CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY CONSCIOUSNESS - A STUDY OF DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT IN COLONIAL TAMIL NADU

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled, **CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY CONSCIOUSNESS - A STUDY OF DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT IN COLONIAL TAMIL NADU** submitted by **A. GANGATHARAN** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of this University has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other university. To the best of our knowledge, this is a bonafide work.

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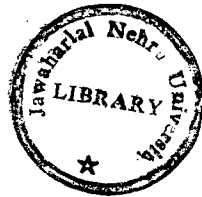
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PREFACE

This study is part of an inquiry into understanding and explaining the ideological genesis of the Dravidian Movement in the light of culture, identity and community consciousness. Further, it seeks to demonstrate how Tamils under colonial subjugation came to terms with their past and present, and how they envisioned a future for their society. During this period, by constructing a golden past and invoking the primordial loyalties, many social groups vigorously attempted to overcome all debilitations, impediments and hindrances imposed by the traditional system to establish a new social order.

The print and Press played a key role in building up an alternate ideological paradigm by creating a community consciousness and a new cultural taste. The intellectual commitment to social transformation through articulation of ideas also have been investigated in this study.

No words can express the deep debt of gratitude, I owe to my supervisor Professor K.N.Panikkar. His wide experience, unrivalled knowledge of Modern Indian History, learned guidance, stimulating discussions and unstinting moral support helped me immensely in completing this work in time.

I am beholden to Professor Romila Thapar for her constant support, encouragement and valuable suggestions.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Table No.	Title	Page
1	Literacy Among Various Tamil Castes During 1901 and 1911	64
2	Religionwise Literacy	73
3	List of Newspapers and Journals in the Late Nineteenth Century in Tamil	95
4	Number and Circulation of Newspapers and Journals in the Early Twentieth Century in Madras Presidency	97
5	Number of Books Published in Each Language During the Last Four Decades	99
6	Important Nationalist Newspapers of the Period	108
7	List of Dravidian Papers	122

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of modern ideas, the development of social protest and religious dissent in the nineteenth century is generally viewed as a concomitant of the dissemination and diffusion of colonial knowledge and English education. In response to the colonial intrusion in the social and cultural sphere, the 'native' intellectual tried to formulate a strategy of cultural defence. However their intellectual bases and ideological premises have considerably varied.[1]

Bengal was the first Province to react sharply against the colonial interference in cultural and social matters. Soon after, other provinces also followed suit. The 'native' intellectuals (middle class English educated) were well aware of the social evils. They realised the necessity for restructuring their cultural and religious beliefs on western lines to meet their social needs. However, they differed in their approach in restructuring or reforming their social beliefs. While the English educated intelligentsia were interested in restructuring the social and cultural beliefs on rational and universal lines, the 'natives' however were very cautious in adopting religious changes.[2]

Madras Presidency did not adequately respond to the changing conditions. This was largely owing to its peculiar social and political structure which inostensibly made the province remain calm throughout the last century.[3] Tamil Nadu, the bastion of traditional culture, lacked a cosmopolitan outlook - the homogenous religious structure, · lack intellectual output, want of leadership initiative and the unquestionable pre-eminence of Brahmins kept the presidency relatively out of the process of social and religious

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1   K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectual and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi, 1995, p.17.

2   Charles Heinsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton, 1964, p.23.

3   R.Sundaralingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891*, Arizona, 1974, p.47.

modernisation. However, the advent of the twentieth century marked an era of political awakening. Consequently, the Presidency underwent considerable social transformation where the two millenna old Brahmin dominance was shattered. This change did not put an end to caste ridden social hierarchy. Conversely, this led to a contestation between caste identities for contending hegemony.[4]

The dynamic aspect of the political history during the period was that each interest group was vigorously engaged in constructing a most appropriate pragmatic identity to articulate freely in all walks of life. As the politics of identity formation took place in the social, cultural and linguistic planes, I found it relevant to study the intricate and complex inter-relation between culture and language vis-a-vis identity formation. Discussing the development and impact of Tamil Renaissance in the light of oriental discourse, I try to investigate the ideological premises for the formation of Tamil identity and its effective use in the social politics. Since colonial politics became complicated with the onset of administrative changes, it necessitated the formation of a larger and substantial neo-political categories - the Dravidian identity to reap the benefits of colonial rule by invoking the primordial sentiments of the people in opposition to mainstream pan-Indian identity.

The past was involved in order to construct a potential ethnic identity to claim a autochthonous status. The construction of archaic history in a new intellectual perspective became crucial to this identity formation. Meanwhile many caste groups, taking recourse to the process of modernisation and colonial possibilities attempted to present their past history in a better light to shun away the social stigma attached to their caste. The proliferation of printed materials and the subsequent dissemination of new

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4   Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905-1944*, Madurai, 1980, p.18.

literacy intensified the process of identity formation. Many cultural and caste groups began to spin their own organisations to mobilize the primordial loyalties towards the newly constructed identity horizon based on a common history.

The emergence of a new identity was determined immensely by the role played by the super structure. The earlier twentieth century Tamil intellectuals viewed the philosophical activities as the cultural battle to transform the popular 'mentality'[5] they launched 'Saivasiddantha' (pure Tamil movement). Subsequently, this movement accelerated the social process of building up an alternative hegemonic structure.[6] In the course of my study, I have assessed and evaluated the significant role played by these movements in building up an ideological base.

The second quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a great social upheaval. E.V.Ramaswami Naicker's (EVR) Self Respect Movement, capitalising on the primordial sentiments of the people, had virulently attacked the Hindu religious social order for its alleged violations of self respect to the common citizen. Further, I have dealt with the restoration of the suppressed identity mediated through literary traditions with reference to the re-reading of the Ramayana in the modern period. In all these aspects, the identity intended to invoke primordial feelings to build up a critical social consciousness among the members of the concerned group.[7] The politics of identity formation constituted the teleological matrix of the colonial Tamil Nadu.

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5   Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London, 1991, p.14.

6   Eugene F.Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in 1930s*, Madras, 1986, pp.17-18.

7   Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures - Selected Essays*, New York, 1973, p.274.

An Overview

Identity crises are not uncommon social phenomena in multi-cultural societies. At the same time these societies had some way to accommodate the aspirations and anxieties of the emerging identities.[8] As Clifford Geertz aptly points out, the state must "reconcile them with unfolding civil order by divesting them of their legitimizing force with respect to Governmental authority, by neutralizing the apparatus of the State in relationship to them, and by channelling discontent arising out of their dislocation into properly political rather than para-political forms of expression."[9] Individual identities primarily develop their identification to social structure.[10] As T.Eagleton rightly points out "Identity is an indispensable medium in which the individuals leave out their life in relationship to their social structure." Appealing to the primordial sentiments they sought to form identity groups. In course of time such identity groups also aligned themselves with the larger community undergoing a dynamic transformation through a dialectical process. It is a process through which these identity groups laid the base for community formation.[11]

The crises of cultural struggle of identity conflict sought to gain a new momentum under the aegis of colonial regime. In a cultural struggle various social interest groups (the subordinate) always engaged themselves in a process of searching for the most appropriate secular alternative identity. These identities were multiple and complimentary to each other. They may sojourn with those identities as long as they

8   Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties*, London, 1951, p.181.

9   Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p.276.

10   Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, London, 1983, pp.114-17.

11   Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties*, pp.101-07.

serve their purposes. These identities were democratised by invoking primordial loyalties, symbolic behaviour, ritual status, linguistic and ethnic affinities.[12] All these identities were commonly constituted and imagined in opposition to the existing social dominant functional world view, such as Dravidian versus Aryan and Tamil versus Hindi. These identities were either shared with or imposed upon people for public consumption at the various junctures of historical development. The successful survival of an identity depends upon its demonstrability by providing a space for horizontal comrade relationship.

The viable nature of the identity largely owes its ability to create and institutionalise their social consciousness which could be possibly done through internalizing their social consciousness into an identity horizon by removing the inner contradiction.[13] An identity horizon can never command a popular accent without the hegemonic sanction. As T.Eagleton opines, Hegemony is a practical strategy by which a 'dominant power elicits' consent from its subject.[14] According to Gramsci, Hegemony has to be established through 'moral', 'political' and 'intellectual' leadership in social life by diffusing one's own world view on the fabric of society as a whole. Consequently the newly developed identities are in the process of defining, re-defining and modifying themselves to withstand the hegemonic pressures from above.[15]

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12   S.Anandhi, *Contending Identities: Dalits and Secular Politics in Madras Slums*, New Delhi, 1995, pp.7-9. Also see Robert L.Hardgrave, *India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation*, New York, 1970, p.72.

13   G.E.Grunebaum, *Modern Islam: The Search for Cultural Identity*, New York, 1964, p.32.

14   Terry Eagleton, *Ideology*, p.43.

15   H.Quintin and Norwell Smith (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, London, 1971, p.333.

identities are conceived and conceptualised basically to meet the needs of the social groups in a given situation. They cannot be characterised fully as the self expression of a particular group. These identities may come and go but the history that it made in the course of time would vindicate its legitimacy. As Anderson rightly points out, "the imagined communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity or genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined."[16] They are primarily the cultural artefact responding to the changing political scenario of the colonial conditions, registering their protest on the modern political platform. Contestation for identity horizon is likely to take place in a transitional society inevitably under the aegis of colonial presence. The emergence of such identities largely depend upon the pioneers and leaders of the respective groups. Appealing to the emotions and sentiments of the people by bringing up issues pertaining to their ameliorative conditions, the social functionaries draw their members around the newly constructed identities. In Gramscian term, they begin to function as the "Organic Intellectuals."[17]

The expansion of the identity horizon mediated through cultural and social milieus sought to gain a group or class awareness. Intense politicisation, effective appeal to the linguistic ethnic affinity and the re-interpretation of the cultural traditions accentuated the process of creating class consciousness among the members of the community. Consequently, the newly emergent identity began to function as a class in itself to

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16   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1991, p.8.

17   H.Quintin and Norwell Smith (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, p. 9.

overthrow the existing dominant hegemonic social order by breaking the social norms.[18]

The process of modernisation acted as a catalyst to this development, activated and intensified the expansion of identity horizon in modern politics. The age of 'mechanic reproduction', as Walter Benjamin observed, print capitalism and celluloid culture and communication technology widened the space for the emancipation of the subaltern identity from the dominant hegemonic culture.[19]

A new identity horizon draws its inspiration from culture, history, religion and language, which are highly charged with emotive content. They need not stem from the objective reality alone. Postulating a hoary past, intellectuals generally woo their members around the newly constructed identity. Since language is the root of culture, it supplies essential group-consciousness for the germination of linguistic identity consciousness.[20] Re-interpretation of the literary traditions and re-telling of the folk narratives linking their glorious past with their present suffering, they mobilised the masses. Moreover language is often invoked as a unifying symbol of the community. Therefore, an appeal on linguistic line in a transitional society makes greater sense.

The construction of identity around religious themes is relatively easier because of its strong ideological base which is tender enough to kindle the minds of the people to adhere to certain norms. Moreover symbols, rituals and rites play a key role in fostering a religious identity formation.[21] The cryptic nature of religious ideology

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18   Glifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, London 1973, pp.153-54.

19   Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, London, 1973, p.265.

20   Joshua Kishman et al, *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, New York, 1968, p.68.

21   Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in Sikh Tradition*, New Delhi, 1994, pp.33-35.

uenshrined in super-natural powers, surpasses all human understanding and subsequently propels strong allegiance to their religious identity. Laconically speaking, identity is an instinctive element which stems from human anxiety to secure a due place in the changing world. Disaggregated groups, marginalised masses and subjugated communities taking recourse to the process of modernisation wanted desperately to liberate themselves from the clutches of imperialism of all sorts (socio-politico-economic).[22] As a result the study of identity in relation to culture is the history of the liberation struggle from below.

Scholars who have studied the historical development of colonial Tamil Nadu paid their attention generally to colonial modernisation, the subsequent social change and the role played by the natives in the vortex of politics. While most of the scholars accepted views that the historical development of colonial Tamil nadu was different from that of the North, they differed in locating the history of its politics and concomitance.

National school of Historiography was unable to comprehend adequately the historical development of the South because it looked for similitudes and parallels. On the contrary the history of colonial South India was a compendium of identity struggles. During this period various contesting multiple identities were engaged in liberating themselves from their immediate oppressors, therefore, personal revolts and social protests have to be analysed in their proper historical context.

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22   S.Anandhi, "Collective Identity and Secularism", *Social Scientist*, p.10.

CHAPTER I

CONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST

The construction of the past as a historical agenda was a part of the intellectual activities of the late nineteenth century. It figured prominently in the attempt of the intellectuals to modernise society. They realised the importance of being sensitive to their past which was misrepresented by colonial rule. As a result, the investigation of the past to perceive the present and to conceive a future became integral to their intellectual endeavour. To use K.N.Panikkar's words "The intellectual quest in colonial India, engaged in an enquiry into the meaning of the past and thus in an assessment of its relevance to contemporary society, was an outcome of this awareness".[1]

The necessity for the construction of the past, though initially viewed as a pre-requisite to reform the society, subsequently turned out to be part of an anti-colonial agenda to retrieve the lost identity.[2] This increasingly becamee very vocal when the national movement reached its mass phase. In this chapter, I would make an attempt to assess and critically examine the emergence of various historiographies in colonial Tamil Nadu. It further seeks to explain how the retrieval of history laid the foundation for the ideological genesis of the Dravidian movement and Tamil identity.[3]

Each one of the schools of historiography developed their own discourse to locate, situate and comprehend the history of India. Perhaps, the needs of the present were at

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1   K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi, 1995, p.108.

2   R. Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications*, Calcutta, 1988, p.11.

3   R. Srinivasan, "The Ideological Genesis of Dravidian Movement", *Indo-British Review*, vol.13, no.1, January-June 1987, p.19.

times overread or imposed into the past.[4] The ideological basis of this historiography was necessarily to disown and delegitimise the cultural rhetoric of Indian history. The oriental school, sympathetically treating the Indian past as a conglomeration of events devoid of historical contingency and chronology, indulged in "piling conjecture upon conjecture" to construct their own cloud lands.[5] Similar to this line, the colonial historiography dictated by its material interest, systematically denied the validity and misappropriated Indian history. Missionary school contribution, may be premised upon a different material plain, their romanticisation of the past at least in Tamil Nadu, kindled the attavistic feelings of native scholars. On the other hand the native school of historiography undertook the task of constructing the past, precisely to retrieve their damaged and lost identity from the womb of the past. However, their process was not a unilinear or undifferentiated progression. It was riven with contradiction, contentions and ruptures.[6] Consequently, it lead to the emergence of conflicting historiography under the aegis of colonial authority.

Oriental Construction

In the imagination of Europe, India had always been the fabulous land of untold wealth and mystical happening, with more than just a normal share of wise men. This imagination propelled the European scholars to probe into the mysteries of India's past.

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4   Romila Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice*, New Delhi, 1996, p.3.

5   P. Sundaram Pillai, *Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature on the Age of Tirujnana Sambandha*, Madras, 1909, p.14. Also see P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar, *The Past in the Present*, Madras, 1924, p.11.
       Professor Sundaram Pillai (1856-1897), a distinguished scholar in philosophy, history and Tamil literature made a valuable contribution towards Tamil historical research. 'Nul-Thokai-Vilakkam', 'Manonmaniyam' were some of his notable works. He was conferred the title Rai Bahadur in 1896 for his outstanding contribution to the field of Tamil literature and history.

6   K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony*, p.vii.

In their attempt to illuminate the obscure and the unread Indian past, they paid more attention in lighting up certain portions of Indian history leaving the rest in steep darkness.[7] The unconscious attempt of the Orientalists' construction of Indian antiquity had caused aspersions and suspicion, which in the process of time paved the way for the prejudicial treatment of the past.

The discovery of Indian past and its revelation to Europe in the late eighteenth century was largely the work of Jesuit Scholars, the European travellers and the civil servants of the East India Company.[8] Soo, the numbers of those interested in the study of classical language and literature grew and the nineteenth century saw considerable achievements in the area of linguistic ethnography, philology and other disciplines of Indology. Though the initiative came from the Jesuit Scholars, the real break through was made by a small band of East India Company civil servants.

Sir Williams Jones, a versatile genius and polyglot and Charles Wilkins, who had mastered the Sanskrit language, founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784,[9] with the aim of promoting the study of ancient Indian civilisation and culture. Wilkins' translation of the 'Bhagwatgita' (November 1784) and of 'Hitopadesa' (1787); and Jones' translation of 'Sakuntala' (1789), the 'Gita Govinda' (1792), and of Manu-Smriti (1794). About the same time, French orientalist, Anquetil Duperron translated four 'Upanishads'[10] from a seventeenth century Persian version. Jones and Wilkins were followed by Colebroke and Wilson.

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7   K.A.Nilakanta *Sastri, Sources of Indian History: With Special Reference to South India*, Bombay, 1964, p.50.

8   Ibid., p.51.

9   A.L.Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, Delhi, 1967, p.9.

10   Nilakanta Sastri, *Sources of Indian History*, p.16.

Subsequently, in the nineteenth century, 'chairs' were established in various universities of Western countries to promote the study of Indology.[11] Buhler, Burgess, Fleet, Hultzch, Kielhorn, Burnouf, Max Muller, Lasseau and Weber, Fergusson and Macdonnel, Rhys Davids, Lanman and Bloomfield were just few great names in Western Scholarship of the last century who held these "chairs" in Sanskrit and Oriental studies. The outcome of the research along different lines were succinctly summed up in the first scientific treatise published in 1904, the "Early History of India" by Vincent A.Smith, an ICS officer.[12] Thus, Orientalism as a branch of study premised upon a different set of ontological and epistemological values to comprehend the history of India for the benefit of Colonial bureaucracy.[13] The oriental project was primarily initiated by the imperial power to unlock the mysteries germaine to its cultural past and classical traditions.

The oriental discourse applied its own categories, vocabularies, imageries, scholarships and doctrines to survey the civilisation from its origin to its prime and its decline.[14] During this period, more and more Europeans came to define the uniqueness of Indian civilization as they perceived it. This definition included the development of an apparatus for the study of Indian languages and texts, standardizing and making them authoritative for both Europeans and Indians. Bernard S.Cohen rightly points out, "through the encouragement of the production by Indians of school books, Indians began

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11   Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, p.11.

12   Nilakanta Sastri, *Sources of Indian History*, p.58.

13   Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London, 1978, p.17.

14   Ibid., p.52.

to write history in the European mode, often borrowing European ideas about the past of India".[15]

In the 1860s the archaeological survey was established with a view to safeguard the monuments and architecture of India, what was thought fit for preservation by them as part of Indian heritage. Viewed in the same perspective, census operations and ethnological survey was conducted in order to prepare monographs about the culture and society. Photographic description and statistical tabulation were also prepared for the academic and administrative requirements, so that India could be part of the "laboratory of mankind".[16]

The outline for the Oriental historiography was laid by Sir William Jones in the late 1780's. Jones, who came to Calcutta as a civil servant, showed keen interest in the study of ancient laws, manners, customs, habits, literatures and institutions. Within a span of a decade he proved to be a promising scholar in the field of Indology. His monumental piece of translation had revitalized the religious order and gave new currency and fixity to the political identity of the Hindus.[17] William Jones was responsible for the introduction of uniform civil code for all *caste Hindus* - whose translation of Manu-smriti published under the title of "Institutes of Hindu Law" in 1794 became the Magna Carta of the Hindu Judicial System.[18]

Conceiving language as a carrier of culture, Jones boldly postulated a well cultivated Sanskritic civilization of hoary past. According to him, the Hindus who were

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15   Bernard S.Cohen, "Representing Authority in Victorian India", in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983, p.171.

16   Ibid., p.184.

17   Nilakanta Sastri, *Sources of Indian History*, p.31.

18   Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, pp.5-6.

first to settle down in the Indus and Gangetic plains, had evolved an independent culture under the stimulus of the existing Indian environment. They handed down their culture to the succeeding generations in the East as well as the West.[19] Their contribution in the ancient and modern times was something original, arresting and impressive.

Jones paid considerable encomium to the exactness and logical structure of Sanskrit. Rejecting the Semitic origin of Sanskrit, he had placed it on par with the classical European languages. He pronounced "the Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is a wonderful structure; more perfect than Greek; more copious than Latin and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the form of German, than could possibly have been produced by accident, so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine all three of them without believing them to have sprung from some common source."[20] Thus he established indissoluble ties between Indo-European languages which had a far reaching political fall out in the later period of British India. Based upon such ontological stereotypes many followed the footsteps of Jones in reinterpreting and reconstructing the Indian past. Prominent among them was Fredrick Max Muller, who held the chair for Sanskrit at Oxford University and made valuable contributions towards the retrieval of oriental literature.

Max Muller applied the term 'Aryan Race' in the socio-linguistic context in 1853. Subsequently, it struck a firm root and evoked an enormous response in Europe. It reach 1 its logical culmination in India with the foundation of the Theosophical move ent. Muller's excitement about the cultural affinity between Indo-European grou₁ was reflected in many of his works. The study of philology resulted in the vision

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19   Nilakanta Sastri, *Sources of Indian History*, p.14.

20   Quoted in Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p.79.

of a vast Aryan race which was regarded as the originator of Indian culture. He held the view that the study of Sanskrit was also the discovery of a lost wing of early European culture.[21] Max Muller, in his book, 'India, What Can it Teach Us?' confidently exhibited the philological ties between Europe and India - "... our nearest intellectual relatives, the Aryans of India, the framers of the most wonderful language of Sanskrit, fellow workers in the construction of our most fundamental concepts, the fathers of the most natural of the natural religions, the makers of the most transparent of mythologies, the inventors of the most subtle philosophy and the giver of the most elaborate laws...".[22]

Muller's exalted description of the Aryan culture stirred up the atavistic pride and the sense of cultural superiority among caste Hindus, got articulated in many ways. Some intellectuals went to the extent of claiming fraternity with European culture. Keshab Chunder Sen, an early social reformer, spelt out, "... in the advent of the English nation in India we see a reunion of parted cousins, the descendants of two different families of the ancient Aryan race ...".[23]

Assiduous adulation of Sanskrit culture and the Aryan system of philosophy crippled the nationalists to revive the golden past from its miryclay. Some of the hard core nationalists strongly believed that the restoration of Hindu culture to its pristine glory would be the only way to achieve the national regeneration. They advocated nationalism as the religion's programme and galvanised the masses around religious symbols, idols and festivals.

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21   Romila Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice*, p.5.

22   Max Muller, *India, What it can Teach Us*, Oxford, 1888, p.15.

23   Quoted in Romila Thaper, *The Past and Prejudice*, p.9.

The Oriental scholar who were engaged in unearthing the Indian past had constituted a political India with fractured identities and conflicting histographies. Orientalism as a set of created theories and practices aided by its own institutions, imageries and vocabulary comprehended the history of the Orient, and transformed them into imagined categories. It developed the culture of the Orient into well-knit categories and imposed it upon the orient for colonial administrative needs.[24] Consequently, the local group were to perceive their society through the official spectacles, such as Brahmins and non-Brahmins, Muslims and Hindus, to obtain favours and privileges.[25]

European initiative in constructing South Indian History

Culture, language and literature were the integral part of a society. They were central to the formation of an ethnic identity consciousness of a group of people.[26] The construction of an identity a historical consciousness of a society largely grew out of the political necessity. The modern scientific study of South Indian history was initially undertaken by amateur evangelists and English administrators. The Jesuit missionaries, who came to South India in the late sixteenth century evinced keen interest in the local manners, habits, customs and institutions. They realised the need to acquire language proficiency in order to propagate the Gospel. Some of the Catholic monks like Robert De-Nobili (1577-1656) adopted the local Saivite life style and other missionaries like Ziezenbalg (1682-1719), C.J. Beschi (1680-1743) and G.U.Pope showed command over

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24   Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p.28.

25   Eugene F. Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, Madras, 1986, p.23.

26   Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, London, 1982, p.61.

local customs and language.[27] Contantius Beschi, an Italian monk, who came to South India in the late seventeenth century mastered Tamil in a decade. He himself authored a number of works in Tamil such as 'Vedavilakam' (explanatory work on the Bible), 'Vethiai-ozhukkam' (work on religious discipline for monks), 'Paramarthagurukathai' (fiction) and initiated the preparation of a Latin - Tamil lexicography. Besides this, his notable work 'Thempavani' an epic about the birth of Jesus Christ earned him a worthy place in the lineage of Tamil erudite Scholars in the modern period.[28] His works are said to have established a new literary tradition for the promotion of Christian literature in the Tamil language. He had undertaken the study of Tamil orthography and published a work in Latin called "A Grammar of the High Dialect of Tamil language, termed Shen-Tamil", to which is added an introduction to Tamil poetry. Later in 1822 it was translated into English by Benjamin Guy Babington for the benefit of Madras Civil Service. Many other missionaries, sent by various churches were actively involved in restoring Tamil Literature from its oblivion. Most often they attempted to construct the Tamil past as it was embedded in the literature. As a result they subscribed to the currency of hoary past and the autochthony of Tamil.

Language and culture rhetorics generally constituted the ideological premise for the germination of an ethnic or a racial consciousness. Missionary scholars who were involved in Tamil research were impelled by the exact logic and copious nature of Tamil. The well laid was ethics, systematic territorial classification and the invocation of the

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27   M.S.Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, Munnirpallam, 1929, pp.317-19, 330-32, 347-49.
      M.S.Purnalingam Pillai (1871-1933), a famous Tamil scholar was instrumental in starting a movement to urge, the government to establish a Tamil university. 'Tamil literature', 'Ravana - The Great' and 'Tamil India' were some of his remarkable treatises. He advanced the theory of "Lemuria" (the original land of Tamils).

28   Eugene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*, Berkeley, 1969, pp.280-81.

egalitarian principles found in Tamil literature provided the ideological conduct to conjure up a well founded civilization which got transmitted into the domain of historical antiquity.[29]

R.C.Caldwell (1819-1891) putative Dravidologist epitomised the quality and the direction of the missionaries linguistic enterprise. Efficiently putting his knowledge of epigraphy, philology and hagiography, he expounded on a theory of the golden past of Tamil civilization in the early period of the Christian era. Critically evaluating the Aryan civilization's impact on Tamil life, he challenged the established functional world view of caste system.[30]

Caldwell came to India with modicum of education to serve the society for the propagation of the Gospel. Like William Jones, within a short span of time he mastered all the native languages, manners and customs. He was known in Madras as a man of some authority in matters of Indian history, culture and ethnology. He published monographs, manuals and pamphlets on various social aspects. 'The Tinnevelly Shanars' published in 1849 and 'A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevelly' published in 1881 earned him considerable repute. However, R.C Caldwell was remembered in the political and academic circles as a pioneer in the field of philology for his noteworthy publication 'A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of languages'.

Bishop Caldwell, if not more than Max Muller, was mainly or partly responsible for the propagation of a racial myth based on linguistic affinity by providing political invective for the emergence of Dravidian rationalism in the early twentieth century.

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29   Ngugi Wa Thiongo, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London, 1986, p.7.

30   Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, Madras, 1976, p.59.

K.Siva Thambi rightly points out the period between 1856-1916 (1856 - publication of Caldwell's work) 1916 publication of 'Communal Manifesto' was the gestation or incubation period for the genesis of the Dravidian movement.[31] Caldwell's theory had transformed the conflict of social-genic into philologenic conflagration by pointing to geno-typical and pheno-typical difference.

Caldwell constructed a Tamil past purely based upon the literary evidence by corroborating to Sanskrit sources. He propounded a logical theory that "Tamil culture had a separate and independent existence before the Brahmins invaded South India".[32] It was this outline that latter provided valuable ammunition for those who sought to prove the antiquity and purity of Tamil. He categorically repudiated that the Dravidian languages were derived from Sanskrit as some, including the noted oriental scholar H.H.Wilson had suggested.[33] On the contrary, he contended that, "Sanskrit has not disdained to borrow... from its Dravidian neighbours".[34] He prepared a long list of words, based on their etymology and use and contended that Sanskrit also had freely borrowed the ideas and terms from its Dravidian neighbours. Paying rich tribute to Tamil linguistic elegance he said, "Tamil the most highly 'ab-intra' of all Dravidian idioms can disperse with its Sanskrit if need be, and not only stand alone, but flourish without its aid".[35] The hostility between Tamil and Sanskrit was not a new phenomenon and Tamil tried to keep herself from Sanskrit, influence from the very

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31   K.Sivathambi, *Understanding Dravidian Movement : Problems and Perspectives*, Madras, 1995, p.32.

32   Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, p.4.

33   Ibid., p.33.

34   Ibid., p.7.

35   Ibid., p.5.

inception. The classic nature of Tamil was viewed by its purity. Caldwell opined, "a Tamil political composition is regarded as in accordance with a good tasty and worthy of being called classical, not in proportion to the amount of Sanskrit it contains, as would be the case in some other dialects, but in proportion to its freedom from Sanskrit."[36]

Caldwell was one of the first missionary scholars to address the social conflict with definite categories. He dwelt deeply into the issue of Brahmin-non-Brahmin religious dichotomy and pointed out that it was the Brahmins who injected their "Puranic-Vedic" superstitious culture into Tamil life. He categorically mentioned that Brahmins had contributed nothing significant to Tamil culture. The language had been cultivated by "native Tamilians called Sudras by the Brahmins," who were "never conquered by the Brahmins".[37] Caldwell strongly advocated that the term 'Sudra' should be dropped and the name of each Dravidian caste according to the locality should be used.

Caldwell propounded his theory of Dravidian antiquity independent of Sanskrit culture on the basis of philological, linguistic and ethnological evidence. He made a careful study of the Tamil way of life and character and pointed out their propensity to philosophy, knowledge and enterpreneurship. He stated that, "wherever money is to be made, wherever a more apathetic or more aristocratic people is awaiting to be pushed aside, thither swarm the Tamilians, the Greeks or Scotch of East, the least superstitious and the most enterprising and persevering race of the Hindus."[38] Such emotive statements, coupled with eulogy and appreciation instilled the minds of the non-Brahmin scholars to pursue their cultural pedigree. These later became the watch words of the Dravidian movement.

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36   Ibid., p.79.

37   Ibid., p.60.

38   Ibid., p.7.

Following the line of Bishop Caldwell, another Scottish missionary G.U.Pope (1819-1907) made a valuable contribution towards the elevation of Tamil literature and Tamil religion as legitimate subjects of study. If Bishop Caldwell's work provided the ammunition for the emergence of the political identity of the non-Brahmins on the basis of their linguistic pedigree, it was G.U.Pope's sedulous English translation of "Thiruvasakam" which extended the ideological backdrop for the revival of the Saiva Siddhanta movement in Tamil Nadu. "Thiruvasakam" is one of the major works of the Saivite canon perhaps intended to take the place of the Upanishads, and there is decidedly no work in the Tamil language deserving that reputation. The whole work is known for the profundity of thought, earnestness of feeling and child-like trust in the divine grace of God.[39] Pope greatly enhanced the arguments in favour of antiquity and sophistication of Tamil culture by placing the Saiva Siddhanta religious system in a high position among world religions. He argued that Saivism was "the choicest product of the Dravidian intellect... and undoubtedly the pre-historic religion of South India."[40]

Rev. G.U.Pope contributed a number of meticulous articles to leading journals such as 'Royal Asiatic Quarterly', 'The Indian Antiquary', 'The Indian Magazine' and the 'Indian Review', which provided valuable information to both European and Indian scholars to pursue historical research in Tamil Nadu.

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39   J.M.Nallasamy Pillai, "Fundamental Elements of Hindu Civilization", *Saiva Siddhanta Deepika*, vol.8, 1904, p.313.
J.M.Nallasami Pillai (1860-1920), took to the study of the Saiva Siddhanta in 1894 and translated the Sivagnana Bodham with valuable notes in 1895. Two years hence he did like service, to "Tiru-Arul Payan" and started the 'Saiva Siddhanta Deepika' in 1897, which has irradiated the Tamil World with brilliant articles and translations. Besides this, he translated many Tamil literary works into English and started a movement for the propagation of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.

40   G.U. Pope (tr.), *The Tiruvacagam*, Oxford, 1900, p.iii.
G.U.Pope (1820-1907) another Scottish missionary scholar contributed much to the elevation of Tamil studies and Tamil religion as legitimate subjects of study for oriental scholars. He advanced the theory of Celtic origin of Tamil and considered Latin and Greek were her sisters.

