

University of Pardubice

Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

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

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Doctoral Dissertation

2022

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Arvind Kaushik, M.B.A.

To my parents and brother,

Yogalakshmi Sundareson, Parthasarathy Kaushik, and Giridhar Kaushik,

For always being there for me and supporting me through the good, bad, and ugly times.

To my second parents,

Rama Muthukrishnan, and Subramania Muthukrishnan,

For always encouraging me and believing in me even when things seemed down.

To my Supervisor,

Martin Fárezek,

For fighting for me, and giving me an opportunity when all seemed lost.

To Balu,

For opening my eyes, and giving me a second intellectual life.

Acknowledgements

It was in the summer of 2010, when I was doing my Master's degree in India, that I first came across the research program of S.N. Balagangadhara. At that time, I was a jaded and disillusioned student. I had completed my Bachelor's study in psychology at York University in Toronto. I was a kid who began his Bachelor's degree with a love for knowledge, a desire to learn about what made human beings tick, and what made us into different cultures. But for some reason, I didn't find what I was looking for in Psychology or the other social sciences. I couldn't put a finger on it, but there was a disconnect between what was taught in social sciences and my own experiences as an Indian.

It was Balagangadhara's research program that gave me the answers I was yearning for. It made sense of my experience as an Indian, and also explained why the social sciences did not have the answers to my questions. Balagangadhara's research program opened a new world for me, and rekindled my love for knowledge. He gave me a second intellectual life – that is the best way to put it. I always be grateful to Balagangadhara and his whole research team for that.

It is through Balagangadhara's research program that I was introduced to my supervisor, Martin Fárez. At that time, I was in a difficult place in my life. I knew what I wanted to do with my life, but I needed someone to open a door for me. It was Martin who opened that door. These four years I have lived in Pardubice, he has been a mentor and a guru to me in every sense of these words. I cannot thank him enough for his kindness and patience in guiding me through my mistakes and helping me to become a better researcher and thinker.

I would like to thank all the members of my department: Pavel Horák, Zuzana Černa, Marek Váchal, Veronika Civinova, Vilém Skopal, Tadeas Zapad Vala, and Nikita Mamtora. They were always there for me when I needed help.

I would like to thank Dunkin Jalki for introducing Martin Fárez to me. In that sense, he too was instrumental in opening the door for me.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank Marianne Keppens. It was her research that made my research possible. I am standing on her shoulders.

Annotation

This work focuses on Tamil nationalism, specifically on its intellectual roots. It examines how the nation-religion-language paradigm underwent a conceptual distortion when it migrated from the British cultural setting to Tamil Nadu, and what this tells us about the native cultural framework. Although the Dravidian movement has been studied extensively, there has been minimal research into its early intellectual beginnings. Most researchers studying the Dravidian movement focused on the birth of Justice Party and the vision of its important leader, Tamil nationalist and separatist E. V. Ramaswami Naicker (known as ‘Periyar’). While this iconoclast and atheist envisioned a Tamil nation free of religion and caste, it was a group of Saiva Vellala intellectuals, and among them especially Maraimalai Adigal (1876-1950), who sowed the seeds for a Dravidian nationalist movement. Unlike Periyar, Maraimalai Adigal was a traditionalist and a staunch follower of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition.

Adigal’s thought linked nation, religion, and language in a way which calls for analysis of the very specific situation which led this Indian thinker to conceptualize Tamil people as a nation. Apparently, he reacted to the British ideas about what made Dravidians (and more specifically, Tamils) into a nation, but much more should be explained about this reaction. There are several problems with the descriptions offered by researchers concerning Adigal’s vision of “Shaivite monotheism” being the original Tamil religion, and how does this vision relate to the building of Tamil nation. A careful reading of Adigal’s writings leads the author of this thesis to a re-consideration of the idea that this Tamil scholar simply accepted the British concept of nation and applied it to his people. Adigal’s points about purifying Tamil language seem to be of a different nature than the British focus on language as the constituent of a nation, and also his claims about Vellalas (his own *jati*) being the original Tamil nation need better explanation than those offered so far.

Keywords

Tamil Nadu, Nationalism, Nation, Religion, Language, Saiva Siddhanta, Christian Thought, Religious Studies, Comparative Study of Cultures

Název Práce

Šivaisticko-drávidský národ: Mezikulturní proměna paradigmatu vymezujícího národ náboženstvím a jazykem.

Anotace

Tato práce je zaměřena na tamilský nacionalismus a zvláště pak na jeho intelektuální kořeny. Zkoumá, jakým způsobem se konceptuálně proměnilo paradigma spojující národ s náboženstvím a jazykem, když bylo přeneseno z britského kulturního prostředí do Tamilnádu, a co tato proměna ukazuje o domácím kulturním rámci. Ačkoliv bylo drávidské národní hnutí předmětem četného výzkumu, velice málo pozornosti bylo věnováno jeho intelektuálním počátkům. Většina badatelů se zaměřila na zrod Strany spravedlnosti a na vizi jejího významného představitele, tamilského nacionalisty E. V. Rámasvámího Náikera (známého jako Perijár). Zatímco si tento ateista a ikonoklast představoval tamilský národ bez náboženství a kast, první sémě drávidského národního hnutí bylo zaseto skupinou šivaistických intelektuálů z kasty Vélálú, a mezi nimi především Maraimalláiem Adigalem (1876-1950). Ten byl, na rozdíl od Perijára, tradicionalistou a věrným stoupencem tradic Šáiva-siddhánty.

Adigalovo propojení národa, náboženství a jazyka si žádá analýzu specifické situace, ve které tento indický myslitel začal o Tamilech uvažovat jako o národu. Je zřejmé, že reagoval na britské pojetí Drávidů (a zvláště pak Tamilů) jakožto národa, ale v jeho reakcích na tyto podněty je třeba vysvětlit mnohé. Objevuje se například několik problémů s popisy Adigalovy vize „šivaistického monoteismu“ jakožto původního tamilského náboženství, které dosavadní badatelé nabízejí, a také jsou problémy s jejich vysvětlováním souvislostí mezi tímto náboženstvím a budováním tamilského národa. Důkladné studium Adigalových prací vede autora disertace k přehodnocení tvzení, že tento tamilský myslitel jednoduše přijal britský koncept národa a užil jej pro chápání vlastního lidu. Adigalovo zdůvodnění nutnosti očistit tamilštinu od cizích vlivů je zřejmě jiného druhu, nežli britský důraz na jazyk jako konstitutivní element národa. Stejně tak jeho vyzdvihování Vélálú (jeho vlastní *džáti*) jakožto původního tamilského národa vyžaduje lepší vysvětlení než ta dosud uváděná.

Klíčová Slova

Tamilnádu, nacionalismus, národ, náboženství, jazyk, Šáiva-siddhánta, křesťanské myšlení, religionistika, komparativní studium kultur

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Introduction to Tamil Nationalism

On March 6, 2018, senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader H Raja tweeted that the statue of the iconic Tamil nationalist E.V. Ramaswami Naicker (commonly known as ‘Periyar’) in Tamil Nadu would be razed to the ground, following the destruction of a statue of communist revolutionary Vladimir Lenin in the state of Tripura. The situation quickly escalated following that tweet: All the major political parties of Tamil Nadu, including the largest one, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Progress Federation) demanded central government action against Raja¹. The next day, four men from an organization known as the Dravida Viduthalai Kazhagam (Dravidian Freedom Organization) cut the sacred threads of some Brahmins in Mylapore². These incidents illustrate the emotional impact of the Dravidian nationalist movement on the politics and people of Tamil Nadu even today, over a century after it began. The political parties of Tamil Nadu still emphasize Tamil national pride, and E.V. Ramaswami Naicker is still revered as an icon by a large section of the Tamil Nadu populace. During this emotional time in both Tamil Nadu and Indian politics, it is worth examining the intellectual framework of Tamil nationalism and the cluster of ideas that went into building that framework.

Various freedom and independence movements arose in India during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Most of these movements promoted one or another idea of nationalism, usually revolving around ethnic or religious identity. One such nationalist movement which arose in India was the Dravidian movement. It aimed to create a separate Tamil state during the first half of the twentieth century. An anti-Brahmin ideology would emerge as the defining feature of this movement. Brahmins were considered a foreign element in the Tamil nation, corrupting it with their Hindu religion, Sanskrit language and caste system. Although this movement began in the early twentieth century and became well known and popular during that time, the intellectual beginnings of this nationalism go back to the late nineteenth century, to

¹ SIVAKUMAR, B. TN parties seek action against BJP leader H Raja for his Periyar statue razing tweet. *Times of India* [online]. [Cit. on 6.03.2018]. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/tn-parties-seek-action-against-bjp-leader-h-raja-for-his-periyar-statue-razing-tweet/articleshow/63185095.cms>.

² KANNAN, Sindhu. Periyar statue row: ‘DVK men’ cut sacred threads of at least eight men in Chennai. *Times of India* [online]. [Cit. on 7.03.2018]. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/periyar-statue-row-dvk-men-cut-sacred-threads-of-eight-people-in-chennai/articleshow/63201343.cms>.

certain intellectuals who were followers of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition in Tamil Nadu.³ These intellectuals weren't explicitly propagating nationalism, but were instead calling for a religious and cultural revival. These Saivite intellectuals began to recast Saiva Siddhanta as a Tamil religion, the religion of the Tamil nation. In this reformulation, Saiva Siddhanta became the quintessential religion of Tamil Nadu⁴. Siva was reinterpreted as the primary Tamil deity, making Saiva Siddhanta a sort of Tamil monotheism in the hands of these Saivite nationalists⁵. In the process, many of the guru traditions in Tamil Nadu, such as the Kanchi Paramacharya tradition were rejected as foreign, Aryan elements in Tamil Nadu society. In addition, the entire corpus of the Puranas and the Itihasas, as well as Sanskrit rituals, were derided as Aryan and false⁶. In contrast, Tamil *bhakti* poetry and songs directed toward Siva and Murugan were considered part of Tamil culture. Within the Tamil religion of the Saivite nationalists, Visnu and his avatars become Aryan gods who have no place in Saiva Siddhanta⁷. By the second decade of the twentieth century, this neo-Saivite revivalism had given way to a politicized, rationalist Dravidian movement that sought to completely remove Brahmin influence on Tamil culture and Hinduism (which it saw as a Brahmanical religion) from Tamil Nadu. By the late 1930s, the Dravidian nationalists began demanding a separate, sovereign state for Tamil-speaking people. One common thread that united both the neo-Saivites and the Tamil rationalists was their opposition to what they saw as Brahmanical traditions and Brahmin influence in Tamil Nadu.

Another common thread throughout the various phases of Tamil nationalism was the emphasis on language purity. For example, Maraimalai Adigal, a prominent Saivite nationalist, was alarmed by the fact that Sanskrit words, and words from other Indian languages, were becoming mixed with Tamil.

³ VAITHEESPARA, Ravi. Maraimalai Atigal and the Genealogy of the Tamilian Creed. *Economic & Political Weekly*. 2009, Volume. XLIV, Issue. 14, p. 45.

⁴ Ibid., p. 46.

⁵ BERGUNDER, Michael, FRESE, Heiko and SCHRÖDER, Ulrike (ed.). *Ritual, Caste, and Religion in Colonial South India*. Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen; Harrassowitz in Kommission, 2010, p. 39.

⁶ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 215.

⁷ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 33. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 147.

Statement of the Research Problem

The central problem this dissertation will tackle is how Tamil Saivite nationalists understood the concepts of nation and religion, and how they related these concepts to one another and to language. This problem can be further subdivided into parts: Firstly, what was religion to these Saivite intellectuals? More specifically, how did they conceptualize Saiva Siddhanta as a religion? Secondly, how did the Tamil nationalists understand the idea of nation? What makes Tamil speakers into a nation? Why didn't they consider Brahmins as a part of the Tamil nation? Thirdly, how did the Tamil nationalists link religion and nation? What makes Saiva Siddhanta a Tamil religion? Why didn't the Tamil nationalists see other traditions that have been practised in Tamil Nadu for centuries, as Tamil religions? Finally, how did the Tamil nationalists link both religion and nation to language? Why did they want a 'pure' Tamil divested of Sanskrit words?

The Cultural Migration of Ideas

Prior to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there seems to have been no nationalist movement in either India or Tamil Nadu. Indeed, the idea of a nation itself seems to have been introduced by Europeans into India⁸. In the article 'Liberal Political Theory and the Cultural Migration of Ideas: The Case of Secularism in India' (2011), it is pointed out that all cultures have commonplace ideas. A *topos* is a particular kind of commonplace idea that has been developed into a theory or hypothesis by a thinker. A plurality of such commonplace ideas are called *topoi*. An important feature of *topoi* is that they are not isolated ideas but a cluster of interrelated ideas⁹. Jakob De Roover also points that, when the *topoi* of one culture migrates to another, these migrating *topoi* are interpreted using the *topoi* of the culture they migrate to. When this happens, there is bound to be some distortion of the migrating *topoi*, because the native culture lacks the conceptual framework to make sense of these ideas¹⁰.

⁸ IRSCHICK, Eugene. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. 1st edition. London: University of California Press, 1969, p. xiii.

⁹ DE ROOVER, Jakob, CLAERHOUT, Sarah and BALAGANGADHARA, S. N. Liberal Political Theory and the Cultural Migration of Ideas: The Case of Secularism in India. *Political Theory*. 2011, Volume. 39, Issue. 5, p. 578.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 583.

There are a cluster of ideas in the Western culture that allow one to connect the concept of nation to religion and language. It is the framework of Christian theology that gives coherence to the idea that nation, religion, and language are linked¹¹. One would expect that the people that come from a non-Christian culture like that of Tamil Nadu would not be able to make sense of the relationship between these three concepts because they lack the Christian theological framework to make sense of the relationship. I propose that this is indeed the case.

Structure of the Dissertation

My dissertation contains a total of five chapters divided into two parts. The first part contains the first two chapters, while the second part contains the next three chapters. The first part examines the nature of the framework that allowed European intellectuals to link Nation, Religion, and language. It then looks at how the Europeans studied India through this conceptual lens.

The first chapter of my dissertation is about how the concept triad of nation-religion-language developed within European culture, specifically looking at the framework that allowed philosophers and theologians to postulate an inextricable link between the three. I trace the origins of the concept triad back to writings of the early Church fathers and the Tower of Babel account. The event at Babel was seen as the fracturing of one humanity speaking a common language into multiple nations each with their own tongue. However, nations were not only identified on the basis of their language but also religion. The fracture of one language into many languages also represents the fracture of the original revelation of God into idolatry and false religion. I briefly trace the history of European theologians trying to recover and recreate the language spoken in the Garden of Eden. These theologians thought that access to the primordial language of humanity would provide them access to the uncorrupted revelation of God. I then specifically analyse the writings of Johann Herder, since he was one of the first intellectuals of the early modern period to write in detail about the concept of nation and its relationship with religion and language. It becomes clear that it is Christian theology that provides the conceptual framework that inextricably links together the idea of nation with religion and language. Without this framework in the background the concept triad would fall apart.

¹¹ KEPPENS, Marianne and Jakob De ROOVER. Orientalism and the Puzzle of the Aryan Invasion Theory. *Pragmata: Journal of Human Sciences*. 2014, Volume. 2, Issue. 2, pp. 2–3.

The second chapter looks at how European orientalists tried to understand India by applying the nation-religion-language framework onto the people they encountered in India. This chapter examines how the discovery of the relationship between Sanskrit and the European languages led to the idea of an ancestral Aryan nation from which both Europeans and Indians are supposedly descended from. The Brahmins of India were thought to be the direct descendants of an Indian variant of the Aryan race or nation. The concept of the Aryan nation is coherent only if one relates nation to language and religion. The Indo-Aryans are a people because they follow an ancient Vedic religion, the predecessor to Hinduism and they share a common language, Sanskrit, which the Europeans saw as the sacred language of the Hindu religion. Hence, why many orientalists referred to the Indo-Aryans as the Vedic people or the Hindu nation. This concludes the first part of the dissertation.

The second part of my dissertation comprises the meat of my arguments. In this section, I once again raise the questions and problems that I raised at the beginning of this essay and put forward a hypothesis that answers these questions and problems that I raise. The third chapter is about the development of the idea of a Dravidian nation. The discovery of a South Indian or Dravidian language family in the nineteenth century, separate from the Indo-European language family, led to the theory of a Dravidian or South Indian nation. These Dravidians were thought to be the indigenous population of India who were subjugated and absorbed into the caste system of the Aryan nation (who were thought to be foreign invaders) as the lower castes. The fourth chapter gives a brief historical overview of the political and intellectual beginnings of Dravidian nationalism and separatism. During the late nineteenth century, many non-brahmin Tamil speakers in the Madras presidency began to see themselves as a separate nation from the rest of India with their own unique religion. This was the intellectual beginnings of what would later flower into the Dravidian nationalist movement. Many of these non-brahmin intellectuals were followers of Saivism, specifically the Saiva Siddhanta tradition. They claimed that Saiva Siddhanta was the original religion of the Tamil nation, and rejected any tradition connected to the Sanskrit language and Brahmins as foreign and Aryan. The fifth chapter specifically focuses on the writings of the Tamil Saivite ideologue Maraimalai Adigal, one of the most prominent intellectuals of that time period. This dissertation raises the following key questions regarding the intellectual foundations of Tamil Saivite nationalism: How did Maraimalai Adigal understand the concepts of nation and religion? How did he connect each of these concepts to each other and language? Finally, how did his understanding and interrelation of these concepts differ from that of the Europeans? The last question is the most important one. If Adigal's

understanding of these concepts is fundamentally different than that of European intellectuals, then it shows that these Tamil intellectuals were using a different conceptual framework than the one used by European intellectuals to understand the various groups and practices encountered in Tamil Nadu. This means studying the manner in which the Tamil intellectuals connected the concepts of nation and religion with each other and language will give us an insight into the cultural framework they were operating under. Understanding the native cultural framework in turn, will allow us to view the social structure of Tamil Nadu society through the lens of this framework.

It is important to note that my research is subsumed under the research programme *Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap* (Comparative Science of Cultures). This research programme was developed by Belgian professor S.N. Balagangadhara of Ghent University. True to its name, this research programme studies Indian culture against the backdrop of Western culture. It was born out of a deep dissatisfaction with the descriptions of and theorizing about India and Indian culture in the social sciences. "It soon became clear that the current descriptions of India tell us more about the culture that produced them than about Indian culture. Rather than describing India, they describe the way in which Western culture has experienced another culture"¹² Studying these descriptions will tell us more about the Western culture than about India.

When it comes to the Indian intelligentsia and social scientists, they merely reproduce Western descriptions of both India and the West. "However, in reproducing these western descriptions about India and the others, something additional intervenes: the Indian intelligentsia too is *constrained* by the Indian culture. This means to say, they do not simply parrot the western descriptions of India but *transform* them in the process"¹³. Because the Indian intellectuals come from a non-Western culture and lack the experiential framework of the Westerners who produced these descriptions, there is bound to be incoherence and distortion when they reproduce Western descriptions of both their own culture and Western culture. If there is a pattern and systematicity to the way Indian intellectuals reproduce Western descriptions, studying these reproductions will give us insight into Indian culture¹⁴.

¹² Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap. In: Available From: <https://gyaana.eu/>

¹³ BALAGANGADHARA, S. N. *Reconceptualizing India Studies*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 59.

¹⁴ Ibid.

My dissertation is an attempt to build on the knowledge produced by the Comparative Science of Cultures research programme. I examine the Tamil intellectuals' understanding of the concept of nation and the manner in which they relate it to language and religion, and compare it to the way in which Western philosophers and theologians understand this concept triad. In the process, some insights about Tamil Nadu culture will be gained.

PART I

The first part examines the nature of the framework that allowed European intellectuals to link nation, religion and language. It then looks at how the Europeans studied India through this conceptual lens.

The Beginnings of the Religion-Language-Nation Framework

Babel

The Biblical account of history sees all human beings as descendants of the sons of Noah, with the descendants of each of the three sons going on to form different nations. This dissertation focuses on the idea of nation within Christian theology, and how it is bound up with religion and language. According to the Bible, at one point in time all human beings lived as one "and the whole earth was of one language" (Genesis 11:1). Some human beings, out of their arrogance, began building a tower (called the Tower of Babel) that would reach heaven. God decided to punish these human beings by confusing their tongues so that they wouldn't be able to understand or communicate with each other, and then scattered them across the earth. For many theologians, this account describes the beginning of one human race becoming many nations. For example, the renowned Church father Saint Augustine in his work *City of God* explicitly states that "nations were divided according to their languages"¹⁵.

In addition to the Tower of Babel account, Genesis claims that "creation itself arose through an act of speech; it is only by giving things their names that [God] created them and gave them an ontological status"¹⁶. According to Genesis 1:5, "God called the light Day and the darkness He called Night... And God called the firmament Heaven". The allusion to creation being a linguistic act is similarly described in the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). In concurrence with this theme, the early Church fathers thought of the world itself as a vast book authored by God, and that by systematically studying nature, one could decipher God's will¹⁷. Some theologians during the Middle Ages believed that when Adam named the animals he gave the name each animal ought to be given, and that the original language spoken in Eden possessed the capacity to match words to things perfectly, and thus to express the true essence of things in a way that later human languages could not¹⁸. Both the Italian poet Dante Alighieri and the Jewish theologian

¹⁵ AUGUSTINE, Saint. *The City Of God*. Translated By Marcus DODS. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871, p. 113.

¹⁶ ECO, Umberto. *The Search For the Perfect Language*. Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1995, p. 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8, 31.

Abraham Abulafia thought of the Edenic language as a *formam locutionis*, a linguistic template or universal grammar from which all languages were formed¹⁹. It is important to note that the end goal for these theologians wasn't the recovery of a primordial language or the creation of a perfect language, but the revelation of God.

The Kabbalist Abulafia lamented the corruption of the original Hebrew because he thought of it as the sacred proto-language whose conventions had been established between God and the prophets. The loss of this language meant that much of the wisdom of the Kabbalah would remain hidden²⁰. In the beginning of the fourteenth century, the philosopher and theologian Raymond Lull published a system of language combinatorics known as the *Ars Magna* which used a system of alphabets and diagrams in various combinations. The purpose of the *Ars Magna* was to create a universal language to communicate the word of God²¹. For both these theologians, the recovery of a primordial or perfect language was a means to access God's revelation without distortions or blemishes. Since the structure of the Edenic language could convey the true essence of things, for Christian theologians, this meant that it could convey the world of God without any blemish or distortion.

According to many Christian theologians, the confusion of the original language of humanity in the Tower of Babel incident signifies the corruption of the revelation of God²². Augustine considered Hebrew as the original language of humankind, and links the preservation of the Hebrew language with the worship of the true God: "The family of Terah, to which Abraham belonged, was the only one in which the worship of the true God survived, and the only one, we may suppose, in which the Hebrew language was preserved"²³. At the same time, he considers Babylon (derived from Babel) as the city of the godless²⁴. Different peoples became defined not only by their languages, but also by their religions²⁵. For example, Saint Isidore of

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 44, 49.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

²¹ Ibid., p. 53.

²² AMSLER, Mark. *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Publishing Co, 1989, p.84.

²³ AUGUSTINE, Saint. *The City Of God*. Translated By Marcus DODS. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871, p. 124.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

²⁵ ISIDORE, and BARNEY, Stephen A. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 183.

Seville – in his work *Etymologies* – identifies each nation based on their religious practices and deities²⁶: "For centuries, [from the time of the Church fathers], Babel was invoked to explain the anthropological mystery of human unity-in-diversity, whether in race, language, religion, or customs." As I show later, even up to the nineteenth century, European Orientalists explicitly relied on Biblical history and genealogy to study other cultures²⁷.

The Idea of the English Nation

As we can see from above, various European philosophers and theologians formulated a conceptual link between nation, language and religion. Christian theology provided the underlying framework that allowed these intellectuals to make such a link. In the following section, I delve more deeply into how specific European thinkers from different time periods (eighth century all the way up to the nineteenth century) conceptualized the relationship between nation, religion, and language with a specific focus on England. In the process, I identify certain commonplace ideas and preconceptions shared among these intellectuals. As I show later, these ideas formed the conceptual lens through which orientalists and missionaries experienced and described India.

There are many debates on nation and nationalism, typically disputing what nation is, when it emerged, what concepts are or are not crucial in its formation, what historical conditions were necessary for the same, whether it is a specifically Western phenomenon which was exported to the former colonies, etc. Unfortunately, there are no theories which would be generally accepted by scholars. In fact, the situation in the studies of nationalism can be well described as an increasing amount of semantic and conceptual confusion. This problem is further complicated by the influence of the nationalist thought upon the study of the phenomenon. If several scholars warned against the ideologization of the studies of nationalism some decades ago, the situation today seems to be even worse. The debates between Indian intellectuals could be well illustrated by a comparison of Irfan Habib's article 'Nationalism in India: Past and

²⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

²⁷ TRAUTMANN, Thomas R. *Languages and Nations: the Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, p. 212.

Present²⁸, with Subrat K. Nanda's 'Cultural Nationalism in a Multi-National Context: The Case of India'²⁹.

Of course, there are very influential works of historians and political scientists, such as Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner on the historical and cultural origins of nationalism. Benedict Anderson sees nations as a Western European phenomenon that originated in the eighteenth century and coincided with "the dusk of religious modes of thought"³⁰. By contrast, political scientist Ernest Gellner for example, considers nations and nationalism as necessary outgrowths of industrialization and doesn't see them as a specifically Western phenomena³¹.

There are also debates about the origins of the concept of nation, specifically its origins in religious thought. Historians and political scientists such as Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner consider the idea of nation-state and nationalism as modern concepts, and for the most part neglect the role of religion in shaping the idea of a nation^{32,33}. Whereas other scholars such as Adrian Hastings and Anthony D. Smith trace the origins of the idea of nation to much earlier times and within Judeo-Christian theology³⁴.

In fact, the situation in the studies of nationalism can be well described as an increasing amount of semantic and conceptual confusion. This problem is further complicated by the influence of nationalist thought upon the study of the phenomenon. These problems are visible in debating the religious roots of Tamil nationalism³⁵.

Although there is no very far reaching and generally accepted theory of a nation, several important characteristics of the phenomenon can be identified, linked with the formation of self-understanding of the English (and later, the British) people as a nation. They came to India with the spread of the colonial British rule, and it was this specific concept of nation to which

²⁸ HABIB, Irfan. Nationalism in India: Past and Present. *Social Scientist*. 2022, Volume. 45, Issue. 3/4.

²⁹ NANDA, Subrat K. Cultural Nationalism in a Multi-National Context: The Case of India. *Sociological Bulletin*. 2006, Volume. 55, Issue 1.

³⁰ ANDERSON, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London New York: Verso, 2016, p. 11.

³¹ GELLNER, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, pp. 50–51.

³² GELLNER, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, pp. 39–40.

³³ HOBBSAWM, E. J. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 5.

³⁴ HASTINGS, Adrian. *The construction of nationhood: ethnicity, religion, and nationalism*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. SMITH, Anthony D. *Chosen peoples*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

³⁵ PANDIAN, M. S. S. Notes on the Transformation of „Dravidian" Ideology: Tamilnadu, c. 1900-1940. *Social Scientist*. 1994, Volume. 22, Issue. 5/6, p. 84.

Maraimalai Adigal reacted, and which he seemed to accept. Because the British understanding of a nation was the model which Maraimalai Adigal and other Saivite nationalists reacted to, we should firstly look into the characteristics of this nation.

Let us begin with Adrian Hastings' book *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (1997). In this book, Hastings shows with compelling evidence how the idea of nation isn't a modern post-Enlightenment phenomenon. There is a "firm continuity in usage across more than six hundred years in [English], that the sense of 'nation' was already in the fourteenth century related explicitly to a distinct language group, and that it drew in large part on biblical and Vulgate roots"³⁶. The Wycliffite translators of the Bible were using the Vulgate Bible as the source which uses the Latin word 'natio'³⁷. Moreover, the idea of England as a nation dates back to at least the eighth century historical work *The Ecclesiastical History of The English People*, written by the English theologian Saint Bede. In Bede's work, the English theologian sees the English as one people and makes it clear that the building blocks of the English nation was the Christian religion and English language.

Hastings claims that one of the levels of unity of the English people expressed in Bede's work is "specifically ecclesiastical a unity dependent upon the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury and the most scrupulous obedience to the apostolic see of Rome...the ecclesiastical unity maintained by Canterbury was effectively the unity of the churches of the English"³⁸.

The other level of unity: "he takes it for granted that this whole medley of peoples and kingdoms has become a single nation, 'gens Anglorum', the people of the English, and he regularly uses the name 'English' to include not only Northumbrians and other Angles, but Saxons and Jutes...*The English, he has no doubt at all meaning Saxons, Angles and Jutes are now a single nation with a single language and a single Church.*"³⁹

The Venerable Bede begins the preface of his work *The Ecclesiastical History of The English Nation* by introducing the contents of his work:

"Thus, from the beginning of this volume to the time when the English nation received the faith of Christ, we have acquired matter from the writings of former

³⁶ HASTINGS, Adrian. *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism*. Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 18

³⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 37–38.

men, gathered from various sources"⁴⁰. He then goes on to state how the ecclesiastical history of each province of England was conveyed to him by various priests and bishops and abbots living in those regions⁴¹."

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. More than the English language however, it was their adherence to or non adherence to the Christian doctrine that makes the English people into a nation for Bede. For example, the Briton Pelagius' interpretation of the doctrine of free will was considered heretical by the Church and Bede himself, and Bede also saw it as reflecting badly on the nation of Britons⁴².

In Book 1, Chapter XIV and XV, the concept of nation as a group of people with a role to play in God's plan is evident. Bede describes how the Britons deviated from Christian teachings and fell into moral decay and this ultimately led to their downfall as a nation. As a result, Bede claims that God willed upon them plague and also brought the Saxons (whom he calls the English nation) into Britain to punish the Britons⁴³.

A general theme or idea running throughout Bede's work is that the story of the English nation is the story of the English becoming a Christian nation, through many obstacles, including a return to idolatry for many provinces. But in the end, the English always come back to the Christian faith. The following quote of Bede praising Pope Gregory on the day of his death is a good illustration of this theme:

" Of whom [Pope Gregory], seeing that by his zeal he converted our nation, the English, from the power of Satan to the faith of Christ, it behoves us to discourse more at large in our Ecclesiastical History, for we may rightly, nay, we must, call him our apostle; because, as soon as he began to wield the pontifical power over all the world, and was placed over the Churches long before converted to

⁴⁰ SELLAR, A.M. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England*. London: George Bell And Sons, 1907, pp. 2–3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

the true faith, he made our nation, till then enslaved to idols, the Church of Christ"⁴⁴

Even though Bede's work doesn't put emphasis on language as one of the properties that makes a nation, as time went on, especially after the Protestant Reformation, the English language assumed more and more importance to the idea of England as a nation. The English were a people not merely because they spoke the English language, but English was seen as the language of the Book of common prayer and the Wycliffite and King James Bible; these scriptures in turn were the pillars of the Anglican religion⁴⁵. The Anglican religion in turn provided the foundation of English nationhood. Hastings cites Bible and Common Prayer book as playing the key role in forming English national consciousness: "Over one hundred editions of the Bible in English between 1560 and 1611 and no fewer than 140 of the Authorised Version between then and 1640 make it absolutely clear that it was reaching very far indeed"⁴⁶. In addition to the King James Bible, *The Book of Martyrs*, a work of Protestant history and martyrology by Protestant English historian John Foxe, was treated as an additional Biblical testament. "It provided a complete history of the church in England, an account of struggles against the papacy of medieval kings...of national liberation achieved under Henry VIII...firmly placed within a national Christian history"⁴⁷. This phenomena of a Protestant based nationalism with an emphasis on vernacular language was also observed in other European nations.

The German historian Werner Fritzmeyer mentions that for Luther, his revolt against the Catholic Church was the true Christian nation (Germany) against the roman papacy (founded by the devil). Luther considered German as the fourth holy language which considered to be the true Christian doctrine: "I thank God that I am. able to hear and to find my God in the German language, Whom neither I nor you could ever find in Latin or Greek or Hebrew"⁴⁸. An important aspect of Luther's thought is the belief that "Opera dei sunt verba eius" [The works of God are his words]⁴⁹. It is through his words that the spirit of the Lord is conveyed to man.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

⁴⁵ HASTINGS, Adrian. *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism*. Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 58.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ SELLAR, A.M. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England*. London: George Bell And Sons, 1907, pp. 58–59.

⁴⁸ POLIAKOV, Léon. *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*. London: Chatto & Windus Heinemann for Sussex University Press, 1974, p. 84.

⁴⁹ PERKINS, Mary Anne. *Nation and word, 1770-1850: religious and metaphysical language in European national consciousness*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 40.

Communication, for Luther, was the highest function of language. For it is through a particular language that God communicated his revelation to humankind⁵⁰. We can observe among Luther and other Protestant intellectuals that the language of their people assumes a special importance because it is through these languages that specific Protestant theologies such as Anglicanism or Lutheranism was introduced among the people of England and Germany. For Luther, German is not merely the language spoken by a group of people, but the language through which the true Christian doctrine was revealed to him. The Christian theme of the divine word becomes increasingly important to religious thought after the reformation. It spurred questions related to the nature and function of language itself⁵¹. Martin Luther thought that language was the progenitor of human thought, with both language and thought having its source in the revelation of God's word⁵². This idea of Luther would be echoed and fleshed out by prominent post Enlightenment Protestant intellectuals such as J.G. Hamann and J.G. Herder⁵³. Hamann and Herder thought language not only gave rise to an individual's thoughts⁵⁴, but also as a "living word", an instrument of God's will that created and shaped communities/nations⁵⁵, much like how God's word had created the cosmos⁵⁶. Luther was convinced that the word of God responsible for creation was identical to the original language of humankind spoken by Adam in the Garden of Eden. Adam's naming itself is linked to the act of creation⁵⁷. The importance of language to these Protestant theologians is that language is the instrument of God's creation as well as revelation.

These ideas about the power of language and its role in God's revelation and creation goes back much farther than the reformation, all the way to the beginning of Christianity. As I showed in the previous section (Babel), the Bible itself refers to creation as a linguistic act. A number of Christian theologians during the middle-ages conceived of the language of Adam as a linguistic template through which all languages emerged, and capable of expressing the true essence of things that later languages could not. For these theologians, the confusion of the original

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵² Ibid., p. 39

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 40-41

⁵⁴ BENES, Tuska. *In Babel's shadow: Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. Detroit, Mich: Wayne State University Press, 2008, p. 38.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 25

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 21

⁵⁷ PERKINS, Mary Anne. *Nation and word, 1770-1850: religious and metaphysical language in European national consciousness*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 41.

language at Babel represented the corruption of true religion⁵⁸. In conclusion, there is a clear continuity of thought from the early Church fathers to Enlightenment theologians, when it comes to the role of language in both communicating and preserving God's revelation.

In addition to role of language in communicating and preserving God's revelation, another commonplace idea that one observes in European Christendom, including England, is the idea of a nation as a group of people constituted by religion. It is the framework of Christian theology that gives structure and coherence to the idea that nation is an entity constituted by religion. Within this theological framework, it is the Jews that become the prototypical model of nationhood. Bede explicitly compares the war and destruction wrought upon the Britons by the Saxons to the Chaldean invasion of Israel. The Israelites were punished because they failed in their duty to obey the covenant, that was the role that God had assigned to Israel, just as the Britons were punished by God because they deviated from their role as a Christian nation⁵⁹.

The idea of England as the new Israel became prevalent during and after the reformation period. England was seen as the chosen nation gifted by God with the true religion. This was expressed in the writings of renowned English scholars such as John Lyly and John Milton :

"So tender a care hath he always had of that England, as of a new Israel, his chosen and peculiar people."⁶⁰

"The favour and the love of heaven, we have great argument to think in a peculiar manner propitious and propending towards us. Why else was this Nation chosen before any other, that out of her as out of Sion should be proclam'd and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation?"⁶¹

By the time of the seventeenth century, many Protestant theologians and philosophers began to regard the Hebrew Bible as a political constitution designed by God himself for the nation of Israel, and attempted to model their own political and legal institutions after the nation of Israel.

⁵⁸ ECO, Umberto. *The Search For the Perfect Language*. Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1995, p. 85.

⁵⁹ SELLAR, A.M. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England*. London: George Bell And Sons, 1907, p. 31.

⁶⁰ *Complete Works of John Lyly* (Oxford, 1902), II, p. 205, Quoted In HASTINGS, Adrian. *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism*. Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 57

⁶¹ *Areopagitica, Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (Yale University Press, 1959), II, p. 552, Quoted In HASTINGS, Adrian. *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism*. Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 57.

The Hebrew Republic

Around the time of the seventeenth century, Protestant political thinkers began to look towards the Torah as a divine political constitution upon which they should model their government. In his book *Hebrew Republic*, historian Eric Nelson clearly demonstrates that, while the central ideas we associate with modern political thought and the modern liberal secular nation-states developed in the seventeenth century, these ideas were "not as a by-product of advancing secularization, but rather out of the deeply theologized context of the Biblical Century"⁶². Protestant theologians began to use the Jewish nation as an exemplar of what the ideal state should look like. They began to claim that monarchies are an illicit form of government based on their reading of the Jewish request for a king in I Samuel as a form of idolatry, and that republican governments are the only legitimate form of government⁶³. These Protestant intellectuals thought the Jewish nation had a republican form of government. In the late sixteenth century we see the beginnings of what would become its own genre of political literature: writings about the Hebrew republic⁶⁴. There were two texts during the seventeenth century that would have a large influence on Protestant thinkers of the time, which led to them seeing republicanism as the only legitimate form of government. One was the rabbinic exegetical text called the *Devarim Rabbah*, which saw monarchy as a form of idolatry⁶⁵. The other was the *De republica Hebraeorum libri III* published in 1617 by Peter van der Cun (Cunaeus). One of the fundamental theses of Cunaeus was that God had given plenary power over both civil and religious affairs to the civil magistrate⁶⁶. Many early-modern Protestant Hebraics, especially the Erastians, thought that God had instituted a form of government for the Israelites in which the Jewish magistrate had authority over both civil and religious affairs⁶⁷.

⁶² NELSON, Eric. *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought*. Cambridge, Mass : Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 3-4.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 19-20.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 91, 93.

These intellectuals began to demarcate the religious practices that had important civic consequences for the commonwealth from those that were actually incompatible with its goals:

"as early- modern authors scrutinized the records of the Hebrew republic in order to answer them, the set of religious matters deemed worthy of civil legislation grew steadily smaller... proceeded under the fervent belief that God himself required the emptying⁶⁸."

The Erastians believed that ancient Israel lacked excommunication for errors in doctrine or belief. No person at any time was forbidden by the priests or Levites from attending sacrifices. Thus, God's own republic was a model for tolerance where intrusions upon the private conscience does not occur⁶⁹. Thus was born the political doctrine of liberal toleration and the model of the secular nation-state. John Locke, considered the father of liberalism, is clear in his writings that religion is the "spiritual realm of the human soul", where human authority and laws are considered to be an impingement upon the soul's liberty of conscience⁷⁰

In addition to giving birth to modern political thought, these intellectual developments in seventeenth-century Europe also gives us the concept of nation shared by Protestant thinkers of that time period: a group of people united by and governed by a set of religious-political doctrines. The Protestant theologians saw the Torah as both a religious doctrine and a political constitution. The conception of the Jews as the prototypical nation and the Hebrew Bible as a set of political laws for this nation would end up having a profound impact on how Europeans perceived India, because they ended up mapping the model of the Jewish nation onto Indian society in order to understand it. I explore this subject matter in greater detail in the future chapters.

Johann Herder and the Basis for a Linguistic Nation

The German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, a Pietist, was one of the first Enlightenment intellectuals to expound in detail the relationship between language, nationality, and religion⁷¹.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

⁷⁰ DE ROOVER, Jakob and S.N. BALAGANGADHARA. John Locke, Christian Liberty, and the Predicament of Liberal Toleration. *Political Theory*. 2008, Volume 36, Issue 4, p. 530.

⁷¹ VAN DEN BERGH, Godfried Van Benthem. Herder and the Idea of a Nation. *Human Figurations*. 2018, Volume 7, Issue 1, p. 1 [Cit. on 20-04-2021]. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0007.103>.

Herder claimed that it was language that created a *Volk* or nation⁷². Herder also considered religion as the foundation of nationhood, regarding theology as the oldest form of philosophy and government in all nations⁷³. An important concept in Herder's history of nations is the idea of *Humanität*. For Herder, *Humanität* embodies the noblest qualities unique to human beings, those in which one clearly see the image of God imprinted in man. This includes the capacity to reason and freedom of action⁷⁴ as well as moral laws and true worship that are imprinted in men's hearts by God at the time of their creation⁷⁵. All our sensual appetites and instincts plant within human beings the seeds of *Humanität* – the unopened bud of Godlike humanity. These appetites are given to us by providence to lead us to nobler sentiments and actions⁷⁶. Herder uses the example of the caterpillar metamorphizing into the butterfly as an example of how divine providence works. The creature advances from the appetite of hunger to the more refined appetite of love. Similarly, divine providence, through nature, is gradually moving humankind toward a more exalted spiritual state in which the "flower of our bud of [*Humanität*]" will certainly appear⁷⁷. Human reason and freedom of action lead man astray into errors and mistakes. However these same errors also lead man to make better use of reason⁷⁸, ultimately helping man progress toward his full potential.

It is toward this end that all human societies are organized, whether they are aware of it or not. Herder's idea of *Humanität* plays an important role in his conceptualization of nations, in which each nation plays a role in God's plan of guiding human beings toward the development of what he calls *Humanität*⁷⁹.

⁷² BARNARD, F.M. *Herder's Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism*. London: Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 57.

⁷³ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Michael N. FORSTER. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 279.

⁷⁴ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Outlines Of A Philosophy Of The History Of Man*. Translated by T.O CHURCHILL. New York: Bergman Publishers, 1966, p. 440.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

⁷⁹ BARNARD, F.M. *Herder's Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism*. London: Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 88.

The Preconditions of Divine Revelation

In his essay about the origin of human language⁸⁰, Herder posits that man is born with an innate capacity for language – in stark contrast to many other philosophers of that time, such as Rousseau and Süssmilch, who insisted that language was a divine creation. However, Herder makes it clear that it was God who implanted within the human soul the capacity for both reason and language. Language and reason together makes us fit for divine instruction, for revelation⁸¹. We need human reason to grasp revelation, and language is the medium through which religion is revealed to humankind.

Reason is the cognizing and willing nature of human beings, because of which he not only cognizes and wills, but is also aware that he is a cognizing and willing being⁸². Humans first develop both language and reason from the sounds of nature. Out of the array of sensory phenomena that he is confronted with, man picks out and acknowledges a specific characteristic sound which he uses as a mark to identify the object⁸³. For example, when a human being's senses detect a sheep, his soul becomes aware and searches for a characteristic mark and, when the sheep bleats for the first time, the soul has found its characteristic mark and names the sheep as 'the bleating one'. Thus, the characteristic mark becomes an inward word, even before the human being turns it into speech. Herder describes this act of acknowledgement as 'taking-awareness'. The human being becomes aware that the sheep is a separate entity from himself. This self-awareness is the beginning of both reason and language.

