fight the other group. The Northern Aryans punished, repressed, and enslaved the first inhabitants of the land. The Southern Aryans subdued the ancient people of the land through cleverness of wit. Although both lineages reduced the non-Aryans to slaves by giving them the name ‘*śūdra*’, the Northern Aryans ignominiously and cruelly debased the *śūdra*s, whereas the Southern Aryans did not. The Northerners, who had few marriages and children with women from other *jāti*s, for the most part remained unblended. The Southerners, through an abundance of

mixture with other *jāti*s, became greatly hybridized. The former have as mother tongues languages that decayed from Sanskrit. The latter have as mother tongues languages like Tamil and Telugu that do not have this family connection to Sanskrit. The former have relatively few religious rituals. The latter have a great many religious rituals. Although in the Vedic period all Aryans ate the flesh of cattle, of the former some groups are still meat-eaters, while of the latter no group will consume meat except by way of the *yajña* sacrifice. In the North, since there were many Brahmins, they were not concerned with other castes' regard for their ancient custom, and did not abandon it. In the South, however, because the number of Brahmins was low, they feared the scorn of the people of other *jāti*s, and abandoned the practice of eating meat. Nonetheless, "a habit is a creeper vine"[447]. Therefore, although they gave up the practice of meat-eating peacefully, by the fault of high-caste Dravidians who have misunderstood[448] the word "*yājña*" there have come to be meat-eaters in each [Dravidian] nation. Likewise, because of the North's large population of Muhammedans[449], who are permitted by their Veda, the Qur'ān, to eat the meat of cattle, other Northerners living among Muhammedans also came to eat this meat. In the South, since the population of Muhammedans is low, other castes feared becoming associated with Paraiyars and other beef-eating castes, and because of this fear the custom was never initiated.

II. The Dravidian Situation

As I have stated above, before the Aryans came there was no caste difference among the Dravidians. Besides the geographic[450] divisions of *kuṟavar*, *iḍaiyar*, *maṟavar*, *uḻavar*, and

paravar, they were also distinguished by profession: they were divided into carpenters, clothes washers, barbers, and so on. In all nations there are classes of gurus, warriors, merchants, farmers, many types of tradespeople, attendants, and laborers; this was also the case in South India. When they accepted Aryan custom, as Adi Saiva Brahmins and the various other *jāti*s, their many other divisions also were assigned names. When names were given out in this way, there came to be many divisions not included among the four *jāti*s- one might estimate as many as four-thousand.

European missionaries[451] became famous for insisting that those who accepted the gospel they brought to India would become free from the cruelty of caste discrimination. Through this attempt to begin eradicating caste, the *jāti* divisions that previously existed become two religions. Through the Christian religion, the people of *jāti*s like Brahmin, Vellala, Maravar, and so on became Hindu Brahmins and Christian Brahmins, Hindu Vellalas and Christian Vellalas, and so forth, so that the number of *jāti*s that existed previously has now been doubled.

Given the above, it is not necessary to explain at length how gurus of the Adi Saiva Brahmin rank established Dravidian Brahmins as their inferiors. By their *jāti*, they were no greater or lesser than the Brahmins. Although neither of the groups was higher or lower than the other by *jāti*, nor were higher or lower than each other in any other way, I will say that some important *jāti*s existed in *bhedābheda*[452] among the others. You can certainly guess which of the former were higher and which were lower. Consider as evidence that, "The five types of sacrifice and the six types of labor and the sixteen rites of initiation[453] and *snānuṣṭāṉa*, *jepa*,

tapa, *homa*, and *devatāpūja* and so forth, and permanent and seasonal duties[454] (differentiated into various categories) are for the most part shared by the Aryans and the Brahmins."[455] In Vedic times, Aryan Brahmins, along with eating meat, also drank intoxicants in the *somapāna* ritual. In the North, members of some groups among them still eat meat. One can hear it said coyly[456] that they occasionally also conduct a wicked ritual called the *paunḍarīka*[457] sacrifice. The Ādi Saiva Brahmins, however, did not start drinking liquor and eating meat from the day they first appeared. They did not know how to conduct any acts as indecent as the *paunḍarīka* ritual. It is clear that this became one of the types of *pūja* conducted within the inner sanctuaries[458] in temples when Aryan Brahmins first came in contact with these Ādi Saiva Brahmins and labeled them a lower *jāti*. In that time Ādi Saiva Brahmins became a *jāti* higher than other Dravidian *jāti*s, and accordingly it can be seen in today's time that within the same caste the members of one group are of higher status than the other. In Chengalpattu[459] District, a few Saiva Vellalas were said to be religious mendicants. In southern districts, people of this group go by the name of Toṇḍaimaṇḍala Mudaliars[460], and in Chengalpattu the hair-tying Vellalas[461]- that is, those Saiva Vellalas for whom it is traditional to tie up their hair- have become castes[462] of temple servants and *pūja*-conducting ascetics. These ascetics do not eat food cooked by the nobles of these hair-tying *jātis*, nor eat food in these nobles' homes. A few of the Saiva Vellalas took on[463] the work of temple servants, and embraced[464] the teachings[465] pertinent to the tasks they conducted at *pūja*s, and so on, and gradually because of these teachings they came to stop eating among other Saivas of their community[466], and so forth. Likewise, because of the ritual duties like *ārcana* that they took on, Ādi Saiva Brahmins considered themselves possessors of special knowledge among the Dravidians and in the course of time became a higher jāti. There are

Saiva Vellala mendicants called *oduvār*s[467]. Ādi Saiva Brahmins in southern districts are called "Pattars"[468], and in northern districts are called "gurus". There are many similarities between these two types of guru, such as their initiation[469] and donning of the sacred thread. But did Saiva gurus really become Adi Saiva Brahmins? Unlike in Chengalpattu District, in southern districts Saiva Vellala mendicants have not abandoned the practice of eating in other Saiva Vellala homes. Although one jāti, in South India one group is considered lower than the other. In Tirunelveli District and Madurai District, they are considered lower than Shanars, Maravars, and Idaiyars. Vellalas may go as far into temples there as Maravars, Idaiyars, and various other *jāti*s.[470] Shanars are not permitted to go as far. However, in northern districts Shanars are not considered not considered lower than these jātis. Like other castes, they go into temples and take *swami darśanam*.[471] If a Shanar from a southern district goes to a northern district, in temples there they will have no difficulty conducting *swami darśanam*. Shanars of the northern district, as people of a *jāti* no lower than the aforementioned Maravars and Idaiyars, eat and drink among these castes. This can also be observed in places such as Salem District, Tiruchenkodu Taluk[472], and Pudupalayam[473]. In southern districts, the conduct appropriate for Maravars, Idaiyars, and other such *jāti*s did not become lower than that of the Shanars. Higher castes' conduct requires abstaining from eating meat and marrying widows. I will not comment here about whether these customs are good or bad. This is not the place to deliberate on this. It is not necessary for my discussion of the topic at hand to consider why these customs are still accepted in the present day in India as part of the teachings of *jāti,* and so I will here simply explain these two customs. The Shanars who adopted higher-caste customs such as abstaining from drinking liquor, marrying widows, and so forth acquired an extremely distinguished position. Their attempt is not

surprising. Under the British Raj, which has turned less powerful *jāti*s with characteristics like this into powerful jātis, it is natural they would become higher in position. In little time, both the wealth and education of the people within this *jāti* increased. Shanars like them in northern districts, seeing that they were low in rank according to the practice of other *jāti*s in their districts, became bitter and attempted to better their jāti position. In previous times, some among the Dravidian *jāti* became distinguished in education, wisdom, and morals, and became elevated over other groups similar to them. In this way, we cannot deny with any certainty that these people attained a higher status over the course of time. It also should not be cause for surprise that in little time Brahmins became their superiors. They were able to do so because of the custom by which a lower *jāti* was considered akin to the women of a higher *jāti*. For some reason or another, if we compare the number of male children to the number of female children in each *jāti*, the number of Brahmin girls is far higher than the number of Shanar girls. In the aforementioned way, it was inevitable that the Shanars of the southern districts became fixed on improving their position, and it is fitting that they carried out this attempt with the help of the scholars of other *jāti*s, who did not even object. The clever among the Shanars are those who, keeping in mind the saying that, "Even if you try constantly, things will not happen unless it is the day they are meant to happen", are constantly committed to this attempt. It is clear from books and other such sources that declare, "The wind with the power of the Shan Kṣatriyas… is servant to the Brahmin," that scholars opposed to this attempt became the more powerful of the two groups. Since higher *jāti*s wanted to prevent Shanars from approaching their status, Shanars, indignant, have granted themselves the title of Kshatriya. If this hidden truth were known, so-called high *jāti*s

would declare themselves superiors to the Shanars and demand they act accordingly. If ten heard this, it seems that at least eight would do this.

Alas[474]! What can be said for their ignorance? They call themselves Vellalas, Maravars, Idaiyars, and other such groups of Dravidians and get into fights saying, "We're a higher jāti", "No, we're a higher jāti", without knowing that Brahmins established caste difference, and they take on the name of Kshatriya when in truth, regardless of who among them is higher and who is lower, their lineages are low in prestige, and Brahmins have become superiors to all of them, and likewise, those who constitute the broader Dravidian people in society- Vellalas, Maravars, Idaiyars, and so on- have become inferior. Is there anything akin to this anywhere at any point in time? Besides, their ignorant attempt is like removing an arrow from oneself, feeling the pain from the arrow, and shooting another one like it to inflict the same wound. Shanars themselves are no lower than Vellalas, Maravars, Idaiyars, and so on. Books like the books that print that Shanars are Kṣatriya in jāti or that the Kammalars[475] are Visva Kula Brahmins have no good purpose, but rather are only suitable for causing harm. So-called "*jāti*" came from the North and was established by outsiders, and it is an identity imposed on the peoples of this nation as a way to make them slaves. There is much evidence that supports this, and there is ancient historical proof of its injustice.