The cultural and historical antiquity of the Tamils were constructed predominantly with the aid of Tamil literary sources. As a result, it necessitated English translation in order to enhance the course of research. Rev. G.U.Pope was instrumental in translating many Tamil works into English. Besides his notable work "Thiruvasakam" he translated a number of works such as Tirukurral, Naladiyar, Manimekalai and some selected portions from Purananurru and Purap Poral Venba Malai.

Many other missionary scholars like Rev. Loevanthal, Rev. Rottler, Rev. Hosuington, have done a commendable job in recuperating Tamil antecedents from the muddied past. Missionary scholars came to South India primarily to win souls for Christ, through preaching the Gospel. In the course of time they acquired the knowledge of the local culture and showed an assiduous interest in decoding and constructing the social history of the Tamils. History writing necessarily endowed with the purpose to read the need of the present into the past. Evangelists evolved a process by which the Tamil history was appropriated through literary sources. The Evangelists' construction was intended to provide an alternative historiographic agenda by giving a new rigour to it. Challenging the oriental conceptualisation about the cultural antiquity of the South India it established an alternative paradigm within the oriental historiography. It elevated the status of Tamil to that of Sanskrit and strongly advocated that Tamil can dispense with Sanskrit. In fact it went to the extent of claiming a universal status for Tamil. The Evangelist school of historiography liberated the Tamil past and claimed autochthonous status for Tamil. By doing so it had created a new critical consciousness among the local intelligentsia about their cultural antiquity. The missionary school of thought had provided ample political invective to the nascent local historians to look back at their culture and civilization with pride and dignity. However, such a historiographic construction cannot stand the test of time and scientific principles. Moreover, such a

mode of historiographic discourse, based upon literary sources, cannot provide the chronological rigour since the ancient Tamil literature was deeply buried in the coils of mythological imagination. A bare historiographic outline of the cultural antiquity gave the local intelligentsia a right direction to construct a history of their own. Colonial intervention and missionary perception about the local social categories politicised the ethnology of Tamil history.[41] Consequently, the history of modern colonial Tamil Nadu was dominated by the contending hegemonies for cultural superiority.

Colonial Initiative

The colonial understanding of the Tamil culture and the conception about their social life was very much interwoven with the material reality of the coloniser. The colonial authority had undertaken the project of constructing the history of the South, in order to establish their supremacy over the cultural life of the society. The oriental school of historiography had already appropriated the history of the northern part of India in the late eighteenth century for its colonial benefit. However, subsequent historical research has revealed the mystery concerning the cultural antiquity of the people. Tamil literature and the Puranas supply the relevant basic information about the culture and social life of the community. But they lacked a sense of history and chronological accuracy.[42] They also failed to provide sufficient data concerning the crucial aspects of the civilization. As a result other scientific methods of research were required for the construction of South Indian history.

The early archaeological, epigraphical and numasmatic research gave ample proof to establish the cultural antiquity of the South. They confirmed the fact of the possibility

41   Eugene F. Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, p.78.

42   V.R.Dikshitar, *Origin and Spread of Tamils*, Madras, 1947, p.7.

of human existence in the neolithic age in the South. The study of pre-history with the notice of "Panducoolies" by Marria Graham (1811) and Babington (1833) set the research on a firm footing.[43] Congreve's report on graves and geologist Newbolds' 1936 report on Bellary mounds instilled the hope for further progress. The advent of Bruce Foote accelerated the process of archaeological excavations and topographical observations in South India.

Bruce Foote was a palaeontologist cum geologist, familiar with the developments in Europe and reached India in 1858. His discovery, five years later of stone implements in laterite deposits near Madras opined a new epoch in India's pre-history. He continued his works for thirty three years, making important discoveries wherever he went; excavation played little part in his work and his methods comprised topographical observation, surface collections on a large scale, and topological analysis. His "Notes on the Ages and Distribution of Antiquities (Madras 1916) based on many years of study of his vast collections offers a monumental reconstruction of the various stages of pre-historic culture of India."[44]

Brue Foote examined, along with William King Jr., the most important pre-historic burial places covering over hundred and fourteen acres of land at Adichanallar on the southern bank of the Tambraparni in Tinnevelly district. These graves at Adichanallar are to be dated to the early Iron age which succeeded the neolithic age in South India. However, Nilakanta Sastri argues that "Many of the sites and objects he (Bruce Foote) assigned to later Iron age are now seem to belong to the early historic or medieval periods."[45]

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43   Ibid., p.17.

44   Nilakanta Sastri, *Sources of Indian History*, p.64.

45   Ibid., p.68.

J.W.Brooks, another English scholar made startling discovery in the Nilgris plateau by opening many old cairns and described them in his important work entitled "Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris". Rea of Madras Archaeological Department also worked extensively and collected a number of artifacts of the prehistoric antiquities for the Madras Museum.

In the field of epigraphical research, a considerable progress was achieved by the 1860s. Hultzsch and A.C.Burnell, pioneers in this field collected a number of inscriptions and collated them for historical research. Fleet, Burgess, Buhler were some of the leading epigraphists who collected thousands of 'inscriptions' and brought out a 'Volume of Inscriptions' containing valuable information.[46] Kidhorn published a volume of 'Epigraphic Indica' in which he made a comparative study of the chronology of the early 'Pandias' on the basis of inscriptional data and astronomic calculations. 'Numismatics' as a genuine branch of scientific historical research also attracted due attention. Hultzsch, Nelson Wright, Richard Burn and Rev. Loevanthal collected a lot of coins of Madura Naika, Vijayanagara and of the early 'Pandias'. They prepared a periodical catalogue of coins ranging from second century A.D. to sixteenth century A.D. Coling Mackenzie's manuscript collection of seven volumes provided valuable information about the coins of early 'Pandias'.

A new approach was set to be framed in constructing the chronological sequence of various dynasties who ruled South India on the basis of recently acquired historical evidences. A.C.Burnell prepared a 'South Indian Inscriptions' volume where he made an attempt to chronologically organise the information culled out from many Chola

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46   S.M.Fazhullah Sahib Bahadur and T.Chandrasekaran (eds.), "Introduction", *Bulletin of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library*, vol.1, no.1, Madras, 1948, p.14.

inscriptions.[47] Hultzsch in his volume, extensively used inscriptional records to construct the chronology of various South Indian Royal dynasties. However, many of their historical conclusions, germane to the chronological tables were proved wrong since they relied too much on conjectures and assumptions to fill the gaps whenever they occurred.[48] In the late nineteenth century a new thrust was given to historical research by establishing the Tamilian Archaeological Society and instituting a 'chair' for archaeology at the Madras University.[49] This facilitated many native scholars to undertake sedulous research in unearthing the ancient past.

The colonial undertaking was largely premised on establishing the Imperial hegemony over the native society by denying the legitimate access to their ancient past. Its primary agenda was not only to appropriate the history of the colony but also to emphasise the necessity for colonial control thereby denying the validity of indigenous history. It developed a rationale based on certain ideological underpinnings for colonial social engineering which created, in turn, a base for the colonial perception of the self alternatively.[50] As a matter of fact the natives viewed their own history through the colonial prison. A culture without vitality, a language devoid of virility; a religion replete with credulity; a society marred by the caste system and a past without meaning, that constitute the candours of colonial historiography. Indeed, the colonial historiography was a history of turbulence descended as a benign gift of metropolitan

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47   V.R.Dikshitar, *Origin and Spread of Tamils*, p.28.

48   Sundaram Pillai, *Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature on the Age of Tirujana-Sambandha*, pp.14-15.

49   Ibid., p.ii.

50   Partha Chatterjee, *The Nationalism and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories*, New Delhi, 1984, p.104.

liberal culture which subsequently transformed the conquest into a historical necessity for the emancipation of the East from its cultural stagnancy.[51]

The colonial construction of Indian historiography was not a product which emerged out of its commitment to the progress of the colony. On the contrary, it was evolved in a bid to meet the administrative needs and to create an ideological currency to maximise the profit through effective mechanism.[52] It was a concerted effort on the coloniser's part to vindicate the necessity for re-structuring the native society on the European model. By doing so it could do away with all intermediary interference in the administrative system. Discussing the nodal point of the colonial historiography agenda, R.Guha laconically opined that the knowledge which the colonial master's were so eager to acquire was basically concerned with information about "the volume and value of agricultural produce, the rules for appropriation of the producer's surplus by landlords and the state, the nature of land tenures and proprietary institutions, the technicalities of estate accounts and above all, the laws and traditions governing the relationship of peasants, landlords and the state."[53] The colonial production of various social and administrative categories were so effectively put into use that the natives were finally forced to seek redress from the metropolitan idioms.[54] Yet another ideological vantage point was that the natives were imagined, within the colonial domain, to be morally bankrupt, who were to be tamed and trained along European lines. Based upon this imperial hegemonic discourse the colonial bureaucracy, army and judiciary were hierarchically organised on racial lines by denying the natives their legitimate rights.

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51   Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony*, pp.113-14.

52   R.Guha, *An Indian historiography of India*, p.5.

53   Ibid., p.7.

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The political use of historiography can be considered as crucial to the colonial agenda. It equipped the colonial authority to divide the society by divesting upon them various categories and labels, thereby creating social tension in the country. This invariably went into its aid to justify the colonial presence. Moreover, the state apparatus was effectively used in aiding the emergency of communal perception on the basis of their imagined categories. This can be demonstrated by pointing to the communal functioning of the administrative machinery.[55] Paddison, the collector of Madura district, based on past record, issued an order declaring the caste men of the Kallar community as a criminal tribe (numerically a preponderant caste group in the southern districts). Therefore, they were asked to give their finger prints to the colonial authority.[56] Finally, the colonial perception about the society was effectively mediated by official reports, school text books and the census reports which led to the social resurgence - the dilemma of cultural crisis began to erupt in the intellectual milieu.

Indigenous Intellectual Response

The intellectual base and the ideological premises were inextricably linked with their perception of the material reality and their concern for social issues. The colonial intelligentsia, the product of Macaulay's mechanism began to view their society through the colonial prism. Strongly impelled by the modern ethics and scientific principles they realised the prevalent social practice and religious beliefs prevalent in the nineteenth century were responsible for cultural stagnancy. The diffusion of European knowledge and ideals, the missionary contact and the self-awareness of their social backwardness created an intellectual quest among the youth educated in English. A spirit of critical

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55   Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony*, p.4.

56   *Swadesamitran*, 27 November 1915.

thinking in them generated a new impetus and vigour to revitalise their society. Majumdar points out:

> A new ideology suddenly burst forth upon the static life, moulded for centuries by a fixed set of religious ideas and social convention. It gave birth to a critical attitude towards religion and a spirit of inquiry into the origins of the state and society with a view to determining the proper scope and function.[57]

They strongly believed their social redemption lay in reforming their religious and social customs. As a result, they evolved a strategy of cultural defence in order to make their society more viable to the onslaught of European strictures.

During the same period, the intellectual reaction in Tamil Nadu to social evils was qualitatively and cumulatively different from the situation in Bengal.[58] Owing to its unique cultural and social differences, the region witnessed a new upheaval based on ethic and linguistic affiliations. Instilled by Tamil consciousness and Dravidian identity, the intellectuals embarked in rediscovering their pristine glory as it was embedded in Tamil literature. Their comparative analysis of the present with the past provided a nascent ideology for the genesis of a cultural movement which in the course of time was transformed into a political movement.[59] The intellectuals created a sense of community consciousness by invoking their antiquarian symbols and cultural rhetoric of their golden past. They invented necessary traditions and created deliberate artifacts which were capable of withstanding the historical inquiry and partly to rouse sheer imagination of their ancestral pride.

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57   R.C.Majumdar (ed.), *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, vol.10, pt. II, Bombay, 1965, p.84.

58   K.Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905-1944*, Madurai, 1980, pp.9-10.

59   R.L.Hardgrave, *The Dravidian Movement*, Bombay, 1965, pp.37-38.

Integral to the ongoing cultural revival there was a deep cry and urge from intellectual quarters to reconstruct the history of Tamil on scientific lines in the light of available evidences. Many Tamil ideologues who were trained in the European model of education got involved in unearthing the Tamil past. Prominent among them was P.Sundaram Pillai, who made a sedulous attempt to organise a group of historians who would undertake the task of reconstructing the history of the Tamils. He proposed a plan to go to Ooty along with other avowed historians for a couple of months to do their job. Emphasising the desideratum in his epistle dated March 15, 1855 to J.M. Nallaswamy Pillai, he wrote:

> ... I don't hope to make converts soon, but is well to make a start.... Please instruct how I could make impression upon them. I trust you can write to such of them as you have influence with, so as to prepare them to give me a learning. I want to do my work in a quiet, silent and private fashion. It would be enough if they are led to think that I have paid some attention to the history of the Tamils, and feel keenly their fallen condition. The rest will follow in due course when I shall have matured my scheme.[60]

He shared his early historical findings, through correspondence, with his friends and earnestly sought their opinions in persuing his efforts. Many scholars who corresponded with him like V.P.Subramania Mudaliar, Ponnambalam Pillai and J.M.Nallaswamy Pillai published his opinion about various historical aspects germaine to Tamil society, from his letters and manuscripts.

Sundaram Pillai, one of the founders of Tamil historiography, gave a new momentum, life and impetus to the chronological order of early Tamil history. He was perhaps one of the pioneering epigraphist who widely used the minute information derived from inscriptions to construct a social and cultural history of Tamil. He had no parallel in collating and corroborating various sources to establish the authenticity of the

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60   'A letter by P.Sundaram Pillai to J.M.Nallaswami Pillai', appeared in *The Tamil Antiquary*, vol.1, no.7, 1907, p.L.

historical evidence. Born in 1855 at Aleppy in Malabar district, he graduated in philosophy from Madras University and dedicated most of his spare time in recuperating the Tamil past from various sources.[61] Rai Bahadur Sundaram Pillai was held in high esteem by both European and Indian scholars for his erudite scholarship and integrity of thought. He contributed a number of articles to the Madras Literary Review, Indian Antiquary, Royal Asiatic Society Journal of Great Britain, pertaining to social ethnology of Dravidian, elements of Hindu civilization, cultural anthropology of Tamil and Chronology of Tamil literature. Besides this, his monumental work 'Manonmaniyam', a Tamil drama and the historiographic treatise on 'Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature' were some of the splendid works in their respective fields.

Sundaram Pillai initiated the process of critically evaluating the various historiographic works brought out by Oriental scholars. His reading revealed many inconsistencies, historical fallacies and misinterpretations of facts made by many colonial scholars. Sentimentally moved by the fallen state of the Tamils and their forgotten historical traditions, he paid individual attention in formulating his theories in a calm fashion. However, his premature death at the age of 42 precluded him to complete his task. Many of his views on historical aspects were published posthumously from his manuscripts by his friends.

He strongly refuted the Oriental charge that ancient Indian literature is completely devoid of historical spirit. The idea of history in ancient times was for universal application, therefore they never bothered to give the names of authors and the date of publication. Sundaram Pillai opined, "Tamil writers, like Hindu writers in general, hide their individuality in the shade of their writings. Even the names of most of them are unknown. They seem to have regarded individual celebrity, like individual existence,

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61   M.S. Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, p.322.

as worthless and absorption into the universal spirit of the classical literature of their country as the highest good to which their composition could aspire."[62] He strongly refuted the allegation that, "Old and true Tamil literature is as barren of historical import as is generally assumed." He strongly believed that Sangam literature was the treasure of reliable historical evidences with which the entire Tamil cultural and social history can be constructed beyond the pale of controversy. He rightly points out that old Tamil literature "furnish us with much historical information which is waiting only to be gathered up and collated, to yield the most reliable data for reconstructing extinct societies and social conditions."[63]

Emphasising the fact that the historical spirit and antiquarian spirit to a great degree even critical spirit, are developments of modern times, he stressed the need for high scholarship and proficiency in the classical languages to assign the data and chronology to various historical events. He categorically stated that "a critical study of this dialect (Tamil-classical) and of this literature would certainly, under ordinary circumstances be held as a prerequisite for conducting South Indian antiquarian researches."[64] He was very apprehensive about Hultzsch's views about South Indian historical research as it would lead to misgivings and wrong conclusion. Hultzsch held that, "a colloquial knowledge of one of the vernaculars with a slight smattering of one of Sanskrit is sufficient for editing successfully the records of bygone times."[65] Mastery over its literature was "too extensive and complicated to be composed without

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62   P.Sundaram Pillai, *Some Mile Stones in the History of Tamil Literature on the Age of Tirujana Sambandha*, p.27.

63   Ibid., p.28.

64   Ibid., p.25.

65   Ibid., pp.9-10.

years of patient study and prolonged attention. As a result, many of the foreign scholars felt that these literary records are utterly devoid of historical implications. Owing to their poor acquaintance with the language they sometime made veritable mistakes in their historical works. Sundaram Pillai pointing out a passage from the eleventh Encyclopaedia Britannica on Tamil literature written by A.C.Burnell wrote thus, "a work supposed to contain nothing but reliable matter. But the passage in question is a veritable nest of errors."[66] In his passage about 'Verasoliyam', Burnell added a curious list of books which was "its own best condemnation. It is full of enigmatic conundrums."[67] A.C. Burnell mistook 'Kaliveruttam' as a work for metre; 'Kandigai' for mode of exposition; 'Manipravalam' for poetic diction and 'Tirumaniu-valaru' for an initial phrase of a particular stanza.

What was central to the argument was the choice of evidence and the method of scrutiny, all the historical facts cannot be obtained on the basis of a single evidence however reliable it may be.[68] The authenticity of the fact must be deduced from composite study of various sources relating to the matter. Implicit reliance on a particular source would lead to ineluctable historical distortion.[69] Burnell had committed the same mistake while writing about Tamil Literature. Having heavily relied upon Hieun Tsiang's statement that Tamils were indifferent to literature worthy of preservation before the eighth century (Hieun Tsiang's visit), and he emphatically wrote in 'Encyclopaedia' that Tamil literature arose under North-Indian influences and "it is nothing more than exact copy, if there be any originality, it is in some of the similar and

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66   Ibid., p.7.

67   Ibid., pp.10-11.

68   Eric J. Bobsbawm (ed.), *The History of Marxism*, New Delhi, 1982, p.9.

69   R.G.Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford, 1994, p.69.

turns of expression only."[70] In support of his dogmatic statement he had nowhere

given any proof. Pointing to all inconsistent fanciful conjectures, often employed by

foreign scholars owing to their lack of in-depth knowledge, he strongly made an appeal

to native scholars to undertake the task of retrieving Tamil history from the clouds of

imagination, and warned that "if they fail to imbibe the historical spirit of modern times,

and do not stir themselves to help forward the researches made regarding their own

antiquities, they will themselves to thank, if their favourite language and literature are

condemned and thrown overboard."[71]

Sundaram Pillai set a precedence by involving himself in reconstructing the

chronological order of the South Indian history. He widely used the so-called collateral

evidences like Tamil literature, Temple edicts and popular oral tradition. In his small

treatise 'Some Mile-Stones in the History of Tamil Literature on the Tirujnana-

Sambandha' (posthumously published in 1909), he set out to establish the age of

Tirujnana Sambandha who was responsible for the Hindu revivalism in the medieval

period. However it is difficult to establish the age of Sambandha beyond the pale of

controversy created by ambiguous sources. Opinion among the scholars about his age

ran between 1320 BC and 1292 AD[72] which created a confusion and according to

Sundaram Pillai "This is certainly very curious: and I am not sure whether we can find

the like of it in the whole range of history."

In the course of arguments he gives a broad outline about Tamil Literature of the

Saivas in a chronological sequence. He also made an attempt to trace an outline of the

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70   P.Sundaram Pillai, *Some Mile Stones in the History of Tamil Literature on the Age of Tirujana-Sambandha*, pp.10-11.

71   Ibid., p.17.

72   Ibid., p.14.

religious history of Southern India with a view to fix the relative ages of the Sambandha, Sankara and Ramanuja. He concludes that Sambandha, after careful deduction, could not have lived in any period later than the early years of the seventh century.

Sambandha, a prominent Saiva Saint and a lyric poet, whose age marked the revival of Hinduism with new vigour and the decline of Buddhism. Fixing a definite date for Sambandha would certainly enable the historians to situate the South Indian History in a firm chronological footing. Sundaram Pillai in his arguments systematically proved the unfounded nature of the hypothesis advocated by various scholars based upon their own evidences. However, Bishop Caldwell and Nelson's theory deserves special mention for they have promised their arguments upon more judicious and reliable evidences. Caldwell's theory was based on two assumptions - first that Kun Pandya's name was Sundara Pandya, who was converted to Saivism by Sambandha which has not been contested. But his second assumption that Sundara Pandya is identical with the Sender Bendi of Marco Polo, that reigned in 1292, was challenged. Sundaram Pillai held the view that the deity at Madura is called Sundara, and Sundara Pandya was a common appellation to all the king's who ruled Madura as that of Sri Padmanabhadasa the rulers of Travancore. He seemed to have complained about Caldwell's theory as it distorted the historical contingency and the fact did not correspond to the reality. The fact of the matter was that during the rule of Kun Pandya, Buddhism was the prevailing religion, though on the point of decline as borne by the hymns of Sambandha. On the whole the theory attempted to comprehend the great span of historical changes within a period of 32 years before the invasion of Malik Naib Kafur in the year 1324 A.D. Sundaram Pillai contending Caldwell's postulate declaimed "within short space of thirty two years, the Buddhistic religion with its widespreading organisation, half a dozen holy orders and thousands of monks in each, all disappeared as if by magic, and the ready made Saiva

religion stepped into its place, with its richly endowed temples with golden images, and outer walls having fourteen towers! If such a theory does not violate all the analogies of history, I wonder what can!"[73] He further dismissed Nelson's theory on the same ground as it violated all the norm and logic of historical contingency. Thus he made a path breaking attempt by discovering a few milestones in setting the chronology of South Indian History beyond the pale of conjectures and speculations.

Sundaram Pillai was perhaps the first native scholar who went into the imperatives of Aryan-Dravidian polemics to retrieve a unique identity for Tamils. Strongly intoxicated with Tamil Saiva pride, he argued that the Brahmins through their cunning and diabolic process were injecting their own ideals to 'Aryanise' the 'Dravidian' religion. Subsequently, Tamils were alienated from their own religious practices. To use Sundaram Pillai's words "...Most of what is ignorantly called Aryan Philosophy, Aryan civilization, is literally Dravidian or Tamilian at bottom. The idea of 'Jenmana', of 'Karma', of 'Maya' and of 'Arul' or Divine Grace, can be directly proved to be ours, and most of the great thinkers and philosophers and even poets who pass for Aryan are our men, as European are now beginning to find out."[74] A careful study of the elements of Hindu civilization certainly confirm the fact, that what was known as Aryan on the surface was actually the 'choicest product of the Dravidian intellect'. Therefore, the real historical research should begin from South in order to ascertain the fact for the construction of Indian civilization from its original place rather than from Indus or Gangetic plain. He emphatically exhorted that "...The scientific historians of India, then,

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73   Ibid., pp.17-19.

74   V.P.Subramania Mudaliar, "A Critical Review of the Story of Ramayan and an Account of South Indian Castes based on the view of the Late Prof. P.Sundaram", *The Tamilian Antiquary*, vol.1, no.2, p.2.

ought to begin his study with the basin of the Krishna, of the Cauvery, of the Vaigei rather than with the Gangetic plain as it has been now long, too long the fashion."[75]

A search for an unique identity in the hoary past created an ethnic and cultural consciousness among the people. Question about one's own identity came to dominate the construction of history such as 'who were the Tamils?'; To which race did they belong?; were they antochthonous of Tamilagam of historical times; Or the immigrants from outside India. If they were migrants, where did they come from?; and with what races of people did they co-mingle in the early stages of their history. Scholars who worked in this area by giving free flight to their fanciful imagination postulated Grand theory which adumbrates a very distant past of their ancestors. On the other hand many modern meticulous historians totally discard all these theories as being too fantastic and speculative in its charter. The political and cultural need of the late nineteenth century India instigated the indigenous intellectuals to evolve a strategy of cultural defence. The spirit of investigation already kindled the atavistic spirit among the English educated intelligentsia. The caste ridden Tamil society haunted by cultural identity began to react sharply under aegis of colonial authority. This, first got articulated on the academic plain and subsequently it spread to other areas.[76]

Following the footsteps of Sundaram Pillai many other indigenous scholars developed the Tamil historiography through their writings on the same lines. V.Kanakasabhai's "The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago" published in 1904, had extensively dealt with the origin and spread of Tamil. Following 'Whig' model of historiography, he developed his arguments on the lines of Tamil ethno-centricism.

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75   Ibid., p.4.

76   Marguerite Ross Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*, Princeton, 1976, p.83.

Rejecting the European scholars opinion about the Sangam of ninth century, he situated the third Tamil Academy (Sangam Age) between AD 50 and AD 150.[77]

V.Kanakasabhai forcefully argued, "From a careful study of ancient Tamil poems, I am led to think that some of the earliest works were undoubtedly composed more than two thousand years ago, and that the Tamil people acquired wealth and civilization at this early period by their commercial intercourse with foreign nations such as the Arabs, Greeks, Romans and Javanese."[78] Owing to political stability and material prosperity, there was a spurl in the literary activity throughout the Tamil kingdom. About fifty literary works of this age have thrown a 'flood of light amidst the gloom and uncertainty in which the ancient history of the country is shrouded.' Kanakasabhai widely using the corpus of Tamil literatures had constructed the Dynastic history of three Tamil kings. Central to his argument was the prudent postulate about the Mongolian origin and the spread of Tamil from Central Asia via Bengal to Peninsular India. Mongolian theory holds that "the Dravidians had lived somewhere on the plateau of central Asia along with the Mongolians before they entered India by the north-eastern passes from Tibet or Nepal, or by the way of Assam and the Tennaserim provinces."[79] According to him the aboriginal inhabitants of South India were the Villavas (Bowmen) and Minavas (fishermen). They were conquered by a highly civilized race called the Nagas who hailed from Central Asia. They were very good weavers and from them the Aryans learnt their alphabets which thenceforth was known as Dev-Nagari.[80]

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77   V.Kanaka Sabhai Pillai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, Madras 1904, p.3.
      Kanaka Sabai Pillai (1847-1903), a noted historian contributed a number of articles to Madras review. He too undertook translation, the task of translating many tamil works into English.

78   Ibid., p.7.

79   Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol.1 (A&B), Madras, 1909, p.lix.

80   V.Kanakasabhai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, p.41.

Kanakasabhai was of the opinion that the Maravas, Eyinas, Oliyas, Oviyas, Aruvalas and the Paratavars mentioned in the Tamil Works of the academic period belonged to the above Naga race, and they had always been hostile to the Dravidian Tamils. Subsequently, these Nagas were in their turn conquered by a Mongolian race called Tamilitti or the Tamils migrated from the place called Tamralipti which lies on the bank of Rupnarayan River 12 miles above its junction with the Hughli mouth of the Ganges. They came to the south of India along the East Coast in 4 bands. The earliest of whom he considers to be 'Marar' who founded the Pandya Kingdom. The second were the 'Thirayar' tribe of the Cholas and the 'Vanavar' a mountainous tribe from Bengal, who were the ancestors of Chera Kings; and the fourth and the last the 'Kosar' tribe of the Kongu country. In this way he accounts for the origin of the four ancient Tamil Kingdoms.[81]

Kanakasabhai further went on to explicate the cultural synthesis created by Nagas and Dravidians. As the Tamil immigrants came into southern India at distant intervals of time and in separate tribes and were fewer in number than the aboriginal Nagas and Dravidians, they had to adopt ancient Dravidian language and in the course of time they modified and refined it into the language now known as Tamil.

Kanakasabhai strongly argued that Tamil had attained a high degree of civilization long before the advent of the Aryans in South India. They developed their language without borrowing any idea from Sanskrit which can be adduced by the copious and exact nature of Tamil. They cultivated the art of Music, Grammar, Astronomy and even abstract philosophy with the help of Mongolian tribes. They borrowed the ideas of philosophy and natural sciences from China since they had direct intercourse with them. Moreover, pointing to philological affinity, he argued that the Tamil language, unlike

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81   Ibid., pp.44-45.

other Dravidian dialects, abounds in words with nasal letters such as *nga, nja* and *nna*; which reflect the Chinese influence in Tamil. The peculiar letter *Rzha* (La) found in Tamil alphabet does not appear in any one of the Indo-Aryan or Dravidian languages. Therefore, it might have been brought by Tamil migrants from Trans-Himalayan region. Kankasabhai developed his hypothesis on the delicate literary linguistic, prehistoric and Anthropomatry evidences. However, no reliable historical evidence support the theory of yellow race for Tamils, as suggested by Kanakasabhai.

Kanakasabhai's theory was contested by various scholars as it had violated all historical cannons of logical consistency. Quoting from various Tamil literary works, M.Srinivasa Aiyangar argued that Nagas were merely a martial tribe and not civilized and the term 'Naga' was given by Aryans to any aboriginal tribe in southern India.[82] Echoing the same sentiments Captain Forbes also opined that the scattered remnants of the black aboriginal race (Nagas) were either exterminated or found a last refuge in the most inaccessible forests and mountains.[83] Sir H.Risley, an ethnologist, also denigrated that long headed people with black complexion could not have come from one region of the earth which is exclusively people by races with broad heads and yellow complexion.[84]

Kanakasabhai's theory of Tamil race provided valuable ammunition for the construction of caste history. Various caste historians claim Kshatriyas or high status for their community on the basis of Kanakasabhai's argument. His theory became crucial for the creation of political myth in the early twentieth century. Integral to the part of

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82   M.Srinivasa Aiyangar, *Tamil Studies*, Madras, 1914, pp.23-25.
       M.Srinivasa Aiyangar (1877-1936) a noted archaeologist and Tamil scholar made a breakthrough in establishing Tamil literary chronological order in a firm footing.

83   *Census Report*, Madras, 1891, p.112.

84   Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, p.xxiii.

construction of the past, questions about the early abode of the Tamils and the origin of their ethnic stock were widely addressed. Many Tamil intellectuals developed sophisticated theories to display a distant past of Tamils. Somasundara Bharati, Maraimalai Adigal, M.S.Purnalingam Pillai and some European scholars adumberated a golden past based upon anthropomatory and literary evidences. Prominent among them was Limurian theory which at least antedated the Tamil past around 10,000 B.C. No dependable historical cannon has spelt about it.[85] However, the hoary past advocated by the Limurian theory was effectively put into use for the creation of Tamil identity-consciousness by Dravidian ideologues.

Brahmin Reaction

Identity crisis and ideological differences are crucial to any social conflict. Contesting identities and conflicting ideologies cannot arrive at a consensus unless considerable compromise is made on the cultural terrain.[86] Unlike other Indian Provinces the Brahmins (only twice born caste) in Madras Presidency failed to evolve a strategy of cultural defence in order to meet the new social requirements. Their indifferent attitude to social reform generated a reactionary attitude among other social groups which, in the course of time, resulted in a cultural conflict in the social terrain.

Brahmin scholars made a significant contribution to the growth of Tamil language and the promotion of history research in South India. Generally, they followed an approach of cultural development of Tamil within the paradigm of pan-Indian civilization. Their identification with the Northern Aryans and Sanskrit considerably precluded them

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85   K.K.Pillai, *A Social History of the Tamils*, vol.1, Madras, 1975, pp.43-44.

86   Tennis C.Martin, paper prepared for the conference on *Ethnicity, Identity and Nationalism in South Africa*, 1993, p.7.

from aligning themselves with the native caste Hindu scholars to conjure up a hoary past.[87] Consequently, they had to disassociate themselves from subscribing to Dravidian ideology which created an indissoluble cultural dichotomy culminating into a power struggle in political arena.

M.Srinivasa Iyengar in his starling work "Essays on the History of the Tamil People, language, Religion and Literature" published in 1914, Madras, alluded to have given a new interpretation to the term Dravida. He begins by saying, "According to Sanskrit Pandits 'Dravida' was the name of a particular tract of country in South and it is so defined in the 'Sabdokalpadruma' on the authority of the Mahabharata."[88] He went on to explain the term 'Dravida' to denote the land in which Tamil is spoken, an inhabitant of the land and finally a class of Brahminical tribe of South India called 'Panja Dravida'.

