

Evaluation report concerning the doctoral dissertation of Arvind Kaushik, Department of
Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Pardubice, Czech Republic:

*The Saiva Dravida Nation: Maraimalai Adigal and the Transformation of the Nation-Religion-
Language Framework*

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This doctoral dissertation by Arvind Kaushik is generally of a high quality and its core chapters on Maraimalai Adigal and Tamil nationalism are particularly original and well-thought-out.

From the beginning, the central research question on which the dissertation will focus is stated very clearly: how did Tamil Saivite nationalists understand the relation between nation, religion, and language when they began to claim that the Tamils were a distinct nation characterized by its own religion and language? How did they draw on these concepts to conceptualize their traditions *as a religion* and Tamil speakers *as a nation*?

Throughout, the thesis keeps its focus on this issue, which it splits up into several sub-questions about the intellectual foundations of Tamil Saivite nationalism. The aim is to find out how different the Tamil nationalists' understanding and use of 'nation' and 'religion' are from the way European intellectuals understood these terms. If there are crucial differences, Arvind Kaushik suggests, then this would show that Tamil intellectuals understood these notions against the background of a very different conceptual framework than Europeans had. By studying the way in which such Indian authors connected nation, language, and religion to each other, he proposes, we can gain insight into the cultural framework within which they were reasoning. His own study focusses on one such author: Maraimalai Adigal, one of the earliest and most influential of the Tamil nationalists. The introduction also adequately explains the structure of the dissertation and its argumentation.

The resulting dissertation excels in clarity and focus: it systematically develops its analysis, discussing each of the elements required to answer its questions and bringing them together in the central chapters; in the conclusion, Arvind Kaushik summarizes the different steps of his argumentation, again with admirable clearness. Because of the scope of its questions, the thesis is compelled to cover a lot of terrain: the Christian foundations of European reasoning about the connections between nation, religion, and language; the way in which this cluster of concepts gave shape to European descriptions of Indian culture; the emerging of the claim that Indian culture results from the encounter between two distinct 'nations' and 'religions', Aryan and Dravidian; the adoption of these ideas and terms by Indian intellectuals; the nature of the Indian traditions and Indian ideas on which Tamil nationalists such as

Adigal drew in their thinking. While each of these elements is important to addressing the central research question, there inevitably are qualitative differences in the way in which they are treated.

The dissertation's strength lies in the chapters of Part II, which form its core. Here, Arvind Kaushik convincingly shows (a) how the European idea that India had originally been populated by Dravidians with their own religion and language, who were then conquered by foreign Sanskrit-speaking Aryans carrying a religion dominated by Brahmin priests, builds on Christian theological foundations, (b) that English-educated Indian intellectuals, and Tamil nationalists in particular, adopted this Aryan-Dravidian account and began to use it for political purposes without understanding its foundations, and (c) how an author such as Adigal did not understand the concepts of religion and nation as they were used by the British, but instead mapped them onto Indian conceptions of '*matham*' and '*jati*', leading to incoherent results. Along the way, Arvind Kaushik also offers an intriguing reflection on Adigal's claims about the Tamil language and its corruption through the introduction of Sanskrit. These chapters form an important and original contribution, which generates new questions about the way in which Indian intellectuals have drawn on European ideas about their culture and about the phenomenon of Tamil nationalism more particularly.

While many corrections have been made, the dissertation still shows some sloppiness in terms of typos and references and some inaccuracies, which should be corrected. A handful of examples:

- On page 44 in the last sentence, "Jones' discovery" is suddenly mentioned, though neither Jones nor his discovery have been mentioned in the dissertation up to that point, if I am not mistaken.
- "Arnston Kircher" instead of Athanasius Kircher, the Jesuit scholar who authored *Turris Babel* (p. 147).
- p. 85: "stAlvart" instead of "stalwart".
- p. 120: "barbaric ppl" instead of "barbaric people".
- On page 124, it is said: "This description of *moksha* once again raises the question..." But '*moksha*' has not been discussed or even mentioned as a term in the preceding pages.
- On page 136, 'sruti' is repeatedly misspelled as 'struti'.
- On page 152, footnote 582 does not mention the journal in which this article was published (the same problem is present in footnote 543 on page 144).

Questions

1. The most vulnerable part of the thesis is its first chapter on the emerging of the religion-language-nation framework in European thinking. Although this chapter has improved substantially compared to the earlier submitted draft of the dissertation, some questions still remain. The author has included an analysis of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* as an illustration of the nation-language-religion triad, which precedes Herder's elaborate writings on the issue. Yet, this analysis contains some problems. On page 24, Arvind Kaushik cites Bede and comments: "From the preface, one can glean that what makes the English into a nation for Bede is that they are a Christian ecclesia who speak the English language, with the ecclesiastical history of each province of England being the focus of his work."