Since the first instance of cognizing and identifying an object became actual with the word of the soul – that is, the invention of the inward characteristic word (the first word) – it is language that determines and shapes human thought. Not only does language shape human thought, it is the very form and substance of thought. Our chains of thoughts are actually chains of words⁸⁴. Since thought is the basic foundation of human activity, one can draw the conclusion that Herder saw language as the starting point of what makes us human.

⁸⁰ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Michael N. FORSTER. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

Herder postulates that older languages are saturated with words for sensory feelings derived from phenomena found in nature⁸⁵, and contain a more limited vocabulary when it comes to abstract concepts: "The older and more original languages are, the more noticeable becomes this analogy of the senses in their roots!"⁸⁶. Only gradually did words for abstract concepts develop out of words for sensory phenomena:

"Just as the human soul can recollect no abstraction from the realm of spirits that it did not arrive at through occasions and awakenings of the senses, likewise also no language has an abstractum that it did not arrive at through sound and feeling. And the more original the language, then the fewer abstractions, the more feelings."⁸⁷

From Herder's writings on language, we can see that he developed an idea of evolution of human languages, in which he saw the earliest languages as primitive, their vocabulary limited primarily to sensory feelings and equipped with a rudimentary grammar⁸⁸. It was only later languages that developed abstractions, with the earlier languages paving the way. As we shall see below, this kind of characterization of early language has parallels with how Herder described the development of human societies: from primitive to civilized. In this narrative, religion plays a central role in the progress of humanity.

The Foundations of a People

Herder characterizes early man as having a "sensitive nature, ignorant and consequently very curious for everything, credulous and hence susceptible to any impression, trustingly obedient and hence inclined to be led to everything good"⁸⁹. This primitive man is attuned to nature and possesses an innate sense of the divine:

"Let one imagine everything set in its natural, living light; what a chosen *garden of God* for raising the first, most delicate *human plants*! Behold this man full of *force and feeling of God*, but feeling as *ardently* and *peacefully* as the sap presses

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 122, 131.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 113.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 279.

in the tree here, as the instinct that, distributed there in a thousand forms among creatures that presses so mightily in each creature individually – as this quiet, healthy natural drive collected into the man ever *can* operate!"⁹⁰

Early man's sensitive nature and innate sense of the divine gave him a childlike piety that prompted him to attribute divinity to everything he encountered⁹¹, thus allowing him to receive the wisdom and virtue of religion in all its loftiness⁹².

This brings us to Herder's ideas on the origin of religion. Herder claims that from the time of their creation, even before the birth of language and reason, God had engraved religion and Humanität into the hearts of human beings⁹³. However, this religion and Humanität were still in a rudimentary form, as mere dispositions. Man has a sense of the invisible in the visible, a religious feeling of invisible operating powers in nature⁹⁴. Only after the birth of language and reason did this internal disposition develop into a full fledged theology⁹⁵, since it is the birth of language and reason that prepares man for divine revelation. Man is led to religion by trying to trace the cause of things. When there is no visible cause of events, peoples of the world presupposed an invisible author. From the time of first contact with the world, Herder speculates that human beings believed in invisible beings, whom he thought hurt or helped him, and sought to placate and befriend these beings through prayer and ceremony. Thus, religion was born. By inquiring about the cause of things, man finally reaches the ultimate cause, God. Even when he engages in false worship, and a false sense of God, there is a ray of truth in it, that of a higher power and the innate awareness in man of that power⁹⁶. It is important to note that the above ideas about primitive man and religion were commonplace in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe. Two well-known intellectuals during that time period, theologian Herbert of Cherbury and philosopher David Hume, expressed similar ideas in their writings. Lord Herbert of Cherbury in his work *De Religione Gentilium* (1663), claims that the worship of God is

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 274.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 277.

⁹² Ibid., p. 278.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 256.

⁹⁴ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Outlines Of A Philosophy Of The History Of Man*. Translated by T.O CHURCHILL. New York: Bergman Publishers, 1966, p. 254.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 256.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 104.

engraved in the human heart⁹⁷. In their quest to discover whether or not there is anything eternal in this world, the ancients begin to look to the heavens and stars which they think are eternal. They also saw the planets and stars as the primary cause behind phenomena such as heat and light.. The ancients attributed intelligence to these entities and began to worship them ⁹⁸. As religions became more complex, man finally acknowledges a supreme being that governs over all things including the stars, and worships that being ⁹⁹. In this manner, humanity discovers God in the fabric of the world.

Hume on the other hand speculates that primitive man out of fear of unknown causes of events begins to anthropomorphize these causes into various gods¹⁰⁰. Out of these various gods, the notion of a supreme deity emerges and primitive man gradually advances toward monotheism¹⁰¹. A shared assumption that is present in the ideas of the above thinkers (Herder, Hume, and Herbert of Cherbury) is that human beings are naturally endowed with a sense of religion, even though it might take a crude and idolatrous form. In essence, what these thinkers are doing is reproducing the centuries-old theological idea that a sense of the divine and worship of the true God has been engraved in the souls of mankind at the time of creation. Both Herder and Lord Herbert explicitly express this theological idea in their writings. One important consequence of this theological idea is that religion is a universal phenomenon found among all nations: "in all languages, one and the same human reason is conspicuous. Thus traces of religion, however different its garb may be, are found even among the poorest and rudest nations"¹⁰².

There is an important difference between Hume's and Herbert of Cherbury's ideas on the development of religion. Hume views polytheism as a stepping-stone toward monotheism. In his quest to find answers about the cause of things and allay his fears about these unknown causes, the primitive man traces these causes to invisible deities and begins worshipping them.

⁹⁷ HERBERT OF CHERBURY, Edward Herbert. *Pagan religion: a translation of De Religione Gentilium*. John A. BUTLER, ed. Ottawa, Canada : Binghamton, N.Y: Dovehouse Editions ; Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1996, p. 59.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

¹⁰⁰ HUME, David. *The Natural History of Religion*. London: Watts, 1910, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁰² HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Outlines Of A Philosophy Of The History Of Man*. Translated by T.O CHURCHILL. New York: Bergman Publishers, 1966, p. 252.

Through the worship of many gods, man is led to the idea of a supreme deity, or ultimate cause of everything. Whereas, Lord Hebert of Cherbury proposes that man is initially led to the worship of supreme God through observing the eternal and beneficial nature of certain natural phenomena including the planets and fixed stars. They worshipped God through the worship of stars, "the most illustrious of the supreme power's works"¹⁰³. However, in due time, false prophets arose among the pagans, and these prophets deified the stars themselves and set up idols to be worshipped by the pagans. They then invented rites, ceremonies, and made these false gods the object of worship rather than the true supreme God¹⁰⁴.

Despite the differences between Lord Herbert's and Hume's ideas about the development of polytheism, an important idea that is implicit in these thinkers' writings is that polytheism is an erring variant of the true religion that is engraved in man's heart¹⁰⁵. By presenting polytheism as an erring variant of monotheism, Herder, Hume and Herbert of Cherbury are building on the doctrine of the fall of man, in which Adam and Eve's disobedience of God symbolizes man's innate sense of true worship becoming corrupted into idolatry. Since it is the corruption of true religion, idolatry shows the human being's capacity to know and worship the true God. This theme of the evolution of religion from polytheism to monotheism plays an important role in Herder's ideas about human history as we shall see below.

In his story about the origin of religion, Herder saw language as an instrument that shapes religion. The whole of nature is a collection of resounding verbs (rustling, bleating, etc), and in a sense, speaking to human beings¹⁰⁶. These resounding verbs are then turned into nouns ('the bleating one', 'the rustling one'), and primitive man begins to see each natural phenomenon as a living agent with its own spirit, either acting for or against him. Just like human beings, these agents of nature express qualities and emotions such as love, anger etc, and as a result natural phenomena became personified into either god or goddess:

"That savage saw the high tree with its splendid crown and admired. The crown rustled!

¹⁰³ HERBERT OF CHERBURY, Edward Herbert. *Pagan religion: a translation of De Religione Gentilium*. John A. BUTLER, ed. Ottawa, Canada : Binghamton, N.Y: Dovehouse Editions ; Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1996, p. 59.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 101.

That is the work of divinity! The savage falls down and prays to it! Behold there the history of the sensuous human being, the obscure link, *how nouns arise from the verbs – and the easiest step to abstraction!* ... because the human being related everything to himself, because everything seemed to speak with him, and really acted for or against him, because he consequently took sides with or against it, loved or hated it, and imagined everything to be human...personified into woman or man – everywhere gods; goddesses; acting, wicked or good, beings!"¹⁰⁷

In all the primitive nations, tradition has been the propagator of religion and religious worship. These traditions are transmitted through language. However, the language of religion becomes more obscure and unintelligible over time because the words and symbols used to convey religious concepts refer to invisible, transcendental ideas that cannot be related to objects in the real world. The priests of these primitive religions exacerbate this process, since they continue to peddle these religious terms and doctrines whose meaning is either lost or corrupted, hence becoming the "blind servants of idolatry, or the lying preachers of superstition"¹⁰⁸. It is important to note that the notion of linguistic unintelligibility and priests corrupting religion is not a novel idea of Herder's. First, as mentioned previously, the idea that the confounding of tongues at Babel led to the corruption of true religion has had a long history in Europe, since the time of the early Church fathers. Second, since the time of the Protestant Reformation, anticlericalism had become a commonplace idea in Europe. The reformers accused the Church of usurping God's authority by acting as mediators between the lay Christian and God and inventing laws and ceremonies that either weren't part of, or went against, the Christian doctrine. Herder combined these commonplace theological ideas to explain the gradual corruption of 'true' religion.

Herder describes true religion as a "filial service" to God: unlike other creatures, human beings are able to perceive God's laws in the works of nature. By willingly following these laws, man's noblest and most beautiful characteristics shine through, and he comes closer to embodying the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Outlines Of A Philosophy Of The History Of Man*. Translated by T.O CHURCHILL. New York: Bergman Publishers, 1966, p. 252.

image of God in his earthly life¹⁰⁹. Thus, religion becomes the highest form of Humanität¹¹⁰; man's first attempt at understanding nature through the law of cause and effect (ultimately attributing all causes to the one God).

Even though Herder considered ancient religions like the Egyptian as mired in superstition and clericalism, he believed each of them had a role to play in the divine plan. These nations were still in their boyhood, and weren't yet ready for the sophisticated philosophy of later nations¹¹¹. It was when the ancient religions had degenerated into idolatry and run their course that providence brought Christianity into the world. Unlike earlier religions which were narrowly national in character, Christianity was universal. The following quote by Herder appropriately encapsulates his ideas regarding the role of nations and religions in the promotion of Humanität:

"The human race had to be *prepared*... for so many millennia, to be *gradually drawn forth* from childhood, barbarism, idolatry, and sensuality; its forces of soul had to be *developed* through so many *national formations* – Oriental, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, etc. – as *steps* and *approaches*."¹¹²

In Herder's discussion of the role that nations and religions play in the promotion of Humanität he is basically developing the doctrine of Praeparatio Evangelica. This early Christian doctrine argues that "God had already sowed the older cultures with ideas and themes that would grow to fruition once they were interpreted in a fully Christian context"¹¹³. Eusebius, for example, in his work Praeparatio Evangelica, attempts to demonstrate the agreement of Plato's ideas with the Hebrew scriptures¹¹⁴, laying the foundation for humanity to receive the Christian teachings. Herder, like Eusebius and previous Christian thinkers, saw Christianity as the fulfillment of all

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 104.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 103-104.

¹¹¹ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Michael N. FORSTER. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 280.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 304.

¹¹³ JENKINS, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. 3rd edition. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 122.

¹¹⁴ GIFFORD, E.H. *Eusebii Pamphili Evangelicae Praeparationis libri XV*. London: Oxford University Press, 1903, p. xxii, xxiii.

that was "good and noble in pagan thought"¹¹⁵. Herder saw Christianity as the religion in which the goal of Humanität is fulfilled.

In Herder's philosophy, religion binds a people together into a nation: "in many nations, one common worship, and religious festivals, are all that imparts to independent families the shadow of a whole"¹¹⁶. Herder also perceives religion as the seed that sprouted the various features of civilization among the nations of the world, including their institutions and systems of knowledge, such as philosophy, history, arts, morals and politics¹¹⁷. Thus, for Herder, religion is the fundamental foundation upon which a nation is formed and distinguished from others. Although Herder also describes language as foundational in forming a nation, I propose that the role that language plays in Herder's ideas is indirect and secondary to religion. As mentioned, according to Herder, man is born with a sense of true religion and worship imprinted in his heart. Language is the medium through which religious doctrines and ideas are shaped, interpreted, and communicated. Religion, in turn, plays a direct role in forming a people into a nation.

Herder and Nationhood

Herder saw reciprocal hatred between groups as the cause of linguistic divergence¹¹⁸. Two or more tribes living next to each other cannot help but quarrel: not only because of conflict caused by similar needs, but by feelings such as jealousy, honour, and pride in their race. Family and tribal bonds turn outward, against another race. As a result, a complete separation between the two tribes occurs: physical, cultural, and linguistic, including family customs.

Herder identifies religion as one of the reasons driving the reciprocal hatred between the two groups. The warring tribes fight in the name of their ancestral spirits¹¹⁹. As a result, family hatred is thus made eternal, and is the cause of war, separation, and differences between

¹¹⁵ BALAGANGADHARA, S. N. *The Heathen in his Blindness: Asia, the West, and the Dynamic of Religion*. Leiden, New York: E.J. Brill, 1994, p. 50.

¹¹⁶ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Outlines Of A Philosophy Of The History Of Man*. Translated by T.O CHURCHILL. New York: Bergman Publishers, 1966, p. 281.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 253.

¹¹⁸ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Michael N. FORSTER. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 151.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 153.

peoples. Herder uses the Tower of Babel account in the Bible as an illustration of his idea. All of humanity was united for one great work or purpose and spoke one language. But then there is a confusion of the language, and a multiplicity of languages result. Herder interprets this as a great quarrel or division over a common purpose (the building of the tower). The spirit of family was diluted, and this in turn led to disunity and fighting. The end result of this fighting was that "they confused the unitary constituent of their origin, their language"¹²⁰.

As humanity splits into different groups, language also diverges, and consequently, customs and religion¹²¹. In Herder's philosophy, a human being becomes conscious of his inner self and his relationships with others through language. Language is also the medium through which the thoughts and feelings of past generations are perpetuated and transmitted to the current generation. Thus it is a nation's language that sustains it from generation to generation¹²².

Besides language, Herder outlines four other components that constitute nationhood, and uses the Jewish people as the perfect exemplar to illustrate these four components¹²³. The four components are: land as shared heritage, the law of the constitution in the form of a covenant, a family/tribal origin, and reverence for forefathers. Herder views all four of the above elements as an organic whole, described at length, and commented upon in the Jewish Holy literature¹²⁴. Thus, it is religious doctrine, in this case the Jewish doctrine, that forms the basis for the other components of the nation.

From Herder's viewpoint, "the whole history of nations is to us a school, for instructing us in the course, by which we are to reach the lovely goal of Humanität"¹²⁵. However, according to Herder, each nation's contribution to advancing human beings toward this goal varies depending on their geographic as well as their temporal location. Herder felt that "the most beautiful form of reason and Humanität" is found in temperate climates, hence the greater progress made by the Greek and Roman nations in the advancement of Humanität when

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 153.

¹²² BARNARD, F.M. *Herder's Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism*. London: Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 57.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 62.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

¹²⁵ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Outlines Of A Philosophy Of The History Of Man*. Translated by T.O CHURCHILL. New York: Bergman Publishers, 1966, p. 442.

compared to the Negro who was "closer to the ape"¹²⁶. In addition to climate, each nation's advancement of Humanität also depends on the time period, with nations of old lacking the means for the promotion of Humanität that later nations had. Herder implores the German nation to pursue a "purer and more noble object" than nations of old who "attained an inferior aim"¹²⁷. Herder's ideas about the role that nations play in promoting Humanität follows the same structure as the doctrine of Praeparatio Evangelica. The primitive nations play the role of the religions that preceded Christianity. Just as pagan religions contain rays of truth that prepare human beings to receive the truth of Christianity, the early nations made contributions toward the progress of Humanität that the later nations built upon.

Conclusion: Nation-Religion-Language Framework

The idea that a people are constituted by language and religion precedes Herder. As I have indicated, when it comes to nation-language-religion connection, there is a cluster of commonplace ideas shared by various theologians and philosophers throughout Europe across centuries. One of the commonplace ideas shared by these thinkers is that of the Jews as the prototypical nation. Both the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic Covenant made the Jews into a people, a kingdom of priests tasked with the mission of spreading the word of God and uniting all humanity as one people. Thus, within the Biblical framework, the Jews become a nation because they have a specific role to play in God's plan.

In the Biblical account of human history, God chooses a group of people to fulfill his designs for the world. A covenant is established between those people and God¹²⁸. These people will do his will by keeping his laws and commandments and teachings by obeying them¹²⁹. "To be a member of a covenanted community, then, is to bind ourselves to be partners with God in creating a certain kind of world for ourselves and our progeny. [God's laws] are the means to bring this about".¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 441.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 442.

¹²⁸ SMITH, Anthony D. *Chosen Peoples*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 50.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

¹³⁰ Greenfeld, Liah. *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 47, Quoted In SMITH, Anthony D. *Chosen Peoples*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 58.

God reveals his will through the language of that particular people of that time. Therefore that language becomes one of the fundamental properties that makes those people into a nation, since it is the medium through which the nation receives and interprets the will of God. From Bede to Milton to Herder the nation of Israel became the prototypical exemplar of what makes a group of people into a nation. Bede saw England as the new Israel chosen by God to be a Christian nation. Bede notes how since the beginning of Christendom in Europe, the Christian religion has taken on different forms in different parts of Europe through a transcription of a conversation between Saint Augustine and Pope Gregory: Augustine points to how different Churches have different customs, contrasting the custom of mass in the Church of Gaul to the Church of Rome¹³¹. Similarly, it is the Church of England and its customs that make the people of England into a nation for Saint Bede.

During the Reformation period, the rise of various branches of Protestantism in different regions of Europe was also accompanied by vernacular literature that expounded on the theology of these denominations. These developments in turn intensified the feelings of nationalism and national consciousness in Europe¹³². Protestant theologians from different parts of Europe began to see their people as a nation akin to Israel, chosen by God to receive the true religion. Since the theologies of these different denominations was being disseminated through vernacular literature, as opposed to Latin which was the official language of the Church, the importance of language to national identity also began to increase both during and after the reformation. Martin Luther saw German as the fourth holy language (in addition to Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) through which the true Christian doctrine came into this world. Different peoples of Europe began claiming their language was the one spoken in paradise¹³³. The concept of Jews as the model nation also played an influential role in the political thought of the seventeenth century, as many Protestant theologians began to view the Torah as a political constitution after which they should model their own societies. Following on the heels of the seventeenth century Protestant intellectuals, Johann Herder also thought of the covenant(s) between God and the Jews as a kind of legal constitution, and thought of the Old Testament as

¹³¹ SELLAR, A.M. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England*. London: George Bell And Sons, 1907, p. 51.

¹³² PERKINS, Mary Anne. *Nation and word, 1770-1850: religious and metaphysical language in European national consciousness*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 31.

¹³³ OLENDER, Maurice. *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Arthur GOLDHAMMER. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 1–2.

providing the foundation for the Jewish nation from their laws to having the land of Israel as their shared heritage.¹³⁴

In addition to the model of the Jews as a nation, the Tower of Babel account in the Bible also became one of the fundamental events that determined how various theologians throughout history connected nation to language and religion. The idea of the Babelic confusion as the source of both religious and linguistic corruption has a long history within Christian theology. Augustine, for example, thought that after the event at Babel, the true religion and the original language only survived in the house of Heber. French Utopian thinker Guillaume Postel saw a "a return to Hebrew as the instrument for the peaceable fusion of the peoples of differing races"¹³⁵. His vision was of one human race, one God, and one language – a sacred language divinely inspired for man. The notion of linguistic corruption requires further explanation.

Many theologians thought that the primordial language spoken at the Garden of Eden was a *formam locutionis* out of which other languages emerged. Moreover, the Bible (Genesis, Gospel of John) describes creation itself as a linguistic act. Hence, Christian theologians from the early Church fathers to J.G. Hamann thought that the original Adamic language had creative powers¹³⁶, and capable of expressing the true essence of God's revelation that later languages could not. Theologians such as Abulafia and Raymond Lull were either trying to recover the original human language or create a universal language through which human beings could receive the original Biblical doctrine without distortion. Similarly, some Protestant scholars felt the need to study Hebrew because they rejected the Church as the sole interpreter of the Bible; it became important to read the scripture in the original language, because, they felt, only the original language could be capable of expressing the truth of the revelation¹³⁷. The confusion of this original language also signifies the corruption of the true religion into many idolatrous religions¹³⁸. Nations were distinguished from each other not only on the basis of language but religion too. Thus, by the time of the Enlightenment, the idea that language and religion were

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

^ECO, Umberto. *The Search For the Perfect Language*. Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1995, p. 76.

¹³⁶ PERKINS, Mary Anne. *Nation and word, 1770-1850: religious and metaphysical language in European national consciousness*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 41.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

¹³⁸ ECO, Umberto. *The Search For the Perfect Language*. Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1995, p. 85.

constituent properties of a nation had become common and widespread throughout European societies.

Herder was one of the first Enlightenment intellectuals to elaborate and expand upon the nation-religion-language connection. In his explanation of how language and religion make a people into a nation, Herder incorporates several theological ideas and doctrines. Herder thought humans are ingrained with a sense of true worship, but that it is the development of reason and language that allows this religious impulse to develop. Herder postulates that language and reason arise simultaneously – both being necessary preconditions for revelation.

Herder interprets the confusion at Babel as a conflict between human beings that resulted in the human race united through a common language and true religion, being fractured into various nations, with the common language and religion becoming corrupted into multiple languages and various, idolatrous religions. Like his predecessors, Herder blamed the corruption of revelation on the corruption of language. In Herder's case, the corruption of religion resulted from religious terminology becoming unintelligible and distorted as time went on.

Herder thought that it was God who implanted within the human soul the capacity for both reason and language, and it was language and reason that together made us fit to receive divine revelation. As a result, language becomes the vehicle through which the doctrines of the true religion are communicated and disseminated among the speakers of that language. Religion in turn binds a people together into a nation. Herder, for example sees religion as the basic foundation from which various properties of a nation arise including their institutions and systems of knowledge, such as philosophy, history, arts, morals and politics¹³⁹.

Thus, 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. These theological concepts became the underlying premise out of which emerged the concept of nation and its role in history. These ideas about nation, language, and religion would become the foundation upon which European intellectuals (Orientalists, missionaries, philosophers) built their descriptions of Indian society.

¹³⁹ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Outlines Of A Philosophy Of The History Of Man*. Translated by T.O CHURCHILL. New York: Bergman Publishers, 1966, p. 281.

The Aryan Nation

This following chapter examines the development of the idea of the Aryan nation. The common textbook story about Indian history is that there was an invasion/migration by a group of Sanskrit-speaking people (later called the Aryans) into India at some point in time. These people had their own religion, whose various scriptures (the *Vedas*) were in Sanskrit. When the Aryans entered India they discovered aboriginal populations with their own languages and religious practices, who were eventually assimilated into the Aryan religion. One of these aboriginal groups became known as the Dravidians. This story became accepted by Tamil intellectuals and became one of the foundations of the movement. There are indications that the theory of an Aryan race and an Aryan invasion was built on a deep layer of Christian theological ideas about human history and cultures¹⁴⁰.

Asiatic Jones and the Indo-European Language Family

The discovery of the linguistic affinities between European languages and Sanskrit in the late eighteenth century led to the theory of a primordial Indo-European language and nation¹⁴¹. The Orientalists who began studying India were guided by a Biblical chronology which sought to trace all the nations of the world back to the three sons of Noah¹⁴². In the process, they were trying to locate the primordial religion, language, and homeland, which they thought was the Garden of Eden¹⁴³. Friedrich Schlegel, in his work, *On the language and wisdom of Indians* (1808), thought he had finally located this paradise in India. He wanted to retrieve the pure, uncorrupted religion revealed by God before the confusion of Babel, by studying the primordial language out of which religion, thought forms, and "poetry of the human spirit" emerged¹⁴⁴. A caveat is required at this point: Even though Jones' discovery provided grounds for the claim

¹⁴⁰ KEPPENS, Marianne and Jakob De ROOVER. Orientalism and the Puzzle of the Aryan Invasion Theory. *Pragmata: Journal of Human Sciences*. 2014, Volume. 2, Issue. 2, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ OLENDER, Maurice. *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Arthur GOLDHAMMER. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 2.

¹⁴² TRAUTMANN, Thomas R. *Languages and Nations: the Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, p. 16.

¹⁴³ BENES, Tuska. *In Babel's shadow: Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. Detroit, Mich: Wayne State University Press, 2008, p. 3, 16.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

that Indians and Europeans shared a common lineage, the idea of a Brahminical tribe of foreign origin precedes the discovery of the Indo-European language family¹⁴⁵; language and religion were the phenomena used to identify Brahmins as a separate tribe or nation. As we shall see later, this way of grouping people based on perceived similarities in religion and language was used to classify various groups in India as different nations.

Max Müller: The Three Original Nations

One of the most prominent Orientalists of the nineteenth century was Friedrich Max Müller. In Müller's writings, we find a detailed discussion of the relationship between language and religion, and how, together, they make a nation. In Müller's *Introduction to the science of religion: Four lectures delivered at the Royal Institution, with two essays on false analogies, and The philosophy of mythology* (1873), he puts forth the idea that, in the earliest stages of human civilization, nations were so inextricably linked to both language and religion that it makes sense to refer to these ancient nations *as* languages and religions. As strong as the connections between language and nation are, Müller proposes there is an even more intimate connection between religion and nationality¹⁴⁶. In his writings, he raises the important question: How does a group of human beings become a people? His answer to that was religion. Out of religion develops "that higher and purely moral feeling which binds men together and makes them a people"¹⁴⁷. The formation of religion constitutes the starting point out of which a nation is born. In Müller's essay, the Jews are a paradigmatic example of how religion unites a people into a nation; it was their faith in and worship of Jehovah that transformed the wandering tribes of Israel into a nation¹⁴⁸. Müller also sees religion as the template from which all the political institutions of a society emerge, including the law. Law was originally derived from an ancient lawgiver, who in turn, received it from a God or deity according to the ancient religions of many

¹⁴⁵ KEPPENS, Marianne. The Aryans and the Ancient System of Caste. In: *Western Foundations of the Caste System*. ed. FÁREK, Martin et al. Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 238.

¹⁴⁶ MÜLLER, Friedrich Max. *Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution; with two essays, On False Analogies and the Philosophy of Mythology*. London: Longmans, Green, 1873, p. 83.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

nations¹⁴⁹. Moreover, in ancient or primitive societies, religion is seen as the underlying phenomenon that impacts all social interactions and holds together all institutions from the micro- to the macro-level. The fundamental social unit is the family, and religious rituals and ceremonies hold the family together. From the aggregation of families emerge tribes, and from the aggregation of tribes emerge nations.

When it comes to the relationship between language and religion, Müller expresses that early religion was "a sacred dialect of human speech"¹⁵⁰. According to Müller, early religion, in its outward form, consisted primarily of a few words and epithets that express spiritual concepts. These words originally carried some material meaning, such as strength or purity, and were gradually elevated into a higher meaning, like holiness¹⁵¹. Thus, Müller conceives of language as not merely a signifier or symbol that conveys meaning and ideas; instead, language is the very form of ideas and knowledge, the source of a people's beliefs and worldview. Müller identifies Aryan, Semitic, and Turanian as the three original languages and religions out of which the three original nations emerged. Müller surmises that before nations were formed, languages grew wild without any fixed form or structure, and that the hardening of language into a particular structure was the result of religious and political influence, with the three original religions being concomitant with the three original languages (Aryan, Semitic, and Turanian). Müller goes on to describe these religions using linguistic analogies. For example, the ancient Chinese religion (Turanian) is a 'monosyllabic' religion consisting of worship of a host of single spirits of nature with no higher principle connecting them together. This monosyllabic nature of Chinese religion influences the nature of Chinese language too¹⁵². Similarly, Müller points out that the gods of the Semitic nations were gods who affected the destinies of individuals and nations, rather than nature gods. This influences the names they use for their deities, using words expressive of moral qualities such as 'exalted', 'king', or 'lord' instead of words that stand for natural phenomena like fire or water¹⁵³. Thus, religion, in addition to giving rise to the basic institutions of society, also shapes and moulds language into a particular form.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 92.

In addition to describing how religion solidified wild and free-growing language into a particular form and structure, Müller also traces the development of religion by tracing the development of language. One of the conclusions Müller draws from the connection of language with religion the following. If languages of certain nations are related to one another and form a language family, this relationship will correspond to a similar relationship between the religions of these nations. Shared religious terminology, such as the names of principal deities and the words used for the essential elements of religion (prayer, altar, etc) among the nations of a language family prove the existence of an original primitive religion, and the nature of that religion¹⁵⁴.

In order to show how the development of language affects religion, Müller compares the Egyptian and Indian religions, stating that both started out as monotheistic – both speaking of the one power without a second, to whom no temples or idols were erected. But these religions eventually degenerated into polytheism, which Müller blamed on the corrupting influence of mythology. This mythology in turn is "an inevitable disease of language"¹⁵⁵. Müller observes that all the Indo-European languages have similar sounding names for the highest God in their respective religions (Dyaus in Sanskrit, Zeus in Greek)¹⁵⁶. This shows that the ancestors of the Indo-European races were worshipping the same unseen highest being using the most exalted name they could think of, namely, light and sky. However, according to Müller, Dyaus did not originally mean the sky. Based on his readings of Sanskrit and Greek texts, he claims that both Dyaus and Zeus originally meant 'Heaven-father' (akin to the Christian God). But once the ancestral language of both Indians and Greeks was torn asunder into many languages, this meaning was lost and Dyaus came to mean 'sky god'¹⁵⁷. In Müller's view, the worship of one God became corrupted into the worship of many gods because of the nature of the Indo-European languages. Aryan words "are swamped by prefixes, suffixes, and derivatives...to the point where the substantive sense of the word is blurred"¹⁵⁸. Because of this, the Aryans sunk into idolatry. If one takes the sun for example, many of the Indo-European languages have

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁵⁸ OLENDER, Maurice. *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Arthur GOLDHAMMER. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 84.

different appellations for different aspects of the sun. Because of this, over time, the root became lost and the word for ‘sun’ became the word for ‘sun god’¹⁵⁹. Müller believed God implanted an intuition of divine within man, but whether this sense of divinity took on a monotheistic or polytheistic form was shaped by language¹⁶⁰. Thus, the human intuition of the divine takes the form of different religions through different national tongues.

In analyzing Müller’s ideas on the relationship between religion, language and nation, I propose that there is a continuity between him and European thinkers of previous centuries. Firstly, when it comes to the relationship between language and religion, Müller’s ideas are clearly building on those of theologians such as Herbert of Cherbury and Herder: God implanted an intuition of the divine within man, and it is language that shapes this intuition into a fully fledged religion, giving it form and structure. Thirdly, Müller, like Herder and Postel, saw language as the cause of idolatry and superstition in religion. As languages change and diverge from one another, word meanings also change and become, at times, unintelligible. This includes the words used to express religious doctrines and theology. As languages change, the original meaning of the religious terminology becomes corrupted or lost, resulting in the degeneration of religious truth into superstition and idolatry. Lastly, both Herder and Müller thought it was religion that gave birth to the basic institutions of nations, as well as the basic features of what makes a nation civilized, such as philosophy, art, and science.

These theological ideas and assumptions played an important part in the European descriptions of India over the centuries. In these descriptions, the Brahmins play a central role.

The Brahmanical Nation

For centuries before the discovery of the Indo-European language family and notions of Aryan and Dravidian nations, the European intellectuals had been thinking and writing about Brahmins¹⁶¹. In these writings, two important ideas emerged and coalesced to form the modern-day commonplace story about Brahmins in Indian society. I provide a summary of these ideas below.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁶¹ GELDERS, Raf. *Ascetics and Crafty Priests: Orientalism and the European Representations of India*. Belgium: Ghent, 2010, p. 53.

The first idea is that of Brahmins as heathen priests. In their polemics with their Greco-Roman critics, the early Church fathers defended their religion by pointing out that Christianity was an embodiment of the ancient and universal religion that had been bestowed by God on all at the time of their creation. The other traditions of the world were either portrayed as proto-Christian or corrupted versions of another religion. In this story, the Brahmins were considered a proto-Christian nation¹⁶². The story of the Brahmin ascetic Dindimus, and his dialogues with Alexander the Great as narrated in works like Megasthenes' *Indica* and *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus* by Palladius, would become the accounts around which the image of the proto-Christian Brahmin was built. The Brahmin ascetic served as a model of ideal monkhood, striving "for the normative ideals of the Gregorian Reforms in the East" such as good morals, chastity, and true religion¹⁶³. Another important process that contributed to the image of the proto-Christian Brahmin was the history of nations found in the Old Testament. According to this, all nations are descendants of the sons of Noah. "Following the lead of Epiphanius, who had first identified the Brahmans as descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo 1797:63), Guillaume Postel (1510–81) speculated in his interesting book *De originibus* (On the Origins) that the Indian Brahmans ("Abrahmanes") are direct descendants of Abraham"¹⁶⁴.

During the Middle Ages, side by side with the image of the pious monk or priest, was a deep-seated distrust of the monk as licentious and duplicitous¹⁶⁵. This anticlericalism of the would take on a much greater proportion and intensity during the Protestant Reformation, as the reformers accused the Roman Church and the papacy of corrupting the true religion. One of the primary arguments of the reformers was that human laws and doctrines turn into idolatry when presented as necessary for salvation, which is exactly what it accused the Roman papacy of doing¹⁶⁶. The anticlerical theology of the Reformation, combined with the reports of Brahmin practices and rituals by European missionaries who travelled to India helped form the second image of the Brahmins: duplicitous priests who have corrupted the true religion that once

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁶⁴ APP, Urs. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, pp. 29-30.

¹⁶⁵ GELDERS, Raf. *Ascetics and Crafty Priests: Orientalism and the European Representations of India*. Belgium: Ghent, 2010, p. 35.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 74.

existed in India by inventing and imposing their idolatrous rites and laws on the populace¹⁶⁷. The sixteenth-century Portuguese historian Diogo do Couto popularized "the view of the *Vedas* as a monotheistic scripture, hidden by the Brahmans from the people to whom they preached polytheism"¹⁶⁸. It is worth noting that the basic structure of this idea of Brahmin priesthood has been retained until today and has become part of the commonplace narrative in books and articles about Hinduism and Brahmanism. Despite modern-day anthropology and South Asian studies being secular disciplines, the concepts of Brahmanism and Brahmin priesthood that they use were developed within a Protestant theological framework within which the Catholic clergy become a corrupt priesthood who had imposed idolatry and false doctrines on the laity¹⁶⁹. In the absence of this framework, the idea of a corrupt Brahmin priesthood becomes incoherent and unintelligible.

A second idea related to the concept of the corrupt Brahmin priesthood was that of Brahmins as a nation. In the course of the seventeenth century, European travellers and missionaries began describing India as a heathen nation divided into four tribes or castes that were arranged hierarchically, according to nobility and purity¹⁷⁰. Scholar Jakob De Roover points out that the Europeans seem to be implicitly using the Jewish nation (consisting of tribes, united by worship of God) as a model to understand the Indian people using Old Testament concepts like tribes and clans¹⁷¹. Some missionaries explicitly compared Brahmins to Jews, noticing resemblances between Jewish institutions and practices and those of the Brahmans. Abraham Roger, for example, thought that the Brahmans among the Indians much resembled the Levites of the Jews. It was the Brahmans who were thought to inculcate and preserve the heathen religion by interpreting and enforcing the laws and doctrines contained in their holy books, such as the *Vedas*, and performing the ceremonies¹⁷².

Just as how the Old Testament contains the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, which together with Mosaic law constitute the foundation of the Jewish nation, texts like the *Vedas* and the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 81-82.

¹⁶⁸ APP, Urs. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 83.

¹⁶⁹ LINDBERG, Carter. *The European Reformations*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 295.

MACCULLOCH, Diarmaid. *The Reformation*. New York: Viking Press, 2004, p. 34.

¹⁷⁰ DE ROOVER, Jakob. A Nation of Tribes and Priests: The Jews and the Immorality of the Caste System. In: *Western Foundations of the Caste System*. ed. FÅREK, Martin et al., Cham: Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 177.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 179.

Upanishads were considered doctrinal texts, and therefore the foundation of the Brahmanical nation. I propose that one of the reasons that certain texts were considered as foundational religious doctrines was because they played an important role in Brahmanical traditions. The Brahmins, in turn, were considered as the priests and lawgivers of the Indian nation. Like the Jews, the Hindus were thought to have an ancient lawgiver. From the readings of texts like the *Vedas* and the *Dharmasastras*, which were viewed as the law books and doctrines of the Indian people, the Europeans thought that it was the Hindu lawgiver, either Manu or Brahma, who originally legislated the caste system¹⁷³, and the Brahmin priests who interpreted and enforced the caste laws.

Practices the Europeans observed in Indian society, such as excommunication and untouchability were understood by mapping the Jewish model of religion onto them. Thus, a French author, De la Crequinière thought that Indians, like the Jews, were organized hierarchically¹⁷⁴. It was also noticed that the Brahmins, like the Levites, were concerned with purity, and had certain restrictions related to that, as well as having rituals to remedy impurity¹⁷⁵. The European travellers also understood the Pariahs through the Jewish model of religion. The Pariahs were thought to be outcastes, excommunicated from the religious community of Hindus for violating caste laws, similar to the way in which Jews were excommunicated for violating Mosaic law¹⁷⁶.

In addition to the covenant law, the Hebrew language was seen as the other factor that united the Jews as a nation – not merely because all Jews spoke it, but because it is the language through which God revealed the Old Testament. In the same way, Sanskrit became known as the sacred language of the Brahmins. The fact that Sanskrit was primarily known and used by Brahmins was seen as evidence that they were a foreign nation. For example, the Jesuit missionary Pere Coeurdoux claimed that the Sanskrit language is the language of the Brahmins, a people that came from the Caucus country which had been peopled by the descendants of Magog¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 186.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁷⁷ TRAUTMANN, Thomas R. *Aryans and British India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 54.

This was the case not only because Sanskrit was primarily known and used by Brahmins, but also because it was the language of the religious doctrines, such as the *Vedas* and *Sastras*, which only the Brahmins seemed to be able to access. In this way, Sanskrit became inextricably linked to the so-called religion of the Brahmins. Even prior to the discovery of the Indo-European language family, European scholars were writing about how Sanskrit was the secret language used by Brahmin priests to conceal the Vedic doctrine from the common masses. The theologian La Croze, expresses this idea clearly in his work when he claims that "the guardians of an ancient monotheistic teaching that the priests kept hidden from the common people"¹⁷⁸ and then created all manner of superstitions and idolatries that they "entertained for their own particular interest". Likewise, the English theologian Thomas Burnet and the French philosopher Voltaire also expressed that the Brahmins possessed an ancient monotheistic doctrine which they hid in their Sanskrit language:

"The descendants of the ancient Brachmins in India and the surrounding Asian countries have a striking resemblance to Egyptian priests: like their Egyptian counterparts who encoded and concealed their monotheist doctrine in hieroglyphs."¹⁷⁹

"We know almost nothing of the ancient Brahmanic rites that are preserved today. [The Brahmins] communicate little about the Sanskrit books that they still possess in this ancient sacred language"¹⁸⁰

With the discovery of the relationship between Sanskrit and the European languages in the late nineteenth century, the Brahmins became equated with the progeny of the Indo-European or Aryan nation, which was supposed to be the ancestral nation of all speakers of Indo-European languages, from the Greeks to the Germans to the Brahmins. An excerpt from Friedrich Max Müller's *A History Of Ancient Sanskrit Literature So Far As It Illustrates The Primitive Religion Of The Brahmans* (1859) is a good example of the expression of this idea about the Brahmins: "the Brahmans of India belong to the same family, the Aryan or Indo-European

¹⁷⁸ Croze, Mathurin Veyssie`re de la. *Histoire du Christianisme des Indes*. The Hague: Vaillant & N. Prevosi, 1724, pp. 454-459, Quoted In APP, Urs. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 82.

¹⁷⁹ Burnet, Thomas. *Telluris Theoria Sacra, Originem & Mutationes Generales Orbis Nostri, Quas Aut Jam Subiit, Aut Olim Subiturus est, Complectens. Accedunt Archæologi;æ Philosophicæ, Sive Doctrina Antiqua de Rerum Originibus*. Amsterdam: J. Wolters, 1694, pp. 471-472, Quoted In APP, Urs. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 163.

¹⁸⁰ Voltaire. *La Philosophie de l'Histoire*. Amsterdam: Changuion, 1765, p. 149, Quoted In APP, Urs. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, pp. 65-66.

family, which civilised the whole of Europe, the two great branches of that primitive race were kept asunder for centuries after their first separation."¹⁸¹ Müller asserts that it is a firmly established fact that the Brahmins of India descended from the same ancestral nation as the Greeks, Italians, and Celts, writing that the "evidence of language is irrefragable" and claiming that no one can deny, after examining the evidence, the common descent of Sanskrit and the European languages: "the terms for God, for house, for father, mother... identical in all the Indo-European idioms"¹⁸². But this begs the question, how does evidence of a common ancestral language between Greek, German, Sanskrit etc prove that there was a common ancestral nation? Why can't two different, unrelated peoples speak the same language? I put forward that the answer is religion. It is religion that makes a people into a nation, unified by a common set of doctrines and laws. Since any religion comes into this world through a language, the language also becomes a unifying factor of a people alongside it. Any distortion or changing of the language risks distorting the doctrines of the religion, thus destroying the unity of the nation. Hence, Müller expresses that the *Vedas*

"contains the [first] record of the Aryan branch of Mankind...poetical relics of a pre-Horneric age; an age in which the names of the Greek gods and heroes had not yet lost their original sense, and in which the simple worship of the Divine powers of nature was not yet supplanted by a worship of personal gods" ¹⁸³.

For Müller, studying the Sanskrit language and the *Vedas* would give insight into an Aryan monotheism before its degeneration into idolatry¹⁸⁴:

"there is a monotheism that precedes the polytheism of the *Veda*, and even in the invocations of their innumerable gods the remembrance of a God, one and infinite, breaks through the mist of an idolatrous phraseology."

Here we see the clear continuity between the ideas of Müller and his intellectual predecessors, such as La Croze and Voltaire. For all these figures, Sanskrit and Hebrew are not merely languages, but the languages of specific religious doctrines. These religious doctrines in turn make the speakers of these languages into a nation. The fact that Sanskrit wasn't a commonly

¹⁸¹ MÜLLER, Friedrich Max. *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature so Far as it Illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmans*. London: Williams & Norgate, 1859, p. 12.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 559.

spoken language was, according to these scholars, an indication that it was the language of a nation separate from the rest of India:

"the Sanscrit was introduced by conquerors from other kingdoms in some very remote age; for we cannot doubt that the language of the *Veda*'s was used in the great extent of country... as long as the religion of Brahma has prevailed in it."¹⁸⁵

This view of religion and language is very much tied into the Biblical framework of history, which also contributed to the idea of Brahmins as a separate nation. This idea formed well before the discovery of the relationship between Sanskrit and the European languages; some European thinkers were writing that the Brahmins were originally a foreign tribe. The common thread within these writings was that language and religion were the criteria used by intellectuals to come to this conclusion about Brahmins. Maturinus Veysseyre La Croze, a seventeenth-century French Orientalist, saw an Egyptian origin to many of the Brahmin practices such as vegetarianism, distinction of castes, and tonsure¹⁸⁶. Another influential author was the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher saw similarities between Brahmin institutions and Egyptian ones¹⁸⁷.