The Tamil speaking non-Brahmins have always called themselves Tamilars but never Dravidas. And the Tamil Brahmins who called themselves the 'Mahajanam' or the 'great men' were, and even now are known to the other Brahmins of India as 'Dravidas'. The appellation of Dravida was always used to denote Tamil Brahmin. Sankarachary who was a great Sanskrit scholar and religious reformer, refers to Trigana Sambandha a Brahmin Saivite Saint and Tamil poet as Dravida Sisu (Dravida child).[89]

The South Indian Brahmins developed an elaborate social ritual code called Dravida-Sampradayam to maintain their caste purity and cultural supremacy over other

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87   E.Sa. Viswanatham, "The Emergence of Brahmins in South India: With Special Reference to Tamil Nadu", in S.N. Mukerjee (ed.), *Indian History and Thought: Essays in Honour of A.L.Basham*, Calcutta, 1982, pp.287-88.

88   M.Srinivasa Iyengar, *Essays on the History of the Tamil People, Language, Religion and Literature*, Madras, 1914, p.3.

89   Ibid., p.7.

castes. M.S.Iyengar further went on to question the validity of Caldwell's use of Dravida term as a corruption or sanskritised form of Tamil. Literally the term Dravida in Sanskrit means a retreat. Therefore, such a term could not be used on a well cultivated language. C.Damodaran Pillai also pointed out "Is it possible for a language to have no native name until one was given to it by Aryans, especially when it was the mother tongue of a tolerably civilized race."[90] Srinivasa Iyengar was of the view that Tamils initially migrated from Central Asia, had entered by the North Western passes to the Indus Valley. In the latter period they were again pushed by the non-Aryan races from the north to the present Dravidian country after the Mahabharata war in the eleventh century BC. He maintained that the Tamils and Aryans never came on to a head on collision for the territory. 'Dasyus' (enemies of Aryans), mentioned in the Rig Vedas as 'Dravidian non-Aryan' who were later subjugated by Aryan settlers and designated them as 'Sudras'. On the other hand, the Dravidas of south were friendly forest folk who helped the Aryan hero Rama in his expedition to Ceylon.[91]

Srinivasa Iyengar strongly disapproved the theory of Aryan colonisation as propounded by non-Brahmin scholars. Aryans and Dravidians maintained a peaceful relationship since the period of Ramayana. Aryan settlers contributed their religious and philosophical ideas to Tamil. It was more of cultural assimilation than colonial subjugation. He strongly criticised the newly emerged Tamil ethnic historiography for its alleged attack on the Aryan Sanskrit culture. To quote his words, "Their object has been to disown and disprove any trace of indebtedness to the Aryans, to exalt the civilization of the ancient Tamils, to distort in the name of historic research current traditions and literature and to pooh-pooh the views of former scholars which support

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90   Ibid., pp.13-14.

91   Ibid., p.24.

Brahminization of the Tamil race."[92] Brahmin scholars equally contributed to the growth of Tamil culture and literature and made it one of the classical languages of the East. He opined that "It is enough for the present to remind them (inventors of new Dravidian culture devoid of Aryan influence) that the earliest grammarians of Tamil were Brahmins, their first spiritual instructors were Brahmins, and their first teachers of philosophy were also Brahmins."[93]

Maintaining Brahminization as the major force in making Tamil civilization, S.Krishnaswami Aiyangar held the view that South India was a mere marshy jungle and the reclamation was started by the Aryans who migrated there at a later period, and he categorically stated that, "The history of peninsular India begins... somewhat later than that of Hindustan, for the Dravidian civilization of the south though much more ancient than its history, owes its history to Aryan immigration, as much as does North India."[94] Many other Brahmin scholars strongly believed that the use of Sanskrit was determinantal to the growth of Tamil. Tamil cannot function without retaking recourse to Sanskrit. All the philosophy and literature available in Tamil were mere replica of Sanskrit. Echoing this view, another Brahmin scholar R.Swaminathan Aiyar wrote, "What are known as Dravidian languages are in all their present essential features a creation of Aryan and Aryanised immigrants from the North.... It also follows... that the tradition about Agastya's immigration to the South is not a mere myth and that what

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92   Ibid., p.46.

93   Ibid., p.42.

94   S.Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Ancient India*, Madras, 1911, p.5.

is known as Dravidian civilization of the South is merely the civilization of the Aryanised immigrants."[95]

P.T.Srinivasa Aiyangar a strong advocate of cultural and even racial continuity of the people of India, elucidated that the dialect spoken during the Neolithic age throughout India was akin to the Dravidian family of languages 'and not to Sanskrit or Prakrit and which might have been evolved from the holophrastic dialect of very primitive people.'[96] According to him the Dravidian race and Tamil people were indigenous to the Peninsular India. Their language was evolved where it was spoken. It was cultivated by the native Tamils and reached its high water mark during the Sangam age. Emphasizing the exclusive character of Tamil, PTS Aiyangar observed, "Of the languages now spoken in India, Tamil reached a high stage of development in very early times. It grew uninfluenced by Sanskrit and its speakers reached a high level of culture long ago."[97] He further exhorted a careful perusal of Tamil sources to enable us to construct the history of South India in particular and the whole of India in general for more than five millenniums ago.

Many of the Brahmin scholars in the early twentieth century tried to slough-off their identification with Sanskrit and established themselves as the joint partners of the Tamil research along with the non-Brahmins. Suriyanarayana Sastri was perhaps the first scholar to advocate the idea of de-sanskritisation of Tamil. He was one among the pioneers who initiated pure Tamil movements along with Maraimalai Adigal. He made a concerted effort to coin new Tamil terms and equivalent words to expunge the use of

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95   Quoted in N.Subramaniyan, "Emergence and Eclipse of Tamil Brahmins", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.4, nos.28, 29, 30, July 1969, pp.1133-34. See also Eugene F.Ivschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, p.299.

96   P.T.Srinivasa Aiyangar, *The Past in the Present*, p.14.

97   Ibid., p.18.

Sanskrit from Tamil prose. His love for Tamil can be attributed from the change of his own name to a Tamil equivalent 'Parithimakalaingar' from Sanskrit. Following the footsteps of Sundaram Pillai, he made an attempt to revive the Tamil drama to its pristine glory. He wrote a number of plays including 'Rupvati', 'Kalavati' and 'Mana Vijayam' which heralded a new era in the Tamil theatre. His treatise dramaturgy, a grammar on the drama, introduced a new pattern and vigour in line with the modern drama. S.Sastri's "History of Tamil Language", was the first work in the direction of Tamil Philology which created a new enthusiasm among the native scholars.[98] U.V.Swaminatha Aiyar (1855-1942) another Brahmin scholar did meritorious service by retrieving the Sangam work from its imminent destruction. After making a careful study of the various mutilated and fragmented manuscripts he brought out the first printed editions of eight major works in 1905, which contributed a corpus of information for the construction of Tamil antiquity. He assiduously urged the Government to grant classic status to Tamil thereby making it a compulsory subject in the university curriculum. In spite of Brahmin scholar's noteworthy contribution to the growth of Tamil research and history, they were unable to break the cultural barrier which beset them from the bulk of the Tamil population for past two millennium.

Brahmin's identification of themselves with the Aryan culture, Sanskrit language and Pan-Indian civilization virtually isolated them from the Tamil society. Crucial to the cultural crisis in Tamil Nadu was the indifferent attitude of Brahmin intellectuals in reforming the society on modern lines in order to accommodate the aspirations of the

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98   Suryanarayana Sastri, *History of Tamil Language: A Textbook of Philology in Tamil*, Madras, 1909, pp.17-19. For biographical sketch see M.S.Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, pp.353-56.
      V.G.Suriyanarayana Sastri (1871-1903) who was the Head Tamil Pandit of Madras Christian College made a startling attempt to establish a modern common literary styles through his writings. He was the first native scholar to venture into the field of philology. He was one of the pioneers in establishing the tamil prose in modern literary context.

newly emerging identities. Indigenous scholars (both Brahmins and non-Brahmins) failed to evolve a consensus in unearthing the past on a unified line. Lack of interaction, want of historical spirit, and overdependence on internal literary evidence led to the conflicting historical assertions. The contending groups claim for cultural self-sufficiency in the realm of history under the aegis of colonial authority created a political dichotomy.

CHAPTER II

THE EMERGENCE OF COMMUNITY CONSCIOUSNESS AND CASTE ASSOCIATION

The emergence of community consciousness and the formation of caste associations in the late nineteenth century heralded a new 'era' of social transformation in colonial Tamil Nadu. Caste System as an indigenous institution was an integral part of the Indian society from time immemorial. Caste was so tacitly observed and accepted completely that it functioned as the unit of social action everywhere.[1] There were about three thousand main castes, each culturally distinct, endogamous community, traditionally sharing a common occupation, rituals and a particular position in the localized hierarchy of caste ranking. Generally, it functioned as an undifferentiated unit. Each caste was characterised by a number of attributes significant to its position in ritual ranking. However, crucial to our study was not the social function of the caste, but of the political incarnation of caste association and community consciousness which paved the way for the genesis of communal and national movement based on supra-local-cultural-ethnic identification.

Caste associations were the logical outcome of the material reality of the colonial Tamil Nadu. Introduction of colonial modernisation, along with administrative paraphernalia, impelled the local groups to organise themselves on community lines.[2] The newly developed transport and communication facilities, proliferation of western political ideas and dissemination of English education created a social consciousness among the caste intellectuals to elevate their social status through traditional and modern

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1   Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications, London, 1972, p.4.

2   R.Sundaralingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India: 1852-1891*, University of Arizona, 1974, p.41.

means.[3] However central to the issue was the colonial interference in the social, political, economic and cultural life of the people in various ways which resulted in the proliferation of the group organisations and communal patriotism.

The establishment of the centralized bureaucracy, the introduction of modern administrative system along with the imposition of social categories on the people for colonial convenience, hampered the smooth functioning of the cooperative village economy.[4] Increasing urbanisation with the unfolding of new economic opportunities offered by colonial state weakened the communal ties and caused social dislocation in the rural areas. Moreover, Brahmins entry into the government service, with the monopoly of education, posed a threat to the power equilibrium of the society.[5] On the whole, the active intervention of colonial state in the rural life necessitated the socially undifferentiated caste groups to pool their resources on communal lines. Primordial discontent arising out of 'social dislocation' and 'political suffocation' always engaged themselves in the process of acquiring an appropriate place for its member.[6] Many aspiring caste groups, pointing to their fallen status, urged their members to assert their rights. These caste groups, taking recourse to their traditional-fraternal affinity in the old social order, made an assiduous attempt to attempt to reap the political and economic benefits ushered in by the colonial modernisation.[7]

3   M.N.Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, Bombay, 1962, p.41.

4   R.G. Baliga, *Studies in Madras Administration: Nationalism and Independence in Madras*, vol.1, Madras, 1951, pp.13-15.

5   Marguerite Ross Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*, New Jersy, 1976, pp.33-35.

6   Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York, 1973, pp.274-76.

7   Eugene F.Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, Madras, 1986, pp.16-17.

Caste was undoubtedly an un-altered feature of the Indian society. Prior to colonial rule in South India, it never functioned as an over arching association embracing all members of a particular caste. Traditionally, the castes of localised community were hierarchically ranked and functionally integrated. The concept of purity and pollution was applicable to the caste groups only within the village boundary. Generally, each caste shared a common traditional occupation, and whether or not an individual is actually employed in that profession, he will be known by the caste's traditional calling.[8] Hardgrave points out that, "the traditional economic system of caste has been likened to a 'super-guild' system, with each caste performing its specific tasks in society by hereditary prescription and divine sanction." The concept of division of labour, endorsed by the caste system, was precisely intended to regulate the labour force for the benefit of the village community as a whole.[9] Caste system as a viable and a socio-economic order functioned only within the geography of the village. The interdependent nature of the village economy and the relative degree of ritual status vis-a-vis to their traditional occupation inhibited the growth of caste solidarity. They never functioned as a political unit to improve their status. While describing the pre-colonial village of Malabar Society, Miller observes, "the only unifying features of a caste over a wide area were the common name and the overlapping zones of Kinship and internal administration; and even these often ended abruptly at political boundaries.... Territorial segmentation thus overrode the uniformity and unity of castes over a wide area."[10] The feudal

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8   Louis Dumount, *Homo Hierarchicus*, pp.33-34. Also see F.G. Bailey, *Caste and the Economic Frontier*, Manchester, p.17.

9   Robert L.Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, Bombay, 1969, pp.5-6.

10   Eric J. Miller, "Caste and Territory in Malabar", *American Anthropologist*, vol.56, June 1954, p.419.

structure of village economy, based upon the patron-client nexus, regulated the social traffic conflict and competition between Jatis never crossed the village boundary. The land owning dominant castes generally controlled the power mechanism of the village. Burton Stein points out that there were active alliances and cooperation between land-owning castes and Brahmins to have a hold on the village which was a "distinctive social and political element" of the medieval India.[11]

Traditionally, caste groups functioned as a corporate body to pool the resources for the mutual benefit. In every village one or two 'dominant' castes held large portions of the land to whom the dependent lower castes owed its allegiance.[12] Consequently, the villages were divided on factional lines for political reasons. F.G.Bailey also points out, "... the castes were not ranged in opposition to one another: rather, the dependent castes are divided among themselves by their loyalties to masters of higher caste."[13] Political clashes occurred between factions of the villages and between villages. At times the conflict between right hand and left hand castes assumed the proportion of communal violence over ritual/temple rites. While describing the clashes between the 'right hand and the left hand' castes in Madras town, W.R.Cornish, the superintendent of 1871 Census Report writes, "The quarrels arising out of these small differences of opinion (standards, devices and symbols) were so frequent and serious in the seventeenth century that in the town of Madras it was found necessary to mark the respective boundaries of the right hand castes in their processions found occupying the streets of the left hand and

11   Burton Stein, "Brahmin and Peasant in Early South Indian History", *Dr. V.Raghavan Felicitation Volume of the Adyar Library Bulletin*, vol.31-32, 1967-68, p.244.

12   Noboru Karashima, "The Power Structure of the Chola Rule", in R.E. Asher (ed.), *Second Tamil Conference*, Madras, 1971, p.14.

13   F.G. Bailey, *Tribe, Caste and Nation*, Manchester, 1960, p.131.

vice-versa."[14] On the other hand, many caste groups frequently attempted to improve their ritual status by adopting the Brahminical customs and life-style. This largely owed to the designation of sudra-hood over a vast bulk of the society. In South India the four fold varna theory had not come into practice for stratifying the society. There was a big hiatus between the priestly class and the other communities in the ritual hierarchy.[15] As a result, the middle wrung of the society was always engaged in acquiring due place in the social order through various pretentious claims.

The advent of British rule brought out a remarkable change in the social behaviour of the various communities of the village. M.N. Srinivas rightly points out that, "It was the establishment of Pax Britannica which set the castes free from the territorial limitations inherent in the pre-British political system."[16] The introduction of new production system undermined the inter-relations of the economic interdependence between the castes in the village. The newly created economic avenues virtually released the lower castes from the archaic patron-client nexus.[17] With the geographic mobility and an access to economic opportunities many caste groups felt the need for spinning caste associations, across the Province, to improve their economic and social position.

Crucial to the social change in the Nineteenth Century was the process of colonial modernisation. Under the impact of the British rule, India underwent a fundamental transformation. As a result, it witnessed a breakdown of old loyalties, change in the

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14   *Madras Census Report*, vol.1, 1871, p.129.

15   K.Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism: 1905-1944*, Madurai, 1980, p.8.

16   M.N.Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, pp.35-40.

17   Louis Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History in India: Collected Papers in Indian Sociology*, Paris, 1970, p.156.

value system and the emergence of new social classes. The integration of India's

economy with the world capitalism via its metropolis in a subordinate position, did not

bring any considerable change.[18] The disarticulated mode of colonial production led

to the uneven development of capitalism with stagnant features. To use Bipan Chandra's

words, "Colonial Modernisation involved not only the Indian economy but also the

patterns of social, political, administrative and cultural. A whole world was lost, an

entire social fabric was dissolved, and a new social framework came into being that was

stagnant and decaying even as it was being born."[19]

Colonial restructuring did not bring wholistic transformation. It only introduced

modernisation partly to integrate the Indian economy with the World Capitalism.

Expansion of transport, communication and English education was instrumental in

consolidating the Colonial Empire. Colonialism, as a historical phenomenon, did not

create a space for the development of capitalism of indigenous kind.[20] On the other

hand, India only felt the slightest impact of industrial revolution of its metropolis. Under

the banner of Colonial modernisation, at various stages, India developed a classic mode

of production by returning the traditional links and feudal structure.

The colonial state made a concerted effort to retain the feudal links and the

traditional elements by reinforcing through official patronage. Bernard S.Cohn in his

essay, "Representing Authority in Victorian India", explicated the dual nature of the

colonial project in comprehending and consolidating the Indian Empire. Aftermath of

the Indian Mutiny in 1857, the British developed a codified theory of authority to rule

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18   Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India,* New Delhi, 1981, p.9.

19   Ibid., pp.17-19.

20   Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880-1905,* New Delhi, 1991, p.7.

India, through the British Monarch. This theory was based upon the ideas and assumptions about the proper ordering of groups in Indian society, on feudal lines, and their relationship to their British rulers. While describing the cultural essence and the political strategy of the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 he wrote, "If India were to be ruled in a feudal mode, then an Indian aristocracy had to be recognised and/or created, which could play the part of loyal feudatories to their British Queen. If India were to be ruled by the British in a 'modernist' mode, then the principles which looked to a new kind of civic or public order had to be developed."[21] Caught up in the thicket of political ambivalence the colonial state conveniently employed the feudal and representational theories to control the local subjects which created an inevitable inner contradiction. It was the semi-feudal and semi-modern nature of colonial administration which created a sensitive environment for the emergence of caste association on primordial lines.

Emphasising the role played by the colonial engineering in generating a political consciousness, I would discuss the development of caste 'Sangams' and their activities with a view to improve their social and economic position. In a limited sense, it is an attempt to trace and study the indigenous social groups' response to the colonial modernisation. Mainly concentrating on the caste groups reaction to census operation, I would try to elucidate the pretentious claim and 'grand history' concerning the mythological origin put forward by them for higher status. During the colonial period, the concept of caste underwent a change without loosing its fundamental feature. It has become, by now, a legitimate candidate for political and social mobilization in modern

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21 Bernard S.Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India", in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1992, pp.178-79.

India.[22] There occurred a shift from focussing on the hierarchical nature of caste structure to its embodiment of various substances. Though caste was largely affected by economic and social change, it has by no means disappeared and it has historically revealed its resilient qualities to change. By taking recourse to both modern and traditional means it has come to serve as an active integrative agent for social and political mobilisation.[23]

Colonial Commitment to Social Change

Caste system, as ruling ideology, continue to play a significant role in the society. It enjoyed the patronage of the dominant section of the society. The priestly class, as the sole proprietor of knowledge, jealously guarded against others access to the education. The dominant caste groups kept the rest of the masses under perpetual economic dependence as servile community.[24] As a result, there was no concerted effort on the part of the lower caste against caste tyranny. They were unable to function as a class for themselves to challenge the hegemonic order of the society. In spite of their numerical preponderance they were incapable of questioning the validity of the caste system. Prior to the nineteenth century, no attempt was made by the caste groups either to claim higher status or entry to the temple.[25] The advent of Christianity offered new opportunities and created a community consciousness among the lower castes.

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22   M.S.S. Pandian, "Beyond Colonial Crumbs: Cambridge School, Identity Politics and Dravidian Movements", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Feb.18-25, 1995, p.386.

23   Robert L.Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, p.203.

24   R. Srinivasan, "The Ideological Genesis of Dravidian Movement", *Indo-British Review*, vol.13, no.1, January-June 1987, pp.7-8.

25   C.Paramarthalingam, *Social Reform Movement in Tamil Nadu: In the 19th Century with Special Reference to St.Ramalinga*, Madurai, 1995, pp.92-93.

Missionaries became the harbinger of social emancipation in the early modern period. Many lower caste people found an outlet in the Missionaries' enterprise to escape from the caste stigma. Their campaign against fraudulent impositions and ridiculous social practices of Hindu religion created a self-awareness among the local people. Oriental scholars, missionaries and colonial bureaucrats were instrumental in bringing the territorially segmented village society into the vortex of politics.[26] However, their commitment to social reform in general, and caste system in particular, were limited due to various political and cultural reasons.

Colonial commitment to social change was always partial, limited and incomplete. It never showed a keen interest in eradicating the social evil in order to create an egalitarian society.[27] Social change was always there in its agenda, but it never became the core of colonial policy. Partly owing to its economic interests and partly to social disturbances, the colonial state did not want to earn the wrath of the higher castes by championing the cause of social reform. On the other hand, the colonial state consistently lampooned the social malady and the cultural backwardness of Hindus.

Colonialism evolved a strategy by imposing different categories upon local society for administrative purpose which created tension among various groups. Under the cloak of modernisation, it converted the traditional economy of mutual interdependence into a system of competition for privileges and favours. Colonialism created or invented necessary categories such as non-Brahmins, Brahmins and other Hindus, animists and aborigines to perpetuate the social differences through divide and rule policy. They saw the development of egalitarian ideas as a measure which would support them against the

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26   Ibid., pp.14-16.

27   K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi, 1995, pp.10-11.

perceived threat from the Brahmin quarters. British viewed that the cultural and social differences between Brahmins and others would enable them to divide the society on communal lines into water tight compartments for administrative purposes. In the late nineteenth century, the imagined category, 'Non-Brahmin', was readily brought into official use, a terminology which tended to subsume a large number of miscellaneous social groups as against the Brahmins.

The debate about categorising the local people for strategical requirement for colonial purpose was advanced by many British bureaucrats. J.H. Nelson, the author of 'The Madura Country' manual contributed to the idea of Non-Brahmin by stressing the cultural and social differences between the two 'races'. He categorically stated, "I believe that it will be found to be necessary to legislate separately for the Non-Brahmin castes, as being in all essential respects separate and distinct from, and incapable of association with, the Brahmins."[28] According to him, there were no 'Sudras' in South India, therefore Hindu laws cannot be imposed upon them. He also stressed the need for revamping the local behaviour pattern to rule the society. Thus, British choice of the so called 'rational category' was replaced by indigenous classification. On the other hand, they realised the need for creating an outlet for newly emerging identity consciousness among various social groups. Traditionally Hindu society was divided on caste lines. Therefore, the colonial state created ample space for the local groups to freely articulate their aspiration in the social realm. Their cultural assertion, social pretention and ritual claims were endorsed by official reports. Many oriental scholars, missionaries, and colonial bureaucrats showed keen interest in caste groups manners, customs and habits. J.H.Nelson in his manual 'The Madura Country' pointing to W.Taylors 'Oriental

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28   J.H. Nelson, *A Prospectus of the Scientific Study of the Hindu Law,* London, 1881, p.148.

Manuscripts' argued that, the Vellalars, numerically preponderant agricultural caste, was

the most respectable among the Tamils. Taylor further enumerated, "The Vellalars, by

the effect of their ploughing (or cultivation), maintain the prayers of the Brahmins, the

strength of Kings, the profiles of merchants, the welfare of all.... Things of good report

or integrity, the good order of castes, and (manual) skill, all these things come to pass

by the merit (or efficacy) of the Vellalar's plough."[29]   Such exalted remarks about

customs and manners were taken by the caste leaders to claim an unique status for the

Vellalars among the Tamils. These flamboyant and bombastic remarks were frequently

brought out in their caste journal so as to kindle their atavistic feelings. Caldwel, a

noted Dravidiologist, of Scotish Mission, wounded the caste pride of the Nadars by

describing them as "down right Indolence... they cannot bear to make experiments and

calculate possibilities of advantage."[30] He further alluded to have mentioned in his

pamphlet, 'The Tinnevelly Shanars', that, Shanars along with the Ezhavas sprung from

the same stock of 'Santrars' (a toddy tapping caste in Sri Lanka). Deeply hurt by the

low profile given by Caldwell many English educated Shanars began to register their

protest. In 1870, the agitation against his remarks culminated in riots and the book was

withdrawn from circulation. Many caste representatives expressing their displeasure over

Caldwel's opinion about their community wrote letters to concerned authorities to

persuade him to withdraw his views. One of the active petitioner Y.Gnanamuthoo Nadar

blamed Bishop Caldwel's writings for Tinnevelly schisms of 1857 and for the

29   J.H.Nelson, *The Madura Country: A Manual*, part II, London, 1868, pp.61-62.

30   Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages*,
        London, 1850, p.56.

resuscitation of caste feelings among Nadar Christians. He wrote also to the Archbishop and the Prime Minister Gladstone himself.[31]

During this period, each of the caste groups, apart from claiming a place in the four-fold Varna, tried to prove their social standing by presenting a very fanciful history about their origin, status and customs.[32] They assiduously stressed the cultural supremacy in order to get due recognition by colonial authority in their official reports. Thus, myth making became crucial to the issue of social ascendancy. Moreover, many of the low caste members, those who made fortune with the unfolding of colonial modernisation felt the need to improve their social status by participating in their community activities. They made an attempt to improve their corporate status by bearing the expenses of the local temple festivals.[33] However, the higher castes jealously guarded against their entry into the temple. Shanans who were designated a very low caste in the hierarchy, improved their economic status by taking recourse to the colonial means. By now, they felt the need of asserting their rights for participating in the temple worship. In 1885, the Shanans of Kamuthi, a village in the district of Ramnad, petitioned to the Raja for permission to conduct a ritual feast in the temple. The temple authorities accepted to receive the offerings through a high caste person but denied them the opportunity to approach the proximity of the temple, since it would pollute the deity.[34] This resulted in a serious judiciary problem in which the colonial government always stood in favour of status-quo. However, the lower caste people such as Vaniyars

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31   Quoted in Robert L.Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad,* p.78.

32   S.Saraswati, *Minorities in Madras State: Group Interests in Modern Politics,* New Delhi, 1974, p.23.

33   C.Paramarthalingam, *Social Reform Movement in Tamil Nadu,* p.203.

34   Ibid., p.210. Also see Robert L.Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad,* p.31.

and Shanans, consistently put forward their claim for higher status in the social hierarchy. They used their economic resources to create new myths about their historical origin, culture and status. While explaining the desire of the lower caste for higher status, the 1871 Census Report Commissioner Mr.Cornish argues that the lower the caste, the more it claimed pre-eminence for itself. He wrote, "As the lower castes, in these days, frequently send out into the world men who accumulate wealth, so it happens that the surplus funds of such men are often employed in the feeding of the Pundits to prove the ancient glories of their particular castes."[35] During those days many caste literature were manufactured to prove their cultural superiority.

Census Operation Report and Caste Aspirations

The relation of Census Report with Hindu consciousness is crucial to the understanding of community formation in modern India. As a result of colonial modernisation, the suppressed social consciousness began to assert itself for equality on par with the higher castes. Census Report provided with an ample space for the subaltern caste groups to claim a high status in order to liberate themselves from the social obscurantism. As a prelude to their political liberation many caste groups organised themselves on community lines to put forward their demands, pretensions and history for due recognition by the colonial authority. Census Report had in a way become the harbinger of social emancipation. It made an indelible impression on the social, political and intellectual life of modern India.

In the late nineteenth century, territorially segmented culturally divided and socially compartmentalised Tamil community witnessed a key social change with the

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35   *Madras Census Report,* vol.1, 1871, p.118.

advent of colonial modernisation.[36] Spread of English education, growth of transport and communication facilities and centralised administration created a new social environment where intermixing of caste members became inevitable for their local transactions. However, in this process, English educated low caste members, were unable to participate freely in public life due to their caste stigma. Age old social restrictions and cultural isolation became impediment to their economic growth.[37] Lower caste intellectuals awakened by the western ideals increasingly felt the need for socialisation and cultural acceptance. Instead of breaking the system to free themselves, they tried to find a more acceptable place within the ambit of caste hierarchy. Owing to their economic independence and political awareness, they engineered caste associations to collectively fight for a berth within the Varna order. Further, they found the census operation as a golden whip to exert their spurious claims. They tried to achieve their goal through official reports which they failed to obtain through the social process. Census Report though recorded their impetuous claims, declined to give legal sanction. It only earned them a considerable rebuke and insult from the society.[38]

Census operation was perhaps, one of the grand administrative activities which directly linked every citizen of the country with the authority. Census taking, as the part of government policy, came into operation since 1871. The concern of Imperial authority for 'census taking' varied with time and region. However, the information elicited from the decennial report also shifted in its emphasis according to the colonial

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36   Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism*, p.18.

37   Milton Singer, *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, Bombay, 1954, p.ix.

38   R. Sundaralingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India*, p.24.

need.[39]Ethnography and religion were thought to be essential features of the early report. But it gave way to political and individual matters in the early twentieth century. The approach and perception of the Census Commissioner also made indelible remark on it. Thus, Census Report was viewed as a study of the colonial life for colonial administration.[40]

Census Commissioners in each of their report, categorically stated that, the recording of the caste and their traditional occupation was purely for demographic and sociological purpose and not to perpetuate the caste system in India.[41] However, strongly impelled by colonial need and oriental understanding, they at times indulged in perpetuating the caste differences. Partly owing to ignorance and partly due to blatant racial approach, "the attempts of European writers", as Cornish rightly points out, "to describe the castes of India have generally tended to make confusion worse confounded."[42] Further, he emphasised that the Census Report must be understood that it, "makes no attempt to deal with the social position of any great division of the people. The castes are entered in the order in which native authorities are pretty generally agreed in the order of their relative importance."[43] He meant the Varnashrama Dharma as the sole native authority in the matter of social regulation. Following a dual approach, he criticised vehemently the unequivocal functioning of the caste system. On the other

39   N.G.Barrier (ed.), *The Census in British India: A New Perspective*, New Delhi, 1987, p.vi.

40   Richard P.Martin, "Bibliographic Notes on the Indian Census", in N.G.Barrier (ed.), *The Census in British India*, p.66.

41   *Census Report*, Madras, 1921, vol.13, p.152.

42   *Census Report*, Madras, 1871, vol.1, p.116.

43   Ibid., p.118.

hand, he tried to locate the Indian society within the gamut of caste system to maintain

social harmony.

The subject of caste system was fundamental to social analysis. Each of the

Census Report devoted considerable pages for the description of caste system and its

functioning with relative data.[44] Economic and social development was further

elaborated with the help of numerous statistical tables and with the discussive sections.

It delved deeply into the caste education, marriage etc. Caste was not merely a basic

category in the minds of the Census Commissioners but a factor which cut across nearly

all human existence. Except the subject 'infirmity', every aspect of social, cultural,

political and economic life were analysed in the light of caste structure. The following

table regarding the dissemination of education with special reference to English education

has been clearly demonstrated on the basis of caste and religion. With regard to

Brahmins, it further sub-divided on the basis of their language. I feel it was crucial to

the emergence of community consciousness which subsequently prepared the masses so

collectively put forward their claims for colonial privileges.

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44   kenneth W. Jones, "Religious Identity and the Indian Census", in N.G. Barrier, *The Census in British India,* pp.79-83.

Table-1
Literacy Among Various Tamil Castes During 1901 and 1911[45]

S.No.	Castes	1901	1911
1.	Agamudaiyan	73	102
2.	Ambalakaram	27	25
3.	Ambattam	55	71
4.	Balija	75	114
5.	Billava	14	22
6.	Tamil Brahmins	391	418
7.	Malayalam Brahmins	447	428
8.	Telugu Brahmins	355	389
9.	Canarese Brahmins	269	307
	Total Brahmins	358	371
10.	Chakkiliyan	6	5
11.	Chetti	154	197
12.	Devanga	32	101
13.	Holeya	1	2
14.	Idaiyan	31	55
15.	Kaikolan	70	119
16.	Kallan	53	78
17.	Kammalan (Tamil)	104	133
18.	Komati	252	262
19.	Kuravan	3	32
20.	Kurumban	8	16
21.	Kusavan	36	51
22.	Maravan	54	69
23.	Mutracha	10	20
24.	Pallani	12	19
25.	Palli	33	48
26.	Paraiyan	5	14
27.	Sale	25	62
28.	Shanan	79	92
29.	Tottiyan	23	33
30.	Valaiyan	13	21
31.	Vaniyan	74	163
32.	Vannan	13	32
33.	Velama	13	20
34.	Vellala	35	130
35.	Labbai	92	132
36.	Indian Christian	109	143

The above report lucidly points to the glaring difference between Brahmins and others. The slow process of literacy made the marginalised castes to remain culturally backward. These castes always made an attempt to elevate their status only within the traditional order. Owing to absence of leadership, they were unable to put forward their claims forthrightly. On the other hand, some of the aspiring castes such as Shanans and artisan castes, pointing to their relative backwardness in literacy, demanded the government to grant more facilities for their caste members.

