

**“JEALOUSY WITHOUT APPROPRIATION”:
COLONIAL IDEOLOGY AND LINGUISTIC CONTESTATION(S)
IN THE TAMIL NATION**

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DECLARATION

This thesis titled “‘Jealousy without Appropriation’: Colonial Ideology and Linguistic Contestation(s) in the Tamil Nation” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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List of Abbreviations

(AI)ADMK	(All-India) Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
INC	Indian National Congress
IA	Iraiyānār Akapporul
PMK	Pattali Makkal Katchi
SC	Scheduled Caste(s)
Tol.	Tolkāppiyam
TP	Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram
Tol.	Tolkāppiyam

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Note on Transliteration

The system for transliteration used here is as per the conventions of *the University of Madras Tamil Lexicon* as shown the table below. However, some proper names and common words are spelled in more familiar ways without the use of diacritics for the sake of readability.

Vowels		
Tamil	IPA	Transliteration
அ	ə	a
ஆ	a:	ā
இ	i	i
ஈ	i:	ī
உ	u	u
ஊ	u:	ū
எ	e	e
ஏ	e:	ē
ஓ	o	o
ஔ	o:	ō
ஐ	ai	ai
ஔ	au	au

Consonants		
Tamil	IPA	Transliteration
க	k / g	k
ச	c / s	c
ட	t / d	ṭ
த	t / d	t
ப	p / b	p
ற	r	ṛ
ங	ŋ	ṅ
ஞ	ɲ	ñ
ண்	ɳ	ṣ
ந	n	n
ம	m	m
ன்	n	ṇ
ய	j	y
ர்	r	r
ல்	l	l
வ்	v	v̄
ழ்	ɻ	ḷ
ள்	ɭ	ḻ
ஃ	ʔ	ḱ

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Timeline of Events

TABLE 1 Timeline of Events: 5BCE - 1800

5 BCE	•	<i>Tolkappiyam Euttu & Colatikaram</i> (composed by TOLKAPPIYAR?)
3 - 1 BCE	•	<i>Tirukkural</i> (composed by TIRUVALLUVAR)
3 - 7 BCE	•	Kalabhari Intergennum
4 - 5 CE	•	<i>Tolkappiyam Porul</i> (composed by ?)
5 - 6 CE	•	<i>Iraiyanar Akapporul</i> (composed by 'IRAIYANAR')
8 CE	•	NARKKIRANAR's commentary on <i>Iraiyanar Akapporul</i>
11 - 12 CE	•	ILAMPURANAR's commentary on Tol.
13 CE	•	CENAVARAIYAR's commentary on Tol.
13CE	•	PERASIRIYAR's commentary on Tol.
14th c. CE	•	NACCINARKIRIYAR's commentary on Tol.
14th c. CE	•	Beginning of the Renaissance
1453	•	Fall of Constantinople; movement of Greek scholars to Italy
1517	•	<i>Ninety-Five Theses</i> by MARTIN LUTHER; beginning of the Reformation
16 c. CE	•	TEYVACCILAYAR's commentary on Tol.
1644	•	Fort St. George established in Madras
1744	•	b. J. G. HERDER
1748	•	b. W. JONES
1759	•	b. F. A. WOLF
1767	•	b. W. VON HUMBOLDT
1772	•	<i>Treatise on the Origins of Language</i> [HERDER]
1772	•	b. F VON SCHLEGEL
1776	•	HERDER moves towards Classicism
1777	•	b. F. W. ELLIS
1783	•	<i>Symposium</i> [WOLF], origin of Classical Philology
1786	•	<i>III Anniversary Discourse</i> [JONES]
1791	•	b. F. BOPP

TABLE 2 Tamil Timeline 1801 - 1900

1808	•	<i>On the Language and Wisdom of India</i> [Friedrich Schlegel]
1812	•	College of Fort St. George established [ELLIS]
1814	•	b. R. CALDWELL
1816	•	<i>Note to Introduction</i> and Dravidian Hypothesis [ELLIS]
1823	•	b. E. RENAN
1832	•	b. C. W. DAMODARAM PILLAI
1836	•	<i>The Heterogeneity of Language and its Influence on the Intellectual Development of Mankind</i> [HUMBOLDT, posthumous]
1845	•	b. IYOTHEE THOSS
1848	•	Rise of German nationalism
1855	•	b. U. V. SWAMINATHA IYER
1856	•	<i>Comparative Grammar of Dravidian</i> [CALDWELL]
1857	•	b. F. DE SAUSSURE
1860	•	<i>Tirukkural</i> [pub. ARUMUGA NAVALAR]
1868	•	<i>Tolkappiam</i> [pub. DAMODARAM PILLAI]
1876	•	b. MARAIMALAI ADIGAL
1879	•	b. E. VE. RAMASAMY
1880	•	SWAMINATHA IYER begins to discover Sangam texts
1881	•	<i>Viracoliyam</i> [pub. Damodaram Pillai]
1887	•	<i>Civaga Cintamani</i> [pub. Swaminatha Iyer]
1884	•	b. E. SAPIR
1897	•	b. B. L. WHORF

TABLE 3 Tamil Timeline 1901 - 2000

1915	•	Pure Tamil movement [MARAIMALAI ADIGAL]
1916	•	<i>A Course in General Linguistics</i> [F. D. SAUSSURE, posthumous]
1916	•	<i>The Non-Brahmin Manifesto</i> [South Indian People's Association]
1917	•	Justice Party
1925	•	Self-Respect Movement (E. VE. RAMASAMY)
1937	•	First Anti-Hindi Agitation (E. VE. RAMASAMY & Justice Party)
1944	•	Dravida Kazhagam (E. VE. RAMASAMY)
1949	•	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (C. N. ANNADURAI)
1967	•	DMK wins state elections
1967	•	State name change to Tamilnadu
1972	•	ADMK (M. G. RAMACHANDRAN)
1989	•	PMK (S. RAMADOSS)

1 | Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This research project aims to understand the relationship between the culture of previously colonized communities and Modernity¹ as one produced by the practices of colonial disciplines, especially philology and linguistics, with special focus on the phenomenon of *linguistic cultural nationalism* in the state of Tamilnadu. It also seeks to explore the ways in which colonized populations realigned and reorganized themselves through the new epistemic devices introduced by colonialism while still maintaining pre-colonial modes of association, through the question of linguistic nationalism.

The political organization of the Indian nation on the basis of languages began with the agitations that demanded the formation of the Andhra Pradesh state on the basis of the Telugu language, in 1949 (King, 1997), but the cultural roots for this movement began much earlier in the era before India came into independent nationhood. Parallel to, and sometimes intersecting with the colony-wide independence movement was another movement in the south that was based on a

¹I define modernity here after Lyotard (1984) as a series of transformations that were triggered in Western culture from the Enlightenment onwards and which “altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts.”

shared vision of Dravidian identity, one that was argued to be distinct from an Aryan-Brahmanical North Indian tradition. This Dravidian movement had a distinctively linguistic turn and often the arguments in its favour emerged from colonial disciplines, including philology, and their “discovery” of distinctive language families in the Indian subcontinent such as Indo-Aryan and Dravidian.

This language-based Dravidian movement has often been identified as *linguistic nationalism* and in the flurry of scholarly interest on nationalism that has characterized modern academic engagements in the social sciences and humanities, there has been a sizeable amount of literature engaged with Dravidian or more specifically Tamil nationalism,² despite the fact that the actual secessionist movement for an independent Tamil nation along the lines of Pakistan was a short-lived one, emerging from the fringes of a larger Dravidian movement that was engaged with questions of caste inequities and a shared vision of the cultural past of southern India. This vision is a defining component of cultural nationalism, as noted by Aloysius (1998)³. The more recent civil war in Srilanka, with Tamil ethnic and linguistic identity at its centre, has further generated scholarly engagement with the idea of lin-

²See Hardgrave, 1964, Washbrook, 1989, Cheran, 1992, Lewis, 1996, Price 1996, Rajan, 1999, Wilson 1994, 1999 and 2000, Subramaniam, 1999, Pandian, 1989, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2000, 2007.

³Aloysius notes the following as some of the main features of cultural nationalism in general:

...first, the beliefs concerning the distinctness, integrity, uniqueness and superiority of one’s culture and second, the claim that such a culture is the proper and legitimate repository of collective and determinative power... then this sanctified culture, with its internal power-configuration is projected as the normative model for the present and future nation. Cultural-nationalist articulation is thus a process that sets forth the nation as an ideological-cultural construct. (Aloysius, 1998, p. 143.)

guistic nationalism and the Tamil Eezham in the last few decades⁴, as has the growing diaspora of Tamils in Canada, USA, the UK, Malaysia, Singapore, continental Europe and other countries in an increasingly globalized world, particularly in the field of post-colonial studies⁵.

What is striking in many discussions on linguistic nationalism is the absence of more basic questions regarding language, and the central role that the changing ideas about language have on such cultural and social movements. Most scholars seem to accept the popular perception of what a language is as unproblematic and in fact implicitly take for granted ideas such as the unity of language and the discreteness of different languages as a given. Even among scholars with an academic grasp of Modernity and its very particular effects, there appears to be a lack of engagement with the idea of language itself as constituted by Modernity, as demonstrated by, for instance, Mitchell (2009) and Bauman and Briggs (2002), among others. In fact, the question of language and the methods of its discursive formation have been explored in other contexts by scholars as varied as Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Bernard Cohn, etc. It is important, therefore, for their findings to inform any research on the question of linguistic identity.

Manjali (2014) identifies four distinctive strands to the developments around language and ideology in Europe. The first comes from Michel Foucault who identified at least two major discontinuities in Western thought that impacted the conception of language in modernity. Foucault identifies the first of these to have happened in the Classical era, and argues that while until the Renaissance, the connection between

⁴Wilson, 1999, Sivarajah, 1996, Chandrakanthan, 2000, Jeganathan, 1995, Coomaraswamy, 1986.

⁵Fuglerud & Fuglerud, 1999, Cheran, 2001, Wayland, 2004, Fair, 2007, Clothey, 2006.

words and things in the world was seen through a series of interconnections that weave the essence of the things they represent to the word, this connection was broken in the transformation that took place in the Classical era as a movement from “resemblance” to “representation”. At this point, “the arrangement of signs was to become binary, since it was to be defined, with Port-Royal, as the connection of a significant and a signified” (Foucault, 1970); in other words, the process of signification itself came to be the object of analysis. This resulted in language itself coming to be seen as a “separate epistemological realm” (Bauman & Briggs, 2003). The second major discontinuity just preceded Modernity, and was a move from “representation” to “historicism”, i.e., the focus shifted from seeing language as consisting of signs to the form of language and the comparison of the forms of different languages with each other.

The first discontinuity that Foucault discusses corresponds with Anderson’s (1983) analysis of the emergence of European nationalism which had a distinctively linguistic component. Anderson identifies the post-Enlightenment period as the one in which there was a shift from the religious organization of societies to the linguistic, with the death of the idea of “divine languages”—languages such as Latin (and Hebrew and Classical Arabic elsewhere) whose words themselves were invested with divine truth as emerged directly from god, and therefore were shared by a religious community. Instead, especially with the advent of print capitalism, certain languages that were previously considered vernaculars, such as French, became elevated to the rank of “national” languages. This also gave language “a new fixity”⁶ which “helped to build the im-

⁶Anderson, 1983, p. 44

age of antiquity so central to the idea of the nation”⁷ This “new fixity” and “image of antiquity” both came to affect the Indian subcontinent (and other colonies⁸) to a great extent under colonial rule.

The second discontinuity that Foucault identifies is one that interests critics of the Orientalist disciplines, including Edward Said, for the shift to a comparative mode of comprehending language was not devoid of its ideological underpinnings, especially in colonial contexts (although as Manjali (2014) points out, “Foucault’s archaeology’ is decidedly averse to seeing the ideological dimensions”.) Said (1973), for instance, observes that the comparative method led to a hierarchical understanding of languages and cultures. The morphological analysis of languages, which Foucault discusses, placed inflectional Indo-European languages like Sanskrit at the top of the hierarchy along with other “Classical” languages like Greek and Latin, and led to it being considered the most “perfect” language, while agglutinating and isolating languages such as the Semitic ones were relegated to being considered corrupt or flawed, and as “lesser” languages. The implications for such a hierarchical view of languages were more wide-ranging, as languages were believed to be windows into cultures (although lying “outside” the cultural) and therefore the structures of particular languages were thought to reflect on the cultures associated with them. Thomas Trautmann argues that this belief was about the relationship of languages with nations:

By means of the theory encoded in the structure of the comparative vocabulary, languages and nations or races were un-

⁷*ibid.*

⁸For instance, Fabian (1986) discusses the impact of Colonialism on Swahili in the Belgian Congo.

derstood as being so closely identified with one another as to have no gap between them. Every statement about the relations among languages was a statement about the relations among nations.⁹

Thus it was believed that the “degradation” of Hebrew, Arabic and Chinese was symptomatic of the degradation of the Orient, with Sanskrit’s “perfection” pointing to a “glorious” South Asian past. Rather than being based on any scientific¹⁰ commitment to truth or objectivity that disciplines like philology claimed to aspire to, Said suggests the ideological basis for such analyses: it was important for the Orientalist scholars to establish the superiority of Sanskrit over Classical Arabic and Hebrew as the other Abrahamic religions were viewed as threat to the chiefly Christian—and indeed, Christian missionary—colonial forces; and Sanskrit, which through philology could be shown to demonstrably predate both languages, provided an ideal counterpoint to the former in the narrative of cultural degradation. Simultaneously, it also allowed for a strong justification for the colonization of the Indian subcontinent, and for the British to view themselves as saviours of a great Vedic civilization gone astray due to the invasion of a “degraded” Islamic culture, as Cohn (1996) has argued.

Besides the Colonialist-ideological categorization of languages, a series of philosophical debates between the rationalists and the empiricists in Europe also contributed to the politics of languages. Rational-

⁹Trautmann, 2006, p.36

¹⁰Trautmann (2006) also argues that the very organisation of languages into the “family tree” model, while giving it a certain appearance of scientific rigour based on the biological metaphor, actually harked back to long-held notions of the division and spread of races based on the Biblical tales of Noah’s sons after whom the language families such as Semitic (Shem), Japhetic (Japhet) and Hamitic (Ham) were named with their respective descendents populating the corresponding nations.

ism in seventeenth century Europe began to view language as a property of the human mind, as “innate” to and produced by it. In this sense, language was not a product of human experience, but an operation of the man’s rationality and a way to express the logical workings of the human mind. Cartesian rationalism had—and continues to have—a strong tradition especially in linguistics, including nineteenth-century philosophers and philologists such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose notions about the generative capability of the human mind would have great influence on Chomsky and modern linguistics¹¹. On the other hand were empiricists like John Locke who rejected rationalism in general and the rationalist model of language. For Locke, language did not so much *eminate* from the rational human mind as it *emerged* from human experience. The external world played a crucial role as the function of language was to order the external world in order to remember it. But this order was one that was voluntarily imposed by human beings as opposed to the innate model of the rationalists. Thus Locke’s model of language is one of wilful creation by human beings.

Although the rationalists and empiricists held opposing views on epistemology and language, they shared much when it came to ideology. Both Humboldt and Locke, despite being part of such different traditions of thought, in trying to account for linguistic and cultural diversity drew conclusions about and based on language that were ultimately racist ones. For Humboldt, the inflectional systems of languages reflected on the culture it was associated with, as previously discussed; and the explanation for this was in the fact that isolating and agglutinating languages, with their “simpler” forms were indicative of lesser

¹¹See Chomsky, 1965

intellectual effort while the “complexity” of the morphological system of Indo-European showed greater intellectual development, and therefore attested to having been produced by more intellectually refined minds—and cultures. For Locke, on the other hand, language, consisting of voluntary acts of creating signs based on human experience, was fraught with the possibility of “imperfections”. Since his empiricism took individuality to the extreme, and all ideas were connected with signs on an individual-experiential basis, complex intellectual ideas could be ridden with individual idiosyncracies or “imperfections” as he viewed them. Thus, Locke considers the “purification” of language as essential for social upliftment. Locke argued that only the language of elite intellectuals was refined and elevated enough for the pursuit of science and philosophy, and that it was necessary to practice both self-discipline and the disciplining of others in perpetuating this purification to all the lower classes, women and children in a sort of “trickle-down” model of language purification. The ideological ramifications of this were that colonized populations and the “lesser races” were also seen as lacking the intellectual capabilities. Bauman and Briggs (2003) consider Locke’s ideas about language as very important to the emergence of Modernity and the subjugation of non-European populations:

Practices of linguistic purification ironically became key social hybrids in that they placed a vital aspect of the creation of modernity in the hands of the elite and designated its fruits as a means of ensuring the reproduction of their social, political, and economic capital. Women, the poor, country people, and non-Europeans were excluded from the contexts and practices needed to participate in this reproduction

process ¹²

Thus, starting from the Enlightenment, a whole series of transformations took place in what Foucault would consider the discourse around language that effected Modernity. However, these transformations not only affected European thought and ideology but had a profound impact on the colonized populations and ushered in and imposed modernity in the colonized lands too, in ways that are still evident.

The transformations of ideas about language in Europe become extremely important in the context of colonialism because, as Bernard Cohn observes, in seeking to subjugate various colonies, the colonial forces “unknowingly and unwittingly invaded and conquered not only a territory but an epistemological space as well”¹³. Cohn argues that the colonial rulers were on an endless quest for knowledge in the colonies, on the one hand, as they believed this was the only way they could effectively rule the lands, through an exhaustive, minute and authoritative grasp of every aspect of “native” culture; and on the other, as a means to discover more about their own past. The belief that everything was empirically knowable, and thus conquerable, drove many colonial disciplines such as anthropology and philology, and a feverish obsession with creating grammars, museums and collecting other “artefacts” stands testimony to this aspect of colonial intervention. The search for knowledge was an important part of the colonization process and the kinds of knowledge it constructed was imposed on the colonized populations, often marginalizing and erasing previously existing narratives, forms of knowledge and worldviews in what Spivak (1981) calls “epistemic vio-

¹²Bauman and Briggs, 2003, pp. 43-44

¹³Cohn, 1996, p.53

lence”. This fact has been attested to by research from various scholars including Naoki Sakai and Lisa Mitchell.

The notion of an intrinsic connection between languages and individuals harks back to rationalist ideas about language being an essential property of the human mind. Sakai too considers “language” to be a Kantian *regulative idea*, something that is posited in order to organize knowledge but whose existence is not verifiable. Although Kant (1934) speaks of the regulative idea in the context of scientific knowledge, it is precisely the point that the regulative idea has often been moved out of the scientific realm and into that of cultural and political organization and individual identity¹⁴—by the imposition of colonial knowledge systems and the complex ways in which they created hierarchies among colonial subjects.

Ramaswamy (1997), among others, has argued that the discourse produced by colonial disciplines such as philology elevated Sanskrit to such levels that it inevitably created hierarchies in relation to other languages such as Bengali, Marathi, Hindustani and Tamil, which were considered “mere vernaculars”, and degraded forms of their pristine mother language, Sanskrit. The discovery of Dravidian as a distinct language family only served to further these hierarchies, always with racist assumptions underlying them. The suggestion that Dravidian was a separate language family, independent of Indo-European, came out of philology itself, and was put forth by colonial philologists Alexander D. Campbell and Francis W. Ellis, who argued that Tamil and Telugu had shared origins, distinct from the Indo-European language fam-

¹⁴However, the separation of the scientific from the cultural as notions is in itself a project of modernity that was contributed to by Western philosophy including Kant. This will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 3, Section 3.1.1 on page 83

ily¹⁵. Forty years later, in 1856, Robert Caldwell gave this argument serious academic backing and demonstrated that the Dravidian language family was even wider than originally imagined and encompassed the entire southern region of the sub-continent. Caldwell is still celebrated to this day¹⁶ for his discovery of Dravidian, for this discovery is perceived as laying the groundwork for and making possible a reawakening of Dravidian consciousness and a recalling of Dravidian pride¹⁷. However, though it is celebrated today, the discovery of Dravidian as a language family only played into the Colonialist project of racial supremacy. Once the opposition between Dravidian and Indo-Aryan were well-established, what emerged was a narrative of the inferiority of Dravidian in comparison to Indo-Aryan. This was a complex narrative that intertwined ideas of linguistic purity with race, culture and religion: the existence of a Dravidian language family led to the idea of a Dravidian race, distinct from the Indo-Aryan, who “originally” espoused a religion and a culture quite distinct from that of the Aryans. This culture and religion were presented as inferior to Classical Sanskrit: “...Sanskrit loomed loftily

¹⁵See Sreekumar, 2009.

¹⁶“...we commemorate the two hundredth birth anniversary of Robert Caldwell, who proclaimed the greatness and uniqueness of Tamil to the world.” (pc., Tamil Cultural Association, JNU, June 12, 2013, trans. mine.)

¹⁷In reality, although Caldwell did, in all his scientific rigour, cause a crucial break from the view that all languages of the Indian subcontinent descended from Sanskrit, he was still immersed in a Colonialist attitude towards the Dravidian scholars who eagerly devoured both his findings and the discipline of philology. He spoke of their efforts at adapting comparative philology in a somewhat dismissive and paternalistic tone, describing it as “not an intelligent, discriminating interest” and “as rudimentary and fragmentary as it was ages ago” as they did not have “zeal for historic truth” which he considered the “special characteristic of the European mind.” (in Ramaswamy, 1997) He thus reinforced the power disparity between colonizer and colonized, as the latter was looked down upon for not possessing the characteristics of the “European mind” and, at the same time, also for aspiring to acquire the same. This was particularly ironic since much European understanding of grammar and philology was shaped by their contact with and reading of ancient Indian grammars such as the *Tolkāppiyam* and Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyay*.

as a ‘classical’ tongue, and Tamil was reduced to a mere ‘vernacular’; where Sanskrit was the language of the ‘fair’ and ‘noble’ Aryans, Tamil the tongue of the ‘menial’ and ‘dark-skinned’ Dravidians; and so on.”¹⁸ (Tamil here generally standing in for the Dravidian race as a whole.) Thus, the Colonialist discourses around language were certainly not simply about language, but only opened a window to a knowledge about entire races and cultures.

One major outcome of this was a rejection of the narratives of the superiority of Vedic culture and the embracing of Dravidian identity. For instance, while European scholars argued that the Dravidian culture and religion had polluted the Aryan way of life, some Dravidian scholars attempted to invert this logic by arguing for a lost Dravidian religion that was monotheistic and free of superstition which had been subjugated by Aryan invaders who brought a degraded culture full of superstitions, animal sacrifice and the greatest evil of them all, the caste system. Another direction the assertions of Dravidian identity took was in keeping with the way the British articulated the difference between the two cultures on the basis of linguistic origins, and set up an opposition between Tamil and Sanskrit as languages standing in for Dravidian and Vedic cultures respectively. For instance, Sumathi Ramaswamy recounts a story from the neo-Shaivite movement where a debate arose between a 19th century mystic and a Brahmin over whether Tamil or Sanskrit was the greater language¹⁹. Literary works such as the *Tamilalaṅgāram* by Dandapani Swamigal, whose hundred verses all work towards proving Tamil’s superiority over Sanskrit, were also

¹⁸Ramaswamy, 1997, p. 14

¹⁹Ramaswamy, 1999

emerging in the 19th century²⁰.

Further, Colonial scholars who studied the literature of languages such as Telugu and other “vernaculars” also engaged with the relationship between Sanskrit and these languages in new ways; where native scholars viewed Sanskrit literary traditions as wellsprings of creativity, the Colonial scholars often viewed these connections as mere translations’ and as the “inverse of originality” as Mantena (2005) observes. Therefore, the discourse of having to break free from the shackles of a hegemonic Sanskrit emerged directly from colonial interventions, especially for the Dravidian languages and literatures, where such oppositions never existed before. Thus language began more and more to be the site of cultural rivalry and contestation.

The emerging relationship between Tamil and Sanskrit was a very complex one. It went beyond simply being about language and was a mix of race and caste. (This aligns with Said’s previously mentioned observation that the lines between ideas of language and ideas of race were often blurred for the Orientalists.) While the Orientalist scholars framed the difference between the Aryan and Dravidian as one of race, in the Tamil context, race was translated as caste. The Southern Brahmins, with their strict adherence to Vedic and brahminical traditions, were considered by the other communities to be the descendents of either the wily Aryan colonizers opportunistically attempting to gain social status through the imposition of Vedic culture; or the devious imposter, of Dravidian origin but attempting to gain social status by pretending to possess Aryan roots. All the previously mentioned debates over the superiority of Tamil over Sanskrit featured Brahmin scholars favouring

²⁰Venkatachalapathy, 2005

Sanskrit and the chiefly non-Brahmin neo-Shaivaites arguing for Tamil. Further, the growing nationalistic atmosphere also created a new confidence in the Brahmins who centred their nationalism around the idea of the superiority of the Hindu religion. As Pandian (2009) notes, the Tamil Brahmins of the early twentieth century, in their nationalistic fervour, began to adapt various means, including the critique of Christianity²¹ through the rationalist movement in Europe via movements in Colonial India like that of the Theosophical Society. The Brahmins utilized this mainly atheistic movement as a means of critique—not of religion itself, but of Christianity—and remained loyal to the Vedas and its tenets, thus expressing a Hindu nationalist philosophy that alienated them from the rest of the Tamil population, who resented their exploitation of the caste system to subjugate the “lower” castes.

The idea that caste as the social evil had come to be imposed by Aryans on a previously caste-free Dravidian society further increased the animosity towards the Brahmins. The discovery, in the early nineteenth century, of Classical Tamil (Sangam) texts that had fallen out of popular memory for several centuries gave credence to this belief; for the lack of a mention in the texts of a rigid birth-based classification of people into social classes such as in the varna system was read as proof that the Sangam period was a golden era of Tamil culture, both in terms of literature and social equality.

The discovery of the Sangam body of literature is arguably one of

²¹For they were humiliated by the idea that the (white) Christians, being outside the caste system, were technically the lowest of castes and yet, as colonizer, forced the Brahmins into a position of subservience and inferiority. On the other hand, many scholars have argued the emancipatory role of the Christian missionaries especially in the case of caste inequities, such as their participation in the upper-cloth revolt (Pandian 2013) and this further underlines the reason for the animosity of the Brahmins towards Christianity.

the most momentous points in the history of modern Tamil culture as it realigned the history of the Tamil language and culture as a secular one. Venkatachalapthy (2005), for instance, argues that the emergence of the canon of Sangam and its displacement of the pre-modern, mainly religious canon in Tamil literature led to the secularization of Tamil culture and cultural nationalism. This falling back on ancient texts to define a modern culture was also an outcome of modernity. The crisis that modernity created in colonized subjects was in the oppositions that were previously mentioned, between modernity and antiquity, and between progress and tradition. The authentically Indian was constructed through various discursive practices in disciplines such as archaeology and philology to be the traditional and the ancient, particularly the pre-Mughal. In the Dravidian context, the existence of a large body of ancient literature in Tamil led to the idea of the authentically Tamil to be seen as emerging from those texts. Yet, there were also internal tensions and paradoxes in these, for the traditional was still seen as inadequate, for the colonialists constantly attempted to “enlighten” and “modernize” the Indian. Thus, although authenticity was to be achieved through appeals to the past and tradition, there was also an anxiety regarding being modern.

The growing anti-Brahmin sentiment in the movement also led to a deep critique of Hinduism and its trenchant problems, which resulted in Hindu-centred strands of the Dravidian movement gradually losing their popularity. Towards the mid-twentieth century, the most important strands of the Dravidian identity movement became opposed to religion. The emergence of strongly atheistic political parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Anna Dravida Munnetra

Kazhagam, and their triumph in elections over national parties like the Congress based on the Dravidian and Tamil identity cemented the relationship between cultural nationalism and anti-religious ideology.

In the last two decades, however, there has been an emergence of caste-based politics that has pointed to the deep fissures in the unifying face of Tamil nationalism. Political parties such as the Pāṭṭali Makkal Katchi (PMK) that represent the interests of particular castes within the Tamil community have begun to gain some foothold although they are yet to achieve electoral success. This has been mirrored by growing, often violent, tensions between various castes, especially between the Dalits and the middle castes. While the social contexts of these tensions are varied and complex, a significant aspect of these contestations is their rootedness in the interpretation of the idea of Tamil culture, based on a harking back to ancient Tamil texts.

The Dalit movement in Tamilnadu is arguably as old as the Tamil Nationalist movement, with thinkers such as Iyothi Thassar raising issues of marginalized castes in the late nineteenth to early 20th century. While the Tamil nationalist movement grew and was strengthened by the stringent critique of caste that emerged from these intellectuals, there has been a sense of alienation for the Dalits from the movement in recent times, as argued by Rajkautaman (1994). The question, particularly, of whether untouchability was in practice in the golden age of Tamil society, i.e., the Sangam period, has come into intense popular and scholarly debate, raising questions regarding the very idea of a shared ideal of Tamil culture. On the one hand, it is argued that the usage of certain words in the classical texts suggest the existence of the practice of untouchability against those of certain occupations such

as washerwomen and drummers, and this might point to a birth-based classification of individuals (Pillai 1969, Hart 1987). These arguments, however, have been contested in various ways by other scholars, including through linguistic analysis (Palaniappan, 2008) that seem to point back to the notion of the ideal, equal society of the Sangam period.

What is crucial to note here is the continuation of an already established mode of contestation as discussed previously, based on the idea of the authentically Tamil as lying in the past, to be corroborated by re-analyses of ancient texts, and often rooted in language and the minutiae of linguistic analysis.

Simultaneous with such popular and scholarly engagements with the idea of Tamil identity, in the post-liberalized and globalized era, a disenchantment with the idea of language-based nationalism has also set in among larger portions of the population, as is evident from popular discussions in the state that consider pride in Tamil identity as less currently relevant, and the embracing of both English and Hindi as more important in terms of economic mobility. Both dominant political parties in the state have, however, continued to push the agenda of Tamil identity in the political sphere, for instance, through the attempts to influence the national politics of the country in favour of supporting the Srilankan Tamils in the Srilankan Civil War; through the organization of conferences dedicated to Classical Tamil; or through the resistance to the imposition of Hindi in schools and in official communications with the Central Government (as recently as in 2014). The forming of new political parties such as the Naam Tamilar Katchi, which chooses to espouse and revive the ideology of Tamil nationalism, and the popular following that the speeches of its founder, Seeman has,

point towards the fact that politics based on linguistic identity has not quite declined from the popular imagination. In the cultural front, too, there have been attempts to revive Tamil purism, which attempts to “cleanse” Tamil of all words with Sanskrit roots and the production of “pure Tamil” words to replace English loans. While the search for Tamil authenticity continues through these efforts, an apparently more pragmatic set of efforts have also begun to take place in the form of modernizing Tamil. While Tamil nationalists take great pride in the official recognition conferred on Tamil as a Classical Language, on par with Sanskrit and Latin, this pride is also bound up with the notion that Tamil is a living Classical language and still relevant in the twenty-first century. The attempts to underscore this relevance is evident in the attempts to modernize the Tamil language. Attempts at modernization have been under way since the middle of the twentieth century, with spelling reform to accommodate the needs of the burgeoning print culture and have continued to current times with further efforts to accommodate the needs of the digital era. Here, too, are the tensions between the absorption of English words and the need for a purer Tamil.