However, as I have shown above, these assumptions about the Brahmins preceded any linguistic or archaeological research and was instead structured around Christian theological doctrines and Biblical chronology. The image of the pious proto-Christian Brahmin was derived from accounts about the dialogue between the Brahmin ascetic Dindimus and Alexander the Great in works like Megasthenes' *Indica*. This dialogue, in turn, was fitted into a theological interpretation of human history, which detailed the existence of an original, pure monotheism at the beginning of humanity and its subsequent degeneration, symbolized by the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Similarly, the transformation of the image of Brahmins from pious proto-Christians to corrupt priests was shaped by Protestant theology which saw the priesthood itself as a corrupt institution. Just as the reformers criticized the Church for promoting idolatry by presenting human doctrines and laws as necessary for salvation, the missionaries who travelled to India and wrote about the Brahmins condemned them for promoting rites and ceremonies not required for salvation. Finally, just as Christian theologians

¹⁸⁵ JONES, William. *The Works of Sir William Jones*. London: John Stockdale, Piccadilly & John Walker, Paternoster-Row, 1807, p. 26.

¹⁸⁶ APP, Urs. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 82.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

from previous centuries (who saw the confusion of tongues at Babel as the beginning of human nations), saw religion and language as constituting a nation, the European intellectuals writing about Brahmins saw them as a distinct nation, and superimposed the model of Jewish nationhood on to the Brahmins.

It is important to understand why the Europeans may have used the Jews as a model to understand India. For seventeenth-century European travellers and missionaries, the Jews were the prototypical nation constituted by the covenant law, given by God himself to the Israelites as their political sovereign¹⁸⁸. Thus, it appears that for seventeenth-century European travellers and missionaries, the Jews served as a model of the ideal nation that God intended, with other nations being imperfect variants of this ideal. This shows that the fundamental theoretical framework and assumptions used by these Orientalists is in step with the European thinkers of the past; namely, that religion and language are the primary phenomena that constitute a nation.

Two important ideas crystallize in the course of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries: one is the idea of Brahmins as a nation of priests with foreign origins. The second is the idea of the caste system as a socio-religious system created and imposed by the Brahmins. Both these ideas are important, because they eventually lead to the idea of an aboriginal nation, separate from the Brahmanical nation. For reasons I shall explore later, the Sudra *varna* and those groups that were considered to fall outside the *varnasrama dharma* were thought of as remnants of an aboriginal nation that was subjugated by the Brahmins. This raises further questions: Why were the Sudras, and others (like Nisadas), thought of as a separate nation from the Aryans? Is it possible to distinguish them as a separate nation or nations? What is the religion/s of these people, and how does one differentiate it from the Brahmanical religion? Do they have a separate language or language family, unrelated to Sanskrit?

The consequences and problems raised by the above ideas would eventually lead to the hypothesis of a Dravidian nation, with its own distinct religion and language family. This process can be summarized in a simple, caricatured form:

1. Indians are a heathen nation, whose many practices and rituals were seen as forms of idolatry.

¹⁸⁸ DE ROOVER, Jakob. A Nation of Tribes and Priests: The Jews and the Immorality of the Caste System. In: *Western Foundations of the Caste System*. ed. FÀREK, Martin et al., Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 185.

2. The Brahmins are the ones who perform the ceremonies and rituals, therefore they must be the priests of this heathen religion.
3. These traditions have a number of texts such as the *Vedas*, the *Dharmasastras* and the Puranas, which were seen as sacred scriptures. Among these, the *Dharmasastras* contained rules related to daily living and the performance of rituals. And so, these were seen as containing the religious laws of the Indians.
4. These texts were written in a language that only the Brahmins could read, thus these texts were seen as Brahmanical doctrines, with Sanskrit their sacred language.
5. Finally, many European intellectuals noted that these Brahmin priests had some unique practices. Thus, the combination of shared doctrines, rites, and a sacred language of their own made the Brahmins into a people or a nation.

The Religion of the Malabars

During the seventeenth century, a Lutheran missionary named Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg travelled to Tamil Nadu and would become one of the first Europeans to directly read Tamil sources and paint a picture about the so-called Malabar monotheism and its subsequent corruption by Brahmin priests¹⁸⁹. As I have mentioned before, this idea of India's proto-Christian monotheism dates back to the early Church fathers, and continued to have a strong hold upon European thinkers and missionaries all the way up to the seventeenth century. After his arrival in Tamil Nadu, Ziegenbalg employed a translator and informant named Alakappan, a Saivite "probably of higher Tamil Sudra caste", who taught Ziegenbalg the Tamil language and introduced him to the religion of Tamil Nadu via Tamil Saivite texts¹⁹⁰. In his writings, Alakappan gives a detailed account of the religion of the Malabar heathens, in which the fundamental doctrine is monotheism. The Malabarians are described as worshipping many gods, but among these is one supreme God, Parabrahman, who has created them and the world, and assigns them specific duties. Alakappan also mentions a certain group of ascetics called the Gnanigol, who worship the supreme God alone while renouncing everything else in the world¹⁹¹. It is important to note that Alakappan was a native informant whose views were

¹⁸⁹ APP, Urs. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 85.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 93.

shaped through Western-style education and prolonged contact with missionaries, and tried to present his religion in the best possible light to Ziegenbalg and the Lutheran missionaries who thought polytheism was akin to devil worship¹⁹².

It was Alakappan who introduced Ziegenbalg to the Tamil siddha text known as Sivavakkiyam, which Ziegenbalg used to illustrate Tamil monotheism. One of the sayings by the Siddha Tirumūlar, in his work Tirumanthiram ('Caste is one and God is one') is used to illustrate the monotheism and anti-Brahmanism of the Gnanigol¹⁹³. However it is important to keep in mind the context of this saying. The God referred to here is Siva, and when it comes to *bhakti*, all castes are one. From the perspective of Ziegenbalg however, these siddhas, or Gnanigol seemed to be challenging the foundations of Malabar heathendom, by questioning the authority of the *Sastras*, rituals, and Brahmins, and did not engage in idol worship¹⁹⁴. For example, the Sivavakkiyam seems to be very critical of the worship of images and *Vedas*: "In the Four Eternal *Vedas*, In the study and reading of scripts, In sacred ashes and in Holy Writs And muttering of prayers You will not find the Lord! Melt with the Heart Inside and proclaim the Truth. Then you will join the Light – Life without servitude."¹⁹⁵ In addition, the Sivavakkiyam emphasizes Siva as the supreme *deva*¹⁹⁶, thus providing more fodder for the account that the Malabarians originally practised a pure monotheism, corrupted by Brahmin priests, whose pure form is preserved by the Gnanigol. It is interesting to observe that Ziegenbalg found an anomaly in his own account about the Gnanigol:

"Given that the Gnanigol attacked central facets of Ziegenbalg's Malabar heathendom and fiercely criticized Vedic authority, the caste system, the Brahmins, etc., it was puzzling that they represent the fourth and highest stage of Malabar heathendom, are entrusted with the fourth Veda, and are revered by both of its great branches as saints."¹⁹⁷

In summary, Ziegenbalg's notion of Malabarian religion was that of a pristine monotheism that became corrupted into idolatry. The reports given by his informant and his understanding of

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁹³ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁹⁵ ZVELEBIL, Kamil. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: Brill, 1973, p. 83, Quoted In APP, Urs. *The birth of orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 98.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 104-105.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 110.

Saivite texts such as the Sivavakkiyam only confirmed this notion of a Tamil monotheism which existed in the past, but only survives as remnants in the present day. Given his Lutheran background, it is not surprising that he focused on those parts of the Tamil Saivite texts that seemed to be against caste, rituals, and the veneration of multiple deities, which he saw as inventions of the devil and his priests, the Brahmins¹⁹⁸. Ziegenbalg's narrative of a monotheistic religion in Tamil Nadu corrupted by Brahmin priests would end up being reproduced almost verbatim by Saivite nationalists such as Maraimalai Adigal, and would end up becoming one of the cornerstones around which they would build their movement. Although there is no evidence that Maraimalai Adigal ever read or was exposed to Ziegenbalg, the point is that the Protestant theological theme of priests corrupting true religion had become commonplace in European writings about Brahmins and Indian religions, and this trend continued well into the nineteenth and twentieth century.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

PART II

This next three chapters comprises the meat of my dissertation. In this section, I once again raise the questions and problems I raised at the beginning of this essay and put forward a hypothesis that answers them. During the late nineteenth century, many non-Brahmin Tamil speakers in the Madras presidency began to see themselves as a separate nation from the rest of India, with their own unique religion. This was the intellectual beginning of what would later flower into the Dravidian nationalist movement. Many of these non-Brahmin intellectuals were followers of Saivism, specifically the Saiva Siddhanta tradition. They claimed that Saiva Siddhanta was the original religion of the Tamil nation, and rejected any tradition connected to the Sanskrit language and Brahmins as foreign and Aryan.

This dissertation focuses on that specific strand of the Dravidian movement, namely, Tamil Saivite nationalism, and raises the following key questions regarding the intellectual foundations of Tamil Saivite nationalism:

1. How did these Tamil intellectuals understand the concepts of nation and religion?
2. How did they connect each of these concepts to each other and language?
3. How did their understanding and interrelation of these concepts differ from that of the Europeans?

The last question is the most important one. If the Tamil intellectuals' understanding of these concepts is fundamentally different to that of European intellectuals, then it suggests that these Tamil intellectuals were using a completely different conceptual framework to understand the various groups and practices encountered in Tamil Nadu. This means that studying the manner in which the Tamil intellectuals connected the concepts of nation and religion – with each other and with language – will give us an insight into the cultural framework they were operating under. Understanding the native cultural framework will, in turn, allow us to view the social structure of Tamil Nadu society through the lens of this framework.

Sowing the Seeds of Dravidian Nationalism: Aryan Invasion Theory and the Idea of a Dravidian Nation

Prelude to the Dravidian Movement: The Idea of an Aboriginal People

Philosophers of science have long noted that all facts are facts of a theory¹⁹⁹; 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. Two scientists observing the same phenomena could come to completely different understandings about that phenomena because of the conceptual thought structures they are using. This important insight from the philosophy of science can also be applied to the European missionaries and Orientalists who arrived on the shores of Tamil Nadu and began describing the culture and religion of the people there based on their observations. These descriptions were not in any sense neutral or objective. Instead, the facts they observed were made to fit into a pre-existing framework.

When the Europeans set foot in India, they arrived with a set of pre-existing ideas about human beings that had become commonplace in Europe for many centuries. These are not one or two ideas but a whole cluster of ideas that have become commonplace in a culture, and part of their common sense²⁰⁰. A cluster of such interconnected ideas are referred to as *topoi*. One such *topoi* is the cluster of ideas related to the concept of nation; which includes ideas about the nature of religion, language, and human history. These clusters of ideas are interrelated and form a conceptual structure or schema. Undergirding this schema is the Christian theological notion that human beings are divided into various nations and that religion forms the foundation of nation. Within the Christian framework, religion is the revelation of God, out of which emerges various phenomena such as law, philosophy, and ethics, which in turn makes a people into a distinct nation. In this schema, language is the medium through which religion is interpreted and transmitted to the members of a nation. Thus, both religion and language constitute a people. Given that religion is the revelation of God's plan, the preservation of the national

¹⁹⁹ LAUDAN, Larry. *Progress and its Problems: Towards a Theory of Scientific Growth*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1978, p. 16.

²⁰⁰ DE ROOVER, Jakob, CLAERHOUT, Sarah and BALAGANGADHARA, S. N. Liberal political theory and the Cultural Migration of ideas: The Case of Secularism in India. *Political Theory*. 2011, Volume 39, Issue 5, p. 578.

language becomes essential for the preservation of the national religion, and consequently the preservation of the nation itself. For many theologians, the Babelic confusion marks the beginning of three important events, one following the other: The distortion of a universal human language into multiple languages, which consequently lead to the distortion of the universal true religion into various forms of idolatry, and one human race into multiple human nations. This conceptual framework helped Europeans make sense of their observations in India and Tamil Nadu. For example, fundamental differences between languages are seen as markers of national difference. Since the South Indian languages are fundamentally different from the Indo-European languages – and similar to each other in terms of root words and grammar – the speakers of these languages are seen as comprising a distinct nation. In the section below, I will show how Europeans used this framework to systematize their observations about the South Indian peoples.

I mentioned before that the discovery of the Indo-European language family provided support to an idea that already existed prior to that discovery: that Brahmins were a foreign tribe or nation that had migrated to India and brought their religion with them. The role of Brahmins in Indian society was seen through the European topoi about religion and language. In the words of seventeenth-century English theologian Thomas Burnet:

"in the Kingdoms of *Indostan*, *Siam* and the other adjacent Parts, there are some who seem to be the Progeny of the ancient *Brachmins*, being different and distinguished from the rest of the People by their Manner and Way of Living, as well as by a Doctrin and Language wholly peculiar to themselves."²⁰¹

The genesis of the idea about an aboriginal race or nation follows a similar thought process. Even before the discovery of the Dravidian language family, the notion of a Brahmanical nation invading India and imposing their religion and civil institutions on an aboriginal populace originated at least as far back as the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1810, Colonel Mark Wilks was one of the first European scholars to talk about a Hindu conquest of India, which he saw as the cause of the caste system. According to Wilks, the aboriginals were the inferior castes, who had been reduced to the status of slaves and outcastes by the conquering Hindus of northern India, who became the superior castes in the system²⁰². Some of the French Orientalists

²⁰¹ APP, Urs. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 162.

²⁰² KEPPENS, Marianne. The Aryans and the Ancient System of Caste. In: *Western Foundations of the Caste System*. ed. FÁREK, Martin et al. Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 239.

of the first half of the nineteenth century also made similar claims. Both Alexandre Langlois and Eugene Burnouf speculated that the caste system had been imposed by a more civilized race of conquerors upon primitive aboriginals, who had in turn been absorbed into the superior races' religious and civil institutions as either lower castes or outcast slaves²⁰³. It is worth mentioning that none of these scholars had any textual, linguistic, or archaeological evidence that a large-scale invasion had taken place. Why then did all of them latch on to the invasion theory?

Aryan Invasion Theory and Caste

It is important to note that the idea of caste as a hierarchical system (which had become well entrenched by the beginning of the nineteenth century) emerged out of two other commonplace ideas: the idea of a Brahmanical priesthood and the idea that texts such as the Purushasukta and the *Dharmasastras* represented the doctrinal foundation of the Indian religion. If these texts are indeed the doctrines of the Indians, then the Purushasukta verses describing society as being composed of four *varnas* with the Brahman priests as the head of the Purusha and the Sudras as the feet led many Europeans to speculate that the Purushukta was describing the socio-religious system of India. At the same time, rules (heuristics?) contained within texts such as the *Manu Dharmasastra* – regarding the behaviour and rituals of the respective *varnas* – were seen as the laws of the caste system. Even though European intellectuals describe the caste system as a hierarchy, the division of the *varnas* into twice-born and Sudras (as well as groups that weren't part of the four *varnas*, such as the Nishadas) was perceived as the salient characteristic within this hierarchy²⁰⁴. The Europeans saw the upanayana ceremony that certain castes undergo as a form of initiation into the religious and civil institution of the Brahmanical or Aryan nation. Based on their readings of the *Manu Dharmasastra*, the Europeans thought that the Sudras were forbidden from undergoing this ceremony. The castes that didn't undergo this ritual were seen as Sudras. Since the Sudras do not go through the upanayana ritual, Europeans saw them as being excluded from the religious and civil institutions of the twice-born castes, and thus as a separate nation from the Aryans. For example, the missionary Robert Caldwell states that "most writers on this subject seem to suppose that the whole of the Sudras, or primitive, servile classes of northern India, to whom this name was progressively applied,

²⁰³ Ibid., pp. 242-243.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 244.

belonged to a different race from their Aryan conquerors"²⁰⁵, and the fact that the Satapadhi Brahmana of the *Rigveda* refers to the twice-born *varnas* alone as Sudras was taken as evidence of this view.

Moreover, since the Sudras were also described in the *Sastras* as serving the other three castes, in the eyes of the Europeans, the Sudras were perceived as slaves of the Aryan castes²⁰⁶. Consequently, the explanation becomes that the Sudras are a nation of primitive aboriginals who were conquered by a superior nation which then made them their slaves and excluded them from their religious and civil institutions²⁰⁷. The fact that Europeans observed certain *jatis* like the Paraiyans being ostracized and/or downtrodden by other *jatis* led them to the conclusion that these castes must be the descendants of the Sudras. Thus, even before the discovery of the Dravidian language family or the concept of a Dravidian religion, the idea of a group of Brahmin conquerors subjugating aboriginal Indians emerged as an explanation of the lower castes and the outcasts of the caste system.

The discovery of a South Indian or Dravidian language family by Francis Whyte Ellis in 1816²⁰⁸ merely confirmed to many scholars what they had already known: that India had an aboriginal race or nation separate from the Brahmins. During the course of the nineteenth century, the idea of the upper castes being descendants of the Aryan invaders and the Sudras being the Dravidian aboriginal nation of India became entrenched among scholars of India²⁰⁹.

Reverend John Stevenson perfectly summarizes what would later be called the Aryan invasion theory:

"On the entrance of the tribes which now form the highest castes, those of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Waisyas, into India, they found a rude aboriginal population, speaking a different language, having a different religion, and different customs and manners; that by arms and policy the aboriginal inhabitants were all subdued, and in great numbers expelled from the Northern

²⁰⁵ CALDWELL, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages*. 2nd edition. London: Trubner & Co.; Ludgate Hill, 1875, p. 11.

²⁰⁶ KEPPENS, Marianne. The Aryans and the Ancient System of Caste. In: *Western Foundations of the Caste System*. ed. FÁREK, Martin et al. Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 245–246.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

²⁰⁸ TRAUTMANN, Thomas R. *Languages and Nations: the Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, p. 1.

²⁰⁹ TRAUTMANN, Thomas R. *Aryans and British India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 157, 175.

regions, those that remained mixing with the new population, and being first their slaves, and then forming the Sudra caste. The language of these aborigines is supposed to have belonged to the Southern family of language, the most perfect remaining type of which family is the Tamil"²¹⁰.

Similarly, Orientalist Horace Hayman Wilson states that the "South was first colonised and civilised by a Hindu race"²¹¹ Reverend Robert Caldwell claims that it was through the Brahmans that the Aryan civilization "was grafted on the old Dravidian stock"²¹², and that the Brahmins tried to eliminate the Dravidian religion.

What is noteworthy here is that the caste system, specifically the division between the twice-born *varnas* and others, becomes the foundation of the Aryan invasion and aboriginal nation hypothesis. For example, it was self-evident for the Orientalist Eugene Burnouf that the lower castes are the remnants of a conquered native populace²¹³. It is only after the discovery of the South Indian language family (as separate from the Indo-European language family) that the difference between the two nations came to be seen in geographic terms, since the speakers of the South Indian languages came to be seen as a separate nation. Even religious differences between these two nations were conceptualized along caste lines. As George Campbell puts it: "The mere fact that they are recognised as orthodox Hindus seems to imply the northern origin of all the better castes in the South, and that is their own account of their origin", while at the same time he regarded "the black aboriginal tribes of the interior hills and jungles...the remnants of the race which occupied India before the Hindus"²¹⁴. As I show below, the above examples demonstrate a common pattern among the European intellectuals writing about the Dravidian nation. The three main criteria used to mark out the Tamil people as a separate nation from the Aryans are religion, language, and their place in the caste hierarchy. Within these criteria, the caste system becomes the axis along which differences in language and religion

²¹⁰ STEVENSON, John. Observations on the Grammatical Structure of the Vernacular Languages of India. *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 1849, Volume. 3, Issue. 1, pp. 73–74.

²¹¹ WILSON, Horace Hayman. *Mackenzie Collection: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental Manuscripts, And Other Articles Illustrative of the Literature, History, Statistics and Antiquities of the South of India*. 2nd edition. Madras: Higginbotham and Co., 1882, p. 33.

²¹² CALDWELL, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar Of The Dravidian Or South-Indian Family Of Languages*. London: TRUBNEE & CO., LUDGATE HILL., 1875, p. 579.

²¹³ KEPPENS, Marianne. The Aryans and the Ancient System of Caste. In: *Western Foundations of the Caste System*. ed. FÁREK, Martin et al. Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 243.

²¹⁴ CALDWELL, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar Of The Dravidian Or South-Indian Family Of Languages*. London: TRUBNEE & CO., LUDGATE HILL., 1875, p. 574.

were mapped. This is amply illustrated by Caldwell in his *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of languages*:

"The South Indian language speakers are the aboriginals of India; received caste system and high civilization from the brahmins. The higher group among them are the Sudras, many of them wealthy cultivators, merchants, artificers and the lower group are the Shannars, Pariahs who are agricultural slaves."²¹⁵

The Dravidian Language Family

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the idea of India being composed of a foreign Brahmanical race and a southern aboriginal race had become commonly accepted by scholars and missionaries writing about India. Language and religion were the two criteria when demarcating Dravidians from Aryans. Even though the idea of a Dravidian race preceded the discovery of a South Indian language family, the discovery of the relationship with the South Indian language helped flesh out the idea of a Dravidian people. Francis Whyte Ellis was the first to discover that most of the common words in the southern vernacular languages are not derived from Sanskrit roots²¹⁶. Although it was Ellis who first discovered the Dravidian language family, it was Caldwell who wrote a detailed treatise on Tamil grammar and literature in his *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Language family* (1848), and who along with G.U. Pope would popularize the idea of a Tamil nation.

For the missionaries and scholars studying India, tracing the origins of and relationships between the Dravidian languages – as well as their relationship with the Indo-European language family – was the equivalent of tracing the origin and relationship between the speakers of these languages. For example, Gover in the introduction to his book *The Folk Songs of Southern India* (1871), writes that an ultimate relationship of some kind exists between the Dravidian and Indo-European language families and this might indicate "that both races were descended from a common source"²¹⁷. Although it might not have been an explicit goal of the Europeans who studied the Dravidian languages, the conceptual structure shared by these

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 39-40.

²¹⁶ TRAUTMANN, Thomas R. *Languages and Nations: the Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, p. 32.

²¹⁷ GOVER, Charles. *The folk-songs of southern India*. Madras: Higginbotham and co, 1871, p. 453, Quoted In CALDWELL, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar Of The Dravidian Or South-Indian Family Of Languages*. London: TRUBNEE & CO., LUDGATE HILL., 1875, p. 525.

scholars was that each of these languages is tied to a specific religion and nation, and that these language families can be traced back to an origin language. This origin language would, in turn, give insights into the origin religion. As Caldwell expresses in his book,

"Indo-Europeanisms which are discoverable in the Dravidian languages carry us back to a period beyond all history, beyond all mythology, not only prior to the separation of the Western branches of the Indo-European race from the Eastern, but prior also to the separation of the yet undivided Indo-Europeans from the Scythian stock"²¹⁸.

In Caldwell's text, one can see that this conceptual structure is intimately connected to the Biblical view of human history, in which the original human religion and language was preserved in the primordial human race who were direct descendants of the sons of Noah:

"On the whole, we appear to have reason to conclude that the various forms of the pronoun of the first person singular which have now been compared, are identical, and that this word was the common property of mankind prior to the separation of the Indo-European tribes from the rest of the Japhetic family"²¹⁹.

Moreover, for Gover, studying the development of the language would give insights into the degeneration of the Dravidian religion:

"He takes as a specimen the word 'pey, devil, and tells us that the true meaning is not 'devil,' but 'light,' and signified originally 'the bright one,' that is, the deity. The name being Aryan, the deity denoted by this name was also Aryan, and was identical with the element light. But some of the Dravidians, cut off from the better teaching of the fathers of their race, degenerated in their worship, and thus a god was changed into a devil!"²²⁰.

In an analogous manner, Caldwell also investigates the grammar and word roots of the Tamil language in order to find clues about the state of the Dravidian religion. For example, Caldwell examines a Tamil translation of the Ten Commandments and notices there are many Sanskrit-

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 306.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 526.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 529.

based Tamil words, but at the same time expresses that it possible to translate the whole of the Ten Commandments into a pure Tamil with no Sanskrit terms, and points out that:

"Of the entire number of words contained in this formula there is only one which could not be expressed with faultless propriety and poetic elegance in equivalents of pure Dravidian origin. That word is 'image!' 'Both word and thing... were introduced into the Tamil country by the Brahmans, with the Puranic system of religion and the worship of idols"²²¹.

If we eliminate from the Tamil language the whole of its Sanskrit derivatives, the primitive Dravidian words that remain will furnish us with a faithful picture...of a religion different from Hinduism."²²²

This quote shows that, by divesting Sanskrit-based words from the Tamil language and only examining the pure, non-Sanskritized Tamil words, Caldwell hoped to arrive at a purely non-Aryan Tamil religion. For example, Caldwell can't find a pure Tamil word for 'idols' or 'priests' and so he assumes that the Tamil people of Dravidians did not have purohits or idols before the arrival of the Brahmins. He also cannot find pure Tamil words for 'philosophy' or 'astronomy', and thus concludes that the primitive vocabulary of the Dravidians shows that they were in a much less cultured and civilized state than the Aryans, hence their conquest²²³.

A common theme in both Gover's and Caldwell's writings is the theme of religious degeneration. Accessing a pure Tamil meant accessing the Dravidian religion in a state closer to monotheism before its degeneration through the introduction of Sanskrit vocabulary, especially Sanskrit religious vocabulary, since this came from the doctrines of the Brahmanical priests whom both Caldwell and Gover blame for the degeneration of the Dravidian religion. Although Caldwell thought that the Dravidians (before the arrival of the Aryan Brahmins) followed a primitive religion of demonolatry, and the Brahmins brought to them a much higher level of civilization, he laments that "The mental culture and the higher civilisation which they derived from the Brahmans, have, I fear, been more than counterbalanced by the fossilising caste rules, the unpractical, pantheistic philosophy, and the cumbersome routine of inane

²²¹ Ibid., p. 51.

²²² Ibid., p. 117.

²²³ Ibid., p. 118.

ceremonies"²²⁴. Thus, the centuries-old Christian theological theme of religious degeneration, including the causes of that degeneration – namely the distortion of language and corrupt priesthood – have become commonplace ideas by the time of Caldwell.

Dravidian Religion

Once the concept of a Dravidian people became clearly crystallized, European missionaries and scholars began looking for a uniquely Dravidian religion that was separate from the Brahmanical religion. Whatever observations they made about the traditions of the Tamil people, they conceptualized and categorized them along two axes: On one hand, they characterized them along geographic lines. Traditions and practices unique to South India were considered part of the Tamil religious system. This was how the idea of Saivism being a Dravidian religion began to take shape. Reverend Stevenson observed that *jyoti-lingas* are mostly found in South and North East India, far from the original Brahmin settlements north of the Ganges and west of Saraswati²²⁵. Siva worship is concentrated mainly in the South. He also noticed that Siva closely resembled a local Ceylon deity and the analogies about Siva more closely resemble analogies about deities in South India than North India²²⁶. Horace Hayman Wilson also made the observation that Saivism is mainly practised in the South, and that the Pandya and Chola dynasties of the past had Siva as their titular deity²²⁷.

However, something that played a more fundamental role in the writings of both these scholars in differentiating Dravidian and Aryan religion was caste – namely the division between the Brahmin and Sudra castes. Sudras were either seen as one aboriginal nation or various aboriginal nations that occupied India before the coming of the Brahmins. The South Indian language speakers were seen as such a nation. F.W. Ellis, considered the first European scholar to discover the existence of a Dravidian language family, pointed out in his introduction to Alexander Campbell's *A grammar of the Telegoo language* (1849), states that those in the northeastern parts of the Mysore Rajah's dominion were of Telugu descent, and retained their

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 119.

²²⁵ STEVENSON, John. The Ante-Brahmanical Religion of the Hindus. *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*. 1846, 8, p. 337.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 338.

²²⁷ WILSON, Horace Hayman. *Mackenzie Collection: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental Manuscripts, And Other Articles Illustrative of the Literature, History, Statistics and Antiquities of the South of India*. 2nd edition. Madras: Higginbotham and Co., 1882, p. 32, 59.

native language. Campbell called them the ‘true’ Sudra cultivators military of the Telugu region²²⁸. European intellectuals began to look for practices unique to the castes that were commonly referred to as Sudras and that weren’t present in Brahmins. Both Robert Stevenson and Horace Hayman Wilson find it important that Siva was absent in the *Vedas* and appeared only in the later texts, the Puranas²²⁹²³⁰. This fact becomes important in these scholars’ eyes because texts such as the *Rigvedas* are seen as containing the original doctrine of the Brahmin/Aryan nation and religion, and the later texts are seen as corruptions or modifications of the original religion in which deities such as Siva were absorbed from other religions into the Aryan religion. The missionary, Robert Caldwell, elaborates on this line of thinking even further – as I show later on. In addition to these so-called Brahminical doctrines, practices which were either unique to the non-Brahmin Sudra *jatis* or not found among Brahmins were classified as being part of the Dravidian religion.

For example, Wilson mentions that the linga form of Siva, the only form in which Siva is worshipped, has no place in the *Vedas*. Both the above scholars also note that the chief priests of Siva temples are either non-Brahmin Pariahs or Guravas, thus making the Saivite traditions aboriginal or Dravidian in their eyes²³¹²³². The heuristic used to separate the Dravidian religion from the Aryan religion is perfectly summarized by Caldwell in this excerpt:

"Any usages are found to prevail extensively in Southern India, and especially amongst the ruder and less Aryanised tribes, which are derived neither from the *Vedas* nor from the Puranas, neither from Buddhism nor from Jainism, such

²²⁸ CAMPBELL, Alexander. *A Grammar of the Teloogoo Language, Commonly Termed the Gentoos, Peculiar to the Hindoos Inhabiting the Northeastern Provinces of the Indian Peninsula*. 3rd edition. Madras: Hindu Press, 1849, p. ii.

²²⁹ STEVENSON, John, The Ante-Brahmanical Religion of the Hindus. *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*. 1846, 8, p. 332.

²³⁰ WILSON, Horace Hayman. *Two Lectures on the Religious Practices and Opinions of the Hindus Delivered Before the University of Oxford, on the 27th and 28th of February, 1840*. London: Oxford, 1840, p. 21.

²³¹ STEVENSON, John, The Ante-Brahmanical Religion of the Hindus. *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*. 1846, 8, p. 337.

²³² WILSON, Horace Hayman. *Two Lectures on the Religious Practices and Opinions of the Hindus Delivered Before the University of Oxford, on the 27th and 28th of February, 1840*. London: Oxford, 1840, pp. 21-22.

usages may be concluded to be relics of the religious system of the Dravidian aborigines"²³³.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the idea of a Dravidian religion had become well established among the European Orientalists and missionaries studying India. Among these Orientalists and missionaries, the two who were the most instrumental in spreading the idea of a Dravidian religion among the native populace are missionaries Robert Caldwell and G.U. Pope. Although Europeans before them had written about Aryan or Brahmanical invaders subduing and subjugating the aboriginals of southern India under a caste system, it was Caldwell who first gave a detailed description of a Dravidian religion, as separate from the Brahmanical religion, while G.U. Pope ended up being the first European scholar to identify Saiva Siddhanta as the Dravidian religion²³⁴. One of the important distinguishing features to separate Dravidian and Indo-European religions, according to Caldwell, was the institution of the priesthood. Among the nations of the Indo-European family, "one of the most characteristic of their religious usages was the maintenance of a distinct order of priests, generally hereditary, who were venerated as the depositaries of ancient traditions and spiritual power"²³⁵, whereas the Dravidian form of religion was characterized by a system of demonolatry in which bloody sacrifices to demon spirits prevailed²³⁶. In this system of demonolatry, it is the Shaman rather than the priest who is the officiator of the ceremonies²³⁷. Thus, a picture emerges from the writings of Caldwell of the Dravidians as a primitive people compared to the Aryans:

"It is not as if the people in the South conquered by the Aryans had been a highly civilised people, with a cultivated language and a literature of their own"²³⁸.

As we shall see later, the Tamil Saivite nationalist Maraimalai Adigal would have a strong counterreaction to this image of the Dravidians as barbarians and the Aryans as civilized and

²³³ CALDWELL, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar Of The Dravidian Or South-Indian Family Of Languages*. London: TRUBNEE & CO., LUDGATE HILL., 1875, p. 580.

²³⁴ VAITHEES, V. Ravi. *Religion, Caste, and Nation in South India: Maraimalai Adigal, the Neo-Saivite Movement, and Tamil Nationalism, 1876-1950*. 1st edition. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 21.

²³⁵ CALDWELL, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar Of The Dravidian Or South-Indian Family Of Languages*. London: TRUBNEE & CO., LUDGATE HILL., 1875, p. 579.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 580.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 581.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 577.

try to invert his image. Among the European scholars, it would be no exaggeration to state that the one who would play the most important role in influencing Saivite nationalism was G.U. Pope. Pope saw the Saivite Nayanar acharyas as the lawgivers of the Tamil religion, and the Kural as sacred poetry that served as an ethical treatise for the Tamil people²³⁹. He found in these teachings a close affinity to Christianity – not only because the morals it espoused seemed similar to Christian morality, but also because it addresses itself to all people – regardless of caste and thus universal in scope. In Pope's own words, the Kural "formulates sovereign morality and absolute reason" in the form of the "highest laws of domestic and social life"; their very essence "virtue and truth"²⁴⁰.

Pope proclaims Saivism as a religion full of inconsistencies: sometimes pantheistic, other times monotheistic. He also propounds an idea which was common among European missionaries and scholars (including Caldwell) at that time: that Siva was a Dravidian deity absorbed into the Vedic religion by merging him with the Vedic god Rudra. This is used to explain Siva's 'incongruous' qualities: He is wrathful and terrible, wandering crematoriums, and is also represented as the majestic king of gods. Pope concludes that the terrible, demonical Siva comes from the native pre-Aryan cults and got mixed up with the Aryan deity, Rudra. Pope also points out how the Saiva religion asserts both these incongruous views of Siva without attempting to reconcile them²⁴¹.

Pope also draws parallels between Saivite texts and Christian doctrines, describing the Tamil Saivite traditions as a heathen variant of Christianity. For example many Saivite texts regard the enlightened guru as an incarnation of Siva, and one should only receive instruction from such a guru. Pope sees this as a variant of the Christian doctrine that Christ was the incarnation of God and that we as human beings receive divine revelation from him²⁴².

The primary reason Pope and other missionaries perceived an affinity between Tamil Saivism and Christianity is the concept of *bhakti*, the prominent part of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition, which the missionaries saw as something akin to Christian piety and which was seen by them as absent in the *Vedas*. Pope speculated that the *bhakti* tradition originated from Tamil Nadu

²³⁹ POPE, G.U. *The Sacred Kural*. London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1886, p. iv.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. i.

²⁴¹ POPE, G.U. *The Tiruvacagam or Sacred Utterances of the Tamil Poet, Saint, and Sage Manikka-vacagar*. London: Clarendon Press, 1900, p. ixiv.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. ixv.

and was inspired by Christianity. The concept of *anbu* so prominent in the *Tirumurai* texts²⁴³ becomes translated as ‘love’. One of the well-known verses in a text known as *Tirumurai* is ‘Anbe Sivam’ and is commonly translated as ‘Love is God’. The *Tirumurai* and other Saivite texts were replete with verses about devotees’ hearts melting with *anbu* toward Siva, and vice versa. Pope, like many other missionaries, saw *bhakti* traditions as being against – or at the very least, not following – caste barriers, since anyone can be a bhakta of Siva, and *bhakti* is supposed to supersede all other religious rules and observances according to many of the Saiva texts²⁴⁴.

Dravidian Nation and Caste

I have shown in the previous sections how the debates about language and religion were linked to caste by European scholars. Even linguistic differences between the Aryans and Dravidians were seen primarily in terms of caste rather than geography. Many European travellers observed that, between the various *jatis*, it was primarily members of the Brahmin groups that showed familiarity with Sanskrit and followed Sanskrit-based traditions. This strengthened their perception of the non-Brahmin *jatis* as a separate people. The same consideration goes for religion. Texts and practices exclusively or primarily found among either Brahmins or the non-Brahmin *jatis* were seen as part of the religion of those *jatis*.

In his work on comparative grammar, Caldwell has a detailed section on the Pariahs, discussing whether or not they are a distinct nation – not only from the Brahmins but also from the other non-Brahmin *jatis* of Tamil Nadu²⁴⁵. Caldwell observes that members of the Pariah caste always act as servants to many of the *jatis* who refer to themselves as upper castes and Sudras²⁴⁶. Furthermore, Caldwell claimed that low-caste inhabitants of southern India are distinguished from the higher caste Dravidians by clear signs of "helotry": the title of Sudras is withheld from the Pariahs and other low-caste people of South India. In addition they are denied entry into temples frequented by Brahmins and other upper castes²⁴⁷. Finally, the strongest evidence that

²⁴³ A collection of Saivite *bhakti* poetry written by Saivite gurus known as the Nayanars.

²⁴⁴ POPE, G.U. *The Sacred Kural*. London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1886, p. ixvii.

²⁴⁵ CALDWELL, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar Of The Dravidian Or South-Indian Family Of Languages*. London: TRUBNEE & CO., LUDGATE HILL., 1875, p. 540.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 543.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 547.

the Pariahs might be a separate nation comes from the fact that the castes that call themselves Sudra also refer to themselves as "Tamilian", whereas they deny this title "Tamilian" to the Pariahs, thus denying them the Tamil nationality²⁴⁸.

It is important to remember that the facts that Caldwell observed became structured through a certain framework or set of assumptions. The fundamental assumption structuring Caldwell's description of the Pariahs is that the people of Tamil Nadu form a nation, and that the Pariahs have been excluded from the religious institutions and practices of that nation. It is evident that Caldwell shares the same fundamental set of assumptions with the French Orientalists from the *Société Asiatique de Paris*, mentioned earlier. It is these assumptions that structure his observations about the Pariahs and lead him to speculate about whether or not they are a separate nation. Caldwell hypothesizes that the Pariahs might have been natives conquered by the Sudra Dravidians. He points to various honourable traditions among the Pariahs that show that at one time they occupied a good position in society.

Although this dissertation does not get into the topic of physical race, many of the European intellectuals writing about India linked physical race to nation, since members of a nation were thought to only breed with each other and not practice miscegenation. Alexander Campbell is a good example of this:

"I have no doubt the southern Hindus may generally be classed as Aryans, and that the southern society is in its structure, its manners, and its laws and institutions, an Aryan society.

Among some of the inferior tribes of the South the remains of the thick lips, the very black skin, and other features may still be traced"²⁴⁹.

Thus far, I have presented the conceptual framework as well as the assumptions and ideas emerging from it that structured the Aryan invasion theory. In the next section I bring up a number of anomalies that confront this theory, pointing out some logical inconsistencies as well as gaps in evidence.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 549.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 574.

Anomalies in the Aryan Invasion Theory

An important anomaly that surfaces in the theory of Aryan invasion and the subsequent subjugation of the Dravidians under the caste system is the fact that there is no evidence, either in the form of archaeological or textual records, that there was a large-scale invasion into the Indian Subcontinent. Caldwell writes:

"But it seems difficult to suppose that such an immense migration as the theory requires – whether all at once or in successive waves – can have taken place, subsequently to the composition of the *Vedas*, during the period covered by the epic poems and the Puranas, without leaving behind it some trace of itself, either in Sanskrit or in Dravidian literature, in coins or inscriptions, or at least in the northern names and relationships of the principal castes"²⁵⁰.

Many proponents of the Aryan invasion theory tried to resolve this anomaly through ad hoc modifications of the theory, claiming that the Aryans came not as conquerors but colonists – mostly Brahmins who gained ascendancy through their administrative skills and intelligence. As a result, the Dravidians eventually submitted to the few Aryan colonists who had entered Tamil Nadu, being absorbed into the Aryan religion and caste system²⁵¹. For example, Max Müller claims that Aryans or Brahmanical people did not enter Tamil Nadu through force and war, "but in the more peaceful way of extensive colonisation, under the protection and countenance of the powerful empires in the north... after having introduced Brahmanical institutions, laws, and religion, especially along the two coasts of the sea"²⁵². However, this ad hoc modification opens up a slew of other problems. How did a few Brahmin colonists manage to impose an intellectual and political hegemony over the whole of South India? There is no evidence of a Brahmanical institution akin to the Church, which had religious authority over the masses, and whose authority was backed by the state. Without such institutions, how could a group of small of Brahmins impose their caste system on an entire nation and make them servile?

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 575.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 109, 114, 577.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 115.

The Aryan invasion theory remains hotly debated to this day across multiple domains from archaeology to linguistics to genetics²⁵³. Despite this however, these domains have produced little evidence of an Aryan invasion of the Indus valley. In fact, recent archaeological findings speak against the theory of an invasion:

"Archaeologists tend to speak of a gradual movement of material culture from the Indus Valley into the valley of the Ganges, and the disappearance of the advanced urban civilisation seems to have resulted from long-term geological and ecological developments"²⁵⁴.

Similarly, biological studies of the human remains excavated at the Indus Valley archeological sites in India and Pakistan show that these remains are "phenotypically identifiable as ancient South Asians" and show biological continuity with the South Asians of today²⁵⁵.

Moreover, if these South Indian peoples indeed had their own system of religion prior to the arrival of the Brahmins, then they should have left behind some evidence of this religion. Lord Curzon points this problem out in his article *On the original extension of the Sanskrit language over certain portions of Asia and Europe; and on the ancient Aryans... Indians, or Hindus of India Proper* (1856):

"the existence of a non-Aryan people and nationality in the South are attested by the Tamulian race and language...If we turn to the Tamul language, the existence of which alone determines the question of a separate race, we ought to find a literature, or at least the remains of one, embodying some record of a religion, laws, and institutions entirely different from Hinduism, and altogether independent of Sanskrit"²⁵⁶.

But no such literature is found.

Next, I come to the idea of a Dravidian nation. One of the important claims that Caldwell makes in the introduction of his text *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* (1875) is that the Indian grammarians had a notion of a Dravidian nation before the arrival of the Europeans. Caldwell provides examples of the term 'Dravida' being used by

²⁵³ FÁREK, Martin. *India in The Eyes of Europeans: Conceptualization of Religion in Theology and Oriental Studies*. Prague: Karolinum Press, 2021, p. 158.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

²⁵⁶ CURZON, A. On the Original Extension of the Sanskrit Language Over Certain Portions of Asia and Europe; and on the Ancient Aryans (आर्य), Indians, or Hindus of India Proper. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*. 1856, Vol. 16, 30, pp. 192-193.

Indian grammarians and linguists, as well as in texts such as the Manusmriti and the Mahabharata as evidence that the notion of a Dravidian nation is native to India. Caldwell cites an excerpt from the Manusmriti that refers to a group called the Dravidas who are part of a group of Kshatriyas who have sunk into the state of Vrishalas (which Caldwell translates as outcastes), because they stopped performing the sacred rites and lost contact with the Brahmanas²⁵⁷. Caldwell mentions the Prakrit dialect, known as Dravidi, and cites a Sanskrit grammarian speaking of Dravidi as "the language of the Dravidas"²⁵⁸. Caldwell understands the term Dravidas as generic for the Dravidian race.