The difference of "higher caste" and "lower caste" is not celebrated even a little under the British Raj, which today spreads justice impartially and treats all the people in the nation as one without bias, and makes it well known that there is no place in Scripture in which God designates a *jāti* as slaves, all of which are suitable ways to end the cruelty of *jāti*. The

number of *jāti*s in the nation that call themselves leaders will increase. Among lower *jāti*s, it is not men but rather women who generally have higher educations, since education is an enterprise that does not require the great physical strength required by means of earning a livelihood like agriculture, trade, and manual labor. These women keep their bodies, clothing, and homes clean, are moral and civilized in behavior, and, constantly keeping in mind the saying that "The meek shall inherit the earth", act with patience, all of which are practices associated with "higher" caste status. This is a celebration of a kinship that they do not truly have: it is reminiscent of the story of the son of a servant who makes a great effort to say to a king, "I am not the son of a servant", and parades beating a drum around town telling the story of how he pleaded to the king. Everywhere, prostitutes give birth to children unsure whether they are related to them or not, and in some places it is customary for up to two or three lineages to be mixed together. Without high-caste conduct, it becomes clear that Shanars in this way cannot be said to be above any of the others with whom they are mixed. Whether Shanars are higher, lower, or equal to others in this aforementioned mixed-caste *jāti*, for some reason they do not agree to enter temples for *swami darśanam*!

Deep research shows that the Shanars' refusal to enter temples is not the result of the lowness of their customary caste conduct[476]. In Vedic times, eating cattle became the conduct of the upper castes, and now is it sometimes the custom of lower[477] *jāti*s; likewise, the Shanars' custom changed over time, as if unknowingly. Clever people must know to praise that which is good in custom and criticize that which is bad. The sacrifice of children on burning pyres, along with some other cruel customs, was conducted only a short time ago, and was eradicated by the Raj. A short time ago, women were not allowed to receive educations, and

it has now become customary that they do. In this way, it is appropriate that we bring a stop to the evil customs we have inherited today and accept and perpetuate the good customs. There are many good customs that we must accept today. The two points that follow are necessary to know for the sake of patriotism[478]: 1) Those who cross the sea for reasons of education, wealth, occupation, business, labor, and so forth and going to countries like England and then return see that there there are fair punishments for crimes like robbery, murder, and so on, and upon returning are stunned to see that even if one is an outcaste[479] in terms of the five great sins[480], they are honored if respected by caste. 2) Upper-class practices in all countries of all religions in the same way over the course of time become superior in the accepted moral conduct and religious customs that existed beforehand, and over time become preeminent in education, wealth, culture, and so on, and bring whichever groups they desire close to them as their servants and so on.

Chapter 4:

The Definition of *Jāti* and the *Jāti* Situation in South India

Later, we will investigate whether among the peoples of South India, the Aryans are one *jāti*, and that other *jāti*s do not mix with that *jāti*, and whether all of the many groups of Dravidians ruined by the Aryans were really of the same *jāti*. However, I have said that in order to undertake this kind of investigation, we must first ascertain what sort of thing *jāti* is. Therefore, we will now consider the definition of *jāti*. There are two types of *jāti*: 1) natural *jāti*, and 2) artificial *jāti*. An Alambadi cow[481] has a long face, long and narrow horns, and a

hanging penis, while a Kongu Nadu cow has a flat face, horns that are neither long nor narrow, and a contracted penis, and the various breeds of cattle like this are illustrations of natural *jāti*. In this way, there are many natural *jāti*s of human beings. Thick, protruding lips, a flat nose, large, puffy eyes, a gap-toothed mouth[482], and other such features are characteristic of Negroes, and slanted eyes, a flat, round face, and other such features are characteristics of the Chinese and various other natural *jāti*s. Artificial *jāti*s are *jāti*s differentiated by humans in ways other than these natural differences. However, in the way stated previously, for a long time the Aryans in South India married Dravidian women, and over many centuries they became mixed with the Dravidians to a great degree, to the point that all the natural features dividing them vanished, whether entirely or all but entirely. There are many artificial *jāti* categories among the Dravidians, such as Vellalas, Maravars, Idaiyars, Kammalars, and so on, but they all belong to the same natural jāti. Some became Brahmins, some became Vellalas, some became Maravars, some became Idaiyars, some became Kammalars, and a some became members of each of the other *jāti*s of South India, and they each adopted a particular style of cutting hair and a particular style of dress, and this happened again as *jāti*s began dividing themselves into various (sub-)*jāti*s that those well-versed in the Laws of Manu[483] would not have distinguished from each other. A short time before when we talked about the Negro and Chinese *jāti*s, it was not necessary to talk about their differences in skin color. The Negroes have black skin. The Chinese have yellow skin. The American Indians have copper-colored skin that looks like a combination of these two races' skin tones. Everyone should be able to discern that, in the same way we have stated above, these three races of humans do not each have one single way of cutting their hair, do not all wear the same clothes, and do not eat one type of food, but rather are made up of

many other *jāti*s of various sorts. Through research on physical distinctions of the above sorts, it has been established that all Dravidians are of one natural *jāti*.

Above, I said that in ancient times Aryans became known as Brahmins to the people of other *jāti*s, and that even today other *jāti*s are not of the same standing as Aryan *jāti*s. Similarly, Dravidians became divided into higher and lower *jāti*s in ancient times. This becomes clear from the example of the proverb, "Kallars, Maravars, and heavy-set Agampadiyars[484] are getting closer and closer to becoming Vellalas", and from the following examples of how today lower jātis are becoming higher *jāti*s. In many districts, there are people classified as Chettis among many castes. At first, people became Chettis through their work as traders[485]. Later, some of them claimed that they were not appropriately classified as part of their *jāti*s and were in fact of a *jāti* superior to them, and in this way over the course of time they were granted rights. In Tirunelveli District, there are many groups of Chettis. They are generally accepted as upper-*jāti* Chettis without ever claiming to be so themselves. Shanars have issued petitions[486] claiming that they should be included in this group. The proximity between these two groups is demonstrated by the fact that Shanar women once wore exactly the same dress and jewelry, sometimes including rings, as Chetti women, and a small group still does, as can be seen from the similarity of older Chetti women's dress to Shanars' dress. These groups of Chettis perform ritual and practical duties at special occasions like weddings, and elders said that Shanars performed all or almost all of these same duties in the past. These former ways of dressing and so on are some of the many examples that show how a *jāti* can change over a short period of time. Among the Mudaliyar Vellalas of Tondaimandalam, it was once customary for men to pierce an ear. This can seen in a carving of a high-ranking Mudaliyar at

the entrance to the Thousand-Arm Temple[487] in Madurai, as well as in other ancient engravings. There are some people who have remembered seeing their grandfathers with pierced ears only a short time ago. Now before our eyes most of the Mudaliyars and the Vellala women among them[488], most noticeably those living south of Madurai, have stopped piercing their ears, and only a few have their ears pierced. It has become clear that like Tondaimandala Vellalars, men from other Dravidian groups also originally had the practice of piercing their ears. The reason that the aforementioned group of Chettis originally became considered to be different from those of other places was not because of some blow to their caste status. Rather, I have established that those who want to see that *jāti*s truly can go from lower to higher regardless of their previous jāti status need only look to the Chettis in Ottappidaram Taluk. The situation may be the same in other taluks in Tirunelveli District or other districts. In Coimbatore District, there is a tier of Pallar considered higher than others[489]. Among Shanars there is this same tier, and I have said that like Shanars, within Vellalas and other castes there is a group of traders called Chettis. One could conjecture that it's possible for the lowest of the Shanars over the course of time to become higher Shanars, then Chettis, then Vellala Chettis, then Vellalas[490], then Saiva gurus, then finally Adi Saiva gurus, since many of lower jātis who joined Rāmāṉuja's religion[491] became Brahmins. When some from the Idaiyars, Paraiyars[492], and other such jātis attained a superior position, whether because of their occupation or for some other reason, they became customarily recognized by many as Vellalas. Now, the absolute highest jāti of Brahmin has become those with the title of Rayar (Rayar is a title used in Abbasid accounts), which is a traditional title by which someone from an intermediate jāti can become a king. The kings of the great

Cheras, Cholas, and Pandiyas were generally Vellalas, as is made clear by ancient stone inscriptions[493] and copper engravings[494].

Thus far, I have still only been able to say little of what must be said about *jāti* difference. The division of *jāti*s may have begun in the final part of the Vedic period. However, there is no basis in the Vedas for *jāti* as it is established now.

The great, world-renowned European scholar Max Müller conducted a brilliant scholarly study of all the Sanskrit literature of the time in order to explain how *jāti* became prominent in the Vedas as a whole, and wrote the following:

> There is not a shred of evidence of any kind in the Vedas for many *jāti* titles of various types. There is no rule dictating that the people of these various classes live in disunity or in hostility towards each other. There is no rule preventing people of different *jāti*s from uniting in marriage. There is no rule dictating that children born of any type of union are lower by birth. There is also no rule establishing any group as suitable for conducting worship or relegating any groups of humans or animals to a lower status.