These various efforts discussed so far, though seemingly disparate, are all part of the larger attempts to reappropriate the idea of the Tamil language and through it, of Tamil culture and a cultural rootedness. It is to be noted that these are typical responses to the modernity imposed upon a colonized population, and although it is possible to argue as Irschick (1994) does that processes of colonization were not devoid of dialogue and were collaborative enterprises, it is undeniable that the violently hegemonic nature of colonialism does not leave much room for true dialogue. For as the previous discussion showed, colonialism

enforced a very particular idea of a language upon the colonized and through the practice of disciplines such as philology, found the colonized populations, their languages and cultures (defined by the colonizer as monolithic) to be a window to understanding their own past. It is this attempt by the colonizer to appropriate and own other languages and other cultures for their own ends that Derrida critiques, for “to wit, language is never owned. Even when one has only a single mother tongue, when one is rooted in the place of one’s birth and in one’s language, even then language is not owned. It is of the essence of language that language does not let itself be appropriated.”²² Yet, the colonizer convinces the colonized of precisely the opposite of this, in what he terms as the ‘Master’s first trick’:

Because the master does not possess exclusively, and naturally, what he calls his language . . . because he can give substance to and articulate this appropriation only in the course of an unnatural process of politico-phasmatic constructions . . . he can, thanks to that very fact, pretend historically, through the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as ‘his own’.²³

Yet, despite the impossibility of “owning” a language, the course of anti-colonial movements (such as in the case of Tamil nationalism) necessarily led to attempts to reappropriate languages and cultures. These attempts as just discussed are constantly riddled with internal contradictions and tensions that testify to what Derrida terms *the master’s*

²²Derrida, Dutoit & Pasanen, 2005, p. 101

²³*ibid.* p. 23

second trick, which lies in convincing the colonized that reappropriation is possible, but what is concealed is that this is based on the master's own terms, and therefore operates on the master's own terms. Therefore, every process of reappropriation becomes a process of colonization even in the absence of the original master, and language becomes the site of endless attempts at appropriation, leading to "jealousy without appropriation" (1998: 24).

Although Derrida speaks of nationalism in general, it is necessary to be aware of the specificity of the European experience of nationalism (and especially colonialism) as opposed to a South Asian one. Although South Asian nationalisms might be, as Partha Chatterjee puts it, derivative nationalisms²⁴, one may also argue after Ramaswamy (1997) that the narrative of European nationalism is often totalizing and cannot capture the complexity or the nuance of the subcontinental experiences. In this sense, the Tamil instance of nationalism is more layered and complex than the point from which Derrida speaks; it simultaneously resists the appropriation of language by questioning the overarching narrative of Sanskrit reigning supreme whilst also replacing this narrative with another (perhaps equally totalizing one) of the supremacy of Tamil. To the extent that other movements based on linguistic pride (such as the Telangana movement) have not engaged with this linguistic contest and contestation with Sanskrit, the Tamil movement provides a unique perspective on linguistic nationalism. This makes it necessary, therefore, to approach and accept Derrida's warning regarding "naive" gestures with caution:

. . . what is at stake here politically is that linguistic na-

²⁴Chatterjee, 1986

tionalism is precisely one of these gestures of appropriation, a naive gesture of appropriation . . . I must resist any nationalist temptation, which is always the imperialist or colonialist temptation to over-step borders...

1.2. Literature Review

As mentioned previously, there is a large and varied body of literature on the question of nationalism, and a sizeable portion of it dedicated to the question of linguistic nationalism. However, most of the literature comes from the perspective of the social sciences and very few works address the question of language itself adequately. The following are some of the literature that attempt to address this question.

Naoki Sakai

Sakai (2009) discusses the transformations that took place in the way the Japanese language was viewed and its conversion into a “national” language, with focus on pedagogy. Sakai says that in the 17th and 18th century, the non-nationalized Japanese education system emphasized the study of Classics from the Confucian and Buddhist tradition without reference to whether they were Chinese or Japanese ones. The values of schools of poetry, religious and dynastic traditions were given more emphasis rather than a national or ethnic identity. It was only in the 18th century, with the founding of the institution of National Studies that classics began to be divided in terms of “national character” and a distinction began to be made between Chinese and Japanese texts. This, according to Sakai, was not simply a new interpretation added to the many already existing ones of the classics but was “in

fact the creation of a new set of regimes whereby the classic text was read anew, rewritten and recreated,” and a testimony to certain epistemic changes in how language was perceived. He argues that this epistemic change was discursively brought about by scholars and translators such as Matori Norinaga, who translated the eighth-century mytho-historical text, the *Kojiki* and thus participated in the invention of “the Japanese as ‘an object in idea’ of systematic knowledge in the eighteenth century.”²⁵ In particular, Matori’s use of “pure” kana script as a marker of the authentically Japanese as opposed to a hybrid script that also incorporated the *mana* or *kanji* script—which he viewed as foreign owing to its Chinese origins—discursively constructed and reinforced the distinction between the Chinese language and the Japanese. Thus, the association of language with nationalism wrought great changes even independent of colonial forces.

Sumathi Ramaswamy

In *Passions of the Tongue*, the idea of linguistic nationalism is the key problematic for Sumathi Ramaswamy. She attempts, in the tradition of the Subaltern Studies historians, to rescue the phenomenon of passion for language in Tamilnadu from the narrative of linguistic nationalism which she considers to be under the “universalizing imperative of Europe’s knowledge practices”²⁶, i.e., the Eurocentric idea of linguistic nationalism which is inadequate, according to Ramaswamy, to speak about and account for alternate forms experience and expression. Ramaswamy instead uses *tamilpa-r̄ru*, glossed as ‘language devotion’, as

²⁵Sakai, 2009, p.8

²⁶Ramaswamy, 1997, p. 3.

the rubric through which to view various practices that would otherwise not fit into the Eurocentric model of nationalism, such as self-immolation for the cause of the language, and other acts of “praise, passion, and practice through which the language is transformed into the primary site of attachment, love, and loyalty of its speakers.”²⁷ *Tamilparru* is the key term by which Tamil devotees themselves differentiate between those who are authentic Tamilians and otherwise. Ramaswamy explores how the Tamil language has been transformed through social and political movements of Tamil devotion and how the Tamil subject has been produced by language devotion such that her “subjectivity merges into the imagined self of Tamil.”²⁸ One of Ramaswamy’s core arguments in using the notion of Tamil devotion is that the sentiments that are usually directed at parents, deities and kings are instead directed at the language, and what she calls “the wholesale annexation of genres of praise, vocabularies of reverence, and habits of adulations which have been conventionally reserved for such notables.”²⁹ The analytic of Tamil devotion facilitates the understanding of this expression better than a theoretically overburdened concept such as nationalism. She also traces in a Foucauldian manner how discourses around the language, based on institutional practices and ideological devices, shape and support the production of the modern Tamil subject. But she is also equally interested in the poetics of Tamil devotion as she is in its politics for the two are inseparable to her for the poetics are “the rhetorical norms and strategies of persuasion through which its adherents attempt to convince their fellow speakers about the glories of their language”³⁰. She

²⁷*ibid.*, p. 10

²⁸*ibid.*, p. 60

²⁹*ibid.*, p. 8

³⁰*ibid.*

considers the various forms of speech around Tamil devotion and their reliance on rhetorical and poetic devices crucial in working towards this task of persuasion. Ramaswamy also ultimately attempts to show the impossibility of the task of the Tamil devotee in constructing a singular, homogenous community or language. Ramaswamy's attempt to trace the politics of Tamil devotion leads her to background her discussion on the Colonial roots of the inequalities that ultimately led to the emergence of a Tamil consciousness and thus a Tamil subject. Backed by exhaustive research on both "native" texts and British, she sketches a picture of the Colonial discourse around language that other various post-colonial scholars have also pointed to. She focuses on the various ways in which the language was imagined by its devotees: as a divine language, particularly in the complex ways in which the Neo-Shivite movement clashed with a Brahmanical understanding of Tamil's divinity and the equally complex issues of caste and community; as a classical language, and the attempts made by the Tamil devotees to compel the Colonial masters to acknowledge the ancience and superiority of the language, on par with Sanskrit; as a language of the Indian nation, with a nationalist focus on Tamil devotion providing a route for resistance in the struggle for an independent Indian nation; and as a language of the Dravidian people, and a means to unite an otherwise denigrated population and their culture. However, Ramaswamy does not examine the core assumptions that underlie the Colonial interest in the languages of the Colonies and its roots in the philosophy of post-Enlightenment Europe and the impact this had on the Dravidian movement.

Lisa Mitchell

Lisa Mitchell also deals with the question of nationalism and politics of language in south India, although with greater nuance and attention to the question of how colonial ideology impacted native understanding of language than Ramaswamy. She traces how language came to be a site of personal identity when no such association existed in pre-colonial southern India. While Sakai wonders how we count language, Mitchell is interested in the idea of parallel languages, referring to linguistic practices before the 18th century which reflected the belief that languages were parallel in the sense that different languages could be used parallelly in different spheres. However, with the imposition of colonial models of pedagogy and the rise of the notion of “mother tongue”, language began to be seen as an “intrinsic” property of the individual, and a single language had to be used with equal skill and proficiency in every context by its “native speaker”. Thenceforth, the grammatical rules of particular languages began to be taught to young learners with the aim of complete mastery over every aspect of the mother tongue, and language pedagogy shifted to the “primer” model, and Mitchell points out how highly unusual this was considering that up to this point, grammars were the concern only of scholars and poets. Mitchell’s work demonstrates the impact of philology and grammar-writing, two major colonial interests, on South Asian pedagogical practices, which in turn had lasting impact on the way colonial and modern subjects related to language. Mitchell also examines how continuous histories and cultures were projected onto particular languages by historians where no such histories existed before. She is particularly interested in the relationship between geographical territory and its being bound to par-

ticular languages, and demonstrates through various historical sources that the currently held beliefs (especially in the context of her area of interest, the state of Andhra Pradesh and what is now Telangana) about the relationships between language and geography were not the basis for any popularly shared collective identities. She argues instead that certain geographical territories were perhaps refer in their collectivity to dynasties of rule and gives evidence that kings were in fact often patrons of poets of many different languages within their realms, despite not “belonging” to those cultures. Mitchell’s analysis of how colonial scholars such as Campbell and Ellis Whyte reinterpreted traditional grammatical notions with a historical linguistic perspective is also illuminating regarding the construction of foreignness within the south Indian grammatical tradition. The core of her argument

...is not that people did not recognize, value, or even praise distinct named languages like Telugu, for clearly they did; instead, we can see that these recognitions emphasized the utility of Telugu for accomplishing particular kinds of tasks or bestowing prestige on the user rather than celebrating the language as a marker of shared identity that excluded speakers of other languages...³¹⁾

The works discussed above provide the overarching framework of the approach to language in connection with culture for this thesis, especially in the caution they practice towards treating language as a foregone entity and conclusion. However, other works have also informed the arguments presented in the current thesis and these will be dis-

³¹Mitchell, 2009, p. 45

cussed and reviewed as and when relevant in each chapter in the body of the thesis.

1.3. Research Questions and Chapterization

This research project will focus on questions regarding how the intervention of colonial disciplines such as philology impacted the understanding of pre-colonial texts, and how these appropriations and attempts at reappropriation continue to impact current attitudes towards language. The work will also focus on the rediscovery of the Sangam body of work, particularly the *Tolkāppiyam* as a grammatical text. How did the fact that the *Tolkāppiyam* was rediscovered and brought back into popular circulation in the specific colonial period and milieu affect its reading, particularly in terms of the newer ideas of grammar and language that were in circulation due to colonial intervention? Chapter two will attempt to answer these questions by exploring the trajectory of the changes in view regarding language that took place in Europe, with the discussion guided by a focus on the development of philology as a discipline and its impact on the emergence of the Tamil consciousness through the work of Colonial philologists like Ellis and Caldwell, Tamil philologists and scholars like Swaminatha Iyer and Damodaran Pillai, and Dravidianist ideologues like Maraimalai Atikal.

Further, the thesis also asks, how did the evidence of the existence of such ancient grammatical texts impact the imagination of an ideal Tamil nation and culture? How was the secular-seeming Sangam body of literature read in order to accommodate the emerging politics of religion and caste in the region? In what way did the texts help in secularizing a culture while simultaneously accommodating language into

a religious paradigm? What were the more underlying notions of language and community that had recently emerged that impacted what Ramaswamy calls language devotion? Chapter three attempts to address some of these questions by examining the various beliefs, myths and legends that surround the texts of the Saṅgam era, particularly grammatical treatises such as the *Tolkāppiyam* and its commentaries, and their role in constituting the idea of a Tamil tradition.

If it is possible to posit an ever-deepening sense of crisis in the attempts to reappropriate and rescue the Tamil language and nation from colonial appropriation, can the recent forays into reviving linguistic and cultural nationalism in popular politics in Tamilnadu be seen as symptoms of that crisis? Where language was posited as the one defining and unifying notion of the Tamil nation, and of Tamilnadu, does the emergence of caste-based political parties signify a breakdown of the linguistic identity as central to the polity, and if so, how does the emergence of a new wave of Dravidianist ideologues fit into this narrative? Chapter four attempts to answer some of these questions. Chapter five tries to draw together the threads of the preceding discussions and offer a concluding analysis.

As mentioned earlier, while the body of work on linguistic nationalism is large, works that are rooted on the question of language and specifically its colonial constitution through discursive practices in various disciplines is sparse, especially in the case of Tamil. While some work of this kind has emerged in recent times, this thesis will draw on such work, but focus directly on the colonial cultural appropriations of language with a specific interest in the ways these have impacted Tamil culture today. The thesis is limited in focus as it deals only with

linguistic movements in India, although with growing globalization the imagined Tamil community includes populations in Srilanka, Malaysia, Singapore and diaspora all over the world. However, due to the differences in the specific ways colonialism operated in different geographical areas and the vastly different directions that cultural and political movements have taken, the scope of the study is limited.

2 | Philology & the Rise of Linguistic Nationalism

The similitude and derivation of languages afford the most indubitable proof of the traduction of nations, and the genealogy of mankind. They add often physical certainty to historical evidence; and often supply the only evidence of ancient migrations, and the revolutions of ages which have left no written monuments behind them.

Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*

2.1. Introduction

One of the important developments that characterise modernity is an increasingly central place given to texts in many societies, whether as

source of law, both religious and otherwise, or as arbiter of the relationship of a community with the past (and the relationship thereof which will be discussed in the final section of the chapter), especially as text contrasts with orality. This was in part due, as Anderson (2006) points out, due to the invention of the printing press, which made texts both quicker and cheaper to produce than traditional methods, making them accessible to a wider audience.

2.2. The Renaissance and The Enlightenment

In the European context, throughout the middle ages, the text traditionally had significance in religion as the religious text was considered the direct word of god. The relationship between the text and language was in particular a deeply entwined one, as it was believed that certain languages were sacred and therefore the words themselves contained power, be it Latin, Hebrew or Arabic for the Abrahamic religions. The text as the vehicle of gods word was therefore thought to be imbued with certain characteristics, such as being impervious to change and was centrally important as its reading and decipherment would reveal the true meaning of god to human beings. The Renaissance, a movement principally concentrated in Italy and characterized by a fervour for the classical texts facilitated an alternate relationship to the text. The renewed interest in the Classics of Greek and Rome manifested in the form of a careful hunt for and unearthing of ancient manuscript and their correction and interpretation.

Simultaneously Renaissance philosophers such as Hobbes had already begun to separate political philosophy from theology, thus rendering the Church superfluous in matters of State. Therefore, by the

time of the Enlightenment (17th-18th Century)—generally agreed upon as the starting point of Modernity—and empiricism began to flourish, religion was no longer the guiding force around which European society was organized. The rise of the nation-state and the “vulgar tongues” or vernacular languages provided powerful ways to reorient the social landscape of Europe.

Despite the fact that the Enlightenment was a rejection of religion in favour of rationality and empiricism, certain aspects of the bygone eras persisted in the period. The text, for instance, so central to theology for being the word of God, found itself persisting with an equally important role in Modernity. The following discussion will examine how this persistence of the text played out, particularly thanks to certain emerging disciplines in Europe such as philology.

2.3. Classical Philology

Philology came to be influential in the emergence of the various modern disciplines that came to be grouped together as the humanities. Although philology took a particular form in Modernity, it was by no means a new or even a particularly European discipline, and may be said to have been practised by various cultures around the world that had textual traditions. The study of text and grammar was common in the Indian subcontinent, China and the Arab world, besides being attested in Greek and Roman civilization.

Classical philology on the threshold of Modernity had deep roots in the late medieval and Renaissance preoccupation with the classics. As practised in Germany and France, Classical Philology was shaped by two major traditions, philhellenism and Biblical scholarship. Philhel-

lenism refers to the study of the Greek classics and culture which were guided by the belief that the Greeks represented the pinnacle of cultural sophistication and wisdom and that the diligent study of the classics would make the wisdom of the Greeks accessible. A core principle of classical philology was the integrity of the text. Despite the fact that the Greek classics that were studied were often several centuries old, fragmentary in nature, and retrieved through many secondary sources, the ideal that grounded the philologist was that the genius of the original author would resound across the millenia and could still be discovered in the texts. This, however, required a particularly rigorous method, as promoted by Friedrich August Wolf. Wolf, often considered the founder of philology, was a perfect blend of the Renaissance spirit, with its enthusiasm for the Classics, and the Enlightenment preoccupation with rationality, empiricism and the scientific method. This was evident in his new study of the classics, which he called *Altertumswissenschaft*, or 'the scientific study of antiquity'. Wolf considered it to be on par with the natural sciences in that the classics could not simply be studied by laypeople and amateurs, but required complete professional dedication. This approach to philology was both historical and literary and therefore required many distinct types of analyses to be synthesized towards one goal, of studying human nature in ancient times through ancient texts.

There were various reasons for the philologist's interest in the Greeks in particular and humanism in general. Firstly, classical philology itself, as previously mentioned, was practised by the Greeks and later by the Romans. For the Greeks, philology was essential for the preservation of knowledge as it provided the means by which scrolls and manuscripts

could be verified to be free of errors and were not duplicates. In an age much before the advent of print, in which all documents were copied by hand, errors in copied texts were unavoidable. Further, as specialised centres of learning emerged and libraries and private collections of scrolls began to grow, the value of texts also began to increase and forgeries also abounded. Philology thus provided a way for librarians and collectors to verify the authenticity of documents before procurement through a close and knowledgeable reading of the texts. This also meant that older versions of texts were considered more trustworthy as they were closer to the original, having gone through fewer copyings and were therefore less likely to be riddled with copying errors—an orientation of philology that became a characteristic of philology in modernity as well. The *scholia* as a philological practise was also a product of the Greeks, and texts analyzed in the method were provided with detailed annotations, commentaries and interpretations along the margins. The philology of the Greeks and later, the Romans writing in Latin, came to fascinate the Renaissance intellectuals of Italy like Lovato and Petrarch, of whom the former studied the Classical texts in detail and imitated them, while Petrarch put philology back into full practise for the first time after the middle ages. One of the most striking changes in the nature of the study of classical texts was also wrought by of the Renaissance intellectuals: the historical turn of philology. From the time of the Graeco-Roman philologists, the main concern of philology had been in maintaining and ascertaining uniformity of style and tone. The medieval scholars who came before the Renaissance also held classical Graeco-Roman texts in high esteem and found their contemporary culture lacking in comparison, as Turner (2015) observes, but

they still thought of their work as being in a continuum with a great tradition. On the other hand, for the Renaissance philologists, there was a new recognition of a break in the tradition, and as retrievable through texts. They believed instead that a “...long-dead ancient Rome ...spoke through the words surviving from it. Philology enabled moderns to recover the historical reality behind these words. To spot and correct errors that had crept into manuscripts ... the philologist needed to imagine the gamut of problems face by long-ago scribes ... philology became a pursuit undertaken from a knowingly historical angle of vision.”¹ Thus, the philologist “...treated his text as a historical and an anthropological document, the much-altered remanant of an early stage of development of human culture.”² This historical turn would come to dominate the thinking of all philologists in Modernity, though the nature of historicity would continuously go through many changes and transformations. As Turner points out, the Renaissance scholars did not understand the idea of “culture” in the modern way, as something that set antiquity apart from them as alien or other.

Philology in the Renaissance also led to a renewed interest in Biblical studies, sparked off by Erasmus’ application of the philological method in Biblical analysis, which was however tempered by the religio-political upheavals of the Reformation. Thus, by the time of the Enlightenment, particularly in Germany and France, philology was considered a minor discipline until Wolf’s attempts to revive it, but seemingly purged of its ties with religion and focusing instead only on its Greek roots. However, the Enlightenment fascination with the Greeks was not just for their scholarly contributions, but also due to a cer-

¹Turner, 2014, *Italian Humanism* para 13

²Grafton & Glenn, 1985

tain conceptions about Greek culture and its ideological implications. The Greeks were thought to be a superior culture for their passionate engagement with beauty, creativity, a close relationship with and appreciation for nature, and an elevated understanding of humanistic principles. As early as in the sixteenth century, grammarian Pierre Ramée had extolled the humanistic virtues of Greek literature. The Greeks were also held in particular high esteem by the classical philologists because this world-view of the Greeks provided a counterpoint to Jewish culture. From the Middle Ages onwards, Greek, Latin and Hebrew were widely studied, as was Arabic, but Hebrew was given a more central place as it was considered by many as the “original” language, the language of God. However, with the coming of the Renaissance, the study of Hebrew had taken on a less religious tinge—German Renaissance scholar Reuchlin, for instance, compared traditional Hebrew grammar directly with that of Latin. Thus, for the philologist, the secularization of the study of Jewish texts allowed for Greek to be on a level playing field with Hebrew. Harpham points out that in this, classical philology “was already . . . explicitly anti-Judaic . . . Its enthusiasm for ancient Greece was all the more intense for being pitted against Jewish religion and culture which were thought to exemplify such qualities as mechanism, abstraction, dualism, and lifelessness.”³ This enthusiasm for the Greeks was further deepened by the discovery of a direct link between the modern Europeans and the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations through their languages as proposed by Sir William Jones in his famous address to the Asiatick Society of Calcutta. The Third Anniversary Discourse provided a way to reimagine a European

³Harpham, 2009, p.42

past that linked modern Germanic languages with ancient ones like Sanskrit, Greek and Latin which could demonstrably be dated to even before Hebrew, and this Indo-European language family would exclude the Semitic languages.

2.3.1. *Johann Gottfried von Herder*

One of the characterizing features of the Enlightenment was an engagement with the idea of *humanism*, which came from various sources but perhaps most significantly from a new self-consciousness of European man to what it meant to be human. The European encounter with other societies and cultures through colonialism had much to do with this self-consciousness. While on the one hand, unspeakable violences were unleashed upon many native populations by European colonizers, a growing fascination with the study of other cultures and a belief in larger humanistic values emerged as the understanding of what humanity was also grew. The Enlightenment engagement with humanism took many different forms, and a more detailed look at a major philosopher of the Enlightenment would be useful in illustrating some of the ways in which it played out.

Johann Gottfried von Herder was particularly influential in not just the ways classical texts were read but also in the larger understanding of language and nation and its relationship to the folk. Turner calls Herder's language philosophy "the central linguistic dogma of [German] romanticism"⁴. Herder influenced in significant ways many German philosophers, both his contemporaries such as Hamann, and those who came after—including Fichte, Schlegel, Humboldt and Hegel—and has

⁴Turner, 2014, Ch. 5, 'Comparative Historical Indo-European Philology'

had a lasting impact on how language was conceptualized in the centuries to follow, even up to the present. Forster (2010) suggests that Herder is the founder of classical German language philosophy⁵, and ascribes to Herder three fundamental principles that represented a sharp departure from the Enlightenment thinkers, and came to dominate the philosophy of language in the continent and beyond. The first principle consisted of the idea that thought is essentially bounded by language and dependent upon it, which departed from a major strain of Enlightenment thinking that considered thought to be unbounded, and language as only a means to its communication. The second principle was that meaning lies in word usage rather than items like ideas and mental objects that are distinct from language itself. The third principle was that all concepts of the mind were based on the senses and that concepts that did not emerge from sensation were based on metaphor or extension of meaning of the concepts that emerged from the senses.

Herder's formulations about language were significant not just for the import they had for language philosophy but also for philology, hermeneutics and translation theory. This was not just a theory of language but its implications made it also a theory of the *text*. The principles of lan-

⁵Forster argues that though Hamann was older to Herder and considerably influenced the latter in many ways, his ideas about language were, contrary to popular belief, influenced by Herder's. The development of Herder's ideas about language as outlined further in the current section predate Hamann's similar writings by at least a decade. According to Dilthey (1985), Hamann's ideas about language were more in keeping with the prevailing trend of the Enlightenment philosophy of the age; it is Herder who represents a break from tradition. It is to be noted that Herder himself did not develop his philosophy of language in isolation but was influenced by various alternate schools of thought of the time but his significance arises from having more nuanced and philosophically sophisticated formulations than those before him, developing not simply epistemological theories but ontological ones as well. His far-reaching influence on entire disciplines and later thinkers is also significant. It is in this context that the present thesis treats Herder as the founder of classical German language philosophy.

guage outlined above simplify some of the problems that arise in the art of interpretation of text; for if meaning lies in word usage rather than referring to ideas that are entities independent from language itself, interpretation would simply be the process of correctly understanding the usage of words. If thought was bounded by language, then there was nothing beyond the text that the writer might be trying to convey and which the interpreter must try to divine from the text. If concepts were based on sensation and extension, then a faithfulness to the form of the text and especially to the sensory aspects of words would ensure the fidelity of the interpretation. The prevailing view of language of the Enlightenment, on the other hand, was not able to deal as well with the problems of hermeneutics and translation.

The cultural relativism that was implied by Herder's philosophy of language— that languages play a moderative role in our experience of the world, and therefore different linguistic groups (and cultures) hold essentially different worldviews—coupled with his idea of the *volk* were highly influential among many philosophers to follow him. Indeed, *volkgeist* became the rallying idea around which German nationalism organized itself. For Herder, the folk spirit represented the true genius of the people of a nation, and the poetry of the *volk* would be suffused with this genius that would resound with all members of the nation. The idea of the *volk* was crucially based on language for it was a shared language that expressed this genius and formed the basis for a shared national character. It is not difficult to see the influence of philology at work behind Herder's ideas of *volk*: the belief that the spirit and genius of a people and their culture was in some way timeless was a child of clas-

sical philology's historical turn⁶

2.3.2. *Philology & Theology*

The rise of nationalism in Europe was quite closely tied up with philology and humanism. Robins explains nationalism as another aspect of the drive behind humanism: "Secular and humanist needs were reinforced by the rise in status of the vernacular languages of Europe after the translation of the Bible into them, one aspect of the religious Reformation."⁷ This was in turn coupled with the discovery of the relationship between ancient languages and German. The Indo-European hypothesis, coming as it did at the end of the eighteenth century, also coincided with the rise of German (or Prussian) nationalistic sentiment, when many German intellectuals were feeling a pressing need to improve the intellectual climate of Germany in the face of a fear of being overshadowed by a towering French literary and intellectual culture. As Bolter observes, for Wolf, the growth of classical philology and *Altertumswissenschaft* would go towards strengthening the intellectual traditions of Germany and German culture, and the political was as strong a motivation for his work as the intellectual.

Despite Wolf's emphasis on *Altertumswissenschaft* as a "scientific" study of antiquity, a lot of the methodology of classical philology in modernity found its source in theology rather than the scientific method of the natural sciences, or the traditions of classical studies that went

⁶Herder's application of the idea of folk spirit to solidify a national culture was singularly influential, but attempts had already been made to historicize the past of nations and peoples with the assistance of philology. According to Turner (2014) philology and etymology had been applied in as early the fourteenth century to ascertain the histories of a people, such as the Germans or the French.

⁷Robins, 1970, p.100

before him. According to Grafton and Glenn (1985) Wolf modeled his *Altertumswissenschaft* on that of theologian J. G. Eichhorn, who had developed a robust method of analysis for the Bible which was historical in nature. Wolf similarly adopted a historical approach to the Greek Classics along the lines of Eichhorn's analysis of the Biblical source-texts, which involved a close reading of the various versions of the texts from different sources in order to access the "original text". During the Reformation, philologists were looked upon with suspicion and distrust for the "secular" and historical approach they took to Biblical interpretation, with the Bible being treated as another historical text that could be used to understand a distant past, thus breaking the sense of the eternal continuity of the divine that the Bible was thought to represent. Post-Reformation Europe, on the other hand, began to look more favourably upon philology for the opposite reasons. Dutch Humanist Grotius, for instance, believed that philology was the answer to the religious strife of Europe, for he believed that philology could help resolve many of the disagreements that rose from conflicting versions and passages of the Bible. Eichhorn, therefore, was one among the many theologians who strove to bring clarity to the Bible through the application of a historical method to Bible studies. It is here that the theological ideals begin to seep back into philology itself; for, while the need to apprehend the original word of God was clearly the guiding force behind the idea of the original text in theology, this idea of a unary origin also spilled over into Wolf's assumptions about the Homeric (and other Greek) Classics. Thus, both Eichhorn and Wolf ". . . found errors and inconsistencies of thought and language everywhere . . . and . . . saw these as clues that could enable one to identify the original substrates that [had been] re-

worked.”⁸ Thus, while Wolf and other classical philologists in Germany were driven by concerns that were recognizably steeped in modernity and had much to do with the nation and the idea of improving the status of Germans by either recapturing the lost folk spirit or rediscovering the genius of the classics, much of the methodology still relied on that of theology, or at least its underlying spirit. In this, the text found itself persisting and in fact gaining a more central place. For if languages were imbued with the cultures they originated from, then the text, as the one seemingly stable site in which language could be apprehended, was key to understanding not just cultures or languages but humanity itself.

It is in this altered, Herderian view of language that Classical Philology paved way for the advent of Comparative Philology and historical linguistics. For:

In the later seventeenth century, philology, like the Roman god Janus, wore two faces. One peered back at scholars of earlier generations: its weathered visage mirroring their abilities as well as their limitations. The other—its features half formed—gazed toward the future. In that age to come, practices of early modern philology would evolve into ways of dealing with languages and understanding their pasts hardly imaginable before 1700.⁹

⁸Grafton & Glenn, 1985, p.21.

⁹Turner, 2014, Ch.2, ‘Philology and History at Century’s End’, para 7.

2.4. Comparative Philology & Historical Linguistics

Wolf's *Altertumswissenschaft*, with its rigorous scientific method, established classical philology as a respected discipline in the latter half of the eighteenth century in Germany and brought many influential intellectuals into its fold, including Wilhelm von Humboldt. The move from classical philology to comparative philology was driven by the discoveries of the Europeans in the colonial world, particularly in India, with the "discovery" of Sanskrit and the Indo-European hypothesis. In 1786, Sir William Jones Third Anniversary Address to the Asiatick Society in Calcutta crystallized observations that had previously and marginally been made about the similarities between Sanskrit, Latin and Greek, and gave what came to be known as the Indo-European hypothesis suggesting that these languages shared a common origin. These discoveries could only be made with the support of the textual tradition that already existed in the subcontinent, particularly the body of ancient Sanskrit literature which the British "discovered" through the process of colonization. The early colonial attempts to learn Indian languages, combined with the interest in learning native religious and legal texts led to the methodology of classical philology being applied to the study of Sanskrit texts, including the Vedas. As Cannon (1998) discusses, Jones himself was an ardent Orientalist scholar of Persian literature and his orientation was that of both a language pedagogue and a literary scholar, for he spent much of his energies in creating Persian grammars to help British administrators in India, and in translating Persian texts in order to make the literature accessible to the British literary public. His posting in Calcutta shifted his focus from Persian to San-

skrit, for which he developed a great fascination¹⁰ that led him to study the language and the religious texts¹¹ in great detail, leading to the Indo-European hypothesis.