The problem with this theory is that none of the Indian texts or grammarians cited by Caldwell posit the idea of a Dravidian nation. It is important to remember that, for European intellectuals, a nation is a group of people constituted by religion and language. While Indian grammarians speak of a Dravidi or Dravida as one of the Prakrit dialects – as well as a term encompassing all the South Indian languages – there is no evidence of these grammarians classifying the Indian population into groups based on their language. The word Dravida is also used to denote the geographic region of South India. Moreover as Caldwell himself points out, the term Dravida "seems to have been less firmly attached to a particular people than the more purely local and dynastic names" of the ruling dynasties of South India²⁵⁹.

Therefore, the etymology of the name Dravidi could have well been derived from and linked to the geographic region, rather than a South Indian nation. When it comes to the group called Dravidas that is mentioned in Manusmriti, there is no evidence supporting Caldwell's claims, namely that the term Dravidas refers to all South Indian peoples. Caldwell assumes that, since they are the only South Indian group mentioned, Dravidas is a generic term for all South Indian peoples. The most damning argument against Caldwell is that the excerpt from the Manusmriti he cites contradicts his own claims. If the Dravidas were formerly Kshatriyas who abandoned their *dharma*, then it is implausible that it is a term referring to all South Indians, since the term refers to a specific *varna* (social class), and it is well known that since the earliest recorded history of Tamil Nadu, people of different social classes existed in Tamil Nadu – as recorded in texts such as the *Tolkappiyam*. More importantly, since the Dravidas were originally part of

²⁵⁷ CALDWELL, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar Of The Dravidian Or South-Indian Family Of Languages*. London: TRUBNEE & CO., LUDGATE HILL., 1875, p. 5.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

the *varna* system of the so-called Aryan people before they became Vrishalas, they couldn't have been a separate people or tribe from the Aryans.

Unlike other nineteenth-century scholars who claimed that the Sudras were a separate race from the Aryans, Caldwell speculates that the Sudra class was originally part of the Aryan race that supposedly invaded India. His basis for this claim is the fact that the Purusha Sukta describes the Sudras as springing from the body of the deity named Purusha or Brahma, just like the other three twice-born *varnas*, "whereas the Nisadas, or barbarian aborigines, are not represented to have sprung from Brahma at all"²⁶⁰. Caldwell considers the Sudras "to differ from the twice born Aryans in rank only, not in blood"²⁶¹. Caldwell goes on to claim that the Dravidians were originally outcasts existing outside the four-*varna* system, and at a later date many of them were absorbed into the already existing Sudra *varna*²⁶².

Caldwell regarded Nisadas and Dasyus as aboriginal northern Indian tribes which were gradually absorbed into the *varna* system of the Aryans²⁶³. However Caldwell contradicts himself once more here, since on the very same page he cites a verse from the Manusmriti which says that "all who become outcasts are called Dasyus, whether they speak the language of the Mlechchas or that of the Aryans"²⁶⁴. If anyone can be a Dasyu regardless of if they speak the language of the Mlecchas or the Aryas, then it follows that language is irrelevant to the authors of these texts when it comes to someone falling into or outside of the four *varnas*.

The above excerpt, taken together with the excerpt from the Manusmriti that claims that Dravidas were Kshatriyas before they became Vrishalas, presents a significant challenge to the idea that those who fall outside of the *varna* system (Dasyus, Vrishalas), including the Dravidians, were a separate nation from those who were among the four *varnas*. Not only does the Manusmriti claim that Dravidas were once part of the four *varnas* (and thus not a separate people from the Aryans), it also claims language has nothing to do with whether one falls outside the four *varnas*; language being one of the axiomatic features in the European concept of what makes a group of people a nation, the other being religion.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 113.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid., pp. 113-114.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 113.

The problem is that, even if we allow that the terms Nishadas and Mlecchas were used to refer to groups residing in the Indian Subcontinent, there is no evidence that the authors of these texts, the so-called Aryan nation, considered them as aboriginal tribes. That is Caldwell's own addition.

Further problems arise when examining European writings about Sudras. The European intellectuals regarded Sudras as a servile caste, remnants of the aboriginal population that are either slaves or servants of the twice-born Aryans. However, when examining the writings of certain scholars on this subject, several problems arise. Caldwell himself observes that the term was applied in Tamil Nadu to chieftains and higher classes of Tamil people, which they proudly wear as a badge of honour²⁶⁵. He contrasts this to the primitive Sudras of the North, who were little more than slaves to the Aryans and did not own any property. There are two huge problems with this claim: Firstly, Caldwell shows no evidence that there were actually groups or tribes in northern India who were called Sudras and who were slaves of the Brahmins. Secondly, Caldwell himself observed that the non-Brahmin castes in Tamil Nadu did not resent this term, which means that the term Sudra could not be referring to something servile or demeaning.

Finally I want to point out that all the European Orientalists and missionaries from the nineteenth century saw religion as the primary element that distinguished the South Indian peoples from the Aryans. In the case of Caldwell, Pope, and others, they all saw one or another of the Saivite traditions as the Dravidian religion, which they then contrasted with the Aryan, Brahminical religion. While it is indeed true that certain practices and traditions are unique to certain *jatis* and regions in the Indian Subcontinent, there is no record of any of the precolonial Indian grammarians or intellectuals grouping these traditions together into a belief system and tying it to a specific people. Nevertheless, this would become the dominant framework adopted not only by European scholars, but reproduced by the natives as well – including the ideologues of the Dravidian movement.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 116-117.

A Political Overview of Tamil Saivite Nationalism

Introduction

A Pandora's box is the best way to describe the developments in the Madras presidency in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The British, through their administrative decisions in the Madras presidency, had opened up a Pandora's box of political grievances and conflicts between different groups in the presidency that sowed the seeds of Dravidian nationalism in the future. This section on the history of the movement gives a brief overview of the political as well as the intellectual developments during the period, including a specific strand of the movement that my research focuses on – Tamil Saivite nationalism.

British Administration of the Madras Presidency

"At the beginning of the twentieth century, Madras presidency was one of the most extensive of all the British territories in India. It stretched from the tip of the Indian peninsula, Cape Comorin, halfway up the east coast to Bengal"²⁶⁶.

Because of its size, it was also one of the most heavily populated provinces²⁶⁷, as well as one of the most diverse in terms of the number of *jatis*²⁶⁸²⁶⁹. The British administration had to manage such a huge and diverse province while extracting revenue from it. Extracting land revenue was the most important task of the British provincial government in Madras. The Madras presidency at that time was settled under the Ryotwari system. The government assessed the revenue of each cultivated field annually, and then collected that revenue from each ryot (cultivator) according to the size of his holdings. This was hailed by many as an efficient method of revenue collection²⁷⁰. The problem with the Ryotwari settlement was that the concept of private ownership familiar to the British was alien to the native inhabitants of

²⁶⁶ IRSCHICK, Eugene. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. 1st edition. London: University of California Press, 1969, p. 1.

²⁶⁷ FRANCIS, W. *Census of India 1901. Vol. 15A, Madras. Pt. 2, Imperial tables.*. Madras: Government Press, 1902, p. 30.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157 .

²⁶⁹ The population of the Madras Presidency, according to the Census of India, 1901 was 38,623,066. There were 466 *jatis* within that presidency.

²⁷⁰ BAKER, Christopher John. *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 7.

the Madras presidency, and the British had a difficult time assessing who had the rights to a certain piece of land. Also, the provincial government in the Madras presidency simply did not have the resources to deal with each cultivator²⁷¹.

Because of these difficulties, the provincial government had to depend heavily on the village officer or collector at the subordinate levels of the administration for assessing land holdings and collecting revenue from the local *ryots*. The village officers, in turn, relied on Indian subordinates at the village level to help them in dealing with the *ryots* and the local population²⁷². Starting in the 1870s, in order to increase revenue and learn more about the population they were governing, the British administration began expanding the scope of the government at the local and municipal levels, and created local self-governing boards in many of the towns and villages of the Madras presidency to achieve this goal. The local self-governing boards were powerful because they were involved in revenue collection as well as relieving the administrative burdens of the provincial government. The power and influence of these local boards, along with the fact that the provincial government were staffing these boards with members of the native population, caused many of the locals to vie for positions on them, since being elected to a board meant having substantial political power and influence within the community²⁷³.

It was also during the late nineteenth century that the provincial government started taking detailed censuses in the Madras presidency in order to achieve a more efficient administration.. When the British provincial government tried to classify the various castes within the Madras presidency they were confronted with very confusing data. For example, the census of 1871 found 3,208 castes that were grouped into hundreds of subcastes. To make matters worse, no two divisions of people could agree on which caste or subcaste they belonged to²⁷⁴.

To allay the confusion and simplify the classification, the British government divided the castes in the census into two broad categories: Brahmin and non-Brahmin. Given their pre-existing assumptions about the Brahmins being descendants of a foreign nation and the non-Brahmin *jatis* being the indigenous Dravidians, this classification made sense and carried some

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 9.

²⁷³ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

²⁷⁴ BAKER, C. J. and WASHBROOK, D. A. *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change 1880–1940*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1975, p. 225.

familiarity for the British administrators. This distinction would eventually make its way into the legal system of the Madras presidency as well. The administrator, J.N. Nelson, claimed that it would "be necessary to legislate separately for the non-brahman castes, as being in all essential respects separate and distinct from, and incapable of association with, the brahman" especially when it comes to marriage and family ties²⁷⁵. Consequently, "Within the peculiar confines of colonial politics, the locals also began using these terms in order to communicate with the government e.g petition, and this division became ingrained in the daily language and goings about in Tamil Nadu society"²⁷⁶.

The establishment and devolution of power to the local boards, as well as the establishment of the Brahmin/non-Brahmin categories into the legal and administrative workings of the provincial government, laid the groundwork for nationalist politics within the Madras presidency in the decades to follow.

Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms

In 1917, when the British Crown was embroiled in the First World War, Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India at that time, announced a series of constitutional reforms that would see the "increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions"²⁷⁷. It is important to note that these reforms were designed to transfer administrative burdens, but not executive power, to the Indians. By 1919, the legislative council was expanded in the Madras presidency, with more Indian ministers, and local political parties given an opportunity to be elected to the legislative councils²⁷⁸. The provincial legislative councils would have power over matters such as local self-government, education, and sanitation, while the main provincial government would retain control in the areas of defence, police, and land revenue²⁷⁹.

²⁷⁵ IRSCHICK, Eugene. *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*. 1st edition. Madras: Cre-A, 1986, p. 23.

²⁷⁶ BAKER, C. J. and WASHBROOK, D. A. *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change 1880–1940*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1975, p. 220.

²⁷⁷ IRSCHICK, Eugene. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. 1st edition. London: University of California Press, 1969, p. 53.

²⁷⁸ BAKER, Christopher John. *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 20.

²⁷⁹ IRSCHICK, Eugene. *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*. 1st edition. Madras: Cre-A, 1986, p. 93.

Many Indians within the Madras presidency began vying for positions within these legislative councils. Some of these were lawyers linked to local patrons in rural areas. Others were wealthy business magnates. Still others were either well connected with or had important positions within the local boards I discussed earlier. The members of the legislative councils were elected indirectly by an electoral college composed of members of various local boards. These local boards were a constituency that could act as a springboard for local politicians²⁸⁰.

During the course of provincial politics, two powerful rival factions emerged within the Madras presidency, each of them wanting to be the ruling political party in the legislative council. One was known as the Mylapore set, the other was the South Indian Liberal Federation, otherwise known as the Justice Party.

Mylapore Set

During the time of these reforms and political changes in the presidency, there were a group of local politically influential lawyers and administrators from Madras city known as the Mylapore (a region of the Madras city) set. They were highly educated, wealthy and had personal connections and networks throughout the region²⁸¹. Another important commonality shared by members of the Mylapore set (which would come back to bite them politically) was the fact that they were all from the Brahmin-Iyer caste²⁸². The Mylapore set derived their political power from the fact that they made up most of the members of the Madras branch of the Congress Party²⁸³ and were also part of Annie Besant's Home Rule League, lobbying for dominion status for India²⁸⁴. Because the British were occupied with the war, the Mylapore set thought the time was right to push for a further devolution of power²⁸⁵.

²⁸⁰ BAKER, Christopher John. *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 325.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24-25.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Justice Party

In the year 1916, a group of wealthy business magnates, landholders and politicians came together to form a party called the South Indian Liberal Federation, otherwise known as the Justice Party. The founders of this party were all non-Brahmin, and they presented themselves as representatives of the non-Brahmin community and their interests²⁸⁶. The Justice Party published the 'Non-Brahmin Manifesto', which contained the ideology of the party, as well as their grievances and demands. The authors of the manifesto used statistics from censuses carried out by the British government, which showed that the Brahmin *jatis* have a monopoly on the civil and administrative positions in the Madras presidency and demanded that this be rectified. For example, the manifesto points out that, in the competitive examinations for the British civil service held between 1892 and 1904, fifteen out of the sixteen successful candidates were Brahmins. Another example used was that "out of 140 Deputy Collectors in Madras at the time (1916), 77 were Brahmins, 30 non-Brahmin Hindus"²⁸⁷.

At this point it is important to give some context and nuance to the statistics presented by the Justice Party about the domination of the Brahmins in civil and administrative positions. Firstly, it is worth mentioning that Telugu and Tamil Brahmins were the most literate castes in the Madras presidency, both in their vernacular language as well as the English language. According to the census of the Madras presidency in 1911, 42 per cent of Tamil Brahmins and 39 per cent of Telugu Brahmins were literate in Tamil, and 11 per cent of Tamil Brahmins and 7 per cent of Telugu Brahmins were literate in English²⁸⁸. If one takes all the Brahmin *jatis* as a group, their literacy rate in Tamil and English respectively was 37 per cent and 8 per cent. This far exceeded the literacy numbers of other castes in 1911. The caste which comes next in terms of literacy is the Komati caste, with a 26 per cent literacy rate. Thus, it becomes clear that the literacy of the Brahmin *jatis* far exceeds that of the others.

When it comes to the Brahmin monopoly on civil and administrative government jobs however, the picture becomes less clear. While the proportion of Brahmin *jatis* in civil and administrative jobs in the Madras presidency was higher than that of the other *jatis*, most of those positions

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26-27.

²⁸⁷ IRSCHICK, Eugene. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. 1st edition. London: University of California Press, 1969, p. 359.

²⁸⁸ MOLONY, J. Chartres. *Census of India 1911. Vol. 12, Madras. Pt. 2, Imperial and provincial tables*. Madras: Government Press, 1912, p. 132.

were petty low-paying clerkships. Moreover, even if one takes all the Brahmin *jatis* in the Madras presidency as a whole, only a small proportion of Brahmins worked in administrative jobs. In the 1911 census of the Madras presidency, only 4 per cent of Brahmins (all the Brahmin *jatis* taken together) worked in the British administration²⁸⁹.

While the Justice Party and their manifesto talk about Brahmin domination of government positions, their goal was the power and influence that came with the few influential jobs at the top of the British administration, such as the position of judges and district collectors. More importantly than high-level positions in the administration, the Justice Party – like any other political party – were looking to win votes and control the majority of seats in the legislative council, and as a result have substantial power in the public and political life of Tamil Nadu. Besides pointing out how the Brahmins were unnaturally prominent in public services, the Non-Brahmin Manifesto also states how "they ran the Congress and thus dominated public life"²⁹⁰. Thus, the target of the Justice Party wasn't the Brahmins as a whole, but the few elite Brahmin politicians and administrators with whom they were competing for power, specifically the Mylapore set.

The Non-Brahmin Manifesto continues:

"The position of the Brahmins as the highest and the most sacred of the Hindu castes, the nature of their ancient calling, and the steady inculcation of the belief, both by written texts and oral teaching, that they are so many divinely ordained intermediaries without whose active intervention and blessing the soul cannot obtain salvation and their consequent freedom from manual toil – all these helped them to adapt themselves easily to the new conditions under British Rule"²⁹¹.

Even though the Justice Party was challenging the power of a few elite Brahmins, in a brilliant political move, they presented themselves as the political party of the non-Brahmins (who make up the majority of the population in the Madras presidency), challenging the centuries-old

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 245.

²⁹⁰ BAKER, Christopher John. *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 27.

²⁹¹ South Indian Liberal Federation (Constitutionalists). *Manifesto of the South Indian Liberal Federation*. Madras: Pingala Press, 1928, p. 5, Quoted In IRSCHICK, Eugene. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India- The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. London: University of California Press, 1969, p. 362.

hegemony of the Brahmin *jatis*. According to the manifesto, the preponderance of Brahmins in the British administration was part of a historical trend of Brahmin domination in Tamil society. In this effort, the Justice Party was drawing on an explanatory framework about Brahmins, the Tamil people, and the caste system that was set in place by European missionaries and Orientalists. By 1916, it was evident that this framework had become familiar among English-educated non-Brahmins. Even the non-English-educated populace had become familiar with the Brahmin/non-Brahmin division of society in the Madras presidency, because it had been incorporated into the census and the legal system. Because of these circumstances, the Justice Party was able to successfully craft a narrative about the indigenous non-Brahmins of Tamil Nadu being oppressed for centuries by the foreign Brahmins and their caste system, and that it was time for the non-Brahmins to challenge that hegemony. As Justice Party stalwart T.M. Nair puts it:

"If the Brahmans while still cherishing their sense of caste superiority obtain power which the Montagu-Chelmsford Report would place in their hands, the chances are that the code of Manu, revised and brought up to date, will come into full operation once again"²⁹².

Before I discuss the intellectual background of the Justice Party and their non-Brahmin movement, I wish to discuss the writings of the English-educated Brahmin elites of the Madras presidency and their vision of Indian nationalism. As mentioned, the Madras Congress Party was made up mostly of people from the Brahmin castes, and many of them were pushing for home rule. Ironically, the nationalism promoted by these Brahmins is a variant of the non-Brahmin Tamil nationalism promoted by the Justice Party, as I show below.

Brahmin Nationalism

In the late nineteenth century, many Hindu Sabhas arose in response to Christian missionaries' criticism and polemics against Hinduism and the caste system. Some of these Hindu Sabhas were structured very much like Christian organizations and churches, with their own rules, newspapers, tracts, and organized campaigns to attract public attention. They even imitated Christian worship and singing²⁹³. Some of these Hindu organizations were run and operated by

²⁹² Ibid., p. 106.

²⁹³ PANDIAN, M S S. *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*. Ranikhet Cantt: Permanent Black, 2016, p. 23.

Brahmins, and their membership consisted mostly of Brahmins²⁹⁴. It was during this time that many of the city-educated Brahmins were concerned that Brahmins were going astray from their original religion. Manjeri Ramier noted how sad it was that most of the modern, educated Brahmins had abandoned their old traditions, such as *sandhyavandhnam*, and are drinking alcohol and eating meat²⁹⁵. During a meeting of Brahmins in Triplicane (a Madras neighbourhood) in 1921, M.K. Acharya, a Brahmin lawyer, lamented that the Brahmins of the day were not 'real' Brahmins, and had abandoned their ancient *dharma*²⁹⁶. What is striking about the first resolution passed by the congregation of Brahmins in Triplicane was that they saw the decline of the Brahmana community as a cause of national deterioration:

"This meeting of Brahmanas assembled at Triplicane deplores that owing to various unhealthy influences both internal and extraneous, the Brahmana community as a whole had greatly declined; and with a view to arrest the consequent national deterioration"²⁹⁷.

Thus, Brahmin *dharma* and its sustenance is tied to the well-being of the nation. Similarly, the Brahmin intellectuals also promoted Hinduism as the national religion of India²⁹⁸. But what is this Hinduism these Brahmin intellectuals were talking about? There is evidence that the Brahmin intellectuals were drawing upon the works of Orientalist Friedrich Max Müller as well as organizations such as the Theosophical Society to form their ideas about Hinduism, as well as their vision of Hinduism as the national religion of India. In his work *India: What Can It Teach Us?* Müller promotes Hinduism as based on the revelation of the *Vedas* and the national religion of India²⁹⁹. In response to the objection that the *Vedas* are "not truly national in character, and does not represent the thoughts of the whole of the population of India, but only of a small minority, namely of the Brahmins, and not even of the whole class of Brahmins, but only of a small minority of them, namely of the professional priests", Müller responds that, just as the Bible represents the Jews, the *Vedas* represent the Indian nation. Given that the Brahmins are the priests of the Indian nation, and being the descendants of those who composed the *Vedas*,

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

they had the right to speak for the whole nation³⁰⁰. In the same text, Müller also describes Sanskrit as the language of religion and law in India.

Organizations like the Theosophical Society played an important role in popularizing the ideas of Orientalists such as Müller. Henry Olcott, president of the Theosophical Society, proclaimed in one of his lectures that the Aryans were the cradle of European civilization and their literature was the source of all Western religion and philosophy³⁰¹. Olcott considered Brahmins to be the direct descendants of the Aryan race within India and the inheritors of the Aryan religion³⁰².

It is evident that many English-educated Brahmin intellectuals were very much influenced by these ideas when they spoke or wrote about their vision of the Indian nation. The Brahmin journalist Subramania Iyer in his text, 'Arya Jana Ikiyam Allathu Congress Mahasabhai' (Unity of the Aryan People or the Congress Party), published in 1888, is very explicit in his formulation of Hinduism as the religion of the Aryans, a pan-Indian religion, and Sanskrit is presented as the language of the gods:

"The Hindu religion of the Aryans is acknowledged as the pre-eminent religion of the world...Though the people in various regions like Carnatic, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bengal, Ayodhya and Punjab and their customs, habits and language vary, they all recognise the *Vedas* as Truth, believe that epics like Ramayanam, Mahabharatam and Bhagavatam are the path to salvation...revere sanskrit as the deva basha"³⁰³.

The Brahmin lawyer P.S. Sivasamy Iyer, in his convocation address to Madras University in 1914, exalts Sanskrit "as the language which enshrines the highest ideas of Indo-Aryan civilisation, as the language in which the highest achievement of the Hindu mind in the region of philosophic speculation and religion have been recorded... language in which the ordinances that regulate our social life and institutions to this day have been written"³⁰⁴.

Some of the Brahmin intellectuals accepted the Orientalist theory about the caste system as a hierarchical socio-religious system created by the Brahmins but defended it as something

³⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

³⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 39-40.

³⁰² Ibid., p. 40.

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 59.

praiseworthy. The Brahmin politician E.M.S. Namboodiripad, as late as 1952, referred to the caste system as a division of labour that organized production in such a way that it promoted individual skills³⁰⁵. Finally, some of these Brahmin elites and intellectuals felt that the Brahmin *jatis* were most fitted to occupy the top political positions and lead the nation. In an article published in the newspaper *New India* in 1919, the lawyer G. Annaji Rao opined that what makes the Brahmin fit to guide politics was that he is a calming restraining influence on society because of his traditions and training³⁰⁶.

In articulating this vision, the Brahmins were clearly borrowing from the descriptions and framework provided by the Orientalists and missionaries. The kind of Indian nation these Brahmin intellectuals were proposing was one where the so-called Vedic religion of the Aryans would provide the foundation of the social life and institutions of the Indian nation. The Brahmins, in turn, are the best representatives of this nation, since it was from their ancestors that the Vedic religion originated, and it is the Brahmins who continue to preserve the Vedic religion by following their Brahmin *dharma*. It is clear that the Brahmins who were promoting this kind of nationalism had accepted the truth of the descriptions provided by the Orientalists – namely that there was an invasion by an Aryan nation sometime in the remote past, that they instituted a religion in India, and that the present-day Brahmin *jatis* are the priestly descendants of these Aryans.

In promoting India as an Aryan nation, Hinduism as an Aryan religion, and Sanskrit as the sacred language; however, the Brahmin intelligentsia were inadvertently sowing the seeds of anti-Brahminism and Tamil nationalism. Although it is true that the Aryans and their religion are glorified and romanticized in the Orientalist descriptions, the other side of this story is that the Brahmins are the priestly class of the invading Aryans who imposed a hierarchical caste system on the indigenous non-Brahmins of Tamil. The very nature of this story is that it divides the people of Tamil Nadu into two peoples: Brahmins and non-Brahmins, and pits them against each other.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

Justice Party and Tamil Saivite Nationalism

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a group of Saivite intellectuals begin to call for a revival of Saivism, and specifically the Saiva Siddhanta tradition in Tamil Nadu. While there were many revivalist movements of this sort going on in both India and Tamil Nadu at that time, this Saivite revivalism in Tamil Nadu was unique in the sense that they were formulating the Saiva Siddhanta tradition as a uniquely Tamil religion, which played a central role in shaping Tamil culture and civilization. Most of these Saivite intellectuals came from the Saiva Vellala caste (one of the *jatis* well known for their adherence to Saivite traditions), and they made up a large proportion of the members of the Justice Party. In fact, it would have been no exaggeration to say that Vellalas formed the backbone of the Justice Party³⁰⁷. Quite a few key figures and leaders within the Justice Party were Saiva Vellalas, such as Natesha Mudaliar, Somasundaram Pillai, and Ramaswami Mudaliar³⁰⁸. These Saiva Vellala intellectuals were not merely trying to revive the Saiva Siddhanta tradition but using it as a vehicle for Tamil nationalism. The Vellala historian M.S. Purnalingam Pillai, in his work on Tamil literature, claimed that Saiva Siddhanta is the native philosophy of South India and the greatest product of the Tamil intellect³⁰⁹. Starting in 1886, many Saiva Siddhanta Sabhas began to be established "for the threefold purpose of cultivating Dravidian languages and history, influencing holders of religious endowments to eliminate corruption, and popularizing what was called Dravidian religion or Saiva Siddhanta"³¹⁰. For these Vellala intellectuals, this reviving of Saiva Siddhanta also meant accessing a pure Saiva Siddhanta devoid of influence from the Vedic religion of the Brahmins. As the Vellala writer M.S. Purnalingam Pillai expresses in his book *A Primer of Tamil Literature* (1904), there was a period when the native Dravidian religion of Saiva Siddhanta was the only religion practised by the Tamil people, and that the Vedic Brahmin religion was the first foreign influence on it. This idea became quite commonplace among non-Brahmins in the beginning of the twentieth century³¹¹.

³⁰⁷ IRSCHICK, Eugene. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. 1st edition. London: University of California Press, 1969, p. 295.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 45, 52, 138.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 293.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 292.

³¹¹ PILLAI, Purnalingam M.S. *A Primer Of Tamil Literature*. Madras: Ananda Press, 1904, p. 254, Quoted In IRSCHICK, Eugene. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India- The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. London: University of California Press, 1969, pp. 293–294.

Many of the non-Brahmins "accused Brahmans of injecting Tamil religion with idolatry and foreign Vedic doctrines"³¹². In addition to corrupting the Saiva Siddhanta religion with their foreign religion, the Brahmins were accused of introducing the caste system into Tamil society. In a 1917 welcome address at the non-Brahmin confederation, Thyagaraja Chetty, one of the leaders and founders of the Justice Party explained that

"The genius of Dravidian civilization does not recognize difference between man and man by birth. The leaders of Dravidian thought, Thiruvalluvar, Avvaiyar and Kambar do not claim to be born from the brain of the god-head. The Nayanmars and Alvars do not claim greatness in virtue of birth. It is the Aryans who have introduced this birth distinction which they have elaborated into the system of *varnashrama dharma* with its concomitant evils. It was that civilization which brought about illiteracy in the century, the pedestal on which is erected the exclusive oligarchy of the Brahmins"³¹³.

Some of the Saiva Vellalas began to claim that the Vellela caste were the original Dravidians, who then later divided themselves into other castes³¹⁴.

The remarkable aspect of the Tamil nationalism disseminated by the Vellala intellectuals is that it is identical to the nationalism of the Brahmin intellectuals in structure. Like the Brahmins, the Vellala elites' concept of the nation is grounded in religious tradition. For the Brahmin intellectuals, it was the Vedic religion that provided the basis for Indian civilization, its institutions and laws, thus making the Indian people into a nation. For the Vellalas, it was Saiva Siddhanta that served as the foundation for the Tamil people's traditions and civilization. Both the Brahmin and Vellala intellectuals form a connection between nation and caste. Both claimed to be the descendants of the original caste, or people from which arose their respective nations and religions. In the case of the Brahmin intellectuals, they claimed to be the descendants of the Aryans who introduced the Vedic religion into India, which in turn unites the Indian people together into a nation. Vellalas, on the other hand, claim to be the original Dravidian caste who

³¹² Ibid., p. 292.

³¹³ CHANDRAN, Subramaniam. Political Process and Governance in Tamil Nadu. *SSRN Electronic Journal* [online]. 2016 [Cit. on 25.05.2021], p. 4. DOI 10.2139/ssrn.2748971.

³¹⁴ IRSCHICK, Eugene. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. 1st edition. London: University of California Press, 1969, p. 295.

were the first of the Tamil nation and founded its national religion. This linking of caste and nation by Indian intellectuals is an important pattern which I will address in detail later.

The Saiva Vellala Nation

Introduction

As we saw from the writings of several European thinkers in the previous chapters, a common picture of India starts to emerge by the nineteenth century; namely, that the Indian Subcontinent is comprised of a number of races and nations, differentiated from each other through religion and language. Two of the most prominent among these are the Aryans and the Dravidians.

The Tamil nationalists seem to have adopted the basic descriptive framework put forward by these Europeans regarding the Aryans and Dravidians and the relationship between them in their writings. So far, I have given a brief overview of the intellectual and political background behind one dimension of the Dravidian movement, namely, the Saivite religious nationalism of a select group of Saiva Vellala nationalists. The nation-language-religion framework utilized by European thinkers, as well as their descriptions of the Aryan and Dravidian people, were structured by their Christian cultural background. Since the Tamil nationalists did not share this cultural background, how could they have understood the descriptive framework utilized by the Europeans? If it is indeed the case that the Tamil intellectuals simply parrot European descriptions without understanding the cultural framework that produced them, there is the possibility of incoherence and distortion when the Tamil intellectuals reproduce the descriptions and concepts they adopted from European thinkers.

I address these questions by analyzing the writings of Maraimalai Adigal, one of the most prominent Saiva Vellala intellectuals of the twentieth century. Out of all the Saiva Vellala intellectuals of his time, he has written most extensively about the Dravidian nation, and about how Saiva Siddhanta constitutes the Dravidian nation. But before I examine the ideas of Maraimalai Adigal, I will give a brief historical sketch of Saiva Siddhanta to the reader.

Historical Sketch of Saiva Siddhanta

On the basis of inscriptional and archaeological evidence, scholars trace the beginnings of Saiva Siddhanta to central India, sometime in the eighth century. Sometime around the tenth to eleventh century it migrated to Tamil Nadu. Based on inscriptional evidence, it appears to have been brought to Tamil Nadu by the rulers. Raja Raja Chola used the Saiva Agamas to construct

Saiva temples³¹⁵. The Saiva Agamas are the oldest textual corpus in the Saiva Siddhanta tradition³¹⁶. The primary focus of the Agama texts is rituals directed toward Siva, especially temple rituals³¹⁷. The Saiva Siddhanta Agamas articulate the practice of nyasa, where Saiva mantras and an image of Siva is used to accomplish the goal of becoming a Siva³¹⁸.

Even though Saiva Siddhanta began in central India, by the thirteenth century it had become well established and localized to Tamil Nadu, and gradually waned from the northern regions of India³¹⁹. It is important to keep in mind that, well before the arrival of Saiva Siddhanta, Tamil Nadu had a long history of Saivite traditions. It is well renowned for a series of Tami *bhakti* poetry or devotional literature known as the *Tirumurai*, written by 63 renowned *bhakti* poets known as the Nayanars³²⁰³²¹.

The coming of Saiva Siddhanta into Tamil Nadu, is marked by the writings of the Tamil Saiva Siddhanta texts, known as the Meykandar *Sastras*, written by Tamil Saiva Siddhanta gurus or intellectuals who trace their lineage back to the guru Meykandar. There is some dispute as to whether the Tamil Saiva Siddhantin gurus prior to the nineteenth century considered the *Tirumurai* as part of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition in addition to the Agamas and the *Vedas*³²²³²³. Nonetheless, the fourteenth-century Saiva Siddhantin intellectual, Umapati Sivacharya, considers the Nayanars as part of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition in his works *Tirumuraikanta Puranam* and *Cekkilar Puranam*³²⁴. Unlike the *Tirumurai*, which contains emotionally charged

³¹⁵ Ibid., p. 234.

³¹⁶ ISHIMATSU, Ginette. The Making of Tamil Saiva Siddhanta. *SAGE Publications*. 1999, Volume. 33, Issue. 3, p. 573.

³¹⁷ PRENTISS, Karen Pechilis. A Tamil Lineage for Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy. *History of Religions*. 1996, Volume. 35, Issue. 3, pp. 234-235.

³¹⁸ Ibid., p. 235.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 236.

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 250.

³²¹ DHAVAMONY, Mariasusai. *Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta: A Study in the Mysticism and Theology of Saivism*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 4-5.

³²² KLOBER, Rafael. What is Saiva Siddhanta? Tracing Modern Genealogies and Historicising a Classical Canon. *Oxford University Press*. 2017, Volume. 10, Issue. 2, p. 188.

³²³ PRENTISS, Karen Pechilis. A Tamil Lineage for Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy. *History of Religions*. 1996, Volume. 35, Issue. 3, pp. 236-237.

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 248, 250.

poetry expressing love toward Siva, the Meykandar *Sastras* are more philosophical, and are concerned with knowledge about Siva³²⁵.

According to the scholar Karen Pechilis Prentiss, one of the main points of difference between the Sanskrit-based (based on the *Vedas* and *Agamas*) Saiva Siddhanta tradition and the regional Tamil Nadu variant was that the latter were more concerned with *jnana* (knowledge), and the former put more emphasis on rituals³²⁶.

Regardless of the differences between the original Saiva Siddhanta tradition and the regional Tamil variant, there is no evidence that the Tamil Saiva Siddhanta intellectuals prior to the nineteenth century were claiming that Saiva Siddhanta was the religion of the Tamil nation, nor that they were trying to create a pure Tamil Saiva Siddhanta devoid of Sanskrit and Brahmin influence. This lends more credence to the claim that the idea of a Tamil nation and Tamil religion was absent in Tamil Nadu prior to European contact.

In summary, "The name Saiva Siddhanta translates to the end of knowledge of Siva in the sense of culmination"³²⁷. The entire Saiva Siddhanta tradition can be defined as a set of practices with a goal of attaining knowledge of Siva. What Siva is and what this knowledge consists of, I will address later.

Maraimalai Adigal: A Biographical Sketch

The focus of the rest of my dissertation will be on the ideas of Maraimalai Adigal. I will examine his understanding of the concepts of religion and nation and the manner in which he formulates the relationship between the two, and to language as well. In the process, I answer the following questions: Is Adigal's understanding of the nation-language-religion framework different from that of the European thinkers? If yes, then in what manner does he transform or distort the original framework? And what does this distortion reveal about the native cultural framework? I then analyse his writings on Saiva Siddhanta in order to answer two questions: What makes Saiva Siddhanta into a religion for Adigal? What role does Saiva Siddhanta play in making the

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 239.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ PRENTISS, Karen Pechilis. A Tamil Lineage for Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy. *History of Religions*. 1996, Volume. 35, Issue. 3, p. 232.

Tamil-speaking populace a nation? I begin with a brief biographical sketch of Maraimalai Adigal, and then move on to an analysis of Adigal's pure Tamil movement.

Maraimalai Adigal (1876–1950) was born in Nagapattinam, a coastal town in Tamil Nadu. Nagapattinam was settled by the Portuguese and later the Dutch colonizers³²⁸. An interesting fact about Nagapattinam was that it was one of the early hubs of Christian missionary activities in South India. It was in the Wesleyan Mission High School that Maraimalai Adigal studied up to his secondary school exams³²⁹. Adigal later taught in the Madras Christian College from 1898 to 1911 as a Tamil professor³³⁰. As one can see, from a very young age, Adigal was exposed to Christian missionaries and their writings, which would have a profound impact on his intellectual life later on. It was also during this period that he became heavily involved in intellectual activities relating to Saiva Siddhanta. He became the editor for a Tamil Saiva Siddhanta journal called *Siddhanta Deepika*, which was started by his friend and fellow Saiva Vellala J.M. Nallaswami Pillai³³¹. He also founded a Saiva Siddhanta Maha Samajam (big organization) in July 1905³³².

In addition to his exposure to Christian missionaries, during his time in Madras, Adigal was attracted to philological studies on Indian culture and civilization, which would also have a profound impact on his intellectual life and activities as a Dravidian nationalist and revivalist ideologue. It was probably in those philological studies that he was first exposed to the idea that language, race, and nation were inextricably connected³³³.

In addition to European influences, Adigal was a staunch follower and admirer of the nineteenth century Saivite saint known as Ramalinga Swami (1823–74). A salient difference between Ramalinga Swami and Adigal was that, even though Ramalinga Swami is known as a radical reformer today, his criticism of Brahmins was limited to specific rituals and caste practices. Unlike Adigal, he did not say that Brahmins were a foreign nation. Nor did he claim that Saiva Siddhanta or Saivism was a Dravidian religion. It was clear that Ramalinga Swami was not a

³²⁸ FRANCIS, W. *Gazetteer of South India*. Vol. 1. New Delhi: *Mittal Publications*, 1988, p. 161.

³²⁹ AROORAN, Nambi. *The Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905-1944, With Special Reference to the Works of Maraimalai Atikal*. London: University of London, 1976, p. 311.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 319.

³³³ VAITHEES, V. Ravi. *Religion, caste, and nation in South India: Maraimalai Adigal, the Neo-Saivite movement, and Tamil nationalism, 1876-1950*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 242.

nationalist ideologue³³⁴. This difference between Maraimalai Adigal and Ramalinga Swami highlights the extent to which Adigal had imbibed the conceptual framework used by the European missionaries and Orientalists to study India.

Why a Pure Tamil Movement?

How did Maraimalai Adigal understand the relationship between language and religion? And how does he perceive the role language plays in making a group of people into a nation? Even though Adigal did not explicitly answer these questions, his writings provide us with clues about how he connected language with religion and nation. Comparisons between Adigal and the European intellectuals' writings regarding the nation-language-religion relationship also gives us further clues on answering the above two questions. However, the purpose of this exercise isn't about Adigal and his understanding of the language-religion-nation concept triad, but what his understanding of those concepts reveals about the cultural topoi he was utilizing.

Adigal can fairly be described as the father of the pure Tamil movement³³⁵. He put great emphasis on using a *senthamizh* (pure Tamil) dialect, devoid as much as possible of Sanskrit words. For Adigal, preserving the Tamil language in its pure form was essential to preserving the Tamil culture³³⁶.

Before delving into Adigal's writings about the importance of preserving Tamil in its classical form and how that enables the preservation of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition, it is important to recognize that Adigal wanting to keep Tamil free of Sanskrit influence was also a way of challenging what he saw as the Brahmins' dominant position in Tamil Nadu society at that time. Adigal's essays about the importance of preserving the purity of Tamil language, are littered with criticism about Brahmins' social status and their behaviour towards other jatis. In the essay *Thamizh oda Pira mozhi kalappu* (Mixing of other languages in Tamil), for example, Adigal makes a connection between Tamil Brahmins supposedly putting more emphasis on mastering and using Sanskrit (as opposed to their native language), to the Brahmins' social status, citing

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113-114.

³³⁵ VAITHEESPARA, Ravi. Maraimalai Atigal and the Genealogy of the Tamilian Creed. *Economic & Political Weekly*. 2009, Volume. XLIV, Issue. 14, p. 45.

³³⁶ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam – 17*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 97.

behaviours such as not socializing or dining with other *jatis*, as indicative of the Brahmins regarding the rest of the Tamil population as their social inferiors³³⁷.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the idea of an Aryan and Dravidian nation with their own respective religions had become entrenched among Tamil intellectuals. In the essay *Thanithamizh Matchi* (The Greatness of Pure Tamil), Adigal links the Tamil Brahmins' practice of mixing Sanskrit words in their literature with Brahmins trying to impose their intellectual hegemony on the Tamil people by promoting their Brahmin religion³³⁸. Here, Maraimalai Adigal is treating Sanskrit not just as a language known and used by Brahmins, but also links Sanskrit to the Brahmin religion in a very specific way. He equates the entry of Sanskrit words into the Tamil language with the imposition of Brahmin religion on the Tamil people. Thus, the preservation of pure Tamil was very much about the preservation of the Dravidian religion.

Besides his opposition to the supposed Brahmanical intellectual and political dominance of that time, the main reason Maraimalai Adigal cites for keeping Tamil pure is the preservation of Tamil culture and traditions. Adigal is right in a very trivial sense when he says we need to protect our language in order to protect our culture. After all, the title of the most ancient Tamil grammatical treatise, *Tolkappiyam*, means protection (*Kappiyam*) of the ancient/venerable/hoary: "The main function of grammar is to protect the language from deterioration"³³⁹.

This statement is the central rationale that Adigal uses in his writings when discussing the need to preserve Tamil in its pure ancient form. Adigal focuses on three dimensions of Tamil language: phonology, grammar, and vocabulary, and the deterioration of these three dimensions because of the influence of Sanskrit on Tamil language³⁴⁰. This leads us to three important questions: What is Adigal referring to when he talks about the deterioration of a language? How does the mixing of languages lead to such deterioration? Finally, how does Adigal connect the state of the Tamil language with the state of Tamil culture and traditions, specifically Saiva Siddhanta?

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 104.

³³⁹ ZVELEBIL, Kamil. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: Brill, 1973, p. 131.

³⁴⁰ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam – 17*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 98, 112.

The obvious trivium that anybody can observe is that every language has borrowed from and mixed with other languages. It seems to be the natural course in the development of any language. Adigal himself states that "Any cultured language cannot exist without mixing with other languages"³⁴¹. He goes on to admit that, since ancient times, other languages have mixed with Tamil, and casts doubt on whether or not there was a time when Tamil was pure and untouched³⁴². When in the natural course of development Tamil absorbs words from other languages, such words become Tamilized and fit into the phonetic structure of Tamil, and Adigal doesn't have a problem with that³⁴³. While Adigal considers it natural for languages to mix, he does consider it problematic when certain scholars and writers unnaturally force Sanskrit or English words into the Tamil language.

As Adigal writes, it is not so much the entry of other words into Tamil language that is the problem; that is a natural process. His problem is with what he describes as the unnatural forcing of foreign words into Tamil. By unnatural forcing, he means the inserting of words and phrases that not only does not fit into the phonetic, but also the grammatical structure of Tamil. In his essays on Tamil language, Adigal argues for the superiority of the grammatical structure of Tamil to Sanskrit. For example, in the essay *Pazhan Kaala Aryarum Thamizharum* (Ancient Aryans and Tamils), Adigal mocks the fact that Sanskrit and Hindi assign genders to inanimate objects and calls it illogical and unnatural. He also claims that the basic vowel and consonant phonetic structure of the other Indian languages, including Sanskrit, emerged from Tamil, while emphasizing that Sanskrit's 'sister' languages, such as Greek and Latin, don't have this phonetic structure. Adigal points out languages such as Ancient Greek and Latin, which have died out of use because of their flawed structure and the less-civilized state of the people who spoke that language³⁴⁴. He praises the fact that Tamil has survived for so long, and explains that this is not only because of the highly civilized state of the Tamil people, but also because the language itself has had very few alterations and changes when it comes to importing words from other languages. For Adigal, because of the richness of Tamil language, it is not lacking in anything and doesn't require words from other languages³⁴⁵.