As a prologue to the subject caste, each of the Census Report discuss in length the origin, evolution and spread of caste system. Long before the advent of Aryans, the country was overrun by Turancan or Scythian race. However, it was improbable to believe there existed a caste system. Contributing to this, the Census Report Commissioner W.Francis posits the totemistic practices that were prevalent among the Dravidans which discards the possibility of a social stratification of any kind. On the other hand, pointing out to the Swayamvara incident of Arjuna marrying Draupathi incognito of Brahmin, he argued Brahmins played a subordinate role to Kshyatriyas. In the early period they (Brahmins) were ordinary performers of domestic rituals, students of Vedas, few in number, feeble in body and spirit. However, in the course of time, he opined, "before the time of Manu, the effeminate and despised priest caste had succeeded in establishing their intellectual supremacy, and in tincturing all laws and philosophy with their own peculiar colouring."[46] In the process of time, people had succumbed to the subjection of Aryan laws and lost their original valour and identity. Later they became anxious to claim a due place in the Aryan social order, rather than liberating themselves

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46   *Madras Census Report*, vol.1, 1871, pp.126-27.

from diabolic subjection. Most of the Census Commissioners repeatedly emphasized that the policy of the Brahmins was one of intellectual ascendancy and conciliation, and they attempted to include the aborigines in their own social system, by grafting them on to the great order of Sudras or servile castes.[47]

The enumeration of traditional occupation against each of the caste became a controversial issue in the early twentieth century. In the Census Reports, under the column 'caste', the hereditary occupation was mentioned in spite of a change in their present occupation. Many aspiring castes strongly refuting such enumerations, petitioned to the Government to make alternative changes in the column 'hereditary occupation.' The artisan caste (Hamsala) also registered their protest against classifying them lower than the agriculture caste. Hamsalas were consistently urging the Government to classify them under the Vishwakarma Brahmin category. However, their claim was never accepted by the Government. The Nadar Mahajana Sangam passed a resolution in their annual conference (1917), to request the government for allowing their caste members to enter their present occupation rather than their traditional occupation.[48] Their demand was conceded by the Government and subsequently, the column for traditional occupation was withdrawn from the Census Report completely since 1921.

With a view to improve their social status and to shun away their social stigma, many of the Caste Associations petitioned to the Government to enter their caste name ending with honorific 'r' in place of nominative singular 'n' or to change their nomenclature in official reports. In due course, their demand was accepted and many of the castes were also allowed to change their name such as Panchama was replaced by

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47   Ibid., p.129.

48   Robert L.Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad,* p.164.

Adi Dravida in 1923. In 1935, the caste name 'Idaiyan' was registered as 'Idaiyar' or 'Yadava'. The fisherman caste name 'Sambadavan' was entered as 'Parvatharajakulam'. Latter Vannans, a Washerman caste was allowed to register their name as 'Rajakas' in official records.[49] The change in the caste name created a new confidence among the caste members and it further strengthened their caste solidarity to function as a new pressure group in the vortex of politics. Some of the caste groups suffered a set back owing to their inability to institutionalise their community consciousness.

Kallan, Maravan and Agamudaiyan who were generally designated as Mukkulator (Triune Caste), were numerically preponderant in the Southern Tamil district. In the Census Report, their traditional occupation was always enumerated as 'Thieving' or 'Plundering'. While explaining their characteristics, the Census Commissioner generally highlighted their proclivity for violence and robbing. W. Francis, in the "Glossary of Castes, Tribes and Races" of 1901, has given a vivid account of their criminal record - "In 1897, 42% of the convicts in Madurai Jail and 30% in Palamcottah Jail at Tinnevelly belonged to either Kallan, Maravan or Agamudaiyan. In Tinnevelly in 1894, 131 cattle thefts were committed by men of these three castes against 47 by members of others...."[50] Further, he continued, "The Kallans had, until recently, a regular system of blackmail called Kudikaval, under which, each village paid certain fees to be exempt from theft. The consequences of being arrears with their payments quickly followed in the shape of cattle thefts and 'accidental' fire in houses."[51] Such frequent descriptions in the Governmental Reports about a particular caste maligned their social image. The

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49   S.Saraswati, *Minorities in Madras State*, pp.25-27.

50   *Madras Census Report*, vol.15, 1901, p.167.

51   Ibid., p.168.

Kallan community was finally, in 1915, was designated as a criminal tribe by Mr.Paddison, Collector of Madura. They were asked to surrender their finger prints before hand in the nearby Police Station.[52] A wholesale character assassination launched by the Government had uprooted them from their social standing. They were unable to recover themselves from this social stigma which adversely affected their economic and educational improvements. Moreover, they were unable to coordinate themselves, by pooling their resource into a community organisation to challenge the validity of the government order. This Act was, however withdrawn only after Independence of India.[53]

Census Reports played a crucial role as a regulatory mechanism in maintaining the caste status of the people. The Census Reports, while giving lower castes an opportunity to articulate freely, never approved their claims considering them as baseless and absurd. Every Census Report gave a vivid account of pseudo claims made by various caste groups for higher status. According to the 1871 Census Report, Cornish found around 2000 Shanars who had registered themselves as Kshatriyas, a position in the caste system which they have no claim to. In the course of time, many aspirant groups expressed their desire to be registered either Vaisya or Kshatriya. In 1891, there were about 153,000 people who had written themselves as Kshatriyas. Many Tamil lower castes emphasising their ancestoral role in military, also claimed Kshatriya status, which resulted in further addition of about 80,000 people in 1911. Some of the Tamil trading castes such as Komati, had put forward their claim for Vaisya status and about 19,000 of them already registered under this column. However, a position in the Varna

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52   *NNR*, Madras, 1915, for the week ending 27 November 1915, *New India* of 25 November 1915.

53   *Census Report*, Madras, 1871, vol.1, p.156.

system which they have no claim to, as there was no such classification found in early Dravidian civilization.[54]

Christianity and Caste

Caste was an unalterable feature of Indian society. It systematically maintained and regulated the social traffic. However, with the advent of colonial rule there seemed to have occurred a considerable fluidity in the system. Many caste groups giving free flight to their fertile imagination, came up with new theories to restore their lost identity in the social structure. Some of their claims were ratified by the government granting legal sanctions. Conversion was considered a conducive method by lower caste people to shun away their social stigma assigned to their hereditary group.[55]

In the early nineteenth century, there occurred an enmasse conversion to Christianity among the lower caste people in the Southern Tamil coastal districts. Many lower caste villages embraced Christianity with a view to improve their social status. As a result, churches were flooded with lower caste converts and were thus designated as 'Shanar' or 'Paraya' churches.[56] Conversion though seen as a liberation from serfdom for the servile people, it hardly helped them to break the social stigma attached to their 'Jati'. The early missionaries strongly believed that Hinduism was racial and social rather than theological.[57] The converts were allowed to continue their social practices in conformity to their ritual status. While pointing out the Missionary agenda

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54   *Madras Census Report,* vol.12, 1911, p.160.

55   Robert L.Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad,* p.91.

56   C.J. Fuller, *Servant of the Goddess: The Priest of South Indian Temple,* Cambridge, 1984, p.21.

57   Ibid., p.32. Also see E.Sundararajan, *Conversion called Confusion,* New Delhi, 1984, p.6.

for reaching out to the heathens, Charbonnaux opined that, "The native congregations of Southern India have been founded on the principle that, to be baptized, a man need not to renounce his own caste and nationality; so that though they are not Hindus, if that word be used in a religious sense, if, on the contrary it is used in its natural and geographical sense, they are Hindus as well as their (fellow) countrymen. They have always been so, and are accepted by all to be so, with the rank and rights of their respective castes."[58]

Catholic missionaries, generally adopting the local customs, permitted the congregations to follow their caste practices and other social norms. In many places, the congregations were divided on caste lines. Priests and Catechists were appointed from within the caste to lead the churches. In the Protestant churches, though the caste system was not permitted on principle, the local congregations functioned as a conglomeration of caste groups. Conflicts between caste groups for social status became very common. People of higher castes refused to take instructions from the priests of the lower caste. In 1852, Sawyerpuram Shanar congregation revolted against appointment of a priest from a lower caste.[59] Many church members blamed the missionaries of not being sensitive to their social feelings. Caste consciousness and community feelings made an indelible impression on the history of Indian church. Inter-caste feuds became inevitable among members and new churches were planted with a view to maintain their caste tradition. In 1857, a rival faction, after breaking its ties with Scotish Church, established a separate

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58   Quoted in *Madras Census Report*, vo.12, 1911, p.60.

59   Robert L.Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, p.76.

Church called "Hindu Church of Lord Jesus", in Nazareth, a small village in Tinnevelli District.[60]

Change of religion, particularly among the lower caste people, did not help them instantly to come out from their social stigma. It however, created a hope and opened up new vistas for social advancement. As Muthalore missionary Kerns observed, "Christianity had taught them to feel they are superior to what they originally considered to be."[61]Access to worship on par with others, new pattern of life style and opportunity for education brought a revolutionary change in them. As John Abbes points out, Christianity "not only offered them the gospel of a new religion, but also the possibility of secular salvation and release from the fetters of tradition which had for centuries burdened them with social disabilities and economic dependence."[62] Caste system was not only accepted as a social phenomenon, but also treated as a real material category to measure the economic and political development of the society. It was given a legal currency by the Government for administrative purpose and welfare measure. Churches also did not try to eradicate the caste observances, as it would hurt their mental and psychological feelings. Census Report also permitted the native Christians to enter their castes. According to 1871 Census Report, there were 3697 Brahmins who registered themselves as Christians along with their caste designations.[63] Further, 5100 Kshatriyas also registered themselves as Christians. Most of the lower caste people did not enter their names in the caste column. Writers, Vellalas and other commercial castes

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60   *Census Report*, Madras, 1921, vol.13, p.63.

61   Quoted in Robert L.hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, p.55.

62   Quoted in ibid., p.57.

63   *Census Report*, Madras, 1871, vol.1, p.112.

registered themselves as christians with their respective caste titles. Conversion was seen more of a social transformation than anything else. It did not bring sudden remarkable change in the economic status of a person. Economically backward lower caste converts therefore, had to be supported by the government along with his Hindu bretherens. With the avowed view, government decided to extend the concession to Indian Christians of depressed class origin. In the field of education, Government decided in May 1926, that the half fee concession to which the poor pupils of the depressed classes are otherwise eligible, under rule 92 of the Madras Educational Rules, should not be denied to them because of their conversion, and Appendix 17A of the Madras Educational Rules has been altered accordingly.[64]

Caste did not show the signs of weakening. On the contrary, it found a new solidarity to function as an effective pressure group to reap the benefits and privileges ushered in by the colonial modernisation.[65] Christianity empowered the lower caste converts to recover their self-worth to lead a dignified life. Education played a key role in changing their perception, mentality and cultural psyche vis-a-vis the social dominant world view. The following, religion-wise literacy table indicate a spectacular growth of literacy among the native Christians. According to 1911 Census Report about 52 per cent of the total population of the native Christians of Madras Presidency were lower castes who generally denied of education earlier.

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64   G.O.No.2239, 3 December 1926. Cited in *Report on Public Instruction in the Madras Presidency for 1922-23*, vol.1, Madras, 1923, p.15.

65   Myron Weiner, *The Politics of Scarcity: Public Pressure and Political Response in India*, Bombay, 1963, p.60.

Table-2

Religionwise Literacy (Per 1000)

Religion	1901	1911
1. Hindu	61	72
2. Muhammadan	74	87
3. Christian	143	165

Mythology and Aspiration for Status

In the late nineteenth century, Myth making became a prominent intellectual activity, among the aspiring caste groups.[66] It came to be viewed increasingly as a process for upward mobility in the social hierarchy. Many of the caste intellectuals actively involved in constructing the history of their past glory to kindle the primordial sentiments.[67] They prepared fictitious genealogy descending from Aryan God or hero. A beautiful and plausible explanation of their caste names was given so as to make it appear that it is not of Dravidian but an Aryan and Aryan of very high class.[68] Their pretensions were also ratified by obliged Brahmins by giving genealogical distinction. However, they were extremely jealous of any new admission into their own caste. Indeed, a perusal of all accounts of caste of Madras Presidency, including the lowest,

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66   Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p.267.

67   M.N.Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, p.21.

68   *Madras Census Report*, vol.1, 1871, p.139.

would leave one under the impression that the whole population is Aryan by race, a claim which historically is highly improbable.[69]

The lower caste people came to believe that the social position assigned to them was by Brahminical authority, and they felt it was tyrannical and unjust. They tried to assert their rights, not by attacking the system as unjust, but by claiming a higher and more ritually pure position in the caste hierarchy. They sought to retain the system and, through the new mythology of the caste history, to place themselves at the top.[70] In Tamil Nadu, though many castes made an attempt to find a berth in the Varna system, only a few contenders, owing to their economic and academic prosperity, employed all fictitious ways and means to place themselves at the top of the social hierarchy.

Shanars, the toddy tapping caste, numerically preponderant in Southern Tamil Coastal districts, designated as a polluting caste in the Census Report, made an attempt to elevate their social status through various means. Hardgrave, in his work, 'The Nadars of Tamilnad' had studied the rise and growth of Nadars in length, under the impact of modernisation. He argued that the Shanar's quest for higher status enabled them to organise on communal lines to press their claim. It was failure to achieve rightful status within the sacred order which motivated them to upgrade their position in secular domain.[71] Further, in a chapter entitled "The New Mythology of a Caste in Change", Hardgrave meticulously studied various methods adopted by Nadars to prove their Kshatriya status.

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69   Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, Bombay, 1969, p.37.

70   Louis Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History in India*, p.112.

71   Robert L.Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, p.239.

As early as 1870s, Shanars put forward their claim to Kshatriya status by publishing a number of booklets and pamphlets. Further, they questioned the various established theories which denied their martial status. In 1874, a native Nadar Christian published a pamphlet entitled 'Shandror Kula Marapu Kattal' (To safeguard the customs of Shandrors) which sought to establish the Nadars as the descendants of the Pandyan Kings, and, having established their noble status, exhorted all Nadars to assume customs of the Kshatriyas. As they began to economically and educationally prosper, they indiscriminately threw up a number of fictitious claims to expunge their caste stigma. Some intellectuals put forward the theory of Shanars as the original inhabitants of the soil. Others claimed Dravidian Kshatriya status.[72] One pamphlet drew scholar's genealogy from the lost tribe of Israel, thereby claiming Jewish origin; others reportedly claimed Jesus Christ himself as a Nadar. Thus the Nadars imaginative brain manufactured all possible stories and claims under the sun, to shun away their social stigma.[73] Hardgrave rightly points out that Myth making was crucial to the political awareness which enabled them to function as a class in itself to overthrow all social impediments. Despite the ridicule to which these stories were subjected, by scholars and by higher caste communities, the new myth of Kshatriya status became increasingly a reality for the Nadar community.

Palli's are otherwise called 'Padiachis' or 'Vanniyas' numerically a preponderant peasant caste in Northern Tamil districts consistently claimed that they belonged to 'Agni-Kula-Kshatriya' or Fire race. The term 'Vanniya' was derived from the Sanskrit

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72   Samuel Sargunar, *Dravida Kshatriyas*, np, 1880, pp.12-13,

73   Robert L.Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, p.239.

'Vahni' means fire[74]. They got gratified their genealogy by Brahmins which traced its origin from Pallava.

Vanniyars claimed that they were the only living representatives of the warrior caste- Agni Kula Kshatriya of Aryan race- among the Tamils. Vijayaswami Nayakar in his pamphlet, 'Shanar Vikarpa Vina Vidai', ridiculed the Shanar's claim for Kshatriya status for, they were only mere menial toddy tapping caste which had no right for such a high status.[75] C. Gopal Nayakar, author of the history of 'Vanniyakula Kshatriya', argued that, the Pallis or the Vanniya occupied a very high position in the ancient India. They were the descendants of Pallavas, who ruled over a country which extended from the border of the Chola Kingdom to the outskirts of the dominions of the Eastern Chalukyas.[76] Subsequently, they were suppressed and reduced to lower status by the invaders race. Another pamphlet called 'Vanniyar Puranam' claimed Vanniyar, who bore the title 'Sampoorvarayar', were the rulers of the soil.[77]

Many more aspiring castes manufactured number of literature, in support of their claim for higher status. Patnulkaran, a weaving caste, migrated from South Gujarat to Madura region, and Kammalans, an artisan caste, assert that they belong to Brahmin caste, use Brahmin title and wear the sacred thread. Many other castes also claim kshatriya or Vaisya status by putting forward a number of legends regarding their origin. The caste mythology became an authority; the adoption of sanskritized custom was their proof; and wealth and education were the catalysts to higher status.

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74   Madean, *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency*, vol.1, pp.121-27.

75   Vijayaswami Nayakar, *Shanar Vikarpa Vina Vidai*, Madras, 1910, pp.1-7.

76   C.Gopal Nayakar, *Vanniyakula Kshatriya*, Madras, 1891, pp.77-78.

77 ·   *Vanniyar Puranam*, Madras, 1932, p.17.

Necessity for Caste Association

The contestation for cultural status between caste groups became inevitable in the late nineteenth century owing to the backward looking of the Tamil society. Unlike other presidencies, Tamil Nadu did not undergo a fundamental social change.[78] Spread of English, modern ideas and the proliferation of print culture did not evoke any positive response in bringing social reform. On the contrary, it created a community consciousness among the suppressed caste groups which in turn made a vain and impetuous claim for equality, in the traditional set up, on par with the dominant caste. No substantial initiative was taken by individuals or community to modernise the society as a whole. The question of social equality and freedom was not addressed properly. This was perhaps owing to the exclusiveness of the Brahmins and their intimacy with the colonial government. Brahmins, as active agents of the British Raj, acted as intermediaries between the ruled and the rule. The incorporation of the Brahminical laws into the judiciary and their monopoly in the education prevented the other social groups from making any substantial improvement. K.Nambi Arooran echoing the same sentiments observed that, "the Brahmins, who by virtue of their caste, occupied a dominant position in society, could hardly afford to advocate any fundamental social changes without at the same time undermining their unchallenged dominance."[79] It was procrastination towards social reform which precipitated the caste crisis into racial conflict.

Vellalas were the first to resent vociferously against the designation of Sudrahood, which was imposed on them. Unlike other caste groups, they directed their attack

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78   L.S.S.O'Malley, *Modern India and the West*, Oxford, 1968, p.77.

79   K.Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism*, p.5.

against the Brahmins, who through their cunning diabolic act integrated Tamil Caste groups into Aryan fold. The Vellala intellectuals who by virtue of their economic and education position and also their connection with Saivism challenged the Brahmin supremacy in matters of religion and society.[80] They were successful in converting the caste discrimination into a racial conflict by advancing the theory of Dravidian Civilisation. However, their attempt was inadequate as it failed to address the chronic issue of social in-equality, an issue lying dormant and unaddressed till the advent of Self Respect Movement.

Traditional Loyalty and Political Modernisation

Under the impact of the British rule, caste has been affected fundamentally by social mobilisation and economic change. The collapse of the village economy and impending process of modernisation incumbered the effective functioning of the caste system. But it did not show the signs of weakening or disappearing from the village life of the society.[81] In its modern manifestation the caste association divulgated a peculiar mixture of tradition and modernity. The combination of both traditional and modern elements increasingly came to determine the new political culture of shared value. Caste solidarity found its expression in history for the first time in the early Twentieth Century in the form of caste association to participate in the public life.[82] Appealing to the traditional and primordial loyalties, caste organisations initially operated as a Forum to

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80 P.Sundaram Pillai, "Basic Element of Hindu Civilization", in Madras Literature Review, vol.1, no.1, January 1987.

81 Robert L.Hardgrave, India-Government and Politics in a Developing Nation, New York, 1970, p.17.

82 Robert L.Hardgrave, The Nadars of Tamilnad, p.126.

put forward their petitions and claims to the Government for higher status and privileges. Soon they realised the effectiveness of the number game and collective ability for bargaining vis-a-vis the Government and others in the political arena.

In 1910, a Nattukottai Chetti community member was nominated as a non-official member of the Legislative Council, in appreciation of its contribution to the welfare activities.[83] In 1921, 'Nadar Mahajana Sangam' delegation successfully convinced the Census Commissioner to nullify the column for 'Traditional Occupation'. The rising expectations of the caste members necessitated the formation of caste association by almost all the castes. Though they represent a mere fraction of its potential, they acted as the sole mouthpiece of the community.

Caste association represented the adaptive response of caste to modern, political, economic and social change. As a corporate body, it pooled all its resources for the welfare of their community by opening schools and colleges for the promotion of education to equip their future generations to contest on par with others for privileges. The effective functioning of the Caste Sangam was largely determined by the economic resources and the leadership initiative. They functioned as a critical link between tradition and modernity.[84]

The nexus between caste associations and national movement was critical to the political development of Tamil Nadu. The national leaders effectively used the caste associations for political mobilisation. S.Srinivas Iyengar, P.S.Sivaswamy Iyer and Sethuratnam Iyer participated in many of the caste conferences and appealed to the

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83   *NNR*, Madras, 1910, for the week ending 7 December 1910, *Swadessamitran* of 4 December 1910.

84   Lloyd I. and Susanne H.Rudolph, "The Political Role of India's Caste Associations." *Pacific Affairs*, vol.33, March 1960, pp.5-6.

community members to join in the national struggle. M.P.Sivagnanam Gramini, the then secretary of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, presided over the Nadar Mahajana Sangam annual conference in 1940.[85] Justice Party leaders also effectively used the caste association for legislative politics. W.P.A.Soundara Pandian, who served as the Vice-President of the Nadar Mahajana Sangam from 1920 to 1934, urged the people to give up all unwise Sanskrit customs and take pride in Dravidian identity.[86] In 1930, many non-Brahmin leaders actively took part in the Congress politics thereby clearing the way for localisation of Congress politics. K. Kamaraj Nadar's political prominence became the catalyst factor to mobilise local people to Congress. Perhaps, he was one of the successful leaders who transcended the caste identity and paved way for the extension of identity horizon beyond caste association.

Caste association acted as a political force for political mobilisation within the community, and as a representative of the community interests to the outside world. Addressing to the immediate needs of the people, caste association had successfully drawn the unlettered masses for the first time, into the domain of modern politics. As Lloyd I. Rudolph rightly points out, the caste association acted as a link between multitudes of the village and the mainstream politics - The modern "incarnation" of caste, the association, "provides the channel of communication and basis of leadership and organisation which enable those still submerged in the traditional society and culture to transcend the technical political illiteracy which would otherwise handicap their ability to participate in democratic politics."[87] As the society began to increasingly modernise

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85   Saroja Sundarajan, *March to Freedom in Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1989, pp.46-47.

86   P.Raja Raman, *Justice Party: A Historical Perspective, 1916-37*, Madras, 1992, pp.146-47.

87   Lloyd and Rudolph, "The Political Role of India's Caste Associations", *Pacific Affairs*, pp.5-6.

itself, by breaking the ties of traditional links, the caste association had to give way for regional and national politics. The plurality of commitment, associations and interests in the process of political development, under the impact of social mobilisation, had eroded the old communal ties and thus liberated the individual for a new pattern of life and behaviour.[88]

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88   Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties*, London, 1954, p.294.

CHAPTER III

THE CULTURAL USE OF PRINT AND THE DISSEMINATION OF IDEAS

The advent of printing technology marked the beginning of social transformation in modern Tamil society. As an agent of change, printing altered the methods of data collection, storage, retrieval system and communication network used by the learned community.[1] It radically redefined the relationship between the individual and society. The traditional monopoly over knowledge and learning was substantially broken by the proliferation of printed material. The age of 'mechanic reproduction', as Walter Benjamin called it, paved the way for the dissemination of knowledge and ideas.[2]

Printing entered popular life early in the modern period, setting up new networks of communication, facilitating new options for the people, and also providing new means of controlling people.[3] It further modified the practice of devotion, of entertainment, of information and knowledge. Printing as a social and intellectual activity altered the relationship between men of learning as well as system of ideas. It not only encouraged intellectual enlightenment but also intensified the emergence of new forms of mystification.[4] It played a key role in establishing a new world order in almost all walks of life. As the history of printing is an integral part of the general history of the modern civilisation, it makes an indelible impression on the political, constitutional,

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1   Elizabeth T.L.Eisenstein, *Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 7-8.

2   Cited in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1991, pp.37-38.

3   Roger Chatier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, Princeton, 1987, p.283.

4   Roger Chatier (ed.), *The Culture of Print: Power and Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, London, 1989, p.6.

ecclesiastical and economic events.[5] Altogether it brought about a cumulative and qualitative change in the cultural and social life of the people. Printing, as Stein Berg pointed out, "Preserved and codified, some times even created" certain vernaculars.[6]

The shift from script to print revolutionised the communication technology early in the modern period. Proliferation of printed material on a massive scale created access to information and knowledge to a large section of the society. The democratisation of knowledge and ideas through print capitalism created a new fixity to language and culture.[7] The communication medium substantially altered the old beliefs, customs, relations and popular perception to power and authority. In the political life, printing as an agent of change made a deep impact by creating new avenues for social mobilisation and mass participation. A new relationship came into being between the ruled and the ruler. Intellectuals had increasingly come to play an intermediatory role. As a result, public opinion and popular will, began to determine the course of political action.[8]

The age of mechanical reproduction enriched the vernacular language with a variety of literary products. New forms of popular genres came into being. The vernacular language was increasingly brought into use, particularly in the field of local administration and popular writings. The development of artistic writing created a new cultural taste among the people. It created unified fields of exchange and communication. Benedict Anderson while deeply delving into the impact of print media, argued that the advent of print and paper made it possible for the first time, for speakers

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5   Elizabeth T.L. Eisenstein, *Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, pp.27-28.

6   S.H.Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing*, Bristol, 1961, p.84.

7   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp.33-34.

8   Cote Jordin and Alainboureau, "The books of Emblem on the Public Stage", in Roger Chartier (ed.), *The Culture of Print*, p.263.

of various languages to comprehend each other. The diffusion of knowledge through print media kindled the atavistic feelings of the ordinary masses which helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation. Further, he emphasised that print technology, by giving fixity, created language-of-power which was different from the older administrative vernaculars.[9]

The printed matter in the vernacular language, as a cultural factor, became increasingly important and influential in the political life of the society. It paved the way for the emergence of a new political, social, communal and linguistic consciousness among the masses. In the early period of modern Europe, the Protestant movement successfully launched religious propaganda against the Papacy through the circulation of printed vernacular literature. Martin Luther the leading religious reformer, published about 3,00,000 volumes of vernacular literature between 1517 to 1525. In spite of poor literacy, the increase in print activities created a new social awareness among the people.[10] The dissemination of knowledge and diffusal of information linked the rural masses with the power centres. The print technology and the subsequent commodification of 'vernacular' literature forged a new relation between reader and author. Thus printed matter now penetrated the reader's private world, "mobilising their sentiments, fixing their memories, and guiding their habits".[11] Reading, as an intellectual exercise, created an opportunity for acquiring more knowledge and also helped them to relate themselves to new ways of life. At the same time it did not immediately bring any revolutionary change in their basic cultural background. As

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9   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp.9-46.

10   Lucian Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, London, 1976, pp.267-70.

11   Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Stanford, 1975, p.190.

Natalie Davis rightly points out, "learning from printed books does not suddenly replace learning by doing. It can provide people with new ways to relate their doings to authority, new and old".[12]

Colonialism and Print Culture

The advent of print culture in India did not make a revolutionary impact as it did in Europe. But it substantially played a key role in creating political awareness in the early twentieth century among the masses. The absence of massive production of printed material in India was due to colonial constraints and political impediments. As Anderson argued, the print revolution was possible only under the aegis of capitalism. Since colonial India's economy was integrated with its metropolis, there was no possibility for the expansion of print culture on a large scale. Printing activities were systematically controlled and regulated by the colonial state for political and material interests.

The development of printing, as a process of colonial modernisation, during the colonial period played a key role in disseminating the cultural content of English education and Western knowledge. The cultural possibilities of the Western countries were realised through new communication networks, thereby facilitating an access to new forms of knowledge and literary products. The print technology was used to inject Western ideas into the cultural life of the Indian society. It sought to locate the history of Indian culture within the Western paradigm. Unlike other Western colonisers, the British authorities did not make concerted efforts to uproot the Indian culture from its soil - rather it tried to appropriate it for larger interests.[13] What was central to the

12   Ibid., p.197.

13   K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi, 1995, p.128.

Colonial policy was to produce "a class of persons - Indians in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". This avowed plan was successfully executed with the spread of English education and print technology, thereby integrating India as an extended province of the metropolitan culture. The print technology contributed to the making of a new cultural outlook, Western in thinking and modern in approach. The proliferation of English literary products through print culture injected Western ideas into the Indian mind. The intellectual appropriation of the Indian culture was not only confined to English education but it was also extended to the vernacular languages. As Panikkar aptly points out, "By facilitating access to literary products, print contributed to the making of a new cultural taste and sensibility and thus of a new cultural personality".[14] This was extended into the arena of popular reading by imitating the Western literary style.

Print technology, as an agent of change, performed limited task by integrating the Indian culture with the European master. The Colonial state strictly maintained its grip over printing activities, both in English and vernacular languages, in order to safeguard its political interest. It had instituted a number of agencies to monitor and regulate the printing activities in the colony. Native Newspaper Reports, Fortnightly Reports and extracts from the local newspapers, Administrative Reports and Civil Investigation Department (CID) Reports provided ample information to the Government to be vigilant about the print activities of the native press. The Colonial state was not hesitant to take hard measures against what it all termed as seditious writings, through the Press Regulations. Print activities were largely controlled and maintained by Missionaries and State apparatus for the propagation of religious and colonial ideals, at least up to the

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14   Ibid., p.130.

early nineteenth century. Spread of English education, increased political consciousness among middle class intelligentsia and the necessity for social reform on Western lines impelled the native scholars to venture into the print activities on a larger scale.

Tamil Revivalism and Print Activities

Print culture played a key role in revamping and resuscitating Tamil literature from its oblivion. The re-discovery of the cultural heritage of the Tamils promoted the Tamil Renaissance, Dravidian consciousness and Non-Brahmin movement which largely determined the course of political and historical development of the Tamil society. These inter-related movements must be viewed as an intellectual fall out or organic response to the growing historical and political consciousness. Studying any one of these developments in isolation would sap the vitality and vigour of historical contingency.[15]

After the fall of the Chola Empire in the late twelfth century, Tamil lost its pristine glory and historical splendour. Its intellectual independence, originality and self sufficiency were neglected by the subsequent Sultanate and Nayak rulers. During this period, very few Tamil treatise were produced which were derivative and imitative in their style and approach. By the turn of the sixteenth century Tamil was ostensibly treated as an off-shoot of Sanskrit. No remarkable work was produced in Tamil during this period. Observing the poor plight of Tamil language, Caldwell wrote in 1856, "for the last two hundred years Dravidian literature appears to have made but little real progress".[16]

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15   Natalia Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, p.226.

16   Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Language*, Madras, 1976, p.159.

By the middle of the nineteenth century Tamil language regained its preeminence and vitality on account of peace and stability and patronage under the aegis of Colonial rule. The spread of English education, rapid growth of printing and development of historical research contributed to this Tamil revivalism. The initial attempt of the Missionaries and Oriental scholars in unearthing the Tamil past gave the native intellectuals an impetus to embark on the field of Tamil research. Growing academic activities in Tamil and the impending debate about the Tamil antiquity motivated the native scholars to undertake the task of reconstructing the old Sangam works from its mutilated and fragmented manuscripts. With the advent of print technology, there was a concerted effort by Tamil intellectuals to bring forth the old Sangam works to print. Tamil literary works had been maintained in palm-leaves from time-immemorial. They were ill-protected against the ravages of time, climate and insects and even tracing these manuscripts was an arduous task. To bring them to print was indeed a stupendous task since they were in an illegible hand, with copyists' errors and without any punctuation marks. Moreover, these manuscripts posed insurmountable difficulties to the editor as the verses had been over written. Lack of accuracy, interpolation, missing verses and lack of verification with the original caused immense difficulties to the editor. However, propelled by the love for Tamil and instigated by the rich heritage of its antiquity, many Tamil intellectuals ventured into collecting, as many manuscripts as possible, to compare and collate for the production of a final text.