The European project of documenting unknown languages had much to do with the breakthroughs in comparative philology. The comparative word list method was used in field research in the colonies, a methodology developed in order to gain familiarity with the “core” or basic aspects of the numerous languages encountered in the Indian subcontinent and beyond. The earliest records of it being used in the colonies is for the recording of the Sumatran languages by philologist William Marsden, and it was most certainly behind Jones Third Anniversary Discourse revelations, though no record of his word lists survive. Trautmann (2006) credits Leibniz with devising this method of linguistic analysis, and says that Leibniz instructed travellers on how to collect linguistic information in order to help with the larger project of understanding the history of nations through the history of their languages, and this instruction included requests for interlinear translations of texts into European languages and “basic” word lists. Leibniz, as a polymath, reveals his philological training here, for this is clearly drawn from the classical philological method of interlinear commentary, explanations and translations. The idea behind the word list was the existence of a “core” of a language, rooted in its most simple and basic

¹⁰Jones and the early philologists in the subcontinent were the Orientalists who were under the influence of Romanticism and Humanism and were often driven by a genuine respect for the plurality of cultures, unlike Macaulay and the Anglican party who were much less inclined to be tolerant of native cultures. However, it was the Romantic spirit that allowed for the kind of synthesis of European and Indian ideas that paved the way for comparative philology.

¹¹Jones’ translation of many Sanskrit texts, including the Manusmriti, had a huge influence on how Hinduism was constituted and viewed thereafter in the subcontinent, not just among the British but also by the Indians.

words, such as those referring to kinship, numbers, part of the body, basic actions, etc. This harkens back to Romantic notions that the words of a language that express the simple and immediate ideas are closer to the real language than more complex and sophisticated concepts.

The method of the basic word list was the most crucial in the discovery of language families and in the development of comparative philology, for it provided the technology which was crucial for the discovery of systematic similarities in language, by ranging words of several languages next to each other. The word list also went beyond simply establishing comparative philology, and Trautmann (2006) goes as far as to say that it was crucial in the project of connecting languages and nations, calling the word list “. . . a method . . . that could put the posited close relation of languages and nations to work, such that language relations could be elicited even in the absence of historical memory and so serve as a key to ethnological relations, that is, the history of nations.”¹²

But it is not the case that all of the methodological breakthroughs of comparative philology had its roots in older European traditions. The encounter of Orientalists and philologists with native grammarians also had an impact on the ways in which the comparative method evolved. One instance of this is the classification of words into tatsama, tatbhava classifications by Sanskrit grammarians which was later taken up by traditional grammarians of many other languages in the subcontinent. As the discussion in the section on Caldwell's analysis of Dravidian will show, the Orientalist understanding of these categories also had an impact on the development of comparative philology, for the historical orientation of philology imbued these categories with a different

¹²Trautmann, 2006, p. 33

shade of meaning, and sharpened the philologists language-internal method of analysis. In this way, the move from classical philology to the comparative transformed the object of philological study from the text to language itself; language thus became a text, with internal coherence and a historical dimension similar to ancient texts, lending itself to similar analysis. Just as the historical text stood testament to ancient and forgotten cultures, so too could language, provided the comparative method was applied rigorously.

The discoveries of comparative philology did not remain in the colonies, however. A huge impact was felt in the Continent, and Sanskrit scholars such as Alexander Hamilton carried the insights of the burgeoning field of comparative philology back to Europe. Hamilton was appointed the first professor of Sanskrit in France, where he was highly influential, and produced a generation of philologists and Indologists that included Friedrich Schlegel. Schlegel came to be one of the most prominent proponents of the comparative method in Germany and an enthusiastic and widely respected Sanskritist. Schlegel refined the comparative method in going beyond the empiricism of Hamilton, which rested on tracing etymologies and comparing word-level similarities of different languages. Instead, Schlegel applied the comparative method at the level of word-structure, particularly noun inflections, to draw conclusions about the relationship between languages. He termed this method comparative grammar and it would become widely applied in the European project of tracing the genealogy of languages.

2.5. Ellis & the Madras College

Much of the initial activity of colonial philologists in India revolved around the study of Sanskrit. The impact of the work of the Sanskritist Orientalists on European philology as just discussed was so strong as to eclipse philological work in all other colonies. In India, too, Sanskrit philology had such a strong influence that the place of Dravidian philology was hard-won, and mainly achieved through the activities of the College of Fort St. George in Madras, especially its founder Francis Whyte Ellis and other members such as A. D. Campbell. But there was also significant participation from the “natives” such as Patabhirama Shastri, who was the erudite head-master of the college.

The college of Fort St. George was established in 1812, founded by Ellis, who was then serving as the Collector of Madras. Ellis was an exceptional scholar, for he was extremely learned in both Tamil and Sanskrit, which for reasons just noted, was not the norm among Indologists. He not only founded the College but conceptualized the very idea, and the model proved to be influential enough to be emulated elsewhere. It was intended to impart training in the various southern languages to the administrators of the civil services and officials associated with the East India Company and thus, a great deal of attention was paid to the development of pedagogic methods for the most important languages with regard to administration. It is in this context that various south Indian languages began to be studied, and the methodology of comparative philology began to be applied.

P Sreekumar has a detailed analysis of Ellis' deployment of the methods of comparative phonology to establish Dravidian as a separate lan-

guage family. He notes that Ellis uses four types of evidence to establish this, consisting of monolingual refutation, multilingual juxtaposition, identification of native Telugu vocabulary, and setting up correspondences in vocabulary and sentence structure.”*Sreekumar 2011, p. 99* He also considers Ellis’ demonstration that “the identification of pure native words is a valuable step establishing cognates¹³” was an important contribution to historical linguistics¹⁴.

Trautmann (2006), among others, has recounted the story of the discovery of the Dravidian language family by Ellis (although he does not use the term ‘Dravidian’, which was a later invention of Robert Caldwell) and the contribution of the other members of the College. He emphasizes the importance of Ellis’ Introduction to Campbell’s *A Grammar of the Teloogoo Language*, first published in 1916 and his *Notes to the Introduction* in the 1926 edition. This is the only surviving work of Ellis’ on the subject of philology, due to his untimely death through poisoning at the age of 41. However, the significance of this work cannot be understated for the history of philology, for it acknowledged for the first time that the languages of southern India were part of the same language family. In proving that Telugu was not, as previously thought, descended from Sanskrit, Ellis and Campbell established the existence of an independent language family from the Indo-Aryan for the first time. Although this discovery is not as well-remembered as that of Caldwell’s, it had an impact on the practices of philology and language pedagogy.

In the case of language pedagogy, the traditional model had been

¹³Sreekumar, 2009, p. 90

¹⁴Here, being a learned scholar of Sanskrit, Ellis is likely drawing from the *tatbhava* and *tatsama* distinctions.

to simply learn phrases or *usages* of the local languages, and this was considered sufficient to effectively communicate in administrative tasks with the locals. But, as Lisa Mitchell notes,

...by the early decades of the nineteenth century the acquisition of linguistic competency simply through usage alone was no longer considered sufficient. Both colonial and local reformers were beginning to argue that systematic comprehensive knowledge of language—both grammar and meaning—was necessary as a basis for further education and training, and most importantly, as a foundation for doing things with language later on...¹⁵

Although Mitchell traces the source of this basic change in attitude towards language pedagogy to the impact of print and shifting trends in the idea of literary culture, it is also necessary to acknowledge the contribution of the work of the College of Fort St. George. Mitchell does mention Campbell in as a precursor to later reformists, but does not examine the source of Campbell's beliefs (as the focus of her research lies elsewhere.) The changes brought about by the study of different south Indian languages as distinct parts of the same family of language clearly played an important role in the transformation of the view of language as use to language as object that Mitchell is concerned with. With the philological perspective taken by Ellis and Campbell, the necessity of treating different languages of the region as distinct objects became established. Further, this impact directly influenced pedagogy as the only printing activity in Madras was carried out by the College.

¹⁵Mitchell, 2009, p. 128

In that pedagogy and education in general became the ultimate tool of colonization after Macaulay, the impact of Ellis and his colleagues' work on shaping the ideas around language has been unprecedented.

2.6. Caldwell & the Dravidian Language Family

This section presents a detailed analysis of Bishop Robert Caldwell's introduction to *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, which was the first full-fledged systematic comparative analysis of the languages of Southern India and their categorization into one family of languages. While Ellis and his colleagues at the College at Fort St George had already expositionally established the idea that the south Indian languages formed an independent language family from the Indo-Aryan, the hypothesis was not as widely known nor as thoroughly explored as Caldwell's, which he seems to have arrived at independently. Although recent scholarship like Trautmann (2006) has brought the significance of the contributions of Ellis and his colleagues to light, Caldwell is still celebrated as the one who "discovered" the Dravidian language family by most Tamil scholars. While Ellis' work was highly significant for the impact it had on early Colonial practices in southern India, including the pedagogic methodology that was developed to train British administrators, its impact was not as wide-reaching as Caldwell's *Comparative Grammar*. This was doubtless because of Ellis' untimely death, as detailed by Trautmann, on the brink of publishing his most substantial works which would remain unwritten; but the context in which Caldwell published his grammar was also significant in the reach it had. A period of forty years separated the publication of their respective works and Caldwell's publication came at

a point when the time was ripe for its positive reception, especially by a Tamil audience, who had in the interim gained the necessary familiarity with philology to appreciate the significance of Caldwell's proposal. Further, the developments in comparative philology in the intervening years also impacted the methodology of the two philologists. Ellis' work was, as Caldwell himself notes, a "very brief comparison, not of the grammatical forms, but only of some of the vocables of three Dravidian dialects . . ." ¹⁶ This difference in methodology was one that was wrought by the work of Schlegel, as previously discussed, and his move from the traditional method of etymological comparisons to a structural comparison, which was still a recent development when Ellis' introduction was published, but well-established practice by Caldwell's time, giving him an advantage in methodology.

Caldwell's work is also significant to the current thesis because of its voluminous introductory section which is ideologically loaded, containing many statements that stand testament to the complex interweaving of ideas regarding race, religion, culture, history and language that underlay colonial philology, and which came to set the stage for the rise of Dravidianist sentiment. This section will therefore read Caldwell's introduction to understand both the comparative method as he applies it to argue in favour of a distinct new language family, and the assumptions that guide and colour his analysis along with its ideological implications.

¹⁶Caldwell, 1856, p. iv.

2.6.1. *The Comparative Grammar & the Philological Method*

Caldwell's main objective in the *Comparative Grammar* is to integrate the languages of southern India into the categorization of world languages that was already under way. Caldwell considers the method of comparative philology as crucial to this endeavour, with the comparative component *Comparative Grammar* being key, noting that, "it is only when philology becomes comparative, that it becomes scientific and progressive,"¹⁷ thus declaring his commitment to analysis that followed from the scientific orientation of Bopp (who he refers to in the work) rather than the more Romantic leanings of Schlegel and the early comparativists. He regards the comparative method as central to understanding the true origin of the languages of the south, as he believes that though the early Orientalists at least had knowledge of philology, their lack of familiarity with the south Indian languages led to the gaps in their insights regarding their true origins. Further, it was the absence of the comparative approach to grammar that caused both the Dravidian and Sanskrit grammarians to not recognize "the common origins" of the different Dravidian languages. He points out that while Sanskrit grammarians did make note of non-Sanskrit elements in the Dravidian languages, they still thought that the Dravidian languages all derived from Sanskrit, just like the North Indian languages.

While the facts that Caldwell presents about the native grammarians are unquestionable, what he does not recognize is that the work of the native grammarians had quite different objectives and orientations than that of philologists. The native grammarians were not, in fact, trying to build a genetic model of languages, as Caldwell and his

¹⁷*ibid.*

colleagues were, and therefore did not require the comparative method to really ascertain where these languages originated from. The idea of distinct ancestries of languages were neither relevant nor even part of the epistemic orientation of pre-Modern grammarians. The idea that the south Indian languages were related in a genetic sense of a “family of languages” was produced by the developments in the emerging humanities and sciences of Europe and such ideas would have had no meaning in the absence of that context for the traditional grammarians.

At the outset, Caldwell rejects Max Muller’s idea, prevalent among Orientalists, that all languages of the subcontinent that did not belong to the Indo-Aryan family of languages were part of the same family of languages of unknown origin; called Tamulian by Hodgson or given the generic negative characterization of Un-Sanskritic, which also included the languages that were spoken in the eastern portion of the subcontinent that later came to be grouped together as the Tibeto-Burman language family. Therefore, Caldwell has not one but two objectives for his work, albeit closely related to each other: to establish that the languages of southern India were of a separate group from those spoken in the North East, and more crucially, to demonstrate this language family could fit into the larger (Euro-centric) categorization of languages. Caldwell tentatively proposes and goes on to show that Dravidian could be brought into this larger fold by his categorizing it as a Scythian language.

In attempting to prove that the languages of southern India were related to each other, Caldwell places Tamil as the central focus of his hypothesis, such that the main aim of even studying the other languages is to understand the structure of Tamil. This reflects in even his choice

of the name of the language family, *Dravidian*, for “The word I have chosen is ‘Dravidian,’ a word which has already been used as a generic appellation of this family of tongues [as a descriptive term, not a genealogical one] by the Sanskrit geographers. Properly speaking, the term “Dravida” denotes the Tamil country alone. . .”¹⁸ The importance given to Tamil is partially due to Caldwell’s own familiarity with it, but also because it is “the oldest, richest and most highly organized”¹⁹ of the Dravidian languages. These characteristics of Tamil are brought up numerous times throughout the work and seem to be the defining factor of the importance given to Tamil. The reason for this becomes clear when it is understood in the context of the discourse around Sanskrit that prevailed among the early philologists and Sanskritists: Sanskrit was held in high esteem (as were Greek and Latin) for the same reasons of its antiquity, its sophisticated organization and its richness. Thus, the fact that Tamil could rival Sanskrit on those very characteristics distinguishes it for Caldwell and confers upon it the status of the central language around which the Dravidian hypothesis could be built, just as the Indo-European hypothesis was built around Sanskrit.

The analysis of the other south Indian tongues that follows also consistently confirms the aptness of this decision to Caldwell; he observes, for instance, that both Gondi and Toda, though geographically separated from Tamil, are both languages whose structures are closer to Tamil than any other Dravidian languages, even those geographically contiguous. Therefore, the connection between Gondi and Tamil is established owing to the technique of comparative structural analysis, for while Gondi shares many more similarities with the neighbouring lan-

¹⁸*ibid.*, p. 26

¹⁹*ibid.*, p. 1

guage, Telugu at the word level, Caldwell is able to demonstrate the “deeper connection” it has with Tamil at the structural level, which in the philological tradition would speak to a historical dimension to the relationship.

This historicity is the driving energy behind much of Caldwell’s work. That this is no trivial matter is revealed in his analysis of the Scythian elements, which he calls Indo-Europeanisms, in the Dravidian languages:

. . . the Indo-Europeanisms which are discoverable in the Dravidian languages carry us back to a period beyond all history, beyond all mythology, not only prior to the separation of the western branches of the Indo-European race from the eastern, but prior also to the separation of the yet undivided Indo-Europeans from the Scythian stock.²⁰

It is easy to see that this was an exciting discovery, for it foregrounded philology as an extremely powerful field of enquiry, more so than anthropology or history in its ability to part the veil of even the prehistoric past. The import of the Scythian analysis also rested on the fact that philology could reveal hitherto unknown facts about Europe to itself, thus also justifying the Orientalist preoccupation with the Orient as a mirror to the Occident.

However, the philological analysis of Dravidian does not only yield revelations about Europe’s history: through almost exclusively linguistic evidence, Caldwell also builds a picture of ancient India. It must be noted that this picture of ancient India is rife with racial tensions, and it fits in with the ideological orientation of the times. The following section will examine the racial undertones and implications arising

²⁰*ibid.*, p.50

from Caldwell's analysis of the history of the subcontinent.

2.6.2. *Race, Religion & Ideology*

Caldwell's hypothesis is embedded in the larger colonial beliefs of the time regarding language and race. This is expressed in his vision of the Dravidian language family as a single language spoken by a single race: peninsular India consists of "different branches of one and the same race, speaking different dialects of one and the same language"²¹. He is speaking of "one and the same language" here symbolically, or perhaps historically, for he later takes pains to establish that the Dravidian languages are not merely dialects of each other, rather distinct but related languages. His conception of the Dravidian race is also given nuance by a further subcategorization, where he assigns certain characteristics to those who speak particular languages: The Tamils are hardworking and enterprising, and the "least scrupulous and superstitious"²², the Malayalis are more superstitious and suspicious of outsiders, the Telugus and Kannadigas are the most numerous, and so on. Caldwell's characterization of the Tamils becomes crucial to his understanding of its relationship with Sanskrit as will become clearer in the later portions of this discussions.

However, his enumeration and demographic description of the languages reveals that this idea of a single race is still more complex, as he considers the Brahmins of south India a distinct race from the rest. He argues that the 'Dravida Brahmins' are actually descendents of those who spoke Sanskrit, the "Brahmanical colonists," who gave the Dra-

²¹*ibid.*, p. 2

²²*ibid.*, p. 5

vidian race “the higher arts of life.” Therefore, though the Dravidian language family corresponds with the Dravidian race, not all those who speak the Dravidian languages are to be included in the race, for the Southern Brahmins are descendents of the Aryan stock who no longer speak Sanskrit except in certain domains. They instead speak the ‘vernacular’ at home with their families despite the fact that Sanskrit is their ‘ancestral tongue’. The Brahmins are not the only exceptions to the Dravidian race; Caldwell also categorizes the southern Muslims as a separate race, ‘Mohemmadans’ of the Deccan region who originally spoke Hindustani, but are “now unable to put a single sentence together in Hindustani,”²³ having completely adopted Telugu in everyday life, nevertheless to be excluded from the Dravidian race. Caldwell takes this argument as far as to leave out the Brahmins and the Muslims entirely from his estimation of the number of Tamilians, therefore suggesting that “Tamilian” to him was a racial category rather than a linguistic identity. This is revealing as it points to the fact that Caldwell and philologists of this period in general had not developed an idea of linguistic identity in its modern form; racial identity was far more closely related to a historical ‘original’ or ancestral language that was fixed in a way that no amount of assimilation into another culture could change. The idea of a personal linguistic identity had not yet reached the rather more mutable modern version.

But the particulars of Caldwell’s analysis indicate a more ideologically grounded reasoning. If certain populations could be exceptions to the inclusion into a race, it begs the question of what makes the other populations intrinsically members of the race. If the Brahmins and

²³*ibid.*, p. 12

the Muslims had ‘ancestral tongues’ that they completely abandoned to adopt Dravidian languages, was it not possible that certain other populations classified as Dravidian might have also have adopted Dravidian languages and thus have comingled and compromised the Dravidian stock? The fact that Muslims and Brahmins seem to be the only two exceptions in Caldwell’s analysis must be read in light of the well-established Colonial attitudes towards both sets of populations. The historical tensions between the Christian colonials and Islam has been widely noted²⁴ and this, coupled with the antagonistic attitude of the Madras school orientalist towards the Brahmins, sheds light on why these particular groups were the “outsiders”.

This negative construction of insider and outsider is constantly reinforced by Caldwell. At many points, he tries to establish the difference between the Brahmins and the other inhabitants of southern India. Even his choice of the name *Dravidian* attests to this, as is illustrated by his explanation for the origin of the word “Dravida”:

Properly speaking, the term “Dravida” denotes the Tamil country alone . . . A Dravida is defined in the Sanskrit lexicons to be “a man of an outcaste tribe.” . . . This name was doubtless applied by the Brahminical inhabitants of Northern India to the aborigines of the extreme South and is evidence of the low estimation in which they were originally held . . . ²⁵

Caldwell’s choice of a name which by his own admission recalls the attitude of the Brahmins towards the “aborigines”—an attitude that Cald-

²⁴Mantena (2005), for instance, discusses another philologist, C. P. Brown, also a missionary to India, and his deep-seated antagonism towards Islamic culture that led to him to consider the Telugu language to be degraded due to its contact with Muslims.

²⁵Caldwell, 1856, p. 26

well interprets as being negative—is particularly loaded. Brook & Schmid (2000) read this as a subversive choice by Caldwell as he also considers the influence of the Brahmins, despite elevating Dravidian culture by bringing in a ‘high’ culture, to be ultimately detrimental to its development; and the name therefore becomes a call to rise above the damage of Aryan culture. Subversive though it might be, this choice of Caldwell’s also is symptomatic of the attitude of the southern Orientalists and missionaries towards Sanskrit and its glorification by the Sanskritists.

Caldwell’s use of language also keeps building on this idea of the insiders or rightful inhabitants of southern India in a more subtle way. The constant reference to Hindustani and Sanskrit as the “ancestral tongue” of the Muslims and the Brahmins, as noted before, establishes a historical dimension to the idea of belonging. He also refers to the Brahmins as “colonists”, which establishes their position of being outsiders in a way that does not truly reflect the fact that the Brahmins, if they were indeed outsiders, did in fact assimilate with the culture that they supposedly conquered. His language while speaking about the Muslims of south India is even stronger in establishing their antagonistic position as conquerors, calling them “warlike” and describing their presence in the subcontinent as the “Peninsula [being] overrun some centuries ago.” This pitting of cultures also extends metaphorically to language, where he speaks of the Sanskrit influence on the Dravidian languages in terms of “encroachment”. Caldwell’s negative attitude to these groups becomes even clearer when contrasted with how he speaks of the Tamils in Srilanka, where he observes that they “thrust out the Sinhalese” but does not seem to consider them colonists in quite the

same way, and despite the fact that the Tamils in Srilanka maintained their language, does not see Tamil as encroaching upon Sinhala. The argument here is not that the concepts of 'colonialist' and 'encroachment' should have applied uniformly across all the various phenomena of linguistic complexity in the subcontinent; the attempt is to draw attention to that fact that these ideas about insiders and outsiders in this particular region that are today taken to be historically sound and valid were in fact the product of a particular set of attitudes that are historically constituted, rather than dispassionate scientific fact.

Caldwell's racialising of linguistic difference in the subcontinent is clearest when talks about the revelations regarding ancient India gained from philological analysis of the Dravidian languages. His picture of the sub-continent in ancient times consists of three races: the Aryans, the Dravidians and a third, unknown race who populated mainland India. He hypothesizes that the Dravidian race dwelled in the mainland till a little before the arrival of the Aryans, but were driven into the southern peninsula by the unknown race. He places the separation of the Dravidian languages from each other in this era after the Dravidian race had settled in southern India, all established through linguistic evidence.

He also traces the pre-migratory history of the Dravidian race through the analysis of Brahui data to a few centuries before the arrival of the Aryans. Through philological evidence, he hypothesizes that the dwellers of the northern portions of subcontinent were not, as mentioned before, Dravidians, but another group of people who drove the Dravidians out of the mainland and were in turn subjugated by the Aryans as their slaves. It is here that Caldwell draws upon his Scythian hypothesis, tracing two types of Scythian influence in the languages of the subcon-

continent. While the Dravidian languages have clear Scythian features, Caldwell finds what he terms a “deeper” Scythian substrate in the Indo-Aryan languages which is quite distinct from that found in Dravidian. His hypothesis regarding this Scythian substrate is that it is a remnant of the non-Dravidian race pre-Aryan race of the subcontinent. Although he bases this on mainly linguistic evidence, he corroborates it with the accounts of ancient Greek travellers.

Caldwell also takes the single term “Sudra” and through a philological examination of it, constructs a cultural history of the subcontinent riddled with various ideas about caste and race. He suggests that the term “Sudra” was the name of a particular pre-Aryan tribe who were the first slaves of the Aryans and thereafter all who became serfs to the Aryans were also named after them. The Dravidians, meanwhile, were flourishing south of the Vindhyas and after the arrival of the Aryans, had interactions with them but were never subjugated. The interactions were mostly with the Aryan Brahmins who gave them the title of Sudras despite not being serfs or slaves to the Aryans. This, according to Caldwell, was a marker of the contempt with which the Brahmins viewed the Dravidians:

The introduction of the Drâvidians within the pale of Hinduism, and the consequent change of their appellation from Mlechchas to that of Sudras appears to have originated, not in conquest, but in the peaceable process of colonisation and progressive civilisation.²⁶

Thus, the idea of caste is closely tied up with the idea of race. Although Caldwell does not subscribe to the Aryan Invasion theory that became

²⁶*ibid.*, p. 75

popular in the years to come, which hypothesized that the Dravidian race was driven out of mainland India by the Aryans and subjugated by them, the racial and caste undertones of much of the Dravidian movement that followed are evident in his philological analysis of the grammar of Dravidian languages.

2.6.3. Linguistic Purity & the Classical Language

One of the important transformations that took place in the thinking about language in southern India during the colonial period was regarding *linguistic purity*. While a very rich multilingual climate prevailed in southern India with most having a grasp of two or more languages for use in different domains²⁷, the idea of linguistic purity was largely absent and was one of the specific and unique products of colonial philology. Caldwell's role here is amply clear from the *Comparative Grammar*, for he very emphatically establishes the idea that the Dravidian languages, as a separate language family from Sanskrit, only deteriorated through their contact with Sanskrit. In fact, Caldwell goes as far as to suggest that the Dravidian languages would do well to be purged of Sanskrit elements entirely, an idea that would become a mainstay of Dravidian politics, especially through thinkers such as Maraimalai Adigal. In her work on Tamil devotion and nationalism²⁸, Sumathy Ramaswamy identifies the rediscovery of the Sangam corpus and its reception by the Tamil audiences as the defining point from which linguistic nationalism arose. While the importance of the Sangam corpus is undeniable and will in fact be further explored in a later portion of

²⁷Mitchell, 2009

²⁸Ramaswamy, 1999

this thesis, the discussion that follows here will demonstrate beyond a doubt that a fertile soil had already been laid by philology for seeds of Tamil consciousness to be sown. However, this is not to detract from the original contributions of Tamil ideologues themselves or claim a unary narrative with colonialism at the centre.

Caldwell points out that words of Dravidian origin and those of Sanskrit origin are easily distinguished; this native grammarians had already done to an extent but the Orientalists seemed unaware of it. He suggests that it would be possible for Tamil, more than any other Dravidian language, to rid itself of all words of Sanskrit origin and thus be “independent”, and he also implies this would be a desirable outcome for the flourishing of Tamil. He considers Sanskrit not as adding to the richness or texture of the language but as rather detracting from its essence. In order to illustrate this, Caldwell compares Tamil and Sanskrit to Anglo-Saxon and Latin respectively, and says that while the English language would be greatly diminished if it were to be purged of all words of Latin origin and retained only the Anglo-Saxon, Tamil would, on the other hand, survive such a cleansing very well. In Caldwell’s opinion, therefore, the use of words of Sanskrit origin in Tamil

... is not through any real necessity, but from choice and the fashion of the age ... Even in prose compositions on religious subjects in which a larger amount of Sanskrit is employed than in any other department of literature, the proportion of Sanskrit which has found its way into Tamil is not greater than the amount of Latin contained in corresponding compositions in English ... Through the predominant influence of the religion of the Brahmins the majority of the words ex-

pressive of religious ideas in actual use in modern Tamil are of Sanskrit origin and though there are equivalent Dravidian words which are equally appropriate and in some instances more so, such words have gradually become obsolete, and are now confined to the poetical dialect...”²⁹

The only reason that Caldwell considers acceptable for the borrowing of words seems to be necessity, and stylistic reasons are unacceptable for disrupting linguistic purity³⁰. He considers the task of linguistic purification much more difficult in the case of the other Dravidian languages, because they had borrowed so much more copiously from Sanskrit that it would now be impossible to replace all the Sanskrit words with Dravidian ones. An interesting intervention that Caldwell makes with regard to Tamil purity is that he ascribes this instinct against borrowing or mixing Sanskrit words to the Tamils themselves. As discussed in the previous section, Caldwell assigns distinct characteristics to the speakers of each of the Dravidian languages, almost analogous to the idea of a ‘national character’, and he ascribes just such a characteristic to the educated Tamils, a “sedulous and jealous”³¹ instinct towards preserving the purity of Tamil. Simultaneously, he also asserts that the language of the “lowest classes of people” is that which is closest to the ancient, pre-Aryan state of Tamil, thus also implying that it is the language of the uneducated that preserves the purity of the tongue. Clearly, Caldwell is here still not free from the influence of the Romanticism of early

²⁹Caldwell, 1856, pp. 33.

³⁰Caldwell is not the first philologists to hold such severe views regarding linguistic purity. Mantena (2005), for instance, argues that the intervention of philologists like Brown and Wilson caused a whole portion of Telugu literature to lose prestige because it was closely tied with the conventions and trends of Sanskrit literature.

³¹Caldwell, 1856, p.32

colonial philology, noting that:

In every country it is in the poetry and in the speech of the peasantry that the ancient condition of the language is best studied³².

Closely allied with the idea of linguistic purity is that of the classical languages. Caldwell often makes reference to “cultivated” languages, which are those that have evidence of a literary tradition and include Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada among the Dravidian languages, as opposed to “uncultivated” languages such as Toda and Gondi whom he refers to as “crude” or “rude”. The latter set of languages are held to be of lesser prestige not just because of their lack of literary history but also because of certain characteristics of the tribes that speak the language: the Kota language, for instance, Kota is considered a crude language because it is the language of a “degraded tribe”³³ who are considered unclean because they consume carrion (or so Caldwell believes due to the information provided by the Brahmins.) The stature of a language therefore could be decided by at least two sets of factors, one that is ‘external to the language, such as the existence of literature and one that is ‘internal in a sense, such as the intrinsic quality it gains by the culture associated with it.

Among the cultivated languages, Caldwell again gives the highest place to Tamil for various reasons, the central one being the antiquity of Tamil. In particular, he notes that Sentamil, the ‘high dialect of Tamil, shows signs of great antiquity and therefore calls it “Classical.”³⁴ He

³²*ibid.*, p. 31

³³*ibid.*, p.16

³⁴The use of the term *Classical* in this context draws from the deeply held values of Classical Philology, as Caldwell seems to be drawing a parallel between Sentamil

gives various reasons for considering Tamil the oldest of the literary Dravidian languages. Firstly, it is so distant from modern spoken Tamil that it would be incomprehensible to the average Tamil speaker, yet is evidently one and the same language. This indicates that it is extremely old, thus allowing for that level of linguistic change. Further, the copiousness of Tamil vocabulary is also indicative of its antiquity. Tamil is the only one among the Dravidian languages to include roots and vocabulary from all the different Dravidian languages; therefore Caldwell reasons, it must be older as the languages must have separated from Tamil at a later point, taking only a portion of the vocabulary. Caldwell proves his mettle as a very skilled philologist here, exhaustively enumerating comparisons between the various Dravidian languages to prove his thesis.