Dr. G. Bhandarkar, a great professor of Sanskrit, summarized his 1894 speech in Chennai[495] to a crowd convened to discuss the matter of reforming social teachings by saying about jāti and other social teachings that,

> …to know their history well, it is good to start by paying systematic attention to the point in ancient history at which these things began appearing in Sanskrit-language texts. These texts include the ritual portion of the Vedas[496]; then next the Brahmanas, Upanisads, and Aranyakas; then the itihasas, which are the Mahabharata and the Rāmāyana; and finally the Dharma Shastras and Puranas; and by examining the full range of these texts I did not come to the conclusion that over the course of time these things [i.e, *jāti*, etc.] stayed the same, and, contrary to the pandits who either said that no changes occurred over time or, aware of these changes, said that they were of no importance, historical and regional context must be taken into account in detail. In

> early antiquity, *jāti* hierarchy did not exist. It appears to have been first established at the end of the Vedic period. Beginning then, humans and other living beings were grouped according to different natures, and thereby hierarchy emerged. It is natural for fathers to want to demand that their sons follow in their footsteps and adopt the ways of making a living that they themselves have taken on. This desire did not first emerge because of *jāti*. In the ancient portions of the Vedas, the word "Brāhmaṇa" refers to hymns praising gods. Some people became particularly distinguished for composing this type of hymn. Through the repetition of these songs, both the singers and any kings for whom they performed came to believe that the singers were blessed with the same glories as the gods. When these singers came to resemble the gods they venerated, everyone wanted to become one of these singers. It became a way to make money. Therefore, the singers made their ancestors and descendants part of the same group. In this way, over the course of time a small elite assumed the occupation of composing these songs and singing them at times of worship. These singers and their families became known as a special *jāti* called Brahmins. In this same way, kings, generals, soldiers, and so on, along with their descendants, became another special Kshatriya *jāti* distinguished by their preeminence in giving offerings. Farmers became Vaisyas. When the Aryans left Punjab and spread out across North India, some of the ancient inhabitants with whom they mixed became the Sudra *jāti*. In this way there were four jātis. However, at the beginning there were no rules about these *jāti*s that were as cruel as those that emerge in later times. In the time of the Vedas and the time of the Upanishads and even in the subsequent time of the Itihasas, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaisyas all ate with each other. Who knew that Durvāsa[497] ate with Draupadi[498]? It was normal for men of upper varnas to marry women of lower *varna*s. It was not customary for men of lower castes[499] to marry women of upper castes. Some of the agents of gods[500] in the Vedas and Gita were not Brahmin. Is it really necessary to say what *jāti* has become now? Let us just say that four *jāti*s have now become four thousand.

As stated above, the source of modern *jāti* as it works today is Aryan texts such as the *Manusmṛti*[501], the *Purāṇa*s, and subsequent texts. Although *jāti* is mentioned in a few places in prior texts, *jāti* is discussed in a way similar to the *jāti*s of occupation found in other nations, and not in a way that leads to the *jāti* now found only in India. Today's *jāti* customs were established subsequently to the *Manusmṛti* and the *Purāṇa*s. These texts list the various classes of women within each *jāti* one by one, but do not prohibit marrying women of "low *jāti*s". Today, even if a Brahmin wants to marry a Vellala woman, to him Vellalas are musicians[502]. Those of a "low" *jāti* who do consent to marry do so without cooking the food

given by higher *jāti*s (as wedding gifts, etc.). “Low” *jāti*s never cook for “high" *jāti*s. Brahmins will also eat food cooked by the “Singus”, “Virasaivas”, and other such *jāti*s- they will only eat food prepared by *jāti*s related to theirs.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I have said that the source of the modern institution of *jāti* is the *Manusmṛti* and the *Purāṇa*s. These texts’ blessings of Brahmins were issued by Brahmins themselves. The teachings of *jāti* themselves were not first issued during the period when these texts were composed; rather, the *jāti* teachings in these texts establish by rule the advantaged position of Brahmins. The following laws illustrate the inconsistency of these later rules with the customs established at some time in the ancient past:

> For Brahmins, the death penalty is the shaving of the head. For other varṇas, the penalty is death. *Manusmṛti*, Chapter XI, 379.

> For the killing of a *śūdra*, a Brahmin should be punished as if they had killed an elephant, a squirrel, a quail, a toad, a dog, a lizard, an owl, or a crow. *Manu.*, Chapter IX, 132.

> In the same way that fire is holy[503] whether it is used for sacred or worldly purposes, a Brahmin is holy whether he is a sage or a fool. *Manu.*, Chapter VI, 317.

> Even if he has committed evil acts, a Brahmin is worthy of numerous blessings in times of both joy and sorrow; he is holy.[504] *Manu.*, Chapter VII, 318-319.

Against the custom of karma, a Brahmin may make decisions on behalf of a king. Śūdras may never do this. *Manu.* Chapter VIII, 20.

Whether or not a *śūdra* has been given a price and bought as a slave, his labor may be requisitioned by a Brahmin in need. This is because God[505] created *śūdra*s for the sole purpose of serving Brahmins. *Manu.* Chapter VIII, 413.

A Brahmin of fully concentrated mind[506] (i.e., thinking completely without sin[507]) is permitted to take hold of the property of a *śūdra*; this is because it is not of the *śūdra*'s karma[508] to have this, and therefore he should give it to his master. *Manu.* Chapter VIII, 417.

If a once-born (*śūdra*) curses a twice-born, his ploughshare[509] must be cut in half. *Manu.* Chapter VIII, 270.

One who slanders another's name or caste must have a scalding iron of ten finger-lengths driven through his mouth. *Manu.* Chapter VIII, 271.

If one is haughty and tries to teach his teacher about his duties, it is the king's duty to pour boiling oil into the offender's ears and mouth. *Manu.* Chapter VIII, 272.

One who raises a hand or a weapon to one of a higher caste[510] (by custom) must have their hand cut off. If he is angry with this, his leg must also be cut off. *Manu.* Chapter VIII, 280.

If one of a lower caste[511] sits in the same place as one of a higher caste, their hip must be branded with a hot brand. His buttocks may be chopped off. *Manu.* Chapter VIII, 281.

If one is haughty and spits at someone above him, the king must chop both of the offender's lips off. *Manu.* Chapter VIII, 282.

Through moral rules such as these, the Laws of Manu and other Aryan law books establish the cruel and unjust principle that the higher live above the lower, on the basis of discrimination by occupation. If we compare ideas like this, to which people of many nations and times have consented, to those found in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* and other originally Dravidian[512]

works, the differences between the Aryan theory of dharma and the rules present among the Dravidians will become obvious. It is possible that amidst those who distinguished right from wrong by reason rather than force, some idiot acharyas came to take the position that rules had fallen from heaven and should be put into effect, and that these few were able to coarsely implement the rules from the aforementioned Laws of Manu to some extent. However, it is impossible for these rules to become moral customs in this way. In the same way that the *Manusmṛti* prescribes rules for people in Hindu society on the basis of four *jāti* categories, each man among the twice-borns in this society is prescribed a code of four life-stages[513]. The stages of this code are as follows: first, one is a student[514]; then, following initiation, one becomes a householder[515]; then, one goes with one's wife into the forest and undertakes penance as a forest-dweller[516]; and after this, one must relinquish his wife and his other attachments and become a renunciant[517]. Renunciants existed in previous times without accepting a code of conduct like in today's times. In the same way, a few men of a "low *jāti*" became sages, and then became a "high *jāti*" of Brahmins.

Those who claim that *jāti* difference is just: *jāti* difference does not exist in India alone, but also in illustrious, civilized England. There, one of a noble family may take a woman from anywhere in the world as a wife. "This isn't *jāti* difference, is it?", they may say. In England, it is very rare for one of a noble family to take a wife from a farmer's family; however, if a farmer becomes a noble, he will take a wife from a noble family. A barber's son is among those who became lord chancellor, a prestigious title and office in that country. In India, however, a so-called Brahmin is always a Brahmin, and a so-called Paraiyar is always a

Paraiyar. No matter how much a Paraiyar may study or behave properly, no matter how rich he becomes, even if he becomes high king, he cannot even become a Pallan![518]

In any place where people of a lower *jāti* are debased, the population of Christians greatly increases. In the Hindu religion, Brahmins do not even allow one of a "lower *jāti*" such as a Paraiyar on the middle of the streets they walk on. Without becoming either a Christian or a Muslim, this lower-caste person is not permitted to walk in the middle of the street or eat in the same places that Brahmins eat. This is what is done to "low *jāti*" Hindus! Why do you allow yourselves to be debased as fools by our religion?

It is as if we are saying, "When you become either Christian or Muslim, then we will grant you advancement," and, "In our religion, although your lineage has been passed down through many hundreds of years, the prize you gain from our religion is not heaven. Join the Christian or Muslim faith; the moment you join, you will be allowed to enter heaven."

Among Brahmins, few rebuke the notion of *jāti* and many are of the position discussed previously. The latter sort includes Sri G. Subramania Iyer, a commentator first for the newspaper The Hindu, and now also for Swadeshamitran; Dr. Bhandarkar, administrator of a prestigious English college; and the deceased Judge Ranadeya of the Bombay High Court.