³⁴¹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam – 17*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 84.

³⁴² Ibid., p. 85.

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 97.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 98.

This richness includes both the wide range of vocabulary as well as the way in which the structure of the language is more attuned to the sounds of nature³⁴⁶. Adigal uses a story to illustrate his point about Tamil's affinity to nature: In the story, a Sanskrit scholar who claims that Sanskrit is the root of the sounds used in all language is challenged and defeated by a Tamil scholar named Poondi Ranganatha Mudaliyar, who recites a poem from the Sitrambala Kovai to demonstrate sounds not derived from Sanskrit. The Sanskrit scholar then remarks that the sounds he heard in this language are sounds that he recalls from his birth, thus showing how close the sounds of the Tamil language are to nature. Another example used by Adigal to demonstrate Tamil's affinity to the sounds of nature is the sound 'om' known as the Omkara mantra. Adigal asserts that om is the first sound of nature, and that this sound first attained a linguistic form in Tamil, and that two of the Tamil vowels directly emerge from the 'om' sound³⁴⁷.

Adigal uses the ancient Tamil grammar treatise, the *Tolkappiyam*, to praise the nuanced grammatical and phonetic structure of the Tamil language, the categorization of the alphabets, and various sounds. The *Tolkappiyam* also analyses how phonemes in Tamil language are combined to create morphemes³⁴⁸. Finally, Adigal's essays on Tamil language cites both the ancient literary works of the *Tolkappiyam* and the *Tirukkural* as examples of the richness of the Tamil vocabulary to comprehensively cover all aspects of human life – from to birth to romance to death. From these writings, it is clear that the problem Adigal is wrestling with is not so much the addition of Sanskrit words, but the alteration of Tamil grammar and phonology, and the replacement of Tamil vocabulary with Sanskrit vocabulary. If, as Adigal claims, the original *senhamizh* language is richer than Sanskrit in these dimensions (phonology, grammar, and vocabulary), then the alteration of these as a result of Sanskrit influence will diminish the richness of the Tamil language.

There are some important facts regarding the literature and grammar of other South Indian languages, such as Kannada and Telugu, that lend greater weight to Adigal's case about preserving Tamil in its classical form.

"In Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, the beginnings of written literatures are beyond any dispute so intimately connected with the Sanskrit models that the

³⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 98, 116, 117.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 109-110.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 111.

first literary output in these languages is, strictly speaking, *imitative* and *derived*, the first literary works in these languages being no doubt adaptations and for straight translations of Sanskrit models"³⁴⁹.

In the case of Tamil literature, it served as its own foundation in terms of subject matter, ideas, and poetic structure³⁵⁰. Moreover, unlike the other South Indian languages, the metalanguage [the technical terms used to describe the grammatical structure of the language] of Tamil has been Tamil, not Sanskrit. As one famous Indian poet claims: "In most Indian languages, the technical gobbledygook is Sanskrit; in Tamil, the gobbledygook is ultra-Tamil"³⁵¹. Thus, Tamil language is the only Indian language which can divest itself of Sanskrit words and still stand on its own. No wonder Adigal uses the analogy of a person with missing limbs that requires prosthetics to function, when comparing languages which have borrowed from other languages – insisting that Tamil borrowing from Sanskrit would be like the Tamil language cutting off its own limbs and using a prosthetic in its place³⁵².

At this point, I would like to briefly summarize the origin and nature of Indian linguistics, as it has important implications for the Tamil poetic tradition as well. Frits Staal, in his work *Rituals and Mantras: Rules Without Meaning* (1996), points out that the rules of ritual performance (which revolves around the correct sequence of steps) follows the same structure as the rules of language³⁵³. Staal picks out three properties of rituals which are also found in the grammar of any language: recursiveness, embeddedness, and modification³⁵⁴. Each ritual is subdivided into rites which in turn follow a certain sequence that repeats itself, thus making them recursive. Within each rite is embedded another sequence of rites, and each of these rites can undergo modification. These same features of embeddedness and modification are also found in the grammatical structure of any language³⁵⁵. Phrases can be modified endlessly by embedding them within other phrases, and phrase structure rules exhibit recursiveness. Sanskrit grammarians such as Patanjali – who have pointed out the similarities between the

³⁴⁹ ZVELEBIL, Kamil. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: Brill, 1973, p. 2.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁵¹ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁵² ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam – 17*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 98.

³⁵³ STAAL, Frits. *Ritual and Mantras: Rules without Meaning*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996, p. 108.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 110.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 109.

recursiveness of language and ritual – have also described this structure through a set of rules that apply to both grammar and rituals³⁵⁶. "Patanjali used the term *laksana* which is a common synonym for *sūtra* or ‘rule’³⁵⁷. Staal outlines the structural similarities between Indian grammatical science and the science of rituals, which in turn is one of the central aspects of Indian religion:

"The main technical device that the Indian sciences of language and ritual introduced and continue to use is the concept of *sutra* that corresponds to the contemporary concept of *rule* developed in contemporary linguistics"³⁵⁸.

Vedic rituals are also accompanied by recitations or chants called mantras. "The very *mantra* announces the ritual act, and explains the act"³⁵⁹, and are constructed according to the phonological rules of Sanskrit³⁶⁰. Thus, being well versed in the rules of Sanskrit grammar is a skill that went hand in hand with the skill of performing Vedic rituals.

The Tamil synonym for the word *laksana* is *illakkanam*. In Tamil, the term *illakkanam* "may approximately be translated as ‘grammar’ provided a system of norms which had to be followed by *ilakkiyam*, roughly translatable as ‘literary works’. Thus, *ilakkanam* was a complex of rules imposed upon *ilakkiyam*"³⁶¹. Tamil grammar evolved alongside the Tamil poetic tradition and the Tamil grammarians seem to have devoted their energy to studying how the grammatical structure of a language applied to writing poetry. The early Tamil poetry of the Sangam age revolved around two topics: *akam* and *puram*. Although the literal translation of *akam* and *puram* is inner and outer, *akam* poetry deals with the subject of love while *puram* deals with the subject of war. *Akam* describes romantic/erotic love, and the various circumstances and situations in which romantic love develops. The subject of the war poetry is a kingly or princely hero fighting a war against another king. Traditionally, the Tamil poet (like his predecessors) had to follow the age-old rules of poetic conventions, such as stereotyped language, rhetorical and poetic properties, and traditional themes³⁶².

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 110

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 353

³⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 354

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 253

³⁶¹ ZVELEBIL, Kamil. *Tamil Literature*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974, p. 4.

³⁶² Ibid.

In the case of the early Sangam-era poetry, each poem was structured hierarchically based on what Zvelibil calls "Form-meaning composites"³⁶³. Out of these form-composites, the two most important ones were *tinai* (setting) and *turai* (situation). The themes of love and war are associated with certain land types, called *tinai*. There are different kinds of love described in Tamil poetry, each linked to a specific land type. For example, separation and pining of lovers is associated with the desert. While two lovers facing suffering and obstacles to their love because they come from different tribes is associated with the mountains. *Patiently* waiting for a lover is associated with the forest³⁶⁴. Thus, Tamil classical poetry associates particular behaviours to specific regions. Furthermore, *tinai* not only refers to the land types, but also the romantic and warlike behaviour associated with each land type³⁶⁵.

Love is also subdivided into well-matched and ill-matched love. The lovers should be well-matched in terms of lineage, age, wealth etc. Examples of ill-matched love are situations where the man's love becomes obsessive, or when a young man desires an older woman³⁶⁶. Both these kinds of love are associated with specific *tinai* or land types³⁶⁷. A curious feature of Tamil linguistics is that appropriate love behaviour also falls under the term *illakkanam*, which generally means grammar. As Kamil Zvelibil says in his work on Tamil literature: "Tamil theoreticians had 'discovered' that the construction and understanding of poetic structures (and even of human behavioural patterns) is subject to structural rules similar to those of primary linguistic structures"³⁶⁸. In addition to *eluttu* (basic 'signs' of language; sounds and letters), and *col* ('words'), the ancient Tamil grammatical treatise known as the *Tolkappiyam* also includes a chapter on *porul*, which can be translated as the subject matter of the poetry, and focuses on the concept of *tinai*³⁶⁹. Thus, Grammar becomes a broad term that refers to a set of rules that structure and govern any cultural phenomenon and practice, according to various contexts.

³⁶³ ZVELEBIL, Kamil. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: Brill, 1973, p. 113.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68, 72, 96.

³⁶⁵ SIVATHAMBY, K. Early South Indian Society and Economy: the Tinai Concept. *Social Scientist*. 1974, Volume 3, Issue 5, p. 22.

³⁶⁶ ZVELEBIL, Kamil. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: Brill, 1973, p. 92.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁶⁸ ZVELEBIL, Kamil. *Tamil Literature*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974, p. 4.

³⁶⁹ ZVELEBIL, Kamil. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: Brill, 1973, p. 134.

In Tamil, the word *illakanam* shares a close affinity in meaning to the word *ozhukkam*. *Ozhukkam* can be loosely defined as the adherence to proper conduct or behaviour in various contexts, which includes the practice of or adherence to a tradition, Saiva Siddhanta being one such tradition. The object of my long exposition on Frits Staal's research about language and rituals as well as Tamil grammar is to show that in Indian culture, understanding and properly adhering to the grammatical rules of a language becomes an important part of properly following and practicing a tradition. For Tamil grammarians, poetic structures and the construction of poetic metres is supposed to be able to convey the appropriate courtship practices/behaviours as well as the romantic experiences associated with each land region. These behaviours are classified according to the goals to attain in life: *Aram (dharma)*, *porul* (wealth), *inbam* (pleasure) with *anbu* (prema/love) being the foundation of all three goals³⁷⁰.

Another reason I chose to discuss Zvelebil's writings about the love poetry of the Sangam age in detail is that Zvelebil clearly traces continuity in key concepts between the love poetry of the Sangam age to the Saiva *bhakti* poetry which succeeded it. Like Adigal, he too points out that traditions and concepts outlined in the *Tolkappiyam* and the *Tirukkural* seem to be incorporated into *bhakti*, such as vegetarianism, non-killing, and *arul*³⁷¹. The love poetry of the pre-Saiva age contains practical insights into the relationship between husband and wife, family, within the community and finally ruler and his people. Man is shown as improving at these things, developing in *dharma* until he reaches the final goal or *arul*. Through following *dharma* he is able to attain *arul*, which is held to be synonymous with knowledge³⁷².

I will go into greater depth on the subject of *arul* in the section on religion, but suffice to say it is either translated as compassion or as a gift from the gods. *Arul* is the final goal of the *bhakti* traditions, and is seen as the path to happiness. The central theme of *bhakti* itself is devotion or love (*anbu*) toward a deity and cultivating that love is what the *bhakti* tradition is all about. The concept of *anbu* is a central theme in Sangam romance poetry as well. "There is in fact a direct connection between the idealized and typified love of the *akam* (love) genre in the early classical poetry, and the ecstasies of the eternal love between the soul and the Lord"³⁷³. Even

³⁷⁰ ZVELEBIL, Kamil. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: Brill, 1973, p. 38.

³⁷¹ ZVELEBIL, Kamil. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: Brill, 1973, pp. 160-161.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

sexual or erotic love is "is not a hindrance, but, on the contrary, frequently a precondition to [bhakti] or, at least, its standard symbol."³⁷⁴. Thus, it would be accurate to say that the Saivite *bhakti* poetry and the love poetry of the classical age are part of the same Tamil literary tradition, since *bhakti* poetry carries forward many of the themes first introduced in classical poetry, most importantly the concept of *anbu*, which is central to *bhakti* traditions.

It is at this point that I come back to the question of how the purity of Tamil language impacts one's access to Tamil culture and traditions, since all of Adigal's essays about Tamil language automatically lead to discussions about Tamil poetic literature, specifically Saiva Siddhanta literature, which was Maraimalai Adigal's primary concern.

One obvious answer to this question would be that, with the disappearance of *senhamizh* (pure Tamil) one would not be able to understand the meaning of these texts (though many of the old Saivite and Sangam-era poetry has been translated into modern Tamil and English). However, Adigal does not seem to be concerned with the intelligibility or the translatability of these texts. When talking about these Saiva *bhakti* poems, Adigal is primarily occupied with the emotions they evoke and the experience they bestow on the bhakta who chant and sing these hymns. For example, in the essay *Siva Linga Unmai* (The Truth of Siva Linga), Adigal describes the poems and hymns from Tamil *bhakti* poetry, like the *Tevaram* and the *Thiruvasagam* as superior to Sanskrit slokas, because it causes the bhakta's insides to melt with love for God³⁷⁵. Likewise, when discussing the wisdom of the Saiva Siddhanta *acharyas*, Adigal focuses on their visions of Siva that manifested before them and the *inbam* (*ananda*) they experienced as a result those visions³⁷⁶, rather than on any doctrines or beliefs they espoused. The Saiva *bhakti* tradition itself (including the poetic literature and practices, such as going to the temple) is described as a tool with which to direct one's thoughts and emotions toward the form of God³⁷⁷. Thus, the impetus for preserving classical Tamil takes on a greater scope than Sangam and *bhakti* literature and making them intelligible; it is also about retaining the emotion and *bhakti* inherent in the language of the poetry. Accurate translations, while capturing the meaning of the texts, cannot capture the richness of the emotional and experiential content that the original poetry evokes.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 202.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 126, 140.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 167.

At this point I have explored one of the two problems that I raised at the beginning of this section, namely, how Maraimalai Adigal related language to religion. Through this process, we have a clearer understanding of why he wanted a pure Tamil language. Comparing the writings of European intellectuals with the Tamil ones makes it clear that both sets of intellectuals were grappling with a different set of problems when it comes to language's role in religion. Among European intellectuals, the search for a pure language first emerges as a theological problem, including the works of scholars whom Adigal was directly influenced by, such as Robert Caldwell. The assumptions made by the Europeans arriving in India were guided by a coherent theological framework. This framework came with certain assumptions, and at the same time provided them with a way to systematize their observations. Within this theological framework, language is not only the medium of communicating God's will, but also the medium of interpreting God's will.

The language spoken by God to Adam was thought by some to convey the will of God perfectly without distortion. The language programs of Church fathers like Origen and Augustine aimed to correct and rectify Latin so that it came as close as possible to the original divine language³⁷⁸. Spanish theologian Raymond Lull attempted to recreate this perfect language through a universal mathematics of combination consisting of universal ideas to communicate the word of God. Trying to find this original language of revelation becomes an important problem, since the distortion of the original language resulted in the corruption of the Ur-religion into many false religions and the fracturing of a united human race into many nations.

The Tamil intellectuals also placed importance on preserving their native Tamil language in its pure classical form without the admixture of Sanskrit and other languages. According to Maraimalai Adigal, the maintenance of *Senthamizh* is necessary for the survival of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition. However, his rationale for maintaining the Tamil language in its pure form differs from that of Christian theologians who wanted to recover or recreate the Adamic language. For Christian theologians such as Dante and Raymond Lull, having access to the primordial language of humankind meant having access to the uncorrupted revelation of God. Maraimalai Adigal's concern was that the *bhakti* poetry of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition would lose its ability to evoke certain emotions if the grammar and phonology of the classical Tamil became altered.

³⁷⁸ AMSLER, Mark. *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Publishing Co, 1989, p. 84.

Saiva Siddhanta: A Tamil Monotheism?

Did Adigal Understand the Christian Theological Framework?

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, many Hindu organizations started springing up around India, including Tamil Nadu, in response to the aggressive proselytizing of many Christian missions of that time. Many of the educated Indians started building Hindu institutions and organizations in the same vein as Christian missions, writing books and pamphlets about the so-called scriptures and doctrines later, and giving many of their practices a doctrinal foundation³⁷⁹. Whether these texts (both Tamil and Sanskrit) were doctrines or not is a question I will get to later. However, it was in the nineteenth century that, for various reasons, Indians began to seek new doctrinal and scriptural justifications for their practices. The consequences of this was that

"Imagining heterogeneous Hindu religious practices in terms of a single institutionalized religion led to different groups claiming that their beliefs and practices were the essence of the Hindu religion. The Brahminical and Saivite claims were the most important of these in the Tamil-speaking region during colonialism"³⁸⁰.

In Tamil Nadu, the English-educated Brahmins and neo-Saivites (mostly Vellalas) were among the most prominent groups involved in these kind of projects.

Maraimalai Adigal was very much influenced by the European missionaries (whom he was both a student and opponent of) at that time. Following in the footsteps of missionary G.U. Pope, whom he cites in the introduction of his essay *Saiva Siddhanta Gnanabodham* (The collection of knowledge in Saiva Siddhanta) (1906), Adigal describes Saiva Siddhanta as a Tamil religion (native to the Tamil-speaking regions), which is monotheistic, and has a God of love and grace, just like Christianity³⁸¹. It is important to keep in mind that Adigal's writings about Saivism were, in part, a response to missionaries to show that the Tamil religion too is as

³⁷⁹ PANDIAN, M.S.S. *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*. Ranikhet Cantt: Permanent Black, 2016, p. 25.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁸¹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 27*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 10.

morally and intellectually respectable as Christianity, with its own brand of monotheism and its own benevolent Lord. In his English introduction to this collection of essays, Adigal describes Saiva Siddhantha as a philosophy consisting of four main concepts: pathi, *pasu*, *anavam*, and karma. In English, he translated these words as God, souls, darkness/evil and moral and immoral deeds³⁸². Adigal himself uses the term ‘God’ in his English writings about Siva. In Adigal’s introduction, he claims that Saiva Siddhanta is a monotheistic religion with one God (Siva), and the essential properties of this God are pure love and bliss³⁸³. Adigal also describes God as transcendent and immanent³⁸⁴. Next, he moves to the concept of the soul, stating that every organism on earth is an individual soul and that they are as eternal as God. These souls are all mired in *anavam*, which he calls darkness or evil³⁸⁵. He uses a quote from Henry Drummond’s *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* to illustrate this concept: "There is a natural principle in man lowering him, deadening him, pulling him down inches by inches to the mere animal plane, blinding reason, searing conscience, paralysing will"³⁸⁶. At a glance, Maraimalai Adigal seems to be describing a Tamil version of Christianity, with a loving God, eternal souls and the presence of evil. However, this leads to the following questions: Did he really understand these concepts? What is God to Adigal? What is religion to him? What would the soul be in his understanding? All of these words are terms within Christian theology that have very specific meanings.

Did his native cultural framework allow him to understand Christian theological concepts such as God, grace, and sin? Or did he create an incoherent jumble because (a) he did not have access to the larger framework of which they were part and (b) still tried to use them and create Tamil equivalents as though this vocabulary adequately described Indian traditions and *jatis*?

All these terms (‘God’, ‘soul’, etc.) are embedded in a larger conceptual framework and interlinked with each other and a series of other concepts within that framework. They form clusters of concepts and the range within which each term can be meaningfully used is constrained by their linkages to the other concepts in the cluster. That is, the larger framework sets limits on how these terms can be understood and used; if one goes beyond those limits, one

³⁸² Ibid., p. 9-10.

³⁸³ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

gets statements that are either extremely difficult to make sense of or plain nonsensical. So the question is: Was Adigal aware of the larger framework and the interlinkages among its concepts when he used terms such as ‘God’, ‘soul’, ‘religion’, etc.? In that sense, did he have access to the larger conceptual framework in which these terms are embedded?

These questions raise three possibilities:

- 1) Maraimalai Adigal knew Christian theology well and was able to understand Christian theological concepts. If this is the case, his English writings should demonstrate the use of theological terminology in a coherent and consistent manner that showed that he knew how the concepts were interrelated within the Christian framework. In addition, the Tamil words that he uses to translate the theological terminology should capture the meaning of those terms.
- 2) The second possibility is that Adigal was like many of today’s English-speakers in the Western world: he did not know Christian theology and did not know the primary meanings of these terms or explain how these concepts are interlinked with each other within the Christian theological framework. However, he had an intuitive understanding of the notions of God, soul, religion..., of the primary meaning of these terms, and of their interlinkages, much like native English-speakers in the West and those who are able to map English vocabulary on their own European language. That is, he had access to the background framework shared by Western English-speakers which constrains the way in which they learn to use a vocabulary, If this is the case, the Tamil terms used to translate Christian theological terms should at least partially capture the meaning of those terms and might be variants of Christian theological concepts.
- 3) Finally, the third possibility is that Adigal did not have access to and did not understand Christian theology and its conceptual vocabulary. The consequence of this possibility would be that Maraimalai Adigal’s writings would show evidence of incoherence and/or distortion of Christian theological concepts. Moreover, if his native cultural framework did not allow him to access or comprehend the Christian theological framework, the Tamil terminology he utilizes would not translate the Christian theological terms at all.

In order to test which of the three possibilities is , I examine both the Tamil and English writings of Maraimalai Adigal. At this point, a caveat is required: Although my dissertation analyzes the writings of Maraimalai Adigal, the object of this analysis is not Adigal’s individual ideas about

religion, nation, and language, but instead about the cultural framework he was operating under. In order to show that Adigal's ideas about Saiva Siddhanta and the Tamil nation are patterns of thinking that are part of the larger cultural framework he operates under, my analysis also references the writings of other Indian intellectuals such as Nallaswami Pillai and Raja Ram Mohan Roy on religion, as well as traditional Saiva Siddhanta texts from which Adigal draws many of his ideas about the Saiva Siddhanta religion.

Analysing Adigal's writings serves a twofold purpose. First, the way in which he makes use of Christian theological concepts such as 'God', 'soul', and 'worship' will tell us whether or not he understands these concepts. If Maraimalai Adigal distorts these concepts and/or uses them in an incoherent and contradictory manner, this is an indication that the culture in which he was born and raised in lacked these theological concepts.

This brings me to the second reason for analyzing Maraimalai Adigal's writings. Of the three possibilities I outlined, if the third possibility turns out to be true, and the Tamil terms used by Adigal do not translate the Christian theological concepts at all, then this raises a slew of interesting research questions. If these Tamil words are not equivalents or variants of Christian theological concepts then what are they? What role do they play within the Saiva Siddhanta tradition? And finally what kind of phenomenon is the Saiva Siddhanta tradition if it is not a variant of Christianity? Just as the English language has a rich corpus of theological writings, the Tamil language also has a rich body of writings, a product of the wide variety of intellectual traditions native to Tamil Nadu, including but not limited to the Saiva Siddhanta tradition. As a result, these traditions gave rise to theoretical terms that over the centuries have become part of the cultural common-sense of the people of Tamil Nadu, similar to how Christian theological concepts have become part of the everyday commonplace ideas in Western culture. Studying the conceptual terminology Maraimalai Adigal uses to describe Saiva Siddhanta, the Tamil people, and the relationship between the two should give us insights into the theoretical framework used by Maraimalai Adigal as well as the cultural common-sense of the Tamil people.

Translating Theological Concepts

In my brief biographical sketch of Maraimalai Adigal, I mentioned that he had received his secondary school education at Wesleyan Mission High School in Madras. It was a common sight in colonial India during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century for English

educated Indian intellectuals to have studied in convent/mission schools run by British missionaries. Education from these schools were considered prestigious and also beneficial from a practical point of view, because of the quality of English education, which in turn was useful in gaining employment in the colonial government's civil service as well as institutions such as colleges and universities. Many of the colleges and universities in the Madras Presidency, such as the Madras Christian College, were also operated by missionaries. Through their missionary teachers, these Tamil students not only learned English, but were also inevitably exposed to Christian doctrine and theology (to varying degrees).

The Tamil intellectuals' exposure to Christian doctrine was both overt and covert. Firstly, the missionaries in Tamil Nadu were overtly propagating the Christian faith through various mediums, from journals to pamphlets as well as teaching the Bible in schools³⁸⁷. The covert way which the Christian doctrine spread among the people of Tamil Nadu was through the English language itself. Specifically, the learning of the English language in and of itself becomes a vehicle through which the native populace is exposed to Christian theology.

What do I mean by this? In Europe, "theological terminology has become part of natural language to such an extent that one has lost awareness that certain words are a part of specialised [theological nomenclature]"³⁸⁸. English is no exception to this phenomenon. Words like 'God', 'soul', and 'evil' are part of the theoretical vocabulary of Christian theology. However, these terms have been part of the English language for so long that they are no longer limited to the domain of theology and have become part of everyday language. Furthermore, the concepts that these theological words express have become part of the cultural common sense of native English speakers. Since Christian vocabulary has become part of natural language usage in European languages and since the terms of this vocabulary are connected in particular ways, a background framework continues to guide their usage and the common ways of understanding them and making sense of them. That background framework is still determined by Christian theology even though we are not generally aware of this.

When missionaries from Britain arrived in Tamil Nadu, they realized that they needed to learn the Tamil language not only to be able to communicate with the natives but also to spread the

³⁸⁷ PANDIAN, M S S. *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*. Ranikhet Cantt: Permanent Black, 2016, p. 17.

³⁸⁸ BALAGANGADHARA, S. N. Seven Problems in Translation: The Case of India. In: *Cultures Differ Differently: Selected Essays of S.N. Balagangadhara*. ed. DE ROOVER, Jakob and Sarika RAO. London: Routledge, 2021, p. 126.

word of God among the natives. Learning the Tamil language was also necessary for the missionaries to teach English to the native population. In the process of learning the Tamil language, the missionaries began to look for and found Tamil words to translate Christian theological terminology. These missionaries assumed that these Tamil words were synonyms for the Christian theological vocabulary they were familiar with. They thought 'Katavul' was the Tamil word for God, 'Anma' the Tamil word for soul, and so on. Therefore when Tamil intellectuals such as Maraimalai Adigal learn English in Christian mission schools, they learn Christian theological terminology through words in their native languages that have already been mapped on to these theological terms by British missionaries.

There are some problems that come to the fore as a result of this learning process. These problems have to do with the translatability of Christian theological concepts into the Tamil language. What do I mean by translatability problems? S.N. Balagangadhara outlines different kinds of translation problems when translating words and concepts from one language to another³⁸⁹. If we consider abstractly two languages X and Y, we have the problem of translating words and sentences from one language into another³⁹⁰. On the one hand we have phenomena and objects that are found universally around the world such as water, milk and grass. In such a case, it is simply a matter of speakers of language X learning the words in language Y that are used as signifiers for said objects. On the other hand, we have scientific and technical terms introduced into one language (by a scientific theory formulated in that said language), such as 'genes' and 'electrons' for which we have to invent new words in other languages. Having considered abstractly the problem of translating terms words from one language into another, Balagangadhara moves on to address other translation problems. Using the examples of Newtonian and Einsteinian physics, Balagangadhara proposes a hypothetical scenario where English words in Newton's theory are translated into German words in Einstein's theory. Balagangadhara uses this example to point out that even though we are translating words from English into German, the problem of translation is one of "translation of the vocabulary of one rival theory into the vocabulary of another"³⁹¹. Thus, translation problems are not limited to translating words from one natural language to another. It also involves problems of translating the technical terminology of one scientific theory into another.

³⁸⁹ BALAGANGADHARA, S. N. Seven Problems in Translation: The Case of India. In: *Cultures Differ Differently: Selected Essays of S.N. Balagangadhara*. ed. DE ROOVER, Jakob and Sarika RAO. London: Routledge, 2021, p. 122.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid., p. 123.

Having established these above translation problems, there are translation problems related to cultural differences. Firstly, we have the problem of translating Christian theological vocabulary from one natural language, English, to another, Tamil. This is a problem because Christian theology possesses a theoretical framework and terms like ‘God’, ‘grace’ and ‘soul’ are technical terms within this theoretical framework³⁹². Of course, this parallel does not imply that Christian theology shares all other characteristics of scientific theories. They are not designed to solve empirical problems, nor can they be tested empirically. But there is a parallel between theoretical terms in theology and theoretical terms in scientific theories. ‘Gravitation’, ‘genetic code’, ‘molecule’, ‘atom’...are technical terms embedded in a particular theory. This is also the case for theological terms such as ‘God’, ‘grace’, and ‘soul’: they are theoretical terms embedded in a Christian theological framework; it is only by learning about this framework that one can also learn the meaning and correct usage of these terms.

Although these theological terms have been part of the English language for centuries, the Tamil language developed over millennia in a non-Christian culture. This raises the question of whether there are words in Tamil that can accurately translate Christian theological vocabulary. This is the first problem. Of course, it is true that missionaries have translated English religious sermons, pamphlets and the King James Bible itself into Tamil. But if it is the case that the Tamil words the missionaries used to translate Christian theological terminology do not capture the meaning of these theological terms, then it follows that the Tamil intellectuals including Maraimalai Adigal wouldn’t have been able to make sense of the theological concepts they encountered in the English language. This is the second problem. Because of this second problem, a third problem arises. When the Tamil intellectuals use Tamil words to translate theological concepts – for instance, *Katavul* = God – it is not simply the case that a signifier in one language takes the place of a signifier in another language that refers to one and the same object which is obviously and universally present in all societies. e.g. *thaneer*=water. Unlike the word water, the word God expresses a concept that is part of a theological complex, connected with other theological concepts, and hence comes with a huge theological baggage. In Christianity (and Judaism), ‘God’ refers to the God of the Bible, the supreme and omnipotent creator of the universe, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; even when the term ‘God’ came to be used more loosely in Western languages, its implicit reference is to this creator.³⁹³ The

³⁹² Ibid., p. 125.

³⁹³ There is the option, of course, that ‘God’ becomes a term of another theory; in that case, ‘God’ can refer to something else. But that option would be viable only when there is an explicit, well-developed theory which uses ‘God’ as a technical term.

same considerations apply to terms such as soul and sin. Hence, when Tamil writers use these theological terms in their writings such as ‘God’ and ‘soul’, they inevitably carry over into their writings a cluster of theological ideas and concepts. They would assume that these Christian theological concepts "have linguistic equivalents (or semi-equivalents) in their native languages"³⁹⁴.

What these writers see as an issue of translating and hence choosing the ‘right’ Tamil equivalents for certain English-language words, then, is much more than that. It is not simply a question of translating one word from English into another word from the Tamil language, much like translating ‘water’ into ‘*thaneer*’. It is a question of translating terms embedded in a conceptual framework into the language of a culture where this framework is neither known nor present and where other background frameworks guide natural language usage. In summary, this is not a translation problem but a problem of understanding concepts that come from one cultural framework using the tools and resources that come from a different cultural framework.

Keeping these three problems that I have pointed to in mind, analyzing Maramalai Adigal’s writings should yield new insights.

Maraimalai Adigal and the Concept of God

I begin by examining two major examples of incoherency in Maraimalai Adigal’s writings when he is writing about God and monotheism. In his essay *Thamizhar Matham* (Tamilian ‘Religion’) (1941), Maraimalai Adigal states that "Behind every structure, every movement, every action there is a living thinking being"³⁹⁵. Similarly, "When looking at the wonder of creation, there must be a greater mind and a greater being behind them"³⁹⁶. This is a well-known argument that has been used for centuries by Christian theologians as well as deists such as David Hume to argue for the existence of God. It presupposes a being whose intention or will governs the universe. In the very same essay, however, Maraimalai Adigal cites a passage from the text *Sivajnana Botham* that states that God’s creation, sustenance and destruction of the universe has no purpose, just as the dreamer has no benefits from his dream in the waking state.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 127.

³⁹⁵ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 31*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 128.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 138–139.

Adigal cites these quotes and also states that God is untouched by action and abstains from acting in this world³⁹⁷. He uses the analogy of a magnet attracting a needle:

"Just like a magnet which attracts a needle and transfers its magnetic power to needles without moving or changing its state, God (*Katavul*) is able to effect the forming, sustenance and destruction of the cosmos without acting"³⁹⁸.

This description of Siva as a mere witness who is without purpose and doesn't act is completely different from and in some ways the opposite of the Biblical God. In Biblical religion the universe is governed by God's purpose and he is perceived as acting on the world with numerous references to God's works in the Bible. This example of incoherence on the part of Maraimalai Adigal when talking about God or *Katavul*, is a strong indication that the Siva of Saiva Siddhanta is not the same or even the same kind of being as the Biblical God.

Let us proceed to monotheism. In another essay (*The Conception of God as Rudra*), Adigal described "two Supreme principles, the red and the blue."³⁹⁹ These are two basic principles called Siva and Uma, responsible for the creation, destruction and sustenance of the universe:

"We have already seen that creation proceeds from an appropriate combination of not three but only two principles, the fiery and the watery; and the created worlds can endure so long only as these two elements maintain their balance ...To keep in harmony the two blind and inanimate forces, the activity of two spiritual and all intelligent forces of similar character is necessarily required ...Hence it follows as a momentous conclusion that there can exist in reality not more than the spiritual heat principle Rudra and the cold principle Uma or Narayana, another thing being unimaginable and unscientific. ...these two Supreme principles together performing the creative, the preservative, and the destructive functions, it is against all reason and science to uphold an independent third principle either to direct or to control the function of preservation."⁴⁰⁰

The two principles Siva and Uma are, in addition to the heat and cold principles are also known as the Siva and Sakti principles of Saiva Siddhanta. Two of the important Saiva Siddhanta texts, the *Sivajnana Botham* and the *Sivajnana Siddhiyar* conceptualize Siva and Sakti as the two

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 148.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

³⁹⁹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 33. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 157.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 157–158.

principles that are responsible for the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe⁴⁰¹. In the *Supaksha* of the *Sivajnana Siddhiyar*, it is said that "Siva begets Sakti and Sakti begets Siva. Both in their happy union produce the worlds and the *jivas* (living organisms)"⁴⁰². The *Sivajnana Siddhiyar* likens Siva to a potter and Sakti as the potter's wheel, with the world being the pot they produce⁴⁰³. However, while Siva is the foundation out of which Sakti emerges, Siva himself is described as a witness who is devoid of action⁴⁰⁴. Instead, the Sakti acts on the world and initiates the process of creation, sustenance and destruction, while Siva remains unchanged and untouched by these processes⁴⁰⁵. Siva is described as pure *jnana* (knowledge) whereas Sakti is described pure *kriya* (action)⁴⁰⁶. This postulation of "two Supreme principles" does not resemble any concept of monotheism, because there are two apparently equal principles which create, maintain and finally destroy the world.

Maraimalai Adigal and the Concept of Idolatry

In order to get an understanding of Adigal's understanding of monotheism, let us look at his understanding of 'idol worship', since idolatry is an integral component of what we commonly refer to as monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). Around 1800, there began an increasing influx of British and American evangelicals into India including Tamil Nadu⁴⁰⁷. "The evangelicals of the eighteenth century tended to view Indian cultures and religions as needing to be thoroughly reformed", according to their Christian and European Enlightenment ideals⁴⁰⁸. These evangelicals saw the various traditions of Tamil Nadu as part of a coherent "integrated religious system" called Hinduism, and attacked these traditions aggressively as superstitious, immoral and idolatrous⁴⁰⁹.

⁴⁰¹ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Sivagnana Botham of Meikanda Deva / translated with notes and introduction by J.M. Nallaswami Pillai*. Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Pub. Society, 1984, p. 22.

⁴⁰² PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Sivajnana Siddhiyar*. Madras: Meykandan Press, 1913, p. 185.

⁴⁰³ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Sivajnana Siddhiyar*. Madras: Meykandan Press, 1913, p. 129.

⁴⁰⁴ MAHADEVAN, T.M.P. *The Idea of God in Saiva Siddhanta*. Annamalai University, 1955, p. 6–7.

⁴⁰⁵ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Sivajnana Siddhiyar*. Madras: Meykandan Press, 1913, pp. 159–160.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160

⁴⁰⁷ JONES, A.W. Hindu-Protestant Encounters. In: *The Routledge handbook of Hindu-Christian relations*. ed. BAUMAN, Chad M. a Michelle VOSS ROBERTS. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2021, p. 104.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

In response to the Christian missionaries' attack on their traditions, many of the English educated Tamil people began to form their own organizations such as the Veda Siddhanta Sabha and the Hindu tract society⁴¹⁰. The structure of these native organizations in many ways resembled the structure of the Evangelical organizations the Tamil intellectuals were opposing. For example, "In the Sadur Veda Siddhanta Sabha . . . all of the basic features of a modern ideological movement were developed—printing press, newspaper, tracts, distribution network, meetings, membership lists, mufassal agent, and organised campaigns to influence "public" opinion . . .". Its members imitated 'Christian worship with scripture reading, preaching, singing and Trinitarian benediction (invocation of Brahma, Visnu and Siva)'⁴¹¹.

These organizations' response to the missionary attack took various forms. Some of the criticisms of the missionaries towards the Hindu traditions were accepted as true, and a reform of these traditions were called for⁴¹². These organizations began publishing pamphlets and magazines that counter attacked the Christian religion⁴¹³, and simultaneously defending their traditional practices against the attacks of the Christian missionaries by drawing parallels between Hinduism and Christianity. " The Hindu idea of sacred places were reconciled with the Biblical Horeb, the 'Mount of God', and Jerusalem as the 'holy city', while cherubim, of the Ark of Covenant, were held to justify idol worship"⁴¹⁴. Thus, in the process of defending their traditions against the missionary attacks, the Tamil intellectuals were compelled to talk and write about their traditions using Christian theological terms and concepts, including idolatry and image worship.

A prominent example is an article in the English language magazine *Siddhanta Deepika*, (originally started by the Saiva Vellala intellectual Nallaswami Pillai) in which an anonymous writer mounts a defence of image worship in the Hindu traditions. The writer defines image worship as "devoted attachment to the symbolic representation" of God.⁴¹⁵ The anonymous writer then employs two arguments in defense of idol worship among the Hindus. Firstly, he claims that no Hindu believes that the idol itself is God⁴¹⁶ and there is in fact no worship of the

⁴¹⁰ PANDIAN, M S S. *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*, p. 23.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴¹² ODDIE, Geoffrey A. *Hindu and Christian in South-East India*. London : Wellesley Hills, MA: Curzon Press ; Riverdale Co, 1991, p. 202.

⁴¹³ PANDIAN, M S S. *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*, s. 24., p. 201

⁴¹⁴ PANDIAN, M S S. *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*. Ranikhet Cantt: Permanent Black, 2016, p. 24.

⁴¹⁵ Image Worship. *Siddhanta Deepika*. 1908, Volume. 8, p. 71.

⁴¹⁶ Idolatry In Christianity. *Siddhanta Deepika*. 1908, Volume. 8, p. 154.

idol itself but the idea that it represents⁴¹⁷. His second argument is that the Hindu believes that God pervades the idol or image he uses to worship God, and that he doesn't worship the idol itself⁴¹⁸. These two arguments about idol worship has been used by many natives throughout the Indian subcontinent and for centuries. When the Lutheran missionary Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg first arrived on the Malabar coast and engaged with the natives in dialogue, they agreed with him that there was one supreme God, and the various heathen deities are but representations of himself⁴¹⁹. The argument that the Hindu worships God through the idol (and not the idol itself) because he pervades the idol was reproduced both by the famed nineteenth century Sri Lankan Tamil Saivite scholar Arumuka Navalar, as well as Maraimalai Adigal. In his debate against the evangelical missionaries, Navalar defends idol worship by claiming that "God who is in the idol, is able to vouchsafe grace to us all"⁴²⁰. In his essay collection *Saiva Siddhanta Jnanabodham*, Adigal has an essay titled 'Thiru uruva vazhipaadu' which translates literally translates as 'image tradition'. Adigal explicitly addresses the Christian and Islamic injunction against idolatry in this chapter⁴²¹. In his defence of *uruva vazhipaadu*, Adigal presents the arguments of Christians and Muslims as such: "God who is not limited by time and space, is being limited by time and space by giving it a form and hence *uruva vazhipaadu* is wrong"⁴²². Adigal's counterargument is that, since God is everywhere and permeates everything, any form can be attributed to him and, since all forms are his, there is nothing wrong with visualizing and worshipping him as a particular form. These arguments of these Tamil intellectuals betray a complete lack of understanding on their part of what idolatry means in Christianity. This lack of understanding of idolatry wasn't just limited to the Tamil intellectuals but other Indian intellectuals as well, one of the most famous examples being Bengali reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Roy criticized Hindu idolatry as fatal and inhumane, introduced by the Brahmins to keep the masses from the true substance of morality⁴²³. On the surface, Roy is simply reproducing the Christian missionary criticism of Hindu idolatry, however, a closer examination of his writings indicates that he did not understand the concept. In his writings,

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 154-155.

⁴¹⁹ HUDSON, D. Dennis. *The First Protestant Mission to India: Its Social and Religious Developments*. *Sociological Bulletin*. 1993, Volume. 42, Issue. 1-2, p. 53.

⁴²⁰ YOUNG, Richard Fox a S. JEBANESAN. *The Bible trembled: the Hindu-Christian controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*. Vienna: Sammlung De Nobili, 1995, p. 117.

⁴²¹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 27*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 124.

⁴²² Ibid., p. 163.

⁴²³ FÁREK, Martin. *India in The Eyes of Europeans: Conceptualization of Religion in Theology and Oriental Studies*. Prague: Karolinum Press, 2021, pp. 191-192.

Roy considered as acceptable for those who have limited understanding of the Supreme being, and that idolatry would "gradually bring them to wish to know God"⁴²⁴. Martin Fárek rightly concludes that "Roy did not really understand the cluster of the western ideas that compose the background of the respective languages and their cultural horizons"⁴²⁵

In order to understand the concept of idolatry in the Biblical religions one first needs to understand the concept of worship. For both Christians and Jews, worship means the actions of reverence expressing devotion towards God⁴²⁶. For Jews, "worship functions as a constant reminder... of their existential situation: they are members of the people Israel, living a life enabled by God in a divinely created and maintained world, corporately heirs to the irrevocable covenants between God and Israel"⁴²⁷. For Christians it also includes devotion towards the person of Jesus Christ whom they see as an incarnation of God⁴²⁸.

Prayer is one of the ways Christians show devotion to both God and Christ. In the New testament, one of the prayers most characteristically offered towards God is in Acts 4:24-30⁴²⁹. Acts 4:24 starts with the prayer "Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is". The prayer continues in Bible verses from Acts 4:27-30 where it is said that the kings and rulers of the earth gathered together against the Lord and his Christ and "to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done", and ends with "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (4:29), "By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." (4:30). These verses show that prayer is a way for Christians to show their faith in and accepting their role in God's will.

Worship then is the act of adoring God expressed by faith in and obedience to God and his word. In these Biblical religions, God is the creator of the universe and whose will governs the universe – one without a second.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., pp. 197–198.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p. 189.

⁴²⁶ HURTADO, Larry W. *At the Origins of Christian worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2000, p. 65.

⁴²⁷ JONES, Lindsay. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005, p. 9806.

⁴²⁸ HURTADO, Larry W. *At the Origins of Christian worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2000, pp. 69–70.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

Now we come to the concept of idolatry. Reverend Christopher North defines idolatry as the worship of the creature instead of the creator⁴³⁰. The author of the 'Wisdom of Solomon gives a more expansive definition, defining idolatry as giving the name of God to that which is not God⁴³¹. Thus idolatry is the worship of that which is not God. The Biblical prophets fought against the use of images to represent God, because the image is distinct from God⁴³², and thus cannot represent the transcendental reality of God. Worship ought to be only directed toward God and not his creation. Worship that is directed toward anything other than God – and this includes images that are meant to represent God – is considered idolatry. Thus, the concept of idolatry found in Christian doctrine negates the arguments made by the Tamil intellectuals. The creator is separate from his creation, and thus the argument by Tamil intellectuals that God pervades either the stone statue or painted image is completely antithetical to Christian doctrine. Furthermore, because the image is distinct from God, it cannot represent the transcendental nature of God.