But Caldwell also simultaneously attempts to establish the independence of Sentamil from Sanskrit, and this he presents as another important qualifying factor for Tamil as a Classical language. Thus, he notes that “High Tamil [or Sentamil] contains less Sanscrit, not more than the colloquial dialect. It affects *purism and national independence* . . . ³⁵” This purity of Sentamil justifies the importance he gives it in his Dravidian hypothesis, while also noting that it is not singularly representative of the Dravidian languages, and it also becomes the reason for its classical nature. Caldwell labours upon this point to a great extent, reconstructing a history of the Sanskrit ‘corruption of Tamil through linguistic evidence.

He identifies three periods in which Sanskrit was introduced into

and Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, as three languages that were both ancient and had rich traditions of literature.

³⁵*ibid.*, p. 54, emphasis mine.

the Dravidian languages:

1. By Sankara Acharya in the 10 - 15 Century.
2. By the Jains in the 8th - 13th Century, when the Sanskrit borrowings were altered to obey Tamil phonology. The Sanskrit-origin borrowings found in Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam all go back to this period, either directly from Sanskrit or indirectly through the Prakrits.
3. The third is a more speculative period which he doesn't give an exact date to. This is of a much earlier age, when, he posits, there was probably direct interaction between the Aryans/Brahmins and the Tamils. This period is characterised by an "utter defiance of rule" in borrowings, unlike with the Jains.

The period before these three, before the contact with Sanskrit began is the one Caldwell is most interested in. At the time that Caldwell was writing, the Sangam corpus was yet to be rediscovered. Swaminatha Iyer, the scholar who brought the corpus to light was still an infant when the Comparative Grammar of Dravidian was published and pre-medieval texts were scarce, and the medieval texts were imbued with much more Sanskrit vocabulary. Caldwell therefore relies almost entirely on the reconstructions of the word-forms of philology alone in order to draw the picture of a truly pure Tamil language.

The central innovation that may be credited to Caldwell here is in the alteration of the idea of a Classical language itself, through the introduction of the idea of linguistic purity. The previously discussed attitudes of the Orientalists towards the mixture of Sanskrit elements into the languages of the south seems to have played a modifying role in this transformation of the idea of a Classical language. It was indeed a transformation, for the philologists were well aware of the influence of

Greek upon Latin, and yet both languages were considered unproblematically Classical. Yet, when the question of Tamil arose, the influence of Sanskrit came under such close scrutiny that the notion of an “independent literary tradition” became a deciding factor in the recognition of a languages antiquity. Such a status being given to a hitherto-fore ‘lesser’ language such as Tamil had inevitable implications for the Tamil culture as well, for as the preceding discussion has shown, for the Oriental philologists, the space between a language and a culture was very slim indeed. The repercussions of this elevation were extremely wideranging, as the following sections and chapters will discuss. For, as Sumathi Ramaswamy notes,

. . . the concept of “civilization” was no innocent classificatory device through which Orientalist and colonial knowledges neatly organized the messy world of culture(s). Instead, it was a fundamental technology of rule in which colonial dominance was secured by institutionalizing a hierarchy of differences, not only between the “West” and the “Orient,” but between the various regions, cultures, and communities of the subcontinent as well, on a developmental scale ranging from savage barbarism to civilized perfection.³⁶

2.7. Damodaram Pillai, Swaminatha Iyer & the Tamil Renaissance

While Caldwell's work on the Dravidian languages was extremely influential in the impact it had on Dravidian consciousness, it was Tamil

³⁶Ramaswamy, 1997, ‘Civilizing Tamil: The Language Classical’, para 6

scholars and thinkers themselves who interpreted it in the spirit of what would become the Dravidian movement. One of the key moments in the modern history of Tamil is the re-discovery of the Saṅgam corpus, which led to what has often been referred to as the *Tamil Renaissance*.

The central figures in the rediscovery of the Sangam corpus were Damoda-ram Pillai and U. V. Swaminatha Iyer. Pillai was a Srilankan scholar of Tamil, extremely learned, and fluent in English as well, thanks to his education in the Batticotta Seminary. He hailed from Jaffna, as did his predecessor in the discovery and publishing of Saṅgam texts, Arumuga Navalar, who was one of the early thinkers of the Srilankan Saivite revival and who published the ancient collection of Tamil couplets that is said to encompass all the wisdom of the Tamils, *Tirukkural*, in 1860. Pillai himself was the first to take up the job of hunting for the forgotten texts of the Saṅgam era and getting them published—for which Venkatachalapathy calls him “a true pioneer”³⁷—starting with the *Tolkāppiyam* in 1868. He got another key grammatical text, *Vīracolīyam* published in 1881, and in 1883, the very important *Iraiyanār Akapporuḷ*.

Swaminatha Iyer, affectionately known to the present day as ‘Tamil *thatha* (grandpa)’, is better known for his work in uncovering the works of the Saṅgam era, perhaps due to his extremely well-written and widely-read autobiography, *En Carttiram* (‘My History’). The nickname is indicative of the regard with which he is viewed, almost as a grandsire of the entire Tamil people, not just because his life’s work saw the rebuilding of the entire Tamil literary tradition to accommodate the ancient works of the Saṅgam period, but also because this gave an indisputable sense of tradition to the Tamil people.

³⁷Venkatachalapathy, 2006, p.100

Swaminatha Iyer's autobiography tells of his visit to Ramasamy Mutaliyar, a government official who was keenly interested in Tamil literature. It was through Ramasamy Mutaliyar that Swaminatha Iyer discovered a whole body of ancient Tamil literary works which lay outside his realm of knowledge despite the fact that he was extremely erudite in Tamil literature. In his autobiography, he describes how he paid a courtesy call to Ramasamy Mutaliyar, who was reputed to be highly learned in Tamil literature—a courtesy that would change the course of his life and that of Tamil literary history. In the course of the meeting, Mutaliyar begins questioning Swaminatha Iyer on who he studied with. Assuming that the former would be impressed to learn that his teacher was the highly respected Meenakshisundaram Pillai, and finding instead he wasn't, and further, continued to question him on his knowledge of Tamil literature, Swaminatha Iyer recalls how he rattled off an impressive list of what were then considered classics. Then:

“What is the use of studying all this?” he [Ramasamy Mutaliyar] suddenly interrupted me and demanded. I was very disappointed. I began to think that he must be too enraptured by his knowledge of English literature, that must be why he was responding this way.³⁸

Even more determined to impress, Swaminatha Iyer continues listing names of important literary work he is familiar with, saving his two or three readings of *Kamparāmayāṇam* and his experience teaching the same as the *pièce de résistance*. But still:

“Very well, is that all?” enquired Ramasamy Mutaliyar. I

³⁸Swaminatha Iyer, 2008, p. 530. Translation mine.

felt defeated. Such disinterest even in the face of the Kamparāmaṇam! What more was left to be said? But he was not finished with questioning me yet. He continued.

“You have read all these later books. Have you studied any of the old texts?”

“But there were so many old books among those I mentioned!” I replied.

“But have you read the books that were the source of those texts?” It was only when he asked this that I began to realize he had something up his sleeve.

“I’m not sure what texts you’re talking about...?”

“Have you read *Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi*? Have you read *Maṇimēkalai*? Have you read *Cilappatikāram*?”

I had not read any of the books he mentioned; nor had my teacher. I hadn’t even seen them. Yet, I could not help but think that he was finding fault with me for not reading three books despite all the books I had read. “I haven’t found those books. If I did, I would read them,” I declared grandly.

Though Mutaliyar had been speaking causally thus far, at this he looked up at me keenly. “I will give you those books. If I do, will you read and explain them?”

“There is no doubt in that. I would definitely do that!” I said bravely.³⁹

When he was given the *Cintāmaṇi*, however, Swaminatha Iyer discovered to his wonder that he had seen nothing like this book before, and

³⁹*ibid.*, pp. 531-532

in fact, could barely understand the language it was written in, undeniable though it was to him that it was Tamil. However, as he later discovered, these texts were in circulation and well-studied among a small group of Jain scholars, while unknown to the larger literary community of the area. The rest of Swaminata Iyer's career was dedicated to the painstaking search, discovery, retrieval and interpretation of more ancient texts from the Sangam period in the form of palmyra manuscripts from various sources and the compilation of a critical editions. To do this, he needed to draw on all his knowledge of Tamil, and Swaminatha Iyer became an expert philologist in the process, an unusual one who had grasp of neither English nor Sanskrit.

It is entirely possible that Swaminatha Iyer's discovery might have gone completely unnoticed despite his feverish activity and enthusiasm in getting the works published if not for the very specific context in which the texts were 'rediscovered'. Following Caldwell's theory regarding the Dravidian language family, and especially his opinions on the implications the linguistic evidence had on the existence of a pre-Aryan Dravidian race, the newly emerging non-Brahmin Tamil elites began to assert the Dravidian roots as central to the Tamil (and South Indian) identity.

A. R. Venkatachalapathy has explained the explosive nature of the reception of Swaminatha Iyer's work in terms of just this context. He avers that this discovery of Swaminatha Iyer led to a complete reorganization of the Tamil literary canon, arguing that, crucially, "while the pre-modern Tamil literary canon consisted predominantly of religious, mythological and didactic texts, the new canon was a largely secular one

where the religious texts were marginalised.”⁴⁰ The new canon therefore reduced some of the most important texts of the previous canon to *chirrilakkiyam* or minor literature. Indeed, Swaminatha Iyer’s own literary education was composed of mainly of two categories of texts: a. *pirapantam* and b. *purāṇam* and *kāvīyam*⁴¹, which “would be considered minor or obscure by modern-day students of Tamil literature”⁴² precisely because of the forging of a new canon thanks to his discoveries.

As Venkatachalapathy notes, “The corpus of Sangam literature with its ancient cultural traditions, seen to be untainted by a Brahminical religion and a culture based on sedentary life, proved just right. The egalitarian communal life depicted in the Sangam literature, with the glorification of ideals such as love, valour, munificence and honour, provided an alternate worldview to that of a Vedic age constructed by the Orientalists.”⁴³

2.8. Maraimalai Atikal

Maraimalai Atikal (1876 - 1950), born Vedachalam Pillai, was an important figure in the history of the Tamil nationalist movement. A prolific author in Tamil, he was also well-versed in English and Sanskrit, in which he did not have formal training. His works include poetry, novels, essays and treatises on literary criticism, philosophy, history, religion. He was much influenced by his association with Sundaram Pillai, the author of the dramatic poem *Manonmaniyam* which has had a long-lasting relationship with the Tamil nationalist move-

⁴⁰Venkatachalapathy, 2005, p. 535.

⁴¹Cutler, 2003, p. 278

⁴²*ibid.*, p. 279.

⁴³*ibid.*, p.543

ment. Maraimalai Atikal is most closely associated with the Tanitamil or Tamil purity movement, which sought to cleanse Tamil of all words of Sanskrit origin. The oft-quoted tale in connection with his final conversion to the cause of Tamil purity is that of his conversation with his daughter Neelambikai regarding the use of the Sanskrit-origin word *teham* instead the Dravidian-origin word *yakkai* in one of the Saint Ramalingars poem. Both agreed that the pure Tamil word would have made the poem much more beautiful and in the ensuing conversation, decided to rename themselves from their Sanskrit-origin name to its pure Tamil counterpart Neelambikai thus becoming Neelayathadei. Maraimalai Adikal went on to be the driving force behind the pure Tamil movement that attempted to rid Tamil of the impurities of Sanskrit words. It is possible to clearly see the notion of linguistic purity translated from Caldwell's philology-driven one to the form it finally took. In fact, he directly quotes Caldwell in at least one instance:

That the Tamils were highly civilized in the past is not only deducible from their ancient literature but is demonstrated also by the researches of Oriental Scholars. Caldwell writes: The primitive Dravidians do not appear to have been by any means a barbarous and degraded people. Whatever may have been the condition of the forest tribes, it cannot be doubted that the Dravidians properly so called, had acquired at least the elements of civilization prior to the arrival amongst them of the Brahmins... In any case Dravidian civilization was pre-dominant in India before the coming of the Aryans. The Dravidians were probably in a much more advanced stage of civilization.

He goes on to emphasize the importance of maintaining the separation and purity of Tamil from Sanskrit:

A language loses its vitality if it is needlessly and thoughtlessly corrupted. So also a class of people becomes disintegrated and weak by harmful admixture. The great and deserving merit of the Tamilians is that, for more than fifty centuries, they have used their language with great care and vigilance and kept it so pure and undefiled, without disintegrating it by reckless mixture with Sanskrit words, that we who are their descendants are able to speak now almost the same language they spoke then and derive the same enjoyment they had of their productions as if they had been the productions of our own age...

Here again is the echo of Caldwell's preoccupation with linguistic purity, but further developed into a sense of the correspondence between a language and a race, clearly enough to be stated plainly. Thus Maraimalai Atikals concern with language purity was clearly rooted in the colonial ideology of the European missionaries.

However, the Tanittamil movement was not Maraimalai Atikals sole contribution. He was also one of the foremost figures in the neo-Shaivite movement, which was in itself a precursor to the Tamil Nationalist movement. Although the Self-Respect movement of later days, led by E.V.R. was popularly a rationalist, atheist movement, it does owe a large debt to the religiously-driven movement of Maraimalai Adikal, who in his own words sought to create a space for a non-Brahmin understanding of the Tamil religion through Shaivism. Vaitheespara (2009) has

convincingly argued that Maraimalai Atikals contribution to the larger consciousness of pride in Tamil language and culture, although rooted in Shaivism.

In his writings, Maraimalai Atikal also demonstrates a great awareness of the tradition of the Tamil civilization:

It is the peculiar good fortune of the Tamils that those halcyon days produced among them thinkers and writers of the right type, differing in this respect from their brethren of such contemporary western civilized nations as the Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Chaldean, the Aryan etc. It is because of this vital difference that the Tamil Civilization endures against odds while others remain merely as archaeological curiosities. The language used by the Tamils continues alive and grows while the rest are all respectable dead languages. To those who deeply consider all these facts it must be obvious that this enduring characteristic of the Tamil civilization is not a little attributable to its birth from the loins of ancient Tamil poets and scholars who bravely, wisely and unflinchingly held up the standard of Tamil culture. Writers of over 1800 years ago were careful to practice the art of writing in pure, well-chosen, simple and virile Tamil words.

The fact that Tamil has a long literary and grammatical tradition is being alluded to here as a central proof of the eminence of Tamil as a language. Here, he clearly draws from his knowledge of “ancient poets” and grammarians, of the Sangam era. It is Maraimalai Atikals deep knowledge of the Sangam corpus, particularly his grasp of the *Tolkappiam* and what it signified to have a separate grammatical tra-

dition that allowed the notion of an unbroken line of Tamil culture to take shape. In combating the rise of the Brahmin-dominated Vedantic ideology with his Shaivite philosophy, one of the first resources that Maraimalai Atikal drew on was his thorough knowledge of the *Tolkappiam*, and recast Shaivism as embodying the essence of Tamil culture from the unbroken tradition of the *Tolkappiyam*. He thus established that there was a strong connection between a non-Brahmin, native Tamil Shaivite religion and the ancient literature of the Sangam era.

Although the movement later took a distinctly atheistic turn much to Maraimalai Atikal's dismay, his contribution to the nationalist movement is undeniable. As Vaitheespara (2009) puts it, What is instead attempted in Atikal's recasting of the Tamil-Saivite and Saiva-Siddhanta tradition is an attempt to forge a close connection between the more rational and secular spirit of the corpus of ancient Tamil literature such as the *Tholkappiam*, the *Thirukkural* and the *Bhakti* corpus. Thus, he didn't secularize Shaivism so much as he served to displace its meaning onto Tamil language and history. This understanding of language and history and the discursive realm that Maraimalai Atikal opened up is what the Self Respect Movement and Tamil nationalism would enter and make use of to establish its secular character.

Thus, the discovery of the *Tolkappiam* and its very particular readings that arose out of the interaction between colonial ideology and anti-colonial assertions guided a large part of how the Tamil renaissance and the nationalist movement was shaped.

3 | Tradition & the Tolkāppiyam

How would it be valid for all times? In other words, how can it come back and present itself again, anew, as the new? How can it be there, again, when it is no longer?

Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*

3.1. Introduction

One of the turning points in the history of Tamil literature was the rediscovery of the Sangam corpus in modernity by Tamil philologists such as Swaminatha Iyer and Damodaran Pillai, as discussed in the final sections of the previous chapter. It has been argued that the impact of a philological approach to these ancient texts created specific effects in their reception, producing a historical understanding of language and identity. The Sangam corpus came to stand for an entirely new imagining of a Tamil past, one that provided glimpses into a tantalizing alternative world-view to the colonial present of the Tamil philolo-

Linguistic Contestations in the Tamil Nation



Figure 3.1: Tamilakam in the Sangam age, based on Menon 2007.
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gists and thinkers. While the entire Sangam corpus had a great impact on the emergence of a new Tamil consciousness and a Tamil renaissance, this chapter will examine the impact of one particular text, the *Tolkāppiyam*.

The *Tolkāppiyam* as the oldest surviving grammatical text in Tamil, and the only grammar from the Sangam era, gained a particularly important place in the history of Tamil literature, one that had hitherto not been enjoyed by any other grammatical treatise in the language, despite the fact that grammars and commentaries in general were always widely studied by Tamil scholars. This was also true of the entire subcontinent, for study of grammar had always been held in high esteem, even in the pre-colonial era. As Sheldon Pollock notes in the context of Sanskrit,

...philology had always been the queen of the disciplines and ... as a result, analyses of grammar, rhetoric, and hermeneutics were produced that were the most sophisticated in the ancient world...¹

With the advent of colonialism, this did not change, and ancient grammars were much admired by colonial philologists², even more so because they themselves were involved in a frenetic engagement with writing grammars for the 'new' languages they encountered in the various colonies, activities that Thomas Trautmann describes as *an explosion in the grammar factory*.

However, the argument here is that the importance gained by the *Tolkāppiyam* in modernity was not exactly that enjoyed by grammati-

¹Pollock, 2009

²Panini's *Astādhyāyi* was so widely lauded for its elegance and sophistication that it continued and continues to influence modern linguistics, and is still studied.

cal works in the late pre-modern era. The work was seen as much more than simply a treatise on the Tamil language, and instead became a signifier of a (lost) Tamil past. The text also seems to lend itself to such a role extremely well: the very word *tamiḷ* makes its first recorded appearance in the Tolkāppiyam, in Eluttatikāram 386: *tamiḷ en kiḷaviy-um atan-ōr-arrē*, “the word *tamiḷ* is also like that”³. This fact has been noted by many, and though the word *tamiḷ* in this and all other occurrences in the Tolkāppiyam and other Sangam-era texts seems to refer to a language, it has often been interpreted as signifying the idea of Tamil in the modern sense, as the site of personal and communal identity. The fact that unlike most known Classical grammars, the Tolkāppiyam was also a treatise on a highly developed and sophisticated poetics inextricably tied the language, its literature and the world-view of an entire culture together. This unified view of language and culture was a key element in constituting a linguistic identity, one that could envision both an unbroken connection with the past and a unary conception of personal identity. The deep connection between the grammar, the language and the culture is an acknowledged reality of the condition of modernity, and is evident in the attitudes of learner Tamil scholars. For instance, Kamil Zvelebil notes that “... is also the first literary expression of the indigenous, pre-Aryan Indian civilization; it represents the essence and the summary of classical Tamil culture.”⁴

In short, the Tolkāppiyam came to be a signifier and starting point of the idea of a *tradition*.

³Murugan, 2000, p.385 This appears in relation to a phonological rule.

⁴Zvelebil, 1973, p. 131

3.1.1. *Tradition in Modernity*

In his seminal work on the relationship between science and modernity, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour argues that the main achievement of modernity was in drawing clear epistemological boundaries between the natural world and the social one, with all known phenomena fitting into these two categories, allowing for no ambivalences. All modern pursuits, including and especially the sciences, were oriented towards this bifurcation of knowledge systems, and all that lay before the advent of modernity was relinquished as the “Other”, as belonging to a barbaric past. Thus, for instance, a past when there was no clear distinction between religion, a social phenomenon, and science, which fell firmly in the realm of the natural phenomena, was considered inherently uncivilized and had to be rescued by the civilizing impulse of the moderns. Modernity was thus “the process of partitioning [that] was accompanied by a coherent and continuous front of radical revolutions in science, technology, administration, economy and religion, a veritable bulldozer operation behind which the past disappeared for ever...”⁵ However, modernity could never achieve the stability that it seems to promise, because of the tension arising from phenomena that Latour terms *hybrids*. Hybrids are those phenomena that exist in the space between pure social subjects and natural objects, and which erase the distinction between the two by imbuing the products of science with social meanings. The existence of hybrids is erased by processes of purification which try to invisibilize the connections between the two categories. As a result, “it is...necessary to break constantly with the premodern past and devise reformist schemes for modernizing societies

⁵Latour, 2012, pp. 130

and technologies, because hybrids keep modernity from ever achieving the order and rationality that it is supposed to embody...”⁶ The disjunction from the past is a crucial aspect of Modernity, as discussed in Section 1.x.x., and for Latour, this disjunction is produced by the very epistemological separation of the social and the natural: “The asymmetry between nature and culture becomes an asymmetry between past and future. The past was the confusion of things and men; the future is what will no longer confuse them.”⁷ The main concern of the moderns is therefore in rendering the future comprehensible.

One of the major lacunae in Latour’s work is that he does not examine the role of language in modernity, especially considering the importance it developed in the period after late eighteenth century, as has been demonstrated by various scholars discussed in the preceding chapters. Particularly, Latour reveals a blindspot in that he fails in considering the epistemological status of language in modernity. Among more recent work, Bauman and Briggs (2003) have attempted to fill this gap by considering language as a third, equally important dimension along with nature and culture that operates similarly, and is subject to similar processes of purification⁸ to invisibilize the hybridity that is inevitably a part of it. Simultaneously, they also establish language as different from the domains of science and society, for while the epistemological reality of the latter was established and strengthened by the processes

⁶Bauman & Briggs, 2003

⁷Latour, 2012, p. 71

⁸Although Bauman and Briggs discuss this process of purification in the European context in terms of Lockean ideas of social dialects and the erasure of their hybridity through a hierarchical ordering, it applies equally to other forms of linguistic purification. The notion of linguistic purity espoused by Maraimalai Adigal as discussed in the preceding chapter is one instance of this process of purification, where Tamil had to be divested of all traces of Sanskrit and its polluting influence.

of modernity, language was on the other hand rendered epistemologically unimportant and “only worthy of attention by linguists and grammar teachers.”⁹ Bauman and Briggs’ formulations regarding language are relevant here due to how they relate it with the idea of tradition. Particularly, they note that the question of language in modernity is one that is “permeated by concern with temporal continuities and discontinuities in language.”¹⁰ As explored in the previous chapter, such concerns are rendered visible through the development of disciplines such as comparative philology and historical linguistics that provided the necessary tools to view language as historical object. Of the relationship between tradition and language, Bauman and Briggs note that:

When used in the service of articulating a purified, modern conception of language ... that is, when it is used to differentiate the past from the present, tradition becomes a mode of discourse that is diagnostic of the past; it is an archaic language-society hybrid characterized by all of those indexicalities of time and place and interest and intertextuality ... In its mediational guise, tradition becomes the intertextually constituted continuum of reiterations by which the language and thus the thought of the past survives into the present, the mechanism that bridges the historical juncture represented by the advent of modernity.¹¹

This conception of tradition is particularly relevant in comprehending the new importance gained by the *Tolkāppiyam* in modernity. For this

⁹Bauman & Briggs, 2003, p.8

¹⁰Bauman & Briggs, 2003, p. 107

¹¹Bauman & Briggs, 2003, pp. 11

status gain of the *Tolkappiyam* created a new relationship between grammar and culture, a change in world-view that David Shulman describes vividly (but perhaps with a tinge of Orientalism):

In south India, beginning means grammar. First there is grammar—something given, not discovered—then empirical language, then poetry, then a culturally familiar world with its gods, human beings, landscapes, sciences, politics, and all the rest of intelligible reality ... without grammar ... one cannot speak; and without speech, there is no world.¹²

This chapter will therefore consider this new significance gained by the grammatical text and use the constitution of tradition in modernity as the key rubric through which to view this significance, arguing that ancient grammatical texts became more than simply repositories of knowledge regarding language and instead became signifiers of a continuity with the past, and of tradition. While the *Tolkāppiyam* will be considered as an important and even key text in this regard, it is necessary to acknowledge that if tradition is, indeed, an “intertextually constituted continuum of reiterations” as Bauman and Briggs put it, it must be understood in the larger sense of a whole literary landscape as it has been imagined in modernity.

3.2. The *Tolkāppiyam*: An Overview

The *Tolkāppiyam* is the oldest extant work of Tamil grammar that is also in part poetics, its first two sections dealing with what modern linguists would term phonology, morphophonemics, morphology, and syn-

¹²Shulman, 2001, pp. 353–354

tax; and the third part with poetics. The precise age of the Tolkappiyam has been at the centre of much debate, with different scholars dating it from the third century BCE to the fifth century CE¹³. The authorship of the Tolkāppiyam is not very clear, and its author is simply referred to as *Tolkāppiyar*, after the conventions of Sangam literature, where most authors are known only by the title of their (most well-known) work or even a metaphor or image that they are known for¹⁴. The name of the text itself is analysed as a compund, formed by *tonmai* (aged or ancient) + *kāppiyam* (literary text, likely from Sanskrit *kāvya*.)

The Tolkāppiyam consists of a total of 1602 *nurpas*, which are verses with a formulaic structure¹⁵, divided into three main parts. The first part, known as *Eluttatikāram* (*eluttu* = letter + *atikāram* = field/treatise) is concerned with the writing system and its characteristics in writing and speech; the speech organs and their role in speech production; the case system and other morphophonemic structures. The second part, *Collatikāram* (*col*=word + *atikāram*), deals with what today's linguists would refer to morphology and syntax–word classes, norms of compounding, conjugations, declensions, lexicography and etymology. The third section of the Tolkāppiyam, the *Poruḷatikāram* (*poruḷ* = substance/content + *atikāram*), seems to present a departure from the conventions of ancient grammars of the subcontinent, for it is an exposition on poetics, a topic not typically dealt with in grammatical treatises. The *Poruḷatikāram* works as a treatise on poetics by giving an exposition on

¹³Kandasamy, 1981

¹⁴For instance, the author of the famous poem, Kuruntokai 40, is known simply as Cempulapeiyanīrār, after his most striking image of “red earth and pouring rain”. Similarly, the Sangam era poetess Kākaipāṭiniyanār Naccellaiyār's name also translates to “Naccellaiyar, who sang of crows.”

¹⁵These are otherwise known as *cūttirams* and are equivalent to the *sutras* of Sanskrit grammars.

creativity, a theory of literature and prosody; its poetics is highly nuanced and is often considered to be unique for the complex relationship it draws between imagery, rhetoric, emotion and ecology. *Poruḷ*, or poetics, is often considered the most important prong of the triumverate of *Eluttu*, *Col* and *Poruḷ*; the medieval commentator of the *Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ*, for instance, through the travails of the characters in his story, sums this view up thus: “Are not *Eluttu* and *Col* explored merely in order to expose *Poruḷ*? If we do not obtain *Poruḷ*, even though we may have these it is as though we do not have them.”¹⁶ Thus the last of the three components of grammar is of paramount importance and its absence has the power to render the other two useless.

Although the interest around the *Tolkappiyam* has been constant and ever-growing since its re-entry into popular knowledge, and although studies on it have been numerous and from many different perspectives, many problems persist unresolved around it. For one, there still exists no authoritative critical edition in translation. While the Tamil text and its critical editions have stood the test of time, a reliable English translation is yet to become available. This poses difficulties inasmuch as the theoretical engagement with the *Tolkappiyam* has remained limited to Tamil scholars who have knowledge of the language. Its presence in the fields of comparative literature and cross-cultural engagements with and readings of the text remain highly limited due to the lack of a critical edition in English. Other issues include determining the exact age of the text, its authorship and even the name of the text is not controversial. The meaning of the name given above is perhaps the one based on the soundest reasoning, but there are also

¹⁶Zvelebil, 1973, p. 115

those who trace the name of the text from the author rather than the other way around. X. S. Thaninayagam, for instance, belongs to this latter camp and gives the following explanation:

Kāppiyar is a name the meaning of which is not readily available, and Tol means ancient or old. He probably belonged to a family of an ancient clan known as the Kāppiyar clan. It is surmised that he might have been a Jain. The work attributed to him may or may not have had a different name in his own time, but because of naming significant works of famous authors by the proper name of the authors themselves, the work of Tolkāppiyar the grammarian came to be designated with a genderless marker and was known as Tolkāppiyam.¹⁷

Thus, he derives the name of the text from that of the author and although this naming convention also did exist, it is less convincing as an explanation especially considering the lack of information around the name *kāppiyar*.

3.2.1. *Tolkāppiyam Porulatikāram*

The third and latest section of the Tolkāppiyam, the Porulatikāram (henceforth TP) may arguably be considered the most significant section of the text purely in terms of influence. While the other two sections are held to be an excellent and still-relevant grammar of the Tamil language till the present day, the TP has had a much greater impact on the shaping of Tamil literature. Mainly due to the surprisingly large span of its vision of what comprises a poetics, the TP has produced a very rich

¹⁷Thaninayagam, 2010, p. 48

and sophisticated system that has permeated into most of Tamil literary production up to modernity. The TP is divided into nine sections, each dealing with different kinds of love, as follows:

1. *akattinaiyiyal* - Sets out the norms of the interior or personal, including love and marriage
2. *purattinaiyiyal* - Sets out the norms of the exterior or public, mainly war
3. *kalaviyal* - On the subject of secret love
4. *karpiyal* - On the union of lovers
5. *poruliyal* - On the discovery of the couple's love by family and friends
6. *meipāṭṭiyal* - A discourse on human emotion
7. *uvamaiyiyal* - A discourse on metaphors
8. *ceyyuliyal* - A poetic grammar based on prosody
9. *marapiyal* - On old and obsolete words

The TP offers a view of poetry that is based on two basic divisions, of *akam* and *puram* poetry, or interior and exterior respectively. The interiority of *akam* is not just a physical one, but in a larger sense, deals with interior emotions, what has come to be known as an “interior landscape”. Similarly, *puram* is not simply an exteriority in the sense of the outdoors, but also includes public existence, especially centred around war and heroism. While these are two major thematic divisions in the *Tolkāppiyam* (and also seen in practice in the *caṅkam* poems), the larger poetic conventions presented in the TP apply to both.

These conventions specify that both types of poetry must draw from the three basic aspects of the universe presented by the poetics: *mutal* or the basics, *karu* or elements of nature, and *uri* or emotions. *Mutal* includes *polutu* or time and *nilam* or land, while *karu* might include all aspects of nature including flora, fauna, gods and humans (including clans, chieftains, etc), and each type of *uri* or emotion must be set in the appropriate context of the other two. Another important but much more complex concept is that of *tinai*, which is often translated as context or landscape, but which is distinct from the idea of *nilam* and is a composite that François Gros calls “a state of the soul”¹⁸.