Nambi Arooran in his book 'Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism 1904-1944' argued that the Tamil revivalist activities can be considered as the beginning of the Tamil renaissance which indeed was the base for the development of communal politics

in colonial Tamil Nadu.[17] Malavai Mahalinga Aiyar was the first Tamil scholar to undertake the task of retrieving the old Tamil classics from their fragmented manuscripts. In 1847, he brought out the extant orthography 'Tolkappiyam-Eluttatikaram' (a chapter on letters from the Tamil classical grammar 'Tolkappiyam') followed by Arumuka Navalar, a renowned Saiva Siddhanta philosopher of Jaffna, who brought out 'Tirukkural' a famous moral treatise consisting of 1330 couplets in 1860. In the next year he brought out 'Tirukkovaiyar' (one of the minor eighteen works of the Sangam age) to print.[18] The real break through in the process of rediscovering the Tamil classic works, came from C.W.Tamotharan Pillai and U.V.Swaminatha Aiyar. Tamotharan Pillai (1832-1901) of Jaffna, soon after his education in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), came to Madras to undertake the Editorship of 'Tinavartamani' then the only existing Tamil periodical. He gained the distinction of being the first graduate of the Madras University in 1858 and served as a civil servant both in Madras and the princely state of Pudukottah.[19] Tamotharan Pillai firstly undertook the task of bringing out the remaining unpublished four parts (words, substance, prosody and rhetoric) of the 'Tolkappiyam' with various commentaries.[20] Besides this, after the perusal, compilation and editing, he brought out other renowned classic grammatical works such as 'Virasoliyam' by Puttamittram in 1881, 'Iraiyanar Akapporul' in 1883 and 'Elakkana-vilakkam' by Vattiyanata Tesikar in 1899. Later on Tamotharan Pillai showed keen interest in epics and poetry and brought out 'Kalittokai' one of the eight anthologies and

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17   Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism. 1905-1944*, Mumbai 1980, p.15.

18   Ibid., p.16.

19   M.S.Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, Munirpallam, 1929, pp.349-50.

20   A.V.Subramania Aiyar, *Tamil Studies*, Tirunelveli, 1970, p.91.

'Sutamani' one of the five minor epics, which were assigned to the post Sangam period. Through his painstaking effort he set a precedence in this endeavour of resuscitating the Tamil literary works from its fragments.[21]

U.V.Swaminatha Aiyar (1855-1942), as a worthy follower of Tamodharam Pillai, completed the task of his predecessors by bringing most of the Sangam works into the limelight. Born in 1855 in Uttamatanapuram, a village in Tanjore district, he received instruction in Tamil grammar and literature, in the traditional manner, from Menachisundaram Pillai of Tiruvavatuturai Mutt. In 1880 he was appointed Tamil Pandit at the Government College in Kumbakonam. It was during this period that he devoted himself in collecting palm-leaf manuscripts. He was only aware of the ancient Sangam works from quotations and citations from treatises. He had never seen them in their complete form. However, he was convinced, "with a sufficient number of copies of each such works, however mutilated and fragmentary they might be, a correct and complete text might be made out".[22] To accomplish this task he toured the state and collected various palm-leaf manuscripts thereby protecting them from imminent destruction. From the plethora of manuscripts, after careful study, he brought out eight major Sangam works such as 'Sivakachintamani', 'Silappatikaram' and 'Purananuru' and also published ten other major works.[23] He always took care to give a biographic sketch, glossary of difficult words and an index to other references. The stupendous task, started by missionaries, in the early nineteenth century, reached its logical culmination during

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21   Nambi Arooam, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism*, pp.16-17.

22   Francies Moraes, "Dr.Swaminatha Aiyar, Editor and Writer", *Tamil Culture*, vol.4, no.1, January 1955, pp.40-41.

23   K.Sundravakaran, *Voo. Ve.Swaminatha Aiyarin Sarithai* (A Biography of U.V.Swaminatha Aiyar), Madras, 1942, pp.12-13.

U.V.S.Aiyer's period, the key person in democratising all classic works by bringing them to print.

The publication of these works was well received, and the growing desire for Tamil literature created a demand for subsequent editions in quick succession. Before 1932 the Kamban's Ramayanam alone went into fourteen editions with various commentaries and paraphrases.[24] Tamil revivalism greatly enhanced the argument in favour of the antiquity and sophistication of Tamil Culture. By placing Tamil heritage among the world's civilization, they claimed unique classical status. By virtue of its copious nature, rich culture and vast living literature, they argued that Tamil was already in pre-eminence before the arrival of Aryans.[25] Many Tamil scholars went on to locate the hoary Tamil civilization in the southern continent called Lemuria, a vast landscape extending from Madagascar to Australia, engulfed by the sea during the great deluge. Many tempting analogies were drawn to claim autochthonous status for Tamil. Tamil revivalism was successful in stimulating a resurgence of interest in Tamil literature. Further, it inculcated the spirit of debate and the desire for Tamil learning.

Proliferation of Print Culture

At the beginning of twentieth century, Tamil Nadu witnessed a literary renaissance with the resuscitation of Sangam works. The proliferation of Tamil associations and the subsequent issue of their journals and literary activities brought the ordinary masses into the domain of a 'reading culture'. The cultural use of print brought

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24   B.V.Narayan Swamy Naidu (ed.), *Raja Sir. Annamalia Chettiar Commemoration Volume,* Chidambaram, 1941, p.245.

25   Engene F.Irschik, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929,* Berkeley, 1969, pp.282-83.

down the heated debate to the private rooms of ordinary people. The circulation of the printed materials introduced new thoughts and changed their attitude to power relations. Facilitating them with new cultural possibilities it shaped their behaviour towards the confronting ideologies.[26]

The circulation of printed materials increased the intellectual activities among the masses and further deepened the Tamil identity consciousness by invoking primordial sentiments. Various associations and interest groups consequently came out with their journals, magazines, books, pamphlets etc to propagate their ideas and opinions.

Proliferation of printed material brought about a revolutionary change by the turn of this century with the increase of intellectual activities in the field of politics and literature. Prior to this the Madras Presidency was almost cut off from the glaring political issues of the nation. In the words of Surendranath Banerjee (1878), Madras "so distinct with the public life of India" was "the only place in all India, where he found it impossible to hold a public meeting upon a question of vital interest to our people and in regard to which there was practical unanimity all over India".[27] Interestingly enough the first book in Tamil was printed almost over a century earlier than the first journal in Bengal. But Madras Presidency did not show further improvement there upon. Caught up in the mundane life, there was not much interest in public issues concerning people at large, which adversely affected the development of print activities. However, it is rather difficult to give a complete and convincing explanation to the slow and poor growth of print activities in the early nineteenth century.[28]

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26   Natalia Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, pp.206-08.

27   V.Subramaniam, "Tamil Political Journalism-The Pre-Ghandian Period", *Tamil Culture*, vol.10, no.4, October-December 1963, p.24.

28   J.Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, New Delhi, 1955, pp.17-18.

In response to the missionaries' scathing attack on Hindu society and culture, many vernacular journals were floated by native intellectuals to reform the Hindu society from within. Soon, revivalists also started journals to fight against the missionaries and reformist propaganda. For example, Bowani Charan Banerjee started an organ of Hindu social and political reform called 'Sambad Kaumudi' to challenge the 'Samachar Durpan' of Serampore which indulged in attacking Hindu religious customs.[29] 'Sambad Kaumudi' was taken over by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and thus the religious polemics saved the way for the development of secular press activities. Bombay Presidency also went through the same process where religious controversy was the genesis of journalism. The first journal was floated to combat missionary propaganda in 1812.

In contrast to this, in Madras up to 1857 four of the five journals were run by missionaries and were heavily subsidised by the Government.[30] Total circulation of these journals amounted to only 1750. It was not only the predominance of missionaries which led to the stagnation of press activities. Indeed, all the factors that accelerated the press in the north were absent in the south. Unlike other presidencies, the missionaries' attack on Hindu religion was unanswered by the local intelligentsia. The en-masse conversion which took place in the coastal districts among the lower castes went almost unnoticed. "No corps-de-elite of English-educated Tamil Mohan Roys and Tagores arose in this period to reform their religion or to fight the foreign missionaries with the language Press".[31] In the political plane, peace, following a long period of anarchy, complete isolation from the cross currents of national politics and the non-participation

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29   V.Subramaniam, "Tamil Political Journalism-The Pre-Ghandian Period", *Tamil Culture*, p.27.

30   Ibid., p.30.

31   J.Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, pp.124-25.

in the 1857 rebellion and its aftermath of bitterness, contributed to a poorly developed press in Madras in 1878.[32]

After 1878 there was a steady and continuous spurt in print activities owing to the advent of Congress politics, Tamil renaissance and the subsequent intellectual awakening. It is interesting to note that from 1892 onwards, reading culture showed a spectacular growth in the vernacular language. There was a cumulative and qualitative change in the field of newspaper production. News headings and cartoons were for the first time introduced.[33] Table-3 extracted from the Native Newspaper Report, indicates the steady growth of print activities.[34]

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32   Ibid., p.129.

33   V.Subramaniam, "Tamil Political Journalism-The Pre-Gandhain Period", *Tamil Culture*, p.35.

34   *NNR*, Madras, 1891, For the weekending 30 June 1891.

Table-3
List of Newspapers and Journals in Late Nineteenth Century in Tamil

Name of the Newspaper	Place of publication	No. of copies issued
Monthly		
1. "Gyyan Dipam"	Tinnevelly	1400
Bi-monthly		
2. "Satya Vedanusaram"	Madras	264
3. "Vedanta Nirnaya Patrikai"	Madras	500
4. "Ayul Veda Bhaskaran"	Madras	500
5. "Arya Jana Paripalini"	Madras	1600
6. "Shrilokaranjhani"	Madras	750
7. "Swadesabhimani"	Salem	150
8. "Brahma Gnyana Bhodini"	Bangalore	119
9. "Sukna Jivani"	Bangalore	440
10. "Satya Vardhamani"	Pasumali	690
11. "Jananukulam"	Tiruvadi	100
Tri-Monthly		
12. "Travancore Abhimani"	Nagarcoil	450
Weekly		
13. "Vettikodiyan"	Madras	200
14. "Vikata Dutan"	Madras	1400
15. "Hindu Janabhushani"	Madras	200
16. "Tarangai Nesan"	Madras	150
17. "Arya Jana Ratchani"	Madras	500
18. "Desabhimani"	Cuddalore	350
19. "Tanjai Janamitran"	Tanjore	450
20. "Kalanidhi"	Coimbatore	250
Bi-Weekly		
21. "Swadesamitran"	Madras	800

At the turn of this century the reading culture assumed new proportions and the circulation of newspapers increased by three times which doubled again in 1911. Indeed, it was a sign of intellectual enlightenment and mass awareness. Endorsing the extension of publishing culture and the art of reading, J.Chartres Molony the Census Commissioner of 1911 Census Report for Madras Presidency observed that, "it can hardly be argued that a great increase of publishing matter stands invariably for an improved intellectual activity; the tons of printed matter daily current in modern Europe do not necessarily denote or coincide with an era of spacious thought. But in southern India the margin between scarcity and superfluity is still so wide that we may welcome the increase in the publications shown by subsidiary Table X as indicative of a growing public to whom the art of reading is sufficiently familiar to render books and newspapers an agreement of life. We are far enough yet from the realization of the vision of the journalist, who saw, as in a glass darkly, Ramaswami learning in intellectual contemplation on the five barred gate of his paddy field, or deciphering the daily newspapers in the village smithy".[35]. The art of reading penetrated extensively into rural life. Growing curiosity for information led to the development of group readings. Village Karnams (officials) read the newspapers aloud for the benefit of unlettered masses. Table-4 gives a vivid picture of the extensive print activity with a comparative analysis for the years 1901 to 1931.[36]

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35   *Census Report*, Madras, 1911, vol.12, p.123.

36   *Census Report*, Madras, 1931, vol.14, p.265.

Table-4
Number and Circulation of Newspapers and Journals in the
Early Twentieth Century in Madras Presidency

Languages	1900		1910		1920		1930	
	No.	Circulation	No.	Circulation	No.	Circulation	No.	Circulation
Tamil	65	38,174	67	74,436	56	63,170	101	211,316
Telugu	36	16,025	48	37,400	37	21,213	47	69,338
Malayalam	27	16,220	56	44,274	28	23,017	21	24,800
Kanarese	13	14,585	30	23,148	15	23,390	11	12,100
Urdu	-	-	-	-	7	5,164	5	3,500
Oriya	1	100	2	2800	5	2,390	5	3,860
Sanskrit	-	-	5	1000	1	700	-	-
Hindi	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	800
Vernaculars Total	176	95,009	237	195,955	202	200,156	227	366,154
English	68	49,652	79	67,543	75	78,505	58	93,700
Grand Total	244	144,661	316	263,498	227	278,661	285	460,214

Note: The discrepancy found in the table is inherent in the original source.

There has been a steady progress in the production of newspapers and their circulation. The number of newspapers and periodicals in circulation has risen from 244 in 1901 to 316 in 1911, to 227 in 1921 and 225in 1931, and the estimated number of readers rose from 144,661 in 1901 to 263,498 in 1911, to 278,661 in 1921 and 460,214 in 1931. It further points out the growing journalistic enterprise among the native scholars who almost established their supremacy over the English press by 1930 and consolidated their monopoly in the vernacular press as well. In its lucidity, the table, shows the linear progression of the mechanical reproduction of newspapers and books in the pursuit of dissemination of knowledge in vernaculars. Tamil taking a lead, as a whole, evidenced a wider circulation with other Presidency vernaculars.

There was a tremendous growth in the production of books during this period which was indeed a sign of development of the intellectual culture. Unlike in matters of newspaper production, book publishing culture catered to the needs of educated

reading public, particularly in English. Table-5 throws light upon the state of publications from 1861 to 1920.[37]

Of the 71,452 vernacular books published in the period, 21,171 were said to be in Tamil which is nearly one-third of the total publications. The fall in the Tamil book production during the last decade of the nineteenth century was attributed to the famine of 1896 and 1897 which claimed about five million lives all over the country. The steady progress in the English book production could be attributed to the production of text books for the schools.[38] The most popular subject for literary activity was religion to which as many as 37 percent of the books were devoted; it was said by G.T.Boag, ICS, Superintendent of Census Operations of 1921, Madras, however that considerable portion of these books are "lighter literature presented under the religious garb."[39]

Tamil Renaissance and Print Activity

After a lull, at the beginning of this century, the Tamil society felt the impact of renaissance, something similar to the fifteenth century European experience, at least in the field of literature and culture which subsequently brought out a considerable political and social change. There was a spurt in literary activities in Tamil. Tamil language and literature developed by leaps and bounds. Many associations, organisations and sangams were established for the promotion and propagation of Tamil research and its cultural ideals.

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37   *Census Report*, Madras, 1921, vol.13, p.122.

38   Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism*, p.57.

39   *Census Report*, Madras, 1921, vol.13, p.122.

Table-5
Number of Books Published in Each Language During the Last Four Decades

Language		1911-1920	1901-1910	1891-1900	1861-1890
	Total	34,684	17,412	9,766	9,590
A.-Vernaculars of India					
(i) Vernaculars of the Presidency		22,139	9,697	5,437	6,449
1.	Badaga	1	1	--	2
2.	Hindustani	399	223	56	275
3.	Kanarese	873	420	337	530
4.	Konkani	120	22	6	19
5.	Kui (Khond)	2	--	--	--
6.	Malayalam	1,278	719	371	790
7.	Marathi	14	5	5	5
8.	Oriya	298	196	13	6
9.	Patnuli, Kshatri or Saurashtri	6	9	1	--
10.	Savara	3	--	--	--
11.	Tamil	11,663	4,820	2,297	3,232
12.	Telugu	7,465	3,255	2,347	1,575
13.	Toda	1	3	--	--
14.	Tulu	16	24	4	15
(ii) Vernaculars foreign to the Presidency		2,400	1,773	1,071	966
15.	Garo	2	--	--	--
16.	Gujarati	20	--	--	--
17.	Hindi	11	--	--	--
18.	Kodagu or Coorgi	1	2	--	2
19.	Lushai	10	19	--	--
20.	Pali (in English)	1	--	--	--
21.	Prakrit	1	--	--	--
22.	Sanskrit	2,364	1,752	1,071	964
B.-Vernaculars of Non-Indian Asiatic Countries		441	254	17	119
23.	Arabic	430	240	13	80
24.	Persian	11	14	4	39
C.-European Languages		9,657	5,663	3,131	2,045
25.	Dutch	6	10	--	--
26.	English	9,569	5,613	3,124	2,026
27.	French	32	12	--	1
28.	German	1	--	2	--
29.	Italian	14	20	--	--
30.	Latin	23	8	5	18
31.	Portuguese	12	--	--	--
D.- Other Languages		37	25	110	11
32.	Others.	37	25	110	11

Pandi Thorai Thevar, a zamindar of Palavanatham and an erudite scholar, pioneered in this direction by establishing a Tamil Sangam in Madurai, in 1901, the ancient seat of Tamil learning.[40] It was an attempt to restore the pristine glory of Tamil by patronizing the scholars in the 'classical style.' Since 1902, the sangam began to publish a journal called 'Sen Tamil' for the purpose of giving direction to a number of scholarly efforts connected with Tamil literature, and it also sponsored the publication of a large number of Tamil classics under the general editorship of reputed scholars like U.V.Swaminatha Iyer, Raghava Aiyenger and Narayana Iyer.

Soon after the pattern set by Madurai Tamil Sangam, many associations were established all over the Tamil speaking area[41] to patronise art and literature. In 1905, Tanchai Karanthai Tamil Sangam was set up in Tanjore. Its organ, 'Tamilagam', a monthly journal, brought out a number of articles concerning linguistic grammatical and literary research under the able editorship of Rajam Aiyangar.[42] The Chennai Tamil Sangam was founded by C.R.Namasivaiya Mudaliar and T.Ramakrishna Pillai in 1907. It undertook the task of publishing Caldwell's 'A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages.'[43] These associations primarily functioned with a view to encourage the study of Tamil classics and bring the Tamil language so as it fitted to the modern times. Both Brahmins and non-Brahmins were actively engaged in stimulating the resurgence of interest in Tamil literature. Coincidental with this interest in the Tamil literature and language, was the beginning of a search into the Tamil past to discover 'who was

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40   Narayana Aiyar and M.Ragava Aiyangar, "Editorial", *Sen Tamil*, vol.1, no.1, 1902, p.13.

41   P.Krishnan, *Tamil Noolgalil Tamil Mzhi Tamil Inam Tamil Nadu* (Tamil Language, Tamil Race and Tamil Nadu in Tamil Works), Madras, 1984, p.36.

42   T.Rajan Aiyangar, "Research in Tolkappiyam", *Tamilagam*, vol.2, no.1, pp.6-7.

43   P.T.Srinivasa Aiyangar, *Tamil Literature*, Madras, 1927, p.347.

responsible for its creation, growth and downfall?'[44] While subscribing to the idea of the cultural elegance of Tamil language, the Brahmin scholars never showed keen interest in Dravidian past, as it had been formulated by some Tamil extremist scholars based on literary account. The plethora of journals that sprang up during this period intensively delved into the Aryan - Dravidian controversy and Brahmin-non-Brahmin polemics. Tamil cultural self-sufficiency and its rich traditions became increasingly their focal point for argument.

'The Tamilian Antiquary', a monthly journal published from Trichinopoly by Pandit D.Savariroyan, between 1907 to 1914, similar to the Indian Antiquary, devoted all its pages for Tamil historical research. Its main thrust was to put the Dravidian past as far back as permitted by the canons of research. 'The Bharata Land or Dravidian India', 'The Relations of the Pandavas with Tamilian Kings', and 'A Critical Review of the Story of the Ramayana and an Account of South Indian Castes',[45] were of the polemical and provocative articles which evoked mixed responses from various quarters. The topic about Ramayana and the advent of caste system in South India generated bitter feelings since it made scathing attack on Brahminical religious values. Many scholars, refuting the denial of divine status to Rama, published articles challenging the validity of that statement. In response to these cultural questions, many Tamil journals ventilated their opinions in their 'editorials'. Thus the politics of culture had been academically legitimised from which the later course of political development took its firm roots.

Yet another mind boggling issue which occupied prominent space in the Tamil journals was the legend of Agasthya. According to this myth, Agasthya a Brahmin saint,

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44   Eugene F.Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, p.303.

45   Various exegesis on Ramayana were published, time and again, in *The Tamil Antiquary*.

received Tamil language from Lord Shiva in the Himalayas and brought it to the Pothiya Hills (Sandalwood Mount) where he founded the Tamil Sangam.[46] Challenging the Aryan origin of Tamil, the Dravidian ideologues argued that Tamil language reached its high water mark in literature in the first Sangam period which was roughly 10000 years[47] ago, long before the advent of Aryans. The Agasthia legend was interpreted by various Tamil scholars to meet the modern political requirement. Writing in 1908, Mani Thirunavukkarasu, in "Sentamil Selvi" argued that a band of Aryans, headed by 'Agasthyar' in their exodus to south, found Tamil in a flourishing condition. Anxious to see their dear language, Sanskrit, predominant in the land, they set themselves to put down their rivals and exterminate the Tamils, the natives of the soil. Failing to root out their language they drove the Tamil speaking population to the southern part of the Peninsula. There the Tamils happily found a congenial atmosphere and their language had liberal patrons among its kings.[48] The question about its origin and early contributors, of the chronology of Sangam age were some of the glaring issues which generated serious debates in the academic world, and is continuing till date. The tradition of Agasthya myth, according to P.T. Srinivasa Aiyanger and L.D.Barnett, became prevalent only after the eighth century when Brahmin influence had gained ascendance in the South.[49] With the revival of Tamil literature and the resurgence of new literary genres, Tamil had developed to the extent of being used for political and secular activities.

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46   H.A.Gunasegaran, "The Historicity of Agasthya", *Tamil Studies*, vol.7, no.1, 1978, p.3.

47   V.J.Thambi Pillai, "Bharata Land or Dravidian India", *The Tamilian Antiquary*, vol.1, no.7, 1907, p.23. Also see K.K.Pillai, *A Social History of the Tamils*, Madras, 1975, p.12.

48   Mani Thirunavukkarasu, "The Legend of Agasthya", *Sentamil Selvi*, vol.1, no.2, p.32.

49   Cited in M.S.Purnalingam, *Tamil Literature*, pp.19-24.

The proliferation of printed matter with the diffusion of Western knowledge contributed to the emergence of new cultural and literary tastes. The cultural hegemony of the colonial discourse increasingly came to impinge upon vernacular literary activities.[50] Imbued with the western ideals and values, many Tamil Shakespears and Thomas Hardys began to produce new popular genres to meet the social needs and the aesthetic sensibilities of the anglicised middle class public. It was an attempt to blunt both the native and the Western traditions to create a neo-literary taste. The cultural outlook, in the words of Panikkar, "was neither entirely hegemonized by the colonial nor confined within the traditional, but was posited in a dialogue between the two."[51] The dialogical model had already evolved in the late nineteenth century in order to incorporate both the traditions, and thus the novel came to occupy a popular position in the cultural ambit.

As early as 1876, the first Tamil novel 'Parathapa Mudaliar Charithram' by M.Vedanayaham Pillai was published and thus can be designated the father of modern Tamil fiction.[52] Followed by the pattern set by him, many other genres were produced in imitation to the Western literary traditions. P.Sundaram Pillai, an erudite Tamil scholar, wrote a play 'Manonmaniyam' in 1895 which was in five acts, on the Shakespearean model. "Its plot is full of interest and in it many purple patches are seen, embodying his philosophical notions."[53] His drama was based on Lord Lytton's 'The Secret Way', one of the 'Lost Tales of Miletus'. Though prosaic style was not unknown

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50   K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony*, pp.127-28.

51   Ibid., p.30.

52   A.V.Subramaniya Aiyar, *Tamil Studies*, p.85.

53   M.S.Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil Literature*, p.349.

to Tamil language, it got a new impetus during the period. Many subjects concerning social life were written in ordinary prose style. In this direction M.Vedanayaham Pillai, wrote in 1862 a digest of case law of the Sudder Court from 1805 to 1861 and published it under the title 'Siddhanta Sangraham', which was a breakthrough in the literary style of modern Tamil.[54] At the turn of the century Tamil had almost become a viable medium of communication on any subject. Proliferation of print and press activities, intense political debate coincidental with the national movement, and the conflict about the cultural antiquity richly contributed to the sophistication of Tamil language. Linguistic purism (Tani-tamil movement), de-sanskritization of Tamil and effective use of Tamil for political purpose further refined the language for independent functioning.[55] By 1915 itself attempts were made to transform Tamil into a pliable language, one that could transmit modern political and scientific concepts. In this direction 'Tamil Scientific Terms Society' was formed in 1916, specifically to answer the needs of Tamil in the twentieth century.[56] In the field of music also attempts were made to rejuvenate Tamil songs (isai) to fit into the Carnatic music system. Sangitha Vidya Mahajana Sangam at Tanjore, Music Academy at Madras were started to popularise the Tamil music among the artists and the public. However, the stark Brahmin and non-Brahmin controversy cramped all these efforts.

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54   A.V.Subramaniya Aiyar, *Tamil Studies*, p.88.

55   Maraimalai Adigal was the founder of 'Thani-Tamil Iyakkam' (Linguistic Purism) to liberate Tamil from foreign language influences.

56   Eugene E.Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, p.303.

National Movement and Print Activities

Tamil Renaissance coincided with the national movement, many of the prominent Congress leaders were themselves Tamil scholars whose writings motivated national feelings, and greatly enriched the Tamil language. Their loyalties were two fold viz., loyalty to the nation and loyalty to the region. Their attachment to mainstream nationalism and their respect for sub-nationalism were not conflicting loyalties.[57] They were proud of their Tamil heritage and the glorious Indian civilization; Bharati C.Subramania, a modern Tamil and national poet was an appropriate example of these two fold loyalties.

Bharati (1882-1921) born in a Smartha Brahmin family held extremely liberal views on casteism. He whole heartedly criticized Varna Srama Dharma in all his writings. In his contribution to *'New India' Journal* on 11 May 1915 he stated, "Now that India is really awakening to a New Age, it will be well for my Brahmana country men if they voluntarily relinquish all their old pretensions together..., and lead the way for the establishment of liberty, equality and fraternity among the Indians."[58] Identifying himself with the inheritor of Tamil culture, he forthrightly argued that Tamil has all the qualities for being designated as a classical language on par with any world language including Sanskrit.[59] In an essay which appeared in 'New India' (5 March 1915) he said, "The Tamil language, for instance, has a living philosophical and poetical literature that is far grander to my mind, than that of 'vernacular' of England."[60]

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57   Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism*, p.59.

58   Cited in Eugene f.Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, pp.285-86.

59   S.Rama Krishnan, *Bharati: Patriot, Poet, Prophet*, Madras, 1982, p.122.

60   David Ludden, "The Songs and Revolution of Bharathi", in Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma (eds.), *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, New York, 1973, p.269.

Further regarding the status of Tamil he penned thus, "Tamil has the same status as Sanskrit, and Tamil can well be the vehicle of modern thought, and must be the medium of Government and of education."[61]

Bharati exalted the contribution of Tamil Nadu to Indian renaissance. He wrote, "Tamil Nadu has been in the forefront even for Indian Renaissance, it gave recognition to Swami Vivekananda even before Bengal gave him due recognition."[62] Bharati envisaged an integrated united India in all aspects. He blended the old traditions of songs of devotion to God with psalms of National movement. He conjured up a traditional past both for India and Tamil Nadu and transmitted them through his writings into a living experience.

Bharati's deep attachment to Hindu religion was highly criticised by Self Respect Movement activists. Kuthoosi Kuruswamy, a Self Respect activist in his pamphlet, 'Bharathi Kanda Parpanniyam' (Bharati subscribed Brahminism) blamed him for not being able to transform his religious identity into a secular one.[63] However, Bharati crystallised the coexistence of various multiple identities in a divergent cultural society. Many other non-Brahmin nationalist intellectuals like Thiru V.Kalyansundram Mudaliar and Ramalingam Pillai had three fold loyalties - nation, language and the community. Thiru V. Ka, a member of Madras Presidency Association (an Association to safeguard non-Brahmin rights), Congress leader and a noted Tamil scholar viewed Tamil culture and Aryan culture as complimentary to Indian civilization. He wrote, "Tamil Nadu is not a land but a nation, had its unique history and heritage.... Yet it constituted a part

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61   Cited in F.Moraes, "Bharati at the Crossroads", *Tamil Culture*, vol.2, 1953, pp.73-74.

62   S.X.Tani Nayagam, "Regional Nationalism and Tamil Literature in the Twentieth Century", *Tamil Culture*, vol.3, no.4, 1963, p.16.

63   Kuthoosi Kuruswamy, *Bharathi Kanda Parpanniyam*, Trichirappalli, 1963, pp.2-3.

of greater India."[64] He argued in favour of preferential treatment to non-Brahmins in matters of seats in the legislatures and posts in the administration. He did not want to politicise social differences for the sake of power politics. Thiru V. Ka also was criticised for his allegiance to Saivism which created differences between Smartha Brahmins and the Vellala Saivites.[65] Viewing philosophical activities as a cultural battle Vellala scholars challenged the Aryan influence in Saivism.

Printed material played a crucial role in instilling patriotic feelings among the masses. Nationalist press, particularly the vernacular journals played a key role in galvanising the masses towards Freedom struggle. Many newspapers were engaged in propagating ideas concerning national liberation movement. Almost all leading national leaders owned newspapers or had connections with them. During this period, people, irrespective of their social origin, participated in the Freedom struggle, in large numbers. Printed material were largely responsible in creating this mass awareness. Apart from Madras Mail (5000 copies - Anglo-Indian owned newspaper) no non-nationalist newspaper had circulation of more than 4000 copies.[66] Whereas nationalist papers, for the first time crossed 10,000 mark in their circulation. 'The 'New India'', 'The Jayabharati', 'The Swadesamitran' and 'The Gandhi' had a circulation of more than 10,000 during the height of Freedom Movement i.e., 1942 to 1945. Table-6 about 'Important Nationalist Newspapers of the period ranging from 1917 to 1944' throws some light on the nationalist press activities.

64   S.X.Tami Nayagam, "Regional Nationalism and Tamil Literature in the Twentieth Century", *Tamil Culture*, p.22.

65   T.S.Raghavan, *Makers of Modern Tamil*, Madras, 1965, p.114.

66   A. Ganesan, *The Press in Tamil Nadu and the Struggle for Freedom: 1917-37*, Delhi, 1988, pp.167-71.

Table-6
Important Nationalist Newspapers of the Period

S.No.	Name of the Paper	Name of the Editor/s	Place of publication	Circula-tion	Year
	Nationalist Papers				
1.	The Everyman's Review (E)	M.S.Kamath	Madras	100	1916
2.	The Desabakthan (T)	T.V.Kalyanasundara Mudaliar	Madras	500	1917
3.	The New India (E)	Annie Besant	Madras	10,000	1917
4.	The Hindu (E)	S.Kasturiranga Iyengar	Madras	6,400	1917
5.	The Swadesamitran (T)	A.Rangasamy Iyengar	Madras	4,000	1917
6.	The South Indian Mail	R.Sundaram Aiyar	Madurai	350	1917
7.	The Vartakamitran (T)	K.Natesa Aiyar	Tanjore	300	1917
8.	The Vysiamitran (T)	S.T.Ramanthan Chetty	Devakottai	500	1917
9.	The Lokopakari (T)	K.Vadivelu Chetty	Madras	950	1917
10.	The Naradan (T)	N.Duraisamy Pillai	Madras	1,000	1917
11.	The Prapanjamitran (T)	M.Shanmuga Mudaliar	Madras	500	1917
12.	The Dravidabhimani (T)	S.G.Ramanujulu Nayudu	Salem	1,000	1917
13.	The Dravida Pathrika (T)	G. Sundaram Ayyangar	Madras	700	1917
14.	The Hindumessage (E)	K.Sundarama Aiyar	Srirangam	1,000	1917
15.	The Jananukulam (T)	T.V.Krishnadass	Tanjore	200	1917
16.	The Vijaya Vikatan (T)	K.Kadirvel Nadar	Madras	700	1917
17.	The Indian Review (E)	G.A.Natesan	Madras	3,500	1917
18.	The Desabhimani (T)	P.T.Thiruvenkatachari	Madras	575	1918
19.	The Pandianesan (T)	P.George	Madurai	400	1918
20.	The Nationalist (E)	G.Harisarvothama Rao	Madras	1,000	1919
21.	The Navaskthi (T)	T.V.Kalyanasundara Mudaliar	Madras	800	1920
22.	The Tamilnadu (T)	P.Varadarajulu Nayudu	Salem	1,000	1920
23.	The Hindunesan (T)	L.Anantha Aiyar	Madras	2,000	1920
24.	The Sourashtra (T)	V.K.Nannaier	Madurai	400	1920
25.	The Swarajya (E)	T.Prakasam	Madras	5,000	1922
26.	The Commonweal (E)	B.Ranga Reddi	Madras	3,000	1920
27.	The Sutandiran (T)	V.Ramasamy Aiyar	Tanjore	1,200	1922
28.	The Ooliyan (T)	Raya Chockalingam	Karaikudi	1,600	1927
29.	The Tennadu (T)	E.V.Kuppusamy Mudaliar	Krishnagiri	1,000	1928
30.	The Ilan Tamilan (T)	S.N.Somayajulu	Tuticorin	--	1928
31.	The Podunalam (T)	A.Selvaraju Chetty	Madras	500	1928
32.	The Swarajya (T)	G.V.Kirupanidhi	Madras	500	1928
33.	The Sukhodayam (T)	V.N.Rangasamy Ayyangar	Arni	500	1928
34.	The Bharati (T)	R.Narayanasamy	Uthamapalayam	1,000	1930
35.	The India (T)	K.Venkata Rao	Madras	46	1930
36.	The Sutandira Sangu (T)	S.Ganesan	Madras	4,000	1930
37.	The Gandhi (T)	T.S.Chockalingam Pillai	Madras	8,000	1931
38.	The Gandhi (E)	K.S.Sundaram Pillai	Madras	5,000	1931
39.	The Kumaran (T)	S.Murugappa Chettiar	Karaikudi	2,500	1935
40.	The Dinamani (T)	S.V.Swamy	Madras	5,000	1935
41.	The Indian Express (E)	K.Santanam	Madras	4,000	1935
42.	The Manikkodi (T)	K.Srinivasan	Madras	600	1935
43.	The Jayabharati (T)	S.Venkatraman	Madras	10,500	1935
44.	The Sutandira Veeran (T)	J.P.Rodrigues	Tirunelvely	200	1936
45.	The Youvana Bharatan (T)	J.P.Rodrigues	Tuticorin	500	1936

Note: (E) = English; (T) = Tamil

Caste Question and Social Issues

The intellectual awakening engendered by colonial rule in the late nineteenth century made an attempt to create a society devoid of differences beyond traditional and colonial. Their perception about social conditions and cultural life was inextricably linked with colonial material reality. As Marx observed, intellectual "production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life."[67] The immediate intellectual attempt was to break the ideological base of the social structure that kept the society under perpetual arrest. The new economic avenues coupled with new literacy and knowledge system ushered in by colonial modernisation gave them an impetus to carry out their struggle against caste hegemonic order.