Idolatry is part of the larger Christian theological framework that includes interrelated concepts such as faith and false religion. These terms and ideas together form the structure of Christian theology, but by the nineteenth century they had become commonplace ideas within European culture. But the Christian theological structure is always in the background. These ideas have shaped the attitudes of Europeans through the centuries. When these terms are ripped out of that cultural context and transported to a non-Christian culture (such as that of Tamil Nadu), there is bound to be distortion and incoherence in the usage of these concepts as we saw above.

In '*Thiruruva vazhipaadu*' we get further clues to Adigal's understanding of idolatry. Maraimalai Adigal begins this essay by contrasting *uruva vazhipaadu* (which he translates as worship in the English preface) in Saiva Siddhanta with other pagan cultures such as Rome and Egypt, claiming that they weren't venerating the true form of God (*katavul*), and were using images and statues of animals and other human beings as gods⁴³³. In the case of the founding acharyas of Saiva Siddhanta, they experienced God in his true form, which he repeatedly refers to in his writings as the *arul uruvam*, the form of *arul*⁴³⁴. On the surface, Maraimalai Adigal

⁴³⁰ JONES, Lindsay. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005, p. 4357.

⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 4359

⁴³² JONES, Lindsay. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005, p. 4358.

⁴³³ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 27*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 124.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., p. 127.

just seems to be parroting the European missionaries and orientalists. He cites Friedrich Max Müller's *Chips From a German Workshop* (1800) for support⁴³⁵, in which Müller describes the ancient Vedic religion as recognizing that all "deities are but different names of one and the same godhead"⁴³⁶. He even reproduces Hume's argument that barbaric ppl out of fear of the natural phenomena such as thunder lightning, disease, thought that there must be some other force commanding this phenomena and started worshiping objects such as the sun, moon, and rain as the powers behind these phenomena⁴³⁷.

Religious Mysticism?: Comparing The Experiences of Nayanars to Christian Saints

Similarly, one can say that Maraimalai Adigal just seems to be describing 'theophanies', when he describes Saivite acharyas such as Thirujnanasambandar (one of the founding acharyas of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition) experiencing the *arul uruvam* of Siva⁴³⁸ that members of other pagan cultures did not experience⁴³⁹. In Jean-Yves Lacoste's *Encyclopaedia of Christian Theology*, theophany is described as God manifesting himself to certain human beings (usually prophets) at certain times to reveal his plan, doctrines, and commandments⁴⁴⁰. Many such theophanies are described in the Bible and in the Jewish apocalyptic literature. However, these texts are clear that even when God manifests himself in these visions, his transcendence is maintained because he either manifests indirectly through an angel or an object such as the burning bush encountered by Moses⁴⁴¹. Even when the prophet Ezekiel receives a vision of God who warns him about the coming judgement on Israel, the prophet Ezekiel did not see the Divine Being Himself, but rather a likeness of him (Ezekiel 1:26-28). Few men can see God (1565). For example, Job while in God's presence, detested himself and repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:6). Even in the case of Moses, there is ambiguity in the Bible about whether or not he was able to see God. In Exodus 33:11 God speaks to Moses "face to face, as one man speaks to another" (1565), whereas in Exodus 3:6 Moses hid his face when he came into the presence of God.

⁴³⁵ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 127.

⁴³⁶ MÜLLER, Friedrich Max. *Chips From A German Workshop*. New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1874, p. 28.

⁴³⁷ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 174–175.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., pp. 130, 140.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., pp. 128.

⁴⁴⁰ LACOSTE, Jean-Yves, ed. *Encyclopedia of Christian theology*. New York: Routledge, 2005, pp.1563–1564.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., p. 1563

Let us compare these theophanies to the experiences of the Saiva Nayanars (devotees of Siva who are at the same time renowned as wise teachers) who experience the form of Siva, as outlined in the *Tirumurais* (a collection of Tamil Saivite *bhakti* or devotional poetry). When he was a child, Siva and Parvati appear before Thirujnanasambandar in a temple, and Parvati breastfeeds him and that was supposed to be the moment that Thirujnanasambandar gains knowledge (called *Sivajnana* in Tamil)⁴⁴². Similarly, in the text known as the *Periya Puranam*, which contains stories about the life and experiences of the nayanmars (Saivite teachers and devotees), one of the founding acharyas known as Appar is in the middle of a long journey towards a Siva temple in another town, when Siva himself appears to Appar (unbeknownst to him) in the form of a Brahmin and accompanies him on his journey, sharing his food with Appar⁴⁴³. In the *bhakti* poetry of the *Tirumurai*, even more intimate experiences are described between Siva and his *bhakta* (devotee). In many of these poems the *bhakta* is portrayed as a woman who has developed an erotic, romantic longing towards Siva:

"Once she heard his name, then learned of his lovely form. Then she heard of his excellent town, and fell madly in love with him. That same day she left her mother and father and the proper ways of the world, lost herself, lost her good name. This woman has joined the feet of the Lord, her lover"⁴⁴⁴.

The difference between the experiences of the Saivite *acharyas* (guru, teacher) and the theophanic experiences of the Christian prophets could not be starker. Most of the prophets cannot bear the sight of God, his divine majesty and glory being too much for their eyes. Even Moses is described as hiding his face in the presence of God. Job's experience in the presence of God is especially striking; he detests himself, sinner that he is, and repents for it. Job is displaying abject humility in the presence of God, acknowledging his smallness in front of God. By contrast, the Nayanars share very intimate human relationships with Siva that is relatable to most human beings. Siva himself assumes different roles when interacting with his *bhaktas*; that of the parent, the friend, the lover.

Thus, although at a glance, Maraimalai Adigal's description of the Nayanars' experience of Siva or *Katavul* seems to be the same kind of phenomena as the Christian prophets' theophanic

⁴⁴² ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p.143.

⁴⁴³ CĒKKILĀR a T. N. RAMACHANDRAN. *St. Sekkizhar's periya puranam*. Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India: Tamil University, 1990, p. 319.

⁴⁴⁴ PETERSON, Indira Viswanathan, ed. *Poems to Śiva: the hymns of the Tamil saints*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, p. 245.

experience of God or at least something similar to this experience, a closer examination strongly indicates that they are two different phenomena. This leads to the question, what does Maraimalai Adigal mean by *Katavul*, the term he uses to translate God, and what does he mean by *arul uruvum*? What is *uruva vazhipaadu*? What is this *Sivajnana* that Parvati feeds Thirujnanasambandar? Is it a kind of revelation similar to the Biblical revelation?

Does Saiva Siddhanta Have A Theology?

Let me begin with the three formative concepts around which the Saiva Siddhanta intellectual tradition is built: *pati*, *pasu*, and *pasam*. *Pati* and *pasu* are commonly translated in English as God (Siva) and soul, respectively. '*Pasam*' is either translated as 'world' or 'bonds/ties'⁴⁴⁵. I wish to briefly examine each of these concepts and the role they play within the intellectual framework of Saiva Siddhanta. This will give us a better understanding of what these concepts mean, and how they compare to Christian concepts such as God and soul.

I begin with how *pati* is explained in the text *Sivajnana Botham*, considered one of the core foundational texts in the Tamil Saiva Siddhanta tradition. *Sivajnana Botham* explains *pati* (God/Siva) is changeless without beginning or end. The cosmos, which is ever-changing and has a beginning and end, arises from him in its beginning and becomes one with him at its end⁴⁴⁶. The cosmos is the dream and the *pati* is the dreamer, and there is no purpose to the dream⁴⁴⁷.

The *pati* has neither likes nor dislikes. He is like the sun that "shines without any desire or intention or volition on its part, yet in its presence, the lotus plant receives its development and while one flower is still a bud, another has fully blown out and a third is withering". Similarly in God's presence, the world undergoes changes, but God doesn't have any desires or intentions

⁴⁴⁵ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Sivajnana Botham of Meikanda Deva*. Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1984, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

as it relates to the world⁴⁴⁸. The Tamil Saiva text *Thiruvartupayan*, describes Siva as pure consciousness, both with and without form⁴⁴⁹.

Even from this brief description, one can see that the *pati* of Saiva Siddhanta is not the same being and not even the same kind of being as the Biblical God. Although the *Sivajnana Botham* says that the world arose from *pati*, it is also clear that the *pati* is not the creator of the cosmos like the Biblical God. Instead, along with *pati*, there existed a primordial substance or entity called *maya*, out of which the rest of the cosmos is formed. The *pati* merely provides the conditions in which *maya* is set into motion and forms the universe just as the presence of gravity provides the conditions in which an object falls to the ground even though it doesn't directly cause objects to fall. Finally, according to the *Sivajnana Botham*, the *pati* does not have volition or intention, nor is the cosmos governed by his intention. This property is diametrically opposed to the nature of the Christian God, whose intention and purpose govern the cosmos according to the Bible and Christian theology.

From the *pati*, we move to *pasu*. *Pasu* refers to any living, sentient being. Another term for *pasu* in Sanskrit is *jiva*. It is also referred to as *anma* in the Saivite texts. The *pasu* "identifies itself with whatever it is united to (either the *pati* or the world) and becomes one and indistinguishable from it"⁴⁵⁰. When the *pasu* or *anma* identifies with the body, it is considered in a state of bondage (*pasa*)⁴⁵¹.

The *Sivajnana Siddhiyar* describes *pasa* as "pervading through the numberless *jivas* as the dirt in copper, it blinds them from *jnana* (knowledge)"⁴⁵². This brings us to two questions: What kind of knowledge does *pasa* blind the *jivas* to? What is the nature of the ignorance that blinds the *jivas*? *Pasa*. comes in three forms. The first is called *anava*. *Anava* can be translated as the shackle of ignorance which keeps the *pasu* from knowledge. The second shackle is called *karma*. The shackle of *karma* keeps the *pasu* bound to the consequences of his actions, while the third shackle, *maya*, keeps the *pasu* shackled or attached to the body and the senses – this state of attachment is also called *banda* in Sanskrit⁴⁵³. "*Maya* besides manifesting itself as the

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴⁴⁹ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Thiruvartupayan*. Dharmapuram: Gnanasambandam Press, 1945, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁰ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Sivajnana Siddhiyar*. Madras: Meykandan Press, 1913, p. xxxvii.

⁴⁵¹ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Studies in Saiva Siddhanta*. Madras: Meykandan Press, 1911, p. 297.

⁴⁵² PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Sivajnana Siddhiyar*. Madras: Meykandan Press, 1913, p. 185.

⁴⁵³ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Sivagnana Botham of Meikanda Deva / translated with notes and introduction by J.M. Nallaswami Pillai*. Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Pub. Society, 1984, p. 35.

Universe, forms the body, senses, worlds and enjoyments"⁴⁵⁴. Since *maya* forms the universe, it is responsible for steering the *pasus* both towards jnana and away from it. Without *maya*, it is not possible for the *jiva* to attain knowledge, since the *jiva* needs the body and senses through which it attains knowledge⁴⁵⁵. At the same time *maya* also causes desire to arise within the *jiva*⁴⁵⁶, and this desire for pleasure⁴⁵⁷ causes the *jiva* to identify with the body and the senses⁴⁵⁸, and this is considered a form of error and ignorance (*anavam*)⁴⁵⁹.

The *Sivajnana Botham* explains that the *pasu* or sentient being is in a state of *banda* or bondage when it identifies itself with its body and thoughts. In this state the *pasu* is also said to be in a state of ignorance or *anavam*. When the *pasu* identifies itself with *pati*, the *pasu* is said to have attained jnana or knowledge. The *Sivajnana Botham* claims that *jnana* is attained once the *anma* understands its oneness with Siva to the point where it becomes Siva⁴⁶⁰. As the eighteenth century Saivite *acharya* Thayumanavar puts it so beautifully – "You who are like the mirror or crystal removed of dust, becoming of the self-same nature of one to which it is joined"⁴⁶¹. Thus, *jnana* is when the *anma* stops identifying its body and senses, and identifies instead with the *pati*.

This description of *moksha* once again raises the question: Who or what is *pati* in Saiva Siddhanta? How does an individual identifying with *pati* result in him or her gaining release from ignorance?

Adigal emphasizes the goal of Saiva Siddhanta as human beings "abandoning their *sittru-arivu* (small/narrow arivu) and attaining *paer-arivu*"⁴⁶². *Arivu* gets translated into multiple meanings in the Tamil language from knowledge to consciousness. In the chapter 'God has a form, the form of Arul' in the essay collection *Arivuraikothu* (collection of insights), it is clear that Adigal uses the word *arivu* to mean consciousness. For example, he states that a baby's arivu is like a mirror clouded by dirt where no images appear. But then as it grows older, it is able to focus on

⁴⁵⁴ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Studies in Saiva Siddhanta*. Madras: Meykandan Press, 1911, p. 308.

⁴⁵⁵ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Sivajnana Siddhiyar*. Madras: Meykandan Press, 1913, p. 187.

⁴⁵⁶ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Sivajnana Siddhiyar*. Madras: Meykandan Press, 1913, p. 185.

⁴⁵⁷ PILLAI, Nallaswami. *Studies in Saiva Siddhanta*. Madras: Meykandan Press, 1911, p. 320.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 319.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 320.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

⁴⁶² ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 27*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 122-123.

and cognize those that it sees around it, like its mother and father⁴⁶³. Maraimalai Adigal refers to Siva as *paer-arivu*⁴⁶⁴. *Paer* means supreme in Tamil. Therefore, *paer-arivu* means supreme consciousness or supreme knowledge in Tamil. We can see here that when Adigal talks about the human being getting rid of his '*sittru-arivu*' and attaining knowledge he is describing the process of attaining *moksha* that is outlined in the *Sivajnana Botham*. *Sittru-arivu* is the *anavam* or ignorance one has to get rid of in order to reach God or Siva, who is also known as *pasu* in the *Sivajnana Botham*. Thus, the knowledge spoken about by both Maraimalai Adigal and expounded in the Saiva Siddhanta texts is experiential in nature, with the Saiva sages and texts asking questions about the nature of the self and consciousness.

It is important to note that both *arivu* and *paer-arivu* also mean *Atman* in Tamil. While it is beyond the scope of the dissertation to delve in depth into the nature of Atman, I'll briefly summarize S.N. Balagangadhara's hypothesis about Atman in his unpublished manuscript titled *On the Indian Notion of Enlightenment: Reflections Based On Experience* (2014). Balagangadhara characterizes Atman as self-consciousness or self-awareness. A sense of 'I' is an emergent property of any sufficiently complex system, sentient creatures such as human beings an example of one such system. Since this emergent property is neither matter nor energy and because it is "logically impossible to distinguish 'one' sense of 'I' from 'another'" there is only one self-awareness. Humans have access to this self-awareness through consciousness (the ability to focus on objects). According to the Indian traditions however, there is a confusion that results when human beings access this self-awareness through our consciousness. Balagangadhara explains this confusion in the following manner:

"Every human adult has a history or a biography, which consists of things done, felt and thought in the course of its existence and as they are remembered. What one has undergone and what one remembers of it are woven on a structure that human emotions provide"⁴⁶⁵.

Balagangadhara describes this structure as I-hood⁴⁶⁶. According to the various Indian traditions, we as human beings identify this structure of I-hood, unique to each human being, with the

⁴⁶³ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 17. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 41-42.

⁴⁶⁴ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 122.

⁴⁶⁵ BALAGANGADHARA, S. N. *On the Indian Notion of Enlightenment* [manuscript]. Universiteit Gent, 2014, p. 5.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

sense of 'I' or self-consciousness. This is a delusion, and this delusion is identified as the cause of human misery⁴⁶⁷.

Against the backdrop of Balagangadhara's essay, it is easier to understand Adigal's statement that the goal of Saiva Siddhanta is "abandoning our *sittru-arivu* (narrow consciousness) and attaining *Siva-arivu* (self-awareness)"⁴⁶⁸. This means abandoning our delusion of I-hood and attaining access to this sense of 'I'. This delusion is what Saiva Siddhanta refers to as *anavam*, and what Adigal refers to as darkness or evil in his English introduction to *Sivajnana Botham*, as I mentioned in the beginning of this section. Coming out of this delusion is what is called Enlightenment by the various Indian traditions. The various traditions offer different routes toward Enlightenment, Saiva Siddhanta being one such tradition.

It is important to note that this sense of 'I' is not limited to human beings. Since the complex system that is a human being is a sub-system within the larger system that is the universe, it logically follows that the universe must have also have access to this self-awareness or self-consciousness⁴⁶⁹. Finally, given that this self-consciousness is a property of the universe's subsystems (sentient creatures), we can say this self-consciousness is everywhere, and at the same time since it is not composed of matter or energy, we can also say it is nowhere⁴⁷⁰. It is this universal self-consciousness that is referred to by Saiva Siddhanta as *pati* or Siva.

At this point I will address Adigal's concept of *uruva vazhipadu*, translated as idol worship in English. Adigal conceives of *Katavul* as having many attributes and infinite forms. This is understandable since *Katavul* is everywhere, countless forms and qualities can be attributed to him. In the Saiva Siddhanta tradition, *Katavul* is conceived of as having the name Siva, and having a particular form and a specific set of qualities. Of all the qualities of Siva, Maraimalai Adigal places most importance on *arul* and *inbam*⁴⁷¹. In Tamil, *arul* refers to the bestowing of a gift by a *devata*. In the case of Saiva Siddhanta, Adigal writes that the gift bestowed by Siva is the gift of happiness (*inbam*), which he himself is an embodiment of. *Arul* is seen that which bestows the final goal of the *bhakti* traditions, *inbam*.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁶⁸ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 122–123.

⁴⁶⁹ BALAGANGADHARA, S. N. *On the Indian notion of Enlightenment*. Universiteit Gent, 2014, p. 7.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁷¹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 85.

The following excerpt from the essay *Thiru Uruva Vazhipaadu* (Image Worship) captures Adigal's view of what Saiva Siddhanta is:

"What is religion (*matham*)? Experiencing the form of happiness (Siva), and the mind becomes aware of this happiness. And having experienced this happiness the Jeevan and God (*Katavul*) become one"⁴⁷².

Based on Maraimalai Adigal's writings about Saiva Siddhanta as well as Tamil Saivite texts, Saiva Siddhanta may best be described as a set of traditions that allow one to attain an experiential state called *inbam* through the cultivation of certain emotions. Attaining this experiential state gives one self-knowledge or experiential knowledge and this is what the Saivite and other Indian traditions refer to as *jnana*. This is the *Sivajnana* that Parvati was feeding Thirujnanasambandar.

Conclusion: Saiva Siddhanta Tradition As An Imparter of Experiential Knowledge

It is now time to revisit the questions raised at the beginning of this section. Was Maraimalai Adigal able to access the Christian theological framework and understand the concepts that emerged from this framework? I outlined three possibilities that arise from these questions. The first being that Adigal was able to fully understand the Christian theological framework and concepts. The second being that Adigal was like many of today's English-speakers in the Western world: he did not know Christian theology and did not know the primary meanings of these terms or explain how these concepts are interlinked with each other within the Christian theological framework. However, he had an intuitive understanding of the Christian theological concepts and of their interlinkages, much like native English-speakers in the West. The third possibility I mentioned was that he had no understanding of the Christian theological framework or its concepts. After analyzing his writings, I have to conclude that Maraimalai Adigal did not understand the Christian theological framework at all and the Tamil terminology (which are part of the Saiva Siddhanta intellectual and textual traditions) that he uses to translate Christian theological concepts do not even remotely capture the . However, this is not just a problem unique to Maraimalai Adigal, his psychology and cognitive capacity. Writings by the other intellectual contemporaries of Maraimalai Adigal such as Nallaswami Pillai and Raja Ram Mohan Roy show that they too encounter similar problems grasping Christian theological concepts and often reproduce the same or similar erroneous ideas when it comes to idol worship

⁴⁷² Ibid., p. 166-167.

for instance. Thus, the native cultural framework of Maraimalai Adigal does not allow him to access Christian theology.

After raising questions at the beginning about Adigal's understanding of Christianity, I then proceed to his writings about God and idolatry, two of the central concepts of Christian theology. One of the common responses of these Indian intellectuals to the Christian missionaries' attacks on their traditions as idolatry is to claim that since God pervades all objects and living organisms in the world, there is nothing wrong with worshipping God as an image or statue. Raja Ram Mohan Roy even states that these responses betray a lack of understanding of both the concept of God and idolatry within Christianity. As explained, God in Christianity is one without a second and separate from his creation. Worship of anything other than God is considered idolatry and a sin.

In the essay *The Conception of God as Rudra*, Maraimalai Adigal speaks of God as two supreme principles, the heat and the cold principle, Siva and Uma (Sakti), responsible for the creation, sustenance, and destruction of the Universe. Adigal draws his ideas about Siva and Sakti from the Saiva Siddhanta texts. These texts describe Sakti as arising from Siva, and it is the Sakti that initiates the process of creation, sustenance and destruction, while Siva remains unchanged and untouched by these processes. This idea of two principles responsible for the creation, sustenance, and destruction of the Universe does not resemble any idea of God found in any of the Semitic religions. When it comes to Siva specifically (the deity whom the Saiva Siddhanta tradition revolves around), the Saiva Siddhanta texts describes Siva or *Pati* as not having any volition or intention and Siva merely provides the conditions out of which the Universe emerges. This property is diametrically opposed to the nature of the Biblical God whose will governs the cosmos.

This raises important questions. If the concepts expounded in the Saiva Siddhanta texts such are not variants of Christian theological concepts, then what are they? What kind of a phenomenon is the Saiva Siddhanta tradition?

The concepts central to the Saiva Siddhanta tradition other than the *Pati* are *Pasu* and *Pasa*. The Saiva Siddhanta texts describes the *Pasu* as any sentient being in a state of ignorance and bondage when it identifies its sense of 'I' or self with its body, thoughts and other worldly objects. This ignorance is also seen as a form of bondage (*pasa*), because it creates attachment

to worldly things and events⁴⁷³, which in turn leads to unhappiness. This notion of ignorance and attachment is not limited to Saiva Siddhanta but found in most of the Indian traditions. The Saiva Siddhanta tradition considers that jnana or knowledge is attained when the *Pasu* stops identifying itself with its body and senses, and identifies instead with the *Pati*.

My brief summary of these concepts (*pati, pasu, pasa*) shows that the jnana or knowledge spoken about by both Maraimalai Adigal and expounded in the Saiva Siddhanta texts is experiential in nature, specifically dealing with the experience of the self or sense of 'I' in sentient beings, wherein this tradition helps the practitioners overcome their attachment and identification with worldly things and events (which it characterizes as a form of ignorance) and attain self knowledge.

Like the other *bhakti* traditions, Saiva Siddhanta places importance on the concept of attachment as a human emotion⁴⁷⁴. Saiva Siddhanta helps the loosen the hold of emotional attachment on the bhakta through practices that redirect emotional attachment from worldly objects towards the deity Siva. Given this understanding of Saiva Siddhanta, one has to question whether the Tamil terminology utilized by Maraimalai Adigal and forming the conceptual nomenclature of the Tamil Saivite texts are theological concepts at all. Instead the Saiva Siddhanta tradition appears to consist of a set of heuristics and tools that help the bhakta break the hold of attachment and ignorance and attain jnana or self knowledge.

When it comes to Adigal's writings on Saiva Siddhanta, not surprisingly, there is more incoherence and clarity in the English writings of Maraimalai Adigal compared to his Tamil writings, given that it is replete with English theological terminology. It is in Maraimalai Adigal's Tamil writings that one gets clearer insights into what Saiva Siddhanta is to Adigal, what makes the people of Tamil Nadu into a nation, and more importantly, what role does Saiva Siddhanta play in making the Tamil speakers into one nation?

⁴⁷³ _BALAGANGADHARA, S. N. Seven Problems in Translation: The Case of India. In: *Cultures Differ Differently: Selected Essays of S.N. Balagangadhara*. ed. DE ROOVER, Jakob and Sarika RAO. London: Routledge, 2021,p. 88.

⁴⁷⁴ BALAGANGADHARA, S. N. Seven Problems in Translation: The Case of India. In: *Cultures Differ Differently: Selected Essays of S.N. Balagangadhara*. ed. DE ROOVER, Jakob and Sarika RAO. London: Routledge, 2021,p. 89.

Saiva Bhakti

As mentioned, the Indian traditions provide numerous methods for accessing happiness. The method followed by the Saiva Siddhanta school and encouraged by Maraimalai Adigal is the path of *bhakti*.

I am well aware that the study of *bhakti* is a huge field and the comparisons with Christian mysticism and devotion, as part of a larger project built in order to explain what *bhakti* traditions of India are, is a huge research field. It would need re-assessment of the early Orientalists' literature, production of Christian missionaries, and of the reactions of Indian intellectuals to these ideas. In these comparisons, concept of God's grace has played a crucial role⁴⁷⁵. I am also aware of differences or continuity between explicit theological studies in the matter, and secularized scholarship on Saiva Siddhanta which are also matters subject for further research⁴⁷⁶

However, because the comparative studies into *bhakti* traditions have been strongly influenced by more or less explicit Christian theological thought, in this brief section I try to contrast the Christian notion of piety and mysticism with Maraimalai Adigal's understanding of Bhakti. Now the question becomes, What is *bhakti*? *Bhakti* is often described in scholarly texts as piety or devotion toward God. However, while both the pious Christian and the bhakta of a *devata* both express similar emotions, the two are completely different concepts. According to the Dictionary of Ancient Christianity, Piety is the application of one's being entirely to the service of God⁴⁷⁷. In the Catholic Dictionary, Piety is described as devotion and loyalty to God that is not acquired through human effort but is the gift of the holy spirit⁴⁷⁸. An example of piety that is cited is from the Old Testament is Abraham's willingness to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God because God commands it (Genesis 22:12). Thus, Piety in Christianity is completely

⁴⁷⁵ OTTO, Rudolf. *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity Compared and Contrasted*. Translated by Frank Hugh D.D. FOSTER, London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1930.

RAJ, Joseph Jaswant. *Grace in the Śaiva Siddhāntam and in St. Paul: a Contribution in Inter-faith Cross-cultural Understanding*. Madras: South Indian Salesian Society, 1989.

⁴⁷⁶ NARAYANA AYYAR, C.V. *Origin and Early History of Saivism in South India*. Madras: University of Madras, 1936. SARMA, Krsna. *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement : A New perspective : A Study in the History of Ideas*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publications, 1987. SIDDALINGAIAH, T.B. *Origin And Development of Saiva Siddhanta Upto 14th Century*. Madurai: Napoleon Press, 1979. SIVAPADASUNDRAM, S. *The Śaiva school of Hinduism*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1934.

⁴⁷⁷ DI BERARDINO, Angelo. *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014 [Cit. on 20-04-2021], p. 3.

⁴⁷⁸ HARDON, John. Gift of Piety. Dans: *Catholic Culture*. 2021. Available From: <URL: <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=33735>>.

submission to God's will. This piety is outwardly manifested through worship and obedience and love toward God⁴⁷⁹.

On the surface, *bhakti* as it is described in the Tamil grammatical texts and the Saiva texts appears to be a variant of Christian love and devotion toward God. In the grammatical treatise known as the *Tolkappiyam*, *anbu* (the Tamil term for *bhakti*) is defined as "the love or attachment that creates a sense of mental satisfaction or pleasure in one's wife, parents, and relatives and that cements or binds them together"⁴⁸⁰. This *anbu* or *bhakti* isn't limited to human relationships but also refers to the love and attachment between the devotee or bhakta and a particular deity, in this case Siva. The experience of *bhakti* as described by Adigal expresses an intense longing for Siva, in which the ideal bhakta's thoughts are focused on Siva and the bhakta's "heart melts" for Siva. Finally the bhakta experiences a vision of the form of Siva, and feels oneness with Siva, with the final goal or end state being the experience of *inbam*, the Tamil word for happiness⁴⁸¹. I am aware that there is a huge body of studies on Christian as well as Jewish and Islamic mysticism, which describes the experience of these mystics in the same way with some of the same words. There have been studies done comparing Indian *bhakti* with Christian mysticism. Although exploring the differences between *bhakti* and Christian mysticism is a whole research program in itself (not merely a research project or thesis), I will briefly touch upon fundamental differences in two key areas that seems to suggest that *bhakti* is entirely different than Christian mysticism and that the two cannot be grouped together as one class of phenomenon.

The first area of difference is the object of experience. The Christian mystic's object of experience is God, whereas the Saiva Bhakta's object of experience is the *pati* or Siva. I briefly described the difference between the two earlier in a simple form. For Christians, God is the creator of the cosmos. He is a person with a will, and it his will that governs the cosmos. The *pati* or *katavul* on the other hand refers to the universal consciousness or sense of 'I'. It is not a sentient person with intention or will. It is detached from the happenings of the universe. The second area of difference is the structure of the experience. The renowned Christian mystical theologian of the Middle Ages, Johannes Eckhart, states describes the mystical experience as

⁴⁷⁹ DI BERARDINO, Angelo., *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁰ DHAVAMONY, Mariasusai. *Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta: A Study in the Mysticism and Theology of Saivism*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 24.

⁴⁸¹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 27*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 122-123.

the process where a Christian becoming conscious that the divine word is the soul's very being. "But this is far more than a cognitive process. It demands that utmost poverty and total detachment whereby he gives up his entire created existence"⁴⁸². For the Christian mystic Bernard of Clairvaux, this mystical experience consists of loving oneself as if one never existed, "to cease completely to experience yourself, to reduce yourself to nothing"⁴⁸³. This Christian mystical experience is structured in a very specific way: The Christian is aware that he is made in the image of God (he is a person with will, and the word of God is engraved in his soul) and recognizes the will of God as reason for his existence. This experience of the Christian mystic shares an important similarity to the theophanies experienced by the Christian saints I described earlier. In both cases, the human being is recognizing his smallness in front of God existence and subordinates his will to the will of God⁴⁸⁴.

In contrast, in the *bhakti* traditions, love towards and devotion towards Siva, and the practices that cultivate these emotions are tools or heuristics that guide one towards self-knowledge. According to the *Tirumantiram*, *bhakti* "mollifies, softens, and melts hearts far more quickly than any other passion"⁴⁸⁵. And by doing so it also melts the fetters of *anavam* or ignorance. The individual is in ignorance because he mistakenly identifies his I-hood (the complex of thoughts, emotions, and memories that make him a unique individual with a history which includes relationships with other people such as family and friends) with the sense of 'I'. The individual's emotional attachment to the I-hood, makes his ignorance very difficult to break. *Bhakti* traditions like Saiva Siddhanta help the individual loosen his emotional attachment to his I-hood by redirecting it toward the *pati*. However, in order for the individual to become emotionally attached to the *pati*, it needs a name and form. After all, a human being cannot conceptualize a sense of 'I'. In the case of Saiva Siddhanta the *pati* takes the form of the deity Siva.

The practices that facilitate this *bhakti* toward Siva includes various traditions such as building temples and performing puja. These various traditions are collectively what Maraimalai Adigal calls the Saiva Siddhanta religion. Now we are in a position to understand why Adigal insisted

⁴⁸² JONES, Lindsay. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005, p. 6348.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 6349.

⁴⁸⁴ The subordination of the will is one of many ideas that structure the Christian mystical experience. And the experience of loving yourself as if you never existed is just one dimension of Christian mysticism.

⁴⁸⁵ DHAVAMONY, Mariasusai. *Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta: A Study in the Mysticism and Theology of Saivism*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 130.

that image worship is necessary in order to experience Siva. A deity with a name and form is a necessary prerequisite as *bhakti* needs to be directed toward someone or something. We are also in a better position to understand Maraimalai Adigal's assertion about the pagan deities of Egypt and Rome being lesser gods, and Siva being the true form of God. Siva is the true form of God, because he is the universal consciousness embodied in a form, and hence also represents knowledge. Adigal explains that the status of Siva as the embodiment of knowledge is also the reason that the *murthi*⁴⁸⁶ of Siva used in rituals and in Siva temples is in the form of a *linga*. The *linga* is supposed to be a pillar of fire, and fire best represents the properties of the *pati*. Just as fire burns away dirt while still maintaining its purity, the *pati* burns away the dirt of *anavam* (ignorance) while being unaffected by it⁴⁸⁷. The deities of Greece and Egypt are supposed to grant various benefits to those who revere them, from protection during war, to a good harvest. But they don't provide them with self-knowledge, the knowledge that ultimately leads to happiness, and hence they are lesser gods. Maraimalai Adigal also includes Indian deities such as Indra and Vayu⁴⁸⁸ as part of these lesser gods. Finally, we can also understand more clearly why Adigal was stressing that Saiva Siddhanta was a monotheistic religion. He understood monotheism through the concepts and ideas available to him in his cultural environment: Saiva Siddhanta is a set of practices revolving around one deity (Siva), hence making it a monotheistic religion.

Separating Saiva Siddhanta From the Brahmanical Religion

Saiva Siddhanta itself was one part of Maraimalai Adigal's writings about religion. The other part was about the so-called religion of the Brahmins, and how it compares unfavourably to Saiva Siddhanta. In this section, I discuss the criteria used by Adigal to distinguish the Brahmanical religion from Saiva Siddhanta.

It is important to point out that Adigal refers to Saiva Siddhanta as both the Tamil religion and the Vellala religion^{489,490}. Adigal claims that it was the Saiva Vellala *jati* who started the practice

⁴⁸⁶ Stone sculpture used to represent the deities.

⁴⁸⁷ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 189.

⁴⁸⁸ These are deities of nature. Indra is the lord of the skies whose weapon is the thunderbolt, while Vayu controls water.

⁴⁸⁹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 29. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 189.

⁴⁹⁰ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 31. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 78.

of revering Siva, hence the origin of their caste name Saiva Vellala⁴⁹¹. He also claims that it was the Vellalas who were the first to start practices called ‘Velvis’⁴⁹²⁴⁹³. These included practices such as venerating one’s ancestors, protecting animals from harm, and also building temples and performing rituals toward a deity, in this case Siva. Together, these practices laid the foundation for the Tamil civilization⁴⁹⁴ as well as the foundation for the Saiva traditions⁴⁹⁵.

Adigal states in his essay *Vellalar Nagarigam* (Vellalar civilization) (1923), that it was the Vellalas who were the ancestors of all Tamil-speaking people, who were the first people to settle the entire Indian Subcontinent. They were the first to introduce agriculture in the subcontinent and as a result, there emerged a well-developed and advanced civilization well before the arrival of the Aryan Brahmins⁴⁹⁶⁴⁹⁷. In Adigal’s eyes, the Tamil civilization can just as well be called the Vellalar civilization. Adigal’s claim of the Vellalas being the first Tamil-speaking people and the progenitors of both the Tamil religion and culture has important consequences regarding his conceptualization of the Tamil nation, as we shall see later.

Maraimalai Adigal considers the Vellala religion as more egalitarian than the Brahmin religion (treating all *jatis* with respect), but he criticizes the Vellalas for abandoning their learning and traditions and believing the lies of the Brahmins, spend all their money helping the Brahmins and treated the *jatis* who serve them as inferior and placing Brahmins on an elevated status above themselves⁴⁹⁸. With contempt, Adigal describes how Brahmins would enter Saiva temples and pray to their minor/lesser gods like Indra and Varuna, and chant Sanskrit slokas revering these lesser gods which Adigal considered degrading to the one true God Siva⁴⁹⁹. Ritual and language become the two key criteria that Adigal uses to differentiate between Saiva Siddhanta and the Brahmin religion, the Dravidians and the Brahmins.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 189.

⁴⁹³ The best translation for this term is virtuous acts directed towards others.

⁴⁹⁴ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 189.

⁴⁹⁵ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 31. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 78.

⁴⁹⁶ Adigal’s writings have innumerable references to Brahmins as Aryan-Brahmins. He also uses the words ‘Aryan’ and ‘Brahmin’ interchangeably.

⁴⁹⁷ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 187.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 96, 215.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 215.

The notion of Tamil speakers as a separate nation from the Brahmins has been around since the first half of the nineteenth century⁵⁰⁰. The origins of the idea of a Brahmanical religion goes back even further; by the time period of the fourteenth century, the idea of a proto-Christian Brahmin religion had been well established in scholarly circles by the end of the fourteenth century. By the time of the nineteenth century, the idea of a Brahmin religion has been firmly entrenched among Europeans studying and writing about India and adopted by English-educated Indians such as Maraimalai Adigal. It appears from the citations in his writings that Adigal himself derived his ideas about the Brahmanical religion from a variety of European intellectuals. Out of these I single out three whom he cites a number of times and were influential in his ideas with regard to the Brahmin religion: Ragozin, Max Müller, and Robert Caldwell⁵⁰¹. I compare the writings of these European intellectuals to Maraimalai Adigal to show that the European intellectuals picked out phenomena systematically when describing the properties of the Aryan-Brahmin religion, which shows they had a background theory that enabled them to systematize these facts into a coherent whole, which Maraimalai Adigal lacked.

Max Müller states unequivocally that

"No one who desires to study the history of that branch of mankind to which we ourselves belong, and to discover in the first germs of the language, religion, and mythology of our forefathers, the wisdom of Him who is not the God of the Jews only, can, for the future, dispense with some knowledge of the language and ancient literature of India"⁵⁰².

From this sentence, it is clear that for Müller, studying the Brahmin religion takes on importance because he regards it as one of the earliest corruptions of the ur-religion. The importance of the Brahmin religion being the ur-religion is revealed in the very next line when he says it is the wisdom of him who is not the God of the Jews only. For Müller this religion of the Brahmins contains traces of the original revelation of God, albeit in a corrupted form. Within this framework, the Brahmins become the priestly lawgivers and religious heads of the nation,

⁵⁰⁰ KEPPENS, Marianne. The Aryans and the Ancient System of Caste. In: *Western Foundations of the Caste System*. ed. FÁREK, Martin et al. Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 239.

⁵⁰¹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 18*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, s. 4.; ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 29*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, s. 47.; ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 30*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, s. 13.; ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 32*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, s. 61,77.

⁵⁰² MÜLLER, Friedrich Max. *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature so Far as it Illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmans*. London: Williams And Norgate, 1859, p. 3.

enjoying certain privileges like performing the religious ceremonies and deciding who gets to participate⁵⁰³ and the *Vedas* become the central religious scripture of the Brahmins since any of the Sanskrit texts refer to it as the basis of all their knowledge and thus the foundation of the religion and morals of the Brahman nation⁵⁰⁴. Moreover, since the *Vedas* are referred to as *sruti* (heard) and *apauresya* (authorless), and since any sacred text has to come from a divine authorship or source to be considered sacred, the European scholars thought the Indians considered these texts such as *Vedas* and Upanishads to be the divine revelation⁵⁰⁵. By contrast, since the *smriti* texts are credited to an author, they are described as human inventions, and are at times considered to be distortions of the original Hindu religion, even if they are based upon the *sruti*⁵⁰⁶. The fact that the Indian traditions gave greater authority to the *struti* when it conflicts with the *smriti* seems to confirm to these scholars that the Vedic texts are seen as their revelation by the Hindus.

Both Ragozin and Müller reproduce the Reformation story of the corrupt priest, as the Brahmins were thought to have presented certain *smritis* as *strutis*, in order to preserve their priestly privileges, as these texts were seen as containing laws that allowed for exclusive privileges and abuse of power by the Brahmins (for example, Müller thought the texts known as Brahmanas were too young to be considered *struti*)⁵⁰⁷⁵⁰⁸. Even when not presenting the *smritis* as part of the divine revelation, the Brahmins were seen as justifying these texts by indirectly connecting them to the *struti*, claiming that what is contained within the *smritis* is derived from the *Vedas*, the *Vedas* being their foundation⁵⁰⁹. The most infamous among the *smritis* being the Manusmriti or the Laws of Manu; the rules and instructions regarding various interactions among members of different *jatis* taken together were seen as comprising the

⁵⁰³ RAGOZIN, Zenaide A. *Vedic India: As Embodied Principally in The Rig-Veda*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899, pp. 115-116.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁵⁰⁵ MÜLLER, Friedrich Max. *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature So Far As It Illustrates The Primitive Religion Of The Brahmins*. London: Williams And Norgate, 1859, p. 75. RAGOZIN, Zenaide A. *Vedic India: As Embodied Principally in The Rig-Veda*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899, p. 122.

⁵⁰⁶ MÜLLER, Friedrich Max. *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature so Far as it Illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmins*. London: Williams And Norgate, 1859, p. 75.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78-79.

⁵⁰⁸ RAGOZIN, Zenaide A. *Vedic India: As Embodied Principally in The Rig-Veda*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899, p. 123.

⁵⁰⁹ MÜLLER, Friedrich Max. *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature so Far as it Illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmins*. London: Williams And Norgate, 1859, p. 87.

religious laws of the caste system, developed by the priests for their own betterment and power while oppressing the lower castes⁵¹⁰. Thus, it was accepted among scholars by the end of the nineteenth century that the caste system was not part of the *Vedas* and was a later invention by the Brahmin priests. Consequently, the *Vedas* and smritis becomes the foundation of the traditional practices of the Brahmin and by extension Hindu nation. As an example, Ragozin thought of the practice of Yagnas as emerging from the precepts of the *Rigveda* and were part of the ministrations of the priests who were obligated to receive royal patronage from the king for the performance of Yagnas and sacrifices. These authors were also aware that there were many practices in India not found in any these texts. But these scholars make it clear that the Brahmins tried to Brahmanize these customs and absorb it into their religion by aligning it with their Brahmin laws or the doctrines of the *Vedas*⁵¹¹. Müller cites a verse from the *Grihyasutras* as evidence: "If there be contradiction between the customs of countries, and those customs which we are going to describe, one must adopt the custom as laid down by us, not those of the country"⁵¹².

When it comes to the origin of the caste system in South India, one salient part of the explanation shared by all three scholars (Müller, Ragozin, and Caldwell) was that the caste system was the result of a civilized advanced Aryan race conquering a primitive Dravidian race⁵¹³. Ragozin points out how the mild mannered and refined Aryas avoided the black skinned Dasyus or natives with their barbarous customs including eating raw flesh. This avoidance was especially pronounced in matters of religion and worship. Caldwell states that "the descendants of those Brahmanical colonists of early times to whom the Dravidians appear to have been indebted for the higher arts of life and a considerable portion of their literary culture. Such of the Brahmans as not only retain the name, but also discharge the functions of the priesthood"⁵¹⁴. This idea of a primitive Dravidian race would produce a strong response from Maraimalai Adigal as I shall show below.

⁵¹⁰ RAGOZIN, Zenaide A. *Vedic India: As Embodied Principally in The Rig-Veda*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899, pp. 274-275.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁵¹² MÜLLER, Friedrich Max. *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature so Far as it Illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmans*. London: Williams And Norgate, 1859, p. 52.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵¹⁴ CALDWELL, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar Of The Dravidian Or South-Indian Family Of Languages*. London: TRUBNEE & CO., LUDGATE HILL., 1875, p. 2.

Despite his disagreements with Caldwell about the civilizational state of Aryans and Dravidians, Maraimalai Adigal appears to use the same criteria used by the European missionaries and Orientalists to differentiate between the Brahmin religion and Saivism, namely, language and ritual. However, a close examination of his writings shows that his arguments take a different direction.