The complexity of this approach to poetics arises from the fact that each emotion is to be set in a particular landscape—with its attendant elements, both human and non-human—in a particular time, both time of day and season, all working together to reflect on and enhance the emotion, which is the central driving force of the literature. The TP also gives a detailed explanation of these various categories, and this has been seen as a revelation of a Tamil world-view or even cosmology. Therefore, in both *akam* and *puram* poems, situations and emotions are set in particular seasons and particular landscapes with appropriate natural elements introduced to form a complex symbolic web. For instance, poems depicting patient waiting would be appropriate if set in the *mullai* or forest setting, while lovers separated and anxious waiting would best be best set in a *neytal* (coast) or *pālai* (arid land) setting. While flors and fauna might cross from one kind of *nilam* to the other, the harmony of the emotion with the kind of *nilam* signifies an “appropriate emotion”, thus revealing a certain world-view that encompasses

¹⁸Gros, 2010, p. 299

both the social and the natural.

The listing of various elements in the TP has been of immense interest for those interested in reconstructing a picture of Tamil antiquity, as it serves as a compendium of ancient Tamil knowledge. But the basic categories of *akam* and *puram* have had a much more far-reaching impact on the conceptualization of relationships and reality. As Selby and Peterson observe,

...*akam* and *puram* are not merely thematic divisions in ancient poetry but complex concepts that continue to pervade Tamil culture as contrastive pairs, encompassing such ‘interior/exterior’ pairings as heart/body surface, kin/non-kin, and home/world...¹⁹

The direct role played by TP in the transmission of Tamil tradition will also be discussed in later sections.

3.2.2. *The Dating of the Tolkāppiyam*

The dating of the Tolkāppiyam is a long-persisting issue. There are a variety of reasons for this difficulty in dating the text, the main one being perhaps that the text itself does not allow for the establishment of a simple timeline. The method to determine the age of the text is, of course, philological, but despite the fact that many experts have used textual evidence and evidence from allied disciplines, there has rarely been any agreement between them.

The oldest and least accepted date was Robert Caldwell’s estimate²⁰. He places the Tolkāppiyam and other texts of the Sangam corpus in

¹⁹Selby & Peterson, 2009, p. 9

²⁰Caldwell’s views are the least acceptable, that is, with the exclusion of the clearly more fantastical estimates of amateur enthusiasts of ancient Tamil, who would place

what he terms as the Jaina cycle, placing the text in the early medieval to medieval period, from the 8th to the 13th Centuries CE. Caldwell discusses the age of the Sangam texts in relation to his estimation of the “waves” of Sanskrit influence upon Tamil, and places the corpus in the second wave:

The school of writers ... by which the largest portion of the Sanscrit derivatives that are found in Tamil were introduced, was that of the Jainas, which flourished from about the eighth century, A.D., to the twelfth or thirteenth. The period of the predominance of the Jainas (a predominance in intellect and learning—rarely a predominance in political power) was the Augustan age of Tamil literature, the period when the Madura College, a celebrated literary association, flourished, and when the Cural, the Chintamani, and the classical vocabularies and grammars were written. Through the intense Tamilic nationalism of the adherents of this school, and their jealousy of Brahmanical influence, the Sanscrit derivatives which are employed in their writings are very considerably altered, so as to accord with Tamil euphonic rules.

While much of Caldwell’s work has stood the test of time, especially his insights into the Dravidian language family that are still accepted by linguists, this dating has been widely refuted, being at least a few centuries later than the most conservative estimates. The error in Caldwell’s estimate may be attributed to the fact that at the time of Caldwell’s writing, the texts from the Sangam era were not in wide circula-

the Tolkāppiyam as early as 5000 BCE, based on texts such as *Iraiyānār Agapporul*, which traces a divine origin for the Tamil language.

tion and he had access to very few of them, and the whole corpus would not be compiled for at least a few decades more.

The nearest estimate to Caldwell's comes from S Vaiyapuri Pillai, a manuscript expert, who in 1956, still estimated the age of the Tolkāppiyam to be no earlier than the fifth century, though this date has been contested by many since. Another conservative estimate comes from Irvantham Mahadevan, an epigraphist who was responsible for the decipherment of the Tamil-Brahmi script. He uses the epigraphic method, particularly the use of diacritic marks, to build his chronology that suggests a date of seventh century CE for the Tolkappiyam. He notes that the dating of the diacritic mark known as the *pulli* in the Tamil-Brahmi script is relevant to the date: "...This theoretical deduction is also confirmed by the actual occurrences of Pulli from about the end of the Arikamedu Period ... The age of the invention of the Pulli has a bearing on the date of Tolkappiyam which is quite familiar with the device ..."²¹ The main weakness in this argument is its reliance on the details of script systems, which is somewhat unreliable, as philologists working with the problems of technologies of textual transmission have noted²².

On the other hand, scholars such as G Devaneyan believe that the Tolkāppiyam was composed much earlier. Devaneyan argues on the basis of various kinds of text-internal philological evidence for a date as early as seventh century BCE. He is also firmly committed to the importance of the philological method in understanding the text, insisting that "Those who have not studied comparative philology cannot understand Tolkāppiyam properly."²³ Devaneyan draws on political,

²¹Mahadevan, 1970, pp. 6-7

²²See Wilden, 2012

²³Devaneyan, 1966, p. 311

geographical and linguistic knowledge along a historical dimension to build his timeline of the Tolkāppiyam. Available knowledge regarding the political climate of ancient southern India guides his reading of the information in the text:

Tolkappiyar describes the Tamil country of his time, as comprising only the three peaceful and prosperous sovereign states of the Pandiya, Chola and Chera dynasties... As the literature of the Third Academy bristles with accounts of bloody wars fought by the three hereditary Tamil kings, among themselves and with their recalcitrant vassel chieftains, Tolkappiyar ought to have lived during an earlier period, when the three Tamil kings alone had the right to wear a crown...²⁴

Devaneyan also considers linguistic evidence, such as the projection of linguistic change based on forms deemed forbidden or ungrammatical by the time of the Tolkāppiyam's writing:

The use of rational honorific plural in the poetic dialect strictly forbidden by Tolkappiyar, became prevalent in the poems of the Third Academy including Tirukkural and there must have been a lapse of long time to allow such a deviation from a recognized grammatical usage.²⁵

His reasoning also includes the more vague, as when he notes that the style of the Tolkāppiyam has too much "purity and elegance"²⁶ and must therefore be dated to a time before that of the Third Academy. Devaneyan also draws on geographical details mentioned in the text

²⁴*ibid.*, p. 309

²⁵*ibid.*, pp.309-13

²⁶*ibid.*, p. 310

and correlates it with historical knowledge to justify his claims, mainly through speculations about the descriptions of the land beyond the western ghats, which “was too narrow to be inhabited by a big population”²⁷ and therefore not counted as part of the Tamil country according to *Tolkāppiyar*.

The problems with Devaneyan’s approach to fixing the date of the *Tolkāppi-yam* is that it veers towards the speculative and is committed to the integrity of the text as one whole unit, where most later estimates are more skeptical about the same. V. S. Rajam, for instance, suggests a date of pre-5th century, although she does not provide a more precise date than that.

Indologist Kamil Zvelebil suggests the idea that the *Tolkāppiyam* need not be considered a single unit composed and written down at one single point. As he observes, “...*Tolkāppiyam*, the core of which may be assigned to pre-Christian era, consists perhaps of many layers, some of which may be much earlier than others...”²⁸ This hypothesis has come to be the centre of the current consensus around the date of the *Tolkāppiyam*, or at least is the least controversial. Zvelebil’s hypothesis went against the earlier norm of treating the *Tolkāppiyam* as a homogenous whole; he attempts instead to reintroduce some of the rigour of the methodology of philology into the speculations around the *Tolkāppiyam*. This involves taking into account the complications of textual transmission and the technology involved therewith.

One of the main concerns for Zvelebil is regarding the relative dating of the *Tolkāppiyam* vis-à-vis the other texts of the Sangam corpus. His analysis of the language of the two and the deviation of the latter from

²⁷ibid.

²⁸Zvelebil 1973, p.137

the rules of the former seem to point towards the grammar preceding the literary works of the Sangam era, but this is complicated by the fact that, as he points out, the political and cultural milieu of the two seem to be the same. Therefore, Zvelebil reaches the conclusion that “the earliest, original version of the Tolkāppiyam belongs to the ‘pre-Caṅkam’ period; the oldest layer of the grammar is somewhat earlier in time than the majority of extant classical Tamil poems.”²⁹

The absolute dating of the Tolkāppiyam is similarly complicated by many seemingly conflicting facts. While a lot of the text points to a pre-Christian Era date, the influence of much later Sanskrit grammatical elements confounds this dating. Zvelebil’s analysis attempts to resolve these conflicts by hypothesizing that the “core” mentioned earlier was the original work, followed by several redactions, the latest of which consists of almost the entire Poruḷatikāram. He suggests an upper limit of the fifth century CE for the last redaction to the text. But the more interesting suggestion Zvelebil makes in order to explain the text-internal problems is that the Tolkāppiyam might not have been written by one author or even just one author followed by several authors adding portions, but that even the original “core” of the text might have been composed by an entire *school* or grammarians, guided, though, by one person’s vision or genius:

However, the organization of the grammar, and some other features of the text indicate that, apart from a possible number of authors involved there probably was a single mastermind who grasped with exceptional insight and intuition the deep grammatical structure of Tamil; who observed the emer-

²⁹Zvelebil, 1973, p.143

gence of Tamil as a full-fledged literary language, distinct from other closely related speeches like Kannada; who helped to institutionalize and standardize this vehicle of literature, and made explicit, in a highly formalized way, the rules of that language and its particular style.

Zvelebil ascribes a date of second to first century BCE to this portion of the text.

T. P. Meenakshisundaram, writing around the same time as Zvelebil, also suggests that the key to arriving at a date for the *Tolkāppiyam* lies in its authorship, and abandons the notion of a homogenous text. But he believes that there were two individuals named *Tolkāppiyar*, one who lived in the pre-Christian era, and one who lived later and also added to the *Tolkāppiyam*, creating the difficulties in its dating. This hypothesis helps account for the inconsistencies that have been observed in the text:

...the grammatical works of the earlier and later *Tolkāppiyar* could not be kept separated, and one therefore finds the contribution of both the authors in what goes now by the name of *Tolkāppiyam*. Of course, inconsistent *sutrās* could have been removed, but *sutras* showing later developments could have been repeated from generation to generation, and when people forgot that the authors were different, it would have been easier for any scholar to introduce them into the earlier work... This means that the whole of the *Tolkāppiyam* has to be studied with a view to find out the older work as distinguished from the later work³⁰.

³⁰Meenakshisundaram, 1974, pp.3-4

Meenakshisundaram's basic assumption about two authors of the same name is not improbable, for this was not unusual in the conventions of pre-modern Tamil literature, and there was, for instance, more than one individual named Nakkirar and Auvaiyar, among others. However, it is less credible that both authors might have worked on the same text: such a hypothesis is both unnecessary (unless one is committed to a different sort of unity of the text or author) and unlikely, and in this sense, a theory of redactions by multiple authors over a period is much more likely considering the history of ancient texts in general.

Although the proposal regarding multiple dates to the origin of the *Tolkāppiyam* has become quite commonly accepted, the attempts to reach a definitive date both among those writing in Tamil and English continued. Abraham Mariaselvam culls estimations from various scholars, including Zvelebil, and summarizes them thus:

The main strata of the three parts of *Tolkāppiyam* (which as a whole K. Zvelebil calls *Ur-Tolkāppiyam*) belong at least to the 3rd century BC. The presence of Jainism and the absence of the trace of Buddhistic philosophy or ideas in it bespeak pre-Aśokan, if not pre-Buddhist, period for the composition of *Tolkāppiyam*. Now, *Tolkāppiyar* quotes many works of grammar... These grammars themselves must have been based on preceding literatures [which] must have belonged to at least a century or two before the *Tolkāppiyam* itself. Tentatively, then, we may say that the early literary production in Tamil must have commenced at least in the 5th-4th centuries BC.³¹

³¹Mariaselvam, 1988, p. 100

More recent literature has also continued to grapple with this problem. German philologist Eva Wilden deals with the it by sidestepping the contentious issue of absolute dating and instead centers the relative dating of the Sangam corpus with the Tolkappiyam as a more useful avenue of investigation. Her conclusion is based purely on text-internal evidence, “gained in the process of text-critical, morpho-syntactical and poetic comparison”³². In this, she is the most thoroughly and exclusively philological in her approach to the problem. But ultimately, she does not have an answer to the question at hand. She concludes:

To this day no hard facts establishing a connection between the inner, literary and the outer, historical sequence have been convincingly shown to exist... Nothing [of the Sangam corpus] can be regarded as securely dated, before the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions of the 9th Century. Consequently, all the dates proposed... must be viewed in the first place as relative dates: important is the position a text holds with respect to the other texts, not the actual century attributed to it in this network of correlations.

The attempts to set a date on the Tolkāppiyam’s composition has been given such a detailed treatment here because it is a concern that is centrally relevant to the focus of this chapter, the idea of tradition. The difficulty in pinpointing even a single consistently acceptable date and the lack of consensus among experts in this regard is symptomatic of the difficulty inherent in the idea of a tradition itself, for it is only the moderns who are preoccupied with the idea of tradition. None of the many commentaries on the Tolkāppiyam that came before modernity

³²Wilden, 2014, p.7

seem overly concerned with exactly when the text was written, though they are not lacking in interest or attention to any of the other minutiae of the text. Those very commentaries, in fact, are also in turn considered a part of the grammatical tradition of the *Tolkāppiyam*, along with many other texts. The grammar and its commentaries are, after all, only one half of the pair of *ilakkaṇam* or grammar and *ilakkiyam* literary works, that make up the whole of Tamil literature. The entire body of literature is understood as a complex of inter-connected texts³³. Therefore it is necessary to not look at the *Tolkāppiyam* in isolation and consider it instead in the context of the other related texts in order to understand how they as a whole constitute the idea of a tradition.

3.3. The Constituents of Tradition

While speaking about Tamil grammatical texts, a term often used is *Tamil grammatical tradition*, referring to a whole host of texts and their commentaries³⁴. The underlying assumption of the idea of a grammatical tradition is that a certain kind of unity—usually linguistic—binds together the various ancient grammatical texts that are available to us today—and even some that are not available but are alluded to—though in reality these are only bound together by the fortune that allowed them, and not other texts, to survive, be “rediscovered” and see the light of

³³It is acknowledged that the idea of an exclusively “Tamil” literature, divorced from the other literary traditions of the region that were all flourishing simultaneously, is in itself a particularly modern anachronism. While the interrelationships between various literary traditions in the south are beyond the scope of this thesis, it must be emphasized that the various languages of the south functioned more as *complementary* rather than *parallel* to each other, as Mitchell (2005) has noted.

³⁴Although the question at hand is regarding the Tamil grammatical tradition, the problems discussed here are generally true of all reconstructed “traditions” including the Sanskrit and other world textual traditions

day³⁵. The fact is that the only surviving Tamil manuscripts available today are only a few centuries old³⁶ and any of them that are of texts more ancient are but reproductions of earlier manuscripts, some even two thousand years old. All the canards that go along with dealing with ancient manuscripts apply to them, arising from the change in media from oral to written to print, from political upheavals that affect the transmission of texts and natural factors as well.

What are the various kinds of texts that go towards constituting the idea of tradition? In the case of a grammatical tradition, this might include primary texts like the *Tolkāppiyam* and later works such as *Vīracolīyam* and *Nannūl*; it also includes commentaries like that of *Ḥampūraṇar* and *Cēnavarāyar* on the *Tolkāppiyam*, and *Nakkīrar* on *Iraiyanar Akapporul*, which are often full-fledged works which could be evaluated for their own merit. But also included are origin stories which often involve the question of language and grammar and have mythical and divine elements attached, and various legendary tales that accrue around the language. All of these go towards the idea of what an *ilakkaṇam* is.

³⁵For instance, one may consider the argument put forth by Subrahmanya Sastri, that the hints of a grammatical tradition preceding the *Tolkāppiyam* does not detract from the preeminence of the *Tolkāppiyam*, for he considers it “to be the father of all grammatical theories in Tamil language” (Sastri 1997[1934]) because it is the only extant work from that period.

³⁶“What we do have access to is a collection of books printed from the 19th century onwards and a number of palm-leaf MSS on which the texts printed in those books had earlier been transmitted but which do not seem capable of surviving more than two or three centuries (in the best of cases) and are, most of the time, not directly datable. As a consequence, it is probably a hard fact that no Tamil MS predating the 17th century (or possibly the 16th century) can be found.” Chevillard, 2014, p. 255.

3.3.1. *Glimpses of Earlier Grammars in the Tolkāppiyam*

Those who speak of a grammatical tradition often assume that the sense of tradition is shared by ancient authors, and it is true that most ancient grammatical texts and commentaries contain references to other texts that form a web of intertextuality that might be conceived of as a tradition. The Tolkāppiyam is no exception and is littered with references to “the learned ones” and constantly ascribes rules to existing, established grammatical norms.³⁷ This is evident from the very first lines of the text:

eluttu enappap̄ṭupa
akara mutala
nakaram iruvāy, muppaktu enpa—
cārntu varal marapin mūnru alaṅkaṭaiyē³⁸

Translation:

Thirty are the phonemes
from /a/ through /n/;
excluding the three, the secondary ones,
So it has been handed down.³⁹

It is to be noted that in the translation of *enpa* in the original to *So it has been handed down*, the translator has exercised his translator’s license, as a strict translation would be closer to *So it has been said*. But there are other instances where the author is more explicit, such as in Tolkāppiyam Colatikāram 353:

³⁷This suggests the existence of earlier grammatical works and, if we are to assume that literature precedes grammar, it suggests earlier literary works as well.

³⁸Tolkāppiyam Eluttatikāram, (TE) 1

³⁹Murugan, 2000, p.3

vērrumai al valik kurukalum tiritalum
tōrram illai enmanār pulavar

Translation:

In non-case relations coalescence
Such as these shortening, ellipses and modification [352]
Are not seen to be occurring,
So does the authority hold⁴⁰

Here, the phrase *enmanār pulavar* refers directly to what Murugan translates as what the authority hold, with *pulavar* referring to an author, a scholar or any authority or learned person.

Similarly, verses in the third part of the Tolkāppiyam also make such references to a received wisdom:

mutal enappaṭuvatu nilam, polutu, iraṇṭin
iyalpu ena molipa iyalpu uṇarntōrē

Translation:

Mutarporu! is
Aspects of land and time,
So do men of discernment find⁴¹.

Thus, it is clear that Tolkāppiyam was not a first attempt a grammatical work in Tamil, with various references to the (always unnamed) learned and the discerning clearly indicating the existence of other previous grammatical works, or at least some sort of engagement with the grammar of the language.

⁴⁰Murugan, 2000, p.137

⁴¹Murugan, 2000, p.374

The Tolkāppiyam also provides some clues as to the literary past that preceded it. However, little can be gleaned of this period beyond these mentions in the Tolkāppiyam, as it is the earliest work that is available to modern scholars. There have, on the other hand, been attempts to place Tolkāppiyam in a grammatical tradition, and one of the earliest such attempts came from British Sanskritist, linguist and lexicographer, A.C. Burnell, best known for his dictionary of Anglo-Indian colloquialisms, *Hobson-Jobson*.

3.3.2. *The Aindra Tradition*

Burnell's work on the Tolkāppiyam is, much to the chagrin of many Dravidianist scholars, titled *On the Aindra School of Sanskrit Grammars: Their Place in the Sanskrit and Subordinate Literatures*. As the title suggests and Burnell's own stated intentions reveal, his interest in the Tolkāppiyam is only inasmuch as it can reveal about the Sanskrit grammatical traditions. Thus, by examining the Tolkāppiyam, Burnell is able to make assumptions about the Sanskrit tradition, for instance, that "the differences between the schools of Sanskrit Grammar must depend rather on system than on matter..."⁴² Burnell considers the Tolkāppiyam very much a part of this tradition, placing it in the Aindra school of Sanskrit grammar, which he posits to be the oldest of the Sanskrit schools of grammar.

The Aindra school, however, is more elusive than Burnell's title suggests. As he admits, none of the ancient grammarians make reference to the school, although others are mentioned by name. The first reference to the school comes from a 10th century account, in a tale that Burnell

⁴²Burnell, 1875, p. IV

himself terms “absurd” (presumably for its mythological elements – although the very name Aindra itself marks it as associated with the god Indra) but based on later mentions in Buddhist texts, Burnell believes this was an actual pre-Pāṇinian school that existed, and tries to prove that Pāṇini himself makes reference to the tradition.

Tolkāppiyam, despite not being either written in or dealing with Sanskrit, is considered by Burnell to be a part of the Aindra tradition, due to the preface to the grammar by Panambaran, where the text is referred to as *aindira nirainda Tolkāppiyam* or “the Tolkāppiyam according to the Aindra”. Burnell goes on to analyze the Tolkāppiyam as a representative of the Aindra schools, comparing it with texts of later ones, and concludes on some general features of the Aindra school, which, he argues, also prove that it is the oldest of the Sanskrit schools. Some of these features are the “natural” and simple organization of the grammars, and the use of basic, everyday words for technical terms, both of which change with Pāṇini, whose grammar is both highly complex in its development of an extremely concise system of sutras, and in its highly technical and specialized terminology and metalanguage.

In modernity, scholars have often rejected this classification of Burnell’s; P. Marudanayagam notes that:

“The fact that Tolkāppiyam is not indebted to Pāṇini in any way and that it is really anterior to the latter so terribly disappointed Burnell that he was on a wild goose chase till he came across the references to Indra’s grammar which he assumed to be an existing grammar or a school of grammarians in order to contend that Tolkāppiyam was indebted to some Sanskrit grammar or at least some Sanskrit grammatical

tradition.⁴³

This sharp critique of Burnell’s argument proves sound as, though Burnell convincingly draws parallels between the Tolkāppiyam and the other Sanskrit grammars in terms of structure, the existence of the Aindra school is still dubious. Marudanayagam also takes exception to Burnell’s understanding of the Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram as a sign of the “primitivity” of the grammar:

It has been repeatedly noticed that some of the Prāticākhyas contain irrelevant matter, and that is also the case with Tolkāppiyam. In the last, besides the strictly grammatical part, the elements of rhetoric and metre, also observations on the method of teaching are given... It is obvious that this inclusion of irrelevant matter is a characteristic of primitive treatises composed before grammar, etymology, prosody and exegesis has been differentiated.

Thus, the treatise on poetics of the Tolkāppiyam is “irrelevant” information in Burnell’s view, from the vantage point of the later practices of Sanskrit grammarians. However, to Marudanayagam, the Poruḷatikāram represents the sophistication of the Tamil grammatical tradition, and he notes that it “has now come for high praise by modern linguists”⁴⁴.

This response to Burnell represents an ongoing scholarly debate around the question of the indebtedness of the Tolkāppiyam to the Sanskrit grammatical tradition. Although Burnell’s analysis of the similarities between the Tolkāppiyam and other pre-Pāṇinian texts is quite convincing, the murkiness around the dating of the Tolkāppiyam has allowed

⁴³Marudanayagam, 2010, p. 33

⁴⁴Marudanayagam, 2010, p. 35

room for contentions regarding which way the indebtedness runs, with some scholars arguing that the *Tolkāppiyam* is the original text whose influence flowed into the Sanskrit grammars.

Burnell's work and the responses to it represent a search for the origins of the Tamil grammatical tradition. However, there are other works that attempt to provide an account of the origins of grammar in Tamil, such as the *Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ*, which tells a tale that elevates grammar writing to an activity of god himself. The existence of divine origin stories in the pre-modern literature is not unusual or exclusive to Tamil; most cultures trace language back to god. But the connections between grammar itself and divinity is much more prevalent in the context of Tamil. Further, as Sumathi Ramaswamy notes, such tales became particularly popular in modernity, when "the quest for foundational principles for the "reform" of society in the aftermath of colonial conquest led to a retreat into "religion" and "tradition," imagined as sites outside the sphere of the colonial state, and hence pure and untouched."⁴⁵ Ramaswamy also gives instances of such stories that cast Tamil as "the language divine" and notes that "legends and stories that had accumulated over the centuries about Tamil's divine powers were recycled and embellished"⁴⁶ in order to support the ideological ends of the neo-Saivites in modernity, and to produce a certain idea of tradition. However, a more thorough reading of the nuances of pre-modern texts is necessary to understand these transformations of notions of tradition, language and religion in modernity. One text that provides some insight is the *Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ*.

⁴⁵Ramaswamy, 1997, p. 24

⁴⁶*ibid.*, p. 31

3.3.3. *Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ*

The *Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ* also known as *Kaḷaviyal enra Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ* or simply *Iraiyānār Kaḷaviyal* (henceforth IA) is a treatise on the *akam* conventions of poetry, composed around the fifth century CE by Iraiyānār, an author whose identity is unclear. The text itself consists of sixty *nūrpas* which talk about love poetry of the *akam* genre, which is the interior landscape as expounded first in the *Poruḷatikāram* (henceforth TP) of the *Tolkāppiyam*⁴⁷. The IA also shares some of the issues around dating that surround the *Tolkāppiyam*. It is now almost uncontroversially considered by scholars to be a layered text, with the main text consisting of the *nūrpas*, and its commentary and a set of poems consisting of the second and third layer.

The third section, known as the *Pāṇṭikōvai*, consists of poetry in the *kōvai* form, which refers to a collection of serially inter-linked poetry, about Neṭumāran, a 7th century Pantiyān king. This work illustrates the conventions that the main text of the IA talks about, and is thought to have been composed in the 7th century. It clearly preceded the second layer as it is often referred to by the author of the commentary.

The second layer, the commentary, was authored by Nakkīraṇār, thought to be at a later date than the core text, likely in the 8th century CE. It is also not free of later interpolations, and its author is named by the text itself: “One should say that it was Nakkīraṇ who composed the commentary on the book made by the great Lord of Ālavāy in Matu-

⁴⁷It must be noted that this chronology that places the *Poruḷatikāram* preceding the IA is not established beyond doubt. As Takanobu Takahashi notes, “It is almost impossible at the present stage of our knowledge to establish the absolute chronology of the TP and the IA, since we have very little evidence for the dates of their composition.” (Takahashi, 2010, p. 132)

rai...”⁴⁸ The commentary is considered a very important work of its own right for its explication of the akam poetics, which had an immense influence on the Tamil poetry of the medieval era, and for the fact that it is the earliest surviving prose commentary in Tamil. It is also full of references, quotations and illustrations from literature that was contemporaneous to it, making it a valuable source of medieval texts, fragmentary though they might be. The commentary has also been a useful source of information as it discusses the authorship of both the core text and of the commentary itself. This is where the commentary becomes most relevant to the current discussion, for it provides what became a very influential and popular story regarding the composition of the main text of the IA that ties up grammar and poetics with divinity:

In those days, the Pāṇṭiya country was afflicted with famine for twelve years. As hunger continued to worsen, the king summoned all learned men, and said, “Heed me, I can no longer sustain you, for my land suffers grievously. You must take refuge somewhere in a place familiar to you, and once the country returns to normal, remember me and come back.” After they had taken their leave of the king and set off, twelve years passed without incident, and fertile rains once more fell upon the land. The king dispatched men far and wide, telling them to bring back the scholars now that the country had returned to normal. The king’s men found scholars competent in the fields (*atikāram*, Sanskrit *adhikāra*) of morphology, syntax, and prosody, but when they returned, they said that they could not find anyone competent in the field of

⁴⁸Zvelebil, 1973, p.117

poetry's significance (*poruḷatikāram*) anywhere at all. The king was overcome with worry, and said, "There is no point in studying the fields of morphology, syntax, and prosody except in service of the field of poetry's significance! If I cannot acquire that, acquiring the others gains me nothing!"

And he went to the temple in Maturai to meditate on the god who is red as fire.

"This is terrible," thought the god, "the king is consumed with worry! But since his worry is centered on knowledge, I shall put an end to it." And he inscribed the sixty verses of this text on three copper plates, and placed them under his throne.

The next day, after they were so placed, in order to worship the gods, the Brahman wiped the divine temple clean, sprinkled water, placed flowers and, though previously he had never swept under the pedestal, that day, prompted by divine interference, he thought, "I shall sweep", and he swept to appease his mind. As he was sweeping and poking inside, the plates appeared. On their emerging, he took and examined them, and they appeared to him as the *Poruḷatikāram* of surpassing excellence.

Seeing them, the Brahmin thought "Our Lord must have made these, knowing how worried the king is because he lacks the field of poetry's significance." Instead of returning home, he went to the main gate of the palace and presented himself to the door wardens. The king called for him to enter, and

the Brahmin came forward to show him the plates. After the king took them and looked them over, he exclaimed, “Here is the field of poetry’s significance! Our Lord must have made this after seeing me so despondent,” and he turned in the direction of the temple and worshipped.⁴⁹

The story thus ascribes the composition of the *Iraiyanār Akapporul* to “the god who is red as fire”, i.e., Śiva himself. The origin of this story is unclear as the main text of the IA makes no mention of its own authorship, and this is a new concern introduced by the commentary. Zvelebil speculates that the bare facts of the story might in fact be true, and that the copper plates might have been written and placed in the temple by an unknown author, later to be discovered; it is quite conceivable that this discovery might have been interpreted as a divine gift.

The name *Iraiyanār*, normally referring to Śiva himself, also adds to this mythical origin tale, despite the fact that it was not unheard of for people to be named after gods, and in fact, there are other ancient poets named *Iraiyanār*. It is only possible to speculate on the ideological reason behind this newly acquired aspect of the text: by the time of the commentary’s composition by *Nakkīraṇār*, i.e., 7th to 8th century CE, Saivism was at its heights and this reflects in various aspects of the literature of the era, including this particular story about the authorship of the IA.

Blake Wentworth argues that the introduction of this story by *Nakkīraṇār* into a text that is otherwise rather lacking in religious overtones is ideologically motivated and results in the erasure of the likely true origins of the text, from Jain and Buddhist scholarship. He is particularly in-

⁴⁹Translation from Wentworth, 2011, pp. 162-163; Zvelebil, 1973a, pp. 115-116

terested in the portrayal of the idea of Sangam here as a group of scholars under the king, interpreting the words of the god Śiva with divine guidance:

But the term *caṅkam*, as has regularly been observed, was not first associated with a literary conference, particularly one that produced its masterpieces with a fideistic dependence on Śiva. *San̄ghas* were Jain, or Buddhist, and it is Jains in particular who are credited with writing some of the most renowned works of early Tamil literature... Here they are thrown aside, for Jains have no part in *Ir̄aiyaṅār Akapporuḷ*'s sense of Tamil, cleanly placed in the Śaiva fold... its *sūtras* were the work of Śiva, and its exemplary verses, the *Pāṅṭik Kōvai*, praise *Neṭumaraṅ*, the *Pāṅṭiya* king held to have been converted from Jainism to Śaivism by the great saint *Ñānacampantar*.⁵⁰

While Wentworth's assertions about the ideological underpinnings of *Na-kkīraṅār*'s story are insightful, one might also be tempted conclude that the medieval commentator took liberties with the truth in order to deliberately impose such an origin story on the text. However, what must also be noted is the difference in understanding between a modern reading and that of a medieval author such as *Nakkīraṅār*. *Nakkīraṅār*'s departure from the non-religious tone of the original text and his imposition of Saivite values on the IA is not an outcome of inauthenticity. It is a creative reimagining of the past that is free of a monolithic idea of identity and culture that had to be preserved in its "original" spirit. A historical relationship with the past where the author's

⁵⁰Wentworth, 2010, p.164

intentions and identity reside as “Other” from the present and from the commentator’s, therefore, was unlikely to have been the guiding force. Therefore, despite the fact that [Nakkīraṇār], dwelling at a time when the language and literature was already hugely transformed by the bhakti movement, “dealt with a ‘classical’ heritage as it were, with a corpus of texts which belonged to another age,⁵¹” the licenses he took with the history of one such text does not have the same implications that a modern view would lead one to conclude on. That the hostilities and the political context of Nakkīraṇār’s time are evident in the work does not detract from this.