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Notes

[1] The figure popularly known as "Periyar" in contemporary Tamil Nadu was born E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, Naicker being a caste name. Later in his life, Ramasamy publicly renounced his caste name, and I have chosen to respect his choice by not using this caste name in this dissertation. This also conforms to the way that he is usually credited on contemporary publications of his works in the Tamil country.
[2] Tamil *sūya-mariyādai iyakkam*
[3] Tamil ta̲ittamil̲ iyakkam
[4] See Ramaswamy (1997)
[5] See Bate (2009)
6 See Pandian (2007)
[7] See Vaithees (2015)
[8] Cf. Trautmann, Thomas. *Aryans and British India.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997
[9] See Geetha & Rajadurai (2011
[10] The term Adi Dravida (Tamil *ādi tirāviḍa* [henceforth, "drāviḍa" for clarity and to reflect standard Tamil pronunciation]) is a common term for "Dalit" in contemporary Tamil Nadu, largely as a result of Iyothee Thass's work. *Ādi Drāviḍa* literally means "first Dravidian", a concept central to Thass's theory of ex-Paraiyar Buddhism.
[11] A principally urban Dalit jāti whose name is the origin of the English word "pariah"
[12] See Keel (2018), p. 7-18; and Trautmann (1997), p. 10-18 and 52-55
[13] Keel (2018), p. 4-16
[14] Trautmann (1997), p. 6-11 and 40-41
[15] For analysis of a representative 18th-century example of Christian genealogy, see Trautmann (1997), p. 42-45. See also Keel (2018), p. 61-63
[16] Keel (2018), p. 15
[17] Keel (2018), p. 24
[18] Keel (2018), p. 37
[19] Keel (2018), p. 16
[20] For more on Jones's presentation of his work as scientific compared to previous works on ethnic peoplehood, see Trautmann (1997), p. 41-48
[21] Trautmann (1997), p. 40
[22] Jones's language family was labeled "Indo-European" by the linguist Thomas Young in 1816. See Bryant (2001), p. 20
[23] See Trautmann (1997), 41-48, where Trautmann discusses Jones's engagement with these 18th-century sources at greater length.
[24] Bryant (2001) p. 15
[25] Trautmann (1997), 41-42
[26] For examples of this sort of engagement, see Inden (1990) and Trautmann (1997), p. 62-130
[27] See Bryant (2001), p. 30-37 for examples of theories of a European Aryan homeland
[28] For examples of Western dismissals of the possibility of ancient racial connections to South Asia, see Trautmann (1997), p. 117-130
[29] Trautmann (1997), 119

[30] Inden (1990) also describes other groups of thinkers, like Romantics, who while not Orientalists in the traditional sense sometimes argued that the fantastical, abstract character of Vedic and Indian thought represented a powerful counterpoint to Western over-reliance on reason and logic. See Inden (1990), p. 66-69
[31] Among the most important passages in question is Ṛg Veda 5.29.10. See Trautmann (1997), p. 210-212.
[32] As Edwin Bryant discusses, European scholars' readings of several key terms in these passages in the Ṛg Veda are likely flawed, and it is therefore spurious to interpret the passages as describing a dark-skinned people. See Bryant (2001), p. 59-67
[33] Annie Besant, the famous Home Rule advocate and an avid Brahmin supremacist, was an active promoter of this idea. See Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 9
[34] See Dirks (2001), p. 116-117
[35] See Trautmann (1997), p. 147 for a brief analysis of this source.
[36] See Inden (1990), p. 56-58
[37] For more on the interaction between biological science and the early sociology of race, see Greene (1959) and Haller (1971).
[38] Greene (1959), p. 424
[39] See Haller (1971), p. 122-131 for a summary of Spencer's thought on social fitness and racial survival.
[40] Inden, 51-54
[41] See Inden (1990), p. 134-137. For a more detailed analysis of Marx and Weber's engagement with race, see Rex (1980).
[42] See Bayly (1995) for an analysis of Risley's thought and the connection between caste and race in colonial British ethnography.
[43] Risley (1892), p. i-ii
[44] Risley (1891), p. 235-263
[45] Risley (1891), p. 259
[46] Risley (1891), p. 260
[47] Risley (1892), p. xxii
[48] Risley (1892), p. xxvii-xxviii
[49] Risley (1891), 239-240
[50] I.e., contemporary Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka. Possession traditions (e.g., to Mariammaṉ or other regional goddesses) and ritual mortification (e.g., devotees' suspension from hooks embedded in their backs to honor Muruganṉ [a historical more than contemporary practice], or Ayyappaṉ pilgrims' insertion of needles through their cheeks) remain salient components of many regional South Indian folk religious cultures. See Dirks (2001), p. 154-169 for an analysis of colonial reactions to the hookswinging practice in the Tamil country.
[51] i.e., *ōṭuvār*s in the Tamil country, non-Brahmin Saiva Siddhānta temple singers. See Chapter Three for a brief discussion of this tradition.
[52] Elmore (1913) p. ix
[53] See the discussion of India as a land of fantasy in Inden (1990), p. 50
[54] Elmore (1913) p. xi
[55] Elmore (1913), p. 137-139

[56] For an analysis of the foundational sociologist Émile Durkheim's thought on "primitive" races and their characteristic modes of social organization, see Fenton (1980), p. 160-169
[57] Elmore (1913), 159
[58] Keel (2018) discusses how Paul Barringer, a former president of the medical faculty at the University of Virginia, believed that the vestigial African genes of American Blacks predisposed Blacks to criminality and lack of self-control. See Keel (2018), p. 98-99
[59] Elmore (1913), p. 7
[60] For more on the impact of Caldwell's work on "Dravidian" discourse, see Pandian (2015), p. 24-26; and Ramaswamy (1997), p. 12-14 and 192-193.
[61] In *The Dravidian Proof* (2006), Thomas Trautmann writes at length about Thomas Whyte Ellis, a British civil servant and scholar who published a paper on a "Dravidian family of languages" including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam three decades before the publication of Caldwell's work. Ellis is very briefly cited in Caldwell's work, but his contributions are not widely recognized outside of Trautmann's study in either Western scholarship or Tamil writings. Since I am chiefly interested in charting the intellectual lineage that contributed to *Tamil* writings on Dravidian history, and since Ellis's work has no meaningful presence in the Tamil writings I have studied, I have elected not to discuss Ellis at greater length here.
[62] Caldwell (1876), p. 45-46
[63] Caldwell (1876), p. 49
[64] Caldwell (1876), p. 49
[65] Caldwell (1876), p. 51
[66] Caldwell (1876), p. x
[67] Caldwell (1876), p. 71
[68] Caldwell (1876), p. 72
[69] Caldwell (1876), 118
[70] Caldwell (1876), p. 118-119
[71] Caldwell (1876), p. 563
[72] Caldwell (1876), p. 566
[73] See Trautmann (1997), p. 30-32
[74] In the case of Arabic, Arabic-speaking Muslim traders from the Gulf region established communities along the southern Malabar and Coromandel coast, and developed both an Arabic script (Arwi) for the Tamil language and a literary tradition of hybrid Tamil-Arabic works. Persian words and influences appeared in these same works, although to a far lesser extent than in Muslim literature composed in North India, where the Persian language and Persian culture played a central role in imperial culture. Outside of scattered references in South Indian Muslim works, Persian's impact in South India is largely limited to its historical influence on Urdu-speaking Muslim communities in South Indian urban centers (famously in Hyderabad, for instance). See More (2004) for a detailed history of early Tamil Muslim cultural and literary identity formation.
[75] For more on the College at Fort St. George and the development of Western scholarly infrastructure in Madras, see Trautmann (2006).
[76] Keane (2007), p. 2
[77] Keane (2007), p. 6-7

[78] Also see Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 105-106 for more on Ziegenbalg and other Christian missionaries in the Tamil country.
[79] For a detailed description of Portuguese Christian missionary campaigns in India, see Frykenberg (2008), p. 119-130
[80] For more on Ziegenbalg and his career, see Frykenberg (2008), p. 146-152
[81] Ziegenbalg (1713), p. A5-A6
[82] Ziegenbalg (1713), p. i-ii
[83] Ziegenbalg (1713), p. xxi
[84] See Ziegenbalg (1713), p. 26
[85] Ziegenbalg (1713), p. 27
[86] Ziegenbalg (1713), p. 28
[87] Ziegenbalg (1713), p. 29-30
[*88*] Some of Ziegenbalg's transliterations are somewhat difficult to trace back to their Tamil originals. Given the context and the Danish pronunciation of this term, I think the most appropriate reading of this term is "Sivaliṅgam" (Śiva-liṅga[m]), and that Ziegenbalg misheard the initial 's' as a 'k'.
[89] Ziegenbalg (1713), p. 19-20
[90] Ziegenbalg (1713), p. 23-24
[91] Ziegenbalg (1713), p. 32-33
[92] Ziegenbalg (1713), p. 37
[93] Rhenius (1836), p. i-ii
[94] Rhenius (1836), p. ii
[95] Geetha and Rajadurai (2011), p. 106-7
[96] Geetha and Rajadurai (2011), p. 107
[97] The Nāyaṉars were a set of 52 poet-saints active in the 10th and 11th centuries CE. The Nāyaṉārs' devotional poetry, also found in famous compilations such as the Tēvāram, forms a core part of the Saiva Siddhānta scriptural canon.
[98] Pope (1900), p. ix
[99] Pope (1900), p. lxxi-lxxii
[100] Pope (1900), p. lxiv (footnote)
[101] Pope (1900), p. lxxiv
[102] Pope (1900), p. xxxiv-xxxv
[103] In fairness to Pope, it should be said that the Tiruvāsagam and other Saiva Siddhānta sources do emphasize Sivaṉ's capacity to save devotees through his grace (*aruḷ*), and that this framing does build on major, preexisting theological similarities between the Christian and Saiva Siddhānta traditions.
[104] Pope (1900), p. lxxiv-v
[105] Pope's mention of Northerners who became Vaishnavas is an allusion to the highly Brahmanical Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, a tradition that produced literature in both Tamil and Sanskrit.
[106] This is one of the chief arguments of V. Ravi Vaithees's monograph, *Religion, Caste, and Nation in South India* (2016).
[107] Hellman-Rajanayagam (1995), p. 118, 120
[108] Hellman-Rajanayagam (1995), p. 121-122.