This and the other citations from Bede do not show what Arvind Kaushik claims they show. Instead, Bede speaks of "the time when the English nation received the faith of Christ" (p. 23) and of Pope Gregory making "our nation, till then enslaved to idols, the Church of Christ" (p. 25). This implies that the English were already a nation before they received Christianity; in that case, what makes the English into nation cannot be that they are a Christian ecclesia speaking English.

These citations lead to another question about the nature of the link that European thinkers postulate between nation, religion, and language. When Bede speaks of the English nation, he seems to assume that this nation already existed before it became Christianized; it was the English nation that found the Christian faith; so, religion here is not connected to nationhood in the sense that it constitutes or forms a nation. In fact, this remained the case in early modern and modern Europe: many European nations were Christian and saw Christianity as a crucial element of their nationhood, but the assumption was not that a distinct nation had to be constituted by a distinct religion. In the 17th and 18th century, both the Dutch nation and the English nation, for instance, were dominated by a form of Protestant Christianity but fought the Anglo-Dutch wars. This was very different from how the Jews became a nation because of their religion and their covenant with God. Here, both religion (the Covenant with and Law of God) and language (Hebrew) are the factors that constitute a nation and distinguish it from other peoples and nations. Yet, Christianity did not determine or distinguish any nation in Europe in a parallel way but instead was the religion of many European nations. Furthermore, several European nations were internally divided into different Christian denominations and groups: for example, in the early modern and modern era, one could find Lutherans, Catholics, Calvinists, Baptists, and other Protestant groups within several European nations. These nations were not constituted by one religion or covenant with God, distinguishing them from other nations; still they were considered as distinct nations.

Why, then, would 18th- and 19th-century British orientalist and missionaries assume that the two different 'nations' or 'races' in India must have been constituted or characterized by two distinct religions, the Aryan and the Dravidian? Merely pointing to the parallel with Judaism and the Jews

as a nation constituted by a religion and a language does not give an adequate answer. Why did they see the Aryans and Dravidians as similar in structure to the Jewish nation and not, say, as similar to the Germanic tribes who converted to Christianity or to the several European nations that had Christianity as their religion? Why was it obvious to them that such an invading or migrating group of people would have a distinct religion and language characterizing them in opposition to the indigenous nation(s) constituted by another religion and language or family of languages?

2. A second question also concerns this chapter, which shows that a handful of European theologians and philosophers assumed or argued that there is a certain kind of connection between nation, language, and religion. But what is the evidence for another claim of the chapter, namely “by the time of European contact with India, the cluster of theological ideas that were instrumental in forming a conceptual connection between nation, language, and religion had become part of the European common sense” (p. 43). Except for the fact that another handful of mainly British authors writing on India presupposed this connection, it is not clear that the cluster of theological claims had become part of common sense in Europe and were widely shared in European societies. What evidence is available for this claim? And, if this is the case, how and why could such clusters of theological ideas spread so widely beyond the books of some intellectuals?
3. On page 60, the dissertation says: “Philosophers of science have long noted that all facts are facts of a theory; there is no such thing as a veridical observation. All human beings have pre-existing frameworks or theories that structure their experience of the world.” While it is true that philosophers of science have concluded that facts are facts of a theory and it is also true that human beings have pre-existing frameworks through which they observe the world, it is unclear how this entails that there is *no such thing as a veridical observation*. What is the author saying here? If you look outside and you see that the sun is shining, is the observation ‘the sun is shining’ not veridical?
4. In the chapters on Adigal, the dissertation shows that this Indian intellectual did not understand Christian theology and its conceptual vocabulary, even though he used several of its terms extensively in his own writings and ‘translated’ them into Tamil. Neither did he have access to the background framework constituting the European accounts of the Aryan and Dravidian nations and their respective religions. He distorts the concepts and claims from these accounts and their theological background framework. Why was Adigal blind to his own ignorance and lack of understanding of these theological concepts and Western ideas about India? He appears to have shared this blindness with other Indian intellectuals of this era. How could these Indian intellectuals collectively assume that they understood this English-language conceptual vocabulary, even though their use of it is incoherent and conflicted with how Europeans discussed religion and nation and Indian culture? The fact that they had their own ‘native cultural framework’

through which they interpreted topoi from Western culture does not suffice as an answer. Why did they not see the need for research into Christian theology and Western culture instead of adopting terms, phrases, and ideas that they did not understand?

Conclusion

All things considered, Arvind Kaushik's dissertation is of a high quality: it is well written; the language is very clear; the style is fine; the text, the chapters, and the conclusion are well-structured; it raises and generates new and interesting questions and develops a clear chain of reasoning, which takes significant steps towards answering these questions; the argumentation is clear, consistent, and coherent; its minor shortcomings can be remedied by future research and corrections. Hence, I strongly recommend that Arvind Kaushik be allowed to defend his thesis.

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