Another interesting aspect of this tale is the new relationship it forges between land, literature and royal duty. The king’s duty as glimpsed through the text involves protecting the land and his subjects, but also the literature. When the drought-struck land is unable to sustain the most learned, the king deems it appropriate to send them away and once the land is fertile again, it is considered similarly fertile enough for the practice of the arts. The king’s distress at not being able to retrieve the third atikāram and thus have complete mastery over grammatical knowledge through his scholars suggests that patronage of language and literature was as important a duty to the king as safe-guarding his subjects’ interests and preserving the land. Thus the king enlists the help of Śiva himself to restore the lost text⁵²

⁵¹Zvelebil, 1973a, p.134

⁵²This picture is in keeping with the pre-colonial networks of patronage and art that was common in pre-colonial Tamil country. The connection between language, land and royalty is also noted by Mitchell (2009), who argues that pre-colonial conceptions of language were as “language of the land” rather than language as personal identity; the king who ruled the land therefore was intimately connected with a language as “natural features of particular local landscapes and environments...” (p. 14). This is part of the transformation that took place in the first millenium CE, what Sheldon Pollock terms “the vernacular millenium”, when royal power shifted from being

The commentary also sheds some light on its own authorship and preservation. In a section that is clearly a later interpolation, the commentary of the IA traces the genealogy of its transmission:

Now we shall state the course in which the commentary became current: Nakkīraṇār, son of Kaṇakkāyaṇār of Maturai, related the commentary to his son Kīraṅkorraṇār; he, to Tēnūrkkilār; he, to Paṭiyaṅkorraṇār; he, to Puḷiyaṅkāy Peruñcētanār, the *ācīriyar* of Maṇalūr; he, to Āṇṭaipperuṅkumāraṇār, the *ācīriyar* of Cellūr; he, to the *ācīriyar* of Tirukkunram; he to Mātavaḷaṇār Iḷanākaṇār; he, to Nīlakaṇṭaṇār, the *ācīriyar* of Muciri. Thus comes the commentary...

The transmission of the text as attested to here is thought to have been primarily oral in nature, being written down only by the final *ācīriyar* or author mentioned. Zvelebil (1973a) argues that although this is not evident from the text itself, it is a plausible explanation as the structure of the commentary itself, being composed in an almost dialogic style, seems to suggest oral transmission.

As in the case of the Tolkāppiyam itself, the controversy around the dating of the IA also provides insight into how grammatical traditions are conceived of in modernity. As mentioned previously, the relative dating of the IA and the TP has also been a source of some debate, with those like Zvelebil believing that the composition of the IA preceded that of the TP, and others like Takahashi arguing the reverse. As noted in section 3.2.2, the TP is considered to be the oldest section of the Tolkāppiyam, thus allowing the space for this debate. However, the main controversy arises from the IA's self-identification (through the couched and expressed in Sanskrit to various vernacular languages.

commentary) as a *mutanūl* or first text (*mutal* or first + *nūl* or text). This has been interpreted by some as reasonable proof that the IA was the first text of its kind on the subject matter of grammar or *poruḷ*. However, Takahashi suggests that this is a misinterpretation of the term *mutalnūl*, which simply refers to “a treatise having no lineage, or... the first treatise in a lineage,”⁵³ thus concluding that interpreting this as statement on the text’s historicity is “far-fetched and incorrect”⁵⁴.

This debate is based on one of important distinctions regarding treatises found in the commentary portion of the IA, viz., that of *mutanūl*, *valinūl* and *cārpunūl* or, the first/original text, the derivative text and the offshoot respectively. The *mutanūl*, as just explained, refers to an original text that has no “lineage”, just the opposite of a *valinul* (*vali* = way/path or lineage), which is a derivative text based on an existing lineage of works, the *cārpunūl* (*cārpū* = related or associated) being a text that is neither an original text nor a part of the lineage of an original treatise but an independent but related text. The term *lineage* is key here, as it is important to note that this is not a historical understanding of a textual tradition: a lineage refers to a manner of organizing treatises that follow from a certain original text, and while these are obviously ordered successively in time after the original text, this type of ordering is not central to the idea of a lineage. Thus, the IA can be a *mutanūl*, despite the fact that, even internal to the story quoted in the commentary, a treatise on poetics already existed, and was lost⁵⁵. The lineage is therefore not a historical idea, with a text having to be the first of its kind in order to be considered an “original” treatise.

⁵³Takahashi, 2010, p. 137.

⁵⁴*ibid.*

⁵⁵For it is difficult to imagine that a text assigned divine origins would ever be considered a *valinūl*.

This is a distinction that is often (unintentionally) elided by modern scholars, as Zvelebil does, who are functioning in an epistemological realm where historicity is supreme, and thus, despite careful adherence to philological principles, historicity is still conflated with other forms of categorizing and organizing knowledge.

But perhaps the most important testament that the commentary to the IA gives to a Tamil major aspect of the history of Tamil literature is regarding the Saṅgam, one of the earliest surviving accounts of this legend which has proved to be among the biggest influences in constituting the notion of a tradition.

3.3.4. The Legend of the Saṅgam

The history of Tamil literature is almost impossible to recount without mention of the Saṅgams, the ancient academies of poets and scholars that are believed to have existed in the southern region in an antediluvian past. The term Saṅgam is used to describe the texts from a certain era of Tamil history, and also the era itself. The texts of the Saṅgam was most likely anthologized in their current form in the middle of the first millennium CE and the very process has significance for “the constitution of a Tamil literary past via a process of selection and evaluation”, as Eva Wilden notes. The ancient academy, according to legend, was located in the city of Madurai and had three successive schools, the first of two of which are obliterated from history due to floods.

According to Zvelebil (1973a), the earliest mention of the Saṅgams in the texts available today to us comes from Appar’s seventh century text, Tirupattūr Tāṇṭakam:

nan paṭṭup pulavanāyc caṅkam ēri

narkanakak kilitarumikku arulinōn kān

Translation:

Look at Him who was gracious enough to appear in the assembly (*caṅkam*) as a poet of fine poems and presented the purse of gold to Tarumi.⁵⁶

But the most clear description of the Saṅgams comes from a slightly later text, the IA.Nakkīraṅār in his commentary gives a detailed account of when the Saṅgams existed, what their composition was and how many texts they produced. Nakkīraṅār's account is that there were three Saṅgams that flourished in prehistoric times, which he calls *talaiccaṅkam*, *iṭaiccaṅkam* and *kaṭaiccaṅkam* respectively. The first, the *talaiccaṅkam*, consisted of 4449 poets and was in existence for 4440 years before Teṇmaturai or Southern Maturai, the city the academy was situated in, was swallowed by the sea. A second academy was formed subsequently in Kapāṭapuram. This academy had a lifetime of 3700 years with as many poets being a part of it, at the end of which this one was also lost to flooding by the sea. The former was under the patronage of 89 Pāṇṭiya kings and the latter, 59.

The *kaṭaiccaṅkam* is the only one which was based in a place still in existence, the city of Maturai, and seems to be placed more firmly in the realm of recorded history than the other two, the accounts of whom seem to be framed more as legends. The third Saṅgam, according to Nakkīraṅār's claims, seems to have flourished for 1850 years and had the patronage of 49 kings over 449 poets.

The legend claims that the first Saṅgam consisted of learned sages like Agastya, and even gods, including Śiva, Kubera and Muruka. The

⁵⁶Zvelebil, 1973b, p. 45, footnote 1.

lost legendary grammar, the *Akattiyam*, was supposedly a product of this Saṅgam. The membership of the *ītaiccaṅkam* produced the *Tolkāppiyam*, according to legend, and the grammar also guided the works of the third Saṅgam.

The legend of the Saṅgam and allied tales such as that of the Kumāri Kāṇḍam has proved to be extremely influential in the way the history of Tamil literature and culture has been envisioned in modernity. Kumāri Kāṇḍam or Lemuria is an ancient utopic Tamil land—sometimes also referred to as a continent—that was home to the first Saṅgam and is supposed to have been submerged by the sea in a pre-historic past, a loss accompanied by an enormous loss of knowledge via submerged books. This loss has created a powerful nostalgia around the original works of Tamil literature, sometimes referred to as the first ever composed by any human culture, and the grand misfortune of its loss to its rightful heirs, the modern Tamils.

Speaking of the legend of the lost land of Lemuria, Sumathi Ramaswamy notes that:

Because of this mystique of loss that cloaks the entire body of Tamil literary works, a special significance is attached to those that are declared survivors of this catastrophic destruction... So much so that even contemporary scholars (in India and abroad) who work on ancient Tamil literature [such as Ramanujan and Zvelebil] write in the shadow of loss...⁵⁷

But the actual existence of the early Saṅgams is shrouded in mystery. The only available records of an academy of scholars such as the one legend talks about is attested to by Jain records which speak of a

⁵⁷Ramaswamy, 2004 p.116

Drāviḍa Saṅgho established in the city of Matura, in the fifth century C.E. This leads Vaiyapuri Pillai to conclude⁵⁸ that the Jain *samgho* is the same as the last Tamil Saṅgam, despite the fact that this would place the latter at a much later date than what is usually believed to be the date of composition of the Saṅgam poems.

Zvelebil, however, speculates based on the fact that all the numbers in Nakkīraṅār's story are multiples of 37 that there might be some truth to Vaiyapuri Pillai's conclusions, considering penchant of the ancient Jain scholars for number play. However, he considers this to only be relevant to the account given by Nakkīraṅār, for he does conclude later that the Tamil Saṅgams are probably earlier than the Jain ones, and suggests that the name Saṅgam might have been adopted at a later date to refer to such academies based on the Jaina nomenclature. This does seem a more reasonable conclusion, when it is considered in the light of the fact that the poems of the Saṅgam corpus, though clearly composed by different poets, are remarkably unified in terms of execution of themes, and this fits in well with Zvelebil's hypothesis. The linguistic evidence of course also attests to a much earlier date for the poems.

The Legend of Agattiyar

But turning to the earlier two Saṅgams, no real evidence remains⁵⁹, not just of their existence but if they are purely fictional, of a source for the legends. The only pieces of information that seem to go towards evidence of the earlier academies are the references to Agattiyar, the legendary saint who is described in different ways by various accounts

⁵⁸Pillai, 1956

⁵⁹Although Zvelebil again seems to believe that this does not entirely rule out their existence.

both pre-modern and modern, as grammarian of the first Saṅgam, as the first ever grammarian and is even referred to as the “father of the Tamil language”.

The figure of Agattiyar is a particularly interesting one in that he is claimed equally by the Vedic Hindu tradition as Agastya, the miraculous saint who was born with neither father nor mother, featuring in the Puranās with his wife Lopāmudra; and the Tamil tradition where he is a member of the first Saṅgam and is considered by some as an incarnation of Śiva himself⁶⁰. He dwells in the uneasy space between Sanskrit and Tamil traditions, where he is an Aryan sage according to some accounts, taught Tamil by Śiva himself and sent south to bring the Dravidians into the Sanskrit fold⁶¹, and according to some others accounts, he is a learned Dravidian who gained mastery over the Sanskrit language and was a guide to the Aryan settlers in the subcontinent⁶². That he was and is held in high regard in the Tamil tradition is unquestionable, for as Ramaswamy recounts, when the temple to Tamil̥ttāy (Mother-Goddess Tamil) was opened in 1993, “the inner sanctum houses in addition to Tamil̥ttāy, images of her two most ancient ‘sons’, the grammarians Agattiyar and Tolkappiyar...”⁶³

Agattiyar is held in such high esteem in the Tamil tradition because he is supposed to be the first grammarian of the talaiccaṅkam, and according to IA, a contemporary of gods such as Śiva and Muruka, from

⁶⁰He is also claimed by the Tamil Śaiva tradition in the *Tēvāram*, the Buddhist tradition in the Tamil grammar, *Vīracōliyam* and the cult of Agastya also has an existence in the Śaiva tradition of Java.

⁶¹The figure of Agastya in the Ramayana, for instance, is of a sage who went south to subdue or kill the Rakshasas and render the land safe for the Aryans.

⁶²Others, such as R. Raghava Iyengar, have raised doubts that Agastyā and Agattiyar are the same person at all.

⁶³Ramaswamy, 1997, 133

whom he learned Tamil. He is often referred to as *kurumuni* or the short sage, and this is also his description in the Vedic and other Hindu texts. Agattiyar's grammatical text, *Agattiyam* is supposed to have had 12,000 verses and set forth the principles of *muttamil* (threefold Tamil), i.e., *iyal*, *isai*, *nātakam* or literature, music and drama respectively. Sivañāṇa Munivar writes in the eighteenth century that the language of the Tamil country and its first grammar, the *Agattiyam*, were both born at the same time: “centamiḷ nilattu molī tonruṅ kālattuṅ tonriya nūl akattiyam.” The sage is believed to have had twelve disciples of whom only the works of the first survive, i.e., Tolkāppiyar. The other disciples of Agattiyar include: Atankōṭṭācān, Turāliṅkar, Cempūtcēy, Vaiyāpikar, Vāyppiyam, Panampāraṅār, Kalārampanār, Avinayanār, Kākkai-pāṭiniyanār, Nattataṅār, and Vāmanar. Chevillard (2014) adds Cikaṅṭi to the list as a “thirteenth” disciple, heretofore not recognized, based on evidence from a commentary on the *Cilappatikāram* by Aṭiyārkkun Nallār. Although the names of have been culled from various literary texts including the Saṅgam poems and the Tolkāppiyam, the actual works of most of these disciples are, just as in the case of Agattiyar, no longer extant, although some poems and fragments of texts quoted in other grammars have survived. However, what information there is available from various sources shows that the disciples were chiefly poets or poetesses, grammarians and in the case of Cikaṅṭi, the author of a treatise on music.

The discussions by Tamil and Dravidianist scholars around Agattiyar's identity mostly revolve around the incompatibility of the beloved Agattiyar, the first expert on the revered Tamil subject of grammar, with an Aryan “invader”—how could a Sanskrit sage teach Tamil to the

Tamils and write its first grammar if the language already existed before the arrival of the Aryans? Iravantham Mahadevan, for instance, explores just such a question, folding in historical time with legendary time, and through the means provided by historical linguistics, philology and history, tries to prove that Agattiyar was indeed a *Tamil muni* (Tamil sage). The central point of Mahadevan's argument is that when the Tamil and the Sanskrit legends around Agattiyar are compared, "the northern tradition is basically ahistorical, and is nothing more than a collection of incredible fables and myths dimly remembered from a very remote past..."⁶⁴ He contrasts this with the Tamil lore which he finds much more credible because, as he demonstrates by drawing from various sources such as the *Tolkāppiyam*, its commentaries, the epic *Maṇimēkalai*, the *Puranānūru* and other Saṅgam texts, Agattiyar is actually chieftain to the *Vēḷir* clan who migrated from the north of the *Vindhyas*. Mahadevan draws evidence from philological studies that the *Vēḷir* were indeed a historical Dravidian clan, and from epigraphic studies to show that Agattiyar was indeed a well-known figure even perhaps among the Indus civilization, thus proving him to be a pre-Aryan figure in the subcontinent. Therefore,

...the Southern tradition rings much truer and appears to be a down to earth account of a historical event, namely the mass migration to the South of the *vēḷir* who are identified as part of a living tradition at the time of the *caṅkam* polity described in the earliest Tamil works.⁶⁵

Although Mahadevan's analysis also veers towards the highly spec-

⁶⁴Mahadevan, 1975, p.30

⁶⁵*ibid.*

ulative and is not completely devoid of mythical references, what is relevant here are the strategies used to give legitimacy to the Tamil tradition's claim over the sage. Mahadevan depends on long-established binary divisions between Aryan and Dravidian, and the narrative of an invasion of the subcontinent by Aryans, going as far as to call them "colonists" and "invaders" at several points. Thus, the main thrust of his argument is to establish the Tamil literary and grammatical tradition as autonomous from the Vedic/Aryan/ Brahmanical one.

But the very basis for this claim, the existence of Agattiyar, is in itself somewhat mythical even in the Tamil lore. As just discussed, the Agattiyar of the Saṅgam legend, who wrote the Saṅgam's first grammar and therefore is held in such high regard, left no concrete evidence of his work behind. As philologist Jean-Luc Chevillard notes, "...when going to the sphere of textual facts... rather than remaining in the sphere of ideological statements, certitudes fade and powerful symbols like *muttamil* "the three branches of Tamil", which is said to have been the subject of Agastya's elusive grammar, are replaced by scanty textual data scattered on a memory map which has many blank spots."⁶⁶

Chevillard also argues that Agattiyar was not always such a familiar figure in the history of Tamil, and in fact only became so widely known from the medieval times. He arrives at the opposite conclusion to Mahadevan, stating that "Agastya need not have really composed a grammar, and... it was sufficient for him to serve as a symbolic intermediary between Śiva and texts that were already extant before the Śaiva bhakti wave."⁶⁷ He also concedes that, considering the fact that many fragments of the lost Akattiyam do find mention in later texts like

⁶⁶Chevillard, 2009, p.243

⁶⁷*ibid.*, p.263.

Mayilainātar's commentary on the Nannūl, it is highly likely that the text itself existed, written perhaps by a Jain scholar, later ascribed to the divine Agastya.

Chevillard's argument is more rigorously textual and philological in that sense. While both he and Mahadevan reject arguments that make use of mythical stories with divine undertones, Mahadevan finds the Tamil legend much more plausible and Chevillard, much less, for the same reason. This is partially because Mahadevan draws from many different sources as discussed previously to fortify his argument whereas Chevillard goes back to the philological method as the most credible. More importantly, Mahadevan foregrounds the opposition between the Tamil legend with the Vedic one in his argument. The picture of the Tamil grammatical tradition as he paints it is therefore one that stretches back to a time before philological (textual) record but is still possible to rebuild by the various technologies of historical and epigraphic reconstruction. But for Chevillard, writing at an age and from a subjective context far removed from that of Mahadevan's, the question of a Sanskrit tradition versus a Tamil one does not hold such import. His concerns are much more to do with the current state of knowledge of the origins of Tamil grammar, but centred on textual evidence:

...we have a number of fragments of texts, preserved as quotations, but not many attempts have been made to study those fragments for themselves. The 12 disciples motif and the ambiguous interest in Agastya the grammarian thus appear as a tentative to give an answer to an interesting question: what were the beginning of the Tamil grammatical tradition. But the answer given is more satisfactory from a

religious perspective than from a history-of-science perspective.⁶⁸

The differences in these two approaches to the idea of a Tamil grammatical tradition show a still-persisting difference in the subjectivity of those, like Mahadevan, who attempt to reclaim the narrative around the Tamil language, culture and its history and those like Chevillard who, though deeply invested in the history of the language and its textual traditions, are still able to claim for themselves a distance (such as that of a history-of-science perspective) from the ideological conflicts that are embedded in the process of the production of tradition itself.

Social Organization in the Saṅgam Era

One final point of interest with regard to the Saṅgam era is a series of debates that have recently taken place regarding the social organization of Tamil society in the Saṅgam era. The traditional view of Tamil society in the early centuries BCE is of a “pre-Aryan” culture, one devoid of the major social inequities propounded by the caste system, which is presented as a purely Vedic invention. E. V. Ramasamy, the ideologue of the Dravidian Self-Respect Movement, took recourse in the argument of Tamil language and culture’s corruption through contact with Sanskrit and Brahmanism:

Let us have a look at the damage that has already been and will be done to us because of Tamil’s association with Sanskrit. Let us take the problem of caste among us. If the word ‘Jati’ is removed from Tamil language, is there any equivalent Tamil word for it? Let the [Tamil] pundits answer. Alas!

⁶⁸*ibid.*, p.264

[There is] no equivalent word! It is clear that there was no caste system among our people in the ancient days; and it emerged [among us] due to our association with the north.⁶⁹

Most importantly, although class-based segregation was just as prevalent in the Saṅgam era as in any other era or society, the concepts of untouchability and rigid occupational restrictions—the hallmarks of the *varna* system—are believed to be absent. This idyllic picture of Saṅgam era Tamilakam is often drawn from the Saṅgam texts which are purportedly devoid of signs of caste or even extreme gender-based social disparity.

Kailasapathy (1968), for instance, in his analysis of Saṅgam poetry, declares that “the caste system as we know it is absent among the Tamils in the early period...”⁷⁰, instead suggesting that “overriding these minor classifications—regional and occupational—was the basic division into heroes and non-heroes.”⁷¹ This is the popular view among Dravidianist Tamil scholars, and is also supported by the research such as Chelliah and Jesudasan. However, the work of K.K. Pillay and George Hart has argued just the opposite. Hart, for instance, bases his analysis on the usages of various occupation names to conclude that Tamil society did have forms of caste segregation:

Evidently, low-born people lived largely in separate places in ancient times as now. *Paṭṭinappālai* 75 mentions a *cēri* outside of a city—then, as now, evidently a place where low castes live—where there are pigs and chickens and where fishermen live. *Paripāṭal* 7.31-2 speaks of the *cēri* of the

⁶⁹E. V. Ramasamy as quoted in Pandian, 2007, p. 203.

⁷⁰Kailasapathy, 1968, p. 259

⁷¹*ibid.*

dancers (*āṭavar*)—who, as will be seen, were of low caste. *Mat-uraikkāñci* 342 mentions a “*perumpāṇ irukkai*” apparently the place where a branch of the Pāṇans (“perum” means “great”). On the other hand, Brahmins had their own section of town, and in those places, there was no meat, no dogs, and no chickens (*Porunarārruppaṭai* 300; *Perumpāṇārruppaṭai* 297)⁷²

These arguments have been in turn countered by Sudalaimuthu Palaniappan in a very thoroughly researched article, where he argues chiefly that an anachronistic reading of the terms in the texts presented by Hart leads to the incorrect conclusion regarding the presence of caste in ancient Tamil society:

Tamil scholars, as a result of uncritical reliance on medieval commentators and lack of awareness of the impact of Jainism-induced semantic changes involving key ancient Tamil terms like ‘pulaiya’, have failed to realise the true state of ancient Tamil society...⁷³

Palaniappan suggests that at the root of the problems in understanding “...is the lack of philological rigor in the interpretation of Classical Tamil texts.”⁷⁴ Where Hart claims that the association found in the texts, of impurity with certain occupations, arises from casteist beliefs, Palaniappan refutes this by arguing that the idea of impurity is associated with those professions that involve taking of life due to the influence of Jainism on early Tamil society.

This debate about ancient Tamil society is based almost entirely on

⁷²Hart, 1987, p. 6

⁷³Palaniappan, 2008, p. 54

⁷⁴*ibid.*, p. 7

evidence drawn from the Saṅgam texts, and the methods are mostly philological. The question continues to be debated.

3.4. The Commentaries

The previous section explored the ways in which various legends, tales and recorded histories regarding Tamil literature and grammar went towards constituting a grammatical tradition of Tamil, often in conflicting and highly debated ways. This section returns to the *Tolkāppiyam* and its commentaries and their role in the same. Commentaries play a very important role in how grammatical texts are received and read not only in modernity, but also in pre-modern times, as part of a philological practice. Considering the long history of the Tamil language and the huge changes wrought upon it by various political upheavals and the progress of time, commentaries by scholars well-versed in the literature of the language often provided the only means of comprehending such texts. But equally as often, if not more, commentators were also creatively reading and reinterpreting texts; they were not simply passive “translators” of ancient texts, but often creators of new texts themselves.

In this sense, commentaries represent one of the most important components in the process of tradition building, for they provide moderns with the necessary links between a distant past and the more recent one. Thus, it is possible to trace a chain of continuity from the author of the *Tolkāppiyam* in the misty past of the late centuries BCE, to commentators like *ḷampūraṇar* in the 11th to 12th Century CE, to *Naccinārkkiniyar* in the 14th Century CE, right up to *Kallāṭar* in the 17th Century CE. However, while such reconstructions of the trajectory

of the growth of knowledge have become naturalized to modern eyes, here again, as in the previous section, there are many departures and ruptures within these narratives that complicate them.

In the context of Tamil, the period beginning from the eighth century CE and lasting up to the sixteenth century has been identified as the “age of commentaries”⁷⁵. This period saw a huge growth in the production of commentaries, not just on the *Tolkāppiyam* but on a myriad other Saṅgam texts as well. One major fact regarding pre-modern commentaries in the Tamil tradition is that the relationship between commentator and original text was not as strictly separate as it is in modernity; the mode of “interpretation” as practised by commentators allowed for much more flexibility. It is true, as noted in Section 3.3.3 (p.116), that clear categories existed at least in medieval times that separated an “original text” from its “derivatives” and “offshoots”—the argument of the current thesis is not that there were no distinctions between different kinds of texts and authors, but that the interpretation of the commentators often took on the role of providing meaning and structure to the text itself, without the accompanying perception of loss of authenticity that is seen in modernity.

This was in evidence in the complications that arose from Nakkīraṇar’s commentary on the IA and its reception, where a bias towards Śaivism was detected by modern scholars, and it was argued here that this was not a product of inauthenticity but a by-product of a different orientation towards the commentator’s role. Normal Cutler also makes a similar point with regard to the ancient Tamil text with the highest number of commentaries, the *Tirukkural*. The *Tirukkural*, a collec-

⁷⁵Wilden, 2009a

tion of aphoristic couplets, is a highly esteemed text, supposed to represent the essence of the wisdom of the ancient Tamils, and is often known as *tamilmarai* (or Tamil Veda). Originally composed by the saint Tiruvalluvar, whose identity is as controversial as that of most pre-medieval Tamil literary figures, the Kural as it is otherwise known, has as many as ten pre-modern commentaries. Cutler focuses on one particular one by Parimēlalakar, for in modernity, it is both highly acclaimed for its nuanced and insightful explanations of the kurals, and highly controversial for its interpretation of the text in accordance with Brahmanical ideology.

The structure of the Kural, of the couplet, combined with its often complex subject matter, of morality and life wisdom, necessitates that the verses are extremely dense, with large ideas being expressed in exactly seven words to each couplet. This often leaves many ambiguities and gaps in the text for the lay reader, even for the original audience, but certainly with the passage of time, the text required interpretation that was provided by the commentators.

Of this role of commentators' interpretations, Cutler says,

...*Tirukkural's* verses invite two kinds of interpretive activities... First, commentators channel the verses' meaning by filling in "gaps" and resolving ambiguities. Secondly, because *Tirukkural's* sparse verses are largely devoid of the kinds of contextual cues that play a major role in the verbal communication of meaning, commentators take it upon themselves to supply such cues.⁷⁶

Therefore, the change in medium from the oral to the written also

⁷⁶Cutler, 1992, pp. 551-552.

had its own attendant problems that made the commentator's role much more important.

The Tirukkural, as it exists today, is composed of 133 chapters of ten couplets each, organized into three sections, on virtue, materiality (in the form of governance and wealth), and love. This structure is however thought to be a later introduction, a result of another intervention by the commentators. Various commentators seem to have grouped together the couplets and helped to structure the text in order to give it coherence, and this is where the commentator's role is most significant, for the commentator's vision allows a text to achieve a level of coherence that the text might not possess on its own, especially in the case of texts that have survived as fragments. Though many of the couplets in the Tirukkural deal with the same theme, there is no *text-internal* coherence or indication of grouping or even ordering. Therefore, the text as it exists today, and as is interpreted as a coherent body of work that expresses a certain life-philosophy of an entire culture, is the consequence in part of much later interventions of commentators.

While the Tirukkural, due to its structural peculiarities, is perhaps the best illustration of the huge role played by commentators in the making of a text, this is also true of most extant ancient texts. Grammatical texts such as the Tolkāppiyam are equally indebted to their commentators for rendering them coherent. It has been noted by many that Tolkāppiyam, while a remarkable work of grammar, does not have the extremely concise form of the sutras of a grammar such as Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*; and despite the fact that the Tolkāppiyam does not have a highly sophisticated metalanguage unlike the former, it is still a text that requires a certain amount of interpretative work in order to be

fully comprehended. Moreover, like the *Kural*, it is likely that the grammar was also first composed orally and then transferred to the written medium, and thus it also required some gaps to be filled. *Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram* in particular, the section on poetics, has been the subject of a lot of scrutiny, and has been interpreted by commentators and applied widely in literature as well.

There are eight extant pre-modern commentaries on the *Tolkāppiyam*, and numerous interpretations and commentaries since its “rediscovery” in the late nineteenth century. The medieval commentators were *ḷampūraṇar*, *Cēnavaraiyar*, *Pērācīriyar*, *Naccinārkinīyar*, *Teivaccilar*, *Kallāṭar*, and two fragmentary commentaries by unknown authors.

3.4.1. ḷampūraṇar’s Revival

Of the medieval commentaries, the most thorough and highly-esteemed is the oldest one, by *ḷampūraṇar*. It is estimated to have been composed in the eleventh or twelfth century CE, and is still considered one of the best commentaries on the *Tolkāppiyam*, for its being extremely comprehensive in its treatment of all three chapters of the treatise. *ḷampūraṇar*’s place in the history of the grammatical tradition is so canonical that he is alternatively known simply as *uraiācīriyar* (*urai* or commentary + *ācīriyar* or author), the prototypical commentator. He is thought to have been a Jain from the Chola country.

While *ḷampūraṇar*’s work is extremely erudite, there are other reasons for his canonical status too. Primarily, he is considered to be the cause of the revival of the “*Tolkāppiyam* tradition” as T. P. Meenakshisundaram notes. This revival was necessary due to the loss of familiarity with the early Tamil grammatical works wrought by the Kalabhra In-

terregnum, when the social order of southern India was disrupted by the overthrowing of the traditional rulers by the Kalabhra dynasty, between the third and seventh centuries CE. The Kalabhras are believed to be the hill tribes of the region and once their rule was firmly established in the peninsula, they began to patronise Jainism and Buddhism⁷⁷. The age saw a growth in literature and education, with the Jainas particularly credited with fostering the growth of Tamil literature and grammar. Modern scholars have interpreted this disruption in different ways, but among the scholars of Tamil literary history, this is viewed as the point of disruption of the Saṅgam tradition. With the restoration of the traditional kingdoms of the south to the throne, however, and with the continued existence of the Jain knowledge cultures, it is argued that literary traditions were revived⁷⁸ and ḷampūraṇar purportedly wrote his first commentary. Not all these facts are undisputed, however; it has been argued that the belief that the Kalabhra interregnum was a “dark period” of southern history was based on the negative discourse and characterisation of the resurgent Pallava and Pandya rulers. The grammatical knowledge of the Saṅgam era might not have been entirely wiped out, considering the fact that the Jainas were largely partial to the promotion of literature and knowledge. This bears out with Mu Vai Aravindhan’s opinion that ḷampūraṇar’s commentary might not have been the first; he believes, based on references to earlier *āciriyars* in the text, that “...it is possible that, in ḷampūraṇar’s time, there were commentaries on the Tolkāppiyam that were transmitted orally. ḷampūraṇar might have heard these and incorporated them

⁷⁷Thapar, 2003, p. 327

⁷⁸cf. Caldwell’s “Jaina cycle”.

when he wrote his own commentary.”⁷⁹

Notwithstanding the accuracy of the facts regarding the commentary being the first, the interpretation of scholars such as Meenakshisundaram follows the now-familiar modern narrative of loss and rediscovery: An immensely important text, the *Tolkāppiyam*, is composed in the heights of the glorious Saṅgam era, and is lost in obscurity due to unforeseen turmoil in the form of a political upheaval, and is rediscovered by an erudite scholar who recognizes its genius and brings it back to its celebrated place in the Tamil literary tradition. This echoes the trope of loss that is attached with the legend of the Saṅgam but a loss that is happily not a permanent one, thus cementing the place of a figure such as *Iḷampūraṇar* in the Tamil tradition, while simultaneously also reaffirming the tradition as one that was preserved by the very natural instincts of this learned scholar. The idea of an unbroken tradition is thus naturalized.