[109] Hellman-Rajanayagam (1995), p. 119
[110] For a rigorous and exhaustive description of this process, see Friedhelm Hardy's *Viraha-Bhakti* (1983)
[111] Hardy (1983), p. 44-45, 127-128
[112] Hardy (1983), p. 41-43
[113] Hardy cites both the Sangam corpus and the Prabandham, a post-Sangam poetic work, as primary influences on Āl̲vār poetry. Cf. Hardy (1983), p. 121
[114] Ramanujan (1993), p. 156-161
[115] Peterson (1989), p. 36-39
[116] Peterson (1989), p. 33-35
[117] Cf. Peterson (1989), p. 33-35 and Ramanujan (1993), p. 111-112
[118] Peterson (1989), p. 34-35
[119] Ramanujan (1993), p. 130-131
[120] See Ramanujan (1993), p. 130-131, where he cites a poem by Nāyaṉār poet-saint Māṇikkavāsagar and compares it to words by the Tamil epic poet Kambaṉ and the Kannada bhakti poet-saint Basavaṇṇa. Ramanujan argues that this turn to vernacular language is an India-wide trend that began in the 6th century CE.
[121] E.g., poems VII.51.10 by Sundarar and I.11.4 by Sambandhar. See Peterson, p. 40-41
[122] Tēvāram VI.301.1; see Peterson (1989), p. 40
[123] In the Brahmanical tradition, texts such as the Vedas and Upaniṣads are deemed *śruti,* "heard", and are understood as direct linguistic expressions of divine realities. Purportedly human-authored texts, in contrast, are called *smṛti*, "remembered".
[124] See Carman & Narayanan (1989) for a detailed treatment of this dynamic in Śrīvaiṣṇava theological literature.
[125] Peterson (1989), p. 58
[126] Appadurai (1977), p. 47-48
[127] Ramaswamy (1998), p. 67
[128] Ramaswamy (1998), p. 69
[129] Ramaswamy (1998), p. 69
[130] Ramaswamy (1998), p. 71
[131] Ramaswamy (1998), p. 73-74
[132] Ramaswamy (1998), p. 75
[133] Ramaswamy (1998) p. 78-79
[134] Ramaswamy (1998), p. 75-76
[135] Ramaswamy (1998), p. 67
[136] Peterson (1989), p. 17
[137] Peterson (1989), p. 17, 52-53
[138] Peterson (1989), p. 206
[139] Peterson (1989), p. 54
[140] Peterson (1989), p. 59-67
[141] Examples include the Hindu Arya Samaj and the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College founded by Syed Ahmed Khan.
[142] Bate (2021), p. 45-46
[143] Bate (2021), p. 46

[144] Bate (2021), p. 53
[145] Bate (2021), p. 45
[146] I once had a conversation in Tamil Nadu with a mother and her grade school-aged child about Navalar, and this was the major take away.
[147] Bate (2021), p. 53
[148] Vaithees (2015) p. 25-26
[149] Vaithees (2015) p. 22
[150] Vaithees (2015) p. 21
[151] Vaithees (2015) p. 22
[152] Vaithees (2015), p. 21
[153] *Aruṭpa* is a term referring to the poetic canon of the Nāyaṉārs, which mainline Saiva Siddhānta considers to be divinely revealed. Followers of Arumuga Navalar slandered Ramalinga Swamigal's songs as "*Maruṭpa*", a punny term that combines *aruṭpa* with *maṟukkam* ("confusion"), indicating that Swamigal's aspirations to divine revelation were ludicrous. See Vaithees (2015), p. 214, footnote
[154] Vaithees (2015), p. 40-41
[155] For examples and analysis of these treatises, see Vaithees (2015), 45-46
[156] Vaithees (2015), p. 52-53
[157] Vaithees (2015), p. 52
[158] Pandian (2015), p. 41-59
[159] See Nallaswamy Pillai (1911), publisher's note.
[160] Nallaswamy Pillai (1911), p. 1-4
[161] Nallaswamy Pillai (1911), p. 14
[162] See Vaithees (20150, p. 25-26 for more on conservatives within the Neo-Saiva community
[163] Tamil *podum* (general, public, external) + *-eṉṟu*, a grammatical particle marking quotations or indirect speech.
[164] Nallaswamy Pillai (1911), p. 16
[165] Although Nallaswamy Pillai's "The House of God" does not engage extensively with Vaishnavism outside of quoting the Bhagavad Gītā, Vaithees notes that Vaishnavism was one of the chief adversaries described in early works by Somasundara Nayakar and other Neo-Saiva theologians. See Vaithees (2015), p. 46-50
[166] Nallaswamy Pillai (1911), p. 17
[167] Nallaswamy Pillai (1895), p. i
[168] Nallaswamy Pillai (1895), p. x
[169] Nallaswamy Pillai (1895), p. vii-viii
[170] Nallaswamy Pillai, viii-ix
[171] J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai. "Ancient Tamil Civilization" *Siddhanta Deepika,* Vol. II. Cited in "Critical Review", p. 6
[172] K. Nambi Arooran (1980), p. 67-69
[173] J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai. "Ancient Tamil Civilization" *Siddhanta Deepika,* Vol. II. Cited in "Critical Review", 6-7
[174] J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai. "Ancient Tamil Civilization" *Siddhanta Deepika,* Vol. II. Cited in 'Critical Review", 7

[175] Not all Tamil authors necessarily assumed that Dravidians had always resided in South India. Some followed Caldwell in suggesting that the Dravidians had migrated into South India from the Near East. Regardless of where these scholars place the Dravidians' ancient homeland, the Tamil people's history in South India is the preeminent focus of this scholarship.
[176] Venkatachalapathy (2007), p. 100
[177] Venkatachalapathy (2007), p. 92-93
[178] In *Tamil: A Biography*, David Shulman has argued that even the earliest phases of Tamil literary history show stylistic and conceptual influences from the Sanskritic tradition. Even if these influences are real, Sangam-era literature and medieval Tamil literature have radically different relationships with the Sanskritic, Brahmanical tradition.
[179] Venkatachalapathy (2007), p. 102
[180] For more detailed discussions of the impact of printing infrastructure on Tamil print culture, see Trautmann (2006) and More (2004).
[181] Venkatachalapathy (2007), p. 103
[182] Ramaswamy (1997), p. 46-47
[183] See Ramaswamy (1997), p. 22-78
[184] See Ramaswamy (1997), p. 22-36
[185] See Ramaswamy (1997), p. 37-46
[186] For more on Brahmins and Sanskrit education, see Pandian (2015), p. 77-83.
[187] For more on Bharati's relationship with Sanskrit and Brahmanical caste, see Arooran (1984), p. 59-63. For more on Bharati's approach to Indian nationalism, see Ramaswamy (1997), p. 46-58
[188] Pandian (2015), p. 77. Also cf. Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 1-5
[189] Pandian (2015), p. 77
[190] Pandian (2015), p. 56
[191] Pandian (2015), p. 70-71
[192] Pandian (2015), p. 79
[193] Cf. Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 1-9, and Arooran (1984), p. 57-58
[194] Pandian (2015), p. 1-10
[195] Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 1-40
[196] For a pithy summary of caste dynamics and caste subalterity in the precolonial Tamil country, see Aloysius (2015), p. 34-54
[197] Irschick (1969), p. 14
[198] For a thorough discussion of this process in the colonial administration of Madras Presidency, cf. Rupa Viswanath's *The Pariah Problem* (2014).
[199] Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 45-51
[200] *The Non-Brahmin Manifesto*, printed in Irschick (1969), p. 363-364
[201] *The Non-Brahmin Manifesto*, printed in Irschick (1969), p. 364
[202] Lee (2020), p. 11
[203] See Lee (2020), p. 13-15
[204] For representative examples of Baker and Washbrook's work on Madras Presidency and Tamil South India, see Baker and Washbrook's *South India: Political Institutions and*

Political Change 1880-1940 (1975) and Baker's *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937* (1976)

[205] See Pandian, p. 8-9; Geetha & Rajadurai, p. xiv; and Vaithees, p. 5-8 for three separate criticisms of the "Cambridge School" and the analytical shortcomings of its materialist approach.

[206] Arooran (1984), p. 129

[207] Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 1-20

[208] See Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 45-49

[209] Arooran (1984), p. 125-134

[210] Lee (2020), p. 17.

[211] Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 193

[212] See Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 187-198

[213] Aloysius, p. 69; Arooran, p. 42-43

[214] For instance, J.M. Nallasvami Pillai's English-language *Studies in Saiva Siddhānta* (1911), excerpted last chapter, prints a number of phrases in un-transliterated Tamil throughout the volume.

[215] Although the caste identity of these authors does not always come up explicitly in their pieces, the authors' surnames generally flag their castes. For instance, "Pillai" is a Vellala surname, while "Aiyar" is a Tamil Brahmin surname, as are all Tamil surnames ending with "-achariyar" (Sk. *ācārya*).

[216] D. Savariroyan, Tamilian Antiquary 1.1, p. 11

[217] *Hind Swaraj* (1910), p. 47-48

[218] *Hind Swaraj* (1910), p. 48-49

[219] *Hind Swaraj* (1910), p. 105

[220] *Hind Swaraj* (1910), p. 105

[221] Savariroyan, 12

[222] Savariroyan, p. 16

[223] Bryant, p. 59-67

[224] Thamby Pillai, p. 35-36

[225] Thamby Pillai, 37

[226] For more on the history of the association of whiteness, beauty, and the Caucasus Mountains, see chapters 4-7 of Nell Painter's *The History of White People* (2010).

[227] Thamby Pillai, 39

[228] See Sumathi Ramaswamy's *The Lost Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories* (2004) for a full-length treatment of this Tamil myth and its convergence with Western thought on a now-submerged continent of Lemuria somewhere in the Indian Ocean.

[229] An English-language version of Chapter One of the essay appears in Volume 1, No. 7 of *The Tamilian Antiquary* as "Valmiki Ramayana and South Indian Sociology and South Indian Castes at the Time of the Ramayana". I have attached my own full, annotated translation of "Critical Review" as an appendix to this dissertation.

[230] Because of the strange hybrid authorship of this piece (are these Subramania Mudaliar's ideas, or P. Sundaram Pillai's?), I have tried in this chapter to speak about the essay impersonally rather than attribute it to one or both of the figures credited for its content.