Unlike in Bengal and Maharashtra, the call for social liberation or social reconstruction predominantly came from the quarters of subaltern intellectuals. Their revolutionary approach to undermine the dominant social world view had a serious long ranging impact in the political life of the society. The proliferation of printed matter through the columns of the vernacular press gave a new fixity to the caste identity and the continuing debate about cultural dichotomy between communities was carried out vigorously throughout the colonial period.

A survey of the substance of vernacular newspapers during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century reveals two major trends in the manner in which the caste issue was dealt with. While accepting the colonial modernisation as an ineluctable outcome, the vernacular newspapers controlled by the priestly class sincerely suggested to the Government not to break the social moorings through new transport

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67   Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow, 1964, p.37.

network.[68] For example, a Brahmin correspondent writing on 28 January 1893 in Tirisirapura Tamil Selvan (weekly published from Trichnapoly - 500 copies) urged the Government, "as high caste people such as Brahmins do not like to sit in the same compartments with low caste people such as Pariahs, it is desirable to set apart one or two compartment exclusively for the use of low caste people."[69] On the other hand in the early twentieth century they adopted a technique of defensive mechanism about the observance of caste order for the promotion of social well being. This fact has been aptly illustrated in the editorial of 'Swadeshabhimani', of Mangalore, dated 23 November 1917, "Although castes may not form a welcome institution by themselves, it would still be possible to turn them into good account. The various castes as separate units can promote their own communal interest without detriment to those of others, more easily than when they are all fused into one caste. From this stand point we must say that the caste system conduces to national advancement. The various castes in a nation are something like the numerous departments which constitute the huge machinery of administration. The caste system is thus not a great evil after all. Because the Western people - only a few of them - unable to understand the advantages of the system, call it an evil."[70]

Another trend was that of the subaltern intellectuals who represented the marginalised masses of the society and made a scathing attack against the symbols, organisations and structures of the dominant world view through all possible means

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68 *Annual Administrative Reports* of Madras Presidency, under the title "News Papers and Journals", gives a short account of contents and substance of the major news papers and journals.

69 *NNR*, Madras, 1893, for the fortnight ending 13 February 1893, *Tirupura Tamil Selvan* of 28 January 1893.

70 *NNR*, Madras, 1917, for the week ending 1 December 1917, *Swadeshabhimani* of 23 November 1917.

particularly through press. Initially, as Gail Omvedt argued that the mass ideology focussing on exploitation and irreconcilable conflict of interest between different sections of the society, aims to undermine the hegemonic power of the dominant world view.[71] 'Pariyan', the organ of 'Pariah Mahajana Sabha', as early as 1893, registered its protest strongly against the idea of holding Indian Civil Service examination simultaneously in India on the ground that Brahmins and other high caste Hindus will easily get through the examination and in consequence will hold superior position in the Government and thus treat the Pariahs and other low caste men with racial contempt and dislike.[72] Further, it gave a call to all other suppressed communities like Sudras and Muslims also, to join together to oppose the proposed Bill being moved by Dadabhai Nauroji, a Congress leader, before the Secretary to State to hold simultaneous examination in India, which would be detrimental to their welfare. It urged them not to be led away by crafty Brahmins and their Congress organization.[73] The subaltern intellectuals prime intention was to break the shackles of servility by claiming equal status on par with the dominant group. The Pariah, as early as 1894, put forward a demand to Governor Wenlock of Madras, to confer the post of Sheriff of Madras city, on a respectable and educated Pariyan.[74]

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71   Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, Bombay, 1976, p.112.

72   *NNR*, Madras, 1893, for the fortnight ending 31 December 1893, *Pariyan* of 1 December 1893.

73   *NNR*, Madras, 1895, for the fortnight ending 30 June 1895, *Pariyan* of 15 June 1895.

74   *NNR*, Madras, 1897, for the fortnight ending 31 December 1897, *Pariyan* of 15 December 1897.

Inter-dinning and the Spirit of Cosmopolitanism

In spite of the dissemination of Western ideals, and advancement of colonial modernisation and communication, the society in Madras Presidency was largely impervious to change till at least the turn of this century. As a result, inter-dining, an ordinary cultural etiquette, received immense coverage from the press, which was portrayed as a major change in the cultural life of Hindu society. Breaking of commensal habits was seen as a prelude to social reformation in Hinduism. While commenting on the dinner hosted by the Governor Lord Pentland to the members of the Madras Corporation, 'The Weekly Chronicle' of 1913 remarks, "... those who had any caste scruples in the matter of dining were invited to join the party after dinner. But with a few exceptions all those who were honoured with Lord Pentland's invitation were present at the dinner."[75] This was seen as a weakening sign of clannishness and caste exclusiveness and the 'The Chronicle Weekly' further remarked that "... what, however, was prohibited ten or twelve years agao is now tolerated and even welcomed."[76] Since then such dinners became part of the functions conducted by Social Reform Organisations. The increase of social feelings in volume and potency, the growing feeling of cosmopolitanism and adoption of western etiquettes considerably made its indelible impressions in breaking the traditional social order. The growing discontent among the subalterns, quest for equality and advent of administrative changes generated a necessity to spin organisations across the province to reap the benefit of modernity.[77]

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75   NNR, Madras, 1913. For the weekending 16 February 1913, Weekly Chronicle of 12 February 1913.

76   Ibid.

77   C.J.Baker and Washbrook, South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, 1880-1940, Delhi, 1975, pp.13-14.

The revolutionary development of anti-Brahmin sentiments evoked mixed reactions among Brahmins. While the liberal Brahmins endorsing the necessity for Social Reform, tried to contain the growing diverse forces against the national solidarity, simultaneously the conservative Brahmins attempted to work, on parallel lines, by promoting Hindu revivalism through various religious movements such as the Theosophical movement and Varna Srama Dharma.

Varnasrama Dharma-Sam-Rakshna Sabha

Propelled by the pattern set by All-India Dharma Mahamandal and All-India Sanatana Dharma Samelan, a handful of orthodox Brahmins mainly from Kumbakonam and Srirangam, started the movement to protect Hinduism from "Social Reform, Theosophy and neo-Protestant, Liberal and Missionary Hindu Movements" in 1915. Its main Organs were Varnasrama Dharma and Hindu Message, which ventilated the views of Arya Santana Dharma under the able editorship of K.Sundararama Aiyar. The preamble of the movement categorically stressed that "The time has come in this country, as it came in the West, for Protestant Hinduism to organise itself as different from Catholic Hinduism.... There is no good in being intolerant towards each other. We must take life as it is and see that our differences in these matters do not interfere with our national unity in Politics."[78]

Apart from publishing pamphlets explicating Sanatana Dharma, the Sabha involved in conducting annual conferences in Trichinopoly and Tanjore, to unite all Brahmins irrespective of their denominations. The Sabha strongly believed that the

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78   K.Sundararama Aiyar, *Varnasrama Dharma*, vol.1, 1915, p.1.

maintenance of Dharma is indispensable for the growth and welfare of the nation. The

objectives, as found in the memorandum of the Sabha are:

1)   The diffusion and promotion of sound and useful knowledge pertaining to the fundamental principles of the Hindu Religion, Shastras etc.

2)   The inculcation of the need for the preservation of the ideals of moral and religious conduct as embodied in the Hindu Sastras.

3)   The promotion of good fellow feeling, harmony, sympathy and cooperation amongst the different sections of the Hindu community, and

4)   The adoption of measures for carrying out the above objectives.[79]

It further reiterated that, "Our aim is not to perpetuate differences between class and

class, or men and men but only to point out that the Dharmas prescribed by the Shastras

for the different classes, if duly practiced, will work out the salvation of the Hindu

community."[80] Performing one's own Dharma, in accordance with the Dharamic order

is the only path to attain individual and national progress.

The Sabha functioned largely as a knowledge disseminating agency regarding

Hindu Sanatana Dharma and committed to the cause of reviving the pristine glory of

Aryan civilization. While admitting the necessity for change, the 'Varnasrama Dharma'

argued that it cannot be done at the cost of fundamental religious values. Sundararama

Aiyar, editor of the Journal, strongly argued that the development of new historical

consciousness among people and introduction of modern ideas based on science has

destroyed and decimated the whole Hindu order.[81] As he observed, the introduction

of ideas based on the spurious sciences of Ethnology and Archaeology has complicated

the situation by rousing racial passions and bitterness among people irrevocably wedded

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79   Ibid., p.2.

80   Ibid., pp.2-3.

81   Ibid., p.44.

to the idea of the social solidarity and organic unity of the Hindu race.[82] Instead of focussing on the communal dichotomy, Sundararama Aiyar tried to convince the non-Brahmins that the real Brahmin was the true saviour of every individual, both for the life here and for the life beyond. Further, he went on to explain the nitty-gritties of Varnasrama Dharma. Each Varna has its own special skills. Each Indian has to pass from one Varna to other at each successive birth in accordance with activity during his present Varna. Each varna functions further as a corporation, not for its own purpose, "but forming a select class of individuals gifted with the pre-natal characteristics to elevate one of their own Dharma and to a higher status of existence after death."[83] However, the Varnasrama Dharma movement was objected to by both Brahmin and non-Brahmin scholars. C.Subramania Bharati, one of the leading Tamil national poets, strongly criticised the conservative and backward view of the Varnasrama Dharma movement. He wrote, "I happen to differ from the worthy Professor (Sundararama Aiyar) I differ fundamentally, radically, absolutely. I think even we, Brahmins, are men and each man's tuft or dinner is his own private concern.[84] V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, the leader of the Servants of India Society, condemned it as an obscurantist movement.[85]

Though the movement did not enjoy much support from the society, the ideals and principles which it preached, had far reaching consequences in the political life of the Tamil society. Gandhi's frequent endorsement and exaltation of Varna Srama Dharma created a serious doubt about the Congress' commitment to social reform and the

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82   K.Sundararama Aiyar, *Dharma and Life*, Srirangam, 1917, p.77.

83   Ibid., pp.40-41.

84   Quoted in Eugene F.Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, p.299.

85   Cited in R.Sundara Lingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1851-1891*, Arizona, 1974, p.171.

eradication of untouchability. For example Gandhi firmly believed that untouchability and child marriage were the parody of Brahminism, otherwise a lofty social Institution. Challenging his view 'the Justice' wrote, "Varna Srama Dharma as in practice, Mahatma Gandhi ought to have found out, is the quintessence of the idea of privilege, of superiority and snobbishness."[86]

Crucial to the issue, however, according to the non-Brahmins was the denial of the basic 'self worth' and 'dignity' in the ritual gradation. Criticism of the Varna Srama Dharma and Brahminism, in the later stage, constituted the bases for the development of the radical tenets of the Dravidian ideology. Coincidental to this, the starting of Home Rule Movement and Mrs. Annie Besant's 'The 'New India'', attack on non-Brahmin Movement created a proxy war situation in the second decade of this century.

Press and Communal Dichotomy

With the development of Press and the dissemination of new ideas, the Brahmin and non-Brahmin polemics assumed a new dimension during the First World War. Both ranged bitterly against each other and continued communal propaganda through their organs. Until 1916, the Brahmin hegemony over journalism in Madras Presidency was almost unchallenged. The only native English daily, 'The Hindu' and in Tamil 'The Swadesamitran' were run by Brahmins.[87] Both the papers were highly nationalist and strongly advocated the idea of Home Rule Movement. Brahmin predominance over newspapers publication stemmed from two major factors. Firstly, owing to their attainment of higher education they constituted an elite group in the society. Secondly,

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86 Cited in M. Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*, Princeton, 1976, p.27.

87 *Administrative Report*, Madras, 1915-16, p.786.

their pre-eminent position traditionally enabled them to assert themselves as the sole protagonists of the national movement.

Until 1915, non-Brahmins, in spite of their long standing rivalry, did not organise themselves as a political homogeneous unit to fight against Brahminism. When Mrs.Annie Besant extended her political activities of Congress and initiated the Home Rule League in Madras in 1916, the non-Brahmins felt the Home Rule Movement would finally result in the entrenchment of Brahmins in the Administration of the country.[88] Therefore, the non-Brahmin social functionaries felt the need for starting a Newspaper to combat what they call Home Rule aggression. In a meeting at Madras in 1915, the South Indian People's Association later designated as the Justice Party decided to float a newspaper to advocate the cause of non-Brahmins. Subsequently, the English daily 'The Justice' and the Tamil daily the 'Dravidian' were started under the editorship of T.M.Nair and G.Kannappan respectively.[89]

Due to hectic political activities both Brahmins and non-Brahmins came to a head on collision in assaulting each other in almost all walks of public life. Mrs.Annie Beasant's 'The 'New India''s vehement and vitriolic assault against non-Brahmin Movement and the virulent usages of value loaded provocative against a section of the people created a serious resentment across the Province. For example, in an editorial on 15 January 1916 'The 'New India'' remarked that in the present age the Panchamas were only reaping the fruits of their previous evil Karma. It would take at least several generations before they would be fit to associate with the high caste children in public

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88   S.Saraswathi, *Minorities in Madras State: Group Interests in Modern Politics*, New Delhi, 1974, p.69.

89   V.Subramaniam, "Tamil Political Journalism - Pre-Gandhian Period", *Tamil Culture*, p.34.

schools.[90] This created a bitter opposition from various sections of the society. The 'Pariah Mahajana Sabha', in a special meeting held in Madras, passed a resolution condemning it as a "monstrous statement", from the so-called, "apostle of universal brotherhood of men".[91] The 'New India' continued to indulge in vituperation and raising libels against non-Brahmin leaders. It did not follow the policy of give and take or to convince the Dravidian ideologues regarding the shares of posts in Administration. In its editorial of 30 November 1916, the 'New India' strongly criticised Dewan Bahadur Subbarayulu Reddiar, a nominee for the membership of Legislative Council and suggested Srinivasa Acharya as an appropriate candidate, which cast serious doubts about the 'New India's' motive about Home Rule Movement.'[92] Taking 'New India's' suggestion as an insult to the Indian community the 'Non-Brahmin' (a weekly) on 17 December 1916 expressed its anger against the clannish and racist attitude of 'New India'. Describing Home Rule Movement as "...deliberately conceived by a handful of Brahmins and a lady like Mrs.Besant, whom some consider as Vasishta or Viswamitra in her second or third transmigration. 'New India' deliberately attacks Dewan Bahadur Subbarayulu Reddiar, one of the foremost leaders of our community. Against such a giant in public work as Reddiar, a puny politician, an unknown figure until yesterday, one Srinivasa Acharya is recommended by 'New India'. We now find in this Home Rule Movement, as conducted by 'New India', the machinery that will trample us down. That our foremost leader should have been picked up for a mean attack is a challenge to our

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90   Quoted in *NNR*, Madras, 1916. For the week ending 12 February 1916, *United India and Native States* of 3 February 1916.

91   Ibid. Also see *NNR*, Madras, 1916, For the Week ending 19 February 1916, *Kerala Deepika* of 11 February 1916.

92   *NNR*, Madras, 1916, for the week ending 17 December 1916, *New India* of 30 November 1916.

community.... We insist that Home Rule, as understood by *'New India'*, will end in a deliberate suicide of our community."[93]

'New India' did not acknowledge the aspirations, ambitions and anxieties of non-Brahmins and Panchamas or care to adequately address the issues of social reform and re-construction. Home Rule movement, as envisaged by Annie Beasant was the revival of ancient Hindu civilization which alarmed large sections of the society. The 'New India' was continuously involved in castigating the non-Brahmin movement as if engineered by some misguided youth and thus failed to recognise the starking social inequality. Stultifying non-Brahmin's 'Communal Manifesto', as an act of cunning diabolism the 'New India' wrote on 21 December 1916, "In a short note we yesterday deprecated the movement of some misguided people who under the guise of helping the cause of the non-Brahmins are playing as our contemporary of 'The Hindu' put it yesterday, 'into the hands of the enemies' of national progress. The rest of the long communal manifesto is mere froth which no sane man will take seriously. As long as India gains Home Rule, it is of but secondary importance whether Brahmin or non-Brahmin, Hindu or Muslim are in prominence...."[94] It rendered value judgement that, "Those who work for the unity are patriots and lovers of the soil and those by their doings bring about disharmony and disunion are the enemies of their country and such should never be trusted by anyone."[95] In response to 'The New India's' strictures, the non-Brahmins, in their usual vitriolic fashion trumpeted on 21 December 1916, "The thunder bolt has fallen. Mrs. Annie Besant has in her recent articles condescended to

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93   Ibid.

94   *NNR*, Madras, 1917, for the week ending 6 January 1917, *New India* of 21 December 1916.

95   Ibid.

notice the non-Brahmins. It is a lie to say that the non-Brahmins excite hatred against Brahmins. Here again she cannot resist the temptation of looking upon the people of India as mere children ready to suckle her breast. She can never hope to make tools of our non-Brahmin leaders.... So far as non-Brahmins are concerned it is time that they now definitely understand that Mrs.Besant is against us as a class."[96]

The rivalry between the two communal blocks was strikingly apparent in every column of the Press. They did not even remain silent from distorting or exaggerating the fact of the matter 'The Hindu' almost subscribing to the 'New India's' ideology, at times, overplayed with the sentiments of the non-Brahmins. While it was intransigent to open its column for communal conflict, it carefully tried to side line the political activities of the non-Brahmins. The editor of 'The Hindu' in the Christmas number of 1916 in a reprinted article by Sir Leithbridge on Indian Tariff reform, advertently omitted the compliments paid to Rao Bahadur P.T.Theagaraya Chettiyar. This created a serious resentment in the non-Brahmin quarters. In response, the 'Non-Brahmin', on the next day brought out an editorial criticising the partisan attitude of 'The Hindu' and stated, "Here is an Englishman, an acknowledged authority on the matters of tariff, who praises an Indian and that praise is very carefully avoided from being presented to the numerous subscribers of a leading newspaper, we think 'The Hindu' owes an explanation to the public.... what justification has a newspaper to carefully avoid reference to a leading public man of our community?" Is it not creating in the Non-Brahmins a feeling of vengeance. Subsequently, the paper published the omitted remarks about Rao Bahadur P.T Chettiyar.[97] 'New India' and 'The Hindu' continuously engaged in branding the

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96   *NNR*, Madras, 1916, for the week ending 24 December 1916, *Non-Brahmin* of 21 December 1916.

97   Ibid.

non-Brahmin movement as an anti-national force and tried to generate a public opinion against the newly started 'Justice' (newspaper-daily). In its editorial of 6 January 1917, The 'New India' openly criticised the non-Brahmin attempt to embark on starting a newspaper and it urged the public "to discourage that source of mischief to the utmost of his power."[98]

The conflict between Brahmins and non-Brahmins reached its watermark with the announcement of the Reform Scheme by Montage, the Secretary of State, in August 1917. The newly emerged 'Justice' and 'Dravidian' facilitated the South Indian Liberal Federation (S.I.L.F.) to articulate the feelings of the non-Brahmins more forthrightly than ever before. Almost all Madras based newspapers, including Anglo-Indian owned newspapers, expressed their apprehension about the ultimate aim of the Home Rule Movement. In the course of time the non-Brahmin press entered into a militant phase. In late 1920s it employed more provocative techniques to mobilise the masses against the established dominant world order. Many religious texts and sacred books were brought to severe criticism and the process of undermining the ideological structure of the established system was effectively launched by the Press.[99] In 1930, there were about seven leading organs fully committed to the cause of social revolution. Table-7 adumbrates the popular support for the social revolutionary activities.

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98   *NNR*, Madras, 1917, For the week ending 13 January 1917, *New India* of 6 January 1917.

99   During this period many journals wrote articles on re-reading of the old sacred books and subjected them into textual analysis.

Table-7
List of Dravidian Papers

Name of the Paper	Name of the Editor	Circula-tion
Dravidian Papers		
1. The Non-Brahmin (E), Madras	C.Sarangapani Mudaliar	500
2. The Dravidian (T), Madras	J.Bakthavatsalam	2700
3. The Justice (E), Madras	P.N.Rama Pillai and M.S.Pandurangam Pillai	3000
4. The Kudiarasu (T), Erode	E.V. Ramaswamy	2500
5. The Unmaivilakkam (T), Virudhungar	P.M.Nachiyappa Nadar	570
6. The Puratchi (T), Coimbatore	E.V.Krishnaswamy	4000
7. The Pahutarivu (T), Erode	E.V. Ramaswamy	1500

Note: (E)= English; (T)=Tamil.

Women's Question

At the turn of this century, the question of women's rights or the position of women in the society came to occupy a central place along with communal equality. As early as 1905, 'Chakkravartini' and in 1907 'Sridharma' were started to propagate the idea of women's liberation. These journals primarily produced articles to educate women on western lines. However, they did not address the social evils which precluded women from equal participation in the social life. Many non-Brahmin journals in the process of celebrating the Tamil past argued that gender and cast inequality were not at all practiced in the ancient society. They were the counter products of Aryan imperialism over Tamil society.[100] After the advent of Aryan civilization they asserted that the women

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100 Under the title, "Social and Economic conditions of the Sangam Age", many journals deeply delved into the social status of women. They argue that women were given property right and the freedom to choose their partners.

became culturally subordinated by marital rites. Since then, women had to forego their rights in accordance with the Dharamic sastras.

With the development of English education and Tamil Renaissance the question about women's role became a critical topic among the liberal nationalists. Many social reformers believed women's liberation should precede political independence of India. They effectively used their pen and tongue to mobilise the masses to achieve the avowed goals. C.Subramania Bharati consistently championed the cause of women's rights. He effectively used his pen to arouse the egalitarian feelings of women and gave a call to break all social barriers to recover their status on par with men. He employed simple and lucid and lyrical style to inculcate social regenerative feelings in young women.[101] He ventilated his opinion through 'Kummi' songs (of women who have won their liberation). Employing the traditional village dance of women, singing and clapping in a circle, he made the women assert their rights on par with men:

"Dance the Kummi! Tread the measure!
Clap hands to time for all Tamils to hear!
Sing, Sing aloud in unison
'Forced to flee are the friends
That preyed on us too long'.

Gone, gone for good are those
That thought it a sin
For women to touch books.
Put to shame are the odd creatures
That confined us in our homes.

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101   S.X. Tani Nayagam, "Regional Nationalism and Tamil Literature in the Twentieth Century", *Tamil Culture*, p.14.

... and declare
That scriptures and ethical codes
We'll make anew;
...."[102]

'Bharati strongly argued that women were no less in intellect, power and knowledge and if they awaken they can dazzle the world.[103]   In his essay on 'Women's Liberation' published in 1917 he gave ten commandments to women such as women should not be given in marriage before puberty; must be allowed equal share in ancestral property and widows must be allowed to remarry.[104]   He strongly believed women were naturally gifted with power and endurance that they alone can save humanity from destruction.   In his song on independence published in 1918, he emphatically stressed that women should be given equal opportunity in matters of public jobs in free India.[105]

Madhaviah was one of the earliest novelists who used the popular genre to advocate social ideas concerning emancipation of women.   In his famous work 'Muthumeenakshi: The Autobiography of a Brahmin Girl', he produced a radical character Meenakshi who transgressed all religious and social norms in choosing a husband of her choice.[106]

Non-Brahmin intellectuals consistently emphasised the need for liberating women from the clutches of old Dharamic order, so as to establish an egalitarian society.   In a bid to oppose the Brahminical values and marital system, many non-Brahmin journals

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102   S.Rama Krishnan, *Bharati*, pp.112-13.

103   Ibid., p.39.

104   S.Vijaya Bharati, *Subramania Bharati: Personality and Poetry*, New Delhi, 1975, pp.29-30.

105   P.Mahadevan, *Subramania Bharati - A Memoir*, Madras, 1957, p.41.

106   A.V.Subramaniya Aiyar, *Tamil Studies*, p.103.

constantly trumpeted that in the Sangam age women lived with dignity and enjoyed equal rights. They played a key role in shaping the society and were the source of inspiration and initiative. 'The Non-Brahmin Youth' pointing to 'Purunanuru' exalted the heroic valour of ancient Tamil women, "When a mother was told that her son had fled before the enemy, she could not believe her ears. She exclaimed 'this cannot be where is my sword'? Let me go to the battlefield. If the news were true then should I not cut off the breast that suckled such a coward." To her joy she found her son in the heap of the dead and returned with martial pride.[107] Another warrior woman sent her only little son to battlefield even after losing her father and husband. Thus was extolled the prowess and adventurous spirit of the early Tamil women.[108] The fallen status of women was largely attributed to the double standards of the Hindu religion. Women alone can break the social hegemony which subordinated her. Appealing to women's sentiments 'The Dravidian' argued "Women's power is lying dormant. If she gets up from her slumber she can change the course of her life overnight."[109] Almost all the journals published during this period emphasised the need for women's education. The progress of the nation, they argued, lies in the active participation of the women in social and public life.

Brahmin intellectuals, since their inception, showed no keen interest towards the cause of women's upliftment, particularly in cultural and social life. Many Congress leaders also subscribed to conservative norms and ideas as far as women's status is concerned. Hindu revivalists strongly opposed the woman's participation in the public

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107   T.A.V.Nathan, "Our Mother", *The Non-Brahmin Youth*, vol.1, no.7, 1928, p.302.

108   K.G.Sesha Aiyar, "Ode to Cheramam-Udihiyan Cheralandan", *The Tamilian Antiquary*, vol.1, no.1, 1907, p.93.

109   Quoted in Sarada Nambi Arooran, *Thani Tamil Eyakkathin Thorramum Valarchiyum* (Origin and Growth of Pure Tamil Movement), Madras, 1994, pp.47-49.

life as it would endanger the observances of religious norms and practices. Sundararama

Aiyar, a Varnasrama Dharama protagonist blamed the nationalists and new English

educated men for causing great dislocation by "dragging them out of their legitimate

domain of the home and dangling before them, the fascination and the fanfare of public

appreciation and public gaze. For what purpose and achievement are they engaged in

this unnecessary and also in our view mischievous past time?"[110]

Whenever the colonial Government introduced social legislation there was a bitter

opposition particularly from Brahmin quarters. They decried that the long cherished

religious and social sentiments and practices were treated with indifference and recklessly

violated, and the Government failed to adhere to its commitment to religious neutrality.

Challenging the validity of the Government's attempt to enact social legislation upon the

age old customs of a large number of people, N.Srinivaschariar gave a call to Brahmins

to form a community to strengthen the principles of Brahminism. Speaking in 1928

about the Bill on Child marriage, he said that public opinion was not invited before the

Bill was introduced. In no other country would this procedure be adopted on a matter

which affected the customs of a large number of people.[111] The Mahamahopadyaya

Yegnaswami Sastrigal, Agent and Representative of His Holiness the Shankaracharya of

Kamakoti Pith, Kumbakonam, also defended before the Consent Committee that "It was

reprehensible to marry after puberty among the Brahmins".[112] Congress leader

S.Satyamurthy also threatened to perform his daughter's marriage in defiance of 'Sharada

Act'. He strongly condemned Government interference into the religious matters of the

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110   K.Sundararama Aiyar, *Varnasrama Dharma*, pp.6-13.

111   *The Non-Brahmin Youth*, vol.1, nos. 5&6, 1928, pp.197-201.

112   Ibid., nos.9&10, 1928, p.406.

society. Portraying Devadasis as retainers of national art and culture, he opined that each of them should dedicate at least one girl to be a future Devadasi.[113] Thus, love for religious values, and traditions and customs precluded them from making any inroads towards the social progress by legislation.

It was during the militant phase of Dravidian movement (the era of Self-Respect), that women's question assumed a new dimension. Locating the question in a larger perspective, E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker argued that fundamental to this was the cultural subordination of the women, due to the existence of ancient religious customs.[114] He tried to liberate women from the shackles of all ideological dominance, thereby creating space for women to articulate in the social sphere. According to him cultural submission of women was the basis of all social evils. Therefore, women must be treated on par with men in the social institution of marriage.[115] To carry out his reform activities he introduced self respect marriage based on gender equality. He followed a very pragmatic approach in disseminating ideas concerning women's liberation. He strongly condemned Tamil scholars who spoke only of the glory of ancient Tamil women rather than addressing the needs of the present time: "It will be worthwhile if you discuss the present status of women and what can be done about achieving women's liberation, instead of glorifying our grandmothers like Allirani, Kannagi and Madavi."[116] He widely used his organ 'Kudiarasu', 'Vidutalai' and 'Puratchi' to propagate his ideas.

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113   R.Sundaralingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India*, p.457.

114   E.V.R.Periyar, *Karpa Aatchikallathu Pillai Petrai Adakki Alluthal* (in Tamil), Madras, 1985, p.7.

115   E.V.R.Periyar, *Vazhkai Thunainalam* (The goodness of the Help to Domestic Life), Madras, 1917, p.13.

116   Quoted in M.S.S.Pandian, "Denationalizing the Past-Nation in E.V.Ramasamy's Political Discourse", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 October 1993, p.2284.

Besides this he published a number of pamphlets to educate the society on modern lines. Thus the print played a key role in colonial Tamilnad in creating a new cultural sensibility and social outlook towards modernity and life.

CHAPTER IV

READING OF THE RAMAYANA IN THE MODERN TAMIL CONTEXT

Every society writes and rewrites its history for the benefit of its people in the light of the existing dominant world view. Literary traditions are defined and re-defined to maintain the social equilibrium. Since literature is the expression of the dominant hegemonic ideology, it undergoes a constant transformation to maintain the cultural hegemony. These literary traditions were largely used to disperse the vibrant social ideas into society. In course of time these literary narrative traditions were generally redefined and modified to safeguard the existing power relations.[1] They were the representatives of main stream culture.

Epic, a long literary piece, is generally passed on from generation to generation to safeguard certain social beliefs. It commands great respect in society for its cultural heritage and infallible sanctity. Ramayana, the great epic of India has been retold in various forms throughout the historical period to maintain certain cultural norms. It was told in different social locations under the impact of diverse social themes. Pointing out to its plurality Romila Thapar expresses, "The Ramayana does not belong to any one movement in history for it has its own history which lies embedded in many versions which were woven around the theme at different times and places."[2] Each rendering of Ramayana had its own crystallization to meet certain social requirements. These versions were appropriated by the societies according to their convenience. However,

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1   Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London, 1991, p.12.