3.4.2. *Cēṇāvaraiyar's Commentary*

The next major commentary on the *Tolkāppiyam* is by *Cēṇāvaraiyar*, composed in the latter half of the thirteenth century CE. *Cēṇāvaraiyar's* name makes an explicit appearance in non-literary sources, in land records and a *Pāṇṭiya* inscription as well. From this, it is concluded that he was of the *Pāṇṭiya* country. It is surmised from his name (*cēnai* = army + *araiyar* = commander) that he was a high-ranking commander of the *Pāṇṭiya* army, and his learnedness and familiarity with Sanskrit works also adds to the assumptions regarding his high status.

Cēṇāvaraiyar's commentary is only on the second chapter of the

⁷⁹Aravindhan, 2008, p. 188; translation mine.

Tolkāppiyam, Colatikāram. Yet his commentary is considered the best on this section, even more erudite than Ḥampūraṇar's. Srilankan scholar C. Ganesayar considers Cēnāvaraiyar's work to be the most authoritative commentary on the Collatikāram because of Cēnāvaraiyar's deft handling of the traditions of both "vaṭamoli" or the Sanskritic tradition and the Tamil tradition. The commentator is also noted for his comprehensive knowledge of both the original text of the Tolkāppiyam itself and the rather reverent place he gives the *uraiāciryar*, Ḥampūraṇar. It is generally accepted that Cēnāvaraiyar's commentary is one of the most insightful and thought-provoking, despite the fact that he confines himself to the study of only morphology, which he considers the most important aspect of grammar.

One of the most important contributions of Cēnāvaraiyar's to the Tamil grammatical tradition is arguably in the intermingling of the Sanskrit grammatical models with that of Tamil. One intervention he makes in this regard is with the categorization of the grammatical object. Vergiani (2003) presents a detailed analysis of the innovations made by Cēnāvaraiyar in introducing Bhartṛhari's threefold categorization of the object, *īpsitatama* into his categorization of the *ceyappatuporul* (or grammatical object) of the Tolkāppiyam. Cēnāvaraiyar's innovation here is significant because he reads a concept from the Sanskrit tradition into the Tamil, but does not apply it uncritically. He instead carefully adapts the concept to fit the difference in grammatical structure between Tamil and Sanskrit. Where *īpsitatama* is one of four different objects for the Pāṇinian system, he only adapts that one type of object for the entire paradigm in Tamil.

...the Pāṇinian distinction between *īpsitatama* and *anīpsita*

is silently dropped, while the other two varieties – *akathita* and *anyapūrvaka* – are not relevant in Tamil, for the corresponding morpho-syntactical structures do not exist...⁸⁰

Thus, while the structure of the Sanskrit language requires the other classifications, in Tamil, “...the threefold distinction of the grammatical object ends up having a purely semantic value, for one type cannot be distinguished from another on the basis of morpho-syntactic features.”⁸¹

The reason for Cēnāvaraiyar’s choice to introduce this classification into Tamil might have been in order to appeal to the prestige that came along with the language. Vergiani also suggests that Cēnāvaraiyar’s times might have been more familiar than the Tolkāppiyam and the Tamil approaches to grammar, and therefore it might have eased his audience’s understanding to be given a more familiar approach to unfamiliar concepts. However, this one instance from Cēnāvaraiyar’s commentary illustrates an important point, viz., even when a text such as the Tolkāppiyam, and an “authoritative” commentary such as ḷampūraṇar’s already existed, it was possible for later commentators to make creative interventions and interpretations on the original text. Had the concept of a Tamil grammatical tradition as distinct and separate from that of other languages existed, this would have precluded Cēnāvaraiyar’s ability to inject his knowledge of Sanskrit into his reading of the Tamil grammar.

Another curious intervention from Cēnāvaraiyar into the Tolkāppiyam is connected with what has been termed an anachronism in his inter-

⁸⁰Vergiani, 2013, p. 177.

⁸¹*ibid.*

pretation of Tolkāppiyam's conception of *kalam*, literally time, referring here to tense. It has often been noted that the Tolkāppiyam claims that Tamil has three tenses, past, present and future. However, all evidence from texts contemporaneous to the composition of Tolkāppiyam seem to suggest that this is in fact not true, and that that form of Tamil had only past and non-past. However, Cēṇāvaraiyar draws examples from the Tamil of his own times to demonstrate that the three tenses do exist. This has been interpreted as an error for not taking into account the language of the era in which the original text was composed, and therefore a flaw in the otherwise extremely sensitive and knowledgeable interpretations of Cēṇāvaraiyar. However, Jean-Luc Chevillard has suggested that this problem can be solved by "...understanding the grammatical terminology and acceptable modes of grammatical argumentation used in both the source text and commentary." Thus, the term *kālam* might refer to tense in some instances but also to time; and the mores of Cēṇāvaraiyar's grammatical argumentation might allow for reinterpretation of the original text in that way as long as it was felicitous to the linguistic usage of the time.

3.4.3. *Pērācīriyar and the Preservation of Tradition*

Pērācīriyar was a commentator on the Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram who is estimated to have lived no earlier than the late thirteenth century CE but most likely in the first half of the fourteenth century. Referred to by his followers only by the reverential title of pērācīriyar (*per* = great + *ācīriyar* = author/teacher/scholar), not much is known about him, as even his name is lost. Although only a fragment of his commentary, on the last five sections of the TP, is extant today, it has had considerable

impact due to its strong argumentation. In a sense, Pērāciyar represents the most conservative of all the commentators for his belief in the strict adherence to norms laid out in the Tolkāppiyam and his rejection of all deviation from the *mutanūl*.

Pērāciyar's central concern is in the preservation of tradition, which leads him to reject all the literary innovations contemporary to him. In fact, Pērāciyar questions the very notion that there could be a *mutanūl* beyond the ancient works of the Saṅgam era. Writing at an period posterior to Nakkīranār's commentary on the IA, he accepts both the divinity of the origin of grammar and Nakkīranār's account of the ancient Saṅgam, thus adding his authority to Nakkīranār's in propagating this particular view of the Tamil past. Yet, as Clare 2011 notes, Pērāciyar also presents a peculiar paradox, for he believes that literary usages must evolve over time to accommodate changes in language, and therefore, the poet must not adhere to texts such as the Tolkāppiyam in such matters. Clare concludes that the answer to this curious paradox might lie in the larger literary trends that Pērāciyar was participating in, in order to establish Tamil as a literary language:

In his use of the Caṅkam poems and the Tolkāppiyam to establish the origins of Tamil as a literary language, Pērāciyar participated in a larger pan-Indian phenomenon of the creation and legitimation of literary languages ranging from Bengali to Kannada during this period... As vernacular traditions transformed themselves into literary languages through the creation of new literature and grammars, Sanskrit literature and literary theory provided the model for much of this process. In contrast, Pērāciyar emphasizes the non-

Sanskritic elements of the Tamil past.⁸²

Here, again, as in the case of Nakkīranār’s imagining of a Śaiva origin to the IA, Pērāciriyar attempts, according to Clare, to root the Tamil tradition to the Śaiva tradition, and thus cement its authority through the appeal to both an ancient tradition and a divine origin.

3.5. Conclusion

The preceding discussions on the formation of the idea of a tradition associated with the Tamil language have attempted to draw a picture of the complexities and contradictions that are inherent in such an idea. If tradition is the means by which the language and thought of the past survives in the present (as noted in Section 3.1.1 on page 85), the various attempts to conceptualize tradition as outlined so far represent a means by which that past becomes real and connected to the present. This attempt to bridge the gap between past and present is what historian Eric Hobsbawm terms “the invention of tradition”, for tradition lies in “the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant...”⁸³

Further, the belief in the invariance of tradition also creates an obligation to maintain it and pass on the beliefs and practices associated with it. As David Gross notes, this obligation is rooted in the word tradition itself, in its Latin root, *traditio*, which implies that “something precious or valuable is... given to someone in trust after which... the person who receives the ‘gift’ is expected to give it unharmed out of a

⁸²Clare, 2011, pp. 29-30

⁸³Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 2

sense of obligation to the giver.”⁸⁴ The internal contradiction in tradition arises from these two ideas, both equally important to the conceptualization of tradition. For if there are aspects of the past that are unchanging and invariant, with the implication that they are *of their very nature* unchanging, the responsibility of safeguarding a received tradition from degradation and change, and of passing it on in such an unchanged state seems unnecessary, yet just such an obligation is the other central idea of tradition. Further, as the previous sections of this chapter have demonstrated, any attempt to reconcile the past with the present is not simple, for the past does not present itself as a coherent entity to be understood as a unified whole.

If the origins of the Tamil culture in itself is tied to ‘the first grammarian and first poet’ as David Shulman terms it⁸⁵, and therefore a grammatical and literary tradition, that very past often seems elusive. This elusiveness is exacerbated, if not created, by the new paradigms of knowledge in modernity, where legitimacy is granted only on the historical and positivist dimensions. Thus, the questions of the dates of composition of various texts becomes centrally important, and the methodologies of philology provide the means to achieve legitimacy. Philology’s conceptualization of history as apprehendable through the excavation of the text therefore presents the study of texts as the one unobjectionable route to legitimate statements about the past. Therefore, a Tamil past envisioned as intimately connected with the literary traditions of the language can only be pronounced as legitimate through cultural-historical excavation of texts such as the *Tolkāppiyam* and *IA*.

Yet these very studies of texts reveal the pitfalls of the promises of

⁸⁴Gross, 2002, p. 8, emphasis in original.

⁸⁵Shulman, 2001

philology. Attempts at discovering the date of composition of canonical texts prove to be riddled with uncertainties; enough ambiguity lies in even rather well-preserved texts like *Tolkāppiyam* that its oldest section might have been composed anywhere between the fifth century BCE and the second century CE; even the most committed philologists of today admit to the difficulties of establishing an simple, universally acceptable date. Similarly, the debates around the relative dating of a text such as (the core section of) *Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ* and *Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram* represent another instance of the same, where two different texts come into competition with each other for the status of the “original” or first grammatical text of their kind.

This pre-occupation with origins, so central to tradition, is also the driving force behind the legends of the Tamil Saṅgams and grammatical traditions pre-dating both *Tolkāppiyam* and IA. However, this is an area where the Tamil past lies beyond the reach of history and therefore, the inclusion of it in constituting a Tamil tradition is in direct conflict with the new modes of legitimacy: The Saṅgams are in the time and space of “legends”, leaving behind no historically verifiable traces that could establish such a long-flourishing literary tradition, codified by an academy of scholars, as having existed in reality. Thus, the “labours of loss” that Ramaswamy (2004) speaks of are one of the means of reclaiming the past that lies beyond history.

In this context, the commentaries become one of the most important components of tradition, as they represent the establishment of concrete ties with an ancient past. Thus, *Iḷampūraṇar*’s canonical first commentary represents a rescuing of the past from obscurity; while it was *Tāmōtaram Piḷḷai* who is credited with putting the *Tolkāppiyam*

into circulation in modernity, it is imagined that without ᩀampūraṇar's effort, the text might never have resurfaced from the "dark period" of early first millenium CE. On the other hand, Cēṇāvaraiyar's place is cemented for his eruditeness and his ability to merge the southern and northern traditions. While his work does deviate from a strict adherence to tradition in that he brings in his understanding of Sanskrit, this fact is considered to be acceptable as he is deemed to have preserved the "original genius" of Tamil grammar. Pērācīriyar's belief in the strict adherence to the mutanūl and contempt towards innovations that deviated from the norms is perhaps the closest to the modern ideal of preservation of tradition. Naccīṇārkkiniyar and later commentators like Cēṇāvaraiyar represent a synthesis of old traditions with more recent ones. The authority of the commentaries arises from two elements, the first of which is of course the merit of the works by themselves, being undeniably works of great learning and understanding; the second is that the commentaries are imbued with authority by the fact, noted above, that they also stand testament to the existence of a past itself. While commentaries like Nakkīraṇār's to the IA directly offer accounts of tradition, steeped in mythology though they might be, commentaries on the whole offer irrefutable proof of the legitimacy of a literary tradition. The fact that certain texts were studied by the brightest of minds even centuries after their composition provides additional proof of an essential genius that echoes across the centuries.

Although the establishment of a historically traceable past presents one of the challenges to the collective conceptualization of tradition, this attempt is constantly complicated by ideological considerations. The glimpses of the past offered by the constituents of tradition discussed

so far become a text that is imbued with meanings that are constantly contested.

An instance of this is in Burnell's attempts to place the *Tolkāppiyam* as part of the Aindra school of grammar and simultaneously use it to make generalizations about the Sanskrit school. In doing so, Burnell's larger goal is to establish the Sanskrit literary tradition as the well-spring of all the grammatical texts in the subcontinent. Though Ellis's Dravidian hypothesis and Caldwell's elaboration of it were well-established by the time of Burnell's work, the place of Tamil literature was still considered inside the fold of Sanskritic tradition. The response to Burnell's assumptions have been, as discussed, indignant and the debates regarding the indebtedness of the *Tolkāppiyam* to the Sanskrit tradition still rage on.

The entire space of the Tamil grammatical tradition is shot through with such ideological contestations, so that on the one hand, the early literature of the Saṅgam age and the world-view revealed by the TP is thought to represent a utopian, egalitarian society without the social stratification and exploitation based on caste and religion, and on the other hand, other narratives involving very same era might also make reference to religious beliefs. Thus, the figure of Akattiyar is simultaneously portrayed by some as a true Dravidian sage, whose wisdom was a gift from Śiva, the true Dravidian god, and by others as a Vedic figure identical to the Agastya of the Hindu epics. Equally, the origin of the poetics is envisioned as a divine gift from Śiva in the IA, and this view is contested in modernity as a later interpolation.

The question of the egalitarian society of the Saṅgam age has also in recent times become the centre of much debate, as discussed in Sec-

tion 3.3.4 on page 126. The crucial aspect of this debate is that it directly relates to an urgent concern in current times, that of caste. The embeddedness of caste in the distant Tamil history becomes extremely relevant due to the deep reliance of modern existence with the norms of early society. For as Palaniappan notes in his concluding remarks,

...the Scheduled Castes or Dalits and the lower castes of those regions dominated by speakers of Indo-Aryan languages must not have been considered low-born originally. But for the information provided by the Classical Tamil literature and especially the poem by the poetess Auvaiyār, the true history of the lower castes of South India and perhaps India as a whole might never have been realised.⁸⁶

Thus the urgency of the issue becomes clear, for the revelations of the past allow for an alternate imagining of the present and future; the possibilities of an ancient tradition offer a relief from the later practices that have, under the cloak of “tradition”, gained legitimacy and propagated certain kinds of violence.

Most of the preceding discussion has shown and argued that the very constitution of the idea of tradition in itself has deep flaws; it depends on a certain idea of historicity and allows for legitimacy only by taking recourse in excavations of the past in order to tie up with the present. This creates cycles of endless contestations, often ideologically-driven, that trace a path back in time to establish links with a world long past. The paradox inherent here is that it is the epistemological changes that were wrought by colonialism that establish the past as a distant Other, and at the same time, the bridge to this past and this Other is proffered

⁸⁶Palaniappan, 2008, p.55.

in the form of disciplinary practices and “proofs” that ultimately prove unstable, if not completely elusive; the past is constantly elusive yet forever implicated in the present.

One way to comprehend this paradoxical nature of the past and tradition is to turn to Jacques Derrida’s notion of the *spectre*, which Derrida brings up in his meditation on Marxism and Marx after the fall of the Soviet: “How would it be valid for all times? In other words, how can it come back and present itself again, anew, as the new? How can it be there, again, when it is no longer?”⁸⁷ While the ghost here is of Marx and Marxism, one may read this after Kleinberg (2012), in the more general context of tradition, for the discussion so far has precisely tried to capture this aspect of it, of tradition as spectre: “Very novel and so ancient, the conjuration appears both powerful and, as always, worried, fragile, anxious.”⁸⁸ Tradition in its current form is “very novel”, for its invention is particularly recent, lying in the dawn of modernity. Yet, it is also ancient, presented as going back to before history, and to the very dawn of time itself, according to some accounts. Its power can gather together and give coherence to a whole host of people, both living and dead, and bind them together by an invisible thread, but it is still “worried, fragile and anxious”, for its survival depends on being passed on, being reasserted and re-established in the face of ever-present threats.

The question that therefore remains is, are these varied contestations around tradition that have been the subject of the present chapter utterly futile? The past has been seen in the preceding discussion as ultimately an incoherent and randomly cobbled-together entity, and any attempts to give it coherence and meaning is only possible by eliding

⁸⁷Derrida, 2012, p. 61

⁸⁸*ibid.*, 62

over its gaps and silences and invisibilizing them. Our view of a Tamil past, its grammar and literature is gathered from fragmentary knowledge based on texts that fortuitously managed to survive the vagaries of time, offering us but glimpses of those that did not survive, and mention nothing of surely many texts and pasts that left no trace at all. The labours of loss that surround the legends of Lemuria and the speculations around the Sangam all attempt to make present that absence and make the silence of the past speak. If the search for a concrete truth in the past through philology and history prove to be endlessly contentious and elusive, breathing life into the spectre of the past seems even more futile.

But here, again, Derrida offers an alternative, for the very foundations of his deconstruction rests on calling attention to gaps, elisions and silences. As Kleinberg observes, “Whereas Heidegger and Levinas each looked to past traditions to make present that which was absent, the portions [...] they assumed to have eroded and been covered over time, Derrida seeks to inhabit those traditions to make these absences explicit...”⁸⁹ This inhabitation of tradition cannot take the forms previously mentioned, that try to bring back what is absent by making it present, as that plays into the assumptions of that which is present. What is instead called for by Derrida is “performative interpretation”, which is “an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets.”⁹⁰ What remains to be seen, therefore, is the possibility of such a performative interpretation.

⁸⁹Kleinberd (2012), p. 122

⁹⁰Derrida 2012, p.63.

4 | The Political Assertion of Identities in Tamilnadu

...so also does the oath express the demand... to put its nature at stake in language and to bind together in an ethical and political connection words, things, and actions. Only by this means was it possible for something like a history, distinct from nature and, nevertheless, inseparably intertwined with it, to be produced.

Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language*

4.1. Introduction

The preceding chapters discussed the formation of the identity of 'Tamilian' and 'Dravidian' from the practices of colonial disciplines such as

philology, and the ways in which its investment of authority in texts led to a literary and textual culture that was imbued with great significance for ideas regarding a Tamil past and 'legitimate' claims on the Tamil culture. Particularly, it was seen that the authentically Tamil was seen as free from Aryan-Brahmanical influence, epitomized by the spirit of the Saṅgam era. The newly emergent sites of identity, i.e., race and language, were intimately intertwined but they were certainly not identical or interchangeable. The complexity of this equation was intensified by a third element that began to emerge as a site of personal and communal identity, that of caste. This was the context in which the Dravidian movement began to take shape in the late colonial era, chiefly through the intervention of intellectual elites such as Maraimalai Atikal.

M.S.S. Pandian's work on Dravidian ideology identifies two major strains to this movement and the transformation from one to the other. The first phase involved the emergence of a consciousness of a distinct Dravidian culture as discussed in Chapter Two, which developed from Colonial interventions that tied up race, language and culture and segregated the Brahmins of the south as Aryan and not genuine members of the Dravidian race and therefore not invested in the Tamil identity. This was taken up initially mainly by the non-Brahmin Tamil elite and was confined to the educated, landed elite as well, detached from the masses who were nevertheless implicated in the Dravidian identity that it was based on. However, the transformation in Dravidian ideology took place with the advent of the more politicized Self-Respect Movement of E. V. Ramaswamy, who took Dravidian ideology beyond the narrow realms of the elite, "invoked a number of inferiorised identities and as a result expanded the realms of politics to include a range

of oppressed groups.”¹

This transformation of the Dravidian ideology also challenged some of the idealizations that were discussed in Chapter 3, particularly the nostalgia for the Tamil past. This is best expressed by the words of E.V. Ramasamy:

The unnecessary ancient principles of the Tamils ... have become useful [only] for deceiving outsiders and plunging [one-self] into foolishness. It has become a duty of the rationalists that such talk [about ancient Tamil ideas] should not be evoked for any reform from now on ... There is nothing at present to be achieved by the talk of ancient Tamils. Therefore it is an important duty of the people not to give any place for [such] fraudulent speech...²

This encapsulates one major difference in the approach to the question of Dravidian identity between the early Dravidianists and the later. A marked distancing from the elitist tendencies of early Dravidianism is also characteristic of the later phase, where the chief concern was regarding the politicization of the masses, especially of the socially disadvantaged. To this end, its strongest and best-known leader, E. V. Ramasamy, adopted a stringent critique of religion and caste, and took recourse in rationalism as the only salvation from the evils of religion. In this last belief, he was, as Pandian (1994) has noted, much influenced by the principles of the European Enlightenment, as was his predecessor and occasional antagonist in the Dravidian movement, Maraimalai Atikal.

¹Pandian, 1994, p. 100.

²E.V. Ramasamy, quoted in Pandian, 1994, p. 97.

However, Ramasamy's form of political action was so extreme, challenging many basic assumptions and beliefs in what Narendra Subramanian calls a 'politics of heresy'³, that despite his huge popularity among the masses, the political assertion of Dravidian identity began to take a much more moderate stance with the Dravidian parties. This was also fueled by the fact that Ramasamy's politics didn't always align with the interests of the larger anti-colonial movements, as it was focused on the inequities within South Indian society. Therefore, the politics of Dravidianst parties after Ramaswamy began to take a less radical approach, also thus reconciling with the elite Saivites.

The major division in Tamil society as envisioned by the Dravidianists was between Brahmin and non-Brahmin. Subramanian (1999) argues that this division arose not just from the colonial categorization of race-as-caste but also from the change in the power structure that colonial rule brought with it, where the reliance on scriptures as central to understanding and ruling the subcontinent privileged the Brahmins and led to their accruing disproportionate power, where in pre-colonial society different groups could gain and lose power, based mainly on material wealth. Pandian (2009) also cites the fact that the Brahmins, constituting a mere 3 percent of the population among colonial Tamils, held most of the administrative or otherwise powerful positions with the British. Further, the assertion of the *varna* system of caste in classifying a Tamil population to whom it was alien (as the social organization was in the form of *jatis*) by the British led to all non-Brahmin castes being classified as Shudras which was resented by many of the non-Brahmin upper castes. The identity of the Brahmins as distinct from

³Subramanian 1999, p.83.

that of the non-Brahmins was also influenced by matters of language and linguistic loyalties, for the Brahmins were argued to have greater loyalty towards the Sanskrit language and the theory of the Sanskritists that Sanskrit was the source of all language of the sub-continent. For instance, as Pandian (1997) notes, Brahmins in control of educational institutions such as Madras University dictated that those who wanted to study Tamil literature needed to learn Sanskrit as well. Further, there was also a strong belief in the superiority of Sanskrit over Tamil among the Tamil Brahmins, as epitomised by the views expressed by Sivasamy Aiyer in 1914:

As the language which enshrines the highest ideas of Indo-Aryan civilization, as the language in which the highest achievements of the Hindu mind in the region of philosophic speculation and religion have been recorded, as the language to which most of what is in the vernacular literatures of India owes its inspiration, and as the language in which the ordinances that regulate our social life and institutions to this day have been written, a knowledge of it is an essential element of culture to every Hindu...⁴

Further, the dialect of Tamil spoken by the Tamil Brahmins is also almost uniform across the state, and so distinctly different from that of the other castes in the greater influence of “Sanskrit sounds” and words that this deepened the sense of cultural difference between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins.

Thus, the early formulation of Tamil society in modernity by Dravidianists was of the Brahmin in opposition to the non-Brahmin, the

⁴In Pandian, 1997, p.88

former being the outsider to the Dravidian race, and the latter the genuine member of the race, subjugated and marginalized by the former. This picture of caste relations was true of both the earlier and later phases of the Dravidian movement.

What is crucial here is the solidification of caste-based rivalries and injustices through the new vocabulary of race and a vision of the past that was offered by the operations of Colonial articulations regarding race. As far as the elites were concerned, this was more of a rivalry regarding power, and as Venkatachalapathy observes, "...[t]hrough a reading of the Sangam classics, the Saivites gave a very sectarian interpretation of anti-Brahminism, harking back to a pre-Aryan Tamil society, where the Vellalars, occupied a pre-eminent position. In this conception of ancient Tamil society, Saivites replaced Brahmins, and their scriptures replaced the Vedas. Even caste was there, though it was only occupation-based and no stigma was attached to it.⁵" With Ramasamy and the Self-Respect movement, however, the division between Brahmin and non-Brahmin began to take the shape of the critique of Brahmanism itself, and began to recognize the lowest castes and women, thus far invisible in the discourse, as equal victims. Brahmanism was no longer simply about insider and outsider and legitimate membership in the community, but was recognized as a distinct ideology. The Brahmins were still the aggressor and outsiders, for reasons mentioned above and for their loyalty to the Sanskrit language at the expense of Tamil.

However, with the more moderate turn brought about by the rise of the Dravidian parties in electoral politics after Ramasamy, the issues

⁵Venkatachalapathy 2006, p.137.

of caste-based oppression became confined to the divisions of Brahmin vs non-Brahmin and the deeper critiques of the caste system and its oppression of the untouchable castes and women began to be underplayed for the sake of maintaining a conflict-free 'Dravidian' identity. The expulsion of the Brahmins from the politically dominant role did not see a dismantling of the system of caste itself, for the material conditions in rural Madras were still controlled by the powerful backward castes and Dalits continue to be subjugated. This has led to the emergence of a new stratification of Tamil society, between Brahmin, non-Brahmin and Dalit.

The emergence of strong Dalit politics and various caste-based political parties has been considered to signify the failure of the Dravidian ideology to address the larger issues that the Dravidian movement seemed to have promised to address. On the other hand, the resurgence of various national-level political forces that have traditionally lain outside the realm of Tamilnadu politics and the indulgence of them by the Dravidian parties has also been seen as a failure and betrayal of the basic tenets of Dravidian ideology, changing their character from a secular, Tamil-oriented one to a Hindu-oriented politics. As Sathiyamurthy 1997 notes, "Tamil nationalism's rapprochement with Indian nationalism has made Hinduism one of its common points of reference."⁶ This has also seen a resurgence of Dravidian ideology itself, who aim to restore the lost original character of Dravidianism, in what we may call a "Neo-Dravidian" movement, with parties such as the Naam Tamilar Katchi (literally "We Are Tamilians Party").

This chapter will attempt to understand the trends and changes in

⁶Sathiyamurthy, 1997, p. 118.

the nature of political assertion of particular ideas of community and belonging discussed so far, as attempts to locate ideas of community and belonging in more recently formulated notions regarding language and race as being sites of identity, with the main focus on the political expression of this identity. The attempts, particularly, to make the idea of 'Dravidian' signify a larger personal and communal identity than the stratifications of caste, religion and gender within it, and the negotiations in the public sphere thereof by various emerging political outfits will also be explored. In order to do this, we will trace the development of the Dravidian ideology as one sometimes in continuation with and often at odds with that of the branch already discussed in Chapter 2, and its change with the progress of the Dravidian parties, while also exploring late-colonial assertions of subaltern and Dalit identities and see them in the context of more recent ones. The resurgence of the Dravidian ideology through neo-Dravidian parties and ideologues will also be briefly looked at.

4.2. A Brief Political History of Tamilnadu

In order to provide a larger context to most of the discussion that follows, this section provides a history of the political movements in Tamilnadu, mainly of the electoral kind.

The establishment of the South Indian People's association in 1916 marks the beginning of an organized political Dravidian movement, with the issuance of the Non-Brahmin Manifesto summing up the conditions of the non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency, and the lack of political power. Out of the South Indian People's Association, the Justice Party emerged, in the 1920s, in an attempt to compete with the

nationalistic Indian National Congress in elections. It was the Justice Party which opposed both the Brahmin-dominated British administration and Indian National Congress (INC).

In the 1930s, the Dravidian self-respect movement spread throughout the South with E. V. Ramasamy, and this movement was also strongly critical of Brahminism, especially in terms of caste inequities, and attempted to focus on and empower the most disadvantaged groups such as the lower castes and women. E. V. Ramasamy, popularly known as EeVeRa or Periyar, was an extremely influential thinker and politician. He reoriented the entire Dravidian movement towards self-respect as a means to achieve social reform, especially against casteism. He rejected Brahminism and religion as a whole as evils that allowed the exploitation of the vulnerable. He also promoted rationality as a means to fight against various irrational beliefs, including superstition and attachment to caste, religion and country; and wrote in favour of gender equality and women's emancipation. He was the driving force behind the self-respect movement and this culminated in more active political involvement in the form of a political party.

The self-respect movement and the Justice Party merged to form the Dravida Kazhagam in 1944. In the pre-Independence era, when nationalism as an ideology was very much in the air, with agitations throughout the sub-continent for the establishment of an Indian state independent of British rule and further, of a Muslim state in the form of Pakistan, there were also dissenting voices in the south of the subcontinent—foremost the DK and its supporters. The post-Independence era saw the movement finally break along linguistic lines, with the younger branch of the DK breaking away to form the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam or

DMK. Meanwhile, the agitation for the establishment of the Andhra Pradesh state on purely linguistic basis had begun the first movement of its kind in India.

Further south, the DMK began to focus more and more on the Tamil identity and abandoned the more radical aspects of its parent party and instead focused on cultural nationalism and caste-based reservations. However, it was only in the late 1960s that the DMK was able to break the dominance of the Congress in the state, and made a sweeping victory in the 1967 elections.

Language proved to be a decisive factor in this victory, for it was preceded by great unrest and agitation among the Tamil population due to the perceived imposition of Hindi as a compulsory language for education in the region. The anti-Hindi sentiment, extremely widespread, along with great dissatisfaction due to food scarcity, led to the DMK's ascent to power. The DMK's commitment to the Tamil identity was further underscored by the change of the name of the state to Tamilnadu almost immediately upon their ascension to power. The first World Tamil Conference was also organized in this period and the fight for reservation for backward castes also began.

The 1970s saw a split in the party, with the breaking away of MG Ramachandran, and the forming of the Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. MG Ramachandran, popularly known as MGR, was an extremely influential leader and when he came to power, the politics of the state also shifted slightly, with more focus on welfare schemes and a detachment from anti-Brahmin and anti-Hindi sentiment. The party enjoyed huge popularity among women and those from deprived backgrounds. The period from the 1980s to current times has mostly seen an even compe-

tition between the DMK and ADMK, especially after the death of MGR.