[231] Cf. *TA* 1.2, p. 6
[232] In the introduction to "Critical Review", Nallasvami Pillai writes,

> It may not be well-known that the Professor held some strong views on these questions, but he was lost to Southern India before he gave full expression to his views in print and from the platform. My acquaintance with the Professor was alas! only short, but we carried on a brisk correspondence in the short time. Just before his death, it was his intention to go to Ooty and stay there a couple months, and he intended to see our people in different towns, and speak to them on some of these topics. (p. 1)

[233] For instance, the Dravidar Kazhagam (see Chapter 5) has reprinted speeches on Dravidian Tamil history by T.M. Nair and other figures, and continues to sell them at the Dravidar Kazhagam bookstore in Chennai.
[234] See "Critical Review", p. 13
[235] *Asura* is a common Sanskrit and Hindu term for "demon", as well as the term most commonly used to describe King Rāvaṇa and his subjects in the Ramayana.
[236] The term *jāti* describes a lived version of "caste" in contemporary South Asian society, in contrast to the philosophical system of *varṇāśramadharma* found in Brahmanical texts. There are thousands of *jātis* found across South Asia, and *jāti* identities not only index a *jāti* community's social rank, but also the language, ethnic homeland, hereditary occupation, ritual purity status, and communal history of a given community.
[237] This bifurcation of Brahmin and non-Brahmin power obscures the important differences in status between caste non-Brahmin communities and Dalits. We will discuss this gap in more detail in Chapter 5.
[238] The term "itihāsa" is a contraction of the Sanskrit phrase "*iti hā āsa"* ("it was this way")
[239] "Critical Review", p. 1
[240] "Critical Review", p. 2, footnote
[241] "Critical Review", p. 3
[242] "Critical Review", p. 4
[243] "Critical Review", p. 4
[244] "Critical Review", p. 5
[245] "Critical Review", p. 1-2
[246] "Critical Review", p. 5
[247] "Critical Review", p. 8
[248] Tamil *vāṉarar*, those of the sky (*vāṉam*)
[249] "Critical Review", p. 11
[250] "Critical Review", p. 9
[251] See Benedict Anderson's canonical *Imagined Communities* for a more thorough description of the history of the idea of the nation-state in European colonial territories.
[252] "Critical Review", p. 10
[253] "Critical Review", p. 9-10
[254] The *tiṉai* system is specifically associated with the *akam* genre of Sangam-era Tamil poetry. *Akam* ("interior") poetry centers on emotional and personal relationships, while the

other principal genre of classical Tamil poetry, *puṟam* ("external") poetry eulogizes rulers, gods, or major events.
[255] Sanskrit for "without *varṇa*", a descriptor of people who fall below the *varṇa* scheme entirely.
[256] See Srinivas, M.N., "A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 15, Issue 4 (1956), p. 481–496.
[257] "Critical Review", p. 17
[258] Cf. "Critical Review", p. 16, which discusses how Tondaimandala ("hair-tying") Vellalas began to separate themselves from other Vellalas. Food purity distinctions are a major feature of Louis Dumont's description of caste in his classic *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966).
[259] "Critical Review", p. 18
[260] Tamil *ōvāy-* literally, "mouth missing teeth", but in the context of the other physiological features the essay mentions here, this term likely refers to the congenital gap between upper incisor teeth common among some peoples native to West Africa.
[261] "Critical Review", p. 20
[262] "Critical Review", p. 20
[263] Aloysius (2015)
[264] Vaithees (2016)
[265] Barnett (1976)
[266] Pandian (2015)
[267] Geetha and Rajadurai (2011)
[268] Ramaswamy (1997)
[269] Aloysius (2015), p. 69
[270] Aloysius (2015), p. 69
[271] For more on Theosophical beliefs on cosmic races and their application to the Tamil country, see Sumathi Ramaswamy's *The Lost Land of Lemuria*
[272] See Pandian (2015), p. 89-97
[273] See Aloysius (2015), Chapters 3 and 4 for a detailed breakdown of Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha activities.
[274] This material is collected and indexed in G. Aloysius's three-volume compendium, *Iyotheedāsar Sintanaigaḷ* (2011)
[275] The full text of the *Ādivēdam* is printed in Aloysius (2011), Vol. 2, p. 185-421**.**
[276] Aloysius (2015), p. 149-150
[277] For two excellent introductions to Thass's thought that draw from a number of his works, see Aloysius (2015), p. 153-178 and Pandian (2015), p. 105-120.
[278] Pandian (2015), p. 113.
[279] Pandian (2015), p. 110.
[280] Pandian (2015), p. 112
[281] See Aloysius (2015), p. 106-125, and Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 231-232.
[282] See Aloysius (2015), p. 220-229 for a more detailed discussion of these paths of influence.
[283] Pandian (2015), p. 213-214. For excellent histories of Muslim involvement in the Self-Respect Movement and Dravidar Kazhagam, see J.B.P. More (1997, 2004).

[284] The popular Tamil film *Iruvar* (1997) tells the story of how Periyar's Dravidar Kazhagam launched the careers of two men (Tamil *iruvar*), M. Karunanidhi and M.G. Ramachandran, the heads of the DMK and ADMK, respectively. In order to skirt political censorship, the film changes the names of the parties and figures involved, while still keeping intact enough key features (e.g., the black shirts of Periyar's movement, Karunanidhi's career as a screenwriter, etc.) to make the story recognizable.
[285] See Ram (2009) for an account of the impact of Self-Respect Movement discourse on modern-day Dalit social and political literacy. When searching for print editions of works by socially critical Tamil thinkers in Chennai and Madurai in the late 2010s, I found Periyar's work to be by far the most widely available of works by the movements and figures covered in this chapter.
[286] For other useful discussions of Ramasamy, his work, and his movement, see Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), Chapters ; M.S.S. Pandian (1993, 1994, 2009); Arooran (1980), Chapters 6-10; and Manoharan (2022).
[287] Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 211-212
[288] For an exhaustive compilation of Ramasamy's Tamil-language publications during the Self-Respect Era, see New Century Book House's five-volume *Yeṉ Soṉṉāl Yēṉ Unakku Kōbam Vara Vēṇḍum* ("If I Say It, Why Do You Have to Get Mad?"; 2017). For a compilation of Periyar's English-language writings published in the English-language Self-Respect journal *Revolt*, see *Revolt: A Radical Weekly from Colonial Madras*, edited by V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai.
[289] This idea neglects the fact that Dalits constitute a fifth category outside and below these four caste groups in *Laws of Manu* and other Brahmanical texts.
[290] For more on the Self-Respect Movement and gender, see Anandhi (2005), Vijaya (1993), and Ganesan (2011).
[291] Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 368-387. For writings by women activists affiliated with the Self-Respect Movement, see the Dravidar Kazhagam's compilations, *Suyamariyādai Iyakka Vīrāṅgaṉaigaḷ* ("Heroines of the Self-Respect Movement"), Vols. 1 and 2
[292] Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 377-380
[293] Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 364-366
[294] For more on the Tamil Isai Movement, see Arooran (1980), p. 252-265
[295] Arooran (1980), p. 254
[296] Arooran (1980), p. 252-253
[297] Arooran (1980), p. 255
[298] Arooran (1980), p. 257
[299] Barnett (1976), p. 71-72
[300] Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 436-437
[301] For more on this phase of Ramasamy's ideological career, see Barnett (1976), p. 65-68 and Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 458-461
[302] Arooran (1980), p. 467-479
[303] For an example of Self-Respect critique of Saivism, see Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 327-332
[304] For more on Neo-Saiva and Self-Respect cooperation at anti-Hindi imposition rallies, see Venkatachalapathy (1995), p. 765-767, and Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 476-477

[305] For a excellent journalistic summary of this event that places Ramasamy's marriage to Maniammai in the context of other important ideological and political tensions between Ramasamy and C.N. Annadurai, see Rangaraj (2016)
[306] See Rangaraj (2016)
[307] Barnett (1976), p. 69
[308] Barnett (1976), p. 70
[309] Barnett (1976), p. 69-70
[310] See, for instance, the work of Manjai Vasanthan, such as *Āriyattāl Vīḻndōm! Draviḍattāl Eḻundōm!* (2015)
[311] For more on Adigal's early career with Somasundara Nayakar and other 19th-century Neo-Saiva figures, see Vaithees (2015), p. 79-86.
[312] An enormous number of Adigal's written works are compiled in the over 30-volume *Maraimalaiyam* (A. Mativanan, ed.), published by the Chennai-based publishing house Tamizhmann.
[313] For more on Adigal's early career as an orator, see Vaithees (2015), p. 110-114. For information on his later lecture tours, see Vaithees (2015), p. 114-121.
[314] Pandian (2015), p. 136-139
[315] For an article-length analysis of this source, see Srilata Raman (2009). See also Adigal's English-language introduction to *Vēḷāḷa Nāgarigam* in *Maṟaimalaiyam*
[316] Raman (2009), p. 80-81
[317] Raman (2009), p. 82-83
[318] Raman (2009), p. 80
[319] Writings by Neelambigai Ammaiyar are printed in *Suyamariyādai Iyakka Vīraṅgaṉaigaḷ* (2016), published by the Self-Respect Publishing House of the Dravidar Kazhagam.
[320] Vaithees (2015), p. 126-128.
[321] Kailasapathy (1979), p. 29-32
[322] See Vaithees (2015), p. 145-152; and Ventakachalapathy (1995)
[323] Vaithees (2015), p. 148-149
[324] Venkatachalapathy (1995), p. 761
[325] Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), p. 461-467
[326] See Pandian (2015), p. 221-225; Ramaswamy (1997), p. 164-168; and Geetha & Rajadurai, p. 461-467 for discussions of Tamil debates on linguistic reform.
[327] Barnett (1976) raises the question of whether characterizations of the early DMK as less socially and politically radical stems from C.N. Annadurai's reluctance to criticize Hinduism in public, as opposed to Ramasamy's brash, confrontational approach. See Barnett, p. 74-75
[328] Barnett (1976)'s fieldwork in the Tamil country in the mid-1970s shows the continuing resonance of the issue of Tamil cultural and linguistic autonomy with voters from a variety of social classes and caste backgrounds.See Barnett (1976), p. 161-226
[329] Barnett (1976), p. 82-83
[330] For a detailed synopsis of *Parasakthi*'s use of DMK symbolism, as well as a description of Tamil public reception to *Parasakthi*, see Pandian (1991).
[331] Pandian (1991), p. 759
[332] Pandian (1991), p. 760
[333] Pandian (1991), p. 760