2   Romila Thapar, "The Ramayana Syndrome", *Seminar*, no.353, January 1989, p.72.

at a point of historical situation, the credibility of these versions were challenged by various social groups.

An epic is seen as an expression of a certain historical consciousness, even though the events it records may not be historically authenticated. The epic was in its origin, a part of an oral meta-narrative tradition, which comes to gain currency as a literary genre at a date subsequent to that of the event described.[3] The epic as a chronotope, stemmed from certain literary and space time, constitute the social discourse of the period. Epic unlike other literary genres, commands a great respect from readers owing to its antiquity, sanctity and simultaneity of time.[4] As an authorial discourse it stemmed from a distant past and creates a mystified relationship between the readers, characters and the author. The functions of the epic are manifold. It gives new meaning to religious beliefs and moral code of conduct, codifies cultural behaviour and ritual patterns and determines the social norms and discursive practices. The statement of the epic is part of an ongoing dialogue over time, based on its heteroglossia. The centripetal force of the epic plays a crucial role in homogenising the society in its cultural configuration.[5]

Epic, as a meta-narrative tradition represents the social behaviour and value system of high culture. While incorporating the grand themes like universal ethics, of battle between good and evil, it also emulates on the other hand, subsidiary ethical values relating to human relationships. At a wider level, it functions as a link between classic

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3   Romila Thapar, *India History and Thought: Essays in Honour of A.L.Basham*, Calcutta, 1982, p.221.

4   M.M.Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Texas, 1982, p.7.

5   Ibid., p.37.

traditions and local culture - where it facilitates assimilation and inclusion of fresh episodes pertinent to the societal needs.[6]

Epic as a high literary genre, well developed in the early period and functions as a record of the absolute past with great national traditions. The absolute past, conclusiveness and closedness were the outstanding features of the epic narrative tradition. Moreover the epic is monochromic, valorized and hierarchical. As a long poem of the past, it lacks relative connectivity with the past. It is completely cut off from all chronic times in which the readers or listeners and the characters are located.[7] Its impervious nature to change, its impenetrability and its temporal and valorized structure isolates it from all contemporary influences. The epic discourse always enjoys celebrating and portraying the distant past by epitomising it. As Bakhtin points out, "The epic incorporation of the contemporary hero into a world of ancestors and founders is a specific phenomenon that developed out of an epic tradition long since completed, and that therefore is as little able to explain the origin of the epic as is, say, the neo-classical ode. Whatever its origins, the epic as it has come down to us is an absolutely completed and finished generic form, whose constitutive feature is the transferral of the world it describes to an absolute past of national beginnings and peak times. The absolute past is a specifically evaluating (hierarchical) category. In the epic world view, "beginning", "first", "founder", "ancestors", "that which occurred earlier" and so forth are not merely temporal categories but valorized temporal categories, and valorized to an extreme degree."[8] The epic world view always intends to give a rosy picture about the past.

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6   Romila Thapar, "A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rama", in Sarvepalli Gopal (ed.), *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhumi Issue*, New Delhi, 1991, p.142.

7   Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p.23.

8   Ibid., p.15.

Anything good or worth preserving has come down to us from the past. Therefore, "the epic absolute past is the single source and the beginning of everything good, for all later times as well."[9] Thus the epic provides the ideological content for the construction of cultural hegemony over society. The conflict in the modern period is the construction of the new identity by de-constructing or re-constructing the epic world view. In short, the modern discourse has had a head-on collision with the hellenistic epic world view.[10]

Ramayana, the long venerated and widely read and respected epic reflects diverse cultural traditions and religious practices. Historically, the interesting aspect of Ramayana is its multiplicity of versions which speaks volumes of the people's perception about the role of the king and the citizens in matters of Dharma and justice. Each of the many versions, views the social reality in its own cultural perspective and makes particular statements as an ongoing dialogue over time.'[11] Some versions contradict others in terms of content and approach. Some of them even subscribe to a diametrically opposed ideology. The function and style of the story in each of the versions is largely determined by heteroglossia or the primacy of literary space-time.[12] The relatively similar stories are treated variously in terms of their own functional world view such as ethics, social and political norms, religious and cultural practices. Therefore, they cannot be considered as the sole property of a particular culture and religion. Each of the versions is the cultural expression of a particular historical time. Even an overview of a single version provides us with a plethora of information about the historical

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9   Ibid., p.17.

10   Craig Brandist, "Gramsci, Bakhtin and the Semiotics of Hegemony", in New Left Review vol.216, no.1, March-April 1996, pp.99-100.

11   Romila Thapar, "A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rama", p.145.

12   Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination, p.242.

happenings of a particular society. But they themselves do not constitute the kernel of the historical fact unless supported by other reliable sources. The variations and interpolations incorporated into the main-stream meta-narrative serve cultural and religious purposes.[13] Therefore, it becomes necessary to differentiate the cultural idioms from the religious ones. The contradictions and deviations are valuable points to assess and examine the role of the epic as a cultural idiom in creating a particular functional world view in society.[14]

The story of Rama initially was a narrative, preserved and protected against the ravages of time by the power of memory. In the course of time it succumbed to the corpus of interpolations, distortions, and exaggerations. The Valmiki Ramayana, in its original form, was never a sacred book. It was neither an itihasa nor a treatise on Dharmic principles. Initially it was viewed only as a 'Kavya' or 'Adi Kavya' which did undergo a substantial change in the course of time to become an Epic or an Ithihasa.[15] Later it was refashioned as a sacred book with the emergence of the Rama cult, in the medieval period.

Contesting Versions

Every society makes an attempt to incorporate the changes into the cultural idioms for popular consumption. These changes have been done in order to define the social attitude and to manipulate political conflict. Epic is a compendium of stories, legends,

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13   Romila Thapar, "A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rama", p.153.

14   Romila Thapar, "Society and Historical Consciousness: The Itihasa-Purana Tradition", in Romila Thapar and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (eds.), Situating Indian History, New Delhi, 1986, pp.354-55.

15   Romila Thapar, "A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rama", p.150.

myths and ballets which gives a new form to the literary genre. Using the raw material provided by the meta-narrative every society develop its own version, in a particular perspective, by giving importance to certain event and omitting the rest. Changing heroes, description of pomp and show emulating individual valour and ridiculing the enemy have been done accordingly with a view to uphold certain social norms and cultural values.[16] There has been a number of renderings developed over the period in opposition to the mainstream Brahminical traditions of Valmiki Rama Katha. Prominent among them are the versions of the heterodox sects such as Buddhists and Jains. According to Buddhists versions Sita and Rama, sister and brother, ruled Ayodhya together for 16,000 years after their marriage. This narrative alluded to have emphasised the purity of blood by emulating the ideals of Kshatriya-hood.[17] Moreover the story was rendered in the popular idiom Pali as against the scholarly Sanskrit. It has even been argued that the Buddhist rendering might have originated much before the Valmiki Ramayana, in the fourth or third century B.C.

The Jain tradition is more aggressive as it places Ravana as the hero of the story, thereby setting out a counter epic- narrative. Vimalasuri's 'Paumacharyam', written in about the third century A.D., in the popular idiom of Prakrit, challenges the Brahminical hegemonic rendering of Rama-Katha. Epitomising Ravana as a staunch Jain monk, who acquired considerable ascetic power through his penance and austerity, Vimalasuri claimed historicity for the Jain version. Further he denounced Brahmins as heretics who subverted the actual story for their own spiritual convenience. The story unfolds with

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16   David Schulman, "Fire and Flood: The Testing of Sita in Kampan's *Iramavataram,*" in Paula Richman (ed.), *Manyb Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia,* New Delhi, 1991, pp.89-90.

17   Romila Thapar, "A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rama", p.152.

the lineage of Ravana and then Hanuman. It gives an account of their sterling qualities. Rakshasas were not demons but human beings and the story dismisses all other vilifying statements of Valmiki's version as misinterpretation of the truth. The story further upholds that Hanuman was not a monkey but leader of a clan with the monkey emblem on its standard. He was not a traitor but played the role of mediator between the rival groups. The story ends up with a proselytising note saying all characters who appear in the story embraced Jainism.[18] Thereafter, a number of Jaina versions came into existence by setting up human characters in Jaina ethics.

The story of Rama-Katha was picked up by a range of interest groups for a variety of reasons, and each one of them claimed authenticity. The story increasingly became a theme and plot for many other popular genres. There has been an enormous geographical spread of the Rama-Katha with the advent of the Rama-Cult. The story as a cultural metaphor and sacred literature began to spread to far-flung areas. More and more Rama-Katha stories were produced in the regional languages by incorporating their indigenous culture, such as Kamban's 'Iramavataram' in Tamil, 'Ranganatharamayana' in Telegu, 'Pampa Ramayana' in Kannada, 'Krittibasha Ramayan' in Bengali and Eknath's 'Bhavartha Ramayana' in Marathi. The writing of the Ramayana in regional languages closely followed the original version, but they were neither verbatim translations nor a slavish imitation or derivative discourse. It was indeed a re-creation of the old epic story in accordance with the changed conditions and needs of the age.[19]

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18   Ibid., pp.154-55.

19   Romila Thapar, "The Ramayana Syndrome", *Seminar*, no.353, January 1989, p.74.

Prelude to the Polemics

The practice of Vaisnavism was prevalent in the Tamil country from first century B.C. R.G.Bhandarkar, a prominent historian, argues that the Samkarsana and Vasudeva cult had come to be worshipped in the Maratha country and it spread further south up to the Tamil country. Bhagavata-Purana (Book XI, Chapter 5, vv 38-40), in its prophetic style opines "in the Kali age there will be found men here and there devoted to Narayana, but in large numbers in the Dravida country, where flow the rivers Tamaraparani, Kaveri and others, and that those who drink the water of these rivers will mostly be pure-hearted devotees of Vasudeva."[20] Vaisnavism spread leaps and bounds in Tamil Nadu and reached its prominence in about the eleventh century. During this period, Kamban wrote his epic when the worship of Rama as an avatar of Lord Vishnu had gained a firm footing. The Vaisnavite saints, the Alvars, narrated rapturously the various facets of Rama's story and spread the message of his infinite grace. Vaisnavism enjoyed royal patronage in the late medieval period and became a popular religious sect. The ideological conflict between Saivism and Vaisnavism led to a serious confrontation which spread to all other cultural activities.[21]

In the late nineteenth century, with the increase in literacy and the advent of the Print media-culture, the story of Ramayana gained more and more religious and political importance. There were a frequent claims to ancestry to the two royal lineages - the Suryavamsha and Chandra Vamsha - and Rama was believed to belong to the former. Many aspiring lower caste groups put forward their demand for the status of Kshatriya, by tracing this genealogy to Rama or Ikshvaku tribe in the book of Ramayana, they

20   R.G.Bhandarkar, *Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Poona, 1913, p.18.

21   A.Pandurangan, "Kamban's Rama: The Divine and the Human", *Journal of Tamil Studies*, vol.31, June 1987, pp.23-24.

became their royal ancestors. Maravan a war-like community, numerically preponderant in Southern Tamil district drew their etymology through a picturesque tradition. In consequence of their assistance to Rama in his war against the demon Ravana, he gratefully exclaimed in good Tamil 'Maraven' or 'I will never forget.'[22] Shanars, a toddy tapping caste, claimed their ancestry to Mahothara, the Prime Minister of King Ravana of Lanka.[23] Some other lower castes, with a view to improve their social status, went to trace their roots from many other Ramayana characters like Hanuman. The story of Ramayana was read by various social groups for a variety of reasons. It has now become an integral part of the cultural life of the society. The themes and characters of Ramayana have been incorporated into folk tales and cultural festivals.

In the political arena the story of Ramayana was brought to severe criticism owing to the cultural conflict between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. As early as 1880, for the first time the story of Ramayana was read by Somasundara Naicker as the history of the Vaisnavites subjugation of Saivites. Srinivasa Sastri, a Smartha Brahmin and Maraimalai Adigal, a staunch Velalla Saivite, also subscribed to this view.[24] The extensive publication of the story of Ramayana, at the turn of this century, shows the resurgence of interest and awareness among the public about the ongoing debate. According to the Madras Presidency Administrative Report for the year 1911-12, two-third of the books published under the title of religion were on the themes of the Ramayana. Various versions, commentaries and paraphrases on Kambana's Ramayana were printed in large numbers throughout the Presidency. Translations of the many other renderings were also

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22   *Census of India,* Madras, 1891, vol.13, pp.216-17.

23   P.Kulanthai, *Ravana Kaviyam,* Madras, 1971, p.43.

24   T. Sadasiva Aiyar, "The Morality of Ramayana: A Review", *Tamilian Antiquary,* vol.1, no.7, 1907, p.46.

published during this period. In 1908, "Another book called Ramagita, published in Madras, which represents itself to be contained in a larger work called 'Sattvaparayana' and is composed in 18 chapters like the genuine Bhagwattgita." R.G.Bhandarkar holds the view, "this work must be a very modern compilation, resembling the 108 Upanisads and tries to establish Rama as a religious teacher."[25] Many Tamil journals subscribing to the impending debate brought out extensive articles and exegesis from various versions to substantiate their point of view. The political use of Ramayana, in this period, created a bitter rivalry between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Gandhi's frequent claim for the establishment of Rama Rajya evoked mixed response from various quarters. The attainment of Swarajya was equated with the establishment of Ram Rajya by the nationalists. On the other hand it was considered as a restoration of Varnasrama Dharma by the Tamil ideologues.

Retrieval of Dravidian Identity from Epic Discourse

Colonial Tamil Nadu in the late nineteenth century, at its crossroads, caught up in the thicket of modernisation, began to scrutinise all its social beliefs and cultural traditions. Consequently, colonial intellectuals felt that they were at the stake of cultural insufficiency. They rationalised the existing social beliefs, and as they were embedded in their literature, they tried to retrieve their social identity through it. They found in the epic Ramayana a group of people unceremoniously conquered and kept under the perpetual arrest of the Aryan illusion. Identifying themselves with the fallen Dravidian race, they questioned the very validity of such narrative traditions. P.Sundaram Pillai questioned the very authenticity of the Sanskrit version of Ramayana and he regarded it

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25   R.G.Bhandarkar, *Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems*, pp.57-59.

as a biased literary work, written in order to "proclaim the prowess of Aryans and to represent their rivals and enemies, the Dravidians, who had attained a high degree of civilization at that period, in the worst possible colour."[26] In an essay entitled "The Morality of Ramayana" published by T.Ponnambalam Pillai and V.P.Subramania Mudaliar in 'Malabar Quarterly' and later in 'Tamilian Antiquary', he thoroughly explicated the Aryan illusion as it was embedded in the Ramayana. The Rakshasas, according to him, were the Dravidians who never existed but had been created by Aryans so that "the Dravidians might look small in the eyes of posterity."[27]

Sundaram Pillai, the modern exponent of Tamil historiography initiated the intellectual process of retrieving the lost history of Tamil identity from the cultural metaphor as a literary tradition. After making a significant breakthrough in the chronology of Tamil literature by establishing the age of Tirujnana-Sambandha, he made a concerted effort to locate the Tamil historiography on a firm footing. He subjected Valmiki's Ramayana to critical examination with a view to extract at least a kernel of historical evidence about the advent of caste system and the subsequent Aryan colonisation of South India. He neither treated Ramayana as an exegesis of religious text nor as a treatise on political domination. He rather viewed the epic discourse as an ideological expression of Aryan hegemony over Dravidian culture.[28]

Sundaram Pillai mainly focussed his attack on the moral edifice of the epic, thereby challenging the discourse of Aryan Dharma. His main contention was that the

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26   P.Sundaram Pillai, "Some Mile-stones in the History of Tamil Literature, or , the Age of Jnana Sambandha", *Tamilian Antiquary*, vol.1, no.3, p.93.

27   T.Ponnambalam Pillai, "Morality of Ramayana", *Tamilian Antiquary*, vol.1, no.7, p.38.

28   V.P.Subramania Mudaliar, "A Critical Review of the Story of Ramayana and An Account of South Indian Castes" (in Tamil), *Tamilian Antiquary*, vol.1, no.2, p.42.

so-called 'Deva race' was unable to live up to the standard pattern set by them. Whereas the monstrous ten headed race did abide by the universal principles even at critical junctures. The moral integrity of the Dravidian race can be aptly vindicated by the treatment meted out to the prisoners of war by them particularly the women. Instead of employing vitriolic jab rhetorics to vilify the characters, he tried to adumbrate the logical inconsistency and the cultural snobbishness of the epic world view.[29] Sundaram Pillai also pointed out the ideological conflict between Saivites and Vaisnavites as it were embedded in the epic traditions. However, he did not deeply delve into the intricacies of the religious controversy. Ravana was shown by him in better light - his acts were exalted and appreciated as if they fitted into the moral standards of the world view. He upheld Ravana, a staunch devotee of Shiva, as he "Was a dutiful son, father, husband and brother. He could always be relied upon and maintained the laws of War with honour. He treated his enemies with generosity, nay, magnanimity."[30]

Sundaram Pillai raised a series of questions about the noble ideals of the Kshatriya Prince, the incarnate of Lord Vishnu. According to him, Rama's alliance with treacherous Sugriva, perfidious Vibheeshana, the brutal killing of Shambuga and the attack on Bali did not emulate the qualities of the so-called defender of the Dharmic order. Rama relied more upon subterfuges than fair open fight which was the Dharma of the Kshatriyas according to Aryan ideas. Further he went into the imperatives of plot construction and the structure of the narrative to expose contemptuous treatment meted out to the Dravidian race. Valmiki's narration of events, coloured with blatant racism beyond imagination gives an innuendo about the design and purpose of the epic. The

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29   T.Ponnambalam Pillai, "Morality of Ramayana: A Rejoinder", *Tamilian Antiquary*, vol.1, no.7, p.64.

30   Ibid., pp.42-43.

hyperbolical digressions such as the "three headed Trisiras", the 'Ten headed Ravana", the ever 'sleepy Kumbakarna' the 'hideous Surpanakha', clearly expose the implacable prejudice of the Aryans.

M.S.Purnalingam, an ardent champion of Tamil antiquity undertook a thorough study to establish the myth of the story of Ramayana and the historicity of the character of Ravana. Ravana, the noble king of Lanka, a part of the larger Tamilagam (Lemuria) before the great deluge, administered the kingdom so well that the internal peace was never disturbed. As a renowned warrior he affected great conquests by his valour. After giving a vivid account of his lineage, progeny, marriage, exploits and his character, he argued that Aryans came as Rishis in the beginning, ruptured the Dravidian civilization by injecting their rituals. They established their cultural supremacy by ridiculing the Dravidian values and their religion. The main thrust of his argument was that the story of Rama, like Mahabharata, was written to describe the Aryan conquest of the 'South'.[31]

M.S.Purnalingam argued that Rama was nowhere described as founding an Aryan empire in the South, nor producing any change or improvement in the civilization of the South. Valmiki knew nothing about the Deccan and beyond except the fact that Brahmin hermitages were to be found there. In support of his view he pointed out from Lassens 'Indisches Alterthumskunde' that the Epic of Rama "was intended to represent allegorically the first attempt of the Aryans to conquer the South."[32]

The story, he argued, might have developed on the basis of Indravrit myth found in the Rig Veda. According to the Rig Veda, Sita appeared as the furrow personified

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31   M.S.Purnalingam Pillai, *Ravana The Great*, Munnirpallam, 1928, pp.1-13 and 24.

32   Ibid., p.49.

and invoked as a goddess and wife of Indra who was none other than Rama. This identification was confirmed by the name of Ravana's son being Indrajit, 'conqueror of Indra'. In the subsequent period the cult of Sita might have spread to the South after the advent of extensive cultivation. Pointing to many oriental scholars' opinion about the authenticity of the Epic, he held the view that the Ramayana is like the Mahabharata utterly value-less as a narrative of historical events and incidents and its heroes were myths pure and simple. Rama was spoken of as an incarnate of Lord Vishnu, but according to historical evidence the cult of Rama came into prominence only in the eleventh century. Thus he concludes that Rama, the hero of Ramayana, is only a new addition of 'Indra battling with the demons of draught.' Simultaneously he contended that the allegorical and mythical interpretation of Rama did not affect in many way the historical character of Ravana who was looked upon as a "mighty hero and monarch, a conqueror of worlds, and a fearless register of Aryan aggressions in South India."[33]

Hyper Literal Reading and Cultural Awakening

At the turn of this century, as the non-Brahmin movement began to grow, many scholars questioned the ideological premises of the Ramayana. This led to a conflict between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins. There was a serious and long debate about the necessity for such a creation of cultural imperialistic ideology; while pointing out the moral utility and the cultural heritage of the Epic, scholars like V.S.Srinvasa Sastri argued that the 'Ramayana was the literary treasure of Indian culture'.[34] On the other hand, pointing to the allusive inconsistencies and cultural humiliation C.N.Annadurai

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33   Ibid., p.80.

34   V.S.Srinivasa Sastri, *Essays on Srimat Valmiki Ramayana*, Madras, 1958, p.xii.

argued 'Ramayana should be burnt'. EVR while he was in the Congress openly said that "all ignoble and ignonimous" Shastras and Puranas should be burnt.[35] These remarks generated heated discussions among the scholars. Many brought their own versions and interpretations of Ramayana to substantiate their point of view.

Prior to E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker, the re-reading of the Ramayana in the modern Tamil context was only undertaken as an intellectual endeavour to de-mystify the long venerated religious values, symbols and rituals. However, the inorganic Tamil intellectuals never envisaged an agenda to invoke the popular feelings through hyper literal reading. The process of deconstruction though started long before, it was EVR who democratised the ideas of Ramayana to arouse critical consciousness among the masses to revolt against the dominant Epic world view.[36]

E.V.R. developed an impeccable and thorough critique of the characters and values of Ramayana. Rejecting Rama as hypocritical and frail, deserving only scorn and contempt, he showed Ravana, the true Dravidian who possessed all kingly qualities as the real hero of the Epic. His iconoclastic reading of Ramayana was the centre piece of his campaign against Brahminism. He considered Hinduism as an ideological instrument designed purposefully to maintain the supremacy of Brahmins, whom he linked with the North Indian Sanskritic culture. According to him, Brahmins were intruders like Moghuls and Europeans, who came to the South only to exploit through political connivance.[37]

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35   Cited in E Sa Viswanathan, "E.V.Ramasami Naicker and the Tamilnad Congress", *Journal of Indian History*, vol.54, Part I, April 1976, p.212.

36   E.V.Ramasamy Naicker, *Purattu Imalaya Purattu* (in Tamil), Madras, 1953, pp.13-14.

37   K.Veeramani (ed.), *Periyar Kalanjiyam*, vol.4, Madras, 1994, pp.77-78.

E.V.R. always focussed his attention on religion since it provided an ideological premise to the dominant world view. He went on to de-claim the insidious nature of Hindu religion and its practices. Employing a variety of methods and principles, he subjected legends and myths to thorough scrutiny and exclaimed its seeming contradictions and incoherence.[38] Further treating them as if they were historical canons, he deprecated the actions and deeds of various Hindu deities.

E.V.R. read Ramayana as a text of political domination. His interpretation of the Epic was intended to the South Indians to their oppression by North Indians. Through his reading of the Ramayana he divulged what he termed as the 'shoddy values of Brahminism' and tried to establish Rama's scramble for power and authority.

E.V.R. was a prolific writer of short, aggressive and vitriolic essays intended to propel the emotive feelings of the masses and articulate social and cultural crises. He possessed a canny ability to convey his most radical message in a simple and lucid style even to unlettered masses.[39] His brief articles with attractive titles about the characters of the Ramayana in a simple style, bombastic but witty rhetorics generated strong popular opinion against Aryan domination. In fact lambasting of such kind gave a new thrust and fixity to his social campaign. E.V.R. brought into use popular media for dissemination of his ideas to create a new social awareness. Through street plays, public meetings and other local art forms, he ventilated his urgent appeal to give up Ram worship with immediate effect, as it deprived the self worth and dignity of individuals. The most notorious popular play 'Keemayana' (Keema is a nonsense sound) based on E.V.R.s exegesis by depicting Rama as a drunkard and Sita as a harlot, challenged the normative

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38   V.Anaimuthu (ed.), *Thoughts of Periyar EVR*, vol.1, 1974, p.726.

39   Anita Diehl, *Periyar E.V. Ramasami*, New Delhi, 1978, pp.29-30.

interpretation of a 'meta-discourse'.[40]   Public ridiculing of sacred images and beliefs of this kind created a new fashion and enthusiasm to break more and more infallible social practices and religious norms.   Similarly, E.V.R.'s attempt to burn images of Rama and the call for celebration of 'Ravana Leela', as a symbolic action, represent a reversal and culmination of the North India performance of Ramayana.

E.V.R. had thoroughly explicated the intricate exegesis of Ramayana, and published a number of articles through his organs to create a new public opinion. However, his reading of the Ramayana was most fully developed in two works: *Irmayanappattirankal* (characters of Ramayana) and *Irmayanakkurippukal* (points about Ramayana).   He used a hyper literal reading to invoke the feelings against the cultural imperialism of the Aryans.   Pointing to the illogical beliefs and immoral characters from Ramayana, he asserted that it was the diabolic creation of 'treacherous Aryans'.[41] Giving some historical fixity to the narratives, he lamented that Aryans who came from outside India have cunningly imposed their authority by coopting all Tamil traditions into Aryan philosophy.   Consequently the Tamils have lost their independence in all disciplines of life.

Ravana was the king of the Tamils, from whom three Tamil rulers (Chera, Chola and Pandya) descended and ruled ancient Tamil Nadu, in accordance with Tamil ethics. They welcomed the Aryan fugitives when they approached their territories in search of a livelihood.[42]   The treacherous Aryans plotted against Tamil kings and

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40   M.K.Subramaniam, *Periyar and Self Respect Philosophy*, Erode, 1980, pp.33-34.

41   E.V.Ramasamy Naicker, *Ramayana Pattivankal* (in Tamil), Erode, 1959, pp.11-12.

42   Ibid., pp.27-29.

unceremoniously usurped the power from them. The Tamil King Ravana was not defeated by a Royal Army but murdered by a mercenary force headed by Rama.[43]

E.V.R. picked his way through the Ramayana, character by character, and vilified those who joined forces with Rama. In his book *Iramayanappatiankal*, he devoted a separate chapter for each character to unveil their misconduct and atrocities committed against the Dravidians. Cruel disfigurement of Surpanakha, attacking Bali from concealment, an innocent Sudra for the sake of a Brahmin boy, and the blatant chauvinist attitude against one's own wife under the garb of chastity do not fall in line with any kind of Dharma. Therefore Ramayana was not meant for teaching any moral ethics. It was an attempt to suppress the dis-empowered through intellectual arrogance. His perusal of Ramayana was not an intellectual exercise. It was an attempt to break the 'culture of silence' to undermine the ideological base of cultural hegemony.

E.V.R.'s reading of Ramayana received greater attention not for its intellectual elegance but for the resentment it invoked against the dominant cultural ideology. His frequent announcement of burning Rama's pictures and the call for the celebration of 'Ravana Leela' gave a new public discourse to woo people towards counter literary traditions.

C.N.Annadurai, a Lieutenant of E.V.R., had gone deeper into the intricacies of Ramayana to prove the Aryan illusion. 'Kambarasam', 'Kambankaviyam' and 'Thee Paravattum' were some of the pamphlets which carried the fiery criticism against the Ramayana as a whole. C.N.Annadurai mainly concentrated on 'Kamban's Ramayana' because it gave a legitimacy for Aryan imperialism by epitomising Ravana as the hero. He argued 'Kamban' was the stooge of Aryan Imperialism who adroitly expunged dark

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43 Ibid., p.53.

characters from Ramayana by adding divine flavour to it. He conjured up a peculiar instrumental rationality to vindicate the misdeeds of the characters of the Ramayana in the name of indigenousing the Epic for Tamil consumption.[44] Therefore, the veneration of such an Epic, however good it may be in quality was a suicidal and self-defeating act. He suggested that their salvation lay in the abolition of such despicable Epics.[45] C.N.Annadurai's criticism on 'Kamban's Ramayana' evoked sharp response from various intellectual quarters. Tamil scholars like Somasundara Bharati, R.P.Seethupillai and Maraimalai Adigal stated that "In Kamban's Ramayana', the poetic genius of the Tamils, which was, at no time, wanting in originality, colour, variety, flexibility and verve reached its summit, in the splendour and sweep of imagination, stateliness of diction, the glory of music, the depth of thought and the massiveness and range of intellect."[46] Criticism of such kind would cramp the literary activities of Tamils. Any attempt to ban 'Kamban's Ramayana' they viewed as suicidal and uncivilized act. Replying to C.N.Annadurai's allegations against Kamban's Ramayana, Somasundara Bharati spoke at a debate at Salem "it was only after the birth of this great Epic poem (Kamban's Ramayana) that Tamils could justly lay claim to a place of rank with the great classical languages in literary wealth."[47]

On the other hand, in the mid-twenties a movement had already been embarked to popularise Kamban's Ramayana among the public. T.K.Chidambaranatha Mudaliar started a Kamban movement in 1920 at Palayamkottai to create interest towards Tamil

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44   C.N.Annadurai, *Thee Paravattum*, Madras, 1995, third edition, p.7.

45   C.N.Annadurai, *Kambarasam*, Madras, 1986, fourth edition, p.71.

46   A.V.Subramania Aiyar, *Tamil Studies*, Tirunelveli, 1970, p.120.

47   C.N.Annadurai, *Thee Paravattum*, pp.28-29.

studies, particularly Kamban's Ramayana. This movement organised lectures, conducted debates and published pamphlets on the theme of Kamban's Ramayana. The movement celebrated Kamban Vizha (festival) throughout Tamil Nadu to create awareness about Tamil literature.[48]

In all these activities it can be easily comprehended that various identity based groups and individual identity horizon together engaged themselves in a constant process of recovering and retrieving their identities vis-a-vis their cultural and social status. Undermining the dominant social perception or constructing an alternative world view was part and parcel of the cultural awakening. Re-reading of the Ramayana in the modern Tamil context, therefore, must be viewed as an integral part of the development of Dravidian ideology. The re-assessment of traditional characters, symbolic representations, cultural statements and the incidence of the Epic with the polemical flamboyance created a rhetoric of political opposition.

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48   A.V.Subramania Aiyar, *Tamil Studies*, pp.93-94.

CHAPTER V

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY - A SEARCH FOR RECOGNITION - E.V.R.'S CONTRIBUTION TO DRAVIDIAN IDEOLOGY

Intellectual history has not yet developed in India as an autonomous branch to study various socio-cultural and political development in the light of the dominant consciousness. Intellectual history has been widely viewed as the study of ideas or thoughts of a particular personality or text.[1]

The role of intellectuals in creating a critical consciousness among the masses is crucial to the study of cultural and social movements in colonial Tamil Nadu. The twentieth century development of politics and social conflicts have been generally studied as the product of a particular historical situation. The creative potentials and innovative ability of the intellectuals has not yet been considered as vital to the construction of history. The intellectual response and their ideological commitment to the colonial political situation has been negated by the reductionist Cambridge school of Historiography thereby denying the social dynamics of the Dravidian movement.[2]

C.J.Baker's *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937* and Washbrook's *The Emergence of Provincial Politics, 1870-1920* echo the Cambridge sentiments. Washbrook attempts to show that the non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu was based more on petty interests than commitment to any strong ideology. He was of the view that, "The non-Brahmins representing ninety eight percent of the population and possessing vast bulk of wealth and political power, denounced the Brahmins which consisted of less than two percent of the population and was possessed of nothing like the

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1   K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi, 1995, p.54.

2   M.S.S.Pandian, "Beyond Colonial Crumbs: Cambridge School, Identity Politics and Dravidian Movements", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18-25 February 1995, p.385.

same economic and political resources for oppressing it."[3] Thus he denied the basic logic behind the movement. It was an attempt to impress the colonial rulers to get more political mileage. On the other hand taking the same stand, Baker argues that a majority of Brahmins were mere cooks, scribes and religious functionaries who could be easily purchased for a few coins or broken coconuts. Therefore the threat to non-Brahmin interest by Brahmins is mere illusory and meaningless. Baker though factually right failed to understand the impact of the Brahminical hegemonic ideology upon the society. As he mentioned, "a few Brahmins who were rich and powerful were capable of ruling the whole society thereby subordinating the non-Brahmins."[4] This was the historical fact which he failed to take into account.