Maraimalai Adigal claims that the Tamil Vellalas welcomed the Brahmin gurukkals⁵¹⁵ into their Saiva temples and gave them an equal status with the Tamil gurukkals, and allowed them to perform and participate in the temple rituals. The Tamil Vellalas also showed the Brahmins respect by performing temple rituals using Sanskrit *Vedas* as well as the Tamil texts. Maraimalai Adigal praised the knowledge contained in the Tamil Saivite texts, and at the same time claiming that the Sanskrit texts of the Brahmins such as the *Vedas*, and the smritis and the Puranas don't even contain an iota of the knowledge contained in the Tamil texts and instead contains rituals that is opposed to the practices of the Saivite traditions, as well as disrespecting the greatness of Siva by propagating false stories about their lesser gods (the Puranas)⁵¹⁶. Adigal also accuses the Aryan Brahmins of showing ingratitude toward the Tamil Vellalas, by insulting the Tamil God Siva as well as the Tamil *acharyas* who founded the tradition. According to Adigal, the Brahmins insult Siva by referring to him as a Sudra god in the Sanskrit text *Vashishtasmriti*, as well as reciting verses and slokas from the Sanskrit *Vedas* in the Siva temples, praising their Aryan gods such as Indra and Varuna who are inferior to Siva⁵¹⁷. Adigal also criticizes the Brahmins of his time for spending all their time studying a foreign language (Sanskrit) and mixing the words of this foreign language into Tamil⁵¹⁸. From the above writings, it is clear that Adigal is using language as one of the main criteria to distinguish between Saiva Siddhanta and the Aryan religion. Saiva Siddhanta is the Tamil religion in which the Tamil God Siva is revered. In the same manner, the Brahmin religion is inextricably linked to Sanskrit, with the texts of the Brahmin religion constantly being referred to as Sanskrit texts.

In addition to language, ritual is used to differentiate between the Aryan and Dravidian religion. A theme that stands out in Adigal's comparison of Saiva Siddhanta to the Brahmin religion is the frequent references to the original Aryan Brahmins who entered into India as a barbaric

⁵¹⁵ Name of the person who officiates and performs rituals in temples.

⁵¹⁶ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 214-215.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

⁵¹⁸ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 17. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 89.

uncivilized people and the violent gods and rituals these Aryans juxtaposed against the non-killing and compassionate traditions of Saiva Siddhanta⁵¹⁹. This appears to be a response to the works of European missionaries such as Robert Caldwell who described the Tamil religion as a kind of demonolatry with violent bloody sacrifices, and Siva as an angry demonic Dravidian deity, specifically referring to the story of Daksa's sacrifice in which Siva's hordes destroy the sacrifice (this story is retold in many of the Puranas). Adigal's responds to this by first claiming that it was the Aryans who engaged in bloody animal sacrifices and it was the Tamil people who practised vegetarianism and *karuna* toward all creatures before the coming of Aryans, and in fact taught these practices to the Brahmins who later adopted it⁵²⁰⁵²¹. In doing so, he also turns the European account of the civilizational state of the Dravidians and Aryans on its head. He claims that the Dravidians, far from being savages who engaged in violent rituals and worshipping demons, were a highly civilized people with cities and kingdoms and engaging in noble practices such as non-killing and worshipping a compassionate benevolent God, Siva.

It was the Aryans who were the nomadic barbaric tribe with the violent rituals and the violent gods and it was the Tamil people who taught them civilization⁵²². In the process of he creates a distinction between Siva and Rudra. The latter is the God of the *Vedas*, the God of the Aryans, who is violent and wrathful. In comparison, the Siva of Saiva Siddhanta is the one who is full of peace and bliss, who out of his compassion gives the gift of happiness to his bhaktas. According to Adigal it was the Tamil people who introduced Siva to the Aryans as Rudra, and they made him a destructive God so that he fit into the pantheon of the violent Aryan gods, but at the same time he had the properties of the Tamil God Siva. This was a small step to bring the Aryans into the Tamil religion. It was also the Tamils who gradually helped the Aryans come out of their violent sacrifices, and introduced *linga murthi puja* to them, which involved offerings of fruits and vegetables rather than the flesh of animals⁵²³. In addition to criticizing Vedic rituals for being violent, Maraimalai Adigal also chastises Vedic mantras for spewing

⁵¹⁹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 31. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 15, 78.

⁵²⁰ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 32. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 96.

⁵²¹ Ibid., p. 99.

⁵²² ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 16, 229. ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* - 29. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 194.

⁵²³ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 232.

hatred against the Dravidian race, citing a line from the *Vedas* which says "Destroying the Dasyus, Indra protected the Aryan colour"⁵²⁴.

One of the striking differences one finds between Adigal's account of the Brahmin religion and the European scholars is that while both talk about the rituals and caste system of the Brahmins, Adigal almost never talks about the beliefs or doctrines of the Brahmin religion. Even when he criticizes the Advaita philosophy of the Brahmins, he talks about Advaita being an impractical way to attain happiness. He lists out some of the properties of the *Brahman*⁵²⁵ such as the *Brahman* being a detached witness, eternal, and unaffected by the world and asks the questions: what do these qualities of the *Brahman* have to do with daily life? How is it useful in my religious life at all? In Adigal's estimation, these supposed qualities of *Brahman* are not useful in our daily life. They are just some authoritative statements made by Brahmanical scholars and considers the Brahmin concept of God too abstract and dry. It is the human qualities of God such as compassion and love that causes him to gift us with happiness⁵²⁶. It is these qualities that make God more accessible to the bhakta.

In his writings about the caste system, another glaring absence in comparison with European writings is observed. The writings of European scholars about Brahmins are replete with references to them as priests or clergy, as well as their sacerdotal power and priestly privileges. In contrast, although Adigal makes mention a number of times about how Brahmins through their cunning were able to introduce the caste hierarchy into Tamil Nadu⁵²⁷, there is nothing in Adigal's writings about the Brahmin's sacerdotal role or power. This absence shows something very important about Adigal's conceptualization of Brahmins as a caste and how different it is from the European understanding of the Brahmins. For Maraimalai Adigal, the Brahmins *jatis* are those groups who are supposed to follow the Brahmin *varna dharma* (he uses the Tamil word *ozhukkam*)⁵²⁸. Although these concepts are too complex to cover in any depth within this text, I will attempt to give a brief explanation of what *varna* and *dharma* are.

In the Vedic texts, *varna* refers to a group within society that plays a specific role or function, Brahmin being one such *varna*. Although both *jati* and *varna* are simultaneously referred to as

⁵²⁴ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 33. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 30.

⁵²⁵ Brahman is the Sanskrit term for universal consciousness.

⁵²⁶ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 21. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 222.

⁵²⁷ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 204.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

castes by many scholars, they are not the same phenomenon. Most of the Indian texts refer to four *varnas*, in contrast, there are thousands of *jatis* in India and they are constantly changing, new *jatis* emerging and old ones dying out. It is unclear what *jatis* are, even though many scholars refer to them as sub-categories of *varna*. The task or function of a *varna* in society is their *varna dharma*. *dharma* in general refers to the role-specific function or task of groups and individuals. For example, there is even Pathi (husband) *dharma* and Pathni (wife) *dharma*. It is important not to conflate *dharma* with religious or moral laws, since these functions/tasks are neither obligatory nor forbidden. Maraimalai Adigal considers Brahmin *dharma* as the performance of rituals and the preservation and dissemination of the knowledge contained in texts such as the *Vedas* and *Sastras*⁵²⁹. These *Sastras* consist of heuristics that guide people in their daily life.

Adigal poses the question put forth in the Vajrasooli Puranam: What does the word Brahmin mean? Is it one's body? Is it one's group? According to this text, one is a Brahmin through his *gunas* (certain mental and emotional qualities) and how he conducts himself in life. A Brahmin is one who is immersed in meditation, who always speaks the truth, who doesn't cause injury to others, who is wise and happy, and is unaffected by distinctions⁵³⁰. Adigal's main criticism of Brahmins is that they have abandoned their Brahmin *dharma* outlined in their *smritis* and *sastras*. Brahmins are supposed to traditionally live simply off the alms of others, do rituals, and teach the texts, but instead, they are working under the British, doing their administrative work (working under the rulers for a salary goes against Brahmin *dharma* according to *Manusmriti*)⁵³¹.

From Maraimalai Adigal's perspective, the Brahmins of his time strayed from their *dharma* by treating other *jatis* degradingly. A vivid example he provides is that of poor members of other *jatis* coming to Brahmin households asking to be fed, and the Brahmins making them wait outside until they (the Brahmins) finish eating, and then giving them bad leftover food. As the member of the other *jati* leaves, the women of the Brahmin household sprinkle cow dung water on them as a form of purification⁵³². Whether or not there is truth to what Adigal says about Brahmins is a different issue. The salient matter is that it is clear in Maraimalai Adigal's

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., p. 87-89.

⁵³¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁵³² Ibid., p. 208.

description of Brahmins and Brahmin *dharma*, that Brahmins don't resemble a priesthood or clergy, but rather the intellectuals of society who protect and disseminate knowledge (this knowledge is not merely textual but includes the preservation of traditions and rituals that fall in the domain of practical knowledge). Importantly, his criticism of Brahmins is purely centred on the domain of practices rather than doctrine or belief. In contrast, the European criticism of the Brahmins assumes that they are a priesthood. The general picture that emerges from the eighteenth and nineteenth-century European descriptions of about Brahmins and caste is that the caste system is a system of religious laws invented by the Brahmins and presented as products of divine revelation in order to preserve their priestly privileges while dooming those castes on the lowest rung of the caste system to perpetual servitude⁵³³. This system was especially immoral because it deceived believers into believing a set of human fabrications as though they were divine commandments⁵³⁴. This charge against the Brahmins along the lines of the Protestant criticism of the Catholic clergy. Namely, that the Catholic priesthood was passing human laws as divine laws, and thereby committing heresy, because they are attempting to usurp God.

Problems with Separating Saiva Siddhanta from the Brahmin Religion

Maraimalai Adigal's attempt to draw out a pure Tamil religion distinct from the Brahmanical religion by tying certain deities to Sanskrit and Tamil texts becomes problematic because it is impossible to categorize many of the practices in Tamil Nadu as Sanskrit or Tamil based. First, take the case of Adigal designating certain deities and traditions as Aryan because of the prominent role they play in the *Vedas* and Vedic rituals e.g. Indra, Varuna. However, many non-Brahmin castes in Tamil Nadu venerate these deities in their own manner, without using Sanskrit texts and mantras. Adigal himself acknowledges that the Tamil people have their own nature deities similar to Indra and Varuna but states firmly that they differ in important ways and bears no relation to their Aryan counterparts. He uses the example of Indra, pointing out the Aryan Indra is a violent deity wielding a thunderbolt whom the Aryans pray to in order to

⁵³³ DE ROOVER, Jakob. A Nation of Tribes and Priests: The Jews and the Immorality of the Caste System. In: *Western Foundations of the Caste System* ed. FÅREK, Martin et al. Cham: Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 196–197.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

destroy their enemies, while the Tamil Indra merely gives rain and provides a good harvest⁵³⁵. Furthermore, Adigal adds that rituals directed toward Varuna and Indra are done by a small section of Tamils, namely those who live on farmland and coastal areas⁵³⁶. Moreover, in Adigal's view, the Tamil Indra (called 'Venthan' in Tamil) was a form of ancestor veneration rather than veneration of a deity, Venthan being the ancestor who established agriculture in Tamil Nadu⁵³⁷.

Secondly, despite the rich history of Vaisnavism in Tamil Nadu, Maraimalai Adigal considers Visnu and his avatars Rama and Krishna as Aryan deities⁵³⁸. Adigal explains that at the time of the composition of the *Tolkappiyam*, the two most popular deities among the Tamil people were Mayon and Seyon, the blue being and the red being respectively⁵³⁹. The blue being Mayon was later called Narayana. Adigal believes the word Narayana was coined in Tamil, and the original meaning meant 'watery being', and the word was used to indicate the cold aspect of the *pati*, with Mayon representing the heat. Visnu on the other hand was a Vedic (and therefore Aryan) solar deity⁵⁴⁰. "Only in the literature produced from the dawn of the Christian era downwards do we meet with any reference to Krishna and Rama"⁵⁴¹. Adigal speculates that Krishna was "introduced most probably by the northern brahmins who, having been rendered unable to maintain their own narrow sacrificial cult and exclusive caste pretensions against the broad principles of kindness to all beings and equality of man, that spread all over the north under the patronage of Buddhist kings," migrated to southern India⁵⁴².

Wherever the Vaisnavite traditions might have originated from, it remains a fact that Tamil Nadu has had its own Vaisnavite traditions for centuries. The renowned Alvars of Tamil Nadu, prominent devotees of Lord Visnu established their own *bhakti* tradition with their own texts

⁵³⁵ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 27. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 237-238.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., p. 236.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., pp. 238-239.

⁵³⁸ There is even a Tamil word for Visnu commonly used by Tamil Vaisnava followers: Perumal.

⁵³⁹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 33, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 140.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 141.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p. 145.

⁵⁴² Ibid., p. 147.

and temples. This Alvar Vaisnavite tradition is as prominent in Tamil Nadu as Saiva Siddhanta, and unique to that region.

Adigal's claim of Saiva Siddhanta being a Tamil non-Brahmin religion is confronted with a number of anomalies. The first is the fact that there is evidence that Saiva Siddhanta did not originate in South India⁵⁴³⁵⁴⁴. Siva as a deity is not limited to South India. As any observer with passive acquaintance of India knows, Siva is venerated all over India, and every region in India has its own Siva tradition. Secondly, Brahmins themselves have been part of the Tamil Saivite tradition for centuries. Two of the founding Samacharyas of Saiva Siddhanta were Brahmins⁵⁴⁵. The sixty-three Nayanars came from various caste backgrounds⁵⁴⁶. Furthermore, by framing Saiva Siddhanta as a Tamil religion whose foundation is provided by Tamil texts, Adigal ignores the fact that the Saiva Siddhanta *acharyas* of the past recognized the *Vedas* as one of the important texts of that tradition, as well as the Saiva Agamas which are written in Sanskrit⁵⁴⁷. Finally, by considering all other traditions other than Saiva Siddhanta as foreign and not Tamil, glosses over the many local deities and traditions in Tamil Nadu that are not found in any Sanskrit texts.

Even assuming that these origin theories are correct, an important question is why does the textual/linguistic origin of particular deities and practices matter when it comes to religion? Why does that emerge as a problem for Adigal? Various Indian traditions have existed side by side in centuries in India, and have always borrowed and exchanged practices, and traditions that emerge in one region migrate and mix with traditions from another region.

This is not to say there was no criteria for distinguishing one tradition from another, nor is it my claim that preserving the grammatical structure and vocabulary of a language wasn't important to these traditions. As mentioned before, Adigal points to the importance of classical

⁵⁴³ ISHIMATSU, Ginette. *The Making of Tamil Saiva Siddhanta*. SAGE Publications. 1999, Volume. 33, Issue. 3, p. 579.

⁵⁴⁴ "On the basis of inscriptional and archaeological evidence, B.G.L. Swamy, Cynthia Talbot and others have traced the lineages of early Siddhantin teachers back to spiritual lineages in central and western India. The school, first centred in what is now northern Madhya Pradesh, seems to appear in the 8th century or earlier; it based its teachings on the Saiva Agamas, a diverse group of texts that influenced Tamil Saivism as well as the Saivism in Kerala" *Ibid*.

⁵⁴⁵ PETERSON, Indira Viswanathan (ed.). *Poems to Śiva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁴⁷ KLOBER, Rafael. *What is Saiva Siddhanta? Tracing Modern Genealogies and Historicising a Classical Canon*. Oxford University Press. 2017, Volume. 10, Issue. 2, p. 188.

Tamil grammar and vocabulary in order to grasp the full range of emotions and experiences expressed in the Tamil *bhakti* poetry. In the same way, performers of Vedic rituals gave importance to the purity of Sanskrit syntax and grammar when chanting mantras. My point is that there is no evidence that Tamil intellectuals were concerned with whether a particular practice or deity originated within Sanskrit texts or among Brahmins.

For European thinkers who studied India however, it was a different matter. From Max Müller to Robert Caldwell to Ragozin (all thinkers who influenced Adigal), the linguistic and textual origin of deities and practices became an important problem for them to solve in their search for the primordial religion of humanity. Within this framework, questions about whether a practice or god originated in Sanskrit texts or Tamil texts make sense, because these texts are not mere texts but the scriptures of the Sanskrit and Tamil-speaking nations. Studying which deity and ritual originated in which scripture not only seemed to give them a fuller picture of the Aryan and Tamil religion but also helped them create a genealogy of these religions and trace them back to an original uncorrupted revelation. In addition, since it is the Brahmin priests who are the closest descendants of the Aryans, any tradition that is prominently practised by Brahmins becomes part of the Aryan religion. It is important to remember that an empirical phenomenon only becomes a problem within the framework of ideas of a certain theory. In this case the theory in question assumes the validity of a set of theological claims, the most fundamental being that religion is the revelation of God's will to human beings. This immediately necessitates preserving the language of revelation in order to preserve the revelation itself from being distorted into idolatry and false religion. The distortion of the universal human language into multiple languages also results in the division of one humanity into multiple nations. When considered outside of this Biblical framework, the notion of a Tamil religion or Sanskrit religion doesn't make sense, and the fact that a practice originated from a people speaking a certain language or text written in that language does not create any problems. It is telling that Adigal reproduces the surface claims and sentiments of the European thinkers regarding the Dravidian/Aryan religion, but not the underlying theological assumptions that led to these claims. In none of his writings does he claim that religion is the revelation of God's will, or that it is important to preserve the Tamil language in order to preserve the revelation of God.

Analyzing the writings of Maraimalai Adigal, it seems that he doesn't understand the Christian concept of religion nor does he understand religious and theological concepts such as monotheism, evil, and piety. In the remainder of this text, I show that Adigal, in the process of

making use of the Western religious concepts in his writings, maps these concepts onto concepts available within his cultural framework.

The Role of Vegetarianism and Nonviolence in Religion

In Adigal's writings, the concept of *ozhukkam* plays an integral part in his conceptualization of Saiva Siddhanta. There seems to be no English word for this idea, and the best way to explain the word in Tamil is that *ozhukkam* refers to one's adherence to a practice or tradition. Adigal explains that an important part of the *sadhana*⁵⁴⁸ of Saiva Siddhanta is showing *anbu* and *karuna* toward all beings. "Those who melt when contemplating on the infinite compassion and *arul* of God, who in addition to our bodies, also gave us the means of sustenance, are the ones who will show compassion toward all beings and would never think of or attempt to harm other beings"⁵⁴⁹. It is only when one cultivates *anbu* toward God that one is compassionate toward all beings and stands firm in *ozhukkam*⁵⁵⁰. Because they are rooted in *ozhukkam*, their hearts become pure, and consequently, they attain *ananda*⁵⁵¹.

In the chapter *Sivalinga Unmai* (The Sivalinga Truth), in a passage criticizing the practice of animal sacrifice in Vedic rituals, Adigal points to how killing goes against the compassionate nature of God and is borne out of the quality of ignorance, taking us away from obtaining happiness, and therefore we should show compassion toward all beings⁵⁵². There are two important ideas contained in this excerpt. Firstly, lack of compassion is borne out of *anavam* and takes us away from the path of self-knowledge. In saying this, Adigal is echoing the Saivite gurus who composed the *Tirumurai*, a compendium of Saivite *bhakti* poetry. In a stanza in the sixth *Tirumurai*, known as the *Tevaram*, the author Appar⁵⁵³ states that compassion is the root of all *dharma* (Daya Moolam Dharmam)⁵⁵⁴. Similarly, in the tenth *Tirumurai*, known as the

⁵⁴⁸ Discipline.

⁵⁴⁹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 21, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 254.

⁵⁵⁰ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 27, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 250.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁵⁵³ One of the sixty-three nayanars and considered one of the founders of the Tamil Saivite tradition.

⁵⁵⁴ RAMACHANDRAN, T.N. *Tirumurai the Sixth (St. Appar's Thaandaka Hymns)*. 1st edition. Mayiladuthurai: Dharmapuram Aadheenam, 1995, p. 150.

Tirumantiram, it is stated that those who have compassion will attain the feet of Siva⁵⁵⁵, and that "with sweet compassion gentler than a mother's" he (Siva) shatters our ignorance⁵⁵⁶. Thus, these Saivite gurus see compassion as a quality that helps foster *bhakti* toward Siva.

Maraimalai Adigal repeatedly stresses the importance of non-killing and vegetarianism in the Saiva traditions in his writings, citing renowned Saivite gurus such as Tirūmular (author of *Tirumantiram*) and Appar. The *Tirumantiram* mentions eight flowers that are offered to Siva in *bhakti*, one of them being non-killing⁵⁵⁷. It is also considered one of the ten important *niyamas*⁵⁵⁸, along with compassion⁵⁵⁹. The first chapter of the *Tirumantiram* contains two entire stanzas, each devoted to non-killing and vegetarianism. The stanza on non-killing states that even the flowers that are offered to Siva in the rituals are filled with love for him, and therefore one must not even kill an atom of life⁵⁶⁰, while the stanza on meat eating claims that one must shun meat in order to attain Siva's feet and happiness⁵⁶¹. These excerpts from the Saivite texts give us a clearer understanding on the role of vegetarianism and non-killing within the Tamil Saivite traditions. The Saivite acharyas saw the taking of life and meat eating as impediments on the path of *bhakti*.

In his work *Tamilar Matham* (Tamilian Religion) (1941), while discussing the importance of vegetarianism and non-killing in Saiva Siddhanta, Adigal claims that it was the Vellalas who started these practices and held on to them firmly, with *ozhukkam*. Moreover, since it was the Vellalas who began the practice of revering Siva, they were called Saiva Vellalas and the

⁵⁵⁵ DHAVAMONY, Mariasusai. *Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta: A Study in the Mysticism and Theology of Saivism*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 130.

⁵⁵⁶ TIRUMŪLAR, NATARAJAN, Balasubrahmanya and MAHALINGAM, N. *Tirumantiram, a Tamil Scriptural Classic*. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1991, p. 43.

⁵⁵⁷ DHAVAMONY, Mariasusai. *Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta: A Study in the Mysticism and Theology of Saivism*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 269.

⁵⁵⁸ *Niyamas* are disciplines or observances followed by practitioners of Saiva Siddhanta.

⁵⁵⁹ TIRUMŪLAR, NATARAJAN, Balasubrahmanya and MAHALINGAM, N. *Tirumantiram, a Tamil Scriptural Classic*. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1991, p. 132.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

practice of vegetarianism is referred to as ‘Saivam’⁵⁶²⁵⁶³. There are a number of important implications that follow from Maraimalai Adigal’s idea that non-killing, vegetarianism, and indeed the Saiva Siddhanta tradition itself originated from the Vellalas, in terms of what it says about Adigal’s conception of religion and nation.

First, non-killing and vegetarianism become one of two main criteria used by Adigal to separate Saiva Siddhanta from the so-called Aryan-Brahmin religion, the other being the caste system. I will discuss the role that the caste system plays in Adigal’s conceptualization of both nation in the section titled ‘Vellalar Nation’.

The Aryan-Brahmin religion is described as being in opposition to Saiva *ozhukkam* because of their meat eating and their violent Vedic rituals involving animal sacrifices, which in turn are directed toward violent Vedic deities such as Indra⁵⁶⁴. Adigal cites verses from the *Rigveda*, which are invocations to Indra to destroy the Dasas and their fortresses, in which he interprets Dasas as the Dravidians⁵⁶⁵. He even accuses the ancient Brahmins of performing human sacrifices, citing a verse from the Sathapathi Brahmana (a commentary on the *Sukla Yajur Veda*) that describes human sacrifices⁵⁶⁶.

The irony in Adigal’s descriptions of the ancient Brahmins as violent meat eaters is that most of the Brahmin groups in Tamil Nadu during Maraimalai Adigal’s time and even up to today are staunch vegetarians. At the time of Maraimalai Adigal’s writings, none of the Brahmin *jatis* in Tamil Nadu had performed animal sacrifices for centuries. Adigal recognizes this, but claims that the Aryan-Brahmin migrants who first entered into the Indian Subcontinent were meat-eating nomads, and it was the Vellalas who taught them vegetarianism and gradually convinced them to abandon animal sacrifice. Maraimalai Adigal claims that the Vellalas avoided contact with and avoided entering the houses of the Aryan Brahmins and kept them from entering their temples because of their meat-eating practices⁵⁶⁷. The Vellalas not only avoided entering the

⁵⁶² There are many *jatis* that go by the name Vellalas. Adigal here is referring specifically to his *jati* the Saiva Vellalas. It is also true that, up to this day in Tamil Nadu, vegetarianism and vegetarian food is referred to as Saivam and Saiva food.

⁵⁶³ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 31, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 78.

⁵⁶⁴ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 230-231.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 225-226.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 194, 199.

Brahmin houses but also the houses of any *jati* that ate meat and did not follow the Saivite traditions⁵⁶⁸. Gradually, the Brahmins gave up their meat eating to be integrated with the Vellalas⁵⁶⁹.

In his writings, Adigal is very critical about the caste system and how Brahmins, through unjust laws, created a caste hierarchy in Tamil society to divide and exploit the Tamil people⁵⁷⁰. However, when it comes to practices such as restrictions on commensality and untouchability, Adigal defends these practices on the grounds of meat eating and non-killing. He asserts that the initial *jati* division in Tamil society was twofold, based on whether or not one ate meat⁵⁷¹. The vegetarian Tamils avoided associating with the meat-eating Tamils and considered them inferior. Even within the meat-eating Tamils, those who ate beef (such as the Paraiya caste) were considered inferior to the other meat eaters⁵⁷². However, Adigal also made it clear that one's superior or inferior status was not based on birth, but rather on their adherence to Saiva *ozhukkam*, which in addition to vegetarianism includes practices such as performing rituals toward Siva and the avoidance of alcohol⁵⁷³. One can elevate one's status by adopting Saiva *dharma*⁵⁷⁴. The crux of Adigal's criticism of modern-day Brahmins is that they consider themselves superior to other *jatis* based on their birth alone, and not because adherence to any *dharma* or certain practices⁵⁷⁵. He extends this criticism to his own caste of Saiva Vellalas for refusing to dine with certain *jatis* and treating them as inferior based on birth alone, despite the fact that these castes are vegetarians themselves, even though they were born in a traditionally meat-eating caste⁵⁷⁶. Whether or not Adigal is correct about Brahmins and the development of vegetarianism in Tamil Nadu, his seemingly contradictory stance of accepting and defending certain practices (such as untouchability and restrictions on commensality) while condemning

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 199.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 194.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 203-204. ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 31, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁷¹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 116-117.

⁵⁷² Ibid., p. 118.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 119.

⁵⁷⁵ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 33, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 153.

⁵⁷⁶ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 59.

Brahmins for the caste system makes sense when taking into account that Adigal's conception of hierarchy is based on practices rather than on birth.

From analyzing Adigal's writings, it is clear that he conceives of non-killing and vegetarianism as two central practices that feed into other Saivite practices. The practices of non-killing and vegetarianism are modes of living that are part of the *sadhana* (discipline) of the Saiva Siddhantin to soften one's heart (compassion) and through that develop *bhakti*. It also influences the manner in which the puja ritual is done toward Siva. Puja is a ritual in which an offering is made to a particular deity, usually flowers, but can also include food items. In the Tamil Saivite traditions, the offering is always vegetarian food⁵⁷⁷. As mentioned, the ritual of animal sacrifice and offering of meat to the deity is pointed to as one of the main differences between the Aryan and Dravidian religion.

This brings us to the concept *madi* (loosely translated as purity). Adigal includes the notion of *madi* as part of Saiva *ozhukkam*. He cites verses from the *Tolkappiyam*, which discusses outer and inner purity. Inner purity involves possessing certain qualities such as patience, equanimity, and being truthful, while outer purity consists of certain traditions, such as vegetarianism and bathing every day⁵⁷⁸. For Maraimalai Adigal, the *madi* practice of vegetarianism not only pertains to the individual Saiva Siddhantin, but also determines caste-based social practices such as avoiding commensality and untouchability.

Regardless of whether Maraimalai Adigal is right about Tamil Saivism originating with the Vellalas, or the Vellalas teaching Brahmins vegetarianism, his ideas about non-killing and vegetarianism gives us important insights about what makes Saiva Siddhanta a religion for Adigal and the relationship between religion and caste. In contrast to Christianity and Judaism, where doctrines and beliefs are interrelated with one another and form an integrated structure, in the Saiva Siddhanta tradition practices feed into another and form a structure that helps the practitioner develop certain qualities or attain a practical goal.

⁵⁷⁷ SIDDALINGAIAH, T.B. *Origin and Development of Saiva Siddhanta Up to 14th Century*. 1st edition. Madurai: Napoleon Press, 1979, p. 32.

⁵⁷⁸ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 117-118.

What is Religion to Adigal?: Mapping the Concept of Religion onto *Matham*

I hope by now, it is becoming more clear that, even though Adigal uses the terminology of Christian theology when he writes in English (such as God, piety, and image worship), his explanation and further elaboration upon these terms shows a distortion of these Christian terms and concepts. It is here that one might raise an objection: Even within the various Christian denominations and between Christianity and the other Semitic religions, there are differences in how they conceive of God and concepts such as piety and idolatry. It is important to remember, however, that even within all that variety, the Christian denominations share some fundamental doctrines. For example, the doctrine that idolatry is the worship of creation instead of the creator and that it is a sin is shared by all Christian denominations. Another example is the belief that in order to be a Christian, one first has to believe in God and his teachings and obey the will of God. The practices of the various Christian denominations reflect faith in and obedience to the teachings of God.

In contrast, Maraimalai Adigal maps the term religion on to a Tamil term called *matham* (matha in Sanskrit). Adigal notes that in many Tamil texts, '*matham*' is synonymous with '*kollgai*', specifically, *matham* is a *kollgai* followed by a group of people⁵⁷⁹. *Kollgai* is defined as a group of ideas, thoughts, and practices adhered to by a group of people. In other words, the *ozhukkam* of a group of people. Adigal points to Saivite, Vaisnavite, Buddhist and Jain traditions as examples of *mathams*⁵⁸⁰. It is important to remember that each of these traditions shares the common goal of attaining happiness through self-knowledge, even though there are disagreements and debates between these traditions over which of them offers the best path to happiness. Thus, *matham* is best conceptualized as a cluster of practices and traditions that are aimed toward helping the individual reach happiness. These practices vary from *matham* to *matham*, depending on their differing ideas on the nature of happiness and the nature of human experience itself.

This explains why there is an absence of anything resembling a theology or a belief system in Adigal's Tamil writings about Saiva Siddhanta. Other than descriptions about the nature of Siva, his writings focus exclusively on various practices within the Saiva tradition that foster

⁵⁷⁹ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 31, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 65.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

bhakti toward Siva, differentiating between right and wrong practices and extensively elaborating on the correct practices to achieve this *bhakti*.

Based on Maraimalai Adigal's as well as the *Tirumurai* writings about the importance of non-killing and vegetarianism to Saiva Siddhanta, I propose that vegetarianism and non-killing are prerequisite practices that make it easier for the practitioner to cultivate *bhakti* by feeding into other practices. For example, vegetarianism has a direct effect on a puja directed toward the deity, where only offerings of vegetarian food are allowed. Maraimalai Adigal even claims vegetarianism and non-killing are the foundation for caste divisions as well as caste-related social practices, such as temple entry and commensality.

This brings up the question: What is the relationship between caste and *matham*? Adigal refers to Saiva Siddhanta as the Vellala *matham*, and at the same time refers to certain traditions and practices as being part of the Brahmin *matham*. While one might argue that Maraimalai Adigal was merely trying to promote his own *jati* as the originators of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition as part of the Dravidian politics of that time, there is evidence that certain *jatis* had been closely associated with certain *mathams* for centuries. At the beginning of this section, I discussed how the term *matham* referred to a group of practices directed toward a particular goal. The term *matham* is also used to refer to *asrams* and *adhinams* of a particular tradition.⁵⁸¹ From at least the sixteenth century onwards, the traditional Saivite *mathams* in Tamil Nadu have been led by Vellala gurus and their disciples, who are also Vellalas:

"The ascribed authority of the centre fundamentally relies on a personal lineage of pontiffs that is based on a guru–disciple relationship between the Gurumaha Sannidhanam and the members of the Adhinam's ascetic brotherhood, the so-called 'Tambirans'. The initiation into the brotherhood, however, is restricted to male aspirants of a particular social background, namely from four different Saiva Vellala groups and one Chettiyar community"⁵⁸².

The guru selects one of his disciples to be his successor. One has to be initiated into discipleship by a guru in order to be a part of the *matham* and perform certain rituals. This *guru parampara* (lineage) trace themselves back to the founding acharyas of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition.

⁵⁸¹ An ashram is a kind of traditional intellectual centre usually led by a guru and his students who have dedicated their lives to both practising and preserving a particular tradition.

⁵⁸² KLOBER, Rafael. What is Saiva Siddhanta? Tracing Modern Genealogies and Historicising a Classical Canon. *Oxford University Press*. 2017, Volume. 10, Issue. 2, p. 194.

Because of the traditions of guru paramparas and *mathams*, the Saiva Vellala *jati* has become closely associated with the Saiva Siddhanta tradition, and many members of the Saiva Vellala caste to this day are staunch Saivites.

Another example of a *jati* closely associated with a particular *matham* in Tamil Nadu are the Brahmin Iyers. Iyers are well known for being followers of the Smartha tradition. The Smartha tradition can be subdivided into two categories: the Mimamsa tradition and the Vedanta tradition. The Mimamsa tradition focuses on Vedic rituals, while Vedanta is an intellectual tradition that focuses on producing and preserving self/experiential knowledge gained from various practices⁵⁸³. Similar to the Saivite *mathams*, each of the ashrams and *mathams* of the Smartha traditions are headed by Brahmin gurus and disciples who trace their lineage back to Adi Shankara, a Nambudhiri Brahmin and one of the leading scholars of the Smartha tradition who founded many of the *mathas*⁵⁸⁴. Many of the Brahmin Iyers look to these and their gurus as a source of knowledge and authority when it comes to their traditions.

Given all this, it makes sense why Maraimalai Adigal refers to Saiva Siddhanta as the Vellala *matham*, while referring to certain traditions as being part of the Brahmin *matham*. A close examination of his writings shows that many of the traditions that Adigal regarded as being part of the Brahmin religion are part of the Smartha and Vaisnava traditions. The Brahmin-Iyer community in Tamil Nadu tend to follow the Smartha tradition, while the Brahmin Iyengar community are followers of the Vaisnava *matham*.

On top of this conceptual framework which thinks of *matham* as a set of practices, Maraimalai Adigal superimposed the descriptions produced by Orientalists and missionaries who were operating under a Christian religious framework. Within this framework, the Brahmins become a nation of priests, the *Vedas* become their religious doctrines, and Sanskrit their sacred language. The Tamil-speaking people are their own separate race with their own religion. Because he has adopted these descriptions, Adigal also started describing Sanskrit as both a Brahmin and Aryan language, and the language of the Brahmin religion. The fact that a large number of texts used in many of the Brahmin traditions are in Sanskrit becomes salient for Adigal; and he calls the deities revered in the Vedic rituals as Aryan *Devas*. As I explained

⁵⁸³ KITAGAWA, Joseph M. *The Religious Traditions of Asia: Religion, History, and Culture*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 18-19.

⁵⁸⁴ JONES, Constance and RYAN, James D. *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. New York: Facts on File, 2009, p. 280.

before, Maraimalai Adigal's project to preserve a pure Tamil language – free from Sanskrit influence – is also part of the project to preserve a pure Tamil religion.

There are three caveats to keep in mind when discussing *matham*. One, although certain *jatis* like the Vellalas and Iyer Brahmins are linked to specific *mathams* (those *mathams* being an integral part of their *jati* traditions), it is not clear how far this pattern applies to other *jatis* in Tamil Nadu. More research is required in this area. Second, no *matham* is restricted to any one *jati* or set of *jatis*, even though being a disciple or guru in some of the *adhinams* or *ashrams* of a particular tradition requires one to come from a certain *jati*. As I discussed before, the Nayanar poets of Tamil Nadu came from different caste backgrounds, and anybody can become a practitioner of Saiva Siddhanta. Third, belonging to a *matham* is a fine-grained affair. No practice or tradition is obligatory. Different *mathams* interact and borrow practices from each other, new practices are born, while age-old traditions are modified depending on the time and circumstances. At the same time, each *matham* seeks to distinguish itself sharply from other *mathams*.

Given these contexts, what does it mean to talk of a pure Saiva Siddhanta? Does Adigal mean a Saiva Siddhanta devoid of influence from any Brahmin *jati* or their traditions? The attempt to separate Brahmin traditions from Saiva Siddhanta runs into many problems. First, there are many groups in Tamil Nadu that go by the name Brahmin. Second, many members of the Brahmin *jatis* have been and continue to be followers of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition. Third, even if one is able to identify a particular *matham* that is followed by and makes up the majority of the traditions of a specific Brahmin *jati* such as the Smarta tradition, the Vedic texts that play an important role in the Smarta traditions are also part of Saiva Siddhanta. Moreover, Siva is revered in both traditions. This leaves Maraimalai Adigal with language as the criteria to demarcate Saiva Siddhanta from the Brahmin religion. However, this too runs into problems. While knowledge of classical Tamil is required in order to understand and access the *bhakti* poetry of the *Tirumurai*, the idea of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition being corrupted by Sanskrit-based traditions, and the proliferation of Sanskrit words into Tamil, make little sense given that Sanskrit texts such as the *Vedas* and the *Agamas* are also considered part of the textual corpus of Saiva Siddhanta.

In contrast, within the framework of the Semitic religions, the idea of linguistic and religious corruption make sense. Since the doctrines and laws of these religions form the foundation of their practices, these practices become obligatory. Practices that are seen as contrary to or forbidden by the doctrines of these religions become instances of idolatry. Idolatry, in turn, is

the corruption of the teachings of God. Since God's revelation comes in the form of one language or the other, the discovery and preservation of the original language of revelation becomes an intellectual *preoccupation* for many theologians, because the loss or alteration of this language also carries with it the danger of a corruption of God's revelation.

I suggest that although it seems that Maraimalai Adigal reproduces the descriptions of the so-called Indian religions provided by missionaries and Orientalists, he shows a lack of understanding of the Western Christian framework that went into structuring these descriptions and, by extension, the ideas and concepts that emerged from and make sense only within this framework; concepts such as the Aryan and Dravidian nations and religions. Since he doesn't understand the Christian framework within which these concepts emerged, he maps them onto native terms and concepts he is familiar with. Idolatry becomes *puja*, and the Aryan religion becomes the Brahmin *matham*. The result is that he ends up distorting these Christian concepts. But the distortion of these Christian concepts also gives us valuable insights into Maraimalai Adigal's understanding of the concept of religion and its relationship with language. I suggest that Adigal's concept of *matham* points to a phenomenon that is fundamentally different from the Semitic religions.

With this understanding of Maraimalai's concept of religion as *matham* and its relationship to language, we now move on to the last piece of the puzzle: Adigal's understanding of the concept of nation.

Vellalar Nation: Mapping the Concept of Nation Onto *Jati*

From the beginning of the twentieth century (when it was part of the Madras Presidency) up to today, Tamil Nadu remains a region made up of hundreds, if not thousands of *jatis*, as well as hundreds of *mathams*. Out of all these *jatis*, Adigal claims that the Saiva Vellala *jati* were the original inhabitants of Tamil Nadu, and describes the Tamil nation as the Vellalar Nation. He also describes Saiva Siddhanta as the Tamil religion. But what was a nation to Maraimalai Adigal? What makes the Vellalars into a nation? And how did he understand the relationship between a nation and a religion? In order to understand Maraimalai Adigal's understanding of the concept of nation, we need to understand his concept of caste.

Adigal claims that in both ancient Aryan and Dravidian societies, a human being's *jati* was not based on birth but on the functions or roles performed by that human being, and that it was changeable. To support his claims, Adigal uses Sanskrit texts such as the Puranas and the

Upanishads⁵⁸⁵. He claims that at one time there were no *jatis* in Aryan society, but that they gradually developed over time. In the Mahabharata, for example, the sage Bhrgu claims that at one time, everyone in society was a Brahmin, but over time they became divided into other *varnas* because they deviated from their *dharma* and their *guna*: those Brahmins who were aggressive by nature, were strong, and fought in battles became Ksatriyas, while those who engaged in lying and delinquency and were immersed in pleasures became Sudras⁵⁸⁶. In the English preface to the essay *Jati Vetrimeyumu Poli Saivarum* (Caste divisions and the false Saivas) (1911) Adigal stresses that the organization of the modern-day castes cannot be compared with the ancient Aryan system of four castes (Brahmin, Ksatriya, Vaisya, Sudra) which was based upon a division of labour and was much more flexible in terms of social rules, with castes being able to change their occupations⁵⁸⁷. It is important to note that Adigal is using the concept of *jati* and *varna* interchangeably as terms for caste. This is problematic because it is not clear whether these two terms refer to the same phenomenon or even interrelated phenomena. The Sanskrit texts talk about four *varnas*, while there are thousands of *jatis* in India. As Martin Fárek states in the book *The Western Foundations of the Caste System* (2017): "As decades have passed, scholars have been struggling with the same problems: How do we define *varna* and *jati*? What is the relationship between these two categories? How does the whole system function?"⁵⁸⁸ While many scholars conceptualize *jati* as a sub-category of *varnas*, it is not at all clear that *jatis* developed from *varnas*⁵⁸⁹.

Adigal states that hierarchies among the *varnas* in the ancient Aryan society were based on the *ozhukkam* being adhered to⁵⁹⁰. Those *varnas* that adhered to a 'higher' or more exalted *dharma*, such as studying the *Vedas* and performing the temple rituals, were regarded as having a superior status⁵⁹¹. Adigal cites verses from a number of Sanskrit texts as evidence of the existence of this sort of hierarchy. According to the *Candogya Upanisad*, even if one is born

⁵⁸⁵ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 82, 84.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 62-63.

⁵⁸⁸ FÁREK, Martin. Were Shramana and *Bhakti* Movements Against the Caste System? In: *Western Foundations of the Caste System*. ed. FÁREK, Martin et al. Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 149.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 151.

⁵⁹⁰ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 29, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 86.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., p. 91-92.

into a family of low status, if one tells the truth all the time one becomes a Brahmin⁵⁹². By the same token, the *Vashista Dharma Sutra* states that a Brahmana or Ksatriya loses their *varna* status if they fail to adhere to their *varna dharma*. This *dharma* includes engaging in certain practices (such as reading the *Vedas* for Brahmins) while avoiding other practices (such as selling meat)⁵⁹³.