[334] Pandian (1991), p. 759. Barnett (1976) reports that in 1968 Tamil audiences were still cheering at many of the more obviously political scenes of the film. See Barnett (1976), p. 82-83.
[335] Pandian (1991), p. 765
[336] Barnett (1976), p. 82
[337] Barnett (1976), p. 82
[338] Barnett (1976), p. 83
[339] See Bate (2009).
[340] Bate (2009), p. 27-28
[341] Bate (2009), p. 67, 120-126
[342] An excerpt from this speech, in which Annadurai outlines his basic reasoning for this move, was printed by the Dravidar Kazhagam in a 2012 pamphlet featuring several of Annadurai's speeches.
[343] *Drāviḍa Dēsiyam!/Mānila Suyāṭci Ēṉ?* (2012), p. 19
[344] Barnett (1976), p. 294-295
[345] Barnett (1976), p. 292
[346] See Harriss (2002), Pinto (1999), and Swamy (1996).
[347] See Pinto (1999) for a more detailed critique of this. Also compare Thirumavalavan's critique of the "Dravidian parties" discussed below.
[348] See Ram (2009)
[349] Hugo Gorringe has written a series of informative articles on the background of the VCK and its ideological and organizational shifts as it expanded from extra-political activism to contesting political elections. See Gorringe (2005, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2016)
[350] For more on Dalit Panther thought on Dalit liberation, see Contursi (1993)
[351] For more on the emergence of Dalit Panther ideology in Tamil Nadu in the 1980s, see Collins (2017)
[352] For more on this shift, see Gorringe (2016)
[353] During my 2018 stay in Tamil Nadu, multiple Tamil acquaintances mentioned admiring Thirumavalavan as a speaker, even if they seemed unaware or unconvinced of his political and social platform.
[354] For two excellent compilations of translations of Thirumavalavan's speeches and written work, see *Talisman (2003)* and *Uproot Hindutva* (2004).
[355] Ambedkarite Dalit liberation thought is based on the work of the seminal Dalit thinker, activist, and author B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar's thought emphasizes the common social experience shared by Dalits across all parts of the Hindu world. Ambedkar dedicated his intellectual and activist careers to bolstering Dalit political power on the Indian national stage.
[356] See "We Will Worship Tamil! We Will Worship Through Tamil!" in *Uproot Hindutva* (2004), p. 118-124
[357] *Uproot Hindutva* (2004), p. 118-120. Thirumavalavan's use of the phrase "low language" references a notorious statement by the Kanchipuram Mutt, a conservative Brahmanical religious institution in the Tamil country.

[358] For more of Thirumavalavan's thought on this topic, also see "Tamilian Advancement: Is Casteism an Obstacle?" (p. 129-137) and "Only Caste-Annihilating Tamil Nationalism Shall Uproot Hindutva" (p. 143-151) in *Uproot Hindutva*
[359] *Uproot Hindutva*, p. 151
[360] *Uproot Hindutva*, p. 144-147
[361] See "If We Must Not Enter the Temple, Then You Must Not Enter the Cheri!" in *Uproot Hindutva*, p. 87-95.
[362] Although the bulls that participate in *jallikaṭṭu* are usually owned by people from high-status castes, Dalit agricultural workers are the ones customarily assigned to the intensive and low-paying work of raising the animals. Dalit workers' responsibility to raise these calves from youth bars them from pursuing education or higher-paying jobs in other industries.
[363] The Hindu," VCK not for Dalits alone: Thirumavalavan"
[364] Dirks, p. 263-4
[365] See *Gandhi Kolai*
[366] See Omi & Winant (2015)
[367] Omi & Winant (2015), p. 124-127
[368] *Uproot Hindutva* (2004), p. xv
[369] See for example "We Will Worship Tamil! We Will Worship Through Tamil!" (p. 117), "Tamilian Advancement: Is Casteism an Obstacle?" (p. 128), "Only Caste-Annihilating Tamil Nationalism Shall Uproot Hindutva" (142), and "He Who Cannot Search History, Cannot Retrieve It" (p. 218)
[370] See "Only Caste-Annihilating Tamil Nationalism Shall Uproot Hindutva", p. 151
[371] *Uproot Hindutva* (2004), p. 131
[372] i.e., Sītā and Rāma, the heroine and hero of the Rāmāyaṇa
[373] *rasa*s are the paradigmatic emotional states underpinning Brahmanical theories of artistic and literary aesthetics.
[374] Translated footnote: "Although the Vedic religious movement applied the term 'Aryan' to various caste groups across this continent [*kaṇḍam*] of Bhārata in the Puranas, Itihāsas, and Kāvyas, by the conventions of historical research this term can be applied to many caste groups in North India who partnered with Brahmins to invade South India."
[375] *anāriyar*, footnoted with a Tamil grammatical gloss (*āriyarillāda pirajādiyār*)
[376] *guṇaṅgaḷum*, from Sk. *guṇa*
[377]Tamil *kaḍavuḷ*, literally "crosser", an ancient Tamil word for god.
[378] *vanmīga,* literally "sacred"
[379] i.e., the south-facing face of Siva
[380] [Translated footnote:] "In lands such as Europe and America, deep excavations at some sites have uncovered bones of animals called 'mammoths', which were much larger than even elephants, as well as bones of very large snakes called boa constrictors that even swallow livestock, and it has become evident that such animals also lived on this land at one time. The Western mammoth is one of the animals that quickly went extinct after the frost [of the Ice Age] thawed. When the final layers of ice cracked, if they did not lose features such as their thick-skinned chests, they died out thousands of years ago and are now extinct- if you were to cut off the meat off of one of its chests, the meat would spoil before even dogs would be able to finish eating it. In this way, there were many types of animals that existed in

previous times that do not exist now and are known through the bones of theirs that have been discovered. Nonetheless, there have been no humans discovered from that time, and not a single human or bone of a human with a very large body, more than one head, or more than two arms. Strange features like two heads or four arms would nowadays be seen as evil omens, and would have died out a great many years ago. Nevertheless, bones of a human with this type of gruesome form have not been discovered.

[381] añcāvīram

[382] vaidika (cf. Sk. idem)

[383] laukīka, (lit. "worldly"; cf. Sk.)

[384] vaidika kiriyaigaḷai (cf. Sk. *kriya*)

[385] appuṟappaḍutta; literally "[get] sent away"

[386] guṇam, from Sk. *guṇa*

[387] vaidikar (lit. "Vedics")

[388] palābalam, from Sk. *balābala*

[389] literally, "cats in rudraksha beads" [uruttirāṭcap punaigaḷ]

[390] The Tamil gives two versions of this word, one literal [ciṅgāḷatōṭṭam], and a Sanskrit-derived word more specifically associated with this specific mythological account [acōgavaṉam]

[391] Also known by the Sanskrit name Meghānada; Indrajit is an epithet reflecting his victory over Indra. Cf. "இந்திரசித்து/intiracittu" in *Madras Tamil Lexicon*, p. 294

[392] *asuraṉ*, from the Sk. *asura*

[393] *veḷi māsakaṟṟi*, lit. "dirtied with an outside stain"

[394] *mānappaṅgamum aṅgappaṅgamum*, literally "the shaming of honor and the severing of limbs [i.e., Śūrpaṇakhā's nose]"

[395] Sk. *mḷecca* is one of the principal terms Brahmanical texts use to identify barbarous foreign peoples.

[396] Son of Vāli

[397] *tūtar*; a jāti community

[398] *ācāriyāruḷ, (*"among *ācārya*s") from Sk. ācārya

[399] i.e., Vālmiki

[400] i.e., Rāvaṇa

[401] i.e., died for him

[402] dēsam, from Sk. deśa

[403] A title for the original, Sanskrit-language version of the Rāmāyaṇa credited to Vālmīki

[404] The Tamil word, kāḍārampaṅgam, refers specifically to land where only dry crops (as opposed to wet crops like rice) can be cultivated. Cf. "kāḍārampaṅgam", *Madras Tamil Lexicon*

[405] Taking into account the discussion about pre-Sanskritic *jāti* classification found in Part II of this piece, *jāti* here should be understood in the sense of Brahmanical caste, not other modes of social or ethnic differentiation.