Washbrook and Baker denied the legitimacy of caste identity for political history. Thus they made it out to be that the non-Brahmin movement was not based on genuine antagonism, it was only fought for petty group interests. They located the caste politics in the domain of communal bloc. Further they held the view that the Self Respect Movement was the product of the disturbed time produced by depression and consequent disruption in patron-client nexus.[5]

Intellectual activity or response developed in relation to given historical conditions which is inextricably linked with material reality i.e., the inter-relationship between ideas and objective reality that determine the nature of intellectual reaction to a particular historical situation. As Marx opines "the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and material

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3   David Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics, 1870-1920*, New Delhi, 1977, p.7.

4   C.J.Baker, *The Politics of South India, 1920-1930*, New Delhi, 1974, p.29.

5   Ibid., p.124.

intercourse of men, the language of real life and that consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life process."[6]

Ideology and consciousness are crucial to the explanation of cultural-intellectual process that emerged from the cultural struggle. Intellectual commitment to cultural crisis is largely characterised by social origin and base.[7] The upper class ideology always makes an attempt to safeguard the organic and functional world view. In contrast, focussing on the exploitative nature, mass ideology always articulates structural transformation.[8] In this chapter I would attempt to study the intellectual commitment to the ongoing cultural struggle of colonial Tamil Nadu, between 1925 and 1944, in terms of the articulation of E.V.Ramaswami Naicker's ideas (the founder of the Self Respect Movement). Considering ideas as the embodiment of action I have focussed on the role of his thought and ideas in engendering new cultural response to the hegemonic world view.

A Life Sketch

> Though things diverse from diverse Sages' lips we
> learn,
> 'Tis Wisdom's part in each the true thing to
> discern.[9]

A very different type of man was E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker (E.V.R.), by no means a great social demagogue like Gandhi or Nehru, a remarkable figure, in many ways an unlikely Indian, positivist in his cultural prejudices and pride, a born non-

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6   Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow, 1964, p.37.

7   K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony*, p.57.

8   Gail Omvedt, *The Non-Brahmin Movement in Western India: 1873-1930*, Bombay, 1976, p.112.

9   Tiruvalluvar, *Tirukkural*, G.V.Pope (Trans), Madras, 1976, p.114.

conformist, celebrator of rationality and discernment, irreverent towards traditions by which even progressive Indians often swear, iconoclastic about social customs and religious beliefs; the progenitor in South India, of militant movements of the depressed castes; drawn powerfully towards Gandhi but repelled by compromises with social reaction; the champion of Justice to the Sudra community and a rebel against Hindu orthodoxy. And ardent admirer of Robert Ingersoll, he propagated the idea of rationalism and discernment, created a new identity for the hitherto Sudras and gave new meaning to the life of the Dravidians. E.V.R. was always a controversial and sometimes even unpleasant personality, he has been a power in South India to an extent that has hardly been matched and his influence on his people is still potent.

A great social reformer and the crusader for social equality, E.V.R. was born in Erode, Tamil Nadu (1879-1974) and his schooling was limited to primary education. As a young child, he began to rebel against the caste norms and social order by breaking commensal rules. After a brief domestic life, he renunciated the world and started to move about as a vagabond in search of meaning in life. Enlightened by a visit to Banaras, E.V.R. returned to his home town to resume his family life. However, his conviction to social reform induced him to actively participate in local politics. His high ideals and faith in human fraternity made him move freely with other caste people without any distinction. With rational principles and a scientific approach to resolve problems he earned himself a dignified place in public arena.[10]

As a staunch follower of Gandhi, he served the Congress whole heartedly for about two decades. He was actively involved in propagating the great ideals of the Khadi movement and made his family adhere completely to Congress ideals. His active

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10   Swamy Chidambaranar, *Tamilar Talaivar: Periyar EVR Valkai Varalaru* (in Tamil), Erode, 1971, p.64.

participation in local and state politics provided him sufficient experience and knowledge to launch a social reform movement in the later period. He was of the view that the Congress under Gandhi's guidance would soon put an end to the perennial problem of caste inequality. However, Brahmins dominating the Congress, had showed a disinterest in promoting social reforms. The issue of Sermadevi Gurukulam and the resolution of communal representation convinced him that he would not get justice from the conservative Congress leaders as they wanted to maintain the status-quo.[11] E.V.R.'s break with the Congress in 1925 came essentially as a result of his insistence on the show-down between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. As he told the party caucuses, it was foolish to act as if there were no divisions among Brahmins and non-Brahmins.[12] It was the basis of all his propaganda and in the following year (1926), E.V.R. founded the Self Respect Movement. E.V.R. was one of those who believed that social reform should precede political reform.

Barnett rightly points out the commencement of the Self Respect Movement marked the beginning of the militant phase of Dravidian politics.[13] His indefatigable attempt and untiring campaign yielded remarkable results in the field of social reform. His scientific approach and the direct assault on Brahminical ideology quickened the process of social transformation. The establishment of vernacular newspapers and the effective use of the Tamil language as a communication vehicle was the turning point in carrying out their activities. The starting of 'Kudiarasu' (Republic) in 1924 was a

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11   E.Sa. Viswanathan, "E.V.Ramasami Naicker and the Tamiland Congress", *Journal of Indian History*, vol.54, April 1976, pp.197-200.

12   Cited in Anita Diehl, *Periyar E.V.Ramasamy*, Delhi, 1978, p.87.

13   Morguerite Ross Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*, Princeton, 1976, p.33.

sustained attempt in this line. He attracted the masses to social reform through public debates, lectures and dramas.[14]

The Guardian of Arya Dharma

E.V.Ramaswami Naicker strongly believed that inequality in any form was dangerous to the development of the Individual and the Nation as well. He strongly opposed Gandhi's cryptic explanation of Varnasrama Dharma. Speaking at a public meeting in Tinnevelly, he criticised, "the highly exalted Varnasrama Dharma in the Tamil country had relegated all the caste Hindus to the position of Sudras, which meant in the Manusmriti; 'the sons of prostitutes'. If such a Sudra were to follow Gandhi's advice he would end up only serving the Brahmins."[15]

Gandhi, as a leader of the Congress, during his visit to Madras, vehemently defended Varnasrama Dharma in the most provocative language. His utterances had the tinder enough to kindle the sentiments of the people. His frequent endorsement to Brahmin supremacy even annoyed most of the non-Brahmin Congress workers. Gandhi stated, "Varnasrama Dharma is not an unmitigated evil but it is one of the foundations on which Hinduism is build (and) defines man's mission on earth; also described the Brahmins as the 'finest flower of Hinduism and humanity.'"[16] Gandhi had further added, "I will do nothing to wither it. I know it is well able to take care of itself. It has weathered many a storm before now. Only let it not be said of non-Brahmins that they

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14   S.Saraswati, *Minorities in Madras State: Group Interests in Modern Politics*, New Delhi, 1974, p.53.

15   E.Sa. Viswanathan, "E.V.Ramasami Naicker and the Tamilnad Congress", pp.214-15.

16   Quoted in R. Sundaralingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891*, Arizona, 1974, p.457.

attempted to rob the flower of its fragrance and lustre...." He further advised that "the non-Brahmins in their ire against the Brahmins should not wreck the system of Varnasrama Dharma, the bed rock of Hinduism"[17] in his speech at Cuddalore on 10 September 1927.

E.V.R. met Gandhi twice to discuss the social problem and related issues. He wrote in 'Kudiarasu' on 7 August 1927, "After having much deliberation with Gandhi, we are convinced that the Sudras would not be met with proper justice in the matters of self dignity and respect in the Congress in India." Again on 7 November 1927 he wrote that, "It is our duty to fight to the finish; ...we cannot wait for a messiah to redeem us from the snare of the Aryan dominance."[18]

Social Reconstruction

E.V.R., a radical revolutionary, the father of the Dravidian movement found a new path for complete social transformation based on human dignity and Self Respect. As a rationalist he challenged the existing social norms, cultural values and Varnasrama Dharma. Unlike other social reformers he questioned the legitimacy of Brahminical ideologies. He developed a highly sophisticated critique against the Hindu religion in order to wipe out the existing caste order. It is better to pluck out the root rather than cut the branches. Therefore, he launched a crusade against the Hindu religion since it had subsumed all sorts of inequalitarian principles. Since the Brahmins were custodians of Hinduism, they attempted unscrupulously to legitimise the patriarchal order of subjugating women's interest under the guise of chastity. Its religious practices, rituals

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17 E.Sa. Viswanathan, "E.V.Ramasami Naicker and the Tamilnad Congress", p.216.

18 Quoted in V.Anaimuthu, *Periyar Ee.Ve.Ra. Sinthanaikal* (in Tamil), vol.1, Tiruchirapalli, 1974, p.677.

and rites were extremely irrational disgustive and exploitative in character. The cultural manifestation of religious ceremonies, incantation of Sanskrit slokas and the exaltation of Puranic texts were the conscious attempt to keep a particular section of people under perpetual arrest.[19] Monopolising the human faculty of knowledge by not allowing others was a deliberate attempt by chauvinistic Brahmins to keep the sons of the soil in social obscurantism. Thus, so to speak the Aryan imperial ideology subordinated the latter into classificatory grid of Brahminical apotheosis.[20]

E.V.R., a born revolutionary, emphasised the need for social transformation. In a transitional society, mere adaptive and innovative changes in the fundamental values cannot and do not resolve the impending crisis. A change in the core values becomes inevitable. As a social functionary, pointing to the inherent social inequalities, he advocated the complete desecration of the existing social order so that the new system would be brought in based on egalitarian principles.[21] Speaking at the first South Indian Social Reformers Conference exclusively organised by non-Brahmins, he said, "I am fast losing my belief in social reform as an agency for the regeneration of our country. I believe that the task before those who are anxious for the advancement of the country and those who are interested in seeing that the large majority of our people are imbued with the ideals of self-respect, equality and liberty is not social reform. On the other hand, it is social revolution born of invincible courage and undaunted boldness."[22] He strongly argued that our society had degenerated to such an extent that

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19   Ibid., p.903.

20   E.V.R.Periyar, *Purattu-Himalaya Purattu* (in Tamil), Erode, 1961, pp.16-17.

21   A.S.Venu, *Periyar Oru Charitaram*, Madras, 1980, p.22.

22   *The Non-Brahmin Youth*, vol.2, March 1928, p.438.

it was impossible to remedy it by social reform; E.V.R. contended, "The much talked about social reform is one of the crafty weapons of the wealthy and the educated classes who are competing with one another in an attempt to gain popularity and influence among the common people.... Such methods of social reform are not intended to confer any benefit on those for whose welfare they are intended."[23]

The great social reformers like Buddha, Kapila, Tiruvalluvar, Ramanuja and others have already tried their best to eradicate all social evils through reforms but failed to achieve desired results owing to the people's ignorance and their infallible faith in God.[24] It is impossible to effect any change by social reform because the sentiments of religion and the veneration of God have been so inextricably linked with the superstitious. According to E.V.R., the abolition of such beliefs means that the destruction of religion and God is destined to benefit humanity.[25]

Creating an Alternate Ideology

Dominant ideology is always in constant attempt to consolidate and perpetuate authority over the society from which they (the holders of dominant ideology) attempt to "realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance for others which are participating in the action."[26] Ruling ideals are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationship which dictates terms to the society in order to control it. As a result the "hegemonic idealogy must inevitably create

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23   Ibid., p.451.

24   E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker, *Man and Religion*, R.Sundarajau (trans;), Madras, 1993, p.22.

25   Periyar, *Vazhkai Thunainalam* (in Tamil), Madras, 1952, p.39.

26   Quoted in Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, Bombay, 1969, p.21.

contradictions." The contradiction is the conflict of interest and value which develops

into confrontation when the subordinated group acquires radical consciousness.[27] Thus

the primary contradictions are the dominant urge which inevitably produce conflict. The

key task here is to create a counter hegemonic ideology that would be capable of

transforming society.

In opposition to Brahmanical ideology, capitalising on the concept of 'Sudrahood',

E.V.R. rallied the hitherto despicable community around the constructed Dravidian

identity, thereby creating a subaltern social sphere. The simple fact is that he created

a space within the rigid social sphere for the subaltern to articulate freely. The people

of the bottom layer acquired radical consciousness to transgress the imposed ideal norms

of the dominant world view.[28] Thus creating a sense of honour in the minds of the

people, he made them move independently.

His primary intention was to wreck the system from within. However he

conceded conversion, as a policy, to be adopted so far as it concerned the untouchables,

as a temporary measure. If they wish, they could come back to their old order, which

meant religion was a matter of convenience rather than conviction.[29] He firmly

believed that no man could live without a sense of honour and self respect. Man

becomes a mobile corpse the moment he losses his dignity. The greatness of a human

being lies in his response to honour and insult; but animals have *no* reaction.[30]

Animals do not undergo the tyranny of psychic injury and emotional dilemma. But the

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27   E.P.Thompson, *The Poverty and Theory and Other Essays*, London, 1978, p.21.

28   S.Anandhi, *Middle Class Women in Colonial Tamil Nadu: Gender Relations and the Problem of Consciousness*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, JNU, New Delhi, 1992, pp.77-78.

29   *Periyar Era*, vol.1, no.7, March 1995, p.22.

30   Ibid., no.6, January 1995, p.17.

non-Brahmins of South India suffer at the hands of Brahmins irrespective of their status and calibre by being culturally marginalised as 'Sudras'. The 'Dravidian' in its editorial rightly pointed out the mental agony of a non-Brahmin when he is stigmatised as a 'Sudra'. "The Brahmins who live by eating the bread and wearing the clothes that we give, yet they call us 'Sudras' without any differences."[31] E.V.R. in his speech at Sennimalai clearly pointed out that man cannot bear mental insult. Taking recourse to "Tirrukural" he emphasises the impact of verbal insult and vilification,

"The wound which has been burnt in by fire may heal,

but a wound burnt in by the tongue will never heal."[32]

Self Respect Prior to Independence

E.V.R. was an iconoclast and non-conformist whose ideas were incomprehensible with orthodox Marxism. As a staunch follower of Robert Ingersoll he celebrated rationality and the spirit of reasoning. He negates all social customs and cultural values that have no empirical importance and material implications. On the other hand, he vehemently opposed cultural marginalisation and denial of social recognition to a section of people in the matter of ritual status. In spite of his flippant attitude towards religion he served on the Temple Trust Committee in his home town. His biographer A.S.Venu pointed out that E.V.R. continued to support financially some of the temple activities. This act brings out a simple fact that he would not like to be alienated from doing social obligations to maintain his ritual status. This is precisely why he involved himself in the Temple Entry Movement. Being an atheist he strove hard to break traditions by leading

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31   NNR, Madras, for the fortnight ending 16 July, Dravidian of 12 July 1917.

32   Viduthalai, Periyar's 110th Birth Anniversary Souvenir, 1988, p.17.

the Temple Entry Movement frequently. Under his leadership he successfully led a satyagraha movement for the Temple Entry in Vaikkom.

Every human being has a right to claim equal ritual status and respect from society, provided he also does so. If he were denied and deprived of that status, he will have all the right to fight for it. He wrote in 'Kudiaradu' 26 July 1928, "Our present fight is not against the flesh and blood of Brahmins but against the Brahminical traditions, Sastras and the Puranic texts that denied the equal status for non-Brahmins."[33] He forcefully argued that Hindu religion as a whole was the primary cause for all the social evils of the society. Caste structure was an epiphenomenal development. Therefore the eradication of untouchability will not suffice to construct a new civil society based on egalitarian principles.

The key institutions and chief components of the dominant ideology must be destroyed in order to change the existing social view. However the success of the task largely depended upon the destruction of the base. As Hindu religion was the handiwork of the Brahmins, it would cause damage to society if it was there in any form.[34]

Diametrically opposed to Gandhi, he argued for a total annihilation of the existing order through proscription of the pro-caste literature. He wanted to conduct a nation wide public bon-fire of pro-caste literature in order to wipe away the insult that was inflicted upon the 'Sudras' and the untouchables throughout the ages. Gandhi's spiritual idealised equality could not bring any concrete development in the society. In fact his idea of mystified equality was intellectual hypocracy which failed to treat an individual

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33   Quoted in V.Anaimuthu, *Periyar Ee Ve La Sinthanai Kal,* p.48.

34   E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker, *Man and Religion,* pp.13-14.

as a whole. E.V.R. said that Gandhi's idea of spiritual equality was like "Old wine in the new bottle" which would not make any impact in the social reality.[35]

Religious Exploitation

Material manifestation of cultural inequality would in fact hamper the effective articulation of human energy for social development. Social equality should precede economic and political equality. No individual can function as a faculty of knowledge without self respect and self confidence. He links this with the backwardness of Tamil society. A feudal society constituted hierarchically could not and did not fight with the well developed and modern society like England. His aetiological understanding of the backwardness was ultimately linked with the terrain of Hindu religion. He opined, "our salvation lies at the destruction of Hindu religion."[36]

Tracing the etymology of the term Hinduism, he said that it has no meaning and origin, indeed it was synonymous to stupidity and irrationality. Hinduism is constructed around the imagined abstract ideas and concocted stories which are full of contradictions. Its basic prime mover was maximisation of religious obligations and blatant racial chauvinism. Hindu religious texts were full of romance, illogical fantasies and idiotic stories which do not contribute anything to the human society. In fact it obstructed human growth and scientific progress thereby destroying human intellect and wisdom.

Coming to the field of economics E.V.R. criticises the exploitative nature of the Hindu religion. According to him the major portion of the Indian resources were frittered away unceremoniously in the name of religion. As an economic critique of the

35   K.Veeramani (ed.), *Periyar Kalanjiyam* (in Tamil), Madras, 1994, p.144.

36   V.Anaimuthu, *Periyar Ee Ve Ra Sinthanaikal*, vol.1, p.228.

Hindu religious exploitation he pointed out in 1926 that the main temples of the Madras Presidency had an income of Rs.25 crores which would invariably be used for unproductive purposes. The outward articulation of 'Sudra' wealth in the form of offerings and religious obligations to the temples and Brahmins constitute the greatest drain which invariably was being used by a microscopic lethargic dominant group. Thus Hindu religion paralysed the economic growth of the Indian society.[37] Religion has been widely used throughout the world for exploitative and subjugative purposes. Realising the divisive tendency and the futile nature of the religious system, he argued for a complete destruction of that social order. According to him religion was an ancient product that could not and did not serve the needs of the modern society. Religious ideology has tinder enough to kindle the minds of the people to indulge in distractive activities thereby paralysing the progress of science and economy.[38]

His ideas about religion and the concept of God was incomprehensible to Marxist dynamics of religion. For E.V.R. religion was an illusion, "the result of an objectification of man's own essence which becomes separated and projected into a new self-sufficient being which is called God. The idea of God was nothing more than the projected image of all that is good in man. Hence religion involved a basic inversion. God being creature, man became the creator, and the man who was a producer of God became a product.... (Thus) man makes religion, religion does not make man."[39] Man being a material being, he must be liberated from the false consciousness of religiosity. His true nature can only be recovered when his religious ideology gets

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37   Cited in *Viduthalai*, Periyar's 75th Birth Anniversary Souvenir, 1954, p.98.

38   K.Veeramani (ed.), *Periyar Kalanjiyam*, p.144.

39   George Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, HongKong, 1983, p.13.

destroyed. "The only way for man to rid himself of this illusion is to destroy the social world that produces it... the struggle against religion is necessarily a struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion."[40]

Traditional religion and modern science, are dichotomous to each other. In modern society they tend to cause damage to social harmony and peace by dividing people on communal lines. Therefore, the necessity for the abolition of religion becomes inevitable. He wrote in 'Kudiarasu', "the period has just come to overthrow faith by reason. Hereafter reason, commonsense and discernment would be the guidelines of the people in the society."[41]

Sudrahood as an Organising Concept

The contestation between Brahmins and non-Brahmins for jobs and posts led to the development of radical political ideology of Dravidianism with the coming of E.V.R. in the vortex of caste politics of Colonial Tamil Nadu. Using 'Sudrahood' as an organising concept, he gave a new direction to the movement. He linked the behavioural manifestation of the culturally undifferentiated status of non-Brahmins with Dravidian identity. Thus the caste conflict was converted into a racial confrontation in which both the groups were trying to emulate their status by taking recourse to colonial aid. He consciously tried to demonstrate the symbolic disequilibrium between the two cultures by constructing an alternative historical past diametrically opposed to each other on linguistic basis. An independent identity unique to their culture, different from that

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40   Ibid., p.13.

41   V.Anaimuthu, *Periyar Ee Ve Ra Sinthanaikal*, p.193.

which the Aryans provided them with a base to challenge the existing dominant social world view.

Daniel Lerner rightly points out, "the combination of projection and interjection is the inner mechanism by which the individual's identity horizon is enlarged and which enables, the newly mobile person to operate efficiently in a changing world."[42] The crucial development is that the newly emerged individual identity sought to have gained a currency from the colonial Government, which challenged the imposed category on them. E.V.R.'s Self Respect Movement precisely attempted to retrieve self dignity and social recognition for hitherto disempowered and inferiorised community through which he aimed to constitute a collective identity.

The basic feature of the Self Respect Movement was a sense of responsiveness to insult and honour. First of all a man had to assert himself, his human worth before he could challenge the dominant view. That Periyar sought to give such identity to the lower caste Hindus is a social fact. In the early period of the Self Respect Movement the collective identity got articulated in the discourse of the Dravidian movement in order to provide substantive citizenship and recognition of the subordinate groups. Keeping this in view the Self Respect Movement aimed to resusciate the victims of inequity and unfreedom of the past to become active subjects, "who through their active intervention in history could ensure self emancipation." Thus the collective identity designed by the Dravidian movement gave a sense of identity defined by oneself as an important phenomenon for human dignity and secular values in Tamil society.

E.V.R.'s focus on human subjectivity centred around the struggle for democratisation and secularization of the hitherto inarticulate levels of Tamil society.

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42   Robert L. Hardgrave, *The Dravidian Movement*, Bombay, 1965, p.6.

He constructed the alternative notions of human subjectivity for democratic community which are based on egalitarian and socialist principles. He made a scathing attack on the caste structure and its oppressive social practices. As Anandhi points out, his attempt to expose and contest the multiple mediation that structure the arrogance and power of the dominant Hindu Caste System, led him to advocate that Sudras and Untouchables by defying the dominant Hindu ideology, which defines them as essentially inferior and relegated them to the lowest social, economic and ritual status. Therefore, they must construct their own parallel system of alternative values and criteria of morality for which they must utilise modes of protest that are common, collective and destructive of the old hegemonic order.[43] Further they must maintain solidarity through a shared goal and self constructed identity. Dominant world view (The Brahminic ideology) has constructed and legitimized the alterity of Sudras and untouchables, in Dravidian discourse. As Barthes put it, "the other must be seen as a social agent speaks a language that is active, transitive (political)... aiming at transformation."[44]

The agenda of the Self Respect Movement did not confine itself to destruction of the caste structure, but it extended its concept of self respect and self worth to women and other oppressed groups. It tirelessly toiled hard to break all subjugated social practices in whatsoever form they existed. E.V.R.'s basic aim was to break the 'culture of silence' and to constitute a community based on equality, liberty and rationality.

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43   S.Anandhi, "Collective Identity and Secularism: Discourse of the Dravidian Movement in Tamil Nadu", *Social Action*, no.44, January-March 1994, p.59.

44   Ibid., p.61.

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Situating E.V.R. in the National Discourse

After losing complete faith in the politics of mainstream nationalism, he constructed an alternative subaltern national discourse to restore the lost citizenship of the so-called 'Sudras' from the hegemonic ideology of Brahmin pan-Indian nationalism through all possible means. His nationalist discourse was developed in opposition to Pan-Indian nationalism and had been strengthened by Gandhi's frequent provocative utterances about the Varnasrama Dharma. His notion of 'nation' had never intended to become counter poised against the political nationalism of India. Even in the height of militant separatist politics, he did not advocate for a territorial based parochial nationalism but rather favoured a nation based on the race which very much believed in the principles of equality, fraternity and freedom.[45] Moreover, his reactionary nationalism registered his protest whenever the very sentiments of the people were discarded and insulted by the Brahmin dominated state, through its administrative policies and programmes. The introduction of Hindi in school curriculum and celebration of irrational Puranic epics added fillip to his divisive national tendencies.[46] He withheld the anti-Congress campaign when it was being increasingly Tamilised in the 1950s. He supported all the welfare policies initiated by the Kamraj ministry. At the same time he continued his propaganda against Brahminical hegemony. In fact during this period Dravida Kazhakam went to the extent of causing threat to the lives of Brahmins to mitigate the caste subjugation. While supporting the welfare schemes of the Congress Government, he adopted all possible techniques, including violence within the purview

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45   Robert L.Hardgrave, *The Dravidian Movement*, p.9.

46   M.K.Subramanian, *Periyar and Self-Respect Philosophy*, Erode, 1980, p.21.

of the constitution to serve equal status in all walks of life for the hitherto so-called 'Sudras'.

Graduated from the school of experience, he was very much aware of the political expediency of the dominant hegemonic order. He built up his movement through various agitational politics and made it viable to challenge the unquestionable two millennium old Brahmin Supremacy.[47] Thus his nationalist programme aimed to recover a right and honourable place for the socially and culturally deprived subalterns. The prime mover of his national discourse was to provide an identity to the masses who were deprived of their due citizenship in the social sphere. However, it is a difficult task for the historians in placing him at the paradigmatic nationalist discourse. To understand his thoughts on nationalism one must be aware of the historical, social and cultural milieus in which he articulated his thoughts and the way he invoked the feelings of the people through agitational politics to rally the masses around the newly constructed and imagined identities like Dravidian, Tamil and non-Brahmin.[48]

E.V.R. conceived 'nation' as a most appropriate positive identity for all on equal footing, and said that he would be ready to give up anything that would hurt the 'self respect' and 'self honour' of an individual in the collective identity for the nation. His scientific thinking, and rational approach and respect for individual rights made him to cogitate an egalitarian society devoid of inequality in any form.[49] His political agenda directly went against the existing hegemonic social and cultural order. He rejected the

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47   K.M.Balasubramaniam, *Periyar E.V.Ramasamy*, Trichy, 1973, pp.33-35.

48   Charles Ryerson, *Regionalism and Religion: The Tamil Renaissance and Popular Hinduism,* Madras, 1988, p.24.

49   B.S.Chandrababu, *Social Protest and Its Impact in Tamilnadu: With Reference to Self Respect Movement*, Madras, 1993, p.53.

Tamil past for its alleged violation against the basic rights of women and Tamil history for its religious arrogance against Buddhists and Jains. In 1925, in totality, he rejected Gandhi, Congress and Brahmins since they were the social agents of an inhuman hegemonic order of Varnasrama Dharma.[50]

E.V.R.'s national discourses were completely disengaged from the so-called pan-Indian past and it constituted in the plane of 'anticipatory'.[51] For him the past history was not a prerequisite for nation building. Emphasising the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, he argued for nation having no prejudice against its citizens irrespective of their phenotypical and genotypical differences. Nation is a covenant made by a body of individuals who are willing to live together for mutual benefit of one another.[52] His discourse, on and off, indicated establishment of a territorial nation as a temporal attempt towards the achievement of a state-less and class-less society.

E.V.R.'s idea of nation is derivative in its content and anticipatory in its attempt. Unlike other Western educated middle class intelligentsia, he did not undergo the tyranny of 'dual alienation'[53] and cultural segregation in his life at any time. Moreover, he did not face any racial insult or psychic injury at the hands of the foreign rulers. On the contrary, as his biographer Chidambarnar points out, that he and his colleagues had immemorable encounters with Brahmins for the violation of their caste order.[54] As a

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50   E.Sa. Viswanathan, "E.V.Ramasami Naicker and the Tamiland Congress", *Journal of Indian History*, p.178.

51   M.S.S.Pandian, "'Denationalizing' the Past 'Nation' in E.V.Ramasamy's Political Discourse", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 October 1993, p.2282.

52   M.K.Subramanian, *Periyar and Self-Respect Philosophy*, pp.46-47.

53   Cabral used 'dual alienation' to conotate the uprootedness of the English educated. See Amilcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, Michael Wolfers (Trans), London, 1980, p.xii.

54   Swami Chidambaranar, *Tamilar Talaivar*, pp.22, 56 and 233.

result of which E.V.R. was convinced that the primary contradictions in the Indian society was not between national versus colonial but Brahmins versus non-Brahmins. His notion of nationalism had its own autonomous discourse which is futuristic in its form and egalitarian in its substance which claims to provide an equal citizenship for all. His understanding of nation was shaped and moulded by the contemporary socio-political conditions. But the essence of his idea of nation (equality) remained intact all through his arguments.[55]

E.V.R. viewed the Congress launched national movement as conservative, communal and opportunist in its approach. M.K.Subramanian points out "The Indian National Congress in its conferences was taking an oath of allegiance to the British Empire while its limited objective was just to secure loaves and fishes of office. In the Madras Conference of INC in 1914 which E.V.R. attended, on seeing the then Governor of Madras Province arriving at the Conference, S.N.Banerjee moved a resolution taking an oath of allegiance to the British Emperor and explained in the course of his address that the British Government was God's messenger to India, as such, the People of India should be, generation after generation, loyal to the British Monarch. The liberal Congress leaders had always been stating, quoting from the Vedas, that King George and King Edward were the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Only after Brahmins had found to their utter disappointment that their monopoly in offices was being challenged by the non-Brahmin nationalists of Madras who claimed the fruits of the Congress to be shared proportionately between all contending social classes. They rose against the British rule declaring to start non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements."[56] Thus the

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55   A.S.Venu, *Dravidastan*, Madras, 1954, pp.39-40.

56   M.K.Subramanian, *Periyar and Self-Respect Philosophy*, p.48.

Indian National Movement was borne out of necessity to safeguard the interest of the dominant minority Brahmins.

E.V.R. strongly attacked the unholy triple alliance of nationalism, capitalism and Brahminism.[57] He wrote in Kudiarasu, "Nationalism of the Indian variety is an idea connected with the prevailing political situation based on the subterraneous motive of establishing a political system consistent with the ancient Hindu civilization, old customs and practices and Sanathana Dharma". He further adds, "Even now, if the British rule in India conducts its administration in accordance with Sanathana Dharma and Manu Dharma, the current nationalist movement, civil disobedience and non-cooperation may be suspended forthwith by the nationalists themselves."[58]

He opined that the Indian National struggle was the handiwork of the socially uprooted English educated elite. He wrote in 'Kudiarasu', "Nationalism in India is a meaningless and dangerous term used by the high caste Brahmins as their brainwave, and spread by the educated non-Brahmins who feel that they could live only by being subservient to Brahmin interests. These two sections of the community use this term to exploit the gullible masses of India."[59]

National movement became a shelter for the educated unemployed to seek their livelihood. Under the disguise of patriotism they have unceremoniously kept a large chunk of masses under perpetual arrest E.V.R. in his words strongly attacked the cunning exploitative attitude of the nationalists, "there is no business other than the nationalist business which is easily accessible as the last refuge of those who cannot eke

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57   Selig S.Harrison, *The Most Dangerous Decades*, Princeton, 1960, p.333.

58   Quoted in R.Sundara Lingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India*, p.196.

59   V.Anaimuthu, *Periyar Ee Ve Ra Sinthanaikal*, vol.1, p.xx.

out a living in other fields and who are neither honest nor upright and of those imposters who thrive on exploitation of the masses."[60]

According to E.V.R. nationalism is an ideology invented by nascent capitalists and social reactionaries to safeguard the existing hegemonic hierarchicised infra-structure to continue their exploitation. In fact, E.V.R. constantly questioned the validity of the national movement and the rationale behind it, since a large section of people were still under the perennial social serfdom. Therefore, Independence/Swaraj is only meaningful to the microscopic minority section and devalorised the nation to free the subalterns.[61]

E.V.R.'s thoughts were not only confined to destruction of caste, but did go beyond religion, gender and territory to establish a society based on the principles of egalitarianism and socialism.

A careful analysis of E.V.R.'s ideas and objectives of social reform clearly show that he wanted to establish a society devoid of religion and faith. Rationality, reasoning, discernment and common sense were guidelines of his ideal society. Humanism is a prime mover of the society where disparity will not be felt in any form. The power relation will be constituted horizontally where self and alterity will be treated on par. His ideal understanding of the historical process does not have a running theme of teleology. He fought a good fight till his death and left a legacy worth preserving.

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60   M.K.Subramanian, *Periyar and Self-Respect Philosophy*, p.63.

61   A.S.Venu, *Dravidastan*, pp.42-43.

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