The failure of the two main Dravidian parties to meet the ideals of a caste-free society saw the rise of other parties to address this lacuna. The Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK; “Liberation Panthers Party”) was established in 1972 to ensure justice to the Dalit and other marginalized groups, including Muslims and Christians in Tamilnadu, although espousing a larger Periyarite approach to the Dravidian/Tamil identity. Similarly, in 1989, the Pattali Makkal Katchi was set up in order to improve the conditions of the OBC Vanniyar community, initially concentrating on reservation issues. More recently, there has been an emergence of neo-Dravidian parties such as the Nam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) and the Tamil Thesiya Periyakkam (TTP), who attempt to re-establish the basic principles of Dravidianist ideology without explicit reference or appeal to particular caste groups.

4.3. ‘Periyār’ and the Politics of Heresy

E. V. Ramasamy, popularly known by the title of ‘Periyar’ or ‘the great one’, was born in the trading town of Erode in 1879. He came from an affluent trading family and his early years were steeped in Vaishnavite religiosity. His rebellious nature, however, caused an early end to his education and he was married by 19. Of his school education and interaction with classmates, Ramasamy notes:

I was very closely associated with those whom I should not [have been.] I was not expected to move freely. My close movement with communities which were considered low and despicable was the main impediment to my education. I was

considered to be a ruffian because of my movements and behaviour ... At last I was taken away from there and sent to a government school. Even there I was stopped in two years. I was only 12 years old at the time.⁷

Ramasamy himself travelled all over India in his twenties with *sadhus* and by 1917, had become disillusioned by Hinduism and its injustices and rejected religion on the whole, when he joined the south Indian wing of the INC. He became a quite important member of the INC, serving as for two terms as its secretary and two as president, and leading several important struggles, like the Vaikom Satyagraha, which was a struggle centred around the Vaikom Siva temple in Kerala, demanding temple entry for 'untouchable' castes⁸; and the fight for banning of alcohol in his hometown of Erode, which was a huge success, and involved a crowd of almost twelve thousand people⁹. The former earned him the title of *Vaikom Vīran* (Vaikom hero/warrior) and two years of imprisonment.

Although Ramasamy was deeply involved in the INC, his dedication to it lasted only for five years, when he became disillusioned with the lack of addressing of caste issues by the Congress. He was also disturbed by Mahatma Gandhi's deep belief in *varnashrama dharma*, despite Gandhi's claims that it was a more idealized form of the traditional caste system without its rigidities and notions of ritual pollution and purity. However, Ramasamy rejected it for its lacks of historical understanding of caste and for not truly being committed to rooting out the basic assumptions of caste.

⁷Veeramani, 2005, 'Genesis of Self-Respect Movement'.

⁸Diehl, 1997

⁹Pandian, 2007

Therefore, Ramasamy left the Congress and started the Self-Respect movement in 1925, which according to Deihl (1977) was “dedicated to the goal of giving non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidian past”. Ramasamy also travelled through Europe and Russia, which had a huge impact on him, and although he had already translated the *Communist Manifesto* before he left for Europe, he returned with a reinvigorated enthusiasm for communism, which caused the colonial government to consider him dangerous¹⁰. Returning in 1932, he took up various struggles including the first ant-Hindi agitations of 1937, for which he was imprisoned again. Upon his release from prison, Ramasamy took up the reins of the Justice Party, which later became the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) in 1944. In the early half of the twentieth century, he also set up several publications and journals to create political consciousness and spread the ideology of Dravidianism and Self-Respect.

The main interventions by Ramasamy in the political articulation of Tamil identity is in the form of privileging the Dravidian identity over all else. This Dravidian identity was construed as the one uniting factor to unite all the people of South India, yet exactly who was included in the category of ‘Dravidian’? For Ramasamy and those who followed him, this category included all the non-Brahmin people of South India, including the Christians and the Muslims; it excluded not only the Brahmins but also those from northern India living in the south; and indeed the Brahmins themselves were considered to be northern Indians and Aryans. This view of the Brahmins and even of north Indians was therefore based on a racial difference of Dravidian vs. Aryan, with

¹⁰*ibid.*

the cultural difference of the Brahmins as previously noted adding to the racial.

But another group that was not completely included in the fold of the Dravidian yet was marginally relevant to Ramasamy's politics were the Schedules Castes (SC) or Dalits/Untouchables¹¹. This is despite the fact that Ramasamy's larger ideological critique of Aryan religion was in its propagation of Brahmanism (or *parpanam* in Tamil):

They call it a godly movement or theist movement by safeguarding Aryan doctrines and Varnasharama Dharma, at the same time making others Sudras and Untouchables. But our Movement, which stands for the destruction of Sudra name and untouchability is dubbed as atheist. They say that to talk with us (Dravidians), or to see us is sinful. But they say it is not sinful to fall at their feet.¹²

The crucial point to note here is the framing of the reference to belonging in terms of 'us' Dravidians and 'them' Brahmins. The Dravidians here are envisioned as consisting of the Shudras—all non-Brahmins who had been relegated by the Brahmins and the colonial legal system to the bottom-most rung of the Varna hierarchy—and the Untouchables, who had traditionally and historically been marginalized by all of caste Hindu society, even in pre-Colonial times. Ramasamy does critique the role of the caste Hindus, the non-Brahmins, in this, but ascribes it to the evil influence of Brahmanical hegemony. However, Ramasamy's view of the untouchables also slipped into the rhetoric of othering on occasion, in speeches which took the form of 'us' Shudras vs. 'them' untouchables,

¹¹Subramanian, 1999

¹²Veeramani, 2005, 'Why Dravidians Demand Equal Status?'

as has been shown by Diehl (1978), although still in a bid to encourage the emancipation of the untouchables. Further, as Narendra Subramanian notes,

He initially argued for extending preferential treatment to the SCs but was critical when the SCs gained quotas in national government employment but the BCs [Backward Castes] did not. To justify according centrality to the BCs in his struggle against Brahminism, he argued speciously that the status of the Shudra was more demeaning than that of an untouchable.¹³

However critical of caste Ramasamy was, it was always embedded in the larger critique of religion, which is the core of his politics of heresy. Ramasamy's view of Hinduism was that it was the religion of the Vedas, the religion of the Aryans and the religion of the Brahmins. As Pandian (2007) notes, "Ramasamy's ides of essentialized Hinduism was premised on the Brahmin self-representation based on Oriental knowledge,"¹⁴ and therefore viewed Hinduism as root of the cause of Brahmanism. He was also committed to an atheism and a critique of religion even beyond Hinduism, for the only solution to the problems of Hinduism that he could envision was a thorough rationality, and a rejection of all superstitious beliefs. More importantly, it was also an attack of the *symbolic* expressions of power of religion, be it the hair-tuft of the Brahmin, the great texts of Hinduism (the Manu Smriti, the Ramayan and the Bhagavat Gita,) the idols of the Hindu gods or the many political attacks the Dravidianists targeted symbols of Hinduism

¹³Subramanian 1999, p.112.

¹⁴Pandian 2009, p.204.

with, which were considered sacrilegious by believers. It is also at this point of critique that the Dravidianist movement cut ties with its earlier form envisioned by the Saivites.

If the Dravidian and Self-Respect movements took a heretical stance with regard to religion, treating it as the well-spring of all inequalities, Ramasamy's politics was no less severe in its scrutiny of the nationalist logic of the anti-colonial movement that was sweeping the subcontinent, particularly with Gandhi and INC. For one, he even acknowledged the positive effects of Colonialism in helping the BCs to recognize the injustice meted out to them by Brahmanism, noting that "Though we have lost much by being the slaves of the British, we have also profited at least a little and realized ourselves as human beings. If we had remained the slaves of north Indians, we would have continued as 'sudran', 'raksasan', 'assuran'..."¹⁵ Although this is arguable considering that the emergence of non-Brahmin identity in modernity has been analysed as produced by Colonial intervention in social order and Orientalist ideology, Ramasamy's own world-view regarding caste inequities fit in with this belief; and moreover, it was an extremely effective rhetorical strategy as well.

This skepticism with the Indian nationalist project is also expressed in his views of who a Tamilian is, although he always maintained a distance from what he saw as the linguistic fanaticism of later activists:

It is because the Tamilian thought of himself as an Indian that he has forgotten the Tamil land, the valour, arts and culture of the Tamils. It is because the Tamilian thought of himself as a Hindu that he lost his self-respect, his wisdom,

¹⁵Ramasamy, 1944, as quoted in Pandian, 2009, pp.191-192.

his common sense and his rights.¹⁶

Thus religion and a national identity are both implicated equally for the loss of selfhood of the Tamils. Therefore, Ramasamy called for a rejection of both, and his disavowal of the nationalist movement was considered as sacrilegious by some as his religious heresy.

Turning to the question of the title “Periyār” brings us to one of the more radical aspects of Ramasamy’s political ideology, which was regarding marriage and the status of women. The title of Periyār was conferred upon Ramasamy by a women’s conference for his challenging of patriarchal notions of women’s space in the polity and for his incitement of women’s participation in anti-Hindi agitations, for which he was imprisoned. Ramasamy encouraged the equal participation of women in all spheres, be it political or social. His formulation of the Self-Respect Marriage therefore was based on the idea of equal participation for women. His vision of social reform also placed great emphasis on widow remarriage. Recognizing that the subjugation of women and their being tied down to the home was precipitated by the responsibilities of child-birth and family-rearing, he also advocated for the use of contraceptives and family planning.

In every aspect of Ramasamy’s critique, women’s issues were also involved, particularly the role played by religion in subjugating women. Periyar’s rejection of religion was rooted in its Brahmanism but also in its patriarchy. A major criticism of colonial rule was for its reliance on the Manu Smriti, and Ramasamy recognized that one of the injustices of the Manu Smriti is in its low treatment of women. His rejection of the reliance on ancient ideas of Tamil culture also questioned

¹⁶Ramasamy, 2007(), p. 7. Trans. mine.

the very notion of *karpu* or virginity, which is central to the conception of the ideals of love in Saṅgam literature, and therefore came to govern gender relations in modernity. Though *karpu* was a concept that applied equally to men and women as envisioned in Saṅgam literature, Ramasamy critiqued it both as a concept in itself and for the way it was applied in modernity to control and curb women's agency. While he was not completely beyond occasional deviation from his own stated disavowal of patriarchal control—as when he expressed the opposition of non-Brahmins with SCs in terms of anxiety regarding the non-Brahmin male's ability to control 'his' women that the untouchable male was free of¹⁷—nevertheless Ramasamy's vision of gender equality was arguably the most revolutionary part of his political ideology, for it erased the boundaries between the public and private spheres in the scope of politics. It also brought women firmly into the realm of politics as participants, which would have a great impact on the way electoral politics was practiced in the state of Madras.

E. V. Ramasamy's political activism continued to have a strong hold over Dravidian politics, even though his strong secessionist arguments were not widely accepted, until his parting of ways with his second-in-command C. N. Annadurai, and the latter's founding of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in 1949. The changes wrought by this new development to the Dravidian ideology had far-reaching consequences for the state.

¹⁷Subramanian, 1999 elaborates on this.

4.4. The Dravidian Parties

The break from DK and the influence of E. V. Ramasamy purportedly took place due to his marriage after the demise of his first to Maniammai, who was nearly forty years younger than him. However, there were deeper ideological reasons for the parting of ways. Moreover, it was also alleged that Ramasamy had an authoritarian control over the DK, which the other members were not happy with. Therefore, with the exit of Annadurai from the Dravida Kazhagam, there was an exodus of many members who joined the newly formed Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

The ideological differences between Annadurai and Ramasamy were extremely deep. The radical stance that Ramasamy took regarding many issues, including the complete rejection of the caste system and of Indian nationalism were both points of departure for Annadurai. While the entire subcontinent was submerged in the anti-colonial movement, Ramasamy's blanket rejection of the project of the Indian nation put him at odds with emerging polity, although his understanding of the masses, his grassroots politics and his political charisma ensured that his popularity did not abate with the rural and the downtrodden. However, for Annadurai and the rest of the DMK, embracing Indian nationalism in the early years after India's independence and participating in the Indian national politics through electoral contestation in the newly-formed state of Madras was an important aspect of their approach, although they did not completely abandon their secessionist train of thought until 1962, when any talk of secession was declared illegal by the Indian government.

Although the DMK continued to hold some of the same political or ideological positions as the DK, such as the opposition between Brahmin and anti-Brahmin, its political focus shifted more towards fighting the hegemony of the Congress in the politics of Madras. Thus, the thrust of DMK's arguments began to be towards the opposition of Dravidian vs. North Indian, as the more Brahmanical Indian National Congress held unbreakable sway over the state in the first two decades after Indian independence. DMK's politics also comprised of a complex of anti-Hindi, anti-north Indian and anti-Brahmin sentiment.

However, with Annadurai, the last of those began to be toned down much more than with Periyar and a distinction began to be made between anti-Brahmanism and anti-Brahmin¹⁸, and Annadurai disavowed the latter and often spoke of Brahmins admiringly as *mettukudi makkal* or uppercaste people¹⁹. On the question of religion too Annadurai often adopted a more ambiguous stance, not rejecting it outright the way Periyar did, while also maintaining a distance from religion.

The anti-north Indian character of DMK's political ideology drew from the rivalries inherent in being part of the Indian nation, comprising of many smaller cultural nationalities of which the Dravidian/Tamil was but one. DMK's stances revealed a distrust of the Congress for its allegiance to the larger nationalist project which was thought to privilege the north at the cost of the south, summed up in Annadurai's lament, *vadaku vazhgirathu, therku theigirathu* or "the north prospers while the south deteriorates". Thus, DMK positioned itself as the saviour of the interests of the Dravidians and the Tamils from the hegemony of the north Indians and the Brahmins who were part of

¹⁸Barnett, 1976

¹⁹Subramanian, 1999

the Congress, organizing agitations in the anti-Hindi movements when Rajaji, the Chief Minister under Congress rule, attempted to introduce compulsory Hindi education in the southern states. The caste politics of DMK also took a much milder tone, especially in the later days, as they continued to support anti-Brahmanism but only to the extent that it would bring the Adi-Dravida into the Dravidian fold, and not to the extent of alienating the Brahmins and taking up land redistribution, which would dilute the material wealth of the BC non-Brahmin castes, who formed their core constituencies. However, the DMK's agitations against segregation of public and educational spaces between Brahmins and non-Brahmins were also a significant part of their resistance to caste practices of the Brahmins.

All the above interests seemed to converge upon the linguistic identity of 'Tamil' rather than the racial identity of 'Dravidian'. Although this shift in the core vision of what the community consists of had taken place, the name of the party did not reflect this shift. This was debated within the party at the time of its founding, but the impact of the Orientalist imagination of a grand Dravidian past and culture was so strong that the term 'Dravidian' was retained in order to invoke that shared past. But apart from this, the identity of the Tamilian was foregrounded in the politics of the DMK, most significantly after their winning of the state election in 1967, when they swept the polls against Congress, thus establishing the first state government by a non-Brahmin party.

Inspired, or perhaps instigated, by the Andhra Pradesh model of a linguistic state, one of the very first changes the DMK brought about on assuming political power was in changing the name of the state to

Tamilnadu. Although the Madras state had been carved out on a linguistic basis, the Tamil-centrism that was at the core of DMK's politics demanded that this be made explicit in the name of the state itself, at the risk of alienating the not insignificant portions of non-Tamil, Telugu- and Malayalam-speaking populations, along with other linguistic minorities.

The split in the DMK came with M. G. Ramachandran, popularly known as MGR, who transformed the stage of Dravidian politics. A hugely successful film star, he brought a new level of mass mobilization after joining the DMK, creating a crisis of rivalry with its second-generation ideologue Karunanithi, who had less popular following than Ramachandran but was being groomed to take over after Annadurai. The rivalry between Karunanithi and Ramachandran caused the former's expulsion from the party, leading to the formation of the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam by Ramachandran in 1972. What followed was a decade of complete dominance of the political scene of Tamilnadu by the ADMK, with Ramachandran coming to power in 1977 and staying in power till his demise a decade later. It was only at this point that the DMK managed to regain power until it was snatched back away by its new president J. Jayalalitha.

One of the marked differences between the formation of ADMK and that of DMK is the absence of any great ideological differences as driving force behind the new party. ADMK conceptualized the idea of the political base and the community in quite similar ways to the DMK, while Ramachandran's major innovations came with more practical matters of rule, such as the devising and promotion of populist schemes, in what Subramanian (1999) terms "paternalist populism." Here, the relation-

ship between the political leader and the voter was envisioned such that welfare schemes and other material offerings, such as promises for rice at Re. 1 per kilogram, etc. Much has been said of Ramachandran's on-screen persona of the hero and its contributing to a personality cult that also ensured that he maintained his status, despite the fact that he and the ADMK did not actually make any great achievements in improving the material conditions of the poor in Tamilnadu who consisted of 63% of the population.

The lack of a serious engagement with caste-based inequities was thus also disguised by the spectacle of the Chief Minister's film career and shallow welfare schemes that targeted and appealed to the most socially disempowered groups. Washbrook calls this aspect of ADMK's rule the politics of 'bread and circus'. More insidious was the ADMK's and before them, the DMK's collusion with upper and middle non-Brahmin caste groups in allowing wide-spread caste-based violence and bloodshed against various backward and untouchable castes. This paved the way for political parties such as PMK, which was the first major party that was based on the support of a particular caste and Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

4.5. Subaltern Self-Identifications

Although the Dravidian movement under Periyar attempted to forge a larger unity across castes as we have seen, this proved largely to be a failure at a later point. The political assertion of subaltern and Dalit communities in Tamilnadu, though epitomized by recent political developments, has early roots, particularly in northern Madras, where the Backward Castes and Dalit castes were not as subjugated in the

pre-Colonial as they were further south, where the untouchable castes had to contend not only with the landed non-Brahmin castes but also the Brahmins. Their northern counterparts, on the other hand, though marginalized, still had relatively greater upward mobility, until the colonial times when the concentration of power in Madras caused them to slide further down the social scale. However, the northern population still had greater social mobility and there were those like Iyothee Thassar who had some access to learning and education.

4.5.1. Iyothee Thassar

C. Iyothee Thassar was an intellectual of the Untouchable Paraiyar caste who wrote and published periodicals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He was born in 1845 and struggled for most of his life to uplift the Paraiyar community from the ignominy of being considered an untouchable caste, mainly through a conception of a Buddhist past for the Paraiyar community that has been termed “Emancipatory Buddhism.”

One of the major issues that Iyothee Thassar had to contend with was the name of the caste itself. The name Paraiyar, although referring originally to the caste, began to take on, in Colonial times, a scathingly pejorative meaning and could be applied as an abuse to anyone who behaved in an undesirable manner. Thus, all Paraiyar intellectuals with a public presence had to address the name of the caste itself, which became an impediment to many. There were those Paraiyar intellectuals like Rettaimalai Srinivasan, who proudly and insistently wore the name Paraiyar in a defiant reclamatory gesture towards what had become a powerful tool of Brahmanical assertion of superiority over an

entire caste. However, this tactic would not be borne by Iyothee Thassar's political sensitivity, and as G. Aloysius notes, Thassar

... carried on a relentless hermeneutic battle against the word Paraiyah as a term of collective identification for the subaltern communities; this would also be parallel to a tortuous and multi-pronged search for a 'common' or 'neutral' alternative appellation, expressive of certain ideological positions.²⁰

This battle led to the establishment of the periodical *Oru Paisa Tamilan*, which attempted to reassert the idea of *Tamilan* as central to the identification of the various subaltern communities. The Tamil identity presented possibilities to escape the degradation thrust upon the Paraiyar community by the violence committed upon the name of the caste itself. Simultaneously, Thassar also considered "Dravidian" as another site of identification that might be emancipatory to the untouchables, and he posed it, as did Maraimalai Atikal and E. V. Ramasamy, in opposition to the Brahmin as stand-in for the Aryan.

However, while Ramasamy rejected religion as a tool of subjugation, Thassar turned towards it to show the lacuna in Brahmanical religion like Maraimalai Atikal. However, unlike Maraimalai Atikal, for Thassar, the possibilities offered by Buddhism were deeply tied with challenging Brahmanism as an ideology and provided the greatest emancipatory possibility. Thassar not only finds Buddhism to offer the solution to the highly unequal nature of Hinduism, but also sees a greater moral superiority in the world-view of Buddhism. In his view, where Hinduism and Brahmanism are concerned with exclusion and go as far as to develop systems such as untouchability, Buddhism is concerned

²⁰Aloysius, 2010, p.16

with greater inclusion, transformation and the radical insistence on moving away from animal instincts to obey and bow to authority. Further, through his erudite understanding of history and culture, Thassar attempted to trace the Paraiyar identity to Buddhist roots, thus establishing a the identity as both predating and lying outside the realms of Hindu untouchability.

Iyothee Thassar, though focused on cultural constructions of subaltern identity, through his tussle with the term *Paraiyar* vis-à-vis notions of 'Tamilan' and 'Dravidian', provided a political discourse around caste identity that had a huge influence. We may also turn next to other more explicitly political bids for subaltern identity.

4.5.2. *The PMK*

The Pattali Makkal Katchi emerged as the first large explicitly caste-based political outfit intending to contest elections in 1989, representing and seeking to improve the lot of the Vanniyar community, consisting mostly of agricultural labourers from the northern part of the state. Its history, however, is not so recent, and may be traced back to the late colonial period when they were known as the Pallis, and were trying to escape the low status accorded to them by the Colonial machinery by trying to be included in the census records as Kshatriyas, thus gaining a high ranking in the varna hierarchy. Although labourers, there were members of the caste who were highly placed or affluent, and whose influence extended both inside and outside the community, executed very ably. In pursuit of their inclusion in the census, they as a community changed their reported name to Agnikula Kshatriyas or Vanniyars²¹,

²¹Muthukumar, 1999.

thus erasing the less prestigious name of the Palli caste.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the political voice of Vanniyars was the Vanniyar Sangam, which attempted to improve the material conditions of the backward caste through political intervention, but the dependence on the unreliable ruling parties created resentment and animosity, especially with the DMK. The emergence of the PMK with its founder Ramdoss marked a change in the activities of the Vanniyar movement. Although the PMK is a caste-based organization, the larger political agenda according to Ramdoss is the upliftment of Most Backward Castes such as the Vanniyars and Dalits as well, though there are often caste tensions between the groups. A major achievement of the PMK has been in winning reservations for the Vanniyars as an OBC caste. The PMK thus represents a shift from Dravidian ideology to caste ideology, with attempts to establish wider political sympathies.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the various approaches taken by different political groups to determine a sense of community and belonging, and the various maneuvers and negotiations between different kinds of identity.

The colonial obsession with knowledge accumulation had to do with pinning down and applying categories to organize phenomena that could not be pinned down and did not possess the internal coherence imposed upon it by colonial knowledge practices. The consequence of such impositions is a violence that excludes existing aspects of that which it imposes upon and simultaneously also invents the object of category.

rization in order to facilitate categorization and render it more convenient. It is the privileging of either particular world-views or authorities and deciding the very fundamental nature of being. Particularly, it was seen that the entire trajectory of caste dynamics was influenced by the British categorizations of castes in ways alien till colonial times. The fact that system of caste did not match the prevalent system in the Tamil region was neither comprehended nor given any recognition.

This is also the self-perpetuating violence of colonialism as it grants legitimacy and only recognizes that to which it grants legitimacy. Therefore, the only way in which it can be appealed to is through a self-inflicted violence in order to become visible and recognized, as bounded within the confines of categories of 'caste', 'gender', etc. Thus, the Vaniyars in late colonialism undertook the project of self-erasure while simultaneously rendering themselves visible and more importantly, *worthy* in the eyes of the British legal system through the inclusion in the census records as properly categorized in the varna system, which had never had to be appealed to before.

The linguistic and racial construction of identity was seen as extremely effective in uniting an otherwise highly fragmented and disparate amalgamation of communities that was to be considered the state of Madras, as was seen in the case of Ramasamy and the Dravidian Parties. However, using linguistic identities obfuscates the exclusions and the violences that are visibilized by other forms of social organization. The open-ended nature of language seemingly allows space to accommodate all the gaps and exclusions of other sites of identity under its rubric, yet the very instability of language as a site of identity makes it necessary return to and to fall back upon other forms of identification

which are inevitably mired in more rigid definitions of insider and outsider. This was seen in the shortcomings of the Dravidian politics and its ultimate succumbing to age-old pressures of caste solidarity.

The failure of the politics of language is therefore the failure of the oath, where the oath given in this context is regarding the “belonging” to a community and to a language, and yet the very failure of the oath is embedded in language and its ability to seem to promise that which it cannot promise. The failure of the oath of belonging promised by linguistic identity is also from the inability of the language envisioned as object to live up to its promise, leaving only an illusion of inclusion and a failed oath.

5 | Conclusion

No, an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmic process of identification endures.

Jacques Derrida,

Monolingualism of the Other

This thesis has tried to trace the intended and unintended effects of the knowledge production of colonial disciplines on the colonized populations, with a particular focus on cultural nationalism that constituted language as object and site of communal and personal identity, and the emergence of linguistic nationalism in Tamilnadu. In doing so, the attempt has been to explore the limits of a bounded view of language, and the difficulties that arise from attempting to

To this end, Chapter Two explored the foundations of philology, noting that although textual cultures and their detailed study to aid comprehension always existed, the new relationship with the past wrought by the developments of the Enlightenment in Europe created a historical understanding of ancient cultures as revealed through philology. Thus, new conceptions of tradition distanced past cultures as a distant

Other, and rendered all aspects of the text as relics of a past culture. Thus language and linguistic analysis also became a window into the past and the birth of comparative philology and historical linguistics furthered these developments, influenced by the forms of knowledge gleaned through the colonies. Turning to the colonies itself, it was shown that the Orientalist fascination with Sanskrit and later with the languages of southern part of the subcontinent led to the Dravidian hypothesis, which exemplified the method of comparative philology. In tying up language, race and caste together and imbuing them with a historical significance regarding the distant past, Robert Caldwell helped usher in a Tamil Renaissance, one that was self-consciously secular in nature. The discovery of the Saṅgam corpus was precipitated by the enthusiasm for the past glimpsed through Caldwell. The various rivalries set up by Caldwell between Aryan/Dravidian, Brahmin/ non-Brahmin and so on led to the rise of the Dravidian ideology through ideologues like Maraimalai Atikal, and new visions of language and linguistic and cultural purity.

Chapter Three turned to the question of a textually constituted idea of tradition as revealed through the Saṅgam canon, particularly viewing the grammatical texts as an important aspect of the conception of tradition in modernity. Several key grammatical texts were examined to reveal the complexities and contradictions that are inherent in the idea of tradition. The concept of tradition was seen as the attempt to reconcile the past with the present, governed by a paradoxical belief that the genius of the cultures of the past was eternal and unchanging but that it was also essential to safeguard traditions from change and corruption in order to preserve it for posterity. The various de-

bates around key texts and the constantly shifting nature of the views regarding the past were also examined, and found to be symptomatic of the pitfalls of philology and its promised ability to make the past comprehensible and concrete, capable of being examined.

The philological belief in the eternal persistence of the text and of the genius of cultures long gone resound across the years was also examined through a culture that is purportedly both ancient and modern, yet unable to resolve some of the most important questions and puzzles through the texts that had become so central to it. Tradition or the past was thus seen as the spectre or ghost that Derrida speaks of, which is ever present and strong yet always anxious, and which only seems become in the gaps and silences of the traces it leaves behind.

Chapter Four turned to the political establishment of the identity of the Tamilian in modernity. The political thought of various ideologues was examined to discern the various complex layerings of different kinds of identity that went into the imagination of who a political subject was. It was seen that the Dravidianist ideology after Maraimalai Atikal took on a less elite and more mass-political tone with E. V. Ramasamy who primarily deployed it as a means of building self-respect and political consciousness among the masses to fight against Brahmin supremacy. This was also true of the Dravidianist parties that followed, but were practiced with varying levels of sincerity. For Ramasamy, it was seen that the Dravidian identity was envisioned through a complex set of attitudes towards religion, anti-colonialism, gender relations, linguistic identity, nostalgia for the past, and most importantly, caste.

The failure of the Dravidian parties to fulfill the ethical imperatives

of politics was seen to have precipitated the rise of caste-centric politics. Giorgio Agamben's analysis of the oath as central to the ethical imperative of politics informed the reading of the issues raised in this chapter.

The larger framework of this thesis is indicated by the title 'Jealousy with appropriation'. This refers to a quote from Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthesis of Origin*, where in speaking of language, Derrida denies the possibility of language having a 'natural' property, noting that,

Because there is no natural property of language, language gives rise only to appropriative madness, to *jealousy without appropriation*. Language speaks this jealousy; it is nothing but jealousy unleashed...¹

This is the idea that permeates the attempts to trace an origin back in texts, through language, into a recorded past as found in the Saṅgam texts and an antediluvian past that is imagined through the relics of the more recent past. The various debates and scholarly disagreements are an outcome of the jealousy that language itself embodies, in the form of endless appeals to authority for legitimacy.

The questions explored in Chapter Two regarding the developments of philology and its influence on the emergence of the Dravidian identity corresponds with a related idea Derrida speaks of, of the tricks of the colonial master. The master's first trick is to hide that fact that he possesses nothing by the invention of the possession of things that cannot be possessed. Like the proverbial Emperor's new clothes, the master is bereft of any possessions, but:

¹Derrida & Mensah 1998, p.24

Because the master does not possess exclusively, and *naturally*, what he calls his language, because, whatever he wants or does, he cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological, with it, because he can give substance to and articulate this appropriation only in the course of an unnatural process of politico-phantasmic constructions, because language is not his natural possession, he can, thanks to the very fact, pretend historically, through the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as “his own”. That is his belief; he wishes to make others share it through the use of force or cunning; he wants to make others believe it, as they do a miracle, through rhetoric, the school, or the army.

This captures precisely the nature of linguistic identity formation discussed thus far. The invention of a bounded, discrete, individualized entity called language was arguably the biggest achievement of colonialism, for it allowed for the very cultural usurpation that Derrida speaks of. The writing of grammars, the study and restructuring of hypothetical “parent” languages and such activities of colonial linguistics went towards the collecting of languages, as the museums did for cultures. The areas of expertise, which could allow language to be thus possessed created experts who by definition were given or withheld legitimacy by the master himself. In the master’s first trick, colonial philology succeeded immensely well, and created ‘native’ philologists like Pillai and Iyer who had internalized the belief in the existence of cultures that could be retrieved and brought back to life.

The master's second trick is implicated in both Chapter Three and Four, where the possibility of a post-colonial writing back to the master seems possible. Through the reconstruction of tradition and through the political assertion of identity, the colonized make attempts towards reasserting the ownership of language, and culture that they were supposedly 'robbed' of by the master. Yet all the attempts seen here prove only that these "politico-phantasmic constructions" and disappear as soon as they are approached and attempts are made to grasp them. For:

Liberation, emancipation, and revolution will necessarily be the second trick. It will provide freedom from the first while confirming a heritage by internalizing it, by reappropriating it—but only up to a certain point, for . . . there is never any such thing as absolute appropriation or reappropriation.

Thus, while the revolutionary aspects of the Dravidian movement, for instance, provide some modicum of relief to its participants, it is revealed in the long run to be ineffective, for it is not possible to reappropriate the identity of the constructions of a race that are created by the master. What is left at the end is only the attempt, as noted at the conclusion of chapter three, to inhabit the gaps and the silences, the slippages of language and the self.

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