Maraimalai Adigal extends the above claims about the Aryan people to the Tamils, namely, that before the arrival of the Brahmins, caste among the Tamil people was based on their role and occupation in society and that hierarchies among the *jatis* in Tamil Nadu was based on the *ozhukkam* followed by each of the *jatis*. Adigal presents certain parts of the second-century Tamil text the *Tolkappiyam* as evidence of this kind of social structure prevailing in Tamil Nadu at that time. Like the *Purushu Sukta*, the *Tolkappiyam* divides society into four broad categories: Anthanar, Arasar, Yaenor, and Izhinthor⁵⁹⁴. These correspond to the four *varnas* described in the *Purusha Sukta*. The Anthanars are described as being involved in intellectual activities and performing rituals in temples, while the Arasars are described as the rajas (kings) and chieftains. The Yaenor class is comprised of those involved in agriculture and trade, and the Izhinthors are those who serve the other three groups⁵⁹⁵. According to the *Tolkappiyam*, the hierarchy between these groups was based on *madi* and *ozhukkam*⁵⁹⁶. The *madi* status of each group depended on the practices and traditions they followed⁵⁹⁷. The Anthanars were on top of the hierarchy because they stood the most firm and followed the most exalted *ozhukkam*. Next came the Arasars, followed by the Yaenor group. The Izhinthor group are the lowest because they are the least adherent to Saiva *ozhukkam* e.g. they eat meat⁵⁹⁸. But at the same time, texts like the *Tolkappiyam* and the *Tirukkural* also state that, no matter which *jati* one is born into, one can elevate oneself in *madi* by following certain practices⁵⁹⁹. Maraimalai Adigal claims that at the inception of Tamil-speaking society there were no caste divisions. Everybody in that society

⁵⁹² Ibid., p. 86.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., p. 91-92.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 108.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 106-108.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 116-117.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 117.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 118.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 119.

were Vellalas, and they all adhered to Saiva *ozhukkam*. According to Adigal, the Vellalas were the Adi Dravidas, the original Dravidians⁶⁰⁰. It is within Adigal's claim of Vellalas being the Adi Dravidas that we find some insights into Maraimalai Adigal's understanding of what makes a group of people into a nation.

At this point I have to raise the question: did Tamil speakers see themselves as a nation prior to the nineteenth century? While some modern scholars have used the Tamil word 'Tamilagam' to mean Tamil nation, textual evidence suggests that the word Tamilagam was used as a geographic term: It meant the region where Tamil speakers dwell⁶⁰¹. Tamil Nadu at the time of the nineteenth century was a region made of thousands of *jatis* each following their traditions. While these *jatis* coexisted peacefully for the most part, and even shared some practices, did they see themselves as one people because they shared a common language? A pattern we see among many of these English educated Tamil intellectuals is the claim that their *jati* were the progenitors of either the Indian or Tamil nation, and that it was their *jati sampradayas* (traditions) that comprised the original religion of this nation. As I discussed before, many of the Brahmin intellectuals from the Madras presidency lamented that Brahmins were moving away from their traditions, and that Brahmins were supposed to be the custodians of Indian culture and civilization, of which the Hindu religion is a major part. In the case of these Brahmin intellectuals, they accepted the theory propagated by European intellectuals that they are the direct descendants of the Aryan race within India and the inheritors of the Aryan religion, Hinduism. These Brahmin intellectuals equated Brahmin *dharma* with the Vedic religion and argued that it is the Brahmins who continue to preserve the Vedic religion by following their Brahmin *dharma*.

In the same vein, some of the Saiva Vellala intellectuals (such as Maraimalai Adigal) claimed that the Vellalas were the original Tamil people. As explained before, the Vellalas have been linked with the Saivite traditions, specifically Saiva Siddhanta, for many centuries; with many of the Saivite ashrams being maintained and run by Vellala guru paramparas (lineages). For many of the Vellala intellectuals, the Saivite traditions and practices are synonymous with the *jati* traditions of the Saiva Vellalas. Specifically, the Saiva Siddhanta *matham* becomes the Vellalar *matham*. By the time of the early twentieth century and the beginnings of Dravidian/non-Brahmin politics, the writings and ideas of missionaries such as G.U. Pope and

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 105. ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam* – 31, Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 78.

⁶⁰¹ MURUGAN, V. *Tolkāppiyam in English*. Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2000, p. xxiii.

Robert Caldwell had become widespread – including the idea of Saiva Siddhanta being the native religion of the Dravidian people. Many of the English-educated members in the Justice Party at the time were from the Saiva Vellala *jati*, and they eagerly picked up the idea of Saiva Siddhanta being the Dravidian religion. Thus, the Vellala *matham* becomes the Tamil *matham*, and the Vellalas become the original Dravidian nation.

I discussed several cases that support the claim that Vellala intellectuals like Maraimalai Adigal mapped the concept of nation onto *jati*. For Adigal, *jati* becomes one of the basic social units of society. A *jati*'s structure is determined by its *jati* sampradayas, which includes, in some cases, the *matham* that members of a *jati* have traditionally adhered to. These practices are not founded on doctrines or laws. Instead, these traditions themselves constitute a form of knowledge and are their own foundation.

Conclusion

We now come back to the primary questions of my research. The primary research question I address is: How did the Tamil Saivite nationalists perceive the relationship between nation, religion, and language? This primary research question can be broken down into four sub-questions: What is religion to these Tamil nationalists? What is nationhood to them? How did they perceive the relation between the two? Finally, how does caste fit into the above triad?

The research methodology I employed is a comparative one. I first examined how Western intellectuals grappled with these concepts and their relationship with one another. After all, it was European intellectuals who first formulated the Aryan invasion theory and the idea of a Dravidian nation. I then examine the manner in which Tamil nationalists adopted and understood the nation-religion-language framework. I hypothesize that, because this framework was developed within the Western cultural milieu, and is connected to other sets of ideas that make up the topoi of this culture, it is bound to be distorted when it travels to a culture that doesn't share the ideas and assumptions of the host culture. Studying the way in which the Tamil nationalists distorted the nation-religion-language framework would give us insight into their cultural framework. In my research, I focus primarily on the writings of Maraimalai Adigal, because he is one of the most influential Tamil Saivite nationalists, and his body of writings on the subject of Dravidian nationalism is the most extensive among that group. It is now time to revisit the primary research problem: How did the Tamil Saivite nationalists link the concept of nation to religion and language?

In European culture, it is clear from the time of the early Church fathers that nation and religion were intertwined concepts, and that the concept of nation emerged from Judeo-Christian theology. In the most basic sense, a nation is a group of people constituted by religion and language. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, this is the concept of nation held by European intellectuals, starting from the early Church fathers to the Protestant reformers, to Enlightenment thinkers such as Johann Herder, all the way to the Orientalist Freidrich Max Müller. The conceptual framework that gave rise to this notion of nationhood is Christian in nature.

The Tower of Babel account in the Bible describes the genesis of nations. Prior to that event, all humanity lived as one, and spoke in one language. The confusion of the tongues at Babel and the scattering of humanity across the earth simultaneously resulted in the fracturing of the common human language into multiple human languages. Along with the fracturing of the

human race and the universal human language, Babel also marked the corruption of the revelation of God into idolatry. Since language is the medium through which human beings receive God's revelation, the distortion of the original language of revelation leads to the distortion of the revelation itself. Thus, since the Middle Ages, Europeans have identified and distinguished nations from each other based on religion and language. Saint Augustine explained that both the true religion of God and the Hebrew language were preserved in the family of Terah, while Isidore of Seville identified each nation based on their gods and ceremonies. As the seventeenth-century theologian, Arnston Kircher, puts it in his work the *Turris Babel* (1679), "Out of the multiplication of languages...are born the various idolatrous religions"⁶⁰².

From the thirteenth century onwards, we see many Europeans claiming that their mother tongue was the one spoken in paradise. This claim – that a particular national language was the language of paradise – also entails that it was that nation which had access to the true religion, and in which the true religion is preserved. In the words of the famed Protestant reformer Martin Luther, "I thank God that I am able to hear and to find my God in the German language, Whom neither I nor you could ever find in Latin or Greek or Hebrew"⁶⁰³. Out of the two elements (language and religion), it is religion that emerges as the fundamental constituent of a nation. Language is the medium through which religion is transmitted and preserved. As the eighteenth-century Pietist theologian states in his essay *The Outlines of a Philosophy of a History of Man* (1800), it is religion that is the fountainhead of what he considered the building blocks of a nation from its form of governance, to its laws, to even its art and philosophy⁶⁰⁴.

Thus, within the Christian framework, since religious knowledge is basically the revelation of God's plan as well as humanity's role in that plan, a nation is a group of people who have a role to play in God's plan. This explains why Herder sees history as governed by divine providence that gives rise to different "chosen peoples" at different points in time, in accordance with the

⁶⁰² ECO, Umberto. *The Search For the Perfect Language*. Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1995, p. 85.

⁶⁰³ POLIAKOV, Léon. *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*. London: Chatto & Windus Heinemann for Sussex University Press, 1974, p. 84.

⁶⁰⁴ HERDER, Johann Gottfried. *Outlines Of A Philosophy Of The History Of Man*. Translated by T.O CHURCHILL. New York: Bergman Publishers, 1966, p. 253.

divine plan of God⁶⁰⁵. Within this framework, the Jews become the prototypical nation. The Jews are a nation because of the covenants God established with them. Both the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic Covenant made the Jews into a holy nation, a kingdom of priests tasked with the mission of spreading the word of God and uniting all humanity as one people (Genesis 9:9, 11; Isaiah 49:6; Deuteronomy 14:2). In return, God promised them that they would be a kingdom of priests, a light unto other nations; and also promised them the land of Israel. The Jews are a nation for two reasons: Firstly, the Jews are a nation because they are a group of people who have a role to play in God's plan. Secondly, the Jews have accepted their role in God's plan by obeying his laws and commandments. This is what unites them as a people. The Hebrew language is crucial to what makes the Jews into a people, because it is the medium through which they receive and interpret God's revelation.

The Europeans who arrived on the shores of India came with the cluster of preconceived ideas and assumptions that I outline above. They mapped the model of the Jewish nation onto the people India, describing them as a nation of tribes organized into a hierarchy, with the Brahmins being the priestly tribe. The Europeans observed that the Brahmins in many parts of India, including Tamil Nadu, had their own unique rituals and practices. These rituals made heavy use of Sanskrit mantras and texts, such as the *Vedas* and the *Sastras*. These texts were viewed as the sacred scriptures of the Brahmin religion, with Sanskrit understood as their sacred language.

Over time, European travellers began to discover many languages and traditions across the length and breadth of India, and theorized that India was a land made up of many nations, each possessing their own language and having their age-old religious customs. It was during this time that the beginnings of what would eventually be known as the Aryan invasion theory began to crystallize.

The simplified version of Aryan invasion theory is that there was an invasion of India by a foreign people known as the Aryans. They conquered the indigenous people of India and imposed their culture and religion on them. Sanskrit was thought to be the language of the Aryans. They are said to have brought the Vedic religion into India, which later turned into Hinduism. The Brahmins were thought to be the priests and lawgivers of the Aryans. Over the course of time, the Europeans discovered the concept of *varna* in the Sanskrit texts. The Rigvedic Purusha Sukta describes four social groups (*varnas*) as making up the body parts of

⁶⁰⁵ OLENDER, Maurice. *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Arthur GOLDHAMMER. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 43.

the primordial being known as Purusha, with the Brahmins being the mouth and the Sudra the feet. Soon, the idea began to crystallize and become established among missionaries and Orientalists that the Purusha Sukta was describing a socio-religious system, imposed by the Brahmins on the indigenous populace of India, which would later be known as the caste system. The European scholars categorized these four *varnas* into two meta-level groupings. The first group consists of the first three castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas), while the second group consists of the Sudras and the Pariahs (whom the Europeans saw as the lowest and as an outcast group). The first three castes were seen to make up one religious community, the Aryan nation, while the second group were thought to be the indigenous population of India, who were excluded from that community and were absorbed into the caste system as servants or slaves. Because of the relationship between the Aryans and the indigenous populace as conquerors and the conquered, masters and slaves, the Aryans were thought to be a more advanced civilization than the indigenous peoples of India. Many scholars speculated that the forest and mountain tribes they encountered in India were the remnants of this aboriginal race. As Robert Caldwell describes it, these tribes had very rude and barbarous ceremonies with bloody sacrifices. Unlike the Aryans, they didn't seem to have any native doctrines or scriptures before the coming of the Brahmins – hence the description of these groups and their religion as primitive. In fact, the description of the aboriginal people of India as tribal by European intellectuals shows their status: These tribes are seen as pre-national, and thus occupy a lower rung of the civilizational ladder, compared to the Brahmins, who were a nation.

The observance of the linguistic relationship between the South Indian languages and their lack of common root words and grammar with Sanskrit and the other Indo-European languages led Western scholars to speculate about a South Indian or Dravidian nation, with the Tamil people being the oldest living descendants of this Dravidian nation some European intellectuals surmised that the Paraiyan caste were the original aboriginal people of Tamil Nadu, before the Aryan invasion.

Having identified the Dravidian nation, the Orientalists and missionaries set out to find the Dravidian religion. Well before Maraimalai Adigal's time, the notion of Saivism as the religion of the Dravidian people was crystallizing among European scholars. At least as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, the missionary Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (who had arrived on the coast of Malabar) described the religion of the Malabars as a monotheistic religion worshipping the one God, Siva. Ziegenbalg also noticed that the Malabarians had their own wise men whom he called Gnanigol. These Gnanigol seemed to be challenging the authority of

the Brahmin priesthood by questioning the validity of the *Sastras* as well as Vedic rituals and caste practices. One of the texts that Ziegenbalg relied on to get information about the Malabar religion was the Tamil Saivite text known as *Sivavakkiyam*, which emphasized Siva as the supreme being and rejected venerating the other deities. Thus, a picture began to form as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, of a South Indian Saivite monotheism corrupted by Brahmin priests, whose pure form is preserved by the Gnanigol. About a century later, scholars such Reverend John Stevenson and Horace Hayman Wilson would reproduce this account, pointing out that Siva was originally an aboriginal deity and Siva worship was originally an aboriginal tradition concentrated primarily in southern India, and that both became absorbed into the Brahmin religion at a later date. They cite certain archaeological and textual observations as evidence of their claims, such as jyoti-lingas being more concentrated in the South, and neither the deity Siva or Rudra appearing in the early Sanskrit texts. Both scholars agree that Saivism is mainly concentrated in the South. The missionary Robert Caldwell, one of the key figures responsible for disseminating the Dravidian nation theory, gives a good summary of the methodology used by scholars to identify the Dravidian religion:

"any usages that are found to prevail extensively in Southern India, and especially amongst the ruder and less Aryanised tribes, which are derived neither from the *Vedas* nor from the Puranas, neither from Buddhism nor from Jainism, such usages may be concluded to be relics of the religious system of the Dravidian aborigines".⁶⁰⁶

It is worth noting that the European intellectuals of the time went about the process systematically. They began identifying practices and deities that had roots in and were more common to the southern regions of India, especially Tamil Nadu, and at the same time were either absent or hardly mentioned in the early Sanskrit texts such as the *Rigveda*, and thus cannot be derived from the Brahmin/Sanskrit-based traditions. It is around the mid nineteenth century that missionaries such as G.U. Pope started exploring the corpus of Tamil Saivite texts which were part of the Saiva Siddhanta school. Pope concluded that, while the Dravidian religion might have begun as a primitive form of demonolatry, it later developed into a sophisticated religious system. Pope found a close affinity between the Saiva Siddhanta religion

⁶⁰⁶ CALDWELL, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar Of The Dravidian Or South-Indian Family Of Languages*. London: TRUBNEE & CO., LUDGATE HILL., 1875, p. 580.

and Christianity, not only because it "formulates sovereign morality and absolute reason", but also because it addresses itself to all people regardless of caste and thus universal in scope.

I wish to point out that the Europeans intellectuals who were making these claims about the Brahmin/Aryan nation and caste system weren't veridical observers who were using a neutral, objective framework. They approached India with a cluster of preconceived ideas about what they would find there. This cluster emerged from a Christian theological framework and formed an interconnected whole. It included ideas about human history and the nature of religion. Furthermore, these observers produced little in terms of evidence to support their claims. For example, there is little to no evidence of a large-scale invasion of a Sanskrit-speaking people in the ancient history of India of the kind that would be required to subjugate the so-called aboriginal populace, including the Tamil-speaking people. In the same vein, there is no evidence of the Brahmins imposing a caste system on the rest of the Indian populace. None of the European intellectuals satisfactorily addressed the following questions in a non-ad hoc manner: How did a small group of Brahmins gain control of so many people? What kind of pan-Indian institutions did they have at their disposal? Who conferred such power and authority on one set of people?⁶⁰⁷ Unlike European Christendom, there was no Indian equivalent of a religious institution like a Church that had the power and authority to make laws for the entire populace and enforce them.

The groups that fell under the umbrella term 'Brahmins' were comprised of a diverse number of other groups which we see even today. For example, the Bhumihar Brahmins of Bihar have no relation to the Nambudhiri Brahmins of Kerala, who in turn have no relation to the Iyer Brahmins of Tamil Nadu.

Nevertheless, the story about the Aryan invasion and caste system would percolate into the Indian populace and be embraced by many Indian intellectuals, including those in Tamil Nadu. In the process, this story created conflict and hatred between groups that didn't exist before. The Brahmins, who had existed for centuries in Tamil Nadu, came to be seen as a foreign people whose traditions and practices were antithetical to the Tamil religion. The notion of Tamil speakers as a separate nation from the rest of India began to form. But, far from creating a shared national consciousness among the non-Brahmin populace, it led to intellectuals of certain castes vying with each other for the title of the 'original Dravidians' of Tamil Nadu.

⁶⁰⁷ FÁREK, Martin et al. Introduction: Caste Studies and the Apocryphal Elephant. In: *Western Foundations of the Caste System*. ed. FÁREK, Martin et al. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017, pp. 8–9.

One of the first Tamil intellectuals to stake the claim of ‘Adi Dravida’ (original Dravidians) for his caste was the Paraiya intellectual named Iyothee Thoss⁶⁰⁸. European scholars during Iyothee Thoss’ time (and before) were already claiming that the Paraiyas – whom they referred to as the untouchable castes – were the original inhabitants of India, and so it made sense that an intellectual from the Paraiya caste would be one of the first to reproduce these claims. Contrary to the missionaries who claimed that a form of primitive demonolatry was the religion of the Paraiyas, Thoss claimed Buddhism was the religion practised by the Paraiyas⁶⁰⁹. Unlike the Brahmanical religion, this Buddhism of the Paraiyas was presented as an egalitarian religion without any kind of hierarchy or caste distinction.

Inspired by Iyothee Thoss, it was English-educated members of the Saiva Vellala caste who began to claim that the ancestors of their caste were the original inhabitants of Tamil Nadu, and that Saivism was the pre-Aryan Dravidian religion, specifically Saiva Siddhanta. The Saiva Vellalas are well known in Tamil Nadu for being Siva devotees and adherents of Saivite traditions. One of the most prominent among these Saiva Vellala nationalists was Maraimalai Adigal. Adigal was one of the first Tamil intellectuals to introduce the idea of a Tamil nation to the wider masses of Tamil Nadu.

Being an English-educated Saiva Siddhantin, he was familiar with the works of missionaries such as Robert Caldwell and G.U. Pope⁶¹⁰, and eagerly picked up and promoted the idea that Saiva Siddhanta is the religion of the Tamil nation. However, in contrast to the story told by scholars such as Robert Caldwell and John Stevenson, in Adigal’s account, the Dravidians weren’t primitive barbaric tribes, but a glorious civilization well before the arrival of the Aryans. The Saivism that they practised wasn’t a form of rude demonolatry with animal sacrifices, but a benign, sophisticated tradition with a rich intellectual history. The contrast set to this Tamil religion was the Aryan religion. In Adigal’s view, it was the Aryans who had brought barbaric rituals that involved animal sacrifices and the veneration of violent deities into India. The Aryan religion included all the practices that Adigal saw as Brahmin traditions.

Maraimalai Adigal took these claims about the Tamil religion even further, claiming that Saivism was not merely the original religion of Tamil Nadu, but the original pan-Indian religion

⁶⁰⁸ PANDIAN, M S S. *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*. Ranikhet Cantt: Permanent Black, 2016, p. 77.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

⁶¹⁰ Pope was the first to suggest that Saiva Siddhanta is the prehistoric religion of the Tamil nation.

before the arrival of the Aryans, citing archaeologist John Marshall's *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization : Being an official account of Archaeological Excavations at Mohenjo-daro carried out by the Government of India between the years 1922 and 1927* (1931) as evidence for this claim⁶¹¹⁶¹². Adigal extends this claim to the Tamil people as well. He relies on scholars such as E.J. Rapson and Sir John Marshall, who claim that Dravidic dialects were being spoken in North and North West India prior to the Aryan invasion⁶¹³. In Adigal's eyes, the Tamil-speaking people were not just one of many groups that peopled the Indian Subcontinent (as claimed by scholars such as Caldwell and Curzon) before the arrival of the Aryans, but the Ur-people of India. It becomes clear from his writings that Maraimalai Adigal was mapping the concepts of religion and nation onto *matham* and *jati*. This explains why Adigal's opposition to the so-called Brahmanical religion is purely on the level of rituals, and how the Brahmin rituals are antithetical to Saivite traditions. It also explains why, for Maraimalai Adigal, a Tamilian is not merely someone who hails from Tamil Nadu and speaks Tamil, but one who is a follower of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition. Since Adigal links the Saiva Siddhanta *matham* to the Vellala *jati*, in his hands, the Tamilian religion becomes the Vellala religion, and the Tamil nation becomes the Vellala nation.

An important trend we observe in the beginnings of Tamil nationalism was that the non-Brahmin castes did not come together as a Tamil people or cluster around a common Tamil religion. Instead we observe intellectuals from different castes claiming that their caste is the forefather of the Tamil people, and their caste practices were the original Tamil religion. The reasons for this are twofold: Firstly, while there were social groupings within Tamil society such as *jati*, *pakuthi*, and *kutumpam*, prior to European colonialism, there is no evidence that the people of Tamil Nadu saw themselves as one people or brethren because they share a common language. Some would object and say the term 'Tamilagam' refers to the Tamil nation. However, in the ancient Tamil texts such as the *Tolkappiyam*, Tamilagam is a geographic designation that refers to the region where Tamil-speaking people reside. Secondly, Tamil speakers weren't bounded together with covenants and laws like the Jews. Instead, Tamil Nadu was comprised of various *mathams* and *jatis*. Each *matham* contained a set of traditional

⁶¹¹ John Marshall claims that there is archaeological evidence that Saivism has a history going back to the Chalcolithic age, and that it was practiced by the Indus Valley civilization.

⁶¹² MARSHALL, John. *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization : Being an official account of Archaeological Excavations at Mohenjo-daro carried out by the Government of India between the years 1922 and 1927*. London: Arthur Probstain, 1931, p. vii, Quoted in ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 33*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, p. 49.

⁶¹³ ADIGAL, Maraimalai. *Maraimalaiyam - 33*. Chennai: Tamilmann Pathipagam, 2015, pp. 34, 295.

practices, however these practices weren't grounded in any theology or doctrine. Instead these practices formed a constellation or structure each influencing the other. For example, lack of animal sacrifice/killing and vegetarianism are clearly linked together according to the Saivite texts, and these above practices in turn, become the basis for *madi* practices according to Maraimalai Adigal. Although no *matham* was restricted to a particular *jati*, certain *jatis* became strongly associated with a particular *matham* because a large proportion of members of that *jati* were followers of that *matham* and certain guru lineages are linked to specific *jatis*..

Now we come to the crux of how Tamil Saivites, such as Maraimalai Adigal, understood the conceptual framework that would transform them into a Tamil nation with their own Tamil religion. Having accepted the European theory about an Aryan invasion and an indigenous Dravidian nation, the Tamil intellectuals – by logical necessity – are forced to adopt the concepts of nation and religion. They then proceed to map the terms 'nation' and 'religion' onto indigenous concepts they are familiar with: *jati* and *matham*.

Maramailai Adigal's writings on the Brahmins give us some insight into how this process of mapping the unfamiliar into the familiar took place. When examining Maraimalai Adigal's writings, it is clear that, even though he accepted a variant of the Aryan invasion theory, he did not share nor understand the background Christian theological framework that provided the foundation for the theory. While the Europeans objected to and criticized how the so-called lower castes were treated, the crux of the European criticism of the Brahmins stems from the idea that they are a corrupt priesthood who are presenting human doctrines and laws (including the caste system) as though they are God's doctrines and laws, and imposing a form of sacerdotal slavery on the populace.

Like the Europeans, Adigal describes the Brahmins as performers of certain rituals and rites, such as the Vedic Yagnas. He also identifies Sanskrit as the Brahmin language, and Sanskrit texts as Brahmanical. However, the similarities end here. Maraimalai Adigal doesn't identify a doctrinal basis or justification for the Brahmin rituals. Neither does he describe the Brahmins as a priesthood or a clergy. Instead, Adigal identifies Brahmins as a *jati* on the basis of certain traditions they follow, and how well they adhere to these traditions. This is evidenced by the fact that Adigal's primary criticisms of Brahmins as a *jati* revolved around how their practices (such as animal sacrifice) were antithetical to the practices of Saiva Siddhanta, and that modern-day Brahmins neglected to adhere to their traditional practices, such as the performance of rituals and teaching of the *Vedas*, and instead were more focused on being model civil servants for the British. Although my research doesn't delve into the structure and function of *jatis* in

India, we can safely say that they are a social grouping (along with *kulla* and *kutumpa*) whose members follow a specific set of practices. It is important to keep in mind that belonging to a *jati* is not an all or nothing affair. One is not obligated to follow any practice in order to be a Brahmin. No single tradition or practice is the monopoly of one caste. At the same time, certain traditions are more closely identified with a certain *jati* than others.

For example, for many centuries in Tamil Nadu, continuing to this day, many members of the Brahmin caste make a living by performing *homa* and *yagna* rituals in homes and temples. Although the performance of these rituals isn't exclusive to Brahmins, they are one of the *jatis* in Tamil Nadu who are well known for performing them. One of the features of most of Brahmin traditions, including *homas* and *yagnas*, was that they made use of Sanskrit texts and mantras⁶¹⁴. As mentioned, this feature became a salient property for the Europeans theorizing about the Aryan (Brahmin) nation.

Although Maraimalai Adigal uses the term 'religion' in his English writings, a close examination of Adigal's use of the term (including the manner in which he systematically relates it to other concepts within his native cultural framework), shows that he is talking about an entirely different phenomenon than the European Orientalists and missionaries.

In order to understand Maraimalai Adigal use of the concept of religion, we have to understand the concepts of *matham* and *ozhukkam* – two ideas that play a prominent role in Maraimalai Adigal's writings. *Matham* is a commonly used term both in Tamil and other Indian languages to translate the English word 'religion'. Maraimalai Adigal's writings primarily concern themselves with two *mathams*: the so-called Aryan-Brahmin *matham* and the Saiva Siddhanta *matham*, which he calls the Tamil *matham*. The cluster of practices within each of these *mathams* revolve around one or a set of deities. In the case of Saiva Siddhanta, the deity in question is Siva. The aim of the practices is to produce an experiential state called *bhakti* toward Siva. The experience of *bhakti*, in turn, is supposed to lead to another experiential state called *inbam* (happiness, *ananda*). While *bhakti* is translated as religious piety or devotion, these terms fail to capture the phenomenon. In Christian theology, piety and devotion are expressions of faith in the Biblical God and his word. Piety also means complete submission to God's will. Piety and devotion, therefore, express a Christian's belief state – how strong and unwavering it is. *Bhakti*, on the other hand, refers to various emotional states in which the emotional

⁶¹⁴ The *yagnas* and *homas* themselves are Vedic rituals, accompanied by Vedic mantras. Sanskrit-based traditions include reading and narrating the Puranas, performing pujas and others use Sanskrit mantras.

attachments we observe in different human relationships (e.g. parent-child, friends, husband-wife relationships) are directed toward a particular deity.

I propose that the group of traditions that comprise Saiva Siddhanta are a constellation of interconnected practices that feed into and influence one another. For example, vegetarianism and non killing (two important practices in Saiva Siddhanta) impacts how rituals performed in the Saiva Siddhanta tradition; no animal sacrifices or offerings of meat are offered to the deity. The practice of vegetarianism and non-killing also help to nurture and develop qualities that are useful for cultivating *bhakti*, namely *anbu* and *karuna*⁶¹⁵, while *dhyaana* and *puja* are tools or vehicles through which *bhakti* is directed toward the deity, It is important to note that these constellation of practices are not a unique property of Saiva Siddhanta, since other *bhakti* traditions such as the Chaitanya Vaisnava tradition share these set of practices with Saiva Siddhanta.

Thus, from Adigal's writings about Saiva *matham*, we can formulate a basic general description of what a *matham* is, and how it is different from what Europeans consider as religion. Unlike the Semitic religions, *mathams* are not a set of laws and teachings gifted by God to humanity, but man-made traditions that are supposed to take the follower of that *matham* toward a particular goal or end state. In the majority of the Indian traditions, this end state is usually some form of happiness. In traditions such as Saivism and Vaisnavism, the experiential state called *bhakti* is the means through which this happiness is attained. This fundamental difference between the two phenomena (*matham* and religion) is also demonstrated by comparing the European intellectuals and Maraimalai Adigal's views on the role of language in preserving religion.

Adigal puts great stress on the importance of preserving Tamil in its pure classical form without any loan words from Sanskrit or other Indian languages. But his reasoning behind doing so was completely different from that of the European theologians. For example, the Kabbalist Abulafia lamented the corruption of the original Hebrew because he thought of it as the sacred proto-language whose conventions had been established between God and the prophets. He feared that the corruption of the original Hebrew meant the corruption of the original revelation of God. For many European theologians it was religion that provided the foundation for the political constitution, ethics and laws of a nation. The corruption of one's national language meant the corruption of the pillars of nationhood. Adigal, on the other hand, emphasizes the

⁶¹⁵ Translated as 'love' and 'compassion' in English.

preservation of classical Tamil because it is the language of classical Tamil poetry, including Saivite *bhakti* poetry. Since *bhakti* is an experiential state that is evoked through certain emotions, and Tamil *bhakti* poetry is designed to stimulate such emotions, the grammar and phonetic structure of classical Tamil plays an important role in conveying the various emotional states associated with the experience of *bhakti*.

Now we come to the idea of *ozhukkam*. *Ozhukkam* is a Tamil term that is usually translated as *dharma* in Sanskrit, and as morality or a set of moral codes in English. When one examines Maraimalai Adigal's usage of the term, it is clear that he is using it to refer to how strictly one adheres to the rules and practices within the Saiva Siddhanta tradition. Hence the term Saiva *ozhukkam*. Adigal primarily uses the term Saiva *ozhukkam* to refer to adherence to vegetarianism and non-killing. Importantly, his use of the term *ozhukkam* also includes following several other social rules relating to commensality and marriage that are impacted by adherence to vegetarianism and non-killing. For example, vegetarians should not dine with meat eaters, nor should those from vegetarian *jatis* marry those who come from meat-eating *jatis*. Therefore, *ozhukkam* is when one diligently adheres to the rules and practices that fall within the umbrella of a tradition. This brings us to the subject of caste and its relationship to a *matham*.

In Tamil Nadu, the caste known as the Saiva Vellalas are closely linked to the Saiva Siddhanta tradition, because many members of that caste are followers of that tradition. Like Saiva Vellalas, many of the *jatis* in India are strongly linked with particular *mathams*. Thus, the *ozhukkam* of a *jati* includes how diligently members of a certain *jati* adhere to the traditions of their *matham*. In the case of Saiva Vellalas, *ozhukkam* is about how faithful they are to the traditions of Saiva Siddhanta.

As mentioned, practices such as vegetarianism structure the social practices of the groups that adopt it, including Saiva Vellalas. In Adigal's view, Saiva Vellala practices such as untouchability toward members of particular castes, as well as refusal to dine or socialize with members of particular castes arise from the practices of vegetarianism and non-killing. Adigal's explanation of these social practices is that they are a way of preserving the Saiva *ozhukkam*. In order to preserve the tradition of abstaining from alcohol and vegetarianism, the traditional 'orthodox' Vellalas not only avoid eating with castes that eat meat and drink alcohol, but also avoids any interaction or contact with them, and tend to marry members of their own group. Thus, an individual is a Saiva Vellala by virtue of adherence to their caste practices – of which

the Saiva *matham* is an important component. Their identity and distinctiveness as a *jati* depends upon them preserving their traditions from generation to generation.

As mentioned before, adherence to any *matham* is a fine-grained affair, similar to belonging to a *jati*. While the Saiva Vellalas placed great importance in preserving their Saivite traditions, they weren't forbidden from adopting practices from other traditions. At the same time, the Saiva Siddhanta tradition wasn't exclusive to Saiva Vellalas, since members from other *jatis* such as Brahmins were also followers of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition.

Saiva Siddhanta itself wasn't a fixed set of practices frozen in time. While certain practices within Saiva Siddhanta were assiduously preserved and passed on (such as vegetarianism), Saiva Siddhanta as a whole was constantly changing with the times and circumstances, including borrowing practices from other traditions. These same considerations apply to all the Indian traditions. Even a cursory examination of the history of these traditions shows that they coexisted and grew alongside one another, and even borrowed from one another. Being a member of one tradition didn't exclude one from following another tradition. Notions of obligatoriness and forbiddances were alien to these traditions. Despite their elastic nature, one should not get the impression that these various *mathams* were fluid or amorphous in terms of the practices they followed. Each *matham* very sharply distinguished itself from the other *mathams* through their specific set of practices. This was the case all over India including Tamil Nadu for many centuries.

In the late nineteenth century, however, among the Saivite Tamil nationalists (including Maraimalai Adigal), a new way of distinguishing *mathams* and *jatis* arose. Traditions and deities that had flourished for centuries came under attack for being foreign to Tamil Nadu. For example, Vaisnavism had a centuries-old history in Tamil Nadu, popularized by the poetry of the Vaisnavite sages known as Alvars (just as the devotional poetry of the Nayanmars popularized Saivism), but it was labelled an Aryan/Brahmin religion. A similar tendency was observed when it came to Brahmins. Even though they had lived for centuries in Tamil Nadu, it was only in the latter half of the nineteenth century that a certain section of the Tamil populace started labelling them as an alien people.

Because these Tamil intellectuals had accepted the Aryan invasion theory, they had to accept the other claims attached to this theory, such as the idea of Tamil Brahmins being descendants of a foreign race. Consequently, these intellectuals were compelled to describe and differentiate *mathams* in a certain way, i.e. Brahmin and Tamil religion. Language and caste, along with

geographic and textual origins, become the criteria for deciding which practices belonged to which religion. For example, although Adigal acknowledges the deity Perumal (which is used as the Tamil name for Visnu) as native to Tamil Nadu, he regards the Vaisnava traditions as an Aryan religion. The reason for this is that the deity Perumal has been venerated and revered in Tamil Nadu for centuries and is amply referred to in the Sangam literature. Visnu, on the other hand, was a Vedic deity, and so Adigal regarded Visnu as an Aryanized variant of the Tamil Perumal. In the same vein, Maraimalai regards Krisna and Rama as Aryan deities because of what he thinks are their geographic and textual origins⁶¹⁶. Thus, the Tamil intellectuals used the same heuristic as their European counterparts: Any practice or deity either derived from Sanskrit texts or that made use of Sanskrit mantras was considered part of the Brahmin religion, and thus foreign to Tamil Nadu.

The intellectuals claiming Saivism as a Dravidian religion also pointed to geographic and linguistic factors to bolster their claims. Some Western scholars also claimed that linga worship and Saiva temples in general were more abundant in southern India compared to the northern regions. In addition, the fact that there was a rich corpus of Tamil Saivite *bhakti* literature going back to the end of the Sangam era and unconnected to Sanskrit literature, gave more weight to such claims about Saivism as a Dravidian religion.

This method of differentiating religions on the basis of language was alien to Tamil Nadu prior to the nineteenth century. In his attempt to portray Saiva Siddhanta as a pure Tamil religion, Maraimalai Adigal was not aware of the problems such an explanation creates. Sanskrit texts and rituals had always played an important role in the Tamil Saiva traditions. The *Vedas* have traditionally been regarded as one of the foundational texts of the Saiva Siddhanta school. So were the Sanskrit Saiva Agamas, which was basically a manual on Saiva Temple structure and rituals. Moreover, Maraimalai Adigal rejected the entire corpus of Puranas, including the Saivite Puranas, as Aryan. These stories have been part and parcel of the cultural and social life of the people of Tamil Nadu for centuries, regardless of their *jati* and *matham*.

In addition to rejecting Sanskrit as Brahmanical, another related trend that arose among the Tamil nationalists was to brand any and all Brahmin traditions as Aryan. Even though there were some traditions exclusive to Brahmins, many of the Brahmin practices, such as wearing

⁶¹⁶ Adigal thought that the Krishna tradition originated in northern India and was brought to Tamil Nadu by northern Brahmins.

the thread and chanting Sanskrit hymns and slokas were practised by many non-Brahmin *jatis* in Tamil Nadu too.

There are two fundamental questions that Maraimalai Adigal adequately fails to address. The first is a question raised earlier: How could a small group of Brahmins with no military or institutional power impose their traditions on the entire Tamil populace? By Adigal's own admission, there is no evidence of a large-scale invasion into Tamil Nadu. He considers the Aryan ancestors of the Brahmins as a small group of nomadic travellers who were given shelter by the Tamil people who were more advanced and civilized than them. Instead of explaining this anomaly, Adigal addresses this problem through ad hoc explanations of the Brahmins using their cunning to gain favour with the Tamil kings and sow discord among the Tamil people. The second question Adigal fails to address is: What is the problem with non-Brahmin *jatis* adopting certain Brahmin traditions, even if the Brahmins were originally foreigners? Why the need for a 'pure' Tamil religion? What would such a religion look like? After all, the history of the Indian traditions is the history of various *mathams* existing side by side, borrowing practices from one another while maintaining their distinctiveness and flourishing. There is no evidence that the population of Tamil Nadu, prior to the nineteenth century, saw the adoption of foreign practices into their local *mathams* as problematic. It is only when certain Tamil people started accepting the European account of Brahmins being the priesthood of a foreign nation who imposed their religion on the non-Brahmins that the preservation of a pure Tamil religion became a concern.

It is important to remember that the Tamil intellectuals were not aware of the Christian theological framework that made the adoption of other religions' practices into own's own religion a problem. Within the framework of the Semitic religions, borrowing practices from other religions becomes a problem because religious practices within these religions are based on the doctrines and dogma of said religion. Adherence to religious practice becomes an expression of faith in God and his teachings. The scriptures of these religions contain God's commandments and laws under which certain practices become obligatory while others are forbidden. Thus, the adoption of practices from other religions becomes tantamount to disobeying the will of God and a lack of faith in his teachings.

The description of Brahmins as imposing their religion on the indigenous population makes sense within this religious framework. It transforms the Brahmins into variants of the Catholic clergy, and texts such as the *Vedas* and *Sastras* as religious scriptures. Within their religious community, the Catholic clergy serve as the final authority on the interpretation of scripture,

and for many centuries had the political and institutional power to impose their interpretation on the community in the form of religious laws. During the Reformation, one of the attacks on the Catholic Church was that they were imposing practices and laws on believers that weren't enjoined by and went against Christian scriptures. The clergy were imposing a form of sacerdotal tyranny on the community by claiming man-made laws were God's own. The European missionaries who came to India and Tamil Nadu made the same accusation about Brahmins. The Brahmins created and established a caste system as well as a plethora of rituals for the Tamil populace, all the while presenting these practices as divinely ordained. If one accepts the above theological framework and its assumptions, then it makes sense to reject these Brahmin practices as false religion. This is why missionaries such as G.U. Pope found an affinity with Saiva Siddhanta; not only did they see it as an indigenous, non-Brahmin religion, it was also a monotheistic religion centred around the worship of Siva, whom the Tamil texts describe as an embodiment of love and compassion⁶¹⁷. The problem is there is little in terms of empirical evidence to support this account of the Brahmin religion and priesthood.

In Tamil Nadu, none of the *mathams* have a doctrinal foundation. The lack of a doctrinal foundation removes the necessity of an institutional authority, such as a priesthood, to set limits and conditions on the interpretation of doctrine, or impose practices on a society based on doctrine. Because these traditions are not grounded in doctrine or law, there are no notions of obligatoriness or forbiddances when it comes to these traditions. Hence, the traditions of *jatis* and *mathams* change over time, borrowing and amalgamating various practices from each other. New *jatis* and *mathams* are created all the time, and the landscape of India is littered with literally thousands of *jatis*. At the same time, since the identities of these *jatis* and *mathams* are solely dependent on their traditions, each *jati* and *matham* seeks to sharply distinguish itself from other *jatis* and *mathams* through their traditions. I propose that this is one of the reasons members of one *jati* avoid commensality and marriage with members of another. In the case of Maraimalai Adigal, he accepts the European account about the Tamil and Brahmin religion, but at the same time and maps the concept of religion onto *matham*. As a result, Adigal ended up rejecting practices and texts that have been part of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition for centuries, because he deemed them to have their origins in Brahmin traditions.

⁶¹⁷ Pope, as well as Adigal, translate '*karuna*' and '*anbu*' as 'compassion' and 'love'.

I wish to briefly summarize the process by which Maraimalai Adigal mapped the concept of nation onto *jati*. In his attempt to portray Saivism, specifically Saiva Siddhanta as the religion of the Tamil people, Adigal is confronted with the fact that Tamil Nadu is made up of numerous mathas and *jatis* who don't see themselves as one Tamil nation. However, because Maraimalai Adigal equated the term 'religion' to *matham*, and since many Saiva Vellalas were well known for their adherence to Saiva traditions including Saiva Siddhanta, he describes Saiva Siddhanta as the Vellala *matham*. In Adigal's account, the Saiva Vellalas become not merely one of many *jatis* that litter the landscape of Tamil Nadu, but the first inhabitants of Tamil Nadu from whom the original Tamil religion originated. The Tamil word 'vellalar' comes from the root word Vellanmai, which means farming. Based on this etymology, Maraimalai Adigal claims that the Vellalas were once farmers. Adigal writes that agriculture is a precondition for any civilization, and hence Vellalas were the progenitors of the Tamil civilization. From the initial population of Vellalas or agriculturists arose the kings, intellectuals, business, and tradespeople – the social classes as defined by the Tamil text *Tolkappiyam*.

It was from these Saiva Vellalas that all the other *jatis* of Tamil Nadu emerged, thus making them the original Tamil people. In Adigal's eyes this makes the Tamil nation synonymous with the Vellala *jati*. Thus, in the process of describing the Tamil *matham* as the Vellalar *matham*, Adigal transforms the meaning of the term 'nation' as well, by mapping it onto the concept of *jati*.

In conclusion, I should first point out what this dissertation is not. This dissertation is not a study of the concept and phenomena of nation and nationalism. Nor is this dissertation a historical analysis of the Dravidian movement or the Saiva Siddhanta tradition. Instead the focus of my research is on the theoretical framework used by European intellectuals to link the concept of nation to religion and language, and what happens when the nation-religion-language triad migrates to a culture that lacks this theoretical framework. Specifically, it examines the manner in which the Saiva Vellala Dravidian nationalist Maraimalai Adigal adopted and distorted the nation-religion-language concept in his attempt to promote a religious Tamil nationalism based on the Saiva Siddhanta tradition. The distortion of these ideas has a certain systematicity to it, because Adigal maps the concepts of nation and religion onto *jati* and *matham*. As a result, these distortions give us insights into the phenomena of *jati* and *matham*, specifically the Saiva Siddhanta *matham*.

While this dissertation is by no means an exhaustive study of Saiva Siddhanta, I hope it leads to further comparative research on Saiva Siddhanta and other *Bhakti* traditions whereby the

bhakti traditions are studied using Christian mysticism and piety as a backdrop. This will give a comparative approach dimension to the discourse. Since the *bhakti* traditions are often described by scholars as variants of Christian piety and mysticism, using a comparative approach will give us a clearer understanding of the differences between the two and, in the process, greater knowledge about both the *bhakti* traditions and Christian mysticism. Similarly, I hope my research encourages more comparative research on nationalist movements, whereby European nationalism is used as a framework with which to compare and analyse the nationalisms of other cultures.

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