[406] Presumably Vālmīki, but

[407] *dōṣaṅgaḷ*, from Sk. *doṣa*

[408] *ōttamar*, from Sk. *hotṛ*, the Brahmin priest tasked with pouring liquid offerings onto the sacrificial fire in Vedic ritual sacrifices

[409] *idu niṟga*, literally "let this suffice"
[410] i.e., present-day South India
[411] The present-day district of Maski in Karnataka. Cf. T.V. Sathasiva Pandarathar, *Piṟkāla Cōḻar Sarittiram*, 2015: Shree Shenbaga Pathippagam, pg. 159
[412] Sk. *daṇḍakāraṇyam*
[413] i.e., Rāvaṇa
[414] A common synonym of tamiḻnāḍu/Tamil Nadu
[415] The Kaveri runs through Madurai, the cultural and political center of lowland Tamil society for much of Tamil history
[416] Also known as the Tāmiraparṇi River of Tirunelveli and Thoothikudi Districts of southern Tamil Nadu. Cf. "porunai", Madras Tamil Lexicon
[417] The city that served as the capital of the Middle Sangam, the mythological period of Tamil history between the ancient First Sangam centered on the now-submerged continent of Kumarikaṇḍam and the Sangam period of recorded Tamil history. For more on this division of Tamil history into three *saṅgam*s, cf. Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Lost Land of Lemuria*.
[418] *kapāḍam*
[419] *iḍaiccaṅgamirī iya(m)*, literally, "the musical note of the Middle Sangam". I have chosen a more idiomatic translation to better convey the eulogistic sense of the expression in English
[420] Literally "South Madurai"; the name of the capital city of Kumarikaṇḍam and the First Sangam
[421] *kaḍal koḷ(ḷu)* is the standard term used to describe the mythological flood that submerged the lands of Kumarikaṇḍam and swept away the myriad literary and material accomplishments of the First Sangam. For more on the trope of *kaḍal koḷ* in Tamil historiography, cf. Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Lost Land of Lemuria.*
[422] These mythical Pāṇḍiyas are distinct from the historical Pāṇḍiya dynasty, one of the "Three Kingdoms" of the imperial phase of Tamil history
[423] *nilam*, a word that is both a general term for a tract of land and a specific term for a set of five geographic landscapes (also commonly called *tiṇai*s) that are a central component of the poetic conventions. The following passage refers to the latter conception, and mentions each of the poetic landscapes by name.
[424] *kuriñji*
[425] *pālai*
[426] *mullai*
[427] *marudam*
[428] *neydal*
[429] See note 52 above.
[430] A classic poetic work of Tamil Buddhist literature
[431] *nīrnāṭṭiṉīr*, literally "those in a low position"
[432] *pirma*
[433] vāṉarar
[434] [Translated footnote:] Although in later times the meaning of the word "asura" took on a negative meaning, in Vedic times its meaning was positive. This [position] is supported by the Rgveda's use of the term "asura" to mean "yajamāna". In the time when Aryans were still rooted in North India, relatives of a reigning Tamil king were hailed with the honorable title

"asura". Afterwards, the two jātis [races] mixed together into one, and in the course of time the term "asura" changed and became known as term meaning "enemy of the Aryans". [in English:] Vide, the Admixture of Aryan with Tamilian, by Pandit D. Savariroyan
[435] talai-sāykkum; literally, "head-hanging"
[436] i.e., chaturvarṇa
[437] the son of Rāvaṇa
[438] i.e., the Laws of Manu
[439] iṉam
[440] i.e., Brahmin ritual officiants
[441] In the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and other Sanskrit-language works of Hindu literature, Triśaṅku was a king of Ayodhyā who was degraded to the rank of *caṇḍāla* by the sage Vasiṣṭha's sons for attempting to secure a blessing from them despite Vasiṣṭha's refusal to offer his blessing, and who was later immobilized in the sky as a constellation while on the way to heaven. Cf. "Triśaṅku" in Monier-Williams's Sanskrit-English Dictionary for a list of citations of Triśaṅku's scriptural appearances.
[442] Tamil women and girls often weave jasmine flowers into their braids or tuck a single jasmine flower behind one of their ears.
[443] the phrase "*eṟiyappaṭṭa pōdu toṉṟuvadu*" can also mean "the appearance of a picked flower", a pun alluding to the jasmine flower referenced earlier
[444] *apūraṇa* (Sk. *apūrṇa*)
[445] i.e., Brahmin
[446] i.e., Parsis or Zoroastrians
[447] This quotation ("paḻakkaṅ koḍiyadu") is presumably a proverb.
[448] tappum upāyattai nāḍi
[449] makamadiyār
[450] nilam parri vagukkappaṭṭa
[451] pādirigaḷ, from Portuguese "padre"
[452] A Saiva Siddhānta theological term for the "difference in non-difference" that a Siva-devotee seeks to achieve with Siva. The essay offers a gloss for this term using native Tamil vocabulary ("vēṟṟumai oṟṟumai")
[453]sōḍacasamskāram, from Sk. sodaśasaṃskāra
[454] nitya naimitya karumaṅgaḷ
[455] The essay leaves this quotation unattributed.
[456] sollavum keṭkavum kūsum- literally, "saying, hearing, and being coy"
[457] An 11-day-long soma sacrifice
[458] karppakiragam, from Sk. garbhagṛha
[459] Spelled "Chinglepet" in colonial English; a region in northwest Tamil Nadu about 50 kilometers south of Chennai.
[460] Mudaliar is a Vellala surname, while Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam is a Tamil word that refers to the region of northern Tamil Nadu where Chengalpattu is located.
[461] *koṇḍai kaṭṭi Vēḷāḷar*; topknots of dreadlocked, twisted, or braided hair are a common mark of Saiva asceticism across South Asia
[462] as a common noun, the word *piḷḷai* can mean "caste" in a broad sense [cf. Madras Tamil Lexicon, entry 7], and as a proper noun Pillai is a common Vellala surname.

[463] the verb *mēṟkoḷ*, a compound verb comprising of *mēḷ* (above) + *koḷ* (seize, take) can mean "gain prominence", "take on a job", "embrace a doctrine", and "occupy a superior position". The essay's use of this word several times in the sentence evokes all of these meanings
[464] mēṟkoḷ; see note above
[465] ācāram, from Sk. ācāra
[466] *iṉam*, which can also mean "race", "family", or "clan"
[467] *oduvār*s are non-Brahmin cantors employed at Saiva Siddhānta temples
[468] literally, "scholar" or "learned man"; from Sk. *bhaṭṭa*
[469] *dīṭcai*, from Sk. *dīkṣa*
[470] Brahmanical temples in the Tamil country have customarily restricted access to certain areas like the saṉṉitāṉam (inner sanctum; Sk. sannidhāna) to Brahmins and other high-caste communities. In present-day Tamil Nadu, these types of entrance restrictions are illegal, but in some major temples they have been replaced by requirements that entrants be Hindu.
[471] That is, are able to view (Sk. *darśana*) a temple icon of a deity with the facilitation of a temple priest (i.e., *swami*)
[472] A taluk (the Tamil term for "county") in Namakkal District of south-central Tamil Nadu
[473] A town near Tiruvanamalai in north-central Tamil Nadu
[474] The Madras Tamil Lexicon entry for this word (andō) says that it is "Regarded as a Sinhalese word".
[475] Literally, "tradespeople"; a Tamil caste group associated with a variety of artisan trades
[476] kulācāram
[477] nīca
[478] dēsābi viruttikku
[479] cātippirēṭṭaṉ, from Sk. jātipreṣṭha
[480] māpātagam
[481] Alambadi is a now critically endangered breed of cattle found in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka
[482] ōvāy- literally, "mouth missing teeth", but in the context of the other physiological features the essay mentions here, the essay is probably using this term to refer to the congenital gap between upper incisor teeth common among some peoples native to West Africa.
[483] māṉava nūl, literally "Manu's book". As in Sanskrit, Tamil words derived from "Manu" (e.g., māṉavaṉ, māṉavar, etc.) mean "man" or "human being".
[484] All three of these jātis are traditionally of low caste status, as opposed to the traditionally prestigious Vellala community.
[485] The Tamil name for the Chetti caste community is also a common noun that refers to merchants or traders, in which sense it is used here.
[486] Many *jāti* communities sent petitions to the British colonial administration requesting changes to the legal classification of their caste status.
[487] *Āyira Kāl Maṇḍapam*
[488] I.e., Vellala women who have married into Mudaliyar families
[489] A Dalit jāti that now goes by the name "Devendra Kula Vellalars", a name that itself is a demonstration of the processes of caste re-identification that the essay is discussing here
[490] *piḷḷaimār*

[491] Rāmāṉuja is the central figure of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, a generally Brahmin-dominated Tamil Vaisnava bhakti tradition. Although Rāmāṉuja's theology is conservative in many ways, Rāmāṉuja did contend that devotion to Siva supersedes caste.
[492] A Tamil Dalit community from whose name the English word "pariah" derives. The Tamil name "*paraiyar*" means "drummer", referring to Paraiyars' customary role as drummers at funerals and funeral processions.
[493] Likely on ancient temple walls.
[494] Royal edicts in the pre-colonial Tamil country were generally issued on copper or stone tablets.
[495] ceṉṉappaṭṭaṉam, the Tamil name for the city the British called Madras. Chennai, the modern name for the city, is derived from this precolonial name.
[496] mantiram, a term designating the Ṛg, Sama, and Yajur Vedas.
[497] A seer in the Mahabharata considered an avatar of Śiva, and who by occupation would be considered Brahmin
[498] The heroine of the Mahabharata, whose royal birth made her a Kshatriya
[499] taḻ + kulam, from Sk. kula
[500] karttākkaḷ, from Sk. kartā; also a Saiva term for Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rūdra, Maheśura, and Sadāsiva as the deities through which the Supreme manifests itself.
[501] i.e., the Laws of Manu
[502] T. icaiyāṉ; musicians are considered intermediate to low-caste by jāti classification schemes in śāstric texts.
[503] Literally, "there is holiness above" [*akkiṉi… mēḷāṉa teyvaṅgaḷ*]
[504] See note above.
[505] kaḍavuḷ, literally "crosser", a common and ancient Tamil term referring to a supreme god.
[506] maṉas samādāṉa-ttuḍaṉ
[507] pāvam, from Sk. pāpa
[508] toṉṟu
[509] The lowest end of a plough
[510] kulam, from Sk. kula
[511] kulam, as above
[512] ādi drāviḍa
[513] āsirāmam, from Sk. Āśrāma
[514] Sk. brahmacharya
[515] Sk. gṛhastha
[516] Sk. vanaprastha
[517] Sk. sannyāsin
[518] The Pallar jāti community is another subaltern Tamil jāti community. The essay's implication here is that Paraiyars are barred from even marginal changes in ritual caste status.